

# Taking Steps to Hike Tourism in Japan

*The number of international visitors to Japan hit 28.69 million in 2017, and the Japan Tourism Agency is pursuing various strategies to keep that figure rising. We asked former JTA Commissioner Akihiko Tamura about the current state of tourism in Japan.*

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## **What are Japan's best selling points for tourism?**

In many other regions, including Europe and America, there is a rather stereotypical image of Japan that focuses only on things like Mount Fuji, cherry blossoms, temples and shrines. However, Japan also has incredible natural wonders and a wide range of climates, from the subarctic areas of Hokkaido to the subtropical zones in Okinawa. Each region also has distinctive cuisines and traditional festivals. We are showcasing this diversity and the various ways visitors can enjoy the country.

One concrete step we've taken is the "Enjoy My Japan" global campaign, in which we use various

methods to share the charms of Japan as a tourist destination. One facet of that is presenting short teaser videos that showcase Japan's gorgeous natural assets and outdoor activities, hot springs, food and other appealing aspects. These videos have received positive reviews in various countries.

Despite Japan having various cultural assets and outstanding natural resources for tourism, until recently these attractions were not being properly introduced to tourists. Japan's beaches are an example. Japan ranks 61st in terms of land area worldwide, but in terms of total coastline length it ranks sixth in the world. This makes Japan an ideal

Akihiko Tamura, former commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency





destination not just for swimming during the summer, but also a place with great venues for sporting events, outdoor concerts and open-air movie screenings. We are also thinking about setting up walking paths to create fun coastal walks.

### **What was your inbound tourism strategy for this summer?**

One strategy is to extend the operating hours of cultural venues such as museums, temples and shrines. This is partly to increase evening entertainment options, but also to encourage people to get out earlier while temperatures are still cool. We are also focusing on the many summer festivals across Japan. We plan to promote them energetically to attract visitors to more rural areas.

Another step we've taken is to create the Safety Tips app, which provides information about disasters in English, Chinese—both traditional and simplified—

as well as Korean. The app provides push notifications such as earthquake early warnings and tsunami warnings, along with tips on how to prevent heatstroke and information about medical facilities.

### **The government aims to attract forty million international visitors by 2020. Tell us what's being done to reach this target and future plans.**

The number of international visitor arrivals exceeded ten million for the first time in 2013. In 2017 that figure grew to 28.69 million, and as of May 2018 monthly arrivals were 15-16 percent higher year on year, so the figures are steadily going up. To maintain this trend, we need to provide a travel experience that is convenient and comfortable.

For example, trains that link airports to the city should have free Wi-Fi, and small shops where staff don't speak English

should have multilingual speech translation systems in place. We have implemented government grants for lodging facilities to help them update their facilities—such as switching from Japanese-style to Western-style toilets and providing international TV channels—to promote a stress-free experience for visitors.

These moves are not just being carried out with the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in mind. With the steady decrease in Japan's population, regions need to maintain a certain level of economic growth by increasing the inflow of tourists. Since the tourism industry is one of the few growth areas, it should be considered one of the pillars of economic growth, and 2020 is just one milestone. We plan to continue sharing the appeal of Japan as a tourism destination in many different ways. 🇯🇵