



## Preface

### Where are tourism studies going when the going gets tough?

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The number of infected people with the new coronavirus is reported daily by the media in Japan. However, even before the spread of the virus infection the Japanese economy has experienced many hardships. Japanese industries, including tourism, have been suffering from several natural disasters such as large earthquakes and typhoons, a decrease in the working population, and the stagnation of the local economies. Under these difficult circumstances, the tourism industry used to meet with great expectations in regions that the businesses were based in. As is often said, the tourism industry is labor intensive. In other words, it has a potential to create numerous employments in the region. In addition, it can generate economic impacts on various industries such as souvenir shops and restaurants.

Since the policy speech by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (at that time) on February 4, 2002, local governments have come to promote the regional tourism to boost the industry and revitalize the local economies. In his speech, the then Prime Minister Koizumi clarified his stance toward regional revitalization through promoting the tourism. Following the policy, the plan to double the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan and so-called “Visit Japan Campaign” have been implemented in January 2003. After that, the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Law came into effect in January 2007, and the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan was formulated in July of the same year. In such a social context, many local governments are now focusing on regional economic development through tourism.

According to the Japan Tourism Agency, domestic travel consumption, including inbound tourism in 2018, was 27.4 trillion yen (about 4.9 % of the real GDP). In addition, the employment-inducing effect brought about by tourism in the same year was 2.39 million labors (the employment-inducing effect including the ripple effect was 4.41 million labors). If the tourism industry did not exist in Japan, the same number of labors as the population of Nagoya City (2.32 million) would have been lost.

Japan’s tourism industry should have been facing an unprecedented increase in tourism demand due to the rapid increase in inbound tourists in recent years and also the hosting of the

Olympic Games in 2020. However, because of the pandemic of the coronavirus infection, the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan, which had reached about 31.9 million in 2019, has consistently decreased by more than 99 % from the same month of the previous year since April 2020. We faced a sharp decline in the number of the tourists. Also, the annual number of domestic guests, including Japanese, at hotels and inns in 2020 decreased by 48.9 % compared to the previous year. The spread of the infectious disease is urging people not only in Japan but all over the world to change in various aspects including their lifestyles.

Many businesses are under pressure to adapt to this new lifestyle. In addition to thorough infection prevention measures, restaurants have begun to take steps to transcend the conventional business boundaries and launch new businesses, such as take-away and food delivery. Uber Technologies Inc. announced that sales in the fourth quarter in 2020 were \$ 3,165 million, down 16 % year-on-year. Due to the expansion of nesting consumption due to restrictions on going out, sales in the delivery sector, including the food delivery service “Eats,” increased 3.2 times to \$ 1,356 million. The ratio of sales in the delivery sector to the total was 43%, increasing by 32 points from the same period of the previous year.

The tourism sector is also forced to adapt to the new lifestyle. In May 2020, the Japan Travel Industry (JATA) formulated guidelines for dealing with the new coronavirus in the travel industry. The Japan Hotel Association also established similar guidelines in the same month. JTB, a major domestic travel agency, is promoting virtual tourism “online tour” initiatives. So far, it is unclear which attempt by which company will succeed or fail. The results will be revealed over time.

We are living in a new era in which people live, interact with each other, and work in different ways. It has even been pointed out that businesses that cannot adapt to this unknown situation may not be able to survive the new era. Even in Japan, it has been reported that many hotels, inns, and restaurants that had survived several natural disasters have been closed. The year 2020 will be remembered by posterity as an important turning

point in the path taken by the international community.

The impact that the new coronavirus infection has brought to the international community reminded us of many things. One of them is the fact that the movement of human beings is one of the major driving forces of the economy. Lockdown, which severely restricted people's movements, drastically undermined the economies of Western countries. The word tourism is defined in Japan as "a variety of activities that are carried out in leisure time away from areas they are living in, with the purpose of interacting, learning, and playing" (Tourism Policy Council (at that time) report, 1995). Generally, the meaning of the word is "a trip for the purpose of fun." Its economic essence is the movement of people. Today, when people's behavior is severely restricted, it is undeniable that it may be necessary to review not only the way tourism should be, but also its definition.

Tourism studies must also adapt to the new era. So far, domestic tourism has pursued various topics such as people's tourism behavior, inbound tourism, and over-tourism. Where is tourism going now, as people's ways of enjoying tourism are changing? For the time being, as seen in this volume, the discussion will focus on the impact of the pandemic on tourism and the new tourism. But, what exactly is waiting for us in the future? It may be a completely new approach that is different from the conventional one. Alternatively, it may be positioned as an extension of previous research.

Tourism studies can be defined by the subject of research and the studies are not limited to any particular approach found in other disciplines. Therefore, we have accepted many new approaches not only from the humanities and social sciences but also from the fields of natural sciences and tourism business. One of the strengths of tourism lies in the degree of its freedom. If conventional research methods are not suitable for the new era, new methodologies should be attempted.

Many researchers will try different approaches in response to the times which are always changing. At this point, we do not know who will survive. But, those who do survive will lead the new tide. Strong people do not always survive. It can be said that those who survive are the superior as a result.

#### **About the author**

Masahide Yamamoto is a professor of the Faculty of Foreign Studies, Nagoya Gakuin University. He earned a Ph.D. in economics from Matsuyama University. Before joining the faculty of Nagoya Gakuin University, he taught at Kanazawa Seiryō University and St. Catherine University. His research interests include tourism economy studies, especially in the Noto region of Japan. His major publications include *Data Science and Digital Business* (English: co-authored, Springer, 2019).