# Tourism Development Cultural Heritage and Sustainability in Japan

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## Location

Japan is an island country, stretching over an area of approximately 1,500 miles (2,400 km), ranging from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north toward the East China Sea and Taiwan in the south. Located in the northwest Pacific Ocean, Japan is an archipelago, or in simpler words, a string of islands (Petry, 2003). The geographical location of Japan can be a fascination for tourists as it is situated in the Pacific Rim and, more specifically, in the Ring of Fire. This geographical positioning relative to about 200 volcanoes is fundamental in making Japan a country that is laced with monumental geothermal energy resources (Masum & Akbar, 2019).

## Population

According to Japan's official population estimate, the country had approximately 122.85 million residents in June 2026. Japan remains one of the world's most populous countries, although its population has been declining. The population distribution is uneven throughout the country as about four-fifths of the country's terrain is mountainous, and the agricultural lands are also covered with rice fields and orchards; hence, these, too, have a primarily low population density. Owing to its diverse landscape, the population density is highest in the coastal areas along the Pacific coast of Honshu (Watanabe et al., 2021).

## Landscape

The wondrous landscape of Japan is often termed as 'rugged' as approximately 67% of the land is uninhabitable due to a predominance of mountainous terrain. Based on five major islands, namely Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu and Okinawa, along with thousands of smaller islands, Japan is a country of infinite beauty and diverse scenic views (Watanabe et al., 2021).

With the revered Mount Fuji, magnanimously visible along Shinjuku's skyline, the pine-covered sand bars of Amanohashidate spanning the mouth of Miyazu Bay and the blossoming cherry trees adding a poetic awe, Japan's landscape is indeed astounding. In more recent times, the term *satoyama* has been used to describe the Japanese landscape and refers to the coexistence of natural wetlands, grassland and woodlands with human settlements, therefore highlighting the importance of landscape preservation (Takeuchi, Brown, Washitani, Tsunekawa, & Yokohari, 2012).

# Number of Tourists Received

Although domestic tourism has been prevalent in Japan over the past, the trend of inbound tourism has been on the rise. In 2019, Japan ranked as the 11th most famous country for travel, attracting about 31.9 million tourists. Since 2011, the number has steadily increased, with 6.2 million inbound tourists in 2011, 19.74 million inbound tourists in 2015 and 31.9 million in 2019; however, in 2020, a significant drop to 4.12 million was observed. This drop can be attributed to the travel restrictions and stringent measures imposed on travelling due to the pandemic. Over the years, Japan has attracted tourists from all over the world; however, the percentage of visitors from East Asia, especially Korea, China, and Taiwan, is significantly higher (Statistica, 2021).

# Popular Attractions

From bustling metropolises to a wealth of natural beauty, from the rich cultural heritage to a distinguished cuisine – Japan offers it all. The popular attractions of Japan include the Oirase Stream, filled with waterfalls and lush woods, offering a chance to tourists to hike or bike along it; the Iriomote Island, which is a tropical reprieve with opportunities for hiking, kayaking, cruising and buffalo-cart ride to the Yubu Island.

The Oze National Park in Fukushima is a highland marsh where the blooms of the ice age still thrive, and the Wakayama Adventure World is a safari, zoo, aquarium and amusement park – all packed into one, offering tourists an opportunity to see the popular giant pandas, enjoy the sea lion and dolphin shows, and amuse themselves on go-karts and roller-coasters. The Island Shrine of Itsukushima is a registered World Heritage site and is a star attraction. Mount Fuji, the Imperial Tokyo, Osaka Castle, Historic Kyoto, Kawachi Fujian Wisteria Garden and Kenrokuen Garden are also some of the popular attractions of Japan (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2021).

# High, Shoulder and Low Seasons

With the blooming cherry trees that mark the arrival of spring from early March to the mid of May, there is a boost in tourism. A similar trend is observed when the maple leaves change colour at the arrival of autumn, which is often called Koyo, i.e., red leaf. Therefore, spring and autumn are regarded as the high seasons for tourism, and visitors gather to admire the Sakura blooms or celebrate Momijigari – hunting the autumnal leaves (Japan Experience, 2018).

Summers are quite hot all across Japan, with the months of June and July marked by torrential rains. The hot weather, although not ideal for tourism, still attracts tourists towards outdoor activities such as hiking and the summer festival of Japan called Matsuri. In effect, summers are regarded as shoulder seasons for tourism. From late December to mid-March, winter prevails in Japan, and it is the time when tourism is at its lowest and cheapest rates are offered as Japan is least crowded due to low

temperatures. Although tourists can enjoy activities such as visiting the onsen, skiing, snowboarding and Sapporo Snow Festival, winter still remains the period of lowest tourism in Japan (Japan RailPass, 2021).

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