



Redefining Japan's Tourism: Post-COVID Challenges and Cultural Dynamics

Soji Lee

Tokai University, Japan

Abstract

The global tourism landscape underwent considerable transformation owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, which altered dynamics and created new challenges. Previously, travel was linked to well-being, fostering social connections and a sense of belonging. However, the pandemic caused substantial disruptions, leading to job losses and changed travel behaviors. Japan, which was already grappling with overtourism pre-pandemic, faced challenges such as strained infrastructure and environmental impact. Post-COVID, emerging hurdles included issues of tourists' etiquette and labor shortages within the industry. Japan's deeply rooted mask-wearing culture, driven by social responsibility, may lead to social stigma if norms are ignored, impacting tourism. Owing to an aging population and unattractive job profiles, the industry faces labor shortages, which leads to difficulties in recruiting during peak seasons. Understanding these challenges is pivotal for the recovery and revival of tourism in Japan. Strategies must align with evolving societal values and sustainable practices, addressing behavioral norms and labor shortages. Using tweet-derived data, this study revealed an unexpected increase in discussions on mask use, highlighting Japan's societal emphasis on harmony and consideration for others. The research highlighted challenges faced by tourists and industry professionals, particularly regarding foreign visitors' comprehension of Japanese cultural norms. The results shed light on the critical factors affecting post-pandemic tourism in Japan, with the aim of exploring cultural influences on sustainable tourism in subsequent research. This endeavor aligns with the vision of the United Nations World Tourism Organization to reconstruct the industry and ensuring equitable benefits for all stakeholders.

Keywords: Post-pandemic tourism, Sociopsychological impact, Labor shortage, Cultural norms, Sustainable development