

Motivations for Travel: A Study of Tourists in Beppu, Japan

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Abstract

From 2007 the Japanese Government has been promoting the idea of the “Tourism Nation” as a brand for Japan to both domestic and international audiences. As the period 2007 to the present has developed, rapid increases in inbound tourists deriving from the falling value of the yen and the impact of the economic development occurring in neighboring countries, have created favorable conditions for the exploitation of Japan's superb facilities for inbound tourism (culture, natural resources, safety, developed country status, food). A subsidiary task of government has been to ensure that both domestic and international visitors are distributed around the nation for the benefit of regional and local economies. This paper examines the impact of changes in inbound and domestic tourism on regional Japan through the medium of a survey of visitors to Beppu, a small regional city in Kyushu.

The surveys on which the current discussion is based were carried out in 2011-2012, and looked at actual motivations for travel. The data was then used to consider whether or not increasing numbers of international and domestic tourists would in fact travel to regional areas. Gender analysis showed that more Chinese and Japanese women travel to Beppu than males, but that this reversed for English speaking area respondents, and for Koreans. In terms of the different age-groups of travelers, for English speaking and Korean visitors, the 20-29 age group was the most heavily represented, while within the Chinese and Japanese visitors the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups were the most heavily represented. The 50-59 age group was also heavily represented in the Chinese sample, while in the Japanese group this segment was almost missing. All respondents said that tourists mainly got their information about Beppu from “guidebooks”, indicating that the city is quite widely known as a destination, at least in North Asia. Subsidiary sources for the Chinese, English speakers and Korean markets were word of mouth and its modern version, social media.

In terms of the number of times respondents had come to Beppu, it is obvious that the Japanese domestic travel market knows and uses Beppu as a major personal bathing destination; they had been to Beppu “many times” (45.2%), with few “first time” responses. Interestingly, the Chinese respondents (69.0%) had also been to Beppu before, while the English speaking area (89.5%) and the Koreans (93.8%) had not. This was an unexpected result, given the relatively recent development of the Chinese market, and the closeness of Beppu to the Busan area of Korea. If there is a new wave of Koreans seeking hot springs, then again it is important to reach out to them with longer stay options than the day tripper or one-night stay pattern they currently favor. With respect to the motivations the respondents had for their travel to Beppu, the main reasons for visiting the city and Oita prefecture were to experience the hot springs (for English speaking respondents (60.5%), Japanese (50%), and Koreans (42.7%)). But this was much less important for the Chinese, who want to stay in “natural” areas (35.7%). Korean (40.2%), Chinese (28.6%) and Japanese (21.4%) respondents also want to “relax”. Other reasons were found to be enjoying activities such as camping and hiking, old buildings, and culture/history. Finally, for the Japanese, food,

driving and events attracted a small number of respondents.

Key words: Motivations for travel; Tourism Nation; Regional development, hot springs

Introduction

In 2013-2014, many events occurred that Japan was proud to show off to the world through tourism (Japan Tourism Agency 2014). In June 2013, “Mt. Fuji – “the object of religion and the source of art”, as well as being an active volcano, was placed on the World Heritage List. In December 2013, Japanese cuisine, as the “traditional cuisine and culture of the Japanese people” was authorized as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage item. Moreover, in September, the Olympic/Paralympic Games were approved to be held in Tokyo 2020. In addition, many important regional events and ceremonies were held at each area in 2013 (Heisei 25): April saw Tokyo Disneyland's 30 year anniversary; the National Kabukiza (Japanese traditional stage/theater) opened after renewal in the Ginza area of Tokyo; Ise shrine held a special ceremony (shikinen-sengu), which occurs only once per 100 years, in Mie Prefecture; and Izumo-taisha held a similar special event (honden-senza-sai, again this only occurs once per 100 years) at Izumo in Shimane Prefecture. These events and others made Japan as a tourist destination much more visible, while also adding depth to the concept of the tourism nation (Funck & Cooper 2013).

The Government also eased visa conditions for tourists from China, amongst other measures to boost inbound tourism numbers, in recognition of that country's growing importance as a generator of outbound tourism, and its close proximity to Japan. In addition, the internal and external airspace of the country was brought into line with Asian and European markets with the introduction of low-cost carrier services between population centers inside Japan and with major source/destination markets. As a consequence, internal travel to regional destinations outside Tokyo and Osaka has become much cheaper for both domestic and international tourists, potentially giving a further boost to the idea of the “Tourism Nation” (Japan Tourism Agency 2014, 2015).

The latest data show that inbound tourism numbers have risen from around 9 million in 2007 to 14.5 million in 2015 (January-September, JNTO 2015, <https://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/tp/sta/PDF/E2015.pdf>). In 2013 domestic tourism stood at some 393 million trips (211.5 million day trips and 181.9 million overnight stays), outbound tourist numbers stood at 16,903,388 in 2014 (down from 18.5 million in 2012), and inbound numbers at 13,413,467. The targets for 2020 for both inbound and outbound tourism are 20 million. These numbers are broadly in line with the rest of Asia (China of course is a much bigger market), and show that Japan is succeeding in once again becoming an important international tourist destination, as it was up to the 1940s (Funck & Cooper 2013). The continuing health of domestic tourism, coupled with the upsurge in inbound numbers mean a bright future for the country and its regions; but in the case of the regions, only if destinations that are presently little-known outside of Japan are made attractive to foreign visitors. This paper looks at one such destination, Beppu City, Oita Prefecture, Kyushu; a very important domestic destination as a result of its natural resources, but one that has historically not attracted many international visitors. The motivations for travel to Beppu of respondents from China, Korea, Japan, and other countries are examined to assess the likelihood of the new waves of domestic and international tourists travelling to this and similar regional destinations.

Travel to Oita Prefecture and Beppu City

Beppu City is located in the center of the eastern part of Oita Prefecture, on the southern Island of Kyushu, and with a population of more than 120,000, is the second largest city in the prefecture. Beppu city is also located in the Aso-Kuju National Park. This place is

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symbolized by beautiful scenery, the “yukemuri” steam from the many hot springs that derive from the volcanoes in the National Park, and Beppu Bay, and is known as an “international sightseeing hot-spring culture city” in Japan (Erfurt-Cooper 2013; Funck & Cooper 2013).

This city is the primary tourist destination within Oita Prefecture, and attracts annually more than eight million tourists, mainly from domestic sources (The method of enumeration of tourists has recently been changed by the city council, reducing the total figure from 11 million to 8 million; Table 1). Another major hot spring destination is the village of Yufuin, some 24km from Beppu, which attracts 3 million visitors per year, but many of these travellers are also visitors to Beppu. The core reason for their visit is the more than 2,600 natural hot springs in and around the city, delivering a volume of hot mineral water second only to Yellowstone National Park in the USA (137 thousand kilo liters per day; Lund 2002; JNTO 2010a). Traditional bathhouses such as Takegawara onsen are a definite tourist attraction, from an architectural and a healing perspective. At the other end of the scale are natural onsen like Hebinoyu, hidden in the forested hills around the city. There is also a beach sand bath (hot, wet sand is used to cover the body as a wellness treatment), which has been used by locals and visitors for centuries (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper 2009; Funck & Cooper 2013).

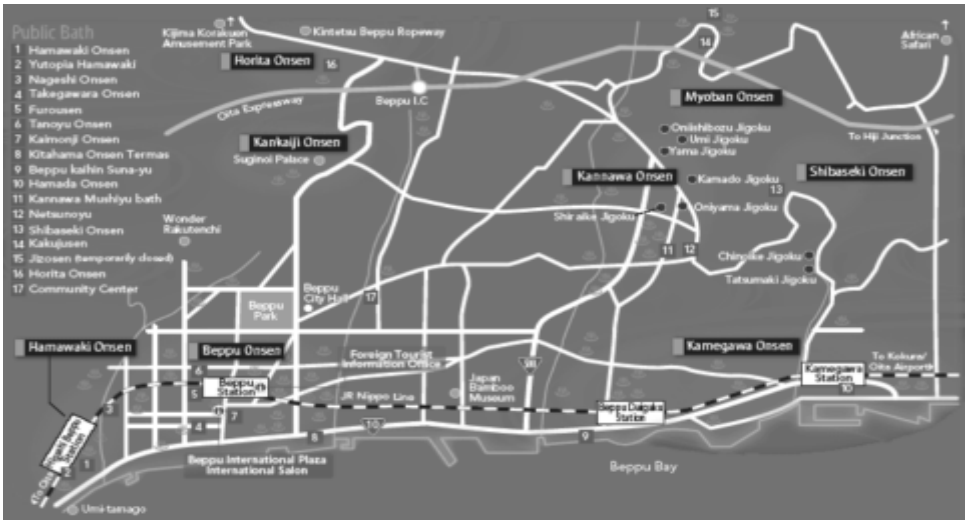


Figure 1. Location of Major Onsen Fields and Jigoku, Beppu City

Source: Beppu City Council International Tourism Office

Unlike resort complexes in northern Japan and other countries, however, the majority of Beppu's hot springs are solely utilized for small-scale *bathing* facilities within the hotel industry, or within local community or private baths (Hotta & Ishiguro 1986; Talmadge 2006). As a result, while the city offers special view-points where geothermal steam rising from many vents can be observed by tourists, its facilities are not oriented to inbound tourists unless they desire the traditional Japanese bathing experience (Agishi & Ohtsuka 1998; Clark 1999; Castro 2009; Smith & Yamamoto 2001). Offsetting this to some extent, at least for domestic visitors, is a special tourist attraction – the *Jigoku Meguri* (Funck & Cooper 2013). *Jigoku* is the Japanese word for hell and *meguri* refers to a tour or pilgrimage to specific geothermal locations (Figure 1). This 'pilgrimage', however, is not strictly religious, although each of these 'hells' have sacred shrines on site. The several *jigoku* of Beppu are a group of ten small geothermal parks with different themes (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper 2009;

Funck & Cooper 2013), utilizing the range of geothermal phenomena like boiling ponds, bubbling mud pools and steaming geysers to their full potential, attracting many visitors on a daily basis. The *jigoku* also offer pleasantly warm foot and hand spas for their visitors, tropical flowers, warm-water fauna such as crocodiles, and hot-spring-cooked food as well as the dramatic geothermal attractions (Figure 2). The tour of the 'hells' is one of the most popular tourist attractions of the city and, as with many locations throughout Japan, repeat visits during different seasons are encouraged.



Figure 2: The Jigoku Experience

Source: Photo courtesy of the Author

Year	Population of Beppu (April)	Number of Tourists	Number of Day Visitors	Number of Overnight Stays	Number of School Excursions	Number of Jigoku Meguri visitors	Number of Foreign Visitors
1970	123,786	9,585,621	4,650,068	4,935,553	1,117,189	1,300,074	N/A
1975	130,554	12,035,418	6,540,991	5,494,427	722,240	1,128,664	N/A
1980	134,403	12,174,342	7,015,284	5,159,058	678,168	715,956	N/A
1985	133,164	11,774,438	7,236,385	4,538,053	534,095	620,535	38,000
1990	130,071	12,156,993	7,915,539	4,241,454	508,393	617,994	N/A
1995	128,255	11,197,243	7,098,509	4,107,734	283,945	N/A	56,947
2000	126,523	11,850,681	7,854,052	4,006,061	77,030	N/A	125,844
2005	126,959	11,735,741	7,810,551	3,925,190	45,165	N/A	176,641
2006	123,015	11,765,789	7,828,823	3,936,966	28,333	N/A	226,013
2007	122,621	11,676,910	7,842,305	3,834,605	30,583	N/A	265,187
2008	122,074	11,518,360	7,779,620	3,738,740	28,514	N/A	251,684
2009	121,398	11,999,003	8,346,658	3,652,345	26,608	N/A	162,122
2010	125,385	7,894,147	5,609,220	2,323,631	N/A	N/A	278,776
2011	125,664	7,881,241	5,637,597	2,243,644	N/A	N/A	157,374
2012	124,998	8,036,213	5,709,678	2,326,535	N/A	N/A	249,000
2013	122,489	8,244,867	5,888,591	2,356,276	N/A	N/A	275,013
2014	121,551	8,165,065	5,748,685	2,416,380	N/A	N/A	336,332

Table 1: Shifts in patterns of population and tourism in Beppu 1970-2014

Note: Total population figures did not include residents of foreign origin until July 2010. The change in the method of visitor enumeration means that the domestic tourism data prior to 2010 is not comparable to that after 2010.

Source: Beppu City Council (2015).

Even though the overnight-stay market has been badly affected by a decline in domestic school excursions and family travel in favour of overseas trips and short-breaks in recent years, *onsen* tourism is still the basis of the local economy, with demand still fairly buoyant (Table 1). In fact, the preliminary figures for 2014 show a rise in the number of overnight stays, indicating a continuation of the rising numbers of tourists visiting the city in recent years (<http://www.city.beppu.oita.jp/02kankou/toukei/pdf/h26sokuhou.pdf>). However, the local population is ageing and the nature of the tourism market (heavily weighted to *onsen* and to *ryokan*) tends to attract mainly older people by definition. Even with the smaller 'green tourism' resort of Yufuin 24 kilometres away competing for a wider range of customers, there are concerns for the tourism future of the area, not just for Beppu City but for Ōita Prefecture as a whole.

Methodology and Results

As mentioned above, Beppu City is a very famous hot spring and traditional tourism area in Japan. Recently, it is not only Japanese who are visiting; the number of foreign tourists is increasing. In order to find out why this should be happening, a questionnaire was designed and administered to both Japanese and foreign tourists who were visiting Beppu in 2011-2012. This survey covered the style of tourism, the purpose, and the motivations behind this travel (Ratz 2011).

Method

This research was carried out at 4 main tourism places in the city: a selection of the hot springs (*onsen*), of the *jigoku* (hells), of the souvenir shops, and in front of Beppu railway station. The first survey was carried out in April, 2011, and follow-up surveys were done at various times until late 2012. The definition of "tourist" used to isolate subjects for the questionnaire was self-defined. The researcher asked potential participants "whether the respondent was a tourist or not", and only proceeded with the survey if the respondent said yes, and was willing to be surveyed. This method produced a random sample; stratified in the sense that particular locations were chosen, but otherwise random. The result was an effective response from 254 tourists.

The responses were classified into 4 groups: "Chinese" (41), "English-speaking" (38), "Korean" (82), and "Japanese", 84. Statistics relating to the respondents were produced from the raw data by SPSS ver.18. This distribution of responses was considered to reflect the more recent markets for the Beppu *onsen* experience: the local Japanese, a relatively strong Korean market, a rising Chinese market, and a small but wide-spread "other (English speaking)" market. Table 2 indicates where the respondents came from. In detail, the Chinese came from Shanghai (8 people), Taiwan (5 people), and other coastal areas. The Japanese mainly came from around Oita prefecture. English area respondents came from America (8 people), Germany (6 people), France (4 people), and other European countries. Koreans came from Seoul (20 people), Busan (15 people), Daegu (8 people), and other cities (39 people).

Table 2: Origin of Tourists by Country and City

Chinese	Shanghai, Taiwan, Tsing Tao, Tianjin, Fukien
Japanese	Fukuoka, Miyazaki, Kumamoto, Saga, Yamaguchi, Shikoku
English area	America, Germany, France & Switzerland, England, Swiss, Italy
Korean	Seoul, Busan, Daegu

Results

A gender analysis showed that more Chinese and Japanese women travel to Beppu (50% and 53.6% respectively) than males (Figure 2), but that this reversed for English speaking area respondents (65.8%) and for Koreans (54.9%). In terms of the different age-groups of travelers, it is interesting to note that for English speaking and Korean visitors, the 20-29 age group was the most heavily represented (Figure 3), while within the Chinese and Japanese visitors the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups were the most heavily represented. The 50-59 age group was also heavily represented in the Chinese sample, while in the Japanese group this segment was almost missing.

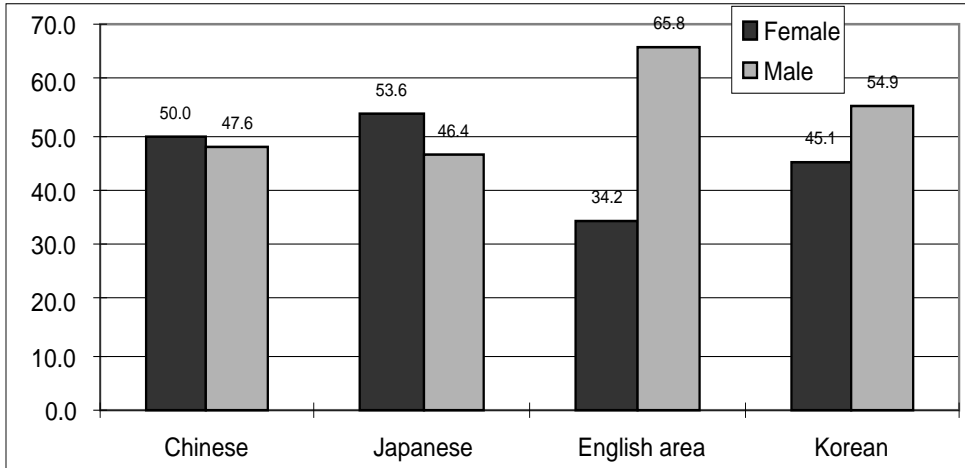


Figure 2. The Gender of the Respondents

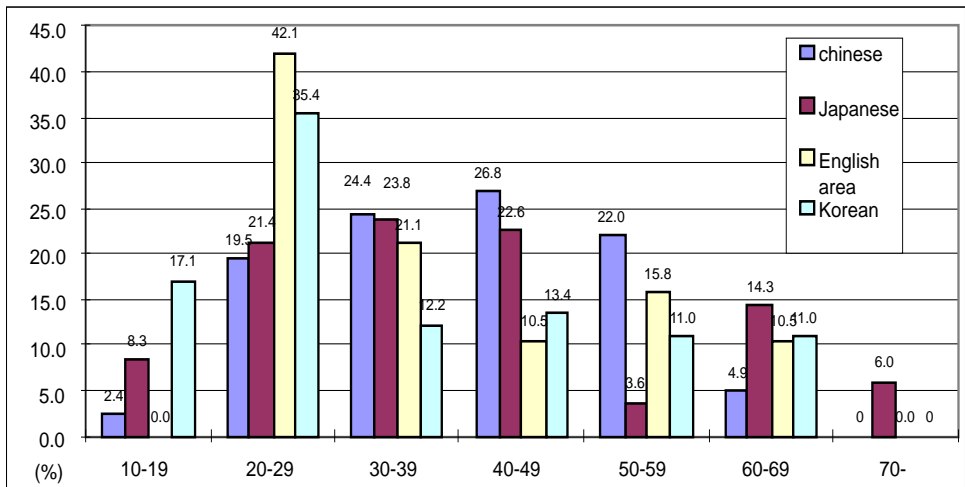


Figure 3. Distribution of Age Groups from each area

Respondents were also asked about their companions (Figure 4). The majority of tourists from English speaking areas indicated “one person” (21.1%), or “friends” (50.0%), while Japanese and Korean visitors indicated “family” as the predominant choice, with friends a distant second. The Chinese however, came with friends (31.0%), family (42.5%), or in groups (21.4%) at a higher rate than those from other areas.

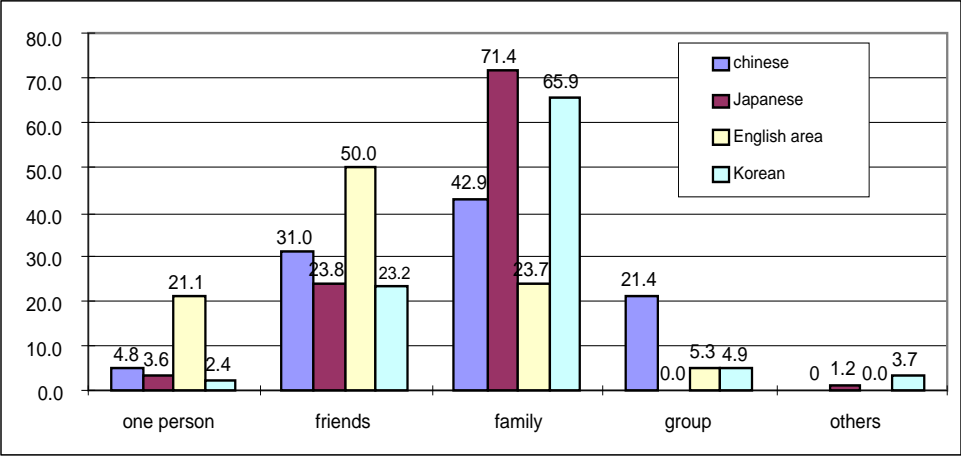


Figure 4. Who did you come with?

With respect to the period of stay: “one-night stay” is the Japanese (76.0%) and Korean (84.2%) preferred pattern. Chinese respondents indicated “2-3 days” (30.0%), and “4-7 days” (30.6%) or “more” as their pattern of stay, while English speaking respondents tended to stay longer than those from other areas. It is important therefore to direct promotional material about the benefits of staying longer in Beppu (essentially, the value of family health and wellness based on hot springs, and other forms of Geotourism) to Japanese and Korean visitors, in the hope that they will change their visiting patterns, from a one-night stay to longer periods.

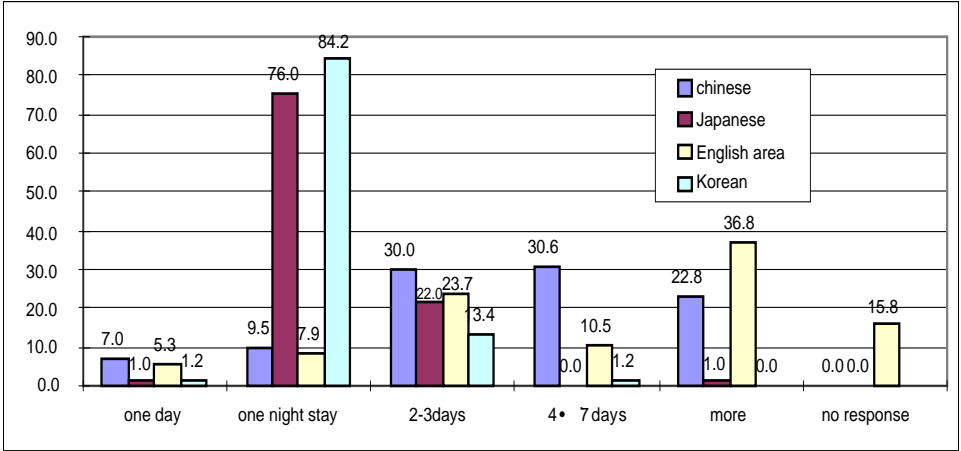


Figure 5. How many days spent in Beppu

The question about sources of information on Beppu attracted plural answers (Figure 6). All respondents said that tourists mainly got this information from “guidebooks”. Subsidiary sources differed by respondent origin though. The Chinese (36.5%) and English speaking area respondents (32.5%) indicated “friends” as another major source, Koreans (36.5%) got it from the “internet”, and domestic travelers from “TV” or other domestic sources. Thus, for the Chinese, English speakers and Korean markets, it is important to recognize the power of word of mouth and social media, and use these channels to promote Beppu.

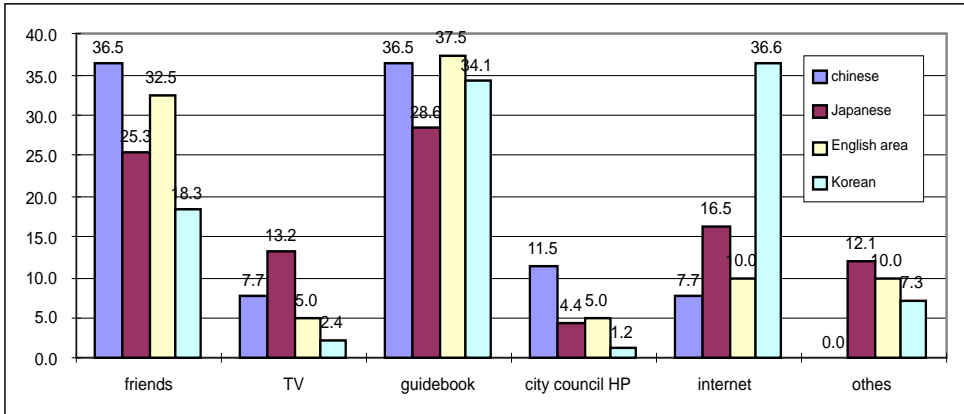


Figure 6: How did you get travel information?

In terms of the number of times respondents had come to Beppu, it is obvious that the Japanese domestic travel market knows and uses Beppu as a major personal onsen destination; they had been to Beppu “many times” (45.2%), with few “first time” responses (Funck & Cooper 2013). Interestingly, the Chinese respondents (69.0%) had been to Beppu before, while the English speaking area (89.5%) and the Koreans (93.8%) had not. This was an unexpected result, given the relatively recent development of the Chinese market, and the closeness of Beppu to the Busan area of Korea. If this is a new wave of Koreans seeking a hot spring experience, then again it is important to reach out to them with longer stay options than the day tripper or one-night stay pattern they currently favor.

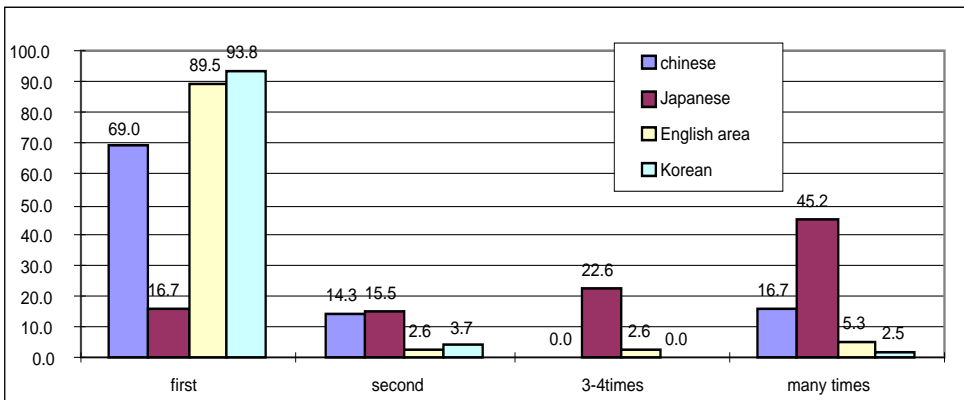


Figure 7: How many times travelled to Beppu?

Motivations for Travel

With respect to the motivations the respondents had for their travel to Beppu, the main reasons for visiting the city and Oita prefecture are listed in Figure 8. All categories were found to be significant statistically. As expected the main reason was to experience the hot springs (for English speaking area respondents (60.5%), Japanese (50%), and Koreans (42.7%)). But this was much less important for the Chinese, who want to stay in “natural” areas (35.7%). Korean (40.2%), Chinese (28.6%) and Japanese (21.4%) respondents also want to “relax”. Other reasons were found to be enjoying activities such as camping and hiking, old buildings, and culture/history. Finally, for the Japanese, food, driving and events

Figure 9 analyzes the reasons for travel more closely. Generally, when asked about the most important determinants of their travel, respondents were asked to evaluate on a 5 point Likert scale just how they reached these conclusions. In other words, what were the parameters under which they obtained the best results from their trip? Except for “stay with friends or partner”, or “enjoy with family”, all categories were indicated as being important. This was however especially true of the desire to “join event in this area”, have a significant “encounter or interchange” with other people or the attractions, experience the area's “history or culture”, gain “new experiences”, and/or “enjoy with natural surroundings”. Each of these responses were strongly significant statistically across the respondent categories.

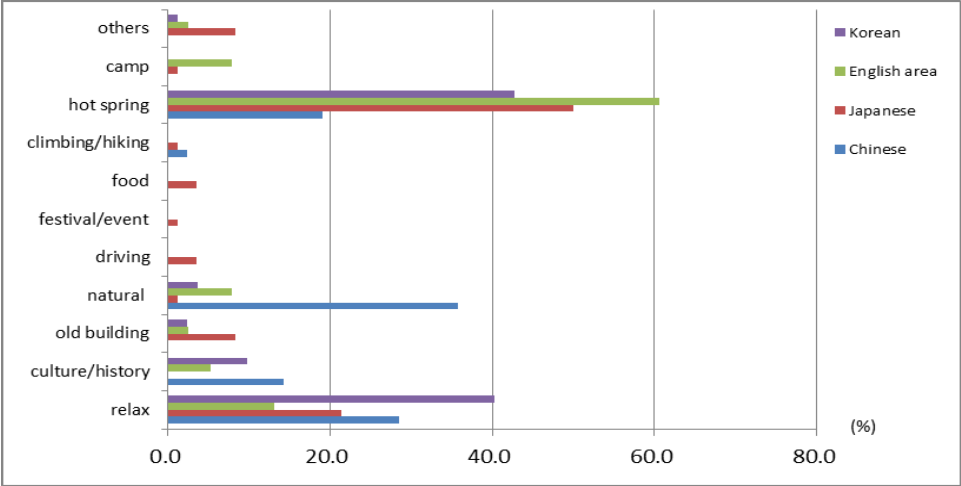


Figure 8. Main reasons for traveling to Beppu.

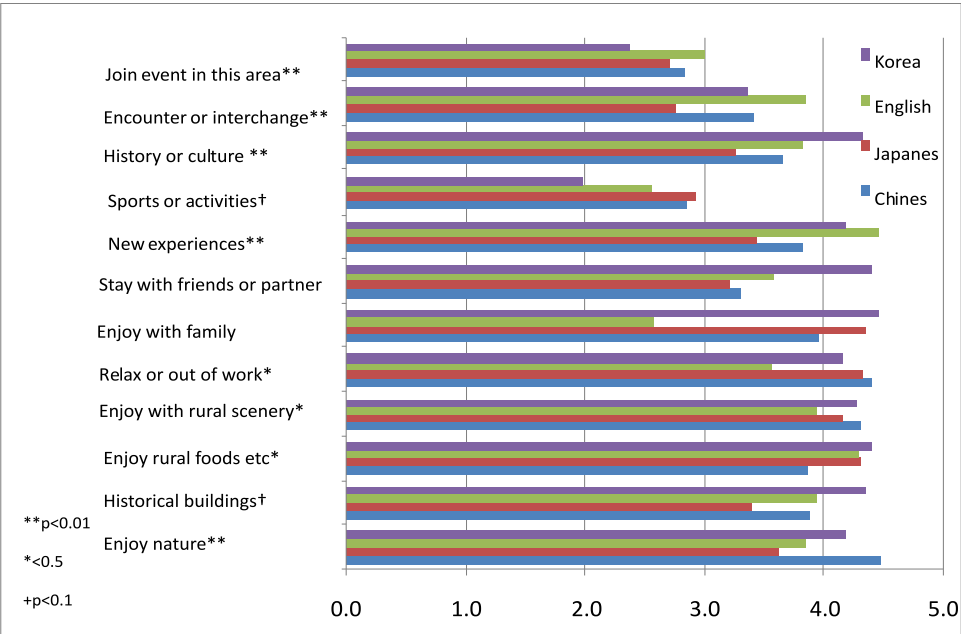


Figure 9. The most important parameters of travel

Respondents were also asked to rate the experience of Beppu, again evaluating this using a 5 point Likert Scale (Figure 10). It was possible to choose plural categories in this question. Each group of tourists were satisfied with every aspect of Beppu, at least statistically. On the other hand, the experiences incorporating “Many people”, “Energetic companions or locals”, the nature of “Traditional or Historical attractions”, and “Touristification of the destination”, were all ranked lower than other categories by English speaking area respondents.

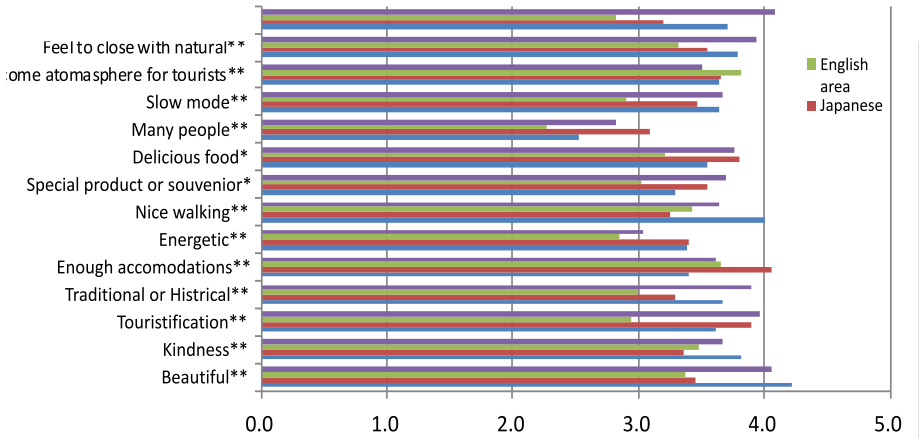


Figure 10. What did you think of Beppu?

Finally, respondents were asked about how they preferred to travel, and all responses except for “dislike to use travel agency” were significant statistically (Figure 11). Most important for the Japanese was whether or not the travel was “Enjoyable travel” (77.4%), but for English speaking area and Chinese people “Like to make travel plan myself” was the most important (76.3% and 42.9%, respectively). “Like to use package tour” or “with travel guide” (30.5%), and “Seek for special experience” (30.5%) were the most important factors for Korean respondents.

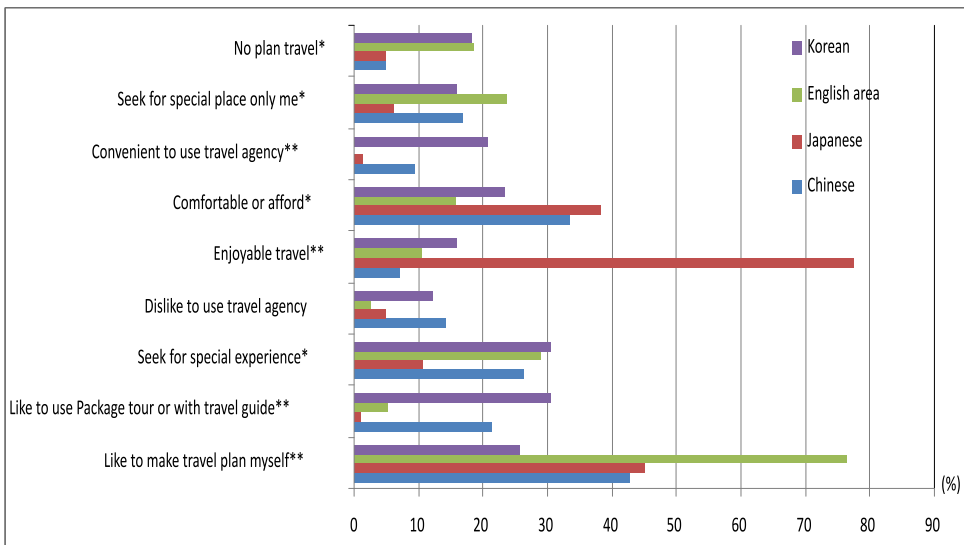


Figure 11. How do you prefer to travel?

Conclusions and Further Research

Many domestic tourists come to Beppu during April for the cherry blossom season and the associated traditional hot spring festivals at each hot spring area. The city has also seen a rise in the number of international tourists over the past few years, but the recent East-Japan earthquake put a brake on this growth for a year or two. Nevertheless, the trend in both sources of tourism is positive for the City. The motivations to visit Beppu were explored in this study, primarily to see how tourists view the destination, and what would be the likelihood of their return. A positive view of the city, communicated to others, is one of the most powerful factors in the continuing health of Beppu as a tourist destination.

A gender analysis of the respondents showed that more Chinese and Japanese women travel to Beppu than males, but that this reversed for English speaking area respondents, and for Koreans. The bathing opportunities in relation to their health and wellness is an important factor in this, as has been observed in previous studies (Funck & Cooper 2013). In terms of the different age-groups of travelers, for English speaking and Korean visitors the 20-29 age group was the most heavily represented, while within the Chinese and Japanese visitors the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups were the most heavily represented. The 50-59 age group was also heavily represented in the Chinese sample, while in the Japanese group this segment was almost completely missing. These patterns may reflect a new exploratory wave of tourists from English speaking areas, who have been avoiding Japan because of its reputation for high prices, now being overlaid on a north Asian market that knows the area for its hot springs resources.

In regard to the knowledge factor, all respondents said that tourists mainly got their information about Beppu from “guidebooks”. This indicates that the city is quite widely known as a destination, at least in North Asia. Subsidiary sources for the Chinese, English speakers and Korean markets were word of mouth and its modern version, social media.

In terms of the number of times respondents had come to Beppu, it is obvious that the Japanese domestic travel market continues to know and use Beppu as a major personal bathing destination; they had been to Beppu “many times” (45.2%), with few “first time” responses. Interestingly, the Chinese respondents (69.0%) had also been to Beppu before, while the English speaking area (89.5%) and the Koreans (93.8%) had not. This was an unexpected result, given the relatively recent development of the Chinese market, and the closeness of Beppu to the Busan area of Korea. With respect to the motivations the respondents had for their travel to Beppu, the main reasons for visiting the city and Oita prefecture were to experience the hot springs (for English speaking respondents (60.5%), Japanese (50%), and Koreans (42.7%)). But this was much less important for the Chinese, who want to stay in “natural” areas (35.7%). Korean (40.2%), Chinese (28.6%) and Japanese (21.4%) respondents also want to “relax”. Other reasons were found to be enjoying activities such as camping and hiking, old buildings, and culture/history, and for the Japanese, food, driving and events attracted a small number of respondents.

In future it will be important to convert the prevailing pattern of outings by car from other centers in Kyushu, Shikoku, and the lower half of Honshu, and from Korea (boat and car). If for example, there is a new wave of Koreans seeking hot springs, then again it is important to reach out to them with longer stay options than the day tripper or one-night stay pattern (primarily for bathing) that they currently favor. And despite the high cost of the expressways, Japanese families from the Fukuoka area are in a similar situation, as they come by car and split their time between Beppu, Yufuin, and attractions like the African Safari Park that is equidistant between these two centers. Special rail tickets and passes, and cheaper long distance buses may assist in the attraction of more visitors from Europe, Korea, and China.

Although the main use of the hot spring water in Beppu is, as in Japan as a whole, for bathing, the mineral content of the water is suitable for a range of medical and health &

wellness applications. Virtually all of the main onsen recognize the potential of the water for the treatment of skin disorders, rheumatism and arthritis, and diabetes. It is likely that this potential for health (medical therapy and wellness (relaxation) will be even more fully realized in the future as the City Council has requested onsen owners and private hospitals to develop this service (Erfurt-Cooper 2013). Future studies of the medical side of the hot springs resource will aid in this conversion.

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She has supported many patients who suffered from schizophrenia, depression, personality disorder, developmental disorder and dementia and so on, at all age levels. She was also a member of the Mukai Hospital Ethics Committee. From May 2012 until March 2013 she was employed by the Beppu City Council, in the Children and Family Division. She is a member of the Oita Prefecture Suicide Prevention Network and the Japanese Association of Clinical Psychologists. Her recent work has included research into tourist motivations as part of a team looking at inbound tourism to Japan, and writing about medical tourism. She is a co-editor of the major reference book *Current Trends and Emerging Issues in Medical Tourism*, published by IGI Press in 2015. Email: aout19@hotmail.com