

<Research Notes>

Is Japan a Visitor-Friendly Country?

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Abstract

Though Japan is the fourth largest travel expending country in the international travel market with 49 billion US dollars after Germany, the United State and Great Britain in 2004, Japan is relatively small in the number of tourist arrivals in comparison with those of the G7 nations. Since Japan is far from major tourist generating countries in Europe and North America, it is very hard for Japan to have the same number of tourists as those of European or North American counterparts. But are the Japanese disadvantage only because of geographical reasons? Have we been supplying foreign tourists all over the world with sufficient travel information that they would like to know in the way they would like to make use of? I have looked into convention promotion activities that have been conducted mainly on the internet by the Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau. In this paper I have studied their activities from the viewpoint of services marketing. In this study, I have found that the Japanese are likely to provide general information to both potential convention planners and general convention participants while the Americans offer more specific information for meeting professionals in mind¹⁾. This is not a paper to assess their management.

Keywords: Convention Business, The Convention Law, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Japan National Tourist Organization, Meeting Planners

1 The Japanese Convention Law of 1994

The Japanese government has been conducting the international tourism campaign- “Yokoso Japan!” or “Welcome to Japan” campaign - the purpose of which is to increase the number of visitor arrivals to Japan from five million in 2002 to 10 million by 2010. The number of foreign visitors to Japan has long been rather small in comparison with that of Japanese outbound traffic which amounted to some 16 million in 2005. The number of international congresses held in Japan has been also small as well.

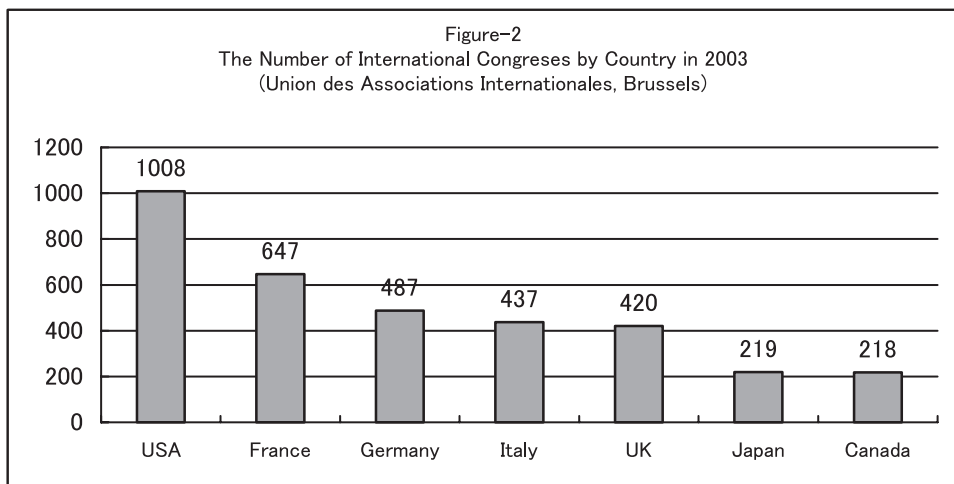
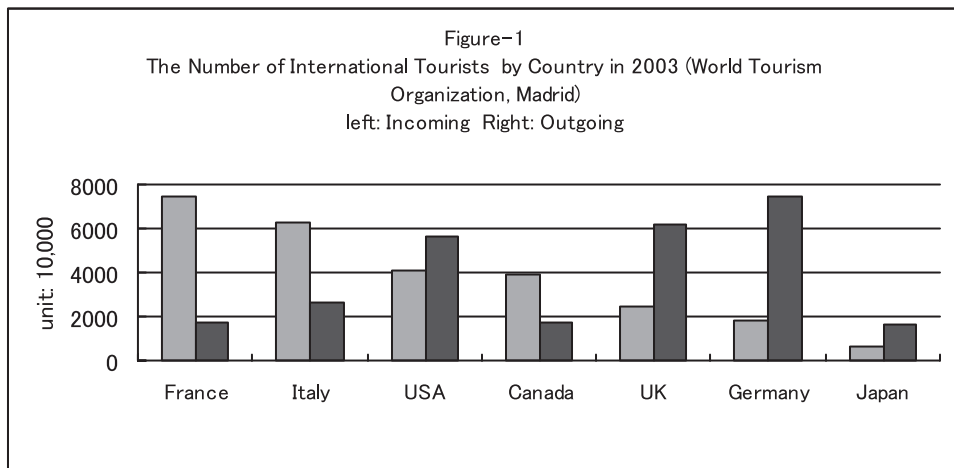
A convention business is one of the most prospective and profitable businesses. An international

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1) The contents of the homepages of the Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau were referred in October 2006.

convention business requires a wide variety of ordinary travel services such as transportation, accommodation, food services and interpreters to very special services covering every professional demand²⁾.

In order to promote international conventions in Japan, the Convention Law was passed in 1994, and 45 cities across Japan have been appointed as international convention cities³⁾. The law orders



²⁾ The definition of an international convention by Union de associations Internationales (UAI), Brussels, Belgium is as follows:

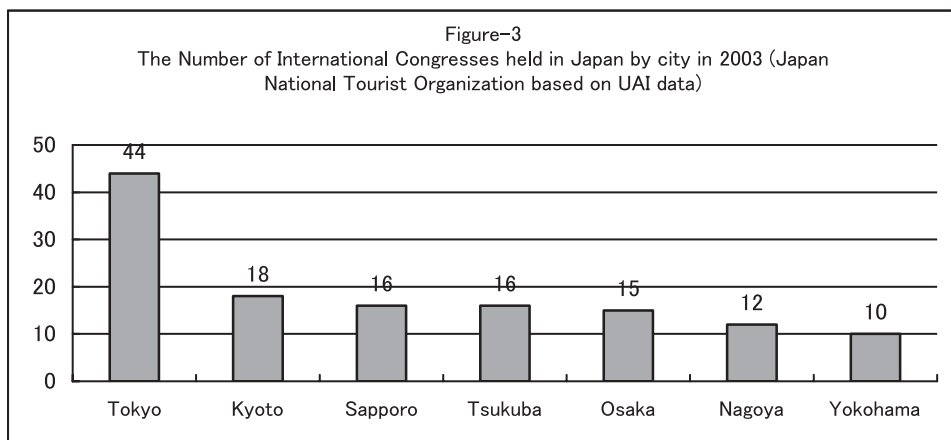
- (1) A convention organized or supported by an international organization.
- (2) A convention organized or supported by a national organization and the number of the participants must be more than 300, 40 % out of whom should be foreigners whose nationalities are five at the least.
- (3) The duration of the convention shall last for three days at the shortest.

that the Japan National Tourist Organization, a Japanese government subsidiary for promotion of incoming tourists, help the 45 cities promote conventions on advertising and promoting the cities in foreign countries. JNTO is also responsible for collecting donations for and distributing government subsidiaries to these commissioned cities⁴⁾.

The Law says that the promotion of international conventions shall help foreign visitors understand Japan and the Japanese, and also help the local people communicate with foreign visitors, thus leading to mutual understanding⁵⁾. According to the law, a convention will contribute to the local economy where the convention is held. It encourages private sectors to build international convention facilities.

The internet has dramatically changed the way information flows. We can now send a lot of pictures at a time, even live. Since traveling, in a sense, means that people go to a place that is strange to them, it is very important for them to get information and data beforehand on their next travel destinations. It is very essential for travel service suppliers to give expected tourists with information on what they want to know most in the way they can utilize as easy and much as possible.

I have examined the homepages presented by the Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau (TCVB)



- 3) The definition of an international convention by the Japanese Convention Law is as follows:
- (1) It should be an international convention whose total number of the participants is more than 20 and they have come from more than two countries including Japan.
 - (2) It should be a domestic convention which hosts more than 20 attendants, and at least 10 people out of 20 should be from foreign countries.
 - (3) Seminars and symposiums that fulfill the above definitions are regarded as an international convention.
 - (4) No convention, conference, seminar or lecture organized by an educational institution like a university or a private company is regarded as international conventions.
 - (5) The participants' accompanying family members and observers are not counted in the number of participants to international conventions.
 - (6) The press people and the foreign people living in Japan are not regarded as foreign visitors in the data of international conventions.

and the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau (LACVB) to see how they have been trying to promote conventions (mainly international meetings) respectively.

2 The Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau (TCVB)

Tokyo's home page for the convention promotion consists of 15 items as follows:

1. Why Tokyo?
Explaining reasons why you should have your convention in Tokyo.
2. Facts and Figures:
Consisting of seven facts regarding basic Japanese travel information from entry visas to explanations of Japanese inn and sushi, and 13 figures that tell you how great Tokyo is.
3. Access to Tokyo:
General information mainly on airlines online to/from Tokyo.
4. Futures and past Conventions:
The list of major conventions held and to be held in months to come is placed.
5. Convention Facilities and hotels:
Eight convention facilities and 25 Hotels are in the list.
6. Unusual Venues:
Nine venues including cruise ships and a museum are introduced.
7. Corporate Meetings Packages: Under construction.
8. Incentive Package Plan:

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- 4) Tsukuba city is one of the 45 cities. The city of Tsukuba set up Tsukuba Convention Bureau (TCB) to promote conventions. There are a number of advanced research laboratories and institutes in the city. And it makes use of its characteristics as the sole advanced-science city in Japan to invite both domestic and international conventions of mainly science and academic societies. TCB offers several incentives both to conference organizers and participants. Cash incentives and financial aids are available for a host. Several literatures on travel and tourist information are prepared for convention participants. Following conditions must be fulfilled to apply for subsidiary:
 - 1) The venue must be in Tsukuba city.
 - 2) The number of participants must be more than 100 in an international conference.
 - 3) The number of participants must be more than 200 in a domestic convention.
 - 4) The organizer has received no subsidiary from other public organizations.
 A host who has successfully fulfilled the above conditions can have a certain amount of subsidiaries depending on what kind of venue the host uses: free public facilities, paid venues or the city-owned international convention center. The subsidiary consists of two categories: the financial support to each organizer and subsidiaries to per participant from ¥100 to ¥1,800 depending on the type of the convention: a regional, a domestic or an international convention.
 - 5) Many convention cities assigned by the convention law have volunteer guides and interpreters who help operate international conventions at their cities. They work for a convention for free at the works of registration, reception, a short break city tour and information services. Tsukuba Convention Bureau has a group of people who can command Chinese, English, French, Korean, Spanish and Thai.

A full package tour of 6days from ¥198,000, and a Basic Package tour from ¥78,000 are proposed.

9. Accompanying persons' Programs:

Tea ceremony, Flower Arrangement, Kimono, Japanese calligraphy and origami programs are shown.

10. Sightseeing Tours:

Seven-whole-day or half day tours visiting places of interest in Tokyo are introduced.

11. Theme Parties: Under construction

12. Promotion Materials: Under construction

13. TCVB Members' List: 12 convention suppliers and nine travel agencies are listed.

14. Request for Proposal

15. Contact us/Access map to TCVB

3 The Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau (LACVB)

The homepage for the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau consists of six columns:

1. Our Services:

LACVB promises its customers to work for them as their local agent to make a congress very successful.

2. Request for Proposal: the same as that of Tokyo.

3. Facility Search: Consisting of four categories as follows:

- Hotels: 163 hotels on the list
- Unique Venues: Presenting 27 categories in seven regions
- LA Convention Center
- CVB Hot Rates: You can request quotations for hotels and convention facilities on the homepage.

4. Supplier Search:

73 types of services are offered⁶⁾.

5. Marketing Kit:

Promotional materials for distributing to general conventioners include the following materials:

- Logo marks of LA
- Icons
- E-Cards that you can download on the internet.
- Maps (Los Angeles Airport and two route maps to LA Convention Center)
- A travel booklet (Listing 213 things to do with two other small travel guide booklets)
- LA Photo tour: Consisting of 10 pictures that you can download.
- LA Facts: 26 topics on nine themes are contained.

6. FAQ: Consisting of 19 specific questions and detailed answers

4 Differences between them

In the comparison of the contents of both homepages, several differences were found as follows:

- 1) The Tokyo's homepage spares a lot of space to explain such Japanese phenomenon as Japanese style accommodation- the *Ryokan*, how to order *sushi*, the Japanese currency system, and the business manner of exchanging name cards.
- 2) The Tokyo's page for convention information engages in providing general information, and avoids giving private companies' names. Since public organizations financed by taxes must keep a distance from private companies in Japan, TCVB is not allowed to give the name of a private company on an official space except in special cases. Business information without specific names makes for content that is vague for readers.
- 3) The Tokyo's homepage is not necessarily well connected with those of private companies for the above reason. Potential congress planners have to collect information separately. The Japanese way makes potential organizers toil to access and search several homepages to find information they are looking for, which is bothersome.
- 4) The Los Angeles' official homepage for meeting specialists has positively invited private companies to its promotion campaign.
- 5) LACVB sees convention organizers/supporters as more important figures than general partici-

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- 6) LACVB lists the following types of suppliers (73 services)
Accommodations, long term rentals, Advertising and Public Relations, Amusement Rentals, Artists and Caricatures, Associations, Attorneys and Legal Services, Audio Visual/Broadcasting Service, Boats and Yachts: Charter and Rental, Bowling, Brochure Display/Distribution Services, Bus Companies: Charter and Rental, Catering, Churches and Religious Organizations, Communications and Paging Systems, Computer Rental, Consultants, Convention, Meeting and Event Planners, Cultural Tours, currency Exchange and Financial Services, Decor and Props, Destination Management Companies, Digital Photography, dinner Cruise, Dinner Theater Shows, Electrical Equipment and Plumbing Services, Event/Show Producers, Exhibit Designers/Contractors and Services, Fairs and Festivals, Ferries, Florists, Freight Forwarders, Furniture Rental, Gaming, Gift Baskets, Gift Selection Services, Golf, Graphic Designers, Ground Transportation Management, Health Clubs, Interpreters and Translators, Language Schools, Leisure Travel, Movie Theaters, Music/Entertainment, Newspapers/Periodicals/Guides and Maps, Night Life Tours, Nonprofit Organizations, Office Supplies and Equipment Rentals, Oil Companies, packing, Shipping and Mailing Services, Parking Facilities and Services, Party Supplies and Rentals, Photographers, Printer/Copy Services, Promotional Items/Giveaways, Receptive Operators, Research Companies, Reservation Services, RV Rentals, Salons, Security and Guard Services, Skate and Bicycle Services, Speakers, Special Interest Courses/Activities, Spectator Sports, Staging and Lighting, Taxis, Temporary Staffing Services, Ticket Services, Tours and Sightseeing, TV Tapings, Universities, Wineries.

TCVB lists the names of the following companies as the TCVB members. They are all suppliers. It seems difficult for foreigners to understand the nature of business of the companies only from the name of a company.

Congress Corporation, Convention Linkage, Inc. ICS Convention Designs, Inc. Japan Association of Professional Congress Organizers, Japan Convention Services, Inc. JTB Communications, Inc, Plando Japan Inc, Simul International, Inc, Media Technical Co., Event Services Inc. TEI Inc, and As destination Management Companies: Hankyu Express International, Happy World Inc, Japan Gray Liner Co. Ltd., JTB Asia Tourist Corporation, JTB Global marketing and Travel Inc., Kintetsu International, MO Tourist Co., Nippon Travel Agency, Seibu Travel Inc.,

pants, and has been trying to provide more information for people in charge of convention operations. In the hotel list, a conference organizer can search the most suitable hotel depending on the number of participants. It is also possible for them to see facility and room availability on the LACVB homepage.

- 6) Tokyo seems to encourage expected clients to make use of Japanese travel agencies to organize the convention in Tokyo while Los Angeles presents all of the information to them so that they can directly contact suppliers including hotels and restaurants to check availability and make reservations. Tokyo's restaurant guide delivers no specific name and address at all and is filled with general explanations of Japanese cuisine. The shopping guide of TCVB engages in explaining types of shops from a department store to a discount shop. No practical shopping information such as names and addresses is presented at all. From the TCVB homepage, a foreigner who is a totally stranger in Tokyo has no way but to resort to a Japanese travel agency or someone even to book a restaurant. In a nutshell, LACVB gives specific information for organizers so that they can plan and reserve on the internet at their desks at home while on the TCVB homepage, no one can make a specific plan and reserve any facilities at his desk at home.
- 7) Tokyo makes use of numbers of facts of Tokyo to convince expected convention planners to hold their next convention in Tokyo. The numbers used are as follows:
 - Transportation hub: 1600 international flights a week, 2800 domestic flights at Haneda airport to/from 63 cities, 4000 departures at Tokyo Central Station.
 - Convenient Transportation in the city: 13 subway lines, 3 major JR lines, Several private lines, numerous public bus lines, 48000 taxi cabs.
 - World-Known state-of-the-art convention venues: Tokyo Big Site, Tokyo International forum and 300 more venues.
 - Superior hotels ranging from deluxe to budget: 3800 hotels and 34000 rooms.
 - Choice of cuisine from Western, Chinese and ethnic to Japanese: 100,000 restaurants.
 - Cultural and entertainment options: 240 museums and art galleries, 277 parks and gardens, 30 zoos, botanical gardens and aquariums.
 - A premier shopping center: ranging from superb department stores and specialty shops to discount shops.
 - Safe and Clean: Walking late at night is OK, and drinking water from the tap is OK.

Though LACVB does not show the list of the reasons why a convention should be held in Los Angeles, they instead give detailed information in the form of specific answers to frequently asked-questions in the column of FAQ that consists of 19 questions. In the column, Say, LACBV answers even questions about taxi fares from Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) to downtown as around \$40-50 including an airport charge while TCBV mentions the number of taxi cabs running in Tokyo as 48,000, but nothing is written about fares. Other than the taxi fares, LACVB FAQ have answered several transportation fares such as shuttle buses between LAX and Downtown, Metro trains, and long-distant taxi fares from LAX.

5 Services Marketing

I would like to see the contents of the two convention and visitors bureaus respectively from the services marketing point of view. Services marketing is an applied marketing analysis based on the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place and Promotion). Services marketing adds the additional 3Ps of Participant, Personnel and Process to the original 4Ps.

The Product

Both homepages are made to promote conventions in Tokyo or Los Angeles respectively. The convention facilities and locations are therefore regarded as the product in their strategies.

The Place

Through the internet, both of them have been trying to sell their products to customers living far away from the respective destinations. The expected customers may not have the faintest idea of what the city is like. It is imaginable that the customers will get all the necessary information to decide the site, as well as prepare and organize the convention through the internet. In this sense, their homepages on the internet are one of the most important marketplaces or showcases.

The Price

As we are most concerned on the price when we buy something, expected convention organizers are most eager to know the cost to operate the convention. Since it is of course impossible to learn the exact cost beforehand, they would like to grasp the overall estimated cost.

The Promotion

Neither Los Angeles nor Tokyo can show themselves at potential customers' office. They have no way to show themselves directly to clients. They make use of the internet which can deliver more pictures than any other means. Picture are more persuasive than letters and words. It is essential for the cities to consider carefully what contents in the form of pictures and letters they should place on the internet. It is important for them to know what decision makers would like to know the most to fix the venue for their next convention.

The Participant

In the congress business, there are two expected participants: congress participants and the organizers/supporters. LACVB or TVCB have choices on which customer they should place first: participants or the organizers. It is clear that LACVB has put the organizers/supporters first.

The Personnel

In Services Marketing, the personnel who have contact directly or indirectly with his/her customers play an important role in building customer satisfaction. Service products are intangible. So how the personnel takes care of the customers can decide the quality of the service the customers have pur-

chased. On the internet, contents play the role of the personnel or the services provider for potential organizers. Therefore the contents tell everything and are essential.

The Physical Evidence

The quality of service is likely to be defined by the atmosphere in which the service product is delivered because the service is invisible. It might be easier for you to understand the physical evidence by explaining with a case of a restaurant. When you choose a restaurant, the atmosphere of the restaurant could be a more important factor than the menu for you in choosing. Because it is almost impossible to know beforehand how delicious the dish you are going to order is, the interior and exterior of the restaurant might be a more important factor for choosing and satisfying after all.

The Process and Service Assembly

This concept shows the concept of the process and service assembly. The stage is surrounded with prospective customers or people who are there for the same purpose. This means that interactive actions among the participants play an important role in making impressions. Also services providers are heroes/heroines on the stage. In the convention business, both organizers and supporters of conventions and the attendants play their roles on the stage. LACBV and TCVB compete by offering the better stage for them.

6 Conclusions

Tokyo's homepage for a convention organizer begins with supplying basic travel information that is easily available on other internet services. They are also very eager to give explanations about Japanese culture such as Japanese style accommodation, food, customs and manners. The page for convention professionals has consequently turned into an ordinary travel information and guide of Tokyo and Japan. It has made the TCVB homepage unsatisfactory for professionals when trying to obtain specific and detailed information for organizing a convention.

Los Angeles concentrates in providing specific and detailed information necessary for meeting professionals to build up their next convention. LA has been trying to give more information relating to convention operations. For example, Los Angeles shows 168 hotels that can host conventions while Tokyo shows just 25 hotels. 73 types of suppliers selectable by region. All of them are listed on the LA page while 12 supplying companies, and nine travel agencies in Tokyo. LA positively lists specific names of restaurants, shops and tourist attractions.

The Japanese are likely to emphasize the introduction of Japanese traditional cultures such as Kabuki, Noh, Kimono, traditional Japanese dancers in Kimono who are in fact rarely seen even by Japanese residents in their ordinary daily lives. They say that young foreigners are more interested in Japanese sub-culture such as animation, free-style fashions or TV games. Akihabara is more popular than Asakusa or Ueno in eastern Tokyo. Tokyo features Asakusa and Ueno in the travel guide of the TCVB homepage.

A convention business requires various kinds of professional services and skills. They need a lot

of information relating to conventions rather than ordinary travel information. The geographical distance from Europe and North America is not the only reason why the number of tourists coming to Japan is small. We may have to think about whether the Japanese way of presentation for the promotion of destination Japan is right and still effective in the internet age. Providing visitors with information that is definitely necessary and indispensable for them is really friendly as their host country.

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