

Expectations of Convention Attendees toward the Tourism Resources at Their Destination

Hidekazu Iwamoto ^{*}, Tokuro Matsuo [†]

Abstract

The objective of this study is to clarify the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination and also to discuss the differences in the expectations of convention attendees before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Tourism resources at convention destinations are important because they increase the attendees' satisfaction, promote networking and improve the image of the destination. This study used statistical data from a questionnaire conducted both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic to clarify the research objective. The questionnaire instrument included demographic information and 12 tourism resources to clarify the expectations of attendees. Descriptive statistics are used in the demographic factors and each respondents' evaluation. The rankings were virtually the same in the results of the questionnaire both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic has not had much effect on the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination.

Keywords: MICE, Tourism resources, Convention business, Questionnaire

1 Introduction

The objective of this study is to clarify the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination and also to discuss the differences in the expectations of convention attendees before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Tourism resources include both natural and cultural resources that have the potential to attract tourists. These tourism resources at the destination are also important to conventions because they increase the attendees' satisfaction and improve the image of the destination. In addition, the convention industry has a tremendous amount of potential to contribute to economic growth.

The convention industry is divided into four categories; the acronym 'MICE.' MICE stands for Meeting, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions. The MICE industry can act as hubs of the economy and bring benefits to the surrounding economy. The economic ripple impact from the convention industry was huge before the Covid-19 pandemic. According to data from the Japan Tourism Agency, the MICE industry produced an economic effect of 1,590 billion yen in 2016. The total was 678.9 billion yen from conventions, 161.4 billion yen from corporate meetings, 569 billion yen from incentive travel, and 1,618 billion yen from exhibitions. Therefore, the Japan Tourism Agency promoted hosting and attracting MICE as a trump card in inbound tourism.

The number of international visitors to Japan finally exceeded the government target of 10 million in 2013. In 2015, 19.73 million international visitors visited Japan. Inbound tourists outnumbered outbound tourists for the first time in the past 45 years. In 2016, the Japanese

^{*} Josai International University, Chiba, Japan

[†] Advanced Institute for Industrial Technology, Tokyo, Japan

government raised its target for inbound tourists to 40 million by 2020 and to 60 million by 2030. The number of international visitors continued to increase and broke the record for the seventh consecutive year in 2019.

However, the number of international visitors drastically decreased due to the Covid-19 pandemic not only in Japan but also overseas. The number of international visitors to Japan dropped to 245,900 in 2021. That is the lowest number since 1964 when Japan first started gathering statistics on international visitors to Japan.

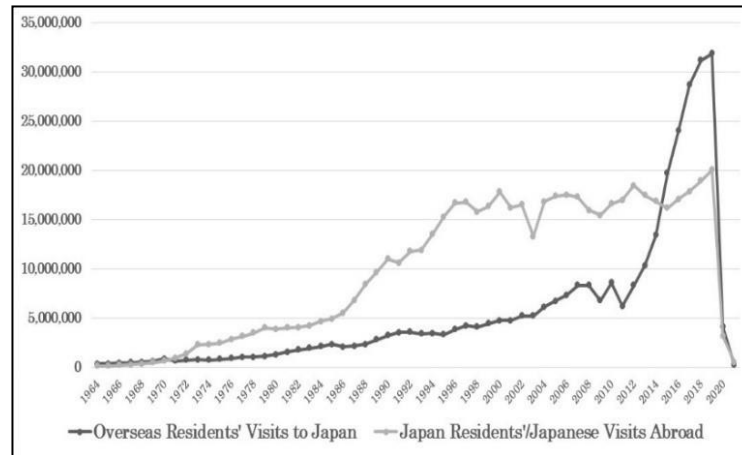


Figure 1: Tourism Statistics (1964 to 2021) for Japan
Source: Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)

The convention business, like other travel and hospitality businesses, has also been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. People all over the world have faced major crises and disasters over the past 20 years: the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the middle east respiratory syndrome (MERS) in 2005, and the global economic crisis from 2007 to 2009. However, none of those crises and disasters reached the level of the current Covid-19 pandemic [1]. The Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected convention destinations because it has led to many conventions being cancelled and postponed.

The number of international conferences held in Japan was gradually increasing in 2019. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of international conferences drastically decreased in 2020 as shown in Fig. 2.

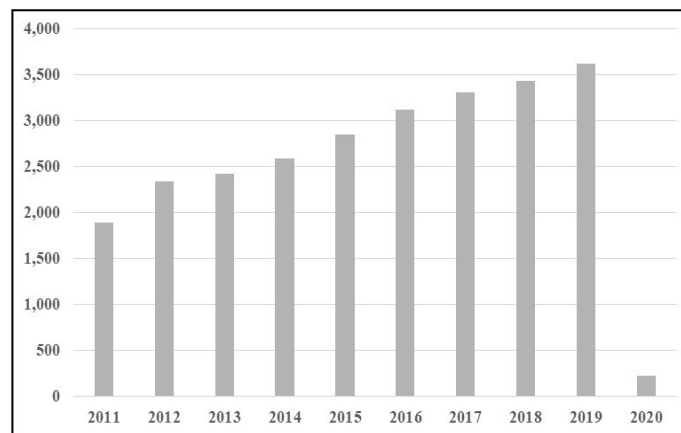


Figure 2: Number of International Conferences Held in Japan (2011 to 2020)
Source: Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)

Online meetings have been taking the place of face-to-face meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, online meetings have advantages such as saving time, improving cost-effectiveness, and increasing attendance.

However, online meetings still have disadvantages such as a reduction in personal contact, a time lag and unstable connections compared to face-to-face meetings. Moreover, from the viewpoint of tourism studies, online meetings do not bring an economic ripple impact on the destination. In addition, one of the most important things for convention attendees is to network with other researchers as this leads to opportunities for collaborative studies. Conventions offer excursions in which it is possible to network with other attendees. This provides opportunities for attendees to talk to each other. That means tourism resources are an important factor in good relationships between convention attendees and in attracting them to the destination.

Therefore, this study discusses what sort of impact the Covid-19 pandemic is having on tourism resources at convention destinations.

2 Literature Review

There are previous studies that focus on expectations toward tourism resources.

Ramyar and Halim [2] insist that tourism infrastructure plays a pivotal role in tourists' satisfaction and expectation levels by using a questionnaire.

Severt, Wang, Chen, and Breiter [3] assess the motivational factors of convention attendees by using a questionnaire. They conclude that activities and opportunities, networking, convenience of the conference, educational benefits, and products and deals are five important factors.

Iwamoto, Matsuo, and Sugiyama [4] examine the importance of networking, the venue, and tourism resources at conventions by using a questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire show that the mean score of international attendees is higher than that of Japanese attendees. That means international attendees look forward to networking with other attendees, the venue, and tourism resources at the destination.

Qu, Li, and Chu [5] examine satisfaction levels for the venue in Hong Kong as an international conference destination. They conclude that modern audiovisual equipment, modern hotel facilities, and accessibility are the top three factors.

Kim, Guo, and Agrusa [6] find the following to be the important factors for tourism resources: beautiful scenery, safety, good places for shopping, different cultural and historical resources, good leisure and recreational facilities, and well-equipped tourism facilities.

Researchers examined various means to increase the number of tourists and convention attendees' satisfaction in the previous studies. Moreover, the researchers introduce the types of tourism resources. However, those previous studies do not mention the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Holding online meetings does not bring an economic impact to local areas from the perspective of the tourism industry. Without an economic impact to the local area, the local tourism industry starts to decline. That means not only a loss of employment, but also a decline in tourism resources in the future.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to clarify whether the Covid-19 pandemic has affected attendees' expectations toward tourism resources and to suggest what kinds of tourism resources should be offered to convention attendees.

3 Method

A. Data Collection

To clarify the research objective, this study employed the statistical data of a questionnaire conducted at the 13th International Meeting on Electrochromism at Chiba University in August 2018 and the 8th Advanced Applied Informatics at Toyama International Conference Center in July 2019. The results of the questionnaire are used for the statistical data as ‘before Covid-19.’ Researchers distributed the questionnaires to the attendees during the conventions. The researchers collected 237 questionnaires during the conventions.

On the other hand, an online questionnaire was conducted at the 9th Advanced Applied Informatic in July 2020 and the AIIT/DCS-BINUS International Symposium in February 2021. The authors collected 119 questionnaires.

The target population in this study consists of the attendees of the three conventions and one symposium.

B. Data Analysis

The survey instrument is divided into two parts. In the first part, the questionnaire includes demographic information on the respondents’ background (e.g., gender, age, position, and specialty). In the second part, the respondents were asked about the tourism resources they expect there to be. The questionnaire items in the second part cover Japanese food, shopping, city walks, nature, beautiful scenery, museums, hotels, hot springs, history, theme parks, traditional art shows, and watching sports.

These questionnaire items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (less important) to 5 (most important). Descriptive statistics are used in the demographic factors and each respondents’ evaluation.

4 Results

The demographic profiles of the respondents ($N = 237$) are shown in Tab. 1. There were 69 female respondents and 168 male respondents. The age group with the highest number of respondents was those in their 20s while the age group with the lowest number of respondents was those in their 60s. The authors collected the questionnaire from the attendees of 25 countries in terms of nationality. However, there were 13 countries and regions with only one participant at the conventions. In addition, Japanese people accounted for 51% of all the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents before the COVID-19 pandemic

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	69	29.1
Male	168	70.9
Age		
20s	78	32.9
30s	52	21.9
40s	49	20.7
50s	44	18.6
60s	10	4.2

Expectations of Convention Attendees toward the Tourism Resources at Their Destination

Nationality		
Australia	1	0.4
Brazil	1	0.4
Canada	1	0.4
China	18	7.6
French	4	1.7
Germany	6	2.5
India	2	0.8
Indonesia	1	0.4
Japan	122	51.5
Korea	6	2.5
Lithuania	2	0.8
Netherland	1	0.4
Poland	1	0.4
Portugal	1	0.4
Qatar	1	0.4
Russia	2	0.8
Singapore	1	0.4
Sweden	1	0.4
Switzerland	2	0.8
Taiwan	48	20.3
Thailand	6	2.5
Tunisia	1	0.4
Turkey	1	0.4
USA	6	2.5
Uzbekistan	1	0.4
Position		
Professor	44	18.6
Associate professor	33	13.9
Lecturer	13	5.5
Assistant professor	17	7.2
Company employee	25	10.5
University student	82	34.6
University staff member	3	1.3
Other	20	8.4

The demographic profiles of the respondents (N = 118) are shown in Tab. 2. There were 30 female respondents and 87 male respondents. One respondent answered ‘prefer not to say.’ The age group with the highest number of respondents was those in their 40s while the age group with the lowest number of respondents was those in their 60s. The authors collected the questionnaire from the attendees of 11 countries in terms of nationality. However, there were five countries and regions with only one participant at the conventions. In addition, Japanese people accounted for 62% of all the respondents.

Table 2: Demographic information of respondents after the COVID-19 pandemic

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	30	25.4
Male	87	73.7
Prefer not to say	1	0.8
Age		
20s	21	17.8
30s	28	23.7
40s	34	28.8

50s	26	22.0
60s	9	7.6
Nationality		
China	5	4.2
Germany	1	0.8
Hong Kong	1	0.8
Indonesia	23	19.5
Japan	74	62.7
Russia	1	0.8
Switzerland	1	0.8
Taiwan	3	2.5
Thailand	2	1.7
United States	6	5.1
Vietnam	1	0.8
Position		
Honorary professor	2	1.7
Professor	25	21.2
Associate professor	15	12.7
Lecturer	17	14.4
Assistant professor	7	5.9
Researcher	7	5.9
Company employee	7	5.9
University student	32	27.1
University staff member	6	5.1

Tab. 3 presents the evaluation of the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination before the Covid-19 pandemic. The results reveal that the highest score (M) was attributed to 'Japanese food' ($M = 4.11$). The second highest score was for 'beautiful scenery' ($M = 4.03$). The third highest score was for 'nature' ($M = 3.79$). On the other hand, the lowest score was for 'watching sports' ($M = 2.67$). The second lowest score was for 'theme parks' ($M = 2.96$). The third lowest score was for 'shopping' ($M = 3.23$). Theme parks ($SD = 1.176$), shopping ($SD = 1.154$), and watching sports ($SD = 1.144$) have the highest standard deviation values in order.

Table 3: Convention attendees' tourism resources at their destination before the COVID-19 pandemic

	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Japanese food	4.11	0.897
Shopping	3.23	1.154
City walks	3.66	1.035
Nature	3.79	1.071
Beautiful scenery	4.03	0.952
Hotels	3.40	1.035
Hot spring baths	3.61	1.121
History	3.67	1.026
Museums	3.35	0.991
Theme parks	2.96	1.176
Traditional Japanese shows	3.25	1.099
Watching sports	2.67	1.144

Tab. 4 presents the evaluation of the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results reveal that the highest score (M) was attributed to 'Japanese food' (M = 4.09). The second highest score was for 'beautiful scenery' (M = 3.86). The third highest score was for 'hotels' (M = 3.79). On the other hand, the lowest score was for 'watching sports' (M = 2.67). The second lowest score was for 'theme parks' (M = 2.81). The third lowest score was for 'shopping' (M = 3.01). Theme parks (SD = 1.186), hot spring baths (SD = 1.166), and watching sports (SD = 1.121) have the highest standard deviation values in order.

Table 4: Convention attendees' tourism resources at their destination after the COVID-19 pandemic

	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Japanese food	4.09	0.952
Shopping	3.01	1.121
City walks	3.75	1.047
Nature	3.70	1.040
Beautiful scenery	3.86	1.023
Hotels	3.79	0.941
Hot spring baths	3.31	1.166
History	3.47	1.002
Museums	3.35	0.990
Theme parks	2.81	1.186
Traditional Japanese shows	3.14	1.070
Watching sports	2.67	1.055

5 Discussion

Tab. 5 presents the differences in the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination before and after the Covid-19 pandemic in a ranking. The rankings of 1st, 2nd, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th places were the same in the results of the questionnaire both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, although the rankings from 3rd to 8th place were slightly different, they were the same items in the results of the questionnaire both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 5: Differences in the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination between before and after the COVID-19 pandemic

	Before the Covid-19 Pandemic	During the Covid-19 Pandemic
1	Japanese food	Japanese food
2	Beautiful scenery	Beautiful scenery
3	Nature	Hotels
4	History	City walks
5	City walks	Nature
6	Hot spring baths	History
7	Hotels	Museums
8	Museums	Hot spring baths
9	Traditional Japanese shows	Traditional Japanese shows
10	Shopping	Shopping
11	Theme parks	Theme parks
12	Watching sports	Watching sports

This study clarified that the Covid-19 pandemic has not had much effect on the expectations of convention attendees toward the tourism resources at their destination. Excursions offered to convention attendees are very important for them because they are not merely trips but provide them good opportunities to network with other attendees. It is necessary to improve the quality of tourism resources utilized in excursions at convention to promote on-site conventions.

There were some limitations in this study that should be noted. The number of questionnaires collected before and after the Covid-19 pandemic was quite different, so it is hard to make an exact comparison. Moreover, more than half of the respondents were Japanese in both questionnaires. Therefore, when thinking about a strategy to promote on-site conventions as promotion of inbound tourism, it is essential to collect more questionnaires from those attending from overseas and to then analyze their expectations toward tourism resources.

Acknowledgement

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