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Incentive travel love for Japan not dampened by overtourism and cheaper perception

By Kathryn Wortley (<https://www.ttgmedia.com/author/kathrynwortley/>) / Posted on 13 November, 2024 13:50

Japan remains extremely desirable for corporate incentive travel, even amid calls of overtourism and a perception of the country becoming “cheaper” due to the weak yen, say events experts.

“Incentive travel demand is extremely strong. We’re completely sold out until summer 2025,” said Naomi Mano, president and CEO of hospitality and event management company Luxurique. “Usually we don’t get bookings so far ahead but people are realising that Japan is so packed, they need to plan early.”



Three quarters of travellers to Japan are staying in Tokyo, Osaka (pictured), Kyoto, Fukuoka and Hokkaido

“Japan is one of the top travel destinations for us, and even more so now since it became more affordable,” says Sulin Neo, CEO and owner of Singapore-based Hemisphere Events. “For clients with a mid-range budget, Japan will be the top choice.”

Happo-en in Tokyo, is welcoming more incentive groups, typically 60 to 100 pax. Growth is growing from Hong Kong, whose incentive market “recovered a few months ago,” and China “compared to last year,” said Naoki Takahashi, global event sales manager.

International visitors totalled 2.87 million in September, 26.4 per cent more than in the same month in 2019, and with almost three quarters of travellers staying in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Fukuoka and Hokkaido, according to the Japan Tourism Agency, many popular destinations are crowded.

This trend, however, will not deter incentive travel groups, and Japan’s popularity on social media as a destination may even drive further growth in incentives, according to Max Boontawee Jantasuan, managing director of events at Bangkok-based Travel Asia.

“Incentive travel programmes are decided based on reviews and social media,” he said, adding that companies might choose Tokyo based on a team member seeing a beautiful bar or café on Instagram.

Indeed, rather than avoid places popular among tourists, “bucket-list sites must be recognised in business event programmes”, opined James Kent, director and COO of destination marketing company The J Team.

“In addition event owners are looking for something special to offer, both off and on the beaten track,” said Kent, adding that “business event owners want to bring the joys of Japanese food and culture to their VIP guests.

Neo agreed, noting that “unique experiences are what clients are looking for now as many people have been to the usual places already.”

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