

A Brief Review of Tourism in Japan after World War II

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Abstract

Today, international tourism has become a significant socioeconomic phenomenon in the world. In 2007, world export revenues generated from international tourism ranked fourth following fuel, chemicals, and automobile products. However, while many developing and less developed countries have viewed tourism as a vehicle for development during the last five decades, Japan only recently realized the importance of tourism as a leading industry. Japan's tourism revenues only amounted to US \$9.3 billion in 2007 (APTEC 2009: 5). In 2007, both Japanese and foreign travelers spent ¥23.5 billion in Japan, and 2.11 million tourism jobs were created as a direct effect. Tourism's ripple effect on the Japanese economy is tremendous. It has generated 4.41 million jobs, including indirect employment and tax revenues of ¥5.1 billion. Tourism has the potential to create even more job opportunities for the Japanese, both at the local level and in tourism-related industries, to increase foreign-exchange benefits, and to have great sociocultural impacts on Japanese communities and ethnic groups.

Tourism involves a number of players, including tourists, host societies, tourism-related industries, and central and local governments. Research on these players and the relationships between them has recently begun in Japan. This paper briefly summarizes the trends and characteristics of tourism in Japan since the end of World War II by dividing the last several decades into five periods and then briefly characterizing each period.

Introduction

Before describing the characteristics of tourism after the end of World War II, it is important to briefly review the travel before that period. In pre-modern Japan, many people traveled on foot on pilgrimages to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples and to visit hot springs for health reasons. These continue to be important modern-day tourist destinations in Japan as well (Miyamoto, 1987).

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After the Meiji Reformation in 1868, the government promoted the industrial revolution, building a modern nation-state. In terms of tourism, the wealthy or the elites began imitating European styles of tourism, such as developing watering places on the beaches at Oiso in Kanagawa Prefecture. European scholars, medical doctors, missionaries, and others working in Japan all played important roles in this process. They bathed in the sea. They built summer villas in Karuizawa on the eastern Nagano Prefecture, which has developed into one of the most famous resort areas today (Nakagawa 1985: 142-3).

However, the era of tourism for most of the Japanese people started after World War I. The government developed transportation systems such as railroads and set up national parks in order to keep laborers “fresh” for manufacturing good quality products and to let those people visit places of natural beauty. Places with hot springs were also divided into two types: those used for health reasons and those reserved for tourism (Nihon kotsu kosha chosa-bu 1994: 74). Then, Japan plunged into a period of war.

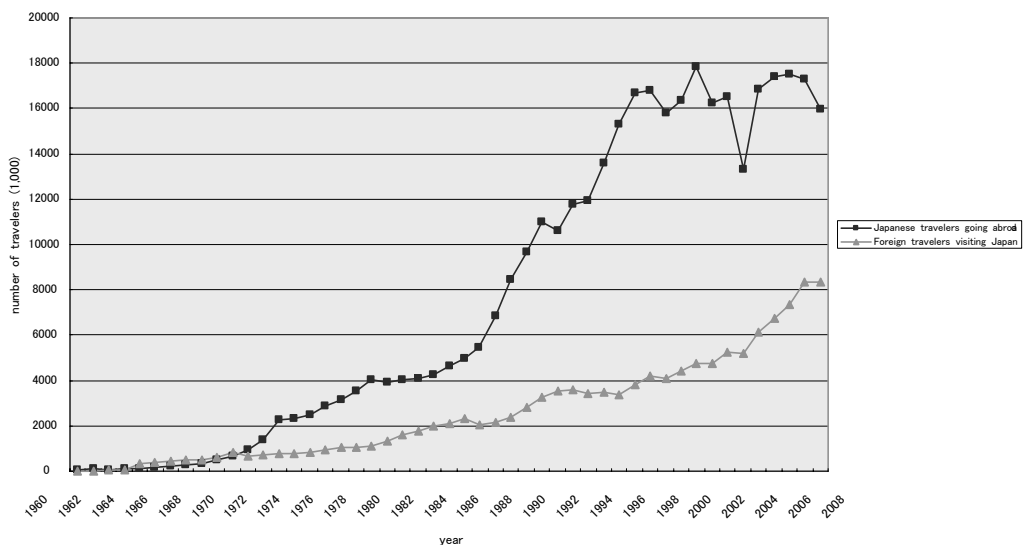


Figure 1. Number of travelers from foreign countries and Japanese travelers going abroad
(2009 Tourism White Paper)

In terms of tourism in Japan, one can roughly divide the post-World War II period into five sub-periods (Figure 1). The first is the reconstruction period, which lasted from 1945 to 1963. During this period, the government did not allow the public to travel abroad for tourism, mainly because the foreign-exchange stock was not sufficient to support tourism. The second period, which lasted from 1964 to 1969, was characterized by more

liberal policies toward traveling abroad. The final three periods are the beginning of mass tourism (1970~1980s), the beginning of alternative-tourism period (1980s ~2006), and the tourism-nation period (2006 to date). The next section briefly reviews the characteristics of each period in terms of tourism.

Reconstruction Period (1945~1963)

Most Japanese could not afford the expense of traveling for tourism until the 1960s because of the devastated condition of Japan after World War II. The economy of Japan started growing especially after the Korean War, which lasted from 1950 to 1953. The economic boom ignited by the Korean War was the beginning of the rapid economic growth of the post-World War II period. The leisure time and disposable income of the Japanese gradually increased, but most of the public still could not participate in long-term vacations because of their work schedules. There was also no system to guarantee long-term vacation time for the public. Laborers' contributions to their companies were regarded as their most important. Since companies required a constantly fresh and high-quality work force, they often organized recreational trips to nearby hot springs for their laborers (Nihon kotsu kosha chosa-bu 1994: 74-5).

The government did not allow the public to travel abroad for tourism in this period because the foreign-exchange stock was not sufficient to support tourism. However, information on foreign countries was introduced into Japan in the form of movies, books, magazines, and other media. Many people, especially among the youth, dreamed of visiting Hawaii, mainland U.S.A., and Europe. The American musical film, *South Pacific*, was released in Japan in 1959 and became very popular. It chronicles the story of an American army nurse who falls in love with a French planter while visiting a small island in the South Pacific. Images of foreign countries and romance attracted many young Japanese people. Since most Japanese could not go abroad and the United States occupied subtropical Okinawa until 1972, some Japanese localities became popular substitutes for foreign countries.

In the late 1950s, many newlyweds started visiting the Nichinan coast of Miyazaki Prefecture on the island of Kyushu. Palm trees were planted along its coastline to mimic the coastlines of Hawaii. This trend continued into the 1970s because it was cheaper and more convenient than visiting Hawaii and other foreign countries. In 1974, 37% of Japanese newlyweds visited Miyazaki and stayed overnight for their honeymoon (Shirahata 1996: 177).

The Japanese longing for foreign countries contributed to the creation of another mystic world within Japan herself—the world of the indigenous Ainu people in Hokkaido.

The Ainu culture, including their language, is quite different from ordinary Japanese. Immediately after the Meiji Reformation, the Imperial government took away the Ainu's entire territory and incorporated it into the state. Because the Ainu were hunter-gatherers and did not have a written language or a private landholding system, they could not show evidence that the land was theirs. The government forced them to join the Japanese nation in 1872 and discouraged the use of their own language and culture. While the government forced them to assimilate into the Japanese mainstream in every aspect, other Japanese discriminated against them because of their cultural difference and the like. However, many Japanese visited the Ainu's tourist villages and enjoyed their "traditional" dances, music, and woodcraft souvenirs, which were created for tourism in the late 1800s. The Ainu showed tourists some of their traditional rites, such as Kumaokuri, which the Ainu people used to send the souls of bears to the gods, thanking the gods for sending them bear meat and leather. Songs about the Ainu were written and sung by Japanese singers, and novels about the Ainu were written and read among the Japanese. Visiting the Ainu in Hokkaido became a booming tourist activity for the Japanese in this period (Otsuka 1996).

At home, those with a certain amount of disposable income sought to purchase three items as a replacement for tourism: TVs, refrigerators, and washing machines (Fukagawa 1991: 61-64).

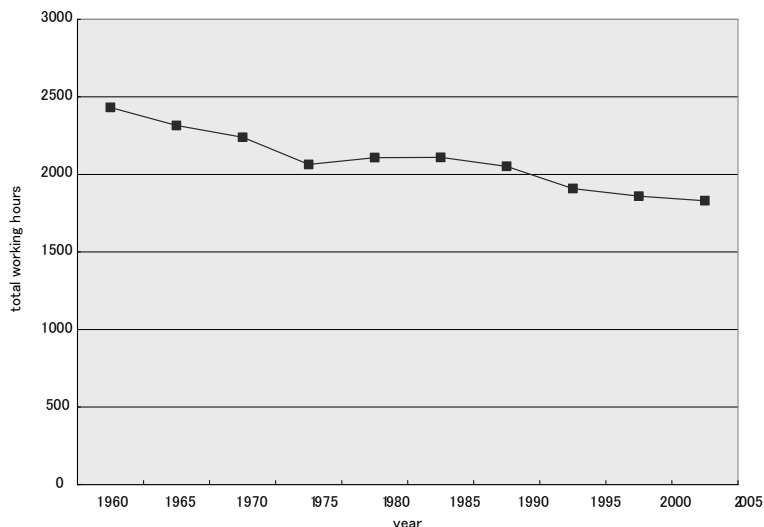


Figure 2. Trend of per capita total working hours in Japan

Source: <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/GL02010101.do> (December 13, 2009)

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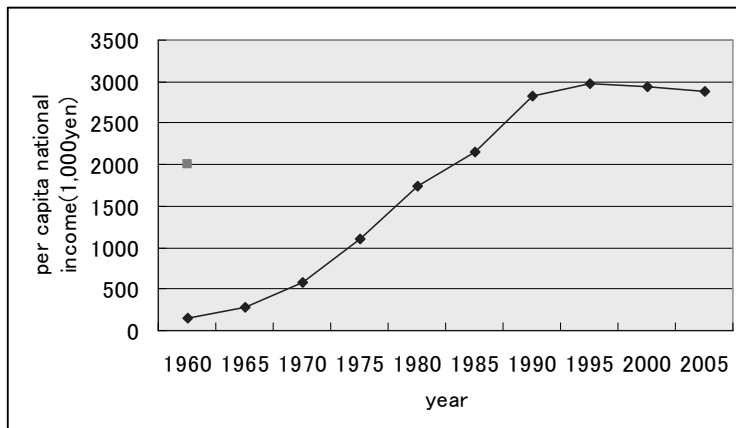


Figure 3. Trend of per capita national income in Japan
Source: Keizaikikaku-cho "Kokumin KeizaiKeisan-nenpo"

Rapid Economic Growth Period (1964~1969)

The post-war economic growth in Japan started after the Korean War broke out. In this period, the migration of many young and middle-aged Japanese to urban areas to join the workforce and support rapid economic growth led to the depopulation of most rural areas, while urban areas, especially Tokyo, became overcrowded. Thus, even traditional festivals were not held in many rural areas due to the lack of young and middle-aged residents. It has become quite difficult, even today, to maintain mutual help among the rural residents.

In 1964, the Japanese government began deregulating tourism abroad, mainly because the foreign-exchange rate was set at a fixed amount. The public was able to exchange no more than US \$500. At the time, US \$1 equaled ¥360.

In 1964, Japan also became the first Asian country to host the Olympic Games. In that same year, Shinkansen, the bullet train, began operating between Tokyo and Osaka. Foreigners visiting Japan for the Olympic Games were able to experience a ride on the world's fastest train and visit Kyoto and Osaka for tourism. In addition, Japan opened its first highway—the Meishin highway between Komaki, in the Aichi Prefecture, and Nishinomiya, in the Hyogo Prefecture—that year. The opening of the highway fostered the motorization of Japan immensely. After the first commercial jet flew over Japan in 1969, air travel also became less expensive. As a result, the government at both the central and local levels started to work seriously on tourism.

In this period, developers built various parks and health centers near suburban areas. These parks were probably established in order to attract the growing middle class,

who had neither automobiles nor sufficient leisure time for more extensive travel (Hashizume 2000: 147-161). This trend continued into the following period.

During this period, those who had certain amounts of disposable income sought out to purchase three of the latest inventions besides traveling for tourism: cars, air conditioners, and color TVs (Fukagawa 1991: 77).

Beginning of the Mass Tourism Period (1970~1980s)

From March 15 to September 13, 1970, Osaka hosted the World Exposition for the first time in Asia. People from foreign countries and all over Japan visited the Exposition for six months, and a tremendous number of package tours were organized for this purpose. Ever since, package tours have been the most popular and affordable way for Japanese to travel. Since the Exposition, Japanese tourism has never ceased. One of the reasons for this is the stable economic growth. As discussed above, many people moved to urban areas as the need for a larger labor force grew during the period of rapid economic growth. Many of them had to live in small houses surrounded by relatively unorganized new communities. When the economic growth stabilized and those people were able to look back at their lives, they realized what they had lost in the process. First, they had sacrificed their family lives on the altar of companies. Second, they lost their rural homelands as they migrated to urban areas. In response, they started to visit various old towns that could serve as a reminder of their old days.

Soon after the World Exposition ended, National Railways (today's JR) began its



Figure 4. “Discover Japan” campaign advertised by National Railways
(*Asahi Newspaper*, October 8, 1970)

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“Discover Japan” campaign, which used traditional images such as Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, and traditional dances of rural towns and villages. Two famous weekly female magazines, *an* · *an* and *non* · *no*, were published in 1970 and 1971 respectively. They made domestic tourism, especially featuring old towns and rural areas, appeal to young women. Since their establishment, they have contributed to the mobilization of many young women to those rural areas and towns, which were rich in traditions and heritages.

In addition to visiting old towns and rural areas, skiing became very popular among the young people, and many ski resorts were developed in Honshu and Hokkaido as a result. Golf courses were also constructed as the game grew in popularity—first among the wealthy and later among the business people. In order to build golf courses and ski slopes, roads and other infrastructure had to be maintained, which required a lot of capital. Thus, developers used outside capital, mainly from Tokyo, to build these attractions. Local capital was usually insufficient for this type of development. The champion of Japanese theme parks—Tokyo Disneyland—was founded on April 14, 1983. This park seeks to fulfill tourists’ expectations by constantly adding new sections. In the same year Nagasaki Oranda-mura was open. It’s said that 1983 was “the first year of theme parks” in Japan (Hashizume 2000: 162).

The new Tokyo International Airport opened in 1978, and mass tourism developed immensely, along with the growing interest in package tours. Then, the oil crises of 1973 and 1978 slowly began to change Japanese ways of thinking about mass tourism and the natural environment.

Beginning of the Alternative Tourism Period (1980s–2006)

The period between the last half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s is referred to as Japan’s “bubble economy.” The price of assets such as real estate and shares soared. In 1987, the so-called Resort Act was enacted to facilitate the building of resorts, theme parks, and other types of amusement facilities by private companies. The most famous amusement park, Tokyo Disneyland, opened in Urayasu City in Chiba Prefecture in 1983 as shown already. Various legislative acts controlling and maintaining natural environments were deregulated to build such facilities. Many local governments teamed up with private companies to promote their individual regions’ incomplete dream. Banks loaned most of the money for these projects. In 1989, the cruise-ship boom began when large cruise ships began offering successful trips. In the early 1990s, the “bubble economy” ended, leading to the failure of many projects still being built at the time. Companies involved in the projects pulled out and returned to the major cities, mainly

Tokyo. Most of the projects failed with huge amounts of loans, and the land transformed for the projects remained untouched (Eguchi 1993).

In 1990, the number of Japanese travelers going abroad passed 10 million for the first time, and the number of travelers visiting Japan passed 3 million. Both numbers have continued to increase ever since, with the exception of brief periods surrounding a few negative events such as the September 11 attacks in the U.S., the SARS outbreak in 2004, and the recent severe economic depression (see Figure 1).

As people began to recognize the negative impacts of mass tourism and grew tired of it, alternative tourism became more popular in Japan. People began to think about nature differently. Since the end of World War II, people have viewed nature as an endless resource to be developed and exploited by them as if it were an inexhaustible object. After experiencing two oil crises in the recent past and holding the Rio Summit in 1992, the world started to emphasize the necessity of sustainability, including in the context of tourism. As a result, many types of alternative tourism appeared throughout the world, including in Japan.

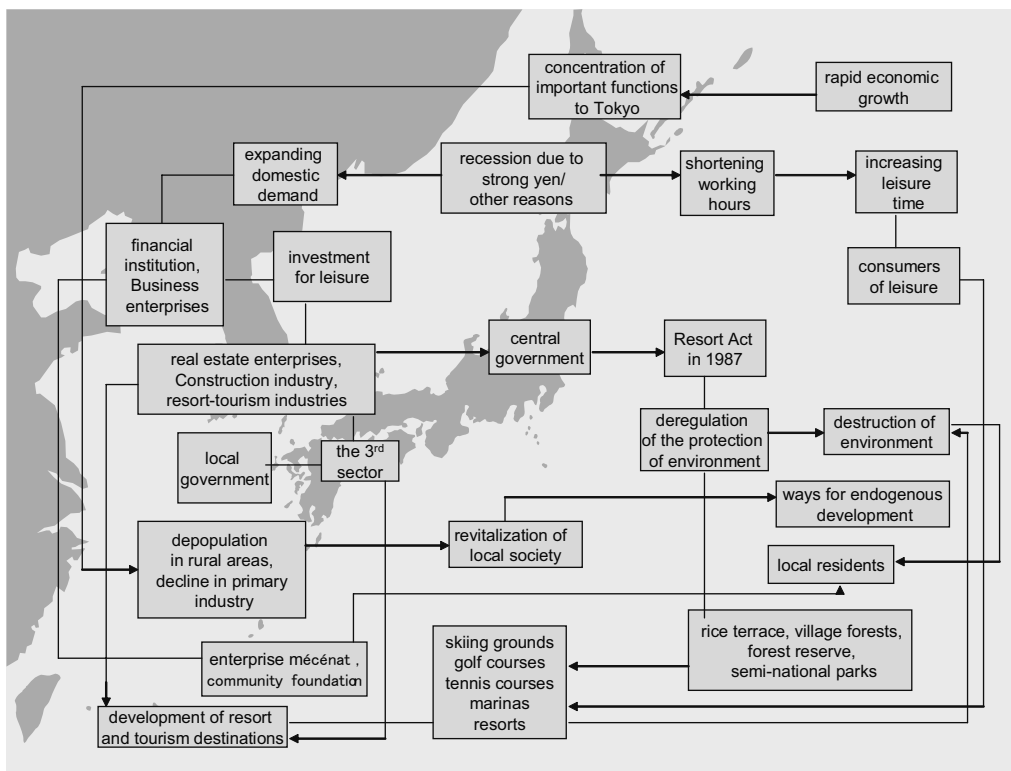


Figure 5. Increasing leisure time and relationships between some factors in the 1980s and 1990s (Eguchi 1993: 131)

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Examples of alternative tourism include ecotourism, rural tourism, green tourism, and blue tourism. Wheeler (2003) summarizes the characteristics of alternative tourism as follows:

- a more caring, aware form of tourism-related small-scale development,
- ecologically sound, local integration with indigenous ownership and control,
- seasonal and spatial spread of demand, and
- a more caring, aware tourist who is well versed in the ethics of “travel” (p. 228).

Tourists, tourism industries, and local governments and communities all created many new destinations for alternative tourism. However, each player defined the new types of tourism slightly differently. For instance, tourism industries sought to gain maximum profits for minimum cost by using new labels for tourism. They have sold ecotourism under labels like eco-tours and mountain visits (Eguchi 2001: 111-114). The government registered Yakushima (Yaku Island) of Kyushu's Kagoshima Prefecture as a World Nature Heritage site in 1993. However, many tourists have continued to visit the island without any control or regulation since then, arousing many negative impacts on the natural environment. To address this issue, together with the government, the island community will regulate the number of tourists entering the island's mountain in 2010. Similar problems have occurred in other World Heritage sites in Japan. The government has registered 14 World Heritage sites in Japan since 1993.



Figure 6. World Heritage sites in Japan (November 2009)

Three of these are Natural Heritage sites, and the rest are cultural. The increasing

number of tourists visiting the sites has caused a number of serious problems, including overcrowding of bathrooms, damage done to the earth's surface, and graffiti. Although the sites are registered for preservation, it has been difficult to realize that goal. All of the actors involved in the World Heritage sites may experience a conflict of interest in terms of their desires for profits and for the preservation of the sites. What we must keep in mind is that, as Richard Butler (1980) suggested, any tourism destinations may eventually evolve from alternative forms of tourism to those of mass tourism.

Wheeler's (2003) ideal characteristics of alternative tourism are difficult to achieve in reality. It is necessary to not only regulate and control the number of tourists entering certain destinations, but also to educate tourists on how to behave ethically.

Toward a Tourism Nation (2006 to date)

On October 1, 2008, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism created the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA), an extra-ministerial bureau. JTA's mission is to stimulate local economies and to further international mutual understanding following the passing of the Basic Act on Promotion of Tourism Nation in December 2006.

The five fundamental targets set out in the Act's basic plan sought to increase the number of (1) foreign tourists visiting Japan, (2) international meetings held in Japan, (3) nights each Japanese stays in accommodations during domestic sightseeing tours, (4) Japanese tourists traveling overseas, and (5) expenditure in Japan on sightseeing tours (JTA 2009: 2). The first target has been quite successful, as the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan has been increasing constantly (Figure 1).

In this same period, a new phenomenon has been observed among tourists and in their choice of destinations. It is safe to say that this new phenomenon is a post-modern one. One of the features of the post-modern period is that the absolute value characterized during the modern period sometimes becomes obscure. For example, while the division between tourists as observers and the hosts being observed used to be quite clear, tourists now often act as the ones being observed. One good example is "geisha tourism" in Kyoto. Many tourists are willing to pay more than 10,000 yen/hour for the chance to become a geisha momentarily. As they walk around in geisha attire, other tourists ask these pseudo-geishas to pose for photographs (Photo 1). To become the non-routine objects, tourists excite extraordinarily and refresh¹⁾.

Besides the geisha example, tourists play the roles of farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, and the like. Inns that poor manual laborers usually rent daily or weekly are becoming popular as inexpensive accommodations for tourists. Ironically, most of these laborers cannot afford to spend money on tourism. Until recently, tourists have avoided these

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Photo 1. Tourist playing as a geisha girl in Kyoto (March 2007).

Photo taken by the author

areas, but now laborers' accommodations are becoming tourists' favorite destinations. We observe this sort of phenomenon in many aspects of our lives. Tourism is just one of them.

What We Can Learn from the Past

We can learn many things from the past:

- (1) Tourism can be a double-edged sword. It may have a negative impact on local culture, or it may contribute to the sustainment of a part of a culture. Therefore, local communities should develop tourism, with outside support if necessary, and the pace of development should be slow, well planned, controlled, managed, and sustainable. At the very least, the local community should participate in the process of planning.
- (2) Ecotourism should be controlled and managed to the extent that it is desirable to sustain the natural environment and the practice of tourism.
- (3) We should consult foreigners' views when planning community development for the purpose of tourism.
- (4) Most tourism-related facilities and transportation are too expensive for both ordinary Japanese and foreign visitors who want to stay longer. We need to create means of facilitating tourism in Japan at a lower cost.
- (5) There should be more supporting systems for tourists from abroad so that foreign visitors can move around easily without understanding Japanese language fluently.

- (6) We must maintain barrier-free environments for tourism for the sake of Japanese tourists, foreigners, and handicapped tourists. Road signs, transportation announcements, tourist guidebooks, and restaurant menus need to be written not only in Japanese but in both English and other Asian languages.
- (7) We should discuss and teach tourism ethics among the Japanese public.

Notes

- 1) Nelson Graburn (1983) has already suggested that some kinds of inversions are common to tourist styles and social groups. He emphasizes that these inversions are polar opposites and that (a) tourists may choose the degree to which a particular behavior is a change from or reversal of their "normal" style and (b) each kind of tourism is characterized by the selection of only a few key reversals (Graburn 1983 21-22). Although many tourists experience inversions of their ordinary lives through the tourism process, they maintain their stance as observers. However, in the post-modern period, tourism has changed to the observers become the observed. Double inversions often occur.

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