

Attracting Japanese Visitors to Festival Tours

by LÃ QUỐC KHÁNH

The number of Japanese visitors to Vietnam is increasing year by year, especially since they enjoy visa exemption when entering Vietnam. Nevertheless, the figure remains modest and a lot of potentials for development in comparison with neighboring countries like Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand which have the same tourism conditions

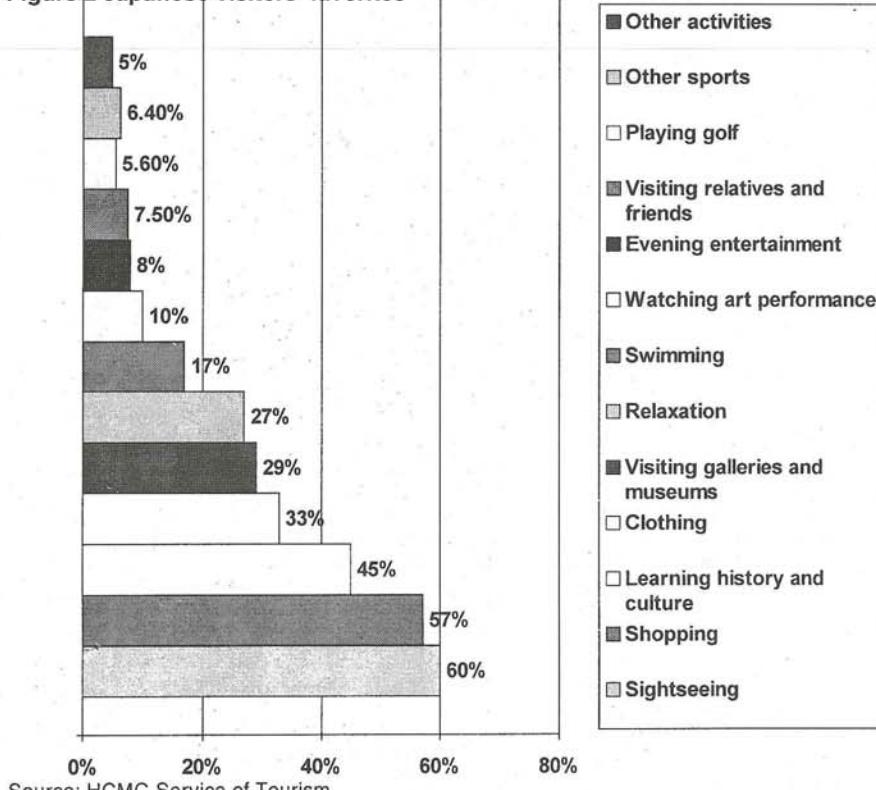
including scenery, climate and natural resources.

A survey conducted by HCMC Service of Tourism in 2001 reveals as many as 23% of Japanese tourists

are allured by local cultural heritages and 25% like to understand the people's cultural life. As a result, the motivation of almost 50% of Japanese visitors

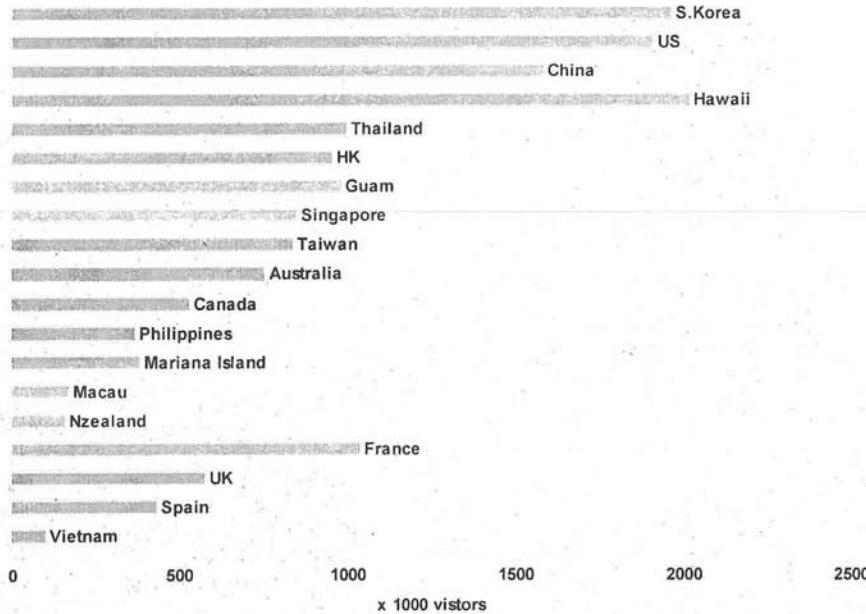
gets involved in culture and life learning. This article suggests festival tours as special products to attract potential markets like Japan.

Figure 2 Japanese visitors' favorites



Source: HCMC Service of Tourism

Figure 1: Japanese visitors to countries and territories in 2000



Source: Japanese National Tourist Organization

Regarding festivals, their cultural attraction is the top concern. In general, Vietnam's festivals have high humanity. Great festivals like Tết (New Lunar Year Festival), Đoan Ngõ, Mid-Autumn (15th day in August –Lunar calendar), Hùng Vương Kings Temple (March 10 – Lunar calendar), Lim Festival, Hương Pagoda or local festivals including Yên Tử, Phù Giầy, Cầu Ngư, Bà Chúa Xứ, Gong Festival (Central Highlands)...reflect unique features of Vietnamese minds and beliefs. Traditional festivals indicate real values of humanity and history. In festivals, traditional arts are performed, showing spiritual beauties of Vietnamese. They are very interesting to visitors from

developed countries like Japan. Japanese visitors, especially aged people, like very much cultural, historical and artistic themes in their tours, so festivals will fascinate them.

Japanese are delighted with ancient relics, cul-

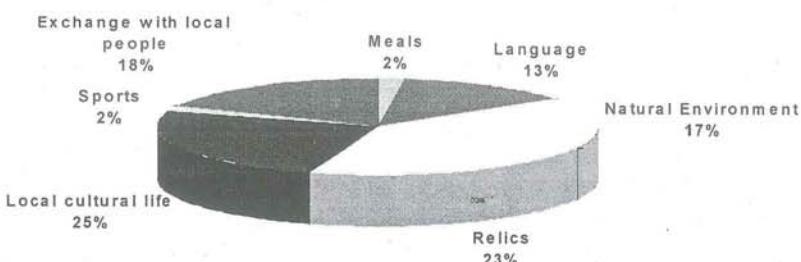
23% with friends and 25.3% with families. These facts give a hint to the organization of festivals which draw collective participation to games, art performances or contests. Japanese have significant virtues like perseverance,

ing games and sports will allure them. The combination of eco-tours, community culture, and festivals will help visitors maximize the benefits of their time and money spent in Vietnam. This is also one of targets of Japanese tour-

ists when they travel abroad.

The peak time of Japanese outbound travel includes February, March, July, August and September. Unfortunately, Vietnam's festivals are less held in these months. As a result, tourist companies should exploit other events such as sports games and cultural contests to avoid tedious tours and diversify products of festival tours in the country. Furthermore, tour guides' competence of Japanese and skills should be enhanced. Their role is extremely important in explaining effectively festivals' contents and customs. This is a big challenge but it certainly brings attractive values to tourists.

Figure 3: The attractive factors to Japanese visitors



Source: HCMC Service of Tourism

tural and historical sites, vestiges of Champ ancient civilization, and cultural heritages recognized by the UNESCO including Hạ Long bay, Mý Sơn, Hội An and Huế. They also love Vietnamese traditional music. If organized in these places, the festivals certainly increase their attraction. Popular terms and sentences spoken in the festival often amuse Japanese visitors. They absorb customs and habits of the destination very quickly, especially young people. Therefore, gifts, souvenirs and books and brochures guiding local customs and cultural beauties are valuable things for Japanese visitors. They are also highly loyal customers and often return to the places where they have ever been and loved. So these impressive souvenirs will recollect their joys with local cultural festivals and make them come back.

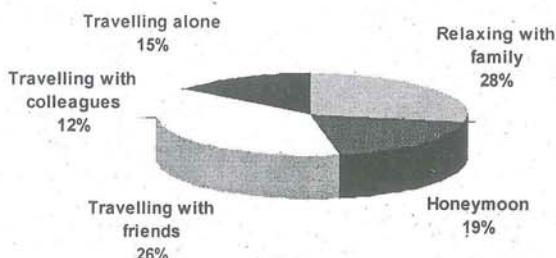
Japanese visitors often travel in groups. For example, according to a report of Japan National Tourist Organization, 10% of Japanese visitors take tours with their colleagues; 17.1% with sweethearts;

politeness, modesty, creativity and altruism; so traditional festivals will help us understand their affection and make them adhere to Vietnam tourism.

Travel agents and airlines are major channels providing information about Vietnam to Japanese tourists (80%). Festival programs should be promoted in these channels in Japan. However, due to their high advertising costs, the organization of familiarization trips for tour operators and their channels should be concentrated to introduce festival programs. In addition, Vietnamese tourist companies are required to take part in tourism fairs, workshops and conferences in Japan; especially Vietnam cultural weeks are very useful and crucial in Japan to diffuse our festival programs.

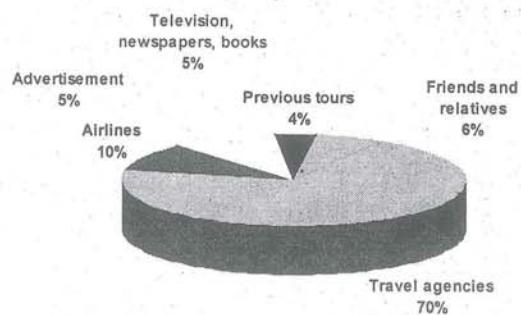
Japanese tourists aged from 25 to 39 and students visiting Vietnam show an upward tendency. These people often like to travel individually, independently, and freely or in small groups with simple facilities and reasonable prices. Festivals like row-

Figure 4: Forms of travel



Source: Japan National Tourist Organization

Figure 5: Sources of information about Vietnam for Japanese visitors'



When organizing tours and alluring Japanese visitors to our traditional festivals, we should also pay attention to their own national holidays and festival. Japan is a country having four distinct seasons and their festivals are often organized in the seasonal change. They keenly take part in their festivals. They thus show less interest in foreign holidays on these occasions. As a result, tourist companies should give heed to these events to schedule appropriate tours.

In recent years, Japanese visitors are very interested in Southeast Asian destinations. The exploitation of festivals to diversify tourist products and allure Japanese visitors' comebacks will face a lot of challenges and promising achievements. This article is only an outline in the whole picture of Vietnam tourism development. The writer hopes there will be a lot of detailed studies in this field so that Vietnamese tourism industry soon design a lot of effective programs attracting Japanese visitors based on the country's cultural resources. ■

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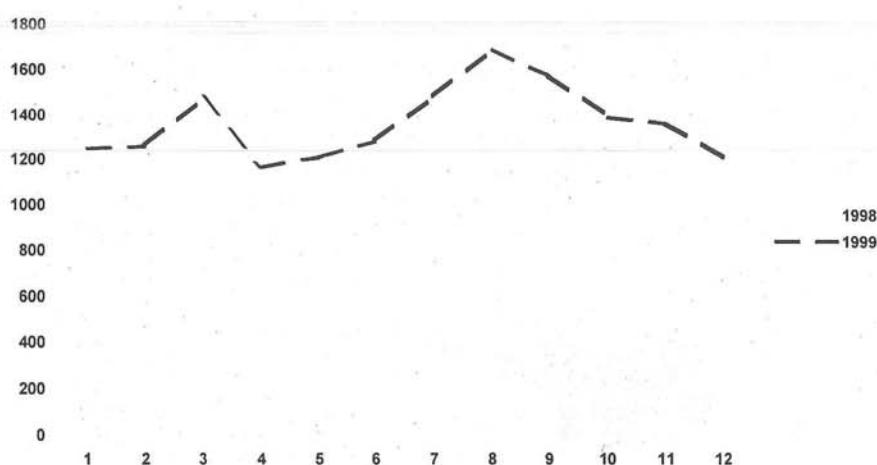
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Figure 6: The number of Japanese visitors to foreign countries in 1998 and 1999

Unit: 1,000 visitors



Source: Japan Ministry of Justice

Table 1 Japanese national holidays and festivals

Holidays and festivals in Japan	
New Year (shogatsu)	January 1
Beginning of spring (setsubun)	February 3
Doll's Festival (hina matsuri)	March 3
Children's Day (kodomo no hi)	May 5
Star Festival (tanabata)	July 7
Obon:	July 15 (Lunar Calendar)
Local festivals (Gion in Kyoto, Okunchi in Nagasaki...)	Many days
Agricultural festivals	Many days
Summer festivals (Gion, Tenjin, Kanda..)	July 17
Japan's national holidays	
New Year's Day (ganjitsu)	January 1
Coming-of-age Day (seijin no hi)	January 15
National Foundation Day (kenkoku kinembi)	February 11
Vernal Equinox Day (shumbun no hi)	March 20 or 21
Greenery Day (midori no hi)	April 29
Constitution Memorial Day (kempô kinembi)	May 3
Children's Day (kodomo no hi)	May 5
Respect-for-the-aged Day (keirô no hi)	September 15
Autumnal Equinox Day (shûbun no hi)	September 23
Health-sports Day (taiiku no hi)	October 10
Culture Day (bunka no hi)	November 3
Labor Thanksgiving Day (kinrô kansha no hi)	November 23
Emperor's Birthday (tennô tanjôbi)	December 23

Source: Japan Today, 1993

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