

JAPAN TO FINALLY REOPEN TO INDIVIDUAL TRAVELERS



Japan, like many others, has closed its borders due to the Covid pandemic. While other nations have opened borders to any tourist (even Japanese), in Japan only in recent months have the first progress on entries been made, allowing people with a work or marriage visa to enter.

During the two years of the pandemic, Japan has almost completely alienated itself from foreign visitors, instead promoting domestic tourism through promotional campaigns like “Go To Travel”. **This initiative led residents in Japan to support industries thanks to funds allocated by the government that went to cover domestic travel costs with coupons and by giving discounts on travel packages.**

However, even for Japanese residents, the increase in infections proved to be a trouble, which led to the campaign’s suspension and in all these several businesses that lived off tourism like restaurants, hotels, agencies and so on, were forced to close their doors. Although it seems that 2022 could lead to an important change: the further opening of the borders has been discussed.

Until a month ago, the country remained sealed off to any kind of individual travelers without a visa and with a very small number of arrivals allowed; from June, there was the first glimmer of hope for tourist travels, opening up to some Asian nations and then, to travel allowed to everyone, but only through group packages offered by agencies, with an itinerary planned and approved by the competent authorities, often compared to those guided tours done in North Korea.

Japan had also created a sort of ranking of the several countries according to the risk of COVID infection, based on the colors red, yellow and blue, requesting a negative COVID test carried out 72 hours before departure. In addition, those entering the country would need to take another test and, if coming from red or yellow countries, do a quarantine period in a registered facility.

However, these days, the situations seem to evolve further: according to Prime Minister Kishida, the government intends to increase the number of daily entries from September, which would reach 50,000 instead of the current 20,000. Interestingly, just this week a survey by a Japanese company targeting 52 different countries showed that 72% of participants would not visit the country if border control conditions remain as they are. Government-imposed tour packages were the main reason for the reluctance to travel to Japan with 71% saying they would change their mind if the tours were interrupted. About 39% wanted the visa requirement to be lifted, while 38% opposed the requirement for a negative COVID-19 test before arrival. About 23% want the daily income cap to be lifted.

Japan’s Step Forward: Yes, to Individual Travelers

But the most interesting news is coming right now: according to Minister Taro Kono, from September 7th a negative COVID test will no longer be required for vaccinated people with at least three doses, and there would be an increase in the daily limit of arriving passengers and, later, also the visa exemption.

This last point is the most intriguing, but also the one with the “catch”: the government would also like to accept individual travelers who do not desire to use the offer of guided tours, but they will still have to book their trip using a travel agency.

Information on Costs for the Travel Package: Flight and Hotel

The official information has not been released yet, however, it is assumed that the agencies will have a useful role to communicate the individual travellers’ journeys, thus allowing them to control their movement (and therefore online sites like Booking, Airbnb, Expedia will not be considered valid substitutes for agencies). Clearly, having to use an agency for your trip to Japan will entail additional costs for intermediation, which will add to the current rather high prices for air tickets.

Before the pandemic, the costs of an autonomously organized trip to Japan could actually be very affordable: the estimates ranged between one thousand and two thousand euros depending on your needs and the duration of the visit, as well as the choice between direct flight or with a stopover. A ticket from European capitals in 2019 could cost an average of 400 to 700 euros (also depending on direct or with stopover), while now with the increase in fuel prices and reduced flights, the figure will certainly be higher.

As for hotels or other kinds of accommodations, this is maybe the most convenient part: Japan’s tourism sector is floundering for new visitors and, for this reason, several options can be found at particularly affordable prices by taking a look at sites like Booking.

However, all this will be relatively irrelevant if you have to contact an agency: it will certainly require an additional payment for its services and, right now, making an accurate estimate is almost impossible.

Date: 2022-09-05

Article link: <https://www.tourism-review.com/individual-travelers-to-visit-japan-again-news12673>