

JAPAN'S TOURISM REPORTED 2.69 M VISITORS IN JANUARY



Japan's tourism sector has begun the new year on a positive note. In January, the country welcomed over 2 million visitors, which marked the eighth consecutive month of such numbers.

According to the latest data from JNTO (the Japan National Tourism Organization), the 2.69 million foreign visitors last month nearly matched December's figure of 2.73 million, which had set an all-time high for that month. **This sustained momentum comes after a remarkable pandemic recovery year in 2023**, where the country welcomed over 25 million visitors, surpassing previous expectations.

Japan's tourism suffered greatly due to the COVID-19 pandemic lasting over two years. However, the country saw a surge in visitors in 2023 due to the rapid depreciation of the yen, making Japan a more attractive and affordable destination.

Despite a minor decline in January compared to December, the number of visitors remained the same as in 2019, when Japan achieved a record-breaking figure of 39.9 million tourists. It is important to note that the statistics for January were affected by an earthquake in Ishikawa on January 1. Nevertheless, tourists from South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia reached an all-time high for a month.

Although tourism from China has not yet reached the pre-pandemic levels, there are signs of improvement. Mainland Chinese visitors used to constitute a significant portion of tourism in Japan. 415,900 Chinese visitors arrived in Japan in January, a 33% increase from the previous month. In addition, Japanese department stores have reported a rise in sales of luxury goods and duty-free items in the first half of February, partly due to Lunar New Year celebrations.

Tourism analysts suggest that there is a shift in Chinese travel trends. Instead of frantic shopping trips, Chinese visitors now prefer leisurely trips, also known as "chill stays." This change in trend is good news for Japan's economy, where inbound tourism plays an increasingly important role. Last year, the number of visitors surpassed the ¥5 trillion (about \$33.3 billion) target set by the government, reinforcing the economic significance of tourism to Japan.

According to government data, the number of Japanese travelers going abroad during winter was significantly lower than the pre-pandemic levels due to the weak yen and rising fuel costs. The Japan National Tourism Organization reported that only 1,786,500 Japanese people traveled overseas in December and January, just 56 percent of the number of outbound travelers in the same period in 2019. This is in contrast to the strong recovery of inbound tourism to Japan.

A major Japanese travel agency, H.I.S. Co., reported that it earned ¥21.7 billion (\$144.4 million) from outbound travel in December, which was only 66.4 percent of its overseas travel earnings from the same month in 2019. **The figures for trips to Hawaii and Micronesia remained less than half of the 2019 levels**, which the company attributed to high local prices and the weak yen. However, according to the transport ministry, the number of scheduled flights to and from Japan this

winter has recovered to 82.6 percent of the 2019 levels. While flights between Japan and Europe or China remain sluggish, North American and other Asian routes have rebounded strongly.

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