

Interview with Takafumi Kawaguchi, Director for Planning and Coordination, Tourism Division, Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs, Tokyo Metropolitan Government

# “Tokyo Tokyo Old meets New”

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

All eyes will be on Tokyo in 2020 when it hosts the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The number of tourists visiting Tokyo is expected to grow more than any other city in Japan. But with a sharp increase expected in the number of tourists all over Japan, we asked Takafumi Kawaguchi, director for Planning and Coordination, Tourism Division, Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, how the Metropolitan government views promotion of tourism in Tokyo.

(Interviewed on July 4, 2017)

## Increase in Foreign Tourists to Tokyo

**JS:** The number of foreign tourists seems to be growing all over Japan, but how greatly has the number of visitors to Tokyo increased recently?

**Kawaguchi:** The number of foreign visitors to Tokyo has increased by 2.7 times in the last 10 years. For the whole of Japan it has increased by three times, and so the trend is rising for both. The most recent figure, which is for 2016, shows the number of foreign visitors to Tokyo has reached 13.1 million, and this number is still growing.

**JS:** What is the reason behind this increase?

**Kawaguchi:** There are many factors that have led to the increase, and naturally these are the same factors that have led to an increase in the number of foreign visitors coming to Japan.

First, in 2003, the Japanese government embarked on its Visit Japan Campaign and various policies were implemented to attract foreign visitors. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has also been promoting Tokyo, and this combination has had a positive impact. There have also been elements such as easing of visa application requirements, increases in international flights to Japan, and also the exchange rate. Various factors surrounding travel to Japan have led



*Takafumi Kawaguchi, Director for Planning and Coordination, Tourism Division, Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs, Tokyo Metropolitan Government*

to an increase in foreign visitors, whether business travelers or tourists.

## Attraction of Tokyo as Tourist Site

**JS:** What are some of the more concrete potentials for Tokyo as a tourist city?

**Kawaguchi:** The attraction of tourism in Tokyo in a nutshell is tradition and innovation. On the one hand, there is tradition that continues on from the Edo Period, such as you can see in Asakusa, and on the other hand, there is the most innovative technology in Tokyo. What is attractive about Tokyo is that it is a modern metropolis with global prestige, and at the same time it embraces the traditional culture that still survives from the Edo Period. Moreover, there is nature around Tokyo. Mount Takao is very popular, and the fact that Tokyo has these various attractions highlights its potential as a travel destination.

**JS:** Which is more popular in Tokyo — overnight trips or day trips?

**Kawaguchi:** In terms of the breakdown of the number of tourists, the majority who come to Tokyo are here for overnight trips. Of the 13.1 million tourists, roughly 10 million are overnight guests and 3 million come here for day trips. Therefore the main type of visit to Tokyo is

staying overnight and visiting many places.

However, we are currently aiming to have visitors stay overnight in Tokyo and then visit other regional locations around Japan. Tokyo plays the role of Japan's gateway, and so it would be ideal if people came and stayed in Tokyo, and continued on to visit other regions. The number of nights they stay in Tokyo varies depending on where the tourists are from. It is often said that those from Europe, America, and Australia tend to stay longer, whereas those from Asia only stay for a few days.

**JS: You mentioned the tourism potential for Tokyo being very high, but what needs to happen in order to improve its attraction as a tourist destination?**

**Kawaguchi:** In order to elevate Tokyo's profile, it is necessary to improve the existing attractions that draw foreign tourists, but it is also important to develop new tourism resources that foreign visitors may be interested in. For example, we are introducing illumination, or tourism promotion through light. At the same time we are also planning to enrich night-time entertainment, and also polish up existing tourism resources such as our waterfront areas.

Naturally, we will also aim to enrich the environment for hosting foreign guests in Tokyo. This is of high importance and priority to make Tokyo more attractive as a travel destination, and as we look ahead to 2020 we are currently working to create such an environment. For example, many foreign visitors ask for free Wi-Fi. We have also already set up large outdoor digital signage that allows tourists to obtain information on Tokyo using touch panels, and many foreign visitors have been using it. In Shinjuku, there is one in front of the metropolitan government building and another one in front of the Keio Plaza Hotel. We intend to set up more.

We also plan to increase the number of volunteers. We are currently aiming to train 3,000 tourism volunteers by 2020. We are also planning to establish tourism information centers. Most recently on June 20, 2017, we opened the "Tokyo Tourist Information Center Tama". We will facilitate a comprehensive hosting environment by utilizing local tourism information counters, ICT, volunteers, and tourism information centers.

It is important to communicate and deliver the many attractions of Tokyo, and hence I think only if we do promotional activities for

overseas can our potential expand. There is no single cure, and therefore it is important to work comprehensively in multiple layers.

**JS: Other attractions such as anime and culinary culture may still have plenty of room for further promotions. Do you have any thoughts on that?**

**Kawaguchi:** We are also supporting programs that focus on such things. Programs are implemented mostly by municipalities and tourist associations. For example, when monuments of anime characters are built and used as part of PR for a particular area, we support that work by subsidizing a very high percentage of the cost. Normally, we provide a 50% subsidy for programs and projects we support. But for those involving anime, we have applied a subsidy rate of two-thirds to fourth-fifths because of its high popularity among foreign nationals.

## Tokyo Olympics Legacy

**JS: A major challenge for the Olympics is what legacy it leaves behind. From a tourism perspective, what does Tokyo have in mind as the legacy of the Tokyo Olympics?**

**Kawaguchi:** Many foreign visitors will be coming to Tokyo for the Olympics, and therefore we are obligated to prepare a welcoming environment both in terms of hardware and software.

For tourism volunteers, we are not only training those that are over 18, but also young junior high school and high school students by calling them "Hospitality Friendship Ambassadors". These youngsters are in junior high school and high school, and therefore we would be looking for English abilities equivalent to Level 3 of the English Proficiency Test. We are training these youngsters so that they are able to greet foreign guests and provide hospitality. There are already programs currently running which allow them to actually greet foreign guests, and these programs naturally all lead to the Olympic legacy.

We are also currently polishing and developing tourism resources in anticipation of foreign tourists visiting Tokyo, and these resources will be carried forward after the Olympics. This is indeed the legacy.

In this respect, all the tourism efforts that we are currently working on will remain as our asset long after the Olympic Games.

**JS: Tourism volunteers have not been very active in Japan so far. With the Olympics, they may gain substantial attention. Could they be the largest legacy of the Tokyo Olympics?**

**Kawaguchi:** When foreign visitors come over, their impression depends on how much good interaction they have with Japanese people. Impressions of cities depend on the interaction with its people and in this sense, the role of volunteers is very important. The purpose of tourism is to have foreign visitors come in, and tying that to revitalization of industries and economic growth in Tokyo. But there is actually more to that. Interactions of people also play an important role in deepening mutual understanding, and in this regard I think volunteers bear such roles and responsibilities.

**JS: It is very significant that youngsters in junior high school and high school take on this role, but how many youngsters are currently trained to be tourism volunteers?**

**Kawaguchi:** We have so far named about 560 youngsters in junior high school and high school to be Hospitality Friendship Ambassadors, but our goal is to have 1,000 ambassadors.

## Tokyo as an International City

**JS: How is Tokyo perceived as an international city? Is there room to improve?**

**Kawaguchi:** In the recent international city rankings conducted by the information magazine *MONOCLE* in English-speaking regions, Tokyo was named No. 1 for its infrastructure and for being a comfortable city to live in. Tokyo was also No. 1 last year in *Condé Nast Traveler* which targets wealthy individuals. However, there is a constant need to improve what we have, and therefore we will not take this for granted and will continue our work.

**JS: One often hears about the frustrations of foreign tourists over the lack of English signs, but is this something that needs to be fixed?**

**Kawaguchi:** Multilingual support is important and we have been supporting various initiatives. For example, businesses in the hotel industry alone cannot develop multilingual information displays and free Wi-Fi, and therefore we have been supporting these efforts via subsidies. This is not limited to just the English language; we also support the Chinese and Korean languages.

For dining out also, we have built the EAT TOKYO system, which translates restaurant menus into various languages, and by simply registering this system via the website, multilingual menus can be created automatically. In addition, we are sending experts to hotels and restaurants to advise them on how effectively they can become multilingual and from what perspective this needs to be created.

**JS: We often hear about the limited number of vegetarian, Halal, and vegan establishments in Japan, but how is Tokyo responding to this?**

**Kawaguchi:** We are seeing an increase in the number of tourists coming from Malaysia and Indonesia, and hence we have begun work to cater to the needs of Muslim people since fiscal 2015. We began by making pamphlets for businesses, which describe the Muslim religion and Halal diet, and what businesses should be sensitive to when hosting Muslim guests. The next year, we made a pamphlet for Muslim tourists on which restaurants and hotel kitchens in Tokyo cater to Muslim needs as well as the locations of mosques in Tokyo. There are all together 124 locations introduced in this pamphlet. The information is not only available as pamphlets but also as digital data. We also host seminars for businesses and have been supportive of creating a welcoming environment for Muslim tourists.

## Coordinating with Local Public Entities

**JS: If more tourists visit Tokyo because of the Olympics, there will be an expectation that they will also visit other parts of Japan and spend money**

### there, but is Tokyo coordinating with other areas?

**Kawaguchi:** Looking at our own vicinity, there is an Association for Wide Kanto Area Tourism Coordination Program Promotion (unofficial translation of Japanese title), which is an association whose members include municipalities in the Kanto area, the Kanto District Transport Bureau and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and it has been implementing joint promotion work.

To support reconstruction efforts and programs in the Tohoku area we would like foreign guests visiting Tokyo to also visit Tohoku, and we are also working on programs to encourage foreign guests to visit the Chugoku and Shikoku areas, where so far very few foreign guests have visited.

To be more specific, we are planning to build tourism routes that connect Tokyo and the Tohoku, Chugoku and Shikoku areas. We will plan a model travel route which will have guests spend one night in Tokyo, then another night in Tohoku, Chugoku, or Shikoku. We will invite overseas media people or overseas bloggers who have the communication skills and audiences to experience this trip. We call it the Monitor Tour, and there is a dedicated website for it serving as a platform for outreach. Travel experiences on this route will be shared online and, for example, a travel journal on eating tempura in Tokyo and then visiting a tourist destination in Shimane Prefecture can be uploaded. Bloggers have their own blogs, so they can share their experiences both on our dedicated website and their own blogs. We are also expanding this work to the Kyushu area this year.

This can be coordinated with MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Convention & Exhibition/Event = MICE) travel. This is because this will be a prize trip to Kyoto after coming to Tokyo for a conference, or going to Sapporo after coming to Tokyo, so we are coordinating with six prefectures and cities — namely Sapporo, Kyoto, Fukuoka Prefecture, Ishikawa Prefecture, Okinawa Prefecture, and Nagoya — to work on getting people to travel to Tokyo and then to the other six cities or prefectures.

We are thus doing joint promotions to invite MICE and making pamphlets together for promotion. For example, we are making pamphlets to introduce Kyoto and Tokyo together. Kyoto has culture, and Tokyo has both culture and technological innovation. By introducing the two cities and highlighting their contrasts, we aim to have those working in MICE become interested in hosting events in

Tokyo and across Japan.

We are also utilizing Tokyo's ability to communicate, and have opened the observatory room on the 45th floor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building to host local specialty fairs and there is a permanent booth all year round to introduce regional specialty items. We also have another booth for National Tourism PR on the second floor of the First Building where specialty items from local municipalities are brought over and introduced.

With Tokyo becoming an international tourism city, we aim to extend the effects of tourism to areas all over Japan.

**JS: Tokyo is coordinating with both the Japan Tourism Agency and Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) under this common awareness. Is that correct?**

**Kawaguchi:** Yes. When tourism policies are discussed at the Metropolitan Government Council, we will ask somebody from JNTO to join the meeting, or we will ask somebody from the Japan Tourism Agency to join the Coordination Promotion Council of MICE.

### Slogan for Metropolitan Tokyo

**JS: Would you agree that Tokyo is being publicized for its diversity?**

**Kawaguchi:** Tokyo is publicized for its diversity, but diversity is a difficult term to convey, and hence one of the tools we are now using to publicize tourism is the slogan “Tokyo Tokyo” that Governor Yuriko Koike announced most recently.

This signifies tradition and innovation. The overseas PR campaign for Tokyo's message is “Tokyo Tokyo Old meets New”, which is an integration of tradition and innovation. The campaign poster has one “Tokyo” written in Japanese ink to signify tradition, and the other “Tokyo” written in roman to indicate innovation. The most popular place in Tokyo for foreign guests is the Shibuya Crossing, so the symbol of it between the two words signifies this integration.

JS

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