

# More Pleasure, Less Work

Leisure is a large and growing market in Japan, thanks primarily to the country's prolonged economic boom which started in December 1986. In its 1991 *White Paper on Leisure*, the Leisure Development Center estimated 1990 leisure spending at ¥68 trillion (\$523 billion), up from just ¥48 trillion in 1985.

Much of this is attributed to Japan's new-found affluence. The younger generation, which is becoming the driving force in consumption, has grown up without ever experiencing much in the way of material deprivation, and this is causing a shift in Japanese lifestyles and values away from material affluence and toward mental fulfillment and the quality of life. When, for example, people were asked in a 1983 survey what part of their life they would be placing the most emphasis on in the future, more responded "leisure and free time activities" than anything else. Leisure has continued to dominate subsequent surveys; in fact, its lead has only increased. When asked the same question in 1990, some 37.2% said they were giving first priority to leisure.

But in many ways, leisure in Japan is still in its infancy. Japan certainly does not come anywhere near the standards of Europe or North America in terms of its leisure facilities and paid vacations. For example, in 1988 only 29% of Japanese workers were on the full-fledged five-day workweek (as opposed to virtually all workers in Europe and North America). Still, leisure time is on the increase, something that stems partly from overseas criticisms of "workaholic" in Japan. More companies are encouraging their employees to take longer vacations, and some schools have started to give children Saturdays off on a trial basis.



The number of overseas trips by Japanese remains above the 10 million level.

Though there are clouds on the economic horizon, the leisure industry continues to perform well, buoyed both by changing attitudes and by the growth in personal incomes that has resulted from the labor crunch.

Travel is a case in point. The number of Japanese traveling overseas began to surge in the latter half of 1986 on the back of the stronger yen. In 1990, some 11 million Japanese were taking trips abroad, the first time the figure had climbed above 10 million. The results for 1991 will be slightly lower, but most of that can be attributed to the Gulf War, which caused a 13% decline in foreign travel during the first six months compared with the previous year. Travel agents responded to the decline by marketing ultra-cheap tour packages, which brought the number back up in July and beyond. In all likeli-

hood, therefore, those taking overseas trips will stay above the 10-million mark.

The domestic travel sector, meanwhile, experienced a sharp rise in 1990 because of the International Garden and Greenery Exposition in Osaka, so most expected a decline in 1991. Such, however, was not to be the case. Many of those who would have traveled abroad opted for domestic trips instead. Hokkaido has become a particularly popular destination—so much so that it is becoming difficult to get plane reservations any time of the year. The fact that people decided to take domestic trips when foreign travel was out of the question is an indication, once again, of how strong the Japanese demand for leisure activities has become.

The year 1992 looks especially bright for this industry. The overseas sector will recover from the Gulf War slump and can look forward to a surge in demand for Spanish tours thanks to the upcoming Olympics and the Universal Exposition Seville 1992. Domestic travel will continue to be strong as well. The volcanic eruption on Mt. Unzen had curtailed much of the travel to Kyushu, but that should be picking up again as "Huis Ten Bosch," a ¥220 billion theme park, opens in Nagasaki.

(Shigeru Katayama, senior economist)

## Japanese Leisure Spending

(¥ billion except for overseas travelers)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991 (estimate)
Leisure market	51,322	53,795	58,502	63,140	68,124
Domestic travel and entertainment	5,633	5,956	6,499	7,010	7,822
Overseas travel (income from international routes)	431	467	539	614	694
Number of Japanese traveling overseas (million)	5.51	6.83	8.43	9.65	11.00

Sources: White Paper on Leisure and other statistics