

JAPANESE people are very fond of traveling. The number of Japanese going overseas has steadily increased since restrictions on overseas travel were lifted in 1964. Japanese overseas tourists topped 10 million in 1990 and reached a record high of 17.8 million in 2000. After the September 11 terror attacks in the United States in 2001 as well as the SARS outbreak and the war in Iraq in 2003, the number temporarily fell sharply but bounced back to the pre-September 11 level of 17.4 million in 2005. The number of domestic tourists, meanwhile, has been edging down from the 1991 peak of 215 million but still totals more than 100 million a year.

Among the various types of traveling, I like cruising best. Several years ago, I was a passenger on a deluxe liner which cruised around the world in 100 days, though I was on board the ship for only a week on a reporting assignment. My room was in the lowest class, with a narrow bed similar to one on a sleeper train. The room fee for the entire 100-day cruise was ¥4 million or ¥40,000 per day, all inclusive. Given that the fee covers transportation, lodging, meals and various entertainments, one may consider it rather cheap. Yet, three elements – money, health and free time – are required to join such a long voyage. The liner was essentially a floating five-star Japanese-style hotel moving around the globe because it was equipped with a large Japanese-style bathhouse, the entrance of which is adorned with a traditional *noren* curtain with a bathhouse mark, and served sumptuous Japanese meals. In addition, all the passengers were Japanese. After disembarking, I felt my body was still rocking and I enjoyed the aftertaste of the voyage.

up to the Arctic region before turning around and heading back to the home port over a period of more than 10 days. The Norwegian coastal route was previously used for more than 100 years to transport local people and necessities. But the voyage is now intended to offer retired people from neighboring countries the chance of leisurely ocean travel.

Another ocean journey I went on was a cruise from Seattle to Vancouver and back on board a 90,000-ton, 300-meter-long luxury liner that took three nights and four days. The distance between Seattle and Vancouver can be covered in just two-and-a-half hours by car. When I asked the captain why the cruise took such a long time even though the ship was in constant motion, he replied that it crossed the US and Canadian borders many times. An ocean voyage offers a luxurious time indeed.

■ Escape from Everyday Life

What is the biggest motivation to travel? To my mind, it is the universal desire to experience something that cannot be experienced in everyday life. Our everyday life is simple and monotonous, and we cannot get away from it easily, which leads to the buildup of stress. It may be that travel gives people the chance to get away from their usual routines, have different feelings, alleviate their stress and regain enough strength to return to everyday life.

If so, the greater the distance from everyday life is, the greater one's pleasure becomes. There are various differences between

The Charm of Ocean Cruising – A Sense of Comfort Rather Than Inconvenience –

By Ogata Shinichi

■ Luxury at Sea

That is not the only voyage I have experienced so far. I also boarded a Norwegian express boat, operated by the Hurtigruten Group, which called at a number of Norwegian ports through fjords

Photo: Kyodo News



people's everyday lives and their life on a ship. For example, at night one sleeps on the water, not on the ground. Looking out from a high position on a boat allows one to take in the vastness of the horizon, instead of buildings and crowds normally seen on the ground. Once people get on board a ship, they find themselves hard-pressed to get off easily just as they do with cars or trains. Yet, the sense of restrictions on the boat somehow combines with the flight from everyday life to result in a sense of comfort rather than inconvenience.

The Japan Association of Travel Agencies (JATA) has named 2006 the Year of Cruising and is holding various events publicizing the charm of ocean travel to people of all ages with the main emphasis on seniors. JATA aims to boost the number of people joining ocean cruise tours to 500,000 in 2010 from some 160,000 in 2004. To tell the truth, I took an ocean trip in my private capacity only once. I hope the day will come when ordinary people like myself without wealth and enough free time can casually enjoy ocean travel. **JS**

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