

Japanese tourists in Finland, Estonia and Latvia-a literature review.



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Abstract:	<p>Based on the results of this literature survey, it can be concluded that the following points are especially interesting from the perspective of rural tourism in Finland, Estonia and Latvia.</p> <p>Characteristics of Japanese tourists Most spend a lot of money but have a short time to spend it. Men have especially short holidays, staying around three nights. The location of Finland is crucial (airport in Helsinki and stopovers) and proximity to Estonia and Latvia convenient. Travel is mainly in the summer or early autumn. In Finland, Lapland is the popular destination in winter (sport and nature) and for all adult age groups. It may be possible to shift the season into autumn (aurora borealis). In summer the most popular destinations are Helsinki (culture), and the old towns of Tallinn and Riga. Quality, originality and good service are appreciated. Japanese tourists make preparations for the trip and enjoy detailed information. Japanese web pages and marketing material are appreciated. They find nature and rural areas exotic, since over 90% of Japanese come</p>

from big cities. Women usually choose the travel destination. Middle-aged or elderly tourists find travel guides and social contacts to be important sources of information. Elderly Japanese travellers might be frugal, but recent terrorist attacks have made destination security more important to them. For young tourists, the Internet, blogs and social media are becoming more important sources of information, but they are also places to share their travel experiences. Young Japanese visitors are willing to try new destinations and their English is good but they have less money to spend.

Destination and motivations

The majority of Japanese are coming for the first time: Finland, Estonia and Latvia are either novel destinations or visitors do not expect to repeat the experience. Typically, tourists are highly educated and have travelled to many countries. They are typically on holiday but the holiday is short (only a few nights) or day trips (cruises). Finland, Estonia and Latvia are rarely the main destinations. Instead, the interest is in travelling to several Nordic and/or Baltic countries on the same trip. Japanese visitors place countries within a larger framework: they are in Europe, Northern Europe and Scandinavia. Thus the motivations to travel to these countries are also similar, including design, safety, novelty, and culture. Although the aurora borealis and other nature attractions are also popular, sport activities are seen as less interesting. Therefore nature activities should be 'soft activities' or have a cultural aspect.

Key target groups

Young women and especially independent women in their 20s and 30s, travelling alone or with friends. They have money to spend and they are used to spending it, making enthusiastic tourists and shoppers. They can stay

for a long time (even six to seven nights) and without a schedule. They are interested in architecture, culture, food, unspoilt nature, the aurora borealis and shopping. Elderly people have the leisure and wealth to travel frequently and at length (tours). Language is still a problem, but is becoming less of an issue. Older tourists can be retired couples or widows. They appreciate safety, routines, guides and group travel. Multiple generations and families: a) mother-daughter couples, b) grandparents with their grandchildren (parents are busy with their jobs), c) three generations (a growing group) and d) young families (parents under the age of 35) or couples without children (who are especially interested in the Nordic countries).

Rural tourism

Rural tourism is an increasing trend across Europe. Rural tourists value nature, landscape and the aurora borealis and they might also be modern humanists (experienced tourists) seeking experiences in exotic and unspoilt nature (forests, sauna, snow, walking on the ice) with local people. Instead of materialism, the Japanese are turning their interest to experiences, including in rural areas and nature. Wellness, relaxing, silence and peace are important to Japanese people but they are also difficult to productise. Origin and naturalness or health and sustainability are a recent trend: this includes local (organic) food, local people and culture. Rural destinations could exploit this trend. Security is another recent trend that is very well suited to rural tourism. Finland, Estonia and Latvia have the image of a safe destination. Finland is characterised by design, culture, unspoilt nature and the aurora borealis. Estonia is characterised by culture (e.g. Tallinn's Old Town) and nature. Latvia is characterised by culture (e.g. Riga). The average time spent in Finland, Estonia or Latvia is short

and if tourists are travelling to rural areas, this takes time. Therefore it is expected that rural tourists are mostly women or elderly people who have more time. Distances are another challenge for rural areas. In Finland, the distances are long and in Estonia, Latvia and Finland public transportation in rural areas is poor: group travellers need buses, and independent travellers may have to rent a car (typical especially in Estonia). The lack of Japanese web pages, Facebook pages and marketing material is a problem. This reduces visibility and awareness of rural tourism enterprises and travel packages. The lack of marketing actions further affects visibility and awareness levels. Rural destinations are not the main target areas in the programmes of Visit Finland, for example. Lakeland, archipelago and coastal areas are attracting less than 10% of Japanese tourists and they have a weak profile. Good contacts (travel agents etc.) and specific marketing actions (bloggers, travel guides, core target groups) can improve this situation. The lack of skills among entrepreneurs and workers is also a problem. In rural areas, tourist enterprises are small and seasonal and therefore have difficulties in providing services for group travellers. Additionally, many rural tourism enterprises are run by part-time or lifestyle entrepreneurs who have less interest in increasing their business or serving special tourist groups such as the Japanese. Part-time and seasonal jobs do not tempt a committed and skilled work force. Japanese tourists are also interested in travelling in autumn (September and October). This may extend the season, which is very important for rural enterprises.

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