

東京オリンピック

In 1964 Tokyo hosted 18th Summer Olympic Games for the first time. It was in the era of Japan's rapid economic growth, and a variety of infrastructure such as Shinkansen (Bullet train), Capital expressway, and Tokyo monorail was constructed for the Olympics. National sport stadium in Yoyogi, and Nihon Budokan in Kudanshita, and some other sport facilities were built and used for the games. Since then, the date of the opening ceremony, October 10th, has become one of Japan's national holidays as "Sports Day." Furthermore, Tokyo was again chosen to host the Summer Olympic Games in 2020. Infrastructure upgrade is under planning for the Olympics again. For example, new facilities including a New National sport stadium will be constructed. Flight slots of Haneda airport will be much increased, so it will be more and more convenient to visit Tokyo. I really hope that a lot of foreign visitors will come to Tokyo not only to see Olympic Games but also to experience and understand Japan and its culture.

北海道新幹線

Hokkaido is the most northern island among 4 major islands of Japan, and the Shinkansen is the super-express train nicknamed "The bullet train". It was launched in 1964 and now it has lines extending from Tokyo to all over Japan. In March of this year, the line between Aomori and Hakodate, from northern Honshu to southern Hokkaido, officially began operation, therefore now we can go to Hokkaido directly from Tokyo by Hokkaido Shinkansen, which takes about only 4.5 hours. The line is planned to extend to reach Sapporo in 2031. Because one of the things that many foreign visitors want to do in Japan is to get on the Shinkansen, and also because Hokkaido is very popular tourist site, we can recommend they take trains to visit Hokkaido more easily than before.

築地市場

Tsukiji Ichiba is a wholesale market for seafood and vegetables located in Tsukiji, Tokyo. It is famous as the largest seafood market in the world with more than 500 billion Yen turnover annually. Inside Tsukiji market, auction is held among wholesalers and middle traders every day. Beside Tsukiji Ichiba, there is a Tsukiji Jogai Ichiba, where a lot of seafood shops and restaurants are doing business for retailers and consumers. Tsukiji Ichiba and Tsukiji Jogai Ichiba nowadays are very popular among foreign visitors who take a tour to see tuna auction and enjoy fresh, tasty but reasonable seafood dishes. With more than 80 years history, Tsukiji Ichiba has come to be undersized, and it is planned to move to new location in Toyosu this year, but because various problems have come out such as soil contamination and slipshod work, the relocation has been postponed. This is one of the serious political issues now.

伊勢志摩

Ise Shima is located around Shima peninsula in the southeast part of Mie prefecture, or about 80 kilometers south from Nagoya. The area is designated as the 1st national park after World War II, and includes two major tourist spots, Ise Jingu and Shima peninsula.

Ise Jingu is the highest rank of jinja with two shrines, Naiku and Geku. Naiku enshrines Amaterasu Omikami, the god of the sun, who is worshiped by Imperial family, and Geku enshrines the god of cloth, food and shelter. Ise Jingu attracts many tourists every year. Shima peninsula is famous as the place where the Summit is held this year. The southern point of the peninsula is Ago Bay, which is a very beautiful Ria coastline and the cultured pearls are very famous. Ise Shima is a place for history and nature. Now the beauty of this area was recognized again because of the Summit, so I hope more and more tourists will visit this area.

富士山

With height of 3,776 meters, Mt. Fuji is Japan's highest mountain. The name Fuji meant fire mountain in the ancients' language, actually, it repeatedly erupted in history. Though classified as an active volcano, Mt. Fuji last erupted about 300 years ago. At that time, 10 centimeters of ash fell on Edo, or Tokyo, which is located about 120 kilometers away from the mountain. Mt. Fuji is registered as a world cultural heritage. It is because Mt. Fuji has been worshiped and loved by the Japanese since ancient times for its noble and nearly perfect cone shape, and also because it is artistically significant as an object depicted in many ukiyoe woodblock prints in the Edo period. Mt. Fuji is world-famous for its beauty and the mountain is a symbol of Japan. Of course it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan.

明治維新

After Commodore Perry came to Japan in 1853 and 1854, Japan was forced to open its door to the world after 220 years of national isolation. Japan realized the need to establish a modern state to get along with powerful Western countries, so the last Shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu stepped down in 1867 and Emperor Meiji came to throne. Then, the Meiji Restoration, so called Meiji Ishin, took place in 1868, which included a series of drastic political, economic, and social changes. The new government promoted industrialization and modernization, through abolishing the feudal system and introducing Western culture and political systems. The Meiji Restoration also brought about internationalization of Japan therefore it was a starting point of many foreign tourists visiting Japan as they are now.

広島

Hiroshima is about 340 kilometers west of Osaka on the main island of Honshu. Hiroshima is noted as the site where the first atomic bomb was used in World War II. Within the Peace Memorial Park, located at the epicenter of the explosion, you can find memorials, museums and the Atomic Bomb Dome. The dome was just 50 meters away from the ground zero, thus it was a miracle that the iron frame of the building could survive. It is registered as a world cultural heritage, and it has been preserved for future generations, forever to pass on the horror and misery caused by the weapon of mass destruction used for the first time in human history. This year President Obama visited Hiroshima for the first time as the U.S. president and appealed for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Though Hiroshima was once destroyed in warfare, it has grown into one of Japan's major cities and attracts a lot of foreign tourists now.

歌舞伎

Kabuki is the most well-known Japanese stage art. They say it started in Kyoto in the 17th century by Okuni, originally a maiden of Izumo Shinto Shrine, but in more recent years it has been performed exclusively by men. Kabuki is an all-round theatrical art consisting of music, dance and acting, and it is characterized by a combination of rhythmical words and dancing, elaborate costumes, and exaggerated make-ups. Kabuki theaters have unique features like revolving stages for quick scene changes, trapdoors in the floor from which actors appear, and extended passages through the audience to make actors' entrance and exits more impressive. In Tokyo we can see Kabuki at Kabukiza in Ginza or at National theater in Hanzomon. Is it difficult to explain Kabuki programs in foreign language? Don't worry, for foreign visitors electric tools which provide English explanation about the programs are available there for their better understanding of Kabuki.

日本の城

Japanese castles are defensive foothold to fight against invaders from surrounding fiefs in the Warring States period. At early stage, castles were usually constructed in mountainside because they are hard to attack and easy to defense. But at later stage as the economy became more and more important, the castles were normally built on flat land with moat surrounding it in order to rule the fiefs more efficiently and activate the economy of the fief. Because many Japanese castles were destroyed in the Meiji period or burned down in World War II, at present there exist only 4 castles designated as national treasures, namely, Matsumoto castle, Inuyama castle, Hikone castle, and Himeji castle. Himeji castle, which is known for its beauty and called an egret castle, is registered as a world cultural heritage.

自動販売機

Vending machines are very popular in Japan and you can find them everywhere on the streets or in the office buildings. They are very convenient because they are running 24 hours and also because various types of things are sold such as cigarettes, magazines, foods and drinks, and much to your surprise, even canned Oden is available. In addition, you can choose coins, notes, and recently various IC cards or mobile phone as a payment method, and of course you can receive change if you pay with notes. Because vending machines are not so popular in other countries as they are in Japan, foreign visitors usually find the Japanese scenery with vending machines a great curiosity, and recently it becomes one of the purposes of visiting Japan to see the scenery. Vending machines are the symbol of Japan's good public security.

函館

Hakodate is the city located at the most southern part of Hokkaido, and it is known as the gateway to Hokkaido. In the history of Japan, Hakodate opened a port to foreign ships for trade at the end of the Edo period, and western culture was introduced. The many stylish buildings were constructed including red-brick warehouses, churches, and western-style houses and they are popular tourist spots now. In addition, Hakodate-yama, Yunokawa hot spring, Goryookaku castle are also worth visiting. Being in Hokkaido, various foods, especially seafood, are of course very delicious. All of these things combined to make Hakodate an attractive sightseeing site and the city is often chosen as the most popular tourist destination in Japan. Because Hokkaido Shinkansen began operation this year and it takes only 4.5 hours from Tokyo, more and more visitors are expected to come to Hakodate in future.

東京スカイツリー

With the height of 634 meters, Tokyo Skytree is the world highest tower located at Sumida ward in Tokyo. It started operation in May, 2012 as a broadcasting tower and sightseeing facilities. There are two viewing decks, at 350 meters and 450 meters respectively above the ground. If the weather is fine, a view from the decks is outstanding because nothing obstructs the view. The area in and around the tower is called Tokyo Skytree Town, which includes a shopping center named Solamachi, an office building, a planetarium, and an aquarium. In addition, Pokemon Center has moved in from Tokyo Tower as a new entertainment this year. Now Tokyo Skytree and Tokyo Skytree town have become one of the most attractive sightseeing sites in Tokyo not only for foreign tourists but also for Tokyo residents.

日光東照宮

Toshogu Shrine is in Nikko, about 120 kilometers north of Tokyo. It was dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of Tokugawa Shogunate, and it was built after his death as a mausoleum and then renovated by the 3rd Shogun Iemitsu, so it will be 400 years old next year. There are about 5,000 elaborate and colorful carvings on the buildings and gates of Toshogu. Three monkeys and a sleeping cat are very famous ones, whereas many of the carvings are in the shape of imaginary Chinese holy animals such as dragons and kirin which, according to Chinese legends, are believed to appear only when a fitting king governs the country. Toshogu Shrine, combined with Futarasan shrine and Rinnouji temple, is registered as a world cultural heritage and becomes a popular tourist site.

熊本

Kumamoto is located in the center of Kyushu island, about 100 kilometers south of Fukuoka. In Kumamoto prefecture, there are two very famous sightseeing spots, Kumamoto castle and Mt. Aso. Kumamoto castle was built around the year 1600 by Kato Kiyomasa, who was a feudal lord of Higo district and known as a master of a castle building. Unfortunately, the castle was heavily damaged by the earthquake happened in April this year, and the restoration is now under planning. Mt. Aso is an active volcano and has the largest caldera in the world. At the center, five peaks create a volcanic core and one of them erupted this October for the first time in 36 years. Crops in Aso district suffered heavy damage from the falling ash. This year's natural disasters gave Kumamoto people a hard time, but they are now overcoming the difficulties and hope that the tourists will come back to Kumamoto as soon as possible.

阿蘇山

Mt. Aso is a volcano located in the center of the southern island of Kyushu, in Kumamoto prefecture. At the center, five peaks create a volcanic core which is still active, actually, it erupted this October for the first time in 36 years. Mt. Aso has the largest caldera in the world, whose outer rim reaches 128 kilometers long. Inside the caldera, more than 50 thousand people are living, the trains are running, and the horses and cows are grazing grass. Kumamoto is known as "a country of fire", and Mt. Aso is a symbol of the country. Located in a national park and registered as a World Geopark, with a lot of hot springs in and around the caldera, Mt. Aso is a popular tourist destination and now many tourists from Asian countries are coming.

日本の祭り

Matsuri, a festival in English, is a ritual to pray for gods or ancestors as a memorial purpose. In Japan, Matsuri are held at Shinto shrines or temples. In the Shinto shrine's Matsuri, Mikoshi is usually dispatched. Mikoshi is a portable shrine in which the spirit of a god temporarily dwells during a festival held in god's honor. It is carried on the shoulders of local residents and marched in their residential area. Another typical Matsuri is Bon-odori, which can be regarded as one of the temple's festivals held in the summer. Peoples are dancing to hold a memorial service for a departed soul. Among so many Matsuri held all over Japan, the three most famous ones are Gion Matsuri in Kyoto, Tenjin Matsuri in Osaka, and Kanda Matsuri in Tokyo. A huge number of tourists come to see these festivals and enjoy themselves a lot.

わび さび

Both "Wabi" and "Sabi" are the highest aesthetic values of traditional Japanese arts, particularly the tea ceremony and haiku. Wabi refers to a positive spirit which accepts and enjoys rusticity and avoids being showy. Wabi was considered the ultimate aesthetic value by the great tea master, Sen-no-Rikyu, who perfected the art of tea ceremony in the 16th century. He prepared his tea rooms with ornaments and utensils suited to his taste of Wabi. Sabi refers to apparent elegance found in decline or in desolation. It was Matsuo Basho, one of the best known haiku poets in the 17th century, who sought Sabi in his haiku, which reflects simplicity and loneliness. Wabi and Sabi are inner value and outer value respectively, thus both are often expressed together.

陶磁器

Tojiki means Toki and Jiki, 2 kinds of Japanese ceramic ware. Toki is glazed pottery with an opaque body. It was introduced to Japan from China in the 8th century of Nara period and their production flourished with chanoyu, the tea ceremony, in the Momoyama period of the 16th century. Seto, in Aichi prefecture, is well-known for its ceramic production and people still refers to Tojiki as "Setomono". Jiki is a glazed porcelain with a white translucent body. It was also introduced from China. In Edo period Jiki made in Arita in Kyushu was exported from Imari port to Europe, where people appreciated its artistic qualities. Japanese Jiki gave Europe a great cultural influence and led to the birth of porcelain manufacturers there. Even now Arita ceramic ware can be one of the good Japanese souvenir.

日本の庭園

There are two types of gardens in Japan. One is a Japanese-style landscape garden composed of rocks, trees, ponds, and other natural objects. This type of garden is designed in accordance with the appearance of nature. The three most famous landscape gardens, Kenrokuen in Kanazawa, Korakuen in Okayama, and Kairakuen in Mito made by Daimyo in the Edo period are all belong to this type. The other type is a dry landscape garden mainly composed of rock and sand. The rocks represent mountains or islands, while the sand represents water. One of the most famous dry landscape gardens is the one at Ryoanji temple in Kyoto. It is known as a Zen-style dry landscape garden in Japan. Just 15 rocks are arranged in three groupings in waves of raked white pebbles. It is hoped that many foreign tourists will visit and appreciate those Japanese gardens.

上野公園

Uenokoen is a park located just in front of Ueno station in Tokyo. This place was the territory of Kan-eiji temple, which is Tokugawa Shogun's family temple, but it was burnt down at Boshin war at the end of the Edo period. Then this area was owned by imperial family but later it was given to the public as a royal gift. Now there are many cultural facilities like art museums, science museums, Tokyo university of the arts, and the Ueno zoo. One of the museums is the National Museum of Western Art, whose building was registered as a world cultural heritage this year as a le corbusier's architecture works. Talking about Uenokoen, we never forget to tell a very popular statue of Saigo Takamori and his dog, who protected Edo town from a disaster of warfare. The statue's area is famous for cherry blossoms and becomes very busy in the peak season. I believe Uenokoen is worth visiting for foreign tourists, too.

西郷隆盛

Saigo Takamori is a samurai in the Satsuma han at the end of Edo to Meiji period. At that time, Satsuma and Chooshuu were two strong hans but they didn't get along with each other. In order to break the feudal system and find the way out of Japan's crisis, Saigo was reconciled with Chooshuu through the intermediation of Sakamoto Ryooma, which led to the Meiji Restoration. When Saigo led an imperial army to come to Edo to fight against a Bakufu army, he finally agreed with Katsu Kaishuu on not attacking the Edo castle. Thanks to this agreement, the Edo castle was surrendered without bloodshed so the disaster of warfare inside the Edo town was avoided. That is why Saigo Takamori is still very popular among Tokyo people and his statue is standing in the Ueno park in Tokyo.

東京駅

The Tokyo station is Japan's central station and it is the largest train terminal in Japan. Many Shinkansen lines start here to various destinations all over Japan. The Tokyo station is located just in front of the Imperial Palace and connected to the Palace by Miyuki street. The station building, which was designed by a famous architect Tatsuno Kingo, is built of red brick and noted for its beauty. The station started operation in 1914, and it survived the Great Kanto Earthquake, but it was heavily damaged by the Tokyo air raids in 1945. After the war, the station building was restored but due to safety point of view, restored building was temporarily 2 stories only though the original was 3 stories. 60 years later, at last the building was restored to the original design. Now the Tokyo station building is designated as important tangible cultural assets, and it has become one of the places worth visiting for tourists.

富嶽三十六景

Fugaku means Mt.Fuji, so it literally means 36 scenes of Mt.Fuji, the famous landscape woodblock prints of Ukiyoe in the Edo period. The artist is Katsushika Hokusai, who depicted Mt.Fuji from various places applying the rules of perspective. The number of the works appears 36, but actual number is 46, because this Ukiyoe series was a great success, so after it had completed with 36 works, another 10 works were additionally published. Among 46 scenes the most famous one should be the work titled Kanagawaoki Namiura, which depicts large waves and a boat almost caught in the waves with small Mt.Fuji in the background. This art works gave strong influence on Western artists like a painter Gogh or a composer Debussy.

五街道

Gokaido literally means five main roads, which originate in Nihonbashi to other important districts in the Edo period. They are Tokaido, Nakasendo, Koshuu Kaido, Oushuu Kaido, and Nikko Kaido. Tokaido is the most famous and busiest among the five roads. It is about 500 kilometers long and has 53 stations between Edo Nihonbashi and Kyoto Sanjoo Ohashi. Those stations were depicted in landscape Ukiyoe woodblock prints by Utagawa Hiroshige. On the Gokaido Tokugawa government set up checkpoints called Sekisho in order to watch out inflow of weapons and outflow of women. That is because Tokugawa government forced feudal lords' family live in Edo as a kind of hostages, so the government were cautious about woman's going out of Edo. Now that people are free to travel anywhere without checkpoints, we hope a lot of foreign tourists move inside Japan and enjoy it.

法隆寺

Horyuji Temple is located in Ikaruga district in Nara prefecture. It was built in the beginning of the 7th century, in the Asuka Era, by Shootoku Taishi who was a son of the Emperor and an excellent politician at that time. It is said that he deeply believed in Buddhism and wanted it spread throughout Japan, that is why he founded some temples, one of which was Horyuji Temple. Its original buildings were burnt down by fire and current buildings were re-constructed in the 2nd half of the 7th century, but anyway they are still the oldest wooden buildings in the world. Horyuji Temple shows the ancient times' style and layout of Buddhist Temple, including the five-story pagoda and the main hall. The temple owns more than 30's national treasures, and together with Hokkiji Temple, it is registered as a world cultural heritage.

数寄屋造り

Sukiyazukuri is one of the Japanese house styles. Sukiya means a tearoom, so Sukiyazukuri is a house with a tearoom, and this style was developed and established in the Edo period. Because Sukiya is a tearoom and the rusticity is the highest aesthetic value in tea ceremony, Sukiyazukuri has simple but elegant design. It is characterized by the use of bamboo or cedar logs, a small and modest alcove, and various kinds of sliding doors such as Fusuma or Shoji. The most famous examples of Sukiyazukuri houses are Katsurariyuu and Shuugakuinrikyuu in Kyoto, both of which were built for imperial family in the Edo period. Visiting those places, foreign tourists can feel the flavor of Japanese culture.

和食

Washoku means Japanese traditional dishes. A basis of Washoku is Ichiju Sansai, or one soup and three dishes. Washoku is characterized by following factors such as healthful diet and good balance in nutrition, the use of various fresh and seasonal materials, expression of beautiful nature and changing seasons, and deep relation with annual events like the New Year. A typical Washoku is Kaiseki Ryouri, which is the carefully prepared meal served prior to a tea ceremony. Other dishes are Sushi, Tempura, Yakitori, Soba noodles and so on. Washoku is registered as UNESCO's world intangible cultural asset. Besides, "the day of Washoku" is set on November 24th and many events relating to Japanese food are held on that day so as to understand Japanese food culture. Now one of the purposes for foreign travelers visiting Japan is to taste Washoku.

鎌倉

Kamakura is about 50 kilometers southwest of Tokyo. From the end of 12th century through the early 14th century, Kamakura was the seat of bakufu or feudal military government, which was started by Minamoto no Yoritomo, a leader of Genji Family. There are many historical and cultural sites in The city. The center of Kamakura is Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine where a lot of Japanese visit to make traditional New Year's wishes. Another famous one is Daibutsu, or the Great Buddha at Kotokuin temple. It is not as large as the Great Buddha in Nara, but both are alike designated as national treasures. Kamakura is an old city, and along with Kyoto and Nara, draws visitors from all over the world.

武士道

Bushido literally means "The Way of the Bushi" and refers to the moral code of samurai warriors which was gradually established between the Kamakura period and the Edo period. It is based on Confucian ethics and promotes ideas such as bravery, loyalty to one's lord, senses of shame and honor. Dying an honorable death was also of great importance to samurai who practiced seppuku, the ritual form of suicide done by cutting one's own belly when taking responsibility of one's own actions. Typical example is revenge of Ako Rōshi, 47 loyal samurai avenged their lord by killing Kira Kōzukenosuke who brought dishonor upon their lord. Finally they were ordered to practice seppuku, which was honorable death for them.

熊野古道

Kumano Kodo, or old routes to Kumano, are the routes leading to Kumano Sanzan Shrines in the Medieval period. Kumano Sanzan are three shrines such as Hongu shrine, Shingu shrine, and Nachi shrine, which all located in the Kii peninsula. The faith in Kumano Sanzan was at a peak from ancient times to the Medieval period, and many believers ranging from emperors and nobles to the commoners made their pilgrimages to Kumano. Because Kumano is a mountainous area, some routes are crossing steep mountains along remote trails. Now Kumano Kodo is registered as a world cultural heritage. It offers all the visitors the chance to imagine what it was like to pilgrimage to Kumano long ago, and to understand the history of Kumano old routes and the sacred sites.

しまなみ海道

Shimanami Kaido is a nickname for Honshu-Shikoku connection road Onomichi-Imabari route. As the Japanese nickname means "Sea route along many islands", the route includes 10 bridges to cross Setonaikai, or Seto Inland Sea via 6 major islands. The length is about 60 kilometers long. The scenery is very beautiful and the breezing wind is cool and fresh. The road can be used not only for automobiles but also for bicycles and pedestrians. It is very rare for bicycles to cross over the sea, Shimanami Kaido has recently become popular among cyclists, and the riders from all over the world want to run on the road. For easy travelers who do not carry their own bicycles, rental-bicycles are available at stations along the route and drop-off is possible.

アキバフクロウ

Akibafukurou is a new type of cafeteria located in Akihabara, Tokyo. In the shop a lot of Fukurou, or owls are bred and customers can touch them. The concept of the shop is to offer extraordinary healing experience. The cafeteria requires advance reservation and a small group can be accepted at a time. As this place is introduced by Trip Adviser and is highly recommended, a lot of free foreign travelers drop in there when they come to enjoy Japanese pop culture in Akihabara.

奥の細道

Okuno Hosomichi is one of the most famous travelogues in Japan by Matsuo Basho who perfected Haiku verse form as a Japanese art in the Edo period. He and his pupil Sora left Edo in 1689 March and visited Oushuu and Hokuriku, then final place in the travelogue is Ohgaki. The journey took about 150 days, and Basho made a lot of excellent Haiku on the way. The haiku made at Hiraizumi, Risshakuji temple, Mogamigawa river are famous in particular. Okuno Hosomichi was published in 1702 after his death. Because Basho is very famous poet also in overseas countries, the spots he visited and made Haiku can be popular sightseeing destinations.

JAPAN RAIL PASS

Japan Rail Pass is a ticket sold by JR group companies, with which you can ride trains and buses operated by JR group as you like. Only foreign tourists coming to Japan for sightseeing purpose are eligible for the ticket, so it is not sold in Japan but overseas only, therefore passengers need to purchase it before they arrive in Japan. Express trains and rapid trains are covered, and all the Shinkansen other than Nozomi and Mizuho are covered. There are 6 kinds of tickets depending on effective period and green-class coverage. Effective periods are 3 kinds, 7 days, 14 days and 21 days. Because Japan rail pass is convenient and economical, we should give the information to foreign tourists beforehand so that they can arrange it before they leave their country.

明治神宮

Meiji Jingu, or Meiji Shrine was constructed to be dedicated to the Emperor Meiji and his wife. The location is just in front of Harajuku station on Yamanote Line. There was a Daimyo, or a feudal lord's house there in the Edo period, and then the land ownership was transferred to Royal family in Meiji period. A vast shrine zone is covered with the forest, a lot of rare insects and creatures are living in the heart of one of the largest metropolitan in the world. It is also very famous that Meiji Jingu receives the largest number of visitors in the New Year holidays every year. The opposite side of Harajuku station is Takeshita street which is famous for Japanese pop culture. Visitors to Meiji Jingu can take time to go there to feel both old and new aspects of Japan at a same time.

民泊

Minpaku means that the travelers stay at a private house for hire. In overseas countries, this service is called vacation rental. Recently the service is generally accepted and utilized more because it has become easy to find vacant rooms through internet service like Airbnb. In Japan, Minpaku is still a controversial topic. Some declare against Minpaku saying that it brings about security problems and deterioration of residential environment. The Japanese government set special economic zone where Minpaku is deregulated to promote it. Now foreign tourists coming to Japan exceed 20 million per year and are still increasing, a shortage of accommodations is an urgent issue to solve. Minpaku must be one of the possible solutions.

浅草

Asakusa is a famous sightseeing spot in Tokyo and very popular among foreign tourists. The center of the town is Sensoji Temple, the oldest temple in Tokyo. Its gate hanging a big red lantern called Kaminarimon, is a symbol of Asakusa. From Kaminarimon to Sensoji Temple is Nakamise shopping street. There are traditional shops along the street, many of which started business in the Edo period. Another famous street in Asakusa is Denpoin street, where visitors can enjoy traditional Japanese culture, for example, we see many foreign tourists wearing rental Japanese kimono are walking around the area. Behind the Sensoji temple is Hanayashiki, the oldest amusement park in Japan, which reminds people of the good old days. On the other hand, Tokyo Skytree, which is located within a walking distance from Asakusa, is the most advanced aspect of Japan. In short, Asakusa has both old and new elements, thus it is the ideal place for foreign tourists to understand Japan.

永平寺

Eiheiji Temple is the head temple of Sotoshu, one of the sects of Buddhism and characterized by Zen concept. It started in the 13th century By Dogen, a founder of Sotoshu. Dogen first learned Tendai at Enryakuji Temple in Hieizan, later he went to China to learn Zen Buddhism and brought it back to Japan. As his new idea was severely attacked by other existing Buddhist sects, Tendai in particular, he escaped from Kyoto and moved to Echizen, current Fukui, and constructed Eiheiji Temple to propagate Sotoshu. His Zen teaches that enlightenment can be achieved through strict mental and physical practices such as zazen. Zen is an important part of Japanese culture, and now accepted by Western people. Eiheiji Temple offers visitors an opportunity to experience zazen. It is now very popular even among foreign tourists, too.

比叡山

Hieizan are mountains stretching over Kyoto and Shiga. They have been sacred mountains since the old days and there are Hiyoshi Shrine and Enryakuji Temple. Hiyoshi Shrine is a head of Hiyoshi shrines, Hie shrines, and Sanno shrines all over Japan. Enryakuji is a head temple of Tendai, founded by Saicho in the 8th century. Later Hieizan Enryakuji Temple became a center of Japanese Buddhism and produced a lot of famous Buddhist priests such as Honen, Shinran, Eisai, Dogen, and Nichiren. Though Enryakuji Temple was once destroyed by Oda Nobunaga in the 16th century and declined, it was rebuilt and recovered later. Enryakuji is registered as a world cultural heritage.

日本の温泉の魅力

There are 27,000 hot springs in Japan and more than 3,000 facilities which provide overnight accommodations with hot spring. Japanese love hot spring bathing since the old days and recently "Onsen" has become one of keywords of sightseeing in Japan. A lot of foreign tourists now come to Japan for the purpose of enjoying Onsen, most of which are located far from the city. They say the charm of Japanese Onsen is that it perfectly relax them, both physically and mentally, in the natural atmosphere and with seasonally beautiful scenery. It is different from Spa or Sauna in other countries. The visitors from overseas can feel and experience Japanese culture by staying at Onsen ryokan and bathing in Onsen.