

# ECONOMY – TOURISM

## Tourism Consumer Behaviour: Gion District, Japan

*Arsi Widiandari*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Japanese Language and Culture Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

**Abstract.** Tourism is one aspect that cannot be separated from human life. The popularity of a tourist spot is accompanied by an increase in the number of tourists, giving rise to the phenomenon of over tourism. Problems regarding tourism behaviour become one unit along with the emergence of the phenomenon of over tourism. This research aims to describe tourist behaviour as part of the problem of over tourism, by taking a case study in the Gion District, Kyoto, Japan. By taking the scope of time before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study are expected to be useful for other communities that have similar problems so that they can think of preventive steps to be implemented next.

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [arsi@lecturer.undip.ac.id](mailto:arsi@lecturer.undip.ac.id)

## **1 Introduction**

In recent decades, the development and growth of tourism has shown a positive trend. Based on data published by (Statista, 2023) the growth trend in the number of international tourists shows positive developments since 1950. However, the Covid-19 pandemic that hit the world around 2020 – 2021 had quite an impact on the decline in the number of world tourists. On the other hand, with the lifting of the pandemic status by the WHO at the beginning of 2023, the number of tourists around the world has begun to increase.

The tourism sector has an important role in the economic movement of a region or country. Tourism provokes the growth of businesses driven by local hosts. International tourism can make a considerable contribution to the country's economy, improvement and development of infrastructure and infrastructure in accordance with international standards.

Globalization is one of the most instrumental aspects of international tourism. Although Europe is a favorite destination for international tourists, Asian region also has good tourism potential. Some tourist destinations in the Asian region include China, Thailand, Malaysia, and Japan.

As one of the leading tourist destinations in the Asian region, Japan has various potential tourism advantages. Japan has 25 properties that have been registered as World Heritage Sites, among which are cultural sites and nature sites. With the ease of mobilization and domestic infrastructure, many international tourists come to Japan.

Japan's tourism trends are experiencing a dynamic situation as it is happening in other countries. Some cities in Japan are favorite destinations for international tourists such as Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Each of these cities has its own characteristics that have become a magnet for international tourists. Along with the positive response received from the development of tourism, there are negative voices that also cannot be underestimated. Significant tourism development allegedly can also bring negative consequences, one of which is overtourism.

### **1.1 Definition of Overtourism**

To be able to recognize the condition of overtourism, it is necessary to introduce the definition of over tourism itself. Overtourism can be defined as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or

quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way ('Overtourism'? Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions, 2018). Over tourism is also found in several other tourist attractions. In short, over tourism is a condition where the number of tourists is too much in one destination. Consequently, the locals host feels that too many tourists come so that the living conditions of the local's host deteriorate.

In research conducted by Made explained about the condition of over tourism that occurs in the historical tourism area of Cirebon which results in reduced visitor comfort, environmental problems and discomfort felt by residents (Utami, 2023). In addition, criticism about over tourism and its relation to the environment was also raised by Wang who explained that tourism has an impact on climate change during 1979 to 2020 (Wang, 2022).

The research of Lee (2021) resulted classification of cities in Japan which are favorite locations for foreign tourists. Overtourism status grouping is done by looking at the frequency of tweets related to the mention of the names of these cities through social media Twitter. Based on these findings it is known that Kyoto is the most popular city as a tourist destination followed by Tokyo (Lee, 2021). The rapid growth of tourists triggers conflicts between tourists and local hosts regarding comfort caused by cultural differences between tourists and local hosts. The problems that arise in tourism management are fundamental, cultural differences between local hosts and tourists can trigger misunderstandings between tourists and local hosts.

## **1.2 Tourist Behaviour**

To understand the behaviour of tourists, we need to understand the character of the tourists themselves. (COHEN, 1972) divides tourists into 4 classifications by looking at their characters.

- a. The organized mass tourist  
This tourist type buys a package-tour and the itinerary is fixed and well-prepared. Tourist destinations are generally well-known tourist destinations.
- b. The individual mass tourist  
Similar to the previous one, this type arranged by tourist agency, except that the tour is not entirely pre-planned, and the tourist still control over time and itinerary.
- c. The explorer  
This type of tourist arranges his/her trip alone. They try to get off the track as much as possible, but still looks for comfortable accommodations and transportation. These types try to associate with local people and speak their language.
- d. The drifter

This type of tourist tends to make it wholly in his own, living with locals hosts and often taking jobs to keep himself going. This type of tourist has no fixed itinerary, budget, and timetable.

## **2 Result and Discussion**

With the reopening of international tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic, Japan is starting to prepare for the arrival of international tourists. Kyoto is one of the cities visited by many tourists, both local and foreign. Based on the development of the number of tourists visiting Kyoto in 2009-2019 as stated in Arba's research (2022), the number of tourists arriving tends to increase. Although the number of tourists had decreased in 2018 (Arba, 2022). This city, which has historical ties and was once the capital of Japan, is known for its many historical relics in the form of Shinto and Buddhist shrines. Some of the famous temples include Kinkakuji, Kiyomizudera and Fushimi Inari. On the other hand, Kyoto is also the city most visited by tourists who are facing a situation of overtourism. Overtourism raises problems, especially those felt by local hosts as well as among the tourists themselves.

Based on a survey published in Nikkei Asia, 7.4 million international tourists visited Kyoto in 2017. The number increased 5 times compared to 2012. When added to domestic tourists, the total reached 53.6 million tourists. This is a very large number when compared to the population of Kyoto, which is only 1.5 million (Nikkei Asia, 2019). Tourist density occurs in tourism centers such as famous temples in Kyoto and other strategic places such as bus stops, train stations and some of the city's economic centers.

Based on the news published in The Asahi Shinbun, even though the growth of tourists visiting Japan is increasing, a number of places refuse the arrival of non-Japanese group travelers, due to the issue of bad manners. In an interview published in the online news daily, a pub owner in Kyoto was disturbed by the presence of foreign groups of travelers visiting his place, because of some of the attitudes shown by foreign tourists. Although the Japanese government is constantly working to improve and promote tourism to the international community, instead of accepting groups of foreign tourists, pub owners will signal that the pub has full bookings when international tourist groups arrive at their pub (Miyano, 2019).

With the increasing popularity of Kyoto as a popular tourist destination, more and more tourists are coming to visit Kyoto. Lines of tour buses carrying groups of tourists have caused traffic jams in the city. Tourists are also seen crowding public facilities such as train stations and bus stops. Gion, a famous district in Kyoto, is also experiencing problems due to the surge in tourists. Gion, which is well-known outside Japan after the film *Memoirs of Geisha*, implemented a ban on photography after several complaints from local hosts about the behavior of tourists coming to Gion.

Many of the tourists who come to Gion, try to take pictures of the geisha, causing discomfort to the geisha. The term *Maiko Paparachi* became famous to describe the behavior of tourists trying to take Geisha/Maiko pictures. In 2019, a photography ban was implemented in the Gion area. The rule imposes a ban on taking pictures in a predetermined area. Those who disobey this rule will be subject to a penalty of 10,000 Yen.



**Fig. 1.** Geisha/Maiko Paparacchi ( Maiko Paparazi )  
<https://www.mbs.jp/news/feature/kansai/article/2023/05/094592.shtml>



**Fig. 2.** Photography Ban in Gion Street  
 Source : <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/741/>  
 With the lifting of the Covid-19 pandemic status, and the reopening of international borders for foreign visitors, the number of people visiting

Japan has also increased. Like other cities, Kyoto is also preparing to welcome tourists like pre-pandemic conditions. However, the limitations and regulations regarding the prohibition of photography that were enforced in Gion Kyoto seemed to be a challenge. This can be seen from the behavior of tourists who still take photos of Maiko or Geisha in the Gion district even though this rule has been enforced.

The regulation prohibiting photography applied in the Gion district was originally implemented to regulate tourist behavior due to the discomfort felt by Geisha/Maiko who are often found in Gion, Kyoto. Lack of information and cultural differences between tourists and the rules imposed by local hosts are one of the barriers and challenges faced by the increasing phenomenon of overtourism in Kyoto.

### **3 Conclusion**

Tourism is an industry. Tourism has quite promising economic potential. The rapid increase in the number of tourists in tourist destination cities has had a negative impact that cannot be underestimated, behind the economic potential of the tourism industry. Kyoto is one of the favorite tourist destinations for both domestic and international tourists. The high number of tourists coming to Kyoto has led to a phenomenon called Overtourism. On the other hand, the high enthusiasm of tourists has a negative impact on local hosts. On the other hand, the high enthusiasm of tourists has a negative impact on local hosts. In this study, the negative impact was felt by Geisha/Maiko due to the behavior of tourists, both organized mass tourists and individuals who often take a picture of Geisha/Maiko without permission. Currently, Kyoto has implemented a no-photography rule for the Gion district. The regulation had a positive effect at the beginning of its implementation. However, after the borders reopened to tourism, and tourists flocked to Kyoto again, this behavior was rediscovered. Socialization about tourist behavior should be explained properly. In addition, there is a need for punishment for tourists who disobey these rules.

### **References**

(2018). *'Overtourism'? Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions*. Madrid: World Tourism Organization.

- Arba, A. (2022, 08 19). *Statista*. Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1180945/japan-tourist-numbers-in-kyoto-prefecture/#:~:text=Number%20of%20tourists%20visiting%20Kyoto%20Prefecture%2C%20Japan%202009%2D2019&text=Kyoto%20Prefecture%20in%20Japan%20recorded,renown%20for%20its%20cultural%20>
- cohen, E. (1972). TOWARD A sociology of international tourism. *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, 164-182.
- Lee, S. (2021). Over Tourism Classification for Sightseeing Areas in Japan. *International Conference on Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* (pp. 16-23). London: ICRSH.
- Miyano, M. I. (2019, 03 05). *The Asahi Shinbun*. Retrieved from The Asahi Shinbun: <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13066990>
- Nikkei Asia*. (2019, 04 17). Retrieved from Nikkei Asia: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/Japan-gets-more-than-it-bargained-for-with-tourist-boom>
- Statista*. (2023, 05 15). Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209334/total-number-of-international-tourist-arrivals/#:~:text=Despite%20the%20significant%20annual%20increase,approximately%20963%20million%20in%202022>.
- Utami, N. G. (2023). Analisis Tingkat OverTourism di Kawasan Wisata Sejarah Cirebon. *Journal of Mandalika Review*, 39-44.
- Wang, H. (2022). Climatology and trend of tourism climate index over China during 1979–2020. *Atmospheric Research*, 1-11.