

# Introduction

Joseph M. Cheer

Center for Tourism Research, Wakayama University

At the time of writing early in 2021, the world is still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty over just when global tourism mobilities will be kick started endures. Never before has such a deep and enduring shock prevailed over the global economy and the expected legacy of this crisis is expected to have considerable social and economic implications. An unintended side benefit of the pandemic, if you can call it that, is that the environmental upside of the enforced slowdown has demonstrated just what a global economic degrowth scenario might look like. Nature has started to reclaim some of its lost territory with animals returning to deserted urban centres and the pollution and smog so ubiquitous in many places, clearing to improve sightlines and air quality.



Figure 1: Go To Travel Campaign (H. Nagai, 2020)

Notwithstanding, the clamor to restart international travel and to dismantle pandemic border closures is on in earnest. Much of this is predicated on quick economic recovery to help avert further business closures and job losses, and to

help governments maintain the confidence of their electors. Furthermore, the extent to which destinations will recover quickly will come down to the ability to mobilize COVID-19 vaccinations for the vast majority, and the speed at which traveller confidence is likely to be regained. Here in Japan, the government's efforts to stimulate tourism growth through its incentive GO-TO Travel campaign, although understandable in its intentions, is widely decried for possibly being the spur for the second wave of COVID-19 infections in the country (Figure 1). If there is one thing that is certain, it is that prognoses and forward forecasts of international tourism recovery will be educated guesses at best.

In pulling together this collection of papers, what is evident is that the work on display, demonstrates the breadth of possibilities there are in the examination of tourism – not only regarding the topics for investigation but also exemplifying the extent to which much research in tourism is multidisciplinary. As is evident from this volume, and in line with the three key pillar areas of research focus (1) Management, (2) Community, and (3) Culture and Heritage, reveals the priority areas for tourism research in Japan, and across the wider Asian region. Nagai's article highlights the vital links between international tourism and crisis management in Japan given the country's rapid inbound tourism growth, coupled with recent disasters on a wider scale. Sano and Sano extend this management critique further pointing out how a better understanding of the urban

tourism ecosystem is vital in a country like Japan where rapid urbanization is evident and where the key city gateways to the country are usually hotspots for international tourists (Figure 2). Both Nagai, and Sano and Sano emphasise how the intersection between tourists and urban contexts presents fertile terrain for tourism research.



Figure 2: Downtown Osaka (H. Nagai, 2018)

The second pillar of research highlighted is the focus on community – a wide expanse for research given the multiplicity of community contexts that are central to tourism growth in Japan since the turn of the last century. The contributions from both Cheer and Ito are provided at two levels – international and regional, and the local level. What is clear in both cases is that despite the vastly different geographical scales, the COVID-19 pandemic has cast a huge shadow over the tourism sector. However, the opportunity to see this as an opening for reshaping the sector, and for embarking on creative destruction toward solidifying community resilience and recovery, is key.

Communities are the frontline of tourism impact as Cheer states and this was most evident in Japan in cities like Kyoto where tourism had become a much bigger proposition than anyone had anticipated (Figure 3). Communities are also the first to begin the process of rethinking as Ito shows, ceasing on new ways to adapt in the midst of COVID-19.



Figure 3: Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto (J.M. Cheer, 2020)

For visitors can be found in the very things that distinguishes the country from its peers – its inimitable culture, contemporary and traditional, and the extent to which its national character is captured in popular culture and in the myriad of historical and cultural landscapes. Kigawa ceases on this and through film, highlights how New Tourism, leverages the medium to reveal the hidden charms of people and place in Japan. While Progano tread a similar path, they

showcase how the many pilgrimage trails that crisscross the country gives visitors a sense of the enormous spiritual and religious legacies in situ, such as Koyasan (Figure 4) and Kumano Kodo (Figure 5) – both in the Wakayama Prefecture. In total, both Kigawa and Progano highlight the immensity of cultural landscapes as a foundation for tourism capacity building.



Figure 5: Koyasan (J.M. Cheer, 2021)



Figure 6: Pilgrims at Kumano Kodo (J.M. Cheer, 2020)

In closing, Center for Tourism Research (CTR) remains a fledgling identity, ambitious and enthusiastic about building its profile as a hub for Asia Pacific tourism knowledge building. CTR embraces international collaborations and multidisciplinary endeavours but remains rooted in its Japanese identity. This volume offers a small glimpse of a larger work in progress that we hope, like the Wakayama Castle (Figure 5), can stand the test of time.



Figure 7: Wakayama Castle (Cheer, 2020)