

Japanese Tourists and Unseen Iran: Challenges and Market Realities

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Background and Aim : According to UNESCO Iran is ranked as one of the ten top countries in the world in terms of its ancient and historical sites. There are a million historical monuments in Iran with more than 12,000 of them registered officially. There has been a dramatic change in Iran's social and economic situation since the Islamic revolution in 1979 and the tourism industry is not an exception. For example, in the 1970s some 60 percent of all tourists to Iran were Americans, spending an estimated 1 billion dollar each year but almost diapered after the revolution. In the case of Japanese tourists to Iran, while 24,106 Japanese traveled to Iran a year before the Islamic revolution which was about 6% of the overall Japanese international market; this rate never happened again during years after the revolution. Nowadays, the average number of Japanese tourists in Iran is about 3,000 a year.

Methods: This study has an interdisciplinary approach. International relations, political science, history, and sociology are the fields have been considered. Tourism Promotion, Cultural and heritage tourism and the impact of international relations on tourism are under focus in this research.

Results: Tourism promotion has been neglected by Iranian officials internationally and Japan's market has not been an exception.

Discussion and Conclusions: In the case of Iran, the wreck of the tourism industry can be attributed to many factors. One of the most important of these is in political relations with the rest of the world. But, there has been almost no political problem between Iran and Japan. In this context, the fact that Japan has remained the major customer of Iranian Oil even after the Iranian revolution brings comparative advantage as well as allowing Iranian tourism policy makers to focus on Japan as a target market.

Innovation and Importance: The author conducted a survey with 450 Japanese in different cities in Japan in 2005-6 as well as interviews with Persian tour operators in Tokyo.

Limitations : The absence of former research in the field and lack of detail information is a problem in this field.

Suggestions: Improving the awareness of Iranian tourist attractions for Japanese to help the lack of information available for tourists.