

## Japanese Senior Tourists – An Untapped Potential in Thailand's Tourism Industry

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### Abstract

The senior tourist market has recently gained more and more attention from tourism suppliers due to its high potential for market expansion. The phenomenon of an ageing society has been taking place in many leading industrial nations around the world, including Japan. The senior Japanese tourist market should be studied more in-depth for a vast number of reasons. This article recommends that Thailand should explore this as yet untapped and high potential tourism niche market for the benefit of Thailand's entire tourism industry.

Key words: Japanese senior tourists, Untapped potential

### 1. Introduction

Coltman (1989: 2-3, 4, and 19-22) stated that travel is the common thread in most descriptions of tourism. It is linked closely to time availability in attracting potential tourists. In general, younger and older people have the most discretionary time, since working people may have blocks of free time only during annual vacations or on weekends due mainly to their career and family care-taking responsibilities. When defining tourism, 4 stakeholders may be broadly identified: the tourists, the suppliers, the government of the destination country, and the local residents of the tourist destination. Tourism can be perceived as the interrelationships arising from the interaction of these 4 groups in the process of attracting and catering to tourists. The term tourist encompasses a variety of individuals with different motives and objectives for their travels and includes vacationers, businesspeople and convention delegates. A tourist destination can be described as an area which combines a number of features attractive to tourists such as natural beauty, historical interest and cultural heritage for example.

Mass travel has its origins in period after the Second World War, when family incomes began to rise, weekly working hours were shortened, and much of the drudgery associated with work began to decline. The three R's, namely, rest, relaxation, and recuperation, became possible almost year-round. Availability of automobiles, highways, airplanes, motels, restaurants, campgrounds, attractions, entertainment centers, and souvenir and gift shops, all contributed to the growth of global mass tourism. With the mixed blend of tourism, recreation, and people's increasingly free lifestyles, it is expected that tourism growth will continue due to a number of reasons. First is the changing global population trend wherein a declining birth rate has led to a decline in childbearing responsibility. This in turn has led to an increase in disposable incomes for people of working age which may be spent on travel. Second is the observation that 50% of all person trips are by people between 25 and 55 years of age. Third is the increase of women entering the workforce. These working women are able to significantly contribute to the disposable income of their families,

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