

Abstract

The domestic overnight travel market in Japan is expected to shrink with the falling population. However, if the sharp drop of the travel frequency of the seniors in the age group of 70s and over can be maintained at the same level as in their 60s, the domestic overnight travel market should be able to expand with the synergy between increased travel opportunities and the growing population of the age group.

(Chapter 1)

The major reason of the travel frequency drop in the age group of 70s and over is their health concern and decline in physical abilities, especially walking abilities. Thus, if the travel environment for seniors using wheelchairs or requiring special walking supports (hereinafter “seniors with special travel needs”) is facilitated, it is possible for the travel of the seniors of 70s and over to be maintained at the level as in their 60s.

(Chapter 2)

If such travel environment is realized, travels are expected to increase 10 million times, with the market increase of 520 billion yen. Furthermore, if one senior traveler is accompanied by another traveler, it should amount to 1.04 trillion yen. With the growing population of the elderly, the market increase is expected at 670 billion yen in 2050 (1.34 trillion yen including the accompanying traveler).

(Chapter 3)

Travel increase of seniors with special needs is also expected to enhance the satisfaction of the seniors and their families, refresh, reduce medical expenses with improved health, expand seniors’ consumption, encourage local economies, and lead to local job creation, etc.

(Chapter 4)

Travelers in need of nursing care are likely to travel to hot-spring areas with their families by car. Although many of them give up traveling because they are too concerned, the difficulties actually experienced are not so significant, and satisfaction is generally high. However, difficulties are found with restrooms and transportation, and especially with bathing. In addition, equipment and services for accepting them as well as information about such environment, are insufficient.

(Chapter 5)

The current situation and issues for facilitating the environment of seniors with special travel needs are summarized as follows:

1. The development of barrier-free environment for public transport facilities has been progressing but it seems to be delayed regarding accommodations.
2. The development of the hubs for “universal tourism” has been progressed but they are limited to some

areas. 3. Some companies specialize in travels with a care worker and some major travel agencies are trying to make proper travel plans but the former has low recognition and is not widely used. The latter is not widely well-known to the general public by brochures, etc. 4. Barrier-free information of accommodations are not easily searched by accommodation search engines/websites. JAPAN Accessible Travel Organization and All Japan Ryokan Hotel Association have been providing such information, but with limitations. There are also some noteworthy cases where some accommodations search engines have set a certain barrier-free standard and have been providing clear information.

(Chapter 6)

Based on the examination above, promoting the acceptance of seniors with special travel needs, and disseminating relevant information were considered to be most critical in improving the travel environment. With this in mind, a questionnaire survey of accommodations was conducted. The results were as follows: 1. 80 % of the accommodations had the experience of accepting wheelchair users but not so actively, and little information was provided regarding the accessibility. 2. Although 70% of the accommodations have the main building accessible for wheelchairs and 40 % has barrier-free guest rooms, or equivalent western or Japanese-western style rooms, they felt reluctant about their acceptance because they thought “the facility and equipment were not enough”. 3. Only 16 accommodations in Japan provided bathing support service. In such cases, bathing support was provided in cooperation with nursing care companies. 4. Subsidies for facility renovation were mostly needed by accommodations for future development.

(Chapter 7)

The following 4 points are proposed through the research results.

1. Enhancing awareness of accommodation managers

Enhancing the accommodation manager’s willingness to facilitate the environment for accepting seniors with special travel needs is critical, e.g., providing managers with information on how it is possible to accept them to a certain degree without major investment aiming at perfect barrier-free environment, but with preparation of additional equipment and with creative efforts by the staff, and how it could be financially viable for business considering the potential market size and successful cases.

2. Strengthening supportive measures for barrier-free renovation of accommodations

Only 9 municipalities had subsidies or tax incentives for the barrier-free renovation of hotels and ryokans. Supportive measures should be widely adopted in all local governments, and the national government should also support such measures of the local government through supplementary budgets, etc.

3. Facilitation of bathing support service

It should be well-communicated to the managers how it is possible to provide bathing

support service without concerning too much about the cost, with the cooperation of external nursing care companies. By utilizing a special district system, bathing services is possible to be covered by the Long-Term Care Insurance System and it may make facilitate the dissemination. In the future, it would be ideal if travelers can receive bathing support easily in most accommodations in the hot-spring areas, such as the case with massage services.

4. Establishment of a system to widely disseminate “accessibility” information

Specific unified standard for accommodations that can accept guests who can walk with a cane or a walker, and guests who uses wheelchairs but who are able to walk a little should be developed, and a special wheelchair “accessibility” mark should be displayed in travel brochures and accommodation search engines/websites for accommodations conforming to the standard. In addition, the “bathing support mark” should also be displayed as well, and details of respective marks should be available on accommodation websites.

(Chapter 8)