

An analysis of inbound tourist behavior after the Great East Japan Earthquake

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ABSTRACT

The Great East Japan Earthquake happened in 2011 has significantly impacted the inbound tourism in Japan. The disaster saw the total number of international tourism arrivals in 2011 drop by 28% to 6.2 million, compared to 8.6 million tourism arrivals in the previous year. In order to get a better understanding of recovery process of inbound tourism in Japan and provide implication for inbound tourism policy in the future, the research attempts to investigate the international tourists' behavior response after the earthquake.

For the purposes of this study, we conducted a web-based questionnaire survey in two major markets for inbound tourism of Japan (i.e., South Korea, and China) with the assistance of an Internet survey company. The survey included very detailed information on tourists' behavior in response to the earthquake, including their perception of what took place in Japan, information sources, whether they had made plans to travel to Japan before the earthquake. For those who had travel plans, we asked their planned destination, travel time, motivation, companion, budget, duration, and their decision after the earthquake. Also sought was information on individual characteristics (e.g. gender, age, education level, annual income).

As a result, we obtained 500 and 1,050 questionnaires from South Korea and China, respectively. The survey results show that 37.2% of respondents from South Korea had made plans to visit Japan prior to the earthquake. Among these respondents, 70% of them cancelled their travel plan, 19% postponed their trip, and another 11% still travelled as planned after the earthquake. In terms of respondents from China, 53.1% of them had made plans to visit Japan before the earthquake. And the percentages to cancel, change their plan, and still travel are 51%, 31%, and 18%, respectively.

A multinomial logit model is employed to analyze tourists' behavior after the earthquake. The model estimation results suggest that gender, education level, travel experience, companion, perception of the earthquake impact, and risk perception of aftershock have significant influence on decision of tourists from South Korea. While the most influential factors for Chinese tourists include age, income, travel experience, travel purpose, perception of the earthquake impact, risk perception of aftershock and nuclear leakage. The analysis also reveals which market segments are likely to be most resilient in the event of a natural disaster. The research findings are expected to provide the hazard management agencies and the tourism industry in Japan with critical insights for their tourism recovery and resilience decision-making.