

Inside this issue

Japan plans to welcome 40 million tourists in 2020 1 + 2

A new standard for QR Code Payment 3

The beginning of a New Era in Japan 3

Toyota provides 24,000 EV-related patents for free 4

会見

INTERVIEW

Japan plans to welcome 40 million tourists in 2020

Interview with Mr. Thomas Köhler, founder of the travel agency Japan-Ferien

Japan expects 40 million foreign visitors next year. Tourism is really a booming industry in the country. To understand the latest trends we met Mr. Thomas Köhler who lived several years in Japan and has a Japan-specialized travel agency since 2012. Mr. Köhler also received a certificate recognizing his contribution from the Japanese Tourism Agency for its effort to promote tourism in Japan after the 2011 earthquake.

Could you please introduce Japan-Ferien to our readers?

Japan-Ferien is a tour operator focusing exclusively on Japan. We opened in 2012, but I had worked with Japan for more than 20 years. We are currently three in the agency, Yoshi Hügler, Alan Müller and me.

Yoshi is our specialist for cultural activities and I am in charge of the geographical aspects of the trip. We want to provide a complete experience to our customers.

Japan-Ferien offers an extensive range of services. We have the travel agency located in Winterthur and we also are a licensed Japan Railway Pass retailer. In addition to the Japan-Ferien website (in German), I also write a blog about my personal trips in Japan and we developed a Japan Portal where you can find an



Mr. Thomas Köhler on the first day of his 5 months walk through Japan

interactive map. We do workshops as well.

We have also published a practical guide for Japan (how to get your Japan Railway Pass when arriving at the airport, how to behave in an Onsen, etc.).

Where did your interest in Japan come from?

When I was a kid, I had a Swiss friend who grew up in Japan. He talked a lot about Japan. I was impressed by the Japanese language and Samurai stories. My interest never decreased since then. When I was of age to visit Japan by myself, I first took some Japanese lessons. For me it was important to be able to communicate at a basic level before leaving. Once in Japan, I further learned the language. I

lived in Japan for 2 years and since then, I've never stopped visiting the country. I have traveled a lot around the world, but Japan is by far the country where I've gone the most. I've been to Japan over 50 times and probably spent in total of more than 3 or 4 years there.

Could you tell us more about your walking tour across Japan in 2011?

2011 was a terrible year for Japan. People suffered from the earthquake, the tsunami and the related nuclear incident. Around the world, only bad news came from Japan. The economy was badly affected and the number of foreign visitors dropped after the incident.

(continued on page 2)

Japan plans to welcome 40 million tourists in 2020

会見

INTERVIEW

(continued from page 1)

So, I decided to do something. First, I went as volunteer to help near Ishinomaki. The next step was to show people how great the country was. My idea was to walk across Japan from North to South and blog only positive things. For five months, I published a story and photos every day. I started on August 1st from Cape Soya and walked almost 3000 km down to Cape Sata by December 31st.

I received a great support through the help of my family, friends and Japanese people among the way, but financially it was an independent project with no sponsor. In Japan, my effort was appreciated by Japanese authorities. This adventure was compiled into a documentary film: "[Negative: Nothing](#)".

What brought you to have Japan-focused travel agency?

Actually, this idea came late in my professional life. Thanks to my experiences in Japan, I thought that I could bring an added value compared to other agencies. I wanted to have something less conventional; offering something more than the usual Tokyo-Kyoto-Fuji-san tour. Of course, we do the "must-see" locations that people don't want to miss, especially if it is their first trip. But we can also help our customers to go off the beaten track if they want. We spend a lot of time with them; the first meeting can last 3 to 4 hours to precisely identify their needs.

What are the most popular places in Japan?

Tokyo, Mt. Fuji and Kyoto are the main destinations. Most of the people going to Japan for the first time want to visit those three places which is perfectly understandable. Hiroshima and Osaka are popular as well. Nara and Miyajima are popular for their beautiful scenery.

What is the best season to visit Japan?

Generally speaking, winters are cold and summer can be quite hot and humid. Spring and autumn are great seasons to visit Japan from north to south. In the end, the first question about a trip to Japan is "when?" Depending on the answer, there are plenty of options. So, no worries if you have to go in summer.

Have you seen any new trends among tourists' preferences regarding Japan?

Yes indeed; I see more and more people looking for cultural authenticity and countryside-oriented trips. Those people want to avoid group tours and are looking for unconventional experiences. This said, since Japan-Ferien focuses on this kind of tourism, my feeling about it might be biased by the fact that my customers are more into these kinds of experiences.

The Japanese government is strongly supporting the tourism industry, what has been improved and what should be?

What Japan achieved regarding tourism is amazing. Last year, the country welcomed 30 million visitors. By 2020, it will be 40 million



Mr. Köhler's [new book](#) about his most surprising experiences in Japan.

and the government wants to increase this number to 60 million by 2030.

Visas are easier to get, as there are tourism centers everywhere. Today, English is very common in the tourism industry and the country is one of the cleanest and safest in the world.

Additionally, the 47 prefectures are working hard to attract tourists. It is a very good way to stimulate local economies.

Like other highly-touristic destinations, the challenge will be to preserve the authenticity of the country.

What do you recommend for people willing to avoid highly touristic places?

The West coast is very interesting. The largest cities are on the other side; therefore, it is easier to find small and authentic cities. The people are welcoming and the rhythm is slower than in the big cities.

(continued on page 3)

Japan plans to welcome 40 million tourists in 2020

(continued from page 2)

If you had to choose one hidden gem to recommend?

This is a very difficult question! I

would probably recommend Yufuin on Kyushu Island. The region is well-known for its Onsens (traditional thermal sources) and beautiful landscape, especially with

the Mount Yufu (a 1,500 meter volcano). People go to Beppu which is a much larger city, but Yufuin is really a hidden gem.

会見

INTERVIEW

A new standard for QR Code Payment

The Payment Japan Association has determined a unified standard for QR codes. Until now, several different systems co-existed leading to additional costs for businesses. I was also confusing for customers. This new standard should not only simplify cashless payments using

smartphones and QR codes; it should also help this technology to spread further in the country.

The technical specifications of this new standard are fully compatible with the EMV global standard (Visa, MasterCard, and AmEx, among others), making it easier for

foreign visitors in Japan and Japanese companies to provide their services abroad.

People in Switzerland should shortly be more familiar with QR codes since the [new standard for invoices](#) will use them next year. More details [here](#)

活動

ACTIVITY

The beginning of a New Era in Japan

This year will be very special in Japan. The abdication of Emperor Akihito and the accession of his successor, Crown Prince Naruhito, will open up a new era for the country. Many festivities will take place all throughout the year.

Japan is the oldest continuing hereditary monarchy in the world, with roots dating back to the mythical founder Emperor Jimmu (660 BC).

However, historical records go back only to Emperor Ojin (4th century AC).

Current Emperor Akihito is therefore the [125th Emperor](#) to be seated on the Chrysanthemum Throne.

Thanks to his constant commitment to the people, Emperor Akihito has become immensely popu-

lar among Japanese. His support for victims of natural disasters together with Empress Michiko has always been highly appreciated by the people. The Emperor is also an accomplished scientist. As an expert in marine biology, the Emperor's articles have been published in both "Nature" and "Science" magazines (among others).

Fully dedicated to his role, Emperor Akihito was concerned that possible health issues related to his age might affect or limit his daily activities and therefore open the way to the first abdication in two centuries.

Emperor Akihito will be formally abdicating on April 30th, marking the end of the "Heisei" period.



Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko
Photo: [Imperial Household Agency](#)

Crown Prince Naruhito will take over on May first, starting a new era, "Reiwa," which can be translated as "beautiful harmony" in English.

活動

ACTIVITY

革新

INNOVATION

Toyota provides 24,000 EV-related patents for free

In order to further promote the widespread use of electrified vehicles, the pioneer of electrification and hybrid vehicles will share its know-how with other car manufacturers and support them in their transition efforts.

First, Toyota will grant royalty-free licences on nearly 24,000 patents accumulated over more than 20 years.

Second, the company will provide fee-based support for the companies using Toyota's technologies.

“Based on the high volume of inquiries we receive about our vehicle electrification systems from companies that recognize a need to popularize hybrid and other electrified vehicle technologies, we believe that now is the time for coopera-

tion,” said Shigeki Terashi, Member of the Board and Executive Vice President of Toyota Motor Corporation.

According to the automotive-specialised research agency [JATO](#), Toyota was the manufacturer with the lowest CO² emission in Europe in 2017, with an average of 101.2 g/

km CO² against 118.1 g/km on average.

[Switzerland](#) and the [EU](#) have settled on a target of 95 g/km of CO², starting partially in 2020 and to be fully in force by 2021.

More detail on [Toyota's Website](#)



A Toyota Power Control Unit: the “brain” making hybrid vehicle possible

Agenda

日程

AGENDA

- ✓ May 21, Lugano, Ticino

The Chamber of Commerce of Canton of Ticino organizes a business event on Japan in collaboration with S-GE.

The current situation and existing business opportunities will be presented.

More information and registration on the [chamber's page](#)

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

JETRO

Japan External Trade Organization

JETRO Geneva
80, Rue de Lausanne
1202 Geneva
Phone: 022 732 13 04
Fax: 022 732 07 72
E-mail: SWG@jetro.go.jp