

Japan's Hospitality Industry Prepares as Foreign Tours Set to Resume



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20220601163755061/>

Japan's reopening for foreign tourist is happening gradually, starting with small, guided groups. They'll be able to visit cities that thrive from foreign visitors, like Matsumoto, in Nagoya prefecture. And as NHK World's Honda Mina explains, business owners there are eager to welcome them back.

Tucked away in this traditional Japanese shopping street, is a western style café. Even as he recovers from knee surgery, owner Christopher Koch is happy to greet patrons. He set up shop in Matsumoto six years ago and moved to a larger location in 2019 after a boom in interest from foreigners. Then COVID hit, leading to an almost 80% drop in business.

All of my plans went out the window. Basically, I wanted to have music events, parties, and invite tourists. And with the pandemic there are no more tourists.

His café is just a 5-minute walk from Matsumoto castle. Once an imposing fortress, now a popular attraction. This is one of the tourist hot spots that foreign visitors could flock to after Japan reopens on June 10th. It's being used as a testing ground for the kinds of guided tours that are being allowed in.

Groups like this one from Australia are made up of travel agents getting a taste of what to expect, starting the day with a temperature check.

And now we're really right into it with the touring and everything. It's gonna be very exciting. It's gonna be fun.

On top of informing their clients back home, they're helping Japan finalize COVID guidelines for the industry.

Participants sign a pledge to follow the rules, to use hand sanitizer, and to wear masks. They're also accompanied by their tour guide at all times.

Sometimes we forget about the masks, but we see everybody else is wearing them too apart from eating. We're not used to doing that in Australia now. Luckily our guide reminds "mask on."

The tour is preplanned, and the travelers cannot stray too far, but there are still opportunities to explore and meet the locals.

I'll put it on my Facebook page.

Thank you.

It was good seeing the tour group, absolutely. It gives me some hope for the summer.

I'm very grateful that the first step has been announced.

But the industry warns that a boom in tourists won't happen overnight. A representative with a subsidiary of Japan's largest travel agency says many customers are being left out.

The overwhelming demand is individual customers that can move freely. If possible, I hope we'll be able to move toward the next step from around September and be allowed to accept solo travelers.

Until then, guided packages like this one are the only way for foreign tourists to see Japan up close.

Source: (NHK World News)

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. What is your opinion about Japan allowing foreigners to enter?
2. Do you think many foreigners will be interested in these packaged tours? Would you like to join a tour like this in another country?
3. Can you think of any problems these types of tours might have?
4. Other than wearing masks and using hand sanitizer, do you think any other rules are necessary?
5. Which types of business and locations do you think have suffered the most from losing foreign tourists as customers?