



The role of social media in Japan's overtourism crisis

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Abstract

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<p>The phenomenon of overtourism is now famously spread around the world, affecting countries such as Italy, Spain, and Indonesia. This research-based thesis aims to understand the role that social media can play in influencing travellers' choices and behaviours, especially regarding the overtourism crisis that Japan has been facing since reopening its borders post pandemic.</p> <p>Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have seen a surge of content regarding certain specific location and experiences within Japan, causing disruptions to local communities, rise in the cost of living, streets littering, and much more. The theoretical framework of the thesis presents an overview of Japan's tourism situation and the role of social media in creating FOMO effects on younger generations. The following chapters define the term overtourism and consider two case studies regarding the city of Kyoto and Mt. Fuji, which are currently under the spotlight for overcrowding issues. Lastly, a chapter concerning sustainable tourism guidelines is presented, including future practices and strategies implemented by the Japanese government to promotes lesser-known areas and redistribute tourists more evenly.</p> <p>The research conducted for the thesis includes a quantitative method, presented using a Webropol survey administered to 136 participants who visited Japan after the covid-19 pandemic. The results obtained by the survey highlight a correlation between social media and the choice of travellers' itineraries. Most of the participants did in fact experience overtourism in multiple locations, especially in popular cities such as Kyoto, with raising apprehension from the local communities. Despite the large crowds, most of the respondents did not think their experience was ruined by overtourism and would be excited to visit Japan again in the future, exploring different locations and more rural areas.</p> <p>The outcome of this research provided valuable insight into both the travellers' behaviours and the way the tourism industry is constantly changing, offering relevant information to future visitors and Japanese stakeholders.</p> <p>The work on this thesis was initiated in late January 2025, with a deadline set for mid-May 2025.</p>
Key words overtourism, social media, JTB, UNWTO, sustainable tourism, Fear Of Missing Out

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1 Introduction

The term overtourism is quickly spreading worldwide, becoming the main topic of various research in the tourism community. This phenomenon can affect any country or specific destination, especially in the age of social media, where popularity can sometimes grow very rapidly, making it difficult for stakeholders to adjust and implement the required strategies. Since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, Japan has witnessed a sudden increase in the number of international tourists, making the country one of the most visited destinations in 2024. While this can be beneficial to the country's economy, it can also bring numerous negative aspects, from overcrowded spaces to the increased cost of living, as well as conflicts between tourists and residents, whose lives are suddenly disrupted by the massive crowds (Lee 2022, 27-29). As a country that highly rely on its ancient tradition and unique atmosphere, new strategies to face the new tourists are essential to preserve these remarkable features.

The aim of this thesis is to understand the role that social media plays in influencing travellers' behaviours and consequentially, in the overtourism crisis that is affecting Japan. In the next chapters the research will explore what type of content and platform is the most used by young travellers, as well as how Japan is currently viewed and represented on social media. Two case studies will be investigated, Kyoto, the former capital, and Mt. Fuji, the iconic symbol of Japan's popularity. These cases will explore the effects that overtourism is having on residential areas and local communities, as well as the strategies and rules that are being inevitably implemented to counteracts the negative effects of the large crowds.

Moreover, the chapters will focus on what sustainable solutions Japan is preparing for the future, with more than 40 million tourists expected in 2025 (JTB 2025). As many rural areas of Japan are experiencing the opposite issues than some of its biggest cities, stakeholders, government bodies, and social media influencers are trying to collaborate in order to make unknown areas more appealing to international tourists. The aim of this study is to not only contribute to academic discussions regarding overtourism, but to also offer useful insights for stakeholders, future visitors, and local authorities.

1.1 Research questions

The thesis focuses on the role of social media in the overtourism crisis that Japan is facing. The main investigative question of the research is the following:

- “To what extent has social media contributed to overtourism in Japan, and what sustainable solution can be implemented to reduce its negative impact on both the local communities and the environment?”

Additionally, the supporting sub-questions needed to reinforce the research are:

- To what level do social media trends and influencers' content impact tourists' decisions in Japan?
- Which types of platform (Instagram, TikTok) have the biggest influence on travel behavior?
- What are the negative impacts of over tourism on Japanese residents, local culture, and the environment?
- What sustainable tourism strategies are currently being implemented in Japan (if there are any)?

To accurately address all the questions, the thesis uses a research-based approach, with a total of 7 chapters and quantitative research carried with the use of a survey.

1.2 Personal interest in the topic

The topic is very dear to the author, as she spent 2 years of her life in Tokyo from early 2015 until late 2016, learning the language and the culture of the country. Moreover, the author was able to participate in the exchange program during her second year in Haaga Helia UAS, attending the spring semester of 2023 at Toyo University in Tokyo. In the meantime, the author frequently visits Japan multiple times every year for both personal and work matters, and was able to notice firsthand the difference between the current overtourism situation and how the circumstances were before the covid-19 pandemic.

As someone who does not use social media when searching for travel inspiration when visiting Japan, the author is very intrigued by the latest trends and how they affect people of her own age or younger, as well as how they would rate their experience after the visit, keeping in mind the overtourism that could be encountered. Lastly, the author's personal knowledge of the language and Japan's media proved to be very helpful during the research, as certain articles and specific events were not difficult to discover and interpret.

2 An Overview of Tourism in Japan

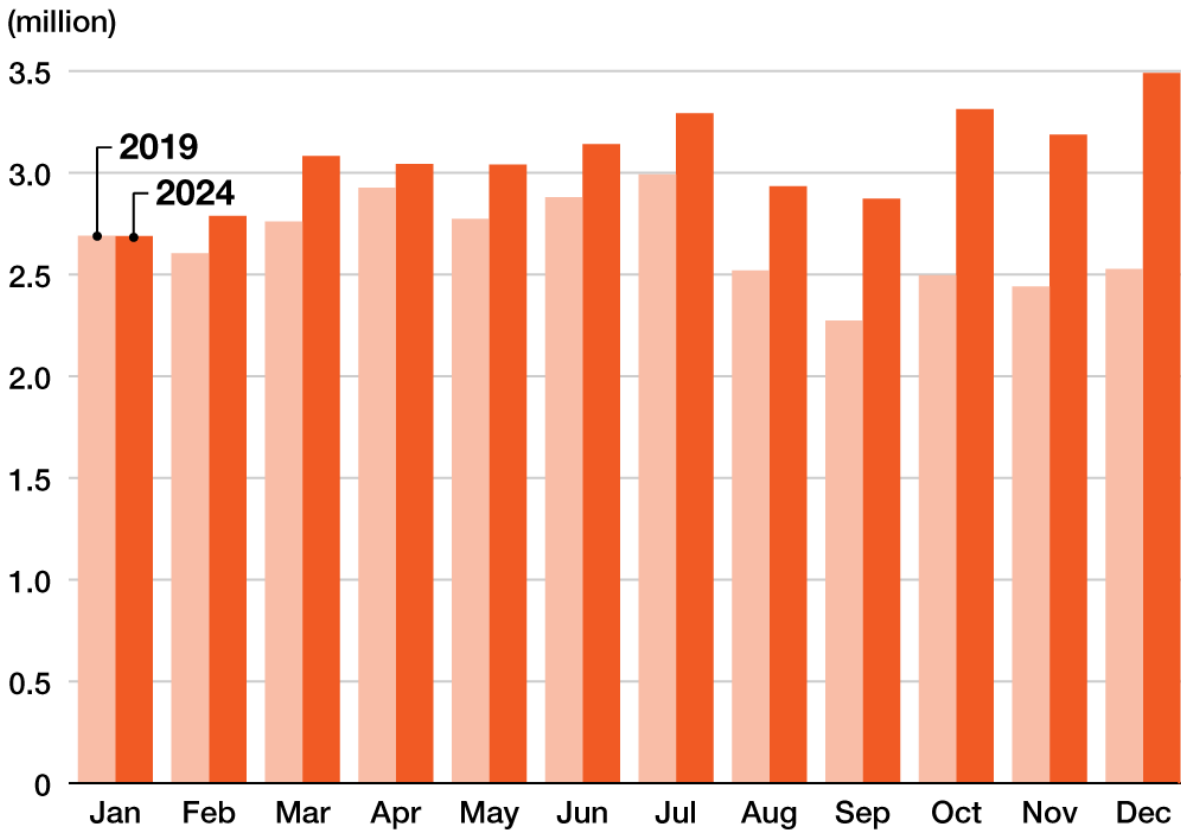
The past 20 years have been hectic for the Japanese tourist industry. The 21st century began with the “Visit Japan” campaign, which was launched in 2003 and successfully reached the pre-established target of 10 million tourists by the end of 2013. Despite challenges such as the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, the campaign was able to set the country on a new level of international inbound tourism (Zhang & McCormac 2014, 110-111). Almost a decade later, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, Japan was preparing to host the long-awaited Tokyo Olympics by investing in infrastructure, staff training and marketing the country as an attractive travel destination. The capital was expected to receive approximately 20 million tourists and 80.000 volunteers during the event, however the economic setback due to the postponed Olympics and travel restriction had a significant impact for all tourist related businesses and stakeholders (Yamamura & Tsutsui 2020, 2).

Despite the international restrictions, domestic travel was still promoted in order to boost the economy and support the tourism industry. As a result, in July 2020 the Japanese government presented the “Go To Travel” campaign to the public. This campaign applied a 50% discount on all travel expenses, including transportation, accommodation, and a voucher to be used at the destination. Although the applicants’ numbers were constantly raising, up to 15 million per month, the campaign was suspended at the end of 2020 after the increase of Covid-19 cases (Tamura, Suzuki & Yamaguchi 2022, 1-2). Following the disruptions caused by the pandemic, as of 2025, domestic travel in Japan is thriving. According to the biggest and most important travel agency in Japan, JTB Corporation (2025), 305 million domestic travelers are expected to hit the market by the end of 2025, with a 102% increase compared to the previous year and a total of 14 billion yen of forecasted expenses.

Regarding international tourism, the number of foreign tourists during the year 2021 fell by 87% compared to pre pandemic levels (Yagasaki 2021, 1-2), this was also due to the fact that Japan was one of the countries that kept its borders closed for the longest period, from April 2020 until October 2022. However, after the removal of all travel restrictions, Japan had a fast and quick recovery, and it welcomed 18 million tourists just in the first half of 2024, setting the record at an all-time high (Japan Times 2024). For 2025, 40 million inbound travelers are expected in the country (JTB 2025), which combined with the number of domestic tourists, will lead to a significant number of visitors and heavy congestions at major tourist sites. This shift in popularity between international tourists can be attributed to different factors. While some of the tourists were forced to postpone their travel plans until after the pandemic, many others keep choosing Japan as a destination due to effective marketing strategies. As this thesis will analyze, the surge in tourism

has been driven by different factors such as social media trends, strategic collaborations with influencers, the growing effect of the “Fear Of Missing Out” (FOMO), and the unfortunate weakness of the Japanese yen.

Number of Overseas Visitors in 2019 and 2024



Created by *Nippon.com* based on data from the Japan National Tourism Organization.



Figure 1. Number of Overseas Visitors in 2019 and 2024 (Nippon.com 2025).

2.1 The Role of social media in travel decisions

In the digital era, social media has become an indispensable tool in our everyday life. People seek social media's help for most activities, including tourism. According to Machado & De Souza (2017, 260-266), 97% of the participants in her research reported using the web daily, while 84% revealed to put social media to use when planning a trip or researching the destination. This emphasizes the shift from physical guidebooks towards more engaging travel information. Online platforms are nowadays essential during all the travel stages, and the newer generations use tools such as Instagram and TikTok to seek inspiration for destinations, accommodation, and leisure activities.

In 2021, Instagram had the greatest impact on younger travelers, with travel related content being the most followed. While being the main source of inspiration for all the travel phases, it is still unclear to what extent it can directly influence the choice of a specific destination for its users (Tešin, Pivac, Basermenji & Obradović 2021, 76). The geo-location feature available in the app enable users to share the exact geographical information of their pictures, making it easy for travelers to find guidance and details about a location they want to visit. When clicking on a certain specific location in the map, users are able to see videos and photos from others who have previously visited the place; this can be useful to receive insights and references on specific landmarks, however, the frequent editing of the pictures and ad hoc content posted by travel influencers can also create an unreachable level of expectations on the travelers (Kilipiri, Papaioannou & Kotzaivazoglou 2023, 1-3).

TikTok is a relatively new social media platform created in China, and it gained most of its popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic. Users can create and share short videos that are oftentimes accompanied by music, filters, and sounds. Unlike other social media platforms, TikTok operates with a different algorithm that spreads content based on the users' interactions and previously appreciated materials, making it an effective platform for companies to target potential customers (Dramićanin, Perić & Gašić 2023, 131-132). Research conducted by Zhou, Sotiriadis & Shen (2023, 2-10) revealed younger generations proactively seek for travel inspiration from the app, and 4 out of 10 respondents would probably consider visiting a place after seeing a good travel video.

2.2 Japan in social media

In March 2023 the Commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency, Ichiro Takahashi, revealed a plan issued by the government to reach the goal of 60 million foreign visitors to Japan by the year 2030. According to the Japanese government, welcoming this large number of tourists will result in around 15 trillion yen in spending, boosting the now struggling Japanese economy (Foreign Press Center Japan 2024). The government choice of collaborating with travel influencers to promote both popular and remote areas is well pondered, considering that Instagram and YouTube are the primary travel channels used for trip planning by Gen Z and Millennials (Arora 2024).

Japan National Tourism Organization is constantly promoting new projects and proposals to foreigners' influencers, with the purpose of promoting Japan as an attractive travel destination (2022) to foreign countries. These collaborations usually include a sponsored trip to certain areas of Japan, which will be promoted in the form of YouTube vlogs, Instagram posts, and short TikTok videos.

The latest collaborations mainly focus on remote Japanese destinations, which would benefit of the raising number of tourists. JNTO (2024) is currently aiming to distribute tourists more evenly and sponsor rural locations such as Niigata and Kumamoto with the help of short movies, filmed in collaboration with Chinese influencers. Despite their effectiveness, these travel content focused on rural areas are successful for sponsored partnership only. Regular travel Influencers who seek engagement by talking about Japan, gain substantially higher views by promoting popular locations. Japan based influencer Mariachiara Paggiolo (Pipkin 2024) agrees on the fact that videos that stay away from major trends do not perform well and do not reach a big audience. Furthermore, many followers directly ask for content related to popular areas such as Tokyo or Osaka. Simple and quick videos such as “5 Places to Eat in Tokyo” can gain thousands of views due to a higher interest in these locations. This is reflected on the worldwide use of the “#JapanTravel” hashtag, which has been currently used almost 7 million times on Instagram only, overtaking other countries similar hashtags by millions. The popularity of certain locations and activities which are advertised by thousands of influencers can lead to congested areas and significantly long waiting times.

Research conducted by Chiba Institute of Technology (Inaba & Iwashita 2023) shows how international tourists in Japan have purposes and needs which are different than domestic tourists. 50% of international tourists are divided between Tokyo and Osaka, and 80% of them have “Japanese food” as their most important goal when visiting Japan. Consequentially, when looking for restaurant advice online through food related videos and trends, most tourist will concentrate in the same locations leaving the stakeholders overwhelmed as well as other adjacent areas empty.

A significant case is the one of Ichiran Ramen (2024), a popular restaurant chain specialized in tonkotsu ramen, a popular Japanese dish served in around 2800 designated stores in the Tokyo area alone (Robledo 2024). Ichiran started gaining online popularity due to its peculiar dining experience, in which customers can order without speaking to a server, and the individual cubicle seating system allows them to have privacy and minimize social interactions. While the chain has been relatively popular, especially between Japanese workers, platforms like TikTok introduced it to international tourists increasing its visibility. TikTok videos containing the hashtag #Ichiran gained more than 72 million views globally (TikTok 2024), making the restaurant a must visit destination for any itinerary. This raise in popularity led to massive congestions of tourists outside the stores, with costumers facing waiting times up to two hours before entering the restaurant causing major inconvenience to owners of adjacent activities and local residents.

2.3 FOMO and Tourists Behavior

The concept of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) has been gaining a lot of importance worldwide, especially in regard of the tourism industry. FOMO is a relatively new psychological phenomenon resulting in someone's state of stress, fear, and depression when unable to participate in popular activities and experiences that take part in the online social sphere or within a group of friends (Setiawan, Garliani & Rahmawati 2025, 164).

This phenomenon is highly linked to the tourism industry. Studies show that FOMO can impact tourists' behavior, decisions and motivation when traveling. While influencing impulsive purchases or trips, FOMO can direct big flux of tourists to viral locations in order to have social acceptance (Kurniawan & Susilo 2024, 103-104). As viral locations and online trends tend to grow, this state of mind is amplified, causing a sense of urgency into visiting popular locations to avoid the feeling of being left out. Creating a mental bucket list of places to visit without any personal connection or real interest in the hosting communities can reduce the place into a mere social media experience set to obtain the perfect "photoshoot" (Siegel 2023, 2).

The issue of overtourism in Kyoto is widely known, and it's the topic of many discussions. The Fushimi Inari shrine is a prime example of how FOMO can affect not only the location itself but the quality of the experience altogether. The famous shrine is certainly one of the most iconic sites of Kyoto, and its thousand red gates sitting at the base of the mountain are one of the most identifiable sights of Japan (El-Habashi & El-Refai 2021, 239-240).

The paralyzing number of tourists that visit the shrine every day is one of the biggest consequences of overtourism in Japan. Approximately 5 million people visited Kyoto each month in 2023 (Arba 2024) with the Fushimi Inari Shrine being the most popular attraction in the city (Harano 2015), overflowing with tourists trying to capture the perfect shot under the red gates, diminishing the sacred location and leading to big congestions of tourists piling up at the beginning of the mountain trail. The shrine is accessible 24 hours, and it is not a rare occurrence for tourists to arrive as early as 3 o'clock in the morning in order to beat the crowd. Social media and FOMO induced tourism keeps visitors from truly connecting with the destination and its authenticity, too alienated and focused on the social media response rather than immersing themselves in the moment (Siegel 2023). Behaviors such as inappropriate clothing, littering, and noise pollutions are only few of the negative aspects of social media induced overtourism, building up to dissatisfaction and anger from local communities all over the world (Siegel 2023, 7-9).

3 Overtourism

The phenomenon of tourism is described by the United Nation World Tourism Organization as the social and economic movement of people to different places or countries, either for leisure, professional or personal purposes (UNWTO 2025). While the development of international and domestic tourism is widely encouraged, as it benefits countries with employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, and economic growth (Sekarani & Widiandari 2023,132), the increasing number of international tourists can contribute to different challenges such as overtourism.

The term overtourism began to gain significant popularity in 2017 and is characterized by the concentration of a large number of visitors at a tourist destination, which often results in littering, noise pollutions, degradation and other negative aspects that impact the lives of both tourists and local communities (Lee 2022, 28-29). Many factors can be attributed to its growth, including the expansion of low-cost airlines, the globalization of social media and the subsequent rise of viral destinations, as well as the growth of accommodation platforms such as Booking.com and Airbnb (Capocchi 2019).

Although this thesis will focus on cases of overtourism in Japan, this is indeed a global phenomenon. In the last decade, notorious cities like Venice and Barcelona have been fighting similar issues and the situation between local residents and tourists is still tense (Lee 2022, 28-29). This is not only an important media topic all over Europe, extremist social movements against tourism are also already in motion (Capocchi, Vallone, Pierotti & Amaduzzi 2019), and in some instances they result in aggressive behaviors, riots, and vandalism (Lee 2022, 28-29). While discussions regarding these issues have been prominent, there are not singular answers which can fit all affected destinations, and institutions have yet to find a real solution.

In this regard, the concept of tourism carrying capacity (CPP) is often brought to light. It is officially defined by the UNWTO as “the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, and sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors’ satisfaction” (Capocchi, Vallone, Pierotti & Amaduzzi 2019), however, accurately assessing this number is not easy. Different cities require different methods to quantify this cap, depending on variables such as resources, residents, and the ecosystem (Zekan, Weismayer, Gunter, Schuh & Sedlacek 2022, 1-3). Following the UNWTO guidelines, multiple approaches have been followed by different destinations, including the implementation of legal measures against short-term rentals, limitation on tourists arriving by cruise, and in real time offers of alternative routes and activities, far from the more congested areas (Capocchi, Vallone, Pierotti & Amaduzzi 2019). While the overtourism situation in Japan is relatively recent compared to destinations like Venice and Barcelona, several

cities in the country are currently affected by this phenomenon. This thesis will focus on the cases of Kyoto and Mt. Fuji, and the correlation between social media trends and the overwhelming number of tourists present in those areas.

3.1 Case studies: Kyoto

As the former capital of Japan, Kyoto is a unique location that is able to unify Japanese history with its modern architecture. The city was built in 794 based on the most important Chinese cities of the time (Bardini 2022), and currently Kyoto still owns more than 2000 temples (Lonely Planet 2025), as well as all major schools for traditional crafts, such as Ikebana and Tea Ceremony (Prough 2022). The urban planning of the city is another considerable aspect, as it was able to expand the city throughout the years while maintaining a special attention to tradition and history. Tourists can walk in narrow alleys, surrounded by fully preserved historical teahouses and numerous placards created to honor special locations or events that took place around the area centuries prior (Prough 2022, 9). Since the city and its beauty were spared from the American bombs during World War II, Kyoto is also one of the most well-preserved cities in all Japan, and of the few that was able to maintain original architecture from before the war (Bardini 2022).

The city had one of the fastest growths in the international tourism sector of the last decade. Its promoting campaigns started in the early 2000s were able to bring over 55 million tourists in 2014, which compared to the 1.5 million residents, was the start of a challenging situation that is still evolving today (Prough 2022, 2). Peak season in Kyoto corresponds with the autumn foliage called Momiji (Chiba 2023), when millions of tourists come to city to admire the beautiful red and orange colors surrounded by gardens and temples. Its location is also particularly strategic, as it is not far from both Osaka and Tokyo, making it easy for tourists to reach the city via train or even night bus; as a consequence, it is not rare for visitors to organize a day trip to Kyoto, while staying overnight in a nearby town (Bardini 2022). Tourists visiting for only one day usually have quite a hectic timetable, trying to make the most out of their limited time and rushing through attractions, prioritizing pictures, and viral checkpoints over a meaningful connection to the site. Social media such as TikTok have thousands of videos available giving advice on 1-day itineraries, with overall 2.5 billion views on short videos presenting the hashtag #Kyoto (TikTok 2025).

One of the most popular and affected locations in Kyoto is the Arashiyama bamboo forest, located in the district of Sagano, in the west part of the city. The bamboo grove itself is only a small part of the district, which includes a large number of famous temples, including the Daikakuji Temple and the Tenryu-Ji temple, located just beside the forest. Consequentially, the walking path surrounded by towering bamboo trees is not long, however its iconic aesthetic is easily recognized in world famous posters and pictures (JNTO 2025). The site is open 24 hours and both the official website

of the forest and the JNTO suggest visiting the area either at sunrise or after sunset to beat the overwhelming crowd (2025). The road leading from the train station to the entrance gate is a narrow street full of street food and bamboo crafting vendors, which can get quite crowded for all day, already creating a sense of discomfort in the approaching visitors. From there on, there are two available paths for tourists to take, the most famous one being Chikurin no Komichi, approximately 400-meters long (Rakuten Travel 2024). This is where the famous pictures are taken and despite being a quite short walk it is not unusual to complete the path in around 45 minutes, with long lines of people waiting for their turn to take the perfect picture. While the main website of the forest (2025) is warning tourists of the popularity and the extremely high congestion, it is also sponsoring various kimono rental shops situated just outside the station, to maximize the esthetic of your Instagram pictures. Unfortunately, the overcrowding situation is obvious to tourists as well and it is slowly impacting the perception of the site as well as the expectations. While the overall rating of the location on TripAdvisor (2025) is still high at a 4.5, numerous visitors define the forest as “too crowded” and “not worth it”, advising others to arrive before the first train is even available. A 2021 article from the CNBC (Pitrelli 2021), warns the readers on what to expect when entering the forest, describing how most edited and oversaturated picture which went viral online do not represent the reality of the site, creating false expectation on the matter and diminishing the real natural beauty of the forest.

Simultaneously, the Arashiyama forest is experiencing environmental decadence due to the behavior of the crowds. Since 2018, more than 100 bamboo trees have been found carved with names in multiple languages, leading to the decision to cut down the effected plants, as all trees are connected, and the damage inflicted into one can impact the whole forest. Trees are now separated from the public by a higher fence and multiple signs warn visitors in different languages to not get too close to the bamboo and refraining from damaging the area (Sekarani & Widiandari 2023, 134). To avoid congestions, in late 2018 an experimental website was introduced to the public. The Kyoto Arashiyama Travel Guide was supposed to predict specific locations overcrowding based on the local Wi-Fi and the people connected to it. The forecasts were presented to redirect visitors to less crowded areas and suggest alternative paths based on the current situation (Kaite 2018), however, after a good first month the initiative was not appreciated in the long run, as predictions were less and less accurate and the system failed to alleviate the congestion (Bardini 2022).

Kyoto is also home of the biggest geisha district in Japan. The Gion neighborhood is an old central area of the city where traditional restaurants and teahouses are still running their businesses and it is not unusual to see a geisha on her way to a teahouse appointment or the next exhibition (Bardini 2022). As tempting as it may be, geishas are to be admired from afar as it is very impolite to stop

and ask for pictures; however, this did not stop the hoard of tourists visiting Kyoto and the Gion district every year, so much so that it led to numerous harassments accidents and dangerous behaviors. In October 2019, the city of Kyoto acted against this situation and processed a photography ban in the district, with fees up to 100\$, preventing tourists to photograph walking girls and private streets (Siegel, Tussyadiah & Scarles 2023, 8-9). Unfortunately, these measures were not enough, as people kept photographing working women illegally as well as ignoring local customs and creating problems for the local businesses. In 2024, a city council urged by the government concluded that some of the most narrow and isolated streets of the district had to be closed to the public, in order to preserve the wellbeing of the local community (McCurry 2024). Business owners in Gion have been speaking their minds about these matters for a few years, and before the ultimate decision, a questionnaire regarding unruly tourists have been sent to 300 restaurants and shops in the area, who reported accident such as heavy littering on the streets, shops property being damaged while taking photos, and disturbance of people recording videos outside private properties and homes (Siegel, Tussyadiah & Scarles 2023, 8-9).

As previously mentioned, one of the most common outcomes in cities affected by overtourism is the large number of waste and littering left by the masses, and this situation is even more enhanced in Japan, a country that rarely relies on trash bins in the streets. When traveling to Japan, one of the first things tourists usually note is the lack of bins or public disposal areas, leaving visitors quite confused regarding what do to with their waste. Taking into consideration that Japanese people rarely drink or eat while walking, it is a normal occurrence to carry their waste with them during the day and dispose of it once returned home, however the same cannot be said about most tourists. The 300 regular bins previously installed by the municipality were unfortunately not enough to keep up with the number of people, so the district of Gion invested in new solar-powered bins that can automatically compact trash, reducing the pick-ups needed during the day, and can hopefully solve the littering issue that is interfering with the lives of the locals (Minami 2025). These difficulties have repercussions on domestic tourism as well. After a survey was administered to Japanese potential tourists, 46% of them declared that this situation reduced their inclination to travel to Kyoto, preferring different destinations. Consequentially, the number Japanese tourists in Kyoto decreased of around 4.000.000 visitors in the years 2020 and 2021. (Bardini 2022).

Much like the solar powered bins and the tourists ban, the city of Kyoto and its mayor, Koji Matsui, are always trying to find solutions to most of these matters. The inability for local residents to properly use public transportations has been a recurring issue, since most of the routes in the city center are overcrowded by tourists, making it sometimes impossible for residents to board the transportations at all. Since June 2024, express buses will run directly on famous routes up to 16

times per day and will stop in popular sites such as the Kyomizu-dera Temple or Ginkaku-ji pavilion. The price of the ticket is higher than a regular bus charging 500 yen instead of the regular 230, however, this doesn't discourage tourists and will hopefully alleviate locals' daily lives (Minami 2024). As of January 2025, the latest plans from the city revolve around the accommodation tax, which according to the mayor Matsui will be increased up to 10.000 yen per night, making it the highest in all of Japan. The money collected will be used to improve transportations and infrastructures so that the city can continue accepting the 50 million tourists expected for the following year, without sacrificing the lives of the residents as well as the traditional sites (Inoue 2025).

3.2 Case studies: Mt. Fuji

Mt. Fuji is unfortunately not unscathed by overtourism. The iconic World Heritage Mountain is both a spiritual and contemporary symbol of Japan worldwide, with over 200.000 climbers each year. The number might seem small compared to other Japanese destinations, however the site is open to tourists for less than 3 months per year, from early July until early September (Japan Travel 2025). The mountain is shared by the Yamanashi prefecture and the Shizuoka prefecture, and while both allow access to the site, the most popular is the Yoshida trail in Yamanashi which is well directly connected to Tokyo. According to the official Japan Travel (2025) website, this trail can get quite crowded and congested, making the climb much slower than anticipated. Warnings for tourists are in place on the website, reminding to take this possibility into consideration when planning a day trip. For this reason, most climbers decide to rest one night at the top of the mountain, climbing down the next day and making it a two-day visit.

Although the access to the path used to be totally free, in 2024 a new daily limit of 4000 climbers and a fee of around 2000 yen was implemented by the Yamanashi prefecture, hoping to moderate the number of tourists (Bhutia 2024). The price, however, was not enough to discourage the crowds, and after various complaints voiced by the local communities it will be raised to 5000 yen in 2025 by both prefectures (Japan Times 2024). Local residents of the nearby towns are facing difficulties not only from the raising number of visitors, but mostly their behaviors. After various locations became viral online for their "instagrammable" view of the Mt. Fuji, city governments had to take measures.

The first location that is currently suffering over its online popularity is Arakurayama Sengen Park. The shot of Mt. Fuji poking behind the red Chureito Pagoda surrounded by cherry blossom trees, is one of the first settings that comes to mind when imagining the famous mountain. The park is located in a residential area of Yamanashi and before the popularity, residents were able to live their lives unaffected. Nowadays, residential streets are always crowded and very loud, with

tourists occupying the few parking spots available for the locals (Toyohira 2025). According to park officials, it is becoming very hard to manage public toilets and keeping them clean, alongside the waste scattered around the park. Moreover, the walk to the viewing deck is preceded by almost 400 steps, and when congested it is almost impossible for elderly and disabled people to arrive at the top. As a result, officials are considering an entrance fee to be put in place, however it is still unclear when it will be implemented and how much will it be (Ikeda 2024).

The second affected location is the small town of Fuji-Kawaguchiko, located in the Yamanashi prefecture as well. According to the town residents, a photo of the Mt. Fuji looming behind a Lawson convenience store was posted online in late 2022, becoming viral on the web. As the spot began to attract hordes of tourists with cameras and drones, the possibility of serious accidents became higher since the store is located in a small single-laned street with little to no sidewalk. In order to get the perfect shot, people would gather in front of a local clinic on the other side of the street, preventing patients from entering or even parking, as all the spots were usually taken by visitors. Many tourists would also stop in the middle of the road to get a better portrait, resulting in constant cars honking and sudden stops. The town had hoped that the multiple languages signs installed in 2023 and traffic cones would deter people from continuing with this dangerous behavior, however in 2024 they were forced to take more severe decisions. In May 2024, a black screen 3 meter high and 20 meters long was erected as a temporary measure, hoping for the location to lose its popularity soon (Noda 2024). Unfortunately, as of March 2025 the location still has almost 7 million views on TikTok, with content creators and tourists still sponsoring the picture spot.

4 How is Japan following the Sustainable Tourism Guidelines

According to the UNWTO (2025), the guidelines to develop sustainable tourism can be applied to any destinations and different forms of tourism. When talking about implementing sustainability we must take into consideration the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of a destination, trying to find a balance that can last for a long period of time. To guarantee sustainable tourism development is necessary the participation of all stakeholders, including political figures and the population. Tourists must also be made aware of the journey, promoting sustainable practices between them while keeping their satisfaction level high. The directives regarding sustainable tourism are in place to make sure that:

- The environmental resources are optimally used for tourism still maintaining the natural biodiversity and local heritage.
- Local communities are respected and are able to conserve their traditions and values, while contributing to inter-cultural arrangements.
- Tourism should provide long-term social and economic benefits equally to all stakeholders, with income opportunities for the local communities, and alleviating poverty where needed.

When implementing the third point to the current economic situation in Japan, there are some concerns regarding the local communities' economic benefits. The country has been battling against inflation for a long time, and after keeping the interests' rate to 0 for more than 17 years the Bank of Japan finally raised the rates in March 2024 hoping for an economic boost. While a weak yen might improve exports and overseas profit, many Japanese are finding life to be too expensive to spend money and boost the internal economy (Lim 2024). For international tourists a trip to Japan can be currently convenient, as 1 US Dollar now corresponds to 150 yen, with a peak of 160 yen in mid 2024. According to the JNTO, tourists spent an all-time high of 8 trillion yen in 2024 (Masuda 2025), with the accommodation industry having the highest monetary increase (Lim 2024). This price escalation had a significant impact for Japanese domestic travellers, who are now left out from certain places that were once accessible to them. For instance, Yoshiaki Kojima's IT employees are now forced to sleep in capsule hotels when going on domestic work trips, as regular rooms are now too expensive due to the surge in tourism. According to Kojima, capsule hotels are still somewhat affordable with prices remaining around 5000 yen (30\$), even though they are constantly increasing as well. While the record numbers of tourists have a positive impact on the job market and is able to boost the revenue of restaurants and stores, it also impacts the lives of Japanese residents (Fukue 2025).

Regarding the first two points of the Sustainable Tourism Guidelines, Japan is now trying to mend some of the issues caused by overtourism on both the environment and the local residents. The

previously mentioned cases of Kyoto and Mt. Fuji are an example of how the government was able to listen to the voices of the community and act on the disruptions of the daily lives as well as the environmental deterioration of some traditional locations. Even though these implementations are certainly new and have yet to settle, it is apparent that most of Japan's solutions rely on charging extra fees to international tourists. Other famous attractions such as the Osaka Himeji Castle is considering having a different entrance price for residents and tourists, raising the latter to 4000 yen, compared to the current 1000-yen ticket. The Nadai Fuji Soba restaurant chain is so overwhelmed by the number of tourists that they recently added dishes to the menu for over 2500 yen, when they were previously famous for their 500 yen only menu (Steen 2024). All of these changes are still relatively new and there is not available data yet to deduce if the pricing raise can actually deter tourists from visiting a certain spot or if the extra profit will be the only benefit in the long run.

4.1 Sustainable Influencing

Shifting the attention towards sustainable travel is an opportunity that could enforce a positive change in both Japan's tourist industry and the wellbeing of the local communities. As previously mentioned, JNTO has strong partnerships with influencers from all over the world, and the organization is actively trying to promote lesser-known locations to avoid congestions and overtourism in the big cities. Two of the latest partnerships focused on promoting hidden locations around Mie Prefecture and Fukushima Prefecture. A popular TikToker from Thailand was invited in the old town of Ouchijuku, where she was able to show her followers a well-preserved village from the Edo Period and some traditional Japanese experience like the Wadaiko drums. The aim is to revive rural and empty areas using social media, and whilst the majority of first-time visitors will focus on famous landmarks and activities, repeat travelers, especially the ones coming from adjacent Asian countries, will always have new places to explore (Inoue 2024).

The idea of redirecting international tourists towards lesser-known locations is received discordantly between Japanese people. The city of Karuizawa, located in the Nagano Prefecture, is the perfect getaway for tourists who wish to spend a few days surrounded by nature. The city is located at the base of Mt. Asama, and it offers activities for any season, such as skiing in the winter, or walking in its forest surrounded by waterfalls in the summer (Japan Travel 2025). According to the mayor, Karuizawa is currently trying to enhance its allure as a tourist destination in the hope of welcoming many international visitors in the long term (NHK world 2025).

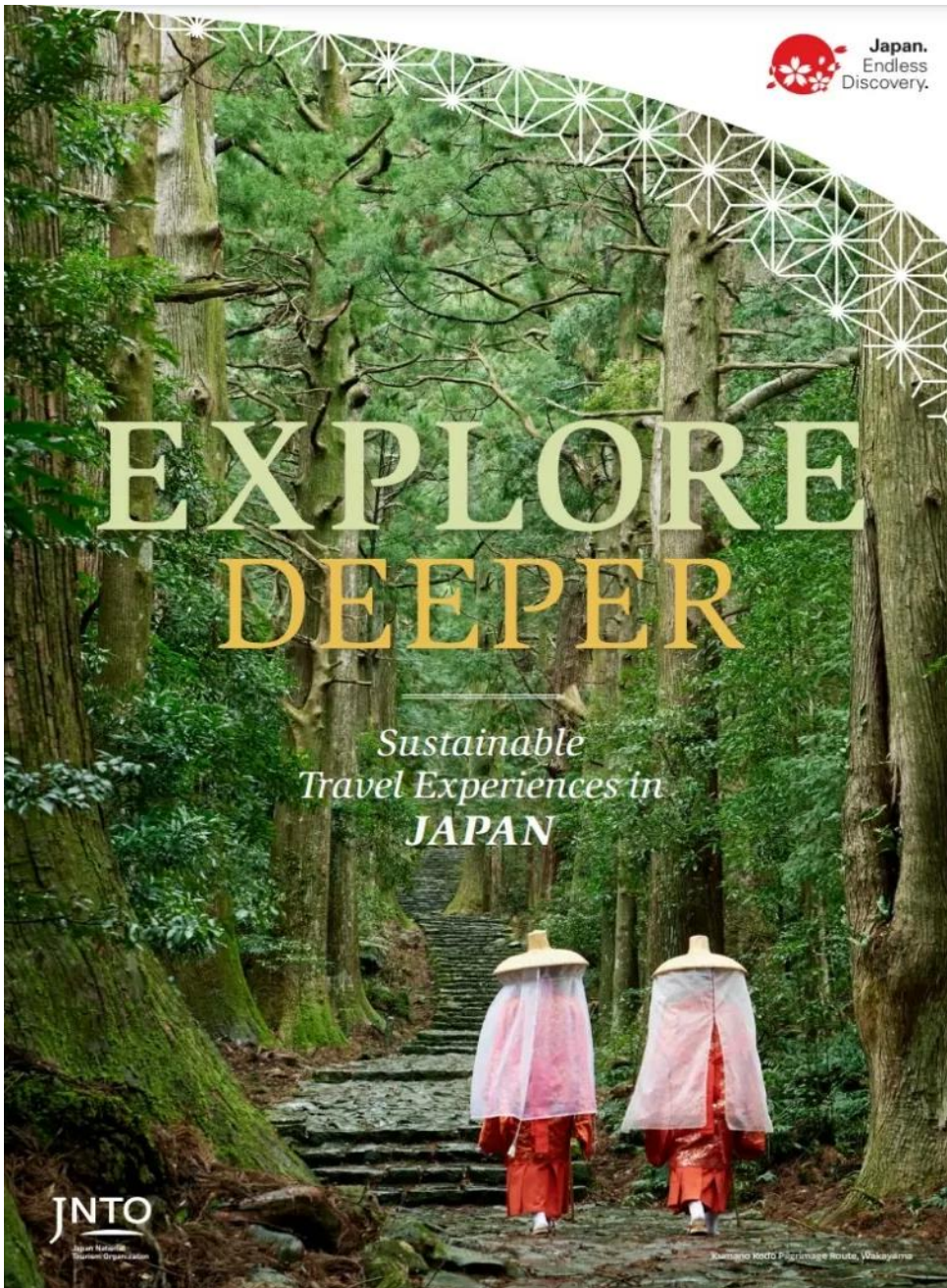


Figure 2. Explore Deeper. (JNTO 2025)

To have more insight on this matter, in 2020 research has been conducted amongst the residents in Karuizawa, examining the perspective of the local community regarding the possible tourists' impact on the city, as well as their participation in sustainable tourism practices (Ribeiro, Moritomo & Woosnam 2020). Whilst half of the participants in the survey were expressing positive feelings regarding the hypothetical increase in the number of international tourists, many perceived the matter in a more negative way. One particular resident expressed his worries regarding the new bullet train station implemented in the city, which would allow tourists to spend only one day in Karuizawa, in the interview he stated: "*As the bullet train has been opened, the visitors who use*

accommodations have decreased. As a result, small accommodations have become bankruptcy." Others concerns included the increasing number of infrastructures: *"There has been recently a lot of development of hotels and resort mansions, [...] and I do not think that the number of hotel rooms is sustainable over the long-term, [...] probably they are going to destroy the economy in the town"*, as well as the possibility of the city to become a new viral and congested location, only to be forgotten once the hype has finally passed: *"As many foreign visitors come here, many businesses can gain economic benefits now. But I am worried about these stores' businesses which currently depend too much on foreigners when foreign visitor number will go down in the future"* (Ribeiro Moritomo, & Woosnam 2020). Lastly, residents were asked their stance on the sustainable tourism development plan, which includes redirecting visitors in more rural areas to help ease the burden on more popular locations. Once more, the response was divided between two groups, with one part expressing enthusiasm on the matter, while the other expressed various concerns, such as the lack of a proper plan from the institutions: *"The current policy is not clear. [...] I think I will support if it is linked to a vision, strategic goals, and strategic strategies and tactics which are all linked together, [...] but currently there is not"* (Ribeiro, Moritomo & Woosnam 2020). As shown by these answers, the Japanese plan of redirecting tourists into experiencing a rural side of the country by promoting less known location with the help of influencers and social media, should be attentively constructed keeping in mind the possible setbacks and downsides which can affect these destinations.

4.2 Conclusion

As discussed in the previous chapters, Japan is facing a phase of great evolution regarding its tourism industry which is driven by different factors, including the rise of social media trends and the amplified visibility of viral location which became a must visit for most itineraries. While such a big increase in the number of tourists can offer great economic opportunities for many local businesses, the congested areas hit by overtourism are facing different types of challenges. The behavior of most international tourists can cause environmental damage and heavy disruptions in the daily lives of local communities, urging the government to act on the matter. Landmarks like the Mt. Fuji and the city of Kyoto are introducing new measures to minimize the inconvenience and damages perpetrated by the masses, who are mainly interested in the aesthetic of the experience and crossing each site off their travel checklist.

With the surge of overtourism, some of the guidelines presented by the UNWTO regarding sustainable tourism are currently being implemented by the Japanese government; however, major concerns still linger among the local communities. The constant price increase is slowly excluding Japanese people from enjoying local restaurants and accommodation, taking a toll on domestic

travel. At the same time, the partnership with various influencers to promote rural locations is, according to local residents, lacking a precise plan and not aware of the possible future complications. It is clear that Japan has no intention on reducing the number of international visitors, as shown by the 60 million tourists' goal that the government is planning to achieve by 2030, the economy boost needed by the country heavily rely on foreign travelers, especially Chinese and South Koreans tourists. Although a consistent growth of the tourism industry is essential for every country, Japan is in need of a precise plan on how to deal with the challenges posed by overtourism, especially when the authenticity of the country is both its greatest asset and the most vulnerable to being jeopardized. Given these ongoing issues, it becomes essential to understand how overtourism is experienced by those directly impacted by it, tourists and residents alike. In the following section, the results of the conducted research will be presented, offering valuable insights into the experiences of international tourists regarding the link between social media and Japan's sudden popularity, as well as the current overtourism situation in Japan.

5 Methodology

The following chapters will focus on the research method used to obtain the necessary data, how they were collected, and the analysis of the received information. Research projects are mostly conducted by using either qualitative or quantitative methods, depending on the circumstances and the results one is trying to obtain. The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of how social media can shape travellers' decisions when visiting Japan, and how the overtourism crisis is connected to and perceived by tourists. To collect the necessary data in order to answer these questions, quantitative method was chosen. While qualitative method is based on observation, feelings, and focuses on discovering the meaning behind certain behaviours (Turato 2005, 5), quantitative research method is mostly used when there is a need to collect and analyze data that can be represented numerically. This method requires the use of certain tools for data collecting such as surveys and questionnaires, and it has been proven effective when having to demonstrate social trends and issues, examining attitudes and behaviours with the use of direct questions, while answering the "what" or "how" of certain situations. Unlike qualitative method, however, it does not give any insight regarding the "why" or the motivation behind these behaviours, as that would require the implementation of open-ended questions and targeted interviews (Goertzen 2017, 12-13).

5.1 Data Collection

In order to support the theory presented in previous chapters, and in alignment with the quantitative method, the required data was collected with the use of a survey. By definition, a survey is a statistical method used to collect information from a selected sample of respondents. Surveys are commonly used to either describe the size of certain behaviors (for instance, an election poll falls under this category), or to analyze how certain variables are related (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau 2011, 2-4). The present research falls under the second category, exploring the correlation between social media and wave of overtourism that hit Japan since the reopening of its borders after the Covid-19 pandemic.

With the advancement of computers helping with the collection of data, most survey are nowadays mostly administered and analyzed with the help of specific platforms (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau 2011, 7-8). This study's survey was built and designed through Webropol, a Finnish software company founded in 2002 which provides efficient tools for data collection, analysis, and reporting (Webropol 2024). The structure of the survey was firstly discussed with the thesis' advisor, and once the questions were finalized and approved in was then launched on Webropol. The survey contained 17 closed-ended questions, three of which were

multiple choice and gave the respondents the possibility to add their own answers in case neither of the listed options applied. Moreover, the questions were divided into sections, each focusing on different topics relevant to the research. The sequence began with general travel background information, followed by questions regarding social media influence, expectations versus reality, overtourism experiences at popular landmarks, and lastly, future intentions regarding a possible return to Japan.

The participation in the survey was not only totally anonymous and voluntary, but it also targeted a specific age group. The accepted target for this research included people aged 18 to 36, as they fall into the Gen Z and Millennials generations. According to Sayyed and Gupta (2020), Millennials are the target audience to most social media marketing campaigns, as they have both the most technology literacy and a disposable income; on the other hand, despite having less available income, young adults belonging to the Gen Z prefer to communicate and seek information on social media, consuming online content more than any other generation (PrakashYadav & Rai 2020). Lastly, participants in the survey were required to have visited Japan after the reopening of its borders in 2022, which was the start of the overtourism wave and viral online content positioning Japan as a highly popular destination. The distribution of the survey was carried out online, and while a QR code option was also available to use, only an open linked was published throughout various social media platforms, such as Instagram and X. In order to target the accurate respondents, the open link was shared with a broader audience with the support of a popular Instagram page called Nodonodo, which focuses on Japanese culture and online language courses (2025). The use of the survey as a data collecting method was fairly easy and whilst error potential is still possible, with the correct strategies it can be a legitimate tool to explore and focus on different specific variables and interests (Ponto 2015).

5.2 Data Analysis

The survey was opened to the public on March 29th, and while the minimum number of participants was reached after 48 hours, the link was closed two weeks later, on April 12th. The minimum number of answers needed for the survey to be validated was 100, and after two weeks a total of 136 answers were collected and included in the analysis. Once the survey was closed, Webropol automatically created a report with the collected data, which was then uploaded to Excel to create the charts that will be presented in the Results section. To analyze the data and support what stated in the theoretical framework, personal or demographic details such as nationality and gender were not necessary, and it is important to note that every time the link was shared on various channels, the purpose of the survey was publicly disclosed, alongside the assurance that no personal data were required nor collected.

6 Results

The following section shows the survey results administered for this research, which aimed to investigate the correlation between social media and overtourism in Japan. The 136 collected answers provide additional insights regarding the travel behavior, expectations, and satisfaction of the respondents. The questions were designed to examine how the travel choices were influenced by social media, whether overtourism was experienced, and how it impacted their experience. While the complete survey is visible in the appendix, the most significant results are now presented using both numerical data and graphical analysis to provide a clear understanding of the answers and the travel trends.

6.1 Social Media Influence

In this section, the most significant findings regarding the correlation between travel and social media will be shown. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the use of social media is highly prevalent between gen z and millennials; for this reason, the only demographical information which seemed relevant in this research was the respondents' age.

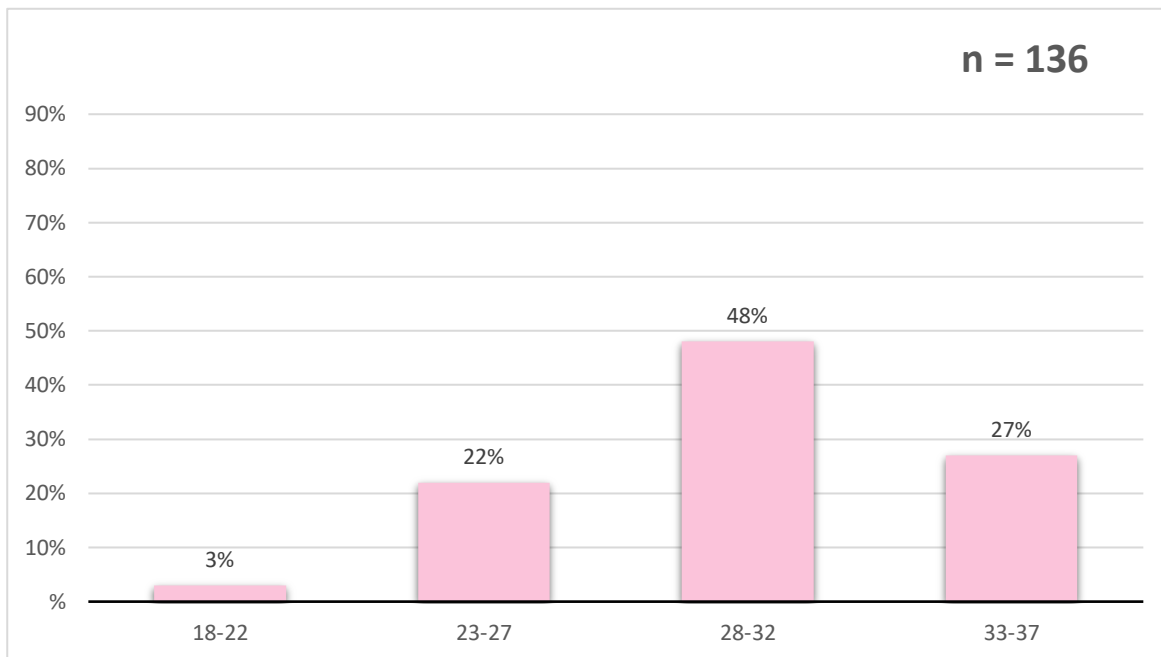


Figure 3. Almost 50% of the respondents are between 28 to 32 years old.

The graph presented in Figure 3 shows that the majority of respondents (48%) are in the 28-32 age group, followed by a 27% belonging to the 33-37 age bracket. Younger respondents aged 23-27 represent 22% of the total, while the youngest group which goes from 18 to 22 years old, only make up 3% of the total.

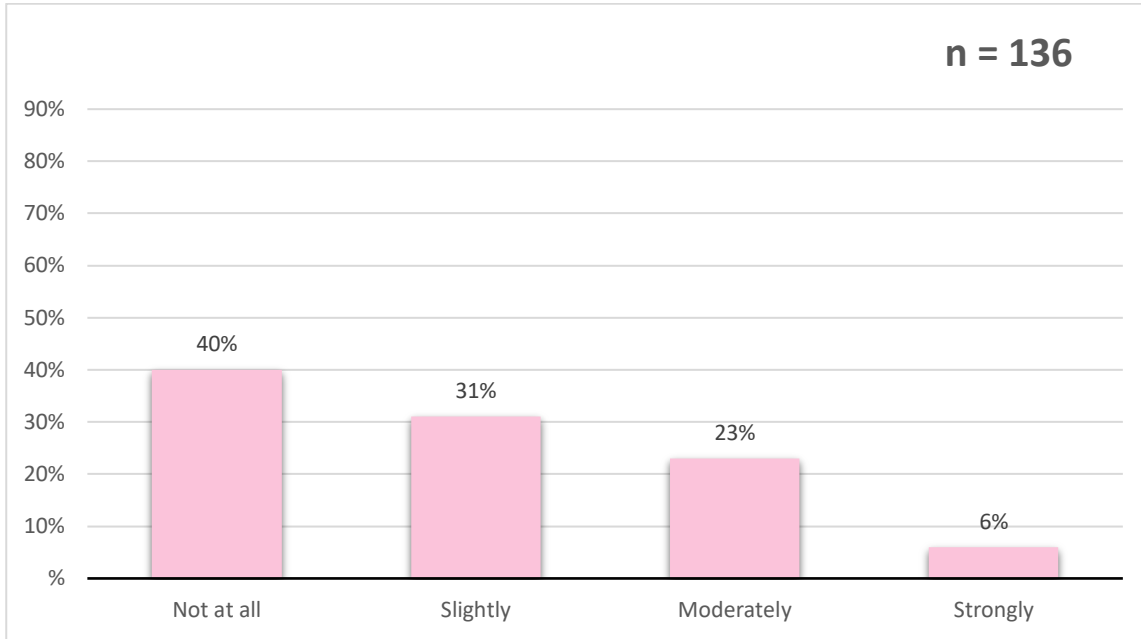


Figure 4. “How much did social media influence your decision to travel to Japan?”

The answers displayed in Figure 4 show that 40% of the respondents were not influenced at all by social media in their decision to travel to Japan. However, the majority of the respondents were in fact influenced to a certain degree, with a 60% of combined positive answers. Withing this 60%, 31% reported being slightly influenced in their decision, and 23% stated that their trip was moderately influenced. The remaining 6% was strongly influenced by social media, in their decision of visiting Japan.

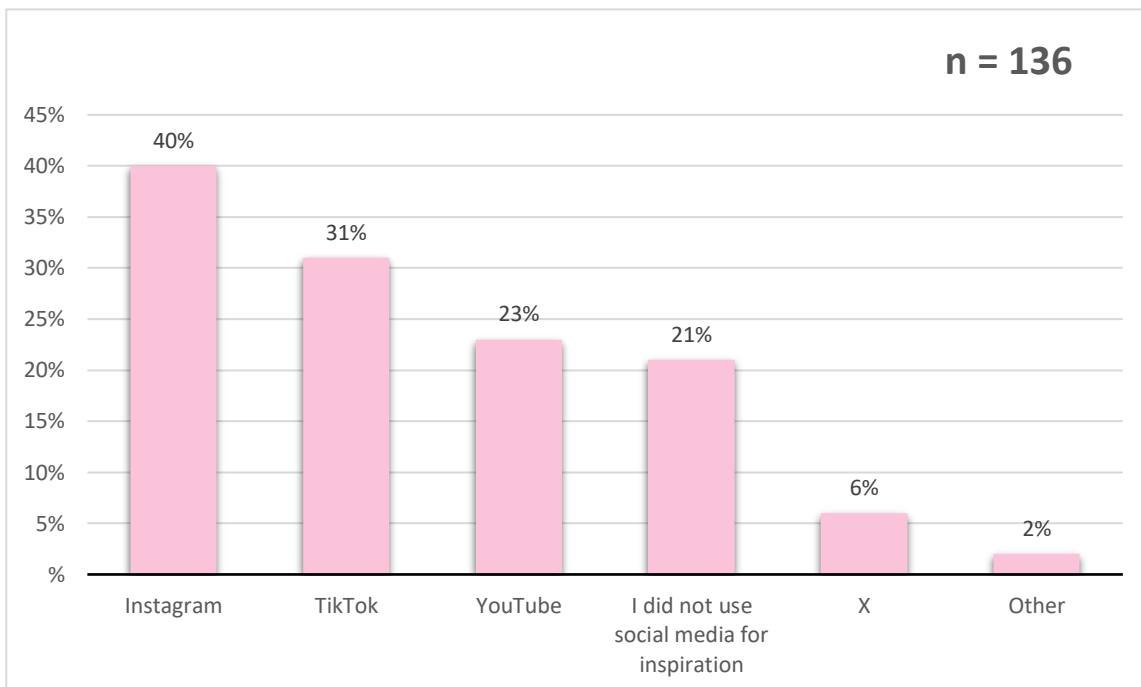


Figure 5. “Before your trip to Japan, which social media did you use the most for travel inspiration?”

This question gives an understanding on which social media is the most popular when looking for travel inspiration. The findings reported in Figure 5 show how Instagram was used by the majority of the respondents, taking 40% of the total answers. The app is promptly followed by TikTok, a relatively newer platform which was used by 31% of the people. YouTube was the third most popular social media, representing 23% of the total, and X (former known as Twitter) was used by only 6% of the respondents. While 21% of the participants stated that they did not use social media for inspiration, a small 2% took the opportunity to indicate others platform that were not mentioned. By selecting “Other” it was mandatory for the respondents to clarify their answers in a dedicated comment box. The three other answers given in the text field were Reddit, Pinterest, and Threads.

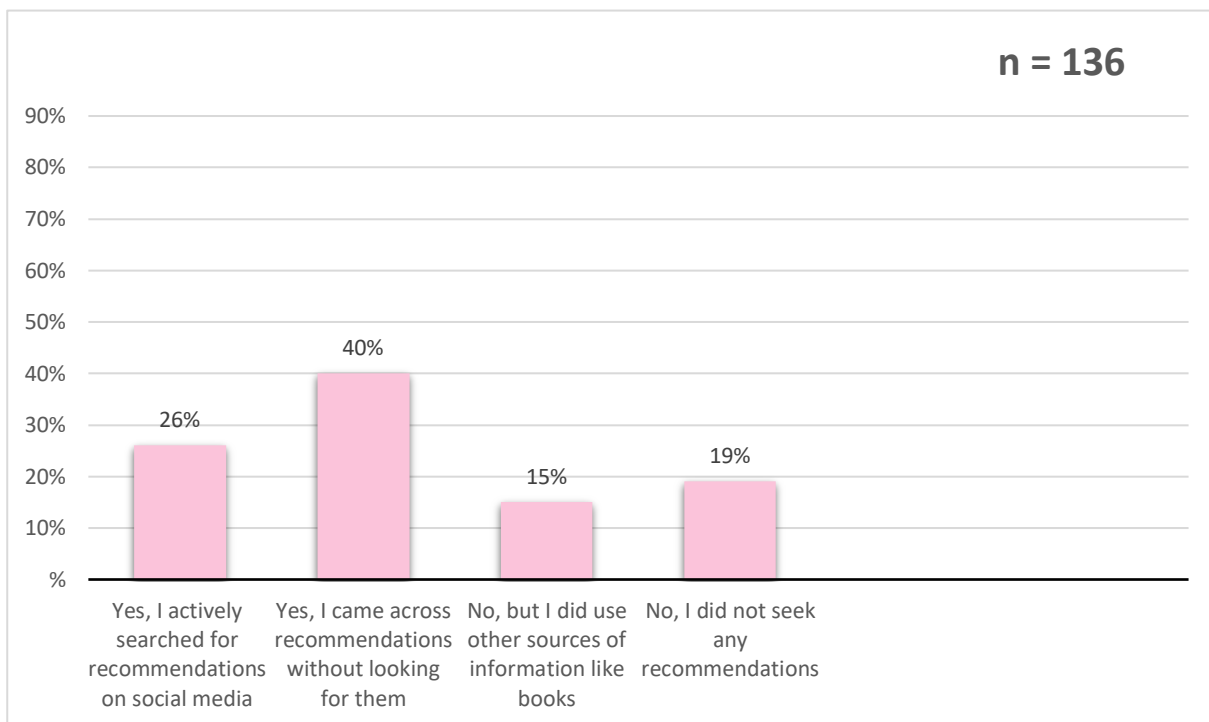


Figure 6. “Did you look at any influencers’ recommendations before your trip?”

The answers reported on Figure 6 demonstrate how 66% of the respondents did look at online influencers’ recommendations before their trip. Specifically, 40% of them came across unprompted travel suggestions and decided to look at the proposed content, while only 23% actively searched throughout social media before the trip for specific recommendations. Around 15% of the participants only used other sources of information, such as books or reviewing websites, whilst the travelers who did not seek any recommendations on any source of information make up 19% of the total.

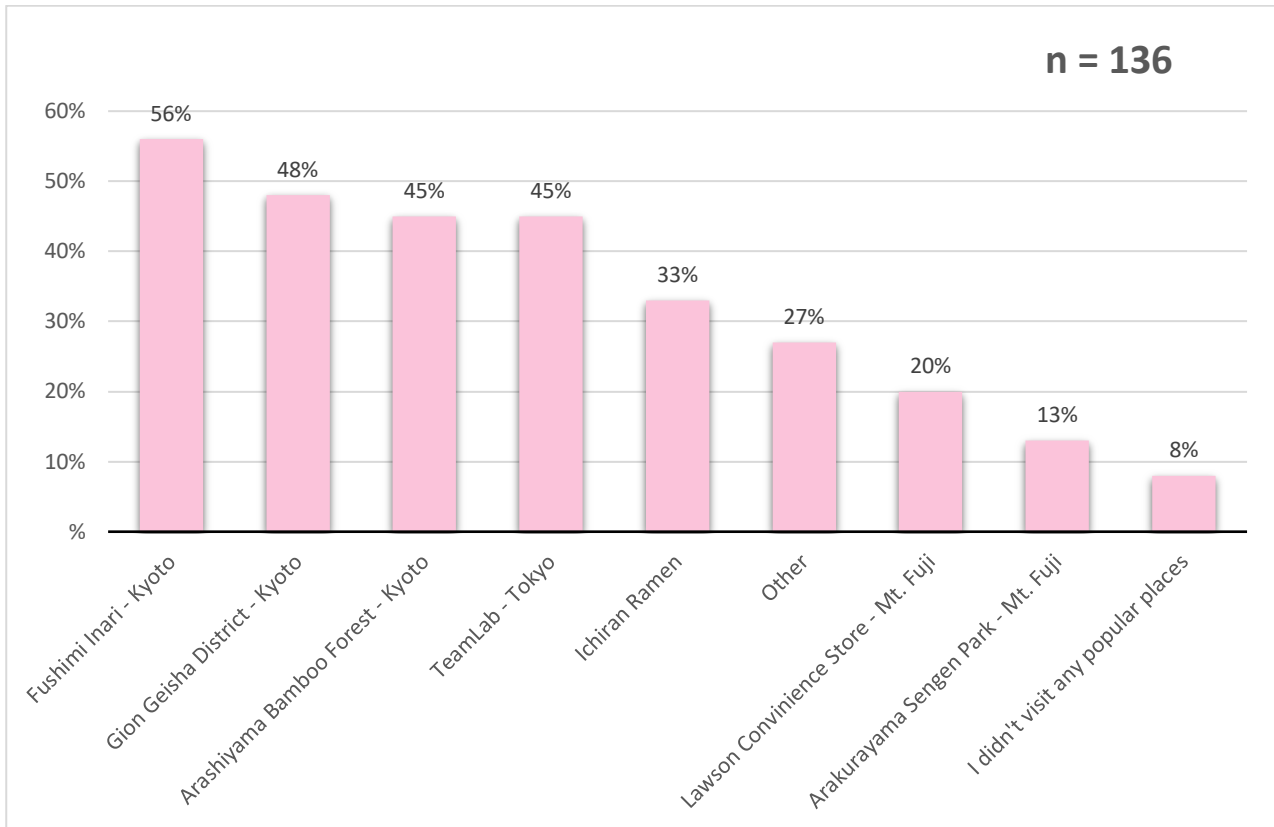


Figure 7. “Did you visit any of these viral/popular places in Japan?”

In this multiple-choice question, participants could tick all the location they visited in their trip to Japan as well as specifying different ones that were not listed in the comment box. All the locations presented in the question either became viral on social media (e.g., Ichiran Ramen, the Mt. Fuji Lawson store) or are between the most popular spots for tourists when visiting. As shown in Figure 5, only 8% did not visit any popular place, while the 92% visited one or more places. The most popular answers were the Fushimi Inari Temple in Kyoto with a 56% rate, and the geisha district of Gion which was chosen by 48% of the respondents. An equal share of 45% was registered by The Arashiyama Bamboo Forest and the TeamLab Museum, followed by Ichiran Ramen which was visited by 33% of the participants. The Lawson store near Mt. Fuji only received a 20% rate, and the Arakurayama Sengen Park was the least visited place between the one presented, registering 13% of the total answers. When choosing the “Other” option, respondents had to specify the destination in the text box. A total of 36 answers were added in the section, with Nara being the most frequent and mentioned by 6 people. Other popular suggested locations were the Shibuya Crossing and Osaka, with 5 mentions each, as well as Tokyo Disneyland which was suggested by 4 participants.

6.2 Overtourism Experiences and Satisfaction

The following questions are related to Overtourism and the intensity with which it was experienced, as well as if and how it impacted the trip and the expectations of the travellers.

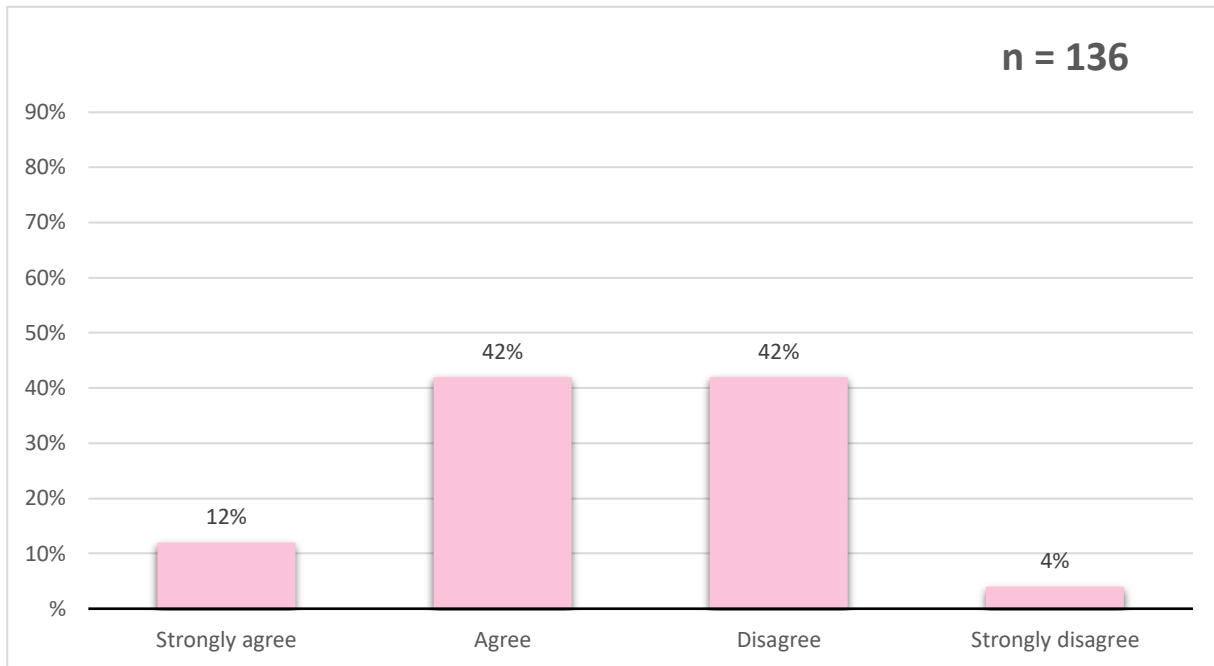


Figure 8. “Do you think social media creates unrealistic expectations about travel experiences in Japan?”

In Figure 8 we can clearly see how divisive this question is. The amount of people who agree or disagree are at a tie, with 42% each, however, 12% of the remaining participants strongly agree on the statement, compared to the ones who strongly disagree, which only represent 4% of the total answers. Overall, the respondents who agreed, even if in different levels, are a higher percentage (54%) than those who did not agree with the question.

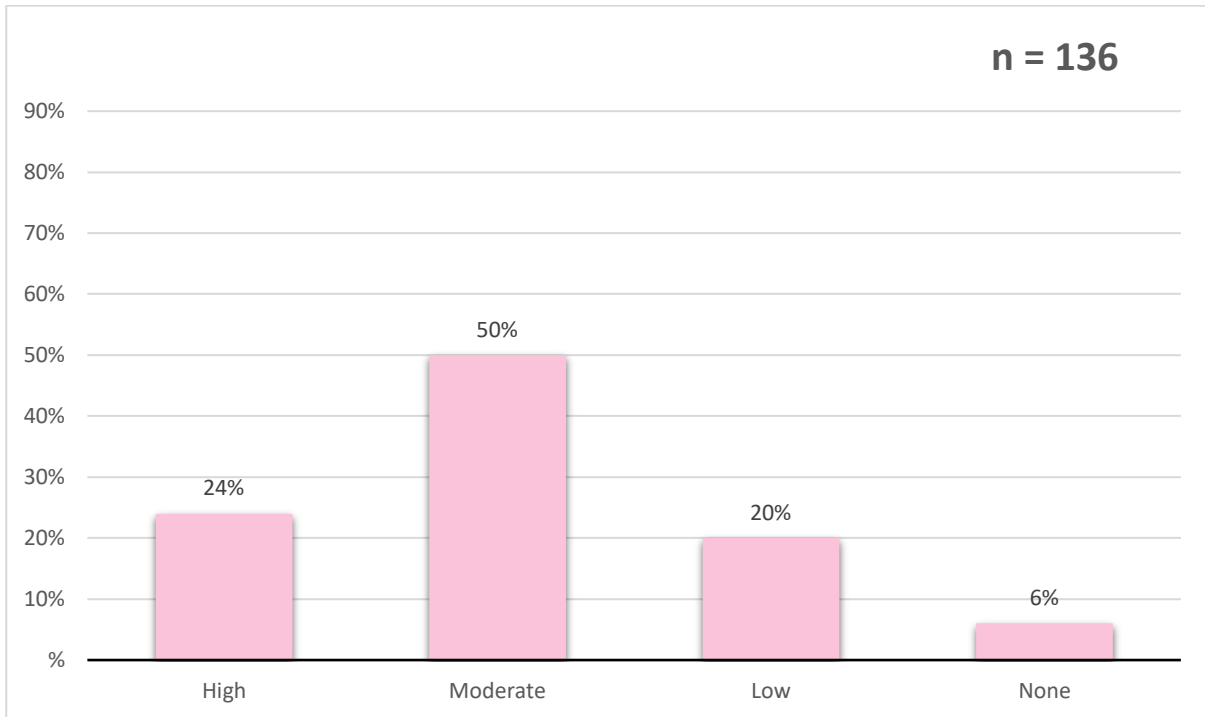


Figure 9. "Did you experience overtourism at any popular tourist sites in Japan?"

With this question the intent was to gather information on whether overtourism was experienced and to what extent. The graphic presented in Figure 9 shows how 50% of the answers reported overtourism experienced at a moderate level, while 24% found the level to be high. 20% of participants deemed the overtourism level to be low, and only 6% stated that they did not experience any level of overtourism. At this stage of the survey, it is not clear yet how overtourism affected the respondents' experiences, however the overall perception is leaning towards a moderate to high level of overtourism perceived by the majority of the visitors.

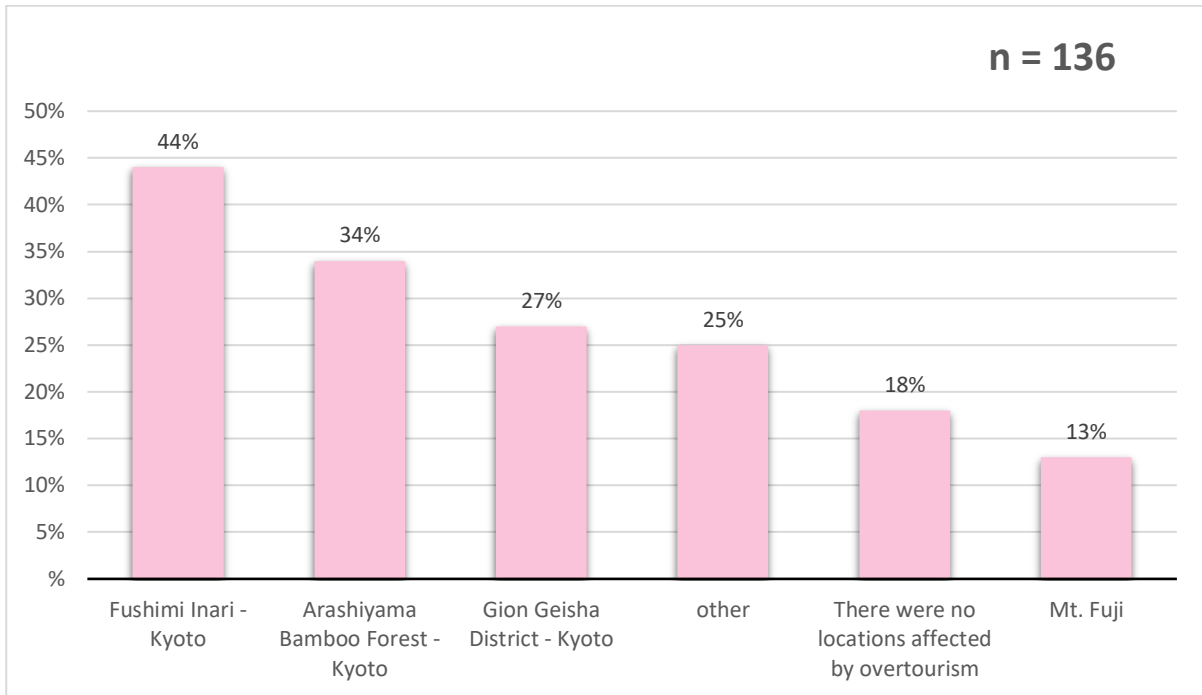


Figure 10. “Which locations did you feel were the most affected by overtourism?”

This question was needed to better understand which locations were most affected by overtourism. Once again respondents could choose multiple answers, and when selecting “other” a clarification was needed in the comment box. As we previously discovered that the Fushimi Inari and the Arashiyama Bamboo Forest were among the most popular places visited by the participants, it is no surprise to notice that they experienced the higher ratings regarding overtourism, with 44% and 34% respectively. They are followed by the Gion district with a 27% and Mt Fuji which only register 13% of the total answers. It is interesting to note that 18% of participants stated that no location was affected by overtourism, whereas in the previous question, only 6% reported not having experienced it. Regarding the remaining 25% wanted to report other locations, Tokyo in general was the most outlined by the visitors with 7 answers, with only the TeamLab Museum itself (which is located in Tokyo), collecting 3 other answers.

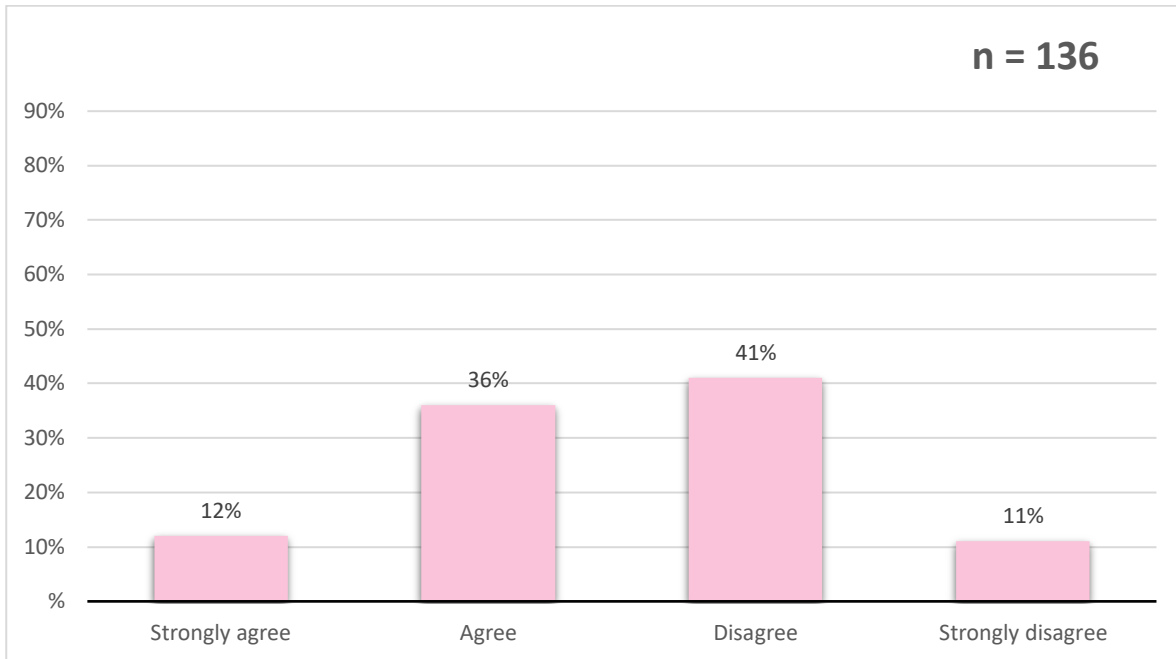


Figure 11. “Did overtourism negatively impact your experience at any of these locations?”

The outcome presented in Figure 11 have once again very divisive results, which divide the general response in two big groups, with 48% agreeing with the question, and 52% feeling the opposite. Within the group agreeing to the question, 36% of the answers simply agree to the statement while 12% have a stronger feeling. The remaining participants who disagreed are divided as such, with 41% disagreeing and 11% who had a strong disagreement.

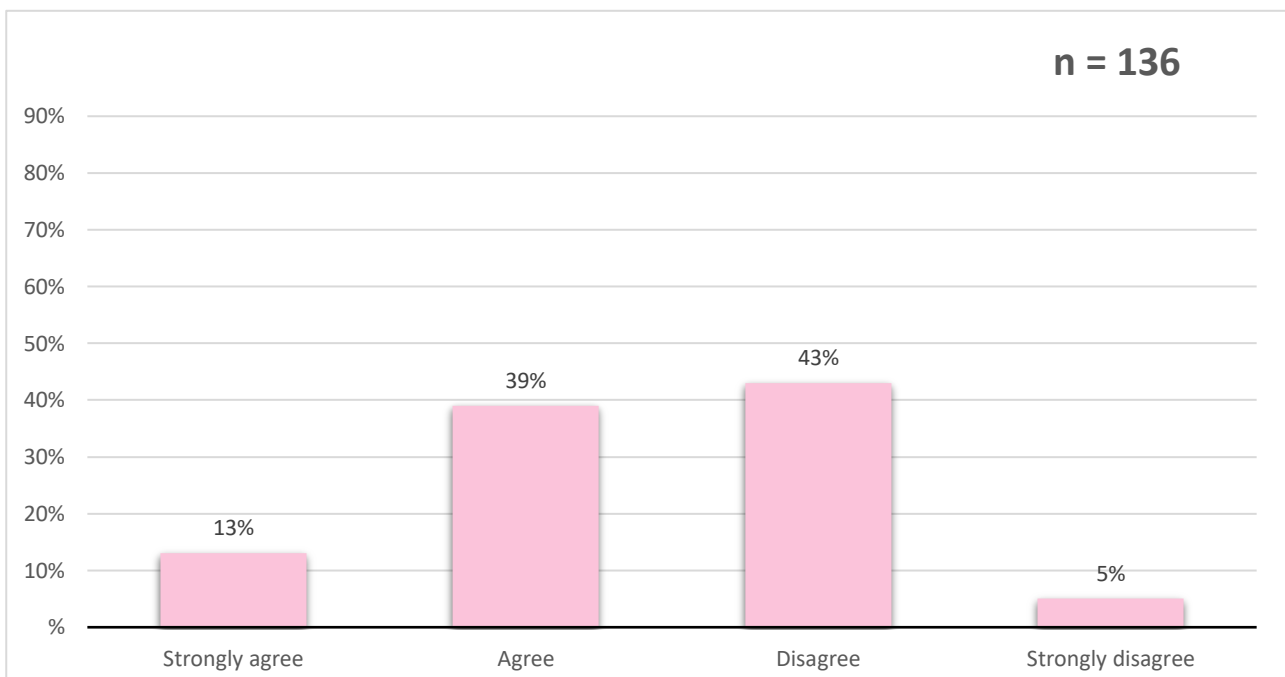


Figure 12. “Did you feel like the presence of tourists had a negative impact on the local communities?”

Regarding the impact that overtourism might have on Japanese local communities, the answers shown in Figure 12 are quite divisive once again, with 39% of participants who felt like the presence of tourists had a negative impact, and 13% of them strongly believing so. However, 43% of the respondents disagreed on the matter, and only 5% presented a strong disagreement. Analyzing the answers in a more general sense, the results show that 52% of the respondents agreed with the question in different degrees, while the other 48% expressed different levels of disagreement.

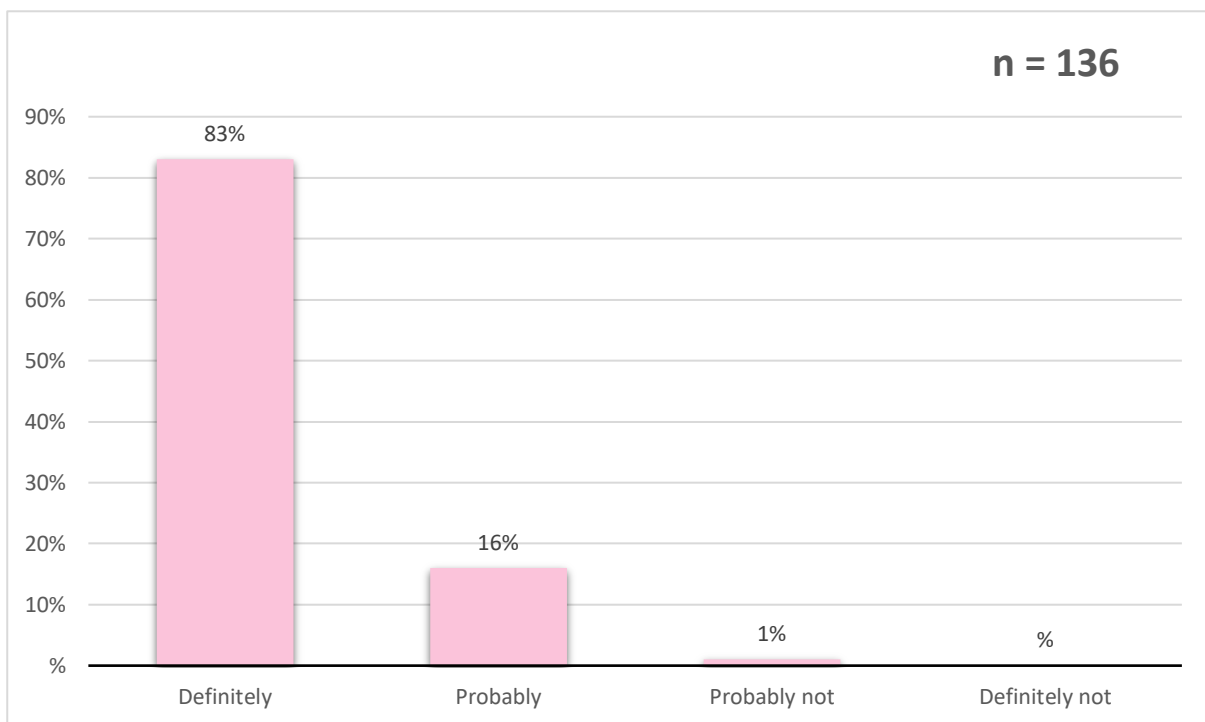


Figure 13. “Would you be interested in visiting lesser-known destinations on your next trip to Japan?”

The result presented in Figure 13, show a strong prevalence of respondents (83%) who declared they would definitely be interested in visiting more rural destinations on their next trip to Japan. They are promptly followed by 16% of participants who would probably be interested, and only 1% who stated they are probably not interested. The rate of respondents who are definitely not interested in this regard, is 0%.

7 Discussion

This chapter will focus on the correlation between the research findings and the theoretical section of the thesis, describing the results and answering the thesis objectives.

The discussion will follow the main objective of this research, which lies in the following question: “To what extent has social media contributed to overtourism in Japan, and what sustainable solution can be implemented to reduce its negative impact on both the local communities and the environment?”. Moreover, the following four sub questions will also be taken into consideration when comparing the survey and the main objective:

1. To what level do social media trends and influencers' content impact tourists' decisions in Japan?
2. Which types of platform (Instagram, TikTok) have the biggest influence on travel behavior?
3. What are the negative impacts of over tourism on Japanese residents, local culture, and the environment?
4. What sustainable tourism strategies are currently being implemented in Japan (if there are any)?

The literature reviewed in the second chapter highlights the importance of social media platforms in today's travel industry, focusing on the influence they have on young travelers' decisions.

According to research conducted in 2017 by Machado, 84% of the interviewed participants stated to actively use social media for inspiration when planning a trip. The results of the survey relatively confirm with what stated by Machado. Despite a lower percentage, 60% of combined answers declared to have been influenced, to different degrees, by social media in their trip to Japan. Moreover, when analyzing which platform prevailed in that regard, the survey results confirmed what previously expressed by Tešin (2021), with Instagram being in the first place with a majority of 40%, followed by TikTok which received 31% of votes. Additionally, the percentage scored by TikTok aligns with the research conducted by Zhou in 2023, which saw the platform as a new raising trend between younger travelers, with 4 out of 10 participants who would visit a specific place after seeing a good video about it. When talking about the influencers' impact on travel decisions, only 26% of the respondents actively searched for specific content and inspiration for their trip to Japan; this could suggest that the 60% of the participants who were influenced by social media platforms, may have been indirectly impacted by marketing campaigns and influencers content. For this reason, the plan formulated by The Japan National Tourism Organization, which seeks to promote lesser-known areas of Japan in partnership with influencers, still holds strong potential.

The third chapter of this thesis focused on the phenomenon of overtourism and how it is currently affecting Japan's most famous sites. In general terms of overtourism, the result of the survey indicates a moderate (50%) and high (24%) level of overtourism in Japan, with a low 6% of participants who claimed they did not experience any at all. As expected, the survey revealed that the Fushimi Inari temple is still the most visited attraction, confirming what was already mentioned in an article from Nippon (2015). The temple is closely followed in popularity by the old district of Gion and the Arashiyama Bamboo Forest, which are consequently the locations where most participants felt the effects of overtourism, aligning with the literature reviewed in chapter 3. It is important to remember that some parts of the Gion district were closed to the public in late 2024 (McCurry 2024), and only 13% of the interviewed participants visited Japan in 2025. A low yet strange 18% of the respondents declared to have not experienced any overtourism in the sites proposed in the survey, while only 6% of them stated the same thing when asked about overtourism in general. There could be different reasons for this contrast; respondents might remember or even interpret the term overtourism differently when applied broadly compared to specific locations. At the same time, people might carry good memories of a certain location despite the crowds and do not associate a negative term like overtourism to specific places. Overall, despite the high rates in overtourism perceptions, almost half of the participants did not find the large crowds to negatively impact their experiences. The majority of the respondents (52%) stated, in different degrees, that their experiences were not ruined by overtourism, while 48% declared the opposite. While being a clearly divisive response, if taking into consideration the previously mentioned CPP concept defined by UNWRO (2019), which defines "the unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction" an important indicator of overtourism, Japan's situation can be perceived in a different way. As mentioned in chapter 3, overtourism is happening globally (Lee 2022), therefore, a new question arises: is Japan facing an overtourism crisis, or are large crowds just the consequences of its new popularity?

Another important aspect of overtourism is the negative impact it has on local communities. In the theoretical part of the thesis various accidents were cited, such as unruly visitors (Siegel 2023), littering (Minami 2025), and crowded residential streets beside famous spots. Residents have been speaking up about these matters for years now, however, the results of the survey present a different perception from the visitors, once again showing divisive feedback. Whilst 52% of the participants felt like the presence of tourists had a negative impact on the local communities, the other 48% did not have this feeling. This means that 66 people out of 136 either saw the benefits of the preventative measures put in place by different districts, or were not directly exposed to certain actions, making them unaware of the issue. In this regard, the case study in subchapter 3.2

regarding the Lawson Convenience Store in front of Mount Fuji recorded peculiar results. As mentioned by Noda (2024), the local communities and the local stores adjacent to this specific Lawson branch were forced to take severe measures to face the large crowds, and while the picture spot is still being sponsored on social media with millions of views, only 20% of the survey respondents declared to have visited the place. According to the article, the popularity of the place mostly spread in Asian countries, and with the majority of the participants being Europeans, this might explain the limited awareness among the answers.

Lastly, Japan is currently implementing various sustainable strategies to solve the overtourism crisis and redirect crowds to lesser-known areas. The NHK (2025) article cited in subchapter 4.1 is just an example of how rural places, like Karuizawa, are trying to increase their international visitors, despite the mixed feelings expressed by the residents. The survey respondents' intentions on this regard are very clear. The vast majority (83%) would definitely be interested in visiting lesser-known destinations on their next trip to Japan, with a remaining 16% who would probably do it as well. Although Japan is largely known for many of its famous spots and experiences, its popularity might be growing as a result of its people, lifestyle, and unique hospitality, which cannot be found in any other country. All of these merits are not limited to big cities, and tourists are probably willing to explore different sides of Japan, as long as the country remains authentic.

7.1 Future Research

At the time this research was conducted, Japan is at a turning point regarding the overtourism crisis, launching strategies and finding sustainable solutions. Most of these solutions will likely change or take years to show their results, for this reason future research to discover their effectiveness and assess how the situation evolved would be of great value in the tourism industry. Moreover, social media are constantly changing and creating new ways to make content and keep the focus of the viewer. Will future social media still revolve around pictures and videos? And at the same time, will viewers still value trends as they do now, or will they focus more on niche content and lesser-known destinations? In 10 years, new research could possibly have the answers needed to answer these questions.

As a final point, Japanese government and JNTO might benefit from research-based thesis, including the present one. Research can be of great help when trying to create new solutions, campaigns, and predicting future trends. It would be useful to have insight on the behaviours and beliefs of international tourists, as well as their perception of the time spent in Japan. This way, new locations that are threatened by overtourism could put preventative measures in place to avoid reaching a point of no return, using the growing number of tourists in their favour.

7.2 Reliability and Validity

This research was designated to have a clearer understanding of the overtourism phenomenon in Japan, and its correlation to social media platform. The work produced was consistently monitored by the thesis supervisor, who made sure the survey presented an orderly structure, clear wording, and no vagueness. The questions were closed ended to ensure an easier understanding and avoid misinterpreted answers. All the answers were anonymous and kept in a private hard drive, at the end of the thesis the survey in its completion will be presented in the Appendix 1.

Despite all the answers being valid and directly linked to the theoretical framework of the research, a few aspects must be considered. For research purposes all the respondents are from age 18 to 37 years old, so the trends and answers do not reflect all ages and generations. Moreover, most if not all the participants come from European countries as it is the continent where the author and the people who helped spread the survey live. Consequently, the answers may reflect Europeans behaviours and lack multicultural aspects. Lastly, as the respondents hopefully answered truthfully and carefully, biases and misunderstanding must always be expected. It is both a popular and controversial subject, that might have influenced the answers based on personal opinions and social desirability.

7.3 Learning Reflections

The writing of this thesis presented a significant challenge for the author. While the term overtourism is not new to the academic world, its correlation with Japan's most famous locations is relatively recent. Previous research and articles regarding these specific locations were either written in Japanese, or they were very recent and thus challenging to discover. Fortunately, the author discovered a newfound passion for research which made it easy to face the journey with enthusiasm, however, curiosity and love for research challenged the ability to maintaining the focus on the main topic, without migrating into unrelated fields.

While the thesis was written in the span of three months, personal challenges as well as a full-time job had to be set aside to fully concentrate on the project, leading to occasional frustration. Moreover, this was the author's first bachelor thesis and the academic writing style, compared to the one used for regular assignments, had to be perfected with time. Overall, this project proved to be a fantastic experience, enhancing the author's knowledge and expertise in the academic world.

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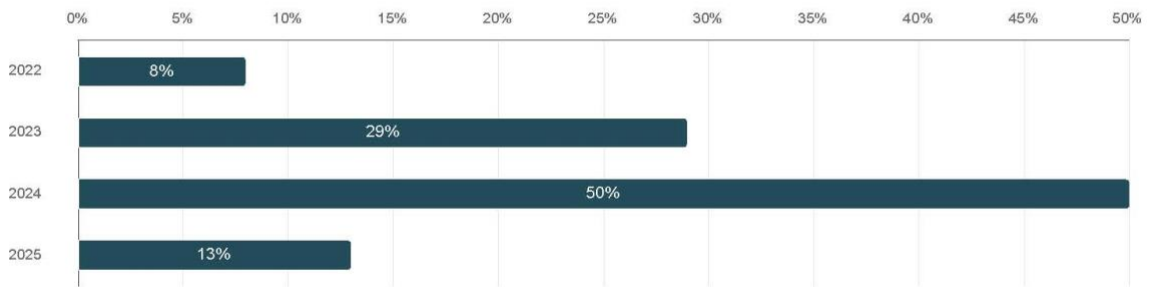
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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

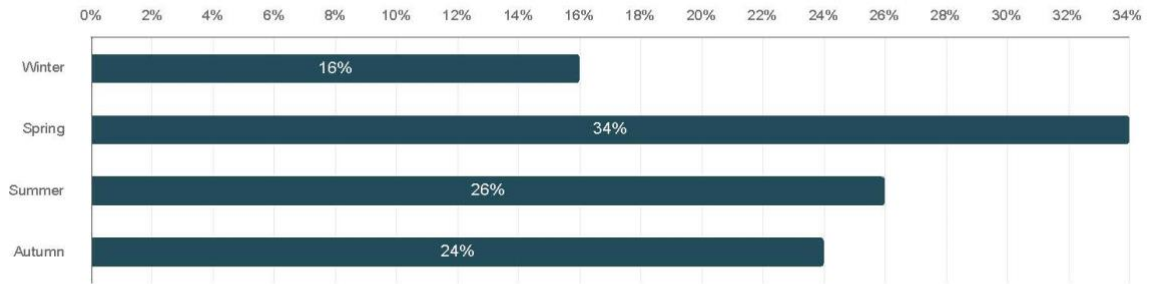
Basic report
The Role of Social Media in Japan's Overtourism Crisis
 Total number of respondents: 136

When did you visit Japan
 Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
2022	11	8.2%
2023	40	28.9%
2024	67	49.6%
2025	18	13.3%

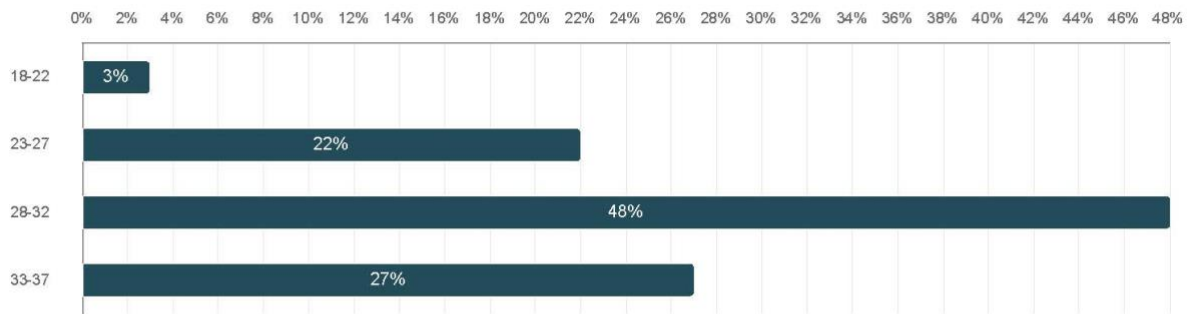
During which season did you visit Japan
 Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Winter	22	16.2%
Spring	46	33.8%
Summer	35	25.7%
Autumn	33	24.3%

Which age group do you belong to?

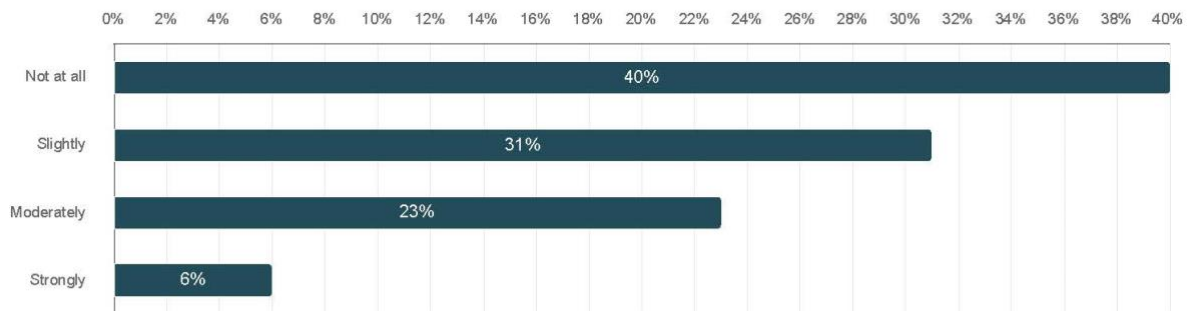
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
18-22	4	2.9%
23-27	30	22.1%
28-32	65	47.8%
33-37	37	27.2%

How much did social media influence your decision to travel to Japan?

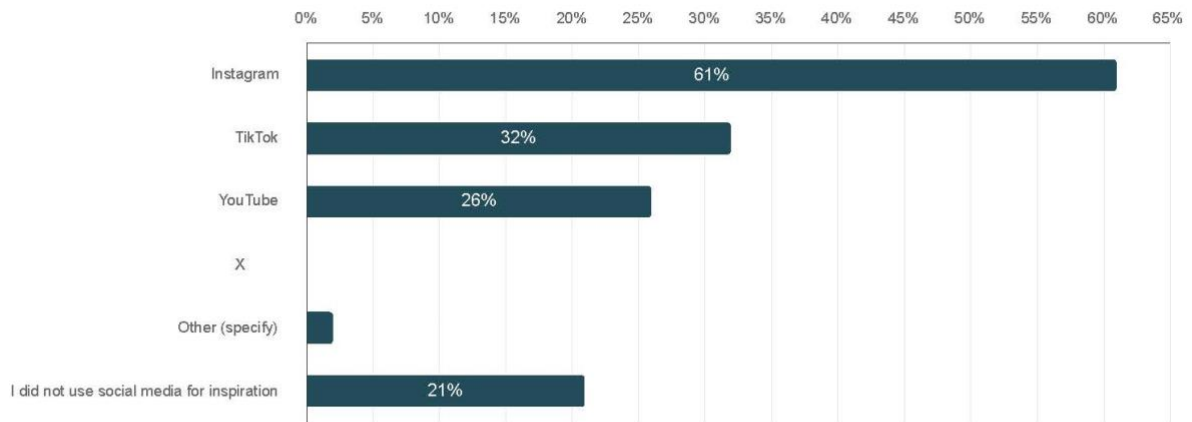
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Not at all	54	39.7%
Slightly	42	30.9%
Moderately	32	23.5%
Strongly	8	5.9%

Before your trip to Japan, which social media platforms did you use the most for travel inspiration?

Number of respondents: 136 , selected answers: 193



	n	Percent
Instagram	83	61.0%
TikTok	43	31.6%
YouTube	36	26.5%
X	0	0.0%
Other (specify)	3	2.2%
I did not use social media for inspiration	28	20.6%

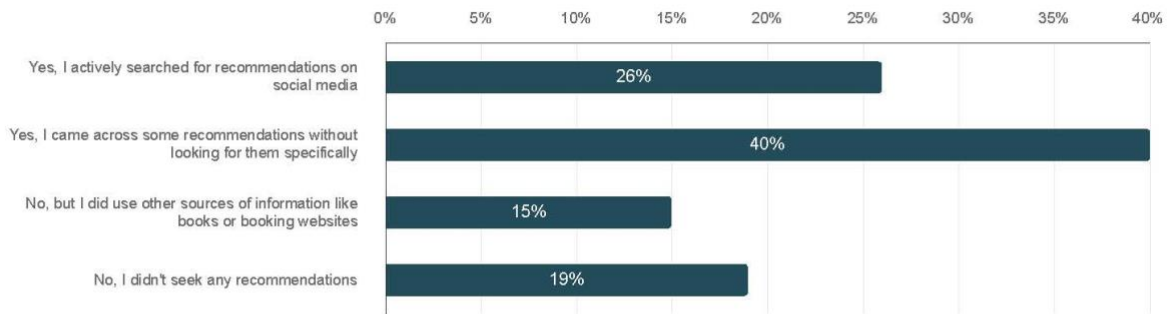
Answers given into textfield

Show all

Option names	Text
Other (specify)	pinterest
Other (specify)	Reddit
Other (specify)	Threads

Did you look at any influencers' recommendations BEFORE your trip?

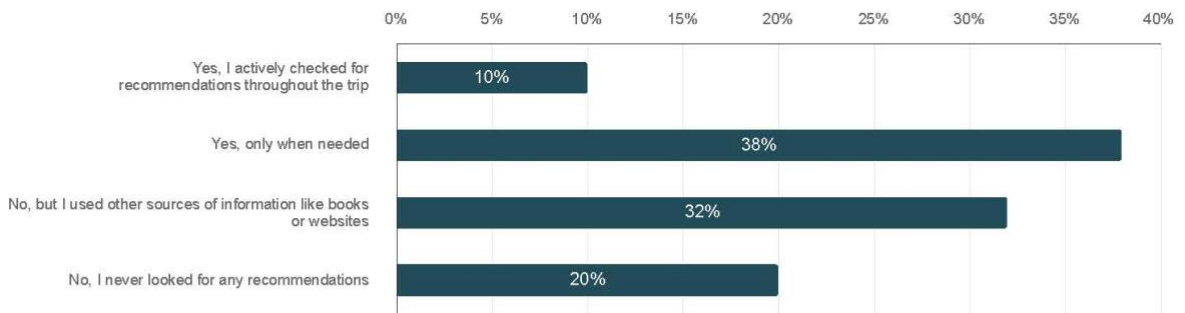
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Yes, I actively searched for recommendations on social media	36	26.5%
Yes, I came across some recommendations without looking for them specifically	54	39.7%
No, but I did use other sources of information like books or booking websites	20	14.7%
No, I didn't seek any recommendations	26	19.1%

Did you look at any influencers' recommendations DURING your trip?

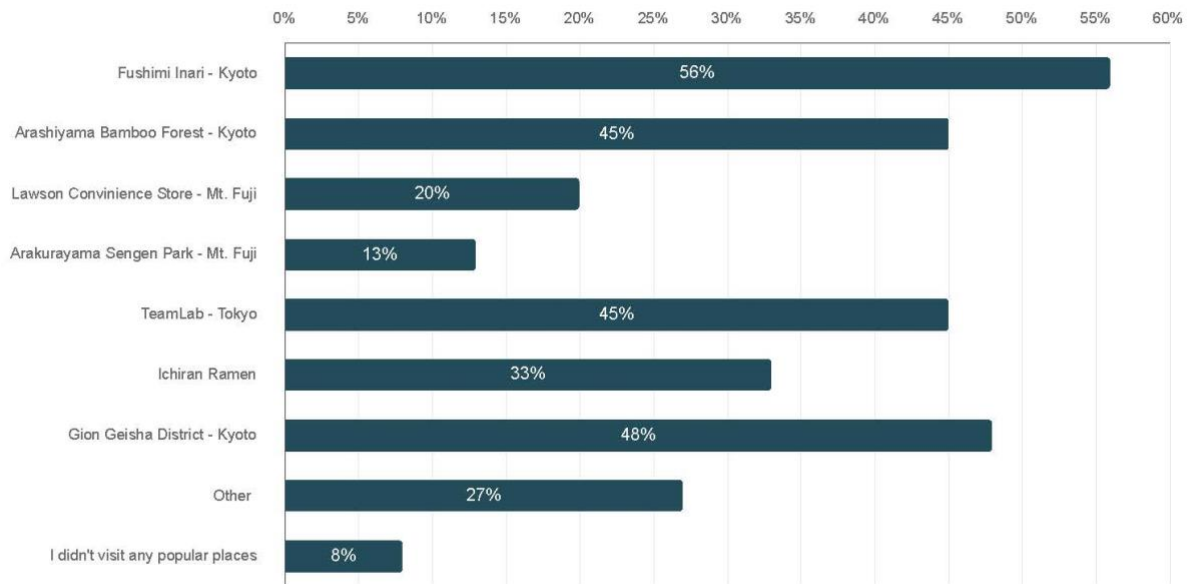
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Yes, I actively checked for recommendations throughout the trip	13	9.6%
Yes, only when needed	52	38.2%
No, but I used other sources of information like books or websites	44	32.3%
No, I never looked for any recommendations	27	19.9%

Did you visit any of these viral/popular places in Japan?

Number of respondents: 136 , selected answers: 392



	n	Percent
Fushimi Inari - Kyoto	74	55.6%
Arashiyama Bamboo Forest - Kyoto	60	45.1%
Lawson Convenience Store - Mt. Fuji	27	20.3%
Arakurayama Sengen Park - Mt. Fuji	17	12.8%
TeamLab - Tokyo	60	45.1%
Ichiran Ramen	44	33.1%
Gion Geisha District - Kyoto	64	48.1%
Other	36	27.1%
I didn't visit any popular places	10	7.5%

Answers given into textfield

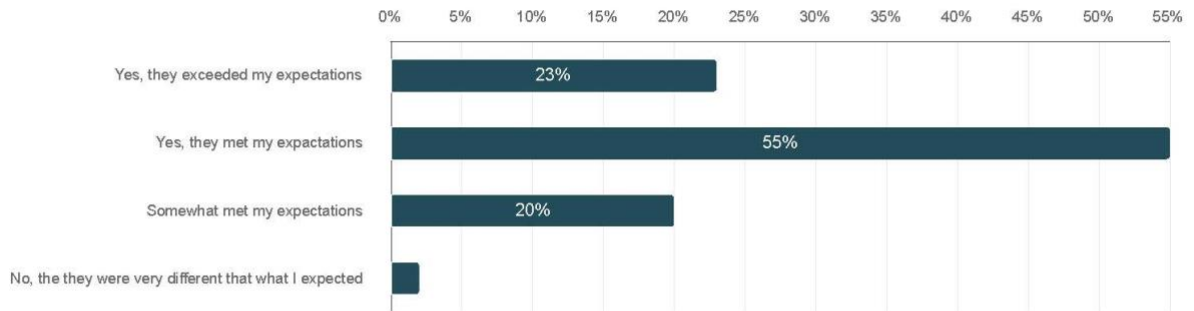
Show all

Option names	Text
Other	Nara, Kinkaku-ji, Osaka Castle
Other	Kinkakuji
Other	Kiyomizudera, Kita Tenmangū, Meiji Jingū, TeamLab Ōsaka, Nara, Todaiji, Umeda Sky Building, Shin sekai and many others
Other	Kamakura, Hiroshima , miyajima
Other	W
Other	Osaka Castle
Other	Universal Studios in Osaka
Other	Shibuya Sky, Don Quijote, Kamakura
Other	Disneyland Tokyo
Other	Universal Studios, Mt. Takao, Dotonbori,
Other	Disneyland
Other	Itsukushima island
Other	Minipig Café, capybara cafe
Other	Nara Park

Option names	Text
Other	Nara
Other	Nishiki Market, Tsukiji market, Senso-ji temple area, Dotonbori
Other	Don Quijote store
Other	Shinjuku Kabukicho, Shinjuku Golden-gai
Other	Asakusa
Other	Tokyo Sky tree, Senjo-ji temple, Shibuya crossing,
Other	Okinawa
Other	Mt.Fuji,
Other	Shibuya crossing, the maun things one can see in Tokyo in two days
Other	Disneyland, Pokemon Cafe
Other	Shibuya Crossing - Tokyo
Other	Kusatsu, Kamakura
Other	Hachiko Statue
Other	Nara due to deers
Other	Nara, Osaka
Other	I've stayed for 4 months so I visited many places!
Other	Meiji jinja, Tokyo tower, asakusa, shibuya crossing
Other	Osaka running man, Kanazawa tea districts, Osaka castle
Other	Capybara onsen
Other	Shibuya Crossing, Sky Tree
Other	Dotonbori
Other	Miyajima, Kiyomizu-dera (Kyoto)

Did these places you visited in Japan meet your expectations based on what you saw on social media?

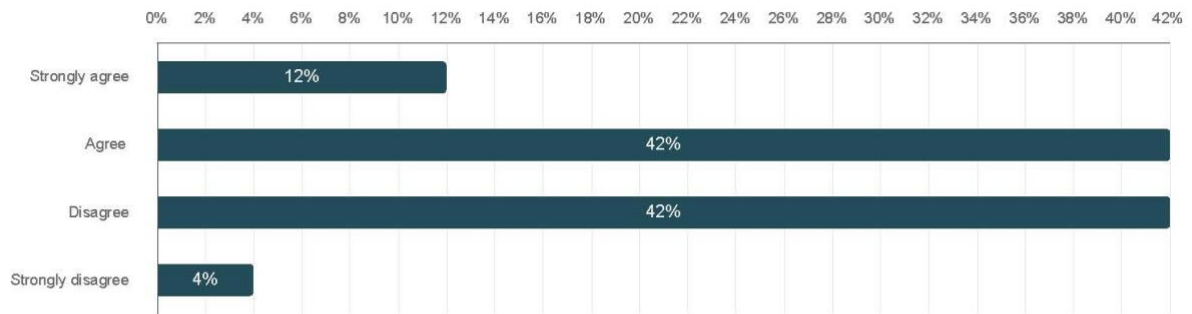
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Yes, they exceeded my expectations	31	23.3%
Yes, they met my expectations	74	54.9%
Somewhat met my expectations	27	20.3%
No, they were very different than what I expected	2	1.5%

Do you think social media creates unrealistic expectations about travel experiences in Japan?

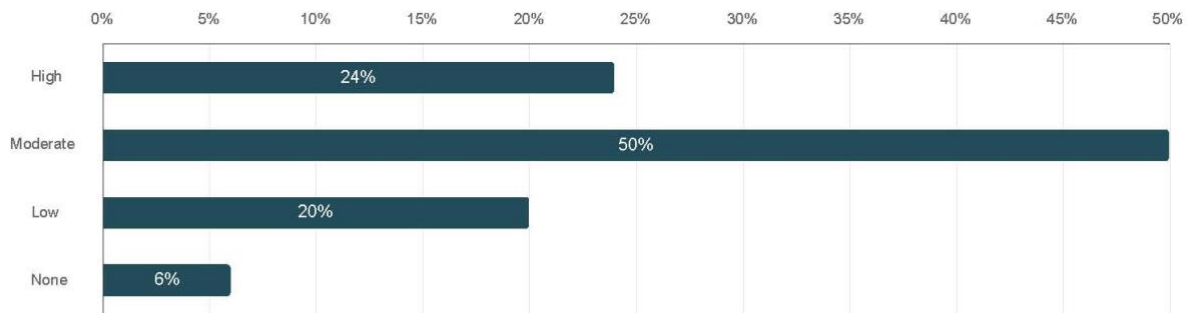
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Strongly agree	17	12.5%
Agree	57	41.9%
Disagree	57	41.9%
Strongly disagree	5	3.7%

Did you experience overtourism at any popular tourist sites in Japan?

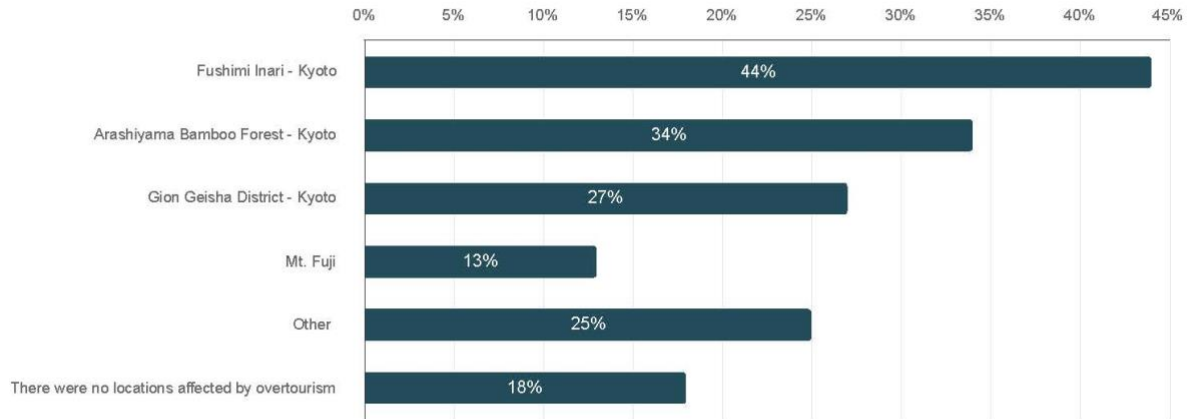
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
High	33	24.3%
Moderate	68	50.0%
Low	27	19.8%
None	8	5.9%

Which locations did you feel were most affected by overtourism?

Number of respondents: 136 , selected answers: 201



	n	Percent
Fushimi Inari - Kyoto	55	44.0%
Arashiyama Bamboo Forest - Kyoto	42	33.6%
Gion Geisha District - Kyoto	34	27.2%
Mt. Fuji	16	12.8%
Other	31	24.8%
There were no locations affected by overtourism	23	18.4%

Answers given into textfield

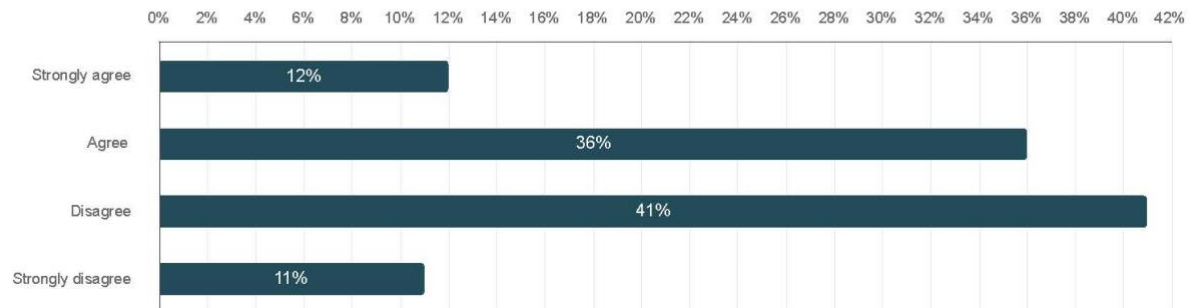
Show all

Option names	Text
Other	Teamlab Tokyo
Other	Nara
Other	Kinkakuji
Other	Tokyo main spots
Other	Tokyo
Other	Team lab
Other	Senso-Ji Temple
Other	Universal Studios in Osaka
Other	Shibuya in general, Harajuku in general, teamlab planets and borderless
Other	Seksi-Ji (tokyo)
Other	Generally, as it was the Sakura season, there were lots of people everywhere. However, as I've been to Japan before, it didn't surprise me too much.
Other	Universal Studios
Other	Disneyland
Other	all of Kyoto (on and off sights, busses, trains, streets. For example locals could not fit into busses due the amount of tourists all day after 6AM) and Dotonbori
Other	Shibuya crossing
Other	I visited only Tokyo and it was during May which is not high season yet, I didn't experience such overtourism that would have affected my experience
Other	Shinjuku Kabukicho, Shinjuku Golden-gai
Other	Senjō-ji temple
Other	Too short visit to accurately have an opinion on this one
Other	trains, popular areas

Option names	Text
Other	Nara
Other	Togetsukyo bridge, Sannenzaka Kyoto
Other	Asakusa
Other	Shibuya
Other	Shibuya crossing
Other	Kyoto downtown
Other	Osaka running man, osaka castle
Other	Harajuku

Did overtourism negatively impact your experience at any of these locations?

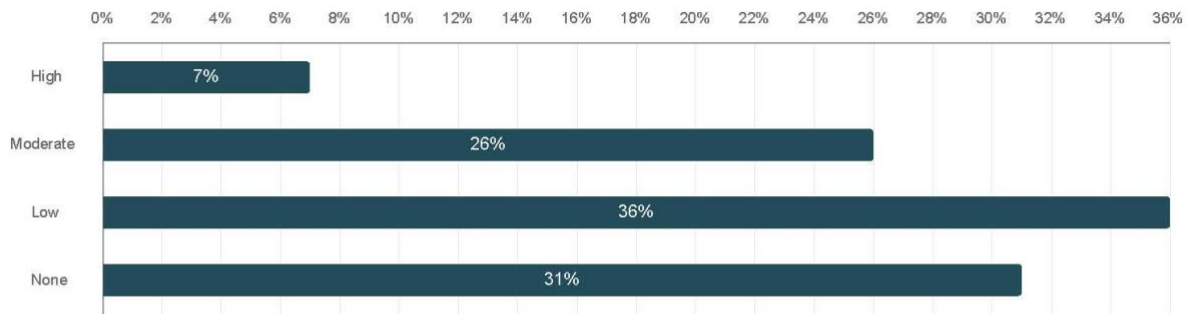
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Strongly agree	16	11.8%
Agree	49	35.6%
Disagree	56	41.5%
Strongly disagree	15	11.1%

Did you witness disruptive behavior from other tourists when visiting popular or viral locations?

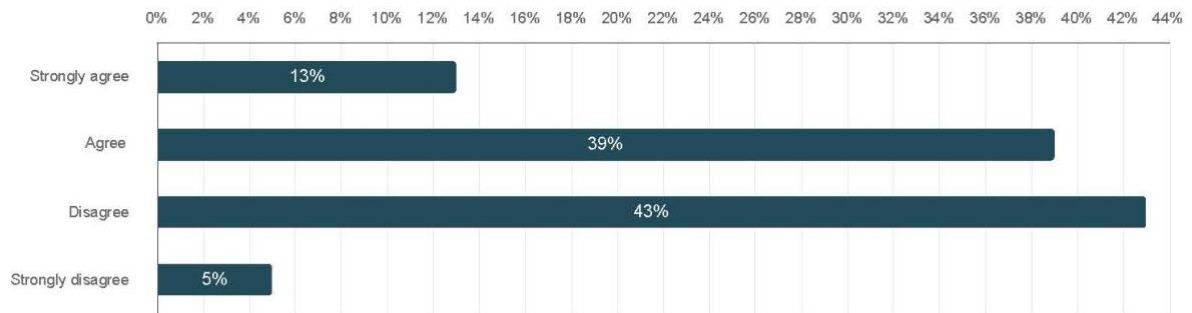
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
High	10	7.4%
Moderate	35	25.7%
Low	49	36.0%
None	42	30.9%

Did you feel like the presence of tourists had a negative impact on the local communities?

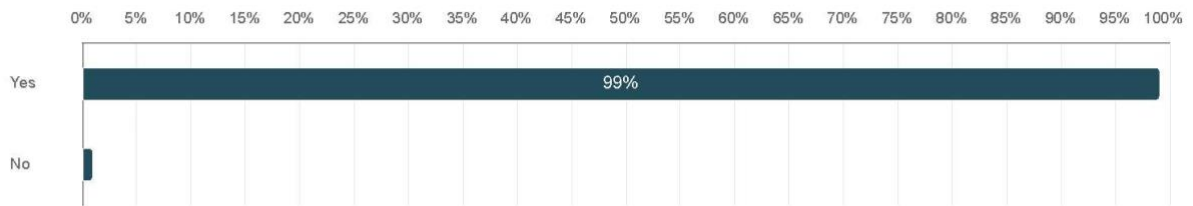
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Strongly agree	18	13.4%
Agree	53	38.8%
Disagree	58	42.6%
Strongly disagree	7	5.2%

Would you consider visiting Japan again in the future?

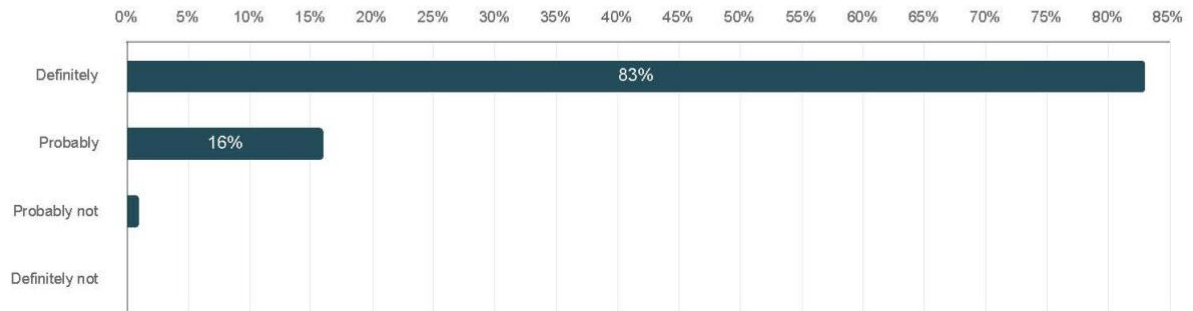
Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Yes	135	99.3%
No	1	0.7%

Would you be interested in visiting lesser-known destinations on your next trip to Japan?

Number of respondents: 136



	n	Percent
Definitely	113	83.1%
Probably	22	16.2%
Probably not	1	0.7%
Definitely not	0	0.0%