

Research Article

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Study on possibilities of expansion of Japanese-Type ecotourism – focusing on nature-based daytrip tourists to ecotourism regions in Nabari City

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Abstract: This paper is an expedition study analysing the features of trips of ‘nature-based tourists’ from amongst daytrip tourists in Japan with the aim of seeking for expansion possibilities of Japanese-type ecotourism. Approximately 400,000 people visit Nabari City in Mie Prefecture, the target destination in this paper, on an annual basis with the aim of enjoying the nature. Samples used for analysis in this paper have been collected from 437-day trip visitors from amongst 500 visitors to major sight-seeing spots of Nabari City from October to December 2014. It has been found through analysis that whilst nature-based daytrip visitors in Japan were satisfied with natural environments themselves, they were less satisfied with regards to activities and services during their trips. Cluster analyses for grasping tendencies per markets were performed and disclosed.

Keywords: Nature-based tourists; Japanese-type ecotourism, Daytrip visitors

1 Introduction

According to the ‘Annual Report on the Tourism Trends Survey 2014’ issued by the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation, the total numbers of Japanese domestic tourists amount to 320,416,000 (overnight trips) and 310,534,000 (daytrips).

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Whilst there are differences depending on the destinations, one of the most popular events people enjoy to do during domestic trips are ‘going to hot springs’, ‘seeing landscapes’, ‘visiting cultural sites’ and ‘eating delicious foods’. Irrespective of age ranges, surveys show that ‘hot spring trips’ and ‘nature-based tourism’ head the list of types of trips people would like to make. This clearly indicates the features of basic Japanese domestic travels; in other words, ‘beauty’, ‘hot springs’ and ‘delicious foods’ are the three basic elements of Japanese domestic travels.

Looking at the results of ‘local activities depending on destinations’ related to the ‘Japanese-type ecotourism’ of this paper, the least popular destination of the item ‘outdoor experience/ecotour’ was Osaka Prefecture (1.3%), whilst the most popular one was Saitama Prefecture (14.0%). Though the Japanese ecotour market appears to be rather small when considering these results, it will vary when the type of trip ‘nature-based trips’ is considered to be part of the Japanese ecotourism market. It is difficult to comprehend features of the Japanese ecotourism market based on the currently provided statistical data. For solving this problem, it is, first of all, necessary to review concepts and definitions of ecotourism. This is especially true in case of countries such as Japan, South Korea or Taiwan in which large cities and nature-based sightseeing spots (such as national parks and ecotour spots) are close.

According to Weaver (2005), it is possible to classify ecotourism into one of the comprehensive type and minimalist type. He states that the minimalist type includes features such as ‘elemental natural based’, ‘superficial understanding’ and ‘status-quo based’ and their travel patterns are short trips, physically passive trips and multi-purpose visits. Namely, tourists from amongst Japanese domestic tourists who prefer and select travel patterns such as ‘nature-based tourism’ and ‘visiting hot springs’ are approximate to minimalists of ecotourism as put forward by Weaver. An approach from the view of Weaver would indicate an increase in the Japanese ecotourism market.

Next, Japanese domestic trips are characterised by the shortness of overnight stays, and according to the above 'Annual Report on the Tourism Trends Survey 2014', the only two prefectures that average number of overnight stays exceeded three days were Okinawa (3.04 stays) and Miyazaki (3.04 stays). As for the remaining regions, people stay for about two nights. On the other hand, whilst the number of daytrips from amongst Japanese domestic trips is of the same level as the number of overnight trips, the ratio of people whose purposes are 'sightseeing and recreation' from amongst major types of trips of daytrip tourists is higher than that of people making overnight trips. It can be understood that daytrip tourists enjoy minimalist type trips by visiting 'sites where nature is beautiful', making passive physical activities such as hiking and going to hot springs on daily basis. An approach to such patterns of daytrip tourists from the view of Weaver would indicate an increase in the Japanese ecotourism market.

This paper proceeds based on the idea that features of the ecotourism markets of regions and countries change depending on how concepts and definitions of ecotourism and ecotourists are set. The term 'ecotourism' first appeared in the 1980s and considered an independent field of study in 2002, when the United Nations designated this year as the International Year of Ecotourism and the *Journal of Ecotourism* was first issued as an exclusive magazine (Weaver and Lawton, 2007). However, considering the diversity of conventional studies related to ecotourism, studies are still not sufficient. It is considered that it is due to not only the shortness of its history of approximately 10 years but also the closed nature of the concepts and definitions of ecotourism. In other words, the diversity of studies of ecotourism might have been restricted by limits of the concepts of ecotourism, for instance, whether possible sites of ecotourism are regions or sites requiring preservation and conservation, whether ecotourism causes educational effects and whether sustainable developments are to be expected through ecotourism. Prior art studies referred to important places such as national parks and preservation areas in Africa and South America. Accordingly, both the number of researchers and the market of ecotourism were limited, and this might have caused the researchers to set boundaries of studies themselves.

As mentioned earlier, the concepts of ecotourism and ecotourists can be understood in a broader sense when approached from Weaver's point of view. It should be noted that it is not the aim to broaden the market scale of ecotourism and ecotourists. It means that it is necessary to reconfirm the importance of diverse research methods and approaches in considering markets of ecotourism

and ecotourists. Ecotourism, which was first suggested as a measure for introducing new wind into regions while preserving their nature, history and culture, is in fact a useful subject for future studies in the field of tourism. Accordingly, it is required to change the viewpoints that have been studied based on the features of ecotour spots and management organisations to viewpoints of revealing features of markets of ecotourism and ecotourists. Particularly, nature-based daytrips that are popular in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are worth studying.

In the present paper, features of tourists from amongst nature-based daytrip tourists will be analysed in order to perform exploratory studies of the ecotourism market in Japan. It is expected that possibilities of expansion and the necessity thereof can be suggested by this approach as future subjects.

2 Literature reviews

Whilst concepts and definitions of ecotourism have been advocated by many researchers and organisations, there is still no consensus of its contents. This is because various types of ecotourism are being provided by various parties concerned as well as by many tourists. Some of the definitions of ecotourism would be as follows. TIES (The International Ecotourism Society) has made a definition that it is a 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people' (TIES, 1990) in view of the necessity of interchange and mutual cooperation amongst countries with nature sites worth worldwide preservation. On the other hand, definitions from academic aspects include more concrete elements. After Fennel (2001) first formed 85 definitions related to ecotourism, Donohoe and Needham (2006) suggested six elements¹ of ecotourism. Weaver (2001) also suggested, based on the studies of Fennel (2001), three elements of 'attractiveness of natural environment', 'educational effects caused by the interaction of ecotourists and natural environment' and 'socio-culturalism and economic sustainability' and made a definition that ecotourism is 'a type of nature-based tourism aiming for ecological, socio-cultural and economically sustainable efforts by providing chances of appreciating and studying natural environments and their specific elements'. In contrast thereto, the definition of Shikita (2008) says that it is 'a system and approach of creating and executing tours through which tourists can experience and study natural environments while minimizing load applied thereon and which benefit and contribute to

object regions'. His definition is based on the three concepts of environmental conservation, regional development and tourism promotion, which are the backgrounds of the birth of ecotourism, and refers to the difference thereof from general tourism and the necessity of a system for specific travel commodities of ecotourism.

As stated earlier, there are various approaches to the definition of ecotourism depending on the purposes of related organisations and viewpoints of researchers. However, what all of these definitions and viewpoints have in common is the importance of how activation of natural resources might contribute to the developments of regions.

On the other hand, there are not many studies related to ecotourism that focus on ecotourists as subjects of studies. Particularly, there are even less studies exploring behaviour patterns of ecotourists and features of the ecotourist market. The primary reason thereof is that it is not easy to define ecotourists who are particular tourists in the presence of various concepts and definitions of ecotourism. Another reason might be that the scope of the market of ecotourists who can participate in ecotours generally acknowledged as highly valuable travel commodities is limited and thus considered to be of less importance in the tourist industry. Nevertheless, studies about ecotourists and their markets have been advanced by several researchers.

Donohoe and Needham (2006) have suggested six key normative tenets of ecotourism, including 'nature-based', 'preservation/conservation', 'environmental education',

'sustainability', 'distribution of benefits' and 'ethics/responsibility'.

Wight (1996) explains the features of the ecotourism market in North America upon grouping them into two groups 'general tourist market with interest in ecotourism' and 'experienced ecotourist market' depending on the findings such as 'popular activities', 'fun activities amongst experiences during ecotourism', 'lodging facilities used', 'important services of ecotourism' and 'reasons of selecting ecotourism'. He found out that the former group preferred 'cultural experiences' and 'wildlife observation' with motivations such as 'revisit accustomed sites' and 'education of nature and culture', whilst the latter groups preferred 'backpacking and special experiences' and 'nature- and water-based activities' with motivations such as 'observing the wild' and 'experiencing the wild'. Hiking was the most popular activity in the ecotourism market in North America.

In the studies of 'overstay ecotourist market segmentation' of Weaver and Lawton (2002) asking visitors to Gold Coast Hinterland, survey subjects were categorised into three groups and features thereof were analysed. They analysed the differences in evaluation of the three groups with respect to six dimensions such as 'action', 'opinion', 'social environment', 'motivation', 'source information' and 'preferred activity', and based on the results thereof, ecotourist markets were respectively named 'harder', 'softer' and 'structured' (Fig. 1). The harder market was characterised as 'strong environmental commitment', 'enhance sustainability', 'specialised

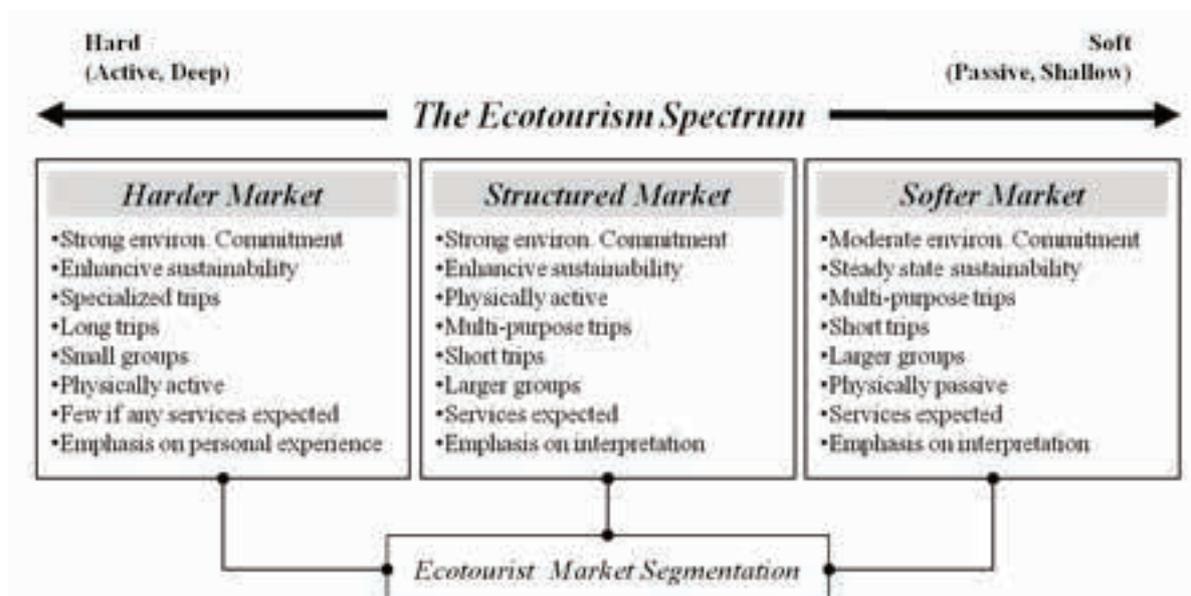


Figure 1: Source: Weaver and Lawton (2002 p. 279). Edited by author

trips', 'long trips', 'small groups', 'physically active', 'few if any services expected' and 'emphasis on personal experience'. The softer market was characterised as 'moderate environmental commitment', 'steady-state sustainability', 'multi-purpose trips', 'short trips', 'larger groups', 'physically passive', 'services expected' and 'emphasis on interpretation'.

Further, Weaver (2005) explained ecotourism upon grouping it into comprehensive type and minimalist type. In case of minimalist type, features similar to the softer market such as 'elemental natural based', 'superficial understanding', 'status quo based', 'short trips', 'physically passive' and 'multi-purpose visit' were observed.

In the geographic segmentation of ecotourism, Weaver and Lawton (2007) asserted that the ecotourist market in East Asia where several millions of tourists visit protected areas every year differs from traditional ecotourist markets. They note that the East Asian ecotourists are characterised by their preference of attractive plants and geographically unique sites (such as flower gardens and waterfalls) over giant animals and by their strong psychological and philosophical relationship to those regions. Apart from that, Thurau et al. (2015) analysed the features of ecotourists utilizing cruise tours. According to their studies, ecotourists utilizing cruise tours enjoyed shopping and sightseeing tours around ports which is a completely different pattern compared to those of general ecotourist activities (such as hiking and camping). Whilst tourists of diverse ecotourism tend to pay more for their tours, their studies refer to ecotourism offered as a part of programs of cruise tours and thus differ from the features of the ecotourism market as discussed in this paper.

As mentioned so far, whilst some prior art studies related to the ecotourist market have been made, their contents are diverse and approaches might still be insufficient. Accordingly, it is necessary to confirm features of the ecotourist market of Japanese taking part in Japanese style ecotourism for the development in studies related to ecotourism.

3 Method of study

3.1 Study areas

Nabari City of Mie Prefecture, which is the study area in this paper, is a smaller city with a population of approximately 80,000 and located between Osaka and Nagoya. Approximately 400,000 visitors (Nabari City, 2014) come

to see natural sites such as Akame Shijuu-hachi-taki Falls, Kochi-dani Valley and Shorennji-ko Lake. Visitors come to view the autumn leaves around the end of November and the beginning of December and almost all of the travel pattern is hiking. Exploration courses include an approximately two-hour tour visiting woods and waterfalls, and a tour visiting cultural and historical remains located in Nabari City. Most of the visitors are from Osaka and Nagoya, which are closely located large cities, and most of the groups are family, spouses or friends coming over on weekends. Owing to the favourable location of a two-hour range from Osaka and Nagoya, most of the visitors come as daytrips.

Nabari City aims to grow into a representative ecotourism region in Japan whilst establishing various plans for supporting development.

3.2 Research design

Prior to research of the present paper, it is necessary to set a concept of survey subjects. This is due to the fact that the present paper proceeds based on the concept 'Japanese-type ecotourists' rather than general ecotourists. Kaizu (2008) says that 'In Japan which has many secondary natural sites which people have taken care of and maintained, ideas related to revitalization of local cities by passing down local treasures from person to person and the coexistence of preservation, utilization and economy which is an aim of ecotourism have many things in common' and called it 'Japanese-type ecotourism'. The important point here is 'the coexistence of preservation, utilization and economy'. As pointed out by Weaver and Lawton (2007), activity patterns of East Asian ecotourists and those of ecotourists in Europe and the United States differ from each other. It seems that the East Asian ecotourism in countries such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan is interested in economic effects caused through the relationship of tourist activities and local areas. Accordingly, information related to ecotourism provided from Japanese local governments are diverse and concrete. Travel commodities include many short trips (daytrips) besides overnight commodities. For local governments, attracting as many as visitors is an important policy task in view of economic effects of local cities. On the other hand, it is not general in Japan to spend a lot of time for travelling because vacation times are short in Japan. Accordingly, in the present paper, 'Japanese-type ecotourists' are defined to be 'a type of travellers whose main purpose is to explore the nature on daytrips, characterised by general commitment to preserving natural environment and passive

Table 1: Number of annual visitors to major sightseeing sites in Nabari City

Study Areas	Total	Ratio (%)
Akame Shijuu-hachi-taki Falls	163,948	13.0
Kochi-dani Valley	128,446	10.2
Shorennji-ko Lake	80,851	6.4
Shorennji-ko Lake Tourist Farm	55,421	4.4
Former villa of Hosokawa Yanase-shuku	21,089	1.7
Toretate Nabari Exchange Hall (Town Station Nabari)	127,875	10.2
Iyashino Sato Nabari-no-Yu (public bath) (Town Station Nabari)	332,084	26.4
Nabari Cherry blossom Festival	30,000	2.4
Nabari Firework Festival	67,000	5.3
Nabari Autumn Festival	10,000	0.8
Yooka Ebisu (shrine festival)	50,000	4.0
Toretate ! Nabari	20,000	1.6
Town Renewal through Local Cuisine in Nabari	90,000	7.2
Charm of Mie – Cheer Up Nabari Fair	43,000	3.4
Nabari Road Marketplace	37,000	2.9
Total Number of Visitors to Nabari	1,256,714	100.0

Reference: Nabari City, 2014

physical activities'. In other words, it is a concept close to the 'softer ecotourists' as proposed by Weaver and Lawton (2002). A questionnaire was made based on such a concept for research.

The survey questionnaire of the present paper included '(1) degree of satisfaction of nature-based tours experienced in Japan', '(2) consideration images of destinations of nature-based daytrips', '(3) loyalties of nature-based daytrips in Japan' and '(4) general features of survey subjects'.

A total of 17 measuring items that were determined to be necessary for measuring images of Nabari City were extracted for the '(2) consideration images of destinations of nature-based daytrips;' by referring to studies of Beerli and Martin (2004a, 2004b) and Ignacio and Marin (2008). Question items (1)–(3) were set to be of Likert seven-point scale, and 10 questions including gender, age, place of residence, number of visits, fellow travellers, annual income, educational background, transportation, motive and occupation were provided as (4).

The survey was conducted for seven times from November to December 2014, during which students of the Management Department of Kinki University conducted a survey asking survey subjects, that is,

visitors to major sightseeing spots in Nabari City (such as Akame Shijuu-hachi-taki Falls, Kochi-dani Valley and Shorennji-ko Lake), to answer the questionnaire. About 490 out of 500 questionnaires were collected, and results of 437 which were of daytrip type were used. SPSS 22.0 for Windows was used for the analysis.

4 Analysis results

4.1 Characteristics of survey subjects

Characteristics of survey subjects who answered the questionnaire of the present paper are as indicated in Table 1.

As for gender, 179 (41.0%) were men and 258 (59.0%) were women; as for age, 108 (24.7%) were in the 20s or less, 101 (23.1%) were in the 30s to 40s and 228 (52.2%) were over 50. As for place of residence, 122 (27.9%) were from Mie, 110 (25.2%) from Nagoya City and Aichi Prefecture, followed by 105 (24.0%) from Osaka City and Osaka Prefecture. As for transportation, 257 (58.8%) came by private car and 93 (21.3%) used the Kintetsu Railway. As for the number of visits, it was the first visit for 235

(53.8%), outnumbering the number of repeated visitors (second time and more). About 117 (26.8%) said that their fellow travellers were friends, 109 (24.9%) came with spouses, 64 (14.6%) as couples and 51 (11.7%) came with their co-workers or in groups. As for motives, 91 (27.7%) answered 'never been there', 85 (19.5%) said 'was nice on the last visit', 73 (16.7%) said that 'recommended by

friends/acquaintances' and 51(11.7%) surfed the Internet. As for occupation, educational background and income, 145 (33.2%) were office workers and civil servants and 121 (27.7%) were homemakers; 279 (63.8%) were graduates with college or higher degrees; and 231(52.9%) had an annual income of 4 million yen or less (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Subjects

Group	Contents	Number	%	Group	Contents	Number	%
Gender	Male	179	41.0	Age	20s or less	108	24.7
	Female	258	59.0		30s to 40s	101	23.1
	TOTAL	437	100.0		More than 50 years	228	52.2
			TOTAL		437	100.0	
Place of residence	Osaka City/Osaka Prefecture	105	24.0	Transportation	Kintetsu Railway	93	21.3
	Nagoya City/Aichi Prefecture	110	25.2		Private car	257	58.8
	Mie	122	27.9		Others (bus, rental cars, etc.)	87	19.9
	Others (Nara, Hyogo, etc.)	100	22.9		TOTAL	437	100.0
	TOTAL	437	100.0				
Number of visits	First time	235	53.8	Motive	Magazines/newspapers	31	7.1
	Second time	110	25.2		Internet	51	11.7
	Three times or more	92	21.1		Travel brochures	27	6.2
	TOTAL	437	100.0		TV/radio	24	5.5
Fellow traveller	Alone	41	9.4		Recommended by friends	73	16.7
	Family	38	8.7		Was nice on the last visit	85	19.5
	Spouses	109	24.9		Never been there	91	20.8
	Couple	64	14.6		Business/homecoming	4	.9
	Friends	117	26.8		Others	51	11.7
	Co-workers or groups	51	11.7		TOTAL	437	100.0
	Others	17	3.9	Occupation	Students	41	9.4
	TOTAL	437	100.0		Office workers/civil servants	145	33.2
Educational background	Graduated high school	158	36.2		Teachers	4	.9
	Graduated college or higher	279	63.8		Doing self-owned business	35	8.0
	TOTAL	437	100.0		Professionals (law, medicine, etc.)	18	4.1
Annual income	Less than 4 million yen	231	52.9		Homemakers	121	27.7
	Between 4 and 6 million yen	112	25.6		Related fields of culture/art	1	.2
	Between 6 and 8 million yen	40	9.2		Related fields of technology/science	2	.5
	More than 8 million yen	54	12.4		Others	70	16.0
	TOTAL	437	100.0		TOTAL	437	100.0

4.2 Grouping based on the degrees of satisfaction of nature-based domestic trips in Japan

Co-operators of the survey of the present paper were travellers visiting Nabari with nature-based purposes. A hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted using the evaluation of satisfaction of nature-based activities such visitors usually enjoy domestically in order to narrow down to three to five groups, and the groups were finally classified into three groups that are deemed to clearly explain the characteristics of the respective groups (Table 3).

From amongst 437 survey subjects, a group with a high level of satisfaction was defined as ‘high satisfied group (average 6.45)’, a group with a medium level of satisfaction as ‘medium satisfied group (average 4.50)’ and a group with the lowest level of satisfaction as ‘low satisfied group (average 2.52)’.

4.3 Differences in the importance of images of nature-based regions

In order to find out how survey subjects categorised into three groups evaluated ‘consideration images of destinations of nature-based daytrips’ and to verify that these evaluations are statistically significant, an ANOVA (analysis of variance) was conducted. Out of 17 image measurement variables, 11 variables showed significant differences amongst the three groups ($F, p < 0.01$ to $p < 0.05$), whilst the remaining 6 variables showed no significant results (Table 4).

More particularly, variables related to nature such as safety, cleanliness/neatness, calmness/quietness, abundant nature and beautiful scenery and variables related to characteristics of Japanese ecotourism such as healing hot springs or refreshing atmosphere showed significant differences amongst the three groups. On the other hand, no significant differences could be seen in view of variables of services related to culture and history or general sight-seeing activities such as prestigious buildings and various

restaurants and accommodation facilities and fun of shopping. Moreover, variables related to ecotourism activities such as enjoyable leisure sports or enjoyable outdoor sports also showed significant differences amongst the three groups. Differences related to the 17 image measurement variables were analysed and evaluated (average) by high satisfied group, medium satisfied group and low satisfied group in this order.

It can be understood from the results of analysis that the higher the degree of satisfaction of ‘domestic nature-based activities in Japan’ is, the higher are the people who consider the importance of places they have visited before and images of nature-based regions they want to visit and that they particularly make much account of nature as it is such as ‘beautiful scenery’ and ‘existence of beautiful nature’.

4.4 Differences in current loyalties of nature-based travels in Japan

According to the results of ANOVA for verifying what kind of loyalties survey subjects of the three groups have with respect to nature-based daytrips in Japan, all measurement variables showed significant results ($F, p < 0.01$).

More particularly, significant differences were seen amongst the three groups with respect to three variables, namely, ‘sufficiently enjoying nature in Japan’, ‘want to continue making nature-based trips’ and ‘want to recommend nature-based trips to friends/acquaintances’ (Table 5). All of the measurement variables were evaluated (average) by high satisfied group, medium satisfied group and low satisfied group in this order. It could be understood from the results of analysis that the higher the degree of satisfaction of ‘nature-based domestic trips in Japan’ is, the higher are the loyalties people have to current nature-based trips in Japan.

Table 3: Grouping depending on the degrees of satisfaction of nature-based activities

	Name of group	Evaluation value (average)	Number of people
Group 1	High satisfied group	6.45	190
Group 2	Medium satisfied group	4.50	203
Group 3	Low satisfied group	2.52	44
TOTAL	-	-	437

Table 4: Differences in the importance of images of nature-based regions

No	Variable	Name of Group	Average	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	F	Significance
1	Safety	High	4.753	1.275	0.093	23.140	0.000***
		Medium	4.054	0.891	0.063		
		Low	3.977	1.023	0.154		
2	Cleanliness/neatness	High	4.742	1.239	0.090	23.391	0.000***
		Medium	4.118	0.871	0.061		
		Low	3.841	0.888	0.134		
3	Calmness/quietness	High	5.363	1.272	0.092	38.281	0.000***
		Medium	4.493	1.031	0.072		
		Low	4.114	1.017	0.153		
4	Abundant nature (mountains, valleys, parks, lakes, etc.)	High	5.926	1.367	0.099	50.635	0.000***
		Medium	4.990	1.231	0.086		
		Low	3.932	1.500	0.226		
5	Beautiful scenery	High	5.974	1.274	0.092	68.526	0.000***
		Medium	4.911	1.178	0.083		
		Low	3.841	1.346	0.203		
6	Existence of beautiful nature	High	5.816	1.445	0.105	52.931	0.000***
		Medium	4.857	1.119	0.079		
		Low	3.818	1.435	0.216		
7	Interesting festivals and events	High	3.526	1.198	0.087	0.321	0.726
		Medium	3.616	1.025	0.072		
		Low	3.545	1.247	0.188		
8	Historical and cultural remains with distinctive features	High	3.979	1.361	0.099	3.223	0.041**
		Medium	3.833	1.030	0.072		
		Low	3.477	1.191	0.180		
9	Prestigious buildings	High	3.616	1.171	0.085	0.028	0.973
		Medium	3.591	0.942	0.066		
		Low	3.614	1.205	0.182		
10	Various restaurants and accommodations	High	3.521	1.229	0.089	0.951	0.387
		Medium	3.369	0.963	0.068		
		Low	3.386	1.280	0.193		
11	Fund of shopping	High	3.105	1.199	0.087	1.226	0.294
		Medium	3.286	1.116	0.078		
		Low	3.273	1.370	0.207		
12	Provision of accurate traffic information and parking information	High	3.647	1.171	0.085	2.016	0.134
		Medium	3.493	0.951	0.067		
		Low	3.318	1.325	0.200		
13	Convenience of transportation	High	3.647	1.424	0.103	1.860	0.157
		Medium	3.512	1.096	0.077		
		Low	3.250	1.349	0.203		
14	Healing hot springs	High	4.342	1.307	0.095	13.374	0.000***
		Medium	3.842	0.962	0.068		
		Low	3.568	1.169	0.176		
15	Refreshing atmosphere	High	4.989	1.425	0.103	43.407	0.000***
		Medium	3.970	1.000	0.070		
		Low	3.614	1.243	0.187		
16	Enjoyable leisure sports	High	3.800	1.277	0.093	3.309	0.037**
		Medium	3.680	0.965	0.068		
		Low	3.318	1.116	0.168		
17	Enjoyable outdoor sports (camping, etc.)	High	4.584	1.536	0.111	23.858	0.000***
		Medium	3.867	0.994	0.070		
		Low	3.409	1.041	0.157		

***P < 0.01, **P < 0.05

Table 5: Differences in current loyalties of nature-based trips in Japan

No	Variables	Name of Group	Average	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	F	Significance
1	Sufficiently enjoying nature in Japan	High	5.7053	1.05282	0.07638	136.152	0.000***
		Medium	4.4433	0.79634	0.05589		
		Low	3.5455	1.13002	0.17036		
2	Want to continue making nature-based trips	High	5.5526	1.21493	0.08814	89.056	0.000***
		Medium	4.2906	0.93833	0.06586		
		Low	3.6364	1.34840	0.20328		
3	Want to recommend nature-based trips to friends/acquaintances	High	5.6158	1.24500	0.09032	99.277	0.000***
		Medium	4.2906	0.83800	0.05882		
		Low	3.6591	1.37998	0.20804		

*** $P < 0.01$

4.5 Differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the three groups

In order to confirm socio-demographic characteristics of the three groups that participated in the survey of the present paper, a cross-tabulation analysis was made (Table 6). According to the results of analysis, significant differences in the incidences were seen amongst the three groups with regards to gender, fellow traveller, motive, occupation, age and annual income (Pearson, χ^2 , $p < 0.01$ to $p < 0.1$).

As for gender, the incidence of women was higher for the high satisfied group whilst that of men was higher for the medium satisfied group. Results of fellow travellers showed that ratios of couples and co-workers/groups were higher in the high satisfied group whilst those of lone travellers, families and spouses were higher in the medium satisfied group. As for motives, media other than TVs such as magazines/newspapers, Internet, travel brochures and recommendations of friends/acquaintances were higher in the high satisfied group. On the other hand, in cases of motives that are related to one's own experiences such as 'was nice on the last visit' or 'never been there', higher incidences were seen in the medium satisfied group. Whilst office workers/civil servants, those doing self-owned business and professionals (law, medicine, etc.) were mostly seen in the high satisfied group, students and homemakers were mostly in the medium satisfied group. As for age, younger generations were in the high satisfied group. No significant differences were observed with respect to educational background, number of visits, transportation and place of residence.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Features of nature-based daytrip tourist market in Japan

The results of analysis of data collected in the present paper indicate the followings.

First, from results of analysing the 'difference in importance of images of nature-based regions' from amongst the three groups divided based on the 'degrees of satisfaction of nature-based domestic trips in Japan', the features of nature-based domestic trips in Japan could be acknowledged. As shown in Fig. 2, measurement items of 'images of nature-based regions' were classified into six dimensions: 'natural environment', 'healing', 'outdoor activity', 'traffic convenience', 'culture and history' and 'service and amenity'. The three groups were considered as viewpoints of markets, wherein the low satisfaction market was positioned on the vertical axis, the high satisfaction market on the horizontal axis and the medium satisfaction market intermediate of the two groups. Positions and sizes of the 'circles' representing overall conditions merely refer to average value levels with respect to each of the items and do not have any numerical meanings.

In making predictions based on data of the subjects of the present survey, current 'nature-based domestic trips in Japan' are generally considered to be of the 'medium satisfaction market' in view of the six dimensions. In other words, considering images of destinations and travel commodities of 'nature-based domestic trips in Japan', the six dimensions (utilities) that can be expected from those destinations and travel commodities are of 'normal' level. However, it was found that the level of satisfaction of the dimension of 'natural environment' was higher than that of other dimensions. Comprehensively, it can be judged

Table 6: Differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the three groups

Variables	Groups	High satisfaction group		Medium satisfied group		Low satisfaction group		Total N	Significance
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
Gender	Male	66	36.9	89	49.7	24	13.4	179	0.029**
	Female	124	48.1	114	44.2	20	7.8	258	
Fellow traveller	Alone	16	39.0	20	48.8	5	12.2	41	0.020**
	Family	15	39.5	21	55.3	2	5.3	38	
	Spouses	36	33.0	54	49.5	19	17.4	109	
	Couples	39	60.9	20	31.3	5	7.8	64	
	Friends	53	45.3	54	46.2	10	8.5	117	
	Co-workers or groups	26	51.0	23	45.1	2	3.9	51	
	Others	5	29.4	11	64.7	1	5.9	17	
	Motive	Magazines/newspapers	20	64.5	9	29.0	2	6.5	
	Internet	24	47.1	21	41.2	6	11.8	51	
	Travel brochures	14	51.9	9	33.3	4	14.8	27	
	TV/radio	9	37.5	12	50.0	3	12.5	24	
	Recommended by friends/ acquaintances	39	53.4	30	41.1	4	5.5	73	
	Was nice on the last visit	34	40.0	41	48.2	10	11.8	85	
	Never been there	36	39.6	46	50.5	9	9.9	91	
	Business/homecoming	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	
Occupation	Others	10	19.6	35	68.6	6	11.8	51	0.065*
	Students	17	41.5	19	46.3	5	12.2	41	
	Office workers/civil servants	72	49.7	61	42.1	12	8.3	145	
	Teachers	3	75.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	4	
	Doing self-owned business	19	54.3	12	34.3	4	11.4	35	
	Professionals (law, medicine, etc.)	9	50.0	6	33.3	3	16.7	18	
	Homemakers	49	40.5	66	54.5	6	5.0	121	
	Related fields of culture/art	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	
	Related fields of technology/ science	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	2	
Age	Others	20	28.6	36	51.4	14	20.0	70	0.000***
	20s or less	67	62.0	35	32.4	6	5.6	108	
	30s to 40s	48	47.5	45	44.6	8	7.9	101	
	over 50	75	32.9	123	53.9	30	13.2	228	
Annual income	Less than 4 million yen	102	44.2	99	42.9	30	13.0	231	0.077*
	Between 4 and 6 million yen	49	43.8	55	49.1	8	7.1	112	
	Between 6 and 8 million yen	11	27.5	25	62.5	4	10.0	40	
	More than 8 million yen	28	51.9	24	44.4	2	3.7	54	
Place of residence	Osaka City/Osaka Prefecture	44	41.9	52	49.5	9	8.6	105	0.826
	Nagoya City/Aichi Prefecture	46	41.8	54	49.1	10	9.1	110	
	Mie Prefecture	59	48.4	50	41.0	13	10.7	122	
	Others (Nara, Hyogo, etc.)	41	41.0	47	47.0	12	12.0	100	
Transportation	Kintetsu Railway	37	39.8	50	53.8	6	6.5	93	0.426
	Private cars	115	44.7	112	43.6	30	11.7	257	
	Others (buses, rent-a-cars)	38	43.7	41	47.1	8	9.2	87	
Number of visits	First time	112	47.7	103	43.8	20	8.5	235	0.377
	Second time	44	40.0	53	48.2	13	11.8	110	
	Third time	34	37.0	47	51.1	11	12.0	92	
Educational background	Graduated high school	59	37.3	82	51.9	17	10.8	158	0.147
	Graduated college or higher degree	131	47.0	121	43.4	27	9.7	279	

*** $P < 0.01$, ** $P < 0.05$, * $P < 0.1$

that whilst the nature-based daytrip tourist market in Japan is ‘sufficiently satisfied’ with the natural environment, other elements (dimensions) related to activities and services of trips other than natural environments remain at a ‘somewhat satisfactory’ level.

Next, for visually representing the socio-demographic features of the respective three markets, fellow travelers were grouped into ‘family/couple/friends type’ and ‘individual/group type’, motives into ‘personal information seeking type’ and ‘media-dependent type’, occupations into ‘professional type’ and ‘regular service type’ and annual incomes into ‘high income’ and ‘low income’ (Fig. 3). Summarising socio-demographic features of the respective markets, those who are sufficiently satisfied with current nature-based domestic daytrips are tourists who come with family, couples and friends and who personally seek for required information. The medium satisfaction market mainly consists of individual and groups type visitors with relatively high annual incomes. The low satisfaction market is a market mainly consisting of regular service type tourists with relatively low annual incomes who seek for information in a media-dependent manner.

5.2 Limits of studies and future considerations

Studies have been made based on the idea that features of ecotourism markets of regions and countries differ depending on how concepts and definitions of ecotourism and ecotourists are set.

Accordingly, it has been tried to discover the features of the ecotourism market in Japan by defining subjects to be ‘nature-based tourists’ from amongst daytrip tourists in Japan and analysing features of their trips. It aims to submit the possibility of expansion and necessity thereof as future research subjects rather than a theoretical contribution to ecotourism.

Therefore, attention has been paid to ‘nature-based daytrips’ as representatives of Japanese-type ecotourism. Survey subjects have been classified into three groups depending on the measurement variables which were based on the degrees of satisfaction of nature-based domestic trips in Japan, and the differences that exist amongst these groups with respect to ‘image of nature-based regions’, ‘loyalties’ and ‘socio-demographic features’ have been analysed. Lastly, features of the three groups from viewpoints of markets have been summarised based on the information obtained from the results of analysis. Based on these processes of study, features of Japanese-type ecotourism, ecotourists and their markets could be confirmed.

However, there are several limitations in the present paper. The first one is the problem of representativeness of Nabari City, the subject of study of the present paper, as a nature-based region. In fact, Nabari is not a nationwide well-known city from amongst existing ecotourism regions in Japan. The meaning of studies based on the analysis of data obtained from survey subjects of the present paper might become weak. However, such a limit of representativeness of survey subjects can be complemented by further studies. The second one is the lack of more concrete segmentation of features of ecotourism, ecotourists and their markets in Japan. In further studies, it is

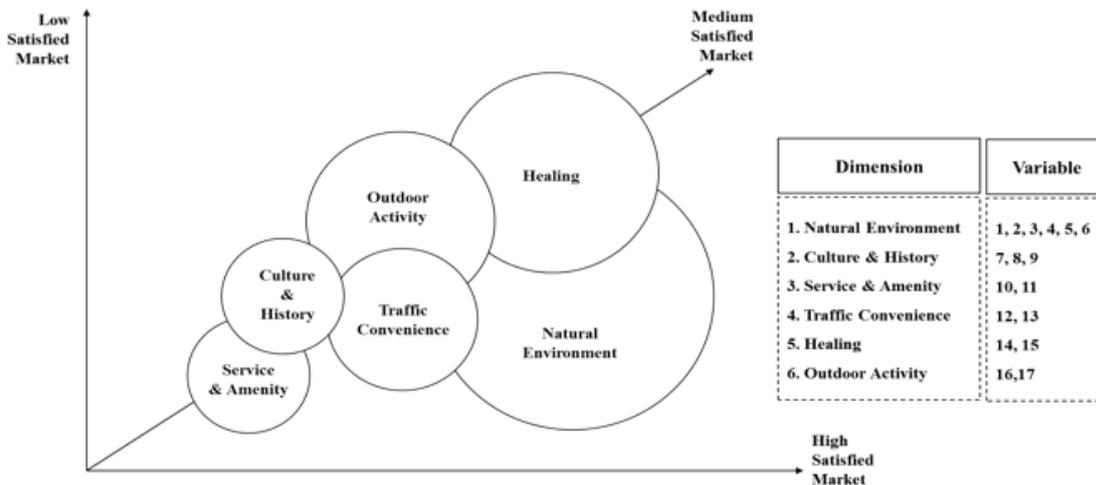


Figure 2: Conditions of nature-based daytrip tourist market in Japan

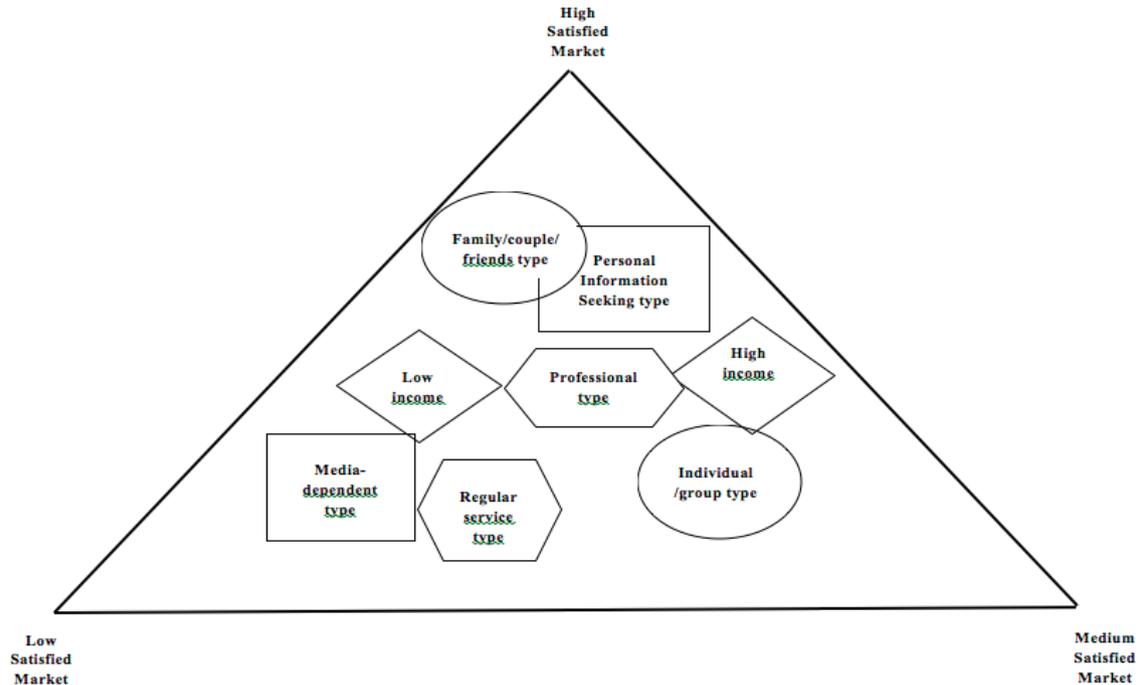


Figure 3: Socio-demographic features of nature-based daytrip tourists in Japan

necessary to set measurement variables that can explain the characteristics of individuals as tourists, such as life styles or activity patterns, in order to further clarify the features of Japanese tourists. The author aims to complement the above limits of studies and to conduct researches in a more concrete and empirical manner based on the results obtained in the present paper. Studies capable of providing information necessary for practical application and diverse marketing strategies are also future issues.

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