

## A Survey of Japanese Tourists in Yellowknife

The number of Japanese tourists arriving in Yellowknife has increased dramatically since 1989 — from about 50 then to an expected 1,000 this year.

That's a twenty-fold increase in six short years since Raven Tours of Yellowknife began offering December-April aurora borealis tours, and the trend shows every sign of continuing. In fact, Yellowknife could become the northern lights capital of the world, at least as far as the Japanese are concerned.

For the benefit of local entrepreneurs wanting to improve their market share of this growing

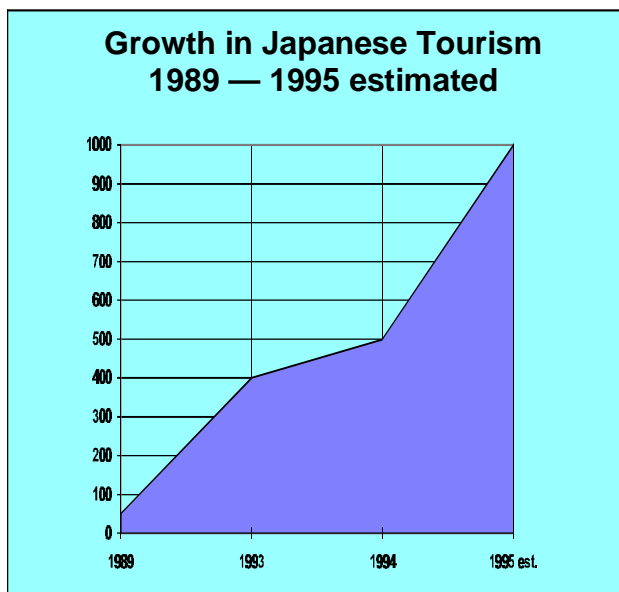
market segment, the GNWT Department of Economic Development & Tourism surveyed 200 visitors in 1993 to elicit their views on Yellowknife businesses and services. The most useful results are reported here, along with some tips from Yellowknifers who are intimately familiar with Japanese social customs and consumer tastes (see the coupon on the back page for complete survey results and analysis).

By and large, survey respondents were impressed by the city, its “warm and friendly” people, and the fact that it has not become too “touristy”, as indicated by this typical comment:

*“I like this beautiful and quiet town. People are simple, kind, friendly and warm. Usually tourist areas have a greedy spirit; but people here are not like that. Visiting from a big city in Japan, this place is so refreshing and heart warming. I hope your city will be prosperous; but at the same time I hope this city stays as it is now. I enjoyed this slow flowing life which we cannot have in Japan.”*

### **No Seconds, Please**

Of course there were also some complaints. Many of them concerned perceived high prices, but interestingly enough from a Western viewpoint, the most vehement indictment concerned meal portions.



The Japanese are used to much smaller meals than ours, and view food left on the plate as a dreadful waste, indeed an affront, if not a sin. So, in their view, is a messy table or desk. According to our experts, restaurants wanting to please their Japanese customers will serve smaller meals and make every effort to remove empty dishes from their tables as soon as possible. They will also refrain from holding utensils and glasses or cups by the business end when handing them to diners.

### Silence is Golden

Several people commented on the noise in their hotel. Some lamented the same kind of irritants that would disturb most Westerners — like boisterous late-night parties in neighbouring rooms — but some also were irked by sounds we would hardly notice, like water running next door.

Despite the fact that many of them come from crowded urban areas like Tokyo, the Japanese are apparently much more sensitive to noise than we are — which is why it is important to speak softly if you want to garner potential customers' respect.

<b>HOW DO YOU SAY ...</b>	
<b>Good morning</b>	<b>ohio go dzimas</b>
<b>Good afternoon</b>	<b>cone nichu wah</b>
<b>Good evening</b>	<b>comb bahn wah</b>
<b>Goodbye</b>	<b>syo naara</b>
<b>Please (go ahead)</b>	<b>dozo</b>
<b>Thank you</b>	<b>domo ari gato go dzimas</b>
<b>You're welcome</b>	<b>dough itachi go dzimas</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>high</b>
<b>I don't understand</b>	<b>wah kadi maasin</b>
<b>Do you understand?</b>	<b>wah kadi masca?</b>
<b>Welcome to place</b>	<b>Yellowknife et yoko so</b>

It is also important to speak slowly to offset usually less-than-perfect English. On that score, written communication might prove more effective in some cases, because many Japanese people can read and write English better than they can speak it.

### Services Good, Goods Ok

When asked to rate the service they received in the gift, art, jewelry and drug stores they dealt with, most respondents said they were generally satisfied:

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very Good	24%
Good	44%
Average	31%
Not Very Good	2%

Overall, respondents were somewhat less impressed with the quality and selection of the arts and crafts they found in these shops:

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Selection</b>
Very Good	17%	24%
Good	33%	44%
Average	41%	31%
Not Very Good	9%	2%

### Keep Gifts Small and Inexpensive

However, these ratings are probably less a reflection of the quality of the arts and crafts themselves than of traditional Japanese consumer preferences. Most Japanese prefer to buy several simple, light-weight and relatively inexpensive momentos, not as souvenirs for themselves but as gifts for relatives and friends back home. Ideally, these would be of equal value, more or less, to spare travellers the embarrassment of

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bearing precious gifts for some and something more mundane for others. As well, it is wrong to assume all Japanese tourists are rich. Most are not, and would have to think twice before purchasing some of the more highly priced northern art.

All of which helps explain why most survey respondents seemed more enthusiastic about simple photographic prints of the aurora borealis than, say, expensive Inuit prints. Several did express interest in Inuit carvings and

prints, but the survey indicated price would be a major factor in their final decision to buy.

Some of their comments provide clues as to what products the Japanese tourist might buy:

*“I wanted to buy soapstone carvings for my friends, but I was shocked because they were so expensive!”*

*“Soapstone carvings are a little too expensive for us. It would be nice if they can make cheaper and smaller ones.”*

## **Attracting and Cultivating Foreign Sales**

One simple and inexpensive but very effective way to lure foreign-language customers is to display a welcome sign in their language in your shop window, as business people who depend heavily on tourist dollars will attest.

Just as many Americans post French signs in stores bordering on Quebec, for example, so local experts maintain that making the Japanese, in particular, feel welcome in this way is extremely important in attracting their business.

Depending on the circumstances, it might also be profitable to have Japanese fliers on hand to explain your establishment, services or products when they arrive.

Places with interesting historical backgrounds, for instance, might offer a brief written background that set them apart from others. Similarly, galleries and souvenir shops might affix explanations of, say, moosehair tuftings, or biographies of carvers, bearing in mind that most Japanese are not at all familiar with Dene and Inuit cultures and artwork.

Once they're in, don't be surprised if you're asked to pose for a snapshot or to do the

snapping, for it is no sweeping generalization to say most tourists from the birthplace of Nikon and Sony are avid photo buffs.

Packaging and shipping are important retail services among Japanese tourists — shipping because they would much prefer to mail their purchases home than cart them around, and packaging because the way something is wrapped has special significance in Japan.

Put bluntly, retailers willing endure such minor inconveniences as forwarding customer purchases are more likely to reap greater rewards than those who haven't the time or inclination. What's more, word-of-mouth advertising travels fast among northern lights enthusiasts, and happy customers will no doubt tell others.

For Japanese translations and tips on catering to Japanese customers, contact Raven Tours at 873-4776.

*“There were not many T-shirt sizes. Please think of Japanese sizes.”*

*“Sweatshirts and cups with a logo are not desirable because you can get them anywhere. I would happily buy if you have something unique for Yellowknife.”*

*“Among the prints and pictures the aurora ones are very beautiful.”*

*“Since this is a place for aurora, why don’t you have books on aurora? Even in souvenir shops there are few pictures of aurora. ”*

*“How about selling video tapes of the aurora as a souvenir?”*

The survey also invited respondents to rate their interest in other possible souvenir and gift items, including: fur jackets, hats, headbands and earmuffs; paintings, prints and photographs; books about northern culture, wildlife; tapes, CDs or videotapes of northern culture, music, etc. The results were:

Rating	Furs	Paintings
Very Interested	41%	34%
Interested	39%	47%
Not Interested	20%	19%

Rating	Books	Tapes
Very Interested	25%	11%
Interested	46%	46%
Not Interested	29%	43%

Asked about their interest in activities not offered by the aurora tour, many respondents expressed interest in lectures on northern cultures and lifestyles accompanied by appropriate films. Raven Tours officials added that Japanese clients have also requested lectures on the northern lights, and the company would welcome proposals from experts in these fields to host such events.

Company officials also said they would like to offer an evening of northern entertainment, including drum dancing, etc., in much the same way as the Yukon establishments put on Klondike Day galas.

The last section of the survey questionnaire asked about northern foods. While the responses were inconclusive, it seems most would like to sample local foods during their visit, but only a few would like to take country-food products home.

## EXTRA, EXTRA ... READ ALL ABOUT IT!

**For a copy of the entire survey, please return this coupon to:**

**Policy & Planning  
Economic Development & Tourism  
Government of the NWT  
Box 1320  
Yellowknife NT X1A 2L9  
Fax: (403) 873-0434**

**Or phone: (403) 873-7272**

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