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Activities Arrangement in Chiangmai Province for Long Stay Japanese Pensioner Tourists

Prathung Hongsrnagon*

Introduction

The current focus of sustainable development on a global basis, derived from the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil, has been a push factor for tourism development in three key aspects. First is the need to preserve the environment and natural resources, second is the need to continually study the tourism market, and last is the need for human resource development. All three of these key aspects have pushed the development of alternative tourism not only to respond to the identified needs but also to replace current mass tourism (Seen Sarobon 2004: 15-21). Long Stay Tourism is considered a type of alternative tourism since it focuses on the learning of language and cross cultural exchanges between tourists, considered to be visiting guests, and local people, considered to be hosts. A period of long stay is considered to be one which is in excess of one month (Longstay Tourism 2002: 2). With this condition, elderly tourists or pensioner tourists have become one of the key target markets for long stay tourism. They have no further career responsibilities and have completed their family care-taking responsibilities. They also have steady incomes from pension funds provided by their government; i.e. pensioner tourists from Scandinavian countries, from the United Kingdom, from the United States of America, as well as from Japan.

Since 1991, Japanese pensioners have increasingly begun to stay as long term tourists in many countries around the globe; i.e. in the United States of America, Brazil, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, Canada, France, Singapore, Germany, as well as Thailand (Japan's statistics 2002: 4). There are several contributing factors for such an increase. Firstly, the number of ageing people in Japan has been increasing at a rapid rate due to a decline in

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fertility and an increased longevity of life span. In Japan, the number of children aged 0-14 years and the number of adults aged 15-64 years have greatly declined, while the number of elderly people, 65 years and older, has increased tremendously. This is due to the fact that Japan has high standards of medical care and public health, education, and the quality of life. Secondly, Japanese pensioners are wealthy and enjoy a high level of purchasing power due to generous pension funds provided by the Japanese Government. The exact pension amount depends on the individual's working background, though those with the Employee Pension Fund receive approximately 70,000 baht per month on average (when 100 Japanese yen is equivalent to 37 Thai baht) (Suwa Yasuo 1985: 1-23). Furthermore, Japan's social structure has undergone change due to a declining trend for members of an extended family to live together in large numbers. Pensioners have thus begun to tend to live alone with their spouses during their retirement period (World Ageing 2003: xxvii-xxxi).

As mentioned above, one of the destination countries for long stay tourism of Japanese pensioners is Thailand. It is true that Thailand possesses all the major elements for a successful mass tourism industry, the so-called 4As, namely accessibility, accommodation, attraction (both natural attractions, i.e. mountains, seashores, waterfalls; and man-made attractions, i.e. art galleries, museums, and the night safari), and actors (i.e. travel agencies, food and beverage shops, tour guides, spa enterprises, etc.) (Robert W. McIntosh, Charles R. Goeldner, and Brent J.R. Ritchie 1995: 21-23). However, in terms of long stay tourism, Thailand still lacks an essential element: activity arrangement. The purpose of activity arrangement is to achieve natural interactions between long stay tourists and the local Thais. As such, these activities are not the type found in a classroom environment. In fact, they are the kinds of activities that facilitate the learning of language and cultural exchange during an individual's long stay in Thailand. Indirectly, such activities can also facilitate the tourists' adjustments to their new physical and social environment. The ultimate aim is to create a mutually beneficial and memorable relationship between the people of the two countries. The author has focused her study in particular on Chiangmai Province for three key reasons. Firstly, Chiangmai Province has attracted international tourists for a long time due to its unique Lanna Culture. Secondly, Chiangmai is one of the five pilot provinces for long stay tourism in

Thailand. Lastly, Chiangmai is one of the strategic areas for tourism development as designated by Lanna Group Cities and the Borderline Economic Areas of various regions (Therdchai Chouybumrung 2004: 35-39).

This article presents some possible activities that could be arranged for long stay Japanese pensioner tourists in Chiangmai Province. It is true that the combination of available accommodation and attractions in Chiangmai offered through various programs by the actors should sufficiently serve the physical needs of long stay tourists. However, these do not meet the spiritual and the mental needs of these tourists. Activities that facilitate the interaction between Japanese pensioners and the local Thais are missing. This article has been divided into 5 sections. Firstly, the concept of long stay tourism is presented. Secondly, causes for the increase in long stay Japanese pensioner tourism are identified. Thirdly, the readiness of Chiangmai Province to provide for the needs of these tourists is analyzed. Fourthly suggestions are made with regard to the arrangement of activities, and finally conclusions and overall recommendations are made.

The Concept of Long Stay Tourism

The meaning of long stay tourism is defined by the Long Stay Japanese Foundation in Tokyo, Japan, as follows:

Living relaxingly overseas for a long period of time, which is not a migration or a permanent residence in a foreign country. All long stay tourists have to finally come back to their home in Japan. The objective of long stay tourism is to do activities as a form of relaxation. It focuses on staying put in one place, as opposed to frequently traveling, in order to seek daily life experiences overseas. As a result, long stay tourists should own a place to stay or should rent one for their daily life activities. As a matter of fact, long stay tourists do not stay in hotels as general tourists. They must also have adequate funding from the Japanese Government so that they

do not depend on any sort of income originating within the country of their long stay. (Longstay Tourism 2002: 2).

From the above definition, it is clear that a long stay tourism project is designed so that Japanese pensioners have a chance to spend their retirement time overseas. This is done in such a manner that Japanese pensioners can learn more about local daily life via cultural exchange activities. They can rely on their pension fund and, thus, they do not become a financial burden on the country of their long stay choice. Long stay tourism is a temporary kind of travel but with a long period of time for relaxation, for learning, as well as for experiencing. All long stay tourists are committed to go back home upon completion of their long stay period.

Causes for the Increase in Long Stay Japanese Pensioner Tourism

The causes for the increase in long stay Japanese pensioner tourism are the phenomenon of an ageing society, the changing social structure in Japan, the Japanese pension fund, and the increasing personal preference of Japanese pensioners to stay overseas as tourists for long periods of time. Each of these factors will now be examined.

The Ageing Society Phenomenon

From the study of the Population Division, DESA, United Nations (World Ageing 2003: xxvii-xxxi), it is known that the number of elderly Japanese has been increasing at a rapid rate. The Japanese population's median age is as high as 41 years, while that of Yemen is only 15 years. Japan is one of the leading industrial nations which is facing the unprecedented phenomenon of the Ageing Society. It is estimated that the year 2050 will be the first time ever in world history that the elderly will outnumber those in childhood. Considering the age dependency ratio of old age to adult age, the ratio will be higher than that of childhood to adult age. This implies that the Japanese population aged 60 years and up will depend on those between 15-59 years of age (adult age) more than those in childhood (0-14 years). Simultaneously, the number of Japanese of adult age who are capable of being responsible for all of the population over 60 years old (potential support ratio) will continue to decrease as a result of declining birth rates. In addition, the parental support ratio of the

Japanese population aged 50-64 years towards those over 85 years old will be heightened due to the increasing longevity of Japanese elders, as detailed in Table 1 (World Ageing 2003: 286-287).

Table 1 Changes in population structure in Japan

Year	0-14 years old (%)	15-59 years old (%)	60 years old and up (%)	Median age	Age Dependency Ratio (whole)	Childhood	Ageing	Potential Support Ratio	Parental Support ratio
1950	35.4	56.9	7.7	22.3	67.8	59.5	8.3	12.1	1.5
1975	24.3	64.0	11.7	30.4	47.5	35.8	11.6	8.6	2.6
2000	14.7	62.1	23.2	41.2	46.8	21.6	25.2	4.0	8.1
2020	12.1	52.8	35.1	50.0	69.6	20.5	49.0	2.0	27.7
2050	12.5	45.2	42.3	53.1	95.8	24.5	71.3	1.4	56.0

Source: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldageing19502050/pdf>. April 23, 2003: 286-287.

The Changing Social Structure in Japan

Japan, with its many large urban areas and high population densities, has reduced the trend of co-habitation with family members, especially between parents and their offspring. The present social living situation has caused the traditional extended family pattern to be replaced by the nuclear family pattern. In addition, the frequency of parental visits is also declining. Table 2 shows the details of a comparison of parental visits to elderly Japanese and elderly Americans in the year 1986-1987 in the cases of both cohabitation and non-cohabitation. (Emiko Ochiai 1996: 160).

Table 2 Frequency of parental visits to elderly Japanese compared to elderly Americans in the year 1986-1987

Case of co-habitation	Visit at least once a week	Visit at least once a month	Visit less than once a month	No visit
Elderly Japanese	40.7 %	40.8 %	16.4 %	2.2 %
Elderly Americans	76.9 %	20.0 %	2.4%	0.8 %
Case of non-co-habitation	Visit at least once a week	Visit at least once a month	Visit less than once a month	No visit
Elderly Japanese	57.4 %	32.1 %	9.2 %	1.3 %
Elderly Americans	77.3 %	18.5 %	3.4 %	0.8 %

Source: Data on Japan derived from Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology and University of Michigan,

Zenkoku koreisha chosa, National survey of the elderly, Tokyo 1987. Data on the United States of America

derived from Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Americans' Changing Lives: Wave 1, 1986.

The Japanese Pension Fund

One major impact arising from the Ageing Society phenomenon in Japan is the establishment of old age benefits, providing security in life for Japanese pensioners. The National Pension Fund has been in effect since 1959, and the Employee Pension Fund and Fisherman Pension Fund have been in effect since 1941 and 1944, respectively. Japanese citizens of 65 years of age and above are eligible to receive benefits from the National Pension Fund. Once they have contributed to the fund for a period of 480 months, they are eligible to receive 804,200 yen per year or approximately 298,000 baht per year. Japanese workers are eligible for the Employee Pension Fund when they reach 60 years of age (or 55 years of age if they are fishermen or mining workers). They are eligible to receive a pension at the rate of 0.75% of their wage index times the number of months of their fund contribution or approximately 840,000 baht per year and up. Should they decide to continue working while 60-64 years old, they will receive an extra 1,625 yen per month in their pension. There is an automatic adjustment to the living cost for both the National Pension Fund and the Employee Pension Fund. Their spouses, meanwhile, will receive a pension of 231,400 yens per year or approximately 85,600 baht per year. The pensioners' first and second offspring will also receive a payment of 231,400 yens per year, while other offspring will receive 77,100 yens per year, or approximately 28,500 baht per year, up to the end of the fiscal year, or up to the time they turn 18 years old or 20 years old if they are disabled (Social Security Administration 2002: 1).

Japanese Pensioners' Increasing Preference to Long Stay Overseas

The Ageing Society phenomenon in Japan has impacted on many areas of society such as in population health care, family elements, accommodation arrangements, social security housing projects, and, most importantly for this study, overseas Japanese migration. At present, there are two types of Japanese living abroad. The first group is those who become permanent overseas residents, while the second is those who stay for long periods of time overseas as tourists. Data from the Japanese Foreign Ministry shows the change in the number of Japanese overseas permanent residents and long stay overseas Japanese during the 16 year period of 1986-2001. During the first phase, the number of Japanese who preferred to live permanently overseas was equivalent to those who preferred to

stay overseas for long periods of time as tourists. Later on, the number of Japanese long stay tourists outnumbered overseas permanent residents, especially from the year 1991 onwards (details in Table 3) (Japan's statistics 2002: 4).

Table 3 Number of Japanese living abroad (year 1986-2001)

Year	Japanese living abroad	Japanese long stay tourists overseas	Japanese permanent residents overseas
1986	497,981	251,545	246,436
1987	518,318	270,391	247,927
1988	548,404	302,510	245,894
1989	586,972	340,929	246,043
1990	620,174	374,044	246,130
1991	663,049	412,207	250,842
1992	679,379	425,131	254,248
1993	687,579	432,703	254,876
1994	689,895	428,342	261,553
1995	728,268	460,522	267,746
1996	763,977	492,942	271,035
1997	782,568	507,749	274,819
1998	789,534	510,915	278,619
1999	795,852	515,295	280,557
2000	811,712	526,685	285,027
2001	837,744	544,434	293,310

Source: <http://www.jin-japan.org/stat/stats/21MG31>. May 27, 2002.

The top ten destination countries for long stay tourism of over three months in duration in 1999 were: the United States of America, Brazil, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, Canada, France, Singapore, Germany, and Thailand (details in Table 4) (Japan's statistics 2002: 5).

Table 4 Top ten destination countries for Japanese long stay tourism of over three months in duration (statistics year 1975-1999)

Country	Year 1975	Year 1980	Year 1985	Year 1990	Year 1995	Year 1997	Year 1998	Year 1999
U.S.A.	109,645	121,180	146,104	236,401	263,577	284,006	289,957	293,606
Brazil	146,488	141,580	120,276	105,060	90,890	86,906	83,803	79,560
U.K.	5,559	10,943	19,889	44,351	51,668	54,649	55,583	55,224
China	5,037	6,199	8,415	8,269	16,592	46,821	44,657	43,997
Australia	3,393	5,007	7,466	15,154	23,929	26,631	27,899	33,188
Canada	8,759	12,280	16,995	21,846	25,493	27,601	28,002	30,681
France	4,646	6,842	12,156	15,026	18,543	20,167	22,238	24,658
Singapore	4,694	8,140	8,077	12,701	24,003	26,684	35,521	24,186
Germany	12,060	13,991	16,073	20,913	23,843	22,318	23,303	23,270
Thailand	5,952	6,424	7,852	14,289	21,745	23,014	22,481	21,400

Source: <http://www.jin-japan.org/stat/stats/21MG31>. May 27, 2002.

Japanese pensioners consider living overseas as long stay tourists to be a viable option when planning their retirement life. Though they might have different objectives for such a long stay overseas, some common issues are involved when deciding to spend part of their retirement time overseas. These are:

1. *To cherish oneself during a second life:* After a long hard-working life in Japan, typically of 30-40 years in duration, Japanese pensioners would very much like to have a second life during which they can fulfill their dreams. Their retirement time should be a relaxed one, filled with fun, joy, and entertainment. Unlike during their younger working lives, during retirement they have time and sufficient funds to enjoy many pastimes such as horse-riding, fishing, canoeing, golfing, etc. Due to social constraints, during their younger lives they normally devote their time to their work amid tight schedules full of social stress. Unfortunately, due to the high cost of living in Japan their incomes were not sufficient to allow them to entertain themselves as they would like to have. In addition, deciding to spend part of their retirement life overseas is also a good excuse for Japanese pensioners to softly decline their company's proposal of hiring them after retirement for some small jobs with some small pay.

2. *To set up one's new goal of life (new social role):* Japanese are hard-working people whose time is always occupied with life's activities. To have one's life free

all of a sudden is a shock and such personal freedom is the opposite to what is traditionally held up to be a model Japanese citizen's responsibilities. It is also a source of pensioners' mental problems. Therefore, Japanese retirement life is a challenging turning point for an individual's spirit.

3. *To revive and to renew one's marriage relationship (between Japanese elderly couples):* In Japanese society, job responsibility is of the utmost importance. It is more important than one's family, more important than one's wife, and more important than one's family members. Retirement offers an individual the chance to renew an often neglected marital relationship.

4. *To get a chance to learn more about foreigners:* Japanese wish to have cross cultural experiences through cultural exchange with local people in the context of normal daily life. The aim is to use one's leisure time meaningfully for the period of their retirement, which is typically 20 years in duration.

Readiness of Chiangmai Province for Long Stay Japanese Pensioner Tourists

Chiangmai Province is an area which holds great attraction for long stay tourists. One can not deny that Chiangmai is equipped with great accessibility, a full range of accommodation options (ranging from resorts, apartments, and condominiums to single houses), famous tourist attraction spots and places which showcase Chiangmai's world renowned Lanna Culture. Regarding actors, Chiangmai possesses a number of private sector companies which operate in the long stay tourism sector. These include enterprises providing accommodation, hospital services, travel services, food and beverages, touring programs, health and spa services, golf, as well as other service providers.

Nevertheless, for long stay tourism, Chiangmai still lacks activities arranged between long stay Japanese pensioners and the local Thais living in the community the tourists are staying in. These activities are meaningful and valuable for these two groups of people with different languages and cultures. The activities can also reduce the adjustment period of the tourists to their new environment in Chiangmai.

Suggestions on the Arrangement of Activities in Chiangmai for Long Stay Japanese Pensioner Tourists

Interview sessions were conducted with officers in Japan who were in charge of long stay tourism programs worldwide for Japanese pensioners. The officers were located in Tokyo, Osaka, and Fukuoka and worked for Long Stay Foundations, Long Stay Associations, Long Stay Clubs, Municipal City Halls and the Offices of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. From these interviews the following list of voluntary works was drawn up. The list comprises those activities which Japanese pensioners may desire to conduct or take part in during their period of long stay tourism in Chiangmai.

1. Fund-raising
2. Gardening
3. Operating a shelter for street children
4. Teaching agricultural skills/language proficiency
5. Conducting livelihood training
6. Collecting of contributions for goods; i.e school textbooks, picture books, clothes, or emergency goods such as medicine and food
7. Presenting cultural programs
8. Involvement in educational programs and special events
9. Acting as a gift store docent
10. Working as a docent in the areas of art/ graphic design/ calligraphy/ intercultural understanding programs for the local community
11. Being assistant volunteer coordinators
12. Training the locals in dressmaking, handiwork, handicraft, etc.

An empirical study with 63 long stay Japanese pensioner tourists in Chiangmai, who were the members of Chiangmai Long Stay Life Club (CLLC), was conducted in July 2004. CLLC was established in 2003 in order to welcome and facilitate Japanese pensioners interested in staying long-term in the province. From an open-ended question, it was found that CLLC members would very much like to take part in activities involving local Thai people. The joint activities could be in the form of volunteer work in the Thai community covering a

number of areas as mentioned above, such as teaching language proficiency, presenting cultural programs, involvement in educational programs and special events, working as a docent in the areas of art/graphic design/calligraphy/intercultural understanding programs for the local community, being assistant volunteer coordinators, as well as training the locals in dressmaking, handiwork, handicraft, etc. The joint activities could also be in the form of leisure activities, such as golf, picnic trips, friendly sports competitions, etc.

These voluntary activities have the ultimate aim of promoting good relationships between Thailand and Japan. They can create a sense of caring and community, both of which are vital to the success of the long stay project. As these activities are voluntary, payment for services rendered is not an issue. This is in accordance with the principles of long stay tourism. Through these activities, Japanese pensioners can utilize their knowledge and experiences in developing their new surroundings. They are thus able to develop a new social role for themselves, one which is useful and meaningful both for themselves and for the community they are living in. These activities can help enrich their second life in retirement, while still allowing them to be close to their spouses. Most importantly, Japanese pensioners get a chance to learn more about the people in foreign land they have chosen to stay in.

Nevertheless, the author suggests herewith that these activities should be coordinated by Thai government units. These units should be responsible for the facilitation of joint activities between Japanese pensioners and local Chiangmai residents which take a non-commercial form. The activities should be available to those who live in both the town and suburban villages of Chiangmai. The aim is to nurture long stay Japanese pensioner tourism in Chiangmai and make these tourists' stays valuable and meaningful experiences, which they may remember as a precious time. These joint activities should play a more predominant role than the presently available classroom based activities, i.e. Thai cooking/Thai arts classes. The classroom based activities are not only superficial in terms of true learning, but there is also a fee collected by the course organizers. Japanese pensioners are required to pay to attend these classes, with the fee dependent on the subject and the course length.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the above discussion it can be concluded that there is currently an increasing trend for Japanese pensioners to stay overseas as tourists for long periods of time. This trend is due to the Ageing Society phenomenon which Japan is currently experiencing, which is causing a change in Japan's population structure. These Japanese pensioners have free time and high purchasing power. They have steady incomes in the form of pensions from the Japanese Government. These factors combined with the fact that they live apart from their offspring have led Japanese pensioners to increasingly prefer to stay overseas in various nations around the world for long periods of time as tourists. One of these destinations is Thailand. Thailand possesses all 4A elements which are required for a successful tourism industry, namely: easy accessibility, full accommodation options, numerous tourist attractions, as well as a handful of actors. This is especially true for Chiangmai Province which is world renowned for its historical tourist spots and Lanna Culture, for which Japanese pensioners have a great fondness. However, the learning of language and the exchange of culture between the tourists and the locals is at the heart of long stay tourism. Chiangmai Province lacks activities that would not only generate the needed interactions between the tourists and the locals, a direct effect, but also to facilitate the adjustment of the tourists to their new environment in Chiangmai, an indirect effect. Thailand's policy for the tourism industry is for it to serve not only as a tool for generating more income for the nation but also for it to help preserve Thailand's environment. This includes not only natural resources, arts and culture, but also local Thai identity. It is in accordance with the objectives of the 1997 Thai Constitution, Section 46 and Section 56 on the "Right of the local community to take part in natural resources and natural environment management," and Section 78 on "Empowering the local community for their self-independence, self-decision-making for local errands, as well as self-participation for local development" (Seen Sarobon 2004: 15-21). The author thus suggests that for the country's future policy implementation, further studies are necessary in order to analyze the needs of other long stay pensioner tourists, such as pensioners from the United States of America and from European countries. Whether or not these newly found needs shall confirm with or shall differ from the identified needs of Japanese long stay pensioner tourists, the

studies would greatly contribute to Thailand's ability to manage the long stay tourism project for foreign pensioners, as a type of alternative tourism, in an effective, successful, and sustainable manner.

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