

The Movement of People and International Tourism

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The numbers of international tourists are rising smoothly, and this is the fruit of tourism promotion efforts. What can be gathered from the efforts therein is the elimination of systematized matters, such as central “visas and related regulations”, in dealing with the “obstacles to the movement of people”. Today’s discussion lies in this area, and along with the current global situation, I shall investigate the Northeast Asian tourism subregion in depth.

The factors in the vitalization of international tourism are: 1) economic development and stability; 2) relaxation of restrictions on and liberalization of overseas travel; 3) development of tourism infrastructure; 4) development of destinations; and 5) development of promotion activities. The most immediate one is 2) relaxation of restrictions on and liberalization of overseas travel. A “visa-free” situation is ideal, but with it being important to defend the nation’s public security and safety, its introduction would not be easy. The types of visa exemptions include: “ordinarily visa-free”; “visa-free for a specified region”; “visa-free for a specific market”; “visa-free for a single country”; and “visa-free transit”. The types of visa acquisition include: “multiple-entry visa”; “electronic visa (e-visa)”; “long-stay visa”; and “locally-issued visa”. Other than visas, there are “the streamlining of Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ)” and “the elimination or cost reduction of institutional obstacles (such as airport taxes) to facilitate travel”. In the “Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report” rankings, tourism competitiveness is evaluated by the indices dealing with the “obstacles to the movement of people”. With the exception of the ROK the other nations rank low in the degree of visa exemption in “International Openness”. In the degree of openness of air transport agreements, Japan and the ROK are advancing, but Russia, China, and Mongolia are tending to lag behind. They are behind in the “governmental prioritization of tourism policy” and the “time necessary for (foreign capital) start-up businesses”.

The active mover on visas has been the ROK. They have introduced visa exemptions for Russians, and a “Jeju Island visa exemption” for Chinese people. The Chinese government has introduced a visa-free system for Japanese people. Recently, at Beijing airport they approve “visa-free transit” of up to six days. The Russian government has adopted visa exemptions for people from the ROK, and there are visa exemptions only for tour groups for Chinese people. The Japanese government has extended the period for multiple-entry visas for the voyages of Russians. The Northeast Asian tourism subregion is putting effort into the elimination of “obstacles to the movement of people” in accordance with the unique character of each country. If they at times promote “e-visas”, “multiple-entry visas”, and “locally-issued visas”, then the vitalization will progress via “border tours” and the like.

Lastly, I would like to mention the concerns we face. One is that the growth of Northeast Asia as a whole has slowed due to the Chinese government’s travel restrictions to the ROK (with its THAAD deployment). Political intervention on the free movement of people should be avoided. Another concern is the surge in all countries for all types of tax, including airport tax, and any impact of the “International Tourism Tax” in Japan which came into effect in January 2019. In conclusion, we should adopt more flexible ingenious methods of all kinds, and not just adhere to the visa exemptions.

(Note: the “Northeast Asian tourism subregion” in this paper comprises Japan, China, the ROK, the DPRK, Mongolia, and Russia. It therefore differs from the statistical region according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization.)

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