

January 16, 2020

Summary of the Year Since the Launch of the "Consumer Hotline for Tourists" - 65% of the inquiries are in Chinese -

NCAC launched the Consumer Hotline for Tourists in December 2018 to offer telephone consultation that overseas visitors to Japan can use if they experience consumer detriment while visiting Japan. The Consumer Hotline for Tourists is accessible in six different languages (i.e. English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese and Japanese) with use of interpretation service through a three-way call system.

One year has passed since the launch of the Consumer Hotline for Tourists. NCAC would like to introduce what kinds of inquiries have been received so that it may be helpful to those who are going to visit Japan.

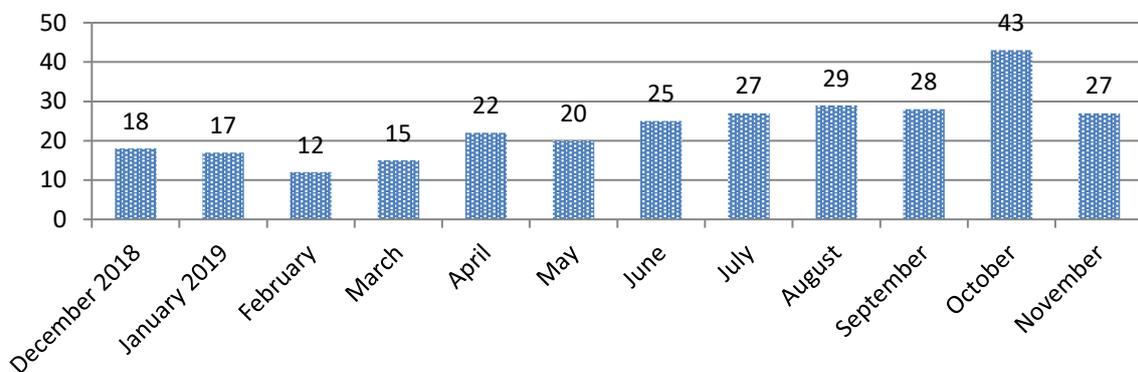
1. Overview of inquiries by PIO-NET¹

(1) Number of inquiries

The number of inquiries received since the Consumer Hotline for Tourists opened on December 3rd, 2018, has reached 283 inquiries² in 12 months since the end of November 2019.

Breaking down the number of inquiries by month, it can be seen gradually increasing, and since the 2019 fiscal year, more than 20 inquiries have been received every month. October 2019 in particular was the period when the Rugby World Cup was held, which seems to be one of causes that increased the number of tourists visiting Japan (Fig. 1)

Figure 1 Number of received inquiries by month



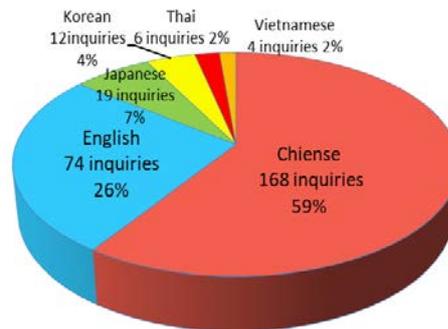
¹ PIO-NET (Practical Living Information Online Network System) is a database that connects NCAC, the consumer affairs centers throughout Japan and others and store information of inquiries related to consumer life.

² From the records up until November 30, 2019, includes "Inquiries".

(2) Number of inquiries by language

Breaking down inquiries received by the helpline into languages available for interpretation, 168 (59%) of all the inquiries were in Chinese, 74 (26%) inquiries were in English. This accounts for about 85% of the total inquiries. Inquiries in Japanese were also received. This includes not only cases with a Japanese speaking person asking for a consultation but there are also cases in which a friend (a Japanese national) of a person asking for a consultation makes an inquiry. (Fig. 2)

Figure 2 Number and ratio of inquiries by languages (n = 283)



(3) Attributes of inquirers

In principle, the Consumer Hotline for Tourists is intended for tourists to Japan, but inquiries from foreign nationals residing in or out of Japan are sometimes received. The total of 283 inquiries consists of 195 (69%) from tourists to Japan (69%), 74 (26%) from foreign nationals living in Japan, and 14 (5%) from foreign nationals outside of Japan. When receiving inquiries from people other than visitors to Japan, the helpline staff listens to the contents of the inquiry and introduces an appropriate consultation service.

2. Overview of inquiries from inbound tourists to Japan

(1) Breakdown by timing of inquiries

Categorizing the number of inquiries from tourists to Japan (195 cases, the same applies hereinafter) by the timing in which inquiries were received: before, during or after tourists visit Japan, 118 (60%) were received from tourists during their visit to Japan, which is the greatest number. However, the number of inquiries received after the person's visit to Japan was 70 (36%), and they include cases in which the issues were not resolved while the tourists were in Japan and cases in which inquiries were received from those who found issues after leaving Japan. Inquiries received before the person's visit account for 4%, and they include problems such as cancellation charges when they cancelled the hotel they booked on a reservation website. (Fig. 3)

Figure 3 Number and ratio of inquiries by consultation timing (n = 195)

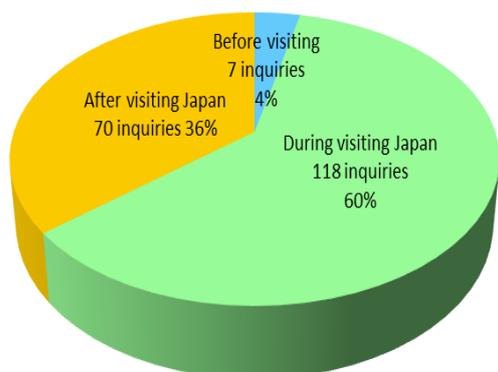
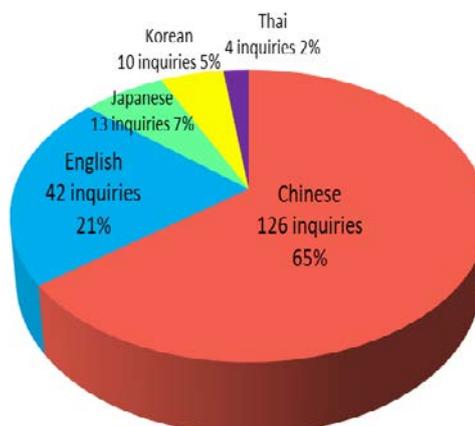


Figure 4 Number and ratio of inquiries by supported language (n = 195)



(2) Breakdown by language

Inquiries from tourists to Japan are received in Chinese the most frequently, followed by English, but the percentage of Chinese is slightly higher than the total number of inquiries received at the Consumer Hotline for Tourists. (Fig. 4)

(3) Breakdown by country/region of residence

The inquirers can opt to mention their country/region of residence. The breakdown shows that China has the highest number at 93 inquiries, followed by Taiwan and Korea. Australia has the highest number in English speaking countries at 11 inquiries. In addition, inquiries are also received from countries and regions with native languages other than the five supported at the Consumer Hotline for Tourists, but most of them are dealt with in English. (Table 1)

Table 1 Number of inquiries by country of residence / region (n = 195)

Country of Residence	No. of inquiries	Country of Residence	No. of inquiries
China	93	Canada	6
Taiwan	27	Thailand	6
Korea	13	Philippines	2
Australia	11	Belgium	2
Hong Kong	11	United Kingdom	2
United States	7	Others (*)	7
Singapore	6	Unknown	2

*: One each for Israel, India, Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, France and Malaysia

(4) Breakdown by type of products/services

Breaking down inquiries by type of products/services, accommodation facilities was the most common at 49 cases, with many trouble cases related to hotels, traditional Japanese inns, and private lodging house (Accommodation field). Next, 24 cases are related to eating out and meal deliveries, and they include problems about menu descriptions and billed amounts (Eating-out field). In addition, inquiries related to health foods, cosmetics, bags, watches and others were received as trouble cases related to shopping such as quality, returns and refunds (Shopping field). Rental, lease and lending and borrowing are mainly inquiries about car rental. Furthermore, several inquiries about passenger transport services including railways, buses, and air navigation have been received (Transportation field).

There are also complaints about the effects of cosmetic surgeries performed in Japan in the field of Medical care and complaints about guides of sightseeing tours belong to the field of Travel agencies. (Table 2)

(5) Breakdown by products/services and language

Breaking down the number of inquiries by products/services and supported languages, it seems that there is not much difference among countries and regions regarding accommodation facilities and eating out / meal deliveries.

However, the number of inquiries related to shopping such as health foods, cosmetics, bags and watches is mostly in Chinese, so you can see that shopping-related problems mainly occur to Chinese tourists visiting Japan.

Table 2 Number of inquiries by products/services (top 10 items) (n = 195)

	Goods & Services	No. of inquiries
1	Accommodation facilities	49
2	Eating out & meal deliveries	24
3	Health foods	16
4	Rental, lease & lending & borrowing	10
	Medical care	10
6	Cosmetics	9
7	Travel agencies	8
8	Bags	7
	Watches	7
10	Passenger transport services	6

*: □: Shopping field.

Table 3 Number of inquiries by products/services and languages (n =195)

	Accommodation facilities	Eating out & meal deliveries	Health foods	Rental, lease & lending & borrowing	Medical care	Cosmetics	Travel agencies	Bags	Watches	Passenger transport services
English	14	8	0	3	1	0	2	0	1	3
Chinese	26	13	16	7	6	8	4	6	6	1
Korean	3	2	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1
Thai	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vietnamese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Japanese	4	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0

*: ■: Shopping field.

3. Sampling of common inquiries

Inquiries from tourists in Japan are mainly related to consumer problems on a trip, and mainly the four categories of accommodation, eating-out, shopping and transportation are the typical contents of inquiries from tourists in Japan.

(1) Accommodation field

[Case 1] I found a hostel with good reviews and booked the hostel. Actually, the room was too dirty to stay.

I booked a hostel, which was highly rated on the hotel reservation website, for seven nights with six family members. However, as soon as we arrived in Japan and entered the room, we found it had a strong smell of cigarettes and sewage, the sofa was torn, and the electrical outlet was defective. I immediately informed the reservation website and contacted the owner. The owner said that a discount would be applied and asked us to stay. However, the room was much dirtier and smellier compared to what was shown on the reservation website and the condition was not good enough to stay. We did not stay even for one night there and found another hotel. We would like to be refunded the fee for an accommodation that we actually did not use.

(Received in October 2019, Thai)

[Case 2] When we arrived at a private lodging house, the owner was out and there was no way to enter the house. We had to sleep outside.

I booked a private lodging house on a reservation website for a trip of a group of five. The appointed check-in time was between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., but we arrived past 8:00 p.m. due to flight delays. We had informed the owner that we would be late in advance, but when we arrived 30 minutes late, the owner was absent so we could not get the key or contact them. When I contacted the reservation website, I was told that I had to visit there at the

same time the next day so I was forced to sleep in the open that night.

(Received in July 2019, English)

(2) Eating-out field

[Case 3] At a restaurant, I was charged for an expensive cover charge, which was totally unexpected.

After we had dinner for two at a restaurant, we checked the total bill for food and drink, and we found that we were being charged 4,300 yen even though we ordered only for 2,500 yen. I was suspicious and asked for the store manager, and the manager explained that it was for a starter (compulsory). I was familiar with starters, but nothing was explained when I ordered, and it was not listed on the menu. I thought it was quite expensive, but I did not want to have an unpleasant experience while travelling, so I paid and left. However, I really cannot accept that the starter was more expensive than the food expenses, nothing was explained to me and I was charged one-sidedly by them.

(Received in September 2019, Japanese (the country of residence is Korea))

[Case 4] At a Japanese-style bar (izakaya), we ordered 4 portions of hot pot dish, but we were charged for 8 portions.

Last night, I visited an izakaya with a total of ten people and ordered 550-yen hot pots. Before ordering, I asked a floor staff member to confirm if it was okay to have one pot for two people, but my question was not understood because of the language barrier. A Chinese-speaking staff member came from the back and said, "OK." That is why I ordered four hotpots with the total price of slightly more than 2,000 yen. This hot pot dish can be ordered by two or more people at 550 yen per person, and the actual billed amount was 4,400 yen, the amount for eight people. It is unreasonable to be charged the amount for eight people, even after I confirmed with the staff member in Chinese before ordering. Moreover, I feel that the menu in foreign languages at the restaurant shows higher prices than the Japanese one.

(Received in May 2019, Chinese)

[Case 5] After drinking alcohol at a bar in downtown, I was charged a hefty fee.

I visited Japan to watch the Rugby World Cup and was guided by a woman I had just met and visited a bar. I tried to pay by card when leaving the bar, but I was told that there was an error so I paid in cash. I was later charged about 2 million yen by my credit card company.

(Received in October 2019, English)

(3) Shopping Field

[Case 6] I wanted to return a luxury watch to a shop because I found the same product sold at a lower price in another shop, but the seller didn't accept product return.

I bought a luxury watch at a duty-free shop, but I found the same product sold at a lower price at a different shop, so I went back to the shop where I bought the watch the next day and tried to return it, but the shop said that it was impossible to return it at my own convenience.

(Received in January 2019, Chinese)

[Case 7] At a duty-free shop which I was taken to during a packaged tour, a tour guide gave me false information.

A guide in a tour bus gave explanations such as "all Japanese people use this", "the prices are the same no matter where you buy them in Japan", and so immediately, at a duty-free shop I was guided to, I purchased goods including nutritional supplements, an electric facial machine, and facial masks, which are worth about 14,000 yen in total. Later, I found out that most of the products I purchased were sold at much lower prices at other stores than the duty-free shop and that these products are rarely sold to Japanese people but mainly to tourists in Japan. I told the guide that I wanted to return the products, but they told me that it was impossible. What can I do?

(Received in June 2019, Chinese)

[Case 8] A brand cosmetic product I bought seems to be fake. I want to return the product, but the seller doesn't accept product return.

I bought four cosmetic products from a famous Japanese brand at a store in a downtown area that I happened to visit, but two of them were similar to examples of fake products shown on the brand's official website. I was not sure about the remaining cosmetics, but they also seemed to be fake, so I revisited the store and told them that I wanted to return all the cosmetics that I purchased, but they told me that they could not accept the request.

(Received in October 2019, Chinese)

(4) Transportation field

[Case 9] Although I bought rental car insurance, I was told that car damage was not covered by the insurance.

When I returned a rental car I had booked on the internet after using it, I was told that the car had a scratch and I would be charged 30,000 yen for the repair. I told them that I wanted to cover it with the insurance I enrolled into when I signed up for the contract, yet they said that it was impossible as I did not contact the insurance company and the police when I found the scratch. They told me that the content above was explained on the internet. However, there was no face-to-face explanation and the contract was in Japanese, so I could not understand it. I do not want to pay for it.

(Received in June 2019, Chinese)

(5) Others

[Case 10] I received acne scar treatment at a beauty clinic. Even one month thereafter, the scar remains.

I had an operation to treat acne scars at a Japanese beauty treatment clinic, but my face was still scarred. The doctor told me that it would heal in about a month, but dent-like scars on my forehead haven't. I made an inquiry to the clinic via an interpreter and by e-mail, and I was told that I needed to wait another month. In addition, I was told that I could have a treatment again if it did not recover after a month. I think that the remaining dent scars on my forehead may be regarded as a medical accident. I am not convinced with the clinic's insincere attitude.

(Received in September 2019, Chinese)

4. To those planning to visit Japan

(1) Advice on accommodation

Carefully read description on the booking site. Also check the official site and reviews from users.

[Making reservations from accommodation reservation websites]

A lot of inquiries seemingly stem from information displayed on accommodation reservation websites such as cases in which the information displayed on the website and the actual facts were different. When booking an accommodation online, make sure to check caution points, check additional sections which only appear when you click them several times and read them carefully, and reserve it after checking the content of contracts and terms thoroughly. In addition, it is important to keep a screenshot of the reservation page in case you there is a problem about the contents displayed on the website and you need to make a claim for it. If you receive a notification that your reservation has been completed, check the contents carefully.

Inquiries related to cancellation fees are received too. Cancellation fees vary depending on accommodation reservation websites and accommodation terms, so please check the cancellation policy and such before confirming a reservation.

[Guest houses (simple lodging house)]

Multiple inquiries were received in which tourists thought they had booked a hotel but it was actually a guest house, and when they went there, they found that it was a very old building without amenities that general hotels would have, it was too small to stay, it was dirty or there was a sense of unsafety. Unlike hotels, guest houses (simple lodging house) may not offer services that regular hotels would have. If you you make a reservation through an accommodation reservation website, we recommend you to check several websites, their official websites and user reviews before completing your reservation.

In addition, it is impossible to unilaterally cancel your reservation only because the reserved

guest house was dirtier than you imagined. In such cases, file a complaint to the owner of the accommodation first, and if it does not help, ask for help from the accommodation reservation website.

[Minpaku (private lodging house)]

Regarding private lodging house called “Minpaku”, inquiries related to quality have been received such as cases in which dirt and smell were so intense that tourists could not stay at all or the heating system was not working in winter. If you use a reservation website, check the information by referring to multiple reviews. Furthermore, there are cases in which tourists could not stay because they could not get in contact with the owner or receive a key. When it is difficult to solve a problem as you cannot get in contact with the owner, please contact the reservation website. It is also important to contact the owner beforehand and confirm contact means to get in touch with them.

(2) Advice on dining out

① If there's any unclear point at an eating place, confirm it with staff.

[Otoshi (compulsory appetizer)]

In Japan, small dishes may be served before ordering at an izakaya and other types of restaurants. This is called "otoshi" and may be charged when you pay. “Otoshi” works as a seating charge, but if you are charged for anything in addition to the "otoshi” charge or there is any doubt about the charge, confirm with a staff member before paying.

[Ordering hot pot dishes, grilled meat, etc.]

Dishes in which multiple people eat from one plate such as hot pot dishes and grilled meat or course menus may require to order for two or more people even if the menu says "○ yen for a portion for one person". Such notices are often written in small letters, so check the menu description carefully and ask the staff if you have any questions. Also, photos of these dishes may be displayed on the menu, but they do not always show a portion for one person, so you should check it as well.

② Don't follow any tout or puller-in.

[Rip-off bars]

Some inquiries were about tourists paying by credit card at a bar in a downtown area and being charged a very large amount at a later date. Most of these tricks include cases in which tourists were introduced a bar by touts or strangers they just met. In such cases, it is very difficult to recoup the damage amount. Do not enter any bar introduced by touts or strangers in downtown areas under the assumption that Japan is perfectly safe.

(3) Advice on shopping

① Remember that product return is not accepted just for your own reasons.

[Return/refund of products]

In Japan, products purchased at stores cannot be returned or refunded just because you find other stores selling them at lower prices or they look different from what you imagined. You can return a product or get a refund only when there is a problem such as a defect or a false explanation about the product. Please check the quality and price before purchasing something, and ask a staff member if you have any questions or concerns.

② If you want to buy something, it is helpful to check prices of the product beforehand.

[Duty-free shop]

Received inquiries include cases in which a tour guide told tourists that the price was the same wherever they buy it in Japan, and took them to a duty-free shop but later they found that the explanation was false. In Japan, the price of the same product varies from store to store, so you should check other stores as well, search on the internet and compare prices before purchasing it.

[Japanese cosmetics and brand goods]

We have received several inquiries about the authenticity of products. Tourists bought cosmetics made in Japan or brand bags from secondhand shops but they are not sure if they are genuine. Some manufacturers do not sell at non-official retailers. Only manufacturers can judge the authenticity of products, but they do not usually accept requests to verify the authenticity, and it is not easy to actually check if a product is genuine. You need to check the quality of goods carefully before purchasing them at reputable retailers.

(4) Advice on means of mobility

When using a rental car, carefully read a contract beforehand. If there's any unclear point, ask the rental car company about it.

[Car rental]

In the field of car rental, many of the received inquiries are regarding the insurance they enrolled into rent a car and its coverage. Requirements to be covered by insurance and application for compensation are decided by the terms of each car rental company. For example, a requirement may dictate that in case of an accident, you should contact the police and the car rental company immediately on the spot. If you fail to follow the rule, insurance or compensation may not be applied and the actual cost may be charged. The requirements to be covered by insurance, application for compensation and other information are usually explained when you sign up for a contract. If a car rental company does not explain them or you have any questions, ask the company. In addition, there are problems regarding

cancellation fees as well. When renting a car, read the contracts, lending agreements and users' guides thoroughly.

5. Consumer Hotline for Tourists

If you experience consumer detriment while visiting Japan, call the Consumer Hotline for Tourists.

If you see any inbound visitor facing consumer detriment, tell the person to call the Consumer Hotline for Tourists.

Accessible hours:

10:00 to 16:00 on weekdays (closed weekends, national holidays, and Dec. 29 - Jan. 3)

Available languages:

English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese and Japanese

<http://www.kokusen.go.jp/tourists/index.html>

