

Japan aims to lure more Thai, Asean tourists



TOKYO DRIFT: Thai tourists visiting Japan dropped 29% after the tsunami. Photo: YoHandy

JAPAN-bound travelers from Thailand are expected to significantly rise as a result of the visa waiver recently introduced by Japan for those on short-term visits.

Although Japan's tourism industry looks to bounce back after it was hit by a devastating earthquake two years ago and the tsunami that ensued, which claimed many lives, Japan is determined to further boost its tourism industry.

Recently, Japan has announced that Thai passport holders can now enter the country without the hassle of applying for a visa. According to statistics, the number of tourists visiting Japan in 2012 totaled over 8 million, up 34.6% from the previous total of 6.2 million in 2011, when Japan was hit by the earthquake and the tsunami.

The tendency has raised the Japanese government's optimism, prompting it to

set a new target of attracting 18 million tourists by 2016 and 25 million by 2020.

In its new marketing strategy, Japan eyes more tourists from Asean countries, with Thai people on top of the chart, followed by Indians in South Asia, to make up for the decrease in the number of Chinese tourists in 2012.

One of the Japanese government's strategies is to allow Thai and Malaysian passport holders entering the country for a short period without the need to obtain a visa. This policy was announced on the June 11.

Japan has noted with satisfaction a steady rise in the number of Thais visiting the country with 223,200 recorded in 2009 and over 268,400 in 2010. However, the figure dropped by almost 29% in 2011 to 191,209 due to the earthquake and tsunami.

— *National News Bureau of Thailand*

Expatriate retirement: abroad vs home

IF YOU have been an expat for a good portion of your adult or working life, you may be wondering whether to retire abroad or return to your home country to retire.

However, before you decide to become either a permanent expat or a returnee, you will need to take into account the following considerations:

Your Retirement Income

The cost of living "back home" may have risen so much during your time abroad that returning on your retirement income will mean a much lower standard of living.

The good news is that inflation tends to be much lower in developed countries than in the emerging markets that are popular retirement destinations, meaning the low interest rates your investments might be getting right now, and for the foreseeable future, may be enough to at least get by on without many worries.

Moreover, not returning home for some nationalities (British) can mean frozen pension incomes.

Retirement Years

By Don Freeman

Housing Back Home

Even if you have a good retirement income, returning home to a place like San Francisco or London, where housing has gotten very expensive, may not be financially viable without a large mortgage if you did not maintain a residence in such pricey locations.

And having a mortgage as a retiree on a fixed income is usually not a smart financial move.

Tax Home Situation

Living abroad for most retirees who aren't US citizens (and thus subject to worldwide taxation) will likely mean significantly lower taxes.

However, taxes may not matter much when making a decision if you will be on a relatively low fixed or investment income while American retirees have 50 states with 50 different tax regimes to choose from.

Cost of Retirement Visas

Returning to your home country will not require you to tie up potentially large sums of money in retirement visa deposits in

non-home country currencies and pay annual expenses to maintain such visas.

Likewise, there is always the risk of retirement visa rules or requirements changing or becoming more financially onerous — forcing you to leave.

Standard of Living

If you have gotten accustomed to living in places where expats enjoy a very high standard of living (live-in domestic help), returning home will likely be much more of a culture shock. After all, it's usually only the truly rich in developed countries that enjoy live-in domestic help — something that may become more of a necessity rather than a luxury as you get older.

Personal Health

The older you are, the more difficult it will be to buy affordable health insurance as there is usually an age cut-off date while government health care programs for retirees rarely cover citizens when they are living abroad.

A possible compromise might be to retire abroad in an inexpensive location close to your home country (Mexico if you are American or Canadian) so that it's possible to easily return to your



PRIME FACTOR: The map charts the world's cities that have costs of living that are cheap (green) and expensive (red). Source: Expatistan.com

home country for a major and expensive medical emergency.

Climate

Living in places like Thailand where the weather is usually hot and humid, plus there is an annual rainy season, may become harder to bear the older you are while "winter" in the tropics may actually be relatively cold when you consider homes usually don't have central heating of any kind.

On the other hand, if you have spent a good portion of your life abroad in warm tropical climates, you might find returning home

to a northern latitude to be an even more difficult adjustment when you are older.

Family, Friends, Others

If you have been an expat for many years, you may not have many close family or friends left in your home country who can assist you in any way. That could make integrating back into your home country even more difficult as it might be hard to find a social circle of friends you can relate to as you have no doubt missed out on a lot of events and cultural or political changes while living abroad.

Shrimp exports to swell

ACCORDING to representatives from various Thailand-based food export associations, the volume of shrimp exports is expected to increase this year by 40%, while the export value will also swell by 20% due to the appreciation of the baht.

Projections about Thai food exports were presented to Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, who'd chaired a discussion on July 8 with entrepreneurs from the food export and agri-food industries.

In the meeting, the private sector called for the Government to attend to anti-dumping measures,

with parties agreeing to the establishment of public private partnership (PPP) working groups to overlook rules and regulations of food export supply chain and FTA developments that impact the food industry.

The PM was told that exports of frozen chickens this year would reach 620,000 tons with a value of 79 billion baht. This would equate to an increase of 7% from last year; whereas the value of processed food exports was expected to be valued at approximately 180bn baht, which would be about the same as last year.

— *Phuket Gazette*

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