

Chapter 4

INBOUND DEMAND RECOVERY AND TOURISM STRATEGY

Section 1

REVIEWING TEN YEARS OF KANSAI'S TOURISM STRATEGY: THE TOURISM AGENCY'S BUDGET AND LARGE HOTEL CONSTRUCTION TRENDS

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Section 1 reviews 10 years of tourism strategies from the viewpoints of the national government and private sectors, and clarifies the challenges of tourism strategies for the future. Specifically, Subsection 1.1 reviews the budget of Japan Tourism Agency for the past 10 years and discusses the characteristics of the national tourism strategy. In Subsection 1.2, we focus on micro-based hotel construction trends in the Kansai region to extract the characteristics of the response to inbound tourism demand, considering the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the upcoming Osaka-Kansai Expo. While this white paper has focused mainly on the demand side, this section discusses the supply side and sustainability of the tourism industry. Finally, we present a summary of Section 1.

1. Characteristics of the tourism strategy based on a 10-year budget allocation

(1) Budget trends of the Japan Tourism Agency

First, we will examine the Tourism Agency's budget from FY 2014 to FY 2023¹⁾ (Figure 4-1-1).

The budget increased sharply from JPY 9.8 billion in FY 2014 to JPY 20 billion in FY 2016. Looking back at the inbound tourism demand during this period, “Bakugai” (explosive buying) became a social phenomenon in 2014 and

1) The budget amounts are the total of the initial budget, and do not include reconstruction quotas or economic measures.

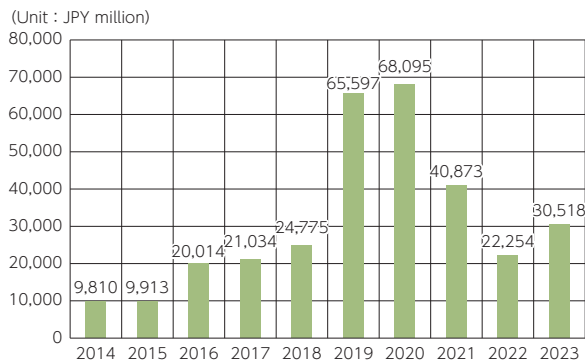


Figure 4-1-1

Trends in Tourism Agency Budget: FY 2014-23

Source: Compiled from Japan Tourism Agency

2015, during which the number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan skyrocketed.

This trend continued after FY 2017, reaching JPY 65.6 billion in FY 2019 and a record high of JPY 68 billion in FY 2020. However, inbound tourism demand disappeared due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the budget fell sharply to JPY 40.9 billion in FY 2021 and JPY 22.3 billion in FY 2022. In FY 2023, the budget increased to JPY 30.5 billion in expectation of a recovery in demand.

The trends in budgets thus indicate a response to the trend of foreign visitors to Japan. Next, we will clarify the characteristics of the budget by purpose.

(2) Characteristics of the budget by purpose

Table 4-1-1 shows the budget allocated for each fiscal year, categorized by purpose. In addition to public relations activities and improvement of the environment for foreign visitors to Japan, the budget also includes items related to SDGs, D&I and DX (Digital Transformation).

Next, Figure 4-1-2 shows the changes in the budget amount by purpose. “Attracting foreign visitors”, promotions targeting foreign countries, accounted for more than 80% of the total budget in FY 2014 and FY 2015.

From FY 2016 to FY 2018, the budget for “Improving the environment for foreign visitors” increased, possibly because local regions were improving their receptions of foreign visitors in response to a steady increase in international tourists. From FY 2019 to FY 2020, there was a large increase in the budget for “regional visitor attraction”. This suggests that the funds were allocated to the discovery and improvement of tourism resources to increase the number of foreign visitors to each region. In FY 2019, there was an increase in the budget for regional development for tourism and DMO”. The increase reflected the reform

Table 4-1-1 Tourism Agency Budget Classified by Purpose

Classification by purpose	Classification Definition
Attracting foreign visitors	Budget related to PR activities for foreign countries
Improving the environment for foreign visitors	Budget for measures to improve the environment for foreign visitors to Japan, such as immigration and tourist information
Attracting foreign visitors to the region	Budget for measures to explore and refine local tourism resources
Tourism development and DMO	Budget for measures to create tourism regions before the institutionalization of DMOs, and for measures to support and reform DMOs
Human Resource Development	Budget for the development of tourism-related human resources, including specialized personnel and interpreters
Accommodations and private lodging	Budget for measures to improve the lodging environment, such as improving the lodging facilities and optimizing the private accommodations
Exchange population	Budget for measures to increase the exchange population with other regions in Japan
Value added and DX	Budget for measures to increase productivity and value added in the tourism sector and support digitalization
SDGs	Budget for the creation of a model for promoting sustainable tourism
D&I	Budget for universal tourism measures
EBPM	Budget related to the collection and analysis of tourism-related data
Others	Budget not applicable to the above
Budget for reconstruction	Budget for reconstruction and promotion of tourism after the Great East Japan Earthquake (separate appropriation)
Economic measures	Budget for measures to support tourism in the COVID-19 pandemic (separate appropriation)

Source: Compiled from Japan Tourism Agency website

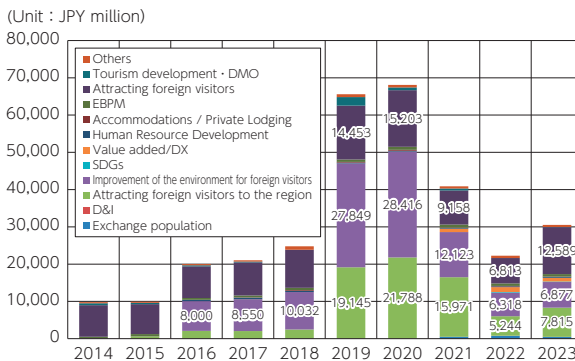


Figure 4-1-2 Budget of Japan Tourism Agency: FY 2014-2023

Source: Compiled based on Japan Tourism Agency

of DMO, which plays a role in tourism regional development, in accordance with word-standard DMO formation²⁾.

From the FY 2021 - to FY 2022, a new category “value added and DX” was established in response to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, anticipating a full-fledged recovery in inbound tourism demand, the budget allocated funds to projects that promote online tourism using DX or create tourism content using digital technology. In FY 2023, a large share of the budget was again allocated to “attracting foreign visitors” in response to the recovery of inbound demand. Utilizing cultural resources to develop tourism contents aiming towards inbound tourism led to a larger budget for “regional tourism promotion” compared to previous fiscal year, indicating that tourism resources were being improved in preparation for the recovery of inbound demand.

The above trends suggest five phases of Japan Tourism Agency’s budget: (1) overseas promotion, (2) improving of the reception environment for inbound tourists, (3) creating local contents, (4) responding to COVID-19, and (5) recovery in inbound tourism demand.

2. COVID-19 pandemic and hotel construction

Subsection 1.1 reviewed the changes in national tourism strategy over the past decade using budget data of the Japan Tourism Agency. Subsection 1.2 draws attention to the private sector. Specifically, we look at how private sectors respond to COVID-19 by focusing on the supply side of hotel construction in the Kansai region.

(1) Planned Construction Costs of Lodging Industry in Kansai

First, let’s review the construction trends of the lodging industry. Table 4-1-2 shows the planned construction cost of accommodation facilities in each of the prefectures in the Kansai region, based on the “Survey of Construction Starts” by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. The estimated cost in Osaka Prefecture increased six-fold from JPY 26.7 billion in 2015 to JPY 154.8 billion in 2017. Similarly, the cost in Kyoto Prefecture increase significantly from JPY 4.9 billion in 2015 to JPY 92.8 billion in 2017. The surge in the construction of accommodation facilities might be due to the aforementioned rapid increase in the number of foreign visitors to Japan triggered by the “bakugai”.

In Osaka Prefecture, the planned amount peaked in 2017 and remained

2) For more information on the government’s DMO policy, refer to the Tourism Chronology.

at the JPY 90 billion level from 2018 to 2019. On the other hand, the planned amount in Kyoto Prefecture peaked in 2018, and reached the same amount as Osaka Prefecture in 2019.

In 2020, the amount decreased in both Osaka and Kyoto prefectures from the previous year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, it increased slightly to JPY 75.1 billion in Osaka Prefecture, but continued to decline further to JPY 13 billion in Kyoto Prefecture.

In 2022, the planned costs significantly decrease to JPY 13.3 billion in Osaka Prefecture, but Kyoto Prefecture increased substantially to JPY 46.2 billion from the previous year. As shown, the planned construction cost reveals the response of the private sectors to inbound tourism demand. In the next subsection, we will examine the response to inbound tourism demand after the COVID-19 pandemic, using microdata on the movements of large-scale hotel construction.

Table 4-1-2 Planned Construction Costs for Buildings in the Lodging Industry: 2011-2022

[Number of building]

Unit : number of building

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Shiga pref.	3	13	4	9	13	8	30	4	4	49	40	80	257
Kyoto pref.	13	9	33	27	35	150	254	265	195	110	21	44	1,156
Osaka pref.	13	18	11	12	29	100	133	85	99	54	27	24	605
Hyogo pref.	17	28	40	24	34	41	68	43	38	40	62	159	594
Nara pref.	10	0	7	5	7	6	22	7	15	7	0	10	96
Wakayama Pref.	22	16	33	31	19	22	22	19	13	10	9	30	246
Total	78	84	128	108	137	327	529	423	364	270	159	347	2,954

[Planned Construction Cost]

Unit : JPY million

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Shiga pref.	564	1,355	57	940	745	3,610	14,033	157	2,337	1,402	789	2,512	28,503
Kyoto pref.	9,963	1,731	18,666	16,680	4,915	32,204	92,837	106,212	91,247	48,974	12,953	46,168	482,550
Osaka pref.	3,385	10,738	13,552	1,948	26,701	77,902	154,810	94,200	89,829	66,711	75,145	13,338	628,258
Hyogo pref.	1,131	1,559	4,473	6,955	11,652	18,895	9,591	27,771	15,564	3,141	4,845	10,579	116,156
Nara pref.	290	0	1,210	1,143	3,511	259	8,212	5,080	6,290	4,515	0	7,508	38,019
Wakayama Pref.	377	460	753	626	516	508	608	479	967	582	2,804	2,938	11,617
Total	15,710	15,843	38,710	28,293	48,040	133,378	280,091	233,898	206,235	125,325	96,537	83,042	1,305,102

Source: Compiled from Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, "Survey of Construction Starts

(2) Inbound tourism demand and hotel construction response

As mentioned earlier, the rapid increase of inbound tourism demand since the mid-2010s has stimulated construction investment in hotels and other accommodation facilities. Here we focus on the trend of hotel construction in the Kansai

region by utilizing APIR’s own survey³⁾. Specifically, we summarize and analyze the number of large-scale hotels that opened in the six prefectures of the Kansai region from 2017 to 2023 and their construction costs. Similar analysis is also conducted for properties scheduled to open by 2026.

Figure 4-1-3 shows the number of new hotel openings in each prefecture. Of the 75 large-scale hotels that have opened or are scheduled to open, Osaka Prefecture accounts for about 51% (38 openings) and Kyoto Prefecture accounts for about 36% (27 openings), making up more than 80% of the Kansai region. Figure 4-1-4 shows the construction cost (estimated) of large-scale hotels. The

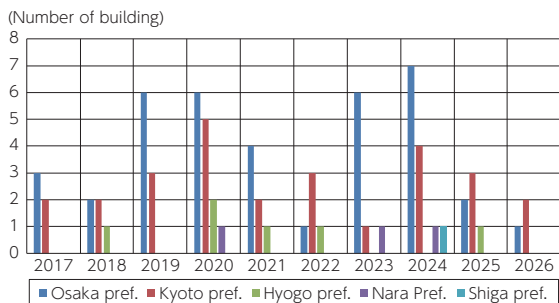


Figure 4-1-3 Number of large-scale hotels opened in Kansai: 2017-2026

Note: Actual opening until 2022; scheduled openings from 2023 onwards.
Source: Compiled by APIR from various press articles

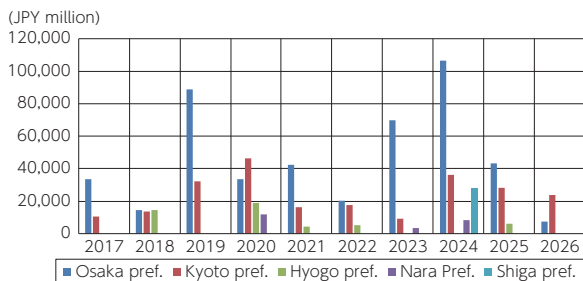


Figure 4-1-4 Trends in construction value of large-scale hotels in Kansai: 2017-2026

Note: Actual openings until 2022; scheduled openings from 2023 onwards.
Source: Compiled by APIR from various press articles

3) Hotels in this study are selected if their estimated construction cost is JPY 4 billion or more and the total floor area is 3,000 tsubo or more. For more details, see Inoue, Nomura and Inada (2023).

total construction cost (JPY 794.6 billion) during this period indicates that Osaka and Kyoto prefectures have by far the largest shares, at 58% and 30%, respectively. In terms of both number and scale, the construction of large-scale hotels is concentrated in Osaka and Kyoto. The geographical distribution in Osaka and Kyoto Prefectures is shown in Reference Figure 4-1-1 below.

(3) Features of Hotel Construction

Next, let us focus on the brand and grades of lodging expense of large-scale hotel construction.

Figure 4-1-5 shows the number of hotels that opened or are scheduled to open between 2017 and 2026, divided into domestic and overseas hotels. the number of large hotels openings (75 openings) peaked in 2020 with 14 openings. Although the COVID-19 pandemic slowed the pace of new openings from 2021 to 2023, the number of new openings is expected to increase again in 2024, with 13 new openings planned in expectation of a recovery from the pandemic. The number of openings of domestic hotels peaked at 10 in 2020, partly due to the pandemic, and has averaged about 4 annually since 2021. On the other hand, while the number of foreign hotels was 4 in 2000 and decreased from 2021 to 2022, it started to increase again in 2023. The number is expected to increase steadily to 9 in 2024 and 5 in 2025.

Figure 4-1-6 shows the trends of hotel construction by grades of lodging expense⁴⁾ (per room per night). Until 2020, the majority of the properties had relatively reasonable rates (B and A). However, as more foreign-brand hotels

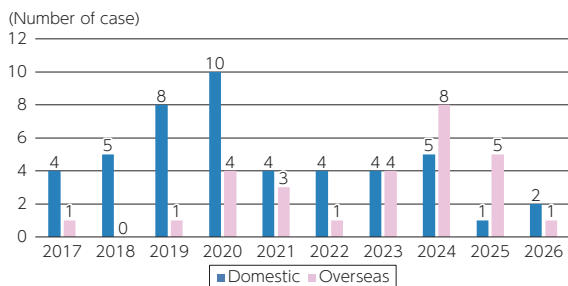


Figure 4-1-5

Hotel openings by brands: 2017-2026

Note: Actual openings until 2022; scheduled openings from 2023 onwards

Source: Compiled by APIR from various press articles

4) The grades of the unit price per night are as follows: B: from about JPY 10,000, A: from about JPY 30,000, S: from about JPY 50,000, and H: from about JPY 100,000.

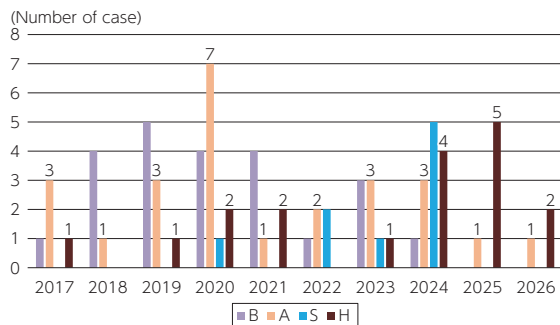


Figure 4-1-6 Hotel construction by grades of lodging expense: 2017-2026

Note: Actual openings until 2022; scheduled openings from 2011 onwards.
Source: Compiled by APIR from various press articles

started to open, the number of hotels with high room rates (S, H) has been increasing since 2023.

Thus, as the number of foreign guests increases, the number of openings also increased steadily at peak at 2020, when the COVID-19 started. Some of the opened hotels were shut down and later transferred to other brands before reopening, while others continued to be built and opened after the construction was suspended.⁵⁾ However, expecting a recovery from the pandemic, overseas top luxury brand and major hotels in Japan continue to steadily build their hotels. Since it takes a minimum of four years from the acquisition of land to the opening for large hotels, many of the hotels scheduled to open around 2024 are probably planning for the Osaka-Kansai Expo. As such, the construction of major hotels in the Kansai region is focusing on quality rather than quantity, in response to the growing number of wealthy foreign visitors.

3. How did the lodging business operators respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?

In June 2019, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 Osaka Summit and invited him to visit Japan. On January 15, 2020, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga headed the 36th meeting of the Tourism Strategy Promotion Council and discussed about “Promoting foreigner-friendly accommodation in rural areas”. The discussion agreed on: 1) the government and

5) For more information on hotel construction trends in the Kansai region, see Tourism Chronology.

financial institutions should cooperate to encourage aggressive capital investment to increase the value added and attractiveness of lodging facilities; 2) the government should promote multilingualization and the separation of lodging and food services.

Many lodging businesses had been optimistic about the bright future of the industry and invested aggressively. However, Japan was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic as cherry blossoms were blooming, and “state of emergency” and “Priority measures to prevent the spread” were repeatedly issued and lifted from April 2020 to until March 2022. How did domestic lodging businesses respond to this unprecedented crisis situation?

Because of the pandemic, hotels were forced out of business, or had their properties sold and rebranded by other firms. Some suspended constructions or delayed their opening. On the other hand, some business owners looked towards the post-COVID and continued to invest steadily in construction and make new developments. The followings are some notable examples.

(1) Examples of well-established and emerging businesses affected by the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic

Fujita Kanko

Originating from the Fujita zaibatsu established in 1869, Fujita Kanko is a prominent lodging business that owns 62 hotels domestic and abroad (as of August 2023), including the Chinzanso, Kowakien, and Washington Hotel. In June 2019, the historic banquet facility Taikoen, which had been used as guesthouse during the G20 Osaka Summit, faced several closures and openings due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a significant decline in demand for weddings and banquets. In June 2021, the establishment ended its operation. By selling the assets, Fujita Kanko managed to improve its deteriorating financial situation.

Meanwhile, a new brand “Hotel Tabinos” with a “MANGA” motif was developed in Hamamatsu-cho, Asakusa, and Kyoto from 2019 to 2021. The once out of business Hotel Kirara Resort Kanku was also reopened as Kanku Izumiotsu Washington Hotel in 2021. Similarly, the Hakone Hotel Kowakien, which was closed down in 2018 due to deterioration, was rebuilt and reopened in July 2023.

White Bear Family.

White Bear Family went bankrupt in 2020 with the largest debt in the travel and lodging industry (total debt of the three companies exceeded JPY 51 billion). The company as a travel planner and travel agency since 1977, based in Hyogo Prefecture. From 2004, starting in Okinawa and then expanding national wide, it operated 27 hotels, including the Hotel WBF. In January 2020, the company

opened its first large-scale project, the 400-room WBF Shin-Osaka Sky Tower, but the hotel operator (WBF Hotel & Resort) went bankrupt in April. The hotel was then sold to APA Group in June and reopened as APA Hotel Shin-Osaka Station Tower (case 1).

In August 2020, Hoshino Resort initiated rehabilitation plan after concluding a share transfer agreement to acquire the White Bear Family and hotel management company (WBF Hotel & Resort), which were in the process of applying for the Civil Rehabilitation Law. About 350 employees transferred to the new Hoshino Resort subsidiary and continued to operate the hotel. Meanwhile, construction of the WBF Grande Kansai Airport (case 2), which was suspended due to the pandemic, was resumed by Hoshino Resort and opened in 2023 as the OMO Kansai Airport (700 rooms). In October 2021, the company completed the civil rehabilitation proceeding, sold its hotel division, and restarted its core business of travel planning and sales agency (Table 4-1-3).

Table 4-1-3

Examples of hotels that abandoned continued operations and rebranded

Case number	Opening name	Operator (Brand)	Operator at time of construction	Date of opening	Properties (<Reference> Press Release/Home Page/ Newspaper Report)
①	Hotel WBF Shin-Osaka SKYTOWER ⇒APA Hhotel Shin-Osaka Eki Tower	WBF Hotels & Resorts ⇒APA Hotel (20/6~)	White Bear Family Co., Ltd	2020/1	The 32-story building is the highest in the Shin-Osaka area. There is an observation restaurant and a rooftop bar on the rooftop with a spectacular view of central Osaka. Closed due to COVID-19 pandemic; reopening as APA Hotel in June 2020.
②	(計画時) Hotel WBF Grande Kansai International Airport OMO Kansai Airport	Hoshino Resorts	White Bear Family Co., Ltd	2023/3	Largest hotel development in "Rinku Town" by WBF in 2018. Construction was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After Hoshino Resort acquired the property, construction resumed and the hotel opened under the "OMO" brand.
③	Hotel WBF ⇒OMO3 Kyoto Toji	WBF Hotels & Resorts ⇒Hoshino Resorts (21/6~)	White Bear Family Co., Ltd	2019/10	Within walking distance of Toji Temple, a World Heritage Site. The hotel will be closed in June 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will reopen in April 2009 under the brand "OMO3".

(2) New developments by APA Hotel and Hoshino Resort, while facing the setbacks by COVID-19 pandemic

APA Hotel.

APA Hotel operates 737 hotels domestic and abroad (as of August 2023), including franchised hotels, and 43 of them were repurposed as “hotels for people with minor symptoms of COVID-19” (as of August 2009, according to Airstair). Opened in 2019, the APA Hotel & Resort (Yokohama Bay Tower), boasting the largest number of rooms for one hotel building in Japan with 2311 rooms, was repurposed as “hotels for people with minor symptoms of COVID-19” in response to the requests from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and Prefecture. Such repurposed properties and deteriorating properties were then renewed and reopened one after another. As a result, the number of hotels had increased by approximately 17% over the past two years, from 583 hotels (95,130 rooms) in January 2020 to 683 hotels (105,290 rooms) in January 2022 (according to figures published in the company’s news release).

Case study of Hoshino Resort.

In Kansai, before the COVID-19, Hoshino Resort only had “Hoshinoya Kyoto” (formerly known as “Arashiyama Onsen Rankyokan”), which was bought and renovated by Hoshino Resort in 2009. In 2021, other than the “Hotel WBF Kyoto Toji (case 3)” in Kyoto City from WBF, it acquired properties that were closed or were completed but could not be opened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including two from “OMO5” before reopening as “OMO3” hotel. In Osaka City, it opened a new large-scale property, “OMO7 Shin-Imamiya (case 4)” (436 rooms), in 2022. Currently in 2023, after rebranding part of the Hyatt Regency Osaka (currently Grand Prince Hotel Osaka Bay) (64 rooms on 4 floors) to “Resonare Osaka”, and acquiring “OMO Kansai Airport” from WBF, the company increased its number of hotels to the total of 7 in Kansai, 4 in Kyoto and 3 in Osaka.

During the unprecedented crisis situation from April 2020 to March 2022, APA Hotels and Hoshino Resort responded flexibly and continued to increase their number of guest rooms. Both brands also have planned to capture the inbound visitors to Japan after the pandemic (Table 4-1-4).

Table 4-1-4 New large properties built by Hoshino Resort and APA Hotel

Case number	Opening name	Operator (Brand)	Operator at time of construction	Date of opening	Start of construction	Properties (<Reference> Press Release/Home Page/ Newspaper Report)
④	OMO7 Osaka	Hoshino Resorts	Shin-Imamiya Development Special Purpose Company	2022/4	2019/6	OMO Ranger will guide you to the Shinsekai area, where you will have a unique encounter. Guests can interact with each other in the common space.
⑤	APA Hotel & Resort Midouji Hommachi Eki Tower	APA Hotel	APA apartment	2019/12	2017/6	APA Hotel has the largest number of guest rooms in western Japan (at the time of opening). The hotel has the latest specifications of the company's new urban hotels, with a large indoor and outdoor bath and an outdoor terrace pool, providing a resort-like atmosphere.
⑥	APA Hotel & Resort Osaka Umeda Eki Tower	APA Hotel	APA Home	2023/2	2020/8	A new landmark tower in the Umeda area of Osaka, with an observation restaurant and swimming pool on the top floor, as well as a large public bath and open-air bath facilities, providing a resort-like atmosphere while remaining in the city.
⑦	APA Hotel & Resort Osaka Namba Eki Tower	APA Hotel	APA Home APA apartment	2024/10	2022/3	APA Hotel, a high-rise tower with the largest number of guest rooms in western Japan. Aiming to become a new landmark in the Namba area as an "urban resort" where guests can enjoy their stay, including a restaurant and swimming pool on the top floor.

4. Summary

We have reviewed 10 years of tourism strategies in Japan and analyzed trends in hotel construction to determine the characteristics of how lodging business operators were responding to changes in inbound tourism demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the forthcoming Osaka-Kansai Expo. The results can be summarized as follows.

The Tourism Agency's budget indicates that before the rapid increase in the number of foreign visitors to Japan, most of the allocation was for overseas PR. However, after 2014, in order to cope with the rapid increase in the number of foreign visitors to Japan, the budget was reallocated to focus on improving the reception environment of tourist destinations in response to jump in the number of inbound tourists. From 2018, as the number of foreign visitors to Japan had been increasing steadily, the budget was focusing on discovering local tourism

resources to draw visitors to regions outside of urban areas. However, after 2020, the budget is allocated to Tourism DX, SDGs, and D&I in response to the changes caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding the hotel construction trend in the Kansai, the number of lodging facilities had been steadily increasing, especially in Osaka and Kyoto prefectures, following the increase in the number of foreign visitors. However, after 2020, hotel construction projects came to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Expecting the recovery in inbound tourism demand and the Osaka-Kansai Expo, hotels with high rates per night are now being constructed not only in Osaka and Kyoto prefectures, but also in other prefectures.⁶⁾

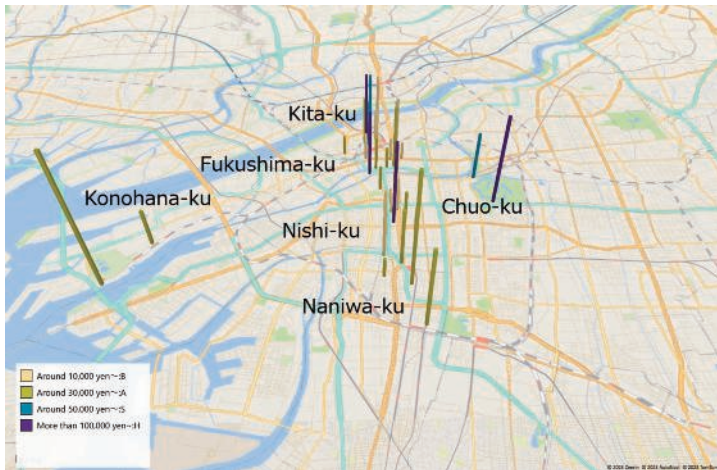
After the pandemic started in 2020, many large hotels have opened. As a result, several hotels went out of business or were acquired by other companies; while others suspended their construction or delayed their opening. Among them, APA Hotel continued to operate by converting a number of its properties into “hotels for people with minor symptoms of COVID-19”. On the other hand, Hoshino Resort acquired properties that were closed or under construction, and put the hotel operations and employees under its management. APA Hotel and Hoshino Resort have increased the number of guest rooms while responding flexibly to the pandemic, and have begun to steadily attract not only domestic guests but also the resumed inbound foreign visitors to Japan.

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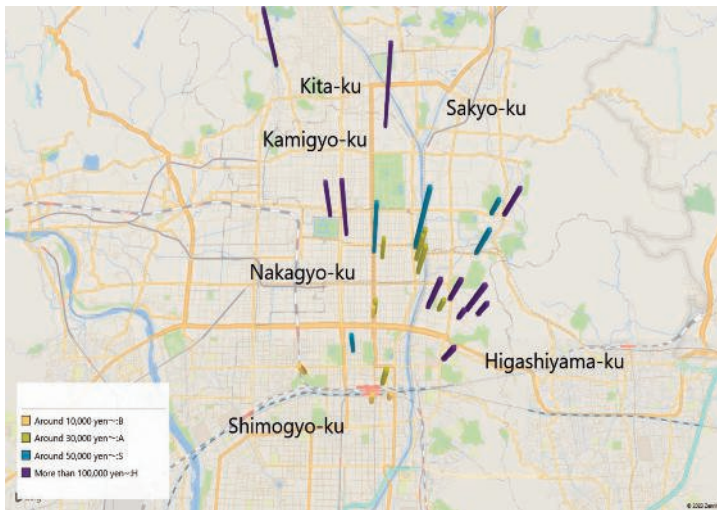
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6) For more information on large hotel construction projects, see the Tourism Chronology section of this publication.

Osaka city : 37



Kyoto city : 27



Reference Figure 4-1-1

Hotel Construction Map 2017-26: Osaka City and Kyoto City

Note: The height of the bar indicates the construction project cost of the hotel in question in Reference Charts 1.1 and 1.2, and the color indicates the grade of lodging cost.