

Polish tourists in Ise

ポーランド人の観光客と伊勢

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The Grand Shrine of Ise is well-known throughout Japan as a sacred place with long history and rich culture. Since the ancient times its connection with the capital city of Nara and later, from the ninth century onward – Kyoto, was very complex and strong. The Grand Shrine has been visited by the emperors and shoguns. Pilgrimage to Ise became such a crucial part of the Edo period culture that a saying was coined: *one who has never been to Ise is not a human*.

Though not on such a large scale, in contemporary Japan people still pilgrimage to the Grand Shrine of Ise. Also, in recent years the city itself has become a popular tourist spot. According to the statistics, the number of tourists visiting Ise in the last twenty years has been steadily growing, to reach its peak last year (over 14 200 000 visitors in 2013), when the *shikinensengu* took place. However, in comparison, the number of foreigners who visited Ise in 2013 is very low, for a little over 40 000; and among those the number of Europeans and Americans is lower still. That being said, it is safe to assume that Poles who visit Ise are very few and far between.

There are many reasons why that is a case. For one, there are not so many Polish people travelling to Japan in the first place. The distance between our two countries is vast and, since there are no direct flights from Warsaw to Tokyo (nor from any other Polish city to Japan), the journey from Poland takes even more time than it should. Because of that Poles tend to choose European countries as a destination for their holiday trips, rather than far-away Japan.

Still, there are some people who does not care about the distance and want to travel to Japan anyway. They usually decide to buy a package tour from a travel agency, since it enables people to visit many places in a short period of time. Also, it seems like the safest option, because should a problem arise, there would a guide to take care of it. The majority of package tours offered by popular Polish travel agencies (such as Rainbow Tours, Logos Tour, Itaka) include sightseeing of Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, Osaka and Hiroshima, but not of Mie Prefecture. Those few that do include sightseeing of Mie Prefecture, however, offer a visit to the Mikimoto Pearl Island, but not the Grand Shrine of Ise. Among the package tours offered by the above-mentioned travel agencies, I found only one that included a visit to the Grand Shrine of Ise.

Of course, some people decide to travel to Japan on their own. While planning their journey, they often look up the UNESCO World Heritage List for interesting places to visit, thus they go and sightsee places like Kyoto, Nara, Nikko or Himeji. Ise is not really well-known overseas, so only those few Polish people who took their time to study history and culture of Japan in depth before going on the journey, decide to visit the Grand Shrine.

In order to attract tourists from abroad, the city of Ise needs more publicity. Establishing contact with foreign travel agencies would pay off as well. Personally, I wonder whether it would be possible to add not the Shrine itself, but the very act of rebuilding it every twenty years to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural List.

伊勢は歴史が長く、文化も豊かな町です。最近、伊勢を訪れる人の数は年々増加しています。去年、式年遷宮が実施されたこともあり、観光客の数は過去最高となり、およそ1420万人になりました。しかし、その中で海外から来た観光客の数は4万人程度に過ぎなかったのです。そして、ほとんどの外国人観光客の多くは、韓国や中国出身の人々でした。欧米人が訪れる数はもともと少ないので、ポーランド人はほとんど伊勢に来たことがないように思います。それは、なぜかと考えてみましたら、さまざまな理由が出てきました。

そもそも日本を訪問するポーランド人の数自体が少ないことが、一番大きな理由のように思います。仕方がないことですが、ポーランドから日本にいたるまでの道のりは、とても時間がかかります。ポーランドから日本への直行便がないので、日本への旅は長く、敬遠されます。

多くの場合、日本を訪れるポーランド人は旅行会社でパッケージツアーを申し込みます。「Logos Tour」や「Rainbow Tours」や「Itaka」などポーランドで有名な旅行会社は、日本へのパッケージツアーを販売しますが、その典型的なツアーでは、東京・京都・奈良・大阪・広島を訪れます。なかには「志摩半島」を含むパッケージツアーもありますが、見の目当ては「伊勢神宮」ではなく、「鳥羽の海女」です。「伊勢神宮」は、三つ大手旅行会社の商品のなかで、ただ一つ販売されています。

また、パッケージツアーではなく、自由行動で日本を訪れるポーランド人は、必ず京都・奈良・姫路・日光などの UNESCO 世界遺産のリストに登録された場所を見学します。海外で知られていない伊勢に足を運ぶことはまずありません。

伊勢神宮は二十年ごとに新しく建てられるので、世界遺産のリストに登録することができません。しかし、伊勢神宮を自然遺産としてではなく、式年遷宮という行事で文化遺産として認められるとしたら、それは海外で伊勢市の知名度をあげることになります。。