

## Inbound tourism at Kamikochi from a national park gateway perspective.

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**1. Introduction.** Kamikochi is an Alpine valley (alt. 1500m) flanked by 3000m mountains. The number of annual visits to this national park hub, which attracts tourists, day hikers and mountain climbers, was estimated at 1.5 million in 2008, but it is in decline. Inbound visitors are seen as a potential growth segment, but no previous research has investigated the demography or characteristics of Kamikochi's international visitor market.

**2. Research method and aim.** Surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted during summer 2010, a year of stabilization for tourism prior to the 3-11 disaster. A total of 188 questionnaires were collected at Kamikochi (n=74), and its two gateways of Matsumoto (n=72) and Takayama (n=42). After first analysing tourist demography, the second aim was to identify Kamikochi's positioning in circuit travel around East and West Japan.

### **3. Results and conclusions.**

i) **Demography;** results showed that almost 40% were repeat visitors to Japan, with >50% at Kamikochi. In terms of their purpose in visiting Japan, there were more holiday-makers at Takayama, over 80% of whom were staying in Japan for 2-3 weeks. There were more business visitors at Kamikochi, and to a lesser extent, Matsumoto, where visitors tended to stay longer or be currently living in Japan. One quarter of all- and one third of Kamikochi- visitors were currently living in Japan, with some degree of language ability.

ii) **Circuit travel;** many Takayama (>60%) and Matsumoto (>50%) visitors stayed  $\geq 2$  nights, but at Kamikochi day-trips from the gateways (Takayama and Matsumoto) were most common (>40%). Takayama visitors formed a circuit with Kanazawa and Kyoto, but also came from Tokyo due to the high use rate of the JR pass (90%). The most common circuit for Matsumoto visitors was Tokyo. Interview results suggest the trend for longer stays at the external gateways may be influenced by accommodation pricing and guidebook information.

**4. Discussion.** As the increasingly international face of Kamikochi's visitor market demonstrates, national park management faces new challenges. An understanding of gateways and circuit travel is vital for marketing parks, as well as providing the basis for visitor flow mitigation. Ultimately, addressing such underlying challenges requires a more flexible, collaborative form of management that can respond to changes in visitor demand.

**Key words :** Kamikochi, national park, gateway, inbound tourism.

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