

Kyoto to increase hotel taxes for tourists

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Kyoto, Japan : Authorities in Kyoto have announced plans to significantly increase hotel lodging taxes as the city seeks to address local concerns over the growing number of tourists.

Since the pandemic, Japan has seen a surge in foreign visitors, with numbers in 2024 expected to exceed 35 million, setting a new record.

However, this influx is not universally welcomed, particularly in tradition-rich Kyoto, renowned for its kimono-clad geisha and Buddhist temples. Similar to other global tourist hotspots like Venice and Thailand's Maya Bay, the rise in visitors has sparked local grievances.

Under the new tax plan, visitors staying in rooms priced between 20,000-50,000 yen (\$127-\$317) per night will see their tax doubled to 1,000 yen (\$6.35) per person, per night.

For accommodation over 100,000 yen per night it will soar tenfold to

10,000 yen. The new levies will take effect next year, subject to approval from the city assembly.

"We intend to hike accommodation tax to realise 'sustainable tourism' with a high level of satisfaction for citizens, tourists and businesses," a statement said.

From Tokyo to Osaka and Fukuoka, major metropolises already levy tourists a few hundred yen per night for accommodation.

Kyoto residents have complained of tourists harassing the geisha like paparazzi in their frenzy for photos to wow their Instagram followers.

Tensions are highest in the Gion district, home to teahouses where "geiko" -- the local name for geisha -- and their "maiko" apprentices perform traditional dances and play instruments.

Last year authorities moved to ban visitors from entering certain narrow private alleys in Gion after pressure from a council of local residents.

One member previously told Japanese media about an instance of a maiko's kimono being torn and another who had a cigarette butt put in the collar of her pristine outfit.

In 2019, the Gion district council put up signs saying "no photography on private roads" warning of fines of up to 10,000 yen.

According to a recent survey, Kyoto residents are also unhappy about traffic congestion and misbehaviour by travellers.

- Fuji blocked -

Tourists have been flocking to Japan since the lifting of pandemic restrictions, attracted by its sights, culture, nature and also the weak yen.

Authorities have also taken steps beyond Kyoto, including introducing an entry fee and a daily cap on the number of hikers climbing the famous Mount Fuji.

This appeared to work, with preliminary figures showing the number of climbers down by 14 percent in the summer hiking season from July to September last year.

Last year a barrier was briefly erected outside a convenience store with a spectacular view of Mount Fuji that had become a magnet for photo-hungry visitors.

And in December Ginzan Onsen, a Japanese hot spring town popular for its photogenic snowy scenes began a trial scheme of limiting entry to day-trippers.

Only people staying at local hotels are allowed to enter the town after 8:00 pm, while those wishing to visit between 5:00 pm and 8:00 pm will need a reservation.

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