

Efforts made by Saga Prefecture to attract tourists from Thailand

Saga Prefecture



Background and motivation for commencing the project

In 2005, the Saga Prefecture Film Commission was established as a targeted measure with incentives to attract visitors from South Korea and China in the beginning, but as many regional governments were also taking a similar approach, the project was unsuccessful. Under these unfavourable circumstances, from July 2013, visa requirements for tourists visiting Japan from Thailand were eased. Additionally, along with economic growth in recent years, there are direct flights from Thailand to Fukuoka Airport which is near Saga. This has made it easier for those travelling to Japan, so Saga Prefecture considered a different target group, putting in effort to attract tourists from Thailand instead.

Project Aims

To attract tourists from overseas to solve the economic issues caused by population decline in Saga Prefecture

To raise awareness of Saga Prefecture in Thailand

Project Outline

The Saga Prefecture Film Commission collected information on Thai movies and dramas to develop location tourism. In addition to conducting interviews with coordinators and travel agencies for Thai movies and dramas, the commission also received information on Thai movies and dramas from the Japan Film Commission.

Since the production itself must be a hit in order to increase awareness and attract tourists, the Commission researched on producers, award-winning directors and popular actors with a proven track record in Thai film and drama production. They made an appointment with Thai cinema's renowned director, Nimibutr, and based on the information obtained from their research, Saga Prefecture emphasised on creating a support system that would present locations suited to the director's needs and reduce filming costs. This led to an agreement to shoot a film in Saga Prefecture.

Measures were implemented right from the beginning of shooting, all the way to promotion of the film. During filming, Saga Prefecture began creating a tourist guidebook featuring the leading actress, amongst efforts made in cooperation with Saga Prefecture's Tourism Division.

Saga Prefecture's Tourism Division carried out a tourism promotion campaign for Saga Prefecture in Thailand in conjunction with the film's release.



Tourism pamphlet tailored to Thai Visitors

Features and Innovations

Saga Prefecture did not simply promote or push what they wanted, rather they gathered information about what the other party was seeking and sought a location within in Saga Prefecture that matched that image to make a proposal suited to the other party's needs.

Classic images typical of Japan (cherry blossoms, shrines, snow, ninjas) can be found in Saga without having to go to Tokyo or Kyoto, meaning the high cost of hotels and filming equipment and overall high prices of cities could be avoided.

Since the production team visiting Saga was unfamiliar with filming overseas, Saga Prefecture scheduled various arrangements such as obtaining filming permits and obtaining visas for filming in Japan.

When the film was released, the Tourism Division of Saga Prefecture went all out with promoting tourism, which resulted in a significant increase in visitors.

At the film's premier, the Saga Prefecture Tourism Division staff went on stage to promote Saga Prefecture. At a Saga Prefecture travel and tourism event held in Thailand, they invited the movie director as a guest, and had him speak about the good points of Saga Prefecture, and the event was successful.

Results of the Project

<Quantitative Result>

(2013 → 2014) Thai visitors (that stayed at least a day) in Saga quadrupled compared to the previous year.

(2014 → 2015) Thai visitors to Saga (that stayed at least a day) multiplied 3 times compared to the previous year.

(2013 → 2019) Thai visitors to Saga (that stayed at

least a day) multiplied 25 times in 6 years.

<Qualitative Result>

- By preparing for tourism promotion from the time of filming, it led to successful tourism promotion at a movie company-sponsored screening event in which many media participated.
- Awareness of hospitality towards Thai tourists in the prefecture has increased, i.e. through learning Thai greetings and adding Thai to signs at shopping streets etc.
- At Yutoku Inari Shrine in Kashima City, there are as many as 200 Thai visitors on a busy day, so that resulted in the first Thai language omikuji (fortune reading slip) and ema (a wooden plaque to write down your wishes) to ever be created in Japan.
- Energy to welcome Thai people is increasing, through, for example, more events are held to introduce Thai culture within Saga Prefecture.
- The Thai archery team at the Tokyo Olympics held their training camp in Saga Prefecture, thanks to the connection Saga Prefecture gained with Thailand through film production.



Visitors from Thailand (Yutoku Inari Shrine)

Issues, Problems and Responses

<Issue 1>

Saga Prefecture is not well known, and foreign tourists entering Japan from Fukuoka Airport tend to visit other better-known prefectures making it easy for them to travel without stopping in Saga

Prefecture.

<Issue 2>

Location tourism makes it relatively easy to produce results in a short period of time. However, it is important to ensure that visitors will continue to come even after the hype has passed.

<Response>

When the Saga Prefecture Film Commission started its activities, it targeted South Korea and China, following the success stories of other prefectures. But with so much competition, attracting tourists from South Korea and China was difficult, hence Saga Prefecture decided to switch to targeting Thailand instead (where visa requirements to enter Japan were being eased) as their main target, while continuing to promote themselves to Korea and China.

Through the cooperation of the Film Commission and the Saga Prefecture Tourism Division, Saga Prefecture was able to implement a successful tourism promotion campaign..

Future Developments (expected effects and project vision and issues)

<Business Outlook>

Overseas tourists using Fukuoka Airport tend to return to Fukuoka Prefecture without staying overnight in Saga Prefecture after visiting filming locations. Moving forward, efforts will be taken to increase the time visitors spend in Saga Prefecture. Additionally, as the number of individual travellers is increasing, it is necessary to create an environment that makes travel easier for those travelling on their own.

<Issues>

Improved transportation (access to accommodation and sightseeing spots, etc.), multilingual guidebooks, improved destination materials.

Reference URL

<https://www.saga-fc.jp/>

<https://www.asobo-saga.jp/th/>

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