

ACCESS TO THE HISTORICAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE IN JAPAN

HIDETO KIJIMA

Japan Accessible Tourism Center / Osaka, Japan

mail@japan-accessible.com

SUMMARY

Today the concerning about accessible tourism in Japan changed for the better. Making it accessible is one of the most important issues in each tourist spot. Historical and natural heritage are impossible to improve, they thought. However some of them made great efforts and now it changed wheelchair accessible. We must keep them originally. Otherwise the interest and value of them are lost, if the facility became accessible. How can we keep its original landscape ? We want to share Japanese ideas and examples.

Making the access road to historical heritage for wheelchair or mobility impairment seems not so difficult. In many cases, they have a special road for VIP or road for fire truck. The roads are hidden on backyard and closed to public. Today they open for wheelchair guests. The accessibility of entering and watching the historical heritage is different in each place. Buy very famous heritage tend to change it accessible even if they break some historical building. They decided the accessibility (publicness) is more important. Many people come means that many person with disability come.

Wooden board walk is one of nice ideas for the access to natural heritage. It is universal design. Kind for everybody (wheelchair, baby baggy, elderly, children, and environment) and safety. But we cannot change all the nature. If do so, the nature changes not nature. The accessible facility and service are just for beginner. It is impossible to change all accessible in natural heritage. Many routes mean good accessibility. Guests may choose the way in their level. Beginner route should be accessible at least.

Key Words:

accessible tourism; heritage; wheelchair access; rebuilding; Aging society

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

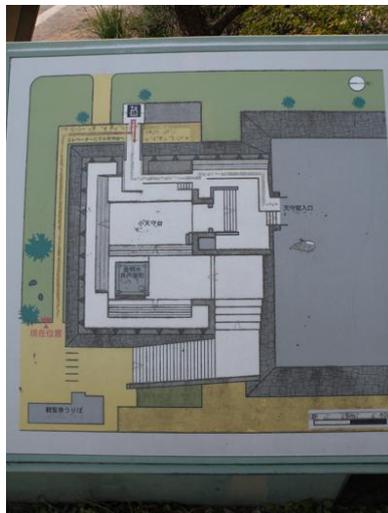
It is often said that wheelchair accessibility is impossible because of old buildings and heritage. But here are some success examples.

METHODS

The researches were done by manual wheelchair users. 8 heritage cases (Osaka castle, Miyajima, Isumo shrine, Tokyo Asakusa Sensoji temple, Nagano Zenkoji temple, Nara Yakushiji temple, Shiretoko five lakes, independence board walk, Nachi waterfall, Takayama old city). .

EXAMPLE

Osaka castle : was rebuilt using steel frame in 1931 after war age damage. The lifts of inside castle were also made on that time, however there were many stairs to enter the castle In 1997, new lift for wheelchair users and elderly was made beside the castle. Today, all can reach on the top floor. Guests can use the lifts, but one way to the top. They are not allowed to use go down. When wheelchair guests comes, the worker tell them the secret cord of button. Castle park are also full wheelchair friendly without any step. There are many castles in Japan. Only Two castles (Osaka, Nagoya) are wheelchair accessible. Both are restored castle last 100 years. The other castles are made by woods and some keep originality. It is very difficult to rebuild and change. Keeping tradition is important. This is a special case, but good case.



Miyajima : is one of the most popular tourist place in Japan. It is like floating on the sea. There were stairs at entrance before. Today there is a ramp. The sign board is quite kind for wheelchair guests because many shrines often are not wheelchair accessible. Natural wooden ramps at gates do not destroy beautiful historical heritage. The ramp is also available at exit. Fortunately inside shrine is very flat and ground floor only.



Izumo shrine : is the oldest shrine in Japan. Originally many barriers for wheelchair, but today it changed accessible. Only stairs to the sacred place. There are many ramps and boards naturally. Sounding gravel road changed partly smooth. They tried to keep landscape.



Tokyo Asakusa Sensoji : is the most popular tourist spot for foreign tourist in Toyo. Their lift of main temple is decorated the same deep red color and with the same traditional tiled roof. Good design lift does not destroy landscape.

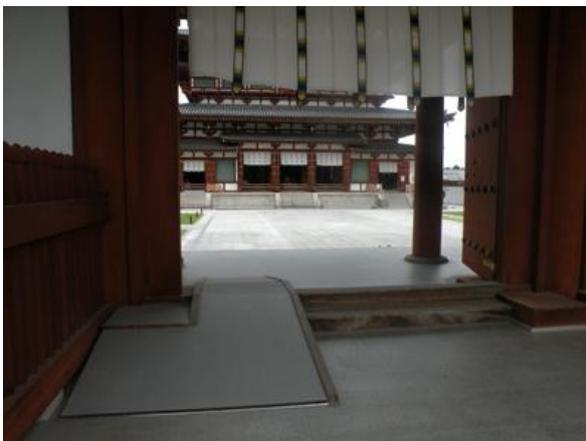


Nagano Zenkoji temple : Nagano Olympic and Paralympics game was held in 1998. Zenkoji is the symbole of city. The temple did not want to make a ramp. The compromise point is ramp made by wood and not put in front. This is the first case of historical temple made a ramp of their traditional main building. Evaluation of the citizens was very good. Accessibility is not only people with disability. Elderly and their family are also happy. After this case, other famous historical temples changed their mind to think accessibility.





Nara Yakushiji temple : was selected UNESCO world heritage in 1998. They changed wheelchair accessible, but their ramps seems not cool. Some new facility destroyed landscape and traditional architecture. Also there are many huge wheelchair sign. The ramps are not natural. They seem like a hospital or nursery home. Not good example. Sometime happen.



Shieretoko five lakes: are located east Hokkaido (north Japan). UNESCO world natural heritage. Trekking around lakes in wood is main attraction. 2 trekking course. Green one is back country with guide. Red one is easy and wheelchair accessible. This wooden walk protects wild bears and deer. 2 meter high. 800 meter long, 3 viewing spots. Electric line with a high voltage. Construction cost was 800 million yen (= 100 million US\$). 1 meter wooden path costs 1 million US\$. Many materials were brought by helicopter to protect nature. Perfect facility, but too much construction cost.



Independence board walk : is accessible wooden path in nature. It costs less than 1/10. Basically, the budget is from donation and volunteer work. One wooden board (20cm*150cm) price is 500-1000yen (=10US\$). The donor put their message and put it by themselves. All materials are made by natural products. Hundreds years late, they return to nature. The process of making this path means education and event. Original idea is from Colorado, USA. Everybody can walk and feel nature. If public authorities make a wooden path, they built high fence. Children and wheelchair users cannot enjoy seeing around because the high fence interfere their sight. It is difficult to make a line between safety and fun. These path are really exciting and adventurous



Nachi waterfall : is holly place since ancient time. 133m water fall and deep forest. The approach is with many stairs. There is another secret route to the water fall. Non-step, but we must go through the locked gate. This secret route is also used by royal family and VIP. Many temples and shrine have a secret route for VIP or car access. However the information is hidden. No sign here Nachi waterfall. A kind local taxi driver taught us the secret gate. Changing main approach is not easy because of historical heritage. However, if they have a wheelchair accessible route, please open it. Information is important.



Takayama old city : is famous for its accessibility and hospitality, located deep mountain area. Typical Japanese traditional houses still remain. The city welcome over sea tourist, guests with disabilities and elderly. They get ideas and opinions from monitor system. There are many bench for elderly and public toilets with wheelchair bigger one. in old city. Also no cars in day time. In Japan, prohibiting cars out from city center is very difficult. Takayama city is rare case and they succeed to be a popular tourist city. All the shops put their original wood or stone board on ditch. They try making accessible as possible as they can.



DISCUSSION

How do we keep their original architecture and landscape ? The balance between originality and accessibility is not easy, but many ways.

CONCLUSION

It was often said that historical and natural heritage were not possible to rebuild wheelchair accessible. However the thinking changed. We have many good examples today in Japan. Each place has each solution to protect heritage. Yes it is possible.

Accessibility is one of customer service. Thinking about accessibility lifts up the whole customer service level. Accessibility is essential minimum guaranteed today. All the people should be able to access heritage as possible.

REFERENCES

Japan Accessible Tourism Center

<http://www.japan-accessible.com/>