

The Historical Development of Japanese Tourism

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INTRODUCTION

This paper offers a detailed narrative of the development of Japanese travel and tourism from its beginnings as religious pilgrimage to the birth of the modern tourism era in 1964, when the global spectacle of the Tokyo Olympics prompted the Japanese government to remove all restrictions on overseas travel. In accessing both Japanese- and English-language materials for this research, the researcher has unearthed undisclosed or hitherto concealed information. The paper also offers the first English-language chronology of Japanese travel and tourism.

TRAVEL BEFORE THE TOKUGAWA ERA

From its earliest days until the dawn of the twentieth century, travel in Japan revolved around religion and religious affairs. Scholar Shuzo Ishimori (1995) argues that 'pleasure' travel in Japan originated in the late seventh century when Empress Jito made more than 30 trips to the Imperial Family's resort villa in Yoshino, as well as trips to hot springs such as Arima in the hinterland beyond Kobe. When Buddhism established itself in Japan in the seventh and eighth centuries religion provided both the objective and the means of travel. By the tenth century, both temples and Shinto shrines were making travel arrangements for their sect members to visit their sanctuaries (Graburn, 1983). The Heian period (794-1185) saw travel to Mount Koya and Kumano Shrine. A round trip between the capital Kyoto and Kumano Shrine took about a month, covered 600 kilometres, and involved a group of 1000 people including guards and porters. Yet until the Azuchi-Motoyama Period (1568-1602) it was extremely difficult to travel vast distances due to the poor quality of the roads and the *sekisho* system. This was a series of checkpoints (on land and sea) that required travellers to pay clearance fees. At the time, a trader taking his boat from Kyoto to Osaka along the Yodogawa River had to clear 660 checkpoints, or one approximately every 100 meters (Ishimori, 1989).

TRAVEL IN THE TOKUGAWA ERA

The dawn of the Tokugawa Period (1603-1867) brought revolutionary changes to Japanese society. The nature and means of travel would change forever. Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 brought an end to years of warfare and ushered in an unbroken period of peace, maintained by an authoritarian military regime based in Edo

(Tokyo). The Tokugawa authorities instituted a number of major policies that would have a profound impact on society and, by extension, travel.

The first of these was the system called the *sankin kôtai*, whereby feudal lords had to reside in Edo one year in every two and leave their families in Edo the year they returned to their home province. Given that there were about 300 *daimyô* throughout Japan, this represented a massive volume of traffic going to and from the nation's capital. To cope with these traffic increases, the government set about improving infrastructure, principally the roads. It designated five main highways (the *gokaidô*), that spread out from Edo like spokes on a wheel, for upgrading. The quality of the road systems led some European observers to the conclusion that Tokugawa Japan surpassed Europe in terms of travel infrastructure. The Swedish physician Olof Willman, after experiencing the Tôkaidô, remarked that "probably no other road in the world costs as much this" (cited by Vaporis, 1995, p.27). The second profound decision of the Tokugawa shogunate was the policy of *sakoku*, or national seclusion. This policy was instituted in 1639 when the Edo government banned Christianity, believing it to be a political threat to its power. More importantly, it clamped down on travel. Japanese were forbidden to travel abroad and those already abroad were banned from returning to their homeland. Travel for pleasure was officially forbidden during the Tokugawa Period. While improving economic conditions gave commoners the means and desire to travel, restrictions on their movements were, however, severe. Despite these restrictions, in 1691, Dr. Engelbert Kaempfer, a Dutch doctor in the Nagasaki office of the Dutch East India Company, was moved to record the following in his diary (cited in Ishimori, 1989):

There are incredibly so many people travelling on the main roads in this country, and in several seasons roads are flooded with the people just as in the big cities of Europe. ...[T]here are at least two reasons why so many people travelling in this country. Firstly, because of the big population of this country, and secondly because of the people's fondness for travelling compared with the peoples of other countries.

PILGRIMAGE AS RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Religion was, as explained earlier, the motivating force and rationale underlying most Japanese travel from ancient times until the late nineteenth century. The main form of religious travel was the pilgrimage. They comprised three types: 1) *honzon* (specific gods or Buddhist images) *junrei* (pilgrimage), a pilgrimage for solely religious purposes, 2) *soshi junrei*, a pilgrimage to visit temples founded or occupied by particular sect in order to worship founders (*soshi*), such as the eighty-eight sacred places on Shikoku, and 3) *meiseki junrei*, a pilgrimage to visit famous places (*meiseki*), such as the seven big temples of Nara or the twenty-one temples of the Nichiren sect. The third type had mass appeal due to its more secular, tourism-like elements. The most famous and grandest pilgrimage was the *okage-mairi*, a term used to describe large-scale pilgrimages to the Grand Shrines of Ise. Supposedly only to be held every sixty-one years, many pilgrimages were held in intervening years. In the spring of 1705, the year of the first mass pilgrimage, children in the Osaka, Kyoto and Sakai area aged between seven and fifteen left their homes and set out for Ise; thirty-three thousand travellers from Edo journeying reportedly passed through the Hakone post station on a single day (Vaporis, 1994). Along the way as many as 3.62 million people joined the caravan (Davis, 1992)

FROM PILGRIMAGE TO PLEASURE

The main participants in Japanese travel changed over the hundreds of years of its development. Travel began with the nobility in ancient times, with warriors and wealthy farmers in the medieval period, and by the end of Tokugawa travel was a mass movement undertaken for the great part for pleasure. By the early nineteenth century, writes a leading western scholar of Japanese life and travel in the Tokugawa Period, travel had become a

'national obsession' (Vaporis, 1994, p.259). When Sir Rutherford Alcock, Britain's first official representative in the final years of Tokugawa, informed Japanese officials he was intending a pilgrimage to Mount Fuji he was told it was "not consistent with the dignity of a Daimio, or even an officer of any rank, to make the pilgrimage - perhaps because too many of the greasy mob must unavoidably come in close contact with them" (Ishimori, 1985, p.185). Many people, including commoners, ignored the official regulations and travelled for pleasure alone, whether lazing in a hot sulphur bath in an *onsen* (hot springs) or staying at inns along the Tōkaidō and savouring local foods and sake. Human nature being what it is, the sight of feudal lords and their caravans travelling up and down the Tōkaidō probably inspired many. From its inception, the Tokugawa authorities appeared to have little interest in actually trying to stop pleasure travel. Officials at checking stations who caught commoners without permits attempting to evade check points let their captives off lightly.

TRADITION IN DOMESTIC TOURISM

Graburn (1983) has called Japan perhaps "the best organised in the world for mass internal travel" (p.2). In annual surveys of Japanese preferred leisure activities, domestic tourism consistently comes out as most preferred (Reja Hakusho, 2001). Indeed, much of Japan's culture and many of its customs require travel, of which sightseeing is often a major component. For example, the two main holiday seasons - *Oshogatsu* (New Year) and *Obon* (mid-summer) - both involve, by tradition, return to one's birthplace or parent's home. Second, public holidays in the traditional Japanese calendar were festivals held to commemorate major transition points in the agricultural or natural cycle. Third, travel is also institutionalised within an organisation. To cite two examples, there is the annual holiday taken by company colleagues (*shokuba ryokō*), and the school excursion (*shūgaku ryokō*), undertaken by all junior and senior high-school students. It is also tradition for university or college students to undertake a *sotsugyō ryokō* (graduation holiday), after graduating and before entering a company. Fourth, trips to natural hot springs (*onsen*) have been popular for all Japanese since the middle ages. Renowned for their healing properties, the soothing waters of Japan's *onsen* continue to attract hundreds of thousands of Japanese each year. One of the most fascinating aspects of Japanese travel is the powerful socio-psychological bond that exists between the traveller and those left at home. Graburn (1983) goes as far to call this the most important aspect of social organisation that "differentiates Japanese travel from that in the West" (p.44). (The Japanese preference for travelling in groups has been well documented (see, for example, Embree 1967 and Nakane 1970). The expression '*tabi wa michizure*' (travel calls for a companion), for example, dates back to Tokugawa. When Japanese set out on a journey, therefore, they leave behind members of the different groups to which he or she belongs (except in the case of an entire school class, perhaps). While this true is for travellers from any culture, it has special significance for Japan, where a number of customs emerged over time that served to reinforce the myriad set of personal relationships developed by a Japanese individual.

TRAVEL IN THE EARLY MODERN ERA

If we can look at the Tokugawa Period to understand Japan's traditional travel customs, the Meiji Period (1867-1912) reveals travel patterns that last to the present day, including the honeymoon (*shinkon ryokō*), school excursion (*shugaku ryokō*) and hot spring stay (*onsen*). The early Meiji reforms embraced the liberalisation of long-standing travel regulations. The *sekisho* (barrier stations) were abolished in 1869 and in June 1871 the Meiji administrators declared that passports were no longer necessary for travel (Yanagida, 1978, p.136). Bridges slowly took the place of ferries, formerly the only means to cross rivers. Horse-drawn buses were introduced in the 1870s, and they were particularly popular on long-distant travels, such as between Yokohama and Hakone. For shorter journeys, rickshaws were used as taxis. (In 1872, according to Yanagida (1978), there were some 56,000 rickshaws in Tokyo alone.) The

advent of rail triggered a boom in leisure travel. Yokohama became a popular destination for Tokyoites. In calendar year 1874, the number of passengers between Shimbashi and Yokohama was recorded at 1,438,417 (Yanagida, 1978, 146).

THE BIRTH OF THE INBOUND INDUSTRY

The opening of Japan in 1867 triggered an influx of foreigners into the country: diplomats, sailors, merchants, adventurers - and tourists. By 1870, the world's four largest steamship companies had offices in Yokohama, as did Japan's largest marine transportation company, Mitsubishi Yusen (contemporary observation by the American, W.E. Griffiths, cited by Shirahata 1996, p.20). With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the completion of the trans-American railway line, and the publication of Jules Verne's "Around the World in Eighty Days" in 1873, around-the-world travel by the rich had become a reality.

The idea of attracting foreign tourists to Japan for the sake of promoting national interests was first proposed in the early 1890s by concerned politicians and financiers. A fervent desire to correct existing unequal treaties—the most critical diplomatic problem in the Meiji Era (1868–1912)—was apparently behind the proposal. There also was an intention to show visiting westerners that Japan was as civilized as the great western powers, not to mention that the incoming foreign currency would contribute to reinforcing the nation's wealth and military strength.

In March 1893, a voluntary organization called Kihin-Kai (The Welcome Society of Japan), headquartered in Tokyo Shokokai (the predecessor of the present Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry), was formed to promote foreign tourism. Eiichi Shibusawa, who is famous as the founding father of Japanese capitalism, was General Secretary; he was assisted by Takashi Masuda, regarded as the head of the Mitsui *zaibatsu* (industrial and financial combines). Masuda had visited Europe and believed that Paris flourished because the city had a successful system for attracting foreign tourists and encouraging them to spend money. In those days, the estimated annual number of westerners visiting Japan was probably no more than 10,000, a more-than-obvious reason for establishing Kihin-Kai. Shibusawa and Masuda ardently tried to establish a system of tourism at the non-government level before the administration involved itself in the business. They were confident that a prospering tourism industry would contribute to national interests. They persuaded hotels and inns to improve their buildings and facilities, urged upgrading the quality of tour guides and interpreters, and arranged tours of noted and historic places. English guidebooks and maps were written and distributed to arouse foreigners' interest in visiting the country.

The first example of group travel in modern Japan dates back to 1905 when Minami Shinsuke, a restaurant owner in Kusatsu on the Tōkaidō Line, established a travel business arranging religious travel to Takanoyama and Ise Shrine. In 1908, he achieved great success when he hired an entire Japan National Railways' train for a 7-day trip to Enoshima, Tokyo, Nikko and Nagano that attracted some 900 customers. Minami named his company Nippon Ryoko, the forerunner to today's Nippon Travel Agency (NTA), one of the Big Four travel agencies in Japan.

Yet the most famous and largest travel agent today in Japan is JTB or Japan Travel Bureau. Its history is fascinating – and revealing. It was established in 1912 as Japan Tourist Bureau (*Japan Tsūrisuto Byūro*) (JTB), mainly with the aim of handling foreign visitors coming to Japan. Its first chairman was the serving deputy governor of the government's Railway Board (Yokoyama p.32). With the birth of JTB, the roles of Japan's first two travel companies were clearly defined: NTA would handle domestic group tours and JTB would service the inbound market. JTB grew steadily over the ensuing years and by 1925 it had expanded into domestic as well as overseas tourism. Overseas travel by steamship grew rapidly during the between-

war years. JTB's inhouse travel magazine, 'Tabi' (trip) was begun in 1924 and its first issue featured an advertisement for travel to China. By 1934, Nippon Yusen was sailing fortnightly to San Francisco and monthly to Vancouver and Seattle and monthly to South America; around twenty thousand issues of 'Tabi' were being printed monthly.

In 1937, with the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War travel was discouraged for pleasure purposes was officially discouraged and in May 1940 it was banned completely. In May 1941 JTB's name was changed from 'Japan Tsûrisuto Byûro' to Toa Travel Company (*Tôa Ryokosha*), in keeping with government policy of banning foreign loan words. (*Tôa* refers to Greater Asia region then under control of Japan.) Two months later the government banned all companies other than 'JTB' from operating travel businesses. In effect 'JTB' became the government's travel agent, arranging the transport for new army recruits, as well as for troop transfers and evacuations.

In 1943, the company's name was changed again, this time to Nihon Kôtsu Kôsha (Japan Transport Corporation). The word 'travel' (*ryokô*) was replaced with 'transport' (*kôtsu*) since the government believed 'travel' was too frivolous an expression at a time when Japanese servicemen were dying in foreign battles. On August 30, 1945 Japan's first foreign 'visitor' in the post-war era arrived at Atsugi Airfield outside of Tokyo. The visitor, General Douglas MacArthur, was motored to Yokohama Grand Hotel where he stayed, free of charge. (No, this was not Japan's first famil of the post-war era.) Among the officials greeting MacArthur on airstrip at Atsugi were representatives from Tôa Tourist Company, sent their at the request of Japan's Foreign Ministry. Two days after MacArthur's arrival, its name reverted to JTB. JTB was the Japanese government's sole designated company arranging for the repatriation of Japanese soldiers to Japan after the war – as well as the return of schoolchildren to their home towns (following the mass evacuation of schoolchildren that had begun in August 1944).

BIRTH OF GROUP AND PACKAGE TOURS

The group tour (*dantai ryokô*) first appeared in the Middle Ages with pilgrimages to Kumano, and was popularised in the Tokugawa Period with the Ise Shrine pilgrimage discussed earlier. In the modern era, the model for group tours from the early years of the Meiji Period was the *shugaku ryokô*. It was the development of the group tour that fuelled the growth and expansion of today's large tour wholesalers. Minami Shinsuke, the founder of the travel agency, Nippon Ryoko (today's' NTA), appears to be the first organiser of the group tour in the modern era (Shirahata, 1995). Minami originally ran a highly profitable business selling boxed lunches (*bentô*) at Kusatsu Station on JNR's Tokaido Line around the turn of the century. According to the man's own words, as a means of repaying the JNR for granting him the opportunity to be so successful, he began to organise religious visits to Ise and Takanoyama around 1903. (Shirahata, 1995, p.192) cited Minami's collection of thoughts contained in an NTA history published to commemorate the company's sixtieth anniversary.) JNR did not arrange group tours internally until the late 1920s when it set up subscription based travel societies, *tsukigake ryokokai*, in towns and villages throughout Japan. People contributed monthly to a fund administered by the local railway office.

One of the first recorded package tours was advertised in a 1933 travel magazine (*Tabi*). It was a 2-night/3-day tour to Gifu leaving from either Tokyo or Yokohama, and having a limit of fifty people (published in the Japan Travel Society's magazine, cited by Shirahata (1995, pp.194-195)). In 1934, Japan Tourist Bureau merged with Japan Travel Society (begun in 1923). At the same time, the Ministry of Railways gave sole responsibility of organising and arranging group travel to JTB. This marked the company's full-scale entry into domestic travel (remembering it had been established mainly to cater for travelling needs of foreign visitors to Japan).

After World War II, it was sports events that triggered the rebirth of the group tour. In 1946, the government instituted the first National Athletic Meet (*kokumin taiiku taikai*), an annual event held in a different prefecture each year. Again, JTB was the given task of making travel arrangements for competitors, coaches and officials from all parts of Japan. (NTA did not recommence business after WWII until 1949.) Another important trend in the early years after the war was the tie-up between JTB and JNR to arrange a group tour to Ise Shrine; in 1948, a 12-carriage train was hired to send 800 people to Ise. The rebirth of group travel encouraged the entry of new companies into the travel business and laid the foundations for growth in the industry.

The first overseas group tours also concerned sporting teams. The first overseas group tour of the post-war era were the Japanese athletes attending the First Asian Games in New Delhi in 1951. In 1952, Japan participated in the Oslo Winter Olympics and the Helsinki Summer Olympics. And in 1954, Japan Air Lines began its first overseas flight with service to San Francisco.

The birth of Japan's modern tourism industry was in the 1950s, after the chaos of the immediate post-war years. In 1952, the Japanese government passed the Travel Intermediary Law, which allowed travel agents for the first time to act as intermediaries in the travel business. Travel agents' main business activities in these early days were restricted to acting as sales agents for railway and other transport companies, as well as *ryokan* (traditional Japanese inns). For this reason most travel companies established in 1950s were subsidiaries of the large railway companies.

Most of their business was done by setting up small sales counters in front of railway stations belonging to their network and within a few years there were hundreds of travel information booths located in railway station precincts around Japan. Meanwhile other travel companies, unable to compete with their transport-related counterparts, concentrated on providing services for foreigners visiting Japan and the few numbers of Japanese travelling abroad. From this beginning as sales agents, travel companies gradually moved into arranging group tours. The most typical group tour pattern in the 1950s was the school excursion (*shūgaku ryoko*).

Until 1964, the Japanese government banned placed severe restrictions on overseas travel, which was only allowable for business, government officials, technical study missions or sporting teams. Only 25,000 Japanese travelled abroad in 1956. Japan's staging of the Olympic Games in 1964 marked the country's re-emergence into international society. In keeping with its higher status the government decided to liberalise the outbound market. On April 1, 1964, any Japanese was allowed to travel overseas, the only restrictions being a spending limit of US\$500 and one trip per year. Few people could have imagined that less than 25 years later Japan would become the one of the world's most lucrative travel markets.

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Chronology Of Japanese Travel & Tourism

- 742** The world's first museum is built, the Shôgô-in, next to the extant Tôdaiji Temple in Nara
- 1635** Japanese are forbidden to travel abroad or to return from abroad
- 1638** Construction of boats over 100seki banned
- 1639** Japan begins 215-year period of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world
- 1718** Around 2.25 million Japanese (5% of total population) visit Ise Shrine on mass pilgrimage
- 1830** Up to 5 million Japanese visit Ise Shrine on last great mass pilgrimage of Tokugawa Era
- 1841** Thomas Cook establishes the world's first travel agency and organises group tour to temperance meeting in England
- 1845** Thomas Cook sells his first package tour (between Leicester and Liverpool)
- 1853** Ban lifted on construction of boats over 100seki
- 1866** Japan's first recorded honeymoon: Sakamoto Ryoma takes his geisha bride on a Kagoshima *onsen* tour
- 1869** *sekisho* (barrier station) system abolished; opening of telegraph line between Tokyo and Yokohama
- 1872** Japan's first railroad - between Shinbashi and Yokohama - commences operation, heralding the birth of modern domestic travel
- 1873** Thomas Cook arrives in Yokohama to promote round-the-world cruising; the first Nara Grand Exhibition, displaying religious art treasures, held to attract sightseers
- 1875** The first recorded *shugaku ryoko* takes place when 45 elementary school pupils from Tochigi Prefecture visit Jisan Kannon
- 1876** Railroad opens between Kyoto and Osaka
- 1885** Japan's first *eki-ben* [boxed lunch sold on railway platforms] is sold at Utsunomiya Station
- 1889** Tokaido Railway Line from Yokohama extended to Kobe
- 1891** Tokyo's Ueno Station and Aomori (in northern Japan) linked by rail
- 1893** Meiji Government and business world unite to establish "Welcome Society" for inbound tourists and foreign residents of Japan
- 1895** Nippon Yusen steamship company begins voyages to the United States
- 1896** The first express train runs between Tokyo and Kobe
- 1903** Minami Shinsuke, a bento seller at Kusatsu Station on the Tokaido Line, organises the first group tour in the modern era
- 1905** The first express train runs between Tokyo and Shimonoseki; Minami Shinsuke establishes Nippon Ryoko, Japan's first group travel business
- 1906** Japan's privately owned railways are nationalised
- 1910** Lunar Park, an American-style amusement park, opens in Asakusa Park
Enoshima (popular for pilgrimage) and Kamakura linked by rail
- 1912** Japan Travel Bureau established to service the inbound travel market; Japan competes in its first Olympics (Stockholm)
- 1913** JTB opens its first overseas office, in New York; First Asian Olympics held in Manila
- 1918** Opening of Hakone Mountain Railway sparks Hakone's conversion from onsen to tourist resort
- 1925** JTB extends its business activities to incorporate domestic and overseas travel
- 1930** The International Tourism Department is established within the Ministry of Transport
- 1931** Haneda International Airport opens
- 1932** JTB commences selling government rail tickets
- 1933** Japan's first recorded package tour, a 3-day rail tour from Tokyo (or Yokohama) to Gifu with a limit of 50 customers
- 1936** Foreign exchange earnings from tourism make it Japan's fourth largest industry (after cotton goods, raw silk, and rayon)

- 1940** Domestic travel, unless for exceptional reasons, is discouraged by the government
- 1941** JTB is forced to change its name to *Tôa Ryokôsha* (Toa Travel Company) when foreign loan words are banned; it becomes the government's sole travel agent throughout the war years, with all other travel agents being banned.
- 1943** Government orders Tôa Ryokôsha to change its name to Nihon Kôtsu Kôsha (Japan Transport Public Corporation), deeming the expression 'travel' too frivolous for wartime.
- 1945** Tourism Section in Transport Ministry established in November; Nihon Kôtsu Kôsha begins using original JTB name again.
- 1946** Tourism Business Council established as advisory body to the prime minister to examine domestic and inbound tourism promotion policies
- 1947** Pan American and Northwest commence trans-Pacific flights; seven travel agents commence selling international air tickets
- 1948** Japan National Railroads and travel agents cooperate to promote domestic group travel; Nihon Tourist (predecessor to Kink Nippon Tourist) and Hankyu Kôtsusha established; 7 travel agents - JTB, Keihanshin, Nishitetsu, Hanshin, Kintetsu, Nittsu and Jardine Matheson - given IATA accreditation to sell airline tickets
- 1949** Hato Bus begins operation; NTA recommences business after WWII; Tobu Travel is established
- 1950** Occupation authorities allow Japanese to overseas travel for business purposes
- 1951** JAL established, commences regular flights between Tokyo and Osaka; the first overseas group tour of the post-war era occurs when Japanese athletes attend the First Asian Games in New Delhi
- 1952** Bilateral Air Service Agreement signed between Japan & the U.S.; Travel Arrangement Law is passed
- 1954** JAL commences flights to Okinawa (then a U.S. protectorate) followed, two days later, by the first services to Hawaii and San Francisco (2/2).
- 1955** Lufthansa becomes first European airline to fly into Japan; Kinki Nippon Tourist established (9/1)
- 1956** The Government's economic white paper declares the end of the "post-war reconstruction" period; Tokyu Kanko established; authority to fly international flights returned to Japan.
- 1958** Haneda Airport returned to Japanese jurisdiction from American administration.
- 1959** Introduction of jet liners on the Pacific route (Qantas B-707); Japan awarded 18th Olympic Games; Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) established with 26 member companies under the name of Overseas Travel Agents Association; JAL commences flights between Tokyo and Beijing and Hong Kong.
- 1960** Nittsu commences tourism business, targeting inbound market
- 1961** Transport Ministry releases first "Tourism White Paper"
- 1962** Transport Ministry instructs tourism industry to adopt a 'no tipping' system
- 1964** Shinkansen ("bullet" train) begins service; Tokyo Olympics; liberalization of overseas travel with removal of restrictions on travel (once per year with limit of US\$500 per time); JTB International established, JTB sets up subsidiary in the U.S.; Swiss Air launches Japan's first overseas package tour, 'Push Button' (19 days, 7 countries, \$500); 127,749 Japanese travel overseas