



AS IT IS

Japan to Permit Limited Foreign Travel Groups

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Japan's government will begin permitting small group **tours** from four countries later this month.

Japan is slowly opening up to foreign **tourism** after putting in place strong border restrictions because of COVID-19.

Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito said Tuesday that tours will be permitted from Australia, Singapore, Thailand and the United States as an experiment.

Those taking part must have three vaccine shots. The tours must also have guides and fixed plans. Each tour can have at most four people. A total of 50 people are expected to join the experiment, the Japan Tourism Agency said.

Participants will enter Japan on a special visa, not a tourist visa, the agency said. The results will be used to create coronavirus guidelines for tour operators, hotels and other related businesses, it said.

The experiment is expected to start next week and continue until the end of May. Additional details, including the length of the tours and where they will go, have yet to be decided.

Japan's tourism industry is hopeful travelers will return soon. The industry has been hit hard by the border controls. But COVID-19 infections have slowed in Japan since earlier this year and the government is slowly expanding social and economic activity.

After facing criticism that its border controls were **xenophobic**, Japan began easing restrictions earlier this year. The country currently permits entry of up to 10,000 people from foreign countries each day. That includes Japanese citizens, foreign students and some business travelers. The government is reportedly considering increasing the daily total to 20,000 in the coming weeks. Currently, foreign tourists are not permitted to enter.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in a speech during a visit to London earlier in May that he plans to ease the border controls as early as June. That would be in line with the policies of other Group of Seven industrialized countries. He gave no additional details.

Foreign tourist arrivals fell more than 90 percent in 2020 from a record 31.9 million the year before. Before the pandemic, the tourism market brought the country more than \$31 billion a year.

I'm Dan Novak.

Dan Novak adapted this story for VOA Learning English based on reporting by The Associated Press.

Words in This Story

tour — n. an activity in which travelers go to a place to learn more about it and to have fun

tourism — n. the activity of traveling to another place or country for pleasure

xenophobic — adj. to have fear or anger at foreigners
