

Growing interest in anime pilgrimage sites

Collaboration between pilgrimage sites and fans vital to sustaining the tourism effect

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Two success cases for anime pilgrimage sites

Interest has been growing in “pilgrimages” to visit anime-related sites in recent years. Site pilgrimage was a trending word in 2016, and the Anime Tourist Association (established in 2016) released the "2018 Japan Anime Tourism 88-Stop Pilgrimage" (**Chart**) in 2017.

While sites associated with novels, movies, dramas, and other contents have attracted visitors in past years, general interest often faded after some time. For example, NHK Taiga Drama (yearlong historical drama series) and Drama Serial that attract strong national interest often spur competition to be selected as a drama setting in the hope of realizing large tourism benefits. However, booms heat up quickly and fade rapidly too, so the effect is typically largest during the broadcast and then sharply declines after the broadcast finishes.

Some anime-related sites are defying this dynamic by sustaining and increasing their tourism effects after broadcasts finish. Tourism effects stand out for Lucky Star and GIRLS und PANZER in anime pilgrimages.

While broadcasts aired for Lucky Star in 2007 (the original manga series began in 2004) and GIRLS und PANZER in 2012, pilgrimage visitor traffic to related sites continued after broadcasts ended. The number of visitors to Washinomiya Shrine (Kuki City, Saitama), where the main character of Lucky Star supposedly lives, recorded over 300,000, more than three times than the previous year in 2008, which was immediately after the start of broadcasts. The number of visitors increased beyond 400,000 in 2009, the following year, and stays in the 400,000 range in 2017 after 10 years have passed since broadcasts began. In Oarai Town, Ibaraki, the primary location of GIRLS und PANZER, 60,000 people participated in the 2012 Oarai Anko Festival (held in November) in which an anime-related event was also held, a steep increase from 2011 prior to broadcasts. This event has continued to gain growing momentum each year since then and the number of participants reached 130,000, which is seven times the town’s population, in 2016.

Importance of developing tourism resources from a fan perspective

Active collaboration between related local areas and fans is an important factor in these two successes. Local governments and residents carefully identify fan needs by communicating with fans and reinforce ties with anime right holders in organizing events and developing goods with continuous efforts to add some twists.

Anime has many passionate fans, and they can become long-term repeat visitors to related sites even in areas slightly off standard tourism routes. Furthermore, foreign visitors to Japan have risen sharply in recent years and are strongly interested in anime pilgrimages. Local governments and residents at anime-related sites should strive to strengthen collaboration with fans aiming at sustaining the tourism effect, using the successes described above as reference.

[Chart: Main Anime Pilgrimage Sites]

Anime name	Local government
LOVE LIVE!	Chiyoda-ku (Tokyo)
LOVE LIVE! SUNSHINE!!	Numazu City (Shizuoka)
Hyouka	Takayama City (Gifu)
GIRLS und PANZER das FINALE	Oarai Town (Ibaraki)
Bungo Stray Dogs	Yokohama City (Kanagawa)
TAMAYURA	Takehara City (Hiroshima)
Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day	Chichibu City (Saitama)
Lucky Star	Kuki City (Saitama)
Durarara!!	Toshima-ku (Tokyo)
EVANGELION Series	Hakone Town (Kanagawa)
Hinabita♪	Kurayoshi City (Tottori)
	Mutsu City (Aomori)
	Yokosuka City (Kanagawa)
Kantai Collection -KanColle-	Maizuru City (Kyoto)
	Kure City (Hiroshima)
	Sasebo City (Nagasaki)
Your Name.	Shinjuku-ku (Tokyo)
	Hida City (Gifu)
Inari konkon Koi Iroha	Kyoto City (Kyoto)
Nagi no Asukara	Kumano City (Mie)

Note: 88 pilgrimage sites selected from anime in the top 30 anime pilgrimage site voting by the Anime Tourist Association (3rd intermediate announcement in 2016)

Source: Made by MHRI based on the list of "2018 Japan Anime Tourism 88-Stop Pilgrimage" (released in 2017), Anime Tourist Association

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