

# Geotourism Researches in English: Rethinking Geotourist and its future in Japan

\*Takayuki Arima<sup>1</sup>

1. Yokohama City University

There are 46 Geoparks and they are almost as many as prefectures in Japan. Since 2008, when the first Geoparks were established in Japan, many people have been involved in their activities. And, what has the tourism research community learned about tourism in Geoparks or geotourism in the last 14 years? This presentation explores the research debate in English on geotourism, and particularly the findings on geotourists / geotravellers. Then, we discuss the existence of potential geotourists in Japan, based on the results of a web-based questionnaire survey.

According to Olafsdottir and Tverijonaite (2018), who summarized the research trends in geotourism studies, most of the geotourism papers published in English were not in major tourism journals which covers a wide range of tourism research topics. This means that most of the articles on geotourism published in English are published in journals specializing in geotourism. In other words, geotourism research in English is an insular phenomenon in the tourism research community. It is also pointed out that very few studies (6.3%) focus on “tourists”. For example, there is no chapter dedicated to tourists in any of the specialized books on geotourism. The lack of research on geotourists, despite the major research subject in tourism research, is a main issue. Without an understanding of the attributes, motivations and behaviours of geotourists, it would be impossible to sell the geoparks properly, and to assist the marketing them that has been required in the management of tourist areas in Japan in recent years.

There are, of course, a few studies in English that refer to geotourists. We would like to explore the image of the geotourist from these studies. First of all, who are geotourists? Do we consider all visitors to geoparks and geosites to be geotourists? In fact, the most studies have surveyed visitors to a particular geopark or geosite, and presented the results of their analysis as a study of geotourists. In other words, the simplest definition of a geotourist is “a visitor to a geopark or geosite”.

However, some of the existing studies have analysed and categorised geotourists in more detail, using different indicators, and the true picture of geotourists emerges from these shades. For example, in terms of travel motivations, geotourists are often said to visit for 'Learning', 'Novelty Seeking', 'Enjoyment', 'Escape' and 'Social Interaction'. And they prefer to visit places with little tourist infrastructure, unlike the general public. In addition, they have a strong awareness of the need to protect geosites. This has also been reported in several studies as a result of interpretations at individual geosites. Geotourists also tend to pay more for accredited tours. Some studies have also shown that tourists with higher Geotraveller Tendency Scale (GTS) also spend more at the site and area. In terms of demographics, there is a common understanding that geotourists are more likely to be highly educated and have higher incomes.

In general, to truly understand geotourists, we need to be aware of these indicators. What indicators can we use to classify and segment visitors to a certain destination and to grasp their characteristics? And how can the results be used in future tourism management strategies? In the case of Geoparks, what are the indicators to understand the unique visitors to a Geopark, i.e. geotourists? This is an important question that needs to be addressed in future research on tourism and geotourism in Geoparks. And, each Geopark needs to set up appropriate the indicators and monitor them on a regular basis according to local conditions. At the conference, we will present some of the results of the web survey as a basis for discussion.

Olafsdottir, R. and Tverijonaite, E. 2018. Geotourism: A Systematic Literature Review. *Geoscience* 8(234): 1-16.

Keywords: Tourism, Tourist, Tourism Area Management, Geopark, Geotraveler Tendency Scale, Monitoring