

Packaging Enduring Experiences: The Marketing of International Marathon Tours in Japan

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Abstract

A number of destinations that depend on Japanese overseas visitors have recently experienced declining visitor arrivals from the record high levels of the 1990s. Popular tourist destinations like Hawaii and Guam are exploring ways to increase numbers of tourists by examining niche markets that involve the consumption of unique experiences, such as those associated with Sports Tourism. There are a number of international marathon events, including the Honolulu Marathon, Gold Coast Marathon, and New York City Marathon that fall into this category of Sports Tourism. These urban gatherings of runners from around the globe have incredibly large numbers of runners from Japan who travel to enjoy the experience of participating in a major sporting event. These events provide a positive economic impact on these destinations via direct and indirect spending from participants and their families (Agrusa, J., Lema, J., Botto, T., & Cho, Y. 2008). This study examines a niche market of Sports Tourism, particularly Japanese overseas travelers interested in international marathon participation. It provides a case analysis of online marketing literature from a major Japanese tour company, Club Tourism International (CTI), which specializes in marathon tours for Japanese consumers. By reviewing the menu items on the company website as well as other online elements used by CTI, (which are also commonly used by other Japanese overseas marathon tour companies) we are able to capture online marketing methods used to attract marathon tour participants from Japan. The latest trends in marketing these events, the types of amenities offered to tour participants, price level variations of tours, and methods used in differentiating tour experiences from other destinations will be examined. The results of this study may be used to assist community and event organizations interested in attracting and marketing similar events to Japanese sports tourism enthusiasts.

Key words: Japan, marathon, distance running, tourism, package tours, sports tourism

Introduction

Participation in marathon running has grown at a rapid rate in many industrialized nations over the past decade. In the United States alone, the number of finishers grew 2% to 10% annually from 324,000 in 2002 to 503,000 in 2010 (marathonguide.com), and to a new high of 518,000 in 2011 (Running USA, 2012). According to Running USA, in 2011, there were an estimated 720 U.S. marathons, another record high, compared to approximately 200 in 1985 and 300 marathons in 2000. With the growth of marathon running, there has also been a dramatic increase in the number of major international city marathons (New York City, Los Angeles, Paris, Lon-

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don, Sydney, Nairobi, Beijing, Tokyo, to name a few). This growth in marathon events has also spread to destination marathons, such as the Maui Paradise Marathon, Reggae Marathon in Jamaica, Great Wall Marathon in China, Dubai Midnight Marathon, Antarctica Ice Marathon, and the North Pole Marathon, also called “the world’s coolest marathon” (<http://www.npmarathon.com/>).

Although most major marathon events are competitive races with large cash prizes going to the winners, not all participants enter a marathon to win. Because of the reality that only a very limited number of age-group awards winners will be recognized in addition to the overall male and female winners, many runners enter to improve their personal best time and/or their placement within their specific gender and age group. In addition, a large percentage of runners enter just to finish and “experience” the event as the marathon can be viewed as a product of *The Experience Economy*. Pine and Gilmore (1998) explain in *Welcome to the Experience Economy* that these “experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of the individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level” and that “consumers unquestionably desire experiences.” In order for the undertrained or even untrained marathon participant to experience the full distance of the event, methods for completing a marathon include running the whole distance at a leisurely pace or using a run-walk strategy.

City marathons initially began springing up around the globe after 1945. Marathons were started in Japan at Fukuoka (1947), Twente in Holland (1948) and the Athens Classical Marathon was brought back over the original 1896 course (with an additional 2195m) in 1955 (AIMS, 2012). After a while, no major world city was complete without its own marathon. Smaller cities also participated in the addition of an annual marathon event to their calendar, as many cities incorporated Marathons into their line-up of events to boost their tourist industries (AIMS, 2012).

The Fukuoka Marathon in Japan eventually grew to be an event of the highest quality. It also became known as the race where the best in the world gathered annually in December to run. By the 1960’s, Fukuoka was an elite race, the unofficial world championship event, with Japan’s top runners and invited elite runners from overseas. The Japanese audience had come to embrace this marathon, along with other top-class Japanese marathons, which were viewed nationally on television. The popularity of the marathon grew with these events, but the large audience had yet converted to marathon participants until more recent years.

Popularity of International Marathons

The number of international marathons in cities continues to grow and the well-established events are not affected negatively by this growth. Organizers of big city marathons around the world in places such as New York, Paris, Berlin and elsewhere report an increase in "destination running" among those who want to combine a holiday with athletic endeavor (Gibson, 2010).

Table 1 below shows the top fifteen largest marathons in the world, using the number of finishers a basis for the rankings.

Table 1. World's Largest Marathons (2011)

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Marathon</i>	<i>Finishers</i>
1)	ING New York City, NY	47,133 (largest all-time)
2)	Bank of America Chicago, IL	35,755
3)	Virgin London, GBR	35,126
4)	BMW Berlin, GER	32,816
5)	Tokyo Int'l, JPN	32,395
6)	Paris, FRA	31,133
7)	Osaka, JPN	26,175 (largest inaugural)
8)	Boston, MA	23,913
9)	Marine Corps, DC	21,042
10)	Kobe, JPN	20,103 (second largest inaugural)
11)	Honda LA, CA	19,902
12)	Honolulu, HI	19,102
13)	Naha, JPN	17,060
14)	ASICS Stockholm, SWE	15,470
15)	Shonan Int'l, JPN	15,278

Source: <http://www.runningusa.org>

Various reasons can be given for the popularity of marathons. One is that people are far more health and body conscious than before and that due to cost and time pressures, and that people are abandoning the gym and organized team sport in favor of more flexible and informal pursuits such as running and cycling (Gibson, 2010). In addition, running a marathon with pledges for a charity have become synonymous with marathon running, adding an element of social consciousness to the experience of finishing a marathon with a crowd of runners.

Despite the popularity of these international marathons, there are still limitations to the numbers that event organizers can accommodate. Unfortunately, many potential participants are disappointed every year as there are limits to the number of runners that these events can manage. Marathons often reach their quotas just days or even hours after opening their doors to receiving applications. The 2011 Tokyo Marathon received 336,000 applications for 36,000

entries (Hays, 2012), while the London Marathon typically has 80,000 applicants disappointed every year (Gibson, 2010).

Growth of Participation versus Gazing

Japan was undergoing tremendous economic growth during the popular running revolution of the late 1970s and early 1980s that was taking place in various nations around the world. Elite marathons in Japan existed during this time, but due to the challenges involved in managing large crowds of marathon runners on city streets, mass participation events were kept at a minimum. Allowing marathons to bring cities to a virtual standstill for the best part of a day was never seriously considered until later.

Large numbers of Japanese marathon runners began travelling overseas to participate in marathons in the 1990s. This period has been identified as "overseas marathon boom years" and "the period of arrival for the active female runner" in Japan (Runners, September 2012). In 1991, the Honolulu Marathon had over 10,000 Japanese participants, making up over 70 percent of the runners. This *Changing Gaze of the Japanese Tourist* shows that "the experience that the Japanese overseas tourist seeks and gains not only has visual components but also other factors such as activity and emotion" (Shono et al., 2005). Large groups of runners flocked to overseas marathons beginning in the early 1990's primarily for the following reasons: 1) Ability to enjoy old-style townscapes and magnificent coastlines as well as each country's distinctive characteristics during the race; 2) Opportunity to experience the best season for running in each country; 3) Ability to savor with the senses the cheering crowds on the roadside at an international marathon event (Tokyo Yuukan, 1993).

Japanese participation surely helped make the Honolulu Marathon a resounding success as the marathon continues to attract large numbers from Japan and is now known as the JAL Honolulu marathon, sponsored by Japan Airlines. A study has been conducted over a three-year period to highlight the economic benefits that the state of Hawaii receives, particularly from Japanese runners in the Honolulu Marathon. Data from this study shows that of the first time visitors who were participants in the Honolulu Marathon, over 90% stated that they are considering returning to Hawaii as tourists other than participating in the Honolulu Marathon (Agrusa et al., 2008).

The Honolulu Marathon was not the only event that Japanese non-elite runners sought to run. They gradually found other races in which to participate in cities all around the globe. Within the past decade, Japanese athletic authorities, city government officials and police departments have sent sizeable delegations to observe the big city marathons in action. Some of these big

city marathons including, New York, Berlin, and London were all visited several times. It was through watching, learning and planning, that the various cooperating parties had pieced together with great care the Tokyo International Marathon (Nakamura, 2007). Tokyo was not the only major city to introduce a mass participation marathon through its city streets. Other large cities, such as Naha, Nagano, and Sapporo had established their races a few years earlier. In 2011, Japan had two inaugural city marathons, Osaka and Kobe, with more than 20,000 finishers, and with 26,175 finishers. Osaka was the largest debut marathon ever, breaking the previous record of 15,771 finishers at the 1998 Suzuki Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in San Diego (RunningUSA, 2012). Table 2 shows the growth of marathon finishers in Japan during the eight-year period from 2004 through 2011.

Table 2. Growth of Marathon Finishers in Japan (2004-2011)

Year	Total	Male	Female
2004	78,776	66,540	12,236
2005	82,930	69,599	13,331
2006	103,590	85,981	17,609
2007	114,520	95,078	19,442
2008	145,416	120,134	25,282
2019	166,794	137,075	29,719
2010	179,215	146,060	33,155
2011	249,910	197,368	52,542

Source: *Runners (June 2012)*

Due to the scarcity of domestic marathons that allow slower runners to finish hours after the winner, Japanese marathon runners began venturing overseas. Thus, runners found they could combine experiencing travel in a foreign country, while at the same time, practicing their hobby of long distance running. One of the most convenient ways to do this was via package tours that included guaranteed entry into the marathon, with all race details handled by the tour provider. Marathon tour companies that specialized in packaging these events came into existence for the sole purpose of accommodating Japanese runners that want to travel to and participate in an overseas marathon in a hassle-free manner. Because of the large numbers of runners involved in these big-city marathons and the systemized production of the marathon tour packages that include the dimensions of Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability, and Control, one may identify marathon tours as good examples of "McDonaldization" as described in *The McDonaldization of Society* (Ritzer, 2008). In this McDonaldized product, each day offers a firm schedule and tourists can take comfort from knowing exactly what they are going to do on a daily, even hourly, basis.

Although Japanese marathon runners seeking overseas running experiences make up a specialty niche market, large numbers of operators came into existence to offer marathon tours. A

simple search using the key words, "Japan," "Marathon Tours," and "Company" results in various tour operators, such as, Nippon Travel Agency (NTA), Top Tour, H.I.S., Hankyu Travel, and DOG Marathon Tour, that offer marathon tours especially tailored to meet the needs of the Japanese overseas marathon runner.

The growth in interest in overseas marathon participation continues to grow in Japan. In November 2012, the U.S. Embassy auditorium in Tokyo had over 70 outbound tour operators, airlines, and sports clubs as well as journalists in attendance to view tourism promotion presentations focused on marathon running. At this event, a total of 13 managers of U.S. metro travel bureaus, marathons and other tourism attractions including Disneyland presented what their destinations can offer in addition to a marathon. Destination managers that have marathons participated "to draw race-crazy Japanese tourists to new destinations, such as the Marathon in Eugene, Oregon" and to show how the "package tours mix competition with cuisine, sporting culture with leisure, Heartbreak Hill with Bunker Hill (U.S. Embassy, 2012).

One of the most active and visible companies in packaging overseas marathon tours to Japanese consumers is Club Tourism International, Inc. (CTI). CTI is one of the leading travel agencies in Japan, having been a participant in Japan's tourism industry for over 30 years. Its parent company, Kintetsu Corporation, is the biggest private railroad company in Japan. CTI is an active member of JATA (Japan Association of Travel Agent) with 2,009 employees and annual sales of 131.4 Billion JPY or approximately 1.6 Billion USD (March, fiscal 2010). CTI offers both domestic and overseas tours, and has four million customers every year (Club Tourism, 2012).

For marathon runners, the company offers 60 overseas events spread throughout the calendar year and has led 30,000 Japanese runners overseas in the last 30 years of operation. Their print advertisement in *Runners*, Japan's most popular running magazine, states their motto, "Let's run the globe! For marathon tours—Safe, Convenient, Fun!" (Travel & Run!, 2010). CTI's head office is located in Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo.

CTI has a distinctive logo that is prominently displayed on all marathon tour advertisements (See Figure 1). The bold Japanese text at the top of the logo reads (translated by author), "Our circle of friends widens, our travel deepens." The CTI corporate website describes the company's mission and the symbolism expressed by their logo:

"Club Tourism aims at, by providing people with opportunities for travelling based on keywords 'Culture', 'Nature' and 'Friendship', making them feel spiritually content and savour the delight of life, and eventually

making them hope to make the world even better. The joy of appreciating profound implication of 'Culture' as well as of getting inspiration that "Nature" brings to us, if being shared with 'Friends', would be multiplied and eventually be spread to the world and the next generations to come. This philosophy is expressed in our logo -- five people dancing happily with their hands holding to each other. The five people, in its five colours, also connotes the Five Continents, adding our desire of expanding the circle of 'Friends' to the whole world.(Club Tourism, 2012)

Figure 1. Logo for Club Tourism



Source: <http://www.visitjapan.jp/cht/detail/A90071/>

Methodology

This study selects the case study approach. It examines the case of one of the most prominent Japanese tour companies, Club Tourism International (CTI). This paper describes CTI's methods used in targeting the niche market of Japanese marathon runners and marketing its overseas marathon tours to the Japanese consumer utilizing the online environment (Internet). This is accomplished by reviewing CTI's use of text and graphics for capturing the Japanese overseas marathon tours market. Online data collection and analysis was conducted from December 15, 2012, through January 31, 2013. All Japanese overseas marathon tour searches and reviews of text were conducted in the Japanese language due to the fact that the targeted market is Japanese.

As the comprehensive guide to both domestic and international marathons in the Japanese language, www.runnet.jp, a website hosted by *Runners*—the most widely read Japanese running publication, was the primary starting point to identify the overseas marathon tour options that are available for the Japanese runners. Overseas marathon tour information was accessed via the www.runnet.jp page and an analysis of data was conducted after entering the home page for each of five randomly selected overseas marathon tours (Vancouver, Los Angeles, Sedona,

Luxor, and Paris) offered by CTI. The main page (home page) for each CTI marathon section was used for data mining and analysis of segmented offerings.

Data collected from each of CTI's main marathon page were in the form of text and images represented on the websites. Common Headings and/or Sections to guide runners through their tour selection experience were noted and presented for discussion. Icons used to simplify online navigation, as well as key themes, and online segments that frequently appear as "must-haves" on the websites' main pages were identified and analyzed for discussion.

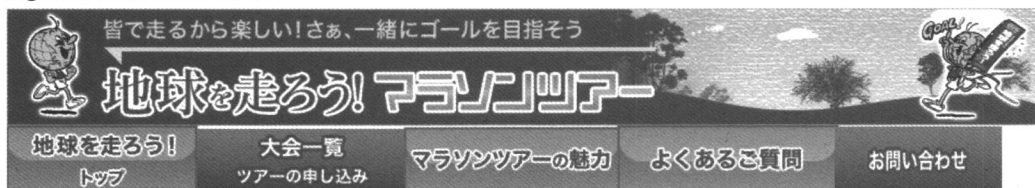
CTI International Marathon Main Page

The masthead on CTI's International Marathon Main Page has a running globe graphic, along with the heading *Let's Run the Globe! Marathon Tours* in large font (See Figure 2 below). Just above this is the phrase, *It's fun because we run with everyone! Now, let's reach the finish line together*, creating the image of a fun, more easily manageable effort of completing a marathon by sharing the experience with a large number of other enthusiastic participants.

There are five menu items below the masthead on the main overseas marathon page for CTI as shown in Figure 2. The menu items are:

1. Run the Globe! Top
2. Events at a Glance / Registering for a Tour
3. The Attraction of Marathon Tours
4. FAQs
5. Contact

Figure 2. Main Menu on CTI



Source: <http://www.club-t.com>

Each of the above menu items represents information and services to meet the expectations of the Japanese tour customer, all making up the basic information required for a successfully executed Japanese overseas marathon tour. These essential components (left to right on the menu) are offered online to CTI customers as an entry point prior to accessing information specific to any of their many overseas marathon tour offerings.

Run the Globe! Top

After clicking on this menu tab, it is clear that the main function of this section is to help one search for an overseas marathon based on one's search criteria. There are two large sections with the headings, *Search for an Event*, and *Recommended Marathon Tours*. In other boxed sections on the side of the page, smaller boxed sections for *Attraction of Marathon Tours*, *Tour Reports*, *Ranking of Marathon Tours*, and *Internet Members Login* are available.

Events at a Glance

The primary function of this page is to see a listing of all overseas marathon tours offered by CTI. The listing comes with menus to filter the list by Event Date (Month), Region, Race Distance, and Registration Deadline Status. The six options available for filtering the race list by Region are: All, North & South America, Europe/Africa, Japan/Asia, Oceania, and Hawaii/Guam.

The Attraction of Marathon Tours

This page emphasizes the tour company's specialization and long experience in leading overseas marathon tours. The heading *Over 30 years we have guided approximately 30,000 runners* is displayed above photos and information of key marathon tour staff members.

Another important area covered in this section describes the type of support provided to tour participants. The four key points mentioned here are Entry, Course Inspection, After Race Party, and Remembrance Photo, all essential components to both domestic and overseas Japanese marathon tours.

FAQs

This page covers three main FAQ categories: About the tours, About Entry in Races, and What to Bring.

Contacts

Listed here is the telephone number with hours of operation. This information is available for those who have questions and want to speak with a marathon tour specialist about any concerns they have related to overseas marathon running and the tours.

Common Elements for Marathon Tours

The five marathons selected at random for this study are Vancouver Marathon, Los Angeles Marathon, Sedona Marathon, Luxor Egypt International Marathon, and Paris Marathon. All five marathons are found on www.runnet.jp listing of overseas marathons and CTI offers tours to each of these international races.

Upon accessing CTI's link for each of these marathons, the user is provided information on the main page at three levels: Race Information page, Registration, and Tour Itinerary. Details for each section are given below.

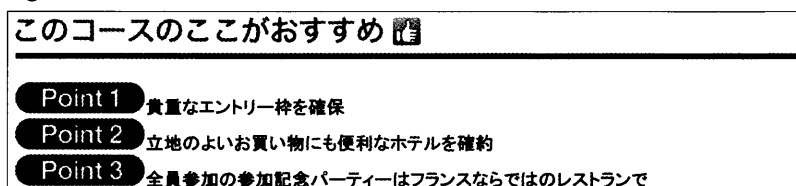
Race Information

This section provides detailed race information, including a description of the race. For example, the *Word from Staff* section provides valuable tips for each race from experienced staff that have travelled to and participated in the event. The Vancouver Marathon, in the *Word from Staff* section, is described by CTI staff as "having ideal temperatures for marathon running due to May temperatures in Vancouver staying in the range of 7 to 18 degrees Celsius." It also continues with "let's run surrounded by the magnificent mountains, flowers and forests and take in the natural beauty of Canada" (<http://www.club-t.com>).

The *Race Memo* section gives all of the details concerning the event. The information provided include: Start time, Course Description, Finish Time Limit, Minimum Age for Entry, and Finisher Souvenirs. A course map showing the route of the marathon through the city is usually provided in this section.

A feature of the CTI website that provides helpful information to Japanese consumers who may not be familiar with a particular marathon, the city, or the amenities offered by the tour company is a section called, *What We Recommend About this Tour*. This section is symbolized by a thumbs-up icon and typically has 2 to 4 key selling points to help consumer with the decision-making process in the choice of marathon tours (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Paris Marathon Recommendations



Source: <http://www.club-t.com>

Figure 3 shows an example for the Paris Marathon, sharing the following three points about this particular tour: Point 1 – Guaranteed entry into the limited-entry race, Point 2 – Shopping in a great area located conveniently near our hotel guaranteed, and Point 3 – Commemorative post-race party for all participants is held in a distinctive French restaurant.

Registration

Once a potential tour participant reaches this area, he/she has several options to select a tour from various price ranges. The prices differ based on the length of the tour, with the basic tour comprising of days necessary to participate in the marathon and related events, while the pricier tours include additional days for post-marathon optional tours. By clicking on a tour option, the detailed tour itinerary can be seen.

In the five marathons reviewed for this study, the number of options ranges from 1 option for Luxor and 8 options for Vancouver. Options for the Sedona Marathon are the basic 5-day Option at 178,000 yen, which allows participants to run in the marathon and attend marathon-related events as the main tour activities. This option also points out that all tour participants will be staying in the “Japanese Runners’ official hotel—The Best Western Arroyo.” The other option, at 278,000 yen, extends the tour to 8 days and includes a trip to the Grand Canyon where participants can enjoy a traditional Navajo lunch at Monument Valley. This tour takes participants to Las Vegas via Horseshoe Bend National Military Park and other scenic sites, where they will depart for Narita, Japan via McCarron International Airport in Las Vegas.

Tour Itinerary

All details of the daily marathon tour schedule are listed in this section for each selected tour. This section also includes information such as, shuttle service to and from the marathon event, meals, course inspection, pre-race carbo-loading pasta party, site of the marathon expo and official marathon hotel, after-race party, and optional tours.

There is also an area on this page that is marked with the heading, *Perfect for those searching for this type of tour*, and lists activities like “Running a marathon” or “Cheering,” based on the selection of the tour.

As mentioned above, The Vancouver Marathon has 8 options for tours. The options vary in the length of the tour and in price, with different departure dates from Japan. This particular marathon is able to provide more options due to the large number of marathon runners that can travel during this time of year (Golden Week – A series of four holidays closely spaced

together and observed at the end of April and beginning of May). The itinerary page presents “Recommended Points” about this marathon on the top of each tour page. The following points are made about this race: “Because this event is held during Golden Week, there are many Japanese runners in this race. The month of May is mid-Spring in Vancouver. It is the best season for running and for sightseeing. So, let’s go to Vancouver where the seafood is delicious!” Figure 4 shows a photo posted on CTI’s website of a recent Vancouver Marathon tour group.

Figure 4. CTI’s Vancouver Marathon Tour Participants



Source: <http://www.club-t.com>

Discussion and Conclusion

Marathon running has grown in popularity in Japan over the past decade and increasing numbers of Japanese marathon runners are going overseas to participate in destination marathons around the world. Marathon tour companies, like Club Tourism International (CTI) continue to lead large groups of Japanese runners to established big city marathons and newer destination marathons that are eager to capture local, national and international marathon enthusiasts markets.

The Honolulu Marathon officials and state personnel recognized early on the positive economic impact that the marathon has had, on not only the city of Honolulu but also the entire state, attracting the high-spending, Japanese market to the state during a time of year when there is

usually a drop in arrivals of tourist to Hawaii (Agrusa et al., 2008). The Hawaii Tourism Authority also recognizes that people travelling to Hawaii to participate or attend events like the marathon translates to visitor spending, which helps to create and sustain jobs, and generate state and local tax revenues (Hawaii Tourism Authority, 2012).

For destinations with the desire to reap the benefits of hosting a successful marathon like Honolulu that attracts marathon participants from Japan, it will be helpful to review the on-line marketing methods used by Japanese marathon tour companies, like CTI. CTI's overseas marathon tours offered to Japanese consumers, like many packaged tours, is offered in a McDonaldized system where the dimensions of Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability, and Control all exist. These are briefly reviewed as they relate to CTI's marathon tours.

Efficiency. This is one of the most important elements of McDonald's and this dimension is clearly covered in CTI's tours. Going through CTI's website to book a trip to an overseas destination is extremely efficient, with the booking of race entry, airline tickets, hotel accommodations, etc. completed in one location (online). In addition, this can be accomplished at any time of day, offering even more efficiency.

Calculability. Entering and running in a major metropolitan marathon with tens of thousands of runners in a foreign country can be an overwhelming experience. Calculability emphasizes the quantitative aspects of products and services sold. With CTI, one knows how many people will be part of the tour, exactly how much vacation time will be necessary, and the total cost for services in Japanese yen.

Predictability. All Japanese overseas marathon tours sold by CTI offer the same basic elements, such as the ease of entry in limited-entry races, experienced Japanese-speaking tour staff, Japanese runner hotel, after race party, and consideration for pre-race meals (such as *onigiri* rice balls and oolong tea) that meet the needs of the Japanese runner. Consumers take great comfort in know that CTI offers no surprises.

Control. This is what is exerted over people that enter a McDonaldized system, including consumers and people that work in a McDonaldized organization. Although there are some options with the selection of tours, itineraries are strictly kept, there are limited choices within the itineraries, and participants must adhere to strict deadlines in entering and in their selection of events. There is little to no freedom to deviate from one's selected itinerary upon selection of a tour.

While the system is McDonaldized, the tour companies have localized the system, just as Mc-

Donalds' in international locations have added local menu items, like Chicken Tatsuta in Japan, McHuevos in Uruguay, and McSpaghetti in the Philippines (Ritzer, 2011:183). The tours offer services suited to Japanese tastes within the McDonaldized system, such as Japanese runners' hotels, consideration for Japanese national holidays, presentation of information in Japanese language, and pre-race meals adjusted to the diet of the Japanese runner. It appears that CTI's system of offering overseas marathon tour packages is working as shown by the quantity of their tours on www.runnet.jp and longevity of CTI. The cookie-cutter approach of offering marathon tours online is efficient, calculable, predictable, and controllable. At the same time, though, we also know that Japanese tourists are interested in activity and emotion as they travel, and not just interested in the visual component, or the gaze (Shono et al., 2005). Consumers today, including Japanese marathon tourists, unquestionably desire experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

What we see in this case is an example of how McDonaldization intersects with The Experience Economy. Japanese runners utilize a McDonaldized system like CTI to pursue a non-McDonaldized experience, the marathon, where even the best-trained runner cannot tell what will happen on that day, and during that time frame, when they are running in the marathon. They are in search of the "something" (Ritzer, 2011:173) that comes with a distinctive content, as opposed to the "nothing" that comes in a McDonaldized system, which is defined as "a social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content" (Ritzer, 2011:172). This "something" includes, experiencing camaraderie with fellow marathon runners on a unique marathon course, going through the roller coaster feelings of pain and joy that may come with covering the marathon distance, meeting new friends from various places, etc. These make up the distinctive content that will differ every time one runs in a marathon event. This distinctive content becomes even more distinctive as an experience, when the marathon is experienced in an overseas destination.

Highlighting the opportunities for staging unique, memorable experiences is recommended for local marathon organizers that have a desire to attract large numbers of overseas participants, including Japanese overseas marathon runners. By studying how marathon tour companies like CTI promote their overseas marathon tour packages online in Japan, we can work directly with the tour providers to help set the stage for a memorable experience for each individual runner.

Because this case study focused on one Japanese marathon tour company, other tour operators and their online marketing methods can be analyzed for comparison. Further research may also include measuring satisfaction levels and conversion rates of users of these websites to determine how the Japanese marathon tour companies can improve online experience.

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