

## Japan, land of rising outbound tourism

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THE Japanese are coming back.

Shortly after reports that two airlines are looking to boost capacity from Japan to cope with a spike in demand for seats around the time of July's Gold Coast Marathon, comes further news that should have Gold Coast tourism operators smiling.

Japan's second-largest outbound tourism operator, Kinki Nippon Tourist (KNT), has announced a doubling in bookings by Japanese travellers to the Gold Coast during the traditional travel period of Golden Week -- a run of public holidays stretching from April 25 to May 6, this year, when many Japanese choose to travel overseas.

Despite Japan being in the grips of its worst recession since World War II, bookings out of Japan have soared generally, according to KNT, but particularly to Oceania, the Maldives, Tahiti and the Gold Coast.

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The Bulletin reported this week that Japanese wholesalers had reported heavy bookings for the Gold Coast Marathon, prompting airlines to try to increase capacity.

Outbound operator JTB declined to return calls to The Bulletin but KNT said the travel boom might have been fuelled by the huge fall in fuel surcharges, steep appreciation of the yen and better timing of the holiday period.

But the picture on the ground seems harder to read.

The Bulletin understands that while Jetstar bookings into the Coast were performing well, JAL's loadings into Brisbane weren't faring nearly as well.

Gold Coast Tourism boss Martin Winter agreed the Japanese market appeared to be a mixed bag, but noted there had been good growth in school student visitors from Japan.

"I don't know what to make of it at the moment. It's a bit patchy and very hard to predict," said Mr Winter.

The numbers of Japanese visiting the Coast began building in the 1980s, peaking at 377,000 in 1997, but dropping steadily since, hitting just over 100,000 last year. However, new low-cost flights between Gold Coast and both Tokyo and Osaka started late last year by Jetstar, have given renewed hope of a resurgence of the Japanese market.

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