

**Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce &
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Year in Japan:

**Mid-term Report
Sustainable Cultural Tourism in Switzerland and Japan**



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From Tokyo, Japan

Part 1: Personal experiences after arriving in Japan

1. Introduction: Personal Background and Motivations

Since arriving in Japan on September 19, 2023, I have had the privilege to immerse myself deeply in the language, culture, and daily life of Tokyo. I am very thankful to *Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC)* and the *Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (SCCIJ)* for letting me take part in their *Year in Japan* program. As a recipient of the *SJCC Scholarship*, this journey marks not only a personal milestone but also a professional chapter of growth and exploration. Furthermore, my goal is to contribute to deeper cultural connections between Japan and Switzerland through language proficiency, firsthand experience, and future work in the cultural and/or creative industries.

My long-standing interest in Japanese culture stems from personal interests and experiences. Prior to this stay, I had already visited Japan twice for short travels (in 2015 and 2019), which sparked and reinforced my admiration for the country's culture, aesthetics, and sense of detail even more. Through earlier activities in Switzerland, such as my involvement with the *Swiss-Japanese Heritage Community* — a during that time active local cultural Swiss-Japanese association — and events related to Japanese culture, arts and pop culture, I began to form more structured aspirations for future engagement between both countries.

Further, while mostly having a background in Sales with some working experience in within the marketing field, I also had studied MAS in Arts Management courses such as cultural marketing and cultural mediation, cultural entrepreneurship, cultural politics and cultural funding and management of cultural organizations at ZHAW School of Marketing and Law.

This scholarship year offered a great opportunity: to develop the linguistic and cultural fluency necessary to contribute meaningfully in a Japanese professional setting, possibly even within the arts, tourism, or communication fields.

2. First Impressions: Settling into the Metropole

While I had previously visited Japan as a tourist, moving here to live marked a profound shift in my relationship with the country. It had been my first time living outside of Switzerland for more than a few months, and although I was excited, the prospect of settling into a new culture and system also brought various moments of uncertainty.

Though, thanks to previous experiences with Japanese friends and cultural activities in Switzerland, the initial culture shock was rather mild. I was already familiar with certain customs and expectations. However, the reality of daily life in Tokyo—navigating city systems in Japanese, setting up administrative accounts, finding housing, and understanding subtleties in behavior—still posed challenges. Even finding appropriately sized shoes or pants occasionally reminded me of how everyday life adapts to cultural norms and local averages.

Together with my partner, who also relocated to Tokyo during that time for a research position, we moved together into a small apartment not far from my language school in Nippori. The neighborhood's residential feel and proximity to daily conveniences helped

create a stable base from which to begin our new life. Tokyo felt vast and dense, yet strangely quiet and orderly. As someone from Zurich, I appreciated the shared values of cleanliness, efficiency, and public respectfulness. Still, there was something uniquely soft and indirect about Japanese social norms—gentle, sometimes maybe even a little bit too non-confrontational, but also deeply attentive—that I noticed even in the simplest interactions.

3. Language Study: Opportunities and Challenges

My language studies formally began on October 6, 2023, at Akamonkai Japanese Language School in Tokyo. Although I had previously studied some Japanese in Switzerland, I had to start studying at a beginner level and quickly realized the steep learning curve that would lay ahead. The school follows more of a traditional Japanese school system with a rigorous teaching structure, which required me to invest considerable time and focus outside of class. My goal was to lay a solid foundation in grammar, vocabulary, kanji, and speaking all while adapting to life in this new environment.

The course structure was very demanding but effective. My classes were mostly held in the afternoon, giving me the mornings for study and preparation. I often dedicated several hours each day to reviewing material and writing kanji — a task made especially difficult after I sustained an injury to my dominant hand while playing volleyball, one of the few leisure activities I engaged in at the time to connect socially with local Japanese and to stay physically active. Despite the pain and the challenge, it posed to my studies and job applications, I continued to attend class and practiced writing with as much persistence as I could muster. Looking back, this period symbolized my determination to make the most of the language learning phase, even when circumstances were far from ideal.

Social life during this time was modest. While I made a few foreign friends through language school, I did not have close Japanese acquaintances in Tokyo. Nonetheless, I actively participated in the school's Japanese Conversation Club. Within small group sessions with native speakers, it gave me a chance to use and improve my practical Japanese skills and deepen my cultural understanding. Additionally, the local volleyball group — which I had joined before my hand injury — composed mainly of Japanese players. It was a fun and energizing way to experience a different aspect of daily life in Japan and momentarily break out of the routine of studying, while also interacting with Japanese.

4. Cultural Adaption: Resilience and Personal Growth

While the initial months were challenging, they were also deeply rewarding. The most fulfilling moments often come in quiet, almost invisible ways — like understanding more of the signs around me or successfully using newly learned grammar structures while interacting with others. These small but steady breakthroughs reaffirmed that my efforts were paying off and helped to build more confidence, little by little.

Although I was still far from fluent, I started to navigate the city with more ease and could handle everyday interactions with growing independence. This growing confidence also helped as I began preparing for the next phase of my year in Japan: working within a Japanese environment.

Throughout this period, I remained focused on aligning my experience with my long-term career goals. With a background in sales, event coordination, and a formal education in Arts Management, I aimed to find a working environment where I could meaningfully apply both language and cultural knowledge — ideally in sectors related to cultural promotion, communication, or tourism. This intentional approach to job searching meant that I was probably far too selective about where I applied and giving me a slower start in successfully entering a Japanese company and finding a position aligning with my aspirations. I wanted this opportunity to be relevant not just for this year, but for the trajectory I envision — one in which I contribute to strengthening Swiss–Japanese cultural and creative ties.

5. Job search in Japan: Transition to working in Japan

While still studying at the language school, I gradually shifted my focus toward the working part of the scholarship year and the job search. From the beginning, I had been clear with myself that I wanted to pursue an opportunity not only compatible with my existing experience in sales, events, and marketing, but also aligned with my growing expertise and academic background in arts and cultural management. This would allow me to apply my competencies in a meaningful way and ideally contribute to fields that foster long-term cultural and economic exchange between Japan and Switzerland.

During my job search, I was intentional about the roles I applied to. I aimed to find a position that would offer real insight into Japan’s cultural, creative, or tourism sectors. This decision came with its own set of challenges. My Japanese language skills, while improving steadily, were still in development. At the same time, my previous injury to my dominant hand affected how confidently I could approach hands-on or fast-paced roles. Nevertheless, I remained focused on proceeding in this situation, hoping to secure a placement that would genuinely enrich my future career path.

In the process, I researched suitable organizations and reached out to potential employers with tailored applications. The experience of writing applications and corresponding with companies in Japanese has been another layer of practical language immersion, while not only learning new vocabulary but also studying the nuances of Japanese business etiquette and communication.

I managed to secure a position as Art Attendant at *teamLab Planets* in Tokyo. *TeamLab* the internationally renowned art collective, blends technology, nature, and human interaction in captivating ways into their art and exhibitions. The Tokyo-based Planets exhibitions has furthermore become a major touristic attraction, lately being recognized by the Guinness World Records as the most visited museum in the world *by a single art group*, and is widely known for redefining how people experience contemporary art and immerse with it.

While still working on my Japanese Language proficiency, I am excited being able to work in such an environment and while looking ahead, I remain optimistic and determined. While progressing slower than initially intended, it is also a good opportunity and possibly a step closer to my long-term goal of working at the intersection of arts, communication, and cultural exchange.

Part 2: Sustainable Cultural Tourism in Switzerland and Japan

1. Introduction:

In an era of growing global mobility, cultural tourism has become a powerful force for regional development, cultural exchange, and identity-building. UNESCO emphasizes that sustainable tourism must “take full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO, n.d.; UNESCO, n.d.-a). In both Switzerland and Japan, cultural heritage—both tangible and intangible—is deeply intertwined with landscapes and traditions, forming a central component of national tourism strategies (OECD, n.d.).

Cultural tourism has experienced substantial growth: it now accounts for nearly 40% of global travel motivations (Data Bridge Market Research, 2023), pushing attention toward its long-term environmental and cultural impact. UNESCO’s World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme promotes stakeholder cooperation and community empowerment as key to heritage sustainability (UNESCO, n.d.-b; UNESCO, n.d.-c).

This section introduces a brief comparative case study approach analyzing sustainable cultural tourism in Japan and Switzerland through four paired case clusters—immersive heritage, institutional innovation, landscape stewardship, and high-traffic cultural zones. Each cluster is evaluated against two core criteria: Community and Cultural Integrity and Economic and Environmental Resilience. A supporting lens—Innovation and Inclusion—examines digital practices and accessibility.

This analysis is grounded in key UN Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 11.4 (protecting cultural and natural heritage), SDG 8.9 (promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism), SDG 12.8 (encouraging sustainable lifestyles), and SDG 17.17 (fostering partnerships) (UNESCO, n.d.-b; UNWTO, n.d.). Switzerland’s “Swisstainable” initiative offers a three-tier certification model promoting environmental awareness, cultural respect, and support for local business (Switzerland Tourism, n.d.; EarthCheck, 2023). Japan’s 2022 Tourism Vision for a Sustainable Society advocates for decentralizing tourism, boosting local cultural assets, and alleviating overtourism stress (Japan Tourism Agency, 2022; WEF, 2025).

By comparing these Swiss and Japanese examples, this report aims to offer practical insights. More importantly, it conceptualizes tourism not as mere consumption but as a cultural contract—a commitment between hosts, heritage, and visitors.

2. Conceptual Framework

To understand sustainable cultural tourism effectively, this report draws from a comparative framework that combines case-based reasoning with thematic categorization. The core of the framework includes four comparative clusters: immersive heritage environments, institutional innovation, cultural landscapes, and high-traffic heritage destinations. Each cluster includes one case from Switzerland and one from Japan, enabling grounded cross-regional insights.

This approach is informed by the principle of comparative cultural sustainability, where cultural practices, governance models, and visitor behaviors are interpreted contextually (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2016). The analysis adopts three main evaluative criteria: (1) Community and Cultural Integrity, (2) Economic and Environmental Resilience, and (3) Innovation and Inclusion. These dimensions reflect the holistic and interdependent nature of sustainable development as promoted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, n.d.; UNWTO, n.d.).

Additionally, this framework is grounded in place-based analysis, which emphasizes how tourism strategies respond to specific ecological, demographic, and cultural conditions (Dredge & Jenkins, 2011). The cases also explore the role of institutions—public, private, and hybrid—as agents shaping tourism practice and impact.

The structure also allows the inclusion of cross-comparative recommendations, ensuring that the findings not only highlight success stories but also generate scalable insights for smaller municipalities or secondary tourism destinations in both countries. The framework helps illustrate not just 'what works,' but 'why it works where it does'.

3. A Comparative Exploration of Cultural Tourism Models

3.1. Immersive Heritage Environments:

Ballenberg Open-Air Museum & Edo Wonderland in Nikko

This cluster explores two living heritage environments that provide immersive experiences in cultural tradition: Ballenberg Open-Air Museum in Switzerland and Edo Wonderland in Nikko, Japan. Though differing in institutional setup and interpretive style, both sites represent how history is transformed into participatory visitor engagement.

Ballenberg, opened in 1978, presents over 100 historical buildings relocated from across Switzerland to preserve regional vernacular architecture (Ballenberg, n.d.). These include farmhouses, craft workshops, and alpine dwellings, animated by demonstrators practicing traditional trades such as blacksmithing and cheesemaking. The museum integrates

agricultural landscapes and local breeds, promoting living heritage as an evolving ecological system.

Edo Wonderland Nikko Edomura, by contrast, is a cultural theme park recreating the atmosphere of Japan's Edo period (1603–1868) with stylized urban layouts and role-play elements. Opened in 1986, it blends education with entertainment, employing actors in samurai, merchant, and artisan roles to deliver daily performances, experiences, and interactive history lessons (Edo Wonderland, n.d.).

Both institutions contribute to cultural preservation and education but reflect contrasting approaches: Ballenberg adopts a museological preservation strategy, while Edo Wonderland embraces narrative immersion and dramatization. Yet both generate valuable contributions to regional identity, cultural awareness, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Sustainability concerns intersect through infrastructure, community integration, and economic accessibility. Ballenberg collaborates with cultural and agricultural institutions to develop regionally rooted partnerships (Swissinfo, 2020). Edo Wonderland has adapted to demographic shifts by tailoring content for international audiences and integrating experiential language-learning opportunities.

As immersive environments, these sites reveal the opportunity for cultural tourism to evolve into multi-sensory education and entertainment formats, provided they engage ethical representation, accessibility, and adaptive management.

3.2. Institutions & Innovation:

Swiss National Museum Zurich & Naoshima Art Island

This cluster focuses on the role of institutions in shaping sustainable cultural tourism through programming, accessibility, and innovation. It compares the Swiss National Museum in Zurich with Japan's Naoshima Art Island project, highlighting different institutional approaches to cultural value creation.

The Swiss National Museum, located near Zurich's main train station, is Switzerland's most visited cultural history museum. It integrates traditional and contemporary exhibitions, featuring multilingual content, free access for minors, and collaborative educational programs (Landesmuseum Zürich, n.d.). The museum is a federal institution under the Swiss Confederation and regularly updates its interpretive and technological offerings to attract diverse audiences.

Naoshima, in contrast, is a privately initiated project led by the Benesse Corporation and the Fukutake Foundation. It transforms an island into a landscape of site-specific art, modern architecture (notably by Tadao Ando), and cultural immersion (Benesse Art Site Naoshima, n.d.-a). The project encompasses the Chichu Art Museum, the Art House Project, and community spaces, promoting slow travel and contemplation rather than passive consumption.

While both institutions engage in cultural dissemination, Naoshima exemplifies private-sector vision aligned with public goals of cultural preservation and regional revitalization. It has sparked national and international dialogue about decentralizing tourism in Japan and rethinking museum experiences (Cultural Japan, 2023).

Sustainability is advanced through architectural integration, renewable energy use, and active efforts to involve local residents in service provision and artistic programming. By contrast, the Swiss National Museum leverages heritage status and accessibility (including free Sunday entry initiatives) to ensure inclusivity and civic engagement.

Both models exemplify institutional leadership in promoting heritage and innovation. They suggest that hybrid models—balancing public mandate with private creativity—can be effective vehicles for sustainable cultural tourism.

3.3. Cultural Landscapes and Multi-Site Heritage:

Lavaux Vineyard Terraces (incl. Chillon Castle) & Yamanashi Prefecture (var.)

This cluster examines two culturally rich regions with strong natural and agricultural identities: the Lavaux Vineyard Terraces and Chillon Castle region in Switzerland and the Yamanashi Prefecture in Japan. These regions exemplify how integrated landscapes can serve as models for place-based tourism, fusing heritage, agriculture, nature, and culture.

The Lavaux Vineyard Terraces, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2007, represent centuries of terraced viticulture that embody sustainable land use, local craftsmanship, and scenic preservation (UNESCO, n.d.). The landscape's steep slopes along Lake Geneva are actively farmed and integrated with wine tourism routes, small-scale producers, and guided heritage walks (Lavaux Patrimoine Mondial, n.d.).

Chillon Castle, nearby, complements the experience by showcasing medieval and literary history in an accessible and well-preserved format. It receives hundreds of thousands of visitors annually and promotes themed events, guided tours, and conservation education in cooperation with local schools and tourism bodies.

In Japan, Yamanashi Prefecture is known for its wine heritage—particularly Koshu grape cultivation—but also for other tourist assets including Mount Fuji (bordering the region), the Oshino Hakkai springs, and temples like Erin-ji. These sites are increasingly connected through thematic routes such as the Yamanashi Winery Tourism project (Grace Wine, n.d.) and UNESCO-associated sustainable practices around water and mountain ecology (Fujisan World Heritage Center, n.d.).

Both regions leverage cultural landscape status to support community-based tourism. In Lavaux, efforts include supporting local vintners with marketing infrastructure and promoting eco-conscious travel via boat or rail (ALPM, n.d.). In Yamanashi, recent strategies aim to revive domestic tourism through multilingual resources, tasting experiences, and collaborations with heritage sites and accommodation providers (Yamanashi Prefecture Tourism Department, 2024).

Challenges include climate change impacts on wine production, pressure from rising tourist numbers, and preserving authenticity while modernizing infrastructure. However, both cases exemplify how intangible heritage (e.g., wine-making, pilgrimage, food rituals) can be integrated with visual and spatial design to deliver a holistic tourism offer.

3.4. High-Traffic Heritage Destinations: Zermatt & Kyoto

This cluster compares two globally recognized heritage destinations—Zermatt in Switzerland and Kyoto in Japan—known for their cultural richness and popularity among both domestic and international tourists. As high-traffic destinations, they illustrate the double-edged sword of cultural tourism: economic vitality versus overtourism and degradation.

Zermatt, located at the foot of the Matterhorn, is a car-free alpine village that combines tourism, sustainability, and heritage preservation. It receives approximately 2 million visitors annually and has developed a sophisticated tourism infrastructure that includes electric taxis, sustainable lodging, and efficient public transport (Zermatt Tourism, 2023). The destination also features a historic core and promotes eco-tourism activities like glacier hiking and traditional chalet stays.

Kyoto, the former imperial capital, hosts 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and receives over 50 million visitors per year. Tourism has intensified since the 2010s, driven by global interest in Japanese culture and strategic promotions before the 2020 Olympics. However, overtourism has led to congestion, resident dissatisfaction, and damage to cultural integrity in heritage zones like Gion and Arashiyama (City of Kyoto, 2024).

In response, Kyoto launched a 'Sustainable Tourism Strategy' in 2022, introducing digital crowd-monitoring tools, promoting alternative destinations within the city, and developing 'Tourism Etiquette' campaigns targeted at visitors (Kyoto City Tourism Association, 2024). Meanwhile, Zermatt exemplifies long-term environmental governance, with energy from hydroelectric and solar sources and partnerships with sustainability research bodies (Siemens Press, 2024).

Both cases illustrate the challenges of managing iconic destinations: preserving cultural character, ensuring livability for locals, and delivering high-quality visitor experiences. Their strategies underscore the importance of integrated policies, stakeholder dialogue, and clear carrying-capacity thresholds in sustainable tourism planning.

4. Comparative Analysis

This section distills patterns, contrasts, and transferable insights from the four comparative clusters. By analyzing them through the lenses of (1) Community and Cultural Integrity, (2) Economic and Environmental Resilience, and (3) Innovation and Inclusion, shared opportunities and challenges are identified across both Swiss and Japanese contexts.

Firstly, community empowerment emerged as a recurring success factor. Ballenberg and Lavaux offer models for engaging local actors through craft, agriculture, and storytelling. Naoshima and Yamanashi demonstrate how decentralized and participatory models (both public and private) can revitalize rural areas while preserving authenticity. However, in high-traffic areas like Kyoto and Zermatt, resident well-being must be actively safeguarded through policies balancing tourism influx with livability (City of Kyoto, 2024; Kyoto City Tourism Association, 2024).

Secondly, economic resilience is closely tied to diversification and environmental policy. Zermatt's long-standing commitment to carbon neutrality through electrified mobility and solar infrastructure sets a benchmark. In Lavaux and Yamanashi, linking gastronomy, culture, and mobility increases income diversity and visitor flow modulation. However, challenges persist with seasonality, dependency on international travel, and rising climate vulnerability affecting vineyards, snow reliability, and water sources.

Thirdly, innovation and inclusion are best advanced through hybrid models. The Swiss National Museum leverages its public mandate for inclusivity, while Naoshima demonstrates how private initiatives can spur visionary infrastructure with wide cultural impact. Digitally enabled sustainability—seen in Kyoto's tourist-behavior campaigns and Zermatt's smart

monitoring—can play a key role in scalable solutions (Siemens Press, 2024; Kyoto City Tourism Association, 2024).

Overall, this comparative lens underscores the value of adaptive, stakeholder-led governance. Cultural tourism becomes sustainable not through uniform templates, but through place-based innovations responding to shared and site-specific needs.

5. Recommendations and Outlook

This final section outlines actionable recommendations for sustainable cultural tourism development. These are informed by the successes and gaps across the selected case studies and aim to support both policy and practice across regions, institutions, and tourism actors.

1. **Prioritize Community-Centric Governance:** Initiatives should elevate local ownership, with co-creation of programming, representation in decision-making, and reinvestment of tourism revenue into regional development. Lavaux’s cooperative wine models and Naoshima’s local engagement programs offer valuable blueprints (Lavaux Patrimoine Mondial, n.d.; Benesse Art Site Naoshima, n.d.).

2. **Benchmark Success Using Holistic Criteria:** Sites and destinations should be evaluated not just by visitor numbers or revenue, but by community well-being, ecological health, inclusivity, and heritage preservation. Establishing regular stakeholder feedback loops and interdisciplinary monitoring can ensure adaptive planning.

3. **Diversify Visitor Flows Seasonally and Spatially:** Encourage off-season travel and develop secondary heritage routes within regions to ease pressure on iconic sites. For example, Chillon Castle and nearby Lavaux vineyards can offer curated packages that expand tourist duration and engagement beyond peak areas.

4. **Scale Lessons for Small and Medium Communities:** Practices from major cases should be translated into toolkits or training modules for smaller municipalities, which may lack the same visibility or infrastructure but hold valuable cultural assets.

The Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities) provide a global framework to align cultural tourism with environmental and social sustainability (UNESCO, n.d.). If interpreted creatively, the intersection of culture, innovation, and community can drive the next generation of sustainable tourism strategy.

Ultimately, cultural tourism’s future lies in its ability to foster shared stewardship of heritage—valuing stories, spaces, and systems that connect people meaningfully to place.

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