

Japanese people least likely to talk to strangers or offer help on airplanes, survey finds

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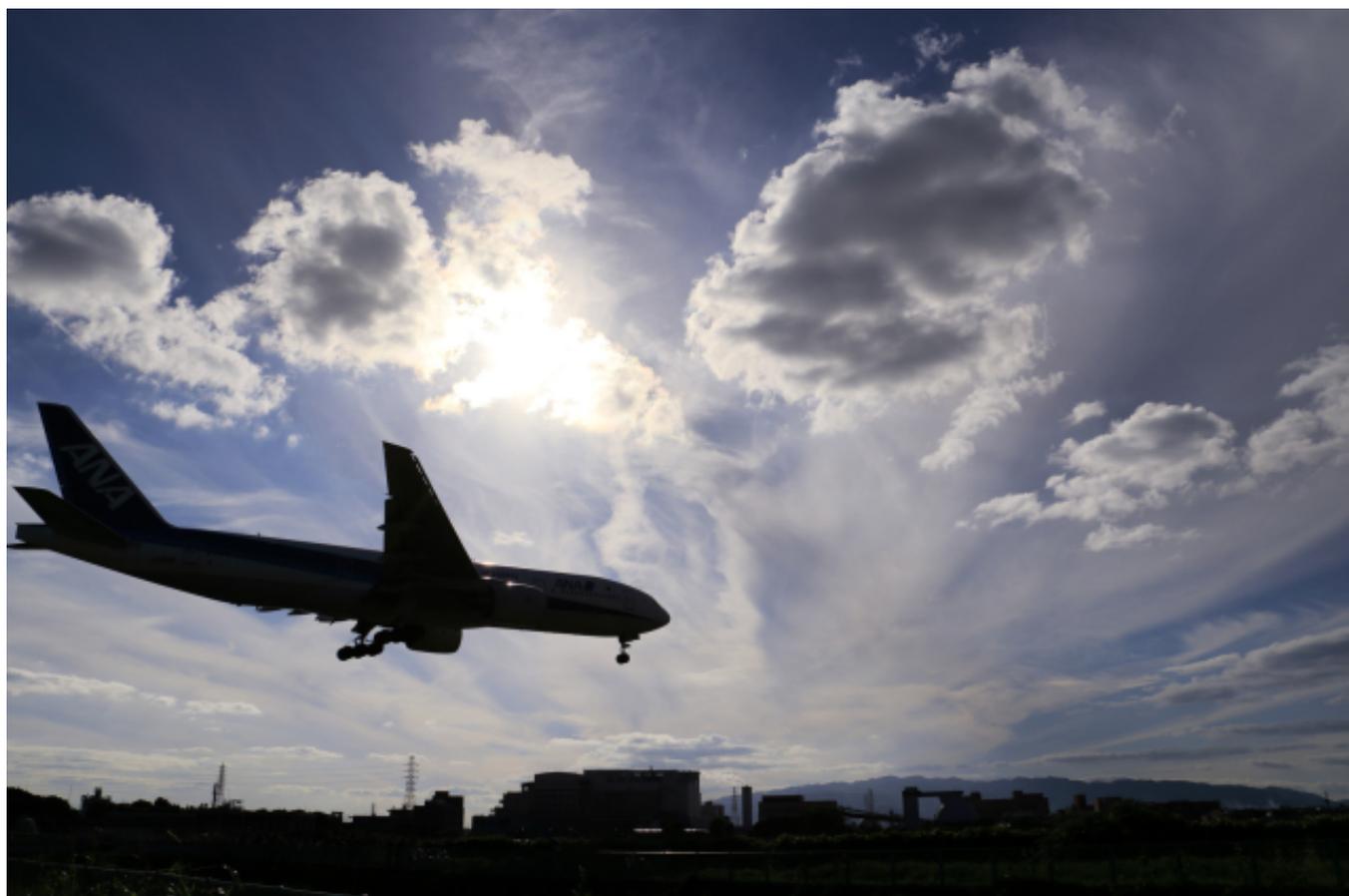


Photo: PAKJUTASO

The Japanese division of travel provider Expedia recently conducted a survey, polling a total of 18,237 travelers from 23 different countries who had ridden an airplane or stayed in a hotel within the last year. But Expedia wasn't interested in their travel destinations so much as the style of their journeys.

Specifically, Expedia wanted to know whether or not the respondents are the type to strike up conversations with strangers sitting next to them on airplanes. The most outgoing travelers were those hailing from India,

where 60 percent of travelers say they'll start talking to the person seated next to them on a plane, even if they've never met before.

Most likely to start talking to stranger in neighboring seat on airplane

- India: 60 percent
- Mexico: 59 percent
- Brazil: 51 percent
- Thailand: 7 percent
- Spain: 46 percent

But where did Japan land on the list? At the very bottom, with only 15 percent of Japanese travelers saying they initiate chitchat with strangers on a plane, a wide gap from even second-to-lowest Hong Kong.

Least likely to start talking to stranger in neighboring seat on airplane

- Korea: 28 percent
- Australia: 27 percent
- Germany: 26 percent
- Hong Kong: 24 percent
- Japan: 15 percent

As a matter of fact, Japanese travelers showed a low level of interaction with their fellow-yet-unacquainted air travelers across the board.

Most likely to offer assistance to stranger trying to put luggage into overhead bin

● Australia: 50 percent

Least likely

● Japan: 24 percent

Most likely to offer travel recommendations to other passengers on plane

● India: 38 percent

Least likely:

● Japan: 3 percent

Most likely to give up spot in security checkpoint for someone who's running late for their flight

● Brazil: 31 percent

Least likely:

● Japan: 5 percent

This doesn't necessarily mean that Japanese travelers are unfriendly or unkind, however, since cultural and even geographic elements are likely at play here.

Japanese culture has always emphasized not bothering others, and so many Japanese travelers will err on the side of caution in refraining from initiating conversations with strangers, in acknowledgement of the fact that the person may not be in the mood to talk. One could also see Japanese people staying quiet on airplanes as an extension of the way they stay quiet on trains, buses, and other shared modes of transportation in Japan. It's also worth taking into consideration that international Japanese air travel involves long-distance flights into or out of the island nation, which raises the odds that passengers want to

quietly relax or get some sleep.

Meanwhile, a large portion of domestic Japanese air travel is business-related (the country's convenient high-speed rail service is the go-to choice for domestic leisure travelers), and being essentially "at work" while traveling is another reason many might choose not to bother their airplane seat neighbor.

Then there's the linguistic factor. The nations most likely to strike up conversations, help with luggage, or offer recommendations were Australia and India, one a native-English-speaking country, and the other one where English is widely spoken. Expedia's survey data includes both international travelers as well as domestic ones, and the odds that any given passenger on a plane will speak English are far higher than that they'll speak Japanese. It's likely that a number of Japanese travelers refrain from chatting with other passengers at least in part because they don't expect to have a mutually understandable language, and likewise don't want to step in and start handling someone else's belongings (luggage intended for the overhead bin) without first being able to verbally express that they're trying to help.



Photo: PAKUTASO

As for Japanese travelers being less likely to give up their spot in the security check line? That's also probably due to a mix of linguistic and societal factors. Again, with Japanese being a comparatively less-spoken language than many others, many Japanese travelers would lack confidence to convey "You can have my spot" to a passenger who's in a hurry. There's also the fact that Japan is a largely rule-abiding society, and travelers might assume they're not allowed to step out of order once they've entered the line. And last, but certainly not least, Japanese society and workplaces tend to be extremely organized. Security lines at Japanese airports are administered in an amazingly efficient manner, rarely taking more than a few short minutes, and so it could simply be that Japanese travelers don't expect a few spots in the security line to make a big difference in how long it takes a traveler to get through the process, and so don't feel the situation warrants much urgency.

Of course, as with any set of statistics, it's important to remember that the numbers aren't iron-clad for all people. Yes, I've been seated near Japanese people on flights who didn't say a single word other than food or drink orders from take-off to landing, but I've also encountered ones who enthusiastically asked others about their home countries and recommended things to see and do in Japan. Still, Expedia's data shows that, in general, your Japanese plane neighbor might not be the one to start the conversation ball rolling.

Source: PR Times via Niconico news/Kyarikone via Jin

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