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Volume 15, 2020 - [Issue 6](#)

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# 'Kamikaze' heritage tourism in Japan: a pathway to peace and understanding?

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Pages 709-726 | Received 27 Jan 2020, Accepted 13 Apr 2020, Published online: 28 Apr 2020

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2020.1758117>

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## ABSTRACT

Reflecting the wider belief that international tourism offers the opportunity to encourage peace and understanding amongst peoples and nations, one objective of Japan's recent tourism development policy is the enhancement of mutual understanding and the promotion of international peace. The purpose of this paper is to consider the extent to which this objective is achievable, particularly in the context of continuing controversy surrounding the country's confrontation of its twentieth century military heritage in general and its role in the Pacific War in particular. Based on research at two 'difficult' heritage sites, Chiran Peace Museum in Kagoshima Prefecture and Yūshūkan War Museum in Tokyo, it explores specifically how the kamikaze phenomenon is commemorated and interpreted for international visitors, in so doing revealing a significant degree of dissonance at both sites. Not only is a selective narrative of heroic sacrifice presented within a wider revisionist history of the Pacific

War but also no attempt is made to acknowledge the prevailing cultural context that might underpin a more nuanced understanding of the kamikaze. Hence, the paper concludes that a meaningful opportunity to enhance international understanding has been missed.

#### KEYWORDS:

Tourism and peace

Japan

difficult heritage

dissonance

Chiran peace museum

Yūshūkan War Museum

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Note on contributors

Richard Sharpley is Professor of Tourism and Development at the University of Central Lancashire, UK, and Visiting Professor with the Centre for Tourism Research, Wakayama University, Japan. His principal research interests are within the fields of tourism and sustainable development, the tourist experience and dark tourism. He has published numerous books and papers in all three areas. Currently, he is engaged in three-year project exploring the presentation and interpretation of Japan's difficult pasts.

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