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ISABELL HANDLER*Doshisha University, Japan***ROSANNA LEUNG***National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism, Taiwan***Exploring Visitors Experience at the Kyotographie Photo Festival in Japan by Applying Auto-driving Reflexive Photo Elicitation Method**

The findings of projects exploring tourists' travel motivation and experience provide important information for tourism industry management decisions. This research explores visitors' experiences of the International Photo Festival 'Kyotographie' in Kyoto, Japan, to provide visitors' feedback and recommendation to the festival's management. This phenomenological study uses the auto-driving reflexive photo elicitation method which asks study participants to use their own photographs, taken during their visit, to elaborate on their experience in interviews. This method's advantage is that visuals trigger and sharpen respondents' memory, invite longer and more comprehensive responses, and is therefore a more powerful instrument for eliciting experiences than an interview alone. To the authors' knowledge, this procedure has not been previously used in a festival context. Nine participants were asked to visit all fifteen locations during the one-month festival period and to take a minimum of 20 photographs each of whatever attracted their gaze. In addition, the following photo themes were suggested: 1: The exhibition; 2: The artist; 3: The management; 4: The visitors; 5: The event space; 6: Event information; 7: Their personal experience; 8: Pro and cons; and 9: The unexpected. Participants were then asked in two focus group sessions to talk about their life experience with photography and past photo exhibitions, followed by Kyotographie specific questions covering their opinion, feelings, and were invited to elaborate on their experience using the photographs they had taken. All participants were also invited to identify strengths and weaknesses using their photographs when applicable. The final step consisted of collecting 20 photographs per participant which they considered representative of their experience. A discussion session based on this data set reviewed the earlier themes,

added new ones and ranked them according to the number of photographs on each theme. This study provides further evidence that collecting information-rich material on experiences that identify visitors' focus during visits helps respondents to answer interview questions and recall memories, particularly where they have to remember settings with large numbers of visual stimuli (such as tours, round trips or various event locations) visited over an extended time period.