

Rapid Reading

Part 1

Have you ever seen the television anime series *Lucky Star*? It was based on a four-panel comic strip series that was first published in a magazine in 2003. The story humorously describes the everyday lives of four high-school girls. *Lucky Star*, which was broadcast in 2007, was a great hit, like *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, one of the most popular television anime series of 2006.

Many fans of novels, movies, and TV dramas make “pilgrimages”: they visit locations where stories were set. These sites are considered by “pilgrims” to be “holy” places. Anime fans have also been visiting such sites. These are called “Anime Pilgrimages.” The sites have attracted fans, both from Japan and from around the world.

Part 2

One famous “Anime Pilgrimage” site is Washinomiya Shrine, in Saitama. A shrine in *Lucky Star* was modeled on Washinomiya Shrine. Some fans noticed this and started to visit it. Soon after that, the connection came to be known quite widely, and many more fans rushed there. Washinomiya Shrine became famous as a “holy” place for *Lucky Star* fans.

According to statistics, the number of New Year’s visitors to the shrine was about 130,000 in 2007, before the anime was aired. The next year, however, it jumped to about 300,000. The number reached 470,000 in 2011, and it remained the same for several years afterwards. It is estimated that the “pilgrimages” added about 3.1 billion yen to the local economy in the ten years following the broadcast.

Part 3

Anime-related events are still held at Washinomiya Shrine and at other “Anime Pilgrimage” sites. A variety of souvenirs, including character goods, are sold there. Many fans visit the sites to buy souvenirs and to take photos.

Sadly, the growing number of “Anime Pilgrims” can also cause problems. Some fans go into restricted areas without permission to take pictures. Others walk around neighborhoods in search of better photo spots, and they are often very noisy. Such behavior annoys local residents.

Certainly, some “Anime Pilgrims” do not respect local customs and lifestyles. However, more and more visitors now try to communicate with local people. As their communication continues, many of the visitors want to do something for the local areas.

Part 4

Even though *Lucky Star* finished airing in 2007, fans have continued to interact with local people in the Washinomiya Shrine area. In the beginning, “Anime

Pilgrims” visited there just to try to experience the world of *Lucky Star*. Later, as they came back again and again, they became fans of the area, too. Meanwhile, local people have tried to understand the anime better, and they have willingly accepted “Pilgrims.” Mutual understanding has also had a very positive economic effect.

“Anime Pilgrimages” also play an important role in attracting tourists from abroad. Those who visit “holy sites” often have a strong interest in Japanese culture and in the locations of their favorite anime stories. Information about “Anime Pilgrimages” is now being provided in many different languages by local people, on websites and social media. “Anime Pilgrimages” have great potential for promoting regional development in Japan.

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TRUE OR FALSE

1. () 2. () 3. ()

- “Anime Pilgrimages” have only attracted Japanese fans.
- Many anime fans visit “Anime Pilgrimage” sites to buy souvenirs and to take pictures.
- Mutual understanding between “Anime Pilgrims” and local people has had little economic effect.