

# Holiday change worth trying

## Giving people days off at different times could benefit economy

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**A**s Japan enters the Golden Week holiday period beginning April 29, some regional governments will move to stagger their holiday schedules on a trial basis. The Japan Tourism Agency has called for such a policy in order to ease congestion on highways and railways, as well as at airports.

For example, the local government of Kameyama, Mie Prefecture, will make April 30 — normally a regular school

day — a holiday for all municipal kindergartens, elementary and junior high schools this year while asking local firms to do the same.

Hotels and other resort facilities, as well as transportation networks, tend to become overcrowded during Golden Week and other long holiday periods, prompting their operators to sharply raise fees. This, in turn, curbs potential tourism demand and prevents the development of high-quality tourism services during these periods.

It is expected that staggering holidays at such times will reduce congestion, curb fee hikes and prevent declines in

service quality, thus leading to increased leisure travel demand and consumer spending.

A number of European countries have already had success with such measures. France staggers its winter school vacations by region, keeping hotel occupancy rates at ski resorts high throughout the season. Germany varies its summer school holidays from state to state.

Of course, changes of this kind would require adjustment on the part of private businesses and workers to reconfigure their work schedules. Government offices and commercial banks, in particular, will find themselves obliged to remain open while holidays are localized. Therefore, they will have to implement steps to keep operating during long holiday periods by encouraging their employees to take staggered vacations.

On the other hand, if Japan's stock exchanges remain open even during long holiday periods, it will serve the interest of market traders and the economy as a whole, enabling faster



The Tomei Expressway is packed with cars leaving Tokyo on May 2, 2009.

responses in the event of a global crisis.

Before actually implementing these changes, the government will have to solicit various opinions and create an adequate preparatory period. But I would argue that such a major initiative involving all Japanese is sorely needed to provide a lift to the Japanese economy, which seems to be sinking deeper and deeper into the doldrums.

The upcoming Golden Week period is the perfect occasion to give this idea serious thought.