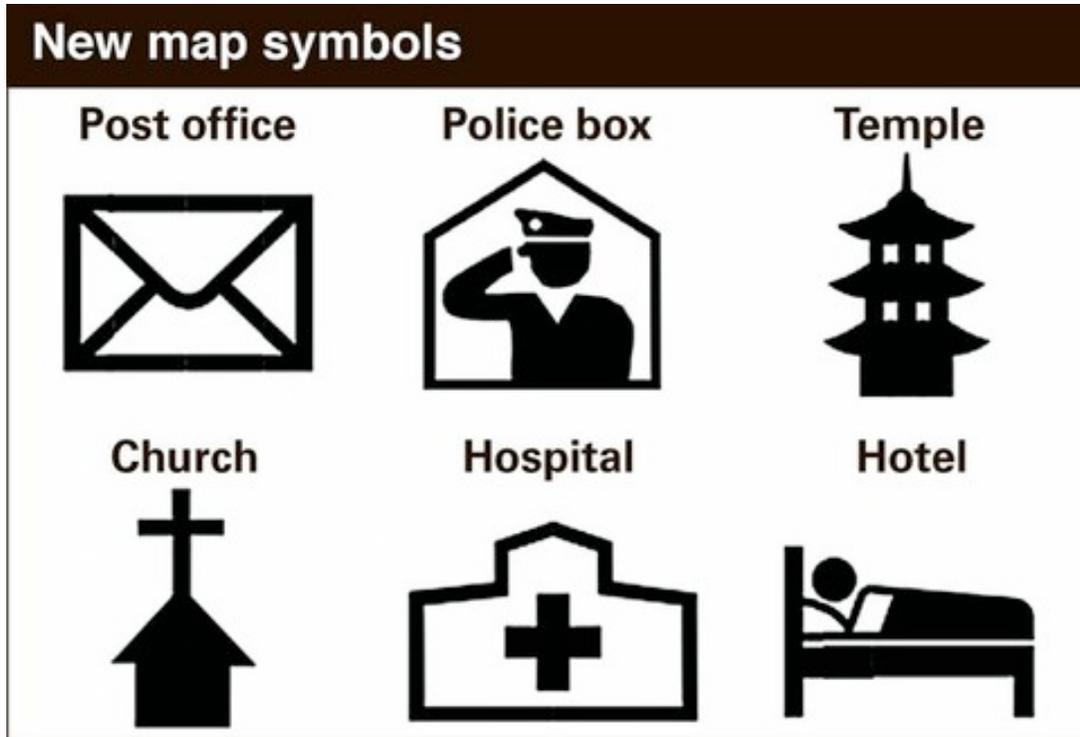


Japan removes swastika symbol from tourist maps

<http://www.examiner.com/article/japan-removes-swastika-symbol-from-tourist-maps>



SOURCE: Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

January 20, 2016

These are some of the new symbols that will be use in tourist maps for foreign visitors to Japan. Credit: Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

For years Japan has used swastikas to denote a Buddhist temple on maps for foreign tourists. Now, with Japan facing a growing number of complaints while gearing up to host both the Rugby World Cup and the summer Olympics within the next four years, the country's Geospatial Information Authority is making a change. The swastikas found on tourist maps will be changed to a three-storied pagoda symbol, The Guardian reported Jan. 20.

The swastika symbol is steeped in infamy for its use by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis to represent their bloody reign over Europe through the better part of the 1940s. However, the swastika is originally known as an ancient Sanskrit symbol and has for centuries been associated with Japanese Buddhism. The swastika used in the maps is slightly different than that of the menacing symbol used by the Nazis. In the Japanese iteration — called manji — the legs of the swastika run counterclockwise, rather than clockwise.

Nonetheless, it's not hard to see why the symbol has caused confusion among overseas visitors, especially considering Japan's Nazi-aligned involvement in WWII. The use of the symbol has caused enough confusion for officials to make a change.

“To build a tourism-oriented nation and ensure smooth implementation of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Japan needs to create an environment where foreign visitors can easily get transport and accommodations,” officials with the GSI told The Japan Times. “For that purpose, it is especially important to disseminate multilingual maps that are easy for foreigners to understand.”

Symbols will only change on maps for foreign tourists, while Japanese maps will remain unchanged. A total of 18 symbols have been selected for the new maps after a comprehensive international survey was completed. Six of the 18 symbols will replace existing ones, four will remain unchanged, and the remaining eight are brand new.

Last year, a record 19.74 million people visited Japan. That’s up 47 percent from 2014. These figures are expected to rise as Japan prepares to host the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 summer Olympics.