Japan’s Osaka bans street smoking ahead of Expo 2025

AFP- The Japanese city of Osaka on Monday imposed a smoking ban on public streets as part of efforts to become more visitor-friendly ahead of this year’s World Expo.

Around 160 countries and regions are participating in Expo 2025, the latest edition of an event held every five years in different global locations.

“The World Expo begins in April. We want to welcome many people from all over the world, so we want to make Osaka a city where people feel safe with smoke-free streets,” mayor Hideyuki Yokoyama said in early January.

Before Monday, smoking was banned in six zones including the area around Osaka station. This has been expanded to the whole city and violators face a fine of 1,000 yen ($6.40).

Local regulations already ban smoking while walking in most places in Japan, but opposition from some lawmakers has prevented strict national laws.

From April, the wider Osaka region will prohibit smoking in eateries with seating areas larger than 30 square meters (320 square feet), although lighting up in a separate space, such as a smoking room, is allowed.

Current national laws ban smoking in establishments with dining areas over 100 square meters.

Expo 2025 has struggled with slow ticket sales and public concern over the construction budget.

About 7.5 million tickets had been sold by early January for the six-month event – half the organisers’ target.

The capital outlawed smoking in all restaurants in 2018, in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics.

Smoking outdoors remains allowed in some Tokyo districts.

Japan’s central and local governments earn a yearly total of around two trillion yen ($13 billion) in cigarette tax revenue.

The national government also owns a one-third stake in Japan Tobacco, the world’s third largest tobacco company.

Tobacco use in Japan has been falling in line with a broader global trend, with the ratio of smokers standing at 15.7 percent in 2023.

AFP