

18.49 Million Outbound Japanese Travelers in 2012 -First New Record in 12 Years Since 2000

According to the estimate of outbound Japanese travel released on January 25 by the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO), the number of outbound Japanese travelers in December was 1.43 million, a decline of 2.2% year on year. This was the fourth month of continuous decline since September 2012 on a year on year basis.

However, the total outbound Japanese travelers for January through December 2012 reached 18.49 million, an increase of 8.8% year on year. This marks the first time that the annual total of outbound Japanese travelers surpassed the threshold of 18 million.

The number of outbound travelers during January through June 2012 was 8,964,605, an increase of 17.5% year on year. This high growth rate in the upper teens was partly due to a rebound after temporary sluggishness in overseas travel following the Great East Japan Earthquake. In the second half of the year from July through December, the actual number of travelers, at 9,525,000, exceeded the figure in the first half of the year, but the growth was in the low single digits, at 1.7% year on year.

Overseas travel was deregulated in 1964, and the number of outbound Japanese travelers surpassed one million for the first time in 1972, with 1,392,000 travelers. It has continued to increase steadily ever since, with 2,289,000 travelers in 1973, 3,151,000 in 1977, and 4,038,000 in 1979. In the late 1980s, growth stagnated for a period, but as the yen strengthened following the Plaza Accord in September 1985, the number of travelers leapt to 5,516,000 in 1986 and 6,829,000 in 1987, and then surpassed 7 million in 1988, with 8,427,000 travelers. The annual double-digit growth continued, with 9,663,000 travelers in 1989. In 1990, the ten-million mark was easily passed, with 10,997,000 travelers.

Entering the 1990s, growth continued with 11,791,000 travelers in 1992, 13,579,000 in 1994, and 16,695,000 in 1996. In the year 2000, a new record of 17,818,000 travelers was set, and surpassing the 20 million mark for annual outbound travelers was seen as only “a matter of time.”

However, as a result of the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, the number of outbound travelers in 2001 dropped to 16,216,000 persons. In 2003 when the travel industry suffered the double punch of the Iraq War and SARS, the figure declined to 13,296,000, dragging the scale of Japan’s overseas travel market back 10 years at one stroke.

Subsequently, a variety of events that were negative

factors for overseas travel occurred almost annually, including avian influenza and terrorist attacks, and the days when one could expect automatic increases in the number of outbound Japanese travelers became a thing of the past. However, in 2012, the figure at last surpassed the previous record of 17,810,000 from the year 2000, reaching 18,490,000, and surpassed the 18 million mark for the first time in history.

Meanwhile, according to JNTO, the number of foreigners visiting Japan in December 2012 was 689,700, an increase of 20.6% year on year, and the annual total for 2012 was 8,368,100 travelers, a 34.6% increase year on year.

However, compared to the number of foreign travelers visiting Japan in 2010 prior to the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear meltdown at Tokyo Electric’s Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant, the figure for 2012 remains negative, down 2.8% from 2010.

JNTO stated that it will “continue to work in 2013 on plans to attract visitors to Japan on a Japan-wide basis” to boost travel to Japan quantitatively and qualitatively by working for the early recovery of the China market and further expanding the southeast Asian travel market.

Japanese Overseas Travelers (Unit: Persons)			
Month	2011	2012	Change
1 Jan.	1,282,348	1,331,144	3.8
2 Feb.	1,391,193	1,572,587	13.0
3 Mar.	1,420,584	1,737,033	22.3
4 Apr.	1,114,906	1,410,963	26.6
5 May.	1,152,339	1,431,204	24.2
6 Jun.	1,267,227	1,481,674	16.9
1~6 Jan.-Jun.	7,628,597	8,964,605	17.5
7 Jul.	1,465,379	1,598,016	9.1
8 Aug.	1,786,412	1,964,041	9.9
9 Sep.	1,637,158	1,622,996	-0.9
10 Oct.	1,517,525	1,470,289	-3.1
11 Nov.	1,497,704	1,440,000	-3.9
12 Dec.	1,461,425	1,430,000	-2.2
7~12 Jul.-Dec.	9,365,603	9,525,000	1.7
1~12 Jan.-Dec.	16,994,200	18,490,000	8.8

JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION