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To: All media personnel

From: Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA)

## **JATA to Start “Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators”**

JATA (Headquarters: Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo; Chairman: Jungo Kikuma) has established the JATA “Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators.” This system, which will certify the quality of inbound tour operators (\*1), will be announced to tour operators on March 1.

This is a self-regulating quality assurance system for the tour operator industry designed to assess the quality of operators from the three perspectives of legal compliance, quality management and service levels, and CSR and to certify excellent operators who satisfy the predefined criteria. The Quality Assurance Review Committee, which is the certifying body, is composed of experts, including lawyers, professors, and government officials, to ensure neutrality and fairness.

These days, intensified price competition among tour operators has led to many price-oriented, low-quality tours and less emphasis by operators on consumer protection and legal compliance. JATA expects that the introduction of this quality assurance system will help foreign tourists in Japan enjoy safe, secure, high-quality tours and help certified operators obtain customers’ business and trust more easily. The system also aims at enhancement of the quality and presence of the entire industry by increasing the number of certified operators as well as at contribution to an increase in repeater tourists to Japan.

In the fierce competition of the international travel market, Japan ranks 39<sup>th</sup> in the world and 10<sup>th</sup> in Asia in the number of inbound tourists . Given this situation, there is an urgent need to attract more tourists to Japan by promoting the appeal of Japan to foreigners and by improving the quality of the tour operator industry and tour products. Through the establishment and proper operation of this quality assurance system, we aim at the further development of inbound tours to Japan.

The outline of the system is as follows:

### **Outline of the JATA “Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators”**

1. Target: Tour operators

2. Criteria:

The system assesses tour operators from the three perspectives of legal compliance, quality management and service levels, and CSR, and certifies excellent operators such as those described below.

(1) Legal compliance

Competent tour operators not only observe laws and regulations themselves but also pay attention to the legal compliance of partner operators in destination areas when selecting such operators, making maximum efforts to ensure the legality of tour products offered to customers. Amid growing international concern over the protection of personal information, competent tour operators have a system to manage the personal information of tourists appropriately.

(2) Quality management and service levels

Competent tour operators ensure emergency readiness in order to offer safe, secure products to tourists, making efforts for emergency training of their staff and establishment of a cooperative framework with partner operators. They also listen to the opinions of tourists sincerely and make constant efforts to improve their quality management and services.

(3) CSR (corporate social responsibility, environmental consciousness, and social action programs)

Competent tour operators give utmost consideration to the diversity in religion, ethnicity, and culture, etc., when they plan tour products for inbound tourists and make efforts so that their staff will deepen their understanding of these matters. Competent tour operators also make the utmost efforts in product planning to minimize the environmental burden. Furthermore, they have a positive corporate attitude toward social action programs.

3. Method and conditions for certification:

The Quality Assurance Review Committee quantifies the above three criteria and certifies the operators who exceed a certain level. However, operators must satisfy the following prerequisites.

(1) Registration as a Travel Agency with the Commissioner of Japan Tourism agency

(2) Acquisition of PrivacyMark (P Mark)

If the operator does not have a P Mark, submission of an oath that the operator plans to acquire a P Mark within one year.

4. Application and review: The review for the certification will be held biannually, and the certification will expire in three years.

5. Schedule:

March 1: Announcement made to operators (on the JATA website).

April 1: First-stage applications start (information on applications to be provided).

June 1: Operators certified in the first stage to be presented.

Early July: Second-stage applications start.

(\*1) Tour operators: Operators who arrange accommodations, meals, and transportation, etc., for tour products.

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