

Guidelines Released for Overseas Mountain Climbing Tour Services; Prepared following Mishap in China Last November

On February 27, Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) released the Supplement for Overseas Planning: Guidelines for Mountain Climbing Tour Services.

JATA drew up service guidelines for mountain climbing tours on domestic trips in September 2009 and worked to provide safe mountain climbing tour services. However, compelled by a mishap near the Great Wall of China in November last year, JATA has prepared new guidelines to promote safe and secure mountain climbing tour services overseas as well.

The circumstances and conditions of mountain climbing vary greatly depending on the country and region, and so in reality, it is extremely difficult to prepare guidelines for different countries and regions. Therefore, to put together these mountain climbing guidelines for overseas travel, JATA proceeded to supplement the existing Guidelines for Mountain Climbing Tour Services for domestic travel by adding information particular to overseas situations.

In addition to adding supplements pertaining to overseas, we also revised the current guidelines and prepared new guidelines so as to contribute to safer mountain climbing tour services. Using these guidelines, JATA aims to plan and conduct safer, more secure mountain climbing tours.

The outline of the guidelines supplement is as follows.

(1) Tour companies themselves must naturally have knowledge of the destination, but when selecting a local land operator, they must confirm that the operator has more detailed and deep knowledge of the tour courses concerned.

(2) Field surveys should be conducted with consideration for seasonal environmental variations and should be conducted during the season when the tours are planned. In the event that local land operator's staff carries out a field survey, tour companies must have a full grasp of the methods and results of the field survey.

(3) In some cases, communications equipment that can be used without a license in Japan is illegal in the destination country. So, it is necessary to check rigorously whether or not communications equipment can be used. The last resort is to have messages conveyed by a human messenger.

(4) When selecting assistant guides who are not Japanese to assist the head guide, their skill as mountain climbing guides is more important than their Japanese language ability, and this should be reflected in the selection criteria.

(5) In certain regions overseas, usage of wireless communications equipment and satellite phones is restricted, and so caution must be exercised regarding carrying in such equipment to those regions. It is desirable that emergency contact capability be constantly maintained by the parties involved in case of emergency.

In addition to the supplement pertaining to overseas tours, the following revisions and additions were also made to the existing guidelines with the aim of contributing to safer mountain climbing tour services.

(1) An explanation of the derivation of the words "mountain climbing," "trekking," and "hiking" were added. Walks for short durations on courses with little change in altitude, which are called "hiking tours" in ordinary tour travel plans, are outside the scope of these guidelines.

(2) An addition was inserted stating that even in areas where cell phones and wireless communications equipment, etc., cannot be used, a system should be prepared for swift communication in case of emergency. In cases where swift communication is impossible, the necessary preparations should be made so that participants' safety can be assured until communication is possible.

(3) When managing the itinerary, the first priority is the safety of the participants. The pre-determined itinerary should not be adhered to or enforced unreasonably at the expense of safety. The leader must take the necessary measures for appropriate itinerary management, including appropriate changes to the itinerary such as cancellation of departure or turning back for the safety of the participants, with overall consideration for the mountain climbing skills of the participants (not their skills as understood before departure but their actual skills as observed after the start of the tour), physical condition of the participants on the given day, condition of equipment, and weather conditions.

(4) Records of a tour company's verification process and condition of arrangements starting from the planning stage shall be retained in the company and shall be correlated with the following measures and results. It must never be forgotten that mountain climbing consists of "planning," "implementation," "recording," "review," and "measures."

Chairman of KATA visited JATA to meet Mr. Kikuma

Mr. Yang, Moo Seung, Chairman of KATA (Korean Association of Travel Agents), visited Mr. Jungo Kikuma, Chairman of JATA, on February 1st, Friday

During his meeting with Mr. Kikuma, Mr. Yang talked about KATA's efforts to expand Korean tourism to Japan. "We have been organizing seminars and forums and have undertaken different initiatives in order to facilitate business exchange with our Japanese partners. In order to provide even more opportunities for business communication, we are planning to work closely with authorities in local areas" said Mr. Yang.

"The number of Korean visitors to Japan has been growing. However, to increase customers' satisfaction, we are working on introducing a new system of rules and regulations for the companies that provide services to foreign tourists. We need to learn from the high quality products which the Korean travel industry offers. I believe that increasing the opportunities for business communication with local authorities will create a favorable environment for further expansion of our business" said Mr. Kikuma in reply.