

## Outbound Travelers Increase 2.5% in January, to 1.364 Million; First Positive Increase in Five Months, Hope for Start of New Uptrend

According to an announcement by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) on February 19, the estimated number of outbound Japanese travelers increased in January by 2.5% year on year, to 1,364,000 persons, representing the first positive increase year on year in five months, since August 2012.

Last year, outbound travelers in the first half of the year from January through June rose by 17.5% year on year, reaching 8,964,605 persons. This high growth rate in the upper teens was in part a rebound from the temporary drop in travel demand in the first half of 2011 due to the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake. However, looking at the second half of 2012, July and August both maintained positive growth, at 9.1% and 9.0% year on year, respectively, but subsequently, negative growth continued for four months. After switching to negative growth in September of minus 0.9% year on year, October was minus 3.1%, November was minus 3.9%, and December was minus 2.2%.

Total outbound travelers in 2012 increased by 8.8% to 18.49 million persons, breaking through the 18 million mark for the first time in history. However, because a decrease trend since September caused concern in the industry, the fact that the number of outbound Japanese travelers increased in January year on year gave the industry hope for a new uptrend in overseas travel demand.

Meanwhile, the number of foreign travelers who visited Japan in January is estimated to have decreased 2.4% year on year, to 668,700 persons. This is the first decrease in three months, since last October, which saw a 3.0% drop year on year.

According to JNTO's analysis, the factors behind the January decrease include the fact that the Chinese New Year, which affects travelers from China, is in February this year instead of January as it was last year as well as the ongoing conspicuous decline in tour groups from China. Even so, positive effects have been noted from the weakening yen, the progress of the Open Skies Agreement, an expanded supply of airline seats due to new air services such as low-cost carriers, and the decrease in airfares.

Looking by market, four countries set new records in January, as follow: Australia (up 42.6% year on year), Thailand (up 33.0% year on year), Indonesia (up 30.3% year on year), and Vietnam (up 38.1% year on year). In particular, more Australians usually visit Japan in January than in any other month, and they set a new record in January on a single month basis. Moreover, since April 2012, Thailand has been setting a new record each month for 10 months straight.

## Applications to be Accepted from April for Certification; JATA's Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators

Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) approved the Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators at its board meeting on February 15. On March 1, the website for the system was launched, and the website presents an outline of the system and the certification process. The plan is to add details concerning the certification system and how to apply starting next month. At that time, acceptance of applications will also begin. Application forms will be downloadable from the website.

JATA recognizes as an urgent task its efforts to boost the number of visitors to Japan by improving the quality of the tour operator industry and travel products, in addition to strengthening Japan's brand image by calling potential visitors' attention to the highlights of travel in Japan. Outstanding tour operators who meet predefined criteria will be certified. Assessment of tour operators will focus on their quality from the three perspectives of legal compliance, quality management and service levels, and corporate social responsibility (CSR), and improvement in these areas will depend on voluntary initiatives in the tour operator industry.

Through this, visitors to Japan will be able to enjoy safe, high-quality trips, and certified operators will receive consistent ratings from customers. Moreover, as the number of certified operators increases, the overall quality of the tour operator industry and its social presence will increase, which can be expected to increase the number of tourists visiting Japan and the number of repeaters.

Japanese Overseas Travelers (Unit: Persons)			
Month	2012	2013	Change (%)
1 Jan.	1,331,144	1,364,000	2.5
2 Feb.	1,572,587		
3 Mar.	1,737,033		
4 Apr.	1,410,963		
5 May.	1,431,204		
6 Jun.	1,481,674		
1~6 Jan.-Jun.	8,964,605		
7 Jul.	1,598,016		
8 Aug.	1,964,041		
9 Sep.	1,622,996		
10 Oct.	1,470,289		
11 Nov.	1,434,503		
12 Dec.	1,436,172		
7~12 Jul.-Dec.	9,526,017		
1~12 Jan.-Dec.	18,490,622		

JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION