

Number of Outbound Travelers in March Declines 4.9% to 1.652 million

—Down 4.3% for First Quarter Overall

According to the estimate of outbound travelers released on April 24 by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), the number of outbound travelers in March was 1.652 million, a decrease of 4.9% year on year. This follows on the heels of February's decline of 9.3% year on year.

The first quarter overall displayed negative results, with 4,439,639 outbound travelers during the three months from January through March representing a decline of 4.3% year on year.

In 2012, the total number of outbound travelers reached 18.49 million, an increase of 8.8% year on year, surpassing the 18 million mark for the first time ever. In January 2013 as well, the figure was positive year-on-year, breaking the negative trend that had prevailed since September 2012. A continuation of the turnaround in the number of Japanese outbound travelers was anticipated, but both February and March posted negative figures, leaving the undeniable impression that the overseas travel market is in a slowdown.

Meanwhile, the number of foreign travelers who visited Japan in March 2013 numbered 857,000, an increase of 26.3% year on year. The growth in March was lower than that in February but was still high, in the upper 20% range. February's strong growth of 33.1% year on year was due to the elevated travel demand which occurs

during Chinese New Year in Chinese-speaking countries and regions such as China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. These countries and regions account for a major share of Japan's inbound market.

The number of foreign travelers who visited Japan during the three months of January through March 2013 continued to display a positive trend, reaching 2,255,100 an increase of 18.0% year on year.

Aiming to Be the Top, Most Advanced Tourism Industry in the World

—Japan Tourism Agency Releases Recommendations Based on Review Committee's Output

On April 3, the Japan Tourism Agency released "Aiming to Be the Top, Most Advanced Tourism Industry in the World - Recommendations of the Tourism Industry Policy Review Committee." This document covers the issues and policies that the travel industry must deal with for the establishment of branding, etc. It is based on the output of the Tourism Industry Policy Review Committee which convened four times starting in September 2012.

Since the Koizumi Administration's "Declaration to Establish Japan as a Tourism Nation" in 2003, genuine initiatives have been developed over the past 10 years to establish Japan as a tourism nation. However, the Japan Tourism Agency pointed out that the existing government tourism policies focused on promotion, and discussion on tourism industry policy was inadequate. The agency explained that, based on this awareness, the Review Committee held multiple discussions on strengthening the tourism industry, which is essential for making tourism a new force for economic growth.

The recommendations suggest that a new awards system be introduced to boost the motivation of those actually engaged in the tourism business. In addition, the recommendations advise review of the FY2013 information provision system for lodging facilities, review of current systems and the ideal condition of the travel industry, and study of construction of systematic safety management in the travel industry. In conjunction, introduction of a tour operator certification system is recommended. The recommendations also advocate promotion of strengthened initiatives for inbound travel and MICE, active development of Japanese travel agencies overseas, an increased international presence for the tourism industry, improved management and productivity in the lodging industry, support for IT, and installation of free Wi-Fi service in lodging facilities.

The Japan Tourism Agency plans to provide a venue for following up on specific initiatives and the progress of study related to the above recommendations, and it plans to promote their steady implementation.

Month	Japanese Overseas Travelers (Unit: Persons)		Change (%)
	2012	2013	
1 Jan.	1,331,144	1,364,000	2.5
2 Feb.	1,572,587	1,427,000	-9.3
3 Mar.	1,737,033	1,652,000	-4.9
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		
1~3 Jan.-Mar.	4,640,764	4,439,639	-4.3
1~12 Jan.-Dec.	18,490,622		

JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION