

Outbound Travelers Decline 12.3%, to 1.237 million, in April;

6.1% Cumulative Decrease during January through April

According to the estimate of outbound Japanese travelers released by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) on May 22, the figure was only 1.237 million travelers in April, a drop of 12.3% year on year. This follows February's decline of 4.9%.

During the four months from January through April, outbound travelers numbered 5.68 million, a decrease of 6.1% year on year.

Last year, the annual number of outbound travelers reached 18.49 million, an 8.8% increase year on year, surpassing the 18-million benchmark and setting the highest annual figure ever. January of this year also maintained the positive trend with a 2.2% increase year on year, but figures for February and March were both negative.

The overseas travel market seems to have shifted from slack movement to an actual slowdown, making the outlook for the future even harsher.

Meanwhile, inbound foreign visitors numbered 923,000 in April, representing an increase of 18.1% year on year. The number of inbound foreign visitors was negative in January, down 2.4% year on year, but displayed an increase of 33.1% year on year in February and 26.3%

year on year in March. Thus, double-digit growth was maintained for three consecutive months.

JNTO attributes this satisfactory movement in the inbound market to the perception that trips to Japan are relatively inexpensive now thanks to the weakening of the yen, the increase in the supply of airline seats, and the Visit Japan promotion conducted in markets worldwide to stimulate travel to Japan during the cherry blossom season in March and April.

Number of inbound trips to grow 42.3% by 2017

According to market research firm Euromonitor International, Japanese tourism is experiencing a tremendous recovery, with visitor numbers increasing by 34% to reach 8.3 million visitors in 2012.

In 2011, a devastating earthquake decreased inbound travellers 28% and in 2012, the region had strong growth of 2.1 million visitors. Furthermore, while bidding for the 2020 Olympics, Tokyo announced a goal to reach 18 million visitors by 2016 and 25 million by 2020.

The solidarity of the international community assisting in disaster relief, the government's campaigns and several tourism organizations proactively encouraging travel to Japan represent the major factors behind the current optimism within the tourism industry.

"The Japanese government spent 8 billion yen in 2012 to ensure that inbound tourism recovered by raising the number of translation guide services to ensure tourists security in case of emergency, building halal friendly environment, and providing interactive smartphone apps with information on radiation levels in major cities", says Ayako Homma, research analyst at Euromonitor. "Business travel also grew by 12% as Japan held major international conferences such as IMF, Sibos, and WTTC, the World Travel and Tourism Council "

Towards the latter half of 2012, the territorial disputes with South Korea and China over the surrounding islands which islands caused Japan to suffer a slight slowdown of incoming tourists from South Korea, China and Taiwan. Those countries represent 60% of the total key visitors in 2012.

"Japan saw strong growth in travellers from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia due to the Japanese government easing visa requirements and shifting promotional campaigns to these countries," said Homma.

Within the forecast period, Euromonitor estimates the number of inbound trips to strongly grow 42.3% by 2017. The introduction of low cost carriers such as Jet Star, Peach and Air Asia in 2012 and the weakening of the yen currency will encourage the country through a full recovery.

Japanese Overseas Travelers (Unit: Persons)			
Month	2012	2013	Change (%)
1 Jan.	1,331,144	1,360,639	2.2
2 Feb.	1,572,587	1,430,633	-9.0
3 Mar.	1,737,033	1,652,000	-4.9
4 Apr.	1,410,963	1,237,000	-12.3
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		
1~4 Jan.-Apr.	6,051,727	5,680,000	-6.1
1~12 Jan.-Dec.	18,490,622		

JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION