

Roundtable Discussion: Toward Recovery in Hong Kong Tourism

Search for New Cooperative Ways to Stimulate Demand for Hong Kong

— Important to Break Free of Conventional PR Activities

Hongkong Japanese Tour Operators Association (HJTOA)



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In 1996 just prior to the return of Hong Kong to China, the number of Japanese travelling to Hong Kong set a new record at 2,380,000. However, the long-term slump that followed was magnified last fall by the escalation of the territorial dispute between Japan and China. In response to the marked decline in Japanese travelers, top executives of Hongkong Japanese Tour Operators Association (HJTOA), an industry group of land operators that specializes in Japanese travelers, visited JATA to discuss ways to improve the situation with Chairman Kikuma and Vice Chairman Tagawa.

How Can We Boost Interest and Desire to Travel to Hong Kong?

Kawahara: First, let's hear about HJTOA from Gianna Hsu, Chairman of HJTOA.

Hsu: The role of HJTOA is to encourage the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) to develop the attractions of Hong Kong and to suggest high-quality travel products and services to our Japanese partners in the travel industry while

promoting close communication with our members. Today, I look forward to hearing the valuable suggestions of JATA Chairman Kikuma and Vice Chairman Tagawa on what we should do to increase the number of Japanese travelers to Hong Kong.

Kawahara: Jungo Kikuma, JATA Chairman, and Hiromi Tagawa, JATA Vice Chairman, could you tell us your views on Hong Kong as a destination?

Kikuma: For our industry, East Asia including China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong together with Macao makes up half of our total overseas travel market. If this region does not experience robust growth, I think the travel industry will, in fact, suffer. So, to achieve our goal of 20 million overseas travelers annually, it is extremely important to meet with everyone here today from Hong Kong and have this discussion.

Tagawa: To find the light at the end of the tunnel, I think that we first need to accurately understand the current condition in Hong Kong. The reason why the number of outbound Japanese travelers has grown to 18.49 million is actually because of the efforts being made by Southeast Asian countries including Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

Issues That Require a Change in the Thinking of the Hong Kong Travel Industry

Kawahara: David Leung, Regional Director for Japan, could you explain about the current condition of, and the issues in, Hong Kong tourism which were mentioned?

Leung: The number of Japanese travelers visiting Hong Kong plummeted sharply during October to December last year. However, since figures were bullish from January through August, there was only a 2% decline for 2012 as a whole. During the first four months of 2013, there was a slight improvement from the fourth quarter of 2012, resulting in a decline of 21% for those months. However, we need to stimulate interest in Hong Kong again because, compared to a few years ago, Japanese travelers' interest in Hong Kong has dropped. I believe that there are multiple external factors affecting the Japanese travel industry's and Japanese travelers' interest in travel to Hong Kong, and HKTB intends to exert every possible effort for improvement.

One specific issue involves the mindset. That is to say, conventional PR methods no longer resonate with people today, and I think that we need a change in our way of thinking. HKTB has strengthened its PR activities directed at Japanese consumers up to now. However, from here forward, I strongly feel that we need to actively pursue cooperation with travel operators on the destination side in Hong Kong. Working as one, we need to advertise the attractions of Hong Kong to the Japanese and work in a new way to gain acceptance for Hong Kong travel products.

Kawahara: Choi Pat Tai, Life Honorary President of HJTOA, please tell us about ideas for enjoying Hong Kong more and about attractions and services that travel agencies can use.

Tai: In 1996 before the return of Hong Kong to China, 2.38 million Japanese visited Hong Kong annually, and for a time, Japan was the largest market in the world for Hong Kong. Subsequently, the figure has fluctuated around 1.2 to 1.3 million with no large increases. Hong Kong is a small area, but it is rich in attractions. Dragon's Back, which was featured in a New York magazine as "the most beautiful trekking course in the world," is a wonderful course that affords a fantastic view of the ocean and the city skyline after only 10