

Interview with Mr. Jamel Gamra Minister of Tourism, Republic of Tunisia

We Can Work Together on the Figure of 100,000 in Five Years Desert, Culture and Spa tourism will Attract More Japanese Travellers



Mr. Jamel Gamra
Minister of Tourism, Republic of Tunisia

Q. First, we'd like to hear your view about the current Japanese market for sending people to Tunisia. How do you analyze the current Japanese market?

A. Well, it is clear that tourism has decreased since the revolution, and even before the revolution, the figure for Japanese tourists wasn't high enough. That's clear. I feel that the Japanese market presents a very big potential for Tunisia. We have so many attractive products for Japanese tourists. If we approach the Japanese market professionally, the figure will increase very quickly and go up to a very high level. This is not only my opinion but also the opinion of all the tour operators I am dealing with. Last year we had 8,000 Japanese tourists, which is not so many. We are hoping to have more this year, and with the work being done on the Japanese market, I think we will increase much faster in the future.

Q. On the basis of your analysis of the Japanese market, what are you focusing on now? Also, what are your future plans?

A. I think that our Japanese experts working onsite in Tunisia are detecting the right products for the Japanese market. Also, they are preparing the appropriate marketing tools for these products. I think three main products have been pointed out. The first is the Sahara, or desert tourism, which is very original and unique to Tunisia and will be a very big attraction for Japanese tourists. The second is culture. In Tunisia, we have more than 3,000 years of culture from different civilizations. We have many touristic sites and archeological sites. Several of them are world heritage sites registered with UNESCO, and they represent a very big attraction for Japanese people. Third is wellness tourism. We have more than 50 spa centers in Tunisia, and we are actually the second wellness and spa destination in the world after France; this is also quite a big attraction for the Japanese market. Promoting all these products will certainly increase the Japanese market. For this, we have to use the appropriate marketing tools and marketing campaigns in the right period of the year.

Q. Could you tell us more about the third category – the spas?

A. Japanese like to enjoy wellness and go to special spas and hot springs. We have such products in Tunisia. This is what I mean by spa and wellness. We have a lot of people

coming from the UK, Germany and Norway, especially for this special tourism.

Q. In the future, to what extent do you want us to visit?

A. We have countries that provide more than one million tourists. Japan is still a very low number. After my discussions with some of our Japanese tour operators, I think we can work on the figure of 100,000 in three to five years. This is what they told me. I asked them to reach this target in three to five years. So, we have to work together.

Q. Could you give the Japanese tourism industry some message as Tourism Minister?

A. We are too small to advise Japan, but I think no country in this world today can neglect the tourism sector. The tourism sector is one of the rare sectors recording progress. It increases from one year to another, and the expectation of the UNWTO for the coming year is that the increase will be 4% to 5% around the world. It should be more in Africa. It is an industry which cannot be relocated. When you invest in tourism, it will remain in your country. So we absolutely have to continue investing in this sector. It is a sector that contributes to opening the minds of people and connecting the world together a little bit, bringing us closer to each other, and it promotes all of the economic sectors. It is the main sector for the other sectors of the economy. It will benefit all of us to conjugate our efforts to promote this sector in a bilateral relationship. Let's coordinate to promote tourism in Japan and in Tunisia by facilitating and promoting exchanges of tourists between Tunisia and Japan. So, go ask your Japanese population to come to Tunisia, and we will ask Tunisians to go to Japan. We will certainly come for the Olympic games.

10 Companies Certified in 2nd Round Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators

JATA newly certified 10 additional companies as part of the Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators. This system certifies the quality of tour operators involved in inbound operations.

Companies certified in 2nd round (in order registered):

Nokyo Tourist Corporation/Toppan Travel Service Corporation/JTB Hokkaido Corp./Tobu Travel Co., Ltd./JTB Tohoku Inc./Asahi Holiday Service Co., Ltd./Jumbo Tours Co., Ltd./NOE Corporation/Odakyu Travel Co., Ltd./Nippon Express Travel Co., Ltd.

The certified companies were issued certificates and are now allowed to display the certified symbol. On October 1, the certified companies were posted on the websites of the Japan Tourism Agency, Japan National Tourist Organization, and JATA. Applications for certification are accepted twice annually, and applications for the third round of certification will be accepted from January 6 until January 31, 2014. The neutrality and fairness of the certification body's quality assurance screening committee is ensured through the participation of government officials and experts such as attorneys and university professors.

Stronger Cooperation for Expansion of Two-way Exchange Confirmed JATA and KATA Confer at Tourism Forum

The Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) and the Korean Association of Travel Agents (KATA) held the JATA-KATA Tourism Forum on the theme of expanding travel demand through two-way exchange between Japan and South Korea. The forum was held on September 12 in Tokyo Big Sight's conference building.



Jungo Kikuma
Chairman, JATA



Moo Seung Yang
Chairman, KATA

At this year's tenth annual forum, in a departure from past years' forums centered on outbound tourism, tourism administrators and tourism agency officials from the Japanese and South Korean governments participated in discussion on both outbound and inbound tourism.

In his greeting at the opening of the forum, JATA Chairman Jungo Kikuma said, "Starting this year, we are expanding the forum with the aim of promoting two-way exchange. Through in-depth discussion, I hope we will make progress." KATA Chairman Moo Seung Yang expressed congratulations to the Japanese participants on the choice of Tokyo for the 2020 Olympics and noted, "The Olympics will be extremely beneficial for tourism in East Asia." He also expressed firm resolve, saying "An issue for both countries is how to utilize travel agencies as FIT increases. Outbound planners from South Korea participated in the international negotiations at the JATA Tabihaku Travel Showcase 2013, and they will create travel products with even higher quality."

The vice-commissioner of Japan Tourism Agency, Yoshinobu Sato, who was invited as a guest at the forum, said, "This year, the number of inbound foreign visitors to Japan is expected to exceed 10 million persons. In our quest to reach 20 million persons, two-way tourism is important. I am counting on a constructive exchange of ideas at the JATA-KATA Tourism Forum." Moreover, Byung Chae Yu, director of International Tourism Division of Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of South Korea, pointed out, "We have expanded tourism exchanges between Japan and South Korea based on a stable foundation. However, due to external factors, the number of Japanese people visiting South Korea has dropped since September last year." He declared, "I hope we will discover a way to overcome the crisis we are facing through this forum." Furthermore, Director Yu exuded confidence, saying, "With the 2018 Winter Olympics to be held in Pyeongchang, South Korea, and the Olympics to take place in Tokyo, I think that Asian style may catch on around the world."

The director of Japan National Tourist Organization,

Takashi Kato, speaking from his perspective as a former vice commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency who signed the documents for two-way exchange of 700 million persons at the Japan-South Korea Tourism Promotion Conference, pointed out, "We must consider the serious impact of Japan's contaminated water problem on tourism and provide accurate information." In response, Joong Seok Kang, executive director of the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), emphasized the importance of cooperation between the two bodies, saying, "In May this year, I explained to a group of Liberal Democratic Party members of the Japanese Diet why inbound tourism in South Korea is in satisfactory condition. Of the foreign tourists visiting South Korea, the Chinese are expected to be the most numerous this year. KATA and JATA have much work to do to achieve an exchange of 10 million tourists."

Moreover, presentations were also given by JATA and KATA staff to explain the outbound and inbound markets of each country.

The vice chairman of the JATA Outbound Travel Promotion Committee, Tatsuo Hayashida, mentioned that the unit sales price is declining while also noting that the number of Japanese people visiting South Korea has plummeted. He said, "I think we can get through this crisis by developing high value-added products. I would like for those of you in South Korea to propose value-creation tours that feature high-return products, rather than placing emphasis on the number of travelers handled." He also suggested the establishment of a tourism working group with JATA as the secretariat.

In response, the president of Duson International, Jin Seok Choi, expressed concern, saying, "The dramatic drop in tourists from Japan to South Korea has caused a crisis in South Korea's travel industry. As a measure to turn the attention of Japanese travelers who are focused on Seoul to the outlying regions, I would like to introduce events in South Gyeongsang Province and areas of picturesque scenery and to make people aware of South Korea as a high value-added market."

Meanwhile, the vice chairman of the JATA Inbound Travel Promotion Committee, Hisanori Zama, gave a presentation on Japan's inbound market with data on Japan's inbound market and explained about the creation of the Action Program, which provides mileposts to measure progress toward the goal of having 30 million tourists visit Japan, which aims to become a tourism nation. "The Quality Assurance System for Tour Operators has started, and I would like for you to actively utilize certified operators," he requested.

Chang Yeon Shin, president of Tour Baksa, explained about South Korea's outbound market and mentioned that 90% of South Korean travelers have cancelled their trips to Japan due to the contaminated water problem. He complained, "Travel from South Korea to Japan, which had been satisfactory, is suddenly in a crisis." He talked about niche products that utilize crises, such as the helicopter tours of the volcano Shinmoedake in southern Kyushu after it erupted in 2011, and he called on JATA, saying, "I would like JATA members to respond with all possible speed."

Through this year's forum, issues in both the Japanese and the South Korean markets were clarified, a tourism working group was set up by both parties, and it was decided to promote travel to regional South Korean cities, which are becoming an area of interest.

Reviewing the Initiatives by JATA's Team Europe

JATA Executive Officer Dambara Speaks at ETOA Tourism Summit

Tetsunori Dambara, JATA executive officer and vice chairperson of the Team Europe Committee (as well as managing director of Miki Tourist K.K.), spoke at the Tourism Summit in the Alps 2013 held by the European Tour Operators Association (ETOA) in Lucerne, Switzerland, on October 8. He talked about the current condition of Japan's outbound travel market and the initiatives of Team Europe. One of the themes is the importance of stimulating demand for travel from Japan, which is an important long-haul market for Europe. Moreover, JATA plans (as of October 29) to participate in a session sponsored by ETOA on the Japanese travel market at the World Travel Market (WTM) to be held in London in early November.

Comprehensive Partnership Agreement with UNWTO Signed



Tetsunori Dambara
JATA Executive Officer

ETOA is an organization composed mainly of European tour operators as well as government travel bureaus, hotels, and railway companies. At the ETOA tourism summit on October 8, approximately 60 ETOA members and invited panelists participated. This summit featured a session on the issues of and countermeasures for the two long-haul markets of Japan

and the US. The number of travelers from these two markets visiting Europe peaked in the 1990s and has not recovered to the same heights since then.

Speaking at the session, JATA Executive Officer Dambara pointed out that, after surpassing 10-million mark in 1990, the number of outbound travelers from Japan has continued to grow over time while experiencing intermittent setbacks. In 2012, the figure reached the previous record of 18.5 million and continues to expand. The Japan Tourism Agency has set a goal of increasing the number of outbound Japanese tourists to 20 million by 2016. JATA has replied that it will be conducting a variety of activities in order to attain this goal.

He mentioned that, at the JATA Tabihaku Travel Showcase 2013 held in September, JATA and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) signed a comprehensive partnership agreement. He stressed the JATA Tabihaku Travel Showcase was the third travel event in the world and the first in Asia to be recognized by UNWTO, following London's WTM and Berlin's ITB. He explained that JATA plans to contribute to the expansion of the travel market not only in Japan but across Asia.

Furthermore, JATA Executive Officer Dambara talked about how JATA is working as one with the industry through Team Europe's projects to expand travel demand from Japan to Europe.

As an example of development of demand in Europe's off-season, he spoke about Germany's Christmas markets, which

started from zero but became popular new destinations. According to Miki Tourist's figures, Japanese tourists spent 4,104 nights at the German markets in December 2000, and this more than doubled to 8,525 nights in December 2012. He emphasized that the Christmas markets started in the three cities of Dresden, Nuremberg, and Stuttgart and then spread to cities across Germany.

In an effort to increase demand in Europe by developing new tourism resources, JATA Executive Officer Dambara explained that JATA started Team Europe in January this year. Team Europe is made up of 37 members, including travel agencies, airlines, railways, and government travel bureaus that promote activities to create demand throughout Europe by holding seminars, creating off-season products, and developing new destinations.

Corroboration of Importance of Initiatives at Session on Europe

The importance of these initiatives by JATA's Team Europe was confirmed at another session held at the ETOA Tourism Summit.

Prior to the above-mentioned afternoon session on Japan and the US, a morning session was held on the theme "Is Europe the Top Destination in the World?" With increasingly tough competition among destinations in the international market, Europe is universally recognized as the top destination worldwide. A debate unfolded among industry experts, tourism policymakers, and analysts centered on whether Europe's position is secure, whether it is threatened, or whether its boast of being the top destination has actually become an illusion.

During the session, panelists expressed the view that we may be entering an age when travelers from around the world, including those from European countries, select their travel destination from among many choices, and the competitiveness of Europe as a destination may be questioned more than before. Given this, the European Travel Commission's Executive Director Eduardo Santander pointed out that, in view of the fact that each European country is deploying separate marketing and promotions, "We need to establish a standardized brand for powerful promotion of Europe overall" in order to boost the competitiveness of Europe as a destination. The Team Europe project that JATA is promoting in the Japanese market may be seen as an embodiment of Director Santander's idea.

Euromonitor International Ltd.'s Senior Research Analyst Mantas Kaluina urged, "We should expand the number of travelers to Europe by strengthening the promotion of countries that are not the main destinations in Europe, as are Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain." This idea attracted attention, and it aligns well with Team Europe's initiatives for destination development in the peripheral areas of the EU.

ETOA is scheduled to hold a session on Japan's market at the World Travel Market in London during the four days from November 4 to 7. At that time, ETOA intends (as of October 29) to present the discussion from the recent ETOA Tourism Summit and to announce the results of a study on Europe as a destination for Japan's outbound market.

JATA plans (as of October 29) to participate in this session sponsored by ETOA at the WTM and again present the current state of Japan's market and JATA's efforts for Japan's travel industry, including Team Europe, and to further deepen the understanding of related people in the field in order to develop demand by building cooperative relationships between Japan and Europe.