

1,000 Person MEGA FAM Tour to Korea Completed Support for Recovery of Demand on the 50th Anniversary of Normalization of Japan - South Korea Relations



Byun greeted the Japanese delegation

In view of the fact that the number of Japanese travelers visiting South Korea continues to slump, last month JATA organized a 1,000-person MEGA FAM (short for “familiarization”) tour to visit South Korea. JATA’s aim was to invigorate product development and travel demand. This large-scale initiative was the first of its kind since “Let’s Go! Tohoku,” a project to support the reconstruction of the Tohoku region, in December 2012. JATA expects demand for trips to South Korea to turn around and begin increasing because 2015 is the 50th anniversary of normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea.



Toast for expansion of two-way tourism between Japan and South Korea

Large-scale FAM Tour is the First in the History of South Korean Tourism

JATA held a MEGA FAM tour to South Korea for approximately 1,000 employees of JATA member agencies during the five days from December 8 to 12.

Tour participants came from 10 cities around Japan, including Sapporo, Sendai, Tokyo, Niigata, Nagoya, Osaka, Okayama, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, and Naha. The first group of 515 persons (December 8 to 10), headed by Seiji Matsuda, vice chairperson of the Outbound Travel Executive Committee, and the second group of 490 persons (December 10 to 12), headed by Hideo Ninomiya, vice chairperson of the Outbound Travel Executive

Committee, split to tour 10 different courses that originated in Seoul, Busan, and Jeju Island.

This MEGA FAM tour was proposed by JATA Chairman Hiromi Tagawa at the Japan-Korea Tourism Exchange Expansion Symposium held in Seoul last August. Chairman Tagawa recognized that the barrier to resolving the slump in bilateral tourism exchanges between Japan and South Korea is “a very difficult psychological problem,” and he pointed out, “First, we must sweep away the psychological barrier in the minds of travel agency staff.” Through the 1,000-person FAM tour, JATA made clear its intention to work toward a full-scale recovery of demand for travel to South Korea.

According to Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), the number of Japanese travelers visiting South Korea dropped 23% YOY in 2013, but during the first three quarters of 2014 from January to September, the decline stopped at 17% YOY. The year 2014 as a whole is expected to be around 40% below the 2012 level.

Choo Suk Byun, president of KTO, greeted the visitors at a welcome dinner that he hosted himself on December 8, saying, “We are honored to receive the 1,000-person MEGA FAM tour, the first of its kind in South Korea.” Referring to the Japan-Korea Tourism Exchange Expansion Symposium held last August in Seoul and then last December in Tokyo, he appraised it as “a meaningful event for educating people about the importance of promoting exchanges and cooperation between local governments and individuals, in addition to the cooperation between national governments, for the expansion of exchanges between the regions in both countries and for the early achievement of two-way exchanges between the two countries of 7 million people.”

Byun explained that the daytrip courses from Seoul and Busan were introduced on this MEGA FAM tour because “we want all of you participants to experience directly for yourselves the attractions of South Korea’s regions.” He spoke of his expectations, saying, “I would like for you to work on travel product creation after you return to your country.”

2015’s Theme is “Revitalize Regional Tourism”

Furthermore, speaking about KTO’s promotional developments for 2015, the 50th anniversary of normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea, Byun said that he would like to make 2015 a year that is memorable for the further expansion of exchanges between the two countries, using “Revitalize Regional Tourism” as the catchphrase. “This is the year to break out of the slump in tourism exchange between Japan and South Korea and the year to restart our leap to the next stage. For this, KTO will exert its utmost efforts,” he said with determination.

In response, Seiji Matsuda, vice chairperson of the Outbound Travel Executive Committee and leader of Group 1 on the MEGA



The ski jumping stadium in Pyeongchang County

FAM tour, expressed his appreciation for the fact that Byun had chosen Japan as his first country to visit after becoming president of KTO and the fact that he had staged KTO's largest exhibit ever at JATA Tourism Expo

Japan 2014. Matsuda expressed his gratitude for Byun's support of JATA's MEGA FAM tour and then emphasized, "Through opportunities such as these, the chances for JATA member travel agencies to sell trips to South Korea will increase, and we will work to revitalize the sending of travelers to South Korea." JATA created a project team for the 50th anniversary of normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea and is emphasizing ideas to stimulate demand through proposals for events and promotion of projects.

In reflection of KTO's intention expressed in its 2015 catchphrase to "revitalize regional tourism," this MEGA FAM tour offered familiarization tours covering seven courses in Seoul, three courses in Busan, and one course on Jeju Island. The B course departed from Seoul and headed toward Gangwon Province where Pyeongchang County and Gangneung City are located, which is where the 2018 Winter Olympics will be held. The course was arranged to incorporate many elements abounding with local color that have rarely been included in tour products until now, such as lunch at a restaurant that serves local country-style dishes in old-style Korean house with a thatched roof and dinner at the Korea Traditional Cultural Experience Center where visitors can attempt to make bibimbap.

At a public meeting with the Japanese press held on December 10, KTO's Japan Team Leader Yong Mook Lim introduced some of the initiatives that KTO was already undertaking to "revitalize regional tourism," the theme for 2015, such as trial operation of a regional tourism shuttle bus departing from Seoul for the equivalent of 10,000 yen/person, something that KTO tried for the first time in 2014. He said that KTO intends to put energy into uncovering demand for travel to the regions, together with returning the number of Japanese travelers visiting South Korea to its previous level.

Expectation of Contents Development by the Japanese Market

Tourism exchanges between Japan and South Korea as of 2013 amounted to 2.748 million Japanese visiting South Korea and 2.456 million South Koreans visiting Japan. In 2014, however, the number of South Koreans visiting Japan appears to have exceeded the number of Japanese visiting South Korea for the first time in six years, since 2008.

Japan and South Korea are currently aiming to make the two-way tourism exchange population between Japan and South Korea rise to 7 million persons. Lim, KTO team leader, expressed the view at the public meeting on December 10 that "if we return to the 2012 level when the number of Japanese visiting

South Korea was 3.52 million persons, then it will be possible to achieve 7 million persons within two years."

For the expansion of Korean travelers visiting Japan, he mentioned a policy of putting energy into expansion of two-way exchanges on the parts of KTO and the Korea Association of Travel Agents (KATA) which until now have not been actively engaged in promotion of outbound travel. He revealed, "We are considering implementation of a 'Tohoku Support Tour' by local governments and travel industry-related personnel in South Korea with participants numbering over 100 persons, on the theme of revitalizing regional exchanges."

Lim again expressed his concern over the current situation in which "South Korean inbound travel agencies that serve



JATA MEGA FAM tour was welcomed at Incheon International Airport

Japanese travelers are facing collapse" due to the fact that the number of Japanese travelers visiting South Korea has dropped by 40% compared to 2012. He pointed out, "If tourism exchanges taper off even between such close

neighboring countries, the relationship between the two countries is also doubtful." He explained, "Our relationship with Japan is extremely important for our continued development in the future, and we would like to build a solid foundation particularly by promoting stable exchanges between the regions."

Moreover, concerning the importance of the Japanese market, Lim said, "Not only will South Korea benefit by a recovery in the number of Japanese visiting South Korea, but Japan is also the only market that can contribute to the development of contents for regional tourism promotion in South Korea," suggesting that, by discovering new tourism materials for tourists from Japan, a mature market, the overall level of South Korea's inbound market could be raised.

Participants in this MEGA FAM tour flew to South Korea from 10 Japanese cities, reconfirming once again the easy availability of flights from all over Japan to South Korea. However, Lim noted that flights from Japan fly into only three points in South Korea, Seoul, Busan, and Jeju Island, and he expressed the hope that "development of demand for travel to all parts of South Korea will be promoted by utilizing charter flights to regional airports in the southwestern and northeastern parts of South Korea."



"Gangneung Seongyojang" in Gangneung, Gangwon-do