

The Increasing Importance of the Travel Industry's Role in "Regional Revitalization" Promoting Two-way Exchanges with the Synergy of Inbound Travel

Just over ten years have passed since the Koizumi Cabinet put forth its plan in 2003 to make Japan a tourism destination. Following the Tourism-based Country Promotion Basic Act and the creation of the Japan Tourism Agency, the Ministerial Council on the Promotion of Japan as a Tourism-Oriented Country was set up in 2013, and the number of foreign travelers visiting Japan exceeded 13 million persons in 2014. With initiatives for "Regional Revitalization" becoming well established, the role of the travel industry in regional tourism promotion is becoming more important. We talked to JATA Chairman Hiromi Tagawa and All Nippon Travel Agents Association (ANTA) Chairman Toshihiro Nikai concerning the outlook for the travel industry in 2015.

----First of all, what are your views on domestic tourism in 2015?



Hiromi Tagawa
JATA Chairman

Tagawa With inbound travel in a satisfactory state due to the tailwind it has received from the weakening yen since last year, domestic travel has also continued its solid trend. The almost daily reports on TV of foreign travelers visiting all over Japan seem to be having a boosting effect on domestic travel. The revival of the Tohoku region is indispensable to the stimulation of domestic tourism; I think that as inbound tourism extends to regional areas, there is a growing momentum for people to see their native towns in a fresh light, and a new trend is emerging from that.



Toshihiro Nikai
ANTA Chairman

Nikai This year, 2015, is when preparations start for 2020 when the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics will be held, and sports tourism is expected to flourish in regional areas. With

the inbound market continuing to grow, one important theme is how to ensure the safety and security of foreign travelers visiting Japan. In the plan to strengthen national resilience in which I am involved, the safety of foreigners in time of disaster is fully taken into consideration. We think of this as one part of our "hospitality" that will appeal to people overseas.

-----In the "Regional Revitalization" put forward by the Abe Cabinet, tourism is likely to play a major role, but what do you think about the role of regional tourism promotion in regional revitalization?

Nikai Just over ten years have passed since efforts began to make Japan a tourism-oriented country, and now there are no heads of local governments or Diet members who don't talk about tourism. However, the reality is that we do not have a full vision of how, specifically, to proceed down the path toward the next step in order to promote Japan as a tourism destination. I think it is important to combine our efforts with regional

revitalization. ANTA would like to continue to focus firmly on tourism promotion that leads to regional revitalization.

Tagawa Tourism resource treasures are sleeping in regional areas. The traditional *shitamachi* district of Tokyo is one such region. I think that regional revitalization must also be promoted even in Tokyo. To stimulate domestic travel, I want to work together with regional areas, utilizing not only the know-how inside Japan but also the experience gained in developing overseas destinations that the travel industry has accumulated over the course of 50 years, ever since overseas travel was deregulated. All six prefectures in the Tohoku region have announced a policy that focuses on the "power of tourism." Because we must spend time working on tourism promotion not just in one area but across a wide area, we need to take a longer-term perspective. By all means, I would like for the regional revitalization being advanced by the government to continue as a long-term measure.

-----Inbound foreign visitors coming to Japan are rapidly increasing, but meanwhile, circumstances are tough in outbound travel from Japan to China and South Korea, which are vital sources of inbound travel to Japan. What are your thoughts on the development of two-way tourism?

Nikai In February, I will lead a delegation of about 1,000 people to South Korea. It is not very well known that South Korea is a country with deep connections with Japan. Because Japan and South Korea are very close countries, there is any number of ways to speak ill of one another if one wants to, but that would be very counterproductive. If we recall the long history of exchanges between Japan and South Korea and talk about instances in current Japan-South Korea exchanges that are heartwarming to both countries, then we should be able to build a great relationship. As travel industry organizations, both JATA and ANTA should work together on building such a relationship. In May this year, a delegation is scheduled to go to China, and precisely because we are in a difficult period, I want us to seize the chance to build stronger bonds and to move forward.

Tagawa I think we should launch efforts this year to build good relationships with both China and South Korea on a double track, i.e., in both the public and private sectors. Last December, JATA led a Mega Fam tour with 1,000 participants to mark the occasion of the 50th anniversary since the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea, and we spread out in groups through the "regions," which South Korea has made a keyword, to conduct local visits. We hope to actively encourage the Japanese travel market so that there are tours to South Korea available all year during this milestone year. China is the site of JATA's board of directors meeting in March this year, and we will have detailed discussions with the Chinese concerning stimulation of demand for tours to China. We intend to make this a milestone for the expansion of the market. With the cooperation of ANTA and JATA, we must expand the channels for two-way exchanges through the synergistic effects of outbound and inbound travel.