

50 Booths to be Displayed at JATA Tourism EXPO Japan 2015

Aiming to Revive Travel by Japanese Travelers on the 50th Anniversary of the Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between South Korea and Japan

Inerview with Joongseok Kang, Executive Director Korea Tourism Organization Tokyo office



KTO's booth at JATA Tourism EXPO Japan 2014



Joongseok Kang

Last year, the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) displayed 46 booths, the most ever. Joongseok Kang, Tokyo Branch Manager of the Korea Tourism Organization,

expressed a strong desire to make the most of JATA Tourism EXPO Japan this year by planning to display 50 booths, even more than last year, since this year marks the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea.

Active PR Because of Tough Times

From the beginning, we expected great things from JATA Tourism EXPO Japan, which was held last September for the first time by merging the Japan Travel and Tourism Association's Tabi Fair and JATA Tabihaku.

Given the continued sluggish growth in the number of Japanese travelers going to South Korea in particular, South Korea decided to display 46 booths, the most ever, in an effort to somehow change the atmosphere surrounding travel to South Korea.

With the participation of 13 municipalities from across South Korea in staging the displays, every booth prepared a program or menu so that visitors could enjoy the attractions of South Korea, from traditional attractions to the latest in tourism resources and materials, covering everything from World Heritage Sites to entertainment and medical tourism.

On the theme of "Imagine Your Korea – Tonaritte Iine! (Wonderful Place Next Door!) Tourism Attractions in South Korea," I think we were able to introduce all the tourism attractions available only in South Korea, including the latest information, recommended local attractions, interactive experiences with South Korean culture, and a variety of stage performances, etc.

Precisely because these are tough times with sluggish growth in the number of Japanese travelers going to South Korea, we decided that we wanted to try to correct even a little the somewhat negative image that was spreading through TV and newspapers, and we decided to do this by staging the largest-ever booth display.

In response to a call-out from KTO, local governments and travel agents in South Korea as well as all other related

parties responded positively. In the end, we were able to put together an exhibit featuring 46 booths.

We were able to attract a large audience particularly with a mini live event featuring Girl's Day, a currently popular K-Pop group, and a talk show which were held on Sunday on the stage at Tourism EXPO Japan. The relationship between South Korea and Japan continues to be strained due to political problems, etc., but the importance of maintaining channels for tourism exchange and cultural exchange has been repeatedly pointed out by both Japan and South Korea. In the mini live event and talk show, we confirmed that Japanese people's interest in South Korean style is as strong as ever, and from that perspective as well, we felt anew the significance of holding JATA Tourism EXPO Japan.

Opportunities to Deepen Bilateral Exchanges through Travel

This is also a year to commemorate because it is the 50th anniversary of normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea. So, KTO would like to put together a display of 50 booths to surpass the 46 booths last year.

We are considering a program for JATA Tourism EXPO Japan 2015 like last year's that will be based on the three pillars of K-Pop, popular performances including non-verbal performances, and interactive South Korean cultural experiences

In the interactive South Korean cultural experience corner last year, the opportunity to try on a chima jeogori, a traditional Korean women's costume, was popular, in addition to options that included making decorative hand mirrors using Korean paper, Jeju organic soap-making, sending picture postcards of South Chungcheong Province, and tasting the Korean cuisine from Gwangju.

In addition, we intend to further augment the content from last year by creating four zones of booths, each with a different theme. In addition to the "interactive cultural experiences" zone, we will feature a "local zone" with tourism information from 13 municipalities across the country including Seoul, Busan, and Jeju Island, a "medical tourism zone" where visitors can do beauty treatments and health consultations, and a "theme tourism zone" filled with information on tourism experiences available only in South Korea, such as Korean entertainment and World Heritage Sites.

Another theme we want to consider relates to the ideal development of exchanges between local areas in Japan and South Korea. We are talking about exchanges that result in deep and intense relationships, transcending national relationships, such as the one between Tottori Prefecture and Gangwon Province. We'd like to find a gimmick for introducing these.

Even when the relationship at the political level is rough, Japan and South Korea must continue to seek peace and conduct exchanges because we are neighbors.

Precisely because we are in such a time, I think that we need to look to tourism to enable deeper exchanges between the two countries through travel. While reconfirming that, I think we must maximize our utilization of the opportunity presented by JATA Tourism EXPO Japan so that all ordinary travelers can genuinely enjoy travel.