

JATA Submits Policy Recommendations to the Japan Tourism Agency Aiming to Make Japan a Major Exchange-oriented Country through Outbound Travel

In anticipation of the “age of mutual exchange of 40 million people,” JATA submitted policy recommendations for inbound, outbound, and domestic travel to the Japan Tourism Agency on April 22. The policy recommendations set forth suggestions for overcoming challenges by engaging the entire country through public-private collaboration including a cross-section of ministries and agencies, premised on the travel industry’s awakening and creation of demand. We spoke with Jungo Kikuma, chairman of the JATA Outbound Travel Executive Committee, and Satoshi Inoue, chairman of that committee’s Policy Recommendations Sub-Committee, concerning the outbound travel policy recommendations incorporating 10-point action plan. The action plan includes the popularization of vacation-taking, support for internationalization of young people, and regional revitalization through internationalization to move toward making Japan a major exchange-oriented country.

The Growing Social Role of Outbound Travel

--- Tell us about the background behind how you put together the outbound travel policy recommendations.



Mr. Kikuma(left) and Mr. Inoue

Kikuma We set up three new sub-committees within the Outbound Travel Committee to work effectively on the various barriers and challenges surrounding outbound travel. The Policy Recommendations Sub-Committee was established to write proposals in preparation for the age of 20 million outbound travelers. Last year, when Japan reached the milestone of 50 years since the deregulation of

outbound travel, Various opportunities were used through the media and others during the year to highlight the significance of the contribution of outbound travel to the internationalization of Japanese people. During this, I keenly felt that the role played by outbound travel has grown greater than ever. So, we are not thinking just at the level of how to create travel products. We drew up the policy recommendations based on our awareness we are in an age when we must energize the framework of outbound travel.

Inoue In the early stage of sub-committee discussions, interest tended to turn toward stimulation of demand, but we began to consider the larger framework surrounding outbound travel which Chairman Kikuma pointed out, and while involving other ministries and agencies through the Japan Tourism Agency, the sub-committee members repeatedly held discussions from the long-term perspective of how to change the country. This is not something that we expect to produce results next year or the year after. We tried to create recommendations that will be effective in boosting outbound travel far into the future.

--- The principal role of the tourism industry is now debated frequently, along with the UN slogan of “Tourism, Passport to Peace.”

Inoue I think this slogan is the basis of tourism. Of course, the contribution of tourism to economic growth is large, but I think we can also expect tourism to play a role in the achievement of

world peace by promoting mutual understanding in countries around the world and increasing people’s understanding of different value systems.

Kikuma As historical background, not only has Japan provided overseas development assistance (ODA) for construction of physical infrastructure such roads and bridges, but Japan is also moving to provide ODA to develop services that support ongoing economic development, such as support for development of tourism and help for the tourism industry to take root in developing countries. I think the travel industry must actively cooperate with tourism-based ODA.

The Industry to Set an Example for Popularization of Vacation-Taking

--- Tell us what you think of “popularization of vacation-taking,” the first item listed in the action plan.

Inoue Needless to say, if people cannot take vacations, they cannot go on trips. Since the ability to take vacation time is essential particularly for outbound trips, the fact that it is currently difficult to take long periods of vacation in Japan is clearly an obstacle to increasing the demand for outbound travel. I think the key point for expanding outbound travel is to make it easier to take time off.

Kikuma In developing the travel market, the issue of disposable time is not a small one. Even if Japan does not go as far as adopting the European vacation laws, we would like to ask for the cooperation of industry in encouraging workers to use their paid vacation time. In the current Diet session, it is expected that an amendment to the Labor Standards Act will be submitted which mandates the taking of 5 days of paid vacation per year. In Japan, workers use only about 20% of their paid vacation days annually, which is extremely low compared to the US and Europe. There are international reports stating that vacation time contributes to improved productivity and to the improvement of work-life balance, and so first it is necessary for the travel industry to be prepared to set a good example.

--- What about “regional revitalization through internationalization”?

Kikuma There are many airports in regional areas, but currently there are very few international flights. An increase in the airlines that serve regional airports would also spur the further expansion of the inbound market, but the existence of outbound demand is a major point for attracting more routes. If we can develop outbound travel demand originating from regional airports, that will underpin the creation, maintenance, and development of international routes, and I think it can contribute greatly to regional revitalization.

Inoue The policy recommendations incorporate a 10-point action plan, and I very much want people to understand that these are all based on a long-term perspective that aims to make Japan an exchange-oriented country, in anticipation of Japanese tourism in the distant future.

Kikuma As I said at the outset, because we are very proud that these outbound travel policy recommendations are something that only JATA could propose, we wrote in the preface “JATA is committed to these recommendations.” I am certain that if the rich lifestyle of the Japanese people is what makes Japan attractive as a destination, then outbound travel by Japanese people will play a role in order for Japan to continue to deliver forward-thinking values.