

New Year's Greeting by Hiroyuki Takahashi, Chairperson, Japan Association of Travel Agents  
**“Reborn”： Our Aim to Achieve a New Tourism**

I would like to wish everyone a prosperous new year as we welcome the year 2023.

After battling COVID-19 for over two and a half years, last year was a year in which we took new steps toward the revival of tourism. A combination of the significant easing of border control measures in October and the depreciation of the Japanese yen, coupled with a rapid recovery in inbound travel to Japan, has finally stimulated international exchange activities. In terms of domestic travel, market recovery can be seen due in part to the tailwind of programs such as the Prefectural Residents' Discount Scheme (*kenmin wari*) and the National Travel Support Campaign (*zenkoku ryoko shien*), and there are clear signs that bode well for the travel industry as a whole.

Under these circumstances, we believe that the most important theme for the new year of 2023 is how we can bring about a recovery in overseas travel. Although a roadmap for recovery has emerged for domestic and inbound travel, overseas travel has yet to gain traction. While this is partially attributable to external factors such as a weak Japanese yen and soaring travel costs, we also recognize the importance of market mechanisms that can address the fundamental issues of raising customer awareness and fostering momentum for overseas travel. Ultimately, we are convinced that achieving a well-balanced recovery in all three areas of domestic, inbound, and overseas travel will be conducive to the development of the tourism industry as a whole.

At the same time, COVID-19 has brought about a major shift in the values of customers, which can also be seen in their travel needs. In order for us to remain the first choice of domestic and international customers, we must provide not only safety and peace of mind but also values that are aligned with the needs of the new era. It is imperative for us to refine our travel materials from a global perspective, create appealing narratives, and provide products and services that strike a chord with our customers. In addition, it is essential for our industry as a whole to take concrete steps toward achieving the SDGs and offer environmentally conscious and sustainable travel, including travel in line with decarbonization goals.

A travel agency's ability to adapt to this new normal is inextricable from the value of its very existence. We believe that if we can break free of the conventional framework of the travel industry and continue to evolve and expand the market, thus creating new value, we will be able to usher in a new phase of tourism.

We are currently facing many other challenges as well. We need to address the shortage of manpower and rebuild the infrastructure that supports travel, adapt to changes in the procurement environment, improve the productivity of the travel industry as a whole, and address various issues such as digital transformation.

We hope that our member companies will continue to work together in 2023 to tackle various issues, create valuable travel that caters to the needs of the new era, and meet the expectations of our customers. We look forward to your continued support in the year ahead.