

New Year's Greeting by Hiroyuki Takahashi, Chairperson, Japan Association of Travel Agents

**"Toward the Development of Sustainable Tourism"**

At the beginning of 2025, I wish everyone a very Happy New Year.

Last year was a year of significant market movement as the demand for travel expanded worldwide. In Japan, driven by the weak yen, inbound travel grew at the fastest pace on record, exceeding 30 million as of October, and domestic tourism has almost recovered to the same level as in 2019. However, the pace of recovery in overseas tourism has been slow due to the weak yen and soaring travel prices. The level of overseas tourism is slightly over 60% of the level in 2019. There are many countries expressing their strong hopes for an early recovery. The travel industry must accelerate efforts to fully revive overseas tourism this year. At the same time, we will promote efforts to encourage young people in particular to actively travel abroad and broaden their perspectives in order to realize well-balanced bilateral exchanges and revitalize international exchange.

This year, there are two events that will provide great opportunities to expand the travel market. The first is Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai, which is scheduled to open in April. We believe this will be an excellent chance for us to increase opportunities for Japanese people to travel overseas by having exhibitors from approximately 160 foreign countries and regions promote their respective attractions. At the same time, since a large number of visitors are expected to travel to Japan to visit the Expo, it also represents an opportunity for us to promote new developments such as regional diversification through "Expo+Tourism" and to introduce travel opportunities with high added value. The Expo is also expected to generate significant demand for domestic tourism, both group and individual. The travel industry will contribute to the success of the Expo as well as the revitalization of regional economies by attracting many visitors.

The second event is Tourism Expo Japan 2025 Aichi/Chubu-Hokuriku, which will be held for the first time in Aichi Prefecture. The significance of holding this event in Aichi Prefecture is to stimulate domestic, international, and inbound travel through synergizing with the Expo. We also aim to expand both inbound and outbound travel at the Chubu International Airport and appeal for continued support for the reconstruction of the Noto Peninsula through tourism. We will maximize our efforts to promote the charms of Japan, both in the domestic market and internationally.

It is also important to take a proactive approach to sustainable tourism in order to resolve issues in the tourism industry. With the rapid recovery of inbound tourism to Japan, overtourism has become an issue in some regions. In order to solve this issue, it is necessary to diversify travel in terms of regions and seasons instead of concentrating on the Golden Route. To this end, the public and private sectors must work together to uncover and refine regional tourism resources, provide products with high added value, establish tourism MaaS and other mechanisms, as well as DX (digital transformation). In addition, the equalization of travel demand and the expansion of total demand for domestic travel are important themes for solving overtourism and revitalizing local communities. We believe that the “learning vacation” and “vacation reforms” that have already been introduced by many local governments will help in promoting these efforts. The travel industry will continue to work hand in hand with local communities and tourism businesses to drive these initiatives.

Last but not least, we will always keep in mind that compliance is the foundation of all the initiatives promoted by the travel industry. We will continue to further our compliance-related training and make sincere efforts to reform our awareness and behavior, together with our member companies.

We look forward to your continued guidance and encouragement in the coming year.