



Commentator

Towards Recovery: A Message to East Asia from Japan's Tourism Industry

Hiromi Tagawa

President and CEO, JTB Corp.

I would like to express my appreciation for this opportunity to participate in the Special Symposium of the Japan Society for Intercultural Studies. I will be presenting "Towards Recovery: A Message to East Asia from Japan's Tourism Industry."

The recent Great East Japan Earthquake was a disaster of unprecedented magnitude, and influenced the tourism industry to a degree that I had never before experienced. In addition to direct damage to sightseeing areas, sluggish demand for travel due to a general mood of self-restraint, a similar restraint from firms for holding international conferences, events, and business trips, and the reluctance of foreigners to visit Japan due to the nuclear disaster have thrown the entire tourism industry into a grave situation. Under these circumstances, hand-in-hand with restoration of the disaster-struck areas, recovery support based on the "power of travel" is being strongly promoted by the industry made up of the public and private sectors come together. Since mid to late April, there has slowly started to be a relaxation of requests issued by foreign governments to postpone or cancel trips, and tours of inspection from abroad have

started to reappear. At the WTTC Global Travel and Tourism Summit in Las Vegas this May, the Japan-China-Korea summit, and the Japan-China-Korea Tourism Minister Summit, I made an appeal to the world to facilitate tourism exchange for our country and for the tourism industry.

Furthermore, during Japan's extended holiday called Golden Week, Japanese consumers are starting to show signs of recovery from the disheartening effects of the earthquake. As the cherry blossoms start to bloom in April and the seasons start to change, Japanese have started to realize that they cannot go on this way forever. Thinking of the victims of the disaster, they have not been eating out or going on trips, living their lives quietly hoping not to get in the way of reconstruction efforts. Believing tourism demand will increase, we at JTB are putting every effort into introducing a full lineup of long-stay offerings for the upcoming summer vacation.

In this way, the Japanese tourism industry is making steady progress, but incoming tourism is a different problem. On this topic, I'd like to ask a request of all of

you gathered here today. I would like to ask you to use whatever influence you have in spreading accurate information about Japan around the world. In actuality, rumor has led people around the world to think “all of Japan is dangerous.” While the area around the nuclear accident has been evacuated, everyday life for people in say, Tokyo, has not been affected. Energy saving measures are in effect, but the trains are running on schedule. This is the true situation in Japan now, which I hope you understand and which I hope becomes the basis for many tourists to decide to visit our country.

And now, I earlier mentioned the “power of travel,” but do you know the “five powers of travel”? The “power of travel” is made up of the “power of culture,” the “power of the economy,” the “power of health,” the “power of education,” and the “power of exchange.” I believe that our present theme of mutual exchange in a united East Asia can especially be encouraged through utilizing the “power of culture” and the “power of exchange.”

First, the “power of culture” is “contributing to the discovery, nurture, and preservation of the history, nature, traditions, art, scenery, and lifestyles of a diversity of countries and regions.” Previously, even in Japan, the uniform group tour was mainstream as far as sightseeing and tourism was concerned. But the Japanese lifestyle has changed to that of great diversity, and it is not so much that everyone has his or her own preferences, but rather that each person will have many different interests. This has led to a recent increase in demand for trips where one can enjoy the treasures of each region of Japan, such as the abundance of nature, the culture springing from daily life, and history – in other words, trips where one can come into contact with the culture of the region. Rather than unordinary experiences, super-ordinary experiences are in demand. And this trend looks to be getting even stronger. For Chinese

tourists visiting Japan, while the purpose of their first trip is often shopping, further trips show a need to experience the country's nature and history. The various countries of Asia show increased maturity in both travel as well as travelers. The desires of travelers are quickly evolving. I am hoping to make Japan a place where local culture-sightseeing can be a model for the people of all of the Asian countries.

Next, the “power of exchange” is “contributing to the realization of a safe and peaceful society through mutual understanding and friendship between countries and regions.” There can be no question that the power of travel shows great potential for deepening mutual understanding between countries and regions. What is necessary for this to come about is for countries and regions to value the others' cultures highly. First, one must know one's own region. Know the history and the traditions from the past that are apparent in everyday life. At that point, conversing together will lead to respect, and mutual understanding will deepen.

In this way, I believe that a deepening of mutual respect of culture through the “power of travel” will make a unified East Asia possible at the popular level. And to encourage this, each region needs to lovingly polish up their lifestyle traditions. Then, they must be properly transmitted. This will make the different regions of East Asia attractive places for cultural exchange, and East Asia itself will become a sphere of cultural exchange.

Lastly, recovery after the Great East Japan Earthquake will require long-term measures. We at JTB intend on helping on a global scale so that we can create an attractive area that visitors will want to experience. We wish to assist in building bridges between the different regions of Japan and the rest of East Asia, as well as in making East Asia into a “sphere of cultural exchange.”

Thank you for listening.