EMBASSY | UPDATE

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Tourists: We've Got You Coming and Going
By Andrew Wylegala

According to the U.S. Travel Association, every 33 overseas tourists to the country generate one job.

Tourism is the number-one services export of the United States. In fact, every country sees inbound tourism as a bonanza. Small wonder the Embassy of the United States in Tokyo—and a growing slice of the Japanese government—works overtime to woo incoming tourists.

But it is not only inbound traffic that benefits an economy. Meeting the needs of domestic tourists and those traveling in markets beyond the home country is also big business. Multi-directional tourist trade contributes an estimated 10 percent of global GDP and close to an equal share of employment.

Moreover, the sector reaches beyond jobs and prosperity. Tourism is also a facilitator of trade and investment and a stabilizing force in international relations. It can help countries open to the world in both economic and human terms. What's not to love with a sector like this?

US bound
A record 18.5 million Japanese traveled abroad in 2012. The United States was the destination for about one in every five Japanese tourists, who headed in one-third shares to Guam, Hawaii, and the mainland.

After a big dip from 1997's high-water mark and a loss of US market share, the United States is drawing more Japanese tourists again. Forthcoming numbers for 2013 from the United States

Department of Commerce will show continued year-on-year growth to 3.77 million Japanese visitors—meaning Japan is the number-one source of overseas tourists, displacing the United Kingdom.

Better still, in spending per traveler while stateside, Japanese trail only Canadians. While Japan's aging demographic is usually viewed as negative, given that the country's 30 million citizens who are aged 65 or older are generally well-heeled and well-disposed toward Americana, Japan is a market to be wooed!

Next June, to help the US travel-trade suitors make appropriate "advances," a senior commerce official will lead a trade mission of suppliers and visitors bureaus to Tokyo, the second of three Asian cities on the itinerary.

Another part of the tourism charm offensive had the Commercial Service–Japan (CS–J) leading 100 Japanese travel agents to the premier US tourism trade show IPW in Las Vegas last June.

Further, the CS–J fielded the United States' largest official presence at the JATA "Tabihaku" Travel Showcase 2013 at Tokyo Big Sight in September, and plans to top that at this year's event.

All this courting is underpinned by the embassy's partnerships with the Visit USA Committee Japan, a non-profit organization comprising US travel suppliers, Japanese airlines and tour operators, as well as Brand USA, a public–private partnership established to promote tourism to the United States.

To learn more, contact the CS–J tourism leads, Tamami Honda and Stephen Anderson.

Japan bound

Last June, the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched its latest action plan, promising improvements such as more multilingual signage.

In 2013, a return of tourists from the traditional top-source country— South Korea—eased visa handling for Southeast Asians, a weaker yen, and reduced concern about 3/11 all helped the country eclipse its long-held target of 10 million visitors.

Having breached this number, Japan's next goal is 20 million visitors by 2020—a feat that, while considered ambitious, would advance Japan only moderately from its current 10th place among Asian destinations.

All around

While officialdom focuses on inbound, the fact is that whether tourists are inbound, outbound, or just tightly wound—say, as they transit yet another airport—they leave a broad swath of prosperity in their wake.

Rising tourism tides to Japan also lift US boats. Literally. Consider US-affiliated attractions here, such as Princess Cruises' new Otaru service.

Next, more tourists to Japan require more aircraft, while even Japan's vaunted infrastructure benefits from US contributions in areas such as security technologies and lodging. And when it comes to welcoming the big influx of visitors for Tokyo's 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the United States offers the unique depth of the world's only eight-time host.

Finally, more tourists spur Japanese GDP and, thus, the prospects of US suppliers of goods and services unrelated to travel.

To reach tourism levels befitting Japan's attractions, it is in soft infrastructure that US companies can make the greatest contribution—and reap the greatest commercial gains.

It is not by accident that the United States is a tourism powerhouse, with the planet's second-most international visitors and the highest revenues. We know the business.

US experts can help Japanese partners develop and market Japan as a destination, pioneering new concepts in such things as eco- and adventure-tourism, special-interest packaging, and web-based marketing platforms—all delivered to appeal to foreigners.

The ACCJ and US companies have much to offer in helping Japan move beyond Kyoto temples and Nara deer as the terminus for foreign visitors.

Kudos to the ACCJ, too, for leading the charge with new task forces on integrated resorts and the 2020 Games.

Governmental ground

Now is an ideal juncture for the public sectors in the United States and Japan to collaborate more intensively to grow tourism for both nations.

From Japan, a rationalization of operations at Haneda and Narita airports in keeping with the spirit of the Open Skies agreement would increase efficiency, as would stepped-up privatization of Japan's airports, and measures to reduce landing fees.

Continued cooperation on modernizing air-traffic control would benefit both capacity and safety. On the US side, our Customs and Border Protection (CBP) colleagues eagerly await approval by the Office of Management and Budget of the rule implementing the APEC Business Travel Cards Act of 2011.

The CBP is working to enlist Japan as a partner in its Trusted Traveler Program, Global Entry. This would make both countries more attractive places to visit by expediting entry and exit formalities, while enhancing security.

Come on, tourists: *youkoso*! Oh, and *itterasshai*!