

JAPAN RECOVERS TOURISM ECONOMY



Industry officials warn that business was likely to get fully back on track next year. Japanese tourism is still facing difficulties a year after the Tohoku earthquake/ tsunami and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), there was a massive 28-percent decline in the number of foreign visitors in Japan compared to the year before. Chances of full recovery were predicted by

mid-2012. Representatives of the Japanese Travel Industry at the ITB Berlin tourism fair, a front-liner of industrial gatherings, were more cautious regardless of posters that say "Japan, Rising Again. Thank You for Your Support".

The Tokyo City Tourism delegate, Hiromi Waldenberger, said that hopes of visitors are pinned on next spring of the city will be returning to the levels of pre-March 2011. "We hope for the next cherry blossom which is March-April 2013... I think that's realistic," she said. Takuo Nagano, marketing specialist for Europe, Americas and Oceania, said the Japan Tourism Agency is spending an average of five billion yen (60 million U.S dollars) for the country's promotion at the Japan National Tourism Organization. He also said that half of it is destined to reconstruct and help get the tourism quake-damaged infrastructure in Tohoku back on its feet; the rest will be used to help promote Japan's 13 biggest markets.

Last year's earthquake and tsunami left more than 19,000 people dead making it the country's worst disaster after World War II. Tourism delegates who spoke to AFP said visitors shunned Japan largely after the incident. Nippon Travel Agency sales manager, Kazu Iizuka, said "It was very slow after the tsunami, almost all the tourists cancelled." According to Iizuka, A slight recovery in business of 30 percent transpired from October but despite hopes it would have come close by next month to about half of the 2010 level.

Before the accident, Kyoto used to receive an approximate of 2.3 million visitors annually. 70 percent of which come from third world countries, Rie Doi, member of the city's tourism promotion division, said. Even though figures were not available for the economic loss due to the decline of foreign visitors, she said they used to spend an average of 50,000 yen (\$613) to 60,000 yen per stay. Apparently, she also said that hopefully tourism in Kyoto would return next year, although reconstruction and improvements were seen late 2011. Waldenberger said that in Tokyo, German tourists began to return after a more than 60 percent decline in July immediately after the accident. She explained that Japan had been very popular thanks to the film "Cherry Blossoms" by Doris Doerrie. A hundred and fifty years of German- Japanese friendship marked the result of official events. The ITB Travel and Trade Show runs until March 11 with 10,644 exhibitors from 187 countries worldwide.

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