

JAPAN FACING THE CRISIS WELCOMES RICH CHINESE



Japan is facing economic downturn. Yen is too strong and the global economic crisis also does not help the tourism industry. Japanese government, however, intends to attract 10 million tourists by 2010 and plans to allow rich individuals from China to visit Japan on their own.

The Japanese economy seems to have a gloomy perspective. The government has announced that the situation was rapidly worsening and there are fears of rising unemployment. The problems are likely to get even worse with the global economic slowdown. Moreover the yen has grown considerably, which naturally affects the **inbound tourism industry**. The number of foreign visitors coming to this country is continuously dropping.

Also, **outbound tourism** is experiencing serious decrease. Japanese may exploit the favorable exchange rate but they seem to be cautious because of the economic crisis. According to the Japan Tourism Agency e.g. trips to Canada were down by twenty five per cent at the end of 2008. Japanese prefer to go to nearer and cheaper destinations these days.

For example, the number of Japanese visitors to Seoul, Busan and other South Korean cities has increased considerably this January compared to the same period last year. Bookings for package holidays for February are up by almost 150 per cent. Various advertisements promise two nights" hotel stay and return flight for as little as Y23,000 (EUR194).

In previous years Japanese tourism was doing well and it was quite a lucrative business. In 2007 more than 8.3 million tourists visited Japan. The government proclaimed its **plan to attract 10 million tourists by 2010** but it seems rather difficult with the current global economic situation and the strong yen.

Nevertheless, Japan's Tourism Department has already presented some of its intention. They want to allow affluent Chinese to visit Japan individually. Currently Chinese are allowed to the country only in tour groups with five to forty tourists with tour guides to escort them. Who is an affluent tourist? A person that has a credit card issued by a major bank in China or uses frequent flyer services. These are some of the criteria the government may use to determine whether the tourists may enter Japan on their own.

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