

# Travel Agencies Face Drop in Tourism Numbers

Travel agencies in Korea have recently been facing persistent financial difficulties. The agencies sought help from the government as a response to deteriorating tourist numbers. The number of Japanese tourists has rapidly decreased after the pending threats from North Korea towards South Korea. The tensions between Japan and South Korea have also added to their concerns.



An official letter was sent to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in order to remedy this unresolved issue. The Korea Association of Travel Agents (KATA) sent this letter as a means to seek financial support in these troubling times. The association consists of 15,000 members from Korean travel agencies that are responsible for taking care of Japanese tourists.

The letter was direct in its assertion regarding the established government goal of hitting the 16 million foreign tourist mark. The officials suggested in the letter that Japanese and South Korean relations were beginning to flounder and financial troubles were starting to ascend.

Focusing on tangible figures related to the decrease; Japanese tourists have seen a 33 percent drop over a year. The official numbers of tourists from Japan are listed at 88,122, a drastic drop from where the situation was last year at the same time.



The decreasing number started to come into effect during the first quarter of the year. A 22.5 percent drop was seen in the first quarter and it continuously dropped from there on. Japanese tourist numbers were decreasing for seven months starting from last September.

The largest rise in the number of tourists is often seen during the holiday termed, "Golden Week". It is a Japanese holiday where families tend to tour out to other areas nearby such as South Korea. However, this is unlikely for this year due to the unfortunate political tensions.

A survey was conducted by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry to establish an estimate on the number of Japanese tourists expected this year. The number saw a significant drop of 10.9 percent in comparison to last year's estimate.

Rhee Byoung-Chan was asked why the decline was so prominent and lengthy. His answer pointed towards the decline being borne from President Lee's visit to Dokdo where the Japanese emperor was asked to apologize. These have created further political tensions that are taking long to mend and causing a hit to the tourism market. The yen has also taken a hit after the markets slowed down leading to further concerns. Most tensions have not lasted as long as the current one with most being resolved within a month or two.



Korean travel agencies have become thoroughly dependent upon Japanese tourists and earn most of their money from these tourists. Due to the decrease in numbers, their earnings have taken a hit and continue to do so as the tensions persist.

The official letter provided avenues for the government to help the travel agencies in. The KATA suggested promotional activities were funded in order to avoid a potential collapse in the tourism industry as being predicted by many.

The private sector will not be able to mend the situation to any great extent until the tensions are resolved between both nations. This can only occur with a face-to-face meeting by officials representing both countries.

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