

# Japan. Endless Discovery.



TADASHI AIZAWA

*Japan has been allocating resources to attracting foreign tourism in recent years. The Japan Journal's Osamu Sawaji spoke with Commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency **Hiroshi Mizohata** about the Government's initiatives in this regard, as well as what Japan has to offer to prospective foreign tourists.*

Hiroshi Mizohata, commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency

## What actions is the Japanese Government taking to make Japan a tourist destination?

**Hiroshi Mizohata:** In June 2010, the Japanese Government enacted its “New Strategy for Growth.” As part of this initiative, the Government set annual targets of 25 million foreign visitors to Japan by 2020, and 30 million foreign visitors annually at some future time thereafter. Over the past several years, the highest annual total we have had was in 2008, when 8.35 million foreign tourists visited Japan. The number of foreign tourists to Japan fell to 6.79 million in 2009. We anticipate tourism figures for 2010 to exceed the figures for 2008, however. The Japanese Government is making information available primarily through the website of the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), which is posted in eleven languages, as well as through tourism expositions conducted abroad. The Government has put par-

ticular emphasis on getting information out about eco-tourism, anime and fashion. We have also designated China as one of the key countries for attracting tourism to Japan, and to this end, we are implementing deregulation measures for China, chief among these being significantly easing restrictions on the issuing of individual tourist visas to Chinese travelers. Local governments are taking initiatives aimed at removing language barriers, including adding more signage in English, Chinese, and Korean on the one hand, and training foreign language interpreters on the other. Improvements are also being made in this regard in the private sector, such as more foreign language broadcasts being made available for viewing on TV sets in hotel rooms. Opening up Haneda Airport to international flights, expanding Narita Airport's slot allocations, and the emergence of low cost carriers (LCCs) will facilitate cheaper, more convenient travel to Japan in times to come.

## What sorts of tourist attractions would you want visitors to Japan to

## enjoy more of?

Sports tourism comes to mind. There are plenty of sports to be enjoyed in Japan year-round. For instance, we have sumo wrestling and other domestic professional sports matches, as well as all manner of international sports events, which take place all across Japan. And people can go hiking and mountain climbing on our many mountains in the summer months. We have extensive ski resorts here as well: in 2011, it will have been 100 years since skiing was first introduced to Japan. Many foreign tourists go to Niseko, in Hokkaido, whether for skiing or other sports on the one hand, or for eco-tourism on the other.

Bicycle races have also been inaugurated in some cities and towns in Japan in recent years, Junior Chamber International Fukuoka, for example, sponsored the inaugural race of an event called the Tour de Fukuoka, a bicycle race wherein everyone from world-class cyclists to the average person on the street can participate, in Fukuoka Prefecture in late November of 2010. The Junior Chamber invited some 300 participants from South Korea, and the organization has signified that it intends to further develop the race into an event that fosters international exchange between Fukuoka and the rest of Asia.

## What other locales are making similar efforts to attract foreign tourists?

Naoshima, part of Kagawa Prefecture, is a tiny island of about 3,400 people in the Seto Inland Sea. It has become a renowned modern art site

worldwide, and especially in Europe. The islanders also take steps to make tourists welcome while they enjoy themselves, by working as volunteer tour guides and decorating their homes with dolls and flowers, among other things. And the city of Takayama, in Gifu Prefecture, is popular with foreign tourists for its preservation of historic streets and houses. Its website posts tourist information in eleven languages, the most of any site in Japan.

## The catchphrase for foreign tourism in Japan is “Japan. Endless Discovery.” What sentiments underlie this slogan?

“Japan. Endless Discovery.” means “Japan is a place where one may encounter emotional experiences without end.” Surveys taken of foreign tourists upon their departure from Japan show that upwards of 90% of respondents report that they were satisfied with their travels in Japan. And we believe that visitors will have the opportunity to encounter Japan on each such visit that is unlike their experiences on any other visit, no matter how many times they come to Japan.



Still from the JNTO commercial “Japan. Endless Discovery.”