

Special Message adopted at the Special International Symposium on the Revitalization of Japan's Tourism Sector and Quake Affected Regions

On October 5, 2011, representatives of UNWTO, WTTC, the Japanese government and local governments in the Tohoku region met in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan, to share wide-ranging information and exchange views on revitalizing tourism in the Tohoku region, including the prefectures of Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima, which suffered severe damage in the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11.

It was reported that the tourism industry in these three prefectures has been severely affected by a drop in visitors due to factors including the violent earthquake and tsunami and the nuclear power plant accident. Reports also showed that the tourism industry in Aomori, Akita and Yamagata prefectures, which suffered limited damage, has been severely affected by mainly negative misperception and misinformation.

However, reports also indicated that almost seven months after the disaster, except for some areas on the Pacific coast, tourist destinations are steadily recovering to a level where there are no obstacles whatsoever to welcoming visitors, including both accommodation and transportation facilities. The Tohoku region has a wealth of natural, historical and cultural attractions, and all prefectures are making strenuous efforts to dispel damaging misperception and misinformation among other activities to help revitalize their local economies after the disaster.

UNWTO and WTTC, which have offered various forms of support when natural disasters have occurred around the world, and Kobe Recovery Workshop, which devoted themselves to rebuilding its downtown area after it was destroyed by the Great Hanshin and Awaji Earthquake in 1996, offered valuable advice on revitalizing tourism in the wake of disasters based on experience accumulated in the course of these efforts. Furthermore, participants recognized that the lessons the tourism sector in the Tohoku region has learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake provide extremely valuable knowledge for other countries.

Following the above discussion, we reached the conclusion that it is important to quell damaging misperception and misinformation as quickly as possible by continuing to share accurate information with the world on the revitalization of tourism in disaster-affected areas and the Tohoku region as a whole. We also concluded that it is crucial to restore and increase the number of visitors to Tohoku and Japan, and to work toward further growth of international tourism in the Asia-Pacific region.

As the first step in this process, UNWTO will mention the facts outlined above at the 19th UNWTO General Assembly to be held on October 8-14, 2011, in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea.

The above details have been recorded and publicized as a Special Message reporting on the outcome of the October 5 meeting.

5 October 2011