

International tourism promotion for regional development

The travel and tourism-related industry continues to contribute significantly to national economic growth worldwide, and the Asia-Pacific region is no exception. The Japanese government has been promoting a “Visit Japan” campaign since 2003 and has set the goal of receiving 10 million inbound tourists by 2010. Currently, Japan hosts about six million inbound tourists annually, while some 17 million Japanese go abroad for tourism each year. Some APO member countries like Pakistan and Malaysia are also proactively promoting tourism by declaring 2007 as a special year for inbound tourism promotion.

Recognizing the importance of the tourism industry in regional economic development, a multicountry study mission on Regional Development: International Tourism Promotion was organized by the APO to examine Japan’s regional development initiatives, particularly its experiences in building up the tourism industry at regional level so that it has become a prime driver and core strength of regional and local development activities. The study mission was held 5–9 February in Tokyo and Hokkaido with the support of Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry and Japan Productivity Center for Socio-Economic Development (JPC-SED). Eighteen participants from 16 APO member countries, most of whom were from ministries of tourism or representatives of tourism associations, were in attendance. The program consisted of presentations by resource speakers, site visits in Tokyo and Hokkaido, and interactions with key Japanese players. The program kicked off with a presentation by Executive Vice President Akira Yasuda, Japan National Tourism Organization, who explained the details of the Visit Japan Campaign—Inbound Tourism Promotion in Japan. That was followed by a presentation by Chief Executive Producer Akira Chouno of the JPC-SED on Approaching International Tourism-oriented Regional Development.

The study mission visited several tourist sites in Tokyo and Hokkaido, starting with Asakusa in Tokyo and then moving on to Sapporo and Otaru in Hokkaido, where they observed examples of how to make use of cultural and industrial heritage sites as tourist attractions. In Hokkaido, the participants were received by officers of local government and had a chance to see the 58th annual Snow Festival in Sapporo. In Otaru, they visited Otaru Canal Plaza, where they heard a presentation by Kouichi Kotaka of the city’s Tourism Promotion Office. The participants felt that Otaru was the most impressive site because they saw how important it is to involve all stakeholders including community residents in tourism promotion. In the 1960s, when Otaru developed an urban planning concept that would have converted its historic canal, along which numerous stone-built warehouses were located, into a roadway, city residents initiated the famous canal dispute that continued for almost 10 years. In the end, the picturesque canal was not totally demolished, and the city managed to preserve its industrial and scenic heritage. Now, the warehouses along the canal have been turned into shops and restaurants, where tourists can visit factories making glass and music boxes and enjoy the old-fashioned street atmosphere. The study mission participants observed civil volunteers preparing for the Candle-light Festival, during which approximately 100,000 candles are lit along the sidewalks lining the canal.

Despite the tight schedule, numerous sites to visit, and the fact that it was the first time a study mission on tourism promotion had been held in Japan, the



Enjoying the scenic canal in Otaru

participants indicated that they had learned a lot during the mission. Although each member country has a different perspective on tourism promotion, this type of mission will be beneficial if combined with the experiences of others. As some pointed out, tourism promotion policies should not always focus on quantity alone but should also pay attention to quality to ensure that the tourism industry is sustainable. The importance of the involvement of all stakeholders and that of brand tourism management were cited by participants as useful lessons learned. 

