Activities of the UNWTO Regional Support Office for Asia and the Pacific

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Item 5b of the Provisional Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General
The Secretary-General submits to the Joint Meeting of the two Commissions an update of the activities of the UNWTO Regional Support Office in Asia and the Pacific in Osaka, Japan.
ACTIVITIES OF THE UNWTO REGIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

1. Over the past few months, aiding in Japan’s recovery after the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and power plant disaster in north-eastern Japan has been one of the Regional Support Office’s top priorities. The development of the Maritime Silk Road in the Region has also been a focus area for the Regional Support Office in recent months. This document briefly outlines the major activities of the UNWTO Regional Support office under these two umbrellas.

Activities carried out from April 2011 to April 2012

Japan Recovery

2. A special resolution was unanimously adopted at the 23rd Joint Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for South Asia and the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific in Colombo, Sri Lanka to support Japan after the country was devastated by an earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant.

3. Based on this resolution, the Japan Recovery News website was created in August 2011, to communicate and provide regular updates of the situation in Japan to the international community. This website was linked to the UNWTO website.

4. UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai visited Japan to meet with Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Noda and other high officials and promoted the message that a boost in inbound travel would aid in the fast recovery of the country.

5. In October, UNWTO, Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in Japan organized a "Special International Symposium on Japan’s Tourism Sector and Quake Affected Regions" in Miyagi, Japan’s hardest hit area. This event was attended by UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific Xu Jing and Risk and Crisis Programme Manager Dirk Glaesser. This event also attracted municipal officials and civilians from the affected areas and experts in tourism management who shared best practices and effective strategies for a quick recovery of Japan’s tourism sector and regional economies.

6. “Japan is back and stands ready to receive visitors,” was the message of solidarity promoted by Secretary-General Taleb Rifai after visiting affected areas and this message was reiterated at the 19th UNWTO General Assembly in Gyeongji, Korea in October.

7. Special symposiums were held in Rome and Madrid in March, in collaboration with the Japan Foundation, to showcase a film entitled “Our Gratitude for Bonds of Friendship of the World.” This film was translated into eight languages (English, Italian, Spanish, German, Portuguese, French, Indonesian, Vietnamese) and was used to express Japan’s gratitude for the solidarity of the international community after the events of March 2011.

8. Speakers of the symposium included Ms. Miyata, nun and travel writer, who extended her heartfelt gratitude for the support received following the tragic disaster, and stressed that these sentiments would never be forgotten, being handed down from generation to generation for many years to come. Ms. Miyata also noted that visitors to Japan encouraged not only the country’s local economies but also people as a whole. Another speaker was architect Mr.
Mr. Haryu, who discussed the development of safe community towns in affected areas. Mr. Haryu expressed a strong understanding of tourism’s role in the revitalization of the affected area, and highlighted the opportunity for a new community town to be a unique tourism destination where people lived safely and harmoniously with the natural resources of north-eastern Japan.

9. More than 100 people from the general public, embassies and media attended the symposium at each venue, and the event was deemed a great success.

10. UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai visited Japan again in April to attend the WTTC Global Summit, strengthen UNWTO’s relationship with the Japanese government and tourism sector and reaffirm UNWTO’s solidarity with Japan during its period of recovery. The Regional Support Office worked very closely with the UNWTO Head Office during this time.

Maritime Silk Road Project

11. In September, the Regional Support Office worked on promoting the Maritime Silk Road, opening a collective booth with the UNWTO Silk Road Programme and Nara City at the JATA Tourism Forum and Travel Showcase in Tokyo, Japan. A Silk Road seminar and networking reception were also held under the name “Tourism Linking Culture on the Silk Road.”

12. Maritime Silk Road poster exhibitions were held twice in Japan during 2012, once inside a water boat terminal and once in the age of discovery ship. These locations achieved a synergistic effect with the water-related exhibition. Various countries along the Maritime Silk Road routes (16 countries in total) were highlighted by these exhibitions, with the aim of promoting tourism to the general public. Posters and brochures were collected from tourism bureaus and embassies inside and outside of Japan.

13. The Regional Support Office, in cooperation with the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, has just completed research on the Maritime Silk Road. While there have been many interesting discoveries, deeper investigation is required to identify Silk Road points from which to develop new tourism packages.

14. The Regional Support Office, together with the UNWTO Head Office, plans to organise a variety of education seminars and video conferences with member countries. As the Maritime Silk Road has a lot of tourism potential, especially for the Asia Pacific Region, this can be an area of focus for the seminars. Most importantly, the Regional Support Office will use this time to communicate and consult with countries in the region about plans and projects, and encourages these countries to participate.