

Remarks of Ambassador at “India-Japan Year of Tourism 2024”

Date: 13 June 2024

Time: 1700-1830

Venue: Auditorium, Embassy of India

H.E Mr. Komura Masahiro, Hon’ble Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan

Shri Mukesh Kumar Meshram, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture, Uttar Pradesh Government

Shri Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal secretary, Culture and Tourism, Madhya Pradesh Government

Mr. Kazuhiko Fukushima, Director of Sales & Planning, Tourism EXPO Japan Promotion Office, Japan Association of Tourism Agents

Mr. Toru Katayama, Senior Director, ANA

Stakeholders from the Tourism sector and friends of India in Japan,

A very good afternoon to you all. It is my great privilege to welcome you today at the Embassy of India, Tokyo, as we gather to celebrate and further strengthen the enduring bonds between India and Japan, as we mark the very important India-Japan Year of Tourism.

Friends,

We are celebrating the year of 2024 as the India-Japan Year of Tourism with the captivating theme of "Connecting Himalayas with Mount Fuji." As you are all aware, this was announced during a meeting between the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, and

the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Japan, His Excellency Mr. Fumio Kishida, in New Delhi in March 2023 and reiterated during the recent meeting between Honble External Affairs Minister of India, Shri S Jaishankar and Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Japan, Her Excellency Ms. Yoko Kamikawa during their meeting in Tokyo in March this year. Since then, we have been on a journey to promote tourism between our both nations. The year 2024, is also significant as we mark the 10th anniversary of India-Japan Special Strategic & Global Partnership signed in 2014.

India and Japan share a Special Strategic and Global Partnership rooted in shared values, mutual respect and a common vision for a peaceful and prosperous future. The growth of this partnership has been remarkable over the years. It covers cooperation in a wide range of areas, from trade & investment and infrastructure development to critical and emerging technologies and defense & security. Today, the focus is on the Tourism sector that is an important component of our people-to-people exchanges.

India represents a captivating destination for Japanese tourists, offering a rich tapestry of cultural experiences. The allure lies in India's diverse landscapes, from the tranquil backwaters of Kerala to the majestic Himalayas, and its bustling cities like Mumbai and Delhi. Furthermore, India's deep spiritual heritage, epitomized by world-renowned sites such as Varanasi and the temples of Tamil Nadu, resonate with Japanese visitors, many of whom are accustomed to a culture steeped in spiritual and historical richness.

Culinary adventures also draw Japanese tourists to India, with its wide array of spices, flavors, and dishes that are both intriguing and distinct from Japanese cuisine. Food tours in places like Goa and Punjab provide a taste of regional specialties that are both vibrant and diverse. Additionally, the warmth and hospitality of the Indian people create an inviting atmosphere that enhances the travel experience. This combination of cultural depth, scenic beauty, and culinary richness makes India a highly attractive destination for Japanese tourists seeking unique and enriching travel experiences.

In the last few years we have seen a great amount of interest among Japanese travellers visiting India. The number of tourists from Japan to India in 2022 was 58,000, up from 15000 in 2021. However, it is clear that this is well below potential. The India Japan year of tourism is an initiative aimed at creating awareness about the enormous tourism potential in India and to encourage a greater cultural understanding between our both nations. Under this ambitious initiative, we aspire to reach each prefecture and hold a month long celebrations of India in Japan. We would like to reach every Japanese either directly or virtually to introduce to them the miracle that is Indian culture and traditions. In this endeavour we see each of the stakeholders of Japanese hospitality industry as partners.

The Indian government , in this regard has implemented several strategic measures to boost in-bound tourism. Initiatives include the 'Incredible India' campaign, which uses multimedia channels to promote tourism attractions. Additionally, the government has streamlined visa processes. Japanese citizens can avail e-visa facility to travel to India.

Infrastructure improvements, such as enhancing connectivity through better roads and modernized airports, along with promoting cleanliness and safety through campaigns like 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan,' have been prioritized to enhance tourists' overall experience. Indian Government has enabled 90,000 skilled hospitality professionals to offer holistic experience to the tourists in the spirit of "Athithi Devo Bhava" or Guest is God.

Buddhism remains a shared connect between India and Japan. The Buddhist Circuit, developed by Government of India and spanning several states offers a profoundly attractive pilgrimage route for tourists, tracing the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha. This circuit encompasses key sites such as Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree; Sarnath, where he delivered his first sermon; and Kushinagar, where he achieved Mahaparinirvana. The Buddhist Circuit is more than just a journey through picturesque locales; it is a voyage into the heart of Buddhist philosophy and a chance to explore the roots of a religion that has shaped cultures. The circuit will be explored in more detail during the presentations.

As we celebrate this important year, I once again reiterate the importance of mutual cultural understanding between India and Japan and its impact on the strength of the people-people ties. I urge each one of you to visit India and see for yourself the melange of tradition meeting technology.

Thank you.