

Ambassador Hiramatsu's remarks  
ITB Outbound Summit, India Habitat Center, on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2017

Mr. Navin Berry, Chief Editor, Cross Section Media,  
Mr. Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Group, Advisor to Ministry of Tourism  
Ambassadors and High Commissioners,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to offer my congratulations to all of you on the opening of “India Outbound Summit” today. India is one of the fastest growing outbound travel markets in the world.

India achieved the milestone of 10 million annual outbound travelers for the first time in 2008, and has reached the level of more than 20 million annual outbound travelers in 2015.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicts that India will account for even 50 million outbound tourists by 2020.

*(1. Necessity of expansion in Travel and Tourism relationship between Japan and India)*

Tourism is an extremely significant industry. Regardless of the purpose of the visit, whether it is for business or sightseeing, tourism creates positive economic activities, connecting people and enhancing political, economic, cultural, and social understanding in each country.

Japan and India have enjoyed strong cultural ties since ancient times. In recent years, the cooperation between Japan and India has been rapidly developing in many fields, such as manufacturing industry as well as major infrastructure projects like Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Project and Dedicated Freight Corridor Project from Mumbai to Delhi.

Besides the economic aspects, the strategic importance of the Japan - India relationship has been certainly becoming more and more relevant in the past few years.

On the other hand, the actual people-to-people interaction between Japan and India through tourism has not been as active as I would have expected. The total number of visitors to Japan from India was 123,000 in 2016, and out of these visitors, only 49,700 were tourists.

I firmly believe that there is plenty of room for expansion in travel and tourism between Japan and India, considering the strong diplomatic and business relationship between the two countries.

## *(2. Japan as a tourism destination)*

Japan may not yet be perceived as a very well-known tourism destination by the Indian traveler, but Japan certainly counts among one of the most popular tourism destinations in the world. In fact, the number of tourists to Japan has been steadily rising in the past few decades and, last year, we received a total number of 24 million visitors to Japan, which marks an increase of 21 percent in comparison to the previous year, out of which more than 21 million were tourists.

Furthermore, popular and attractive cities such as Tokyo and Kyoto have always enjoyed high rankings as desirable cities to live and visit in the world's renowned magazines and newspapers.

Japan offers a vast array of unique and diverse cultural and geographical experiences in a compact territory. The distinct change of four seasons of a year influences and shapes Japanese aesthetics and sensibility, and this permeates all layers of Japanese life, from the appreciation of nature - most famously the cherry blossoms in spring - to architecture, design, art, fashion, and cuisine.

Japan's distinct geography and culture has "something" for everyone. The list of Japan's unique and special features is long, but if you allow me, I would like to highlight a few;

We have snow-capped volcanoes like the representative Mount Fuji, lush tropical reefs and beautiful beaches in Okinawa, the hustle and bustle of mega cities like Tokyo, which is actually

the most populous metropolis on earth, ascetic Zen gardens in Kyoto, Japan's cultural capital for thousand years, sad memorials in Hiroshima, Buddhist temples, colorful summer and autumn festivals, folk villages, high-speed trains, and many more.

Whenever visitors come to Japan, they can experience the particular Japanese way of life. Japan has an advanced society where tradition blends in with modernity in a manner that has no parallel with any other country in the world.

This is the reason why Japan is not just an interesting tourism destination as a foreign country, but you may also learn a new way of seeing and perceiving life.

Likewise, when Japanese people visit India, they come into contact with Indian culture in a direct and candid manner. And these experiences are what make travel and tourism such an attractive industry and a two-way business for mutual economic and social cooperation.

### *(3. Efforts to improve travel and tourism relationship between Japan and India)*

Having said that, I believe there is still much to do to enhance awareness of Japan as a tourist destination among the people of India. Therefore, the Japanese Government is now planning to expand tourism promotion of Japan through television, social media and movies.

Especially, 2017 is designated as "the year of Japan-India friendly exchanges", and the Embassy of Japan is organizing many cultural and tourism events. I hope Indian people will enjoy many aspects of Japanese culture throughout India, this year.

I also think it necessary to expand the civil aviation network between Japan and India. Currently, Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways operate 21 flights weekly, and Air India operates 7 flights a week. Although there are direct flights from Delhi and Mumbai to Japan, passengers from major metropolitan cities, such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Kolkata, mostly use indirect flights to Japan via Singapore, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur.

I expect drastic improvement of air connectivity between major metropolitan airports in India and Japan, creating more air traffic options between the two countries.

*(4. Conclusion)*

I am delighted to be here today with the influential leaders in the Indian tourism industry to have serious discussions on the Indian outbound tourism market, and I wish to express my sincere gratitude for all the people working for this very important summit.

I strongly believe that this summit will be a significant step forward in Indian tourism, leading to a much higher level of Japan-India tourism exchange.

Thank you.