



Tourism EXPO Japan 2024 Forum Report

Keynote Panel Discussion The 7th TEJ Ministerial Round Table

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Tourism EXPO Japan 2024 Forum Report

C O N T E N T S

Theme of TEJ 2024

Travel, An Encounter with New Value Awaits

Keynote Panel Discussion 4
Expanding the Tourism Exchange Population

The 7th TEJ Ministerial Round Table 8
Creating a New Travel Journey

※ Panelists' affiliations and titles are indicated as at the time the Forum was conducted.



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Keynote Panel Discussion

Expanding the Tourism Exchange Population

Moderator



Ms. Marjorie Dewey
President, Connect
Worldwide Japan Co., Ltd.



Marjorie Dewey

Panelists



Mr. Shigeru Takada
Executive Director, Adventure
Division/Adventure Base SIRI,
Tsuruga Co., Ltd.



Mr. Shumpei Shimada
CEO, SATOYUME CO., LTD.



Mr. Eduardo Santander
Executive Director, European
Travel Commission (ETC)



Mr. Eijiro Yamakita
President and CEO, JTB Corp.

● Greetings

Meeting New Travelers

Marjorie Dewey

Dewey: Today's theme is "Expanding the Tourism Exchange Population." We have invited experts from the tourism industry to share their perspectives and case studies. We will hear how they aim to meet new travelers and develop unique products. Topics will include adventure travel, regional revitalization, tourism management and tour operations.

Now, let's begin with the first panelist, Shigeru Takada. He is the Executive Director of the Adventure Division at Tsuruga Co., Ltd., as well as a board member of the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO).

● Presentation 1

Moderate Expansion of the Tourism Population Through Adventure Tourism

Shigeru Takada

Today, I will talk about the expansion of the tourism population through adventure tourism.

I was born in Kitami City, Hokkaido, and grew up in Akan Lake Onsen, Kushiro City, Hokkaido. I have loved outdoor sports since childhood, and even when I traveled to Canada as a rugby coach in 1983, I enjoyed outdoor activities to the fullest. After returning to Japan, I worked as a fishing guide at Akan Lake Onsen and collaborated with professional angler Toru Nishiyama to promote fly fishing in the area. Later, with the assistance of Hiroshi Torihata, a certified A-class coach of the German Canoe Federation, I launched the first canoe school in Eastern Hokkaido.



Shigeru Takada

In 2016, while serving as the head of our international business division, I attended the "Adventure Travel World Summit" (ATWS) held in Alaska. Shortly afterward, the company owner suddenly asked me to focus on adventure tourism. In response, I became the head of our newly established Adventure Division in 2017.

Adventure travel spans a wide range, from soft adventures to hard adventures. The majority of participants are drawn to soft adventures, such as cultural experiences. I thought, "This is a perfect match for Japan," and began engaging with adventure travel. For example, rather than visiting fabricated Ainu-themed villages, visitors immerse themselves in the actual living communities of the Ainu people to experience their culture. Adventure travel emphasizes an appreciation for the lives and histories of local residents.

Protecting and Enriching the Region

The benefits of expanding the tourism exchange population include increased economic activity through the movement of people, thriving businesses, and revitalized logistics. Additionally, it creates jobs, brings vibrancy to the region, enhances its visibility, and ultimately contributes to its development.

But are there any drawbacks? Some might think that if it leads to regional development, then that's enough. I used to

think the same way. However, there are downsides, such as overuse of resources and disruptions to the daily lives of local residents. Problems like long queues for buses, garbage and landscape issues arise where none existed before.

Furthermore, if the expansion of the tourism exchange population comes to a sudden halt for any reason, the damage to the region can be severe. Large groups entering forests or mountains can cause significant harm to plants and nature, leading to the degradation of the area. Adventure tourism exists to prevent such outcomes.

Adventure tourism seeks moderate expansion of the tourism population. Guests are often highly educated, affluent and intellectual, with a strong sense of sustainability. They value experiences that cannot be purchased with money and demonstrate a cooperative spirit with other travelers. They respect the nature, culture and residents of their destinations and are eager to learn. They also prefer dining at local restaurants and izakayas where they can interact with the locals.

When a moderate expansion of the tourism population occurs, even a slight increase in visitor numbers can lead to a significant increase in revenue. Since the population expands gradually, infrastructure and reception systems can be adjusted accordingly. Additionally, high-quality customers emerge, attracting more good customers through word of mouth.

This approach ensures the protection and

prosperity of the region. This principle is one of the most important concepts in adventure travel. It resonated with our company's owner, which led to the launch of "TSURUGA Adventure Base SIRI" in Akan Lake in 2017, where we offer adventure tours. I hope you can learn more about adventure tourism today. Thank you very much.

Dewey: Thank you. You mentioned wanting to promote adventure tourism in Japan. What do you think are the key elements? What is necessary for it to take root in Japan?

Takada: It's important that local residents welcome the tourists. Visitors must feel that they are welcomed, and a friendly atmosphere is crucial. These tourists are highly educated and understand the importance of protecting the region. They also have a desire to interact with local people. If anyone here represents a community, I urge you to embrace adventure tourism.

Japanese people are very polite, but they are often reluctant to speak English because they fear making mistakes. However, this is not a serious issue. If foreign or adventure tourists visit, even a simple greeting would be greatly appreciated.

Dewey: That's excellent advice. Using tools like Google Translate for communication can also be effective. Thank you very much.

Next, we have Shumpei Shimada, the

CEO of SATOYUME CO. LTD. He works with local businesses across Japan, engaging in regional revitalization, strategy

formulation, product development, and channel development. Welcome.

● Presentation 2 Creating New Destinations

Shumpei Shimada

SATOYUME operates with the mission of "turning hometown dreams into reality," specializing in consulting and project production for regional revitalization. Currently, we have launched and operate various businesses in over 50 regions across Japan, including renovated traditional houses turned into hotels, antenna shops, and local trading companies.

Today, I would like to share SATOYUME's challenges under the theme of "Creating New Destinations." As the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided and inbound tourism has recovered, overtourism has become a hot topic in the media. However, overtourism is a localized issue affecting famous tourist spots. Japan still has many regions with incredible charms that remain unknown to the world. If these regions become new destinations, Japan's tourism capacity could multiply, transforming it into a true tourism nation.

Since our founding in 2013, SATOYUME has remained committed to the philosophy of "preserving the landscapes and lifestyles of unnamed villages and towns." For example, Kosuge Village in Yamanashi Prefecture, with a population of about 700, has no convenience stores, supermarkets,



Shumpei Shimada

railroads or highways. However, after more than 10 years of our involvement, it has now become a destination visited by many people from both Japan and abroad.

In Kosuge Village, we launched a lodging project based on the concept of "a village of 700 people becomes a single hotel." Around 100 vacant houses in the village were renovated into individual hotel rooms. The roadside station serves as the reception desk, the village roads act as hallways, and the villagers themselves take on the role of concierges. Previously overlooked traditional houses were transformed into luxury accommodations with nightly rates exceeding 40,000 yen, thanks to the craftsmanship of carpenters and designers.

Villagers participate in operations as guides, drivers and cleaners, with their warm hospitality gaining popularity.

Since the end of the pandemic, the number of international guests has been steadily increasing, with foreign visitors now comprising nearly half of the total. Last year, we introduced a "Whole Village Wedding" plan, where the village mayor acts as the officiant, and the villagers gather to celebrate the couple's new beginning. The first clients were an Israeli couple.

Turning Regional Challenges into Tourism Assets

This movement to create new destinations, which began in Kosuge Village, has gained the participation of JR East. In 2021, SATOYUME and JR East jointly established an investment company to launch the "Entire Rail Line as a Hotel" project. This initiative aims to expand to 30 regions across Japan by 2040.

This new travel concept reimagines remote railways, where declining populations and passenger numbers have left stations unmanned. The unmanned stations serve as hotel receptions, while nearby village homes are converted into guest rooms, restaurants and saunas. Villagers become the staff, managing the stations and accommodations while providing hospitality. This approach allows travelers to experience the charm of rail travel and community hospitality. This initiative was featured on NHK and won the

highest honor, the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Award, at last year's Japan Tourism Awards.

In July of this year, SATOYUME launched the "Destination Create Project," a joint venture with major travel company H.I.S. The project aims to refine and globally promote the hidden charms of Japan's regions, including unique histories, cultures, townscapes and cuisines, to attract more international visitors.

Although it has just started, four regions have already joined the project: Kahoku Town in Yamagata Prefecture, known for its Mogami River, a hub for Japanese dyes and safflower production, and a treasure trove of food; Shiiba Village in Miyazaki Prefecture, one of Japan's three great hidden regions, preserving the tradition of slash-and-burn farming; Kuma Village in Kumamoto Prefecture, rich in water resources like limestone caves and the Kuma River, now recovering from heavy rain disasters; and Tokushima Prefecture, the first to participate as a whole prefecture, showcasing unique culture and nature like the Awa Odori dance and Naruto whirlpools.

The term "lifestyle tourism" is becoming more common. Travel is not entirely separate from daily life and existence; rather, they may be seen as two sides of the same coin. What constitutes someone's everyday life and lifestyle becomes someone else's extraordinary travel experience. Designing a travel destination, therefore, may be seen as supporting the design of someone's life purpose.

Dewey: Thank you. As you continue to develop destinations, which areas do you think hold the most appeal?

Shimada: I believe that regional challenges can become tourism assets. The efforts of local people to solve issues such as vacant houses and unmanned stations, along with their determination and stories, inspire others and become a reason to travel. The more challenges a region has, the greater its potential to become a tourist destination.

Dewey: Japan has so much to share, and the

ideas themselves can become part of a story, which makes it all the more fascinating. Thank you.

Now, let us consider how Europe manages its tourism industry. Our next speaker is Eduardo Santander, Executive Director of the European Travel Commission (ETC). Over 19 years, he has worked in tourism marketing, brand development, social rights advocacy and public relations. He is passionate about promoting the freedom to travel, smart connections and sustainable tourism.

● Presentation 3

Expanding Overtourism and the Need for International Cooperation

Eduardo Santander

This summer, overtourism has likely been an unavoidable topic in many places worldwide. Since the recovery of international travel post-COVID-19, overtourism has re-emerged as a significant issue. Communities in popular tourist destinations, not only in Europe but globally, have expressed concerns about the impact of excessive tourism.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when travel became impossible, we believed that the tourism industry could be reformed positively and sustainably across economic, environmental and social dimensions. However, this summer, pent-up demand post-pandemic has led to overtourism in cities like Barcelona, Amsterdam, Venice,

Kyoto, New York and Dubrovnik.

It was thought that while many people would travel in the two to three years following the pandemic, inflation would eventually dampen this trend. However, this has not been the case, especially in Europe, where people have cut back on other expenses to prioritize travel. Concerns about overtourism are not limited to Europe's popular cities but can also be observed in Hawaii, the Greek islands, Spanish beaches, U.S. national parks and Africa.

I believe overtourism should be considered a social phenomenon. There are concerns that it could lead to societal rejection of the tourism industry, and we must address this issue immediately. While we are aware of the benefits tourism brings, we often fail to consider its long-term consequences.

Governments must not be swayed by the

immediate benefits of spending and investment in tourism. Instead, they need to implement decisive policies to control the true nature of tourism demand.

Deepening Discussions with an Eye on the Future

The biggest issue is that overtourism and tourism as a whole are often oversimplified as problems caused by having too many tourists. While this may be a fundamental aspect of overtourism, it is merely a surface-level factor.

How should we measure the capacity of tourist destinations? Should this involve metrics across various fields, such as transportation systems, the airline industry, the hospitality sector and local government infrastructure?

Additionally, when considering how tourism impacts the uniqueness of a place, cultural factors come into play. Yesterday, I saw a poster on Tokyo's monorail encouraging foreigners to observe manners in order to preserve Japan's deeply rooted sense of kindness and politeness.

There is also the issue of place. As people visit or live in an area, they begin to question whether they are locals or tourists. Be it in Kyoto, Venice, Madrid or New York, people start to wonder who truly "owns" the place. This is the paradox of the "place-holder triangle": Are they a resident, a visiting tourist or an investor in the area?

The issue of overtourism is highly complex, but various solutions are emerging,



Eduardo Santander

such as Amsterdam's ban on cruise ships, which is part of a "degrowth" or "de-marketing" strategy. I believe we must rethink our approach to marketing.

Finally, implementing entrance fees or gates could address part of the overtourism problem. However, solving these issues undoubtedly requires international cooperation, as these challenges are not localized but global in nature.

Dewey: Thank you very much. In your presentation, you mentioned societal rejection of the tourism industry. How should this be addressed? Do you have any advice on how to foster a positive perspective among residents?

Santander: At the World Economic Forum, we collaborated to establish the "10 Principles for Sustainable Destinations." I believe we should implement these principles and jointly evaluate their

outcomes.

First, it's about scientifically monitoring and certifying the data. You can't change what you can't measure. It's clear that we need to change our KPIs, as metrics like visitor numbers and expenditures alone are insufficient. We need to discuss consumer behavior, perceptions of destinations, resource consumption and elements like water and energy use.

Second, we need to value the people who work in the tourism industry. Third, we must involve residents in tourism policymaking.

Then, there is the preservation of heritage and nature, which is at the core of any destination. Seventh is responsible

consumption, which has become an increasingly important consideration in our daily lives. It's also crucial to think about and act upon the infrastructure that will be needed 15 or 20 years from now. Additionally, resilience must be embedded into these principles.

Dewey: Thank you very much. That was excellent advice. It also highlighted the need for thoughtful planning on our part.

Our final panelist is one of the most prominent leaders in Japan's travel industry, Eijiro Yamakita, who currently serves as President and CEO of JTB Corp. Could you tell us how JTB is creating new business models and bringing together people, places, and possibilities?

● Presentation 4 Continuously Creating New Exchanges

Eijiro Yamakita

I will speak about "Initiatives for Creating New Exchanges." At the JTB Group, we pursue the concept of exchange creation as a way to generate new value. Our guiding principle is "connect, create and link." Since our establishment in 1912, we have engaged with numerous stakeholders, and we aim to leverage these relationships to foster new forms of exchange.

Our business domains are divided into three categories: tourism, area solutions and business solutions. Tourism focuses on travelers, providing support for comfortable and meaningful journeys. While this represents the traditional concept of travel,

we also focus on destinations themselves, exploring how to improve the quality of life for local communities and enrich the region through economic impact. This is the aim of our area solutions initiatives.

The other pillar is business solutions. Companies use travel as a tool to address various challenges, such as promoting products globally. Travel is also used for purposes like incentive trips to boost employee morale or trips to invite and engage clients. This is why we have established a dedicated axis for corporate solutions.

During the recovery phase following the COVID-19 pandemic, inbound tourism to Japan has grown significantly. However, outbound tourism has struggled to rebound.

This is partly due to the impact of exchange rates, but it also reflects a more inward-focused mindset among people, resulting in fewer cross-border travels.

As Mr. Santander mentioned earlier, the issue of overtourism has become apparent. The challenge lies in resolving the concentration of visitors in specific times and places. Additionally, the tourism industry has struggled to fully integrate DX (digital transformation) into its infrastructure. Sustainability, meanwhile, has become a common theme.

Finally, there is the added value of travel products. Instead of simply traveling to enjoy various activities or shop, we aim to create value that closely aligns with the purpose of the trip. The issue of labor shortages also needs to be addressed. We are undertaking various initiatives to tackle these challenges.

Mitigating Crowds Through Various Ideas

One example of these efforts is the "Kai-Fuji-Yama Road Concept" being implemented in Yamanashi Prefecture. Near the base of Mt. Fuji lies the beautiful Lake Kawaguchi, which attracts significant crowds. To disperse these visitors, two tourist bases were established. For instance, cycling and electric bikes are offered to visitors, creating a flow that spreads people out from highly concentrated areas. Additionally, information is provided to foreign tourists on where to visit next in



Eijiro Yamakita

Japan.

Another initiative is the "SICS Island Concept" being carried out in Takamatsu City, Shikoku. The Seto Inland Sea has many beautiful islands, but with limited means of connection between them, most visitors end up going to the same islands. To address this, concierge services have been introduced, offering various cruise ship options for high-value travel experiences.

We also launched the "Hirosaki Farm Support Project" in collaboration with companies. In Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture, a labor shortage for apple harvesting was addressed by partnering with Asahi Breweries, who provided staff to assist with the harvest.

Another challenge is the relatively weak nighttime economy. To address this, we've introduced night buses for easier travel and developed various shows and entertainment options, creating a flow that disperses people

across different times.

Next, we're working on outbound travel from Japan. We've partnered with Major League Baseball to introduce various hospitality programs. In Europe, we offer the "Land Cruise European Circulating Bus" product, which provides circuit tours to make it easier for FIT from around the world to explore Europe's corners.

Finally, there's "SMM" (Strategic Meeting Management), which manages business events to help companies achieve their objectives. This has become a high-value component of corporate activities.

●Panel Discussion

Considering Tourism Beyond Visitor Numbers: A Focus on Spending

Dewey: Now let's discuss how to create new travel populations and guide them to new destinations. Does anyone have a topic they'd like to raise?

Santander: I'd like to raise the issue of collaboration. During my brief stay in Japan, I noticed numerous common challenges and opportunities, all of which seem connected to the ever-changing geopolitical landscape.

Tourism is becoming an increasingly important tool in policymaking, and I understand that elections are approaching. How are the Japanese people expecting politicians to address these issues? Mr. Yamakita, could you respond?

Dewey: You are undertaking a truly impressive number of innovative projects. As you collaborate with various communities, what do you think is the most important aspect of working with these people?

Yamakita: It's essential to understand the needs of the region, listen to people, and collaborate to solve problems. Identifying the issues they face is the first step. Then, involving as many entities as possible — companies, governments, and others — and connecting them to create collective strength is crucial.

Yamakita: I think public-private cooperation isn't easy. It's important to create a big-picture framework, which might naturally lead to collaboration. However, I believe this can't be solely government-led; there are needs in the private sector, among travelers and in local communities. Communication is vital for successful cooperation.

Dewey: Mr. Takada and Mr. Shimada, have you received any support from the government for your initiatives?

Shimada: Over the past 5 to 10 years, I've felt that the government has been strongly committed to tourism. However, I believe the support is somewhat skewed toward physical infrastructure. There are many subsidies for renovating ryokans/traditional

inns, but human resource development has not kept up.

Inbound tourism has grown significantly, but labor shortages mean hotels can only open half their rooms, and while they can serve lunch, providing dinner is often a struggle. The private sector should also focus more on human resource development, and additional government support would be beneficial.

Dewey: This is a topic we'll discuss further at the upcoming Tourism Ministerial Roundtable: how to encourage young people to participate in the tourism industry and join the workforce. Mr. Takada, what is your perspective on the connection between the government and Hokkaido?

Takada: In Hokkaido, the understanding of tourism is very high. However, municipalities only count the number of tourists and don't estimate how much money they are spending. That's the problem.

Additionally, as overtourism becomes an issue, the most important thing is to mitigate the damage to various areas. In my work as a guide, I set capacity limits for each region. We estimate how many people a particular area can accommodate and identify areas that could handle more visitors. I hope everyone will adopt a similar way of thinking.

Dewey: That's very interesting. You're determining the capacity for specific regions

as part of your business, right? The topic of calculating tourism based on spending versus visitor numbers — quality versus quantity — has been something I've observed over the years. In North America, where I primarily work, there has been a significant shift toward evaluating tourism based on spending rather than visitor numbers. I hope to see similar changes in Japan. Does anyone have another topic to raise?

Educating Supply and Demand in Tourism

Yamakita: Mr. Santander, I have a question. You spoke about the issue of overtourism, and there's always a conflict between tourists and residents. However, residents also want to travel and have unique experiences in other destinations. I think this is a common issue globally, but how can we create harmony between these groups?

Currently, we're involving students in efforts to gain regional experience and learn from local communities. For this, the quality of communication is crucial. Do you have any good suggestions?

Santander: The keyword here is education, something Japan excels at. It's not just about schools and universities; it's also about re-educating both the supply and demand sides of tourism.

We live in a highly globalized and uncertain world. A few years ago, we experienced a pandemic, and every day,

there are issues arising from climate change. In Japan, there are typhoon seasons, snow shortages, heavy snowfalls and periods of low fish catches. We must confront these global issues together.

Overtourism can, in a sense, be managed. We know when tourists will arrive, when airlines will increase flights, and when the tourism season is. In the EU, we're working on diversifying tourism by promoting lesser-known destinations.

Therefore, my first point is that education is the key. Education is also linked to policymaking. Our organization is based in Brussels to ensure direct access to decision-makers like the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Recently, for the first time in history, an EU Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism was appointed. This signifies that Europe is starting to take tourism seriously by integrating it into all levels of policymaking. This is extremely important.

Tourism is not just a single category; it is interconnected with transportation, accommodation, hospitality and education. People engage with all these areas and have the ability to change habits. It might take years or even decades, but the role of us, the leaders in the tourism industry, is to accelerate this process, support entrepreneurs, and realize public-private partnerships.

We must think about what can be accomplished in the next 5 to 10 years, what is realistic, what is feasible within your plans, and what is not. Also, consider how

the government can support these efforts. It is complex, but it is not impossible.

Dewey: You're absolutely right — there are several examples that show it's not impossible. Europe is now leading other countries, and I hope we can draw guidance from that. Does anyone else have a topic to raise?

Increased Awareness of Sustainability Influencing Destination Choices

Shimada: Mr. Santander, I have a question. We are working to create new destinations in Japan, but could you tell us what kinds of new destinations are emerging overseas and any trends you've observed?

Santander: Trends are constantly changing, but the most significant behavioral shift is the growing awareness of sustainability among people. Especially in Europe, most people are paying attention to the tourism industry and its impacts — not just on carbon emissions but also on local communities.

The greatest mistake the industry can make is to view customers as mere numbers or sources of revenue. Customers are making decisions and considering actions for the benefit of their families and communities. Therefore, in product development and marketing campaigns, it is essential to explain why certain initiatives are being undertaken.

Additionally, due to climate change,



people are beginning to shift their destination preferences. This summer, a trend emerged where many people chose cooler destinations. Instead of seeking sun and beaches, travelers headed north. This trend, which saw tourists dispersed to lesser-known destinations such as Scandinavia, Bulgaria and Ireland, has yielded very positive results.

The European Commission believes it is necessary to support and increase such destinations.

While overtourism is an issue, there are also places that desire a significant influx of tourists. Balancing this is challenging. For example, being asked to bring two million tourists to Bulgaria is unrealistic. It must be approached step by step, with proper education along the way.

Recently, we ran campaigns about responsible tourism in both Japanese and international markets. The message was to do what's right — for yourself, the destination and the industry. This approach ensures that it's not just the local community that benefits while tourists suffer but creates a win-win situation for all.

Dewey: Mr. Shimada, I have a question. How do various regions in Japan perceive your hotel project in a village of 700 people? Do you receive inquiries about whether similar projects could be implemented in their villages and how products can be developed?

Shimada: Thankfully, we've received many inquiries from various regions. We visit

these areas to assess whether they can truly become destinations. When we find people who are working hard in those regions, we feel that the project is likely to succeed. We want to continue creating new destinations alongside such dedicated communities.

Dewey: This ties into the theme you all mentioned. Having people within a community who are willing to take the initiative and collaborate is essential.

We're nearing the end of our time, but I'd like to hear from Mr. Takada. Do you have any final comments?

Takada: In adventure tourism, travelers also want to visit places like the towns where Mr.

with the local people in those areas.

However, one challenge is that no one is promoting these areas. If someone starts spreading the message, saying, "This place has these wonderful features," the region can begin to develop.

For example, one town might be struggling with overtourism, while its neighboring town receives no visitors. In such cases, the neighboring town might feel envious. Resolving this fragmented situation can create a win-win for everyone.

Dewey: That's very true. Thank you very much. With that, we'll conclude the keynote panel discussion. Thank you for your outstanding insights and perspectives.



Shimada is working. They want to connect

The 7th TEJ Ministerial Round Table Creating a New Travel Journey



Reimagining “Travel” with an Eye for the Future

The 7th TEJ Ministerial Roundtable, on the theme of “Creating a New Travel Journey,” gathered ministers from nine countries and four senior executives of international tourism organizations. It kicked off with a welcome message from Harry Hwang, Director of the Regional Department for Asia and the Pacific at UN Tourism. In his speech, Hwang emphasized that the future of global tourism hinges on embracing technology, empowering youth and women, and prioritizing sustainability. He stressed that by focusing on educating young people and nurturing their innovative potential, we can create a high-value, sustainable tourism sector that is both resilient and inclusive.

The speakers shared strategies and introduced case studies to promote sustainable regional development through quality-focused approaches, to create high-value tourism experiences by incorporating cultural elements, and to engage youth in the future of tourism.



Welcome Message



Leaders From Various Countries Joining Hands To Create New Journeys

Mr. Harry Hwang

Director, Regional Department for Asia and the Pacific, UN Tourism

The theme “Creating A New Travel Journey” at this year’s Tourism Expo aligns with UN Tourism’s mission to transform the global tourism industry amid economic and geopolitical challenges. This transformation emphasizes sustainable tourism through inclusive economic growth, environmental responsibility, the empowerment of women and youth, and effective use of technological innovation. These synergies establish guiding principles that shape our path forward.

UN Tourism implements these principles through concrete actions, with investment as a cornerstone for transformation. The organization launched a 14-member state initiative for sustainable tourism investment and promotes technological advancement through programs such as the Tourism AI Global Startup Competition. UN Tourism also prioritizes tourism education for young people, recognizing them as key drivers of innovation in the industry’s future.

The world is increasingly recognizing the importance of tourism, and tourism uniquely contributes to all 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. UN Tourism monitors progress toward its key indicators, particularly sustainable consumption and production. With World Tourism Day approaching tomorrow, UN Tourism would like to emphasize its “Tourism and Peace” theme to foster mutual understanding, peace, and inclusive development. Tourism EXPO and roundtable discussions are crucial platform for international leaders to address industry challenges. Through collaboration and innovation, the sector continues building a more resilient and inclusive future for global tourism.

Panelists



Building Cultural Bridges through Immersive Local Programs

H.E. Ms. Maria Esperanza Christina Garcia Frasco

Republic of the Philippines, Secretary of Department of Tourism

Represented by H. E. Ms. Mylene J. Garcia-Albano, Ambassador, Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines

The Philippines Department of Tourism has launched two complementary programs to enhance tourism experiences while protecting the country’s natural and cultural heritage. The Philippines “Eatsperience” Program, part of the “Love the Philippines” campaign, offers immersive cultural experiences across the country’s 7,641 islands.

The program features cultural immersion with local families, hands-on traditional craft workshops, and eco-adventures focusing on conservation efforts such as coral planting in Palawan. Visitors can also participate in culinary journeys exploring Filipino cuisine, engage in community development projects, and experience major cultural festivals.

Complementing this initiative is the #LeaveNoTrace program, which promotes responsible tourism, particularly among young travelers. This program supports zero-waste travel practices, encouraging participants to actively improve visited areas through cleanup efforts while sharing their sustainable travel experiences on social media. Remember that the most profound impact you can make is to “have no impact at all” on the physical environment.

Together, these programs represent a comprehensive approach to tourism that balances cultural immersion with environmental preservation and emphasizes meaningful connections with local communities. The initiative demonstrates the Philippines’ commitment to creating tourism experiences that benefit both visitors and local communities while protecting the country’s diverse ecosystem and cultural heritage for future generations.

Panelists



Engaging Youth: Key to Sustainable Tourism Leadership in ASEAN **Honorable Dato Dr. Abdul Manaf Metussin**

Brunei Darussalam, Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism

Tourism in Brunei Darussalam has grown remarkably, with arrivals increasing by 200% from 2022 to 2023. The country aims to welcome half a million tourists annually through air transport. As UN Tourism reports, this industry creates one in ten jobs worldwide, making it vital for economic growth.

Brunei Darussalam aims to boost tourism by engaging youth as crucial workers and future leaders. The focus is on high-quality, high-value tourism that adapts to emerging trends such as artificial intelligence while prioritizing sustainability. Modern travelers seek immersive experiences rather than simply visiting attractions, making it imperative to innovate our tourism offerings. Regenerative tourism offers meaningful experiences benefiting nature and local communities, showcasing Brunei's abundant natural beauty and cultural heritage. Brunei takes pride in its pristine underwater ecosystems and vibrant coral reefs, lush rainforests, and undisturbed mangroves while actively engaging local communities in promoting cultural tourism.

The ASEAN "Six Countries, One Destination" initiative promotes regional nature conservation and cultural preservation, recognizing that ecosystems extend beyond national borders. Engaging young talent as champions of regenerative tourism is vital for fostering high-value tourism while preserving nature and culture across the region. This approach combines meaningful local experiences with environmental and community benefits, ensuring sustainable tourism development for future generations.



Japan's Dual Strategy: Balancing Tourism Distribution and Disaster Resilience

Mr. Masanao Ozaki

Japan, Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism

Japan's tourism initiatives focus on two key points: redistributing inbound tourism beyond major metropolises and building resilience against natural disasters and crises.

While inbound tourism shows signs of recovery, an imbalance exists between urban and rural areas, with tourism concentrated in three major metropolitan regions: Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. To address this imbalance and promote sustainable tourism, the Japan Tourism Agency selected 11 model regions to create high-value-added inbound tourism destinations. This initiative involves concentrated government support through expert dispatch and enhanced overseas promotion via JNTO. The Matsumoto-Takayama area exemplifies this approach, utilizing Chubu Mountainous National Park for cycling activities and supporting hotel renovations to increase destination profitability and attractiveness.

The second focus addresses Japan's vulnerability to natural disasters including earthquakes and typhoons. Having developed extensive knowledge in emergency preparedness, crisis response protocols, and recovery strategies for the tourism sector, Japan is collaborating with UN Tourism to host the Tourism Resilience Summit in November 2024. This partnership reflects Japan's belief that sustainable tourism requires international alliances rather than individual country efforts. The Tourism EXPO Japan Ministerial Round Table serves as a platform for this international cooperation, aiming to enhance destination attractiveness while ensuring sustainability.

Panelists



Malaysia’s Tourism Strategy: Harmonizing Nature, Culture, Luxury and Business

YBr. Dr. Yasmeeen binti Yasim

Malaysia, Deputy Secretary General (Tourism), Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture

Malaysia’s National Tourism Policy 2020-2030 focuses on four key areas: nature-based tourism, cultural heritage tourism, luxury travel, and international business events. Each sector emphasizes sustainability, community involvement, and economic impact, transforming tourism beyond an economic driver into a bridge between cultures and communities.

Nature-based tourism leverages Malaysia’s rich biodiversity, offering immersive experiences in rainforests and beaches while promoting conservation through eco-friendly tourism products.

Cultural heritage tourism celebrates the country’s multicultural identity through architecture, crafts, cuisine, and festivals. Community-based initiatives ensure that benefits reach local populations while providing authentic experiences for visitors.

The luxury travel segment provides bespoke experiences, including private island retreats, sea cruises, high-end resorts, and personalized cultural tours for discerning travelers seeking both comfort and authenticity.

International business events combine world-class infrastructure with natural and cultural assets to attract high-spending business tourists while minimizing environmental impact.

The upcoming Visit Malaysia 2026 campaign reinforces these priorities, fostering government, private sector, and community collaboration. This strategy aims to create a sustainable, inclusive, high-value tourism industry that benefits the economy, citizens, and environment while showcasing Malaysia’s unique strengths in the global tourism landscape.



An Emerging Tourism Destination Blending Heritage, Youth and Growth

Mr. Umid R. Shadiev

Republic of Uzbekistan, Chairman, Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan, an emerging tourism destination, welcomes 2027 as the International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism, making tourist development a national priority. Since implementing an open-door policy in 2017, visitor numbers have surged from 2 million to 6.7 million, with projections reaching 10 million this year. The sector’s management under the environment ministry underscores its ecological importance in national development.

With over 8,000 tourist sites, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva, the government is investing in tourism infrastructure and restoring over 1,500 cultural heritage sites. The country focuses on diverse tourism products, particularly developing pilgrimage routes that attract various religious groups – from Buddhist sites drawing Japanese visitors to Zoroastrian heritage appealing to India’s Parsi community.

As a young nation with a median age of 27, Uzbekistan recognizes its responsibility to provide job opportunities for youth through sustainable tourism development. The strategy includes spreading economic benefits to rural areas by promoting local services, handicrafts, and cultural experiences beyond traditional Silk Road destinations.

The government also prioritizes the conservation of protected areas, from the mountainous Ugam-Chatkal in the east to the newly established Aral Kum National Park in the west, integrating environmental stewardship with tourism development.

Panelists



Cultural Crossroads of Ancient Heritage and Modern Tourism

H.E. Mr. Evtim Miloshev

Republic of Bulgaria, Minister of Tourism

Cultural tourism development is a priority for Bulgaria, one of Europe's oldest nations, and it has maintained its name for 13 centuries. The nation ranks third in Europe for archaeological and cultural sites, with over 40,000 locations. With 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and five intangible cultural heritage elements, Bulgaria showcases diverse attractions such as ancient Plovdiv (over 8,000 years old), early Christian centers like Serdica, and Varna, where the world's oldest processed gold was discovered.

The country's cultural appeal extends to its renowned products, including oil-bearing roses, yogurt, wines, and healing thermal springs. Recent initiatives highlight traditional culinary experiences with local recipes and ingredients. Bulgaria's tourism sector shows strong growth, ranking 5th among European countries in recovery, with a 6% increase in overnight stays during Q2 2024 compared to 2023.

Bulgaria sees cultural tourism as vital for connecting countries, cultures, and religions. The nation implements a sustainable tourism strategy focusing on year-round cultural experiences while integrating modern digital innovations. Bulgaria will host the 47th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 2025, strengthening its position as a significant cultural tourism destination and contribution to global cultural exchange and preservation.



Tourism Strategy: Balancing Growth, Innovation and Regional Identity

H.E. Ms. Olga Kefalogianni

Hellenic Republic, Minister of Tourism

Represented by Ms. Vasiliki Koutsoukou, Secretary General for Tourism Policy and Development, Ministry of Tourism

Tourism, a primary global economic driver, requires a strategic shift for sustainable prosperity. We prioritize quality over quantity, focusing on long-term innovation, authenticity, and regional development. Tourism's positive impact enhances residents' quality of life, preserves natural resources and local identity, and offers nationwide benefits.

Infrastructure investments serve both residents and tourists through improved transportation systems, green energy initiatives, and sustainable resource management. We are developing diverse tourism offerings by promoting special interest activities like yachting, mountain hiking, spa and wellness experiences, and gastronomy and wine tourism, helping extend tourist activities across regions and seasons.

We leverage each region's unique characteristics by involving locals in decision-making and destination management through regional organizations while aligning with national strategic planning. These organizations create networking opportunities and synergies across regions, ensuring tourism benefits local communities.

Digital innovation plays a crucial role through second-generation AI technology, including detailed mapping of cultural assets and experiences and advanced travel information systems. These technologies enhance the visibility for regional destinations while preserving their authentic character. This comprehensive approach ensures tourism is a positive force for regional growth while preserving natural and cultural heritage.

Panelists



Youth as Cultural Ambassador: Montenegro’s Vision for Tourism as a Path to Peace

H.E. Ms. Simonida Kordic

Montenegro, Minister of Tourism

Tourism is a powerful platform for fostering peace and stability in a world burdened by conflicts, providing neutral spaces for cross-cultural connections and understanding. As a leading industry in Montenegro, contributing 30% to the country’s GDP, tourism development focuses on responsible planning and youth engagement.

Young people play a crucial role in shaping sustainable tourism’s future through their deep engagement with social and environmental cases. Their active involvement in social media helps showcase how travel can be adventurous and purposeful. As hosts and travelers, youth serve as effective ambassadors, promoting their regions while learning about others.

Montenegro advocates shifting from quantity-focused to quality-focused tourism, emphasizing authentic experiences and local values. This approach aims to protect natural resources, preserve local cultures, and contribute to local economies while promoting universal values through tourism experiences.

The country’s sustainable tourism strategy focuses on developing models that position tourism as a force for good. While tourism development remains an economic priority, Montenegro recognizes its broader impact on global peace and stability. The “new travel journey” thus becomes a path toward peace and stability, making tourism a vehicle for positive global change while maintaining economic benefits for local communities.



Harnessing the Power of Tourism to Create Resilient and Equitable Communities

Mr. Curt Cottle

United States of America, Senior Policy Advisor/Team Lead for Outreach and Engagement Policy & Planning/National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) International Trade Administration/U.S. Department of Commerce

The U.S. government’s National Travel and Tourism Strategy, released in 2022, focuses on promoting the nation as a premier destination while building a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable tourism sector. The strategy aims to increase both the volume and value of tourism through four key pillars, particularly ensuring diverse, inclusive, and accessible travel experiences.

The approach incorporates sustainability and community-based development strategies, including investments in technology and emissions reduction, while addressing challenges such as destination carrying capacity and impact on natural and cultural resources. Brand USA, the nation’s destination marketing organization, promotes the full diversity of American experiences, leveraging gateways for international travel to tell a broader, richer story of the United States.

The initiative capitalizes on America’s multicultural heritage and diaspora communities, emphasizing local food and music traditions, and diverse ethnic experiences. The strategy encourages attractions to incorporate various community perspectives in telling collaborative stories about the country.

Working with the public and private sectors post pandemic, the Biden-Harris administration’s strategy supports tourism growth from urban centers to wilderness recreation hubs while building resilience to natural disasters and public health threats. This comprehensive approach aims to create jobs and foster growth across communities while ensuring long-term sustainability and protecting natural and cultural resources.

Panelists



Accountability and Responsibility are Key to Shift from the First to Best Destinations

Mr. Eduardo Santander

Executive Director, European Travel Commission (ETC)

As Europe accounts for 54 percent of international arrivals and remains the top tourism destination, responsibility and accountability in tourism are essential. Rather than focusing solely on tourist numbers and spending, ETC prioritizes promoting authentic, sustainable experiences. We urge local authorities to establish new KPIs for success that go beyond traditional metrics of arrivals and expenditure.

To foster responsible travel, we need to educate the younger generation and offer experiences related to cultural heritage and nature, promoting off-season travel, carbon-neutral vacations, and immersive community experiences. By supporting local artisans, sustainable accommodations, and cultural engagement, we aim to offer meaningful travel that emphasizes quality over quantity.

The focus is on creating experiences highlighting the richness of local culture and traditions, mainly through gastronomy tourism, where travelers can explore a region's culinary heritage through vineyard tours and truffle hunting. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to support initiatives prioritizing local needs rather than pursuing profit at all costs. Educating the younger generation and encouraging longer stays with local interactions are central to this vision. In cooperation with the Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA), the "Oishii Europe" campaign will spotlight food culture and responsible travel.



ASEAN's Vision for Tourism: Collaboration, Implementation and Digital Adaptation

Dr. Aladdin D. Rillo

Managing Director for Policy Design and Operations
Economic Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)

In ASEAN countries, where tourism plays a vital role, sustainability forms the core of future development. The focus extends beyond sustainability as an end goal, emphasizing the transformation of the tourism sector to generate meaningful, sustainable outcomes. This transformation requires a pragmatic approach and three critical considerations.

First, a multi-stakeholder approach is essential, demanding close collaboration between public and private sectors. This collaboration ensures all stakeholders can participate in decision-making processes and advance their perspectives on sustainable tourism development, supported by proper governance and institutional frameworks.

Second, comprehensive implementation of frameworks and guidelines is crucial for guiding sustainable policies, requiring detailed implementation plans, improved tourism data collection, and adequate monitoring systems to effectively measure tourism performance and outcomes.

Third, the tourism sector must remain dynamic and adaptable to changing global and regional realities. Digital technology is a key driver for transformation, facilitating evidence-based decision-making and implementing responsible tourism practices. Raising awareness of sustainable tourism within the private sector and considering necessary policy interventions to address market-driven tourism are also critical components.

Ultimately, sustainable tourism must be part of an inclusive strategy that goes beyond maintaining sector competitiveness to ensure benefits for future generations and promote long-term growth.

Panelists



Youth as Tomorrow's Travelers and Tourism Professionals

Ms. Liz Ortiguera

Managing Director for Asia Pacific & Sr. Advisor to the CEO
Interim SVP for Membership & Commercial
World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)

Tourism's future aligns with the values of younger generation, who are more environmentally conscious and prioritize experiences and purpose over material possessions. This alignment presents a unique opportunity to engage youth both as travelers and industry professionals.

Talent acquisition and skills training are the biggest challenges in the travel industry. With projections indicating 64 million new jobs in the next decade, attracting young talent has become crucial. To address this, we must focus on several key areas. First, youth education about tourism as a force for good shows how responsible tourism creates jobs, strengthens communities, and preserves natural and cultural resources. Second, the industry should highlight how technology and innovation reshapes tourism while emphasizing that real-world experience remains at its heart.

Third, showcasing entrepreneurial opportunities, from tech startups to eco-friendly ventures, can encourage young people to view themselves as future innovators and leaders. Fourth, promoting tourism as an experiential career with diverse professional pathways highlights the sector's vast ecosystem of opportunities. The industry must also create respectful work environments where staff are protected, valued, and motivated to grow.

Moderator



Reimagining Tourism: Insights from Global Leaders on Quality, Sustainability and Youth Engagement

Ms. Marjorie Dewey

President, Connect Worldwide Japan Co., Ltd.

In the wake of recovery and rebuilding from the pandemic, we have discussed how we can reimagine the travel industry by involving young people, creating new high-value tourism, and increasing sustainable regional development through discussions on the theme of Creating a New Travel Journey. Speakers from different countries and international organizations gave interesting insights. I believe this has provided many useful takeaways for attracting younger generations to tourism and creating sustainable tourism that values natural and cultural resources.

ツーリズム

Tourism

公益社団法人 日本観光振興協会



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Honourable Dato Dr. Abdul Manaf Metussin



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