

Kyoto Opens Office in Dubai

by Daisuke Matsunaga (Consul-General of Japan in Dubai)

Japan considers tourism to be one of the key industries for the revival of its economy, and is increasingly looking to tap the significant potential in the Muslim market. At present, most Muslim tourists visiting Japan come from Malaysia and Indonesia, but the Gulf region with Dubai as its hub is fast becoming the new hope for Japanese tourism.

For this reason, the city of Kyoto has recently opened an office in Dubai that will promote tourism and encourage people from the Gulf countries to visit Japan's ancient capital.

We know that Muslim tourists in Japan often like to check the availability of Halal restaurants and find out where local mosques are located. Japan is therefore making greater efforts to provide this kind of information on the internet.

For example, the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has “Japan Travel Guide for Muslim Visitors” website (http://www.jnto.org.sg/for_muslim_visitors.html).

And the city of Kyoto has its own website: “Muslim friendly Kyoto” (<http://kyoto.travel/muslim>), which provides a list of Halal restaurants recognized by the Kyoto Muslim Association as well as useful maps showing where to find Kyoto's mosques.

The new Kyoto office in Dubai participated in the Arabian Travel Market, or the annual international tourism fair, which was held this year from 5-8 May at the Dubai World Trade Center. A traditional “Tea House” brought some Maiko ladies (ladies in kimono who entertain visitors with their traditional performance), and they demonstrated their skills in Japanese dancing, playing string instruments and performing the tea ceremony. Catering to local demand, Kyoto also brought hijabs to the fair, which had been dyed by a local company using an age-old technique.

Although Europe is still the main holiday destination for people in the Gulf region, Japanese food and popular culture are taking root with public here, providing fertile ground for potential tourism development. I sincerely hope that Kyoto's new office and its efforts in Dubai will bear fruit and lead to a significant surge in tourism to Japan from the Middle East.