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作家

ECO-TOURISM AND JAPAN
A COMMENT FOR THE MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A lot of valuable discussion and work has gone into the creation of this new manifesto on eco-tourism, and as a member of the committee I can only express gratitude for all those who spent so much time on the project. I am sure it will give a lot of excellent guidelines and will promote a lot of interest and discussion.

However, the fundamental problem of eco-tourism has not been faced, and it is a subject over which I have discussed personally and directly with several past Ministers of Environment, three Prime Ministers, Environment Ministry officials, the Japanese media and so on for nearly twenty years.

Tourism, to be a success for both visitor and host, has to have some very firm and internationally reliable infra-structures. The host government must commit to take care of the visitors, and at the same time sift out those who for various reasons are unwelcome.

Japan has been doing a commendable job, and the Immigration officials, Customs officials, police, Ministry of Transport, as well as the excellent health and hospital systems in Japan are to be commended. The quality of Japan's hotels, modern and traditional, are respected and often envied the world over. Japan has gained a reputation for being a safe, honest, hospitable country to visit, and as one who has come to Japan first as a tourist, then as a student, diplomat, on a cultural visa, and eventually on through permanent residence to Japanese citizenship, I can certainly vouch for this.

With the rise of international terrorism, especially that of Islamic extremists, several Asian countries are suffering a decline in international tourism, and this will worsen. Japan is an extremely attractive country because of its unique culture, its island nature, and admirable security systems. The threat of terrorist acts has recently put a great burden on the officials and field officers of the Immigration, Ministry of Transport and police, and they are doing their utmost to have

trained staff in the field and ready to tackle any threat.

The core of eco-tourism is the national parks. With the exception of a very few excellent individuals, Japan is pathetically lacking in numbers and quality of rangers. I m not going over this again and again, and I have listened to all the excuses.

A core of at least one thousand highly trained and dedicated rangers who can do all kinds of field work, from interpretation to rescue, is desperately needed. Poaching, illegal dumping of garbage and even industrial waste, the spread of damaging alien fauna and flora, the regulation of guides and many subjects which have been kicked around in discussions and committees and panels for years, can only be tackled by a ranger force of high quality. Japan does not have one and the Ministry has shown no real interest in creating one. As I have said before, let the ranger force be uniquely Japanese, work in close co-operation with the police, local agencies dealing with rescue and so on, it could even be a part of the police or the Self Defence Forces if needed, but a good national park ranger force is needed.

I ve outlined this in detail to the Ministry of Environment and my comments are on record. It is time for action, no more words.