

## **Japan–Saudi Tourism Partnership Accelerates Ahead of Expo 2030 Riyadh**



Yoshiteru Koyano, chairman of Nippon Travel Agency. (c) AFPBB News

**As Japan wraps up Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai with more than 25 million visitors, momentum is building for a new tourism partnership between Japan and Saudi Arabia ahead of Expo 2030 Riyadh.**

Japan, Tokyo. November 2025

### **Tourism MOU with Saudi Arabia**

Nippon Travel Agency (NTA), Japan's oldest and leading travel company, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Investment in September 2025, aiming to promote growth in the travel and tourism sector between the two countries.

NTA, established in 1905 with a network of 250 branch offices at home and worldwide, plans to set up its first local base in Riyadh in the coming years in line with the MOU, according to NTA chairman Yoshiteru Koyano.

The two parties plan to develop tourism products and packages that promote Saudi Arabia's cultural, heritage and entertainment attractions to Japanese tourists, while promoting Japan as a key destination for Saudi Arabian outbound tourism through joint campaigns.

They will also collaborate on event-driven travel projects and explore investment opportunities in tourism infrastructure, entertainment facilities, and hospitality sectors in both countries.

The MOU came after Saudi Arabia's Tourism Minister Ahmed Al-Khateeb and Japan's then Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Hiromasa Nakano agreed in August to strengthen their strategic partnership in the tourism sector through innovation, human resource development and sustainability.

### **Legacy of Expo**

The Expo helped align the visions of Japan and Saudi Arabia, Koyano said in an interview after signing the MOU at the Expo venue.

"It is crucial to maintain this momentum for the next Expo in Riyadh five years from now," said Koyano, who is also vice chairperson of the Japan Association of Travel Agents, the nation's tourism industry group.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Pavilion held more than 700 events during the six-month fair, drawing more than 3 million visitors to the venue, which utilized cultural heritage and cutting-edge green technology.

Koyano stressed that through the Expo, Japanese interest in Saudi Arabia has "accelerated significantly" ahead of Expo 2030 Riyadh.

The upcoming Expo in the Saudi capital is expecting 42 million visitors

and participation from 197 countries and 29 international organizations. The upcoming Expo will be held on a site of over 6 million square meters, about four times the size of Expo 2025, featuring five distinctively themed zones, aiming to create a legacy that will bring transformation to Saudi Arabia and the world.

### **Saudi: Global Tourist Destination**

Since opening its tourism industry in 2019, Saudi Arabia has worked towards becoming a global tourist destination. With sizable investment in the sector, the country aims to welcome 150 million tourists annually by 2030.

Japanese travelers are among its key targets. Tourists from Japan are eligible for the electronic e-Visa program, which allows stays of up to 90 days within a one-year period from the date of issuance and multiple entries. Direct flights connecting Japan and Saudi Arabia are currently under consideration, news reports said.

### **Promoting Tourism Between Japan and Saudi**

NTA is considering “offering opportunities particularly for younger generations” to visit Saudi Arabia, for example as school trips, Koyano said.

“For many Japanese, Saudi Arabia still evokes images of an oil-rich desert nation, yet it holds the potential to become a future major destination for Japanese tourists after Europe, America and Asia,” he said, referring to the country’s historical sites and futuristic urban scenes.

Koyano also expects the number of tourists from Saudi Arabia to Japan will expand at a time when tourism in Japan is booming, with the highest number of foreign visitors ever coming to the country.

“Saudi people's interest in anime, ramen and other Japanese culture is higher than many Japanese imagine,” he said. “We should implement solid initiatives that encourage them to keep coming to Japan.”

NTA, hosting more than 200,000 travelers a year from around the world, plans to offer to Saudi tourists special tours covering not only e-game and other entertainment events but also medical tourism, he added.

*By Shingo ITO, editor-in-chief at AFPBB News*

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Yoshiteru Koyano, chairman of Nippon Travel Agency. (c) AFPBB News

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Yoshiteru Koyano, chairman of Nippon Travel Agency. (c) AFPBB News

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A ceremony to mark the MOU between NTA and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Investment at an event hall of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan. (c) JETRO