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## Travel with a purpose

### The year tourism banded together for Japan



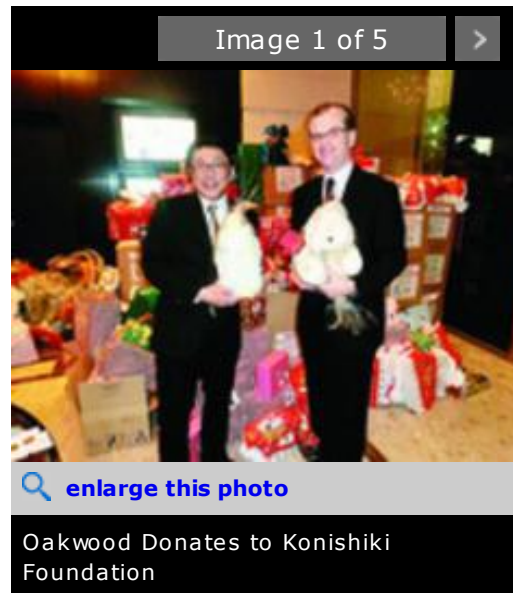
by [Serene Lim](#)

04:45 AM Dec 26, 2011

Japan's triple tragedy at Fukushima in March led to an international outpouring of sympathy and support. Besides Japanese companies and relief agencies sending aid and donations, the travel industry stepped up in ways big and small to lend a hand.

Airlines like Delta Air Lines pledged US\$1 million (S\$1.3 million) in cash and kind support to disaster relief efforts through the American Red Cross and Japanese Red Cross Society, as well as an immediate US\$250,000 cash donation from its foundation. Korean Air, meanwhile, donated at least 5,000 boxes of water and 2,000 blankets on its scheduled flights to Narita in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

The hospitality sector truly shone. Some allowed travellers to



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Oakwood Donates to Konishiki Foundation

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convert their reward points as cash donations, like American chain Best Western. Others went all out: Shangri-La Tokyo launched its WISH.ForJapan campaign where proceeds from the hotel's packages, spa and restaurants were donated. Its Singapore counterpart also chipped in by creating special Wish.forJapan chocolates, with proceeds going to the campaign funds.

Hospitality personnel such as Martin Fluck, country manager of Oakwood Asia Pacific Properties in Japan, took pains to ensure the well-being of his residents and Japanese staff in Tokyo even as foreigners left the country, spearheading efforts in his properties. Oakwood Residence Azabujuban offered complimentary stays for the NGO All Hands while Oakwood Residence Aoyama provided a two-bedroom apartment to the staff of Habitat For Humanity to assist in their relief efforts for a year. Oakwood was also a supporter of the Konishiki Kids Foundation, which donated nearly 3,000 pieces of toys to kids in Tohoku as Christmas presents.

"It was just amazing to see how the Japanese associates handled themselves. They never panicked and solely focused on taking care of the residents," Fluck said. "I always had great respect for the Japanese people and I think that all the other countries around the world can learn a lot from their character and attitude."

Travel websites, too, stood up to be counted. Popular hotel booking website Hotels.com introduced a total of nine deals and promotions to encourage travel to Japan once the country was declared safe for travellers. "To help the hotel industry in Japan to cope with low occupancy rates in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake, Hotels.com ran the 'Support Japan' campaign, which included community and communication programmes to support the nation's recovery from the disaster such as donating hundreds of sterilised milk bottle sets to local hospitals within the disaster area in Fukushima," said Zoe Chan, senior PR manager for Hotels.com, APAC.

"Hotels.com also rolled out a separate initiative, the 'smile' campaign (picture, right), which brought together more than 300 smile ambassadors from the hotel industry in Asia to show their support for Japan by sending in images of their smiling faces and

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words of encouragement. The campaign received great traction from the Japanese public, who expressed how overwhelmed they felt by the love and support shown to them by the hotel community in Asia."

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