

More Indians visit South Africa, many mean business

Indian tourism to South Africa continues to grow, with an unprecedented 32.6 percent increase in the third quarter of 2007, but China is fast catching up, say the latest reports of South African Tourism (SAT).

Monthly reports issued by SAT, South Africa's tourism marketing body, indicate that this increase from India and China continued until January this year, with Chinese tourism having taken a lead for that month with an increase of 41.7 percent from January 2007.

The constantly growing trade links between South Africa and India are further highlighted by the fact that 61 percent of Indian tourists were here for business.

Many of the Indians here for business also visited the tourist spots of the country, although they spent on an average one night less than the six that their Chinese equivalents did. Half the Chinese visitors were here for business, showing that trade between South Africa and China is also increasing.

An earlier intensive drive in India by SAT to lure more tourists to the country, including using television sports presenter Mandira Bedi in advertisements, appears to have paid dividends as 14,806 tourists from India visited South Africa from July to September last year.

Tourism from China increased by 30 percent in the same period, resulting in the overall tourism from Asia and Australasia growing even faster than that from the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Comparing the visitors from India and China, SAT said Indian visitors were slightly older than their Chinese counterparts. Only 29 percent of Indian visitors were between 25 and 34 years old, as compared to 36 percent Chinese visitors; while 58 percent of Indians were between 35 and 54 and 51 percent of Chinese visitors fell into this category.

Many Chinese business travellers were in South Africa for the first time (70 percent) as they sought new business opportunities, while only 57 percent of Indians were here for the first time.

While both Indian and Chinese visitors spent most of their time in the commercial hub of Gauteng province, Chinese tourists preferred the Western Cape for their leisure visits, while Indians preferred Natal province, especially Durban, home to more than 70 percent of the 1.2 million South African Indians descended mainly from the first arrivals from India as sugarcane farm labourers in 1860.

Tourists from both the countries cited safety and security as their main concerns while visiting South Africa.

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