

# ZIMBABWE TOURISM CHIEF PLANS TO ATTRACT CHINESE TOURISTS



Zimbabwe has been facing a decade of persistent economic decline and now seeks to bolster its tourism sector by attracting Chinese visitors. Zimbabwe is a landlocked country but it has one of the most beautiful natural sites in the whole of Africa - the Victoria Falls.

Zimbabwe is planning to attract Chinese by relaxing its visa restrictions for tourists from China and increasing the air connectivity between the two nations. These are their main strategies according to the country's head of tourism, Karigoga Kaseke.

Kaseke, the current Chief Executive of Zimbabwe Tourism Authority had also previously made it clear that **Zimbabwe seeks to attract an annual number of no less than fifty thousand Chinese tourists**. Zimbabwe aims to achieve this target by the year 2015. The Southern African nation hosted less than five thousand Chinese tourists in 2012.

More than seventy percent of all tourists who visited Zimbabwe in 2012 came from the neighboring countries. The total number of foreign tourists to the country was just about 1.8 million. Chinese tourists to Zimbabwe alongside other tourists from Japan and the West made up less than 10% of the entire tourist arrivals to the country. However, these groups of tourists contributed to a large portion of the US \$749 million brought into the Zimbabwean economy by tourists visiting the country in 2012.

The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority also confirms that Chinese tourists to Zimbabwe have increased by over 165% to just about 3,714 in the first quarter of the year. **This effectively makes China the main tourist market for Zimbabwe in Asia followed closely by Japan**. The entire Asian market contributes less than 35% of the total tourist arrivals in Zimbabwe but this percentage is constantly rising.

This is because the amount of Chinese tourists is growing. There were more than 22.6 million outbound Chinese tourists in just the 1st quarter of 2013. These Chinese tourists are seeking new countries to explore apart from the traditional destinations in Europe, America and Southeast Asia. However, the main challenge to Zimbabwe in its struggle to attract Chinese tourists is the fact that South Africa and Kenya remain as the preferred destination of most Chinese tourists visiting Sub Saharan Africa. The Seychelles and Mauritius, which are both, implementing a visa free policy towards tourists from China are also set to be a competitive headache for the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority.

The Authority is planning to grant China tourists a Category A (visa free) status and an E-VISA platform. Both governments are still negotiating the former while the latter may shorten the visa application process to only three working days. The Authority is also planning to launch a private airline by the end of August this year. This private airline is set to fly to Guangzhou Province in China three times a week via Singapore. It will also fly the Harare - Victoria Falls route locally.

The Royal Zimbabwe Airlines, Zimbabwe's first private airline has successfully applied for a permit

to run this company. The monopoly of Air Zimbabwe, which no longer flies international routes, has thus in effect been broken. However, the intricate details of the investment deal with the Royal Zimbabwe airlines remain sketchy. However, Munesu Munodawafa, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Transport has confirmed that the deal has in fact gone through.

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