

SOUTH KOREA AND CHINA SHOW SIGNS OF EASING UP ON TOURISM



South Korea and China have had several economic and geopolitical disagreements recently. However, tourism has seen appeasement gestures. China has lifted its ban on group visits to South Korea. South Korean authorities have unveiled a plan to attract more than 1.5 million Chinese visitors by the end of the year.

The Ministry of Tourism in Seoul is doing everything possible to ensure Chinese tourists return to South Korea. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 5 million Chinese tourists visited the country yearly. However, the number of visitors dropped drastically due to the pandemic and Beijing's 2017 decision to ban group visits in response to installing the US THAAD missile defense system in South Korea. This ban was lifted three weeks ago, and the Ministry of Tourism hopes to bring back Chinese visitors.

South Korea is looking to take advantage of the recent Chinese cruise ship visit to the popular tourist island of Jeju by launching several initiatives to attract more Chinese tourists. The government is opening new visa centers, increasing air links, and offering refunds of VAT or visa fees for group visits. In addition, South Korea is planning new tourism programs that cater to Chinese visitors and integrating popular payment methods such as WeChat Pay or Alipay.

A seduction operation has been planned to attract 2 million Chinese tourists by 2023 and boost GDP by 0.16 points. However, there is concern about how the South Korean population will respond to this, given the rising anti-China sentiment in recent years.

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