

# Bringing Asia to Africa

Bradley Brouwer

Bradley Brouwer is the Regional Manager of the Asia Pacific region for South African Tourism – a job which sees him promoting South Africa as a destination to Japan, Korea, China and Hong Kong, and which keeps him very busy travelling between his office in Tokyo, Japan, and the Regional Head Office in Beijing, China. As October is traditionally a popular time for Japanese visitors to travel to South Africa, we chatted to Bradley about the intricacies of attracting Japanese visitors to our shores.

Text: Nicky Furniss  
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What successes have you experienced in promoting South Africa to the Japanese market in the last year?

The hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup was a great success. Initially we experienced a lot of negative publicity and negative comments about the country. But then we held a post World Cup press briefing and the Chairman of the Japan Football Association apologised to South Africans saying that he was sorry about his negative comments earlier because he had experienced firsthand that South Africa is a safe and friendly destination.

South African Tourism also made alliances with the major FIFA partners and associates, such as Adidas, Sony, Coca-Cola, Japan Post Bank and Cosy Corner, and this helped us to extend our limited resources and to create a much better awareness of South Africa as a country.

2010 has been an auspicious year as our two countries celebrate the 100-year anniversary of diplomatic relations between South Africa and Japan. The Japanese Embassy in Pretoria has planned a number of celebratory events to mark the occasion. Has your office been involved in any similar celebratory events in Japan?

We are constantly involved in promoting the anniversary celebrations on our Japanese website ([www.south-africa.jp](http://www.south-africa.jp)) and during all of our activations and activities this year. We are very proud of the 100 years of diplomatic ties between Japan and South Africa.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup was another landmark occasion this year and a relatively large contingent of Japanese fans came to South Africa to support their team, the Samurai Blue. A Japanese media contingent was also present and media monitoring conducted by the Japanese Embassy during the tournament revealed increasingly positive reporting on South Africa as a country as the tournament continued. Have you noticed a perceptible change in attitude towards South Africa as a destination, amongst Japanese travellers, as a result of these reports? Do you think the World Cup will result in more Japanese visitors coming to South Africa and how do you intend to capitalise on the success of the tournament to encourage more Japanese visitors to select South Africa as a travel destination of choice?

Yes, the public attitude has changed dramatically towards South Africa since the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The media were reporting only negative incidents in Japan – which they picked up from South African news agencies – until the



supporters of the Samurai Blue started blogging about their time in South Africa. This forced the media to start reporting more responsibly and now South Africa is highly appreciated and new interest in the destination is evident.

We still face the challenge of there being no direct flight between Japan and South Africa and we know that the numbers will only really pick up once one is established. We are constantly encouraging airlines to fly directly, and I hope now that there will be enough demand to get them going. We are using every opportunity to use the legacy of the World Cup to our advantage.

Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado – a member of the Japanese imperial family – visited South Africa during the World Cup in order to support the Samurai Blue as the Honorary Patron of the Japan Football Association. From all accounts, the Princess had an enjoyable first trip to South Africa. Was her visit – though unofficial – reported in the Japanese media and if so, do you think it will have any effect on the number of Japanese visitors choosing to come to South Africa?

Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado is such a great supporter of South Africa and always has such positive things to say about our country. Her visit was not widely reported, but she is a modern Royal and has supported us in so many ways in the past. I do believe that we will continue to have Her Imperial Highness' support going forward and that the Japanese do read her media coverage.

During October, many Japanese visitors come to South Africa to see the flowering of the Jacaranda trees in Pretoria. Which other times of year would you recommend to Japanese tourists wanting to visit our country?

Well, since the Japanese are such wonderful flower lovers we also promote the Namaqualand daisies in August and of course, the famous Jacaranda blossoms in Pretoria, Stellenbosch and Pilgrims Rest are a huge draw card – so much so, that one Tour Operator has chartered The Blue Train three times in October! We are steadily seeing more interest in other activities now as well.

What kind of feedback do you get from Japanese tourists returning from a first time visit to South Africa? What surprises or delights them?

They say that “diamonds are a girl's best friend”, but for the Japanese they are even better when they are purchased in South Africa! I am also constantly told of how surprised people were of the friendly smiles and welcoming approach of South Africans. We are also told of how great our wines are and how many Japanese tourists wished that they could take more back home with them.

Travelling on South Africa's leading luxury train, The Blue Train, remains a popular choice among Japanese tourists visiting our country. How, do you think, The Blue Train appeals to the Japanese market?

The Blue Train is perfect for Japanese travellers as it is so luxurious and attention to detail is the order of the day. This makes the South African experience so much more pleasurable, due to the fact that they can relax on the train as their itineraries are often very tight as the Japanese vacation time is very limited. I do believe that a trip on The Blue Train is the highlight of many Japanese visitors' trips to South Africa.

I would like to wish all the Japanese travelling on The Blue Train this month, the greatest experience and the most wonderful stay in South Africa – a destination that is so beautiful that they will have to visit it again. ■