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Title: SA tourism hosts Japanese travel, trade journalists

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By Bathandwa Mbola,

South African Tourism is hosting a Japanese delegation of senior journalists from travel, trade and mainstream publications on a ten day tour to showcase South Africa as a travel destination.

"We know that newspapers and magazines are in the top three information sources for travelers seeking information about South Africa and therefore getting South Africa covered by respected publications is of major importance," said SA Tourism's Country Manager in Japan, Bradley Brouwer.

Represented on the tour were Higashi-Aichi and Kobe Newspapers in addition to numerous Japanese trade publications.

Japan is a significant and highly lucrative tourism market for South Africa.

In 2006, South Africa welcomed 17.2 percent more Japanese travelers, making it the second fastest growing source market in the Australasian region, after India.

Commenting on these positive results Mr Brouwer said "while these figures are encouraging, our aim, in line with our tourism growth strategy, is to actively and aggressively invest in growing markets, in order to attract even more arrivals from Japan and the rest of the rapidly growing Australasia region."

He said it was therefore hugely important that the entire country, and not just the tourism industry, is represented in a positive light.

The Japanese delegation has met Environmental Affairs and Tourism Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk and Mpumalanga MEC for Economic Development and Planning, Craig Padayachee.

The delegation's tours of Mpumalanga, Durban and Gauteng have "blown them away" said Mr Brouwer.

"Apart from all the fun we have had, what has been particularly gratifying is the flurry of stories hitting the front pages of key Japanese travel publications each day. It doesn't stop with this trip," he said.

"Tomorrow the entire sales team of Thai Airways in Japan arrives in South Africa. This is also a major coup for the country. This group is accompanied by key consumer media from Japan and we are hoping for similar coverage."

Japan is one of the South Africa's key economic partners in the world and South Africa's largest trading partner in Asia.

South Africa's exports to Japan have increased since 1992 from R4 billion, to approximately R33 billion at the end of 2005.

Imports from Japan in the same period have increased from R5 billion to R24 billion, which ensures a positive trade balance of R10 billion.

Japan became South Africa's first export partner in 2005, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States (US).

It is South Africa's fourth largest import partner after Germany, China and the US.

In the past decade South Africa has consolidated its position as Japan's most important trading partner in Africa. - BuaNews