

Sunday Times

THE PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE

PENWELL DLAMINI

THE Russians are coming! At least that is what South African tourism officials are hoping.

They want to attract more Russian tourists so the Department of Tourism is training tourist guides to speak Russian and Mandarin.

The department says 7 000 Russian tourists visited South Africa in 2015, a number tourism officials want to improve.

Most were high-income tourists

Guides mastering Russian

who came for luxury safaris etc.

The department said that 17 million Russians visited Thailand for its beaches and it wants local coastal destinations to compete for the trade.

According to the Chinese Embassy, 30 000 tourists from the Asian nation visited South Africa in the first half of 2016.

The department is training eight

tour guides in Russian and 20 in Mandarin in the first phase of the programme.

The programme's top performers will spend two to four weeks in China or Russia to enhance their understanding of the language they have learnt.

Those enrolled in the programme are front-line staff in the tourism industry.

Tour guide Phisoa Malyob of Lewodi Cultural Village in Botet-ordena, is thrilled about the training.

"For us to know their language and culture is a great experience and will make our visitors feel that they are indeed at home."

Chinese deputy ambassador Li Xueji said there were other language partnerships with the SA police, as well as the International Relations and Basic Education departments.

CAPE TIMES

Mandarin and Russian classes to 'boost tourism'

Kgopi Mabotja

JOHANNESBURG: China and Russia are the biggest new tourism markets to South Africa. In a bid to ensure that the country keeps this market, the Department of Tourism has added an incentive.

Yesterday it launched a language programme to teach South African tourism front-line staff, including tour guides and hotel staff, Mandarin and Russian.

There are 30 tourism staff who are currently finishing a two-month language training programme.

"We do this to ensure that we are globally competitive. We also need to ensure that we improve satisfaction levels. If more tourists come to the country we are able to create suitable job opportunities. Masses of first-time international travellers are pouring out of China and the other Brics countries; this project supports this trend," said deputy minister of tourism Thokozile Xasa.

The Chinese have been an important trade partner with South Africa. Last year alone during the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, a total of 26 agreements worth R91 billion were signed. Both China and Russia have recorded a steady increase in the number of tourists visiting South Africa.

In 2015, between January and July, 40 953 Chinese visited South Africa. In the same period this year, the number increased with 8 438 more tourists visiting, statistics released by the Department of Tourism show.

Also, last year between January and July, 3 680 Russian tourists visited South Africa. In the same period this year the number increased to 4 089.

Xasa said the foreign language process will foster better working relations with not only China but other Brics member states.

"South Africa has proposed establishing a coordinating forum for tourism within Brics; cooperation on tourism is critical to maintain our competitive edge in an increasingly competitive global environment," she said.

Small business owners in the industry said the programme will go a long way to improving relations with their customers.

Among those was Kabelo Mothupi, owner of a start-up tour operating company, Merakong Tours and Adventures. Having spent almost two months in the programme, Mothupi can hold down a conversation in Mandarin.

"This will help us develop that intimate relationship with our clients. Tourists will keep on coming to South Africa and we, as small businesses, are going to benefit a lot. It's worthwhile."

Welcome to SA, yes we speak Mandarin

Johannesburg - China and Russia are the biggest tourism markets to South Africa, and in a bid to ensure that the country keeps the markets, the Department of Tourism has added an incentive.

On Wednesday, it announced its language programme in which it is teaching South African tourism front-line staff, among them tour guides and hotel staff, Mandarin and Russian.

The department hopes that the programme will attract more tourists to the country.

Thirty tourism staff are on the verge of completing a two-month language training course in those languages.

"We do this to ensure that we are globally competitive," Deputy Minister of Tourism Tokozile Xasa said. "We also need to ensure that we improve satisfaction levels. If more tourists come to the country, we are able to create suitable job opportunities. Masses of first-time international travellers are pouring out of China and the other Brics countries. This project supports the trend."

China has been an important trading partner for South Africa. Last year during the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation, 26 agreements worth R94-billion were signed between the two countries.

Between January and July last year, 40 953 Chinese visited South Africa, Tourism Department statistics revealed.

The number rose by 8 858 for the same period this year.

Between January and July, 3 630 Russians visited, and that number increased to 4 089.

Xasa said the foreign language process would foster better working relations with all Brics member states.

"South Africa has proposed establishing a co-ordinating forum for tourism within Brics. Co-operation on tourism is critical to maintain our competitive edge," she said.

Small business owners said the programme would go a long way in improving relations with their customers.

Among those in the programme is Kabelo Mothupi, the owner of start-up tour operating company Merakeng Tours and Adventures. After two months, he can hold a conversation in Mandarin.

"This will help us develop that intimate relationship with our clients. Tourists will keep on coming to South Africa and we, as small businesses, are going to benefit a lot," he said.

He intends teaching three of his employees Mandarin.

Foreign languages for tour guides

LERATO DIALE

DEPUTY Minister of Tourism Thokozile Xasa yesterday highlighted the continued growth of tourism in the country.

Xasa was speaking during the launch of the Foreign Languages Training Programme in Sandton yesterday.

The programme will see 20 people learning Mandarin and 10 tour guides learning Russian.

"Frontline staff play a critical role in how tourists perceive a country and equally so, tour guides are a vital part of the tourism value chain," Xasa said.

"It is for this reason that among the key objectives of the programme is to



GROWTH: Thokozile Xasa.

train tour guides and frontline staff at establishments that deal with tourists."

Xasa said the programme would give those undergoing training insights into the cultures of the societies associated with Russian and Mandarin.

She said the programme was aimed at meeting the needs of Chinese and Russian tourists but also to achieve the aims of the bilateral agreements on tourism with respective countries.

Xasa said Chinese tourist arrivals in the country reached 58178 for the first half of the year, an increase of 63%, when compared to the overseas total growth of 18,6% while a total of 7244 Russian tourists visited South Africa last year.

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Mandarin meets siXhosa in the North West

Beneficiaries of the language training programme launched by the Department of Tourism have shared their joy at learning the culture of Chinese and Russians.

Phelisa Matyolo of Lesedi Cultural Village in Broederstroom, on the border of Joburg and the North West, is one of the 20 people who are currently being trained in Mandarin in a department-baked initiative to better serve the growing numbers of Chinese tourists visiting South Africa.

She works at the village where they show off five of the country's cultural groups – Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi, Sotho and Ndebele in dance, culture and food. The village also provides accommodation for tourists.

"It is important for us at Lesedi Cultural Village to know Mandarin. Every day of our lives at the village we host groups of Chinese tourist. Monday to Sunday," Matyolo said.

"For us to know their language and culture it is a great experience and will make our visitors feel that they are indeed at home. Their culture and our culture are similar. The training has been great thus far. We have learned how to greet people of different ages, introduce ourselves and welcome people into our country.

"We are also learning Chinese culture – their food, why they sit in circles."

There is also a group of eight which is learning Russian in order to grow their understanding of South Africa's Brics partner.

According to the Department of Tourism, last year there were just 7 244 tourists from Russia. Most of them were high-income tourists who came for luxury safari tours.

But the department wants to focus more on growing the Russian tourism market.

It told TMG Digital that 1.7 million Russians visited Thailand, mainly for the country's famous beaches. South Africa has more than 2 500 kilometres of coastline and beaches are seen by the department as one of the growth areas the country should promote to Russian tourists.

Language project launched

TOURISM | The Department of Tourism has launched a programme to train its first group of frontline staff in Russian and Mandarin. In 2013, the government signed an agreement to co-operate with the People's Republic of China in the tourism sector. TMG Digital

SA tourism officials learning Russian and Mandarin

THE Department of Tourism has officially launched a programme to train its first group of front line staff in Russian and Mandarin.

In 2013, the South African government signed an agreement to cooperate with the People's Republic of China in the tourism sector. This gave rise to the partnership to train locals in Mandarin in order to improve the service provided to Chinese tourists to SA.

Russia had signed a similar agreement back in 1998, but this was reinforced into a stronger partnership in 2014.

There are 20 South Africans from across the country learning Mandarin while eight are learning Russian. The top performers in the languages will get to spend between two and four weeks in the country whose language they have mastered.

The trainees are from all races and age groups and their common denominator is that they are tourist guides and front line staff in the tourism sector in SA.

The training in Mandarin will wind up at the end of the November while the Russian group will finish at the beginning of the same month.

According to the Chinese Embassy, 58,000 tourists from the Asian nation visited SA in the first half of 2016.

Addressing the launch, held at the Hilton Hotel in Sandton, Chinese deputy ambassador Li Song said the relationship with SA was growing and at its best levels ever. Song congratulated the trainees on their journey and said it would have value in their lives going into the future.

"You will not regret all the time and energy that you put in the learning of the Chinese language. Your language skills will pave a way for a lot of opportunities in the future."

Song added that there were other language partnerships with the departments in police, international relations, and basic education.

Deputy Minister of Tourism Tokozile Xasa said language was a key component of how people experience the country they visit.

"Although the world continues to transform into the digital space.. that can never replace human contact. A welcoming greeting for a traveler in the language that they understand brings confidence that they can get information," said Xasa.



Mandarin and Russian lessons for local tour guides

Guides and staff interacting with tourists in the country are to be skilled in the Mandarin and Russian languages when Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom launches the Foreign Language Training Programme on Wednesday.

The initiative comes as a result of China and Russia being among the top tourist markets for South Africa. The two countries are also South Africa's partners in the BRICS group of emerging economies.

According to the Department of Tourism, "thirty tourist guides and front line staff from various provinces have been selected to participate in the three month training programme."

The Language Training Programme's curriculum is set to focus on language tutoring, reading and writing skills and a course on the culture of both countries.

"The Foreign Language Training Programme will ensure that tourism practitioners are adequately capacitated with a proficiency in Mandarin and Russian," the department said in a statement.

China has been one of South Africa's pivotal trade partners since the dawn of democracy in 1994 with the country being home to the continent's largest and oldest Chinese community.

In December last year, during the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), a total of 26 agreements worth R94bn were signed between China and South Africa.

Agreements included a \$2.5bn deal between Transnet and the Export and Credit Insurance Corporation of China (Sinasure) as well as a \$500m loan to power utility Eskom from the China Development Bank.

Total trade between South Africa and China experienced an upward trajectory since 2009, growing from R118bn to R271bn by the end of 2013.

While there is a trade imbalance between China and South Africa, according to government, both countries have implemented various mechanisms to address these discrepancies.

Earlier in 2015 President Jacob Zuma traveled to Moscow to meet with his Russian Counterpart Vladimir Putin to hold bilateral talks aimed at strengthening trade ties between the two BRICS partners.

According to the Presidency: "the leaders agreed on the need to intensify cooperation in various areas further including trade and to explore opportunities further in the areas of mining, energy and agriculture amongst others."