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Media Contact: Sunhee You, +82-44-203-2040, sunheeyou@korea.kr

Targets 20 Million Tourists, USD 24.5 Billion Tourism Revenue by 2024

Prime Minister HAN Duck Soo presided over the 8th National Tourism Strategy Meeting, focusing on: tourist convenience, regional tourism, and industry innovation to shape “South Korea’s Tourism Export Innovation Strategy”

<Key Points of “South Korea’s Tourism Export Innovation Strategy”>

【Strategy 1: K-Culture Linked Tourism Export Enhancement】

As part of the Visit Korea Year 2023–2024 initiative, the plan involves expanding group electronic visa fee waivers, increasing limits for immediate tax refunds on duty-free purchases, and improving transportation reservation services and payment methods

Intensive promotion of Korean tourism in 25 international cities through the “K-Tourism Roadshow,” large events such as the Korea Beauty Festival and K-Pop concerts, and the development of related tourism products

【Strategy 2: Boosting Regional Tourism with Local Content】

From 2024 to 2033, approximately KRW 3 trillion will be invested in Busan, Gwangju, Ulsan, Gyeongnam, and Jeonnam to enhance cultural, maritime, and recreational tourism infrastructure as part of the “Southern Region Mega-Tourism Development” project

Development of K-Food belts, representative regional festivals, and stay-over tourism

Establishment of “Regional Tourism Strategy Meetings” and “Regional Tourism Collaborative Bodies” to strengthen governance and cooperation between central and local governments

【Strategy 3: Industry Innovation through Convergence and Value Addition】

Easing medical tourist visas, selecting Korea’s representative healing tourism destination, opening a new Yeongjongdo resort complex equipped with shopping malls, performance halls, and water parks, and developing package products¹

Applying the E-9 employment permit system to the hotel and condo industry, expanding “Youth Job Leap Encouragement Fund” support in the travel industry to address workforce shortages

Operating joint inspection teams with public participation to eradicate low-price dumping and overcharging and establishing a “Fair Coexistence Center” for receiving and supporting unfair trade complaints to improve tourism quality

The government announced “South Korea’s Tourism Export Innovation Strategy” during the eighth National Tourism Strategy Meeting, chaired by Prime Minister HAN Duck Soo on December 8 at the Asia Culture Center in Gwangju Metropolitan City.

The National Tourism Strategy Meeting, established under the Framework Act on Tourism, is a government-wide body for establishing and coordinating tourism policies. Chaired by the Prime Minister and involving ministers from 13 departments, this body previously announced the “6th Tourism Promotion Basic Plan” during the Visit Korea Year 2023–2024, targeting 30 million foreign tourists by 2027.

“South Korea’s Tourism Export Innovation Strategy” was discussed in the eighth meeting of the National Tourism Strategy Meeting, which was attended by various government departments, private experts, and stakeholders. The strategy focuses on attracting 20 million foreign tourists and achieving USD 24.5 billion (KRW 32.3 billion) in tourism revenue by 2024, emphasizing enhancing tourist convenience, boosting regional tourism, and driving industry innovation.

Government: Prime Minister (Chair), Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism (Secretary), Ministry of Strategy and Finance, Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, etc.

Private Sector (8): YIM Hae Min, CEO of Creatrip, PARK Hyun Bong, Head of the Gangwon Tourism Organization, LEE Jae Woo, Representative of HanaTour ITC, SHIM Jun Beom, Head of Music Content Business at CJ ENM, LEE Yun Kyung, CEO of Channel K, YANG Won Il, Head of JEONJU Tourism Marketing Company Co., Ltd., SHIN Dong Hoon, CEO of Streaming House, OH Daniel, Social Media Reporter for Korea Tourism Organization Operations in 2023

Related Organizations (5): CEO KIM Jang Sil of the Korea Tourism Organization,

¹ For cases where treatment purposes are recognized, the duration of the Long-term Medical Tourism (G-1-10) visa will be extended from one year to two years

Chairman YOON Young Ho of the Korea Tourism Association, Chairman OH Chang Hee of the Korea Association of Travel Agents, Vice-chairman KIM Young Moon of the Korea Hotel Association, Chairman SHIN Hyun Dae of the Korea MICE Association

At the meeting, Prime Minister HAN stated, “Because of COVID-19, the number of foreign tourists, which had exceeded 17 million, drastically dropped to 970,000 in 2021, leading to difficult times for the industry, national, and local economies.” He added, “Fortunately, this year, we expect to surpass 10 million visitors for the first time in four years, indicating a recovery in the tourism market. As such, the government must exert every effort to ensure that our tourism industry achieves its best performance ever by 2024.”

He further instructed, “The government, local authorities, and the tourism industry must collaborate closely to promptly implement the innovative strategies discussed today. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism should regularly review and adjust these strategies.”

The details of the “South Korea’s Tourism Export Innovation Strategy” discussed today are as follows.

Strategy 1: K-Culture Linked Tourism Export Enhancement

Enhancing tourist convenience is a crucial factor in securing international competitiveness for attracting tourists post-COVID-19. The government will focus on significantly improving the convenience of K-Tourism, including immigration, shopping, and transportation.

To lower the barrier to visiting Korea, we will alleviate the visa fee burden. The group electronic visa fee waiver, temporarily applied only to Chinese tourists from September to December 2023, will be extended through 2024 and expanded to include Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

To boost shopping tourism, which contributes to foreign currency earnings and stimulates local economies and related industries, the government will double the limit for immediate tax refunds on duty-free purchases starting January 1 next year. Additionally, we aim to connect 1.8 million ZeroPay merchants with foreign apps for seamless payments and provide immediate tax refund services at duty-free shops, planning to increase the number of these shops to 40% of all duty-free outlets by 2024. A new duty-free shop will also be reopened at Incheon Port with a newly selected operator. ²

² The financial limit for a single instance is increased from KRW 500,000 to KRW 1 million, with the total limit raised from KRW 2.5 million to KRW 5 million

In line with the increasing trend of individual tourism, we will enhance domestic travel convenience after entry into Korea. The government, in collaboration with the private sector, will develop a mobility app exclusive for foreign tourists to assist with public transport reservations for trains, buses, and taxis and improve English services on navigation apps. We will also expand tourist interpretation guides using artificial intelligence to assist foreign tourists in navigating the country with ease.

Intensively promote Korean tourism during the “Visit Korea Year 2023–2024”

In collaboration with the private sector, the government will host large events throughout the year where potential tourists can experience Hallyu, shopping, beauty, and medical services. Starting with the “Korea Grand Sale,” set to take place early next year (January–February), the first “Korea Beauty Festival,” which combines beauty, fashion, and medical wellness, will be held in Gwanghwamun Square in June. In September, for the first time domestically, we will host a large-scale Hallyu festival that was previously held overseas, aiming to attract global Hallyu fans.

The “K-Tourism Roadshow” for comprehensive marketing in foreign countries will be expanded from 15 cities this year to 25 cities next year, and new (Provisional) Korean tourism promotion offices will be established in 10 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and New Zealand for market expansion. At Incheon Airport, the starting and ending point of Korean tourism, a K-Tourism and Culture Zone will be established to promote various attractions and major events using immersive content.

In collaboration with overseas K-brand franchises such as convenience stores and chicken shops, we plan to release limited edition private label products and conduct Korean tourism promotion campaigns, expanding the marketing frontiers for Korean tourism through public-private collaboration.

Enrich various Korean tourism contents by converging with K-Culture

We will develop tours linked with major international art fairs such as KIAF and Frieze (September 4–8, 2024) and expand the representative performing arts festival “Welcome to Daehangno.” Additionally, we plan to introduce custom-themed tours for Hallyu fans, such as “BTS Road,” and launch a “K-Culture Training Visa” for foreign youths participating in K-Culture training programs within this year.

The ongoing transformation of the Cheongwadae into a landmark for Korean tourism will continue.

We will expand themed tourism courses linked with nearby historical, cultural, and tourist resources (10 courses in 2023 to 20 in 2024), enhance exhibition and performance programs, and improve rest and convenience facilities to increase visitor satisfaction.

Leveraging the “2024 Gangwon Winter Youth Olympics” held from January 19 to February 2 in Gangwon Province, we will actively promote winter tourism products to the travel industry in China and Southeast Asia. We will support transportation to nearby festivals, such as the Daegwallyeong Snow Flower Festival. Additionally, plans are in place to further develop tourism products and training programs linked with major e-sports events, building on the global popularity of the “2022 Hangzhou Asian Games” gold medal and the “2023 League of Legends Championship” victory.

Strategy 2: Boosting Regional Tourism with Local Content

Advance the era of regional tourism by expanding large-scale regional tourism infrastructure and strengthening central-local governance.

The “Southern Region Mega-Tourism Development” project, a 10-year initiative (2024–2033), will be fully implemented. The government, local authorities, and private sectors will invest a total of KRW 3 trillion in Busan, Gwangju, Ulsan, Jeonnam, and Gyeongnam. This investment aims to develop stay- and experience-based tourist attractions in each region by integrating tourism resources such as coastal and inland areas, and the Dadohae islands with culture and technology, creating a “K-Tourism Resort Belt.” Additionally, approximately KRW 10 billion (USD 7.6 million) will be invested over four years (2023–2026) in Geomundo, Maldo, Myeongdo, Bangchukdo, Baengnyeongdo, Ulleungdo, and Heuksando to develop them as “K-Tourism Islands.”

The regional tourism promotion system will be strengthened. A new “Regional Tourism Strategy Meeting” will be established where 17 cities and provinces will discuss regional tourism promotion plans. Regional tourism councils in Gangwon, Chungcheong, Gyeongbuk, Gyeongnam, Honam, and other regions, involving airports, local governments, and industry stakeholders, will also operate to enhance the development and marketing of competitive regional products.

We will support the discovery of tourism content that reflects regional characteristics to transform the whole of Korea into a vast tourist destination.

For each of the five major regions nationwide, representative food content will be identified to establish the “K-Food Belt 30” and promote Korean gastronomic tourism internationally. Furthermore, potential cultural tourism festivals will be selected through a contest to be developed as “Global Festivals,” with support for an extended duration, securing one-stop transportation from

airports to festival venues, and enhanced foreign language guidance.

To address regional population decline, support for stay-over tourism will be strengthened. By the end of the year, a provisional “Digital Nomad Visa” will be introduced to facilitate workations, allowing domestic stays of 1–2 years. Additionally, the number of cities specializing in night tourism will increase from 7 to 10, including Tongyeong, Daejeon, and Busan. ³

Reflecting the growing demand for outdoor activities, bicycle tourism and walking trips will be promoted through course development, improved guidance systems, and stamp tours. In particular, the “Korea Trail,” which opens in full this March, will be developed into a world-class walking trail resource, with plans for inviting famous trail completers from abroad for exchanges and launching national participation campaigns.

Strategy 3: Industry Innovation through Convergence and Value Addition

We will focus on developing high-end tourism by leveraging South Korea’s competitive strengths, such as natural landscapes, traditional heritage, K-Culture, advanced industries, and safe living environments, to generate high added value.

Healing, meditation, beauty, and spa are among the themes for designating Korea’s representative healing tourism destinations, supported by integrated branding and marketing. Additionally, to make full use of Korea’s renowned medical technology for medical tourism, we will ease the issuance of medical tourism visas and expand tailor-made medical tourism products for patients undergoing treatments like dermatology and cosmetic surgery, often followed by tourism activities. Strategic marketing will also be implemented in a total of 12 countries, including new additions such as Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and Canada. ⁴

With the opening of a new complex resort in Incheon’s Yeongjongdo Island, equipped with a foreigner-exclusive casino, 5-star hotels, and a 15,000-seat performance hall, we will develop stay and transit tourism programs and package products utilizing the large performance hall to establish a hub for K-Pop concert tourism. Furthermore, we plan to establish the “5th International Meeting Industry Promotion Basic Plan (2024–2028)” in February to leap toward being “Asia’s No.1 International Meeting (MICE) Tourism Destination,” offering a blueprint for hosting and promoting

³ Workation is a portmanteau of “work” and “vacation,” referring to the practice of employees performing their regular work duties while on vacation, combining tourism and relaxation

⁴ For cases where the purpose of treatment is recognized, the extension period for the Long-term Medical Tourism (G-1-10) visa will be increased from the current one year to two years, effective August 28, 2023

international conferences.

To restore the tourism industry heavily affected by COVID-19, we will expand the supply of the workforce and continue to pursue the improvement of the quality of Korean tourism.

After piloting, we will develop and implement a plan to introduce the Employment Permit System (E-9) to the hotel and condo industry, and relax the criteria for the specific activity visa (E-7) for semi-professional staff (hotel reception clerks). We will also expand the “Youth Job Leap Encouragement Fund” support for the travel industry, allowing any employer with more than one insured person under employment insurance (previously five or more) to receive incentives for employing youth, actively addressing the industry’s workforce shortage.⁵⁶

To eradicate the recent social issue of overcharging, we will newly operate a “Public Participation Joint Inspection Team” and host a “Festival Food Fair Pricing Campaign” to improve the quality of services like accommodation, transportation, and food in major tourist areas. Additionally, a new “Fair Coexistence Center” will be established to support the travel industry with unfair trade complaints and legal consulting, and a continuous effort of self-regulation will be made through public-private cooperation and regular inspections.

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⁵ Employment Permit System: A system for introducing non-professional foreign labor (such as from Southeast Asia and other countries with which memorandums of understanding are signed) into sectors facing domestic labor shortages.

⁶ Employment visas for foreign professionals with specialized knowledge and skills are currently limited to receptionists in hotels with a foreign guest occupancy rate of over 40% from the previous year.