



TOURISM AROUND
THE WORLD MONTHLY

The interview of
Mr. Samuel Koo,
President and CEO of Seoul Tourism Organisation and
Seoul Convention Bureau during IT&CMA show,
08 October 2009
Bangkok, Thailand.



Seoul, Capital of South Korea is geographically a strategic centre for the Northeast Asian economy and a city with a wealth of talent in terms of its workforce. This provides foreign businesses with great opportunities to conduct business to their fullest potential.

Seoul boasts many natural resources with beautiful surrounding mountains and a river that unusually runs through this big city. In addition, Seoul City is concentrating its efforts on becoming even more environmentally aware by creating extensive greenery around the city.

Consistently ranked as one of the top 10 international conference destinations in the world and among the top 3 in Asia, Seoul's harmonious blend of ancient tradition and cutting edge technology makes it an obvious choice for meeting planners. The appeal begins with its accessibility, made easy thanks to two airports.

While attending the recent IT&CMA exhibition in Bangkok, Tourism around the World Publisher, Dimitri Laspas, took time to meet with Mr. Samuel Koo, President and CEO, of Seoul Tourism Organisation and Seoul Convention Bureau, in order to discover a little more about the success story of South Korea's Capital city, Seoul. Here is what he found out!

In your opinion what is the conference infrastructure in Seoul like and how would rate the level of service offered by hotels in Seoul?

Without question, the development and establishment of Seoul as a conference and trade exhibition destination is an important goal and market for tourism in South Korea. As such, conference/event tourism has seen an increase in Seoul over recent years. We are proud too that soon the capital will have its own new modern, state-of-the-art convention centre.

How do you think the global economic crisis has affected tourism in Seoul and how are the city's tourism sector coping with the situation?

Times are definitely hard. The current economic crisis is like nothing we have seen during the last decade. The global economic downturn is causing a serious and direct influence on the world's tourism industry but we can only try to ride the storm and come out the other side. We are seeing our neighbours and our major competitor destinations recording losses - some greater and others smaller - in both occupancy and in prices. The hoteliers in Seoul have already markedly improving their prices and their service to be more attractive. As a result, luckily South Korea is seeing a dramatic increase in incoming tourists.

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What do you think the future holds for conference tourism in Seoul and why should one select South Korea as the destination for its conference?

I believe there is a huge potential now and in the future for tourism in Seoul. The potential of Seoul as a cultural, city and lifestyle destination is unique. We have an extremely good tourism product which we are constantly working to improve in the according to the changing world.

One of the key attractions of Seoul for both leisure and business tourism is the superb transport facility in the city.

The extensive train and bus service connects every corner of Seoul quickly and efficiently.

The Seoul Tourism Organisation, with the support of the central government provide on-going support to the tourism industry including tax cuts for hotels, as part of the general tourism promotion effort.

With regards to Convention business, Seoul Tourism Organisation offers considerable financial assistance for each international convention or an exhibition attracted to Seoul. Indeed other cities also offer similar programmes.

In general how is the current (inbound) tourist flow in Seoul?

So far, 2009 has been a good year for inbound tourism for Seoul. The number of inbound visitors has increased by 15.3% year on year, reaching 3,792,355. We have seen increases in tourists from Tiawan, China and Malaysia too. We are sure that even with the negative global ecominic situation, Seoul will continue to see tourist growth up until the end of 2009 and into next year.

Why do you believe that Seoul is a safe destination for its visitors?

Seoul is undoubtedly a very safe destination. As inhabitants of the city, we have a different point of view and conception compared to visitors. A lot of negative press has been said about Seoul, but as they say 'you should not believe everything you read!' It is the government's aim to ensure the safety of everyone in the city not only inhabitants but visitors and tourists.

How does Seoul maintain its position as the Destination in the East part of the Asian continent?

Seoul Tourism has been keen to pursue diverse tourism marketing strategies to increase overseas tourists and MICE. Due to the high level of competition in the international tourism market, combined with increasingly sophisticated tourists, the marketing efforts need to be systematic, more aggressive and customer oriented. One of the successful tools Seoul Tourism is using is working closely in partnership with local businesses and in the sector of training and hospitality. Our position as a top destination these days is helped by the great number of Chinese tourists travelling to South Korea.

Seoul ranks 2nd after Singapore in the number of international conventions attracted in 2008 (according to the International Congress & Convention Association).

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Seoul

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How do you see the future of Seoul tourism in attracting European and Middle Eastern Business Travellers?

Until recently, Korea has not been among the top tourist destinations in Asia. But following vigorous efforts by central and local governments, combined with private sector backing and initiatives, Korea has been adding tourist attractions and mounting aggressive overseas marketing campaigns. Now Korea, and Seoul in particular, are beginning to appear on international media lists of 'desirable tourism destinations'. In 2008, the tourism industry accounted for 6.8% of the country's total gross domestic product (GDP), and there appears to be a wide recognition that the number will grow, thanks to strong government efforts.

Seoul, has been selected as the World Design Capital 2010, and has embarked on a huge effort to make Seoul more attractive through renovation and new construction projects; namely the Han River and Namsan Mountain Renaissance. Seoul is also being reborn as a green city with clean air and city buses running on natural gas.



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