

"The 3,000-year-old city of Xi'an, which was the country's capital for 13 dynasties, is pinning its hopes on growing foreign investment to attract more inbound tourists.

Its rich historical sites have brought Xi'an international fame, and Western travelers are already attracted to the ancient city.

Most tourists to Xi'an come from the United States and Europe, according to the local tourism authority.

"I'd really like to go to Xi'an someday, especially to see the terracotta warriors," said Kyle Sutherlin, a university researcher from the US, who has visited China but not Xi'an.

"I'm sure that there is tons of neat stuff to see there and the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda looks pretty cool," he added.

However, the current number of foreign tourists to the city does not reflect the potential pull of Xi'an's rich tourism resources.

Statistics from the National Tourism Administration reveal that more than 1 million international travelers visited Xi'an in 2011, and that number was exceeded in the first 11 months of 2012.

But in 2011, the city ranked 18th on a list of Chinese cities that welcomed inbound tourists.

"I hope the situation will change in the future, when more business travelers arrive in Xi'an," said Kang Lifeng, deputy director of Xi'an tourism administration.

The low number of business travelers is the main reason for the city's lack of inbound tourists, he added.

Kang can expect more foreign business travelers in 2013, because the whole province is working on absorbing foreign investment and enterprises.

The province anticipates it will attract 2.88 billion yuan (\$462 million) in foreign investment in 2012, a 22-percent increase compared with 2011, said Jia Mingde, deputy director of the commerce department of Shaanxi province.

More than 80 percent of foreign investment and trade in Shaanxi province is located in its capital, Xi'an, he added, because other regions in the province are not suitable for industrial investment.

More foreign companies have started to eye Xi'an because the central government has continually promoted the "go-west" campaign.

Samsung Group, headquartered in South Korea, located its new factory in Xi'an in July 2012. The first stage of the project involved \$7 billion - the largest single investment from a foreign company in China.

"I believe the project will help the number of South Korean visitors to Xi'an double after the factory begins operating in the middle of 2013," Kang Lifeng said.

There is room for massive growth in South Korean and Japanese visitor numbers, he said, because only 60,000 travelers from the two countries visited Xi'an in 2011, despite both countries being the biggest source of tourists to China.

To attract more business travelers, MICE tourism - meetings, incentives, conferencing and exhibitions - will be the focus of the city's tourist industry.

The city is building up more supporting facilities for MICE tourism.

The Xi'an Qujiang International Conference and Exhibition Group Co Ltd, which holds the most conferences and exhibitions in the city, opened its 76,000-square-meter conference center in December 2011, its exhibition center opened for business in 2007.

The conference and exhibition group saw a significant increase in business in 2012, said Ma Jianming, general manager of the group.

The growing MICE business and the tourism industry complement each other, Ma said.

Only when the city is attractive will exhibitors come, he said, and the tourist attractions in Xi'an lure the non-local exhibitors.

"The historical and cultural background will be a unique feature for the MICE industry in Xi'an," he said.

Traffic is another issue limiting the city's tourism industry, as the city only has 10 non-stop international routes and all the destinations are in Asia. "

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