



# Mutual visa-free policies prove a win-win for China, S. Korea

Waivers to boost tourism, economic growth for both, experts said

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Experts said that China and South Korea are set for a win-win result from their tourism cooperation after implementing mutual visa-free policies in succession, a move that will boost not only the tourism industry but also economic growth on both sides.

During China's eight-day National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival holiday in early October, tourism destinations and shopping malls in South Korea saw a surge of Chinese tourists, thanks to the implementation of the temporary visa-free policy by the South Korean government.

Under the policy, Chinese group tourists — consisting of three or more people — are allowed to enter South Korea without a visa from Sept 29 to June 30, 2026, and stay up to 15 days. Previously, only the country's Jeju Island gave such access, allowing Chinese individuals and group tourists to stay for up to 30 days with a visa waiver. That access is still valid.

"Thanks to the visa-free policy, the number of group tourists bound for South Korea from the National Day holiday till date has registered a growth of over 60 percent compared with September at our platform, while it has multiplied compared with the same period in 2024," said Liu Haomiao, a manager responsible for tour products to South Korea at domestic travel portal Tuniu.

He said travel to South Korea is a good idea now because of the short flight hours and the currently valid visa-free policy. "The popular scenic spots for Chinese travelers are the ancient Gyeongbokgung Palace and the shopping area of Myeong-dong in Seoul, as well as Hallasan in Jeju Island," he added.

"The government has set an ambitious target of drawing 5.36 million Chinese tourists this year, approaching the 6.02 million recorded in 2019 before the pandemic disrupted international travel ... The Bank of Korea estimates that an increase of 1 million Chinese group tourists could raise the gross domestic product by up to 0.08 percentage points," reported the Korea Herald, South Korea's English-language newspaper.

The visa-free travel rollout was a positive response to China's previous-



Tourists wait to enter a duty-free shop in Seoul, South Korea, on June 9. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY



**Left:** Making use of the visa-free policy, four South Korean tourists display entry stamps on their passports at Beijing Capital International Airport on Jan 28. CHEN ZHONGHAO / XINHUA **Right:** South Korean tourists take pictures in front of the renowned Peace Hotel in Shanghai on Nov 30 last year. CHEN HAOMING / XINHUA

ly launched visa-exemption policy for people of South Korea, and is bound to give a fillip to tourism and economic development on both sides.

The Chinese government announced in November 2024 that people holding regular passports of South Korea, on account of business trip, tourism, family visit, and transit, are allowed to enter the Chinese mainland free of visa from Nov 8, 2024 to Dec 31 this year for up to 15 days.

Encouraging reports have underlined the success of the policy. Figures from domestic travel portal Trip.com Group show that from November 2024 to mid-September

this year, tourism bookings by residents of South Korea to China increased by 131 percent year-on-year, as reported by Global Times.

As South Korea's Chuseok — the country's public holiday to celebrate the harvest and the full moon — coincidentally overlapped with the Chinese National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival holiday this year in early October, Trip.com Group said that many tourists from South Korea visited Chinese destinations like Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong and Dalian in the northeastern province of Liaoning during that period.

Chen Minsheng, an independent

tour guide in Zhangjiajie, Hunan province, which is also a popular Chinese destination among South Korean tourists, said that he is pleased to see the more friendly visa policies of the two countries.

"Many of my customers are elderly people aged around 60 from South Korea and I'm very happy that they come to China and see the beautiful views and experience different traditions in China. People-to-people communication is always the most heartwarming, which can deepen our mutual understanding and lay a solid foundation for cooperation between the countries," he said.

# APEC members bank on HK's 'superconnector' role in free trade network

By **LI LEI** in Hong Kong  
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Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation members have banked on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's role as the pivotal gateway to the Chinese mainland under the "one country, two systems" policy, with trade between the city and APEC members continuing to surge in the past nearly three decades.

Irina Fan, director of research at the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, credited the city's professional services and supply-chain expertise for enhancing its appeal as a key gateway to the mainland for other APEC members.

"Hong Kong acts as a superconnector and super-value-adder," Fan told China Daily.

Hong Kong joined APEC in 1991. After the city's return to the motherland in 1997, Hong Kong's membership has been maintained under the name "Hong Kong, China", a testimony to Hong Kong's autonomy in external trade and economic matters under "one country, two systems".

This distinct status, allowing Hong Kong to participate in APEC as a separate economy from the Chinese mainland, solidifies its role as a premier two-way facilitator for the world's second-largest economy.

Fan noted that about two-thirds of mainland-related investments were channeled through Hong Kong in 2024.

Official data shows that re-exports of goods through Hong Kong from and to the mainland reached HK\$3.78 trillion in 2024, accounting for 84.3 percent of the city's total re-export trade value.

For Hong Kong entrepreneurs, many of APEC's priorities are critical enablers for international growth, such as promoting trade and investment liberalization.

Hong Kong has expanded its free trade network to many APEC members, including Chile, Peru, Australia and New Zealand. In 2017, the city signed free trade and investment agreements with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, a move

Hong Kong acts as a superconnector and super-value-adder."

**Irina Fan**, director of research at the Hong Kong Trade Development Council

that has benefited seven APEC members — Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines.

Kevin To, founder of Hong Kong-based electric vehicle maker One Energy, said his company has an assembly line in Thailand and imports parts from the Chinese mainland. As both the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong have signed free trade agreements with ASEAN, the import and export costs of his products have been significantly reduced.

Fan said that as companies adopt resilient strategies to diversify production, Hong Kong has become a critical hub for this restructuring, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

The APEC agenda has shaped Hong Kong in many other ways. The city has been a pioneer in developing "Single Window" customs systems, a digital platform that fulfills a 2007 APEC strategy plan by eliminating trade choke points through a single document entry point.

Hong Kong also consistently advocates for the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, an initiative to integrate the region's patchwork of bilateral deals into a unified trade zone.

Concurrently, the city works to ensure the benefits of economic integration to its micro, small and medium enterprises, another APEC priority. The Hong Kong government has implemented funding programs to help them secure loans and explore new markets, alongside providing business information and technical advice.

This supportive ecosystem is a key advantage for innovators like To, whose startup has benefited from government policies and the resources of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Park.

# Academy making strides in deepening collaboration for healthy aging goals

By **WANG XIAOYU**  
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As demographic shifts reshape societies across the Asia-Pacific region, the APEC Health Science Academy, an affiliated center under the mechanism of the APEC Health Working Group with China as its focal point, has prioritized healthy aging as a central pillar of its mission this year, responding to one of the most profound challenges facing the region today.

Luo Yanan, vice-dean of the academy, said that 19 of the 21 economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation have entered an aging society, generally defined as having 10 percent of the total population aged 60 or above.

In China, the number of elderly aged 60 and above reached 310 million by the end of last year, constituting 22 percent of its total population. The nation has been actively responding to population aging for years.

"During meetings of senior officials of APEC this year, we have shared China's policies and experiences in promoting healthy aging, as well as its pilot programs and policy innovations that focus on providing comprehensive elderly care and combining medical and elderly care services," she said.

Luo added that the academy has also compiled a report aimed at improving healthy aging governance across the region.

"The report states that while most APEC economies have established aging policy frame-



Luo Yanan

works, significant gaps remain in areas such as curbing discrimination against old age, building age-friendly communities and strengthening long-term care

systems," she said.

Luo noted that the rise of digital and intelligent technologies offers a critical opportunity to build smart health systems tailored to the demands of the elderly.

"The academy will continue to deepen cooperation between APEC economies in healthy aging and share Chinese wisdom and solutions to help the region cope with the aging trend," she said.

The academy was officially established in 2015 to help advance population health across the Asia-Pacific region and deal with the rising challenges posed by cross-regional diseases.

In addition to fostering discussions and cooperation related to an aging society, Luo said that the academy has held a number of panels and forums on mental health and digital technologies, as well as public services for people with disabilities in recent years.

She said that the academy would strive to strengthen epidemic prevention, surveillance, response and recovery capabilities and improve well-being for all in the future.

# Cooperation promotes sustainable fishing in Yellow Sea

By **ZHAO YIMENG**  
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On a summer morning this year in the Huang-Bohai New Area of Yantai, Shandong province, volunteers transferred lively fish seedlings into water buckets. Nearby, team members carefully poured these buckets into an inflatable waterway, releasing the young fish. The seawater carried them toward the open sea, marking the sixth China-South Korea joint release of fishery resources for stock enhancement.

During the event, over three million seedlings of various species, including swimming crabs, greenfin horse-faced filefish, Korean rockfish, and blackhead seabream, were released into the Yellow Sea, an important fishing ground for fishermen from both China and South Korea.

Since the joint fish stocking event was launched in 2018, more than 11.46 million aquatic seedlings have been released into the waters to restore fish populations and improve the marine ecosystem, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Shan Xiujuan, an expert from the Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences under the ministry, said the fish stocking activities have significantly contributed to restoring economic fish populations in recent years. "They've helped protect the marine environment and improved the live-



Some 3.56 million fish seedlings are released into the Yellow Sea during the sixth China-South Korea joint release of fishery resources in Yantai, Shandong province, on July 29. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

lihoods of fishermen in both countries," said Shan, a researcher from the academy's Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute.

In recent years, the gazami crab, one of the most widely fished economic crab species, has become a concern for both China and South Korea as it is vital for both nations' cuisines and marine biodiversity. Both countries actively monitor the released crabs.

In 2022, Chinese marine biologists collected 29 parent crabs for release, and a survey found that eight of the 559 adult crabs recaptured were offspring of the released parents,

according to the ministry.

Starting in 2024, marine experts from the two countries began exchanging data on the gazami crab and agreed to develop a joint molecular marker detection system by 2026. "The system incorporates microsatellite (also known as Simple Sequence Repeat, or SSR for short) and single-nucleotide polymorphism, or SNP, markers, aiming to enhance tracking and evaluation of the released crabs," Shan said.

The resources of the Yellow Sea are crucial for the sustainable development of the fishing industry and the well-being of fishermen in both

countries. In 2000, the two nations signed a mutual fisheries agreement. The long-term and stable implementation of the agreement over the past two decades demonstrates the goodwill and joint efforts of both China and South Korea to pursue common development, the ministry said.

The two sides have cooperated in areas such as fishery resources conservation, maintenance of order in marine operations, and protection of fishermen's rights, greatly contributing to sustainable fishery development in the region.

Over the years, China and South Korea have established various dialogue mechanisms, including a joint committee on fishery and high-level talks, regularly discussing fishery issues to foster mutual understanding and cooperation.

In April, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's Oceans and Fisheries Working Group hosted a workshop in Busan, South Korea, focusing on best practices for preventing and combating illegal fishing. As APEC members, China and South Korea have been working to strengthen vessel management and combat illegal fishing activities through joint patrols in designated areas, the ministry said.

China is eager to continue its partnership with South Korea, further deepening cooperation and expanding the scope of joint efforts to ensure the healthy development of the fishery industry, it added.