The Moscow Times
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North Korea Targets Russian Tourists with New Beach Resort

June 26, 2025



KCNA

North Korea has opened a new beach resort aimed at attracting Russian tourists, South Korea's Unification Ministry said Thursday.

The Wonsan Kalma resort, located on the country's eastern coast near a former missile testing site, is set to open for domestic tourists in July.

The new beach resort was originally scheduled to be completed in April 2019 to mark the birthday of North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung, but sanctions-related difficulties in obtaining construction materials and the Covid-19 pandemic delayed the project, the Korean Herald reported.

According to the BBC, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un grew up in Wonsan, where many of the country's elite reside, and has long expressed a desire to develop the region.

Spanning a four-kilometer stretch of coastline, the development features hotels, restaurants,

shopping centers and a water park. Both budget accommodations and VIP cottages are available, alongside hotels offering a wide range of amenities, according to North Korean state media agency KCNA.

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KCNA reported that "the tourist zone is equipped with hotels and inns capable of accommodating around 20,000 people, allowing domestic and international visitors to choose accommodations that suit their preferences."

At the opening ceremony, Kim hailed the project as a "prelude to the new era" of North Korea's tourism industry.

Russian Ambassador Alexander Matsegora attended the event as a guest of honor.

Tour operators cited by the BBC have indicated that the resort is expected to cater primarily to Russian tourists.

"The fact that the Russian ambassador was invited and highlighted [in the state media report] also appears to have been intended with Russian tourists in mind," the Korean Herald quoted an anonymous Unification Ministry official as saying.

The opening comes amid a period of strengthened relations between North Korea and Russia.

The two countries resumed cross-border rail service this week, while a Russian airline asked authorities to launch a direct air route between Moscow and Pyongyang.

Elliott Davis, director of Uri Tours, a private tour operator that helps Westerners travel to North Korea, told the BBC that the hermit kingdom holds "niche appeal" for certain travelers.

"It's intriguing to experience something as familiar as a beach resort that's been shaped within the unique cultural context of North Korea," he said.

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