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North Korea Bars Foreign Tourists From New Resort After Lavrov Visit

By AFP

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KCNA

North Korea has barred foreign tourists from a newly opened beach resort, the country's tourism administration said this week, just days after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited the area.

The sprawling seaside resort on its east coast, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's pet project, opened to domestic visitors earlier this month to great fanfare in state-run media.

Dubbed "North Korea's Waikiki" by South Korean media, the Wonsan-Kalma Coastal Tourist Zone appears to be lined with high-rise hotels and waterparks, and can purportedly accommodate approximately 20,000 people.

State media previously said visits to Wonsan by Russian tour groups were expected in the coming months.

However, following Lavrov's visit, the North's National Tourism Administration said "foreign tourists are temporarily not being accepted" without giving further details, in a statement posted on its official website this week.

Kim showed a keen interest in developing North Korea's tourism industry during his early years in power, analysts have said, and the coastal resort area was a particular focus.

He said ahead of the opening of the beach resort that the construction of the site would go down as "one of the greatest successes this year" and that the North would build more large-scale tourist zones "as quickly as possible."

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The North last year permitted Russian tourists to return for the first time since the pandemic, and Western tour operators briefly returned in February this year.

Seoul's unification ministry, however, said that it expected international tourism to the new resort was "likely to remain small in scale" given the limited capacity of available flights.

Kim held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Wonsan last week where he offered Moscow his full and "unconditional" support for its war in Ukraine, KCNA reported.

Lavrov reportedly hailed the seaside project as a "good tourist attraction," adding it would become popular among both local and Russian visitors looking for new destinations.

Ahead of Lavrov's recent visit, Russia announced that it would begin twice-a-week flights between Moscow and Pyongyang.

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