

## Xi: Tourism important for progress

China, with long history, rich culture and beautiful scenery, welcomes tourists from all over the world, President Xi Jinping said in a congratulatory letter to an international tourism meeting on Wednesday.



UN World Tourism Organization assembly attendees look over promotional products in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Wednesday. [Photo/China News Service]

“Tourism is an important channel for different countries and cultures to communicate with each other, an effective way of developing a country’s economy and a key industry to improve people’s lives,” he said in the letter to the 22nd General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

The biennial officially kicked off on Wednesday in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province. Activities started on Monday and the event runs through Saturday.

More than 1,000 representatives from 130 countries and regions are attending the meeting to discuss using sustainable tourism as a development tool and reinforcing Belt and Road tourism cooperation.

Xi said China pays great attention to the development of the tourism industry, which accounts for more than 10 percent of the country’s economy and employment. In the next five years, Chinese tourists will make 700 million outbound trips.

He said the UNWTO plays a positive role in promoting the development of global tourism and strengthening international tourism cooperation.

“We hope all nations can utilize the opportunities of the meeting and push the tourism industry globally for greater development together,” he said.

Vice-Premier Wang Yang, who attended the meeting, said China joined the UNWTO in 1983. Tourism has grown from a marginal to a major industry for the country’s economy during the past three and a half decades, Wang said.

But China is not a “tourism power” yet, he said, and needs further development through expanded, deepened cooperation.

Taleb Rifai, secretary-general of the UNWTO, said China has become a world leader in all paths of life over the past decade and tourism is no exception.

“It is very inspiring to see China’s commitment to international cooperation and tourism at the highest level,” he said.

Li Jinzao, director of China National Tourism Administration, said the Belt and Road Initiative has created a larger tourism market among countries involved. There were at least 25 million tourist trips between China and other countries involved in the initiative in 2014 alone.

An initiative for tourism cooperation among nations involved in the initiative was formed during the meeting to improve tourism facilitation and quality and to face challenges and risks together.

“The Chengdu initiative sets out how we can harness tourism’s potential and share our resources through large-scale partnerships to create a better future,” Rifai said.