

Beat: News

N. Korea resumes domestic flights as tourism jumps 20 percent

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USPA News - North Korea has reopened some of its domestic flight routes for the first time in years after the number of foreign tourists arriving in the reclusive country jumped by 20 percent during the first six months of the year, representatives confirmed on Tuesday. Air Koryo, the country's sole airline, said in an advertisement published by the state-owned newspaper Pyongyang Times that it will resume domestic flights from mid-July.

"The flights will take local and foreign tourists and businesspeople to scenic attractions and economic development zones," the airline said. The advertisement said it will offer flights between the capital Pyongyang and Sondok Airport in South Hamgyong province on Mondays, flights between Pyongyang and Orang Airport near the city of Chongjin on Tuesdays, and flights between Pyongyang and Samjiyon Airport in Ryanggang province on Wednesdays. Chinese tour operator Young Pioneer Tours (YPT) said Air Koryo restarted the domestic flights on Monday. "Indicative of the changing face of tourism in North Korea, the availability of regular domestic flights is set to increase the opportunity to travel within the DPRK," the tour operator said, referring to North Korea by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Foreigners previously had to charter aging Soviet-era aircraft to fly between cities, a journey which can take several days by rail or road. "Regular flights like this have not been scheduled before - at least not in the six years we've been doing this," said Troy Collings of Young Pioneer Tours. The news came as Korea International Travel Agency head Ham Jin told the pro-North Korean newspaper Choson Sinbo that, when compared to the same period last year, the number of foreign tourists entering North Korea had jumped by 20 percent during the first half of 2014. The vast majority of foreign tourists are from China, estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands a year, but the number of Westerners has also increased in recent years. Tuesday's news indicates that recent incidents in which foreign tourists were arrested by North Korean authorities have not discouraged people from visiting the reclusive country. North Korea said late last month that it will prosecute two American tourists who were arrested earlier this year following two separate incidents. An Australian tourist was also arrested in February but later released and expelled after apologizing in a public confession.

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