

Singapore expects tourist total to double

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Singapore projects that the number of arrivals in the city-state will double to 12-14 million in 2023 from the previous year, as it sees more flights and Chinese visitors following the lifting of strict COVID restrictions.

The number of forecast international visitors, however, will be around two-thirds to three-quarters of that before the pandemic in 2019.

Singapore Tourism Board said total tourism receipts are expected to reach as much as 21 billion Singapore dollars (around \$16 billion), up from a preliminary estimate of about SG\$14 billion in 2022.

"We are in a very good place to continue to have Chinese arrivals come back strongly now that they have made announcements about relaxing measures," STB Assistant Chief Executive Juliana Kua told reporters on Tuesday (Jan 17).

Singapore became one of the first countries in Asia to lift COVID-19 restrictions last year. Unlike Japan and South Korea, the city-state has not stepped up its rules on Chinese travelers following the country's reopening on Jan. 8.

STB Chief Executive Keith Tan said Chinese visitors to Singapore this year are

expected to come in "between 30 to 60%" of the 2019 level, when the city-state saw 3.6 million arrivals from the country, the largest contributor by market.

Barring unexpected circumstances, the STB said it projects overall international visitor arrivals will recover to pre-pandemic levels by 2024.

The stronger numbers come after visitor arrivals to Singapore reached 6.3 million in 2022, exceeding the agency's earlier forecast of 4 million to 6 million. The number was still a third of the pre-pandemic level in 2019.

Overall, Tan noted there is "very strong demand" in key markets to travel to Singapore. But supply-side factors, notably international flight capacity, could moderate the recovery of the country's tourism industry.

As of January, flight connections between Singapore and China were less than 10% of the pre-pandemic level, STB said.

"We are now, at this point, cautiously optimistic that supply-side factors will reach some degree of normalcy by the end of 2023," Tan added.

STB said it will continue to work with the tourism sector to ramp up hiring to meet the higher demand.

As of September, Singapore had a total of 65,000 workers in the tourism sector, about 78% of the 2019 level, STB said, as many workers had left during the pandemic.

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