

Japanese ambassador: Spread the message about Laos' charms to Japanese tourists

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The many attractions of Laos are unknown to most Japanese so the number of its citizens visiting the country has not reached its full potential, the Japanese Ambassador to Laos said in a recent interview.

"Laos has huge potential for tourism but in my opinion this potential has not been fully exploited," Ambassador Takeshi Hikihara said on Friday.

"The most important think for Laos is to make your country known to other people."

Ambassador Hikihara made the comment during an interview with *Vientiane Times* and the Lao News Agency at his residence in Vientiane.

Many Japanese who visit Laos for the first time fall in love with the country and want to return again and again, he observed.

"But many Japanese have no reason to come to Laos for the first time because they don't know Laos. They don't know about its charms and beauty," he said.

In September 2017, a four-day Tourism Expo was held in Tokyo and the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism of Laos sent goodwill ambassadors there with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and private Lao companies. About 200,000 people visited the Expo.

The ambassador recommended that Laos continued to participate



Ambassador Takeshi Hikihara gives an interview.

in the Expo, saying it was the most effective form of advertisement for Lao tourism in Japan.

It was important for Laos to reach out to promising tourism markets such as Japan, Europe and America, he added.

The embassy has observed that more and more Japanese people have taken holidays in Laos in recent years.

In 2016, almost 50,000 Japanese came to Laos.

Global tour agents also say that people in many parts of the world do not know about the beauty and charms of Laos, even though it is very picturesque, has stunning landscapes and is culturally interesting because of the colourful traditions of its 49 ethnic groups.

Founder of Travelindex, one of the world's largest travel and tourism indexes and directories which owns 71 websites including the Visit Laos Website, Mr Bernard A. Metzger,

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suggested that Laos should produce and publish much more information about tourism.

"What we need from you or the government is content. There is never enough content," he told *Vientiane Times* during a recent visit to Laos.

He said that many local tour operators have good content in their brochures, but the content available on websites and YouTube is very limited.

"YouTube is number one for travel videos," he said, referring to the critical need to post travel videos on YouTube.

Limited information about tourism in Laos

remains a problem even though the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism has engaged in promotion campaigns at global events and exhibitions to make the country better known to the outside world.

Launching Visit Laos Year 2018, Lao authorities have invested more in advertising and promotion campaigns both in Laos and at global events in an attempt to boost the number of people both from home and abroad taking holidays in the country.

Campaign activities prepared for Visit Laos Year 2018 comprise events in Laos and other countries,

including Lao Night at the ATF 2018 in Chiang Mai, Thailand; a Cocktail Party at ITB Berlin 2018 in Germany; participation in the SMT Tourism Exhibition in Paris, France; Lao Night at the Lao Festival in Tokyo, Japan; Lao Night at the ITE HCM in Vietnam; and participation in the international tourism exhibition, WTM London, United Kingdom.

Visit Laos Year 2018's activities are also being advertised in all Lao media outlets, CNN, and the International Biz News magazine of Europe.

The government has set a target to attract at least 5 million foreign visitors in 2018.