

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LA mayor opens tourism office in China

Mon Oct 9, 2:28 PM ET - Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, on a trip to China, opened a first-of-its-kind city tourism office in Beijing on Monday that he hopes will encourage travel to his hometown and pump hundreds of millions of dollars into its economy.

"Los Angeles is putting down a permanent welcome mat for the tens of millions of Chinese tourists who will visit our great city in the coming years," Villaraigosa said in a statement. "More tourism means more jobs and a healthier economy."

The announcement in a Beijing office complex came on the second day of Villaraigosa's two week trip to China, where he was eager to pitch Los Angeles as full of opportunities for the expanding markets of China, South Korea and Japan — the city's top three trading partners.

"Our ability to connect our diverse city with those economies is key to our future," he said.

The tourism office, run by the convention and visitors bureau, will target Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. It will market Los Angeles as an attractive business and leisure destination, and travel agents will help provide resources for international travel.

The office expects to vie for a good share of an anticipated 100 million Chinese travelers who are expected to visit the United States annually by 2020.

Villaraigosa was joined on his trade mission by several dozen of Los Angeles' most powerful business and labor leaders. They, as well as economists in Los Angeles, said the \$500,000 price tag of the mayor's trip was worth the investment. International trade accounts for the largest number of jobs — about 450,000 — in Los Angeles County, followed by tourism and film and television production, the experts said.

During his tour, Villaraigosa planned to announce more than \$200 million in investments by Korean banks and development companies in various Los Angeles construction projects. He also was to announce a promotional tourism campaign targeting customers of Japanese convenience stores. Villaraigosa's aides said Los Angeles was the first city in the world to open a tourism office in Beijing. Other states and countries have similar operations in place, however. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger made a similar trip to China last year and Villaraigosa's three predecessors also went to China. The cost of the mayor's trip was being borne by the city's port, airport agency and the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, isn't the first by a California official. Business leaders were paying their own way.

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