

## **Interview: Mexican official says direct air route between Mexico, China likely to open in 2011**

By Maja Wallengren

MEXICO CITY, July 10 (Xinhua) -- A new direct air route between Mexico and China is expected to open before the end of 2011, a tourism official has said.

In an interview with Xinhua, Rodolfo Lopez Negrete, director of the Tourism Promotion Council of Mexico's Tourism Ministry, said opening a new direct route between Mexico City and Beijing is seen as one of the ministry's top priorities, and they are discussing the issue with several international airlines.

"China is one of the main priorities for Mexico," Lopez said, adding that Mexico has a special investment in the budget for tourism promotion in China.

"There are a number of opportunities that we are working on in order to improve the connectivity between Mexico and China, and we are sure that if we can get a direct flight between Mexico City and Beijing, we will see a major increase in the number of tourism arrivals," he said.

Lopez said progress had been made in talks with China's Hainan Airlines, Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific and Mexico's Aeromexico.

"Talks with Hainan Airlines are quite advanced, although we still don't have anything confirmed," he said.

Tourism authorities are also talking with Aeromexico to "explore the possibility of adding a flight to Beijing," Lopez said. Aeromexico currently has a direct flight to Shanghai with a stop in Mexico's northern city Tijuana, and passenger numbers on these flights are impressive.

Lopez said they are also considering opening a flight between Mexico and Hong Kong.

"There is interest from Cathay Pacific to establish a flight to Mexico from Hong Kong via San Francisco or Los Angeles," he said.

The number of Chinese tourists in Mexico has nearly doubled in the past two years, up to 30,000 in 2011 from just over 16,000 in 2009, Lopez said, adding that Mexico's goal is to receive at least 100,000 Chinese tourists in the next few years.

As part of the many initiatives to promote the influx of Chinese tourists to Mexico, the ministry and the Promotion Council have worked closely together with Mexican embassies and consulates in China to speed up the processing of tourist and business visas for Chinese nationals, Lopez said.

"The visa processing mechanism is very important. We have established as a goal that visas should be processed in a period of a maximum 72 to 96 hours, and at most of the

Mexican embassies and consulates, the time has already been reduced to 72 hours," he said.

Both Mexico and China, which are among the world's top 10 tourist destinations, will benefit from a new direct route with increasing tourist arrivals, Lopez said.

"Mexico has a high level of respect and admiration for China and the ancient Chinese culture, and Chinese tourists have a high respect and admiration for Mexico," the official said, adding that this creates two highly complementary markets.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, China was one of the world's top four tourist destinations with 52.2 million international arrivals in 2009. Mexico ranked the 10th most visited destination with 21.5 million arrivals in that year.