



Chinese consuls help push tourism

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QUEENSLAND'S efforts to lure Chinese tourists are being supported by Beijing's diplomats in Brisbane who are working hard to secure more direct flights to the state.

Consul-General Ren Gongping said he hoped carriers could move from November-February seasonal flights to regular services all year around.

This backs up an \$8 million push by the Queensland

and Federal governments to lure China's middle class to holiday in Queensland.

The bid has gained urgency because of falling numbers of Japanese tourists and the decision by Qantas to halt flights between Cairns and Japan later this year.

More Chinese visitors are coming to Queensland with 161,000 tourists visiting in 2007 — up from 125,000 the previous year.

Mr Ren, however, said these official figures were not very accurate as many visitors came through Sydney

and Melbourne before heading north to the Gold Coast and the Great Barrier Reef. The real number was probably about 270,000, despite visitors restricted by the difficulties getting airline tickets.

At present China Eastern flies from Shanghai to Brisbane during the northern high season from November to February. It was possible, Mr Ren said, to extend the services over five or six months.

His next aim is to get China Southern to open direct flights from Guangzhou

to Queensland and is hopeful that this could expand from seasonal flights to an all-year service.

"They will visit Brisbane very soon," he said.

"I believe in the near future they have to make a decision. Hopefully they can fly here all year around. We are very positive about Brisbane. Queensland is booming ... we do need direct flights."

Read the full interview in David Costello's blog at www.couriermail.com.au