

A LOT TO OFFER

Seychelles punts its tourist potential in China

With 115 islands scattered about in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, Seychelles is a country far removed from the concrete jungle and stress of modern urban area lifestyles. It is precisely because of the idealic weather, outdoor charm and laid-back ambiance that Seychelles is making a big push to capture the lucrative market of high-end tourism. Yet one big challenge that may scupper these tourism ambitions is the debilitating effects of climate change. Rising sea levels linked to global warming threaten to drown many of these islands. It is for this reason that the island nation has a particular interest in the Copenhagen Summit on climate change taking place in December this year. Seychelles President James Alix Michel, who was in Beijing recently to promote his country's tourism attractions to China's growing outbound market, shared his views on bilateral relations, tourism and the climate change with *ChinAfrica*. Excerpts follow:

ChinAfrica: You are here to promote your country's tourism features in China. How can Seychelles attract Chinese tourists?

James Alix Michel: I think Seychelles has the natural beauty and charm to attract Chinese tourists. But I think what is missing is the promotion of Seychelles in China. I know a lot of Chinese now have the means to travel and an increasing number of Chinese are traveling abroad. I think Seychelles needs to do more promotion in China. This is exactly what we are doing today in order to make Seychelles known to Chinese people.

Also, we are looking at the possibility of air links. This is I think will also encourage tourists from China to Seychelles. Seychelles provides a variety of attractions and I believe we can attract a lot of Chinese people. We have beautiful beaches, the sea that is very suitable for diving and for fishing, and also we have the environment and the unique culture of the island people.

You have been to China several times. Are there any differences now to be compared to your previous trips?

Yes, I have been to China many times and visited many cities. I like China very much. It's a good country. As a president, it is my third visit. My first visit was during the Beijing Summit of FOCAC (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation) when I met with Chinese President Hu Jintao. The second time was during the Olympic Games. I think each time I come to China, I see very positive changes and the attitude of development. China is a country that is developing very fast, and is becoming very strong economically - one of the most important economic powers in the world.

One thing that my country and I appreciate about China is the sincere friendship and partnership that exists between China and other developing countries like Seychelles. Between Seychelles and China, there are not only state-to-state relations, but also the personal friendship between President



Seychelles President James Alix Michel

Hu Jintao and I. President Hu Jintao has been to Seychelles. I think the relation can only grow further and be enhanced so that we can strengthen our cooperation and special relations between China and Seychelles, and the Chinese people and the people of Seychelles.

We appreciate a lot the progress China is making because as a developing country, when China succeeds, the developing countries will also succeed.

What are your expectations of the coming Copenhagen Summit in December? How can we cooperate in combating climate change?

First of all, [I would like to talk about the Copenhagen Summit]. I think the summit is one of the most crucial [mechanisms we have] to deal with the future of our planet and the future of humanity that we are having so far. As far as the small island states are concerned, we have made our position very clear that the world has to take action to reduce carbon emissions and stop the warming of the oceans. Our planet is heading for disaster. What is worse for small island states is that we will disappear, lose our human rights to exist as a country. When global warming emerges, the sea level is going to rise, many islands will disappear. So, for us, it is a question of survival, especially the islands in the Indian Ocean; some of the islands will be flooded.

Fortunately, most of our islands are mountains, but our coastal areas are going to be affected. Thus, the Copenhagen Summit is very crucial to our survival. I hope the nations of the world will take the responsibilities at that summit and come to concrete solutions to take actions to save our planet.

Chinese President Hu Jintao made a speech at the UN Climate Change Summit on September 22. I think President Hu Jintao's [ideas] coincide with our own. The point is necessary in pointing out the direction of ensuring that we combat climate change and that we try to balance development and climate change to ensure they are sustainable.

Also, we will look how to change the ways we do things, and how we change the way we carry out development in order to protect our environment. You know we have to make our environment compatible with the development that we make so that we have a sustainable way of developing our countries and economies. This is where China can help small island countries with renewable energy projects.

China has got vast expertise in solar heating and other environmentally friendly technologies. In small island states, we don't know how to use the resources. This is where China can help small island countries to develop such kind of energy so that we can become more environmentally sustainable and be able to develop along the lines where we prevent the problem of the warming of the earth.

I noticed that you personally met Chinese volunteers recently. How do you regard the importance of the non-governmental exchanges in promoting our bilateral relations between our two countries?

I think it [non-governmental exchange] is very good. Apart from government-to-government cooperation, people-to-people cooperation is also very important and the work can be translated into action if we have commitment of the non-governmental organizations to go forward to other countries to Africa in various aspects. I can say this expertise contributes their share to governments in the countries where you are.

People can learn from each other about culture and the way of life. When we get together, we can understand each other better and now we can get along better and develop our friendship, which I think is necessary if we are to be involved in a world where the human race is happy. My country does appreciate the services of the volunteers. Perhaps in the future we can also send some volunteers to China so that we can have more exchanges.

I am happy to say at the moment we have about 50 Seychellois studying in China. This is a part of the process. They learn Chinese language and when they go back [home], they are very happy to share Chinese culture. So, I think the changes are very important.

Would you please brief us on your country's preparation for the coming Shanghai Expo?

The preparation is very good. Our ambassador in Beijing, Mr. Philip Legall has been elected a member of the coordination committee of the organization of the Expo. I am very happy that the Expo is held in China and we supported it from the very beginning. We are actively participating in the Expo. We cooperated with the Chinese side in the designing of our pavilion. I think it is going to be a success for every country to showcase itself not only to China, but also to the world to see what we are doing and what we can offer. ■