NT aims for more Japanese visitors

By TONY NELSON

The number of Japanese visitors to the Territory could soar more than six-fold under a strategy to be recommended to the NT Government.

The strategy is aimed at lifting the Territory’s share of the market from 3 per cent of total Japanese visitors to Australia to 7 per cent by the year 2000.

This would mean an increase from an estimated 20,000 in 1992 to a projected 130,000 in eight years.

The strategy depends on charter flights from Japan direct to the Territory, and greater availability of seats through expansion by Qantas and other operators in Asia.

Potential

It also requires intensive marketing of the Top End.

The Deputy Chief Minister, Mr Barry Coulter, will brief the Government and the NT Tourist Commission this week on the potential of the Japanese market.

Mr Coulter returned on Friday from a rush trip to Tokyo to meet leading Japanese tour wholesalers who were concerned at the closure of the NTTC’s Tokyo office.

He also spoke to the Australian Tourist Commission and to Japanese tour organisations and airlines servicing Australia.

Mr Coulter said the wholesalers saw the Territory as a huge growth area, but only if they could get tourists here on a comparable cost basis to other Australian destinations.

It was a bonanza waiting to happen, Mr Coulter said.

The problem of cost was the main message he received, but there was also a need for the Top End to be marketed more vigorously.

Mr Coulter cited a tour brochure from Jetour Australia for Japanese holiday-makers which showed costs of about 109,000 yen ($A1170) to get to major Australian destinations, but at least 200,000 yen ($A2125) to include Ayers Rock on the itinerary.

In other words, it was almost twice as expensive to get Japanese tourists to the NT.

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If Japanese flights came directly to the Territory, the “add-on” component would largely disappear.

Mr Coulter said he would recommend the Government make aviation policy the point of much greater focus.

But the problem of air travel could not be underestimated - or solved easily.

Japanese aircraft could theoretically land in the Territory, but under present Australian aviation policy would have to give up some landing rights on the lucrative eastern seaboard.

There was also a problem of tight berthing at Japanese airports.

At Norita, for example, Qantas had just 18 berths and could not get any more.

But opportunities would arise when Qantas merged with Australian next year and if Ansett was allowed to set up in Asia.

Mr Coulter said on the matter of overseas NTTC offices including Tokyo closing, talks had been held with the Tourism Minister, Mr Roger Vale, the Chief Minister, Mr Marshall Perron, and the NTTC interim chairman, Mr Jeff Weigh.

Mr Vale would make announcements soon.