

Hello Kitty Named Japan Tourism Ambassador

The cartoon cat will represent Japanese tourism in China and Hong Kong.

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Japan's tourism ministry named Hello Kitty, one of its most popular cartoon characters, tourism ambassador in China and Hong Kong. Officials believe Hello Kitty will tap into a fan base that includes children and young women, encouraging a larger flow of tourists into Japan, The Associated Press reports.

Hello Kitty's new appointment is "an honor," said Shintaro Tsuji, president of Sanrio Co., which designed Hello Kitty's image in 1974. Tsuji added that Hello Kitty will "work hard to attract many visitors."

By adding Hello Kitty as a goodwill tourism ambassador — along with Korean singer Younha, Japanese actress Yoshino Kimura and Japanese pop/rock duo Puffy AmiYumi — the Japanese tourism ministry hopes to achieve its goal of attracting 10 million overseas visitors each year. The number of foreign tourists has grown steadily since the government began a "Visit Japan" campaign in 2003, with 8.35 million people visiting last year.