

SHANGHAI: VISA-FREE STAY LURING TOURISTS



Shanghai is making considerable efforts towards cementing its status as a global destination of choice by letting visitors who are jetting in stay in the city for 3 days without a visa. If permitted by the central government, the city will spread out this strategy to the cruise terminals.

Tax-refund centers and duty-free outlets will be established there, according to Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration. This strategy was first proposed by Zhao Wen, Shanghai's Deputy Mayor, in March. It is likely to be implemented in the course of the year.

Since the beginning of the year, air travelers from 45 countries have enjoyed a 3 day visa-free stay in Shanghai's 'administrative area'. This move has seen a rise in the number of tourists and their spending.

Tourists bearing third-country visas and plane tickets can apply for visa-free transit at Pudong and Hong-Quiao airports. Prior to this arrangement, tourists flying from 32 specific countries were allowed a 2 day visa-free stay.

According to Chen Ping, who is in charge of incoming and outgoing tourism in the administration, an early research for a viable strategy is more essential than running around when trouble has already began. He noted that adequate thought needs to be given to potential problems that may be presented by the new policy. The administration is still awaiting authorization from national customs and finance organizations.

According to Chen, it is not easy to estimate the precise benefits of the new policy since tourists arriving in cruise ships map out their travel plans well in advance, as opposed to business travelers. The program however is in line with the city's plan to improve its tourism and cruise industries.

Upcoming policies and programs are further opening up Shanghai to the world. The cruise industry is no longer a preserve of the high-and-mighty, and every seaside city such as Shanghai, Sanya and Tianjin must cash in on it to improve tourism. Shanghai now becomes the first testing ground for the advancement of China's cruise industry, after an approval from the National Tourism Administration.

This year, Shanghai's cruise terminals have witnessed high traffic due to policies that have ensured that even ordinary people can afford a vacation. In March alone, Wusong and Beiwaitan ports handled about 90,000 passengers, representing a 60% increase.

Other experts such as Zhang Fubao, Shanghai Port International Cruise Terminal general manager and Gu Xiaoming, a professor, agree that the visa-free program will go a long way in helping Shanghai compete with other sea ports; and stand out as a global destination of choice.

Jiang Wenjun who oversees incoming tourists from North America and Europe at China International Travel Service in Shanghai noted that 10% of them travel by cruise. This proportion has experienced no growth over the years, partly because the travel market in China is wanting.

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