

CHINA'S GOLDEN WEEK WAS NOT GOLDEN FOR EVERYBODY



From October 1st to 7th each year, Chinese employees are given the chance to enjoy a week long break and spend time with their family at top tourist spots and facilities as a part of the annual 'Golden Week'. The fact that this year's Golden Week encouraged 428 million tourists to travel through China and brought in a revenue of 223.3 billion yuan (36.5 billion U.S. Dollars) should be cause for celebration across the country but while many are cheering the results, a significant number of workers are questioning the real worth of the national holiday and hoping for some changes in the future.

The initial economic reports paint a great picture and make this year's holiday seem like a great success.

Starting with the positives, the economic forecasts have shown some encouraging figures and trends and **officials are calling 2013's Golden Week a huge success**. Economists with the Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Lu Ting and Robbie Li, have compiled an encouraging report that talks about great data and improvements - apparently resulting from the current employment rate, higher wages and general sense of consumer confidence - and there are figures showing that the country's top 125 tourist attractions reached an impressive 8.4 million visitors on Monday and Tuesday alone.

There is a sense that the current state of the country and its change in financial attitudes from saving for necessities to spending on luxuries has contributed to this 18.8% increase and high revenue but there are many additional factors and incentives being highlighted.

A lot of work has been put into making the country tourist-friendly for Golden Week such as improved road and rail networks, discounts at top resorts and attractions, a relaxation of tolls on major roads, new policies for self-drive tours and a reduction in fuel costs by 2.8% on September 30th.

There is an idea that all the new initiatives and incentives that have been put into place for tourists during Golden Week are making this holiday period the best for travelling around China; however, local residents and workers would disagree with this notion and are much more critical of the holiday.

While Golden Week may be seen as profitable and a huge success by the economists looking back on the national holiday, the employees and locals that were meant to be enjoying the benefits have been less positive with their views. To them, **the week brought nothing but chaos, stress and fatigue; workers were plagued by long traffic jams and overcrowded tourist spots and facilities and many saw the week as a waste**.

Experts may be talking about improved transport systems and opportunities but this was not experienced by the residents that were on those roads and unable to make reservations. The Jiuzhaigou Valley World Heritage Site saw visitors stranded there with no way to get home and, in some cases, families had to change their plans and cut their holidays short because it was all too stressful and unfulfilling.

Understandably, Chinese workers no longer see the Golden Week as much of a holiday at all and are keen for a change. Current Chinese labor laws do little to aid their enjoyment because workers have

to make up for time lost by working extra shifts on the weekends on either end of the holiday - which accounts for the high levels of fatigue experienced - and those that have worked for their employer for less than five years are only entitled to five days of paid leave a year, a period many would like to enjoy at any time other than the first week of October.

In short, it is important to remember that there are two sides to the aftermath of the 2013 Golden Week; the positive side that looks at the increased visitor numbers and high revenue and sees the holiday as a success and the negative side that experienced the initiatives and chaos first-hand and are calling for change. Whether these changes will happen is uncertain because it is hard to argue with the figures but there is also no arguing with the fact that this Golden Week has left the country divided.

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