

CHINESE ONLINE TRAVEL MARKET PUTS OUTBOUND TRAVEL AHEAD OF ARRIVALS



Recent reports into the status of China's inbound market do not make for great reading for local tourist agencies. While many are looking at potential growth in the number of Chinese passengers using budget airlines and cruises, arrivals into the country were down 4% in 2014. Even though there are predictions for a recovery, the status of Chinese hotels is also having a negative impact - with occupancy levels dropping in the nation's luxury establishments as the economy slows and anti-corruption policies take hold - and there are also concerns that international brands are oversupplying their stores. There is, however, hope for improvements in these vital areas as forecasts confidently predict a speedy recovery for inbound travel during 2014. Additionally, there is an understandable focus on the fact these luxury hotels are rising in value - with forecasts stating that their worth will increase from 61 billion US dollars to 91 billion between now and 2018 - rather than the fact that fewer travellers are choosing to stay in them.

While inbound travel struggles and aims for a quick recovery, there is much better news regarding the present and future success of the outbound market.

The outbound market is on the rise according to new data from a survey by Euromonitor International, with a 16% growth rate expected for this year alone, and a number of foreign destinations have benefited from this development. Naturally, nearby destinations like Hong Kong are profiting nicely but it is Thailand who are currently leading the way, with a growth rate of over 25%, and South Africa and New Zealand are only marginally behind on 24% and 22% respectively. This growth is being partially attributed to a rise in China's online travel market although 70% of travellers asked still rely on recommendations from friends, family and colleagues and only 36% achieved this via social media. Having said this, there were greater numbers of internet users taking advantage of travel agents' websites, general internet searches and - top of the list for travel websites with 625 - global favourite TripAdvisor. The number of citizens with internet access is growing, with the total expected to reach over 800 million by 2018, and as this online travel market continues to rise, these rankings could potentially alter.

However these high numbers of tourists are getting inspired to travel, be it through traditional recommendations or new online resources, global tourism is seen as strong industry that can only improve and outbound expenditure has reached a record \$120 billion, with continued growth predicted for the next five years.

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