

# ASIAN DESTINATIONS BENEFIT AS CHINESE TRAVELLERS HEAD FURTHER EAST



At one time, Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand were among the top destinations for Chinese travellers but this is no longer the case at all now that international relationships are breaking down and these Chinese tourists are fearing for their safety. There is social and political unrest in Thailand and the Philippines, anti-China protests are taking place in Vietnam and China are still holding Malaysia responsible for the 154 lost Chinese passengers on the missing flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. This uncertainty and diminished appeal means that many travellers have cancelled their trips, leading to a massive drop in arrivals in the Southeast Asian region, and some mainland agencies are not even giving clients the option of holidays to some of these destinations. As a result, Chinese tourists are left with the choice of either not going away or moving their vacation elsewhere.

Many Chinese travellers are making the decision to take their vacations in Eastern Asian nations instead and they are being warmly welcomed.

As Chinese holidaymakers turn their back on these traditional resorts, they are being drawn to the potential of lands like Japan, Cambodia, South Korea and Singapore. Young travellers that were looking forward to their stay in Malaysia and Thailand, but now have concerns about the sort of welcome they would receive, are making new plans in Singapore where they are sure of getting a much friendlier welcome. It is quite interesting that while Chinese arrivals to Southeast Asia are said to be down 45%, arrivals in Japan are up an impressive 66%. This sway over to Japan is partly due to the fact that Japanese airlines are increasing flights on their budget airlines.

This appeal of affordable packages and convenient flights is also a key factor in the rise of Chinese tourists heading to South Korea this year. More than 100,000 Chinese visitors are expected into the country this year alone as it becomes a more appealing, alternative destination and this appeal is partly due to potential improvements - from a Chinese point of view - in visa policies. Seoul are looking into the prospect of a visa-waiver for Chinese travellers, something that is currently only in place for Jeju island and could really open up the capital to new visitors.

These nations are much more appealing following the year's developments but this growth may not be short term.

What is most interesting about these figures, especially in South Korea, is that this growth for 2014 is actually part of an ongoing trend and experts say that there is a 50% year-on-year rise in Chinese visits to this particular country alone. This is not a short term flirtation with the region; relationships with Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia have been damaged and there are promising new love interests awaiting Chinese travellers further East that show their appreciation. The travel deals and potential policy changes show that this a two-way street. The Chinese are willing to switch their holiday plans to Japan, Cambodia, Singapore and South Korea, and are about to arrive in high numbers, but these destinations are also looking at ways of enticing them further and strengthening the relationship. 2014 is going to be a big success in these countries in terms of Chinese arrivals but it would not be too optimistic to hope for something similar for 2015 as well.

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