

CHINESE TRAVELERS PREFER LOCAL EXPERIENCES OVER SHOPPING



Hong Kong had been a popular shopping destination for the keen mainland Chinese shopper for many years but these days it appears that it is losing its past glory. The latest travel insights from the provider of travel intelligence ForwardKeys and the global market research firm GfK (Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung) show that the total number of Chinese tourists who intend to visit Hong Kong in the coming months of April - September, is significantly lower by almost half (48 percent), compared to the same period last year.

On a more positive note, Japan, South Korea and Thailand are still the top three travel destinations among the Chinese, recent data shows that there has been a spike in the total number of advance bookings made for traveling to the above countries during the April - September period. **Flight bookings to South Korea increased by 85 percent over the same time period last year, while Japan and Thailand also registered increased bookings by 50% and 60% respectively.**

Laurens Van Den Oever, who is the global lead for Travel and Hospitality at GfK, said that trips to Hong Kong from China have decreased, and this was partly caused by the yellow-umbrella protest that occurred over a prolonged period of time in the 4th quarter of last year. A study that was conducted by GfK on the destination image of the top 5 Asian countries among the Chinese showed that shopping is the key draw of Hong Kong; and the decrease in the number of tourists may mean that shopping is no longer a priority for mainlanders.

Van den Oever presented these most recent travel insights at the World Travel Fair that was held recently in Shanghai on 7th May 2015. The findings are based on the joint analysis and reports of ForwardKeys and GfK.

For now, increased interest in Thailand and Japan, countries that are perceived by Chinese to be rich in culture and history, show that they are more attracted by the experience the destinations offer.

Additionally, Olivier Jager, who is the CEO of ForwardKeys, observed that local-government policies also have a major contributing role in the global tourism industry. He gave the example of the ease in visa-requirements in Japan and Thailand for people from mainland China that has had a positive impact on tourism with a significant increase of tourists from China in these countries.

Another recent study accentuated the fact that Chinese travelers are becoming more and more connected, with roughly 9 in 10 (89 percent) of them using more than one device to research and book their trip. 45% of the people who participated in the survey said that they used a tablet, three quarters (74 percent) said that they used their smartphone and 85% said that they used their home computer.

Van Den Oever said that **the massive rise in internet use in the world's most populated country is rapidly changing the tourism landscape of China and the world.** He also said that industry players must be fully aware and understand the consumers' travel behavior so that they can be able to execute the most effective target-marketing strategies that will enable them to remain competitive in the business.

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