

CHINESE TOURISM EXPECTED TO HIT THE 130 MILLION MARK



After being the global travel story in 2015, the boom of Chinese tourism is expected to continue. The forecast is that the number of people traveling overseas from China is likely to hit the 130 million mark, an increase of 10 million over the last year, according to Jiang Yiyi, director of International Tourism Development Institute in China Tourism Academy. For four years now, the number one source, as far as outbound tourists are concerned, has been China.

It is expected that this will lead to intensified efforts by country tourism boards to make themselves more accessible to the Chinese, specifically in terms of language. **This year it is likely that there will be an increase in international flights and the Chinese will travel to destinations that are currently not on their radars.**

According to Jiang, there is a possibility that more countries will relax visa requirements for the Asian travelers and improve the Chinese language environment in the future. This is because the number of Chinese tourists increased by leaps and bounds last year after some countries waived visas, streamlined application procedures, implemented visa on arrival facilities and cut down or waived processing costs.

For instance, South Korea cut down visa requirements incrementally last year and this resulted in a 10 percent increase in the Chinese travelers visiting the country. As many as 6.3 million visited South Korea in 2014 as per the country's tourism data.

Furthermore, South Korea is likely to continue as the top destination for Chinese travelers as the country has extended the validity period of Chinese tourism visas to 90 days from 30, introduced relaxations in age requirements, and it is expected that the waiver of visa fee for Chinese travelers will be extended until the end of this year.

Additionally, South Korea has decided to adopt a special visa this year in order to integrate travel with leisure, cultural experiences and hairdressing, wherein the age, education and income requirements will be further relaxed for the Chinese. At certain shops, holders of this visa can also enjoy tax rebates if they purchase products worth more than 1 million won with each item costing less than 200,000 won.

Japan and Southeast Asia will also be sought after destinations for the Chinese this year because of relaxed policies and proximity. Shopping is expected to give Japan an edge as the country plans to introduce rebates on consumption tax for inbound tourists. As many as 400,000 travelers spent approximately 100 billion yen during the last weeklong National Day holiday.

While the Belt and Road Initiative is expected to provide benefits to Southeast Asia region, the United States will gain in 2016 because of the 10-year multi-entry visa policy. 2016 is US-China Tourism Year.

On the other hand, the extension of visa waiver by Russia beyond Chinese travel groups to individuals that make bookings through accredited agencies are likely to work to their advantage this year. A Clear trip report shows that the number of Chinese visiting the neighboring nation rose

200 percent in 2015.

Another factor that would contribute to explosive growth in number of travelers from China's third and fourth tier cities is the increase in international flights. In 2016, China is expected to add a minimum of 200 international air routes to the existing 663. China has also signed air transportation agreements with 118 countries last year.

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