

# GERMANY SCARES OFF CHINESE TOURISTS



In general, Chinese tourists tend to spend more money than other travelers. In spite of terror attacks and the refugee crisis, the amount of Chinese tourists in Europe is expected to continue growing. However, Germany puts many obstacles in the way of potential visitors from China applying for visa.

In the competition for the Chinese tourists, Germany is taking a shorter straw than other European countries. **The reason is the strict implementation of Chinese visa regulations according to the Schengen-treaty, which are handled more loosely by other EU countries.**

"French visas are much easier to come by because France is not as strict as Germany," said a manager of the tour operator Ctrip in Beijing.

Even though all EU countries within the Schengen area are supposed to adhere to these regulations the same way, France neither requires hotel bookings nor original invitation letters. According to manager Hu Xiaodan of the travel agency Changzhou Guolü, the German embassy's visa procedure is much more elaborate.

## **New Visa Application Centers**

Some websites already recommend Chinese tourists heading to Europe to apply for a visa in France. Since there are much fewer visa officials, France gives out a larger amount of visa, raising the number of Chinese tourists in Europe to 2 million in 2015.

According to the ministry of foreign affairs in Berlin, Germany's officials in China had given out 360,000 Schengen-visa, albeit 80 percent of them were multi-entry and 20 percent multi-year visa. Even though travel agencies and travelers complain about the strict requirements, the German visa procedure has been described by the foreign office as "fast and customer friendly".

Most visas are issued within 48 hours. In order to handle the inflow more confidently, ten new visa application centers have been opened in China.

Wei Xiao'an, director of the Chinese tourism academy, confirmed the varied strictness of visa procedures across different EU states. He expects the number of Chinese tourists in foreign countries to increase by 10 percent to a new value of more than 130 million.

## **Large Flow of Tourists Heading towards Europe**

Even though the main destinations still remain within Asia, according to the director Europe is increasingly popular.

"Europe-tourism will experience an increase this year, because the Chinese are getting bored of their neighboring countries such as Korea and Japan." In his opinion, a fear of terror or the European refugee crisis will not scare Chinese tourists in the long run.

The number of French visa may have been decreased by 18 percent as a result of December's attacks in Paris, but Wei Xiao'an believes this to be a temporary phenomenon: "There are certain

effects, but no changes in the general travel behavior."

Chinese travel agencies think of Europe as a rising star. "There is not much fear of terror or refugees," says Hu Xiaodan of Changzhou Guolü. The Ctrip-Manager added: "Chinese customers are not really affected. We expect a very generous growth."

**Chinese tourists are rather popular, since they tend to spend larger amounts of money on luxury goods than other tourists.** The German tourism industry is longing for higher yields as well. According to recent estimates, more lenient visa procedures could lead to an additional dozen direct flights from China to Frankfurt per week.

"Germany is shooting itself in the foot, if it continues to follow the Schengen regulations so strictly," says an EU expert. The Schengen-states however have yet to mutually reduce the strict requirements for Chinese tourists. It seems that not only France but Spain and Italy handle their visa much more loosely.

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