

# MOROCCO: A NEW HOLIDAY HEAVEN FOR CHINESE TOURISTS



During a visit to Beijing in May 2016, the Moroccan King Mohammed VI exempted Chinese nationals from visa obligation when traveling to Morocco. The decision has been effective since June 2016. The impact on tourism has been considerable.

The number of arrivals of Chinese tourists in the second half of 2016 amounted to more than 40,000, 300% more than in 2015. In the first half of 2017, **nearly 50,000 Chinese nationals traveled to Morocco – mainly to Casablanca, Fez, and Ouarzazate.**

Hayat Jabrane, founder of Goal Voyages, and former general secretary of the National Tourism Confederation (CNT) explained why the Chinese market is so important for Morocco:

“A market like China can only have a positive impact on Moroccan tourism, since it is the country with more than 1.5 billion inhabitants of which more than 100 million travel. It is a market with high potential since the Chinese tourists spend the most. The visa waiver has given new impetus to the tourism development from China. Thus, after receiving barely more than 10,000 Chinese tourists in 2015, Morocco reaches almost 50,000 by the end of June 2017.”

Morocco's intentions are clear: to welcome the largest number of Chinese tourists in the years to come.

According to the experts there is still much to do to sell the destination to the Chinese tourists.

“We have very good relations with the Chinese news agency Xinhua, which contributed greatly to the influence of the city of Ouarzazate by making several reports on the Chinese channel CCTV. The Chinese are very connected, they watch TV, surf the Internet. Having a good relationship with their news agency ensures good visibility,” said Zoubir Bouhoute, Director of the Provincial Tourism Council of Ouarzazate

According to Moroccan hoteliers Chinese tourists love to discover new cultures. Morocco has always attracted them, and the visa waiver boosted their interest.

According to Hayat Jabrane, the promotion of Morocco's destinations in China by the ONMT has produced good results. "However it is insufficient compared to the number of provinces in China in which Morocco is not known at all."

The manager suggests to invest more in digital promotion. "When traveling a long distance, Chinese

tourists usually combine two or three countries. Morocco needs to develop extensively its presence on the right websites," Jabrane explained.

"Moreover, a direct air connection would be ideal, all accompanied by promotions in the form of cultural events in China with significant presence of the local press," suggests the former SG of the CNT.

Although Morocco is full of assets, such as its history, culture and gastronomy, the country has to adapt to the demands of Chinese tourists who require, for example, Mandarin-speaking guides, which are still rare in Morocco.

Several travel agencies admitted not being sufficiently ready to welcome these tourists in the best possible way. It will therefore be necessary to improve the equipment, multiply the number of guides and prepare Chinese menus to satisfy the particular habits and tastes of these tourists.

According to a poll conducted by the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, there are several features and services that Chinese tourists expect beyond the facilities or Mandarin speaking staff. **They prefer rooms equipped with wifi and a system of reception for iPod / iPhone.** The quality of food and drinks also counts for the Chinese travelers who despite their worries, are often tempted by the flavors of the countries they visit.

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