

CHINESE TOURISTS FACE SEVERAL OBSTACLES IN SPAIN



The major weaknesses of Spain as a tourist destination for Chinese tourists include the limited air connectivity, the slow entry visa issuing process, as well as the general ignorance of the Chinese market and existing prejudices. These disadvantages are aggravated by complicated processes to manage the tax-free refund, and the limited advertisement of Spain as a tourist destination in China.

Connectivity

This problem has become quite clear in the figures: as of March 2018, only eight direct flights and 25 weekly flights, carried out by six airline companies, operate between Spain and China. These numbers are even more worrisome in comparison to the more than 6,200 annual flights that link to Frankfurt, or the almost 8,000 between Charles de Gaulle and China, while Madrid barely reached a thousand in 2016.

Visas

The problem of visas is due to a lack of resources that causes the Spanish consulates to take longer than other countries to issue the necessary visas to arrive to Madrid.

Beijing authorized Spain as a tourist destination for its citizens in 2004. Fourteen years later, Spain is still taking an average of 15 days to issue visas, when Italy does so in five days, Germany in three, and France can do it within a day.

The situation in the United Kingdom, which is not a Schengen Area, allows for a multiple entry visa, and this has encouraged London to be the European destination with the best performance for this market in 2017, or the case of Morocco, whose visa exemption policy from last year enabled its tourism market to grow by a 400%.

Wrong perception

Generally, there is a wrong perception of the Chinese customer in the Spanish tourism industry, which luckily is changing step by step. Until relatively recently, the Chinese customer was identified as a low-cost, unsustainable consumer, who didn't have a significant interest in Spanish culture.

But currently, the millennial and digital FIT (free independent traveler) consumer, which already represents about 50% of the Chinese tourists, spends the night in 4-star hotels, has the highest tourist

expenditure and has an enormous interest in the local culture. Satisfying them, adapting to their needs, offering them what they're really looking for, is the real challenge to earn their loyalty.

Other minor issues

Besides the three issues mentioned above, there are other relatively minor problems having an impact on Chinese market, such as the tax-free refund, the difficulties faced by the Chinese tourists with a high purchasing power (expenditures of more than 2,800 euros per trip), when managing the tax refund in the Spanish airports, in comparison to the automation of this system in several European airports, is the reason that promotes shopping tourism in other capital cities of the Old Continent.

Also, the limited advertisement of Spain in China, even though it registered a growth of more than 65% year-on-year during the past term, makes it still a quite unknown destination to the public.

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