

THE WORLD GETS READY FOR CHINESE TOURISTS BUT BORDERS REMAIN CLOSED



In an increasingly uncertain panorama at different levels, attention is once again turning to Asian countries that still have closed borders, such as China. Whether restrictions will be lifted is one of the biggest unknowns of the moment. This is logical, as it is one of the world's largest tourist markets. Chinese tourists are well known for spending more than other visitors when on holiday.

Rumours are beginning to indicate that the end of the limits is near. According to the Civil Aviation Administration of China, **regarding the next five years, international flights will gradually begin to resume.** That is, from 2023 until 2025, at least according to the data.

However, the big question is whether these measures will be implemented sooner than expected. The reason is that some surveys indicate that the population is increasingly interested in tourism-related content. According to a study by Dragon Trail International, people describe their feelings towards tourism as "fascination" and "excitement", so it seems that the population is ready to go on a trip.

What Will Be the Flight Situation Like?

The first thing we have to look at is the current flight situation. Since the pandemic, they have followed very defined and limited security policies. Chinese airlines could only have one route per destination country with one flight per week.

This adds to the strict cancellations policy. Every time a route reached five positive cases of Covid in one flight, it was suspended for two weeks. If the number reached 10, it was suspended for a full month.

Looking further in the past, in 2019 the connectivity with Europe improved thanks to the activity of the major airlines, the opposite of what happened in the case of the United States. In any case, it seems that there will be increased competition caused by a growing travel interest.

Where Will Chinese Tourists Travel?

To determine future trends, it is necessary to go back in time. Specifically, in 2019 just before the outbreak of the pandemic. Based on the data collected by ForwardKeys, the most distant locations outside Asia top the list.

Europe (51% of the total), the United States (17%) and Australia (9%) account for the greatest number of visits. In terms of continents, there are certain very clear trends, with large cities prevailing. This is the case of Los Angeles, Moscow, Sydney, New York, Melbourne and San Francisco.

In Europe, London has grown in popularity the most. Paris and Rome are also of great interest. In addition, Chinese tourists tend to travel to these destinations in groups, while in the United States they travel mainly for business or even alone, and in Australia, family trips are the most popular.

Japan has improved its market share from 10% in 2014 to 23% in 2019. In Asia, Thailand became the

key destination with a share of 24% and South Korea was at 9% in 2019. As these three countries plan to open borders for business this year, the question is whether this will have any direct impact on China's situation.

What Are the Travelers Like Now?

After such a long time without traveling, and as a result of what we have experienced in recent years, it is logical that the Chinese tourists have changed. Especially because, depending on their age group, they are looking for very specific experiences, which may become a trend in the near future.

Experts determined three profiles that could be crucial in international departures of Chinese travelers:

Millennials

Younger groups will be very important. The population between 25 and 34 years of age accounts for 30% of the total number of visitors. Meanwhile, if we extend the range from 25 to 44 years, the percentage rises to 52% of the total number of travelers. In other words, they are a key group that will set new trends in the future.

It is also interesting that 65% of this group has higher education. In addition, there are other very strong interests, such as a preference for private tours or personalized experiences. As is logical, they make extensive use of technology, whether to get information about the trip, to share their experiences or to make reservations.

Seniors

Despite what it may seem, the over-60s are still a big group of tourists, especially in domestic tourism. Not only that, but 11% of senior travelers spent more than 10,000 yuan on their trips, a higher figure than those born after the 1980s.

It is important to bear in mind that, given that we will increasingly have an ageing society, this will be a key segment. For example, it is estimated that by 2050 there will be 487 million people over the age of 60, equivalent to one-third of the total population.

Middle-class parents

Finally, the amount of parents who go on family vacations is striking. Their preference in terms of accommodation is clear, as they opt for higher quality hotels. For example, 50% prefer four or five-star accommodations.

On average, US\$1,250 is spent per child, a not insignificant figure. Not only that, but this group is expected to grow in the near future. For all these reasons, they may be indispensable travelers once the borders are opened to the outside world.

What Will Happen in the Future?

Many markets continue to pin their hopes on an immediate return of the Asian giant to the travel world. **ForwardKeys is confident that this will happen soon, as a result of the increased confidence generated by the good results in domestic tourism.**

As in the rest of the world, the population's desire to explore and live new experiences has increased. It should also be noted that the plan for the coming years focuses on developing the industry to offer innovative quality services. Therefore, although it is too early to say for sure that China will open its borders in 2022, it seems that we can expect that, when it does, tourists will travel as before.

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