

CHINA EXPECTS STRONG REBOUND IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IN 2023



The volume of visitors entering China from other countries will experience a "remarkable recovery" in 2023 in view of the expected removal of restrictions and quarantines, as well as a greater number of international flights, according to a report by the China Academy of Tourism.

That institution, affiliated with the country's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, estimates that travel arrivals bottomed out this year at 20 million trips, down from 32 million in 2021, 27.5 million in 2020 and, of course, 145 million in 2019, the last pre-pandemic year.

"The new policy will be favorable for the growth of the domestic tourism market and help boost the confidence of business operators," said Cheng Chaogong, a senior researcher with Tongcheng Travel, a Suzhou, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency. "In a short time, cross-provincial tours in China will witness a round of rapid growth," Cheng said. A rebound in international tourism is also expected.

Although China still maintains an eight-day quarantine for arrivals from abroad, the rapid dismantling of the 'zero covid' policy has translated into a significant 351% rise in searches for international flights, according to data from virtual travel giant Trip.com.

Recently, the official press has begun to downplay the risk of the omicron variant through numerous articles and expert interviews, a turn of argument that accompanies the relaxation of some of the strictest measures of the 'zero covid' policy, in force for almost three years.

The authorities have already stated that the "conditions" are in place for the country to "adjust" its measures in this "new situation" in which the virus causes fewer deaths, although they have also announced a plan to accelerate the vaccination of the elderly, one of the most vulnerable groups but at the same time the most reluctant to be inoculated.

The Executive will allow asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic infected people to be isolated in their homes - until now a transfer to a quarantine center was mandatory - and indicated that it will no longer be necessary to have a negative covid test to enter most places and establishments, with the exception of hospitals or schools.

The changes came after the anger over the restrictions crystallized into protests in various parts of the country following the death of ten people in an apparently confined building in Urumqi (northwest), with slogans such as "I don't want PCR, I want to eat" or "give me back my freedom".

The government defends the policy by stating that it has saved millions of lives through 'zero covid', which consists of isolation of all infected people and their close contacts, strict border controls, partial or total confinement in places where cases are detected, and constant PCR testing of the urban population.

Tourism professionals now estimate that there will be a relatively larger flow of people taking long-haul trips around New Year's Day and the Spring Festival (starting on January 21), as traveling between provinces will no longer require negative test results, according to the latest guidelines.

Following the optimization and adjustment of pandemic prevention policies, online travel agencies have re-launched various kinds of cross-provincial group tour products. Beijing-based online travel agency Qunar said it has launched more than 100,000 such options and has continued to update its portfolio.

Meanwhile, Sanya of Hainan province, Shanghai, and Lijiang of Yunnan province are among the most popular destinations with the highest search volume. Tours to seashores and islands, theme parks, zoos and botanical gardens, and lakes and mountains have become popular for travelers, according to Tuniu Corp, a Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

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