

BEIJING FACES LOW TOURISM NUMBERS



According to experts, even six months after the number of international travelers remains low, China lifted COVID-19 restrictions and reopened its borders. This is seen as a sign of a growing divide between China and the West, which could have negative consequences in the long run. In the first half of this year, the total number of foreigners who visited Shanghai and Beijing was less than a quarter of the figure for the same period in 2019, before the pandemic.

During the first quarter of this year, only 52,000 individuals arrived in mainland China from overseas, a significant decrease from the 3.7 million arrivals during the same period in 2019 across the country.

Just like in previous years, almost half of the visitors were from Taiwan (an autonomous island) and the Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Macau. Only a few people traveled from long-distance destinations like Europe or the United States.

The China Tourism Association's director, Xiao Qianhui, pointed out that there has been a significant decline in tourism numbers - visitors from Europe, America, Japan, and Korea. According to the expert, the reduction in foreign tourists and business people visiting China reduces the chances for foreigners to experience the country firsthand and engage with its locals. This, in turn, plays a significant role in mitigating geopolitical tensions. An absence of visitors could also contribute to lower investment in China.

Foreign direct investment into the country fell to \$20 billion in the first quarter, compared to \$100 billion in the first quarter of last year.

According to Chinese and foreign tourism experts, leisure travel rates from North America to China dropped by around 40% in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2019. The decrease is partly due to the strained relations between China and the West, which has made visitors more hesitant about traveling to China.

The US government issued a travel advisory in June, advising Americans not to travel to mainland China. This was due to concerns about "arbitrary enforcement of local laws," including travel bans, curfews, and possible wrongful detention.

However, China's ambassador to the United States, Xie Feng, has called for increased tourism between the two countries. He suggested hosting a tourism forum and increasing the number of flights and also called Washington to reconsider its travel warnings.

Date: 2023-08-07

Article link:

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