

CHINESE TRAVELERS PLAN TO VISIT FRANCE AND ICELAND



Chinese outbound tourism, a testament to Chinese travelers' resilience, is gradually returning to pre-pandemic levels. The number of issued flight tickets steadily increased in the first quarter of 2021, reaching just 32% below Q1 2019 levels.

Bookings for the upcoming May holiday in China are only 13% lower than in the same period in 2019. This data underscores that Chinese travelers, with a renewed sense of adventure, are now ready to explore the world again.

Increased Interest in Long-haul Travel Destinations

According to a recent survey, over 63% of respondents have already traveled outbound in 2024 or are planning to do so. **This is a significant increase compared to last year's data, where only 41% of people had outbound travel plans.** Only 10% of respondents said they have no plans to pursue outbound travel opportunities this year, in contrast to 31% in April 2023.

Chinese travelers seem more interested in intercontinental travel, as 39.7% of respondents plan to or want to visit a region outside Asia in 2024. Europe is the leading long-haul destination, with 26.7% of respondents planning to travel there.

South Korea tops the list of countries people plan to visit for outbound travel in 2024, followed by traditional hotspots such as Thailand and Japan and newly visa-free Singapore. France is the most popular choice for long-haul destinations, followed by Iceland. Iceland has emerged as an unexpected favorite, thanks to social media and reality TV depictions of its natural phenomena, such as the aurora borealis and volcanoes. It remains in the top 10 most coveted outbound destinations.

Relaxed Visa Requirements Attract More Chinese Travelers

Relaxed visa requirements have proven to be a significant factor in attracting Chinese tourists. The destinations that simplified visa requirements for Chinese travelers since 2023 have seen an increase in the number of visitors—a 115% increase in travel from China to Kazakhstan, an 18% growth to Singapore, and a near-complete travel recovery to Russia and Malaysia in the first quarter of 2024.

However, Thailand's performance has been below average for Chinese outbound travel, possibly due to the negative impact of a shooting incident in October last year. This suggests that while visa waivers are a significant draw for Chinese travelers, other factors, such as safety concerns and flight connectivity, also play a crucial role in their choice of holiday destination.

The Safer World for Chinese Travelers

It has been over a year since China reopened after the COVID-19 pandemic. **The fears about the safety of foreign destinations are gradually fading away.** According to a survey, the respondents' perception of safety has improved for 10 out of 12 destinations, including Thailand. Travelers strongly desire to experience overseas travel now that the COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

The survey also revealed that Hong Kong was voted the safest outbound destination, followed by Singapore, Switzerland, and Australia. It is very promising that Chinese travelers have started feeling safer about destinations worldwide. The fear of COVID-19 has slowly dissipated, allowing them to explore new landscapes, cultures, and cuisines without hesitation.

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