

**DIGITAL CHINA**

# HOW TO WIN WITH CHINESE TOURISTS

**AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR 2020**



**ASHLEY GALINA DUDARENOK**

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**AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE  
FOR 2019**

**by Ashley Galina Dudarenok**

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Ashley Galina Dudarenok is the founder of Alarice and ChoZan.

**ChoZan** - your business school for digital China.

- Presenter of the world's top 2-day Chinese digital marketing training program for entrepreneurs and teams
- Keynote speaker on topics related to modern Chinese consumers, digital marketing and New Retail
- Custom-made corporate trainings
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- Social media video masterclasses: A certificate course you can take at home giving you the latest insights and tools to advance your marketing career
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- Specialists in China digital marketing strategy development
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# Introduction

China has the world's largest pool of tourists and in the past decade, Chinese tourism has seen outstanding growth. Now more than ever, Chinese people are travelling. With growth in the larger economy and an increase in disposable income, people are also spending more on travel and in their destination.

According to data from the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), in 2000 there were only 4.5 million outbound trips. In 2018, there were 149.72 million. Purchases while travelling accounted for 11% of per-capita spending in 2018, which is twice the level recorded in 2011.

Changes in Chinese travellers' behaviour have also been noted in recent years. They're adapting more "Western" travel habits. Instead of just going sightseeing and shopping, they're more willing to engage in in-depth experiences of local

lifestyles and culture. Unique, tailor-made travel services are also a new trend. For example, some are moving from 5-star hotels to boutique hotels or Airbnb homestays and bespoke tours are becoming more popular.

We've created this mini book for those in the tourism industry who want to understand Chinese outbound tourists and recent trends in order to attract them and provide the best service to them. If you've ever asked yourself "How can my business benefit from the increasing number of Chinese travellers?", this book will answer that question.

In the past 8 years, I've worked with over 300 brands helping them tap into China. Since 2016, I've been a speaker at over 90 events and run my signature Chinese social media masterclasses across Asia, Europe and the Middle East. You're in safe hands.

*Learn more about my China digital marketing trainings at [chozan.co](http://chozan.co) and get all the details about my social media marketing agency services at [alarice.com.hk](http://alarice.com.hk).*

## CHAPTER 1

# A Market Overview

In 2016, the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) forecasted that by 2020, Chinese outbound trips would total 150 million per year. With 2018's 149.72 million outbound trips, they seem to be right on track.

Following the economic rise of the last decade, Chinese consumers have more money to travel. In recent years, outbound travel has increased 13.5% year-on-year and continues to rise.

Korea and Japan are the most popular destinations and it's primarily first tier city residents who go overseas. But now, although Korea and Japan still see a lot of Chinese tourists, destina-

tions have become more diverse and second and third tier cities have joined the market.

The United States, Canada, Japan and Korea have recently seen declines in tourists due to the ongoing trade war and other issues, while places like Southeast Asia and Europe have seen increases.

Not only are more Chinese people travelling overseas, but the number of trips per traveller is creeping up, too. One survey by Coresight Research and China Luxury Advisors found that the average Chinese traveller went overseas 2.1 times from June 2017 to June 2018. Residents of tier 1 cities are driving this increase with an average of 2.3 trips. Those making three or more trips a year jumped from 21% in 2017 to 34% in 2018. Chinese tourists in general now have easier visa access in many markets and tourists from lower tier cities are benefitting from an increasing number of international and connecting flights from their airports.

### Where Are They From?

Five urban areas and ten cities serve as the source of most of China's outbound tourism according

to the World Tourism Organization and the China Tourism Academy.

| The Five Urban Areas That Fuel the Chinese Outbound Tourism Market |   |
|--|---|
| Cities   | Province / Area                           |
| Beijing, Tianjin   | Hebei                                     |
| Shanghai   | The Yangtze River Delta                   |
| Guangzhou, Shenzhen  | The Pearl River Delta                     |
| Chengdu, Chongqing   | Sichuan and neighbouring provinces        |
| Wuhan, Changsha, Zhuzhou, Xiangtan                                 | Hubei, Hunan, inland on the Yangtze River |

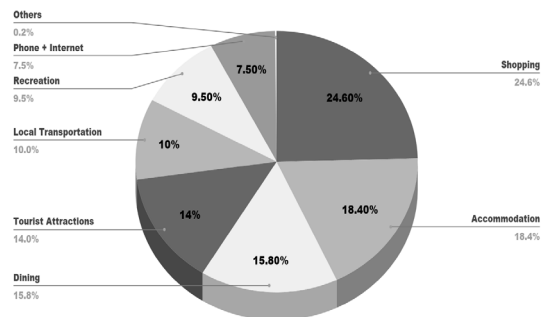
| The Top 10 Cities for Chinese Outbound Tourists |
|---|
| 1. Shanghai                                     |
| 2. Beijing                                      |
| 3. Guangzhou                                    |
| 4. Chengdu                                      |
| 5. Chongqing                                    |
| 6. Nanjing                                      |
| 7. Kunming                                      |
| 8. Wuhan  |
| 9. Xi'an  |
| 10. Hangzhou                                    |

Spending Power

Chinese travellers are spending more and staying longer when they travel. Shopping, accommodation and dining have been the top three spending categories for several years. However due to an increase in cross-border e-commerce, there's been a significant change in shopping preferences. Chinese shoppers don't need to go overseas any more to get access to a variety of foreign products at a reasonable price. While travelling, they now prefer to buy products they can't easily find at home or online.

This also means that shopping has become more about quality and exclusivity. It's not about getting products. It's about the shopping experience.

The China Tourism Academy calculated that in 2018, outbound travel spending by Chinese tourists was over 277 billion USD. The estimated average Chinese tourist budget per person in 2019 was 6,706 USD, which is 15% higher than 2018.



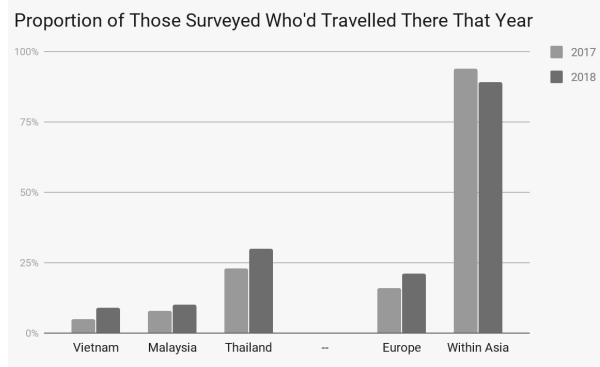
Source: Nielsen 2018

## Where are they going?

In 2017, visa procedures were one of the three most important determining factors when choosing a destination. In 2018 it was still important but wasn't a top priority. This is likely because more and more countries are easing their entry procedures for Chinese tourists.

According to the Henley Passport Index, as of October 2019, a Chinese Passport is ranked 72nd. 71 destinations provide visa-free entry and many countries have recently eased their visa requirements for Chinese passport holders. In addition to easier visas, Chinese tourists are becoming more sophisticated and are turning to less familiar destinations.

That is affecting the number and variety of destinations visited by Chinese travellers. Nielsen reports that in 2018, Chinese tourists visited 2.8 countries or regions, up from 2.1 in 2017. Asian countries still top the list but people have begun to look farther afield. Japan and Korea are the top draws but numbers declined in 2018 as more tourists went to Thailand, Europe, Malaysia and Vietnam.



Source: Nielsen

Places like Croatia, Serbia, Northern Europe and some African countries are seeing more visits as a result of relaxed visa requirements, a well-designed promotional campaign from the European Travel Commission and demand spurred by popular TV series and movies.

**In 2018, Chinese tourists travelled the most to the following countries (by departures)**

- 1) Thailand (10.41 million)
- 2) Japan (9.06 million)
- 3) Vietnam (7.79 million)
- 4) South Korea (5.28 million)
- 5) The United States (3.02 million)
- 6) Singapore (2.55 million)
- 7) Malaysia (2.44 million)
- 8) Cambodia (2.33 million)
- 9) Russian Federation ( 2.04 million)
- 10) Indonesia (1.7 million)

*Source: UN World Tourism Organization and the China Tourism Academy*

**In 2018, Chinese tourists felt most welcomed in**

- 1) Japan ( 20%)
- 2) Thailand ( 16%)
- 3) South Korea ( 12%)
- 4) Australia (11%)
- 5) The United States ( 8%)
- 6) Singapore ( 6%)
- 7) Canada ( 6%)
- 8) New Zealand (5%)

*Source: Hotels.com survey*

**Chinese tourists' favourite European destinations in early 2019 were**

- 1) Russia
- 2) Italy
- 3) France
- 4) The UK
- 5) Germany
- 6) Spain
- 7) Greece
- 8) The Czech Republic
- 9) Switzerland
- 10) Portugal

*Source: Ctrip*

**The top emerging destinations in Europe with their year-on-year Chinese tourist growth rates as of mid-2019**

- 1) Croatia (540%)
- 2) Latvia (523%)
- 3) Slovenia (497%)
- 4) Bulgaria (459%)
- 5) Estonia (321%)
- 6) Albania (300%)
- 7) Serbia (295%)
- 8) Malta (281%)
- 9) Ireland (220%)
- 10) Denmark (212%)

*Source: China Tourism Academy & HCG Travel Group*



### **Why are They Travelling and How are They Choosing Destinations?**

Most tourists from China are travelling for enjoyment, sightseeing and leisure purposes. This is a signal of the nation's affluence and the desire to see and experience the world.

Travel agencies have been replaced by friends, family and online recommendations and information. 57% of Chinese outbound tourists turn to their families and friends for inspiration and information. Even though younger tourists heavily use mobile apps, online travel agency (OTA) websites are the top choice for 52% when making trip preparations, while only 15% of respondents selected OTA booking apps and 3% use international booking apps.

Aside from common sense considerations like proximity, ease of travel, familiarity and affordability, there's a broad range of factors that influence Chinese tourists to choose their destination. What follows is a list of the most important factors compiled from a variety of sources.

- 1) Scenic, unique tourist attractions
- 2) Attractive, unique local cuisine

- 3) Interesting activities
- 4) Safety and political stability
- 5) Ease of visa procedures
- 6) Air quality and access to nature
- 7) Affordability
- 8) Availability of convenient mobile payment options like Alipay and WeChat Pay
- 9) Reputation, online reviews and ratings by other Chinese tourists
- 10) Quality and variety of shopping
- 11) Friendliness of locals
- 12) Promotions that overlap Chinese holiday times
- 13) Accommodation quality and security
- 14) Availability of Chinese speaking staff and Chinese signage
- 15) Good Wi-Fi
- 16) Historical and heritage sites
- 17) Climate and weather
- 18) The exchange rate

It's also important to remember that tax rebate issues are of primary importance to many Chinese tourists. Payment platforms like Alipay and WeChat Pay have mechanisms to help outbound tourists obtain their rebates quickly and easily. However, cities, airports and shops with stream-

lined tax rebate services score points with Chinese tourists. For example, in October 2019, the city of Dubai introduced a WeChat mini program (an app within WeChat) that allows Chinese tourists to get instant VAT tax rebates on their purchases in the city. This is a smart move.

*If you're wondering how to get into the China market, have urgent questions about Chinese tourists or want to hone your digital media presence in China, contact us at [natalia@alarice.com.hk](mailto:natalia@alarice.com.hk) to schedule a consultation.*

## CHAPTER 2

# Modern Chinese Tourists: Who Are They and How are They Travelling?

So, who's coming to visit? Modern Chinese tourists aren't one group and are changing and developing every year. Some traits cross demographic boundaries, like the fact that women make up 53% of Chinese tourists, while others don't. And things are changing rapidly because of current events and trade tensions. Understanding the differences and preferences of these groups is crucial to attracting Chinese tourists and increasing the most important kind

of marketing - word of mouth.

Here's some of the key information as things stand in November 2019.

### **Millennials**

One of the most desired consumer groups among marketers all over the world is millennials and China is no different.

Chinese millennials, born in the 80s and 90s and now between 20 and 39 years old, are hitting prime consumption age. Described as educated, open-minded and tech-savvy, they make up 31% of China's total population, representing 415 million consumers. BCG estimates that by 2021, millennials will make up 46% of China's urban population. They will experience increasing purchasing power and will gradually become the main consumers of products and services.

In tourism, millennials play a vital role in shaping trends, as they represent 55% of all Chinese travellers and according to a Coresight Research survey they take an average of 2.3 trips per year. They tend to be more independent and have so-

phisticated demands.

While other travel groups pay greater attention to climate, exchange rates and prices, millennials are ready to pay more and go farther in order to experience unique cultures, cuisine and greater shopping options. Some call it the "experience it all" approach and it's expected that they'll keep these habits and preferences as they age.

This group is also more spontaneous and makes the largest number of last minute bookings. Usually their trips are inspired and encouraged by influencers on platforms such as WeChat, Weibo and Xiaohongshu.

Millennial travellers are ready to spend a significant amount of their income on travel and on average spend more per day (US\$ 346) than other groups (US\$ 320).

Millennials are also affecting their parents' travel choices, especially when they travel in groups with older family members.

### The New Middle Class

China's new middle class is driving consumer spending growth. While the majority of Chinese consumers are not in the affluent or middle-income groups, there is a huge middle class, it's growing and it's expected to reshape not only China's consumption market but outbound tourism. It's expected that the number of middle class families will rise as a result of China's plans to achieve an urbanization rate of over 65% by 2030.

Meanwhile, as coastal areas are already developed and saturated, the urbanization process will expand to western and inland areas. According to McKinsey, the share of the middle class from first tier cities is expected to decrease from about 40% in 2002 to 22% by 2022 while the middle class in lower tier centers, especially third tier cities, grows.

It's expected that this rising middle class will spend more money on travelling in the upcoming years. They are also making trips that are 1-2 days longer. This is probably due to another rising trend of Chinese travellers taking more long-haul trips.

Chinese middle class travellers can be characterized by the attempt to imitate the middle class lifestyle they observe in other cultures. They want to experience the daily lives of people in the countries that they visit and have adventures, like surfing in Bali or hiking in the Grand Canyon.

Another interesting feature is that middle class tourists like to visit historical and heritage sites as part of a process of reflecting on their own culture and way of living.

### Families

51% of Chinese travellers go abroad with family. However, this doesn't just mean parents with young children. Multi-generational families are quite common. About 25% of family groups include aging parents. They know that their parents' and grandparents' lives were tough and it's a chance for them to express their gratitude, affection and be good children and grandchildren. The middle-aged and younger adults on these trips are willing to pay more for better service for their parents and grandparents.

As for parents travelling with younger children, they often view travel as an investment in their children's education, enabling them to get knowledge firsthand and broaden their mind and outlook. High-end travellers in this group avoid single-purpose trips and like to combine beaches, adventure, fine dining and leisure activities.

Family groups tend to travel during summer vacation and Chinese New Year so it's a good opportunity for marketers to promote at these times in ways that appeal to families and their values.

### **Seniors**

There are 80.8 million people in China aged 60 to 65, of which 46.1 million are living in cities. They're older but healthy enough to participate in almost all of the same activities as middle-aged travellers. In 2017, those over 55 years of age accounted for 26% of Chinese tourists.

Today's seniors have saved with a view to enjoying their retirement and many built up healthy nest eggs during China's economic growth years. Instead of staying home and looking after their

grandchildren, modern seniors are more willing to pursue a lavish lifestyle than previous generations. They're cultivating their own interests and travelling.

For those born in the late 1950s and 1960s, much of their life was spent in a closed and impoverished society. With new wealth and increased personal freedoms, some are trying to make up for lost time. They have a strong desire to explore the world but they remain socially conservative and uncertain.

Travelling abroad is so new to them, other countries are so unknown to them and foreign languages are so unfamiliar to them that they tend to travel in groups. They trust group tour organizers to know the best places to stay, the most interesting sights and local specialties to eat but they prefer small groups that allow some freedom, show authentic local life and don't make them stand out as they travel. Older travellers feel that they need guides to bridge language and cultural barriers.

And mobile payments aren't only an important factor for millennials. Data from Nielsen in 2018

shows that 68% of Chinese tourists aged 45-59 used mobile payments during their overseas trips.

### **Luxury Travellers**

Following the rise in disposable incomes, the high-end travel market is also peaking. Chinese high-end tourists account for only 20% of the market but account for more than 80% of total expenditures. On average they spend 4 times more than ordinary travellers.

As a consumer group, they expect more personalized and tech-enabled services. They're used to "smart" experiences in daily life and expect services with connected, mobile, AR/VR or AI options during their stay. It's expected that, in the future, this group will take more interest in art and culture during their trips abroad.

According to the Hurun Research Institute, the top five destinations for luxury travellers in 2018 were Europe (39%), America (36%), Africa (29 %), South Asia (23 %) and Japan and Korea (22%).

### **Medical Tourists**

China is working hard to update its medical system. Although things are improving, medical care services vary greatly throughout the country and even in 1st tier cities, there's a general distrust of doctors and the medical care system, which is still very bureaucratic and overburdened. Outside of large cities, a 2017 study by The Lancet revealed that about half of all doctors lacked even a bachelor's level education and had qualified for their posts through limited vocational courses.

According to numbers from Korea's Ministry of Health cited in a 2014 news report, 70% of the foreign patients who got cosmetic surgery there in 2013 were Chinese. Singapore is also a popular cosmetic surgery destination.

Some families also engage in "birth tourism" because of better maternal and neonatal health services and to potentially ease foreign citizenship and educational opportunities for children they hope to send overseas for primary, secondary or tertiary education. Malaysia has become a destination known for its fertility treatments.

But it's more than this. People are also seeking treatments for serious conditions and lifestyle diseases, such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. As the Chinese population ages, this demand is expected to increase.

The numbers are hard to pin down. Many estimate the number of medical tourists at around 500,000 while a few claim that there are as many as 3,000,000.

Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Germany, The UK, Malaysia and the US are already favoured medical destinations. Gulf nations such as Qatar and The United Arab Emirates are now trying to join their ranks. Qatar has established a hospital specializing in women's and children's health as well as cardiac and neurological procedures and announced visa-free travel for Chinese citizens. Dubai started its global medical destination plans in 2002 and the Dubai Health Authority claims that more than 326,000 medical travellers visited the emirate in 2016 with over a third coming from Asia.

As the United States is seen as too expensive, only the very wealthy seek treatment there with

the majority heading to Japan and Europe for now.

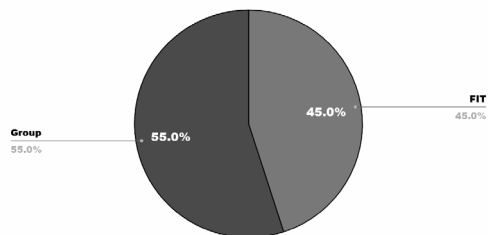
This has also spawned a new type of business as medical tourism facilitators have sprung up in China. These entrepreneurs have partnerships with hospitals around the globe, find the kinds of treatments patients are seeking and take care of paperwork and travel details and help patients deal with issues like language and cultural differences.

### **Group Travellers**

Contrary to conflicting popular beliefs, group tours are neither 100% of the market, nor have they disappeared completely. They're still very popular but no longer dominate the market the way they once did. More than half of Chinese tourists participate in group tours, including semi-independent tours, tailored tours and small tours with acquaintances.

Families, senior tourists and tourists from smaller cities are keen on traditional package tours. Tailored tours, including private tour groups with no strangers are also popular.

**Chinese Outbound Tourists**  
**Fully/Free Independent (FIT) Travellers vs. Group**



Source: China Tourism Academy / The Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Data Center

In the past decade, with more senior citizens and tourists from smaller cities joining the outbound travel market, the ratio of group tourists was increasing. The trend began to reverse, however, as more travellers sought out more personalized, unique experiences and more millennials chose to travel independently.

According to the China Tourism Academy and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Data Center, in 2018, 51% of respondents indicated that they were willing to participate in a group tour in the future, down from 72% in 2017. This seems to indicate that more people plan to travel independently in the future.

Semi-independent tours, which include air tickets, hotels, and optional one-day tours or themed

activities, have won favour with many travellers because of their convenience, comfort and freedom. Private tours with family or friends, are also increasingly popular. Sales of these tours doubled on Ctrip in 2018. Tailored tours meeting specific needs are also beginning to grow at a fast rate. They grew by 150% in 2018 according to Ctrip. In order to understand the lives of local people better, more Chinese tourists are willing to hire local guides and in 2018, these bookings also doubled on Ctrip.

Booking package tours online has further expanded and booking through offline channels is decreasing. 76% of package tour participants booked their tours online and only 18% used offline travel agencies. Online travel sites, apps and the official websites of offline travel agencies are the most popular channels for package tour booking.

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## CHAPTER 3

# The Chinese Tourism Platforms You Need to Know

**W**eChat and Weibo dominate in terms of social media that can influence travel decisions. Among China's FIT travellers, WeChat influences 44% with Weibo influencing 32%. But there are more digital channels that are an important part of the trip planning process, particularly in terms of word of mouth marketing, booking flights and researching destinations.

## Content Platforms

### 1 WeChat

WeChat's dominance as the de facto operating system for daily life in China gives it a grip on

young travellers. Of millennial overseas travellers, 80% daily or occasionally consult the official WeChat accounts of destinations they visit and 87% chat with friends hourly or daily on WeChat. If you want Chinese consumers to know who you are, you need to be on WeChat.

People also see lots of images from trips taken by friends and family as well as photos by well known public figures and travel bloggers on their holidays. These wield a lot of influence.

Location, brand and store mini programs are also very popular and make finding your business or location easier for Chinese customers. It would be wise to invest in a mini program on WeChat. WeChat Pay is one of the most used payment systems in China so installing a WeChat Pay system at your business and online would be a move in the right direction. Tax refund mini programs are also used frequently when Chinese people travel so if you provide one that immediately administers these refunds to your Chinese customers, that would be a big hit.

### 2 Weibo

Weibo is similar to WeChat in terms of its level of

travel-related influence. It even has a yearly conference where it hands out awards to top travel influencers. In 2019, Weibo noticed an increase in the amount and impact of travel content connected to culture, experiences, rural tourism, guesthouses, ecology and more. Keywords relating to cultural travel were posted over 500 million times, an increase of 14%, and content with the keywords was read 1.6 billion times, an increase of 28%. A presence on Weibo is also a requirement.

### **3 RED / Xiaohongshu**

Xiaohongshu (translated as “little red book” or RED for short) began as an app that specialized travel-related shopping. Users posted recommendations for products and brands they discovered while travelling. Most couldn’t be bought in China at the time. Although the platform has evolved, it still features a lot of travel content and foreign brands.

It’s seen as a very personal, authentic and reliable platform. Travel influencers present their firsthand experiences, personal opinions and reviews of travel experiences, services and destinations. Connecting with influential users on this

platform is highly recommended.

### **4 Mafengwo**

China’s version of TripAdvisor is one of the most popular platforms among Chinese travellers. Tourists give reviews and ratings and share travel experiences, tips and photos.

### **5 Douyin**

This is the Chinese version of TikTok. Both apps are owned by Chinese developer Bytedance and operate in the same way, just for different audiences - one inside China and one outside. In the West, it’s seen as an app for kids in the 6-12 year old range while in China, it’s users and audience are older with many in their mid-20s.

It’s a short video sharing platform that mostly features short videos backed by music. The clips are very short so they focus on fun, entertaining, highly visual and energetic images. If influencers at your venue made some vibrant clips, they could reach a wide audience of young travellers.

## **Booking Platforms**

### **1 Ctrip**

Ctrip.com is China’s one stop shop for accom-

modation reservations, transportation ticketing, package tours, corporate travel management and more.

Because Ctrip is China's largest online travel agency, influencers, who are usually called key opinion leaders (KOLs) in China, frequently tag Ctrip in posts about booking tickets and other topics while travelling, adding to the brand's exposure. A presence on the site is highly advised.

## **2 Fliggy**

Fliggy is the online travel platform of the Alibaba Group. As an online travel platform (OTP), as opposed to an online travel agent, it provides direct access between customers and airlines, hotels, railway operators and more. Brands and businesses can gather data directly from customers while selling their products and getting exposure for their brand.

In March, 2019, Fliggy integrated e-commerce into the app. The shopping tab is on the home page just below booking services for transportation, lodging, and tourist sites.

Users can browse and select products, then pay

and choose a time and location to pick up the goods. Paying upfront guarantees their purchase and allows them to avoid queues.

## **3 Qunar**

Qunar is China's top travel related search engine and travel information platform. They help consumers find and compare value and experiences for flights, hotels, packages and other travel services.

## **4 Tuniu**

Tuniu is an online leisure travel company in China that offers a large selection of packaged tours, including organized and self-guided tours, as well as travel-related services for leisure travelers. It covers over 140 countries worldwide and all the popular tourist attractions in China.

## **Other Players**

### **Qyer**

Similar to Mafengwo and RED - without the shopping focus - Qyer.com is a Chinese website that enables travel enthusiasts to write notes, give each other tips and share their experiences. It provides information about travel destinations, transportation and accommodation. It

finances itself through commissions from hotel and airline ticket booking.

### Airbnb

Airbnb's Weibo hashtag #爱彼迎故事# (The Story of Airbnb) and #遇到, 想不到# (Meet the Unexpected) are popular among many travel KOLs. Appealing photos and interesting stories in social media posts have attracted a lot of attention for Airbnb. According to one article, China is Airbnb's fastest-growing domestic market, but this is mostly for Chinese travellers using Airbnb within China. It's important to note that regulations regarding Airbnb are not only different from country to country but also from region to region and even city to city. Please take note of the regulations in your jurisdiction.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Travel Trends for 2020

China changes quickly and given other ongoing situations which are currently impacting the travel choices and decisions of Chinese citizens, such as the US-China trade war, a suddenly changed exchange rate, unrest in many places along with a host of other issues, here are some trends that we've noticed. Some are continuations from the past while others are new but they will all be important in 2020.

### Everything is mobile

It's not an exaggeration to say that for most Chinese people, their whole life is on their mobile phone. According to a KPMG survey from 2018, 73% of Chinese people would rather lose their

wallet than their phone. In the US, the statistic was reversed, with 74% preferring to lose their phone. This tells you something about how much Chinese people rely on their phones.

That's why mobile promotion channels and mobile payment options are the most effective ways to encourage Chinese tourists to travel to, shop and sightsee at your location. Every traveller will use a smartphone for some part of their travel planning and during their overseas stay.

In the past few years, there's been a significant shift from traditional booking methods to mobile options. In 2018 43% of travellers were using mobile websites to complete bookings, 11% were using desktop sites, 13% were using mobile apps, 4% went to traditional travel agencies and 1% booked trips directly through social media platforms.

### **WeChat Pay and Alipay**

Mobile payment options were one of the 8 most important factors for Chinese travellers for overseas shopping. The two main players are WeChat Pay and Alipay. More and more retailers and hotels are expanding their cooperation with these

two providers in order to better serve visitors from China. However, Chinese tourists still feel that this needs to be improved. They want to have more options for scanning QR codes and paying via mobile phones.

### **Overseas Beauty and Luxury Products**

According to Jing Daily, the proportion of travellers buying beauty items abroad jumped from 66.2% in 2017 to 71.5% in 2018. Apparel, in contrast, slid in popularity. Some 56% of survey respondents who expected to travel again in the following months planned to increase their overseas spending on luxury beauty items, making it the top category for higher overseas spending. Clothing was the second most popular luxury category with 43% of respondents saying that they expect to spend more on it.

Demand for overseas luxury beauty items is higher than the overall demand. For example, when respondents were asked which luxury categories they expected to spend more on within China, beauty products fell to third place and only 29% said that they expected to increase their spending. This means that prestige beauty products will likely continue to see strong de-

mand overseas.

### **A More Adventurous Approach**

Between the huge availability of information on social media and the popularity of different TV series and films, people are more willing to visit adventurous destinations. Based on Hotels.com's 2018 research, 62% were inspired by films or TV series, 52% of people got inspiration from social media and 51% were motivated by videos that had been shared. These modes were most influential for destinations like Latin America (73%), the United Kingdom (72%), France (69%) and North America (68%). TV series like Game of Thrones and movies like The Secret Life of Walter Mitty have made a huge impact on tourism to places like Croatia, Ireland and Nordic countries.

Among new activities and features which attracted Chinese tourists, music festivals, international film festivals, unusual accommodation and hiking in rainforests or mountains were at the top of the list.

According to Jing Travel, starting in 2016, China was the third largest market for Nepal's hiking tourism industry. Increased air connectivity be-

tween Nepal and China is a big part of this shift. Five Chinese carriers now connect Nepal with mainland China.

In February 2019, numbers from the Nepal Tourism Board showed that there were more Chinese tourists than Indian tourists. 16,205 Chinese tourists arrived, which was 5.3% more than in February 2018. A total of 14,831 Sri Lankan visitors and 14,571 Indian tourists came to Nepal that same month.

### **The Winter Olympics Effect**

Observers are looking to 2022, when Beijing will host the Winter Olympic Games. They expect a spike in Chinese tourism to cold weather locations to see or participate in outdoor winter sports in the run up to the big event.

### **Local Cuisine is King**

According to a Hotels.com survey, 70% of travelers said that tasting something they could only find in that location is a key element for a great travel experience. 73% of millennials born after 1990 agreed.

### More Independent Approach

Usually when someone thinks of Chinese tourists, it evokes images of a uniformed group following a guide with red flags. These travellers still exist but recent data indicates the rise of the independent tourist. In 2018, Coresight Research noted a decline in group package tourists from 31.6% in 2017 to 22.7% in 2018 and a rise from 20.7% to 26.8% in travellers who independently planned and booked their trip arrangements.

There's a misleading perception that only young travellers are fuelling this trend. A growing number of travellers from major urban areas who speak better English are also joining this group.

*If you want to stay up to date on the latest trends, updates and changes in the mainland's digital world and the world of Chinese tourism, subscribe to the China Marketing Circle. It's a private WhatsApp / WeChat group that delivers curated news, updates, trends and case studies to China watchers, entrepreneurs and marketing professionals. Send an email to [cmc@chozan.co](mailto:cmc@chozan.co) mentioning this book for an extended free trial of 1 month.*

## CHAPTER 5

# Recommendations and Cases

Here are some of the top recommendations for those seeking to connect with Chinese tourists while they're still in China and when they come to visit your destination.

### 1) Don't wait until they're at your destination.

#### **Begin a relationship with them before they travel.**

Travel requires planning and research. If tourists don't know about you before they plan their trip and have no way to encounter you once they're planning their trip, you're really counting on luck alone, and that's no strategy.

### 2) Create two different strategies: One for group travellers and one for individuals.

These are still the two main groups of travellers

and, while there may be some overlap, they require different approaches through different channels and you'll need to be prepared for both.

### **3) Use a variety of digital channels and KOLs.**

Standard media advertising isn't likely to reach potential customers in China. Much of life in China's major cities is lived on smartphones and focused on social media. Collaborating with KOLs who love to travel is an effective strategy. An influential KOL can enable your business to connect with travellers in China before they leave home or plan their journeys. Advice or reviews from popular Chinese influencers are persuasive and serve as tangible guides. By contrast, television ads are expensive, highly regulated and often perceived as artificial or too openly commercial.

To choose potential KOL partners, you have to do some intensive research into their style, focus, audience, interests and so on. Their content should be highly engaging and interactive and you need to consider your budget as influencers with very large audiences and good reputations charge much more for a partnership than a smaller KOL with a limited audience.

### **4) Make the most of WeChat.**

WeChat has so many options for brands and is a touchpoint for Chinese citizens of all kinds. Your brand should have an official account. A mini program is highly recommended. Offline services, such as notifications that are sent to your account followers when they're near your location, are great options. Enabling WeChat Pay at your offline locations as well as on any online locations is also highly recommended.

### **5) Get on Mobile Payment Platforms that Chinese Travellers Use.**

Using Chinese mobile payment apps isn't just practical and convenient, it can make Chinese visitors more loyal. In the most popular destinations in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, about 74% of Chinese tourists used familiar mobile payment solutions. Chinese mobile payment usage in other destinations lines up as follows:

Japan and Korea - 70%

Australia and New Zealand - 68%

Canada and the United States - 61%

France, the UK, Italy and Germany - 60%

The top three places where mobile payments



were used were department stores, large supermarkets and duty free shops. The top three purchases via mobile payment apps were skincare and beauty items, local specialties and food.

#### **6) Invest in Chinese-speaking staff and signage.**

It's interesting how Chinese travellers became one of the most desired traveller groups in the world, but at the same time the most important element in welcoming them is often missing. Chinese travellers in every group rate Mandarin speaking guides, signage and hotel staff quite high on their list of factors when making travel decisions. Hotels.com's 2018 survey indicated that 33% of travellers want access to hotel websites in Chinese and would like Chinese restaurants onsite.

Ensure that your destination provides Chinese-language information that is mobile-optimized and easily accessible in both China and in the destination market. Retailers and destinations need to make it easy for tourists to both do pre-trip research and in-destination information gathering. Brands and retailers should test their websites in China to ensure that the accessibility and speed is up to Chinese consumer standards.

#### **Case studies**

##### **1) The KOL so big, national tourism boards want to work with him**

Shenwei, the king of travel KOLs, has over 5 million followers on Weibo. He writes aspirational travel literature like *The Day I Met the World* and romance novels with touching titles *I Like You, You Know*. He's a regular TV and radio show guest and has his own travel show on Xiamen Tourism Radio, FM 94.0 called *The Travel Diary of Shenwei*. He also has his own travel programs on Youku and Tudou. He's been invited by tourism bureaus from Canada, New Zealand, Thailand, Cambodia and some domestic tourism bureaus to promote their destinations, tours and hotels. When you can reach a dedicated, loyal audience of more than 5 million, it makes sense.

##### **2) Ireland doubles down on tourists from China**

One of the nations that has seen a rise in the number of Chinese tourists reaching its shores in recent years is Ireland. It's been one of the destinations to benefit significantly from Game of Thrones tourism and it's keen to increase the number of Chinese arrivals. It's doubled its investment in the mainland market. It's increased its marketing team in China, ramped up public-

ity with a focus on social media (mainly WeChat and Weibo), added direct flights to Dublin from key locations and, in June, it introduced 5 year multi-entry visas for Chinese travellers who have a good record of overseas travel.

### 3) The little village that could

During Golden Week 2018, Alipay partnered with a number of retailers in the UK. They tailored their marketing to Chinese shoppers and helped retailers establish mobile payments. This cooperation included a designer goods outlet park known as Bicester Village, in Oxfordshire, an hour from London. Among Chinese tourists, it's an attraction second only to Buckingham Palace. More than half of Bicester Village stores became "Alipay-enabled", including Burberry, Coach, Gucci, Prada, and Polo Ralph Lauren. The average spend by Chinese tourists during Golden Week was more than 50 percent higher than it was in the UK as a whole, making Bicester the number one outlet in the world among Chinese outbound tourists, in terms of total spending value, during Golden Week.

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*keting Masterclass near you, or ask us to design a custom training for your organization. Email us at natalia@chozan.co for more information on my global training events or to schedule a custom training for your team.*

## CHAPTER 6

# The Travel Year

Chinese citizens in the workforce get anywhere from five to fifteen days paid holiday depending on their seniority. This means that the two Golden Weeks - the week-long National Day holiday in October and the week-long Spring Festival holiday (usually in February) - have a great impact on domestic and outbound travel.

The other major driver is summer vacation in July and August, especially for students and families with children.

52% of Chinese tourists plan trips of 4 to 7 days which are usually short-haul journeys to countries in Asia like Japan and Thailand. Long-haul travel requires at least a week and can extend to a month. 19% of Chinese tourists take trips of 1 to 2 weeks.

Trips of fewer than 4 days tend to be within China to major cities, tourist sites or to special administrative regions like Hong Kong and Macau. Notably, tourism to Hong Kong SAR has been severely curtailed in 2019 due to unrest in the city.

### The Biggest Times for Chinese Travel

Chinese New Year is the biggest travel time with 23% of tourists travelling at this time. The National Day holiday saw 19% of tourists travelling then with 8% travelling during the Labour Day holiday in May and 6% during the Mid-Autumn Festival. 45% of travellers chose to travel at flexible times at some point during 2018, an increase of 8%.

While 64% of respondents planned to travel overseas for Chinese New Year in 2019, 29% planned to stay in China. The most popular domestic choice is one's hometown, with 10% planning to travel there.

### Summer and Autumn

Thailand is still the top choice for summer and autumn travel but it has dropped by 5% with

only 22% of tourists travelling there. The Maldives maintains its second position but has also fallen by 3% to 15%. The popularity of Hawaii, Saipan and Malaysia rose, with respective increases to 15%, 13% and 11%. The popularity of Bali and Fiji have waned.

### Winter and Spring

Japan is the top choice for winter and spring travel with 36% choosing to travel there in cold seasons. New Zealand saw a significant spike in winter travel rising by 13% to 21%. Australia is in third place with 18% of winter travel. Switzerland also performed well, increasing by 5% and ranking fourth with 12%. The popularity of Thailand weakened, dropping by 8%, and ranking fifth with 10%.

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## CHAPTER 7

# A Step by Step Checklist

Now, to sum it all up, here's a checklist for you.

### Step 1:

Set up official accounts on major social media platforms. Prioritize WeChat and Weibo. Establish a presence on other prominent travel platforms such as Ctrip and Fliggy.

### Step 2:

Research Chinese influencers and choose ones that match your brand to help you spread the word about your product, location, brand or shop.

**Step 3:**

Set up mobile payment options like Alipay and WeChat Pay that can be used online and offline. Enable options to make it faster and easier for Chinese tourists shopping at your location to receive their tax refunds.

**Step 4:**

Get Chinese speaking staff, make a Chinese version of your website available, even if it's a somewhat simplified version, and optimize it for the kind of information Chinese tourists are looking for. Help Chinese tourists to find your location with detailed directions and other tips in simplified Chinese.

**Step 5:**

Apply for Welcome Chinese Certification, as described below.

In 2013, the China Tourism Academy (CTA) and China's National Tourism Administration (CNTA) introduced certification for brands and businesses that deliver a high standard of service to Chinese tourists.

It's called Welcome Chinese Certification, and

participating in the program enables a partnership with the CTA which will then promote your business in the Chinese market. Certification is available for airports, airlines, railway stations, parks, hotels, restaurants, museums, shopping outlets and more.

Factors taken into consideration include:

- An understanding of Chinese culture, customs and traditions
- An open visa policy
- An understanding of the evolution of the Chinese outbound market and its new realities
- The availability of free Wi-Fi
- Ease of payment for Chinese travellers
- Availability of Mandarin language services
- Close contact with Chinese travel partners that can help destinations to detect and follow market changes
- Diverse and authentic travel experiences that will help to attract repeat tourists.

*If you're wondering how to improve your engagement with Chinese tourists, have urgent questions or want to hone your digital media presence in China, contact us at [natalia@alarice.com.hk](mailto:natalia@alarice.com.hk) to schedule a consultation.*

# Conclusion

China's economy has been on the rise for decades. Improved living standards, a growing interest in tourism and relaxed travel regulations for Chinese citizens have led to a huge rise in the number of outbound Chinese tourists. And China is the leading outbound market in the world, which provides huge opportunities for different tourism industry players.

If you think that giving tourists discounts, organising tours to famous landmarks or showcasing your area's beautiful scenery are enough to attract them, then you're bound to be disappointed.

It's understandable that destinations, brands and businesses are at different stages in terms of attracting Chinese tourists and therefore have different strategies. Mature destinations should focus on fully/free independent travellers (FITs)

from wealthier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Suzhou and Chengdu, as well as group tourists and new FITs in second and third tier cities. Emerging destinations will do well to focus on high-end tourists needing tailored tours with lower cost options that will be attractive to the young, independent travellers.

Chinese tourists and their outsized spending habits are here to stay. If you haven't already tried to connect with them, there's no time like the present. If you need any advice, we're here and ready to help.

Now, let's go get them!

# Your 2020 China Travel Calendar

| Month        | Week  | Dates                          | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold  |
|--------------|-------|--------------------------------|---|
| January 2020 | 1     | Jan 1st-5th                    | <b>January 1st - New Year's Day</b> is a public holiday. Some limited outbound travel at Christmas and New Year   |
|              | 2     | Jan 6th-12th                   |   |
|              | 3     | Jan 13th-19th                  | <b>School winter holidays begin</b> - Many schools have winter holidays that coincide with the Spring Festival. They usually begin in mid-January and end in mid-February.  |
|              | 4 + 5 | Jan 20th-26th<br>Jan 27th-31st | <b>January 24th, 25th and 26th - Spring Festival / Chinese New Year</b> is a public holiday. <b>The Golden Week</b> holiday is from <b>January 24th-30th</b> . There will be a lot of outbound travel and it's one of the best times for long-haul trips. The largest human migration on Earth happens within China as people travel to their hometowns |

| Month         | Week | Dates         | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold   |
|---------------|------|---------------|--|
| February 2020 | 1    | Feb 1st-2nd   |  |
|               | 2    | Feb 3rd-9th   | February 4th - 2 years until the Winter Olympics in Beijing start.<br>February 8th - The Lantern Festival. Not a day off work but some people may travel locally. Families will celebrate with their children. |
|               | 3    | Feb 10th-16th | February 14th - Valentine's Day. Not a day off work. Some couples may travel locally within China.<br><b>School winter holidays end</b> in early to mid-February.  |
|               | 4    | Feb 17th-23rd |  |
|               | 5    | Feb 24th-29th |  |

| Month      | Week | Dates         | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold   |
|------------|------|---------------|--|
| March 2020 | 1    | Mar 1st       |  |
|            | 2    | Mar 2nd-8th   | March 8th - International Women's Day<br>Not a day off work but this is a good opportunity to promote travel opportunities to women. |
|            | 3    | Mar 9th-15th  | March 12th - Arbor Day<br>Not a day off work but this is a good opportunity to promote nature travel opportunities and eco-tourism.  |
|            | 4    | Mar 16th-22nd |  |
|            | 5+6  | Mar 23rd-31st |  |

| Month      | Week | Dates         | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold  |
|------------|------|---------------|---|
| April 2020 | 1    | Apr 1st-5th   | <b>April 4th - The Qing Ming Festival</b> is a public holiday. This festival honors ancestors. Families may travel locally or within China. |
|            | 2    | Apr 6th-12th  |   |
|            | 3    | Apr 13th-19th |   |
|            | 4    | Apr 20th-26th |   |
|            | 5    | Apr 27th-30th |   |

| Month    | Week | Dates         | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold   |
|----------|------|---------------|--|
| May 2020 | 1    | May 1st-3rd   | <b>May 1st - Labor Day</b> is a public holiday. The holiday is on a Friday in 2020 so people are likely to take short-haul trips within Asia or take annual leave to take long-haul trips.<br>May 4th - Youth Day. Not a day off work. |
|          | 2    | May 4th-10th  | May 10th - Mother's Day. Not a day off work. This is a good time for travel for extended family groups to places that mothers and grandmothers would appreciate.   |
|          | 3    | May 11th-17th |  |
|          | 4    | May 18th-24th |  |
|          | 5    | May 25th-31st |  |

| Month     | Week | Dates          | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold  |
|-----------|------|----------------|---|
| June 2020 | 1    | June 1st-7th   | June 1st - Children's Day. Not a day off work.  |
|           | 2    | June 8th-14th  | <b>June 8th-10th National College Entrance Exams</b> (The Gaokao) After these very important and stressful exams, many students go on holiday with their friends within China or to a nearby Asian destination.   |
|           | 3    | June 15th-21st | June 20th - Summer solstice. Many like to escape the summer heat so it's a popular time for travel.<br>June 21st - Father's Day - Not a day off work. This is a good time to promote tourism for extended family groups to places that fathers and grandfathers would appreciate. |
|           | 4    | June 22nd-28th | <b>June 25th - The Dragon Boat Festival</b> is a public holiday. The holiday is on a Thursday in 2020 so people are likely to take Friday as their annual leave and take short-haul trips within Asia. Some may take more annual leave to take long-haul trips farther afield.    |
|           | 5    | June 29th-30th | In some cities, <b>primary school summer holidays begin</b> at the end of June.   |

| Month     | Week | Dates          | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold   |
|-----------|------|----------------|--|
| July 2020 | 1    | July 1st-5th   | <b>School summer holidays begin</b> in some places at the beginning of July. |
|           | 2    | July 6th-12th  |  |
|           | 3    | July 13th-19th | <b>School summer holidays begin</b> in many places in mid-July.              |
|           | 4    | July 20th-26th |  |
|           | 5    | July 27th-31st |  |

| Month       | Week | Dates         | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold   |
|-------------|------|---------------|--|
| August 2020 | 1    | Aug 1st-2nd   |  |
|             | 2    | Aug 3rd-9th   |  |
|             | 3    | Aug 10th-16th |  |
|             | 4    | Aug 17th-23rd |  |
|             | 5+6  | Aug 24th-31st | August 25th - Chinese Valentine's Day. Not a day off work.<br><b>School summer holidays end</b> at the end of August |



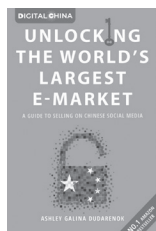
| Month                 | Week | Dates          | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold   |
|-----------------------|------|----------------|--|
| <b>September 2020</b> | 1    | Sept 1st-6th   | The school year begins.  |
|                       | 2    | Sept 7th-13th  | September 10th - Teacher's Day. Not a day off work. Students will give their teachers gifts and thank them for their hard work and guidance. This may be a good time to promote educational trips to families and trips to snowy areas to learn about sports in preparation for the 2022 winter Olympics in Beijing. |
|                       | 3    | Sept 14th-20th |  |
|                       | 4    | Sept 21st-27th |  |
|                       | 5    | Sept 28th-30th |  |

| Month               | Week | Dates                       | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold  |
|---------------------|------|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>October 2020</b> | 1+2  | Oct 1st-4th<br>Oct 5th-11th | <b>October 1st - The National Day Holiday</b> is an official holiday. <b>The Golden Week</b> holiday is from <b>October 1st-7th</b> . Many people will take the 8th and 9th (Thursday and Friday) as annual leave to take longer local, regional or long-haul trips. <b>October 1st</b> is also the start of the <b>Mid-Autumn Festival</b> . |
|                     | 3    | Oct 12th-18th               |   |
|                     | 4    | Oct 19th-25th               | October 25th - The Double 9th Festival. Not a day off work. This is similar to the Qing Ming Festival. People go hiking and visit the graves of their ancestors to pay respects.  |
|                     | 5    | Oct 26th-31st               |   |

| Month                | Week | Dates         | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold |
|----------------------|------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>November 2020</b> | 1    | Nov 1st-5th   |                                    |
|                      | 2    | Nov 6th-12th  |                                    |
|                      | 3    | Nov 13th-19th |                                    |
|                      | 4    | Nov 20th-26th |                                    |
|                      | 5    | Nov 27th-30th |                                    |

| Month                | Week | Dates         | Holidays - Travel Holidays in bold  |
|----------------------|------|---------------|---|
| <b>December 2020</b> | 1    | Dec 1st-6th   |   |
|                      | 2    | Dec 7th-13th  |   |
|                      | 3    | Dec 14th-20th |   |
|                      | 4    | Dec 21st-27th | December 21st - The Dongzhi Festival Not a day off work. This celebrates the winter solstice and is an important festival in China, especially for older people who eat and drink special foods to stay healthy.<br>December 25th - Christmas Day. Not a day off work. Some people may want to travel to experience Christmas abroad or to see snowy places and learn more about winter Olympic sports. |
|                      | 5    | Dec 28th-31st |   |

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**— Jia Song, China Enterprise Business Center**



Ashley Dudarenok is a serial entrepreneur, global keynote speaker, 3-times bestselling author, vlogger and podcaster.

As a marketer and social media agency head with more than twelve years of professional experience in Greater China, she's seen the transformation of China's online world firsthand.

Her specialties are China market entry, Chinese consumers and New Retail.

