

DIGITAL CHINA

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HOW TO WIN WITH CHINESE TOURISTS

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AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY



ASHLEY DUDARENOK

If you've ever thought about attracting Chinese tourists to your location, shop or brand, this is the book for you. In our updated version for 2023 and beyond, find out who China's outbound and domestic tourists are, where they're going, what they're buying and why. In this book you'll learn:

- The current state of China's outbound and domestic tourism three years after the start of Covid
- The latest travel trends for Chinese tourists
- Which online platforms you need to be on to reach Chinese travellers
- Best practices for marketing to Chinese travellers

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"Ashley understands the ecosystems of WeChat, Chinese social media and social commerce, Chinese consumers and Chinese New Retail at a level, and with a depth and breadth of knowledge, that places her among the elite thinkers and doers in Chinese digital commerce."

– **Michael Zakkour, Founder & Chief Strategist, 5 New Digital**



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She has worked with Chinese tech giants and some of the world's most loved Fortune 500 brands.



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# **HOW TO WIN WITH CHINESE TOURISTS**

**AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE  
FOR THE TRAVEL AND  
TOURISM INDUSTRY**

**by Ashley Dudarenok**

**Ashley Dudarenok** is a naturalized Chinese serial entrepreneur, award-winning digital marketing professional and author. Recognized as a “guru on digital marketing and fast-evolving trends in China” by Thinkers50, Ashley is the founder of China-focused digital marketing agency Alarice and China digital consultancy ChoZan 超赞. She has a deep theoretical knowledge of China’s digital landscape development and is immersed daily in the market, observing and applying what works for businesses. She has served some of the world’s most loved Fortune 500 brands by applying tactics and strategies learned from the fast-moving, innovative China market and has published over a dozen books about digital China.

**ChoZan 超赞** (chozan.co) - Learn for China, learn from China. ChoZan 超赞 is an award-winning China digital consultancy backed by research. It executes consulting, trendwatching and training projects for in-house commercial and marketing teams to aid their success in China. ChoZan 超赞 also serves global multinationals and tech companies going through digitalization. It helps them to learn from and make sense of China’s digital transformation journey and use these experiences to shorten their own learning curve at home.

**Alarice** (alarice.com.hk) is a China-focused digital marketing agency. Alarice executes consumer and market research to create China marketing strategies, it manages brand social media communities on WeChat, RED, Weibo and Douyin, it develops content, works with influencers, launches campaigns and more. With 12 years of successful experience in this rapidly evolving field, it has delivered outstanding results for global brands in a variety of industries, including FMCG, beauty, finance, luxury, tourism, education, wine and spirits, B2B and others.

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# Introduction

The first edition of this mini book was written in 2019. Chinese tourism domestically and to foreign destinations had been booming since around 2014 and international travel was an aspiration among those in China's middle class as well as among intrepid young solo travellers. This was tempered only by a trade war that started between the US and China in January 2018.

Here's a sample of headlines from 2018 and 2019:

“Chinese Tourists Are Taking Over the Earth, One Selfie at a Time”

Bloomberg, February 12th, 2018

“Why Chinese Tourists Deserve Your Attention”

Forbes, September 20th, 2018

“How Chinese Tourists Are Changing the Travel Landscape”

Condé Nast Traveler, November 2nd, 2018.

“How Chinese travellers are revolutionising travel”

World Travel & Tourism Council, March 20th, 2019.

“Chinese Tourists’ U.S. Spending Has Plunged. The Trade War May Be to Blame.”

New York Times, June 12th , 2019.

“Chinese tourists spent \$250 billion in 2017”

The World Economic Forum, June 17th, 2019.

New phenomena had developed like tourists from China flocking to luxury outlets just outside of London set up to resemble a traditional town and groups of Chinese tourists roaming around unsuspecting, quiet villages in the UK snapping photos. In Australia, and other countries, Chinese tourists made trips to buy certain products in bulk that they then sold when they returned home to China.

Mostly due to the trade war, things had started to moderate in 2018 and 2019. Then, about a month after the first edition of this book was published in November 2019, reports started to come out of Wuhan, China of a mystery illness that was spreading from a wet market in the city. And we all know what happened after that.

The world turned upside down, especially for travel and tourism. Suddenly, a fun leisurely activity became something that could spread illness or

strand people outside their home country as travel bans, flight restrictions and massive quarantine measures took hold in country after country to deal with a devastating, highly contagious novel coronavirus that no one had any immunity to.

We’re now on the other side of it in some ways, thanks to rapidly rolled out vaccines, significantly adjusted habits and a lot of lessons learned. However, Covid is still with us and has become endemic. The trade war continues, there’s a war in Europe and there’s renewed conflict in the Middle East.

Travel habits and preferences have changed over the last few years. This includes China. So here we are with an updated version of this mini book to reflect some of the changes that have occurred.

Although Chinese tourism has bounced back to a degree within the country, people are still favouring travel closer to home. Internationally, tourism is down, with only a few very popular, sunny destinations, like Spain, getting their tourist numbers back to pre-pandemic levels in recent months. Many places have also seen a change in their tourism demographics due to Covid, a cost of living crisis in Europe and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Now let’s dive in and take a closer look at the new world of Chinese tourism.

## CHAPTER 1

# A Market Overview

**G**lobal travel, transport and supply chains were turned on their head by the spread of Covid-19 which was first detected in its most destructive form in December, 2019 in China. What was at first thought to be a localized epidemic eventually led to a global pandemic. As a novel coronavirus, no one had any immunity to it.

Covid was not only highly contagious but some people got very severe versions of it, while others didn't. It was especially dangerous for the elderly and those with compromised immunity. On top of that, it had an unusually long incubation stage which meant that some people were infecting others for 2 weeks or longer before they themselves even knew they were infected. This meant that to protect

others, people had to exercise caution constantly just in case they were infected and didn't know it.

Before vaccines were made, there were limited actions that could be taken to prevent its spread. Decreasing contact with others by social distancing, limiting travel, increasing ventilation, wearing masks, washing hands and disinfecting surfaces were crucial in controlling the spread. Millions died all over the world, many more were afflicted with chronic long Covid and it was a scary, uncertain time.

These measures persisted even after effective vaccines were available as the vaccines prevented serious cases and reduced infection rates but didn't prevent infection entirely. Several variants and mutations of Covid have spread around the world and it's now endemic.

Many of the early measures are still with us today as people all over the world try to prevent reinfections and long Covid, keep the elderly and immunocompromised safe and make sure their healthcare systems aren't overwhelmed by huge numbers of people getting sick at the same time.

This is also why many have been reluctant to travel even when opportunities are opening back up again.

People are now much more aware of the fragility of their health and the infection and logistics risks of travel. There are also cost of living and inflation issues in many places, making long distance travel too expensive for many.

This dramatic disruption also occurred shortly after global concerns about overtourism began to rise in 2016 and 2017. Popular tourist spots like Venice, Barcelona and Ibiza had local movements to reduce the number of travellers as it was adversely affecting the lives of locals in the form of inflation, crowds, noise, rubbish, disrespectful behaviour, damage to local monuments and a large number of apartments and houses that were either vacant or for non-locals.

Places like Maya Bay, which was made famous by the Leonardo DiCaprio movie *The Beach*, and dive sites in Thailand that were affected by coral bleaching were also shut down.

As a result of all these factors, health, safety, sustainability and affordability are at the forefront as tourism begins to regain its footing.

As countries in or near Europe are close together with good bus, rail and road links and there are plenty of budget air carriers operating in the region, travel between these places has been less affected

than some other areas. However, the war in Ukraine has dissuaded some from outside Europe from travelling there.



Source: Statista

Given that many people previously employed in tourism-related businesses moved on to other jobs, as travel returns, services are having a hard time catching up again. People have found shops closed, hours changed, staff missing or untrained, queues longer, costs different and sudden flight cancellations seem to be the order of the day.

### China's International Tourism

Prior to Covid, China was the world's most important source of tourists. 155 million Chinese travellers were known for their love of shopping

while travelling and spent more than a quarter of a trillion dollars in other countries in 2019. So, in addition to health threats and so many other issues, it was a big blow to the tourism sector in many locations when strict travel controls went into effect and cut off this valuable group.

During Covid, many countries introduced restrictions for countries where there were large numbers of Covid infections and for bordering nations. This was to protect their local populations and prevent the spread of the illness. At times, some destinations still allowed travel from China but required Covid testing or quarantine periods. Within China, there was strong control of travel between provinces and major cities. There was also a strict limitation on exit visas so outbound travel was extremely difficult if not impossible.

Since Covid protocols were dropped and people started travelling internationally again, there have been some major changes in the number of outbound Chinese tourists and where those tourists are headed. Economic issues in China mean that people have less money to spend on outbound travel and it's unlikely that tourist numbers will return to their former levels until those issues have been solved.

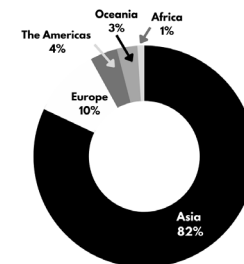
In the meantime, let's look at a few examples of the situation before and after major travel restrictions to get a better understanding of the situation.

### Asia

The majority of China's tourists travel within Asia. The destinations aren't far away, there are lots of warm, beautiful locations geared toward tourists, there are often affordable package tours or cheap flights available and there are some cultural affinities, like lunar new year dates that match those of China's lunar new year.

Let's look at the current situation in the favourite Asian destination for Chinese travellers in 2019 to see how it's doing so far in 2023.

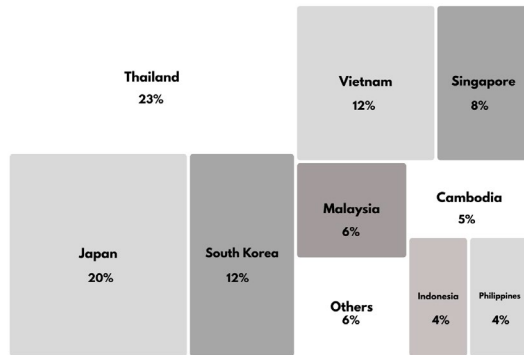
Chinese Tourist Destinations (H1 2019)



Source: Ctrip

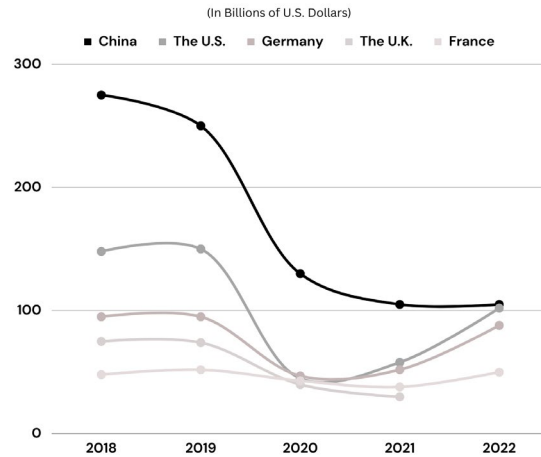


Mainland Chinese Visitor Arrivals in Asia  
(Ex-Greater China) 2019



Source: Local Tourism Authorities, AP Hospitality Advisors

Expenditure by Travellers from the World's  
Top 5 Outbound Tourism Countries



Source: Statista

## Asia

### Thailand

Thailand's economy is heavily reliant on tourism and the country was very active in courting large numbers of tourists from China before the pandemic. Once there was news that China's strict Covid Zero policy would be dropped, Thailand did a lot of preparation and promotion expecting, and hoping for, a much needed rebound in tourist numbers. However, economic problems at home, changed habits and attitudes, and internet rumours have hampered a return to 2019's Chinese visitor levels.

In 2019, Thailand hosted 11 million Chinese tourists. From January and May 18, 2023, 1 million Chinese tourists arrived in Thailand. By September, 2023, that number had risen to 2.3 million.

This was a concern to the tourism sector as the Thai government had rolled out the red carpet expecting an influx. They had targets of 5 million Chinese tourist arrivals engaging in US\$ 13.18 billion in spending this year. They announced temporary visa-free travel for Chinese travellers in an attempt to raise the numbers but it's a bit of an uphill battle at the moment.

Thailand's tourism has been particularly hard hit by social media rumours. A movie called *No More Bets* recently topped the box office in China. Its plot revolves around Chinese tourists being trafficked to work in tech scam centres. These scams are run by Chinese criminal gangs in the region and operate mostly in Cambodia but have also been found in border towns in Myanmar and Thailand as well as the Philippines. They usually target job seekers from Taiwan, Vietnam and Southeast Asia through what seem to be legitimate job offers. They don't usually target or abduct tourists but the film has spooked Chinese travellers as it has brought this urgent issue to light.

There have also been tensions between locals and Chinese tourists in Thailand over issues relating to wildlife protection laws. In June, 2023, in violation of the country's marine protection laws, three Chinese tourists were accused of touching a starfish and stepping on coral reefs during a diving expedition in Phuket, Thailand. They could face heavy fines or up to two years in jail. As mentioned earlier, during Thailand's heaviest tourism phase prior to Covid, the country had to shut down certain areas to protect the natural environment so these are strong concerns in the country.

It remains to be seen if the Thai government can reach the tourist number and spending targets it set for 2023, or after that. It may need to pivot to tourists from India, the Middle East or other locations.

Now let's take a look at a country in the second most popular region for Chinese tourists that has had an ongoing relationship with them - France.

## **Europe**

### **France**

France, and Paris in particular, have been favoured destinations for Chinese travellers starting from about 2011. In the early days, there were cultural misunderstandings and resentments on both sides as the tourists' behaviour and the proliferation of tour groups rubbed locals the wrong way and the reactions of Parisians, as well as thefts and pickpocketing, left the tourists with a bad taste in their mouth. Many Chinese tourists also fell victim to Paris Syndrome. They expected a city of romance and beauty and were disappointed by the realities of a modern European city full of busy people and other tourists.

The number of Chinese tourists grew every year. The middle ground they seemed to negotiate by around

2015 was that the tourists understood local etiquette better while efforts were made to accommodate them in many spaces, because it was clear to all that they were big spenders and were exceptionally interested in luxury items and French brands of status.

Galleries Lafayette is a large, high-end department store in Paris. Before the pandemic, lots of tour buses full of Chinese tourists stopped there daily to go on shopping sprees. It also had a dedicated entrance and special annex for Chinese tourists with Mandarin-speaking shop assistants. The store accepts WeChat Pay. Other prime tourist locations accept Alipay. UnionPay, China's answer to Visa and Mastercard, is accepted at many shops and ATMs in France.

China's new middle class was there to invest and acquire. In more recent years, the focus of younger tourists was also about getting the right selfie in the right outfit in the right spot. Then came the pandemic. Let's take a look at how things changed.

### **Chinese Tourists and Luxury Shopping**

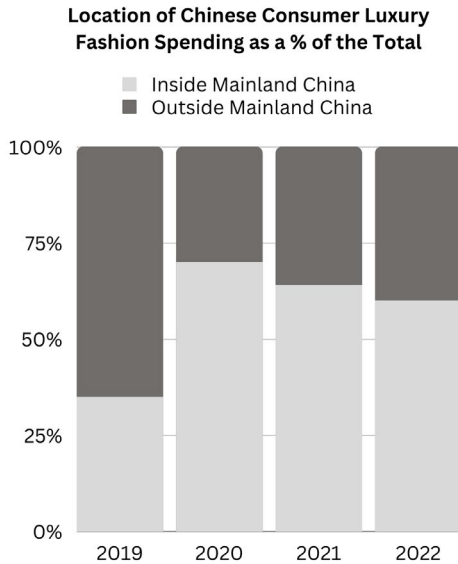
Bain tracks nine categories of luxury goods and experiences. More than 80% of the market is made up of luxury cars, luxury hospitality, and personal

luxury goods. In the decade leading up to 2019, Chinese consumers had played a huge role in the growth of global luxury sales and this was still true in 2019.

A report that year by Bain stated that 90% of the growth in the global market in 2019 came from Chinese buyers, who bought 35% of the world's luxury goods. About 70% of these customers spent their money abroad as their love affair with travel dovetailed with their increase in luxury purchases. Much of this travel was in France. This rate was expected to decrease over time because of efforts to lower taxes within China on luxury goods. As we'll see, this process was accelerated enormously by the pandemic, at least in one location.

With the onset of the pandemic and travel restrictions in early 2020, dynamics shifted rapidly. Most Chinese luxury purchases were now being made domestically rather than abroad.

Most forecasters don't think that overseas luxury shopping will return to its former levels. Some predict that it will stay as it is now, with about 40% overseas and 60% domestic, others think it will end up about 50-50 while another group feels it will end up with 60% abroad and 40% at home. We'll have to wait and see.



Source: McKinsey and The Financial Times

As this shift was happening, there was also a big adjustment with regards to the epicenter of duty free shopping in Greater China.

Hong Kong had been the primary location for luxury and duty free shopping for decades. As the city was a duty free port, luxury goods cost much less there than in the Mainland.

Over the past few years, Sanya and Hainan Island have taken over this role. The Chinese government released the Overall Plan for the Construction of Hainan Free Trade Port on June 1, 2020 which

outlined the development of the whole island province into a free trade port (FTP), China's biggest special economic zone. The completion of construction of huge, high-end, duty-free shopping malls along with hotels and resorts in Hainan coincided with the pandemic. Chinese consumers who wanted to buy luxury items either did it online or went on holiday to sunny, sandy Hainan and did their shopping there. They didn't need to go to France. The number of tourists from Mainland China also dropped in Hong Kong and its share of luxury shopping dropped right along with it.

There are still Chinese tourists shopping in Europe but there are fewer and they are a different type of customer. The cost of flights to France skyrocketed and is still about 80% higher than before the pandemic. This means that most people travelling there now are wealthy or business travellers. UBS said that data from VAT refund company Planet showed that Chinese tourists' average transaction value in Europe in March, 2023 was 28% higher than it was in 2019.

In Paris, Galeries Lafayette isn't getting the foot traffic that it used to. Well, if people can't come to the party, bring the party to them. In April, 2023, 10 years after opening its first store in Beijing, Galeries

Lafayette entered into a joint venture with listed Chinese real estate company, Hopson Group to accelerate its China expansion. In July, it opened its first store in Shenzhen. It also plans to open stores in Chongqing and Macau in 2023 and open 10 stores in China by 2025.

The other Chinese visitors to France are people who are travelling to see friends and relatives and a very small number of foreign students. Those visiting friends and relatives tend to want to see and do things that are off the beaten track or find hidden gems with the help of those they know locally.

In July, 2023, a tour bus full of Chinese tourists was attacked during a riot in Marseille. It became an international incident and was much publicized in China. On top of all the other issues, safety is a top concern for Chinese travellers so this isn't likely to show the country in the best light as a tourist destination.

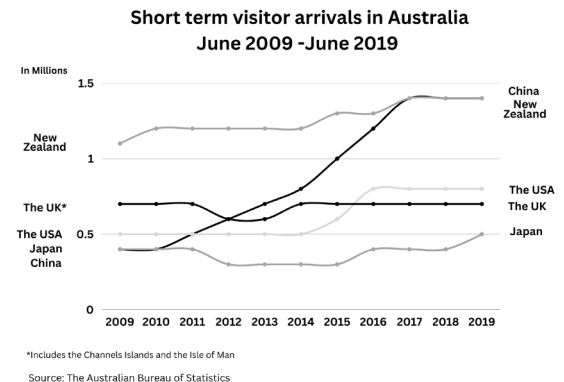
It's a new era for Chinese tourism in France.

Now let's examine one of the top destinations in Oceania for travellers from China.

## Oceania

### Australia

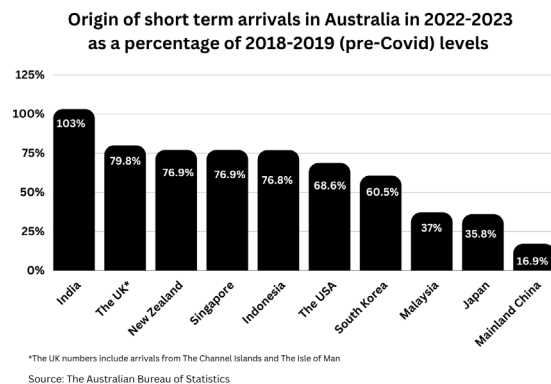
In 2019, Chinese tourists were at the top of Australia's tourist charts with New Zealanders right behind them. There were nearly 1.4 million tourists in 2019 who spent a total of A\$8.3 billion. However, so far, in 2023, the predicted rebound in tourism from China hasn't happened. In fact, the numbers have recovered only 16.9%. The lowest of 10 major countries of origin. Only tourism from India has risen above its pre-Covid levels.



Part of the reason is that when China allowed group tours again in February, 2023, after Covid Zero policies were finally ended, Australia wasn't on the initial list of nations where group tours were permitted. Some felt that geopolitics played a role

in the decision. The initial list featured countries in Southeast Asia, Africa and South America.

According to aviation analytics company Cirium, the number of flights from mainland China to Australia was only one-fifth of what it was before the pandemic because rising fuel costs drove up prices and decreased demand.



Tourism Australia launched a major campaign in China in March, 2023 called 'Don't Go Small, Go Australia' with plans for a follow up 'Come and Say G'day' campaign as well as a trip to Chengdu in June by its executives for on-the-ground promotion.

In August, 2023, Australia was finally added to the list of destinations approved for group travel along with Japan, South Korea, the U.S., the U.K.,

Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and others.

However, even if Chinese tourists return to Australia in large numbers, struggles remain. Many tourism workers, including multilingual guides and bus drivers, moved into other fields during the Covid downturn, taking their skills, talents and experience with them so the country's capacity to serve large cohorts of travellers from China has been negatively impacted.

Now let's take a look at travel within China.

### China's Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism was on an upward trend until Covid began to spread at the beginning of 2020. On January 23rd, 2020, Covid lockdowns began in Wuhan. After that, there were selective and sudden lockdowns in other areas of the country, weekly or daily mass testing and travel protocols, such as phone apps that recorded negative Covid tests, to prevent its spread within China.

There were times when travellers got stuck in other cities or provinces due to strict lockdowns and had trouble returning home. People were also sometimes confined to their hotel rooms with little

notice with the door locked from the other side. This made people wary of travelling far from home.

Travel restrictions for inbound travellers began in March 2020.

China's strict Covid Zero policies stayed in force until December 7th, 2022, when freedom to travel around China without the necessity of a negative Covid test resumed. China welcomed its first international travellers with the new regulations in January, 2023.

The number of domestic trips reached 6.006 billion in 2019 but rapidly declined in 2020 to 2.879 billion. In 2022, according to China's Ministry of Culture And Tourism, there were 2.53 billion domestic tourist trips. This was down 22.1% year-on-year and was the lowest figure amid the country's strong Covid restrictions. With the easing of Covid restriction in 2023, there were positive signs of recovery and growth.

### **The Number of Trips and Spending Power**

The 2023 Chinese New Year holidays in late January saw 308 million domestic trips, generating almost RMB 376 billion in tourism revenue. This upswing indicated that domestic travel volume had recovered

to 90 percent of 2019 figures but spending was only at 70 percent of pre-pandemic levels.

During the May Golden Week, from April 29th to May 3rd 2023, there were a record 274 million domestic tourists. This was up 70.83% from the previous year. Revenue was also up from the previous year, reaching 148.056 billion RMB. However, comparing the numbers to 2019 is revealing. The number of trips was 19% higher than 2019 while the revenue was only slightly higher. This means that there are more trips but less spending than before the pandemic.

During China's October National Day Golden Week in 2023, while numbers came in below official predictions, they signalled a return to form. Domestic tourism revenue of 753.43 billion yuan (\$103.24 billion) was an increase of 1.5% compared to 2019 and the number of domestic tourism trips - 826 million during the latest eight-day holiday - rose by 4.1% compared to 2019.

In each case, we see that the increase in trips is larger than the increase in spending compared to before the pandemic, reflecting economic issues at play in the country.

### Where Are They From?

First tier and new first tier cities serve as the source of most of China's domestic tourism.

#### Top 10 Domestic Tourist Origin Cities

1. Shanghai
2. Beijing
3. Shenzhen
4. Guangzhou
5. Chengdu
6. Hangzhou
7. Nanjing
8. Chongqing
9. Suzhou
10. Wuhan

#### Top 10 Domestic Tourist Origin Cities During CNY 2023

1. Beijing
2. Shanghai
3. Chengdu
4. Guangzhou
5. Shenzhen
6. Chongqing
7. Tianjin
8. Nanjing
9. Hangzhou
10. Wuhan

### Where Are They Going?

According to the *New Year's Travel Data Report* from Mafengwo in 2023, Southwest China (25%), Eastern China (24%) and Southern China (23%) were the most popular regions. The top 10 domestic tourist destinations by province are Yunnan, Hainan, Guangdong, Sichuan, Fujian, Guangxi, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Jilin along with the capital Beijing. The most popular attractions in Yunnan are Manting Park, Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, Lugu Lake, Xishuangbanna, and Erhai Lake.

Hainan Island has been a very popular destination in China for some time due to its tropical weather but it has become even more popular in the last few years. In October, 2022, the world's largest duty-free complex opened there. The island was designated as a duty-free zone in 2011 but there has been a lot of development of resorts and malls in the last few years. This enormously broadened the options for duty-free shopping not only in Hainan but in China as a whole. The island has now essentially taken over from Hong Kong as the go-to location for those wanting to engage in duty-free shopping. Hong Kong is now attractive primarily for its financial services, as a city with its own flavour and as a place to take interesting selfies and social media photos.



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

Most tourists from China are travelling for enjoyment, sightseeing and leisure purposes. Due to the weak economy and a shift to purchasing online, shopping is not a big draw, except for wealthier tourists buying luxury items and duty-free destinations like Sanya.

Travel agencies have been replaced by friends, family and online recommendations 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.

#### **International Destinations**

There are a host of factors affecting decisions to travel abroad and the choices of destinations.

##### 1) Geopolitics

Worsening relations between China, the US and some other countries as well as an increasing number of conflict zones have had an effect on tourists' desires and airlines' abilities to travel to certain destinations. For certain destinations,

there may still be flights but they're longer and less affordable given that flights need to avoid dangerous airspace near areas of armed conflict.

##### 2) Health and Safety Concerns

Due to sudden conflicts, high crime rates, infection awareness or perceptions of racism or unfriendly attitudes, destinations like the US, Canada, Eastern Europe and some countries in the Middle East have fallen out of favour.

##### 3) Novelty

Although most Chinese tourism still occurs within Asia, numbers are down for popular locations like Thailand and the Philippines as people look to new, unique destinations. A survey in June by research intelligence company Morning Consult showed that interest in Central America, Africa and Antarctica is up. Countries in Africa and South America were also in the initial batch of countries where group travel from China was allowed after things opened up again so, for those who can afford it, these are new destinations on the map.

##### 4) Affordability and Availability

The cost of flights has increased along with the wait times for visas while capacity has decreased.

A report by Skift Research from July 2023 stated that China's domestic airlines had fully recovered capacity but that international flights were down nearly 5 million seats and were still operating at less than 50 percent of pre-pandemic levels.

#### 5) A Preference to Stay Local

During the strongest pandemic controls, Chinese tourists got into the habit of travelling within China and seeing places that were nearby. This was more affordable and safer if a sudden lockdown occurred. With those restrictions gone, many are still in the habit of travelling domestically or prefer it to travelling abroad. It also makes travel more affordable at a time when people are trying hard to economize.

*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 [info@chozan.co](mailto:info@chozan.co) to schedule a consultation.*

## CHAPTER 2

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

Modern Chinese tourists aren't one group and they change and develop every year. This is especially true in a Covid world where travellers' values have changed. Here are some of the key characteristics and trends associated with modern Chinese tourists:

### **International Tourists**

#### **Tour Groups**

This group made up the bulk of Chinese tourists before the pandemic. After 3 years of restrictions

and upheaval, the restoration of China's outbound tourism took a big step forward on February 6th, 2023 when Chinese group tour travel to 20 countries started again. Initially, this only included trips to Southeast Asia, Africa and South America, but it was later expanded.

Usually, these are full package tours with a local guide who handles virtually every detail of the itinerary, including which attractions you'll see, stops along the way, where'll you'll stay, eat, and so on. Tourists in the same group usually wear the same T-shirts or hats. They're mainly from lower tier cities and prefer cheap, mass market package tours and duty-free shopping.

There was an increase of 358% in searches and inquiries for outbound tour group travel from Jan 20th to Feb 5th, 2023 and 1,200 outbound group tours were launched on Ctrip on Feb 6th.

### **High Net Worth Individuals (HNIs) - The Wealthy**

As noted earlier, costs for international flights have increased and although there are fewer Chinese tourists in Europe, their average transaction value was 28% higher than in 2019. The allure of some parts of Europe is declining due to wars in Ukraine and Israel, but other parts of Europe and prime destinations like Thailand, Korea, Japan are still

attractive to people who have the means. Because of economic issues at home, HNIs may be more willing than ever to invest in luxury goods or items that can increase in value. Wealthy travellers are also able to pay for resort experiences and family travel within Asia more easily and more frequently.

### **Young, Independent, Budget Travellers**

This is an emerging group for outbound travel. South Korea in particular has noticed an increase in this type of tourist.

They're Millennials or Gen Z and prefer travelling independently rather than in tour groups. They spend less on duty-free shopping and more at convenience stores. They're more likely to go off the beaten track or to spots they know from social media and are looking for experiences, memories and unique situations that they can capture and feature online.

Some ships used mainly by tour groups going to Korea from China were peaking at only 18% to 19% occupancy in August and September 2023, while flights were at 45% of their August 2016 levels, before China blocked group tours to Korea for reasons related to Korea's missile defense systems.

Duty-free and travel retail, done mostly by group tour travellers, was down 27.6% from the year

before. This is especially notable because travel to Korea was extremely difficult under China's tight Covid policies the previous year.

At the same time, data from Korea's BGF Retail's convenience store data showed that in September 2023, cross-border payments by customers, which are used primarily by Chinese tourists, increased 70.7% compared to the same month in 2019, before the pandemic outbreak.

These younger visitors are also going to new areas of Seoul they've discovered online, like Garosu-gil in Gangnam District and Seongsu near Seoul Forest. They're less crowded and good for photos. They're avoiding areas like Myeongdong and Dongdaemun, which are typical tourist spots that were previously the most popular among Chinese visitors.

### **VFR - Visiting Friends and Relatives**

This group overlaps some travellers who also fit into the categories listed above. The Chinese diaspora is huge and many people have extended family members in other countries or have younger family members who are studying abroad. After Covid restrictions were eased in China, people were keen to visit relatives and friends in other countries that they hadn't been able to visit for an extended period.

This group is different from others in that they're

more likely to have visited the region before and have seen the tourist spots and landmarks before. They're less likely to engage in shopping except for gifts or desirable goods that they can't buy in Mainland China. They're also more likely to visit spots that are out of the way or more known among locals.

### **Domestic Tourists**

Within China, there have also been changes to the kinds of people who travel and how they travel. Let's take a look.

### **Event Tourists**

Event tourism is essentially any tourism that relates to events. Popular events for Chinese tourists are usually related to entertainment, sports or commerce. This includes music festivals, concerts, marathons, football matches, exhibitions, and more.

In 2022, Post-80s, aged 33-42, (43%) and Post-90s, aged 23-32, (30.2%) were the major groups travelling to music festivals. More young people are willing to travel to other cities for music festivals. In terms of spending, 30% of attendees spent 0-500 RMB while 38.4% spent more than 5,000 RMB, including transportation and accommodation.

At 41.7%, Post-80s have the strongest preferences

when it comes to visiting museums and exhibitions, while Post-90s and Post-95s (aged 23-27) together account for 32.1% and Post-70s (aged 43-52) account for 17.3%. Post-70s are significantly more enthusiastic about museums and exhibitions than music festivals.

In 2023, and for the foreseeable future, more and more tourists will seek travel that improves their emotional and mental well-being and fewer will be focussed solely on material pursuits. They're motivated by the desire to experience competitions, festivals and celebrations.

### **“Special Forces” Travel**

This kind of travel operates in bootcamp mode and is favoured by college students, those new to the workforce and others who have limited time and money. Special forces style tourism features highly planned, extremely packed itineraries that take in all the key attractions in a short time at minimal cost using mostly or only public transportation. This has become popular on Chinese social media since early 2023.

Travellers share photos of their train ticket collections and detailed itineraries with the names of tons of attractions. They're competing to see just how many attractions they can pack into a day at

low cost while using public transportation and shuttle buses, then sleeping on trains at night on the way home.

Low cost travel, especially for university students, has its own versions in the West in the form of backpacking, hostelling, rail or bus travel, road trips with several people sharing a car or van and other budget conscious methods. The van life movement has grown out of this for people who want to pursue the lifestyle long term and for people who are trying to escape extremely high housing costs.

The difference seems to be that in the West, this kind of travel emphasizes freedom from a rigid schedule, leisure, nature, frugality, making friends, having experiences, self-reliance and flexibility over a longer period of time while scrimping on accommodation and daily luxuries. In China, there's the added variable of very limited time off of work or studies. This results in people trying to cram as much as they can into a weekend, a public holiday or one of China's three Golden Weeks.

### **Couples with Children**

Parent-child travel is a big topic in China. As in the West, the big times for this kind of travel are during the summer and winter school holidays. Parents travelling with children always spend more than

non-parent tourists. The most popular destinations are theme parks, zoos, museums, and islands.

According to data from Ctrip, travel bookings in July are 50% higher than June and summer travel by parents with children accounts for 30% of all summer bookings. Spending per parent-child family booking was nearly 50% higher than that of other family bookings.

Summer vacation from July to August and winter vacation during January and February are the peak seasons for Chinese parent-child travel. Modern parents, like the post-80s generation, prefer customized, good quality, high service travel products.

### **Staycationers**

Taking a vacation while staying close to home is becoming increasingly popular. With a wide variety of local destinations and attractions, there are lots of options for fun, relaxing staycations in China. Here are some things people are choosing to do in their own area.

Staycations became popular when strict Covid policies were in place and have remained popular after the policies were dropped. Staycations and photo-friendly hotels are trendy. People posting

photos from fancy hotels on social media is a popular trend with Chinese tourists and influencers.

Usually, luxury and five-star hotels in one's own city or area are the destinations. The holiday is spent enjoying luxury services, spas, swimming pools, and delicious food while documenting the stay with photos shared on social media.

### **Travellers with Pets**

In recent years, pet ownership in China has been on the rise, with dogs and cats being the most popular pets. There are more pet-friendly hotels and restaurants in China now so travelling with pets is possible and getting more popular with young tourists.

China's pet market in 2022 was worth about 311.7 billion RMB. The number of dog and cat owners reached 68.44 million. There were 36.19 million dog owners and 32.25 million cat owners.

More young Chinese people are travelling with their pets. There are restrictions on keeping dogs as pets or travelling with them in urban areas so they go to places that are more accommodating and more hotels, B&Bs and homestays (called minsu) are recognizing the potential of the pet travel market and are offering pet-friendly accommodations.

If you search for “pet travel” on Chinese social media platforms, there are tens of thousands of related posts. Many pet owners share videos, photos, and travel guides featuring their adorable pets. Dogs and cats are the main types of pets taken on these trips. Pet travel groups are popular in provinces and cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Sichuan, and Chongqing, offering a wide range of travel routes and plans to pet owners.

### **Adventurers**

Adventure tourists are an emerging group. Young city dwellers are looking for time and experiences in nature. Adventure travel offers an exciting, diverse range of experiences for those seeking to explore the country’s natural beauty, culture, and history. More and more young tourists are choosing this option.

A study called Pioneering Explorers found that more than half (55%) of Chinese travellers belong to the pioneering explorers’ tourist group, an active bunch who are always eager for their next adventure. Outdoor sports tours have become a trend since the dropping of Covid restrictions. People want to get out of cities, go camping in a gorge, explore mysterious caves, watch the sun set behind mountains, and hike in the dark. These are

all seen as the new cool for young Chinese outdoor tourists.

### **Drivers**

Road trips with your own car or a rented one are becoming increasingly popular among domestic travellers. With a rapidly developing highway system and a growing number of scenic driving routes in China, there is a unique and exciting opportunity to explore the country at one’s own pace.

In 2021, about 70% of non-tour group tourists chose to rent a car after they arrived at their destination. This increased to 79% in 2022. 17% chose public transportation, taxis and non-motorized transportation. Another 4% of users chose to travel in rented cars with paid drivers. Male tourists (57%) are the primary group when it comes to driving. Post-90s, Post-00s (aged 23 and younger) and Post-80s travellers who bring their kids also prefer to drive (84%).

In summary, to get a better understanding and develop an effective strategy for tourists from China or other countries, you need to develop customized experiences to win over your target audience, develop an effective social media marketing strategy and regularly watch consumers and competitors.

*If you want to know about China's current trends in your particular hospitality or travel specialty, ChoZan does detailed research that will help you see things clearly and reveal valuable insights. Contact us at [info@chozan.co](mailto:info@chozan.co) to schedule a free initial consultation.*

## CHAPTER 3

# The Chinese Tourism Platforms You Need to Know

Online travel agencies (OTAs) in China play an important role in travel booking and information collecting because the market is very digitized. Meanwhile, emerging social media platforms leverage social strengths to communicate and connect directly with target consumers. Content platforms like Douyin (TikTok) and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) have always been gathering places for users to share their travel experiences. Starting from 2023, the pace of their expansion into the hospitality and travel market accelerated noticeably.

### **Content Platforms**

#### **1 Douyin**



This is the domestic version of Chinese app TikTok. Both apps are owned by Chinese developer ByteDance and operate in similar ways but for different audiences and with different databases - one inside China and one outside. In the West, it's seen as an app mainly for kids in the 6-12 year age range while in China, its users and audience are older with many in their mid-20s.

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

In 2023, Douyin sped up its expansion into the hospitality and travel world. In March, Douyin introduced supportive policies for hotel and travel businesses, actively recruiting merchants to join the platform. In May, Douyin launched the "Calendar Room" feature, allowing users to search for and book hotel rooms instead of solely allowing the purchase of group-buying vouchers. This move was interpreted as Douyin's official entry into the OTA business. In July, Douyin even registered and established a travel agency.

## **2 RED / Xiaohongshu**

Xiaohongshu is a lifestyle platform that inspires people to discover and connect with a range of diverse lifestyles.

Founded in 2013, it boasted a valuation of between US\$ 10-16 billion in 2022 and had 260 million monthly active users in 2023. Xiaohongshu, or RED, has emerged as one of China's most dynamic and rapidly expanding social media platforms. Setting itself apart from traditional social networks, Xiaohongshu places a greater emphasis on product discovery, shopping experiences, and lifestyle trends rather than solely serving as a means of communication. It reached 200 million monthly active users, and has 43 million content creators. 50% users are from tier 1 and tier 2 cities.

Xiaohongshu's expansion into the travel market has been gradual. In 2020, Xiaohongshu made its foray into the B&B and homestay market through a partnership with property tech company Dingdandao. At that time, Xiaohongshu primarily utilized travel as important content, whether it was promoting local trips or the Red City urban plan, Xiaohongshu focused on content creation while guiding users to OTA platforms such as Fliggy and Ctrip for bookings.

After 2022, Xiaohongshu expanded further. It established its own campground called Anji Xiaohanghang and launched a store called Xiao Lvzhou (Little Oasis) to sell outdoor camping products. Additionally, Xiaohongshu established a travel company with business operations covering campground services, scenic area management, and amusement park services.

### **3 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% check the official WeChat accounts of destinations they visit daily or occasionally 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.

### **4 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.

Sina Weibo has always been an important player in the travel consumption chain. From obtaining travel information and inspiration before the trip to sharing and interacting during after the journey, Sina Weibo's vast data presents valuable travel inspiration and discussion topics, significantly influencing people's travel decisions and driving current travel trends. Sina Travel also release "#100 Weibo Annual Travel Destination List" annually.

### **5 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.

## Booking Platforms

### 1 Ctrip

Ctrip.com is China's one stop shop for accommodation 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.

Ctrip launched content channels in 2021 within the Planet platform. It features attractive destinations, products, service providers and KOLs to promote products and share experiences.

### 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.

### 3 Meituan

Meituan Travel mainly targets private resorts, amusement parks and other entertainment venues. It focuses on urban and regional tours near cities. Due to the pandemic, the demand for long-haul trips and tours was suppressed, so local and regional tours played a critical role.

### 4 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.

### 5 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 travellers. It covers over 140 countries worldwide and all the popular tourist attractions in China.

*If you're interested in learning more about China's digital transformation in travel and tourism and how your company can accelerate its digital journey, contact us at [info@chozan.co](mailto:info@chozan.co) to schedule a free initial consultation to see how we can help.*

## CHAPTER 4

# Travel Trends for 2024

China lifted Covid-related travel restrictions at a fast pace, both within the country and internationally. Although the sudden relaxation of restrictions initially created some uncertainty and hesitancy to travel, Chinese tourists soon demonstrated a strong desire for exploration in their homeland and the willingness to go abroad again in smaller numbers. Let's look at some of the more prominent overall trends, trends for international travel and domestic travel trends.

### General Trends

#### Hospitality is About More Than Hotels

Hospitality is no longer only about well appointed hotels and a calm place to rest and accommodation isn't simply a stopping point. People have more expectations and desires that go hand in hand

with travel now. B&Bs and homestays that are comparable to traditional hotels but with additional facilities and services and a unique style are gaining a following.

According to a survey done by Yue Yu for an Otago University marketing management thesis, for Chinese tourists who use B&Bs and homestays like Airbnb, the primary draws are price, functional attributes, unique and local authenticity, novelty, bragging rights and their sharing economy principles. Staying in a home is affordable, there's a kitchen or patio, it's in a residential area with neighbours going about their day, it's something that can be shown off to others through photos and videos, especially on social media, and it involves ordinary people sharing their property.

The survey also mentioned that the authenticity tourists were seeking wasn't always in the home or B&B they were staying in but that the home or B&B allowed access to authentic experiences and interactions of daily life in the place they were visiting. Some tourists who travel abroad also like them because they can use kitchens to cook their own meals.

In China, homestays and B&Bs are called minsu and it's also a new trend domestically. Affordability and access to daily experiences and local life in

accommodation with flavour, culture, heritage or uniqueness is a big factor.

### **More Online Tourism Content**

Traditional OTA platforms are still popular, but social media is rising as a new tourism battlefield.

In 2022, tourism KOLs on Douyin, Weibo and RED increased by 68% YoY. From January to September 2022, Douyin had 1.39 billion pieces of newly added travel-related content and total views for travel content exceeding 11 trillion. Meanwhile, RED had over 20 million travel posts during the same period. On Weibo, the hashtag “#Travel with Weibo” has started 140 million discussions while the hashtag “#Travel Big Player” got 167 billion views on Douyin. This online content includes short and long video, vlogs, photo posts, text posts about personal travel experiences, tips, guides, livestreaming, coupon offers, giveaways, promotional content, and gamified material.

### **From Visitor to Experienter**

More Chinese tourists want to get the feel of a place and become more involved in local life when they travel. More young Chinese tourists are changing their travel role from visitor to experienter, preferring to immerse themselves in the daily life of local residents and experience authentic lifestyles

as much as they can. Delicious street food, bustling night markets, interesting side streets and out-of-the-way places really attract modern Chinese tourists.

### **International Travel Trends**

#### **Tourist Numbers Have Decreased, Spending Has Increased**

It was noticed in early 2023 that Chinese tourist numbers in Europe had declined while their spending per person had increased. This is likely due to a shift in the type of tourist travelling there at this time. Group travel to Europe had not yet been approved by the Chinese government and there were still waits for visas and more expensive flights. This means the people from China most likely to be travelling in Europe at the time were people of some means who were highly motivated. One of the biggest motivations for Chinese travel to Europe is to buy luxury goods directly from the retailers there. So there's an interesting dynamic that has arisen of fewer Chinese tourists going overseas who are spending more while a larger number of Chinese tourists at home are spending less.

#### **Interest in New Destinations**

As mentioned in chapter 1, there is greater interest in new and unique destinations. In the tourism boom

that preceded Covid, many people from China had the chance to go abroad. It was more accessible to more people than ever before. Now that flight numbers, flight costs, regulations and other factors have reduced access, those still willing and able to travel outside of Asia want to see and experience new locations.

In addition, China's Belt and Road Initiative aims to solidify links with countries in Africa so they were among the first areas approved for group travel from China.

This means that there was increased interest in travelling to Africa, South America and Antarctica. Interest in the Middle East had also been high but that has probably dwindled as a result of the horrific attacks in Israel in October, 2023.

### **Increased Safety and Security Concerns Are Keeping Chinese Tourists at Home**

Concerns about crime and violence in foreign countries aren't new for Chinese tourists. However, the nature of those concerns and the kind of crimes and violence they're concerned about have changed, as have some of the locations of concern.

For example, Thailand had previously been regarded as a safe travel destination but a hit movie that spotlighted human trafficking gangs in Asia has

frightened tourists away from Thailand, even though the criminal gangs responsible don't operate much in Thailand and usually don't target tourists.

In places like the US, Chinese tourists were wary of widespread gun ownership and the volatile gun violence that can erupt there. Now, they are additionally put off by a rise in discrimination and attacks aimed at Asians as well as strained relations between the Chinese and American governments.

Worst of all, since 2019, two terrible wars have begun in Ukraine and Israel making those countries, surrounding areas and the world itself a more dangerous place. The wars have also affected flight paths and costs to places where there are no ongoing conflicts.

### **Domestic Travel Trends**

#### **Short Haul Travel Increase**

During the pandemic peak, short haul trips increased and they're still popular with Chinese tourists. In 2022, Chinese tourists' travel radius shrank and people focussed on exploring and enjoying attractions and experiences in a smaller geographical area at weekends and during short holidays.

This trend has remained and people often spend

their weekends enjoying parks, rural areas and going sightseeing in nearby areas.

### **Capturing Natural and Seasonal Events**

Time-limited attractions and events are trending among Chinese tourists. They are still after limited editions, but of a different kind. They're seeking out swiftly changing seasonal scenery and other phenomena that only appear at certain times of the year in certain places. For example, people don't want to miss spring peach blossoms in Nyingchi, Tibet, the grasslands of the Xilingol Reserve, the "Sun Autumn" of Huangling in Jiangxi or a winter trip to Sayram Lake to see the ice formations. These unique, seasonal events and sights attract tourists to locations around China.

### **Outdoor Activities**

Outdoor activities are also booming, especially camping-style activities. During the National Day Golden Week, 2022, outdoor tourism bookings were up ten-fold YoY. Spending per outdoorsy customer is about 650 RMB. According to data from JD.com, sales of tents and mats increased 72% YoY while picnic supply sales increased 77% YoY.

### **Diverse Transportation Options**

Chinese tourists now have access to and the budget

for a greater range of transportation options.

Different transportation modes lead to different travel experiences. Flights, High-speed rail, driving and cycling are very popular. For long-haul travel, flights and high-speed rail are growing. They connect most cities in China and cover the country's major tourist destinations, shortening travel time and extending the radius of tourists' daily travel. Driving and cycling are becoming more popular as they allow people to see and be part of beautiful scenery and allow greater freedom in terms of time and destination.

High-speed rail journeys are surging in 2023. High-speed rail travel is convenient and popular. China has built a network that spans nearly 40,000km (25,000 miles) and is now the world's largest for bullet trains that can travel up to 350 km/h (220 mph). From January to March 2023, the railways handled 753 million passenger trips, surging 66% year on year. In March, the average daily number of railway passengers reached 8.58 million, surging 171% year on year and nearly on par with the same period in 2019.

Themed trains are emerging for popular spots. Themed train routes have not only improved the quality of rail journeys, they also provide tourists with more travel options. For example, there's a

Breezy Train to Dali, a Barbecue Train to Zibo in Shandong, and a Panda Train to Chengdu. The launch of these specialized trains not only allows tourists to enjoy a more comfortable travel experience, but also adds fun to the journey.

### **Duty-free Retail is Booming**

Domestic duty-free sales in the Asia Pacific region are forecast to reach \$81 billion by 2027, with the vast bulk of them coming from China, according to a new report from market research provider Euromonitor International. The figure is almost half of the \$168 billion that will be generated by the entire global duty-free market by 2027.

China Tourism Group Duty Free Corporation Limited (CTG), the parent company of China Duty Free Group (CDFG), the world's largest travel retailer, has reported robust year-on-year revenue growth of 29.68% for the six-month period ending on June 30th, 2023, reaching RMB 35.858 billion (US\$4,965,656,359).

Hainan has emerged as a strategically significant domestic shopping paradise and a thriving destination for luxury brands. They are establishing their presence by offering distinctive omnichannel experiences, immersive environments, and personalized in-store interactions to attract

sophisticated Chinese consumers. Luxury brands with the means are establishing more locations within China as international travel decreases and Hainan is one of the prime locations. Its luxury market is still growing.

*Are you looking for corporate training that focuses on online marketing and sales possibilities for companies in the tourism sector? ChoZan can help. Contact us at [info@chozan.co](mailto:info@chozan.co) to schedule a consultation.*



## 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 Chinese tourists 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.

Establish a presence on Chinese social media and key travel platforms. Make content that's attractive to Chinese tourists. Engage with them and ask them

questions. Respond promptly to their queries. Build awareness and your reputation. Make branded travel-related products - like inflatable neck pillows, packing cubes or makeup bags - available for purchase and delivery within China.

Large companies that have seen a decrease in the number of Chinese travellers at their locations overseas have even taken steps to open more locations in China. Smaller companies might not be able to afford this, but a pop-up shop or small contact office in China might be within the budget.

**2) Create an environment that embraces Chinese culture, makes visitors feel welcome and prevents misunderstandings.**

Understanding Chinese culture and customs can help hotels and other businesses better accommodate Chinese travellers.

It starts from the moment Chinese tourists get to the airport. Make sure they understand the rules, procedures and expectations before they board the plane by handing out information or making announcements in Chinese. Whenever possible, have Chinese-speaking customer service staff, have Chinese food available for passengers, and offer user-friendly mobile services.

Hotels can offer information on local Chinese

festivals, put up Chinese-style decorations for major Chinese holidays or have mahjong (麻将) tables available. This also includes thinking about basics like eating habits and customs. People appreciate it when chopsticks are available, there are Chinese instructions for the appliances and there's information about the best or nearest Chinese food restaurants and grocery stores. Which brings us to our next point.

### **3) Make information available in Chinese.**

Language is the most common challenge for Chinese tourists when they travel overseas. Launch WeChat mini programs in Chinese to introduce your destination and provide informative content for travellers. Ensure that your destination provides Chinese-language information that is mobile-optimized and easily accessible in both China and the destination market. Retailers and destinations need to make it easy for tourists to do both pre-trip research and in-destination information gathering. Brands and retailers should base their Chinese language sites in China and test them there to ensure that the accessibility and speed is up to local standards.

Ideally, you should also employ Chinese-speaking sales staff. The tourism decrease that happened during the pandemic meant that a lot of Mandarin-

speaking staff have moved on to new careers so it may be a challenge to find people with the necessary language skills. You could employ translation staff to work from home with access via a toll free number. B&B, homestay and store staff have also used Google Translate or translation apps like DeepL to successfully communicate with their Chinese customers.

### **4) Digitization of payment options, offline facilities and customer service is essential to improve the experience of Chinese customers.**

Chinese travellers are used to digital lifestyles, such as e-payments, intelligent home appliances (IoT), online check-ins and fast check outs. They look for speed, responsiveness and convenience. Do your best to make your business available and responsive on digital platforms and treat digital access as a priority when your guests arrive.

The penetration rate of online payments in China reached 86% in 2021. WeChat Pay, Alipay, and UnionPay are the 3 most-used payment channels in China. Scanning QR codes to make payments is common in China and many tourists expect this as an option. Chinese tourists also use Alipay, for other services such as accessing digital coupons, food delivery, booking taxis, reserving attraction tickets, and issuing tax refunds.

Stores should highlight the best products that are currently on sale or discounted and provide online channels to contact the store, buy items and have them delivered. Online apps for tax refunds would be very helpful and online channels can also be used to stay in touch after they've returned home.

**5) Be aware of Chinese customer expectations for service delivery, communication and time use.**

Chinese customers may use indirect, formal communication and direct, informal communication in different circumstances and at different times than is the custom locally. Their speaking volume may also differ from local standards. It's important to be aware of these differences and not take things personally or overreact. Make efforts to be flexible, close the gaps when possible and explain the differences and local expectations in a diplomatic way when necessary.

Customer service expectations in terms of speed and responsiveness are often higher in China. Chinese people tend to value time and want to use it efficiently. They may be used to responses to customer service enquiries through a brand's social media account in 30-60 seconds. If there are processes that may take some time, if they can't be

sped up, it's best to explain to Chinese customers what the time frame is likely to be and why.

**How Things Can Go Wrong**

**Cathay Pacific's PR crisis**

In May, 2023, Hong Kong-based carrier Cathay Pacific Airways fired three flight attendants after a complaint that they had discriminated against non-English speaking passengers went viral online. A passenger on a Cathay Pacific flight from Chengdu wrote in an online post that flight attendants complained amongst themselves and mocked passengers in English and Cantonese. They said the flight attendants made fun of passengers for asking for a carpet instead of a blanket in English. A recording of the incident was also posted and circulated widely online.

This triggered criticism on Chinese social platforms and people shared other unpleasant travel experiences they had had with the airline. Later, the CEO of Cathay Pacific publicly apologized and promised to ensure that this wouldn't happen again. Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee also said that he was outraged and disappointed by the incident.

Now let's look at some examples of what happens when things go well.

## Case Studies

### **Thailand does its first tourism roadshow in China using a variety of touchpoints**

Thailand's Tourism Authority (TAT) had its first tourism roadshow in China in January and February, 2023 to coincide with the return of flights between the two countries. 120 businesspeople from China and Thailand attended events in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. Chinese online travel agent Ctrip also launched an online marketing campaign to promote its tour packages in Thailand. Chinese visitors to Thailand generated 531 billion baht (14.6 billion US dollars) in revenue in 2019.

On the evening of January 11, 2023, TAT and Ctrip worked together to do Thailand's first livestream for Chinese tourists. TAT governor, Mr. Yuthasak Supasorn joined the livestream and interacted with viewers.

The stream attracted over 10 million viewers in China and overseas and recorded sales of more than 20,000 room nights equalling GMV of over RMB 40 million (THB 197 million).

It was timed to build anticipation before the lunar new year holiday, which was from January 21st to 27th in 2023. It's one of the biggest holiday times in China and one of China's 3 Golden Weeks.

Hotel bookings by Chinese tourists in Thailand jumped 12-fold over the week-long Spring Festival break compared to the previous year, according to data from online travel agent Trip.com.

Upon arrival in Thailand, the first tourists back to the country after the lifting of restrictions were greeted with flowers, gifts and huge welcome signs.

### **The Palace Museums's digitization and gamification builds interest, educates and allows non-travellers to access travel experiences**

Beijing's Palace Museum is known for its metaverse, AI (artificial intelligence), VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) offerings starting from around 2017. Its digital approach allows people to see wings of the museum that are under renovation through digital replicas and to see digital versions of priceless relics that are too delicate, damaged or valuable to be housed in public galleries. This approach allows small artefacts to be magnified on large screens so people can see tiny details that are hard to see in traditional display cases. They have also had exhibitions that use smartphone filters and AR to enable people to virtually don historic clothing and interact with figures in famous ancient artworks.

Because they're digital, these kinds of experiences

can also be made available online so that people who can't travel to Beijing can still participate in them. For example, in 2020, the museum made a 360° virtual tour that is still available online in English and Chinese.

In February 2023, leading Chinese AI software company SenseTime partnered with the Forbidden City to launch a digital art project called "Apprentice in the Forbidden City Digital World."

The project used AI and AR to create an immersive digital experience that showcased Chinese culture and the history of cultural relic restoration. The first, "Exquisite Golden Dragon - Decoding Traditional Architectural Painting," revealed the remarkable restoration techniques for colour painting used at the Forbidden City. Their app enables audience interaction with the physical and digital worlds so people can learn the history behind cultural relics. They can complete virtual restoration tasks, and share their work with friends.

And don't forget that gamification and digital scenarios can also be easily applied to digital marketing campaigns.

*Looking to learn from trends, apps and platforms in China's travel and tourism sector? Get in touch with ChoZan at [info@chozan.co](mailto:info@chozan.co) to schedule a free consultation.*

## CHAPTER 6

# The Travel Year

Chinese citizens in the workforce get anywhere from five to fifteen paid holiday days depending on their seniority. This means that the three Golden Weeks - the week-long holidays during the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) in January or February, Labor Day in May and National Day in October - 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.

### **The Biggest Times for Chinese Travel**

Chinese New Year is the biggest travel time. According to statistics from the Lanyu Cultural Tourism Development and Design Institute, 308 million tourists travelled during the holiday in 2023. There were more than 9,400 commercial

performances nationwide, up 41% from 2022 and 23% from 2019. Box office revenues reached 378 million yuan with audiences of about 3.238 million people and there were 10,522 activities related to intangible cultural heritage.

Hainan's duty-free shops had sales of 1.7 billion yuan in the first five days of the Spring Festival holiday, an increase of 20.03% compared to 2022, and an increase of 325% compared to 2019.

### **Summer and Autumn**

Summer travel booking data showed that people are slowly increasing their travel distance and time. 28% of travellers opted for 5-6 day trips, 25% travelled for 3-4 days and 17% took journeys that were 7-8 days long. Just over 8% of tourists took a trip of more than 10 days. Group tours accounted for 47% of packaged travel products and customized team tours made up 36%. Some chose to book flights and hotels separately while others organized self-driving tours.

### **Winter and Spring**

According to the Ice and Snow Tourism Group of the China Tourism Research Institute, there were 344 million ice and snow leisure travellers in winter 2021-22, and the income from ice and snow leisure travel was 474 billion yuan. This was about double the number from 2016-17.

In 2022, snow and ice tourism reached a seasonal peak in February and the number of trips in January and February accounted for 85% of winter trips. School winter holidays also frees up families to travel together and enjoy winter sports.

*If you want to know more about tourism in China, go to <https://alarice.com.hk/china-tourism-report-2023/> to download Alarice's China Tourism Report: How to Win with Chinese Tourists in 2023.*

## CHAPTER 7

# A Step by Step Checklist

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

### STEP 1

#### PRESENCE:

Set up official accounts and share content on major Chinese travel and social media platforms to increase brand awareness. Prioritize social e-commerce platforms such as RED, Douyin, WeChat and Weibo.

### STEP 2

#### INTEREST:

Work with top KOLs and celebrities on prominent, interest-oriented travel platforms like RED, Douyin, and Trip.com. Choose ones that match your brand

best and adapt your promotions to each platform to help you spread the word about your product, location, brand or shop.

### STEP 3

#### DRIVE TRAFFIC:

Expand your influence and reach by working with top and mid-level KOLs on diverse platforms, such as WeChat Channel, Meituan and Fliggy. In order to reach sales and branding goals and win over consumers, investing in long-term marketing is necessary.

### STEP 4

#### MOBILE AND DIGITAL SERVICES:

Offer digital products and services to attract people who can't travel to your destination or who might travel to your destination in the future. Give virtual tours online. Offer online courses about the history and culture of your area. Make the offerings as unique and tech savvy as possible.

For travellers who are able to make it to your destination, set up mobile payment options like Alipay, WeChat Pay and UnionPay that can be used online and offline. Let potential customers know about the availability of free Wi-Fi at your location.

Enable options or provide assistance to make it faster and easier for Chinese tourists shopping at your location to receive their tax refunds.

### STEP 5

#### CONVERSIONS:

Drive conversions and enable purchases through multiple platforms and livestreams, particularly on social e-commerce platforms. Make it as easy as possible for customers to make purchases online. Don't forget that platforms like Taobao and Tongcheng are also valuable.

### STEP 6

#### RETENTION:

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.

Other factors to take into consideration include:

- Staff understanding of Chinese culture, customs and traditions
- Whether your location has an easy visa policy for Chinese citizens

- An understanding of the evolution of the Chinese outbound market and its new realities
- Close contact with Chinese travel partners that can help you detect and follow market changes
- The availability of diverse, 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 about or want to hone your digital media presence in China, contact us at [info@chozan.co](mailto:info@chozan.co) to schedule a consultation.*



# Conclusion

China's economy faced plenty of challenges in 2023. Technically, its economy grew but at a slower pace than in previous years. Its property sector has taken a beating, Covid has had a huge impact on many areas of the economy and daily life and geopolitical tensions have increased. Before the pandemic, improving standards of living and increasing disposable income sustained high numbers of outbound Chinese tourists, but now these same people are reconsidering overseas trips.

Destinations and tourism businesses need to carefully evaluate their strategies for attracting Chinese visitors moving forward or pivoting, as has happened in some markets, to tourists from other locations. Too much reliance on discounts and packaged group tours may not appeal to newer generations who prefer independent personalized experiences. High-end, luxury options tailored for wealthy Chinese from first-tier cities will remain important for mature destinations. However,

emerging destinations should focus on experiential tours that provide cultural immersion at different price points, appealing to both affluent and young budget-minded travelers.

While Chinese tourism spending power remains significant, concerns over health, safety and geopolitics will influence travel decisions. Those aiming to connect with Chinese tourists need insightful local knowledge and cultural sensitivity. Political tensions could also impact regulations and foreign travel appetite. Overall, the outbound Chinese market demands nuanced, adaptive strategies that take into account evolving consumer trends and macroeconomic realities. Experience-driven, diverse offerings may prove most resilient.

While their dominance in the tourism sector is declining, Chinese travellers are still a significant part of the trade. 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 2024 China Travel Calendar

January	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 7th	<b>January 1st - New Year's Day</b> is a public holiday. There's some limited outbound travel at Christmas and New Year.
	2	8th -14th	
	3	15th - 21st	
	4 +5	22nd - 28th 29th - 31st	<b>School winter holidays begin.</b> Many schools align their winter holidays with the Spring Festival to begin in late January and end in mid-February.

February	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 4th	
	2 + 3	5th -11th 12th - 18th	<b>February 10th - 17th is Spring Festival / Chinese New Year / Lunar New Year.</b> There's a huge amount of domestic travel as the largest human migration on the planet takes place. This is also prime time for outbound travel and is one of the best times for long haul trips. Note that many people would be expected to work on Sunday, the 4th and Sunday the 18th.  February 14th - Valentine's Day. This is not a public holiday but people might travel locally.  <b>School winter holidays end in early to mid-February.</b>
	4	19th - 25th	
	5	26th - 29th	

March	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 3rd	
	2	4th -10th	March 8th - International Women's Day. This isn't a public holiday. This is a good time to promote travel opportunities aimed at women.
	3	11th - 17th	March 12th - Arbor Day. This isn't a public holiday. This is a good time to promote nature travel and eco-tourism.
	4	18th - 24th	
	5	25th - 31st	

April	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 7th	<b>April 4th, 5th and 6th - The Qing Ming Festival.</b> This festival honours ancestors so families may travel locally or to other parts of China. Note that some people would be expected to work on Sunday the 7th.
	2	8th -14th	
	3	15th - 21st	
	4	22nd - 28th	
	5	29th - 30th	

May	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 5th	<b>May 1st to May 5th - Labour Day.</b> The holiday starts on Wednesday so people are likely to take short-haul trips. Note that many people would have to work on Sunday, April 28th and May 11th.  May 4th - Youth Day. This is a good opportunity to promote tourism products attractive to young people.
	2	6th -12th	
	3	13th - 19th	
	4	20th - 26th	
	5	27th - 31st	

June	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 2nd	June 1st - Children's Day. This isn't a public holiday. It's a good time to promote family travel or educational travel.
	2	3rd - 9th	
	3	10th - 16th	<b>June 10th - The Dragon Boat Festival.</b> The holiday is on a Monday so people may take short-haul trips within Asia or may take extra leave to take long-haul trips.
	4	17th - 23rd	
	5	24th - 30th	In some places, <b>school summer holidays</b> begin in the last week of June.

July	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 7th	<b>School summer holidays</b> start in many places in the first week of July.
	2	8th - 14th	
	3	15th - 21st	
	4	22nd - 28th	
	5	29th - 31st	

August	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 4th	
	2	5th - 11th	August 10th - Chinese Valentine's Day. This is not a public holiday.
	3	12th - 18th	
	4	19th - 25th	
	5	26th - 31st	<b>School summer holidays</b> end in the last week of August.

September	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st	The school year begins.
	2	2nd - 8th	
	3	9th - 15th	September 10th - Teacher's Day. This is not a public holiday. Students give their teachers gifts and thank them for their guidance. This is a good time to promote educational trips or trips to practice and learn about sports.
	4	16th - 22nd	<b>September 15th, 16th and 17th - The Mid-Autumn Festival.</b> Note that some people will have to work on Saturday September 14th and Sunday September 29th.
	5 + 6	23rd - 29th 30th	

October	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1 + 2	1st - 6th 7th - 13th	<b>October 1st to October 7th - The National Day Holiday.</b> People often take this as a chance to take long domestic trips or take long-haul trips. Note that some people will have to work on Saturday, October 12th.  October 11th - The Double 9th Festival. This is not a public holiday. This is a day to thank one's ancestors, similar to the Qing Ming Festival. People often go hiking and visit the graves of their ancestors to pay their respects.
	3	14th - 20th	
	4	21st - 27th	
	5	28th - 31st	

November	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st - 3rd	
	2	4th - 10th	November 11th - The Double 11th Shopping Festival / Single's Day. This is not a public holiday. It is the time for the biggest online promotions, sales and discounts. This is a time to promote special travel products and packages at reduced prices.
	3	11th - 17th	
	4	18th - 24th	November 24th - Black Friday. Discounts, especially on imported products.
	5	25th - 30th	

December	Week	Dates	Public Holidays and other notable dates
	1	1st	
	2	2nd - 8th	
	3	9th - 15th	December 12th - The Double Twelve Shopping Festival. This is not a public holiday. Big sales on e-commerce sites.
	4	16th - 22nd	December 21st - Winter Solstice. Not a public holiday. Families gather to eat sweet dumplings (tangyuan).
	5 + 6	23rd - 29th 30th - 31st	December 25th - Christmas. Similar to Valentine's Day, this is a commercial holiday. Some people will have parties or give gifts on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

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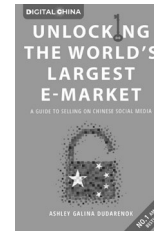
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## Our Digital China Books

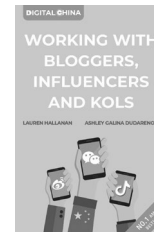


This extended and updated edition, expands the analysis of the booming social media scene in China, where two tech companies, Alibaba and Tencent, and two social media giants, WeChat and

- Weibo, rule the roost. You'll learn about:
- How to Harness China's Most Influential Social Media Apps and Platforms
  - How WeChat and Weibo Work
  - The Most Effective Social Media Campaigns for WeChat and Weibo



<https://tinyurl.com/4js56j2n>



Want to know more about influencer marketing in the world's largest and fastest growing online market? This is the second book in our series guiding you through China's digital space. You'll learn about:

- The Most Influential KOL Platforms and How They Work
- How to Find and Select the Right Influencer
- The Ins and Outs of Effective KOL Campaigns
- KOLs in action: Revealing Case Studies



<https://tinyurl.com/p85f6brh>



A behind the scenes look at how, in only a few short years, Alibaba CEO Jack Ma's vision of "The New Retail", where 800 million consumers take for granted a world of convenience unimagined anywhere

- else, has become a reality. You'll discover:
- Why New Retail is about ecosystems and habitats, not channels and e-commerce
  - A deep dive on the New Retail models and ecosystems of Alibaba, JD, Tencent and others
  - How New Retail is going global and why you should adopt it



<https://tinyurl.com/32z8mmad>





China is known for being the manufacturing base for the world, but it's more than that. It's also a highly digitized society with some companies that are using very innovative management approaches. Learn how to approach the country's tech savvy customers and learn from its new leadership models.



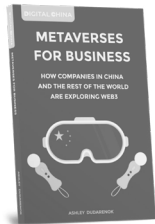
<https://tinyurl.com/267r7j47>



If you're a B2B company operating in China, this book is for you. Find out how to set yourself apart in the B2B space through the power of digital marketing and online platforms.



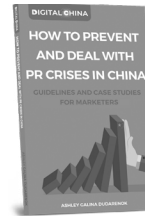
<https://argo.page.link/yD95n>



Metaverse. A buzzword that had its day. What are metaverses and how do they relate to businesses? This mini book guide is for entrepreneurs and marketers who want to know how brands are using immersive digital spaces and Web 3.0 for marketing, sales and engagement.



<https://tinyurl.com/22m28t8d>



This book has been written to help companies avoid PR Crises when dealing with China. Find out examples of mistakes and PR Crises on how to respond to certain political, social, cultural, taste and preferences issues.



<https://tinyurl.com/55k2h3da>



Chinese consumers are on everyone's mind. Who are they? What do they want and need? This indispensable guide is for anyone who wants to understand how people in China make their purchases and what leads them to make their purchasing decisions.



<https://argo.page.link/twXA3>



We all know that influencers, key opinion leaders (KOLs) and social media personalities of all kinds serve important roles in marketing on digital platforms. However, the crucial role that micro-KOLs and key opinion consumers play in China's complex social media world is sometimes forgotten.



<https://tinyurl.com/4vujsmmw>

## Our Services

Alarice and ChoZan 超赞 offer a variety of services for businesses that want to enter the China market or learn from it for marketing strategies and digital transformation.

### 1. China Marketing Strategy and Trendwatching

If you need an effective, tailored, digital strategy for China that includes detailed research, your product's consumer journey and a bespoke marketing matrix we can help. Go to [www.alarice.com.hk](http://www.alarice.com.hk). We can also help track trends in China related to your competitors, consumers, marketing or sales. For more information, go to [www.chozan.co](http://www.chozan.co).

### 2. Corporate Training: Learn from China, Learn for China

Does your marketing team need training to get up to speed on Chinese consumers and digital marketing trends? Is your firm digitizing and looking to take a new approach to business based on lessons from China? Your commercial and leadership teams can stay at the ready and shorten their learning curve with our training. For more information, go to [www.chozan.co](http://www.chozan.co).

### 3. Keynote Speeches by Ashley Dudarenok

For dynamic, energy-filled, keynote speeches related to customer centricity, the future of retail, learning from China Chinese consumers, e-commerce, social media marketing and more, Ashley fits the bill. Ashley covers topics ranging from building seamless consumer journeys and implementing social+ models to effective CRM loyalty programs and China's metaverse and Web3 marketing. She also speaks on topics such as entrepreneurship and thought leadership to inspire current and future leaders. For more information, go to [www.ashleydudarenok.com](http://www.ashleydudarenok.com).

### 4. Chinese Social Media Marketing Retainer

If you are ready to take your China-focused pull marketing to the next level with outstanding content, social media community management and creative campaigns to put your brand ahead of the game, Alarice can help. To find out more, go to [www.alarice.com.hk](http://www.alarice.com.hk).

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