

TRAVEL

Europe looks for new ways of tapping Chinese tourists

Israel introduces a 10-year multiple-entry visa for Chinese, replacing a 30-day single-entry visa

By WANG MINGJIE in London wangmingjie@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Seeing the size and the ever-changing nature of the outbound tourism industry in China, European destinations are looking at new ways to tap into the Chinese market.

The Austrian city of Innsbruck — located in a broad valley between high mountains, halfway between Munich, Germany, and Verona, Italy — launched a business-to-consumer campaign last year in a bid to attract more Chinese visitors.

As increasing numbers of Chinese travelers source their travel information through word-of-mouth and word-of-mouse, Innsbruck's tourism board invited some key Chinese influencers to the city in a bid to boost local tourism, said Peter Unsinn, the board's marketing manager. "They were posting their experiences on Chinese social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, and recording videos about the city in their own ways, which are now used for marketing within China," he said.

The city also approached some Chinese actors, actresses and models, who have several million followers, who also posted their experiences of Innsbruck online.

"Through this campaign, we



Chinese tourists have fun with a photo at Stonehenge, a prehistoric site in Wiltshire, England, in July last year. ZHOU HONGJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Ben Julius, founder of Tourist Israel

have received more than 50 million views about our city, its history and the activities we offer," Unsinn said.

While European nations are making serious efforts to snatch a piece of the Chinese outbound tourism pie, countries like Israel have also taken steps to increase the number of Chinese visitors to the country.

Earlier this year, the Israeli government introduced a 10-year multiple-entry visa for Chinese, replacing the previous 30-day single-entry visa.

"This not only allows tourists to visit for longer and mul-

tiply times, but also allows them to go on extensions to Jordan and Egypt, and return to Israel without problems," said Ben Julius, founder of Tourist Israel, adding that the government also canceled fees required for groups from China visiting Israel in order to streamline and lower the costs of visiting.

On a nongovernmental level, new direct flights were launched by Hainan Airlines from Beijing to Tel Aviv this year to compete with El Al, an Israeli airline that was previously the only airline operat-

ing that route. Cathay Pacific is expected to start flying from Hong Kong to Tel Aviv next year, offering greater connection options from China.

"Many sites in Israel have begun to make signs and offer information in Chinese, while hotels are beginning to offer food to suit Chinese guests and rooms with small modifications to accommodate the market," Julius said.

According to James Kennell, principal lecturer of tourism at the University of Greenwich, the key for destinations and tourism businesses as the Chinese outbound tourism market matures, is to develop better knowledge of the Chinese tourism market through research and partnerships.

"The destinations that are better able to meet the needs of a sophisticated and increasingly diverse Chinese market will benefit from access to the huge and growing market," he added.

Tourism: Fewer opt for packages

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a lot of labeling of Chinese tourists, such as pigeonholing a particular age group as all liking to shop and demanding to eat Chinese food all the time.

"It is important to avoid stereotypes, because the outbound Chinese market is becoming more sophisticated, more mature and more segmented. I do not think foreign marketers should use stereotypes to portray the Chinese market in their advertising and promotion," said Morrison.

A new tourism research report confirmed that the market is maturing as the motives for Chinese travelers change from sightseeing to lifestyle experiences.

A research report on 2015-2016 Chinese outbound tourist consumption by World Tourism Cities Federation and Ipsos, a market research firm, was presented at the World Travel Market in London recently.

Based on a survey of over 11,000 Chinese tourists, the report suggests that more than 76 percent consider travel an important way to improve their quality of life and happiness. It also found that the average Chinese tourist makes five foreign trips abroad during a lifetime.

"This shows that the Chinese outbound tourism market is developing in a way that is much more in line with Western markets," said James Kennell, principal lecturer in tourism at the University of Greenwich. "I suspect that as Chinese millennials (people who reached adulthood by the year 2000) move into the tourism market, we will see these trends continuing."

As the Chinese outbound market matures, there will be more independent travelers

and fewer who opt for package tours, meaning foreign tourist destinations will need to develop new types of tourism products and new arrangements for Chinese tourists.

"It will be a good opportunity for special interest tourism, involving history, art, culture, cuisines, the natural environment and ecology," Morrison said.

The outbound Chinese market is becoming more sophisticated, more mature and more segmented."

Alastair Morrison, former president of the International Tourism Studies Association

Worldwide, international tourist arrivals have surged from 25 million globally in 1950 to 1.1 billion in 2015, and are expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

The increase of 700 million global travelers anticipated between 2015 and 2030 will mainly stem from China, said Arlt, who spoke at the 2016 World Tourism Market in London. For Europe, this is a good chance to lure the rising numbers of Chinese visitors to more places, so that big, popular cities do not become even more congested with tourists.

Given the evolving nature of more experienced Chinese visitors, the Italian tourism authorities are looking to offer more diverse travel itineraries.

In an attempt to attract experienced Chinese travelers known for seeking out new destinations, a new Italian tourism product — the Pilgrims' Paths — is meant to appeal to the curiosity and desires of the target group. It consists of routes, once walked by religious pilgrims, that are packed with history.

Raffaella Rossi, director of Francesco's Ways, a consortium of businesses aiming to promote the routes internationally, said such new tourism options respond to the needs of tourists, including Chinese travelers, because they offer a large variety of experiences in places that are not so well-known to the public.

"We must help tourists from China get to know our great food and wine, numerous crafts and shopping areas, as well as the small towns in different regions, and romantic places where they can experience 'slow' tourism and come into contact with untouched nature. We need to enrich our offerings of special and thrilling experiences that can spark the interest of this clientele," she said. Slow tourism allows travelers to take their time to more fully enjoy the experience.

Almost every tourism board is talking about getting more Chinese visitors. However, Arlt said not all of them understand that it is not necessarily the number of arrivals, but the numbers of overnight stays and how much each visitor spends that is important.

"Having fewer visitors who stay longer, spend more, have more interest in the country they are visiting is actually better and more sustainable than bringing crowds of package-tour, short-time visitors who look for the cheapest offer and do not really care about what they are taking photos of," Arlt explained.

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