

Press release

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Chinese tourists spend US\$229 billion in 2015

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- **China hits 109 million outbound tourists**
- **South Korea and Thailand overtake Hong Kong as most popular destinations**
- **Europe beats North America as most popular destination outside of Asia**

Nuremberg, January 14, 2016 – GfK's latest analyses of the Chinese market shows that China produced 109 million outbound tourists in 2015 – with retail spend of US\$229 billion. This is a key milestone in China's outbound tourism history.

These statistics consolidate China's position as one of the top global sources of tourists, in terms of both number of trips and money spent during international travel. At the same time, there have been profound changes in the behavior of the typical Chinese traveler, with Chinese Millennials firmly established as the core drivers of China's outbound tourism spending.

Chinese travelers looking for new destinations

Up until 2013, Hong Kong was the preferred destination for China's outbound tourists, driven by its cultural similarity, lower travel costs and accessibility via short-distance travel. On top of this, Hong Kong offered a shopping paradise, and that was a strong motivating factor for Chinese tourist at that time.

But since 2014, increasing numbers of China's outbound tourists have been opting for other destinations that offer historical and cultural experiences, as well as shopping.

By the start of November 2015, the top five favorite destinations for Chinese travelers (counting air and overnight visits), were South Korea (representing a traveler increase of 112 percent since 2011), Thailand (up 263 percent), Hong Kong (up 37 percent), Japan (up 157 percent) and Taiwan (up 54 percent).

Europe remains the most popular destination for Chinese travelling outside of Asia, showing an increase of 97 percent in the number of air and overnight visits in the last four years. This is followed by North America (up 151 percent) and the Middle East (up 177 percent). Africa remains the destination least visited by Chinese tourists – but with signs that this could be changing, as visits have risen by 306 percent since 2011.

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Laurens van den Oever, global head of travel and hospitality research at GfK, comments, “China’s outbound tourists remain strategic to Hong Kong and its businesses – but other destinations are jumping ahead in winning their favor. Destinations such as Hong Kong need to re-evaluate China’s new breed of young and independently-minded travelers, to understand how best to attract them and capitalize on the growth of China’s outbound tourism.”

China’s new set: not ‘tourists’, but ‘travelers’

According to GfK data, half (50 percent) of China’s outbound travelers are aged 15-29 years old – the “millennials” group – while over a third (37 percent) are aged 30-44 and 10 percent are 45-59.

The sheer size of the millennial group within China’s travelers makes this a commercially attractive target audience for those destinations who are looking to draw in Chinese tourists. This attraction is increased by the fact that two thirds (66 percent) of Chinese Millennials belong to the high income bracket. Not only that, but their financial standing is expected to increase as their careers advance, since seven out of ten Millennials hold ‘white collar’ executive or professional jobs.

Understanding the desires that motivate this major section of China’s outbound travelers is therefore paramount.

An annual study from GfK shows that Chinese Millennials are more ambitious than their predecessors, aged 50 and above – and more hedonistic in their willingness to spend money to indulge and pamper themselves. They are also slightly less price sensitive, being the biggest purchasers of luxury goods in Asia Pacific.

Almost more importantly for the travel market is that Chinese Millennials also cherish freedom more than their parents or grandparents; they want the ability to pursue their passions and go after meaningful, adventurous and exciting experiences. They are also technologically savvy with almost everyone owning a smartphone and being highly involved in sharing experiences on social media platform.

For destinations looking to attract this lucrative group, then, the ideal approach is to approach them not as ‘tourists’ but as independent travelers who will respond to opportunities to plan personalized trips.

For more information on GfK’s travel data, please contact Laurens van den Oever (laurens.van.den.oever@gfk.com).

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