

Chinese Visitation to the U.S.

China is widely regarded as a fast-growing market for U.S. tourism. According to the National Travel & Tourism Office, in 2017, more than 3.1 million tourists came to the U.S. from China and ranks as the fifth-largest market in term of visitation into the United States. However, recent changes in U.S. policy have affected Chinese travel to the U.S.

Golden Week (the name given to a 7-day national holiday beginning around Oct. 1) is a key indicator of Chinese travel trends. In 2018, the U.S. dropped from the number 5 destination for Golden Week travel in 2017 down to the number 11 destination.¹ The decline in Golden Week travel meant a 42 percent drop in Chinese airline reservations to U.S. destinations for 2018 compared to 2017.²

Additionally, it is getting harder for Chinese Nationals to get U.S. visas. According to State Department statistics, “102,000 fewer Chinese people received business, leisure, and educational visas from May through September of this year compared with the same period last year, a 13 percent drop.”³

Spending Trends of Chinese Visitor

The Chinese traveler is unique in many ways. Some key visitation and spending trends to consider when marketing to Chinese visitors.

- Regardless of destination, shopping is the number one category of spending among Chinese tourists (about 25 percent of total spending). Comparatively, non-Chinese tourists spend the highest percentage on hotel accommodations (about 29 percent of total spending).⁴
- Additionally, worldwide Chinese tourists spend 19 percent on accommodations, 16 percent on dining, 15 percent on tourist attractions, and 8 percent on recreation.⁵
- In the U.S. specifically, according to the ITA National Travel & Tourism office in 2016, 88 percent of Chinese tourists spent their time shopping, 51 percent experienced fine dining, 36 percent went to the countryside and visited a small town, 5 percent went camping or hiking, and 2 percent engaged in snow sports.⁶

Industry Insight

According to Shoko Hirao, the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing’s (VDTM) international rep for the Asian market, most Chinese group tours are looking for very inexpensive hotels (around \$59/night) and prefer to eat at fast food chains rather than a sit-down restaurant. In addition, many of the group tours will only visit attractions that have free or very low-priced admission.

¹ <http://www.inboundreport.com/2018/10/16/first-casualty-of-china-trade-war-golden-week-travel-to-america-down-40/>

² <https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-chinese-tourism-students-trade-war-20181031-story.html>

³ <http://www.inboundreport.com/2018/11/06/usa-drops-to-11-from-5-in-2017-among-popular-destinations-for-chinese/>

⁴ <https://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/nielsen-global/cn/docs/Outbound%20Chinese%20Tourism%20and%20Consumption%20Trends.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/nielsen-global/cn/docs/Outbound%20Chinese%20Tourism%20and%20Consumption%20Trends.pdf>. This report is a wealth of information regarding the Chinese traveler and I would encourage anyone considering marketing to China to read the full report.

⁶ http://tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/2016%20China.pdf

Ms. Hirao also notes that the Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism is not prioritizing the Chinese market since the state can't satisfy the needs of Chinese tourists with low-cost lodging and inexpensive dining options. However, since Boston lodging properties and attractions offer low-cost group rates, the Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau is targeting Chinese travelers.

Caroline Donaldson-Sinclair, VDTM's international rep for the UK and European market, advises that any property or attraction interested in hosting Chinese FIT tourists should have ensure a Mandarin speaking employee on hand to community with the Chinese visitors.

Similarly, Richard Liu of [China Tourism News](#), notes that Vermont businesses courting Chinese FITs should translate into Mandarin informational materials. Given the popularity of smoking in China, Mr. Liu further suggests having designated smoking areas at lodging properties and attractions with signage in Mandarin to ensure smokers know exactly where they can go.

Vermont lodging properties and attractions that see Chinese tourists are exclusively hosting tour groups accompanied by their own tour leader/ translator to ensure smooth communication. One lodging property in Burlington recommends that all hotel rules (e.g. where guests can and cannot smoke) be clearly stated in the contract with the tour group.

VDTM and the Chinese Market

Currently, the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing (VDTM) does not market specifically to China. Forest Zhang of Epoch Media Group recommends instead of targeting would-be Chinese visitors in China, businesses should be looking at targeting Chinese-Americans which is an easier market to break into. We will be conducting an international marketing research project within the next year, and the results of that research will help us determine priorities for new international markets. In the meantime, VDTM will meet with Chinese tour operators who request appointments with us at the various international summits we attend ([U.S. Travel Association's IPW](#), [Receptive Tour Operator Summit East](#), and [International Inbound Travel Association Summit](#)).

Resources

For those Vermont lodging properties and attractions that would like to increase Chinese visitation to their specific destination, there are some opportunities to do so:

- [2019 Brand USA China Sales Mission](#)
- [2019 Active America China Sales Mission](#)
- [2019 Receptive Tour Operator Summit West](#)
- [National Tour Association China Preferred Partner Program](#)
- [China Tourism Forum at Temple University](#)

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