



Chinese prefer “affordable luxury outdoor” trips over hardcore adventure ones

Adventure travel is yet to flourish in a big way in China and most of the people prefer “affordable luxury outdoor” trips, which combine outdoor and adventurous activities with sightseeing and vacation.

Cycling, climbing, rafting, surfing, hiking, snorkelling... indulging in such activities and planning a trip around the same is exciting for those who have got a taste for adventure.

Sellers acknowledge that adventure travel isn't just a vacation. Accordingly, they gear up for a thorough understanding of locations, the chosen activity, the equipment involved, safety, weather conditions etc. For instance, if the traveller intends to go for rock climbing and decides to take equipment along rather than hiring it, then how about carrying it all the way to the destination? This alone can be a critical decision-making point - whether to go ahead with a certain adventure trip or not.

“Adventure is a high-level (advanced and well-thought out) travel activity that meets the psychological needs of people to explore nature and challenge themselves. Today in China, it is only the needs of a small niche market, and only a small group of consumers in the Chinese market will choose adventure trips, while more people will prefer what we call “affordable luxury outdoor” trips or “comfortable adventure”, which combines adventure with leisure vacation. It provides outdoor experience accessible to ordinary people,” explained *Zhang Jun, General Manager, China International Travel Service (Shenzhen) Co., Ltd.*, operating under the brand of “Xinjingjie” (New Landscape). The 16-year old company offers several types of specialized tours, including adventure trips.

Preferences

Jun referred to Africa, Oceania and Europe, along with China, as preferred destinations for such trips. As for the type of trips, he said, off-road riding trips in the Western China are popular. “(Also) outdoor accommodation (in popular destinations) in the midst of nature is also exciting,” he said.

“It is possible to develop a limited number of representative and entry-level trips, which represent the essence of the specific destinations. Family adventure is also a good idea, which will facilitate the interaction between parents and children in the process, help the children to grow and make the family relationship closer,” mentioned Jun.

Providing an update on the company's current adventure travel business, he shared that this segment of trips is in its nascent stages, but it is expected to pick up in the years to come.

“We are still at the early stage in this segment, which only covers a small share of our operations. However, it is one of our focused directions in the future,” said Jun.

Segregating the profile of adventure travellers

For those keen on adventure trips, the drivers include experience and challenge, said Jun. “Moreover, tourists are no longer satisfied with previous regular trips and seek for more exciting and themed journeys. It is definitely a trend, indicating the expectations of some emerging middle class or wealthy segments.”

Jun shared that there are two kinds of adventure travellers in China.

- The first group is termed as “backpackers”. They are young and like hiking and outdoor activities, but their purchase power is limited, and they mainly engage in weekend excursions.
- The other group comprises top-level businessmen and executives who challenge themselves with adventures for a distinctive lifestyle.

"In the future, in the middle of these two segments, there will emerge the middle class, which represent enormous market potential, yet prefer comfortable adventure tours. We call it "in-depth tourism", which is suitable for families to travel together, with a lower level of difficulty," said Jun.

Does this mean that there are no takers for "challenging" adventure trips or is the segment too small?

Jun indicated that there are indeed professional/ tough and amateur/ comfortable categories to choose from. Professional adventure fans don't care about comfort and only focus on the overall destination experience, while amateur consumers look forward to a comfortable experience.

"As long as the products are properly segmented and categorized with well-designed pricing strategy, I believe the prices will be understood and accepted by consumers," said Jun. As for the demand for adventure travel shaping up towards being more of a customized and personalized travel experience, he said premium consumers call for autonomy and personalization. "But for most amateur adventure travellers, the offerings can be standardized, because without too much experience and special requirements, they don't need personalization. They won't link pricing to personalization, because they understand that these offerings are not ordinary tours and are acceptable to special pricing."

For adventure trips targeting amateurs, "it is important to include "safe and moderately difficult adventures", "clean and relatively comfortable accommodation" and "simple yet unique meals" in the itinerary," recommended Jun.

Individual or group travel?

One of the important considerations is whether adventure travellers like to move in a professional or a dedicated group or in a familiar group (friends/ family) or rather as an individual, who is keen on exploring and indulging in the activity on his or her own.

"At present, adventure travellers often travel with a small group of friends or tend to participate in some activities organized by specialized organizations. Unless it is particularly marketed by travel agencies, they seldom join travel groups. Also, currently, adventure tourism isn't the mainstream business of travel agencies," he said. Jun added that adventurous activities organized by travel agencies target mass travellers. So they have to ensure safety, which is a prerequisite for such kind of arrangement.

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