

## THE LEADING COMMUNITY OF CHINA'S TOP TRAVEL BUYERS

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### **Chinese travellers get real taste of culture travel with improved services**

As the trend of relishing “experiences” in a foreign location is gaining prominence over the past two years, cultural travel has become an integral part of outbound tourism featuring travellers from China.

Language, along with the feeling of being secure, often were cited as key considerations among travellers from China as they stepped outside their country for a holiday.

But such concerns are now starting to take a backseat.

In fact, lot of wrong or old assumptions are now waning away. For instance, shopping and visiting iconic landmarks are what Chinese travellers are generally associated with. Shopping could be a primary reason for Hong Kong or Macau, but not for destinations in Europe or North America. Rather, as also pointed by McKinsey in one of its reports late last year, Chinese now show penchant for “experiences” plus have diverse travel needs. Exploring local events, cuisine, art etc. is high on the agenda as of today. And the global fraternity serving travellers from China is evolving accordingly.

“With the explosive growth of outbound tourists from China, more countries are also upgrading their services to Chinese travellers by providing Chinese instructions and Chinese-speaking guides,” shared *UTour’s communication manager Li MengRan*.

Elaborating further, MengRan added, “For overseas travel agencies, the language barrier can be eliminated by tour leaders. For example, *UTour’s “Master Guide”* program is based on the insights of tour leaders on local culture, history, architecture and art, who may have been living in Europe for many years; an architecture expert studying the history of the local architecture; an expert photographer who knows the best light for the most beautiful photos etc. Through their vivid and interesting explanations, travellers gain first-hand understanding on local culture.”

Also, with the development of translation tools (gadgets with translation software or online translation), travelling has become much easier.

A number of assisting devices available, such as interpreters, translators and guides, are being developed and helping people from China when they travel abroad. “In addition, VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality) technologies show huge potential in the tourism market, which are widely used in cultural and artistic venues such as museums and art galleries, and help Chinese travellers explore local cultures,” added MengRan.

### **Being prepared with special products**

As an established outbound travel operator in China, *UTour* has focused on a wide range of cultural travel products, in which art exploration, architecture, human history and music are the main interests.

In order to offer more effective and in-depth understanding for Chinese travellers during their journey by means of one-to-one introduction of tour leader and local guides, *UTour* launched its themed product line of “*Master Guide*”. “*UTour’s* market research indicates that compared to other elements of travel, most tourists believe that cultural travel calls for greater guidance of “*Opinion Leaders*,” she said. Accordingly, the company works with experts in various fields - scholars, celebrities etc. to create its cultural and social travel products.

MengRan explained that all experiential products involving the appreciation of local and exotic cultures, and participation in diverse and rich local cultural activities are core themes of cultural travel.

*UTour’s* general products also describe the specific items that tourists will experience, such as feeding pelicans and dolphins, catching crabs and intimate contact with animals in Australia; building your own teddy bears in the UK; and visiting a chocolate workshop and making chocolates in the US.

According to *UTour’s* statistics, the main audience of cultural travel products is mainly middle-aged and old-age tourists. In addition, white-collars and office workers in Tier 1 cities are also the mainstay consumers. “They often expect to meet their needs of seeking knowledge through travel and thus enrich their inner spiritual world. Moreover, they are willing to explore local customs and traditions through unique environment and scenes of the destinations. Tourists with rich experience in outbound travel prefer cultural travel. With rich

enriched experience of outbound travel, the demand for cultural travel is greater. For these travellers, travel not only is a trip, but also meets the mental pursuit in the heart. They may be inspired by a movie, a reality show, a dish or an experience, so the cultural influence on them is more profound," said MengRan.

### **Evolving travel preferences**

MengRan pointed out that be it for where Chinese traveller stay or what they do is changing.

She said, "Chinese tourists are increasingly (becoming) demanding on overseas accommodation. Whether a self-guided tour or a group tour, the accommodation experience has shifted from hotels to diverse accommodation. Accommodation plays an important role in the tourism industry, because travellers spend a lot of time in the guest rooms, so unconventional accommodation such as homestay is a future trend of Chinese tourists, which will continue to rise."

She further added, "Moreover, in terms of travel activities, it has also changed from brief sightseeing to cultural travel, experiential travel and leisure vacations as well as special travel products focusing on the theme of world heritage."

MengRan referred to a couple of main drivers for travellers who enjoy culture trips:

- Participation and experience – Cultural travel products with remarkable experience and participation lead to higher traveller satisfaction.
- Multi-element development - The diversity of cultural travel also drives the participation of tourists, such as the integration of food culture, festivals, music and sports elements. Beyond the charm of the destinations, it also enriches unique experience of diversified elements.

UTour's statistics shows that today's outbound travel market in China is still dominated by group tours, completed with self-guided and semi-self-guided tours. "Customized travel has grown rapidly in recent years and is also an emerging trend. In a group tour product, a travel agency arranges cultural activities in advance for travellers. In contrary, in a customized tour, the travellers tend to schedule and refine the itinerary according to their own interests, which reflect different needs of tourists for cultural experience. Some tourists are keen to visit European wineries to experience the wine culture; some study Western cuisine; and the others seek excitement and challenges. Thus, the experience of cultural travel is more targeted and specific," shared MengRan.

### **Prominent cultural activities**

MengRan mentioned that for tourists, festivals are the most powerful embodiment of local cultures. As early as in 2017, UTour focused on "festival" as a new entry point of cultural travel and launched a themed collection of "Fantastic Festivals". One of the first festival-themed product lines of its kind, it includes the Songkran Festival in Thailand, the Beer Festival in Germany, the Bull Festival in Spain, the Thanksgiving Day in US, the Day of the Dead in Mexico, the Camel Festival in India, the Rose Festival in Bulgaria, the Vivid Sydney etc.

Creating an unforgettable New Year abroad was the focus of UTour in the Spring Festival of 2019. As a part of this initiative, UTour launched the "Chinese New Year at Disneyland: China-US Art Parade" and invited hundreds of Chinese artists to hold a cultural parade and exhibition at Disneyland California Adventure Park. In addition to this, artists also enjoyed a Chinese New Year gala dinner at Disneyland, adding a cordial Chinese flavour to the US journey during the holidays. "It provided high-value-added cultural travel products with unique experience and taste for middle-aged and elderly travellers, and also presented the civilized, healthy and happy portraits of Chinese middle-aged and senior tourists to the world. It is another testimony to the friendly exchanges between Chinese and American cultures," she said.

Post this, in early February 2019, UTour Study Tour undertook the largest Chinese youth exchange program at the Infinitus Music Festival in Canada by presenting hundreds of "young musicians" at artistic and cultural venues in Canada. The Infinitus Music Festival is one of the largest music festivals in Canada, which is also an exchange platform of both worldwide music and cultures. Taking culture as a message and promoting exchanges and cooperation is the key objective of this event. "The project received praise from the Chinese Embassy in Canada, which thanked it for the outstanding contributions to the cultural exchanges between China and Canada," said MengRan.