



### **Chinese travellers embrace culture travel for an immersive experience**

Learning about a new culture is an integral part of a foreign trip, but Chinese travellers are starting to dig deeper in truly knowing what a place, its people and cultural nuances stand for.

There are many ways in which culture travel can be defined – exploring a place culturally and architecturally, experiencing a destination rather than just being a visitor, living like a local and learning from them etc. Irrespective of what it stands for, culture travel is pulsating and encapsulating for one and all.

Summing it aptly, *Maria Yi Xin, Chief Financial Officer of Tuniu Corp.*, says, "In a way, all travel is a form of cultural travel." Xin adds it is about traveling to explore and experience new cultures.

From Chinese traveller's perspective, Xin says it needs to be understood that China's outbound market is still relatively young compared to other developed countries, so many Chinese customers are traveling abroad for the first time or its their first time in a particular destination. Overall, the growing consumption power in China is emerging as a driver because consumers have the spending power to experience new cultures.

"Most notably for Chinese travellers, they are especially fond of experiencing local cuisine during their travel and visiting key attractions," shared Xin. In comparison, more experienced travellers may be interested in more specific aspects of the culture, such as art or history.

Xin also shared that culture trips are more prevalent among travellers from higher-tier cities and the younger generation. For travellers from lower-tier cities or older travellers, there is a stronger preference for traditional organized tour products. Spending varies significantly depending on the traveller and the destination. Budget for long-haul destinations from China such as Europe or North America are generally higher.

And to what extent the demand for customised and personalised travel experiences is being reflected in culture travel? "Culture trips are customized in nature because each traveller has their own preference for experiencing local culture. Cultural trips are mostly conducted through self-guided tours and individual tours. Group tours provide various cultural activities too but these experiences are not as immersive," said Xin.

#### **Is it about familiarity or newness?**

Interestingly, going beyond art, music, food or architecture, Chinese travellers have also shown penchant for event-specific cultural activity.

As Xin mentioned, one of the more prominent international culture activities during the past 12 months has been the FIFA soccer World Cup.

"This is due to the wide-spread popularity of soccer in China," explained Xin. So this means that rather than indulging in a novel activity, one also needs to consider certain global or universal aspects that are already popular in China. It shouldn't be just about presenting Chinese with unique travel products that they haven't heard or witnessed in any manner in their market before.

While a trip might get initiated owing to a popular event, travel companies still need to understand what else a culture travel itinerary needs to include. For example, culture travel can be about specific events - The Mozart Week festival, the Diwali festival in India etc. or simply living in a village. But it shouldn't be forgotten that in addition to such events there are critical aspects too that Chinese audience looks for. It's just not about events, rather one also must evaluate the significance of archaeological ruins, national monuments, other local daily/ seasonal events etc. "At this juncture, Chinese travellers are mostly interested in the basic experience." While specific events do attract certain more sophisticated travellers, Chinese traveller generally still have a preference for the basic experience (must include aspects like experiencing local cuisine, visiting attractions etc.).

As for living like a local and immersing deeply into a specific culture, Xin said such "purely-experience tours" are still in its growing phase. "While they are quickly growing in popularity, these tours only contribute to a

minority portion of trips. Self-guided tourists are more inclined to travel for interaction with local people," said Xin.

Xin recommends that culture-related trips and itineraries should still revolve around key attractions. Experiencing local cuisine, shopping and entertainment should also be included in the itinerary. "Chinese travellers' preference for quality is evolving. As China's consumption continues to grow, travellers are opting for higher-quality accommodation and experiences," said Xin.

### **Exploring a culture**

Language is a key component when it comes to understanding the nuances of any new culture, and more so when one consider the significance of interacting with new people on a foreign soil.

Agreeing with the same, Xin explained why Chinese love to travel in a group.

"Language can be a challenging part of traveling to a new destination. That is why a large population of Chinese travellers travel with group tours. For self-guided tour travellers, the development of translation tools have been helpful for Chinese travellers to communicate with the locals," said Xin. "In terms of technology, translation devices have been useful in promoting self-guided travellers as they are now able to travel without the need of a tour guide or a local."

Another aspect is how they end up communicating or sharing their trips with others.

"Chinese travellers have a preference to share their trips on social media. As a result, experiences that are more readily shareable with their friends and families are extremely popular. Secondly, Chinese travellers enjoy shopping for unique local products," shared Xin.

The quality of the product counts, too. Xin recommends the trade to focus on the customer experience. "It is not about how many attractions were visited, but rather the depth of each visit. Chinese travellers are increasingly quality conscious, so be sure to offer products that are high-quality in nature," said Xin.

### **New opportunities**

With rising popularity of cultural tours, there are a number of new revenue opportunities, said Xin, adding that there is an especially large opportunity for destination products and services as they are generally very fragmented.

Tuniu has worked on its offering, letting customers to dynamically bundle products. Travellers can select their accommodation and transportation of choice and bundle it with various destination-based products. This gives travellers the ability to dynamically tailor a cultural trip to their own preference. Tuniu also offers tailored tour products, giving customers the ability to fully design a trip based on their demand, even if it's not a standard product.

"We expect culture travel products to be one of our fastest growing sub-segment," concluded Xin.