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Finding ways to let Chinese travellers enjoy a new culture to the maximum

Travel companies have to ensure "all senses" are aroused in order to maximize the pleasure of enjoying a culture trip. CTS' recommendation for those who are trying to serve Chinese travellers - try to perceive a specific culture by a variety of means, including seeing, listening, learning, tasting and feeling.

Knowing about a particular culture is an integral part of any foreign trip. Chinese travellers have shown proclivity for food, art exploration, architecture, music etc. It is time companies focusing on culture travel expand their offerings so that Chinese travellers can better entrench themselves in any local experience.

"(Travel) is dominated by culture. Culture-related contents cover a large portion of the trips, closely combined with cultural information. In the future, Chinese and even global travellers will prefer more informative trips," asserted *Chen Zhuo, General Manager of Europe Division & Cultural Travel Division at CTS Shanghai.*

CTS is one of the largest state-owned travel agencies in China, with presence in all cities in the country as well as 15 countries across the world. The annual turnover of CTS Travel Division exceeds RMB15 billion. The company's product line of 70 offerings served 500 travellers in 2018, generating the revenue of RMB15 million.

Not being overawed by a new environment

Being prepared in a way that one enjoys a trip freely is a pertinent aspect especially considering the fact that customized tours, in which a traveller tends to schedule and refine the itinerary according to one's own interests, are gaining in popularity. In case intermediaries intend to have a bigger role as a specialist then they need to show their expertise, especially making apt use of technology and gadgets. This way rather than being overwhelmed by the whole idea of entering a new location and struggling to overcome the language barrier, Chinese travellers can relax and be confident about enjoying their trip to the core as they are fully-informed about a specific culture, plus face no problem in communicating with people, too.

Overall, the situation, too, has improved. As specialists point out, 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 slowly fading away.

"There are translation gadgets available," mentioned Zhuo.

Zhuo acknowledged that along with tour guides, today artificial intelligence technology is also helping people interact (for e. g. Chinese traveller asking question in Chinese and answer coming in English via the device) with others in a simple manner. The trend of facilitating instructions in Chinese and the presence of Chinese-speaking guides, along with apt use of online tools, translation gadgets etc., is making a trip more enjoyable.

"Translation gadgets, videos and virtual reality will all work well," said Zhuo, who added that CTS' strength lies in offering a combination of cultural content and outstanding guides.

In-destination preferences

There are several trends that are being suggested at this juncture. For instance, globally the trend of living or enjoying a city like a local. Essentially it is about entering the real world of the "locals" and getting closer to embracing the local lifestyle. However, Zhuo disagreed with the same and mentioned, "I don't agree that "living like a local" is a big trend."

So then what has been the most prominent "culture activity" been during the last 12 months?

"A lot of culture activities, such as photography, soccer, skiing and cuisine," said Zhuo, adding that culture travel can be about specific events - for instance, The Mozart Week festival, the Diwali festival in India etc. As for the way Chinese travellers explore and indulge and enjoy destinations etc., Zhuo referred to the significance of "interactivity and experience". He also mentioned that travellers can be deeply engrossed in culture travel, and even relish the comparison between different cultures.

When specialists talk of experiences, it could mean one packs an itinerary with various activities such as a festival or simply visiting locations. But in true sense, one has to dig a lot deeper, and ensure "all senses" are aroused, according to Zhou. "Try to perceive a specific culture by a variety of means, including seeing, listening, learning, tasting and feeling," he said.

Zhuo added that even though Chinese are open to exploring art, architecture, archaeology, history, music etc. it doesn't mean that culture travel doesn't need to be refined to suit the tastes of different travellers from China. "It is important to categorize them (activities or themes) correctly. For example, the destinations can be easily classified by country and city. So it is essential to properly classify cultures," he said. Culture trips do not necessarily appeal to a certain demographic of Chinese travellers such as travellers of a certain age, from large or small cities, etc., said Zhuo. "There is no limitation in terms of demographics. It depends on interest," he said. Zhuo emphasised that travellers tend to be price sensitive, and at the same time the significance of quality of experience shouldn't be forgotten. As for how travellers choose their trips, certain specialists point out that 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. According to Zhuo, such trips are "largely group tours".

CTS expects a robust growth in culture-related trips. The expected growth rate of CTS' culture travel products in the next 2-3 years is around 200%, shared Zhuo.