



Overseas study tours balancing learning and playing

Sometimes considered as a peek into the future country and institute where Chinese students are going to study at for the next couple of years of their life, **study tours** are often taken at a faster pace which typically last between several days to a few weeks. Chinese youth have the opportunity to explore their desired countries, cities, and even certain universities on these trips in a safe group setting. This explains why the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada that collectively host close to 70% of Chinese overseas students, are also among top destinations for Chinese study tour visitors, thanks to the native English-speaking environment and having large amount of well-known universities.

Popular activities during study tours include language courses, hands-on workshops to learn local art and culture, and visits to local landmarks. Chinese parents aim to inspire and reward their children as well as encourage a broader sense of learning through these overseas study tours.

High quality overseas study tours involving good choices of destinations

So, what makes an ideal destination for these young Chinese visitors, who often come from Chinese middle- to upper-middle class families and already enjoy all convenience and modernity their cities can offer? According to the interviewed industry expert in Caissa Tourism Group, an ideal destination for overseas study tour should offer "enough learning elements and resources where students can learn about the country and destination in depth". Giving more details on this aspect, Caissa's industry expert remarked that academic subjects such as science, literature, humanities, and history are important requirements to Chinese study tour customers. Additionally, physical locations and landmarks at the destination included in a tour plan equally inspire interests in visits. Some basic factors, she continued, "such as the perception of social stability and accessibility to visas also contribute to the attractiveness of destinations for overseas study tours".

The interviewed industry expert ranked Japan, Germany, and several other European countries along with aforementioned "traditional" English-speaking countries on top of her destination. In a newly developed overseas study tour by Caissa that features Chinese tea culture in Japan, participants learn about the history and dissemination of Chinese tea culture. In studying how the Chinese tea culture has developed in neighboring countries, participants had the opportunity to watch Japanese tea ceremonies, walk through tea gardens, make their own matcha, and learn the aesthetics of Japanese tea rooms. Such trips are typically highlighted with visits to local Japanese schools where Chinese participants and local students celebrate bilateral culture exchange activities. The depth and diversity of elements that can be included into study tours are far beyond mundane tourist landmarks, which

the interviewed industry expert believed contribute to destinations' success in attracting Chinese study tours.

Chinese parents are the main decision makers in deciding where and how their children take study tours during summer or winter holidays. Therefore, Caissa's industry expert explained, "the image and desirability of a destination, the perception of educational value of courses arranged in study tours, the professionalism of study tutors and the trustworthiness of organizers are all factors that Chinese parents take into considerations when make decisions on overseas study tours".

Professional and specialized services helping one stand out of competitors

Compared to non-themed tourism products, study tours belong to categories of themed travels that incur travel expenses in the range of mid- to high-end. "Depending on where the destination is, an overseas study tour costs between RMB 15,000 to 30,000 (ca. USD 2,270 to 4,550 ¹). Such costs can be a substantial amount of household spending on education for Chinese middle-class families, who are often depicted by media as being anxious subject to peer pressure. "A Monthly Salary of 30,000 Yuan Is Not Enough for a Child's Summer Vacation", a viral Chinese social media post some time ago highlighted the anxieties that Chinese middle-class parents feel which in turn, result in them spending large sums of money on children's summer activities, including overseas study tours.

But why are overseas study tours so expensive? Certain cost factors, Caissa's industry expert explained, such as the inclusion of learning components and activities, certified educational tutors and counsellors as well as the management of underage youths push up the price. However, she considered that more could be done from both supply and demand sides to justify study tours' higher costs. For example, what needs to be improved, as she explained, are the "capability of suppliers who can integrate educational resources and capabilities of destinations that can provide high quality services. Service providers need to holistically design study tours' products. Besides facilitating teaching, they are also responsible in ensuring participants' safety and providing seamless travel arrangements in transport, meals, accommodation, and dealing with emergency and counselling with certified tutors."

From a demand perspective, the interviewed industry expert stressed that many Chinese parents also need to equip themselves with more knowledge of overseas study tours in order to be able to distinguish authentic products that have clearer themes and more depth in learning, from fake and mediocre ones.

Learning and curiosity having no age limit

Chinese middle-class families' commitment in sending their children to see the outside world continues to fuel the growth in overseas study tours. The market volume of overseas study tours from China is above 27 billion RMB (ca. 4 billion USD), according to a 2019 study conducted by the Intelligence

¹ RMB to USD exchange rate: <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/yearly-average-currency-exchange-rates>

Research Group. The industry expert estimated that Caissa's overseas study tour market will maintain a double-digit annual growth rate in coming years, thanks to Caissa's capability in integrating global education resources and well-established travel services.

The industry expert stated that Caissa's main customers are currently Chinese students in elementary schools and middle schools, whose trips are paid for by their parents. However, she expected that, in the near future, Caissa's study tour market segment will expand further to see more young adults and even elderly customers.

"The market penetration rate of study tours is only as low as 5% at the moment, and we expect to see the market volume of overseas study tours quadruple in the future," she concluded.