

**China Travel –Inviting the  
World to Experience a Real  
China**

*(Summary)*

National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency



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## **China Travel –Inviting the World to Experience a Real China**

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization, adopted at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, explicitly calls for facilitating both outbound and inbound travel to promote broader people-to-people exchanges and cooperation internationally. Recently, New China Research, the National High-Level Think Tank of Xinhua News Agency, further summarized for presentation the new features, trends, and outcomes of facilitating inbound tour administration for foreign nationals to introduce the global appeal of China's tourism resources and explain the inspirations and global significance of facilitating inbound visits that enables China's greater opening to the rest of the world.

## Chapter 1

# China Travel Is Attracting the World

Since the beginning of 2023, China has introduced a series of facilitation measures for foreign nationals to come to China for work, study, and travel. It has continued to widen the channels for them to visit China. With the continuing generation of policy dividends, the enthusiasm of foreign visitors for traveling to China has continued to heat up, with the number of inbound tourists shooting up. “China Travel” has become a catchphrase in many overseas social media and the number of hits for related topics has continued to climb.

With the continuous expansion of the visa-free “circle of friends” for China visits and the optimization of measures to facilitate personal travel and exchanges, more and more international tourists are choosing China as their travel destination to experience the real China up close in person. Since the beginning of this year, China has introduced a series of facilitation policies and measures for foreigners hoping to come to China for work, study, and travel, including easing the requirements for foreigners coming to China to apply for visas at ports of entry, exempting foreigners from 24-hour transit inspection at Beijing Capital Airport and other hub airports, and facilitating the accommodation of foreigners in China. The latest statistics from the National Immigration Administration (NIA) show that, in the first half of 2024, 20 percent of foreigners entered China for work, study, or travel with visa exemption. The latest data from the National Immigration Bureau show that in the first half of 2024, the number of foreigners who entered China reached 14.635 million, up 152.7 percent year-on-year. Among them, 8,542,000 foreigners entered China visa-free, a year-on-year increase of 190.1 percent. In the third quarter of 2024, 8,186,000 foreigners entered China at various ports, registering a 48.8-percent increase over the same period of the previous year. Among them, 4,885,000 entered visa-free, a 78.6-percent year-on-year growth. All these figures show the strong recovery momentum of China's inbound tourism. With the continuing optimization of policies and further opening of the market, it is expected that China's inbound tourism market will continue to maintain its growth momentum in the years ahead, contributing further to the recovery and development of the

global economy.

At the national level: building a top-level system, innovating measures, and restoring inbound tourism as a national policy. To further promote a higher level of opening to the world, the National Immigration Administration launched five policy initiatives at the beginning of 2024 to facilitate the entry of foreigners into China: relaxing the conditions for visa application at ports of entry, allowing foreigners who urgently need to come to China to apply for visas at ports of entry with invitations and other documents, implementing a 24-hour transit exemption policy at nine regional hub airports such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and streamlining entry procedures for passengers with international connections; allowing foreigners to apply for visa extension, replacement and re-issuance in China; permitting foreigners to apply for re-entry visa in view of the need for multiple entries; simplification of requirements for visa application materials... More and more inbound tourists can apply for visas without making a single run.

At the local level: piloting as forerunners in keeping with local conditions. Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, and other megacities and transportation hubs have continued to extend a series of immigration service policies to further optimize the experience of foreign tourists in China. Beijing launched a foreign bank card contactless transit service to allow them to swipe foreign bank cards for direct access to subway platforms. More than 3,000 A-class tourist attractions and cultural facilities in Shanghai support admission to museums by foreign tourists with passports and other valid documents. Chongqing concentrates on building a payment facilitation demonstration area to promote the full coverage of business districts, tourist attractions, transportation hubs, etc. with facilities ready for foreign card payments.

At the market level: new services and products aiding the quality development of inbound tourism. To enhance foreign visitors' accommodation experience in China, hotelier businesses across China have undertaken a series of initiatives to meet the growing demand of international tourists and improve service quality. In cultural exchanges and language communication, many hotels have stepped up staff training to improve their cross-cultural communication skills. In terms of the variety of meals offered, in view of the steady increase of Muslim visitors, hotels up and down the country have added more Western restaurants and introduced Muslim food in response to the need for diversified catering

for overseas guests. Some travel agencies have also launched multiple new inbound tourism routes, a move that allows foreign tourists to have individualized exploration of China's natural scenery and cultural charms during a short stay.

Tourism is an industry that encompasses multiple sectors. In China, tourism development is an important priority of efforts for promoting high-quality development and serves as an important engine for economic development. Against the backdrop of China's strategy of building a strong tourism country, the "China Travel" market faces extraordinarily broad vistas and plays an important role in driving the development of the world economy.

As a large country endowed with abundant tourism resources, China offers a unique appeal to the world from the perspective of its bountiful supply, from the snow and icy world in the North to the tropical seashores in the South, from the hustle and bustle of thriving cities in the East to the plateaus and mountains in the West, its tourism resources have a unique appeal worldwide. From the perspective of tourism concepts, as tourism has become the rigid demand of people around the world for a better life, the concepts of nature and greenness, cultural protection, and scientific and technological innovation, among others, bring overseas visitors myriad opportunities for travel, pleasure, and the benefit of rewarding, soul-touching experiences in China. From the perspective of innovation of tourism products, tourism demand and niche markets are constantly emerging, which propel the uplifting and growth of creativity and innovation in tourism facilities, products, and services. With regard to tourism as a vehicle for promoting international trade and cooperation, the inbound travel business has witnessed a steady recovery and the number of inbound tourists received by some tourist agencies has come close to the 2019 level. In terms of tourism promotion and advocacy, various tourism exchange activities and efforts to strengthen cooperation with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have continued to enhance the international popularity and influence of "China Travel".



## Chapter 2

# **China Travel Enables the World to Have a Direct Appreciation of the Development Achievements of Chinese Modernization**

According to a special survey by the China Tourism Research Institute on the satisfaction of inbound tourists, more than 60 percent of the respondents viewed experiencing Chinese culture as the primary goal of their trips to China. In the vast expanse of history, Chinese civilization, with its breadth and depth, has remained a source of illumination for all corners of the world. From the collision of ideas among the hundred schools of thought in the pre-Qin era to the literary pinnacle of Tang poetry and Song lyric, to the profound impact of the Four Great Inventions on the world's scientific and technological revolution, Chinese civilization is an important chapter in the annals of human civilization. It is a shining pearl of brilliance in the treasure house of civilizations of humankind.

Today, China attaches great importance to the inheritance and protection of historical and cultural heritage as well as the creative conversion and innovative development of the fine traditional Chinese culture. During their stay in China, visitors from abroad can enjoy a cultural feast of the fusion of ancient China and its contemporary reincarnation everywhere in the country. The unique charm of Chinese culture is becoming China's core attraction and a major destination for international tourism.

In this round of the China Travel boom, countless foreign tourists have set foot on this land with a yearning for China's historical relics and traditional culture. And they have also been shocked by the magnificent scrolls of China's high-speed development and the technological achievements that can be seen everywhere.

Journeying through China with a cell phone to scan anytime, anywhere. Since the beginning of 2024, Chris Hutchinson, a British blogger who has traveled around the world, has been taking his family on a China tour. At first, they withdrew money from banks and used cash to pay for their daily expenses. "After learning to use WeChat and Alipay, everything became so much easier and simpler," he said. "It's incredible

that everything can be done with a cell phone. Even at street food stalls, one can pay by just scanning the code!” added Chris's wife Tamira. By the time they reached Shenzhen, Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson got a drone-delivered Starbucks takeout for the first time in their life. After arriving in Shanghai, they strolled along the Bund at night and experienced a city walk amidst a dazzling show of lights and brilliance over and throughout the city. “The whole city was surrounded by technology. We saw skyscrapers shooting up like rockets into the sky. Even the bridges had constantly changing holographic projections.”

In the heatwave of the China Travel boom, foreign tourists in China are not only attracted by a myriad of distinctive natural landscapes, historical buildings, and folk culture in Chinese cities, but are also eager to walk into vegetable markets, cultural centers, and other scenes of ordinary city life to experience the changes in the daily life of urban and rural residents in China today. Views of every life of ordinary people have become a new favorite for foreign tourists.

“The good life of urban and rural residents exactly provides a beautiful sight in the eyes of tourists,” commented Dai Bin, President of the China Tourism Research Institute, in an analysis. Chinese and foreign tourists are entering the daily life scenes of urban and rural residents at an accelerated pace. Vegetable market tours are equally sought after by tourists, just as museums, art galleries, and operatic theaters.

In the first eight months of 2024, Shanghai received 2,908,600 million foreign visitors, up 1.4 times from the same period last year. Tourist routes and products that showcase today's happy life of Shanghai citizens are favored by tourists from abroad. After touring the cosmopolitan luxury and splendor of the Bund, Philippe, a Swiss tourist, stepped into the ancient town of Zhujiajiao, a water town to the south of the Yangtze River. Wandering through the quaint old streets and savoring delicacies such as Granny's Rice Dumplings and Xiaobiaolongbao (small steamed buns with soup inside), he was having a good time in serenity.

Overseas bloggers praise the beauty of China by capturing the wonders with their lenses. In Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province, a Korean tourist hailed the rolling mountains and peaks in front and expressed his heartfelt praise: “This is indeed a fairyland on earth that only God can create.” Luigi, a Belgian blogger, hiked to Jiuzhaigou, Sichuan Province on foot to take pictures of the splendid and magnificent lakes and mountains; a British photographer went deep into the hinterland of Xinjiang to capture with

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his lens the snowclad forests at the foot of the Tianshan Mountains.... On overseas social media platforms, a stream of video clips showing China's mysterious landscapes win countless likes.

## Chapter 3

# **China Travel Conveys a Credible, Lovely, and Respectable Image of China**

China's development of high-quality and high-level inbound tours has created conditions so that more foreign tourists can come, want to come, and are willing to come. It enables them to fall in love with a credible, lovely, and respectable China through firsthand experience and personal observation, forming a correct understanding of China and deeply identifying with it. It also enables them to take part in China's development opportunities.

Inbound travel is an important channel for international tourists to get to know China directly and deeply. It is an effective means of building China's national image through non-governmental means. Many foreigners who have never been to China mainly learn about China through the media, but some Western media outlets, out of various motives, are either inarticulate or not objective or fair in their reports on China, which prevent foreigner audiences from a full understanding of a real China. Visits to China based on personal experience and interactive communication provide more foreign tourists with the opportunity to experience the vast land of China with their physical presence here. What they see and learn is more direct and closer to reality than what the media convey and is more helpful in shaping an image of China that is real, three-dimensional, and comprehensive.

Openness is a distinctive hallmark of contemporary China and a huge dividend given to the world. International tourism developed rapidly after WWII, particularly so when driven by the process of globalization. It has become an important part of the global economy. In 2019, before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism contributed \$9.6 trillion to global GDP, accounting for a whopping 10.3 percent. It also created 10 percent of the jobs in the global labor market. Spending by international tourists amounted to \$1.8 trillion, accounting for 6.8% of the world's export total. Having experienced the bitter winter of the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism export revenues have recovered to 96 percent of the pre-pandemic level in 2023. However, compared with the overall recovery speed of tourism in several other large regions such as Europe, the

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Americas, and Africa, the overall recovery of the Asian and Pacific region still lags behind.

“If people make friends for benefits, they will part ways when the benefits are gone. If people make friends for the sake of power, the relationship will fall when the power is gone. Only friendship built on sincerity from the heart can endure.” China has always adhered to the concept of “one world of harmony” and “one family in the world”. It has always maintained an open and inclusive mind in accepting and absorbing different cultures, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and respecting each other. It welcomes more friends from abroad to come to China, to write more hot stories of Sino-foreign exchanges, and to discover more energizing opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation. From bustling urban landscapes to the ancient countryside, from hi-tech industrial parks to vibrant innovation centers, the diversity of landscapes that China presents fascinates an ever-increasing number of foreign visitors looking for good development opportunities in the country.

## Chapter 4

# **China Travel Promotes Exchanges and Mutual Understanding among Civilizations**

Tourism diplomacy is not only a means of diplomacy and communication, but also an important channel for a country or nation to influence the world with its outstanding culture and values. The Manila Declaration on the Social Aspects of Tourism emphasizes that tourism should play a role in major global social issues such as the promotion of peace, settlement of disputes, and safeguarding of the international economic order.

In addition to its industrial and economic functions, tourism is also an important engine for bilateral and multilateral cooperation. More importantly, it is a public tool for building the national image and promoting cultural dissemination. As part and parcel of China's tourism diplomacy, inbound tourism, while serving China's national interests, has contributed immensely by enhancing the inclusivity and coexistence of different civilizations, enriching the world garden of civilizations, and promoting world peace and stability.

As a global cultural exchange phenomenon, inbound tourism has given a big boost to the synergy and interaction among countries as well as the exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations. While countries vary in their cultural backgrounds, they can, amidst the collision of and communication between different cultures, learn about each other's lives, customs, values, behaviors, etc., reduce misunderstandings, eliminate barriers, increase understanding, forge friendship, and lay the foundation for cooperation between countries. The ever-closer people-to-people exchanges, like trickles, will converge into a torrential long river of friendly exchanges.

Tourism is a carrier of culture and a way of cultural acquisition. Chinese sages put “traveling thousands of miles” and “reading thousands of books” on the same level of importance. In tourism activities, tourists form their behavior based on their motives for travel such as seeking something new or different, searching for knowledge, beauty, pleasure, and so on. This is, in essence, also a process of perceiving, experiencing, enjoying, and disseminating culture. Only by shaping tourism with culture,

highlighting culture with tourism, and promoting the integrated development of culture and tourism can people be better enabled to appreciate the beauty of culture and cultivate the beauty of the soul through the appreciation of the beauty of nature.

China boasts a culture with a long history and a civilization that is expansive and profound. By traveling in China, friends from all over the world can experience and learn about Chinese culture and gain a deeper understanding of the history of Chinese civilization and, from it, gain more in-depth knowledge of the outstanding continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness, and peacefulness of Chinese civilization.

Now, the world is going through an acceleration of big changes unseen in a century, with global changes of our times of epoch-proportion unfolding in an unprecedented manner, with conflicts between different cultures flaring up from time to time. Tourism is acclaimed as a “messenger of peace” and a “bridge of friendship”. It can play a role as a “stabilizer” and “lubricant” in easing tensions.

In the face of the trends of anti-globalization and populism, the majority of countries and the international community continue to take peace and security as the direction of their ardent pursuit. Peace and development also continue to drive mankind in its efforts to jointly cope with a variety of serious challenges and difficulties. As part of great power diplomacy, China's tourism diplomacy has always been focused on the main theme of the times and amplified the latter. It helps tell China's story and display the image of a beautiful China through inbound travel. For China's tourist industry, the promotion of peace and economic development is the first priority, and cooperation to achieve win-win results, the fundamental path.

## Concluding Remarks

Tourism represents mankind's aspiration for and pursuit of a better life. It is an important way to learn about new things and explore the unknown world. Since ancient times, Chinese people have had the cultural tradition of traveling. The sages "read ten thousand books and traveled ten thousand miles", leaving behind countless popular masterpiece travels and articles.

Over 300 years ago, Xu Xiake, a famous Chinese scholar in the Ming dynasty, traveled extensively to "reach the unvisited and explore the unknown". Xu Xiake Travels, the travelog that he wrote after more than 30 years of travel, is both a world geography masterpiece that contains systematic observations and descriptions of nature, but also a great work of tourism that depicts China's splendor of gigantic mountains and beautiful rivers. It is a monumental work with a profound and far-reaching influence.

More than 700 years ago, Marco Polo, a traveler from Venice, traversed thousands of miles to China and opened the door for the East and West to meet and get to know each other. With this, he transformed his extraordinary personal journey into the shared memory of the countries of Eurasia and built a bridge for exchanges between Eastern and Western civilizations.

With China's continuing rollout of a series of measures spearheaded by the visa optimization policy to facilitate foreign visits to China, more foreign tourists have the opportunity to come to China, see China, enjoy China, and fall in love with China. China Travel in the new era will contribute to the forging of global consensus and to a new pattern of people-to-people exchanges, cultural interaction, and close communication, keeping the garden of world civilizations full of colors and vibrancy.