

Rise of the Chinese Independent Traveler

SKIFT REPORT #1

2013

Long accustomed to fly-by-night group tours, the new Chinese tourist is increasingly independent and demanding of more unique and authentic experiences when they travel. While group tourism still dominates, brands face challenges in serving the new Chinese tourist.

By Vincent Trivett and Skift Staff

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Introduction



Chinese celebrity
Qu Wanting

Courtesy: Tourism Vancouver

Mainland China became the world's biggest source of foreign tourists in 2012. The United Nations World Tourism Organization counted 83.2 million Chinese citizens traveling abroad, a 395.7% increase from 2002. These newly affluent travelers spent \$102 billion while they traveled, making them the biggest-spending tourists.

Despite slowing economic growth at home, the trend continues unabated. In the first five months of 2013, 37.9 million Chinese traveled abroad, an increase of 17.3% over the year before.

The massive increase in Chinese outbound travel is not lost on governments, brands and hotels. Especially as Western economies falter, leaving citizens with less cash and confidence to travel abroad, tourism organizations across the world are proactively luring in their share of these increasingly affluent visitors to their countries. This could become more challenging as the market for Chinese tourists becomes increasingly sophisticated and fragmented. This report examines the trend toward independent, rather than group tourism and how travel providers can reach them.

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Group travel still dominates

Outbound travel for Chinese mainland citizens is still dominated by group tours that often bus the tourists from city to city on a gruelling schedule. A common visit to continental Europe with a package tour might hit five countries in as little as 10 days¹. These groups have a reputation for staying in budget motels, only eating Chinese food, passing through the major attractions as quickly as possible and spending most of their travel budget on luxury consumer goods, sometimes in outlet malls. The prestige of bringing back gifts and souvenirs for friends and family at home is a high priority.

Attracting these groups is a straightforward affair. Destinations, retailers, and hotels have only to work out a deal with the Chinese travel agent and agree to their requests for amenities such as a water boiler

or congee for breakfast to bring these lucrative groups in.

This mode of travel is still the norm, but its growth is slowing while individual tourism is rising meteorically. Even if they rely on a travel agent for flight and hotel bookings, independent tourists choose where to go, eat and shop on their own, rather than follow an omnipresent tour leader.

The predominance of group package tours has led to an oversimplified profile of the Chinese traveler. It is now increasingly necessary to appeal to this more confident, worldly, but proudly Chinese demographic that is eager for unique experiences. At the same time, travel companies have to provide individual visitors with the same feeling of being in "good hands" and convenience that group travel provides.

Understanding the draw of group tours

Group travel is still popular for convenience and price as well as a history of restriction on individual travel. Three decades ago, any sort of outbound travel was impossible for all but official delegations and Olympic athletes. Even domestic travel was greatly discouraged. In 1983, The People's Republic signed its first Approved Destination Status (ADS) agreements with Hong Kong and Macau to allow select groups visit family there. In 1990, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia were also approved. As of July 2013, 116 countries² are fully approved for

group travel and another 32 are still in the process of ratifying the agreement.

In 2009, Beijing declared tourism as a pillar industry, changing its attitude from scrutiny and containment to encouragement of both outbound and inbound tourism. Foreign governments are also relaxing visa restrictions to allow Chinese to visit independently or in small niche group tours.

To organize outbound travel to an approved destination, agencies are certified

10 characteristics of independent outbound Chinese tourists

- 1 Younger** - 60% are in the consumer "sweet spot" between 25 and 45.
- 2 Richer** - Over 80% have an annual income over 60,000 RMB. The average for urban consumers is 24,000 RMB.
- 3 More educated** - The vast majority at least have bachelors degrees.
- 4 More sophisticated travelers** - Fully independent tourists usually aren't on their first trip abroad. Many study or have studied in other countries. Even when they aren't fluent in foreign languages, they aren't afraid to deal with locals on their own. Younger Chinese are more worldly than their parents, but still proudly Chinese.
- 5 More connected** - The internet is the main source of information for independent tourists. They see internet and social networking access as a major necessity. They often consult friends for travel advice and use first-hand travelogues in blogs when planning a trip.
- 6 Demanding** - This whole generation of only children that grew up in relative abundance is accustomed to high quality and attentive service.
- 7 Enjoys indulging** - Independent Chinese tourists aren't all budget travelers. Nearly half spend more than 9,000 RMB per trip, more than the average of about 7,500 RMB. Consumers under 45 make up most of the luxury market, and they mostly shop abroad.
- 8 Eager for unique travel experiences** - They aren't as interested in hitting the must-see landmarks. To stand out in their social circles, they seek out uncommon destinations and niche tours based on classy hobbies like wine appreciation to express their individuality.

by the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and keep a sizable amount of insurance to resolve disputes. Groups must be at least five people, including the tour leader, who is required to stay with the group at all times according to the ADS agreements.

In exchange for their autonomy, group tourists get a competitive price and guaranteed safety. Groups also allow them to

enjoy foreign destinations in their native language and remove the discomfort of interacting with locals.

According to the CNTA, there are currently 1,274 travel agencies³ licensed to sponsor outbound travel in the Mainland.

For groups too small to fit into the ADS framework, tourists must apply for individual visas for each destination.

9 Plan extensively - Independent travelers plan out itineraries for up to several months and rarely veer from their plans.

10 Stay in one destination for longer periods - They stay longer than group tourists and try to learn more about the local culture.

Independent travel

Fully independent outbound tourism is growing even faster than foreign travel in general, and the market is still in its infancy.

The CNTA said that in 2011, 20.37 million Chinese tourists visited countries other than Hong Kong and Macau, the two semi-autonomous special administrative regions (SARs) within China. Of those, 7.7 million, or 37%, left without a group tour.

Global Blue, a company that analyses tax-free shopping, estimates that up to 40%⁴ of

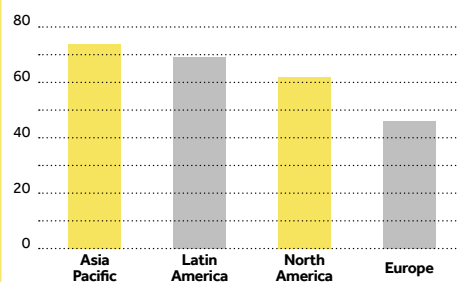
Chinese travelers are independent. Qunar.com, China's most popular website for comparing and ordering travel products, sees the overall market for independent outbound travel as 20% to 30% of the total outbound market. Still, 35% of Qunar's customers, all of whom are self-organizers, said that they prefer group tours for outbound travel, according to its own market research. This compares to 56% of all internet users, who still prefer the comfort of a group tour when they go abroad.

Where they go

The vast majority of independent outbound tourists, even excluding those that go to China's SARs, choose to visit Asian destinations.

In "The Characteristics of Independent Chinese Outbound Tourists," Yixian Xiang of Ningbo University's Sino-European Institute of Tourism and Culture found that 56.3% visit Asia. Europe was second with 27.4%. Thailand is the most popular destination country on any continent. According

to her questionnaire, Thailand attracted 9.1% of independent tourists.



Percentage of Chinese visitors that arrive independently, according to hoteliers

Source: Hotels.com China International Travel Monitor, 2013

Thailand's Tourism and Sports Ministry counted 2.79 million arrivals⁵ from China last year, up 62% from 2011. Of those, 1.01 million came independently, a 57.7% year-over-year increase.

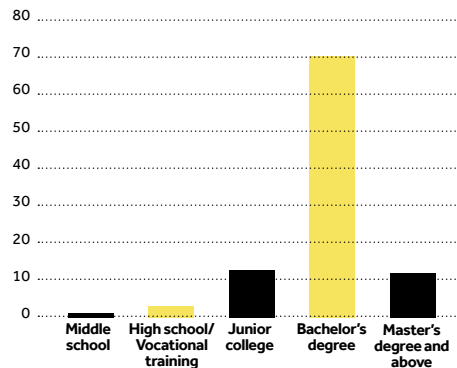
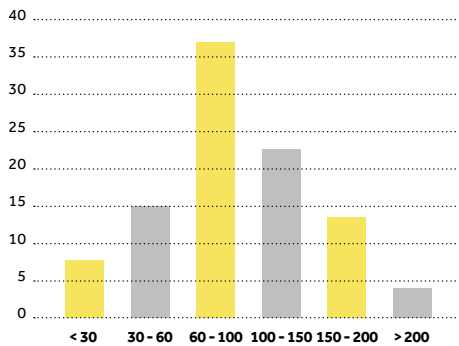
Thailand is particularly attractive for the ease of obtaining an independent tourist visa, low cost, proximity and mix of urban shopping and natural beauty.

The growth of independent tourism can also be seen in sharp relief in Taiwan, where non-group travel from the Mainland only began in 2011⁶. In the first five months

of 2013, 1.19 million Chinese arrived in Taiwan, a 12.38% increase from the same period in 2012. Only 780,000 came as part of a group, a decline of 1.6%. At the same time, independent tourism rose 244%⁷.

Individual travel is still very constrained by the countries' agreement, but the governments are easing restrictions. In April, the cities that Mainland travelers were allowed to visit expanded to 13. The cap on the daily number of Chinese tourists allowed to enter Taiwan was raised from 5,000 to 7,000, of which 2,000 are permitted to come independent of a tour group.

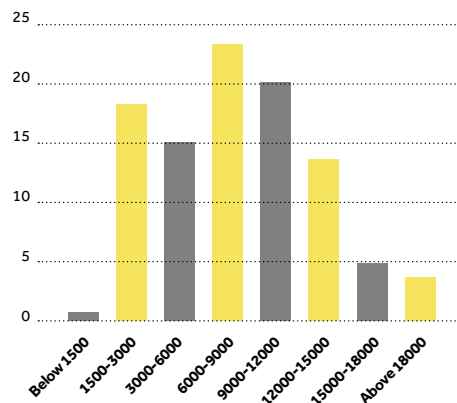
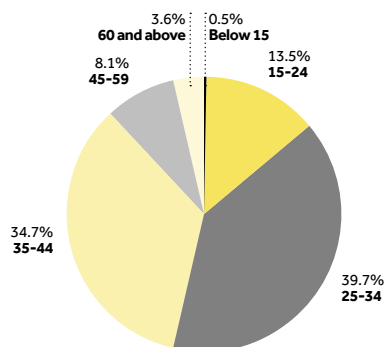
Demographic characteristics of independent Chinese Tourists



LEFT: Annual income (RMB)

RIGHT: Education

Charts based on survey data in Yixian Xiang's "The Characteristics of Independent Chinese Outbound Tourists" in Tourism Planning & Development⁸



LEFT: Age

RIGHT: Expenditure

Younger, and hungry for the best



Actress Gao Yuanyuan

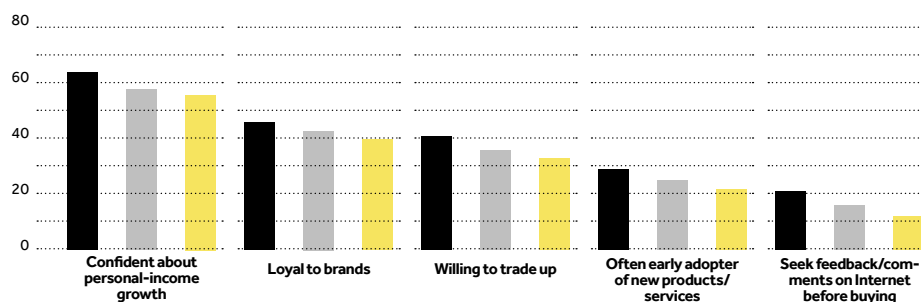
Courtesy: Visit California

The shift from independent to group travel is still in the green shoots phase, but this trend goes hand-in-hand with a demographic sea change for China: a second generation of affluent consumers coming of age. These discerning young consumers favor self-organized travel.

The younger generation of Chinese (born in the mid-1980s and later) do not remember the struggles their parents went through in the tumultuous decades under Mao Zedong. They are more optimistic about

their future earnings potential and less interested in saving for a rainy day.

McKinsey, the U.S.-based management consulting firm, labels this cohort as Generation 2⁹ or G2. They say that this generation comprised 200 million urban consumers and accounted for 15% of all Chinese urban consumption last year. Within 10 years, they will be three times as numerous as the baby boomers that drove the U.S. economy for decades.



Percent of responders

● Upper-middle-class urban Generation 2 members¹

● Upper-middle-class urban population²

● Total urban population³

Source: 2012 McKinsey survey of 10,000 Chinese consumers

1. People born after mid-1980s and raised in a period of relative abundance.

2. Annual household income of 106,000-229,000 renminbi (equivalent to \$16,000 to \$34,000 in 2010 real terms).

3. Personal-care-product example

These young people grew up comfortable thanks to China’s economic resurgence since the 1980s. McKinsey’s research¹⁰ says that they are “confident, independent minded, and determined to display that independence through their consumption.” They found that this generation is significantly more likely to consider expensive things as intrinsically better. They are more brand-loyal, but eager to trade up and try new products. This younger demographic, those under 45, make up 73% of the luxury

market in the country.

The vast majority of them grew up with a monopoly on their parents’ attention thanks to the one-child policy, which is strictly enforced in urban areas. Only the richest urban Chinese families can afford to flout the law and raise a bigger family. Since 1978, mandatory family planning created a class of “little emperors” that are used to immediate gratification.

		18-34 years	35-65 years
Willing to pay	Willingness to pay for the best product ¹	41%	31%
	Willingness to pay for the technology ²	42%	36%
Rising Expectation	Desire for self-indulgence ³	45%	37%
Individualism	Expectation for products that meet specific requirements ⁴	39%	31%
Online activity	Need for Internet ⁵	44%	16%
	Intention to always check information online ⁶	33%	18%

< Younger vs. older consumers

Source: McKinsey Annual Chinese Consumer Survey (2012)

1. % of repondents who “always pay premium for the best personal care products, within bounds of affordability

2. % of repondents who are “willing to pay extra for a product with the latest technology”

3. % of repondents who are “willing to spend on personal care products to indulge myself”

4. % of repondents who felt it is “very important to receive targeted product information that is designed specifically for me/my requirements”

5. % of repondents who said they “cannot live without the internet”

6. % of repondents who “always check information online for consumer electronic products before purchasing”

This group is most likely to prefer independent travel. According to Xiang’s study, 74.4% of independent tourists are between 25 and 44. They are also more educated than the general population of China. The vast majority, 82.9%, have at least a bachelor’s degree, whereas only 46.3% of Chinese outbound tourists have a bachelors degree.

They are more global, educated, and consumption-driven than their parents, and their travel habits are also different. Where the older generation tends to treat tourism in Europe, for example, as a trip to a historical museum and a shopping mall, younger independents are more interested in the lived modern culture of their destinations.

Seeking individuality, authenticity



Actress Gao Yuanyuan
Courtesy: Visit California

More experienced Chinese tourists, like Western backpackers, think of themselves as explorers, and they see group tourism as banal. They want control of their itineraries, and they respond well when brands make them feel special.

Many of the younger generation, especially those raised in upper-class families, have already been abroad on one of the grand

bus tours as children. They don't need to have the obligatory picture of the Eiffel Tower. They flock to less mature destinations such as Paris, and seek out novel experiences that make them stand out in their social circles.

Independent tourists or small, self-organized groups are seeking out more authentic experiences that increase their prestige

as individuals. Niche tours for activities such as wine appreciation, golf and ocean fishing are increasingly popular for small groups of experienced tourists.

This preference extends to lodging as well. According to the Hotels.com China International Travel Monitor survey, 54% prefer a hotel with local flavor, compared to 49% of group tourists.

Chris Erickson, general manager of the Heathman, a high-end luxury hotel in Portland, Oregon, says that Oregon, a fresh destination for Chinese, is getting more interest because it isn't a common place to visit.

"As travelers get more educated, they don't want the full itinerary planned for them," he

says. "The want to be the first. They did the Los Angeles, Las Vegas and San Francisco triangle, and they are looking for things that their friends never did."

Erickson says that small groups are discovering the famous Bandon Dunes golf course nearby and are even renting cars for road trips to seek out Oregon wineries.

Christine Lu, the co-founder and CEO of Affinity China, a lifestyle platform for independent Chinese travelers, says that her clients frequently ask the company to help them choose destinations where other Chinese are not traveling to during the peak periods of Chinese New Year and October National holiday.



Western Hotel Chains on Sina Weibo

Understanding the Chinese social network Sina Weibo is key if companies want to reach younger travelers who are already engaged in either praising or criticizing their brands. The links below go to pages for major hotel chains active on Weibo.

- [W](#)
- [Westin](#)
- [Sofitel](#)
- [Indigo](#)
- [Sheraton](#)
- [Hilton](#)
- [Hyatt](#)
- [Four Seasons](#)

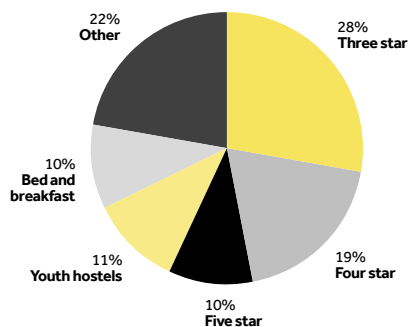
Planning longer, staying longer

Independent tourists know that they aren't in a controlled environment, so they take more control in their planning process. Xiang's study showed that a six-month planning period isn't uncommon, and 100% primarily use the internet to plan.

"Since they typically do more research before embarking on a vacation, it's important for hotel and tourism brands to have a strong online presence that is not limited to typical search engines," says Andrew Schrage of Money Crashers Personal Finance, who markets to Chinese consumers.

This is partly out of necessity as individual tourist visas often require Chinese citizens to state where they are staying and when. They are much less likely to veer from their plans. While they don't travel under the dictatorship of a tour operator, they are just as unlikely to let serendipity guide them. Given that by the time the average independent traveler gets on the plane with his

or her plans already made, brands need to reach them in the planning phase, especially three to six months before the peak travel seasons that coincide with national holidays and school breaks.



When seeking out destinations and choosing travel products, first-hand word of mouth and travelogues on blogs are most trusted. Though they like to feel that they are blazing a new trail, knowing that another Chinese traveler has been there makes them more comfortable.

Hotel preferences of Chinese independent tourists

Source: [Hotels.com China International Travel Monitor, 2013](#)

Enormous influence of social media

Brands and destinations cannot underestimate the importance of social media for Chinese consumers, especially the growing class of young netizens that are more likely to plan their own trips. Among independent travelers, 33% still seek the advice of travel agents, but most prefer to deal exclusively online, and 31% say that social media plays a role in their travel planning, according to a survey by Hotels.com¹¹.

Z_Punkt, a German consulting company, found¹² that 48% of Chinese consumers are already using social media in their travel planning. Data¹³ from Chinese social networks says that the country has 597.6 million social media users. This makes up 91% of all Chinese internet users.

They are fortunately very open to interacting with brands. Insites Consulting says that 66% are likely to follow brands on social networks.

This could be a double-edged sword. According to Edelman Digital¹⁴, 61% of Chinese would write about positive experiences of products or companies, and 53% are likely to write about negative experiences.

This is much more than the global average. Americans, by contrast are only 36% likely to write positive comments about brands, and 29% would post something negative.

This underscores the importance of culturally sensitive service for Chinese visitors since a bad experience is likely to be broadcast on Weibo or to a private circle of friends on WeChat, harming the brand.

Nevertheless, it is a good practice to smooth friction to sharing. Young, internet savvy Chinese travelers take access for granted. McKinsey found that 44% of the 18-34 demographic reports that they "need" the internet, and 33% say that they intend to always check information online. Brands such as hotels and retailers should turn on the wifi to accommodate them. Unless they pay a significant fee for foreign data, free wifi allows them to share their experience and even get real-time feedback on purchases from their friends back home. Some destinations, including Germany and Sydney, Australia, are offering Chinese-language mobile apps for offline access to maps, phrasebooks, and other relevant information for visitors.

5 Marketing strategies for reaching independent Chinese travelers

- 1 Get active on Chinese social networks - These tourists are avid netizens, and they are open to following brands. Actively engage and make it easy for tourists to share and interact with friends while on the road.
- 2 Create more shareable marketing material - Rather than mere promotional materials, some brands see success with branded online entertainment that could spark viral interest. Online content costs less than traditional television spots and reaches the younger demographic most likely to organize their own travel.
- 3 Target key opinion leaders - Enlisting celebrities and sports figures to promote a destination or brand generates news in mainstream Chinese media and raises interest for would-be tourists. Those with strong following on social networks can reach more people than the brand alone can hope to.
- 4 Play to tourists' individuality - The younger generation likes to feel unique and special. Campaigns that emphasize unique opportunities besides general sightseeing. Offer unique cultural experiences, but continue to provide Chinese-specific amenities.
- 5 Reach out to them before they leave - Since Chinese independent tourists mostly stick to pre-determined itineraries, you have to get them before they leave. Ramp up marketing efforts three to six months before the peak seasons at Chinese New Year and the national holidays in the fall.

Star power

Everyday Chinese trust the opinions of their friends. Recruiting key opinion leaders are a simple and cost-effective way to promote a brand or destination to vast numbers of people.

An increasingly popular strategy is to employ a "brand ambassador" to promote a destination. New Zealand promotes its

natural scenery to Chinese visitors through Yao Chen, the actress also known as the "Queen of Weibo" with almost 50 million fans following her on the social network. She became New Zealand's brand ambassador in 2011 as part of the country's 100% Pure campaign. Her official work was limited to a few appearances and photo shoots, but in November 2012, she decided to hold

her wedding at a resort in Queenstown on the South Island. She posted updates and photos from the wedding, which drew a huge amount of buzz.

Thanks to her wedding, Tourism New Zealand found 40 million discussions on Sina Weibo and 6,900 stories in Chinese media, including the front page of the Shanghai Times. This exposure was equal to an advertising campaign worth¹⁵ tens of millions of dollars.

"How can you quantify the value of over 45 million followers?" says Tony Everitt, Tourism New Zealand's General Manager of Asia, based in Shanghai. "Yao Chen's ambassadorship has been incredibly helpful in appealing to our target demographic."

Air New Zealand ran with this theme and started a "Romance Class" campaign for traveling couples.

Recruiting celebrities as brand ambas-



Air New Zealand ran with this theme and started a "Romance Class" campaign for traveling couples.

< Yao Chen's wedding at a New Zealand resort

Source: Sina

sadors for tourism destinations is becoming more popular. Qu Wanting promotes Vancouver¹⁶ and Gao Yuanyuan recently became the face of California¹⁷ tourism for China.

Celebrity contact can also help a brand stand out. Since Chinese tourists are such big spenders, every brand in the world seems to be desperately vying for their affection. To truly stand out for luxury consumers, some brands are organizing

small group tours with celebrity escorts. For example, the pianist Lang Lang gave a private concert¹⁸ for Chinese guests at a Mont Blanc store in New York. Actor and model Hu Bing accompanied a group of affluent Chinese travelers to Las Vegas, Orange County and Beverly Hills during Chinese New Year. The opportunity of having a Chinese celebrity accompany the guests for shopping at Tiffany & Co. and Burberry was a very unique experience.

Sponsor viral content



◀ Screenshot from Sho Luo's YouTube Page

Source: [Sho Luo's YouTube Page](#)

Movies are powerful for raising awareness of lesser-known destinations. The 2012 movie "Lost in Thailand" recently bested "Avatar" as the all-time highest grossing film¹⁹ in China. The low-budget slapstick comedy is also credited with contributing to the tourism boom²⁰ that followed in early 2013. Chinese arrivals to Thailand rose 93% in the first quarter of 2013, a period comprising the peak travel season of the Chinese New Year. Similarly, the 2008 Feng Xiaogang film "If You Are the One" put Hokkaido²¹ in Northern Japan on the Chinese tourist's map, as it prominently featured the island's pastoral beauty. The same can be done proactively by brands and destinations. Original content online is much more likely to be shared by friends than traditional marketing materials.

"Many luxury brands are still too focused on print magazine ads. Why not get creative and integrate their brands into TV dramas and movies that influence millions via word of mouth and social media?" says Ms. Lu of Affinity China.

Tourism Australia did this in 2012. They hired Taiwanese pop stars Rainie Yang and Sho Luo for a five-part romantic mini series²² broadcast on Tudou, a Chinese video sharing site (YouTube is banned in mainland China). Production and promotion cost less than A\$1 million, and reached an estimated 500 million Chinese fans. The series highlighted some of the lesser-known attractions in the country such as Melbourne's graffiti-filled alleyways.

China is no stranger to brand-sponsored television. Unilever, for example, sponsored the Chinese version of the international sitcom Ugly Betty. Even in the late 90s, Boeing sponsored a 20-part series²³ to raise brand recognition of its jets. Branded drama is shifting online as traditional television advertising is expensive, and the young, affluent demographic that tourism marketers should target is more interested in their laptop and mobile screens²⁴ than the state-filtered TV that their parents watch.

Reaching independent tourists

Group travel was and is popular because it simplifies the process of securing visas and hotel bookings and arranging the itinerary. It also takes away the intimidation of visiting a foreign country with an alien tongue and offers comforts of home such as Chinese cuisine.

While independent tourists prefer to trade some comfort and convenience for the freedom to build their own itinerary and choose where to shop on their own, brands and destinations must still provide

The massive increase in Chinese outbound travel is not lost on governments, brands and hotels.

those comforts of the group tour. Governments around the world are easing visa restrictions and other barriers to travel. For instance, U.S. President Barack Obama ordered the State Department to increase non-immigrant visa processing²⁵ in China and Brazil by 40% and ensure that 80% of applications are processed in 21 days

or less in 2012. France, by contrast, can process a visa for a Chinese citizen in as little as two days.

Though independent tourists are much more open to experiencing local cultures and think of themselves as different from the older folks on package tours, much of the same wisdom about catering to Chinese tourists still applies.

Mandarin-language websites, social media presence (especially Sina Weibo, WeChat, and QQ), marketing collateral and public relations with local press are still important. Hiring Mandarin-speakers and training all staff in Chinese culture and customs is crucial. If staff are perceived as rude by Chinese visitors, they are likely to take it as an affront to their entire country. Little things like slippers in hotel rooms go a long way. Chinese expect that as much as Westerners expect a familiar-looking toilet in their hotel.

“On-site, it’s important to maintain the in-language theme that you’ve used to attract travelers to your destination. If you’ve gone to great lengths to market to the Chinese traveler, but on-site you haven’t taken into account their preferences for language, food, recreation or amenities, it will be damaging to your brand long-term,” says Dan O’Sullivan, Vice President of Sales for EMEA at TransPerfect, a provider of language and localization services. “The same social media

platforms that you've used to effectively market can then be used to publicize your shortcomings in the on-site experience."

Almost all school children in China study English, and between 1978 and 2011, 2.25 million students left China to study²⁶, mainly in English-speaking countries. But it is not wise to assume that fully independent tourists do not need native language support. The survey by Yixian Xiang found that despite being far more educated, only 12.8% of fully independent Chinese tourists can speak English and 44.6% had some skill in the language. Independent tourists are less afraid of interacting with foreigners in a language they don't speak very well, but making it easy for visitors to get around with Chinese goes a long way.

Wolfgang Georg Arlt, professor for tourism management and director of the COTRI China Outbound Tourism Research says that Chinese

Independent tourists are less afraid of interacting with foreigners in a language they don't speak very well.

language signage is not so much about utility as it is about respect for Chinese culture.

"This is about 'face,' not practicability," he says.

Other measures such as hotels serving Chinese breakfast foods and providing room slippers also makes even these young, experienced travelers have better experiences. "They are still Chinese and many younger Chinese are very patriotic, to say the least," he says.

Brand recognition is still very important. Starwood Hotels, which operates the W, Sheraton and Westin as well as other brands, says that they are at an advantage because they have a long standing relationship with Chinese guests since they were the first international brand to open in China.

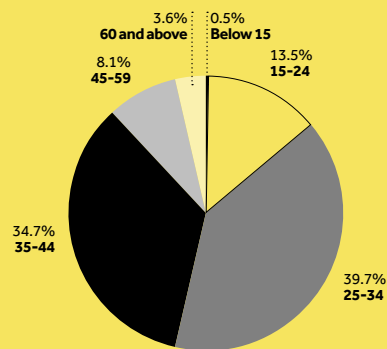
"When Chinese travel abroad, they tend to stay at the hotel that they are familiar with. This actually gives Starwood a strategic advantage to attract Chinese guests," the company said in a statement.

Another important practical matter is making it known that your store accepts China UnionPay, the country's only domestic bank card. This should be prominently marked in windows and in promotional materials.

The importance of brand presence in China is also true for luxury retail. Bain & Co. reports²⁷ that Chinese do 65% of their luxury shopping abroad, mainly because these products could be 40% more expensive in China. Many retailers even take losses²⁸ on Chinese locations in hopes that awareness of the brand translates into sales once customers come abroad. It helps cement their status as a prestige brand, so an item bought at the flagship store is even more coveted.

The Fully Independent Chinese Outbound Tourist

Independent Chinese tourists are younger...



... and more educated.

Percentage with bachelor's degrees and higher

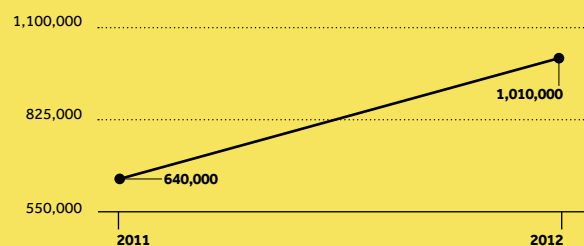
82.9%

Independent tourists

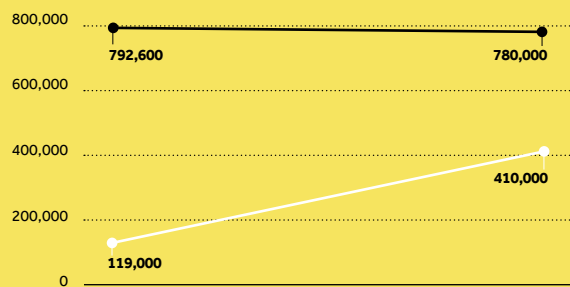
46.3%

Urban population

Thailand, the most popular outbound destination for Chinese, saw a 58% increase in independent arrivals in 2012.



Taiwan only allowed independent tourists from the Mainland in 2011. In the first five months of 2013, group tours declined by 1.6% while independent tourism increased by 244%.



Of 597 million social network users, **66%** follow brands

61% would write about positive experiences

53% would write about negative experiences

Sources:

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Skift is a business information company focused on travel intelligence and offers news+data+services to professionals in travel and professional travelers, to help them make smart decisions about travel.

Founded in 2012 by media entrepreneur Rafat Ali, Skift is based in New York City and backed by Lerer Ventures, Advancit Capital and other marquee media-tech investors.

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