

Chinese tourists flock to Europe US for holiday cheer

Écrit par merchid.berger@finances.gouv.fr (Merchid BERGER)
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"Increasing numbers of Chinese tourists are choosing to travel abroad for Christmas, leading to a boom in business for travel agencies, despite the Christian festival not being a public holiday in China.

All outbound group trips organized by China International Travel Service Ltd, or CITS, sold out a month before Christmas Day, the tourism agency said.

Shopping in Europe and the United States is becoming increasingly popular among Chinese tourists, especially because many stores offer discounts ahead of Christmas Day.

"The number of our customers joining groups to go shopping in Europe and the US increased by 20 percent this Christmas compared with 2011," said Li Meng, deputy director of the outbound department of CITS.

Western countries are beginning to rival Hong Kong and Macao, which are still the top destinations for Chinese mainland residents to go shopping, he said.

According to the British tourism authority, the number of Chinese visitors to the United Kingdom reached a record 150,000 in 2011. The visitors also spent a record 240 million pounds (\$390 million).

With more foreign airlines operating flights between China and Western countries, ticket prices are dropping, Li said.

With the lower exchange rate and relaxed visa restrictions, white-collar Chinese workers are increasingly opting to visit Western countries over Christmas.

Luxury brands based in Europe and fashion brands in the US are a lure for Chinese consumers.

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"Chinese consumers can buy luxury items in the brands' home country at a lower price than in Hong Kong or Macao," Li said.

Because the shops in Western countries will close for Christmas Day, the shopping groups usually depart one week before Christmas, he added.

After Christmas Day, Western stores offer even greater discounts than the day before, Li said, so the tourist groups stay for several days.

Airlines also enjoy good business on their international routes over this period.

"We do not have any air tickets left from China to Paris one week before Christmas Day," said Zhou Yinghui, Air France's public relations manager in China.

More Chinese people are visiting Europe over Christmas, although foreigners, who are going

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back to Europe for the holiday, are still the airline's main customers, Zhou said.

Islands in Southeast Asia are also a major destination for Chinese tourists.

Hong Qian, a female office worker in Beijing, is planning to take a Christmas holiday to Malaysia with her boyfriend.

Hong and her boyfriend have to use their annual leave for the trip.

"I want to enjoy the sunshine and beaches there, rather than the white Christmas in Beijing," she said.

They are scheduled to depart on Saturday, after the peak dates of departure have passed, Hong said.

Chinese tourists are increasingly choosing to spend their holidays on the warmer islands this Christmas, a departure from the usual practice of large tourist groups visiting several countries, said Niu Yue, an officer from the marketing department of online travel agency Ctrip.com International Ltd.

"Our packages to the Maldives, Sabah, Koh Samui and other islands were sold out as soon as they were launched," he said.

According to CITS, the number of travelers visiting islands in Southeast Asia increased 50 percent this Christmas from last year."

[Source](#)

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