

Targeting the Chinese market

The Industry View



RESEARCH

In association with...



What did we do?

- **UKinbound asked us to explore industry experiences of targeting the growing Chinese tourist market**
- **Successes? Pitfalls? Advice? Key considerations?**
- **We conducted a range of qualitative case study interviews with attractions, hoteliers, destinations & marketing experts throughout the UK**
- **To find top hints, tips & questions to ask yourself**



What is the Chinese market?

- **208% growth since 2010, spending on average £2,059**
(VisitBritain 2018)
- **An appealing market, but not ONE market**
- **Which market will you target?**

**Group
package
tours**
(ADS visas)

**Business
delegations**

**Affinity
groups**

Students
(& visiting
families)

FITs
(seasoned middle-
aged travellers or
affluent millennials)



What is the Chinese market?

- **Group package tours**
 - Large tour groups (up to 200) on ADS (Approved Destination Status) visas, which means tour guide is responsible for safe return of the whole group. Tours are regimented & pre-planned by Chinese Tour Operators.
 - Tend to be first time visitors, often from '2nd or 3rd tier' cities, few English language skills.
- **FITs (Free Independent Travellers)**
 - Growing market who have greater control/choice over what they do/where they go. Either self-book online or through bespoke TOs. Tend to be more confident with language skills & education.
 - Diverse groups within 'FIT': could be seasoned middle-aged travellers or affluent millennials.
- **Some other types of visitor (not limited to this!)**
 - High-net worth **business delegations, international students** (school and university) & their parents, **affinity groups** who travel together based on common interest.
 - **Utilising universities** – with nearly 100,000 Chinese students in the UK, building relationships with Chinese societies at local universities for package trips/ creating packages for visiting parents a valuable avenue
- **Understanding the nuances of your market means fewer mistakes made!**

Why visit Britain?

- What makes Britain appealing to Chinese visitors?
- Culture more iconic than history
- Give them a uniquely 'British' experience they can flaunt to friends back home
- Photo opportunity experiences e.g. traditional afternoon tea



British food & drink



TV & Film



Royalty & landmarks

Why visit Britain?

- What makes Chinese visitors travel all the way to Britain, rather than anywhere else in the world?
 - There's a **love & fascination for British culture**, rather than purely heritage, as **China has its own rich history** & isn't always aware of the specifics of British history.
- So what **are** they aware of? What are Chinese people's perceptions of Britain?
 - Royalty and aristocracy, TV and film, food and drink (fish and chips, high tea, pint), Premier League football, fresh air/English countryside are all iconic– think about **what they learn about Britain in school & how your attraction/ destination/ hotel can play on that**
- So... don't give them something they could easily get in another country!
 - You're marketing your own **BRITISH**, unique experience that they can flaunt to friends and family back home

Finding your connection with China is important

Strike lucky with a celebrity visit ...

... or find a unique connection like Cambridge

... but maintain 'Britishness'

What's yours?

輕輕的我走了
正如我輕輕的來

我揮一揮衣袖
不帶走一片雲彩

——徐志摩《再別康橋》詩句

Finding your connection with China

- You're going to need **visibility in China** or you may struggle to get visitors. This connection with China could be luck (e.g. celebrity visitor, film set), or could be building on an existing link (e.g. Cambridge Willow tree poem).
- **The story of the Cambridge poem:**
- Chinese poet Xu Zhimo wrote 'Second Farewell to Cambridge' in 1928, featuring an iconic Willow tree in the city. The poem is a staple in the Chinese school curriculum, & thousands of Chinese visitors flock to see an inscription of the poem on a boulder at King's College, Cambridge (pictured). Cambridge has utilised this to welcome Chinese tourism, & the destination as a whole benefits from the increased visitors.
- Balance this connection with still being unique to Britain & most importantly **recognisable as British**. Have a think – what could your connection be?

Example of success: Chinese celebrities

Appeal

**Stroke
of luck**

**Smart
phones**



**International
students**

Collaboration

Gifting

Case Study: Castle Howard

- **Attractive aspects** – British Heritage, Aristocracy, Film (Brideshead Revisited), Celebrity:
- **A stroke of luck** – Taiwanese Pop Star Jay Chou married at Selby Abbey, reception at Castle Howard. Both since inundated with visitors, but not just blind luck – deliberately built on this growing market
- **Welcoming visitors** – Chinese speakers meet & greet, staff undertook Chinese welcome course, & signs/materials have Chinese versions
- **Utilising smart phones** – QR codes, audio & digital content, WeChat Pay, selfie spots
- **International students** – Encouraging Chinese university students to bring visiting relatives, & enlist a Chinese intern, who gives advice on attracting Chinese visitors & cultural/language skills
- **Collaboration** – Close relationship with their DMO (VisitYork), plus relationships with hotels & attractions in the area, e.g. The Grand in York
- **Gifting culture** – lightweight, quality, bespoke to the attraction gifts, which plays into gifting culture
- **Results** – large increase in Chinese visitors. Grown through positive feedback via social media & between tour groups, engagement with social media, local collaboration.

Promotional strategies

- **Solo** - Do you have the resources to go it alone?
- **DMO** - Is your DMO focusing on China? A good place to start!
- **Collaboration** - Can you pool resources with others in your area?
Spreads the cost of the long-term investment

Definitely work collaboratively. *It's such a huge market, and unless you've got a bottomless pit of money I don't think you can tackle it on your own.*

- Attraction

*We work extremely closely with our **partners within the city** and that definitely, definitely helps... it's always going to be a destination sell*

- Hotel

Promotional strategies

- Elements of all three strategies sometimes work, all dependent on your situation.
- **Solo not recommended** - requires lots of time and financial investment – your organisation will need major pull with Chinese audience to get them there alone.
- **DMO a great starting point** - depends on whether China is a key focus of your DMO. Risk of being diluted among other attractions if you can't represent yourself in China/at meetings. Regardless, DMOs will have great resources to start with and are a good way to build relationships with likeminded businesses.
- **Collaboration** – pooling resources with other businesses in your destination can spread out what is undoubtedly a long-term investment. Strengthens the pull to your area and was recommended by most of the people we spoke with.
- **Your destination and situation will define what strategy you take.**

Example of success: collaboration

“All of our visits to our website are driven through WeChat & WeiBo, because basically Chinese consumers live their lives through these platforms”

Case study: Windermere Lake Cruises

- Lake Windermere Cruises & the “English Lake District China Forum”
- **Attractive aspects** – clean, fresh air outside, photo opportunities, beautiful scenery
- **Research stage** – What did Chinese people know about the Lake District? Many thought it was in Italy/Canada! Knew they’d have to explain & cement the Lakes as iconic to UK
- **Collaboration stage** – 10 businesses joined to form “English Lake District China Forum”, a collective that pooled resources to pay for Chinese digital marketing (WeChat, WeiBo, locally hosted website). Now 20 businesses involved in the partnership, promoting the whole region. Links with TOs, cities, airports (e.g. Manchester)
- **Challenges** – Language barriers, visa issues
- **Results** – “China has just boomed, really” 50% of international market is Chinese, grown substantially since direct marketing begun

Promotional tactics

- **Balanced mix of TO relationships and digital marketing** – if within price range, paid expert agents are available to manage some or all of this
- **Tour operators vital for group tourists, but getting on an itinerary needs demand and visibility**
- **Digital marketing same concept as UK, just locally hosted and on Chinese platforms:**

Baidu (search engine)

WeChat / WeiBo (social media)

Ctrip / Mafengwo (OTAs / review sites)



Don't be daunted - ask the experts

“ Enlist an expert intern:
The best thing to do is get a Chinese intern, get a relationship with the university... enlist their help, enlist their guidance ”

“ Ask for advice:
It's not being embarrassed to say: 'Okay we don't really know what we need to be doing, what do you think we need to be doing?' ”

“ Employ a SM manager:
They now actively manage on a monthly basis our Chinese social media... we get ourselves embedded in Chinese way of working and culture ”

Asking an expert

- **Knowledge sharing** - helps the whole industry benefit from increased travel trade with China
- **Experts can help realise some of the promotional tactics if they're daunting**
 - Third party marketing agents mean access to contacts & relationships in China
 - Social media managers can set up and run your Chinese social media to build that all important online presence
 - Possibility to split the cost, like the Lake District?
- **Hire a Chinese international student from local university**
 - They gain marketing and UK work experience
 - You gain Chinese language social media content & first-hand market insights
- There's scope to get expert advice & services at any budget. What's most suited to you?

Adapting your product offering

- **Tried-and-tested welcoming touches:**

- Hot water, familiar food options, Mandarin signs, free wifi, QR codes, basic cultural and language staff training

“ One simple change, and all of a sudden you seem very welcoming to Chinese customers - *Attraction* ”

- **Adapting retail:**

- Phone payment (WeChat/Alipay), understand gifting culture demands high quality, lightweight, made in **Britain**

Adapting your product offering

- **Saving face:**
 - Make things clear and simple so visitors have no risk of getting things wrong
- **Restaurants:**
 - Translated & picture menus accessed by QR code, set menu of ‘typical British’
- **Attractions:**
 - Translated signs (or QR), simple tickets & navigation, photo opportunities



A young couple is taking a selfie in front of the Tower Bridge in London. The woman is wearing a white top, a straw hat, and sunglasses, and is holding a pink smartphone. The man is wearing a blue shirt and sunglasses, and is waving. The background shows the bridge and the city skyline under a blue sky.

Make it easy...

To navigate...

To understand...

To pay...

To share!!

“

Once you start to get people to your destination, how do you get those guests to become your ambassadors? And that's got to be through the social media channels, even if it's just basic content.

”

Challenges

- **Long-term investment** – no quick wins, a commitment, need to invest time & money laying the groundwork:
 - All things considered, **is this the right market for you to invest time and resources in?**
- **Cultural and language barriers** – try Chinese cultural training course for tourism e.g. VisitBritain
- **So... invest early in knowledge/training, partnerships & visibility, and the rewards come over time**



Example of success: engage the press



A screenshot of the ETtoday news website. The top navigation bar includes the logo 'ETtoday新聞雲', the date '1/29-2/28', and 'ET直播'. The main headline reads '習近平帶起炸魚薯條風潮 英店家湧入大批陸客...推出中文菜單!' (Xi Jinping sparks a trend of fish and chips, British shops flooded with large numbers of mainland tourists...推出中文菜單!). Below the headline is a video player and a photo of a group of people eating at a table.

A newspaper article with the headline 'Latest must-see for Chinese tourists... a Yorkshire chippy'. The article is by Colin Fernandez and discusses the popularity of fish and chips among Chinese tourists. It features several photographs: a man eating, a woman serving food, and a group of tourists. The article includes sub-headlines like 'They bring their own tea leaves' and 'Don't forget the mushy peas!'. The bottom of the article has a sub-headline 'We like do-gooders, just not as friends or partners'.

Case study: Scott's Fish and Chip Shop

- **Attractive aspects** – Traditional 'British' offering of fish & chips, Chinese president eating with David Cameron drove popularity, good location (London to York), coach parking
- **Early stage** – DMO targeting China, 'familiarisation' visits with Chinese TOs, limited success
- **Pushing things forward** – Enlisted DMO's Chinese digital marketing advisor: translated menus (physical & QR code), manages Chinese social media accounts. Saw increased visitors, a few coach-loads turning up in August 2018
- **Clever use of PR** – Issued press release about the influx of Chinese visitors, within two weeks were covered by local and national news outlets (papers, online, radio, TV). "That's the key, it's responding to those requests". BBC global news app led to story being picked up by Chinese news outlets.
- **Responsive social media** – Groups book over WeChat, and engage asking questions on social media. They provide content e.g. videos of how the food is prepared, meeting the staff.
- **Results** – 10% increase in general business, requests on WeChat for coach groups (2x a week in high season), requests from Chinese TOs to be put on tour itineraries in summer



This research was carried out in compliance with
ISO 20252, (the International Standard for Market and Social research),
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