

China as a tourism destination for foreign students

Business



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China as a Tourism Destination for Foreign Students Introduction In the following scenario I would like to examine China as a tourism product and also as a tourist attraction from the point of view of foreign students. In the winter of 2008 I had the privilege to spend 2 weeks in China.

My visit was rather unusual, for the fact that my hosts were not locals or either hotels, but rather a group of foreign students then living and studying in Beijing. My main purpose of visit was not educational but rather mainly leisure.

Nonetheless because of the reason I was mainly spending my time with and around the foreign student population of Beijing, I was able to see through their eyes. Consequently I gained familiarity of what it means to be a foreign student in the land of China and also of the drives and trends for foreign educational tourism. These experiences caught my attention and drove me toward to a further study of the above mentioned subject. In the following I will state China as a tourist destination, thus I consider it important to provide a clear definition on what it actually means.

According to the definition: " Tourist destinations are a mix of tourism products, experiences and other intangible items promoted to consumers" (Page & Connel 2006, p. 321) There are several ways of analyzing a tourist destination however in my investigation, I would like to use the so called 4 A's of the tourism product as the basis of my analysis. The 4 A's can be taken apart into the examination of Attraction, Access, Accommodation and Attitude of the given tourism product (Godsave 2010). I find it crucially important to examine all of those 4 areas in order to find a relevant picture of a destination.

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From the attraction point of view it is important to inquire what type of draw took part in the attraction of tourists. There can be several types of attracting the move of tourists toward a particular area, for example natural assets, towns or cities culture or even relatives.

As to the access part of the analysis, it is important to look at both the, to and inside access of the destination. In this part, it is essential to talk about transportation issues but also bureaucratic issues such as visa requirements on entering the given country. The third of the 4 A's refer to accommodation in the chosen destination.

In inquiring this particular aspect we have to consider the status of the hospitality, catering and shopping facilities. It is understood that there can be an excellent attraction possibility that may drive movements of tourists to a certain destination but if there is no possibility for accommodation or a place to spend money there is not going to be a tourism product to be talked about. It comes from the simple fact that tourism is driven by mainly the catering and shopping revenues of the certain destination.

For that reason the results of this part of analysis are crucial.

Lastly I would like to draw attention to the attitude feature of the destination. In this segment I will examine the attitude of the government, traders and also the host population. In my opinion this section is as important as the ones mentioned above if not even more. Tourists or people in general tend to remember more likely to the attitude of the people in any kind of situation rather than to the service provided itself.

Consequently from the tourism point of view attitude can not be forsaken.

Analysis of the destination World's interest growth in China In the past twenty years a major focus turned toward China.

The whole World was looking at its economic boom and its emergence to become one of the strongest economic powers. In all of the major areas its economy has grown in such ways that even during the current economic crisis in contrast to other parts of the world its growth only slowed down instead of coming close to crushing (Economist 2009). As to China's tourism, it is the 4th largest in inbound tourism. The number of oversea tourists was 131.

87 million in 2007 (Du Guodong 2008). The World Tourism Organization assumes that in 2020, China will become the largest tourist country and the fourth largest for overseas travel.

Parallel with the world's emerging attention in China in both an economic and touristic way interest grows toward China's official language, Mandarin. It is estimated that around 40m people study Mandarin which figure grew from 30m in 2005 (Economist 2010). Tom Adams, the chief executive of a Mandarin education company says: " The recession has focused people on where growth is going to come from. " That statement very well summarizes the main reason of why people start to be more interested in China and in China's official language.

There is a growing generation, mainly those in their college years, who especially feel and understand the need for turning toward China. There's already a growing segment, who with their desire of taking a closer look at

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the mysterious land of China decide upon going as far as even studying and living there. In the following I would like to examine China as a destination from their point of view. Attraction During my time in China, when asking a foreign student about the reasons of their choice of studying there, I received very wide range of answers.

There were mainly 3 types of reasons.

Some of them were mainly interested in the culture and daily life on the East. They were drawn by the adventure factor. They wanted to experience something that to them seemed quite mysterious and unknown and were eager to discover and delve into this new country. On the other hand, I've heard some say that since there's an increasing openness toward foreigners and more information available on what it means to live in China they thought they would give it a try.

Many of them were very interested in the strange phenomenon present in China of its one-party ruled government with the communist attitude going toward a capitalist economy. To them who did not live during the cold war and the peaking era of communism, China seems a place where they can somehow discover a world that they have not known before.

Meanwhile, there were students whose main reason of their studies in China were mainly the ones mentioned above in the previous section. They understood the emergence of China and turned their faces toward ' where the growth was going to come from'.

They are the purposeful with their focus on their career and with their eyes gazing upon the happenings and trends of the world. Many of them are <https://assignbuster.com/china-as-a-tourism-destination-for-foreign-students/>

mainly engaged in Chinese language studies and are eager to learn about everything related to China. Many of them believe that in order to be successful in their professional life they have to gain an understanding of one of the World's most emerging economies in order to be successful.

The Chinese government did not fail to realize the growing demand for possibilities for foreigners studying in China.

A recent study was released on the plans of the Ministry of Education of China, attempting to attract 500, 000 foreign students by the year of 2020 (Sarah Pont 2010). Zhang Xiuqin, director-general of the ministry's department of international cooperation and exchange states, that their main attempt with the program is to show China's culture to the global community and also to draw the outline of China's 10-year educational plan. It seems that the central government understands the heavy importance of the coming of the international students and even provides scholarships and encourages local governments and schools to do the same thing.

In the past year, there was around 800 million yuan (\$117 million) offered in scholarships to international students and the provincial governments offered about 110 million yuan in scholarships (Sarah Pont 2010). These governmental acts can also be a good indicator for international students deciding upon to study in China.

According to the Education Ministry of China the top 3 countries sending students, however other countries even from Europe, Africa and South-East Asia encourage their students to take the initiative of the government scholarship programs (Sarah Pont 2010). Access

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China is situated on the Eastern part of the Asian continent. About the same distance separates it from Europe as it does from the American continent. In today's modern transportation system it can be easily reached by air travel within 12-16 hours from both Europe and the USA. A significant improvement can be seen in the development of transportation system of China.

Since 1949, the Chinese government put a lot of effort into developing a comprehensive system (China Highlights 2010). Also the 2008 Olympics held in Beijing took a major part in the boost of transportation development.

One of the most obvious fruits of that is the freshly built Beijing Capital International Airport. Traveling long distance, train is one of the cheapest and easiest ways of travel inbounds. However as a foreigner it can get quite difficult for the lack of foreign language skills of the local population and also the lack of English signs at the stations.

However one can purchase special tickets incorporating special services designed for foreigners including separate waiting lounge and preferential boarding (China Highlights 2010).

Nevertheless it is only available at certain stations, only in big cities and also it is quite costly for a student. An other way of traveling long distances is on the highway system of China. Almost all the towns and cities are accessible by highway. Consequently buses can be a very good ways of travel, especially reaching remote parts of the country.

There are more frequent departures of buses for that reason it can be a more favorable way of travel for a student, also adding the fact that ticket

prices can be less expensive for the same distance than of trains (China Highlights 2010).

As to traveling inside of the borders of cities, in most places there are fairly good public transportation systems. Subways can be found in every big metropolises and are easy to use even for foreigners for there are usually English signs accompanying Chinese characters. It is even possible to hear English announcement at the stops of the metro. In contrary other ways of the public transport such as city buses most of the time are quite hard to understand for the lack of English sings. However one of the most popular and important means of transportations remains the bicycle.

They can be found everywhere and are easy to use to get to the desired destination within the city. There can be wide lanes found especially reserved for bicycles. Nevertheless in the emerging traffic of cars one has to learn how to ride their bikes in China. There are different rules according to biking than the ones people coming from a Western society accustomed. For instance, in China it is certainly not taken as an insult if taxis hunk while passing a biker, furthermore it is considered as a way of providing attention to the safeness of the biker to let them know a car is coming so they will not get hit.

At the same time, there are no restrictions on how many people can travel on one bike or even what people carry on.

It is widely usual to see one person riding the bike and an other one sitting on the " back seat". During my time in China I have even seen people carrying humongous coops fool of chicken on their bikes or either huge sacks

in the middle of Beijing. Certainly this type of travel can become the favorite means of transport for a foreign student for the fact it is certainly a different experience they got accustomed to, from wherever they come from.

Certainly as I mentioned above, there are significant amount of taxis in bigger cities. They are a fast and easy way of transport. However there's a saying among foreigners living in China: " Never take a black cab".

There's a simple reason for that, there are two type of taxis in China, the legal and illegal ones. For becoming a legal taxi there are several restrictions to follow given out by the government, which are not necessary to follow for the black cab drivers (tourbeijing. com 2010).

However there are not only transportation issues that must be mentioned in the analysis of the access of the given destination, but certainly bureaucratic issues have to be taken into consideration. In order to enter China as tourist but also as a foreign student it is necessary to obtain visa.

There are 8 types of visas that the Chinese government offers for foreigners entering the country, there are two that would suit international students (Paul Traynor 2009). They are the visas titled as ' X' and ' F'.

The X visa is offered for those who come to the country with the intend to study for more than 6 months; F visa is for those coming with the same purpose for a shorter period of time (tavelchinaguide. com). In order to obtain it, is necessary to fill out several forms and obtain certain health checks, and also to pay the given fee which is \$140 for US citizens and \$30 for citizens of any other country.

This type of visa provides a resident's permit for as long as the visa is valid and also provides the possibility to travel in and out of the country as many times as the student would like.

However it is not permitted to work on this visa without permission (tavelchinaguide. com). As long as visa is obtained beforehand there are normally no problems in the process of obtain. However if one would like to extend or either switch their visa during their stay in the country there can be major problems in the procedure.

As Paul Traynor, a journalist student living in China states: " To begin, there are no regulations set in stone in any one place that details what kind of state the Chinese visa situation is in at any one time.

Each city in China is different in terms of what they can offer foreigners; that said, each city (Chinese consulate) in the world is different in what they can offer. " In his blog, he writes about his experience in trying to switch from student visa to a working visa with a long and complicated journey. It seems one has to know the small gates next to the big ones in order to come out of a visa switch both financially and in time more efficiently. It is fairly common for students travel to Hong Kong in order to obtain a new visa.

Hong Kong is one of the two special administrative regions of the People's Republic of China (the other one is Macau) which means that there are different regulations and restrictions are in effect there than in other parts of China (Wikipedia 2010). It is often cheaper and faster to travel to Hong Kong, obtain a visa and go back to China than having the problem sorted out within the country. As from the point of view of foreign students it is one of the

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minuses of China's growing educational tourism industry. Accommodation
When it comes to housing, most foreigners find themselves in trouble in
China.

Most cities have their own area where foreigners tend to live, they are the so
called foreign ghettos.

Yvonne Kennedy in an article on Beijing's renting for foreigners very well
describes the reasons for the existence of such ghettos: " As early as the
12th century, Arab traders were forced to live apart from the regular Chinese
population. Until the mid-1990s, the Beijing government strictly regulated
where foreigners and overseas Chinese could live. It was in the Chaoyang
central business district, where the foreign embassies are located, where
land has been long been zoned for foreigner-occupied dwellings.

Such land costs double as a result. " This type of segregation in the dwelling
place can mean paying \$ 3000 per month, instead of the average rent for
locals which is around 3000 RMB (about US\$375). This comes from the high
demand for apartments for business people with company-granted housing
allowance.

Clearly foreign students do not have the budget to pay \$ 3000 every month
out of their own pocket consequently they have to seek some other way to
find accommodation (Yvonne Kennedy 2010). One of the ways is to seek "
commodity housing", which is housing owned by individual rather than the
government.

Even up to today, most Chinese people live in housing owned by the
government in their working unit. Even in order to legalize the rental at a
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commodity place, foreigners have to get permission from the police, which even having all paperwork done can be a difficult task (Yvonne Kennedy 2010). However if foreigners would like to enjoy the advantage of paying the same price as the locals and also figures out the way to obtain to get all permissions they have to face the inconveniency of living as a local as well.

Sophie Stephanie Roell, a journalist living in Beijing writes about her experiences: It was pretty primitive,” she recalls. “ The toilet was a hole in the ground. I had a camping stove and a little balcony, and absolutely no privacy. ” Many foreigners I met had also many complaints about the poor conditions in which the houses were, with paint suddenly falling off the walls after living in the house for a month, problems appearing with electricity, plumbing and at the end they did not receive much help from their landlords. Rather they felt as though more of a burden on the owner rather than the ways of their income.

Nonetheless most foreign students put up with all of those disadvantages because as they say, they can better experience the ‘ Real China’ instead of the artificial atmosphere of foreign ghettos. Attitude From my experience, I observed that the attitude of the Chinese host population can be varied in a very wide range. However there are several common factors that can be detected while living in China. As a foreigner, or as Chinese people consider people from either the United States or Europe, as ‘ whites’ one can find themselves in quite interesting situation.

For the reason, that China has been historically a closed country, opposed to many English speaking multicultural countries, there is still a great

amazement and sometimes even shock in the Chinese people's minds when seeing a foreigner.

It is not uncommon to have people staring at foreigners with surprise in their eyes or even having them spitting when seeing a foreigner for their superstition of it drawing luck to their household. Despite this, after the first shock, Chinese people tend to be friendly and welcoming toward foreigners. Especially when they realize that a 'white' person can speak their language.

They often offer help in their language studies which can be a great help for one's further language studies. At the same time Chinese traders are extremely helpful and friendly toward foreigners. In their assumption if one is a foreigner they are surely rich, in conclusion they try their hardest to get a hold of foreigners.

However for the above mentioned reasons they can be very pushy, and can become annoying for one living in China for longer period of time. In fact, one of the first words foreigners learn in Mandarin is: " Bu yao! " which simply means, " I do not want it! ".

It can come very handy when experiencing the over pushiness of Chinese traders. As I mentioned it several times before the attitude of the government toward foreigners and foreign students is becoming better as they start to realize the benefit and advantages of having a foreign student community within the country. In addition the development of a new migration law shows a positive change in the attitude of the government (The Economic Times 2010). Its development started in May 2010 and shows high hopes in the ease down of the bureaucratic access of the country.

Recommendations and conclusions

After my analysis I find China as a fairly developed destination with high hopes for improvement in the area of educational tourism. However there certainly is a need for further changes and progress in order to make it even more attractive for more young foreigners. In the following I would like to give some recommendations that I find important to mention. First of all, I definitely would encourage the government's attempt to ease down its visa requirements and put it into a more universal law system that would help foreigners living in China to stay for a longer period of time.

However there are already major changes in that field and it is only the matter of time when there will be these realized. Certainly there is great need in the change of the housing system for foreigners.

If China desires to attract more foreign students to the country there will be a need for the ease of the discrimination toward foreigners in housing. At the same time, in my opinion there is a need for China to open up and develop its rural territories. I acknowledge the fact that there were not many words on that subject in this current analysis.

It actually comes from the simple fact that foreign students mainly stay close to the shores in the bigger cities where universities are located. However in my consideration there is a great demand in the foreign student population to explore other parts of the country as well. In fact, there is fairly good access to most parts of China with public transport however in rural parts of China, access within the destination itself is very poor.

There are not much information for foreign tourists, and certainly there is not much signs written in English which makes an average person not speaking Chinese shy away from visiting the countryside.

In the overall I see high potentials in China's educational tourism and I will be looking at it with great expectations on how that field will develop.

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