

Overseas destinations top online searches

Hu Min

Searches for tour products involving overseas destinations have increased significantly since China further relaxed COVID-19 controls, according to travel operators.

The National Health Commission announced that from January 8, the country will end central quarantine for international arrivals and scrap flight bans, with COVID-19 now downgraded from Category A to Category B in infectious disease management.

According to Mafengwo, a Chinese travel services and social networking website, searches for outbound tours had increased by 460 percent as of yesterday morning compared with the same period the day before, with key words such as “visa,” “passport” and “travel preparation” being the most searched.

According to its instantaneous search statistics, Bangkok, Tokyo, Chiang Mai, Singapore and Osaka are the most popular overseas destinations.

“The continuous relaxation of COVID controls will relieve travel demand, and the upcoming Spring Festival holiday is expected to be the first significant turning point of the outbound tourism market,” said Feng Rao, the website’s tourism analyst.

Sherry Zhang, a local travel enthusiast, is planning a trip to the United States in March and was excitedly checking air tickets at midnight after the NHC’s statement.

She posted her previous flight ticket from Germany’s Frankfurt to Shanghai on WeChat Moments.

“It was my last outbound trip before the pandemic; now it’s time to pack my bags and go!” she exclaimed. “It has been far too long.”

“Happiness comes unexpectedly,” said another young city resident, Le Xiaowei.

“I’d like to visit Japan or Canada in the new year because they’ve been on my bucket list for far too long.”

According to Shanghai-based online travel operator Trip.com, searches for popular overseas destinations increased tenfold within half an hour of the statement’s release.

It said that outbound flight and hotel searches have reached a three-year high.



The most searches were for Japan, Thailand, South Korea, the US, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and the United Kingdom. Searches for group tours for the Spring Festival rose six-fold from normal.

“Chinese mainland tourists have made significant contributions to the international travel market, particularly in Asia,” said Fang Zeqian, a Trip.com tourism analyst. “We expect the Asian tourism market to see more Chinese tourists after the relaxation.”

“The relaxation of COVID controls will make overseas trips easier. The snow has melted, and the spring outbound tour is due.”

Tongcheng Travel said the most popular destinations following the relaxation are Japan, South Korea and Thailand, with tourists from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou accounting for the majority of searchers.

Shanghai Spring Tour said it has already begun replanning outbound tour products and services based on demand.

“We are screening resources and transportation for outbound destinations, as well as having discussions with our partners about relevant products,” said Zhou Weihong, deputy general manager of Shanghai Spring Tour.

“We are gathering our staff from outbound tour service departments and offering training depending on the changes,” she added.

Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing and centralized quarantine for all inbound travelers will be cancelled, according to the statement.

They must still take a PCR test 48 hours before departure and can only enter China if the results are negative. International flight bans will also be lifted, it added.

“

The continuous relaxation of COVID controls will relieve travel demand, and the upcoming Spring Festival holiday is expected to be the first significant turning point of the outbound tourism market.

Feng Rao

A tourism analyst with travel services website Mafengwo