

In addition, short-term tourist visas issued to Chinese visitors have not been resumed yet.

“In Japan, for example, only five-year multiple entry visas are available now and they are targeted mainly as high-income travelers,” said Tracey Shi, a visa operator with a local travel service company. “We think that short-term visa application will be resumed in March, but no one can tell for sure.”

Travel agencies are busy reconstituting overseas group packages in anticipation of loosened controls and greater demand ahead.

“Retraining personnel is our major task now,” said Zhou Weihong, deputy general manager of Spring International Travel Service Co. “For the past three years, many of our outbound travel personnel, such as tour guides and team leaders, have switched to domestic business or even left the industry.”

Experts said outbound tourism at the moment still faces challenges. Indeed, the whole travel-related industry is experiencing some temporary

growing pains.

“At the moment, there are still factors affecting the market, such as inadequate flight capacity, expensive air tickets, ever-changing overseas entry policies and even the uncertainty of coronavirus itself,” said Liu Deyan, associate professor at the College of Tourism of Shanghai Normal University. “It is estimated that some important air routes will be resumed in March, and the first real travel peak might not arrive until the summer holidays.”

Despite pricey air tickets, demand for outbound travel appears strong as students seek to return to overseas schools, companies resume international business and people want to visit relatives they haven’t seen in three years.

“There is pent-up demand after three years,” the professor said.

Liu said the Chinese government and travel service companies need to facilitate the resumption of group tours, which are essential to the outbound travel market.



Chinese tourists are greeted by Thai officials as they arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok on January 9. — Xinhua

Chinese tourists take a selfie next to a street vendor at Myeongdong shopping district in Seoul, South Korea. — Reuters



Popular street fairs in Thailand are getting busy again as tourists come back. — Zhang Jiawei

