

# Deputy calls for better services for foreign tourists

Shen Mengdan and Tian Shengjie

Shanghai should create an official inbound travel service platform and hold more Shanghai promotion events to boost international tours.

Zhou Weihong, a Shanghai People's Congress deputy, said that there are gaps between international and inbound travel services.

"There are still many obstacles for foreign travelers in China, such as a lack of informative travel information platforms and a complicated ticket-buying process," said Zhou, deputy general manager of Spring Tours.

Since learning about a destination is the first step in planning a trip, Zhou believes that Shanghai inbound tourism should establish a communication platform so that visitors from other countries can access it and become acquainted



The Shanghai Yuyuan Lantern Festival attracts a large number of overseas visitors this month. — CFP

with tourism services.

She also pointed out that many domestic hotels do not serve guests from overseas and that bilingual menus are

rarely found in restaurants. She therefore proposed that standardized language and service training be established for foreign-related services.

It would be appropriate to introduce a list of lodging and dining establishments that welcome visitors from overseas.

"We should also carry out

activities to promote Shanghai's culture for foreigners who live and work in Shanghai so that they all become promoters of Shanghai's image," Zhou said.

By doing this, the marketing of Shanghai's tourism will become more approachable and dynamic, encouraging and motivating foreign visitors to engage in joint activities.

She stressed the importance of the China International Travel Mart (CITM) and expressed her hope to fully utilize this platform by encouraging all exhibitors to visit Shanghai and connecting them with regional travel companies.

Authorities in charge of border inspections have reported that 3.56 million foreign visitors entered and exited the country through Shanghai airports in 2023 – a 19-fold increase over 2022 – and made up around 10 percent of all foreign visitors in the country.

# Advisers in plea to make e-payments easier for foreigners

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SHANGHAI political advisers and lawmakers at last week's "Two Sessions" suggested ways to improve the e-payment experience of foreigners visiting the city.

Jiang Shan, a political adviser, said that while digital payment is prevalent in China, it can be a barrier for visitors from countries and regions who still use cash and credit cards.

"With the widespread use of Alipay and WeChat Pay, the number of vendors using point-of-sale (POS) devices for transactions has fallen. Many store owners do not keep enough cash as well," said Jiang, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference's Shanghai Committee.

"International visitors face difficulties in using digital payment because of language and digital identification issues."

He suggested creating "digital IDs" based on single-source Exit-Entry Administration data to allow short-term international travelers to open bank accounts. The bank accounts can be topped up for three to six months. International travelers can then register with Alipay and WeChat Pay and use "code scanning" payment in Chinese stores like locals.

Jiang also suggested that one-stop guides and support services at airports, train stations and special events for overseas travelers can help them download, register and activate digital payment accounts.

"For folks who can't shift to digital payment," Jiang said, "our government can give rechargeable cards like Hong Kong's Octopus card, useful at all transit and convenience stores. This can be handy."

He suggested service booths be set up at airports, hotels and banks where

international passengers can buy and top up their cards and get their refunds on departure.

Cao Hui, a deputy to the Shanghai People's Congress, the city legislature, also pointed out that the payment issue for overseas tourists needs to be taken seriously. His suggestion was discussed and supported by many deputies during Tuesday's panel discussion of the Pudong delegation.

Cao is a doctor at Renji Hospital. He said some foreign experts, who were invited to participate in medical exchanges in Shanghai, told him recently that they were unable to use or were not accustomed to Chinese mobile payments.

For example, if registering a payment app with an overseas mobile phone number, expats may not be able to receive verification codes. If binding mobile payments with a foreign bank card, the expats may be charged

a commission and some functions and payment amounts may be limited, he said.

Cao suggested that to let foreign tourists experience China's online services for taxi, takeout and shopping, more telecommunications operator branches should be established, as well as more guidance signs at airports and other ports of entry.

The local transport and tourism departments can jointly launch a travel card for foreigners for public transport, taxis and scenic spot tickets, he said. The card can be sold or recharged at the city's ports of entry.

Cao said: "This year, many international events will be held in Shanghai, such as the Formula 1 Chinese Grand Prix and the Olympic Qualifier Series for Paris 2024. It can be predicted that a large number of foreigners will visit the city, which is a good opportunity to let them feel the warmth of the city."