

Payment made easier for foreign tourists

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How is Shanghai's payment environment for inbound travelers? We talked with several at the iconic Yuyuan Garden scenic area this week.

Efforts have been beefed up to create a transaction-friendly environment for foreign tourists in China.

The country will guide major payment platforms to raise the single transaction limit for overseas travelers using mobile payments from US\$1,000 to US\$5,000, a press briefing heard on Friday.

The central bank will instruct platforms such as Alipay and Tenpay to raise the annual cumulative transaction limit, according to Xinhua news agency. And the platforms were also told to optimize their operating procedures and improve the efficiency of binding overseas bank cards, while simplifying identity verification when conducting transactions.

Kumamoto Atsuyuki, a university student from Japan, bought a postcard and used Alipay for transaction in Shanghai on March 3.

"It is very convenient and I have already downloaded Alipay and WeChat apps before my visit," he said. "When I first visited China in 2019, I paid with cash. I thought Alipay and WeChat payment is more convenient by simple scanning."

"The download process was smooth as well," he added. "Many Japanese travelers already made the download prior to their visit as there were promotions online."

His group comprising about 30 young Japanese tourists appreciated Shanghai's metropolitan scenery and experienced the city's cultural and tourism splendor.

Englishman Paul Wainkerr is on a business trip to Shanghai. In total, he will stay four days.



Foreign travelers queue up to buy tickets at Yuyuan Garden in Shanghai on March 3.



Above: Japanese travelers shop at the scenic area in Huangpu District.



Right: Foreign tourists visit the Yuyuan Garden scenic area. — All photos by Jiang Xiaowei

"I used my credit card and some cash and found no problem for transactions," he said. "Shanghai is a very nice and lovely city."

While Hannah, a traveler from the United States, said she had some trouble while downloading Alipay. "I tried to download Alipay several times before my visit, and I failed in the verification. If Alipay worked, the payment should be much easier."

She bought incense, books and postcard with cash and a credit card and visited Nanjing Road, the Bund and Yuyuan Garden during her stay.

During an investigation, the reporter found that the Ningbo Tangtuan (glutinous rice balls with soup) Eatery, a time-honored restaurant inside Yuyuan Garden scenic area, does not have point-of-sale (POS) device for credit cards.

Zhou Weihong, a Shanghai

People's Congress deputy, suggested the commission fees of credit card transaction be cut as well as introducing subsidies to lure small businesses to use the POS device.

She also called for the elimination of language barriers in transaction.

"Most mini-programs and QR code procedures for payment are in Chinese, and many shops don't have staff who can guide the process in foreign

languages," she said.

Sometimes people need SMS code for verification, while some did not have Chinese mobile number, leading to failure for payment, she added.

Zhou, also deputy general manager of Shanghai Spring Tour, had suggested standardized language and service training for foreign-related services, and businesses in downtown areas, particularly at tourist attractions.

"With micro tourism experiences such as city walk gaining popularity, the payment demand of inbound travelers is not limited to big shopping malls, but various lifestyle and entertainment scenes," said Zhou.

She also pointed out that many local hotels do not serve overseas guests and that bilingual menus are rarely found in restaurants. She therefore proposed that standardized language and service training be established for foreign-related services.

China's inbound tourist market has seen a strong rebound as favorable policies such as mutual visa exemptions have accelerated recovery.

During this year's Spring Festival holiday, inbound travel orders soared 48 percent from the same period in 2019, according to Shanghai-based online travel operator Trip.com.

On March 1 when the mutual "visa-free era" between Thailand and China officially took effect, the number of travel orders from Thai travelers to China surged 300 percent from the same day last year, and grew 160 percent compared to 2019, it said.

Shanghai, Guangzhou, Kunming, Beijing, Chengdu, and Chongqing are their favorite destinations, it said.

Shanghai Spring Tour said the number of inbound travelers who would travel in China in March had grown 10 percent compared to February.