



**Dragon Trail**  
INTERNATIONAL

# TRAVEL TRENDS IN THE YEAR OF THE HORSE

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## Chinese Outbound Travel Trade Survey

Dragon Trail Research

January 2026





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INTERNATIONAL

## Solutions to build and strengthen your connections to the Chinese travel trade



### Digital Solutions

Dragon Trail's digital trade hub solutions include training courses and webinars optimized for WeChat, product catalogues, and data management systems to ensure you get the best results.



### Trade Representation

We identify and introduce you to key partners and contacts in the Chinese travel trade, and work with them to promote your product or destination, while keeping you up to date on this dynamic market.



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## Introduction: Tapping into the biggest growth opportunities for China's outbound travel market in the Year of the Horse

The Year of the Fire Horse begins on 17 February 2026, with a longer-than-ever, nine-day public holiday to celebrate the Chinese New Year. What can we expect for this peak season for Chinese outbound travel, and for the rest of 2026? To find out, Dragon Trail surveyed 315 travel agents selling outbound travel from mainland China.

Our respondents were optimistic about the year to come, with 87% expecting market growth. But most are predicting moderate rather than significant increases, and they admit that growth slowed in 2025. Under these market conditions, it's more important than ever to pinpoint the traveler profiles, products, and destinations with the most potential, and use this knowledge to optimize your approach to working with the Chinese travel trade.

Most of the biggest trends are ongoing: Independent travel continues to grow; tour group size continues to shrink. Trips are getting longer, with rising interest in in-depth exploration, niche travel themes, and fresh destinations inspired by social media. Chinese travel agents are under increased pressure to deliver personalized services and customizable products to their clients, and looking for the information and tools needed to put together food tours, visits to viral destinations, stays in special hotels, and local experiences. Key demographic markets such as silver travelers, family groups, and Gen-Z each require unique approaches and offerings. Interest in ice and snow tourism also continues to grow, with travelers' appetites for the northern lights, hot springs in the snow, and other wintry experiences bigger than ever.

What can we expect from the upcoming Chinese New Year holiday? South Korea, Thailand, and Singapore are poised to be the leading hotspots, according to survey respondents. Russia's new visa waiver policy will boost visitor numbers, while Nordic countries – particularly Iceland and Norway – have truly captured Chinese travelers' attention. Beyond the top 10 destinations, Chinese travel agents expect their customers to explore widely, visiting cities, islands, deserts, and icebergs.

Chinese travel agents want to explore, too – they're eager to learn more and connect with suppliers by going on FAM trips in 2026, as well as attending small-scale workshops and salons, major trade shows in China and abroad, and online presentations. Please get in touch with Dragon Trail to discuss how we can help you to make these connections.

**Sienna Parulis-Cook**  
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Market Research Analyst

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Market Research Analyst

# Chinese travel trade survey findings: Our 5 top takeaways from the report

## **1. Modest growth is expected for China's outbound travel market in 2026, following a slow rebound in 2025**

87% of surveyed travel agents forecast growth in China's outbound travel market in 2026, with most expecting modest growth. In 2025, growth rates slowed, but were strongest among silver and younger demographics, alongside small group travel and FIT. In addition, Chinese travelers are demonstrating a stronger demand for in-depth trips featuring longer stays and cultural exploration, as well as interest in niche destinations inspired by social media content.

## **2. Safety is the most important – and growing – factor, but visa policies and direct flights have a major impact on destination choice**

Safety has always been a top priority for Chinese travelers, and travel agents now say it's even more important than ever – 79% say it has an “extreme impact” on destination choice. The next most important influences on destination choice are visa policy and direct flight connections. Travel agents told us that “visa-friendly” policies particularly suit the spontaneous nature of Chinese outbound tourism – nearly half (47%) say that travelers are most likely to book their trips within 14 days of departure.

## **3. Asia and northern Europe are the most popular destinations this Chinese New Year**

... but Chinese travelers are venturing far and wide, including Antarctica, Oman, Chile, and Vanuatu. As of the end of December 2025, South Korea, Thailand, and Singapore topped the list, with Russia, Iceland, Norway, and France among the most popular long-haul destinations.

## **4. The popularity of ice and snow tourism continues to grow in China**

65% of survey respondents said that ice and snow tourism is even more popular this winter than it was last year. Unique winter experiences like hot springs in the snow, and nature tourism – including the northern lights – have the most potential to grow even more in the coming years.

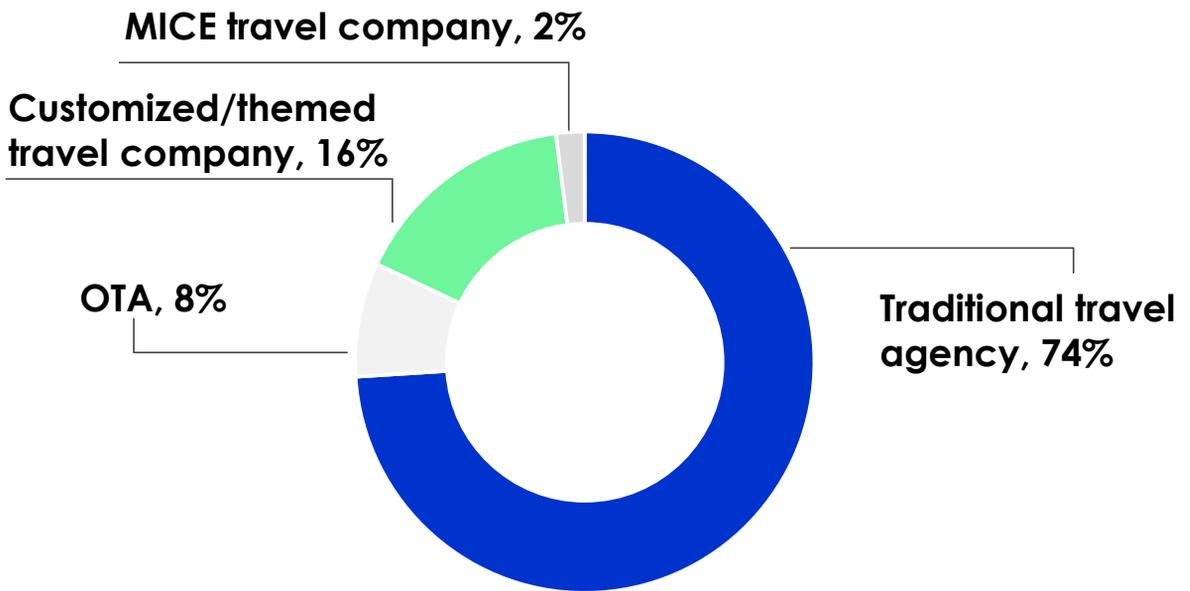
## **5. Chinese outbound travel agencies are getting ready for greater personalization and customization in their client services**

To meet the demands of today's outbound travelers, Chinese travel agents are preparing to upgrade customization services, respond better to personalized demands, and develop more small and private tours in 2026. Itinerary builder technology and other AI services can help them provide this.

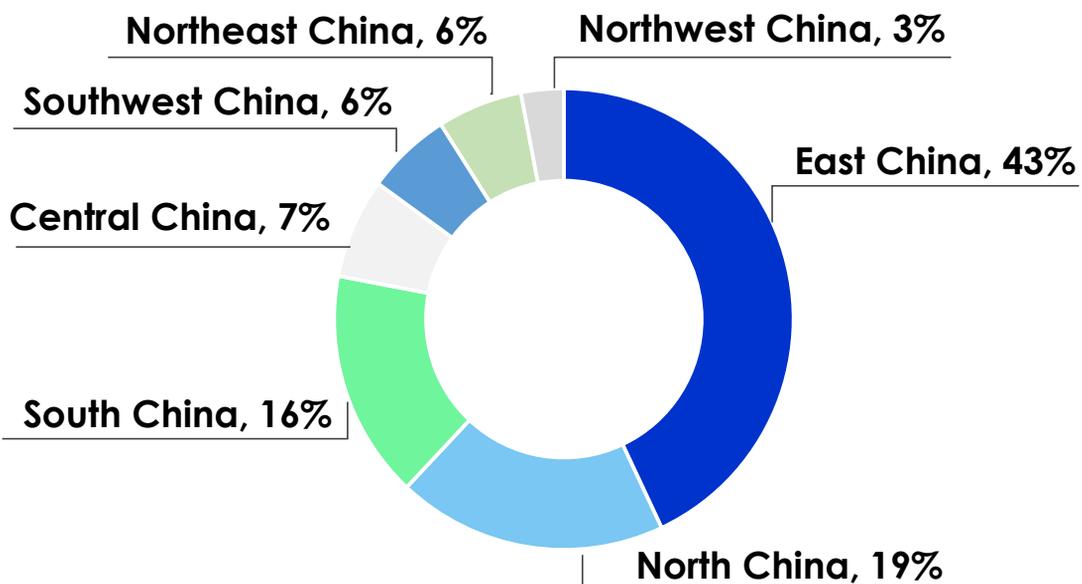
## Methodology

From 22–31 December 2025, Dragon Trail Research conducted a 26-question online survey of travel agents currently selling outbound travel for mainland Chinese travel agencies. Survey respondents were strictly vetted, and our data cleaning process identified and removed invalid responses, resulting in a total of 315 valid responses.

### Company category of respondents



### Company region of respondents



# 01 2025 Market Status & 2026 Market Outlook



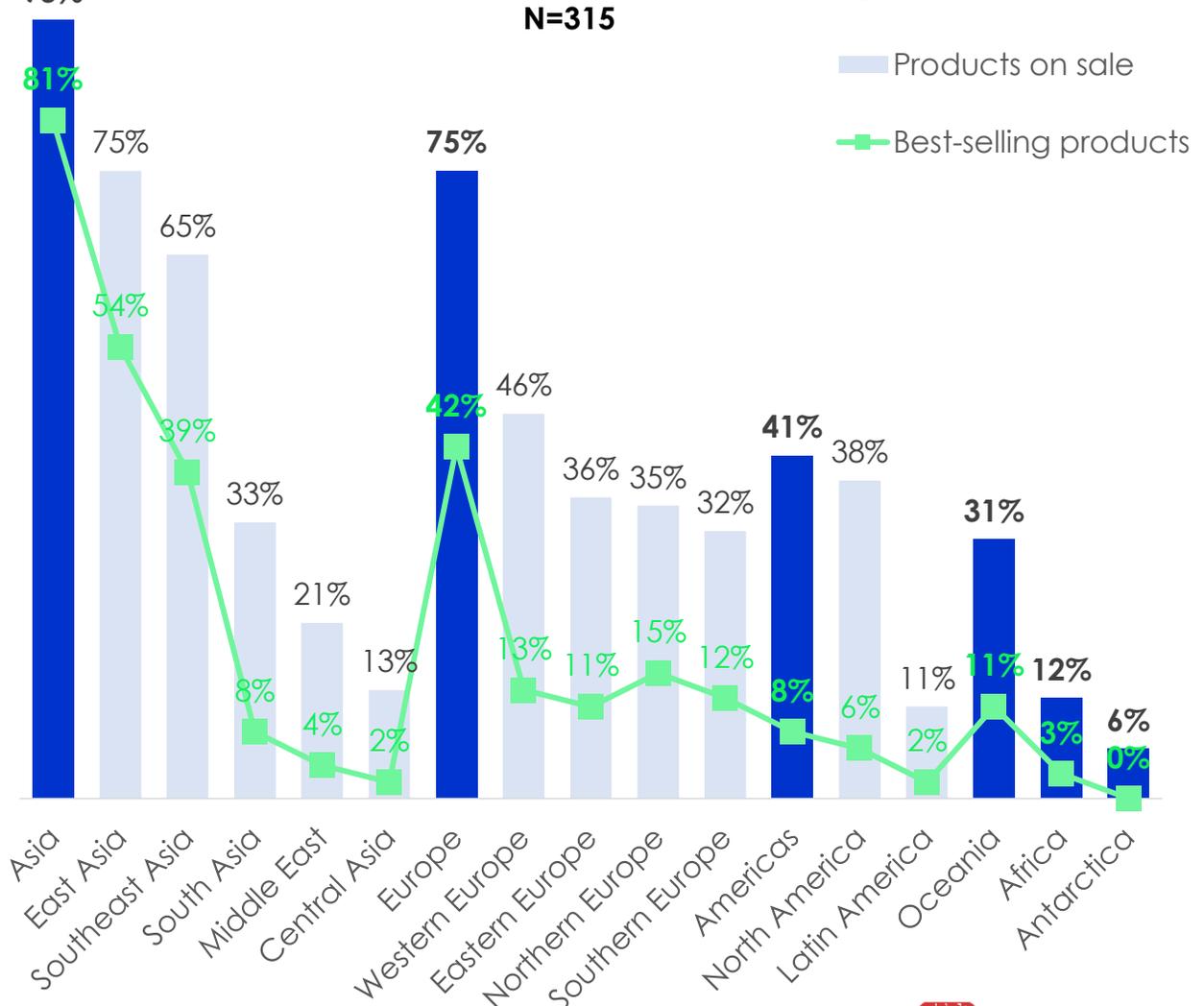
In 2025, China's outbound travel market grew, but at a slower pace. East Asia led in product coverage and sales, with Southeast Asia rebounding to second place and Europe showing strong potential. Safety ranked as the top factor shaping destination choices, followed by visa-free policies and direct flights. Chinese travelers showed increasing interest in safe, visa-free, and Chinese-friendly destinations. Looking ahead, our survey also identifies some emerging demands in the market that are worth watching in 2026.

Photo by Harrison Qi on Unsplash

## East Asian products continue to lead sales, while Southeast Asian products recovered to second place

In 2025, East Asia was still the sub-region with the widest product coverage and strongest sales performance in the market. Southeast Asia rebounded to second place, having slipped to third in our last Chinese Outbound Travel Trade Survey (July 2025). European travel products were offered by 75% of the surveyed travel agencies, with 42% of respondents rating the region as having the strongest sales performance. Within the region, Western Europe was sold by the most travel agents, while Northern Europe showed the best sales performance. Product coverage for the Americas, Oceania, Africa, and Antarctica stood at 41%, 31%, 12% and 6%, respectively.

### On sale and best-selling Chinese outbound travel market products in 2025 (by region)

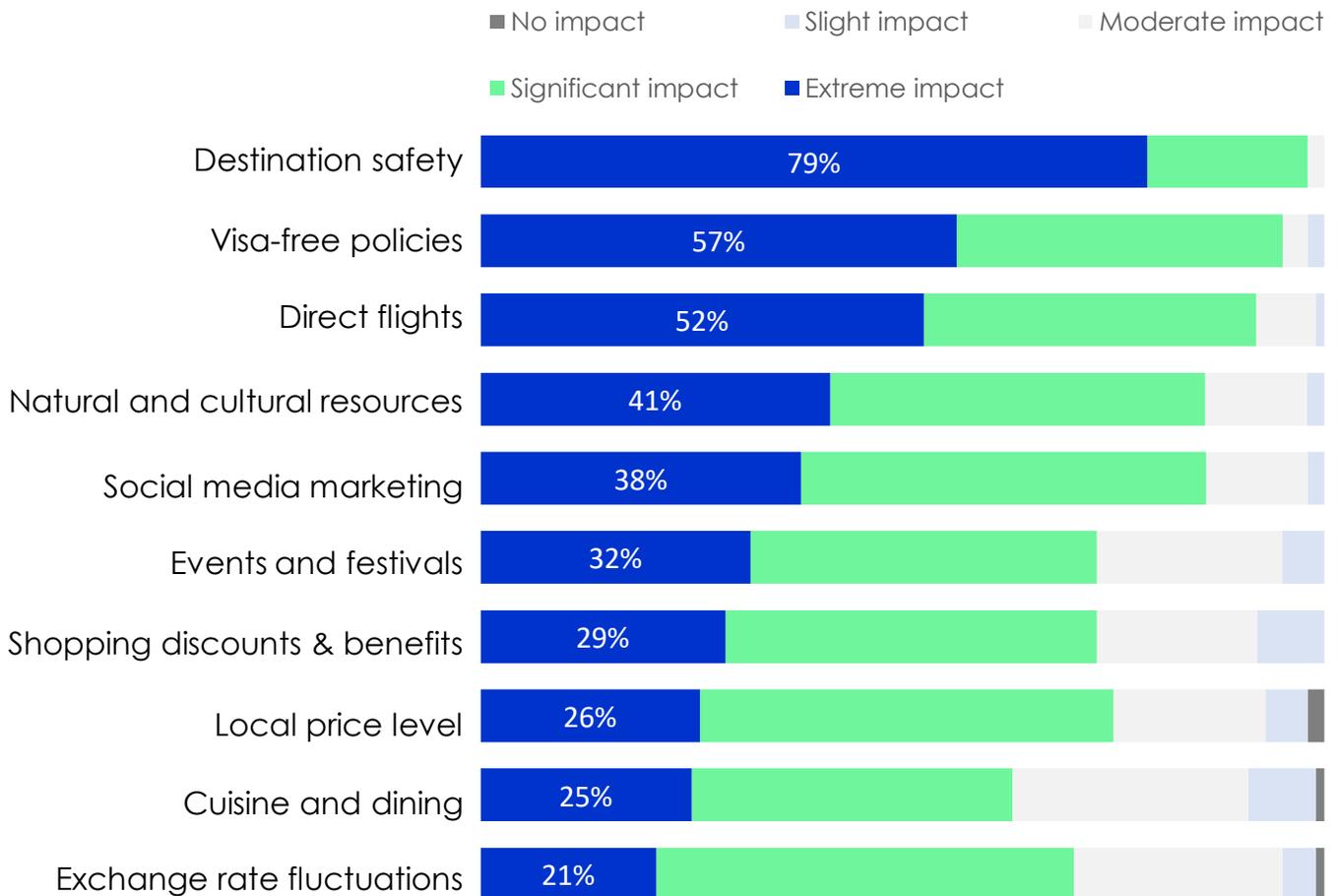


## Safety, visa-free policies, and direct flight connections are the top three factors influencing Chinese travelers' destination choices

What influences Chinese travelers' choice of outbound destinations? Destination safety is undoubtedly the top factor. 79% of surveyed traveled agents thought destination safety has extreme impact on Chinese travelers' decisions. Visa-free policies and direct flights are the other two key influencing factors, chosen by 57% and 52% of agents, respectively, as exerting extreme influence on destination choices. These practical considerations outweighed a destination's natural and cultural resources (41%), social media marketing (38%), and events and festivals (32%), among other factors.

### How do the following factors influence Chinese travelers' choice of outbound destinations?

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## Travel agent voices: 2025's Chinese outbound travel market trends

According to travel agents' observations, the Chinese outbound travel market maintained overall growth in 2025, yet at a slower rate. Younger travelers and the silver demographic were the key driver groups in the market.

Independent travel showed robust growth in 2025, while group travel shifted toward smaller group sizes. In addition, Chinese travelers demonstrated a stronger demand for in-depth travel, featuring longer stays and deep cultural exploration.

### Market growth

*"On the whole, there is growth, yet the growth rate is not fast."*

*"The middle-aged and elderly are the key travelers, and we're seeing growing demand for high-end personalized travel services."*

*"Overseas travelers are becoming younger, and family group tours are on a clear rise."*

*"The market is enjoying steady growth and a slow rebound. Middle-aged and elderly travelers are taking more long-haul trips, while young people enjoy checking in (daka) at viral spots and exploring off-the-beaten-path places."*

### Travel style

*"Independent travel is the main choice and growing pretty fast. Group tours are moving toward smaller groups, and vacation bookings are also booming. People are more into in-depth travel these days – like trips that last over a week – and they also love staying at nice hotels."*

*"In 2025, China's outbound tourism market is moving away from traditional, rushed sightseeing tours. Instead, it is placing greater emphasis on in-depth experiences, themed-customized trips, and an in-depth understanding of the local culture and history."*

*"Outbound travel is gradually shifting from short-haul destinations to long-haul ones, evolving from simple sightseeing focused on food, entertainment and leisure to a more immersive experience centered on appreciating local culture."*

## Travel agent voices: 2025's Chinese outbound travel market trends

Short-haul destinations such as Singapore and South Korea continued to enjoy sustained popularity in 2025. Meanwhile, the appeal of European destinations was on the rise.

Chinese travelers are increasingly inclined to opt for safe and developed destinations due to geopolitical concerns. Travel agencies opine that a growing number of travelers will prefer to visit countries friendly to China.

Niche attractions are gaining increasing popularity among Chinese tourists, driven by social media marketing and visa-free policies.

### Destinations

*"Short-haul destinations including South Korea and Singapore have maintained consistent popularity, underpinned by visa-free policies and cultural affinity."*

*"The Asia-Pacific region remains the mainstream choice for outbound travel, while Europe is witnessing a rising popularity, and the number of travelers visiting Japan is on the decline."*

*"Chinese travelers are more inclined to choose safe destinations."*

*"There is a growing trend toward travel in developed countries."*

*"A growing number of travelers will prefer to visit countries friendly to China."*

*"More and more people are into visiting off-the-beaten-path spots, especially those that get a lot of buzz from self-media."*

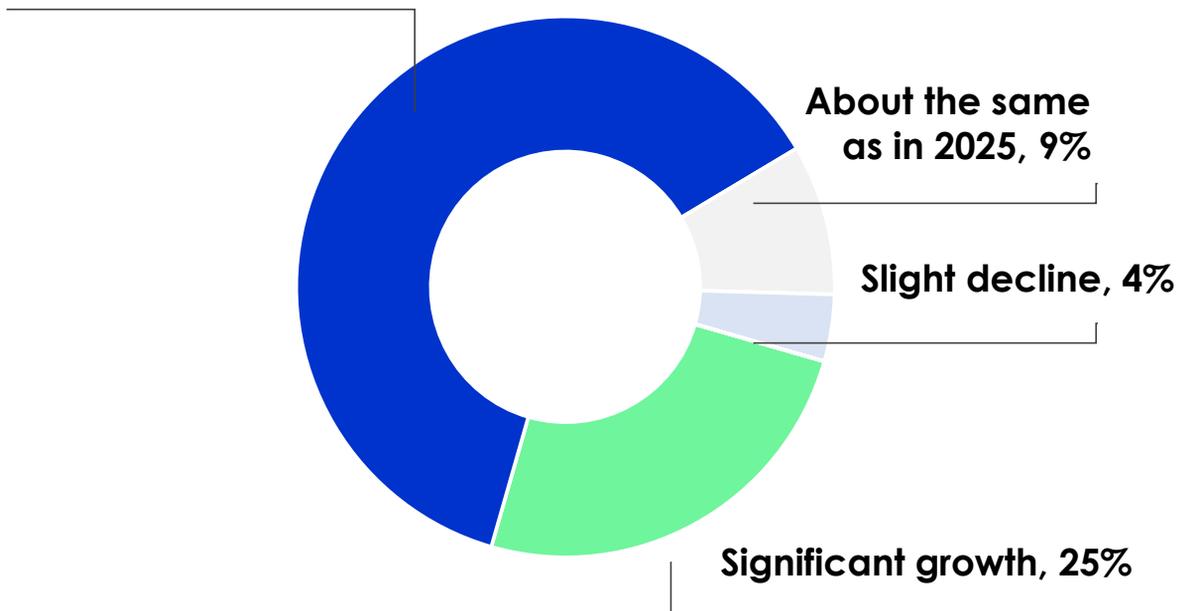
## Travel agents forecast modest growth for the 2026 Chinese outbound travel market

Looking ahead to 2026, 62% of surveyed travel agents believe that Chinese market demand for outbound travel will see moderate growth, with another 25% forecasting significant growth. In their eyes, emerging demands from the Chinese outbound travel market that are worth watching in 2026 include a growing preference for visa-friendly destinations, heightened emphasis on destination safety and security, social media-driven interest in niche destinations and travel routes, rising popularity of themed travel products, and wider adoption of AI tools among travelers [see next page].

### How do you expect Chinese outbound travel market demand in 2026 to compare with 2025?

N=315

**Modest growth, 62%**



## Travel agent voices: Emerging demands in the Chinese outbound travel market worth watching in 2026

**Visa-friendly destinations will gain greater popularity**

“Countries with visa-friendly policies are more popular. Travelers prefer the option of ‘packing up and going on a whim’, so destinations with relaxed visa policies tend to be their top choices.”

**Destination safety and security will matter more**

“Safety comes first. Chinese tourists are setting much higher standards for overall travel safety nowadays.”

“The demand for travel products with safety assurance will grow amid the volatile international situation.”

**Travelers seek more niche destinations or routes, especially influenced by social media**

“More niche destinations may emerge as travelers’ top picks.”

“Travelers are more inclined to explore niche and off-the-beaten-path destinations, such as lesser-known islands in Southeast Asia, underrated countries in Africa, and quiet towns in Europe, in pursuit of uniqueness and privacy.”

“Social media travel vlogs will become a far more powerful driver of travel decisions, fueling rising demand for new niche itineraries and personalized travel services.”

**Themed travel will grow more popular**

“Cross-border ‘food + travel’ packages will gain even greater popularity. Demand for culinary experience tours – such as traveling to a country specifically to savor local specialties or even taking cooking classes with local chefs – will surge.”

**AI will influence trip planning and the travel experience**

“The growing popularity of AI has made it possible to use this technology to formulate travel itineraries and address existing shortcomings.”

# 02 Products & Sales



Chinese tourists increasingly seek more personalized and immersive travel experiences. How are travel agencies performing in product sales, and how will they continue to optimize their offerings over the next year to better meet the evolving demands of Chinese travelers? Our survey results reveal the best performing outbound travel products in 2025, and product adjustments planned by Chinese travel agents for 2026. We also examine the booking habits of the spontaneous Chinese tourists.

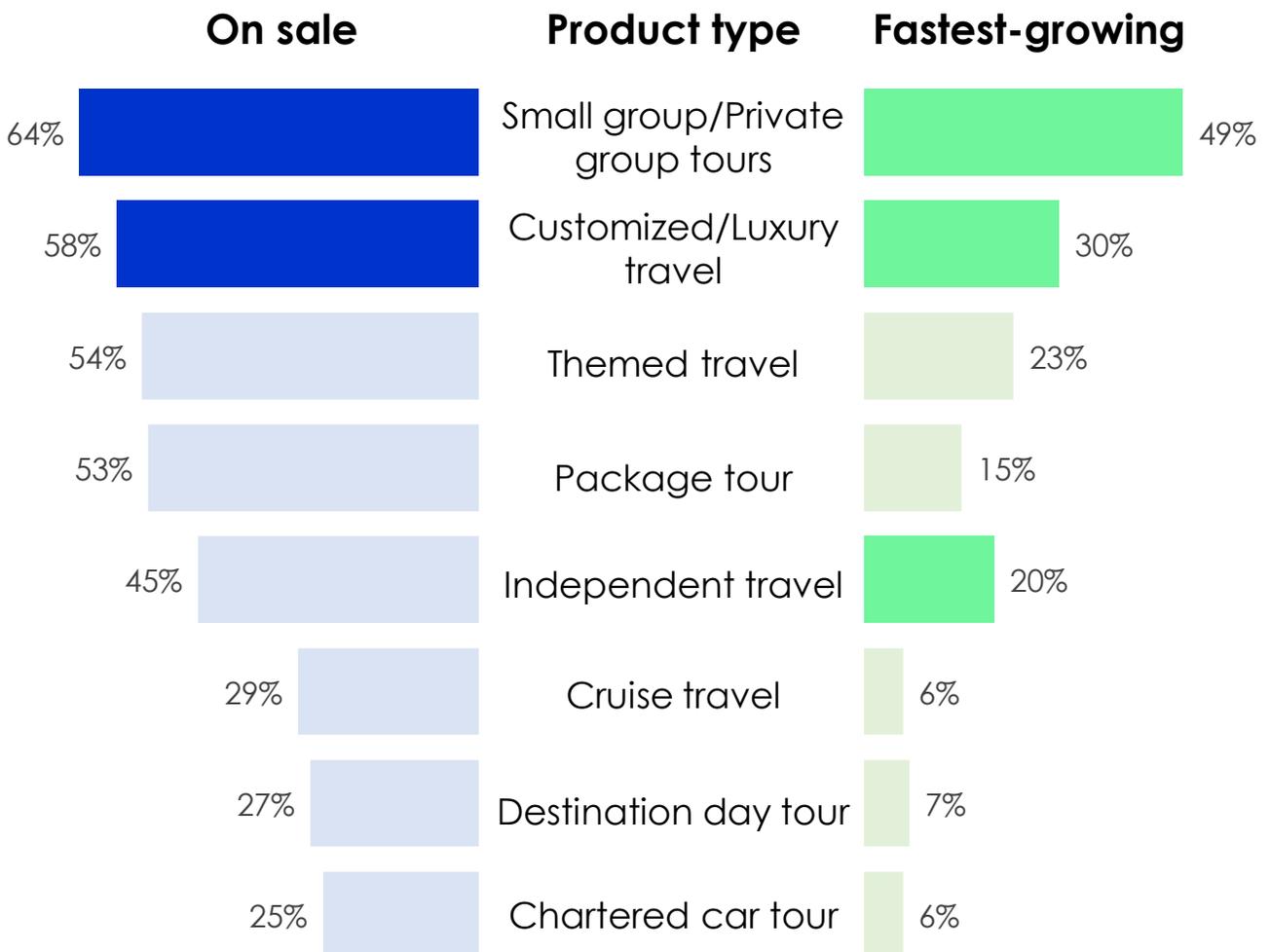
Photo by Sigmund on Unsplash

## Personalized demand fuels sustained growth in small and private group tours

We asked Chinese travel agents what types of outbound travel products they sold and which grew fastest in 2025. The results once again reflect the evolving travel patterns of Chinese tourists, stemming from their increasing desire for customized, in-depth travel experiences. Small and private group tour stood out as the most popular product type, sold by 64% of surveyed travel agents and identified by 49% as the fastest-growing one. Following closely were customized and luxury travel (58%, 30%). 20% of respondents said independent travel was growing fastest.

### On sale and fastest-growing Chinese outbound travel market products in 2025 (by product type)

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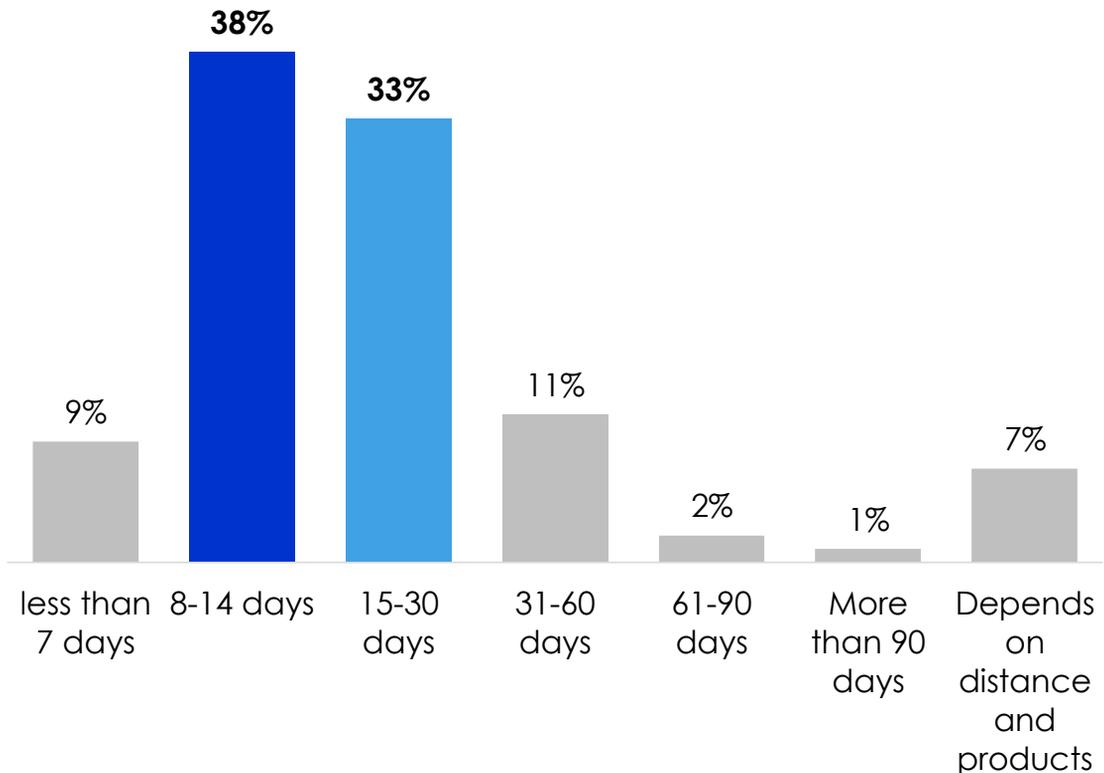


## Chinese travelers tend to be spontaneous, booking their trips at short notice

One-third (33%) of travel agents said their outbound travel clients usually book trips two weeks to one month in advance. Some travelers are even more spontaneous: 47% of respondents said that their clients would book less than two weeks before traveling. While 7% of travel agents said the booking period depended on destination distance and product type, Chinese tourists generally prefer to take off on a whim, and only a few would book outbound travel more than two months in advance.

### How far in advance do your outbound travel clients usually book their itineraries?

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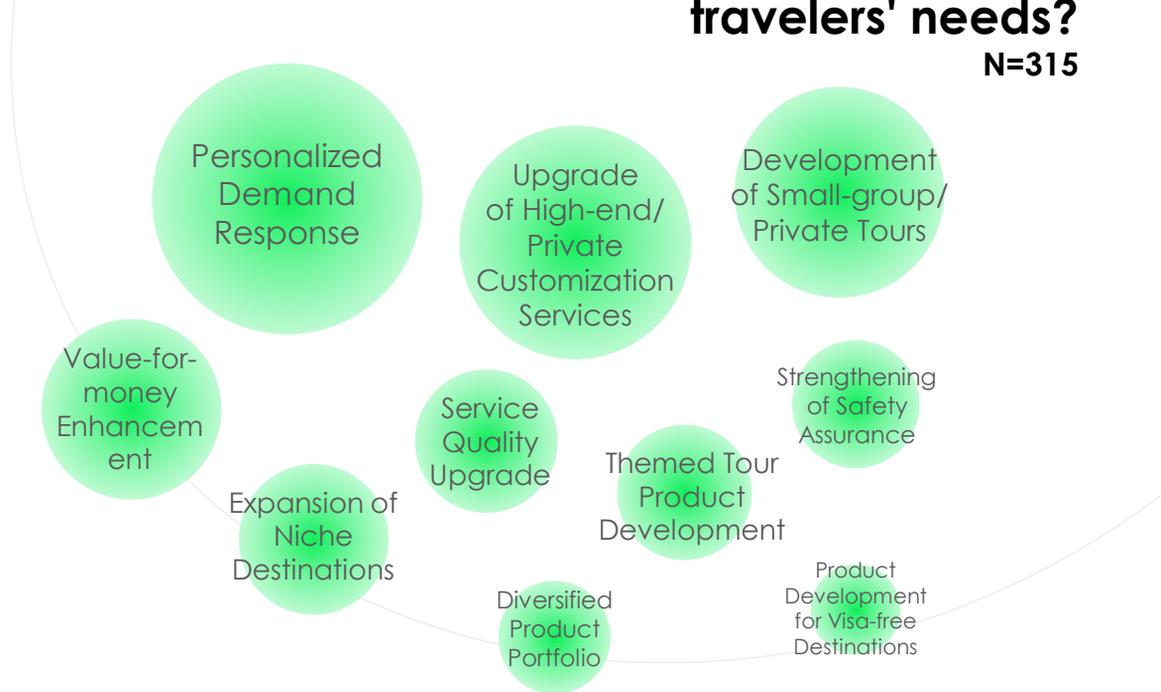


## Chinese travel agents are updating products in response to travelers' evolving demands

When asked how they would adjust their outbound travel products to better meet the demands of Chinese travelers, travel agents expressed intentions to respond to personalized travel demands, upgrade customized services, and develop more private and small-group tour products in the coming year. With the rising needs for niche and visa-free destinations with high safety, travel agents are also planning to optimize their product portfolio accordingly.

### What outbound tourism product adjustments will your company make in 2026 to meet Chinese outbound travelers' needs?

N=315



*“Offer differentiated and customized travel products to cater to different demographics – families, young adults, seniors – such as chartered car, car rental, immersive cultural experiences, educational family tours, etc.”*

*“New exclusive travel products for visa-free destinations will be introduced, focusing on in-depth experience itineraries in countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan.”*

*“We will increase investment in customized tours, offering diverse choices in accommodations and activities, and we provide customized itineraries with quotes.”*

# 03 Winter Travel



Chinese New Year is one of the annual peaks for outbound travel, and in 2026, the public holiday period is longer than ever, with nine days off between 15-23 February. Where and how will Chinese outbound travelers celebrate the Year of the Horse? Our survey uncovers the top destinations, types of travel and travelers, trip length, budget, and more. Plus, we explore the continued growth of ice and snow tourism, and what it means for the Chinese travel market.

Photo by Sahil Pandita on Unsplash

## Family travelers seeking sun – or snow – are the target market this Chinese New Year

With nearly all (98.4%) respondents selling outbound travel products for Chinese New Year 2026, we asked what was selling best. Medium-haul destinations were the most popular, chosen by 61%. Chinese New Year is a peak time for family travel, and 52% of agents said that families with children were the top traveler segment. Warm weather and island holidays were most popular (35%), followed by ice and snow experiences (25%). Private and small-group travel stood out as the leading mode of travel, chosen by 55%.

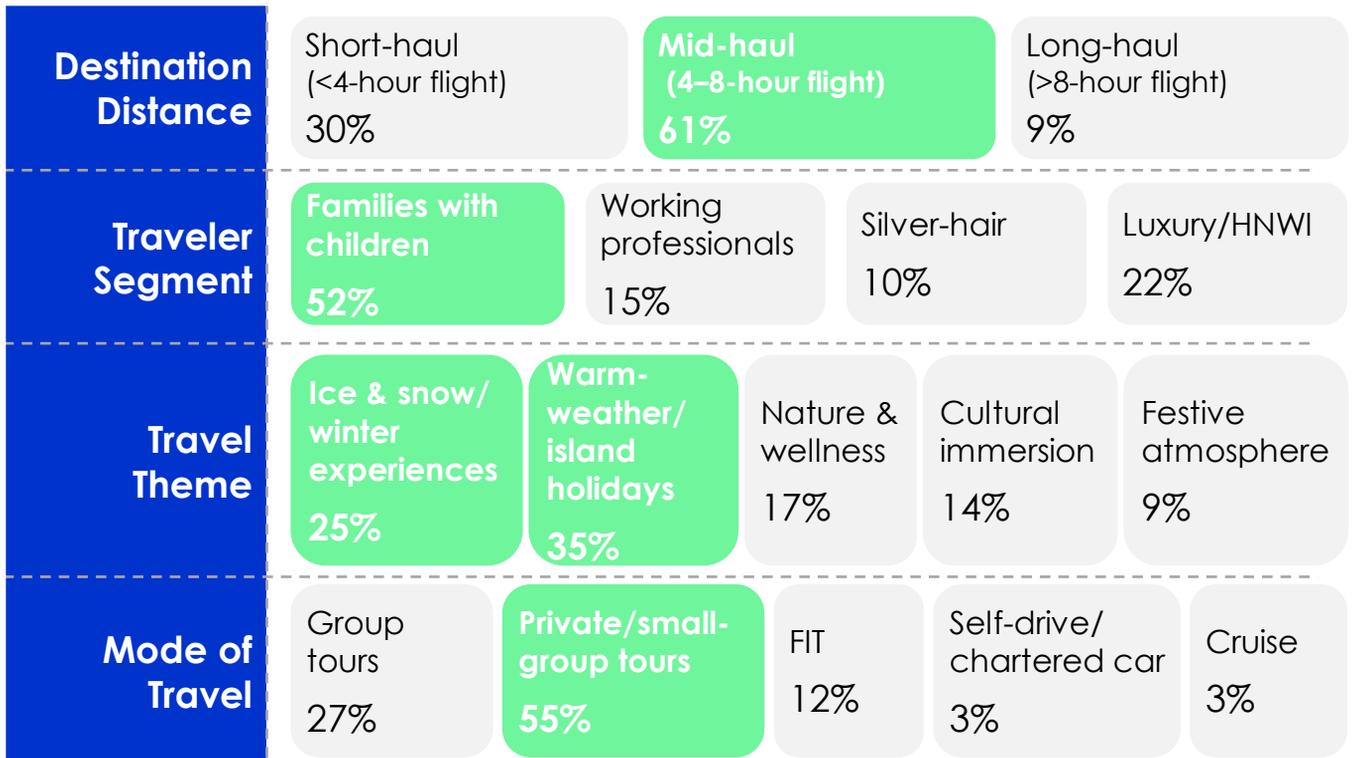
### Does your company currently sell outbound travel products for Chinese New Year 2026?

N=315



■ Yes ■ No

### Which CNY 2026 outbound travel products sell best? N=315

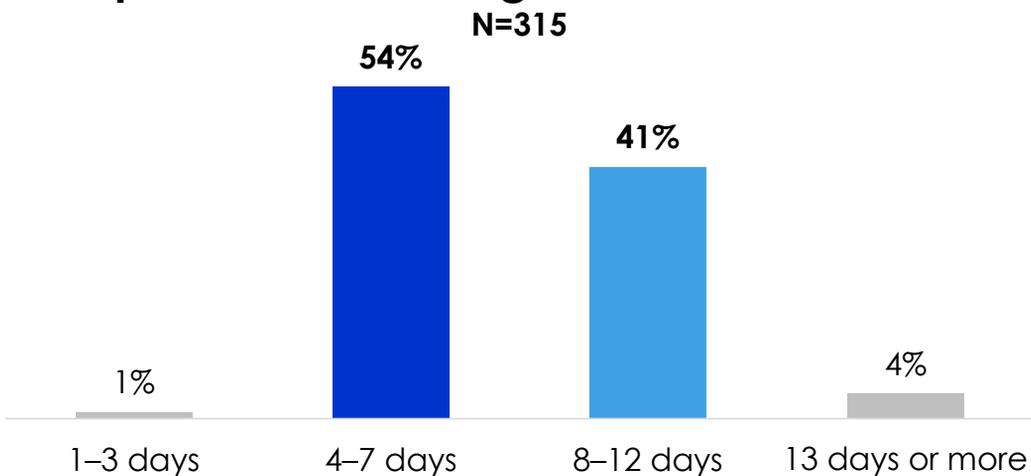




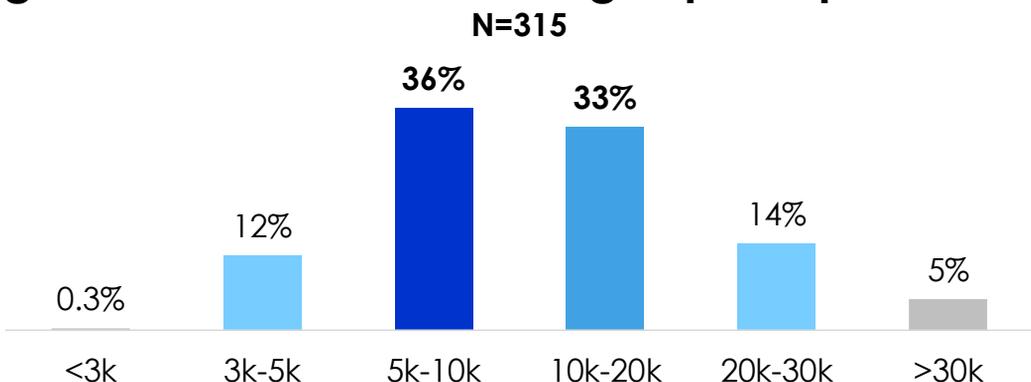
## Most outbound trips will last around one week, and cost RMB5,000–20,000 per traveler

More than half (54%) of travel agents said outbound trips of 4–7 days are most popular at Chinese New Year, with another 41% choosing trips of 8–12 days. In terms of cost, around one-third each said that clients would spend RMB5–10k (US\$717–1,433; 36%) or RMB10–20k (US\$1,433–2,867; 33%). 19% of travel agents said that travelers would spend more than RMB20k per person on average.

### For CNY 2026 outbound travel, what is the preferred trip duration among Chinese travelers?



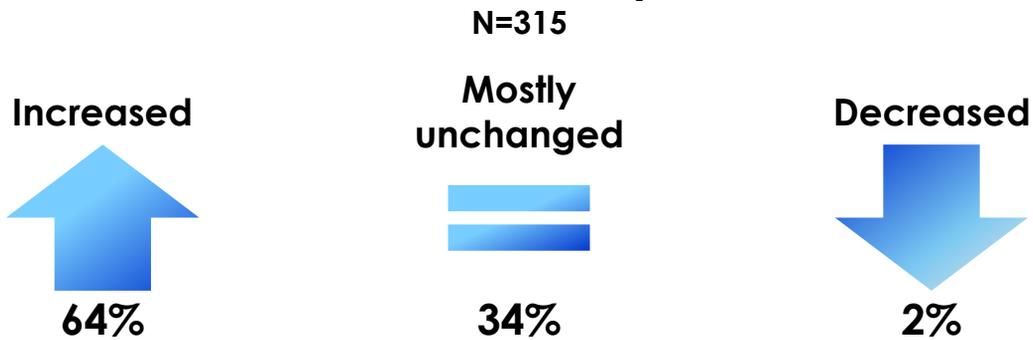
### For CNY 2026 outbound travel products, which price range best reflects the average spend per traveler?



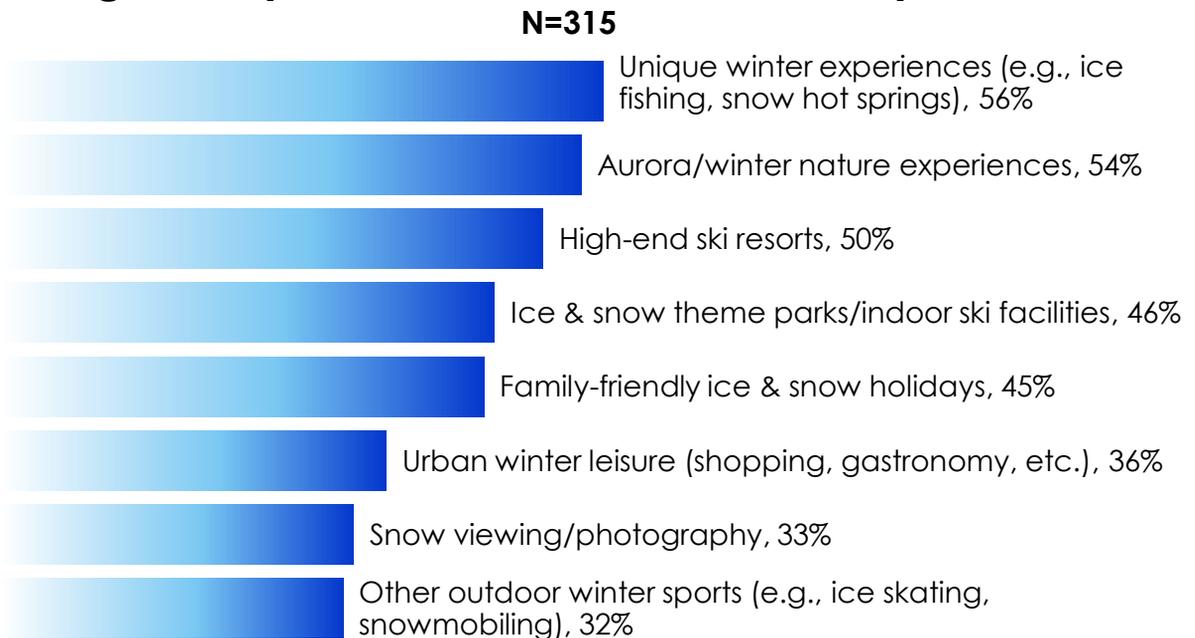
## Ice and snow tourism continues to heat up

The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics was a major catalyst for rising interest in snow sports among Chinese consumers. With the 2026 Milan-Cortina Olympics coming soon, the trend for ice and snow tourism continues to grow, according to nearly two-thirds of travel agents. Our respondents see the greatest growth potential for unique winter experiences like ice fishing and hot springs in the snow (56%), followed by northern lights and other winter nature experiences (54%). This helps to explain the popularity of Russia, Iceland, Norway, and other Nordic destinations during the Chinese New Year holiday.

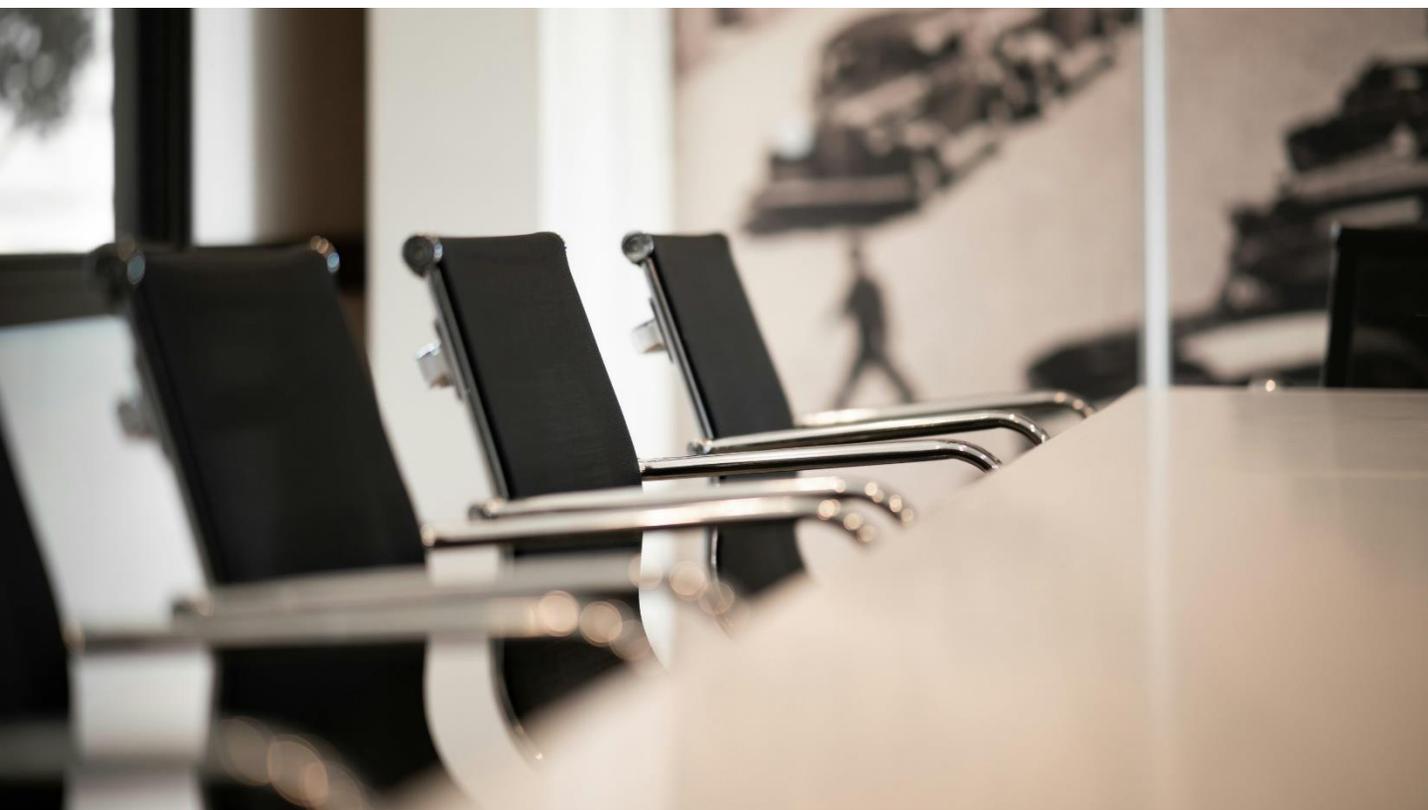
### Compared with last year, the demand for ice & snow tourism in China this year has...



### Which ice & snow tourism products have the greatest growth potential over the next two years?



# 04 B2B Engagement



What's the best way for travel brands to meet and work with the Chinese outbound travel trade in 2026? FAM trips and small-scale trade events and salons are most preferred by our survey respondents, alongside major travel trade shows in China and around the world – most outbound travel agents plan to attend these in the coming year. Online, live streaming sessions, webinars, and training platforms all offer opportunities to complement and enhance your offline trade engagement throughout the year.

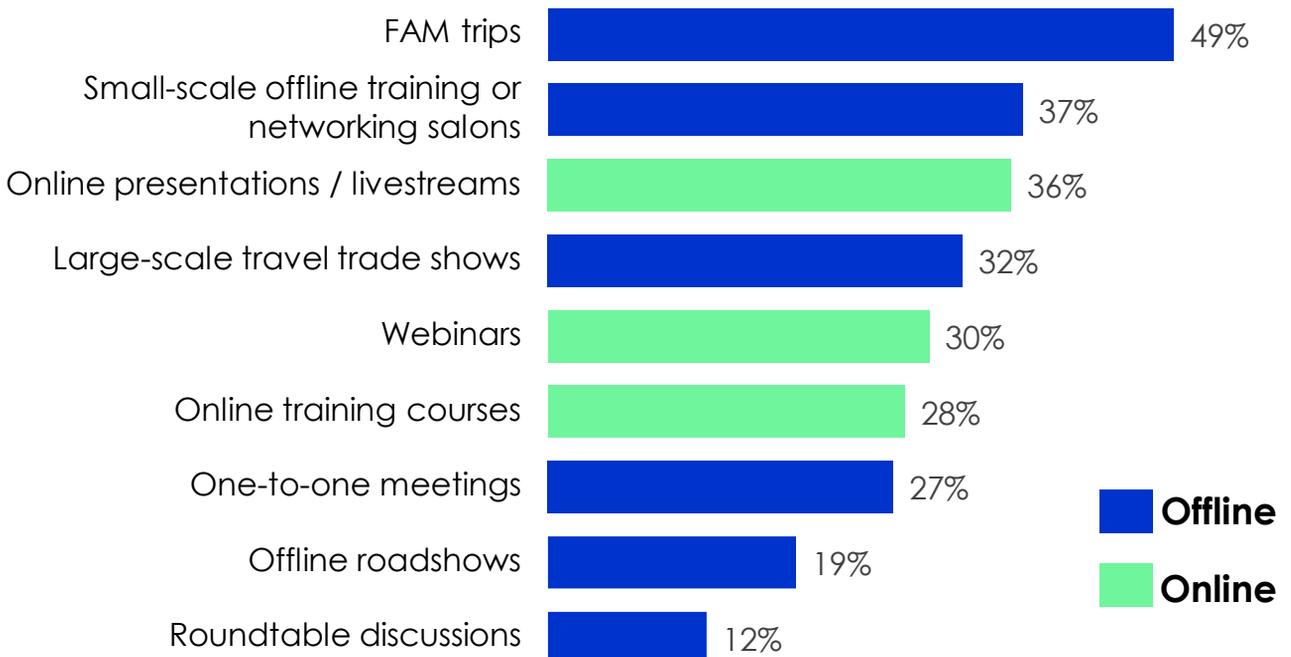
Photo by Michael Fousert on Unsplash

## FAM trips remain the most-favored way for travel agents to learn about and work with overseas destinations and brands

Chinese outbound travel agents continue to identify FAM trips as the most helpful way to learn about and work with overseas destinations and travel businesses, as they did in our survey one year ago. In the current survey, 49% of respondents chose this option. Small-scale offline events and salons also continue to be popular (37%), with travel agents benefitting from a focused and intimate professional setting. Livestreams and online presentations were again chosen as the most-favored online resource (36%), as we've seen consistently since 2024. Around one-third of respondents (32%) said large-scale travel trade shows were most helpful – turn to the next page to see which ones they attended in 2025 and are planning to go to in 2026.

### When working with overseas destinations or travel businesses, which resources would help you the most?

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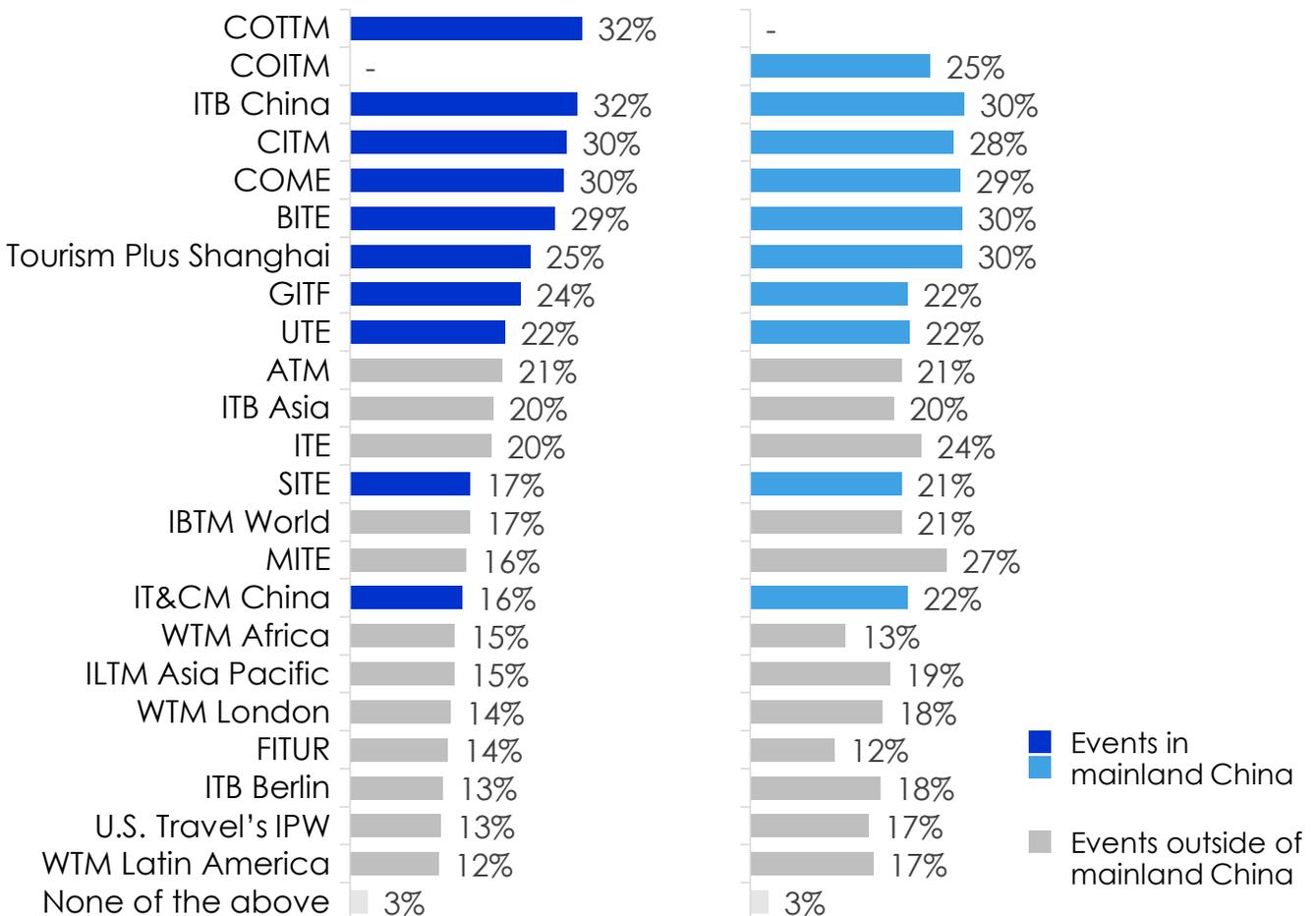


## Almost all outbound travel agents attended travel trade shows in 2025 and plan to do so again in 2026 – in China and around the world

97% of respondents said they attended travel trade shows in 2025 and plan to do so again in 2026. Shows held in mainland China were the most popular, with COTTM in Beijing and ITB China in Shanghai topping the list for 2025 (32% each). Outside of mainland China, ATM in Dubai was the most popular travel trade show in 2025 and is again a top choice for 2026, alongside MITE in Macau, ITE in Hong Kong, IBTM in Barcelona, and ITB Asia in Singapore.

### Which travel trade shows have you attended in 2025? Which travel trade shows do you plan to attend in 2026?

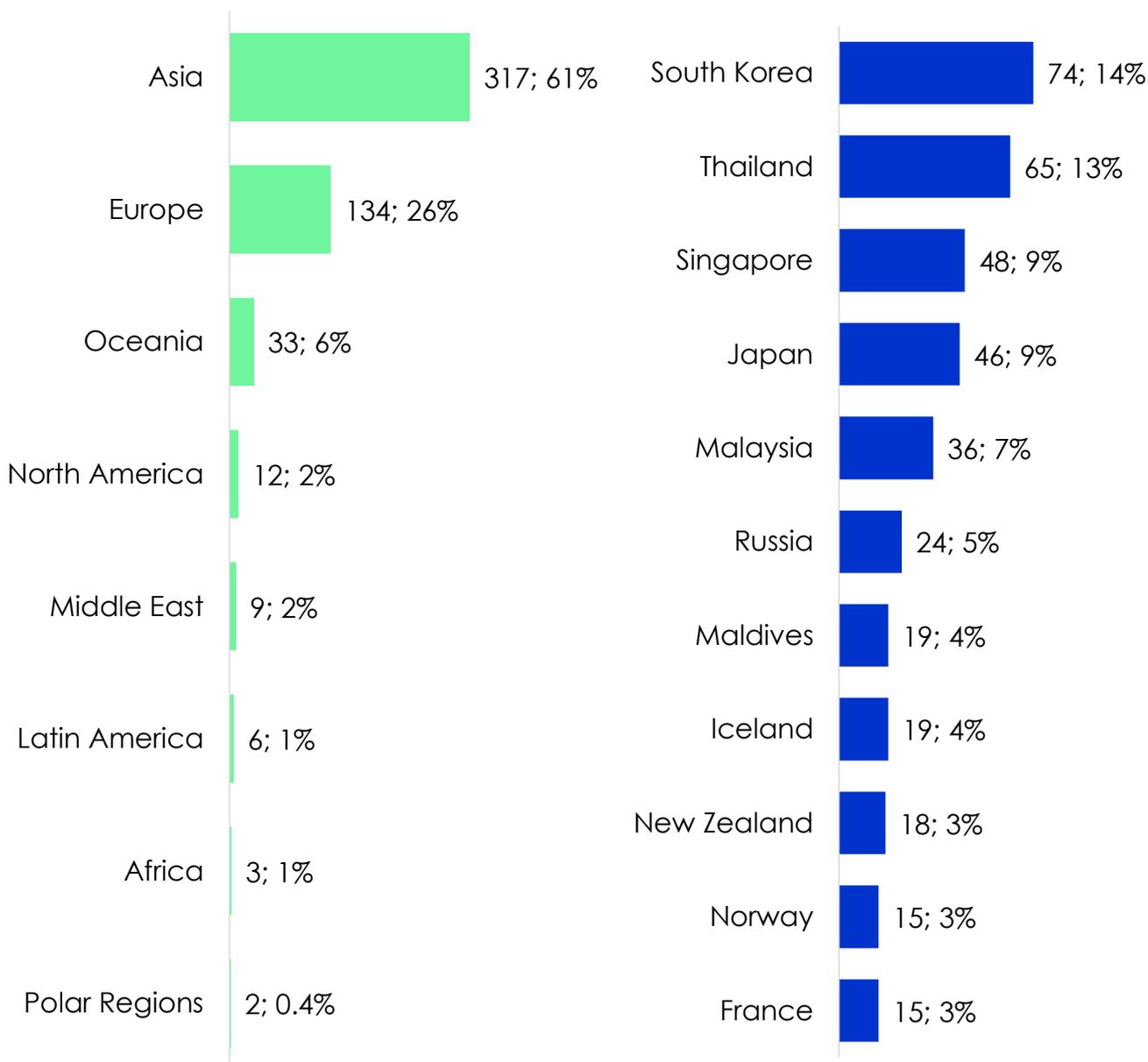
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# Appendix A

## Top-mentioned outbound travel regions and countries for CNY 2026

By word frequency



Word frequency reflects how many times each destination was mentioned; percentages refer to the share of total destination mentions (n=522); respondents could name multiple destinations.



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Dragon Trail Research empowers decision-making for the travel industry. Founded in 2019, Dragon Trail Research delivers quantitative and qualitative research fueled by statistics to help our clients uncover market trends, evaluate tactics, and engage their target audience.

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