



THE VALUE OF TRAVEL IN A CHANGING WORLD

Chinese Traveler Sentiment Report

Dragon Trail Research

April 2026

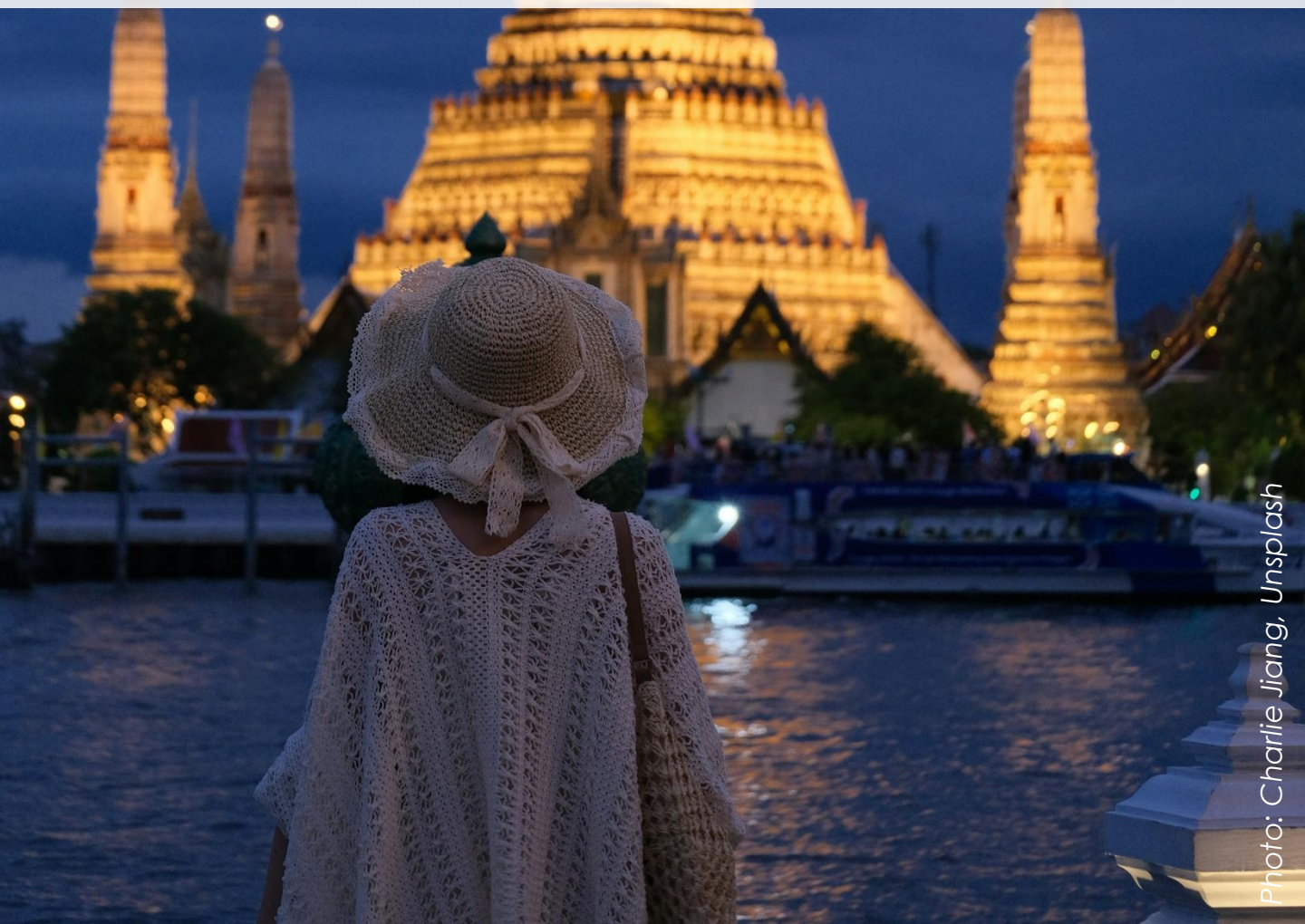


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Introduction: In a changing world, travel still offers respite from the everyday, through fresh experiences, landscapes, and cultures

Much has changed in the world since Dragon Trail's last Chinese Traveler Sentiment Report, published in September 2025. Several developments in particular have impacted Chinese outbound tourism. The fallout from a diplomatic incident in November 2025 has halved flight capacity from China to Japan – which had been riding high as the top international destination for Chinese travelers for some time. Tourism to the Middle East – a rapidly growing new hotspot – suddenly came to a standstill in March 2026 after the outbreak of war in the region.

How are Chinese consumers reacting to these events? Our latest Chinese Traveler Sentiment Survey, conducted between 16-20 March 2026, with 1,038 respondents, offers answers. Outbound travel intention has softened compared to last year, but it remains higher than in 2024. Trends like longer trips, increased spending on experiences, and the substantial influence of Chinese social media platforms like RedNote on outbound travel inspiration and planning are all still going strong.

The Iran war has already had a major impact on Chinese travelers' plans, and safety perceptions for Gulf countries have fallen significantly. Japan, usually perceived as a relatively "safe" travel destination by Chinese consumers, has dropped to its lowest safety rating since China lifted COVID-era restrictions on international travel. However, Japan remains firmly in the top 10 list of travel destinations, with survey respondents still inspired to visit through social media content. At the same time, Thailand is making a comeback, recovering at last from poor safety perceptions over the past few years. Vietnam's safety rating has also improved, and we see growing intention to travel to Southeast Asia.

Amid the stresses of world events and everyday life, Chinese consumers are seeking relaxation as a central motivation for travel – it's the top reason survey respondents gave for traveling outbound during the upcoming May Labor Day holiday. In this report, we've included a deep dive on wellness travel to explore this theme further – looking into what kinds of wellness and sports-related activities are most in demand among Chinese travelers, who is seeking these experiences, why, and what they're willing to pay for them.

China's outbound travel market is highly safety conscious, but also resilient and looking for new adventures. We hope this report will prove valuable to global travel brands in understanding what Chinese travelers are seeking, what most inspires them, and how they will be planning and booking their next outbound trips.

Tiana Tian
Market Research Analyst

Janice Meng
Market Research Analyst

Sienna Parulis-Cook
Director of Marketing
and Communications

Chinese traveler survey findings: Our 6 top takeaways from the report

1) **May holiday will bring longer, regional trips**

24% of respondents who intended to take an outbound trip in 2026 said they planned to do so during the May Labor Day holiday (1-5 May). Most trips will be intra-regional, with South Korea, Macau, Thailand, and Hong Kong the top destinations. Close to half (44%) of respondents plan to take extra leave to extend their holiday, with 33% expecting to travel for 6–10 days, and 11% planning to travel for more than 10 days.

2) **Destination preferences and safety rankings show major shifts**

Thailand is experiencing a strong comeback among Chinese tourists this year, with improving safety ratings, a boost in the percentage of survey respondents who plan to travel there for the May holiday, and greater traveler intention to visit Southeast Asia. In contrast, the impact of China's travel advisory for Japan is reflected in a sharp decline in public perception about Japan's safety as a travel destination. With the outbreak of war in the region, safety rankings and travel intention for the Middle East both saw considerable drops.

3) **The Iran war has already had a profound impact on Chinese travel plans**

Survey respondents identified the international security situation as the top factor influencing their outbound travel decisions. 43% of survey respondents' travel plans have already been impacted by the Iran war, and we see softening travel intention to nearly all world regions. Two-thirds (65%) said the war had significantly decreased their willingness to travel to the Middle East and North Africa. Understandably, this impact is most pronounced in the short-term.

4) **Chinese travelers plan to increase spending on experiences**

Over half (56%) of Chinese outbound travelers say they are planning to increase spending on activities and experiences, with 49% planning to increase spending on dining. Young travelers aged 18-24 showed a stronger intention to increase spending across all categories – including shopping and accommodation – compared to travelers from other age groups.

5) **Social media content – especially natural scenery – inspires Chinese travelers**

RedNote (Xiaohongshu) remains the top source of outbound travel information, chosen by 53% of respondents in this survey. Following closely are Douyin, and OTAs like Ctrip. Chinese travelers said they were inspired by social media to visit a wide range of places, with content featuring natural scenery the most influential.

6) **Relaxation and stress relief are Chinese travelers' top wellness goals**

The majority of Chinese travelers are open to integrating some wellness experiences into their trips, especially with the goal of relaxation and stress relief. Spa and hot spring experiences, and nature-based healing activities are most popular. Most survey respondents say they are willing to pay a limited premium to add wellness activities into their travel experience.

2026 Travel

In early March, Dragon Trail surveyed Chinese travelers' interest and preferences for outbound travel in 2026. While interest in international travel has softened slightly compared to spring 2025, it remains higher than in 2024. The international security situation is now the top factor influencing destination choices. Looking ahead to the May Day holiday, our survey findings reveal key insights into travel companions, budgets, trip duration, and why Chinese consumers are choosing to travel outbound.

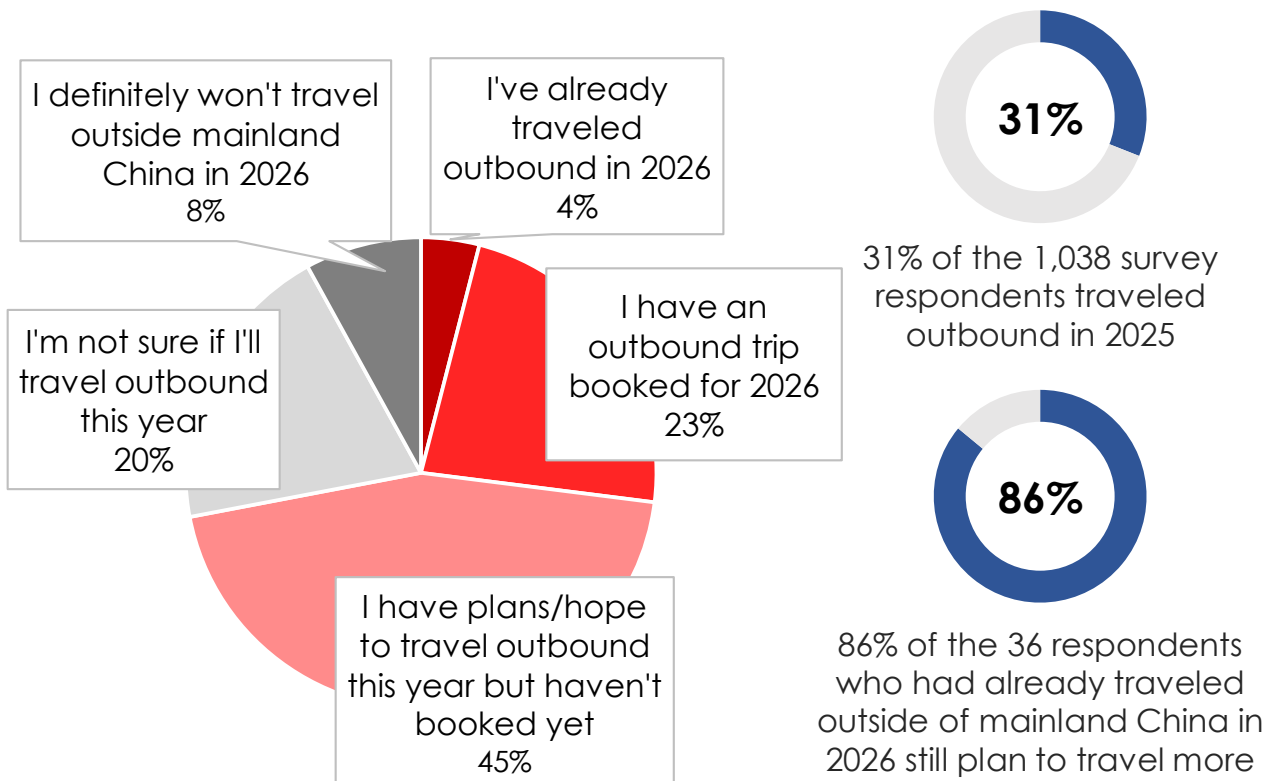
Photo by Artem Korolev, Unsplash

72% of Chinese travelers express interest in traveling outbound this year

As of mid-March, 4% of survey respondents had already taken an outbound trip in 2026, and another 23% had booked their first outbound journey of the year. Compared with last year, overall outbound travel interest in 2026 has softened slightly, from 75% in spring 2025 to 72% this year, though it remains higher than during the same period in 2024. In the following pages, we will take a closer look at where these travelers have gone, what factors influence their outbound travel decisions, and the outlook for the 2026 May Labor Day holiday.

What are your 2026 outbound travel plans?

N=1038










South Korea tops visited destinations, and Iceland enters the top five in spring 2026

Among surveyed Chinese travelers who had already traveled outbound in 2026 by mid-March, South Korea was the most visited destination, followed by Macao, Japan and Thailand. Iceland once again made it into the top ranking of visited destinations. From being on travelers' wish lists to making it into the top 10 in 2025, Iceland has now reached the top five – albeit with a small sample size. New Zealand, similar to the same period last year, remains among the most popular destinations.

Destinations of recent outbound travel in 2026

N=36

			% Visited ¹	% Repeat visit
#1		South Korea	16.7%	83.3%
#2		Macao	13.9%	80.0%
=#3		Japan	8.3%	33.3%
=#3		Thailand	8.3%	100.0%
=#5		Iceland	5.6%	0.0%
=#5		Hong Kong	5.6%	0.0%
=#5		New Zealand	5.6%	0.0%

¹Destination visited on respondent's most recent outbound trip by March 2026

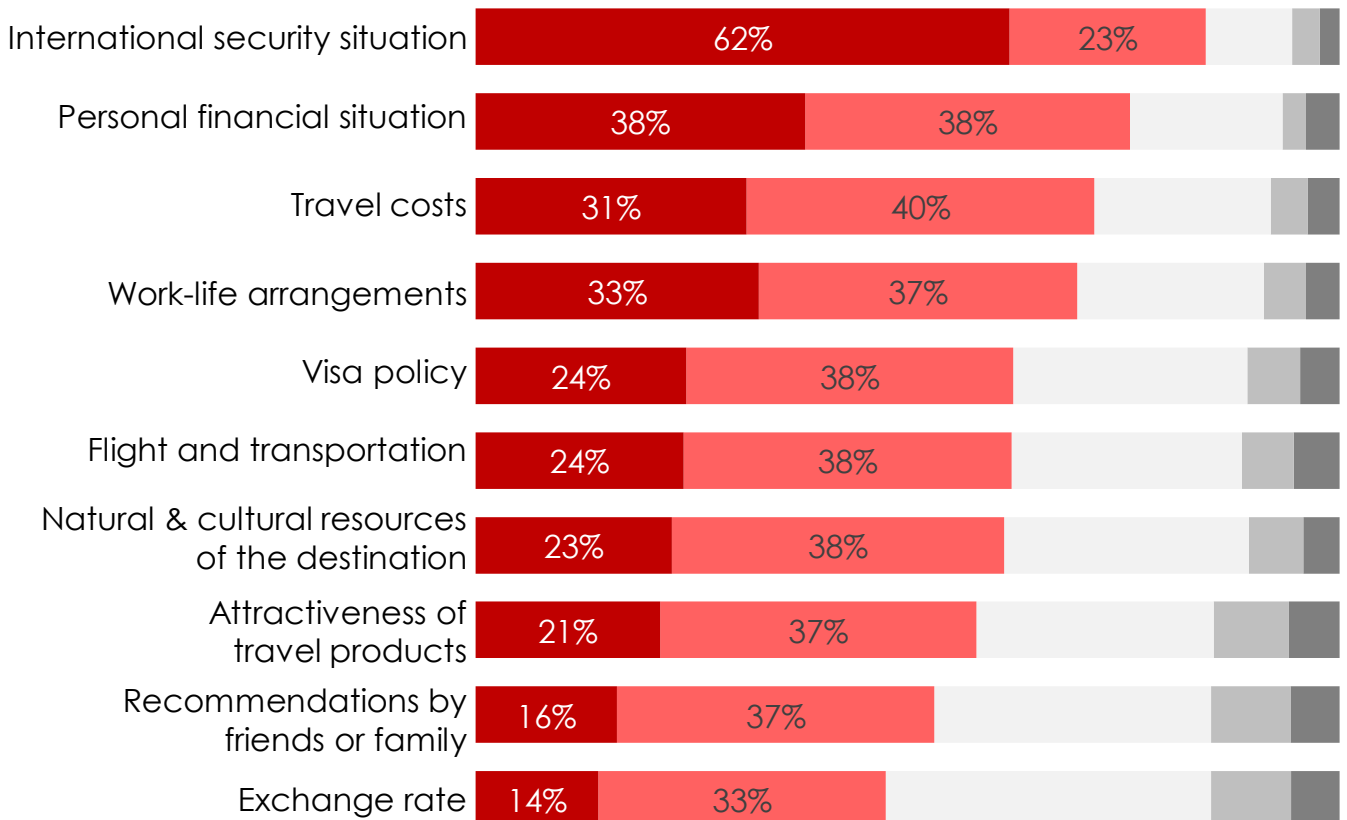
International security most strongly influences Chinese travelers' outbound travel decisions

What influences Chinese travelers' choice of outbound destinations? Survey respondents identified the international security situation as the top factor, with 85% saying it has extreme or significant impact on their outbound travel decisions. Personal financial situation is the second most influential factor, extremely or significantly impacting 76% of surveyed Chinese travelers' outbound travel decisions. Travel costs and work-life arrangements are the other two key influencing factors, chosen by 71% and 70% of surveyed respondents, respectively, as having an extreme or significant impact on their destination choices.

How do the following factors influence your 2026 outbound travel choices?

N=1038

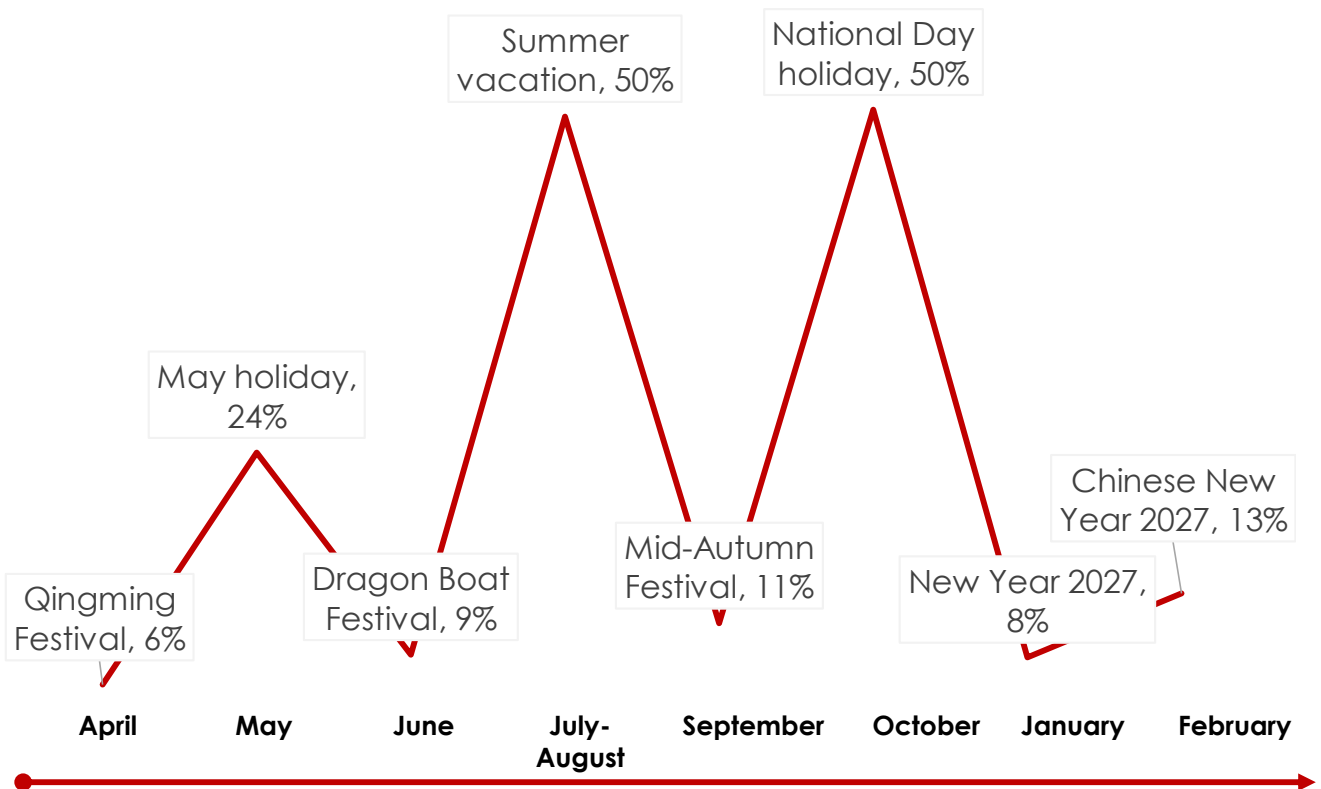
■ Extreme impact ■ Significant impact ■ Moderate impact ■ Slight impact ■ No impact



Summer vacation and October's National Day are the peak outbound travel periods in 2026

We asked survey respondents who have outbound travel plans about their intended outbound travel window over the next 12 months. The results are similar to last year (Chinese Traveler Sentiment Report, April 2025). Summer vacation and the National Day holiday in October are the peak travel periods, each chosen by 50% of surveyed Chinese outbound travelers. The May Labor Day holiday is another peak period, with 24% of respondents planning to travel outbound during that time. On the next page, we will dive into the top destinations and travel plans for the 2026 May holiday.

When do you plan to travel outbound in the next 12 months? (N=743)













5% of travelers chose to travel outbound at other times such as weekends and off-peak seasons.

South Korea takes the top spot for 2026's May Labor Day holiday

Among surveyed Chinese travelers who have outbound travel plans for the 2026 May holiday, South Korea is the most popular destination, chosen by 16.3% of respondents. After ranking as the top destination for the 2025 National Day holiday in our last sentiment survey (September 2025), it has again taken the top spot. Macao is the second most popular destination. Thailand has seen a moderate rebound, with 9% of respondents planning to visit, compared to 5% during the 2025 National Day holiday in our last sentiment survey. In contrast, the percentage of Chinese travelers choosing to visit Japan fell from 9.5% to 5.1% over the same comparison period.

2026 May Day holiday: Outbound travel destinations

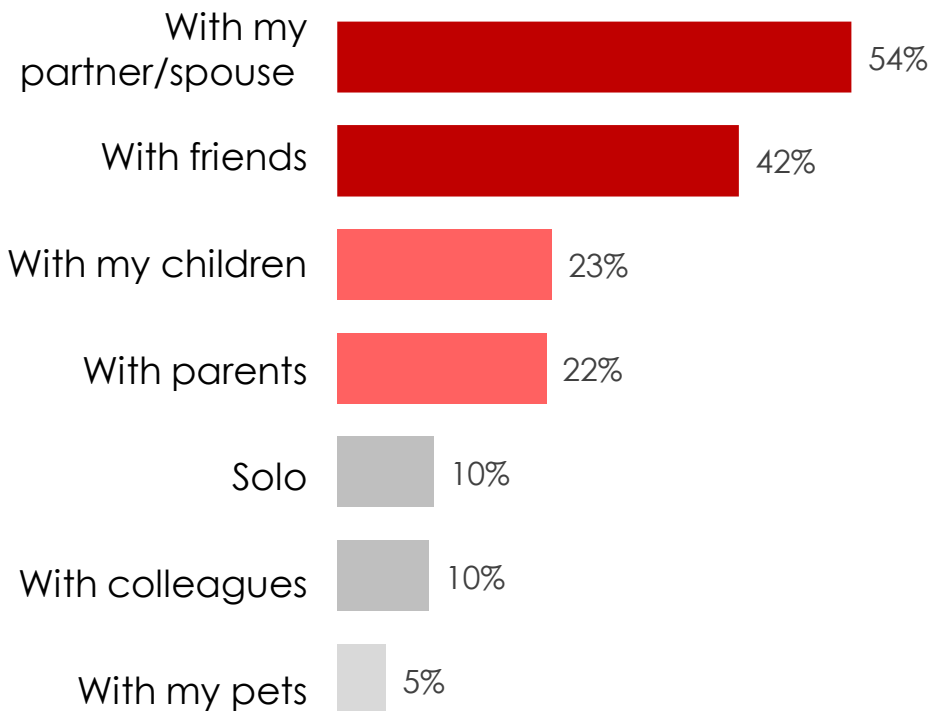
N=178

			% Booked/ plan to visit	% Repeat visit
#1		South Korea	16.3%	27.6%
#2		Macao	10.7%	42.1%
#3		Thailand	9.0%	18.8%
#4		Hong Kong	6.7%	41.7%
#5		Japan	5.1%	44.4%
=#6		Australia	4.5%	25.0%
=#6		Singapore	4.5%	50.0%
#8		Malaysia	3.4%	33.3%
=#9		Maldives	2.8%	0.0%
=#9		New Zealand	2.8%	20.0%

Over half of Chinese outbound travelers will go with their partner/spouse for the May holiday

Which companions are survey respondents traveling with this May Labor Day? Partner/spouse is the top choice, selected by 54% of respondents. Friends come next at 42%. Meanwhile, 23% of travelers plan to bring their children along, followed by traveling with parents (22%). It is worth noting that 5% of respondents intend to travel with their pets – a trend supported by the fact that some airlines have introduced pet-friendly cabin policies.

2026 May Day holiday: Outbound travel companions N=178



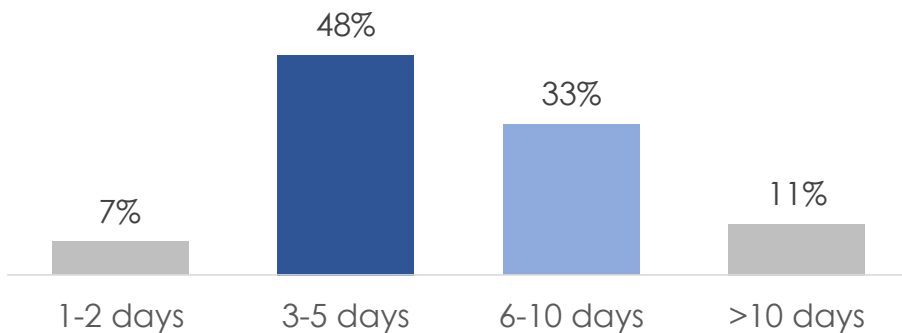
44% of respondents plan to take extra leave to extend their May Labor Day holiday

We asked surveyed Chinese outbound travelers about their intended travel duration for the 2026 May Labor Day holiday (1–5 May). The most common choice was 3–5 days, selected by 48% of respondents. Notably, 44% of respondents plan to take extra leave to extend their holiday, with 33% expecting to travel for 6–10 days, and 11% planning to travel for more than 10 days.

As for their total outbound travel budget during the May holiday, RMB10,000–20,000 (US\$1,465–2,930) per person is the most common range, chosen by 28% of respondents. Notably, 15% of respondents have budgets over RMB50,000 (US\$7,325) per person for the May holiday, with 7% of surveyed outbound travelers having budgets above RMB100,000 (US\$14,650).

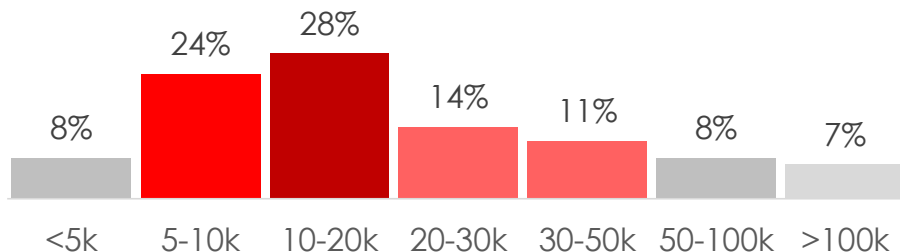
2026 May Labor Day holiday: Outbound travel duration

N=178



2026 May Labor Day holiday: Outbound travel total budget¹ per person (RMB)

N=178

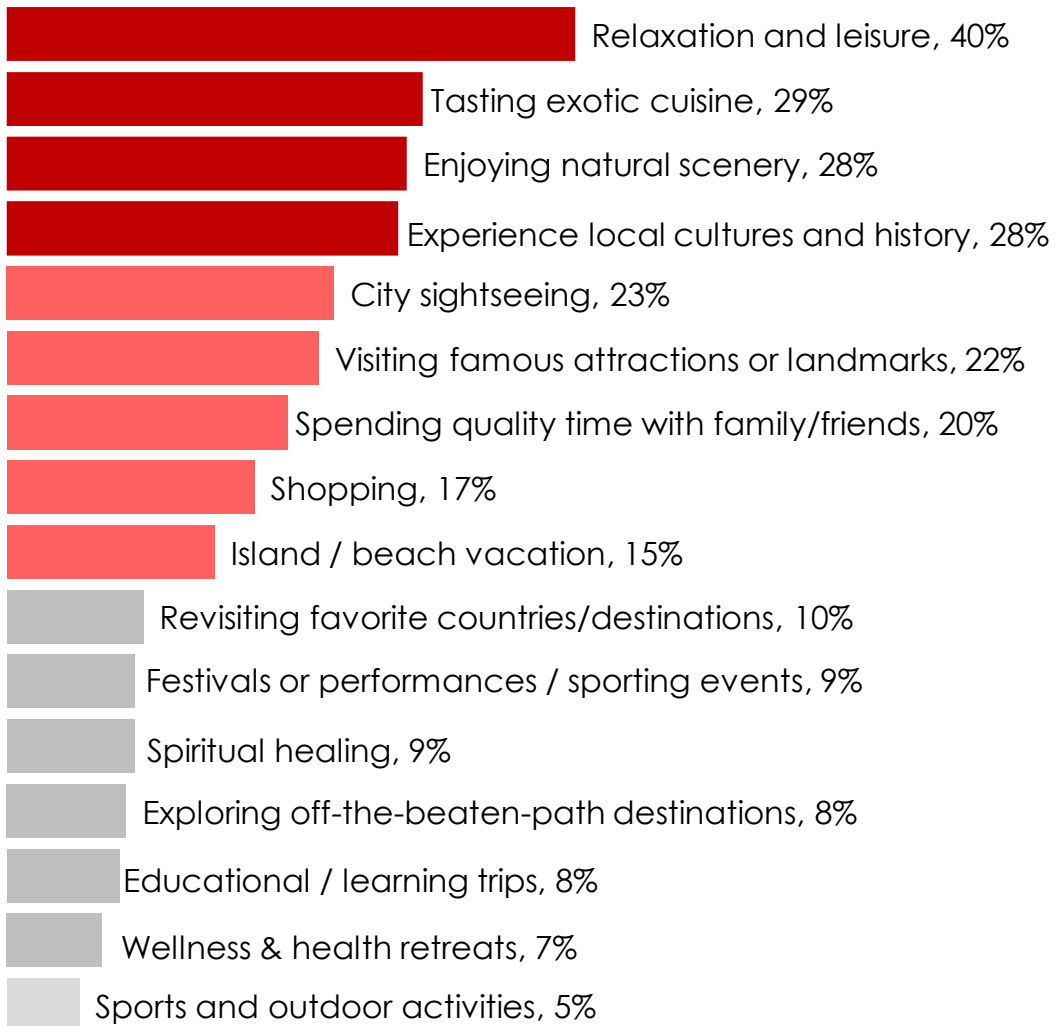


¹Including international flights, accommodation, and local expenses

Relaxation and leisure is the top outbound travel purpose for the 2026 May holiday

Relaxation and leisure is the top travel purpose for the 2026 May Labor Day holiday, chosen by 40% of surveyed Chinese outbound travelers. Tasting exotic cuisine (29%) ranks second, closely followed by enjoying natural scenery (28%) and experiencing local cultures and history (28%).

2026 May Labor Day holiday: Outbound travel purpose N=178



Destinations

A lot can change in just a few months. Responses to our survey questions about destination preferences and safety perceptions reveal significant shifts for regional outbound travel, as well as the immediate impact of the conflict in the Middle East.

Photo by Scott Taylor, Unsplash

Overall interest in outbound travel to most destinations has softened since last year

Compared to one year previous, consumers indicated less interest in traveling to most world regions. Southeast Asia, which had seen declining scores throughout 2025, is the biggest exception, with a 0.08 point increase since last spring and 0.11 increase since September 2025. South Asia is the other region with an improved score. The order of the destination preference list remains nearly unchanged, except for the Middle East, which dropped from 7th place to 10th, with a decrease of .40 points.

How interested are you in traveling to these areas of the world? (N=1038)

↑↓ vs. 2025 Spring



Europe



Northeast Asia



Southeast Asia



South Asia



Oceania



North America



Antarctica



Central Asia



Latin America



Middle East



Africa

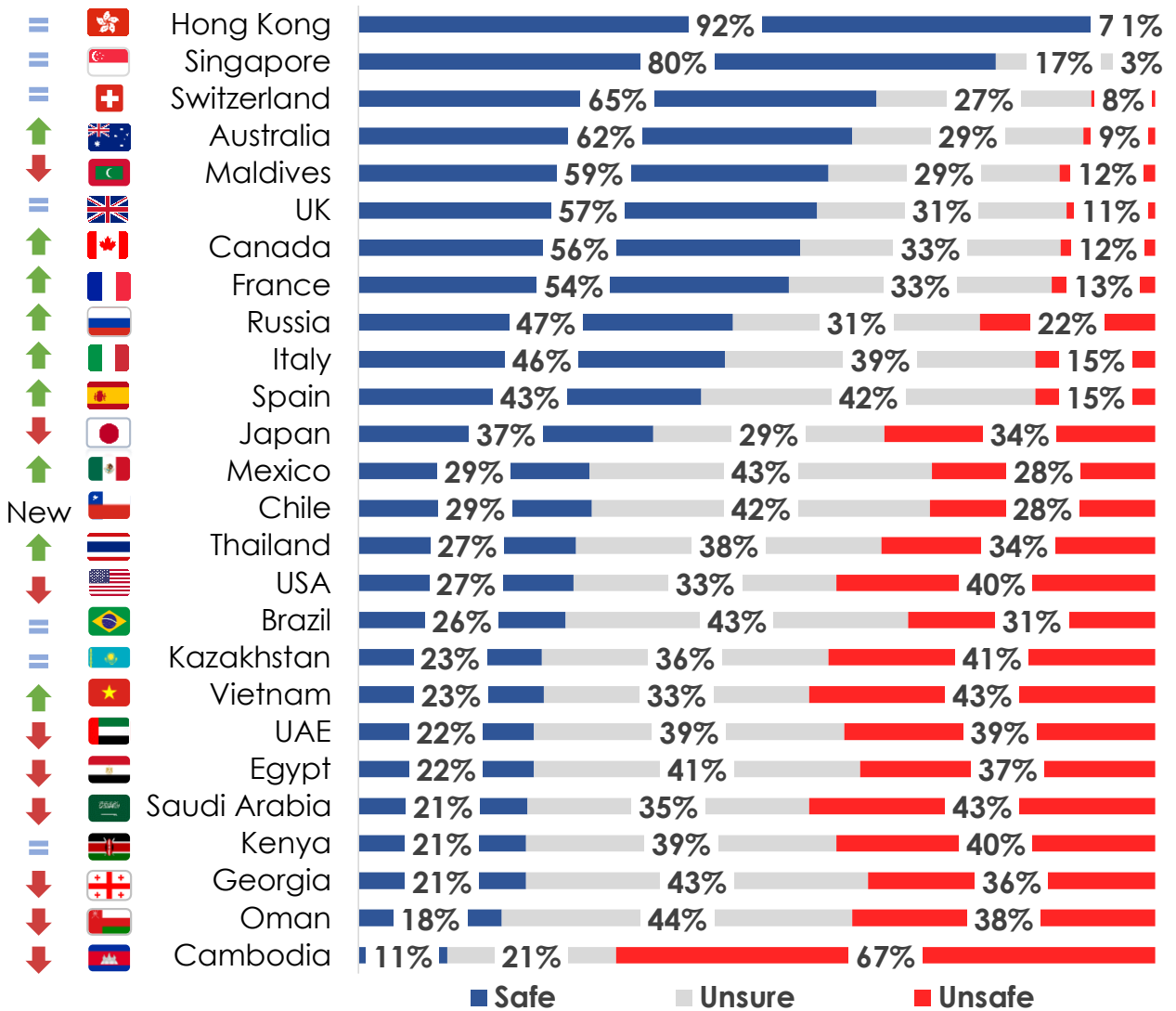
*Average score between 1-5, with 5 being extremely interested

Destination safety rankings have been significantly impacted by geopolitics

Many destinations have seen big changes to their safety perceptions since our September 2025 survey. In the Middle East, safety rankings for the UAE and Saudi Arabia have seen significant decreases – though Egypt's safety score stayed stable. Japan has suffered an even bigger decline than the Gulf countries, going from 57% to just 37% "safe", and from 16% to 34% "unsafe" in half a year. On the other hand, Thailand has moved up the rankings by seven places, with its "unsafe" rating improving from 48% to just 34%. Australia and most European destinations also saw improved safety rankings since last year.

How safe is it to travel to the following destinations?

Safety ranking vs. Sep. 2025

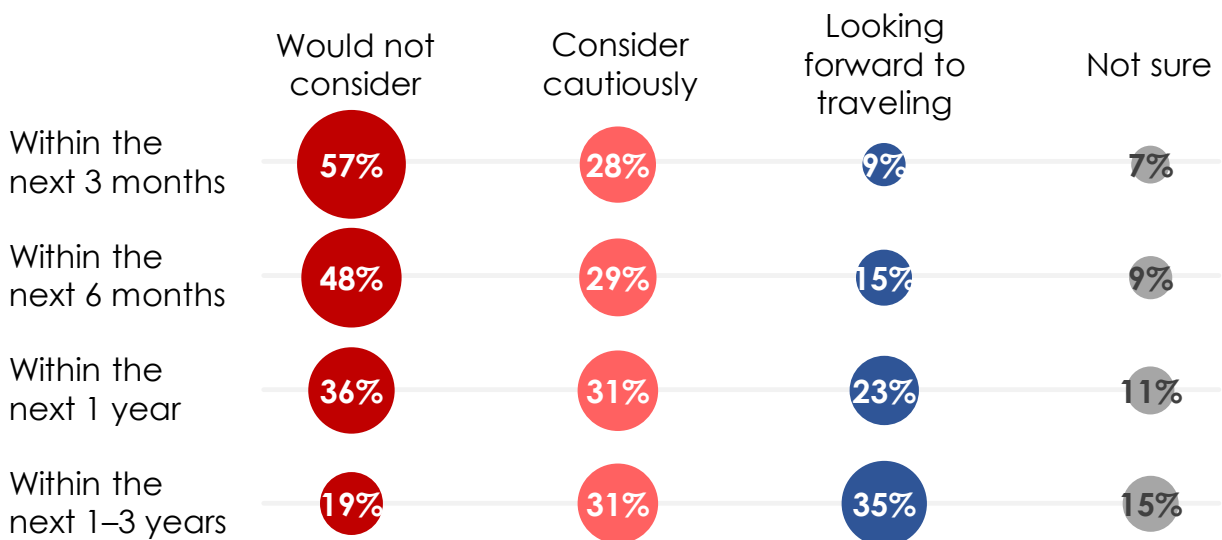


The Iran conflict has shaken consumer confidence and interest in the MENA region

Several weeks after the start of the Iran conflict, Chinese travelers' confidence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was deeply impacted. Two-thirds (65%) said the war had significantly decreased their willingness to travel to the region. Understandably, the impact is most pronounced in the short-term. Although 57% said they wouldn't consider travel to MENA in the next three months, this drops to 19% for the next 1-3 years.

Willingness to travel to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) during the following time periods

N=1038



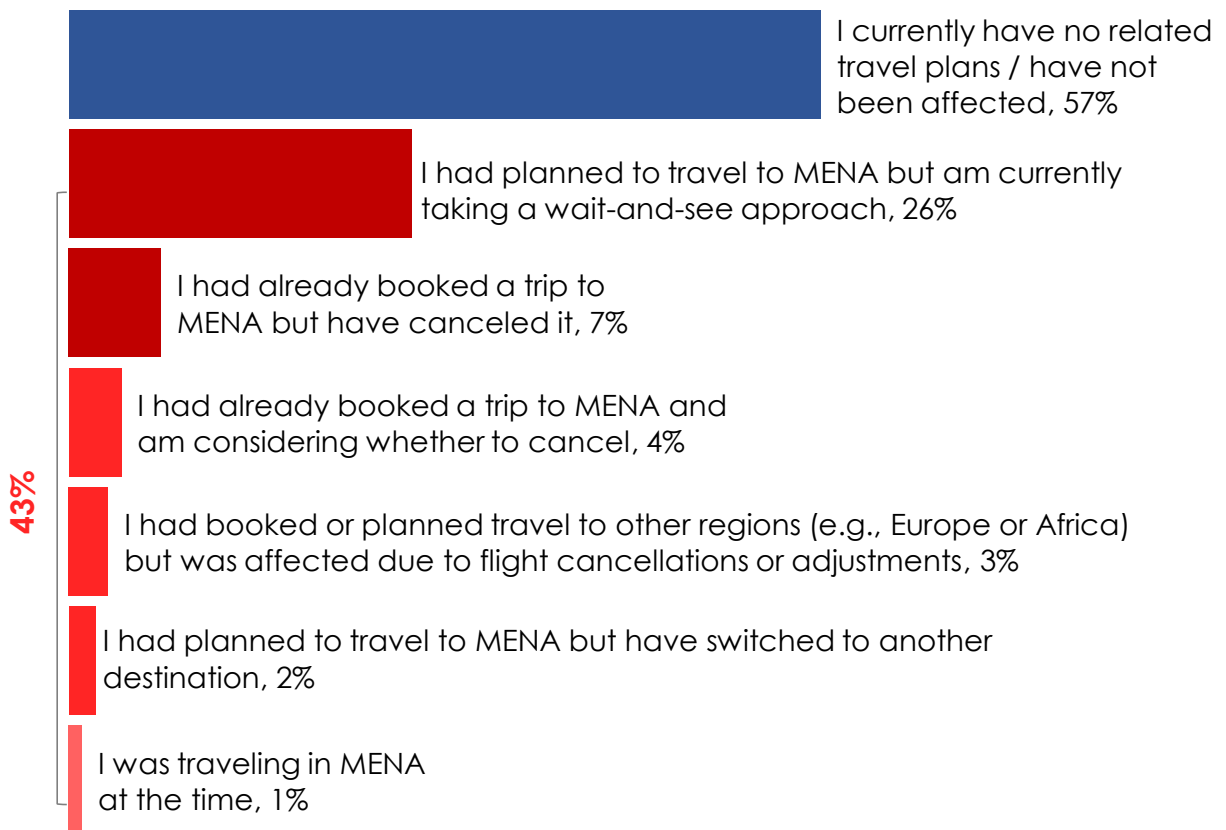
Has the recent situation in the Middle East affected your willingness to travel to the region? N=1038

- 65%** It has significantly decreased my overall willingness to travel to the Middle East and North Africa
- 31%** It has some impact; I would be more cautious about traveling to certain destinations
- 2%** It has little impact on me
- 1%** Not sure / Not familiar with the situation

43% of survey respondents' travel plans have already been impacted by the Iran war

57% of survey respondents said that the recent situation in the Middle East had not had any impact on their travel plans. More than one-quarter (26%) said they were now taking a wait-and-see approach towards future plans for travel to the MENA region, with a further 7% having canceled an already-booked trip within three weeks of the war's outbreak. 4% said they had a trip to the region booked and were still considering whether to cancel, and another 3% had travel to another world region disrupted because of the impact of the conflict on flights. 2% said they had already switched their MENA trip plans to a new destination. 2% said they had already switched their MENA trip plans to a new destination. 2% said they had already switched their MENA trip plans to a new destination.

Has the recent situation in the Middle East affected your travel plans? (N=1038)



Safety and stability will be key to attracting Chinese travelers back to the Middle East

We asked survey respondents what it would take to make them more willing to consider traveling to the Middle East and North Africa. Unsurprisingly, the majority (75%) said that the local situation would need to stabilize, with significantly improved overall safety. Consumers will also be looking to destinations and the travel industry to support with additional security measures, including providing safety information (39%) and improved Chinese-language services and emergency support (38%).

Under what circumstances would you be more willing to consider traveling to the Middle East and North Africa? (N=1038)

A more stable local situation and significantly improved overall safety, 75%



Clear safety information provided by travel agencies or destinations, 39%



Improved Chinese-language services and emergency support, 38%



More convenient direct flights or flight connections, 26%



Attractive travel packages or promotional offers, 26%



More relaxed visa requirements, 22%



Recommendations from friends or family who have visited, 21%




Seeing more travel experience sharing on social media, 19%



More positive travel information or recommendations, 19%



Travel Behavior



What are the characteristics of Chinese tourists' travel behavior in 2026, particularly in terms of where they spend more, what inspires them to travel and how they book? Our research highlights experiential consumption as a priority for Chinese outbound travelers. We also continue to track the top channels for travel information and booking, with a deep-dive on how social media inspires Chinese travelers' destination wish lists.

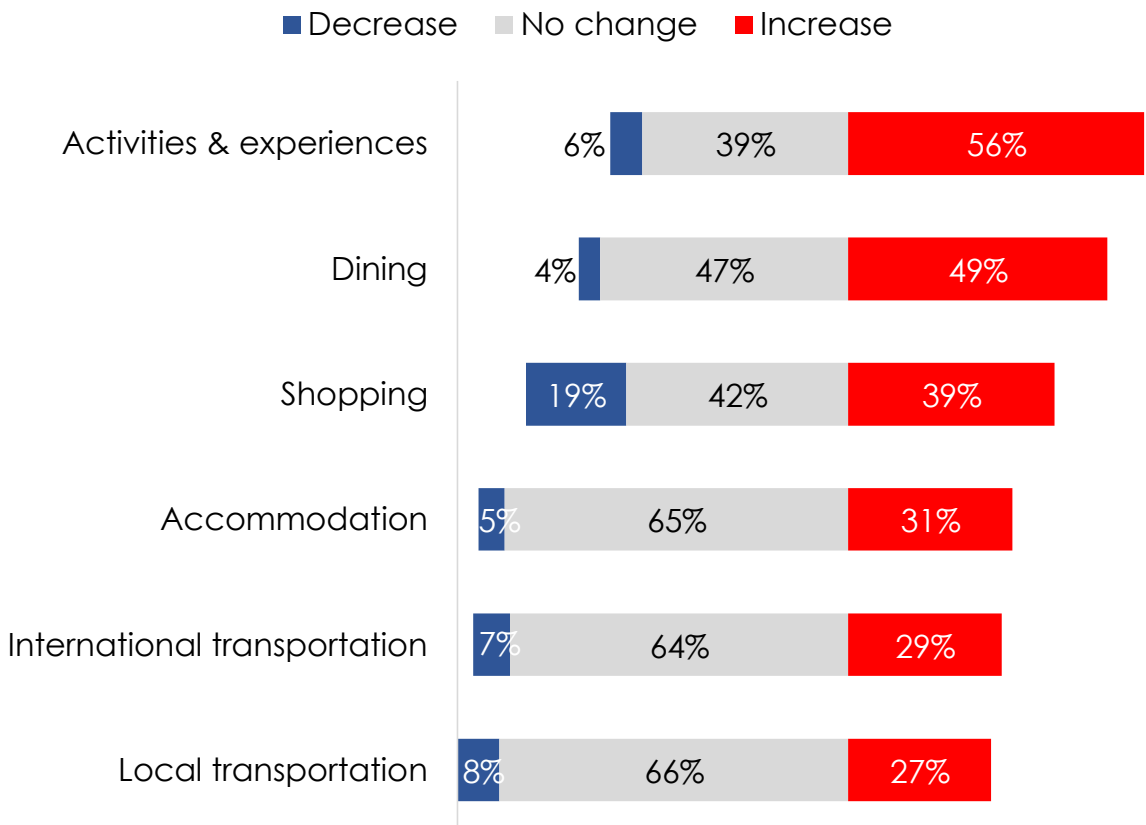
Photo by Tansu Topuzoğlu on Unsplash

Chinese travelers, especially young generations, are shifting towards experiential consumption

We asked respondents with previous outbound travel experience how they planned to adjust their travel spending for their next outbound trips. Surveyed travelers exhibited a shift towards experience-led consumption, with over half (56%) planning to increase spending on activities and experiences, and 49% planning to increase spending on dining. Young travelers aged 18-24 showed a stronger intention to increase spending across all categories compared to travelers from other age groups (see Appendix A for detailed data). Fewer than one-third of respondents planned to increase spending on accommodation (31%) or transportation (international: 29%; local: 27%).

For your next outbound trip, how do you expect to change your spending in the following categories?

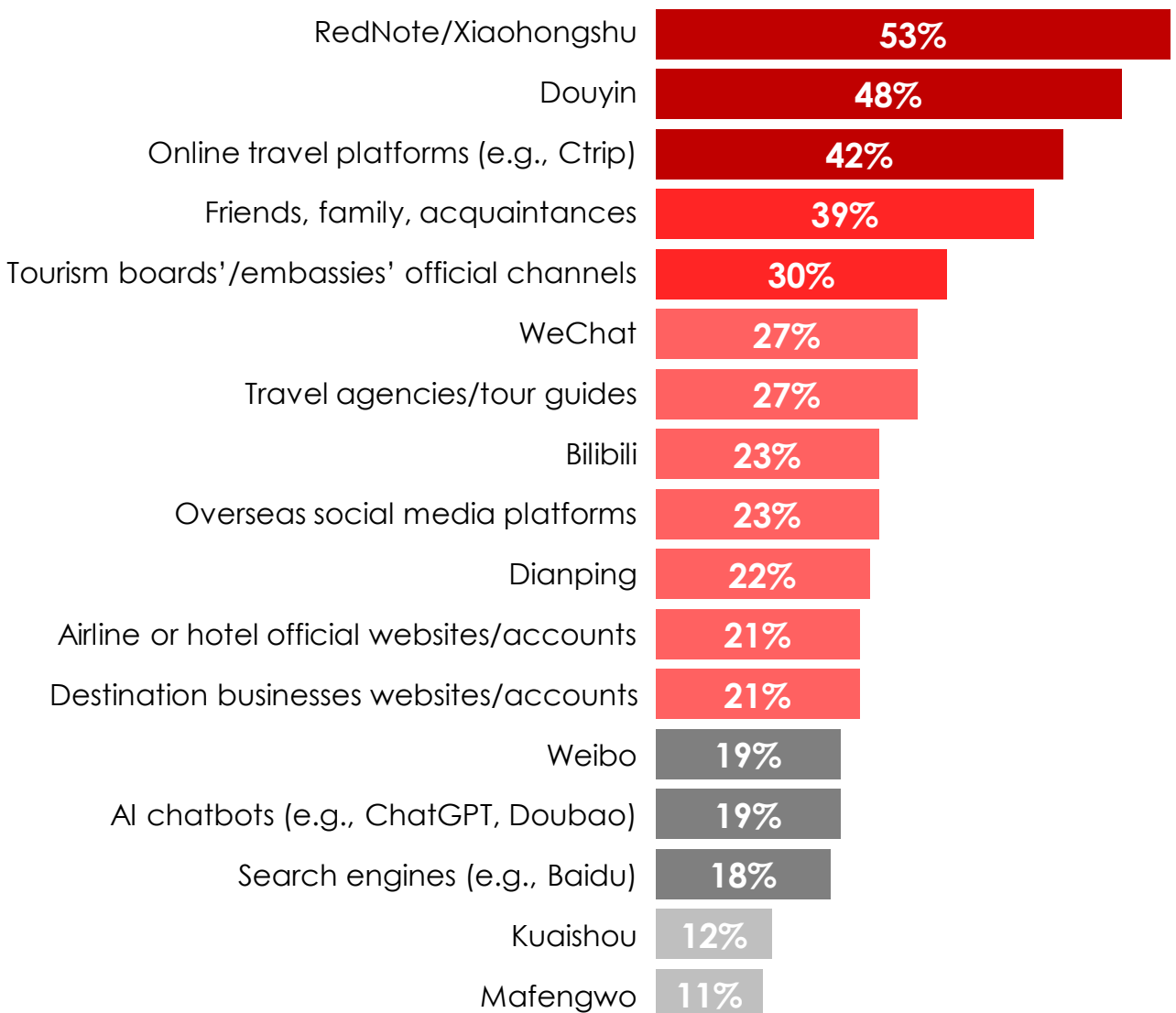
N=493



RedNote remains the leading information source, while older travelers rely more on word of mouth and travel agencies

Consistent with the results of our previous surveys, RedNote (Xiaohongshu) remains the top source of outbound travel information, chosen by 53% of respondents in this survey. Following closely are Douyin (48%), another social media platform, as well as online travel platforms such as Ctrip (42%). While friends, family and acquaintances are an important information source for all age groups (39%), these personal recommendations are particularly influential among travelers aged 45-65 (49%; see Appendix B). Travel agencies and tour guides are another widely used channel among this age group (36%).

Chinese travelers: Channels used for outbound travel information (N=1038)



Chinese travelers are inspired by social media to explore diverse destinations for their scenery, leisure, culture, and convenience

When asked which outbound destinations they were most inspired to visit on social media, Chinese travelers mentioned a wide range of places, from Asian destinations such as the Maldives and Japan to more distant ones such as Iceland, New Zealand, and even Antarctica. Natural scenery is the biggest draw, while cultural and leisure experiences – as well as practical considerations such as visa policy, safety, language and value for money – also impact Chinese travelers' wish lists. [See Appendix C for additional data.]

In the past year, which overseas destination have you been most inspired to visit by social media? What aspects attracted you the most?



Natural Scenery

- Maldives
- Switzerland
- New Zealand
- Iceland

"Maldives has quiet islands and crystal-blue ocean, a relaxing escape away from the noise of the city."

"I want to see the Northern Lights in Iceland."



Leisure & Enjoyment

- South Korea
- Thailand
- Dubai

"South Korea – it has lots of food options and convenient shopping."

"I was inspired by Xiaohongshu posts on Chiang Mai, Thailand about ziplining, night markets, food, and temple visits."



Culture & Exotic Appeal

- Japan
- Russia
- Italy
- Egypt

"Russia, it has rich cultural heritage, and the people are warm and friendly."

"I want to visit Egypt to see the pyramids and experience its ancient culture."



Practical & Convenience

- Singapore
- Malaysia
- Hong Kong

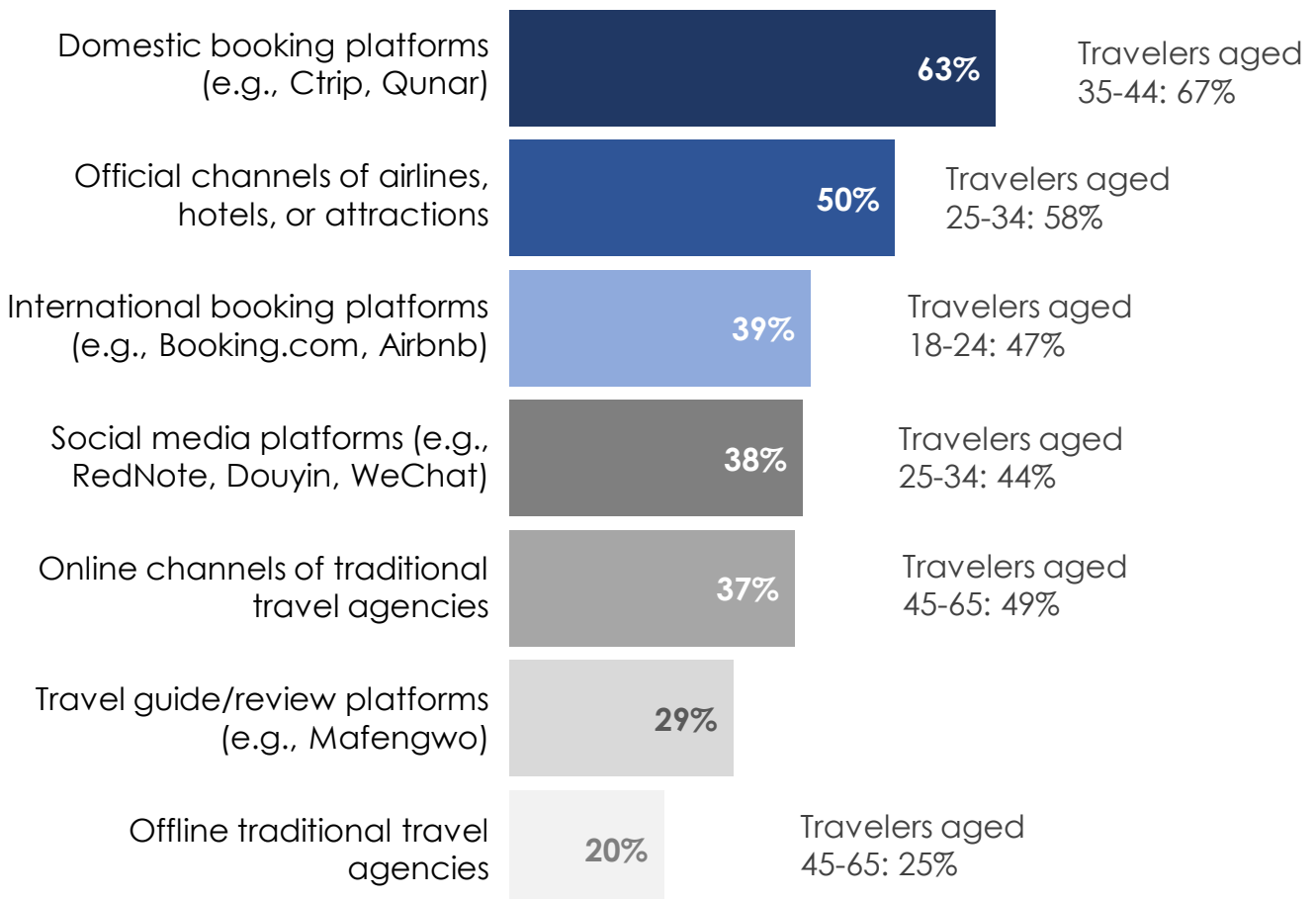
"Singapore – safer environment, more diverse food options, more Mandarin speakers, making communication easier and giving a stronger sense of security."

"Malaysia, for its convenient visa policy and moderate travel costs."

Chinese online booking platforms are the top choice for respondents of all ages

Chinese online booking platforms, such as Ctrip and Qunar have repeatedly been selected as the most common channel for booking outbound travel, chosen by 63% of respondents who had traveled outside of mainland China in the past. A further 50% said they usually book outbound travel through the official channels of airlines, hotels or attractions. International booking platforms (39%) rank as the third most common channel among Chinese outbound travelers, and they are more frequently used by travelers aged 18-24, with 47% of this age group selecting them. Online and offline channels of traditional travel agencies are more preferred by respondents aged 45-65, with 49% and 25% of this age group choosing them, respectively.

Chinese outbound travelers: Booking channels (N=493)



Wellness & Sports Travel



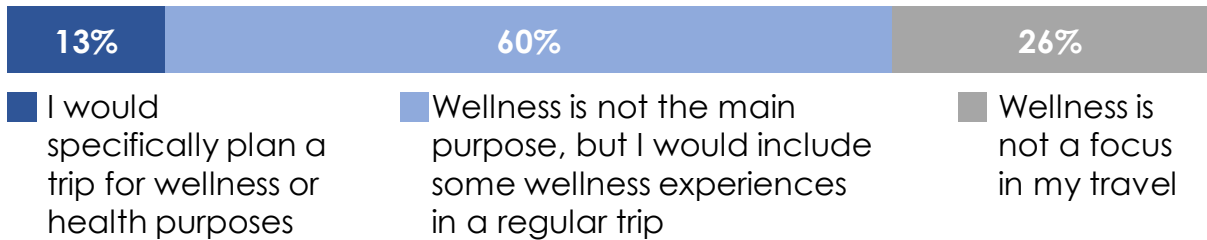
Driven by a growing focus on health and wellbeing and a desire for immersive, unique experiences, wellness and sports tourism is on the rise. We took a close look at this emerging segment, revealing Chinese tourists' attitudes towards wellness and sports experiences in travel, top popular activities, and their willingness to pay a premium.

Photo by Yannic Läderach on Unsplash

The majority of Chinese tourists are willing to engage in wellness travel, with relaxation being their main priority

How do Chinese tourists value wellness experiences while traveling? Our survey results show that while 60% of respondents do not consider wellness as the main purpose, they are willing to integrate some wellness experiences into their trips. 13% would plan a trip specially for wellness purposes. Chinese travelers find relaxation and stress relief the most appealing aspect of wellness experiences, with 81% of respondents selecting it. Around half consider wellness activities good opportunities to have unique experiences at the destination (51%), spend quality time with family or friends (48%), or enhance mental well-being (48%).

Which of the following best describes your preference for wellness-related travel? (N=1038)



Which aspects of wellness experiences during travel do you find most appealing? (N=1038)

Relaxation and stress relief, 81%

Unique experiences at the destination, 51%

Spending quality time with family or friends, 48%

Enhancing mental well-being, 48%

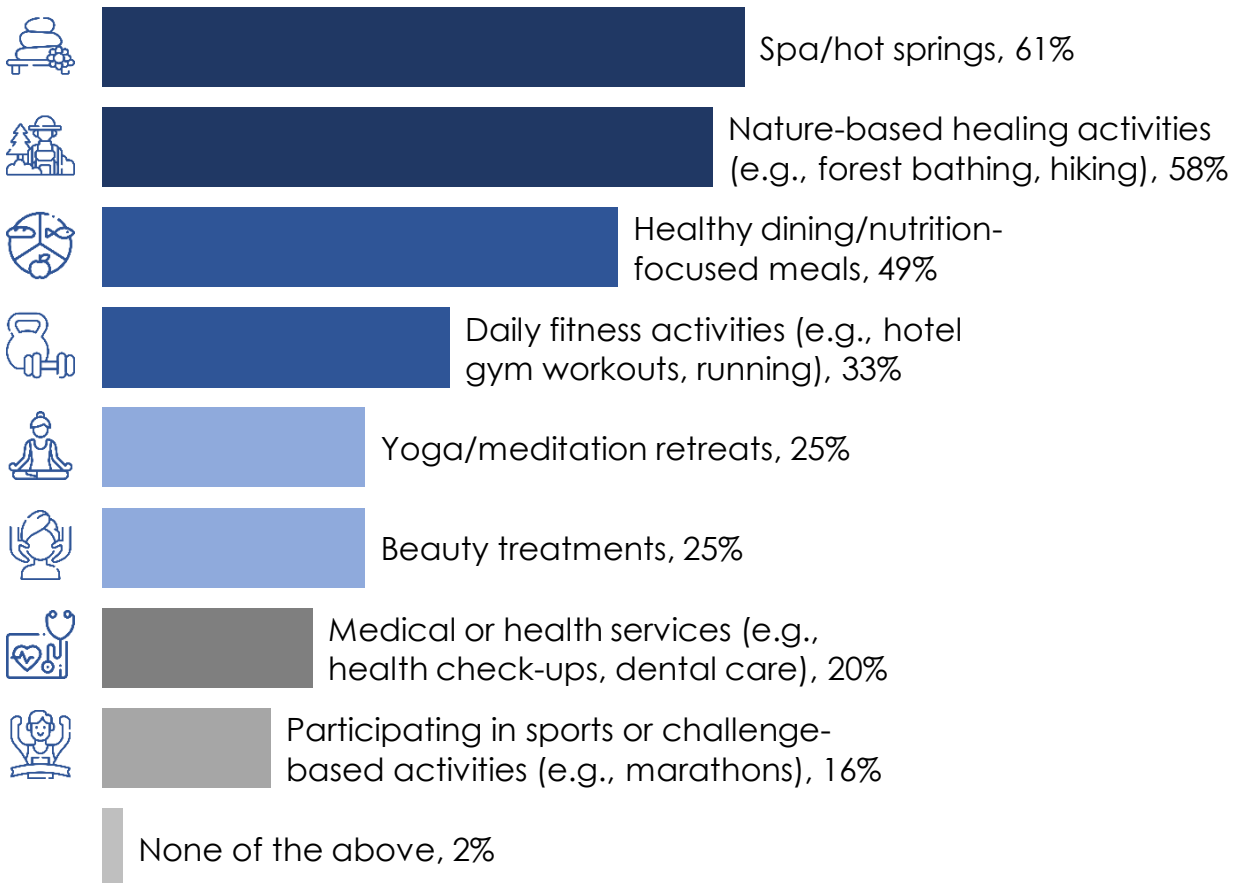
Improving physical health, 42%

None of the above, 1%

Popular wellness activities range from spa and hiking to healthy dining and fitness training

When it comes to specific wellness activities during outbound travel, spa and hot spring experiences are the most popular, chosen by 61% of respondents. Nature-based healing activities, such as forest bathing and hiking, followed closely behind at 58%. Other popular wellness activities among Chinese tourists include healthy dining, daily fitness exercises, yoga and meditation, and beauty treatments, highlighting the all-around appeal of wellness in travel.

During outbound travel, which of the following wellness-related activities would you consider participating in? (N=1038)

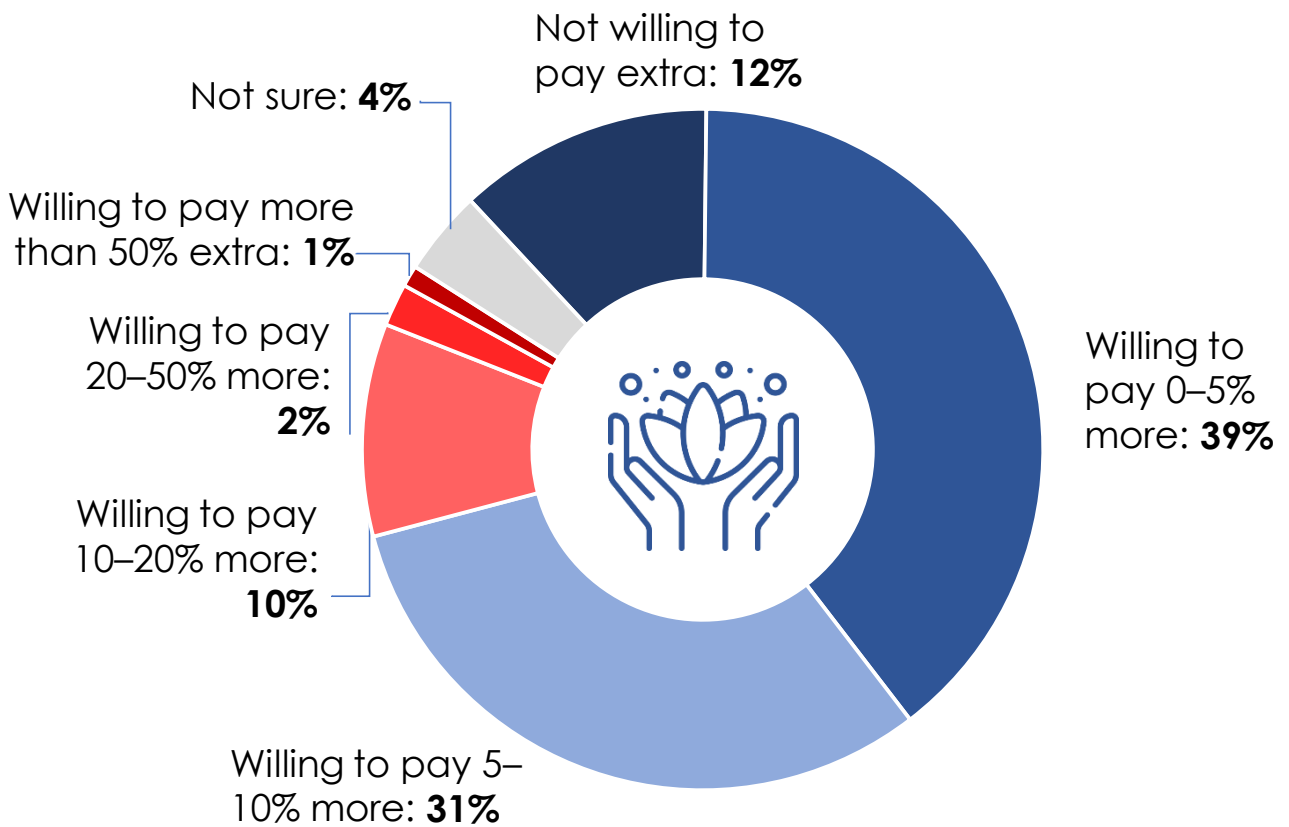


Icons from Freepik for Flaticon

8 out of 10 respondents are willing to pay extra for wellness experiences or services

84% of our survey respondents said they were willing to pay more for wellness experiences or services during outbound travel. However, the majority of them are only prepared to pay a limited premium. 70% of respondents said they would only consider additional charges of 10% or less for wellness activities when traveling outbound; 14% were willing to pay more than 10% extra.

How much extra would you be willing to pay for wellness-related experiences or services during outbound travel? (N=1038)



Icons from Freepik for Flaticon

Outdoor nature activities are the most popular sports experiences among outbound travelers

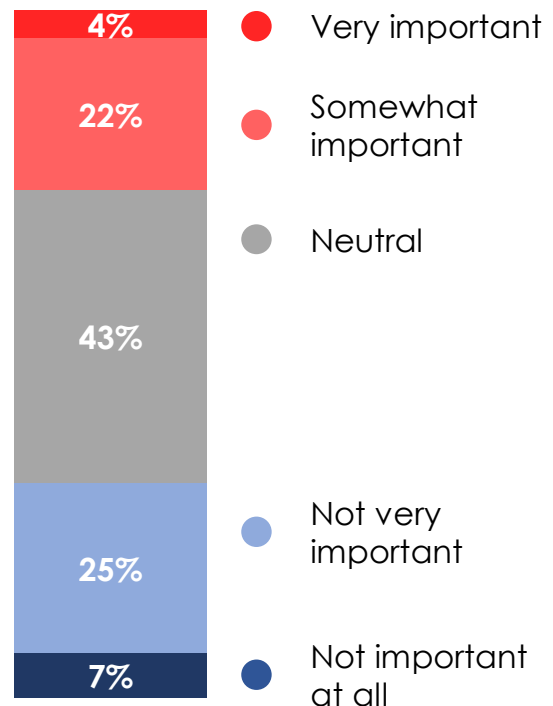
Among respondents who have traveled outbound in the past, 89% had participated in sports activities during their outbound trips, with outdoor nature activities such as hiking and cycling the most common, selected by 65%. 40% said they had participated in more demanding sports such as marathons and skiing while traveling outbound, followed by 36% who had visited famous sports venues, and 34% who had watched sports events.

On the other hand, only 26% of overall survey respondents consider sports experiences or resources to be important when choosing an outbound travel destination. Respondents who value sports in their destination choice skew towards male, young to middle age, family-oriented, and relatively affluent travelers (see Appendix D for more data).

During your past outbound trips, have you participated in the following sports-related activities? (N=493)



When choosing an outbound travel destination, how important are local sports-related experiences/resources to you? (N=1038)

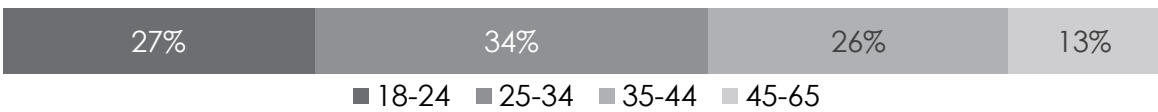


Methodology

From 16-20 March 2026, Dragon Trail Research conducted a 45-question survey on the overall sentiment of mainland Chinese travelers, using Tencent's survey panel. Our data cleaning process identified and removed invalid responses, resulting in a total of 1,038 valid responses.

Respondent age, gender, and city of residence were controlled with quotas to reflect market distribution status.

Age



Gender



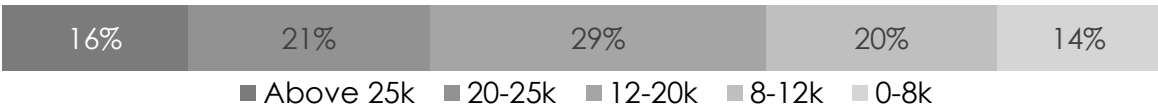
City of residence



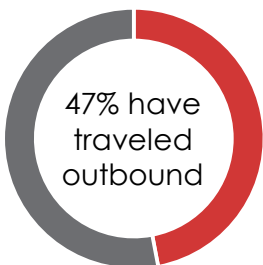
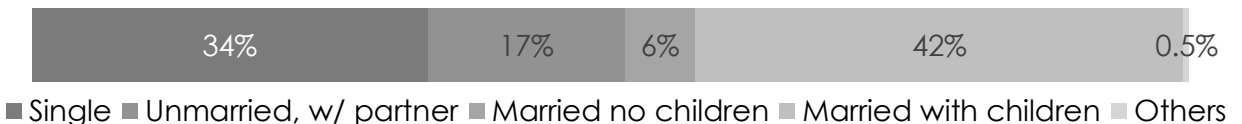
Education



Monthly salary (RMB)

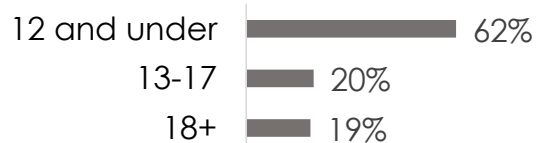


Family



All survey respondents had interest in outbound travel. 47% had previously traveled outbound.

Age of Children



Appendix A

Percentages of respondents expecting to increase spending in the following categories for their next outbound trips, by age group

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-65
<i>base</i>	493	79	203	152	59
Activities & experiences	56%	62%	59%	56%	37%
Dining	49%	58%	50%	44%	48%
Shopping	39%	46%	45%	35%	24%
Accommodation	31%	44%	33%	29%	10%
International transportation	29%	32%	31%	31%	15%
Local transportation	27%	35%	22%	28%	25%

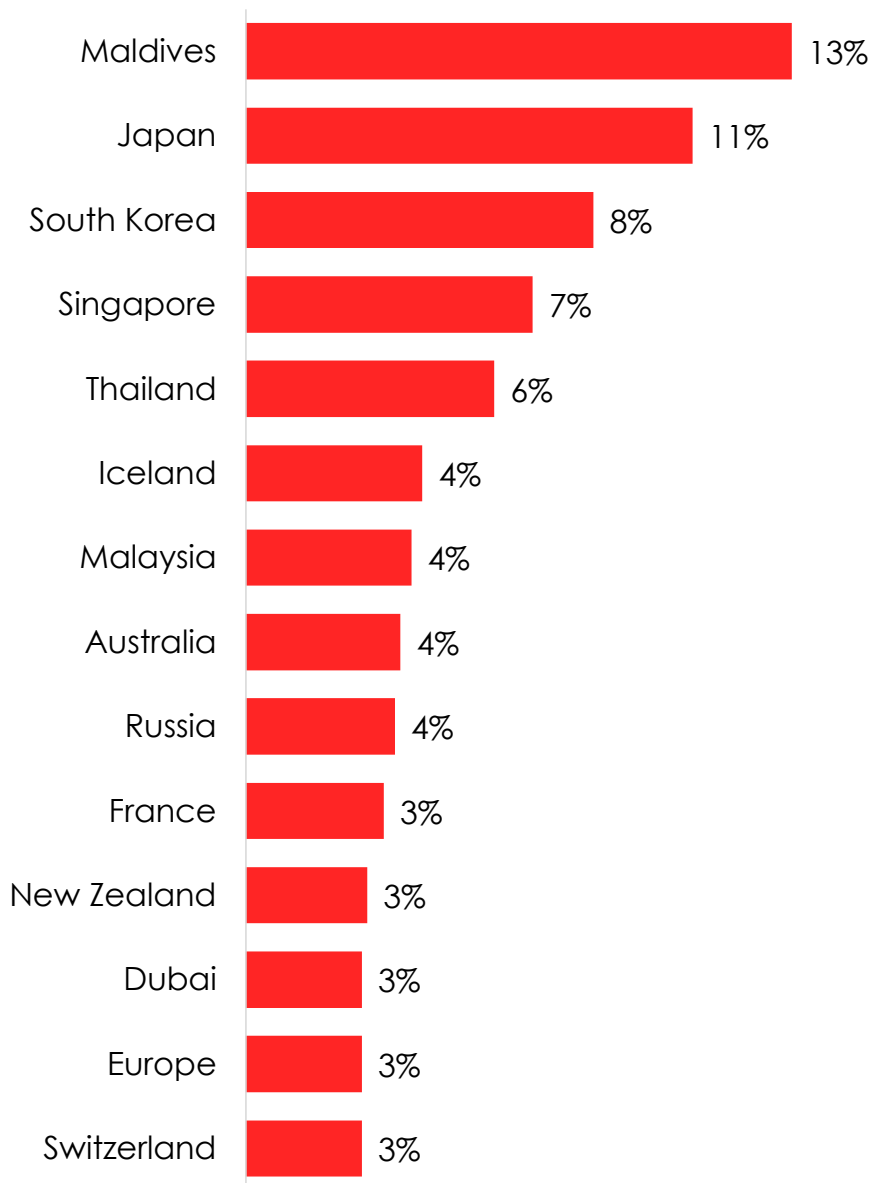
Appendix B

Top channels used for destination information by Chinese travelers, by age group

	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-65
<i>base</i>	1038	276	357	265	140
RedNote/Xiaohongshu	53%	59%	61%	49%	26%
Douyin	48%	57%	45%	45%	39%
Online travel platforms (e.g., Ctrip)	42%	37%	39%	49%	49%
Friends, family, acquaintances	39%	36%	38%	39%	49%
Tourism boards' / embassies' official channels	30%	30%	32%	26%	28%
WeChat	27%	24%	26%	30%	31%
Travel agencies/tour guides	27%	21%	26%	30%	36%

Appendix C

Top mentioned overseas destinations that respondents were most inspired to visit by social media in the past year
By share of mentions, n=760



Appendix D

Demographic profile of respondents who think sports-related experiences or resources are important when choosing an outbound destination vs. overall respondents

	Overall respondents	Sports-driven travelers
<i>Base</i>	1038	272
City of residence		
Tier 1	23%	23%
New Tier 1	32%	34%
Tier 2	36%	33%
Tier 3 and below	9%	10%
Age		
18-24	27%	21%
25-34	34%	38%
35-44	26%	30%
45-65	14%	11%
Gender		
Male	47%	55%
Female	53%	45%
Whether have children		
No children	57%	50%
Have children	44%	50%
Monthly household income (RMB)		
Above 25k	17%	22%
20-25k	21%	23%
12-20k	29%	31%
8-12k	20%	16%
8k and below	14%	8%



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