

Rise of the solo traveler

Tourism industry opens up to the large number of single holidaymakers happy to go it alone

By SHI JING

Traveling alone is becoming increasingly popular as a new type of tourist emerges from China.

In a survey by the country's largest online travel agency Ctrip, about 15 percent of those booking breaks last year appeared to be single, an increase of 10.4 percent compared to 2015.

Up to 41 percent of those choosing to travel alone were aged between 19 and 30, and most were unmarried, although the report did not disclose detailed figures.

"Traveling by yourself these days seems to be a way of pursuing a kind of spirituality," said Shi Yuzhuan, chief marketing officer of Ctrip's tourism division. "It is extremely popular among young people nowadays."

Online outlets have enabled more individuals to travel alone. Booking air tickets, hotel rooms and trips to scenic spots can be done with a click or two.

If single consumers need help, they can always call a travel consultant on their smartphone.

"People no longer feel helpless when traveling by themselves," Shi said.

According to Ctrip, singles from major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen are more than happy to travel alone.

In terms of destinations, Lijiang and Kunming in Southwest China's Yunnan province, and Jiuzhaigou in Sichuan province, also in the southwest, are the most popular domestic routes.

Seoul, Hong Kong and Bangkok top the list for overseas trips. Of those traveling alone, up to 58 percent were women.

Zhao Lei is a marketing manager at a multinational beverage company in Shanghai and takes at least five trips each year.

With disposable income to play with, she mostly travels to overseas destinations.

"I have no plans of saving for marriage," the 36-year-old said. "If



A tourist participates in a local Miao ethnic tradition in Liuzhou, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

TAN KAIXING / FOR CHINA DAILY

58
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getting married will affect my travel plans, I would rather remain single."

When asked about the reasons for traveling alone, most of those interviewed by Ctrip said they enjoyed the freedom.

Meeting new friends and even starting a relationship also appealed to them.

Li Kai is a programmer with an Internet company in Beijing and prefers traveling alone than going with friends. This gives him the chance to meet more people during his trips.

"My life is already quite mundane," the 27-year-old said. "I look at codes all day and my circle is very small."

"I prefer to travel on my own so that I can make new friends," Li

added. "These trips are also more challenging."

Ctrip's survey found that 98 percent of people traveling on their own were satisfied with the experience. This was a far higher rate than those taking off with friends or family.

"That is partly because the travel packages in the market are more suited to singles than to families or friends," said Liu Deqian, a tourism researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Cooking up tasty profits

Surging revenue in the online food delivery business is being fueled by the singles market

By ZHU WENQIAN

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Single people appear to be hanging up their spatulas, or *guo chan* in Chinese, and picking up smartphones to order takeaway meals.

Cooking looks as if it is going out of fashion with people who live alone, boosting the online food delivery business.

"According to my experiences, there are barely any singles who are willing to cook," said Yang Gengshen, spokesman of Ele.me, one of China's largest online food delivery companies.

Last year, revenue from China's food delivery market surged 44 percent compared with 2015, figures released by consultancy Bain & Company highlighted, although detailed numbers were scarce.

"Sales revenue in the food delivery sector is expected to continue to grow, with the change of consumption behavior of young people," said

Neil Wang, China president at consultancy Frost & Sullivan.

"Besides, food delivery has helped restaurants to increase their efficiency," Wang added.

In the first six months, fast-growing startup Ele.me reported that its revenue jumped 127 percent year-on-year. In late August, the company announced the purchase of Baidu Waimai, a food delivery division that was part of search engine giant Baidu.

The move is expected to strengthen Ele.me's position in the industry, which is being fueled by the singles market.

Rival Meituan-Dianping also revealed that 65 percent of its orders are from unmarried consumers.

"Chinese cuisine is complicated and requires a great amount of time to cook," said Wang Puzhong, general manager of the food delivery department at Meituan-Dianping.

"Singles regard cooking as a waste of time."



A deliveryman from Ele.me waits to pick up an order in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY