

Red tourists salute history

These trips are a growing tribute to the people who sacrificed their lives for a worthy cause

By CHEN MEILING

chenmeiling@chinadaily.com.cn

Young Chinese people are showing a growing interest in "red tourism", travel industry insiders said.

Red tourism refers to trips to places known for their association with the evolution of the Communist Party of China or CPC, and related aspects like history, culture and heritage.

Such trips are designed to sensitize younger generations to China's modern history, and to inspire them to pursue excellence, so that their expected achievements in their respective fields would contribute to China's progress, in line with the economic development trend of the last few decades.

Red tourism is also inspiring travel firms to develop innovative services, experts said.

Data from online travel agency Ctrip showed that 39 percent of travelers who opted for red tours from January to May were aged 19 to 38. Those aged 39 to 58, the group that traditionally constituted the majority among red tourists, accounted for 32 percent of the total in the same period.

The number of red tourists born after 2000 this January-May period has increased by 60 percent year-on-year, bringing down the average age of red tourists from 32 in 2015 to 28 this year, Ctrip said.

According to Chinese travel website Mafengwo, most of the top 10 destinations during this year's summer vacation (July to August) are third- and fourth-tier cities where significant CPC events had taken place in the past, or the hometowns of important persons in Chinese



Tourists negotiate the Luding Bridge across the Dadu River in Southwest China's Sichuan province. Associated with the Long March, the site is popular on the red tourism circuit. WANG HUABIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

modern history.

These places include Jiaxing in East China's Zhejiang province, where the birth of the CPC was announced from a red boat on the local South Lake in 1921; and Xiangtan in Central China's Hunan province, the hometown of Chairman Mao.

Yao Weichan, 32, a government official in Hunan province, said she visited Chongqing on her own in 2013 and her first local destination was Zhazi Cave, where CPC members were tortured and killed while being held as prisoners by Kuomin-

tang back in the 1940s.

"I want to visit that place on my feet to experience and feel history," she said, adding the attraction was full of tourists, which showed today's generation believes in paying tribute to the people who laid down their lives for a worthy cause.

This year, she and her colleagues also visited the site in Shanghai where the first CPC National Congress was held, saying she was "quite impressed by the faith of CPC members at that time".

Tourists made around 1.15 billion trips to red tourism sites in 2016,

up almost 12 percent from 2015. Tourism-related income from these sites grew 17.2 percent to reach about 306.1 billion yuan (\$44.8 billion) in 2016, according to Tuniu, another major online travel agency.

Xing Xiaoliang, an analyst with market consultancy Analysys, said red tourism is an important category for China's tourism industry. Red tourism has great growth potential, he said.

Xing also said schools invite students and companies their employees to go on red tours, to expand their knowledge about Chinese history.

Besides, since many of these spots are scenic and located in poor and little-known regions, the growing flow of tourists will help boost regional economic growth, he said.

The National Development and Reform Commission also encourages cities to improve construction of infrastructural facilities and preservation of historical relics, to attract more people and improve the satisfaction of visitors, according to a plan for boosting red tourism released in November last year.

Feng Rao, who leads tourism research at Mafengwo, said many attractions have been developed using innovative travel products, so as to improve visitor experience, which helps red tourism to gain popularity among young people.

At a red tourism attraction of Pocun village in Lingshui Li autonomous county, South China's Hainan province, tourists get to wear the uniform of the Chinese Red Army, wait in line to get their "quota" of rice, vegetables and meat, after handing in their "food coupons".

Retro style post offices, canteens and bicycles recreate scenes from the past. To make red tourism more fun, the city of Shanghai has designed games for travelers, who would have to solve puzzles in poems or voice recordings, and find clues in different local red tourism sites, in order to complete the task of "rescuing CPC members in prison", according to a report in The Paper.

"Red tourism-themed products generally sell well on online travel websites. And we are glad to see they are no longer monotonous exhibitions of old desks, chairs or photos," Li Qiuyan, brand development manager of travel service website Lvma, said in an online report.

>> FROM PAGE 24

end accommodation in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Sapporo found their orders soar over 80 percent year-on-year.

Tokyo tops the list of most popular overseas destinations this summer, with the number of bookings for hotel rooms in the city expanding by nearly 100 percent over the same period last year, according to Ctrip.

Sapporo, which is cooler when it is hot summer in China, saw an increase of 89 percent in hotel room bookings. Besides, compared with spring this year, the average hotel room rate in Sapporo climbed 43 percent over the past season, whereas the hotel room rate in Kyoto added only 1 percent.

Meanwhile, customer bookings for rooms at children-friendly hotels have witnessed a significant growth

as young families are traveling more. This summer, the tropical islands of Southeast Asian countries have become the most well-received destinations for those tourists traveling with their children, Ctrip found.

Bali island in Indonesia, Costa Rica in Latin America, Phuket island, Koh Samui, Krabi and Pattaya in Thailand, Langkawi and Kota Kinabalu in Malaysia — these are all listed among the top 10 most popular destinations with children-friendly hotels. Among these, hotels in Pattaya and Kota Kinabalu saw a 50 percent rise in occupancy this summer.

"More airlines have launched direct flights between China and Southeast Asian countries, and the number of Chinese tourists who travel to the region is rising rapidly, given its proximity and relatively easier visa policies," Xie said.

Currently, 120 million Chinese hold valid passports. This means, 90 percent of the Chinese population has not traveled abroad yet, indicating a significant growth potential for outbound tourism.

Sun Jie, CEO of Ctrip, said earlier this year that by 2020, around 240 million Chinese citizens are expected to hold passports, and this will further spur the boom in the outbound tourism market.

The China Tourism Academy said in its report in June that 131 million Chinese mainland tourists traveled to Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and the rest of the world last year, up 7 percent year-on-year. The corresponding figure was 8.42 million in 1978 when the reform and opening-up began. So, the number grew an average 15.5 percent annually.

Recently, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

and Belarus in Europe and Zimbabwe in Africa have introduced visa-free or visa-on-arrival policies for Chinese tourists. As of July, there are 72 countries and regions that have introduced either visa-free or visa-on-arrival policies for Chinese citizens.

This summer, the largest number of Chinese travelers who applied for tourist visas to visit foreign countries were from Shanghai, Beijing; Guangzhou and Shenzhen in South China's Guangdong province, Nanjing in East China's Jiangsu province, and Chengdu in Southwest China's Sichuan province, respectively.

Compared to last summer, the number of visa seekers from those cities grew 50 percent to 160 percent, according to the Ctrip report.

Those born in the 1970s and 1980s accounted for the majority. Travelers who were born after 2000 made up

nearly 20 percent, and most of them traveled abroad for the first time with their parents, Ctrip said.

Japan, Thailand, Singapore, the United States, Malaysia, Australia, Canada and France, were among the countries that received the most visa applications from Chinese travelers this summer.

Japan saw its number of visa applications from China surge 142 percent over last summer, and the number jumped 66 percent for Australia, the report said.

According to global marketing consultancy Accenture, travel firms should customize products to suit individual tastes, so as to meet the demands of different tourists. For these days, some seek adventure and thrills, and some a more luxurious experience, while others may be cost-conscious.