

# Initiatives bolster global tourism

Belt and Road among China-led plans that encourage the flow of people between countries, forum hears

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The China-led Belt and Road Initiative and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area will provide new growth engines for the development of the global tourism economy, an industry playing an increasingly crucial role in driving socioeconomic progress, officials and industry experts say.

These remarks were made at the opening ceremony of the Global Tourism Economy Forum (GTEF), held in Macao from Oct 23 to 24.

Gao Yunlong, chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, said the BRI has promoted cooperation between countries and regions, and “that will definitely create huge room for the development of the tourism industry”.

“As economic globalization deepens and the Chinese mainland makes greater efforts on reform and opening-up, especially when President Xi Jinping raised the concept of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, the country’s tourism is embracing a ‘golden age,’” he said.

Zurab Pololikashvili, secretary-general of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), said better infrastructure in the Bay Area, including the newly opened Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, will make travel in the region more convenient and encourage the flow of people.

According to the UNWTO, interna-



Macao Chief Executive Fernando Chui Sai-on (center, front row) and other guests attend the opening ceremony of the Global Tourism Economy Forum on Oct 23.

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tional tourism generated \$1.6 trillion in export earnings and international tourist arrivals reached approximately 1.3 billion last year, representing a 7 percent year-on-year growth.

The organization forecasts international tourist arrivals to rise between 4 and 5 percent this year.

A report by the World Travel and Tourism Council shows that the travel and tourism sector accounted for 10.4 percent of global GDP and generated 313 million jobs, or 9.9 percent of total employment, in 2017.

“Tourism has already become an industry that plays an important role

in and has a widespread impact on social and economic development,” noted Gao of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce.

As a popular tourism destination, Macao is determined to make a big contribution toward this development. It is striving to build itself into a world center of tourism and leisure, and a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between the Chinese mainland and Portuguese-speaking countries — or “one center, one platform”.

Holding the forum in Macao can help the city create more space for

regional cooperation and promote innovation in the development of the industry, said Fernando Chui Sai-on, chief executive of Macao.

Edmund Ho Hau-wah, vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and forum chairman, said it is important for Macao to give full play to its function as “one center, one platform”.

It should take advantage of its strengths in connecting the Chinese mainland and the West to drive sustainable development of the global tourism economy, Ho added.

Since its establishment in 2012, GTEF has become a platform for world leaders, tourism ministers, international CEOs and industry experts to share their insights on the opportunities and challenges presented by the global tourism economy amid a fast-changing environment.

Themed Strategic Partnership in a New Era, Rising Momentum for a Shared Future, the two-day event featured a range of activities, including forums, business matching, exhibitions, workshops and cultural activities.

## Big data brings big changes to travelers

New technologies like mobile payments are helping companies at home and abroad attract more Chinese tourists

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Mobile payments and the use of big data have helped shore up Chinese tourist arrivals in Europe, industry executives said during a forum on global tourism, held in Macao from Oct 23 to 24.

In a speech delivered at the opening of the Global Tourism Economy Forum, Jane Jie Sun, CEO of online travel services provider Ctrip, said her company invests in artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, deep learning and data analysis to “help our partners better understand our customers”.

Shanghai-based Ctrip is China’s biggest online travel agency. Its partners include airlines and hotels, allowing Chinese travelers to book

everything they need through one website.

Sun said Ctrip has over 300 million users, and by deep diving into data the company gathers from these online bookings, Ctrip can help its customers “to make a seamless, satisfying and safe trip to Europe”.

Sun noted that Europe is attracting more Chinese tourists thanks to increased flights and improved visa facilitation. And while in the past travelers would visit Europe via package tours, an increasing number of Chinese tourists now prefer to travel independently rather than join organized groups.

Ctrip helps travelers customize their trips through an application to book airplane tickets and hotel rooms, rent a car, hire tour guides and reserve seats in upscale restau-

rants, she added.

Sun said travel safety is a priority, and Ctrip offers travel insurance and a 24-hour emergency relief SOS service. “We want to make sure that no matter where our customers are, they are well-protected and well-served,” she said.

For Desiree Bollier, chairperson and global chief merchant of the Bicester Village Shopping Collection, her company’s partnership with Chinese financial services firm UnionPay has helped in tailoring products and services for Chinese clients.

Bicester Village, based in Oxfordshire in England, is a renowned shopping destination. Its boutiques offer discounted fashion brands that have been attracting Chinese tourists in recent years.

Bollier said data gathered through

the partnership “accelerate our understanding of what the Chinese guests like to eat, what they like to shop, what kind of services they’re expecting”.

By getting “local knowledge” about Chinese customers, Bollier said that Bicester shops and restaurants were able to cater more to their Chinese clients. They hired bilingual staff and offered personal shopping services.

Ge Huayong, chairman of China UnionPay, said the company plans to promote mobile payments in Bicester to cater to Chinese consumers’ needs.

Bollier said most of Bicester Village’s stores have yet to accept mobile payments, but the company is changing direction due to its partnership with UnionPay. “Electronic wallet is here to stay,” she said, noting that Bicester Village must adapt to pay-

ment technology “because without it we’re completely non-relevant”.

China is now the world’s largest source of international tourists, according to the latest report issued by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). It said China continues to lead global outbound travel in terms of expenditure. Chinese travelers spent nearly \$260 billion in 2017, or nearly twice that of the US, the second-biggest spender, with \$135 billion.

The UNWTO report also noted that Europe is a popular destination for Chinese tourists, with about 54 percent of them classified as free independent travelers. Most of these tourists are in the 30-49 age group and use mobile payments, eliminating the risk of carrying cash and avoiding currency exchange fluctuations.