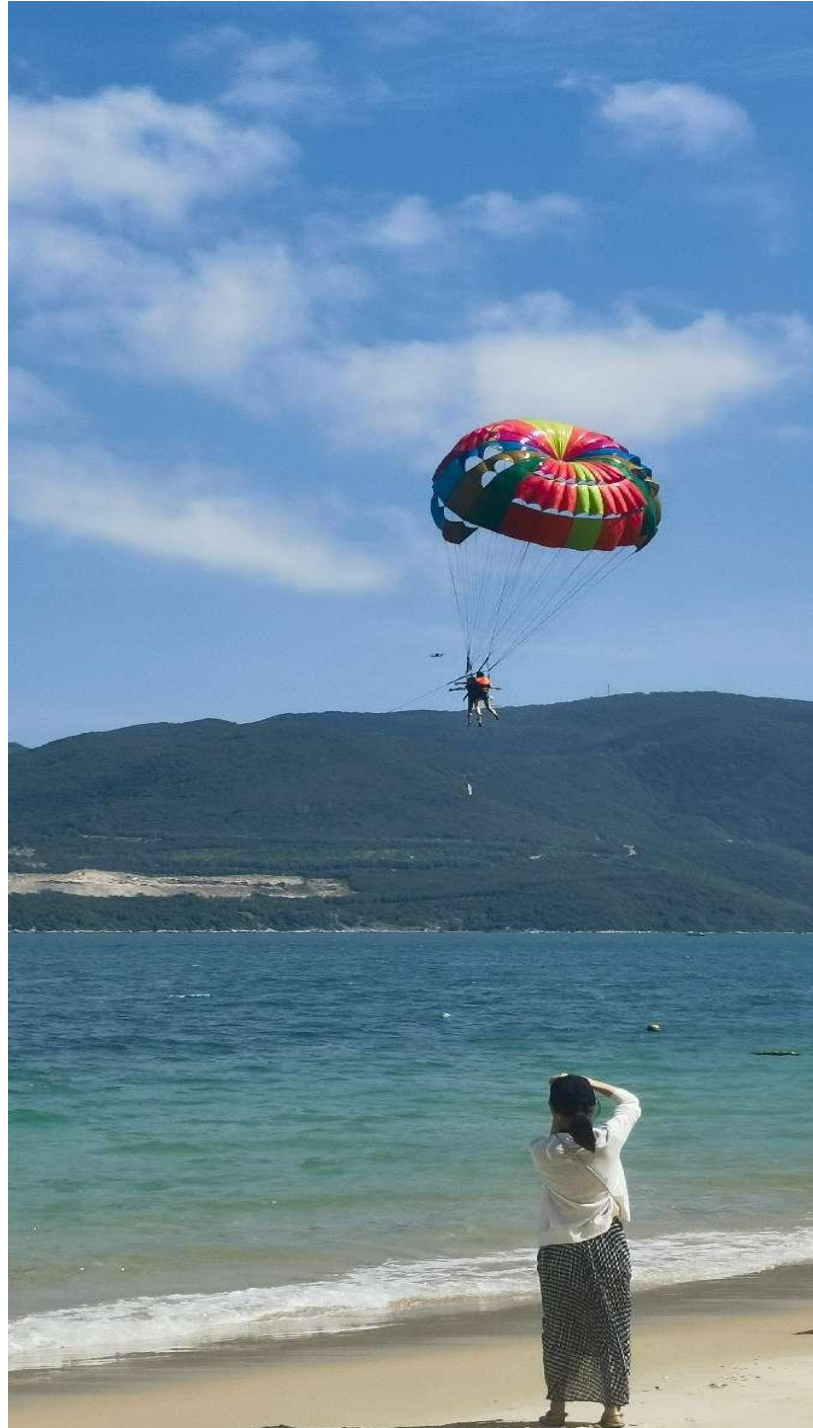




28th February 2025
Editor in chief: Daniel Zheng
Editor: Jessica XU, Liz Zhou



Flying even higher in the next 25 years!
HOPE team in Nha Trang to celebrate company's 25th Anniversary!

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Inside HOPE

Celebrating HOPE's 25th Anniversary with us in 2025----Team Building tour in Vietnam

Founded in 2000, HOPE International Education is now 25 years old from 2025! A team-building trip to Nha Trang, Vietnam in February marked another milestone of the company as well as a the beginning of a series of celebrations!

As a professional organization specializing in international education cooperation and training, recruiting and promotion for overseas institutions in the Chinese market, over the 25 years, HOPE help more than 30000 students enter the top institutions at all levels in the UK, US, Australia,Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, Ireland and HK region. Besides, HOPE assisted more than 40 domestic universities, secondary schools, international and bilingual schools, vocational colleges establishing joint programme, institutional links, sister school relations with more than 35 overseas institutions.



Team Building in Vietnam to Celebrate 25th Anniversary

The 4-day team building in Vietnam witnessed a review of the success the company achieved in the past 25 years, an awarding ceremony for the annual top-performing staff, and the team spirit from staff across different offices. It was beyond the celebration itself. The whole team reaffirms its mission of ‘Driving Education Forward’ and their determination, that is, not to seek quantity only but quality, not to seek size of business only but a sustainable development of the company in a long run.



Team Building in Vietnam to Celebrate 25th Anniversary

For student services, the role of HOPE is not only limited to helping students get offer, but also a one-stop service for academic and career planning and development.

The journey to Nha Trang has a time to return, but the education mission has no end. It is HOPE's greatest asset to walk through 25 years in a down-to-earth way, doing something extraordinary and meaningful in supporting students personal development.

Events Forecast

HOPE School Link Forum and School/Summer Camp Fair 18th - 19th April 2025

Linking with Chinese schools for recruitment is a cost-effective promotional strategy for overseas schools in China. As education globalizes, more Chinese primary and secondary schools are forming partnerships with overseas schools for exchanges. This is supported by local education authorities. Overseas schools can promote their programmes, seek opportunities like teacher training, and enhance their profiles through these partnerships. The Forum, organized by HOPE International Education and SEAIE, offers a chance to meet Chinese schools in Shanghai and nearby areas. About 30-40 principals will attend, with activities including speeches, discussions, appointments, and networking. A school and summer camp fair will follow in the next day. Below is the itinerary:

Date	Time	Event
17 th April Thur	18:30 - 21:00	Welcome dinner reception
18 th April Fri	08:30 - 13:30	School Link Forum followed by lunch reception
19 th April Sat	13:30 - 17:00	School and Summer Camp Fair

Cost

The cost for the events (both School Link Forum and School and Study Tour Fair) is £1000 (or equivalent RMB or USD at Bank of China selling exchange rate of the date of invoice). International travel, inter-city transport, hotel accommodation and other costs not specified are not included.

Service included:

1. Full promotion package arranged by HOPE including media advertisements and editorial, website advertisement, direct mails in local institutions; Translation and counseling service (stand assistance) during the forum, workshop, fair and interview if have;
2. Welcome dinner, venue and lunch during the forum, venue for the fair;
3. Hotel booking at corporate rate (accommodation cost will be paid by institution direct to hotel);
4. Post-event follow-ups and coordination for school links



2024 School Link Forum and School Fair held by HOPE

Please contact Alice Zhang, International Partnership Manager, for more details by email to event@hope-studyabroad.com

HOPE's Annual Charity Event for Autistic Children 29th March 2025

HOPE has been working with Shanghai Clover Autistic Children Rehabilitation Centre for decade to raise the awareness of the general public on autism and supporting the autistic children and their families. A series of events have been organized by HOPE and Shanghai Clover including charity walk, charity cycling, charity photo contest, auction and charity sales of autistic children's painting in the past 10 years. 4 years ago, HOPE and Shanghai Clover also launched a training course for volunteers that over 100 students has participated via different forms so far.



Charity walk in Shanghai, Hangzhou and Nanjing 2024

This year, HOPE will organize this annual event in Shanghai Botanical Garden on the morning of **29th March, Saturday, 2025**. The event will include hiking, Charity Sales, Autism Quiz competition and prize awarding for the winners. This is to raise the awareness of autism among the general public before the World Autism Awareness Day on 2nd April. We are expecting to attract 300-400 people from our students, parents, partner schools and universities. If you are interested and if you are still in Shanghai, you are very welcome to attend. There is also sponsorship opportunity for our partners institutions. For more details about participation and sponsorship, please contact Liz Zhou, Marketing Service Manager via l.zhou@hope-studyabroad.com.

INSIDE HOPE --- Photo news of February



Visit from Charterhouse School Malaysia



Visit from University of Reading

After Chinese New Year, HOPE Shanghai Office welcomed visiting representatives from overseas schools and universities, including University of Reading, University of Essex, Charterhouse School Malaysia. More are expected to visit HOPE Shanghai, Hangzhou and Nanjing in March.



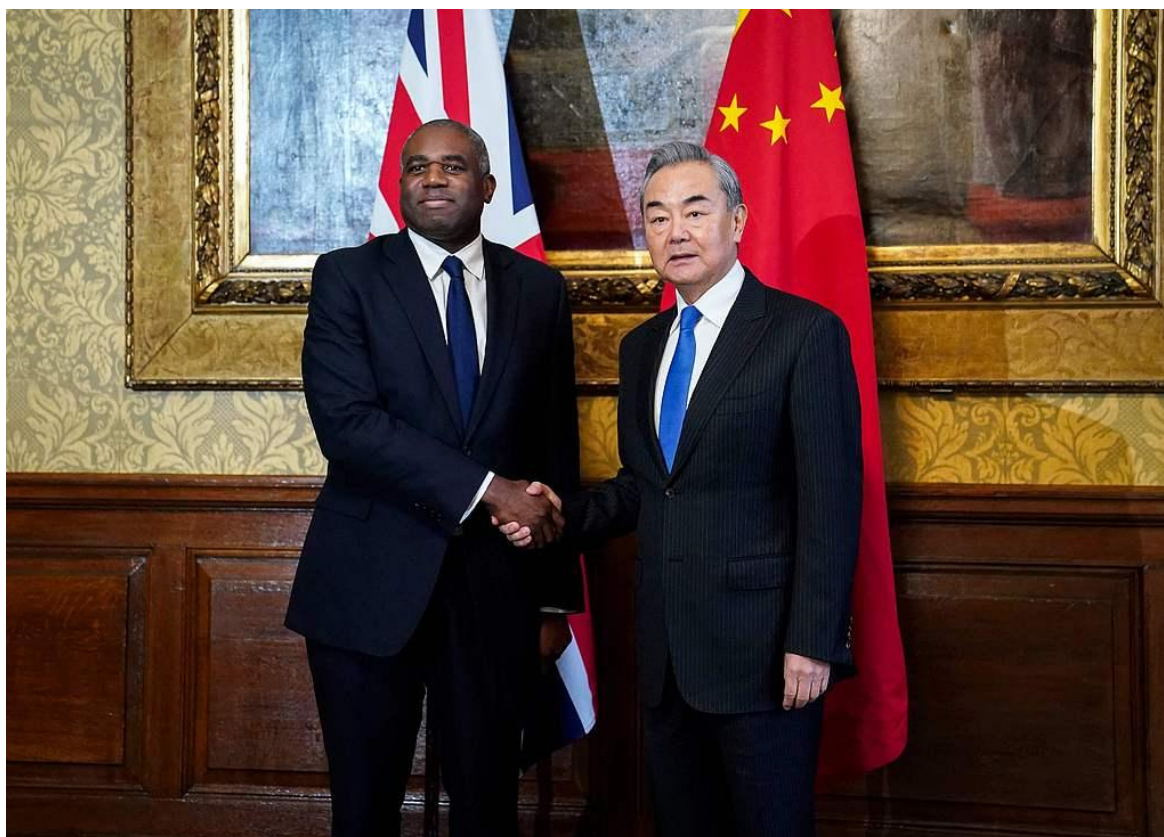
On 21st and 22nd of February, Chanel Zhang, General Manager of HOPE Hangzhou Office, attended the St Alphe Conference held in HK, and had 23 appointments with school representatives from the UK, US, Canada and Australia during the two day event.

News from local media

China, Britain agree on roadmap for cooperation

By ZHANG YUNBI | CHINA DAILY | Updated: 2025-02-15 07:33

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202502/15/WS67afd2c9a310c240449d5654.html>



Britain's Foreign Secretary David Lammy (L) shakes hands with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi ahead of a meeting at 1 Carlton Gardens in Central London on Feb 13, 2025. [Photo/VCG]

Beijing and London have agreed on a roadmap for future collaboration during Foreign Minister Wang Yi's trip to Britain, setting out plans for senior UK officials' visits to China, as well as intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation on global issues.

On Thursday local time, Wang embarked on meetings with key figures including British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Jonathan Powell, the prime minister's national security adviser. Wang also co-chaired the 10th China-UK Strategic Dialogue with British Foreign Secretary David Lammy. The previous dialogue was held in 2018.

According to a statement on the dialogue issued on Friday by the Foreign Ministry, the two sides reached a six-point consensus on a roadmap for their next steps in interactions, and the first three points are about the visits of senior British officials to China.

"The UK minister for energy security and net-zero will visit China and hold the China-UK Energy Dialogue," said the statement. The UK minister for science, research and innovation will also travel to China and attend the meeting of the China-UK Joint Commission on Science, Technology and Innovation, and the UK minister for education will visit for China-UK education ministerial consultations.

The two countries will "accelerate preparations for and hold" institutional dialogues such as the China-UK Joint Economic and Trade Commission as well as dialogues on health and industrial-cooperation, the statement said.

Beijing and London also agreed to "build on cooperation highlights in financial services, clean energy and artificial intelligence", and will deepen cooperation in areas such as global governance, development partnership, climate change and cybersecurity.

Observers noted that prior to Wang's UK trip, the China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue in January achieved fruitful results, and recently exchanges at various levels have recently resumed. President Xi Jinping met with the British prime minister on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro in November.

On Thursday, Wang told Starmer that the leaders' meeting "launched the process of improving and developing China-UK relations". Starmer said he expects the two countries to engage in candid and constructive dialogue to promote the sustained and stable development of their ties.

Wang's visit marks the second occasion in a decade that a Chinese foreign minister has visited the UK, and seven years have passed since the previous China-UK Strategic Dialogue, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said on Friday. This "shows the positive willingness of the two sides to actively implement the consensus of the leaders and to continue promoting the stabilization and improvement of bilateral relations", he added.

Ding Chun, a professor and director of the Center for European Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said: "Beijing has been perceiving and handling China-UK ties from a strategic height, and the fresh consensus on the roadmap for bilateral interactions illustrates the great momentum of the ties' growth.

"Currently, the bilateral ties are more focused on seeking common ground, shelving differences and advancing pragmatic cooperation, which is in tandem with the latest changes in global landscapes."

When co-chairing the China-UK Strategic Dialogue with Foreign Secretary Lammy, Wang said it is natural that there are differences and disagreements between China and Britain, and "what is important is to have an objective and rational perspective and strengthen dialogue and communication in the spirit of mutual respect".

Wang said China and Britain, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, should demonstrate their responsibility as major countries, practice multilateralism, support free trade and promote the political settlement of hot-spot issues.

Lammy said it is necessary for Britain and China to strengthen strategic communication and jointly promote world peace and stability.

Britain is committed to developing a long-term stable, mature and strong relationship with China, and is willing to strengthen high-level exchanges with China and carry out constructive dialogue and practical cooperation in various fields, he added.

Shanghai Disney Resort launches education program to develop talent

By Zheng Zheng in Shanghai | chinadaily.com.cn | Updated: 2025-02-24 17:13



Shanghai Disney Resort unveils the Shanghai Disney Dream Vocational Campus. [Photo provided to chinadaily.com.cn]

Shanghai Disney Resort announced the establishment of the Shanghai Disney Dream Vocational Campus on Feb 21, marking a step in its commitment to developing tourism industry talent in China.

The first campus will be established at the Shanghai Institute of Tourism, with internal admissions beginning in March.

"Shanghai Disney Resort is committed to nurturing the next generation of tourism professionals by equipping students with practical skills, real-world industry knowledge, and employment opportunities early in their careers," said Andrew Bolstein, senior vice-president of operations at Shanghai Disney Resort.

"Through the Shanghai Disney Dream Vocational Campus program, we are excited to enhance our work in cultivating young talent, together with local schools such as the Shanghai Institute of Tourism, to provide hands-on learning experiences and leading industry insights that will empower students to excel in China's tourism sector and advance its service quality," he said.

Students enrolled in the program will be offered a co-created curriculum, practical training programs, and internship opportunities at Shanghai Disney Resort.

"It represents a new form of diversified education and industry-education integration," said Kang Nian, president of the Shanghai Institute of Tourism.

The vocational campus aims to cultivate highly skilled service and management talent for the tourism, leisure and vacation sectors by enhancing the mechanisms that incorporate positive ideals with technical education, as well as integrating work experience and academics to provide a better practical solution for deepening industry-education integration, said Kang.

The inaugural program will enroll 100 students from various majors, including tourism management, omni-media advertising planning and marketing, hotel management and digital operations, catering management, tourism English, and exhibition planning and management.

It will offer a two-and-a-half-year program, with two years of classroom learning followed by a six-month practical internship at the resort. The curriculum will be delivered through a combination of professional Disney trainers, online learning platforms, and interactive teaching methods.

Since 2016, Shanghai Disney Resort has launched the Shanghai Disney Resort Talent Class program at 14 institutions nationwide, attracting over 2,400 students. Among them, nearly half who completed internships were hired as full-time cast members at the resort.

The resort has also partnered with more than 150 educational institutions across China, providing internship opportunities to over 22,000 students, with more than 3,000 continuing their careers at Disney.

The vocational campus program aims to prepare students for careers in the tourism sector and cultivate talents for the industry, said Hu Ziyi, director of Talent Acquisition and Cast Experience of Shanghai Disney Resort.

She detailed the curriculum structure: "Our program combines Disney's culture, operational knowledge, and soft skills development. The courses are designed based on our years of operational experience and broader industry insights."

Looking ahead, the resort plans to expand the academy model to more institutions across the Yangtze River Delta region and eventually nationwide, said Hu, adding that the initiative comes at a time as Shanghai Disney Resort continues to grow, with a third hotel under construction and new attractions in development.

As international tourism rebounds, Hu said the program also aims to cultivate talents to meet the demands of an increasingly global tourist market.

Upbeat on Chinese students in US

By MINLU ZHANG in New York | chinadaily.com.cn | Updated: 2025-02-14 14:22

https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202502/14/WS67aee112a310c240449d54f2_1.html



Jamie Beaton with his co-founder Fangzhou Jiang at Harvard University, sitting outside the dorm in March 2024 where Crimson was born and built from his laptop. [Photo provided to chinadaily.com.cn]

Jamie Beaton walked into the interview room in Times Square, took off his coat, and glanced at the ball. He remembered New Year's Eve in 2014, when he had watched the ball drop here. That night, he was online coaching an international student from China, Fangzhou Jiang, who would later join him as a co-founder of what is now an almost \$600 million business.

Born in New Zealand, Beaton started the college admissions counseling company Crimson Education when he was 17. He applied to US universities like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Wharton, Columbia and Duke — and he got into all of them.

"I had seven months free before starting at Harvard, so I began mentoring students in Auckland," he said. "I'd visit their homes, coach them, and do seminars. It grew organically, almost like a passion project before Harvard."

Soon the passion project grew into a company that has the highest revenue globally in the college admissions counseling space, especially in North America.

The company soon expanded globally across 23 countries and attracted many clients, especially in China.

"China is a little bit different from the rest of the world because they already had so many people applying that the numbers have been flat or moving around based on these geopolitical factors," Beaton told China Daily.

Working as an educator between China and the United States, he has firsthand experiences in what cultural exchange between the two countries could bring to the world.

"When it comes to cultural exchange in general, it's very important, because if the world breaks into, for example, a Cold War between China and its territories, America and its territories, and no one goes to each other's countries for trade, and you have this kind of segmented world where you don't have cultural exchange — you just create unnecessary conflict," he said.

But when people from China study in the US, or people from the US study in China, and there is a cross-pollination of ideas and understanding — very quickly, things that seem like they are insurmountable become negotiable, he said.

To further his business expansion in China, Beaton studied at Tsinghua University in Beijing, one of the country's top institutions, and spent six months living in Shanghai.

"It's been very rewarding in my life to have those kinds of cultural exchanges where I lived in Shanghai and I went to school in Beijing. And I think it's quite a limitation for a young person if you only live in your city or your country because you really don't have perspective on how your country can improve for the better," he said.

For decades, Chinese students have been the largest group of international students in the United States. But recent data reveals a significant shift: the number of Chinese students studying in the US has been declining since the 2019-20 academic year.

In the 2023-24 academic year, for the first time, Indian students outnumbered their Chinese counterparts, with 331,602 Indian students enrolled in US higher education institutions — a 23.3 percent increase from the previous year — compared with 277,398 Chinese students, a 4.2 percent decline, according to the nonprofit Institute of International Education.

Beaton offered a different perspective on the numbers, suggesting that Chinese student enrollment is either increasing or holding steady at top US universities.

"What we're seeing in the data is that the number of students attending top-tier schools remains quite consistent — it's not declining," he said.

In fact, at some institutions, those numbers are even growing, Beaton said. However, he said the significant drop is occurring among the long tail of other universities, and that's where the real decline is happening.

The reason for this trend is twofold. First, the return on investment for certain degrees is much lower — it's harder to secure top jobs, and the cost of education is high.

For some families, especially those from higher-income backgrounds, that type of degree is almost a luxury, akin to "tourism education", rather than a necessity, said Beaton.

On the other hand, the interest in the top 40 US schools remains robust, with intense demand, because they offer a strong return on investment for families, he said.

One of the key factors contributing to the decline in Chinese international students in the US was the government's "China Initiative," which had targeted Chinese students and scholars. Beaton believes the impact is still very limited for Chinese students applying to undergraduate programs in the US.

"There is certainly sensitivity if you're a Chinese citizen and you enroll in a US PhD program focused on advanced robotics. Some employers work with sensitive technologies related to space weapons and space exploration, where this sensitivity applies," he said.

"But for undergraduate degrees, there's really no issue. You can attend colleges and study anything you like — applied math, physics, computer science, AI — and, in fact, these are the most popular majors among my Chinese students."

minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

Quality of study tours to be improved

By YANG FEIYUE | China Daily | Updated: 2025-02-05 08:47

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202502/05/WS67a2b538a310a2ab06eaa1ea.html>

Operators encouraged to provide superior products to enhance consumer experiences



The development of study tours is being pushed as a priority by the government as it expects to raise the quality of such offerings to the public.

In January, the State Council, China's Cabinet, released a list of measures to foster new growth points in the culture and tourism sectors and to boost related consumption. Among them, the innovative development of study tours run by travel agencies was highlighted. The central government encouraged various organizations with educational travel resources to provide high-quality experiences and enrich the variety of such tours.

It detailed that a number of high-quality study tour facilities and courses will be established, and efforts will be made to cultivate a group of high-quality study tour enterprises.

In November, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism also issued a notice of detailed instructions to push forward the healthy and orderly development of study tour operations.

It emphasized that focus should be placed on the positive guidance of study tourism that contributes to the development of socialist advanced culture, inherits excellent Chinese traditional culture, showcases the great achievements of the new era, and promotes the comprehensive development of individuals.

The ministry called upon related parties to increase the supply of educational travel resources, and fully leverage the important role of cultural heritage and tourism resources in enhancing the well-rounded development of young people.

The notice said that sectors such as culture, history, art, technology, education, sports and natural resources, as well as industries like manufacturing, agriculture and services, will be encouraged to provide high-quality study tour resources for the public, and efforts will be stepped up to investigate and assess study tourism resources and build a number of high-quality study tour facilities with distinct themes, strong curriculum, and faculty support and comprehensive services.

Public welfare-oriented study tour activities targeted at young people in particular will receive more development support.

The popularity of study tours has grown rapidly in recent years, and has played an increasingly positive role in enhancing the all-around development of young people. However, though many of the tours help to promote China's traditional culture, some concerning issues have emerged, according to an official with the ministry's department of science, technology and education.

"Some study tour advertisements are misleading, or the content quality is low, or the prices of products do not match the services provided. Additionally, there are safety risks associated with certain products," said the official explaining the background behind the notice.

As a significant portion of the participants in study tour activities are young people, including minors, there has been a strong social call for improvements in their management mechanism to enhance industry oversight and improve the overall quality, the official noted.

"The notice actively guides travel agencies to establish the correct orientation in operating study tours, understand the rules, strengthen product content development, regulate business practices and improve product quality, thereby ensuring that the operation of study tours by travel agencies can develop healthily, orderly, safely and sustainably," the official said.

The notice intends to guide travel agencies to further strengthen their ability to develop and utilize educational travel resources, integrate and supply study tour courses and provide targeted services to youth groups.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in collaboration with other related departments, has conducted thorough investigations and research, and clarified the division of responsibilities among various departments in managing study tourism.

Culture and tourism authorities are responsible for supervising and managing study tours operated by travel agencies; the education administrations are responsible for supervising and managing study tour activities organized by schools; and the market regulation organs oversee the advertising and contracts of market entities running study tour services.

Based on these responsibilities, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism will take the lead in formulating standards for study tour products, services, camps and other aspects, and guiding and promoting the implementation of these standards. The industry's self-regulation role will be emphasized, encouraging relevant industry organizations to develop quality standards based on the needs of the study tourism market.

This intends to provide consumers with references when selecting study tour products and offer support for government departments in providing categorized guidance and management, according to the ministry.

Gao Jingjing, deputy secretary-general of the China Association of Travel Services, said the release of a series of regulatory policies marks the industry's entry into a new phase of standardization and upgrading.

A more robust regulatory mechanism and higher industry access thresholds mean a better development environment and higher industry standards, Gao said.

"This will not only meet the growing and diversified needs of consumers but also attract more social resources, driving industry upgrades and product innovation," she said.

Gao noted that study tourism, as an innovative deep integration of education and travel, can not only boost cultural inheritance and cultivate talent but effectively promote the development of related industries such as local dining and accommodation, thus injecting new momentum into regional economic growth.

Wang Yachao, who runs the study tour company Kits, said as the country increasingly focuses on quality education, the study tour market holds immense potential, and the demand will become increasingly diversified.

He said positive policies for study tourism will help give rise to more high-quality experiences, which can better match the needs of students for personal growth.

In its notice, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism vowed to strengthen the safety management of study tourism, such as banning experiences to areas that are not open to the public or lack a guarantee of safety. The ministry said it will also support the development of a training system in vocational schools for study tourism talent.

Institutes of higher learning, research organs and enterprises are encouraged to engage in learning tourism theory and practice studies.

Shi Meishan, a professor at the School of Culture and Tourism at Qingdao Vocational and Technical College of Hotel Management, concurred that higher education institutions must keep pace with market trends. They should cater to the demand for talent in roles related to product development, marketing, planning, management operations, product execution and product sales within the study tour market, especially in the context of digital and intelligent development, he said.

This requires the targeted training of more high-quality and specialized professionals, Shi said, adding that more integration among industry, academia and research is needed.

The ministry also asked operators of study tours to differentiate their products from other activities such as volunteer work, training and competitions when advertising study tour products, in order to fully protect consumers' right to be informed.

yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Visa-free option gets stamp of approval

By Wang Mingjie in London | China Daily | Updated: 2025-02-04 07:51

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202502/04/WS67a15678a310a2ab06eaa063.html>



Foreign tourists pose for a picture at the Forbidden City in Beijing on Dec 25. WANG XIN/FOR CHINA DAILY

Throughout 2024, China steadily expanded its visa-free travel program, easing entry procedures for international visitors.

The updated policy, which took effect on Nov 30, allows travelers from 38 countries, including 32 European nations, to stay in China for up to 30 days visa-free, doubling the previous limit.

The significant change represents a transformative step in enhancing international tourism, fostering economic collaboration and advancing cultural diplomacy. Experts widely regard the development as a strategic effort to position China as a more accessible and appealing global destination.

The nation's visa-free policy has simplified travel to China by removing obstacles that have traditionally deterred potential tourists as well as business travelers.

Oliver Sedlinger, CEO of tourism consultancy firm Sedlinger & Associates, lauded the initiative as "wonderful news for the global travel industry". He noted that visas often act as barriers to international travel, adding, "Removing these obstacles will undoubtedly boost tourism and make China more appealing to travelers worldwide."

Statistics from the National Immigration Administration highlight the policy's early success. In the third quarter of 2024, foreigners made 8.186 million inbound trips to China, representing a 48.8 percent increase year-on-year. Of these, 4.885 million trips — an impressive 78.6 percent year-on-year rise — were facilitated by the visa-free policy, according to data released by the administration in mid-October.

During the first half of 2024, inbound trips totaled 14.635 million, marking a staggering 152.7 percent year-on-year growth. Among these, 8.542 million entries, reflecting a 190.1 percent increase, were made under the visa-free policy.

Altogether, foreign travelers made 22.821 million inbound trips to China during the first three quarters of 2024. Of this total, 58.8 percent — or 13.427 million trips - were facilitated by the visa-free policy, based on NIA data calculations.

"Introducing favorable visa policies is a smart move by China," Sedlinger said. "Many countries have implemented similar measures to great effect. These policies act as crucial levers for developing local tourism industries and maximizing their potential."

While awareness of the changes may take time to spread, Sedlinger remains optimistic: "With all the cultural and natural attractions that China has to offer, I am convinced there is a huge, sustainable potential for further development, and this potential is now being unlocked by removing the visa hurdle."

China's visa-free policy is enhanced by its 240-hour visa-free transit option, which allows travelers from 54 countries — including Russia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada — to explore major transit hubs like Beijing and Shanghai for up to ten days without a visa, as they transit to a third country. This combined approach makes China especially attractive to foreign travelers looking for shorter or more spontaneous trips.

Amrita Banta, managing director of Agility Research & Strategy, shares a similar sentiment. She noted: "The visa-free scheme removes one of the significant barriers that discourage potential tourists. It shows China is genuinely interested in welcoming more international visitors, which will strengthen both economic and cultural ties."

Banta also highlighted the policy's diplomatic implications, suggesting that it serves as a strategic effort to boost international partnerships. "This move fosters not only tourism but also goodwill between China and the participating countries," she added. "It encourages deeper connections, smoother interactions, and provides the world with an unparalleled opportunity to explore China's rich culture and heritage."

For business travelers, the streamlined entry process simplifies logistics, enabling more efficient networking and meetings. Sedlinger highlighted the broader appeal, saying "These policies, combined with more convenient payment solutions, make China a more accessible and attractive destination for both leisure and business travelers."

Tom Harper, a lecturer specializing in China's international relations at the University of East London, noted, "The move will help facilitate exchanges between China and the world, making travel easier and more attractive".

However, Sedlinger pointed out that immediate growth might be tempered by limited direct flight capacity between Europe and China. Despite this, the long-term potential remains immense, as more suitable travel products are developed and awareness grows.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the average daily expenditure of foreign tourists in China amounted to 3,459 yuan (\$477.32) in 2023, directly driving up consumption by more than 100 billion yuan.

"The return of international guests will have a distinct positive economic impact," Sedlinger explained. "Sectors such as hospitality, retail, and food and beverage will directly benefit, while the ripple effect will extend to other industries." He also emphasized the policy's role in maintaining existing infrastructure, such as international flight connections, which support both inbound and outbound travel.

Banta concurred, adding, "By attracting more tourists, China is promoting high-quality exchanges that can foster better connections and mutual understanding between nations".

The visa-free policy is also a testament to China's commitment to deepening global integration. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning has stated that the initiative aims to "facilitate high-quality development of Chinese and foreign personnel exchanges and high-level opening-up to the world".

Harper said: "The policy is very much in line with China's efforts to promote opening up, which has become imperative in recent years. It underlines China's commitment to globalization and its role in fostering international partnerships," he explained.

Jochum Haakma, chairman of the EU-China Business Association, applauded the policy for enhancing bilateral relations. "The increase in foreign entries is factual proof that this works. It fits perfectly within China's broader opening-up drive," Haakma said. He believes that high-level exchanges across sectors -from education and research to tourism and trade — will foster mutual trust and understanding.

Experts are optimistic about the policy's potential to inspire reciprocal arrangements. Haakma advocated for greater reciprocity between China and participating countries, arguing that mutual visa-free travel could further enhance bilateral relations.

This sentiment is echoed by Sedlinger, who believes that easing visa restrictions is a benchmark for developing tourism industries worldwide. The policy not only benefits China but also provides a model for other nations to follow, fostering a more interconnected and accessible global tourism landscape.

The policy's impact is also felt on a personal level. Malte Poppensieker, a German national living in London with his Chinese wife and children, praised the change for making travel to China more convenient. Germany was among the first countries granted visa-free entry to China in December, 2023. For him, the change represents a step forward in simplifying international travel and moving away from restrictive reciprocal agreements.

"Visa processes are cumbersome and often a major obstacle," he said. "This new policy makes travel much easier, even without being part of a bilateral arrangement. I hope it becomes a permanent measure."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Poppensieker traveled to China two or three times a year to visit his in-laws. In the past, he found the visa process frustrating — plagued with paperwork, long waits at application centers, and additional trips to collect passports.

With the visa-free policy in place, his recent experience was starkly different. Flying into Chengdu, he was initially concerned about procedural hiccups, given the policy's novelty and limited international flights to the city. However, the process was "super smooth", requiring only a simple arrival form before breezing through customs, he said.

For Poppensieker and his family, the visa-free policy has made visits to China more accessible and stress-free. It's a change he hopes will continue, allowing for more frequent and hassle-free trips in the future.

Simone Trazzi, chief operating officer and executive director of UFI Group Asia Pacific Region, echoed this sentiment. Recently awarded the 2024 Shanghai Magnolia Silver Award, Trazzi credited the visa-free policy for enabling his parents-in-law to travel from Italy to attend the ceremony.

"This policy is incredibly beneficial for individuals coming to China, particularly to cities like Shanghai," Trazzi said. "It's an important initiative to attract more international tourists,

as well as businesspeople and professionals traveling from Europe to visit companies, factories, or explore new opportunities. I believe this policy plays a crucial role in re-attracting international companies and revitalizing international business here."

Reflecting on his own journey, Trazzi shared, "I came to Shanghai in 2008 as a young manager, relocating with my wife for a job opportunity. Over the years, I've grown professionally, taking on greater responsibilities, and eventually becoming CEO for Asia Pacific at UFI Group. During this time, I've witnessed Shanghai's remarkable transformation — advancing in sustainability, becoming a global hub for commerce, logistics, and finance, and establishing itself as a center for innovation."

Trazzi highlighted Shanghai's ability to attract talent and foster development. "We've set up both our R&D center and production site here because we believe this is the right place to be. Shanghai offers unparalleled opportunities, and our company continues to invest in this vibrant city."

Pi Wei contributed to this story.