

# Australia pitching to Chinese tourists

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AUSTRALIA'S tourism industry is investing heavily in becoming China-friendly with the expectation of a pay-off in the billions.

Advertisement

In hotel rooms around Australia, Mars Bars are making way for instant noodles and beef jerky.

Staff are told not to check guests into rooms with the number four or to offer them sliced pears and green hats.

"It's that crucial first impression that's still eluding much of our industry," says Peter Hook, of Accor, Australia's largest hotel group.

Accor has introduced a program at 35 hotels to make service and rooms more familiar to Chinese guests.

They employed Mandarin-speaking staff, put dim sum and familiar food on their buffets and installed Chinese TV channels.

"The reaction is immense," Mr Hook said. "There's a change in attitudes straight away."

And business from Chinese visitors has increased by nearly 25 per cent in the past year.

This year the number of Chinese tourists coming to Australia increased by 17 per cent to 573,000, overtaking Britain for the first time and making Chinese tourists now second only to those from New Zealand.

"We've shifted a lot of resources into China in particular to capitalise on the growing middle class," says managing director of Tourism Australia Andrew McEvoy.

Reflecting the change, the tourism body launched its latest ad campaign in Shanghai in June. The YouTube ad has notched 30 million views - 20 million of which have come from China.

Tourism Australia wants to more than double the number of Chinese tourists coming to Australia to make them a \$10 billion market inside a decade.

The key, Mr McEvoy says, comes down to fundamentals such as having Mandarin-speaking staff and a familiar breakfast.

Consulting firms offering an education in Chinese mores have themselves become a growth industry.

"There's 56 ethnic groups in China: you can't see people as a whole," says Gary Crockett, the chairman of China Ready & Accredited, a Chinese-owned business that trains the tourism industry.

Mr Crockett's firm educates hotel staff on Chinese culture, including its various lesser-known nuances.

"You don't give a Chinese man a green cap," he says. "That has a connotation of disgrace: it means their wife has had an affair."

Sliced pears, by a quirk of Mandarin pronunciation, can also symbolise separation.

"A small amount of [Chinese] people are very superstitious," says Wanning Sun, a professor of Chinese culture at UTS.

But she says the bigger issue for Australia is to learn more about the tourism markets in cities outside Beijing, Shanghai and China's capital provinces.

"Despite the fact that there's a lot of people coming from China to Australia, in percentage terms [that's] nothing," she says. "[We] haven't reached people from medium-sized cities and county level yet."

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/travel/travel-news/australia-pitching-to-chinese-tourists-20121228-2bzn.html>*