



THE LUXURY OUTBOUND TRAVELER

Luxury Chinese Traveler Report 2026

Global spending trends & strategy

US\$255B

TOTAL OUTBOUND
SPEND, 2025

US\$1,350

AVG. TRIP SPEND PER
CAPITA

49%

TRAVELERS > US\$3,400 /
TRIP

US\$300B+

PROJECTED 2026 SPEND

An outbound-intelligence read of the affluent Chinese traveler — where they go, what they spend, and how to reach them. Compiled from WTTC, McKinsey, China Tourism Academy, Dragon Trail, Skift, Jing Daily and i2i Group field intelligence across Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world's top-spending traveler is back

Chinese travelers have reclaimed their position as the world's highest-spending outbound tourists. WTTC reports that Chinese consumers spent more on travel in 2025 than any other nationality¹. Average per-trip spend has climbed to roughly US\$1,350 and nearly half of outbound travelers now spend above US\$3,400 per trip — a structurally premium pattern that rewards brands fluent in luxury, culture and Chinese digital channels.

" She is 25 to 44, lives in a Tier-1 or Tier-2 metro, books 2 to 6 months out, travels 7 to 9 nights with a partner or family, and spends more on shopping, dining and experiences than US, UK or German travelers — often by a factor of two or three. "

WHAT'S IN THIS REPORT

- **Europe** — Spain, Italy, France: spend per Chinese visitor outpaces every other nationality.
- **Middle East** — Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi are the fastest-growing destinations for affluent Chinese.
- **Southeast Asia** — Thailand and Malaysia rebuild premium Chinese visitation; spend per trip is 2× regional norms.
- **Reaching them** — WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Douyin and Weibo: platform-by-platform playbook plus targeted storytelling.
- **Case studies** — Marriott, SLH, Capella, Emirates, Lufthansa, Galeries Lafayette, Cartier, Dior, Louis Vuitton.

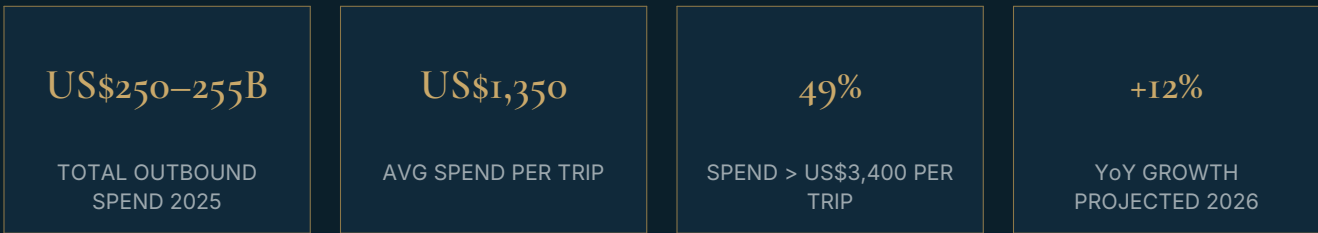
GLOBAL SPEND

OI

Chinese tourists lead in global travel spending

WTTC · McKinsey · China Tourism Academy

China's outbound travel sector is once again powered by world-leading spending¹. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and partner research bodies confirm Chinese consumers spent more on travel in 2025 than any other nationality, with luxury and experiential travel driving the premium tier.



- Total outbound travel spend reached **US\$250–255 billion** in 2025, with strong rebound momentum continuing into 2026^{1,2}.
- Average per-trip spend climbed to roughly **US\$1,350**, with **49%** of travelers spending over US\$3,400 per trip².
- Strong currency reserves, increased visa relaxations and a high-spending middle and upper-middle class continue to power demand³.

Insight. Chinese outbound travel has matured beyond shopping. Premium brands that win in 2026 will be those that treat the Chinese guest as the most lucrative customer in the room — not a secondary segment. Spend gravitates to luxury hospitality, fine dining, retail flagships and bespoke experiences.

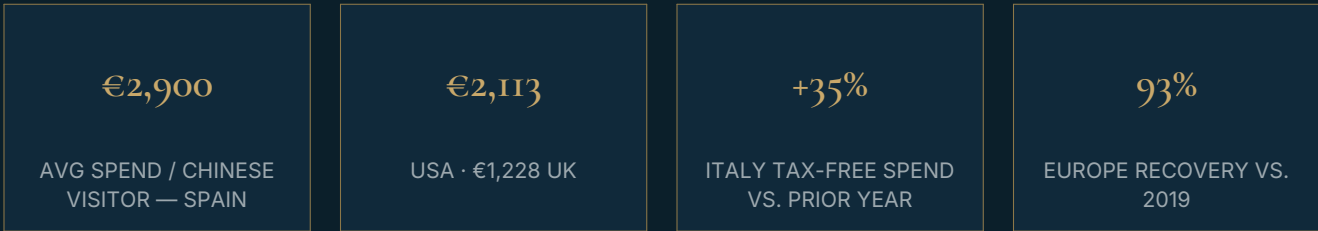
REGION 01 — EUROPE

02

Europe: Chinese spending soars past other nationalities

Spain · Italy · France

Europe remains the #1 long-haul priority for affluent Chinese travelers. In Spain, Italy and France the per-visitor spend from China substantially outpaces every other top inbound nationality^{4,5}.



SPAIN

- Roughly **650,000** Chinese visitors in 2024, contributing **€1.8 billion** to the Spanish economy^{4,10}.
- Average spend per Chinese visitor: **€2,900** — vs. €2,113 for US visitors and €1,228 for UK visitors⁴.
- Spain projects sustained double-digit growth in Chinese arrivals through 2026^{7,9}.

ITALY & FRANCE

- Italy: tax-free shopping by Chinese visitors grew **+35%** year-on-year, the highest in Europe⁵.
- France: Chinese travelers remain the highest-spending inbound luxury segment in Paris and the Riviera⁶.
- **2026 outlook:** Spain, Italy and France are forecast to exceed pre-pandemic Chinese visitation by Q4 2026¹⁰.

Insight. European luxury hospitality, retail and dining brands should treat Chinese FIT travelers as their highest-yield segment. Average daily spend is 2–3× that of equivalent US or UK visitors, and the cohort is increasingly culture-led rather than shopping-led.

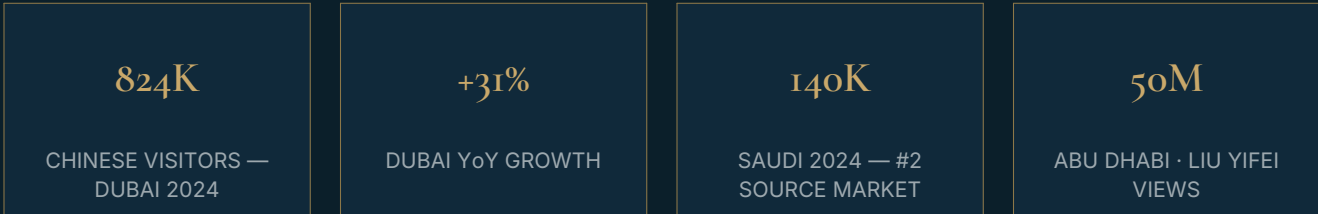
REGION 02 — MIDDLE EAST

03

Middle East: fast-rising Chinese expenditures

Dubai · Saudi Arabia · Abu Dhabi

The Middle East has crossed from emerging to mainstream in the Chinese outbound mix. Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi posted record growth in Chinese arrivals through 2025, fueled by visa relaxations, direct flight expansion and high-profile cultural campaigns^{11,12}.



- **Dubai:** 824,000 Chinese visitors in 2024 (+31% YoY); currently the leading luxury hub for Chinese outbound spend in the region^{11,13}.
- **Saudi Arabia:** ~140,000 Chinese visitors in 2024, now its #2 source market; eVisa expansion is driving accelerated growth¹¹.
- **Abu Dhabi:** the Liu Yifei tourism campaign generated over **50 million views** on Chinese social platforms¹⁴.
- **2026 outlook:** Middle Eastern destinations forecast double-digit growth in Chinese arrivals as additional direct flights from Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu come online¹⁵.

Insight. The Middle East is the fastest-growing region for affluent Chinese travel. Storytelling that pairs cultural depth (heritage, desert, gastronomy) with luxury hospitality and shopping is outperforming generic destination marketing on Xiaohongshu and Douyin.

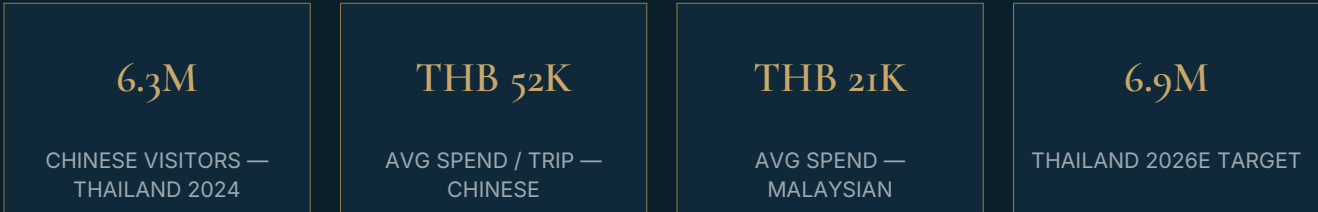
REGION 03 — SOUTHEAST ASIA

04

Southeast Asia: Chinese visitors return as big spenders

Thailand · Malaysia · regional outlook

Southeast Asia is rebuilding premium Chinese visitation as consumer confidence recovers. Chinese travelers spend significantly more per trip than any other regional source market — by a factor of two to three^{16,17}.



- **Thailand: 6.3 million** Chinese visitors in 2024 — the country's #1 inbound source¹⁶.
- Per-trip spend by Chinese visitors averages **THB 52,000** (~US\$1,440), vs. THB 21,450 for Malaysian travelers — over **2.4x** higher¹⁶.
- Strong rebound forecast for 2026 with Chinese arrivals projected to reach **6.9 million**^{17,18}.
- **Regional outlook:** Vietnam, Cambodia and Indonesia are rapidly courting affluent Chinese with new luxury developments and direct flights¹⁹.

Insight. Southeast Asia's premium Chinese segment skews toward FIT, wellness and high-end family travel — not group tours. Resorts, spas and signature dining experiences capture the largest share of incremental spend.

STRATEGY

05

Reaching the Chinese luxury traveler

Social media & storytelling strategy

Reaching affluent Chinese travelers requires fluency in the country's four dominant social platforms. Each plays a distinct role across the inspiration research booking funnel^{20,21}.

OWNED ECOSYSTEM

WeChat

1.3B monthly active users

The hub for direct customer relationships. Official Accounts, Mini Programs and Channels enable end-to-end inspiration through to booking — the highest-leverage owned channel for hospitality and luxury brands^{21,25}.

INSPIRATION & RESEARCH

Xiaohongshu / RED

200M+ monthly active users

China's word-of-mouth engine for affluent female travelers. Travel inspiration, hotel reviews and curated city guides drive destination consideration; KOL partnerships outperform paid media^{20,22}.

VIDEO & DISCOVERY

Douyin

746M MAU · 74% find travel inspiration here

Short-form video drives mass-market and aspirational travel discovery. **74%** of Chinese travelers cite Douyin as a primary source of travel inspiration²⁶.

CULTURAL CONVERSATION

Weibo

600M MAU

The public conversation layer — celebrity, news and trend amplification. Best used for brand campaigns, large cultural moments and KOL announcements²⁰.

STRATEGY

Targeted storytelling & B2B amplification

Platform reach is necessary but insufficient. Brands that win the affluent Chinese traveler combine targeted storytelling — tailored to mainland cultural context — with B2B amplification through Chinese travel-trade networks²².

TARGETED STORYTELLING

- **Cultural depth over destination clichés.** Chinese travelers respond strongly to heritage, gastronomy and craft narratives — less so to generic landmark photography²².
- **KOL-led content.** Trusted travel KOLs on Xiaohongshu and Weibo deliver materially higher conversion than paid media for luxury hospitality^{22,23}.
- **Service in Mandarin.** Mandarin-speaking concierge, WeChat-based check-in and Alipay/WeChat Pay acceptance are now table stakes for premium properties^{20,21}.
- **Mini Program commerce.** WeChat Mini Programs deliver frictionless booking and loyalty integration — the single highest-leverage technical investment in 2026²⁵.

B2B AMPLIFICATION

- **China Visitors Summit (CVS).** i2i Group's flagship trade event connects destinations and luxury brands directly with Chinese travel-trade buyers; the 2025 MENA edition convened leading regional DMOs and luxury hotel groups²².
- **Travel-trade media.** ChinaTravelNews, Dragon Trail, Jing Daily and i-click amplify B2C campaigns to Chinese trade audiences and corporate buyers^{3,15}.
- **Direct partnerships.** White-label WeChat Mini Programs and co-marketing with Chinese OTAs (Ctrip, Fliggy) compound owned-channel performance.

Insight. The winning playbook is layered: WeChat as the owned hub, Xiaohongshu and Douyin for top-of-funnel inspiration, Weibo for cultural amplification, and B2B trade activation through events like the China Visitors Summit. Brands that treat any single platform as the answer leave 60–70% of demand on the table.

06

WHO'S WINNING

Case studies: winning strategies
Hospitality · Airlines · Luxury retail

Across hospitality, airlines and luxury retail, the brands winning the Chinese traveler share three traits: deep WeChat fluency, KOL-led storytelling, and seamless on-property service in Mandarin^{20,24}.

HOSPITALITY

Marriott. WeChat Bonvoy Mini Program plus tier-targeted Chinese-language campaigns; over half the Chinese audience now holds elite Bonvoy status.

Small Luxury Hotels (SLH).

Curated WeChat content + Xiaohongshu KOL partnerships drive FIT bookings to boutique European properties.

Capella Hotels. China-tailored storytelling and Mandarin concierge services deliver premium ADR uplift.

KOL Xiao Dan.

Single Xiaohongshu post generated **¥1M+** in direct hotel bookings — proof of KOL conversion power²².

AIRLINES

Emirates. WeChat-led campaigns highlighting premium cabins and Dubai as a luxury hub; sustained Chinese loyalty growth.

Lufthansa.

Chinese-language WeChat content plus targeted Weibo cultural tie-ins around European travel themes.

Finnair. Helsinki as a luxury Nordic gateway, marketed via

Xiaohongshu and Douyin to affluent FIT travelers.

LUXURY RETAIL

Galleries Lafayette. WeChat tax-refund Mini Program and Mandarin in-store service lift Chinese spend per visit.

Cartier. Heritage storytelling and bespoke Lunar New Year activations on WeChat and Weibo²⁴.

Dior. Couture-led Xiaohongshu KOL campaigns and exclusive WeChat Mini Program drops²⁴.

Louis Vuitton & Gucci.

Cross-platform WeChat + Douyin campaigns paired with airport and flagship-store activations.

Insight. The pattern is consistent across categories: deep WeChat fluency, KOL-driven inspiration on Xiaohongshu and Douyin, and Mandarin-first on-the-ground service. Brands that under-invest in any single layer cede share to those that operate the complete stack.

IN CONCLUSION

The decade of the Chinese luxury traveler

Chinese travelers are once again the world's most lucrative outbound segment. They spend more, stay longer and demand more than any comparable cohort. Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia are the structural winners; brands that combine WeChat fluency, KOL-led storytelling and Mandarin-first service will compound share through 2026 and beyond.

Insight. Three things to do in the next 90 days: (1) audit your WeChat presence — Official Account, Mini Program, Channels; (2) brief Xiaohongshu and Douyin KOL programs against your top three destinations; (3) align the customer-facing service stack — Mandarin concierge, WeChat Pay, Alipay — to your highest-spend properties first.

Thanks

China i2i Group

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