

# POLICY REVIEW

## Policies aim to help tourist agencies

Ministry measures to prop up smaller companies during COVID-19 drag

By XU LIN  
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The Ministry of Culture and Tourism recently compiled a list of 19 preferential policies issued by central ministries to help operators in the tourism sector pull through difficulties during the COVID-19 era.

Official data showed that in the first three quarters of this year, about 2.7 billion domestic trips were made, a 39 percent increase year-on-year, and total tourism consumption was 2.4 trillion yuan (\$371 billion), up 63.5 percent year-on-year.

Besides reducing fees and taxes, the policies call for financial institutions to issue credit with subsidized interest and to raise funds for micro, small and medium-sized culture and tourism companies. Insurance products centered on the cancellation of travel and performances due to the pandemic are also being promoted.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has worked with the China Development Bank to financially support essential programs and the digitalization of the tourism sector.

In February last year, travel agencies were able to withdraw 80 percent of the mandatory money saved in banks as cash deposits for tourism service quality, funds meant to cover emergencies. Legally, agencies must deposit these funds before they open for business.

By the end of last year, about 29,000 travel agencies across the country had received over 7 billion yuan from the funds, which they must eventually repay. The ministry recently postponed repayments due on Feb 5 to Dec 31 of next year.

Travel agency owner Shao Bin, who operates two agencies in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, received a refund of about 240,000 yuan, but said that the money was insufficient and that other preferential policies also have not been of much benefit.

“For over a year, my travel agencies have had no income due to the epidemic. Now, I don’t put much time and money into marketing due to continuing uncertainty,” said Shao, who specializes in customized travel.

Wu Liyun, an associate professor of the China Academy of Culture and Tourism at Beijing International Studies University, said: “These national policies aim to increase the circulation of funds and reduce operating costs for travel agencies. Still, it’s a very hard time for travel agencies, almost two years after the outbreak.”

She pointed out that it’s difficult for micro, small and medium-sized business to obtain loans or investments because financial institutions favor larger enterprises, believing they are more likely to meet repayments.

“It’s essential to establish a mechanism for companies that are more in need of help, so they can benefit from preferential policies.”

Liu Simin, vice-president of tourism at the Beijing-based Chinese Society for Future Studies, said the temporary refund of deposits to travel agencies is just a cushion. The industry is facing a major reshuffle, and competition in domestic travel is heating up.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

“If the latest outbreak can be controlled soon, the domestic tourism industry can recover a bit during the upcoming winter season and Spring Festival holiday, as tourists can visit the warmer southern regions or go skiing in northern China,” he said.

Wu suggested that travel agencies adapt to the COVID-19 prevention and control situation and invigorate the industry through innovation.

“Outbound and inbound tours, the most profitable offerings for travel agencies, have been suspended in China due to the global pandemic,” she said.

“As trans-provincial travel is restricted from time to time by sporadic outbreaks, travel agencies

should work hard to create high-quality, themed tour products focused on local and neighboring regions.”

She suggested that travel agencies adjust their business models to supplement incomes. For example, they can incorporate “New Retail,” a term referring to the seamless integration of online and offline shopping.

“They can take advantage of their connections at home and abroad, and promote products like local specialties to potential clients.”

Some companies have already begun making such moves. For instance, the Beijing-based Caissa Tosun Development Co Ltd has expanded from tourism and cater-

ing for airlines and trains to New Retail, destination marketing and tourism investment.

Wu also said the digitalization of the tourism sector is creating new business opportunities. Theme parks, for example, have been profiting from augmented and virtual reality technology.

In addition, “the digitalization of cultural heritages will not only better preserve it, but also turn it into properties the general public can interact with,” she said.

Feng Rao, head of tourism research at Mafengwo, a travel service and social networking platform, agreed.

“The pandemic has boosted the digitalization of the tourism indus-

try and the upgrading of domestic travel consumption, offering glimmers of hope for the industry.”

Feng added that content counts in digitalization, and visitors prefer in-depth, personalized travel experiences.

“Short-distance, neighboring travel and road trips are popular. We provide in-depth travel tips on camping, surfing, hiking, cycling and skiing to attract young travelers.”

He added that Mafengwo has also adopted the Travel Property Index, unveiled by the China Tourism Academy in March last year, to evaluate the digitalization of destinations and scenic areas, including their online reputation and promotion.

### Policy Digest

#### Ads targeting youth for tutoring prohibited

Advertisements for off-campus tutoring targeting high school and primary school students and toddlers are no longer allowed to appear in public spaces, residential communities, online platforms or in the mainstream media, a statement said.

It also strictly prohibits the appearance of such ads on railways, subways, buses and bus stop shelters.

According to the statement, online platforms, mainstream media and owners of outdoor advertising spaces must examine ads they run and avoid those about off-campus tutoring.

The statement, drafted by the State Administration for Market Regulation and seven other departments, was released on Nov 9 in an effort to implement a guideline issued in July aimed at further easing the burden of homework and restricting off-campus tutoring that was becoming an increasing part of the lives of students already in compulsory education.

#### Further antivirus action for day cares urged

Local health authorities should take measures to prevent COVID-19 in day care institutions for children under 3, the National Health Commission said in a statement issued on Nov 8.

The risk of outbreak at these institutions increases in autumn and winter when colder temperatures lead to more indoor activities and less-efficient ventilation, it said, adding that local health authorities must work hard to prevent outbreaks and ensure the safety of children.

Authorities should have a full understanding of the complexity of the fight against the virus, the importance of containing it and the fact that long-term efforts are needed to control the pandemic, the commission said.

It also asked them to ensure that institutions, parents and government departments do their part to fend off COVID-19.

Authorities should also help institutions create a plan to prevent and control the virus, strengthen health management of children and staff workers and work to curb the spread of influenza and other viruses common in the colder seasons.

They should also carry out special inspections, punish institutions that don’t take the required preventive measures and make sure there are no loopholes in prevention efforts.

#### New manufacturing centers to be set up

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said on Nov 9 that it has approved plans to establish four national manufacturing innovation centers in three provinces.

The centers will focus on innovation in four areas — 5G medium and high frequency devices, advanced glass materials, high-end smart home appliances and voice-related technologies like speech recognition and synthesis.

Companies in Guangdong, Anhui and Shandong provinces will create the centers. No dates have been announced for completion.

#### Plan looks to cultivate more skilled workers

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has issued a plan to improve vocational education during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period to provide sufficient skilled workers for China’s socioeconomic development.

One of the goals is for vocational schools to enroll at least 3.6 million students by 2025.

The plan also asked local human resources authorities to carefully implement the Vocational Education Law, as well as a guideline issued by the ministry in 2018 to improve the welfare and salaries of skilled workers.

WANG QINGYUN

## Short-distance tours becoming popular option as outbreaks persist

By XU LIN

Chinese travelers are learning to appreciate the beauty of their hometowns and neighboring regions as they increasingly take short-distance tours, which are becoming popular due to travel disruptions caused by sporadic outbreaks of COVID-19.

The country’s short-distance travel market performed better than the long-haul market this summer, according to Chinese travel agency ly.com.

The report found that two-day, one-night weekend trips were preferred, with travelers opting for road trips, theme park visits and lodgings at holiday resorts.

According to Mafengwo, a travel service and social networking platform, the most popular short-distance tours during the first half of the year included activities such as camping, mountain climbing, cycling, skiing and visits to hot springs and art galleries.

Data from Mafengwo also showed that camping was often combined with outdoor experiences such as fishing, paddle boarding, yoga, horseback riding and cave exploration.

As outbound tours remain suspended due to the pandemic, Chinese travelers have been exploring the wealth of domestic tourism options.

Among them is 30-year-old Shanghai resident Sheng Yiyun.

“I like to visit less-crowded destinations to explore new ways of traveling. Also, in-depth tours help you better understand local cultures and customs,” said Sheng, who has traveled to 33 countries and regions. A former headhunter, she became a full-time tourism influencer in 2019.

Some of her fans prefer outdoor experiences like hiking and camping. Others, especially her female fans, like to visit destinations where they can take pretty photos of themselves.

In an effort to boost the civil aviation industry, domestic airlines began offering packages last year that allow passengers to take unlimited flights during certain periods of time.

Thanks to these packages, Sheng has traveled to many Chinese cities cheaply, allowing her to enjoy the ethnic cultures of provinces such as Gansu and Hainan.

She has even visited some destinations several times to enjoy their scenery during different seasons.

For example, in the Tibet autonomous region’s Nyingchi city, the annual peach blossom festival is held between March and April. It is the best time to enjoy picturesque views of flowers and the landscape.

Sheng also said that the late autumn scenery of Tengchong, Yunnan province, and Wuyuan, Jiangxi province, are appealing, while winter is a good time to go skiing in northern China.

On weekends, she goes camping around Shanghai and in neighboring Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, where there are plenty of well-equipped camping sites.

“Camping allows me to bring my portable home with me, and that is my own small comfort zone,” she said.

Not only is she able to enjoy beautiful sunrises, she can also enjoy starry night skies. There are even bonfire parties at some sites.

She once pitched a tent in suburban Shanghai and made herself a cup of coffee in the woods.

“When you are cooking and eating meals outdoors, you also have a better appetite,” she said.