

## Online Travel Agents in China Challenge Conventional Agencies

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With nearly seven in 10 Chinese leisure travellers accessing destination websites, and about six in 10 using online travel discussion forums to source information, travel operators and tourism promotional bodies will need an effective Internet presence to capture the opportunities presented by Chinese outbound tourism, according to a new research study conducted by The Nielsen Company in partnership with the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).

The new 'China Outbound Travel Monitor 2007' reveals that traditional travel agents rank only second behind online sources (63%) as the most popular source of information for potential travellers while the use of traditional media is found to be much lower (40%) for newspapers and magazines.

Conducted in October 2007, via a combination of telephone and online interviews, the 'Monitor' surveyed 1,500 travellers in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, about their behaviour, attitudes and opinions of various destinations and provides insights into their decision-making processes, information sourcing, booking choices, accommodation preferences and more.

The 'Monitor' covers all outbound leisure and business trips taken over a 12-month period between 2006 and 2007. Findings covering a further 23 cities throughout China will be released in early 2008.

'China's outbound travel market is recognised as one of the key emerging outbound travel markets in the world and has evolved faster than any other Asian outbound market,' said Dr Grace Pan, head of Travel & Leisure Research, The Nielsen Company, China.

'It is important for industry participants to keep a close eye on this lucrative market by tracking how Chinese travellers are evolving, in terms of their travel behaviour, travel motivations and satisfaction levels with tourism suppliers around the world.'

PATA Strategic Intelligence Centre Director Mr John Koldowski said: "PATA is proud of our solid working relationship with The Nielsen Company. The Chinese outbound market in 2006 represented 35 million visits and continues to grow dramatically. We are confident this latest study will provide invaluable strategic insights, which in turn will help our members tap deeper into this burgeoning market."

Chinese outbound travellers from the three key cities are also turning to the Internet for their travel bookings. While the majority is currently using traditional travel agents (61%), Chinese travellers booking via online travel agents and hotel or transport operators websites (29% and 16% respectively) are on the rise, with their numbers expected to continue to increase.

'Given the astounding growth in China's online population, the Internet will become the most efficient way to quickly understand consumers across China's vast markets, marketers have to innovate to leverage the Internet to reach consumers as standard online advertising may not be adequate to capture the attention of the increasingly technology-savvy Chinese online population,' continued Dr Grace Pan.

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