

## Striving Towards a Modern Coastal Metropolis

## Anticipated Ningbo Travel Surge to Visa-Free Destinations During Chinese New Year

By Jin Lu

Several countries are recently rolling out visa-free or visa-on-arrival policies for Chinese tourists. These destinations boast enchanting landscapes and a wide range of activities. Some further sweeten the deal with direct flights. This development has sparked extensive discussions within China's tourism industry, particularly on identifying the most appealing destinations for the upcoming Chinese New Year holidays.

So, which destinations will emerge as the new favorites for Ningbo travelers? Market indicators may already be providing some insights.

## Outbound Tourism Surge

With the positive news, online travel platforms are witnessing a notable uptick in searches for these destinations. As the New Year and Spring Festival holidays draw near, the prevailing consensus within the industry is that outbound tourism is poised to attain unprecedented highs.

"Reciprocal visa-free policies will be a significant boost to the inbound and outbound travel market," said Chen Jin, Deputy General Manager of China CYTS (Ningbo) International Travel Service Co., Ltd. These visa-free countries have the potential to become preferred destinations for Chinese tourists, with their island getaways, lush forests, majestic mountains, charming towns, and a plethora of activities, from desert sand duning to paragliding and even shark diving. Coupled with the availability of direct flights available, the outbound tourism during the Spring Festival of the Year of the Dragon is expected to intensify.

According to Airbnb's 2023 Winter Chinese Outbound Travel Trends Report, Chinese users' demand for outbound travel is anticipated to accelerate, with the search volume



Outbound tourism is poised to attain unprecedented highs. [Photo provided by Ctrip]

generated by users planning outbound trips during Chinese New Year increasing by more than 14 times compared to the same period last year.

## More Convenience, Lower Costs

Why are visa-exempt destinations poised to be the next hit with Chinese tourists? The reason is twofold. "To begin with, visa exemptions translate to zero visa fees. In the case of travel to Malaysia, a destination that has recently waived visa requirements for Chinese tourists, the previous necessity of paying 300 yuan for a visa is no longer applicable," explained a representative from the Ningbo Travel Agency Association. "Secondly, travel procedures have become markedly more convenient." Previously, securing a visa necessitated at least a week in advance, but now the likelihood of rejection is eliminated, making the travel experience much less stressful.

Visa exemptions also afford Chinese travelers the convenience

of exploring several destinations in one trip. Xiao Peng, a researcher at the Qunar Big Data Research Institute, shed light on this phenomenon: initially, when Malaysia announced visa exemptions for Chinese visitors, the growth in travelers exclusively choosing Malaysia was not substantial. However, with Singapore gearing up to grant visa exemptions to Chinese tourists from early next year, a surge in individuals planning trips covering both nations is anticipated. This shift could extend a 3-day tour to Malaysia into a 5-6 day venture encompassing both Singapore and Malaysia, offering a more cost-effective option for single-trip outbound travel.

Presently, Ctrip has launched a special seasonal promotion. For the month of December, airfare from Ningbo to Singapore is available at a competitive rate of 751 yuan, while tickets from Ningbo to Thailand are priced as affordably as 825 yuan. In nearby Hangzhou, flights to Malaysia are also being offered at an enticing rate, starting at 899 yuan.

As per a recent research report from Galaxy Securities, the resurgence of international and regional flight schedules in the winter-spring flight season has led to a remarkable 70% reduction in the average price of international flight tickets for the 2024 New Year's Day period compared to the corresponding timeframe last year. This significant drop has propelled a four-fold increase in booking volume.

## Potential Favorites

Ningbo's leading travel agencies are already putting out Spring Festival outbound travel packages, shedding light on emerging trends. "The current favorites are five to six-day trips. Longer journeys of seven days or more to destinations such as Australia, Spain, Portugal, Sri Lanka, and Dubai are also gaining traction," said Zhao Qichao, Operations Director of Fly International Travel Group Co., Ltd.

Taking cues from last year's "Top Ten Asian Ocean Tourism Destinations" list by the Ningbo

Institute of Culture and Tourism Research, which includes Jeju Island, Nha Trang, Boracay, Phuket, Bali, Sabah, Okinawa, the Maldives, Singapore, and Samui Island, industry insiders predict that destinations with visa exemptions and direct flights from Ningbo will stand out.

Ctrip's latest data, as of December 5th, highlights Tokyo, Singapore, Bangkok, Phuket, Osaka, Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, and Seoul, as popular outbound destinations for the upcoming Spring Festival.

Meanwhile, Tuniu has observed a rising fascination with their 11-day in-depth Iran tours and 7-night 9-day Sri Lanka tours. According to a spokesperson from the company, "Anticipating the extended 9-day Spring Festival holiday next year, we expect a considerable upswing in the winter outbound tourism market. Travelers are exploring a myriad of options, including winter sports, off-season island getaways, and more distant locales like Australia and New Zealand."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Excitement Builds for 2023 Ningbo Marathon on December 31st

By Xu Zhuowei

The highly anticipated 2023 Ningbo Marathon is set to take place on December 31st at the Ningbo Olympic Sports Center, as officially announced during a press conference held on December 11th. The event, offering marathon, half marathon, and mini run categories, anticipates 15,000 participants, distributed as 3,000 for the marathon, 6,000 for the half marathon, and 6,000 for the mini run.

During the registration period from December 2nd to December 6th, a whopping 20,282 runners signed up. The organizing committee will allocate spots through a lottery system.

The total reward pool for this year's marathon surpasses 300,000 yuan. Marathon winners stand a chance to receive a maximum individual prize of 26,000 yuan, while half marathon winners could claim up to 15,000 yuan. The top ten finishers in both categories will all be rewarded. Notably, a Ningbo Citizen Award has been introduced, offering recognition to the top 20 male and female runners with a maximum individual reward of 3,000 yuan. Elite runners achieving a 3-hour finish (male) and 3 hours and 30 minutes finish (female) will be honored with a special cape.

The race will commence and conclude at the Ningbo Olympic Sports Center, weaving through iconic locations such as Ningbo Binjiang Sports Park, the central lake of the Cicheng new urban zone, and Guanshan River. The carefully selected route promises a blend of cultural heritage and modern vibrancy.

Runners will be treated to the presence of cheer-leading ensembles, instrumental performances, and delightful singing and dancing acts along the route, enriching their overall experience.

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## 双语汇 Different Tongues

## 听丝路回响 扬文化之帆

By Gou Wen

In December, the 2023 "Culture City of East Asia" Youth Exchange Activities were held in Ningbo.

38 teenagers from China's Ningbo, Japan's Nara, and South Korea's Jeju gathered at the Hushan Art Museum in Haishu to stage a musical performance, utilizing the power of music to cultivate bonds of cross-cultural understanding.

今年12月,2023东亚文化之都青少年宁波交流活动举行。来自中国宁波、日本奈良、韩国济州的38名青少年齐聚海曙的湖山艺术馆,以音乐为主题,共同开启了一场跨越国界的艺术交流之旅。

The welcome ceremony featured performances such as

The Flower Burial Song with an ensemble of Chinese instruments, Color of the Ocean with vocals, piano, and electric guitar, and a Yue Opera rendition of Eighteen Farewells from The Butterfly Lovers.

启动仪式上,《葬花吟》乐器合奏、《Color of the ocean》乐队表演、《梁祝·十八相送》越剧表演等节目轮番上演。

Enthusiastically engaging in conversations about their lifestyles and cultures, the teenagers set a lively and joyful mood.

来自中日韩三国的青少年热情洋溢,互相交流着彼此的文化和生活,现场气氛热烈。

The friendship between Ningbo, Nara, and Jeju has a long history. The three cities

have been connected since the Tang Dynasty through the Maritime Silk Road. Since being jointly elected as "Culture Cities of East Asia" in December 2015, they have organized diverse annual cultural exchange activities.

宁波、奈良、济州之间的情谊源远流长,从唐朝开始就通过海上丝绸之路有了联系。三地自2015年12月共同当选“东亚文化之都”后,每年都共同开展各种文化交流活动。

The three cities have collaborated on hundreds of artistic events, cultural heritage projects, research endeavors, and reciprocal tours.

目前,三地之间已开展文化艺术、文物遗产、学术研究、旅游推介等领域的交流活动上百场(次)。



The 2023 Culture City of East Asia Youth Exchange Activities. 2023东亚文化之都青少年宁波交流活动。

[Photo by Song Tianyi] 宋天一 摄

