

The development dilemma and countermeasures of COVID-19's tourism industry in Inner Mongolia



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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an environment-sensitive and vulnerable to domestic and foreign events, which may lead to downturn and crisis. Compared with other dangerous events, the outbreak of infectious diseases poses the most widespread threat to the industry [1]. COVID-19 has brought a great impact on China's tourism economy, witnessing substantial decline. Now the epidemic has been put under control. What confronting most tourism enterprises is how to resume the tourism industry and what approaches to be adopted. This report gives a discussion on development of tourism and marketing creativity of tourism in the post epidemic era based on available public reports. Some references for the recovery of tourism in Inner Mongolia are also offered.

China adopts a dynamic zero-COVID policy rather than reduce infection to zero in the era when epidemic becomes a new normal. Liang Wannian, head of the COVID-19 response expert group of China's National Health Commission (NHC), said that the policy aims to prevent virus from spreading to communities and to identify and treat patients in a timely manner [4]. In the early stage of the outbreak, China put forward the initiative of "not getting out unless it's necessary", under which the traffic was suspended for a time, and some industries were seriously impacted [3].



Figure 1. Map of Inner Mongolia

Source: Journal of my 2013 China Expedition Part VIII (Inner Mongolia)

With a population of 2.4 million, Inner Mongolia has a large area which stretched across the northern edge of China. Situated in the northern part of China, Inner Mongolia has itself connected to the rest regions of China with highways, high-speed railways, and airlines until the pandemic led to close down of airlines. Since the COVID-19 broke out, it registered 1,191 confirmed cases. Most of the

confirmed cases were found in Hulun Buir League, Alxa League, and Xilingol League. The state immigration administration also required the border ports to strengthen the management of overseas flights and charter flights. The policy of no boarding and no staying is implemented for overseas ships. Trucks shall take designated routes to cross the borders. Non coronal mode shall be adopted to prevent the transmission of the virus through imported goods or related personnel [5]. China has started promoting COVID-19 vaccination among

children aged between 3 and 11. Immunologists working on vaccine R&D have assured that the vaccines proved to be safe among the population of this age.

Since the beginning of 2021, the tourism industry in Inner Mongolia has gradually resumed its growth with increased tourists and tourism income. From January to June, the region received 40.437 million domestic tourists, returning to 61.12% of the same period before the epidemic with an increase by 4.5 percentage over the first quarter; the domestic tourism revenue reached RMB 59.702 billion, returning to 41.68% of the income level in the same period before the epidemic with an increase by 2.3 percentage over the first quarter. However, due to the COVID-19 and the lack of innovative tourism products, there are many urgent problems confronting Inner Mongolia's tourism industry.

1. Characteristics of tourists and scenic spots (from January to June 2021)

(1) Self-driving travel has become the first choice

Self-driving tourists accounted for 56.2% of domestic tourists in the region, which was 16.4 percentage higher than the same period last year and 12.2 percentage higher than that from January to March.

(2) Most tourists choose to travel independently with families or relatives

34.726 million tourists, accounting for 85.9%, chose to travel together with individuals, families, or friends. The number of trips organized by units (arrangements) reached 5.237 million, accounting for 13.0%.

(3) The occupational composition of tourists is diversified

There is diversified occupation distribution of tourists received in the whole district. The tourists from enterprises and institutions account for 23.0%; professional and technical tourists accounted for 12.0%;

(4) Weibo and WeChat have become important information channels for tourists

There are 14.24 million tourists, accounting for 35.2%, learned about Inner Mongolia's tourism resources through social media such as Weibo and WeChat. 1.239 million tourists learned it from through friends and relatives, accounting for 30.6%; 10,303,000 tourists learned it from advertisement, accounting for 25.5%.

2. Major problems

(I) Continuous decline of tourist consumption

In 2019, domestic tourists spent RMB 2,359.9 per person; In 2020, the number was RMB 1924.1; from January to June of 2021, the average spending of domestic tourists in the

region was RMB 1,476.6 per person, and the spending of tourists demonstrated a continuous decline.

(2) Declined outside tourist sources

Due to lack of innovative marketing and new tourism products etc., the outside tourists of Inner Mongolia are declining. For instance, from January to June 2020, outside tourists in Inner Mongolia accounted for 42.6%; in 2020, the outside tourists accounted for 41.5%.

(3) Serious homogeneity and fierce competition in the tourism market

In recent years, in despite of rapid development of tourism in Inner Mongolia, there is a serious problem of homogeneity, which is mainly reflected in single identical project, purchase of products without originality, grave shortage of "entertainment" project and intense mutual competition. For instance, in 2020, the district attractions were 4.1 times that of 2010 over the same period, while the district tourism revenue was 3.3 times that of 2010 3.3. The growth rate of tourist attractions was higher than that of tourism revenue.

3. Countermeasures and Suggestions

(1) Regional travel as an alternative form of tourism

In view of the long duration of COVID-19, the United Nations World Tourism Organization has issued global guidance on reopening and restoring tourism in a safe manner. As to restoration of tourism, researchers believe that regional tourism, health tourism, and rural tourism may become new models of tourism. The geographical advantages of Inner Mongolia can give full play to this. Moreover, Inner Mongolia has vast grasslands which is favorable for rural tourism and homestays.

(2) Further exploration of boutique tourism with distinctive characteristics

At present, the Inner Mongolia tourism is mining grassland culture and promoting grassland and desert view spots. A breakthrough is expected from the grassland to the desert due to insufficiency. Pictures in contrast with local ethnic cultures should be explored. It is believed that the grassland food culture, fashion and characteristic construction can be skillfully fused into tourism consumption. The local traditional famous food was packed to provide tourists with clean, healthy and original Mongolian food culture.

(3) Enhancement of marketing innovation in Inner Mongolia tourism

With the "Belt and Road" initiative, the cooperation with well-known scenic spots and travel agencies at home and abroad has been strengthened to promote the popularity and reputation of Inner Mongolia in the tourism industry; furthermore, the favorable opportunity of western development should be seized to plan and hold online tourism exchange meeting and invite well-known painters, writers, photographers, influencers to Inner Mongolia, thus

promoting the tourism in Inner Mongolia. The model of "influencer + short video + live streaming" should be adopted to promote the characteristic tourism resources of Inner Mongolia.

After the epidemic, sustainable tourism in Inner Mongolia is suggested to create a more relaxed atmosphere, strengthen tourism publicity, and attract regional tourists who like to relieve pressure and maintain mental health. Due to the short travel distance, tourists can use the time saved during the trip to integrate into the local life and carry out in-depth leisure travel. So as to gradually attract external tourists according to the situation of the epidemic, tourism products can be promoted through the current popular way of live streaming.

Reference

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