

Simple ways to prepare your business

Be China Ready



Extend a world-class welcome

The last few years have seen a significant rise in the number of visitors to Tasmania from China.

A record 20,400 Chinese tourists visited the state in the 12 months to June 2014, a 61 per cent increase according to the International Visitor Survey by Tourism Research Australia.

This trend began in the 1990s as mainland China opened up tourism and encouraged their citizens to travel abroad to gain cultural and Western knowledge and understanding. It is also a reflection of the strong bond that has existed between China and Tasmania across three centuries, starting with Chinese miners being welcomed in large numbers to the state in the 1880s.

Since then, the local community has grown in number and also in its contribution to Tasmania's way of life, which saw Tasmania and China's Fujian province establish a sister state relationship in 1981. Launceston and Taiyuan have had a sister city relationship since 1995.

This large local Chinese community, increasing numbers of international students calling Tasmania home and a growing wealthy Chinese middle class, on the back of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation within mainland China, has significant economic potential for our state.

The Tasmanian Government places a strong focus on attracting Chinese investment to the state and growing the number of tourists who visit.

Delivering a distinctly Tasmanian experience

Chinese visitors to Tasmania are much the same as any other tourists, but there are some important cultural points that are worth noting to ensure your business makes the most of what will increasingly be a major economic driver for Tasmania.

These tourists may be simply on holiday, here for business, longer term students studying in Tasmania or visiting friends and relatives.

So, it is important to note that travellers will have different levels of wealth, travel experience, needs, requirements, and aspirations. Understanding these differences is very important if you really want to exceed customers' expectations.

Welcoming Chinese visitors is not about changing everything you do, or about making everything "Chinese".

In fact, it is the opposite - Chinese visitors seek to experience authentic Australian experiences and to interact with locals.

But we have to make it as easy as possible, and adjusting and tailoring service delivery can do just that.

“Face” is the DNA of the Chinese culture

The concept of “saving face” or “losing face” is not exclusive to Chinese culture.

No one likes to be embarrassed or put into a potentially humiliating situation and it's important to always ensure customers feel comfortable when dealing with your business.

What is often referred to as “Chinese face” has many descriptions and definitions but in simple terms it is all about respect.

Respect for others, respect for elders, respect for society and respect for self.

It is also about the image that a person portrays to others and about being true to that image and then being treated accordingly and is closely linked to “status”.

Receiving “face” or winning “face” is what it is all about and Chinese people try to “give face” to others in all their dealings.

When dealing with Chinese customers it is important they do not lose “face” which can be caused when there is conflict, dispute, or embarrassment.

Chinese customers may talk around issues and tend to be more indirect than direct so try to use open questions and avoid too many yes or no options.

Giving respect

We can also “give face” with our actions and there are some important things to know that will improve your chance of increased business.

When meeting and greeting, a firm but not hard handshake is the preferred method and women can give a “half hand” shake.

Avoid hugging or patting people. Use two hands when giving or receiving a business card, giving back a credit card or receipt, and giving the customer the purchase or a room key.

A farewell is in many ways more important than welcome.

Seeing a customer out of your door and all the way to their car or the street kerb denotes genuine gratitude for their business and is more likely to win you a recommendation or return

Acknowledging the decision maker

Chinese society is based on respect of seniority, so within any given group of people the most senior person will be the decision maker.

Others may speak for, or on behalf, of them due to language barriers, but you need to recognise that leader through your body language and attention.

In a business situation the ultimate decision maker is the boss, the most senior person in that company or group.

This may be either a man or a woman and they should be greeted first, served first, treated with more attention and never, ever put in a position where they may be embarrassed.

Using a few Chinese phrases can be welcoming and it is not hard to make a good first impression.

Here are a few worth trying:

Welcome

Huang Ying Ni (who-won ying knee)

How are you?

Ni Hao Ma? (knee how mar)

Thank you

Xie Xie (she-eh she-eh)

A little language goes a long way

Over 90 per cent of visitors to Australia from Asia, including China, have tertiary education, so they have studied English at both secondary and tertiary levels.

In many cases an understanding of written English may be much better than spoken English although of course the best method of communication is in your visitors' native language.

For Chinese visitors this is Mandarin for spoken elements and Simplified Chinese characters for written elements.

Some markets in Asia (such as Hong Kong) use Cantonese for speaking and traditional characters for writing.

While those who can read traditional characters can also read simplified Chinese, it doesn't work the other way around.

Use simplified characters as they can be read by all.

The Chinese language is based on characters. Each character has a meaning in its own right and can be joined with another character to form new words or meanings.

This makes the meaning more important than the actual word, so if you are translating English to Chinese, make sure it is the meaning that gets translated.

For this reason it is highly recommended that any translation is done by a professional translation company rather than simply using online translation services, which can often be very literal and result in errors.

The Australian accent and Australian English can be confusing to any overseas customers so when you are talking, try to slow down a little, enunciate words more clearly, and keep sentences and words short.

This will make it easier for customers to understand, but do not talk louder or slow down as if you are talking to a child because these gestures are understood all too well and cause "loss of face".

A menu to appeal to Chinese tastes

Food is very important to Chinese visitors and research indicates that many want to try local Australian produce and cuisine but find it difficult.

In many ways this is due to the way in which we serve food, generally with individually plated dishes, whilst the Chinese style is “shared” plates.

Think about offering sampling options.

- Platters or shared plates.
- Australian “sampler platters - seafood/meat/mix.
- Wine “buffet” or taster glass series.
- Fish/seafood are very important as they denote wealth and prosperity.

The key reason for this is “face” with shared plates allowing the senior member of the group to have more of something they like.

It also gives people the option to sample a dish before they commit avoiding the embarrassment of not enjoying a complete meal.

The simple addition of Chinese condiments can make a big difference.

- Soy sauce, chilli sauce, wasabi, and Tabasco are the key four.
- Fresh chopped chilli available on request.

It might also be worthwhile taking the time to provide some information about items on the menu, and provide detail on the difference between types of oysters, fish, cuts of meat and even types of wine and recommendations about matching with food.

Also remember Chinese prefer hot drinks and this may well mean plain hot water.

An attractive shopping environment

Like many visitors, Chinese tourists love to shop and this is also an important part of showing respect to family, friends and colleagues. Shopping is the number one spend area for Chinese visitors.

A range of gifts might be purchased for friends/work colleagues as well as family, and these will acknowledge seniority and hierarchy.

Popular items are representative of their experience – Australian, authentic, artistic and things that show “knowledge from their travels”. Products labelled “made in China” need to be avoided.

Whilst books can be a dangerous gift, if they denote learning and knowledge (especially for children) then they are quite acceptable.

For personal shopping, the 30 per cent luxury tax on internationally branded luxury goods mean Australian prices are very competitive.

The most widely available and used cards in China are Union Pay debit cards as these allow visitors to spend outside of the US\$5000 cash limits per trip.

Accepting Union Pay is a big business advantage as it will make payment easy. If you offer this payment method, the symbols should be highly visible at your entrance and cashier stations and included in all sales/marketing collateral.

Being aware of superstition

For many in China, superstition is an intrinsic part of everyday life, decision-making and consumer sentiment, and needs to be taken seriously.

Numbers are represented by Chinese characters, each with its own meaning and it's good to think about these when pricing or allocating rooms.

- 8 the best number, signifies prosperity and wealth
- 4 the worst number, signifies death
- 6 a good number, signifies things will go smoothly
- 9 a good number, signifies things will last a long time

Colours can also have meaning and significance and is worth knowing this when considering wrapping papers, ribbons and other packaging.

- Red the best colour, signifies good luck and prosperity
- White the worst colour, signifies death
- Black a good colour, signifies strength
- Yellow/gold very good colours, signifying wealth

Feng shui is a Chinese philosophical system of harmonising with the surrounding environment and bad feng shui can lose you business.

There are many websites and books that will give you good feng shui advice but a couple of important things to note are:

- avoid cluttered entrances – this signifies bad energy is trapped inside
- avoid bedheads against windows – signifies all the good luck will leave you.

All cultures have different customs and traditions and these are just a few ways that you can do more to welcome Chinese visitors to your business.

There is no need to overcompensate, but by making a small amount of effort in the right place, you should be able to win more business from a growth area in Tasmania.

To find out more about training opportunities and resources for your business go to www.skills.tas.gov.au/employersindustry.

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