China: Tourism Market Insights

March 2026

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Contents

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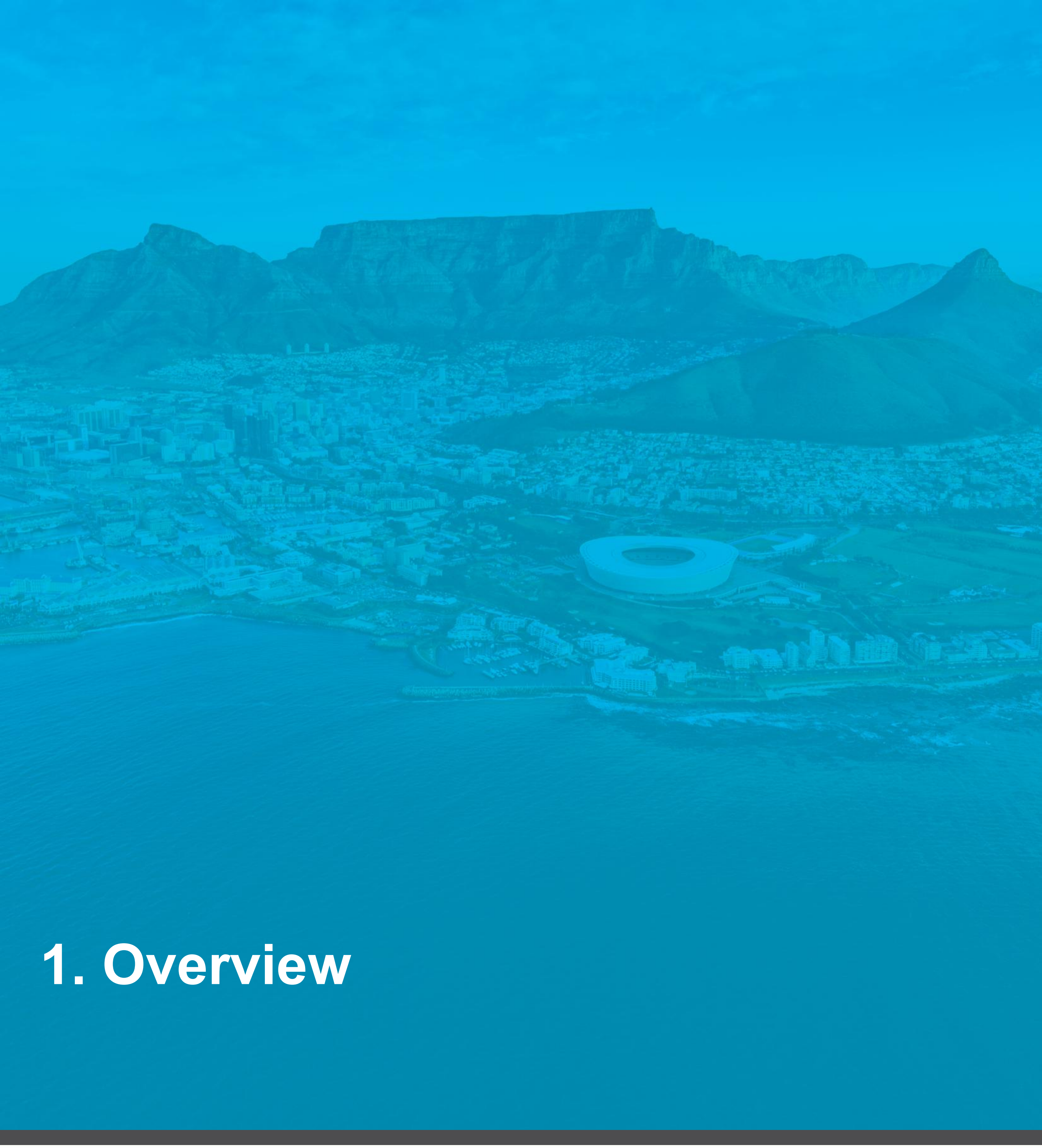

1. Overview

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1.1. Key Insights & Executive Summary

1.1.1 Market context

China has emerged as one of South Africa's potential source markets for tourism. In 2025, global outbound travel from China (including Hong Kong) exceeded 134 million trips, and this number is projected to rise to 147 million in 2026 (Euromonitor, 2026). Recent data from SA Tourism (2026) show that tourist arrivals from China to South Africa grew by 212% (129,268 tourists) from 2022 to 2025, approximately 41% of pre-pandemic levels. In the same period, Chinese tourist arrivals in the Western Cape grew by 215%, reaching 36,898 tourists from 2022 to 2025 and approximately 18% of pre-pandemic levels in 2025 (SA Tourism, 2026).

These figures highlight the potential opportunities for South Africa in the Chinese tourism market. For Cape Town and the Western Cape, the potential growth trend presents an opportunity to establish the destination in the minds of Chinese travellers, especially as they increasingly look for long-haul destinations that offer safety, authenticity and unique experiences.

1.1.2 Outbound travel growth drivers

- **Travel safety priority:** Safety and security continue to be primary concerns for many travellers, and this affects their travel decisions.
- **Digital planning:** New trends will reshape travel experiences, with the use of digital planning tools and new traveller preferences.
- **Visa and air connectivity**: Relaxed travel restrictions and better international connectivity are key considerations.
- **Health, wellness and sustainability**: Young travellers are increasingly prioritising wellness and sustainable practices. They are favouring eco-friendly accommodations and experiences centered around health, such as yoga retreats and nature activities.
- **Evolving preferences**: There is an increasing focus on luxury travel and high-end lodging (4 stars and above).
- **Demographic shift**: Travellers include a rapidly expanding, larger middle class and more affluent older travellers.
- **Generation Z (Gen Z) influence**: The younger generation is driving market evolution with their emphasis on independent planning, authentic experiences, and engagement through social media and influencer recommendations

1.1.3 Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) arrivals in South Africa and the Western Cape

- China was the second-largest Asian source market for visitors to South Africa and the Western Cape.
- About 10,212 Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourists visited the Western Cape (17% of all Asian tourists to the Western Cape) in 2025.
- A total of R176.9 million was spent in the Western Cape by Chinese tourists, with an average spend of R18 000 per tourist in 2025.
- Extended stays amounted to an average of 10.9 nights in the Western Cape in 2024.
- Purpose of visit in South Africa: 45% of Chinese (Incl. Hong Kong) tourists travelled for business and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) in 2025.

1.1.4 Market potential for Cape Town and the Western Cape

The Western Cape received 27% of the Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourist arrivals from South Africa's overall Chinese tourist arrivals recorded in 2025. To capitalise on the growing interest in travel from both leisure and business sectors, including Chinese travellers attending MICE events, there is a need for collaboration and leveraging of both political and economic ties between China, South Africa, Cape Town, and the Western Cape.

Sources: SA Tourism (2025); China Trading Desk (2024); Tourism Economics (2025/26); Euromonitor International (2025/2026); iClick Interactive (2024); cited by Wesgro (2026)

1.1.5 Relations between China, and South Africa, Cape Town and the Western Cape

The press release on *Cape Town strengthens economic ties in China,* highlights four key areas that are essential for enhancing relations between China, and Cape Town and the Western Cape (Invest Cape Town, 2025). These four areas include:

1. **Commitment to values**: The Western Cape wines are positioned as premium products due to their commitment to quality, sustainability, and transparency, aligning with international consumers.
2. **Economic ties**: The importance of strengthening economic relationships between South Africa and China is emphasised, noting that China is a key trade partner.
3. **Benefits**: It is acknowledged that strengthening these ties will benefit exporters, tourism and attract long-term investment for Cape Town's economy.
4. **Air Connectivity**: A direct flight between Cape Town and China is highlighted as a crucial next step for enhancing trade, tourism and investment flows.

1.1.6 Sought-after leisure tourism and business or MICE destination

To expand market access for tourism in China, tourism stakeholders need to leverage the existing trade relations in South Africa and the province.

Leisure tourism destination

1. **Promotion strategies -** Effective promotion of South Africa and the Western Cape in the Chinese market is grounded in three pillars:
    a) **Experiential travel:** Encouraging key stakeholders, including trade partners and media, to explore new and immersive travel experiences in the province, such as curated wine tours or culinary experiences with unique activities.
    b) **Sustainable development:** Positioning Cape Town and the Western Cape as a sustainable tourism destination by incorporating educational components that concern environmental and wildlife conservation.
    c) **Cultural immersion:** Showcasing the rich tapestry of Cape Town and the Western Cape's local culture, communities and traditions to attract Chinese tourists seeking authentic, cultural experiences.
2. **Social media:** Boosting Cape Town and the Western Cape's presence on platforms like WeChat and TikTok to engage with travel influencers and promote the destination.
3. **Chinese visa:** Recognising the need to work closely with Travel Trade Organisations (TTOs) and to address the access barrier of visa readiness.

Business events and MICE destination

1. **Competitive destination positioning:** More effective marketing and customised incentives are needed to enhance Cape Town and the broader Western Cape's competitiveness to increase regional spread. It is crucial to develop pricing strategies to align with the budgets of Chinese corporates.
2. **Sustainability as a key differentiator**: Chinese buyers prioritise sustainability, which presents an opportunity for Cape Town and the Western Cape to promote eco-friendly practices and integrate corporate social responsibility (CRS) initiatives in business events.
3. **Technology and infrastructure expectations**: High-speed internet, digital conference solutions and smart venue technologies are in demand for seamless event management.
4. **Need for language and cultural adaptation**: The lack of support for Mandarin speakers creates an opportunity for enhancing language services and cultural awareness, so as to cater to Chinese customs and preferences for a better delegate experience.

In summary, the future growth of Cape Town and the Western Cape's position in the Chinese market goes beyond merely profiling travellers and creating itineraries. It is essential to enhance and sustain the market value through effective marketing strategies. These strategies should be guided by a nuanced understanding of travellers' evolving profiles, their motivational and behavioural factors and the need to adapt offerings. In addition, key elements such as the destination's commitment to sustainability, meaningful community engagement, technology development, infrastructure investment, and increased safety awareness will shape this trajectory.

Sources: Wesgro (2024, 2025); Invest Cape Town (2025); World Economic Forum (2025)

1.2 Objectives and Methodology

Objectives

Market research in the tourism sector is essential for gaining insights into travellers' preferences and behaviours, which can be obtained from examining various factors such as economic conditions and cultural influences. It also plays a crucial role in identifying emerging markets and monitoring the performance of the tourism industry (SIS International Market Research, 2025).

This report offers valuable insights into China's tourism economy, outbound travel, and consumer trends. In addition, it provides an overview of the number of tourist arrivals in South Africa and the Western Cape, as well as air travel trends.

Methodology

To compile this report, a mixed-method approach involving a combination of secondary quantitative data and secondary research was employed to gather trends and insights into the Chinese traveller market. Various research sources were referenced, including international and national databases and travel industry reports.

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1.3 Definitions

- **Outbound tourism spending** – Refers to the amount paid by residents of the country of reference for the acquisition of goods and services, including transport, for and during trips abroad. All spending that is made in the destination is included. Trips that are over 24 hours are included; however, day-trippers and transit passengers are excluded.
- **Outbound departures** – The number of outbound trips by residents of the country of origin to the destination country, excluding day trips.
- **Business outbound air travel** – International trips by residents for business purposes including unmanaged and managed, and MICE – meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. Outbound air departures include scheduled airlines, charter and low-cost carriers.
- **Leisure outbound air travel** – All international trips by national residents for leisure purposes including recreational trips/holidays, visiting friends and relatives and other purposes (such as sports, education, medical, shopping, religion etc). Outbound air travel includes scheduled airlines and non-scheduled airlines.
- **Travel & tourism** – The activity of travellers on trips outside their usual environment with a duration of less than one year. Economic activity related to all aspects of such trips is measured in the research.
- **Direct contribution to gross domestic product (GDP)** – Refers to GDP generated by industries that deal directly with tourists, including hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transport services, as well as the activities of restaurant and leisure industries that deal directly with tourists.
- **Total contribution to employment** – The number of jobs generated directly in the travel and tourism sector, plus the indirect and induced contributions.
- **Visitor** – Any person travelling to a place other than his/her usual environment for less than 12 months and whose main purpose for travel is other than the exercise of an activity to be remunerated at the place visited.
- **Same day visitor** – Any person who visits a place without staying the night.
- **Tourist** – A visitor who stays at least one night in the place visited.
- **International tourist** – An international visitor who stays at least one night in collective or private accommodation in the country visited.
- **Overnight trip** – A journey undertaken by one or more members of the household for at least one night away from home, where the persons travelling did not receive any remuneration (did not make any profit) at the destination. For a trip to be complete, the person must return to his/her place of residence.
- **TFDS** – Stands for total foreign direct spend within South Africa. When reported, it excludes the component spent on capital goods.
- **Average spend** – The spend per tourist, obtained by dividing the total direct spend by the number of tourists.
- **Bed nights** – A measure of occupancy representing the total number of nights in which tourists stay in South Africa.
- **Length of stay** – The duration of time that a visitor or tourist spends at a destination or in the country; in this survey, it is calculated by dividing total bed nights by the total number of tourists.
- **Origin market** – Refers to the departure location of the travellers' air itinerary. The city of departure is the "origin city".
- **Tourist arrivals** – Arrivals of travellers staying overnight at the specified destination. When the destination refers to a country, the arrivals count each step within its territory that includes an overnight stay.
- **Historical data** – Refers to arrivals in a past period, in relation to the database update date considered in the analysis.

2. Overview of China and the Travel Market

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2.1 Overview of China

About China	
Where is China?	China is located in Eastern Asia, between North Korea and Vietnam. It has coastlines along the East China Sea, Korea Bay, the Yellow Sea and South China Sea.
Total population	• 1.41 billion in 2024. • In 2024, the median age was 40.6 and this is forecast to reach 48.8 by 2034.
Language(s)	Standard Chinese or Mandarin (official; Putonghua, based on the Beijing dialect), Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghainese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Hokkien-Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan, Hakka dialects,
Religion	Folk religion 21.9%, Buddhist 18.2%, Christian 5.1%, Muslim 1.8%, Hindu < 0.1%, Jewish < 0.1%, other 0.7% (includes Daoist (Taoist)), unaffiliated 52.1% (2021 est.)
Time difference	China is six hours ahead of South Africa
Climate	The climate is extremely diverse; it ranges from tropical in the south to subarctic in the north.
Total travel and tourism contribution	In 2025, international visitor spending in China is forecast to reach USD 144.1 billion, 12.9% above pre-pandemic levels. On the other hand, domestic visitor spending in 2025 is forecast to reach USD 967.5 billion, 14.9% above spending in 2019.

Table 1: Total travel and tourism contribution in China, 2019–2035

	Total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP	Total contribution of travel and tourism to employment
2019	**11.9%** of total economy **$1.7tn**	**84.2m** **11.0%** (share of total jobs)
2024	**9.0%** of total economy **$1.6tn** Change vs. 2019: -4.8% ▼ Annual change: 27.7% ▲	**82.1m** **10.9%** (share of total jobs) Change vs. 2019: -2.6% ▼ Annual change: 3.6% ▲
2025 (F)	**10.0%** of total economy **$1.9tn** Change vs. 2019: -4.8% ▼ Annual change: 15.8% ▲	**83.4m** **11.0%** (share of total jobs) Change vs. 2019: -1.1% ▼ Annual change:-1.6% ▼
2035 (F)	**13.9%** of total economy **$3.8tn** CAGR (2025–2035): +7.0% ▲ Economy CAGR (2025–2035): **3.5%** ▲	**103.2m** **14.5%** (share of total jobs) New Jobs (2025–2035): **19.8m**

Source: WTTC (2025); cited by Wesgro (2026)

Sources: CIA World Factbook (2025); World Bank Group (2025); Euromonitor International (2025a), WTTC (2025); cited by Wesgro (2026)

2.2 Global outbound tourism trends

According to the *ITB China Travel Trends Report 2025/26* from Tourism Economics (2025), Chinese outbound travel is projected to continue recovering and growing. This trend is largely influenced by structural shifts in the population, such as an expansion of the middle class and an increase in older, affluent travellers.

In addition, there is a noticeable shift in the market towards a younger demographic, with insights from South African Tourism (2025) highlighting the dominance of Millennials and Gen Z. These groups are moving away from traditional sightseeing and are gravitating towards transformative, immersive travel experiences. Travellers are increasingly seeking authentic, unique, and diverse experiences, with a rising emphasis on independent travel, while safety and security remain major concerns for many travellers (Tourism Economics, 2025).

Travel insights further reveal a notable rise in multigenerational and family trips, as travellers increasingly seek meaningful, shared experiences abroad. This shift is influenced by affluent individuals from Tier 1 cities, who prefer personalised and luxurious journeys tailored to their specific interests. With wellness retreats, luxury dining and custom itineraries in high demand, travel planning is becoming more digital-first, with social media and mobile platforms playing a crucial role in shaping decisions. Looking ahead, the expansion of visa-free access will drive the outbound travel from China (China Trading Desk, 2024; Euromonitor International, 2025).

2.2.1 Keywords for targeting various Chinese traveller segments

Gen Z travellers are highly interested in technological trends and innovations and they frequently engage with content related to healing, mindfulness and mental well-being. In contrast, **high-end, middle-aged travellers** tend to prefer content that emphasises environmental consciousness and sustainability, as well as immersive and in-depth travel experiences. **First-time travellers** are typically drawn to adventurous content that highlights unique landscapes, cultural insights and historical sites, while also engaging with current trends in popular travel destinations. **High-spending** travellers value luxury, quality and environmental consciousness, seeking exclusive, eco-friendly travel experiences (China Trading Desk, 2024; iClick Interactive, 2024).

2.2.2 Chinese share of global outbound tourism spending and outbound trips

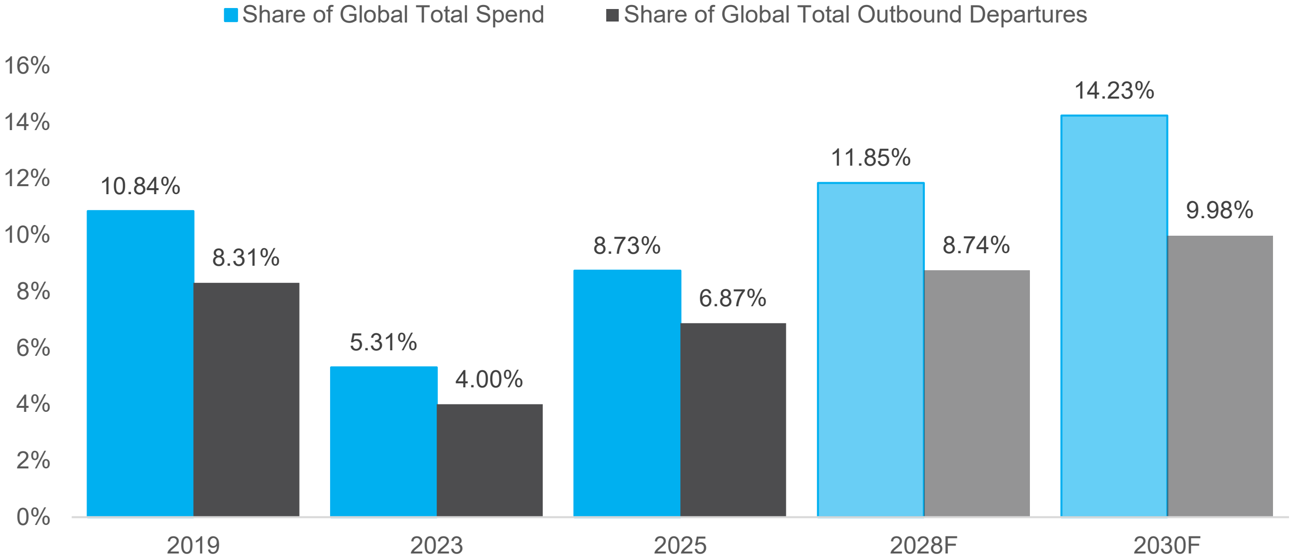
According to the data derived from Euromonitor International (2026), China's position as a global source of international tourism spending has fluctuated over the years. In 2019, China held the position of the second-largest source of global expenditure, accounting for 10.84% of the global total. However, this share decreased due to the impact of the pandemic between 2020 and 2022, as the country fell to fourth place in 2023, representing only 5.31% of the global outbound spending. In 2025, China reclaimed the third position, attaining an 8.75% share of global spending.

Looking ahead, forecasts suggest that China will regain its position as the second largest source of international spending by 2028, with 11.23% of the global share, and a further increase to 14.23% by 2030 (Euromonitor International, 2026). This can be seen in Figure 1.

In relation to global outbound travel, China has also experienced shifts over the past several years. As of 2019, the country was the third largest contributor to outbound travel, accounting for an 8.31% share of total trips. By 2023, however, this position had declined due to the impact of the pandemic, placing China fifth with 4.00% of global trips. In 2025, China rose to the fourth position, with a share of 6.78% global trips (Euromonitor International, 2026).

It is forecast that in 2030, China's outbound travel will regain momentum, with the country projected to reclaim a third-place ranking globally as travel demand among Chinese tourists continues to rise, driven by their desire for new experiences (Euromonitor International, 2026). This can also be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: % Share of Chinese global outbound tourism spending and departures, 2019–2030F



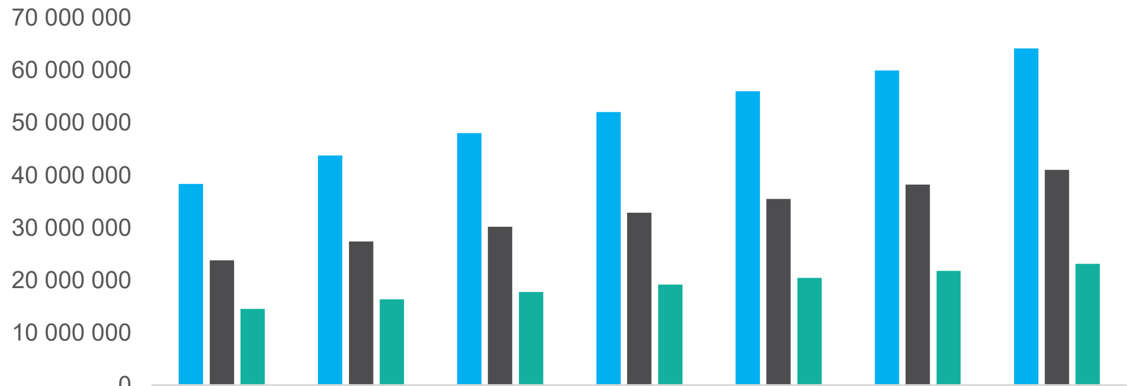
Source: Euromonitor International (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

Note: All figures shown for 2028 to 2020 are forecast projections (F).

2.2.3 Outbound air travel market trends

Looking ahead, outbound air travel is projected to increase by 46.6% by 2030, with leisure air travel expected to grow by 50% relative to 2025, outpacing business air travel by only 8.5%, as shown in Figure 2 (Euromonitor International, 2026). However, the potential growth of business air travel presents a valuable opportunity for marketing and promotion to business travellers from China (Tourism Economics, 2025).

Figure 2: Outbound air departures, 2024–2030F



	2024	2025	2026F	2027F	2028F	2029F	2030F
Total Air Outbound	38 356 300	43 740 900	47 980 200	52 025 700	55 959 700	59 956 700	64 123 900
Leisure Air Outbound	23 809 700	27 385 900	30 185 600	32 868 900	35 502 500	38 196 400	41 019 500
Business Air Outbound	14 546 600	16 355 000	17 794 600	19 156 700	20 457 200	21 760 400	23 104 400

Source: Euromonitor International (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

Note: All figures shown for 2026 to 2030 are forecast projections (F).
**Air outbound includes outbound trips by residents taken on scheduled airlines, charter or low-cost carriers for business and leisure purposes.*

2.2.4 Top global outbound destinations for Chinese tourists

Figure 3: Chinese outbound departures over 3 years (2024–2025): top five destinations (including South Africa)

- The global top five destinations for Chinese outbound trips from 2023 to 2024 were mostly in Asia-Pacific countries (see Figure 3), which were more affordable options, as shown in Table 2.

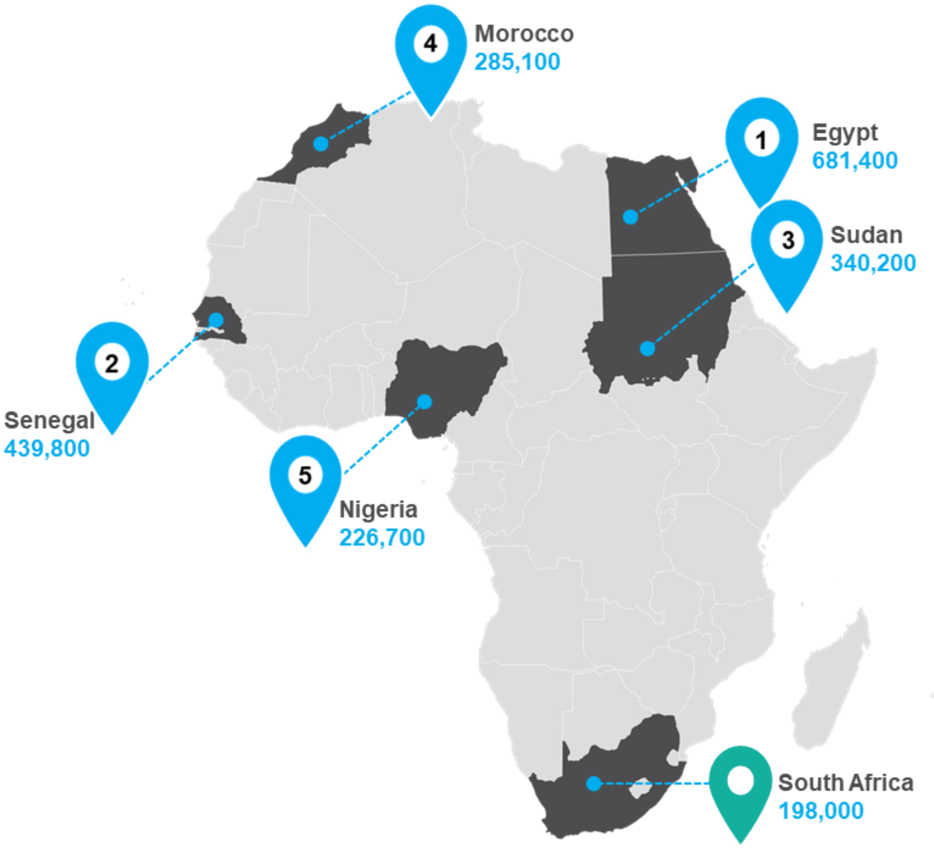
Table 2: Chinese outbound departures: top five destination markets globally, 2023–2025

2023	2024	2025
1. Hong Kong, China (12.4 million)	1. Hong Kong, SAR China (14.7 million)	1. Hong Kong, SAR China (15.1 million)
2. Macau, China (9.7 million)	2. Macau, SAR China (11.3 million)	2. Macau, SAR China (13.7 million)
3. Thailand (3.5 million)	3. Thailand (6.9 million)	3. Japan (9.6 million)
4. Japan (2.4 million)	4. Japan (6.7 million)	4. Thailand (6.3 million)
5. South Korea (2.0 million)	5. South Korea (4.6 million)	5. South Korea (50.4 million)
SA in 53rd position (61,500)	SA ranked in 61st position (66,300)	SA ranked in 63rd position (70,200)

Source: Euromonitor International (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

2.2.5 Top outbound destinations for Chinese tourists in Africa

Figure 4: Total Chinese outbound departures over 3 years (2023– 2025): top five destinations (including South Africa) in Africa



- South Africa's ranking for China's outbound trips to Africa remained in 6th position in 2024 and 2025. Table 3 shows that, over the past three consecutive years (2023–2025), Egypt and Senegal were the leading markets for outbound trips to Africa for Chinese tourists.

Table 3: Chinese outbound departures: top five destinations markets in Africa, 2023–2025

2023	2024	2025
1. Egypt (206,500)	1. Egypt (222,400)	1. Egypt (252,500)
2. Senegal (135,600)	2. Senegal (146,400)	2. Senegal (157,800)
3. Sudan (101,000)	3. Sudan (118,800)	3. Sudan (120,400)
4. South Africa (61.500)	4. Morocco (106,500)	4. Morocco (118,900)
5. Nigeria (60,600)	5. Nigeria (80,500)	5. Nigeria (85,600)
	SA ranked in 6th position (66,300)	SA ranked in 6th position (70,200)

Source: Euromonitor International (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

2.2.6 Trends among different generations

The insights in Figure 5 provide additional important information about travel preferences that Chinese travellers consider across different generations.

- **Generation Z travellers:** This generation prefers cultural immersion and eco-friendliness, favouring destinations that enhance local traditions and emphasise environmentally friendly practices.

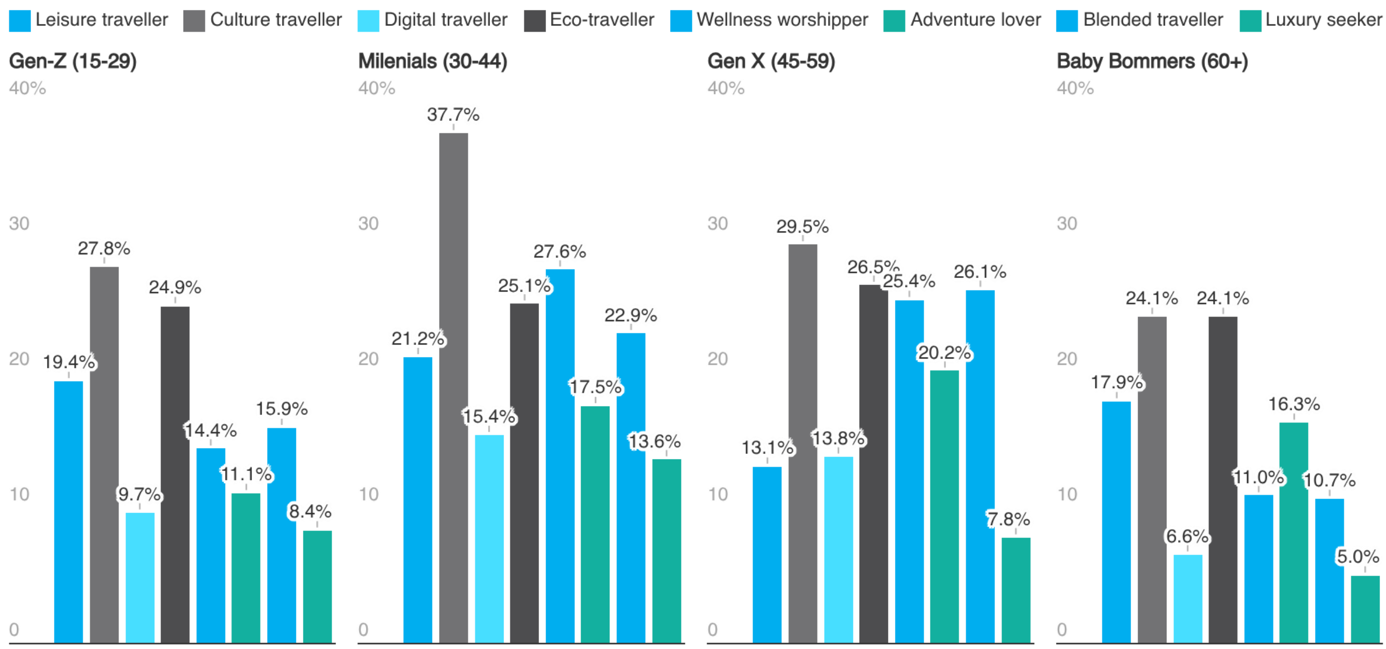
- **Millennial travellers:** This generation of travellers seeks cultural experiences, wellness, eco-conscious adventures, and bleisure travel (business and leisure).

- **Generation X travellers:** These travellers embrace a multifaceted approach to travel that includes eco-friendly awareness and wellness experiences while balancing business-related travel with leisure activities.

- **Baby Boomers travellers:** This generation values cultural immersion, focusing on local heritage, arts, and nature. They prioritise community engagement and responsible tourism, aligning their travels with their values.

Across all four generations, Chinese travellers are increasingly interested in meaningful travel experiences that promote personal connections, environmental responsibility and a blend of business and leisure.

Figure 5: Chinese traveller trends for different generations, 2025b



Source: Euromonitor International, Voice of the Travel Consumer Survey (2025b); cited by Wesgro (2026)

***Note**: Consumer data and insights presented in this section are sourced from Euromonitor International Voice of the Consumer: Travel Survey for the period of 2025. The survey explores the trends that influence consumers' travel habits, personal traits, and decision making when travelling.*

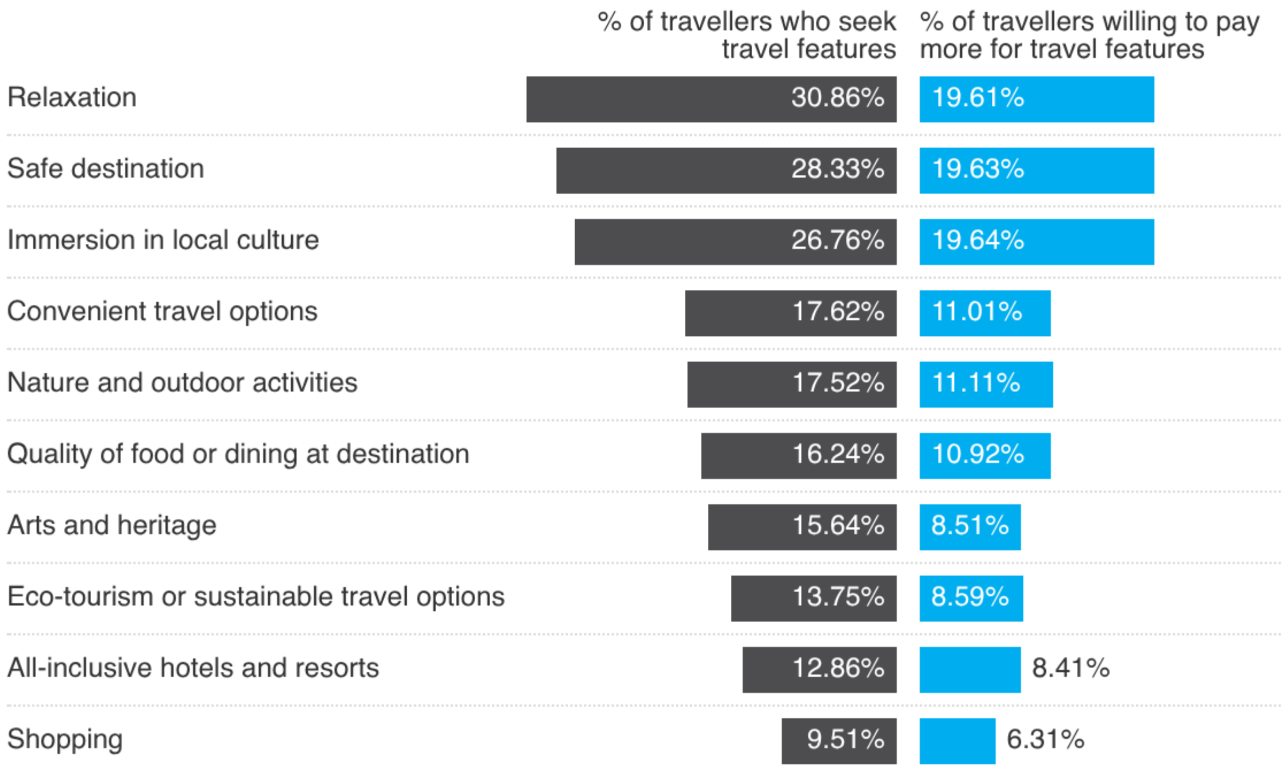
2.2.7 Destination features sought by Chinese travellers

Looking at the destination features (see Figure 6) sought by Chinese travellers when planning future vacations, and at travellers' willingness to pay more for travel features when booking their trips, three features emerge:

1. **Relaxation:** Chinese travellers are more inclined to travel to destinations that offer leisure activities promoting relaxation.
2. **Importance of safety:** Ensuring a secure destination is essential for Chinese travellers, who prefer locations that are low in crime and which effectively manage health and safety concerns.
3. **Desire for cultural engagement:** Chinese travellers are keen to connect with local cultures by experiencing genuine customs, traditional cuisines and practices that enable significant interactions with local communities.

In addition, there is a notable willingness among these travellers to pay extra for features that enhance their experience in these areas, indicating a strong desire for a high-quality travel experience that aligns with these preferences.

Figure 6: Top 10 most important features in destinations, 2025



Source: Euromonitor International, Voice of the Travel Consumer Survey (2025b); cited by Wesgro (2026)

***Note**: Consumer data and insights presented in this section are sourced from Euromonitor International Voice of the Consumer: Travel Survey for the period of 2025. The survey explores the trends that influence consumers' travel habits, personal traits, and decision making when travelling.*

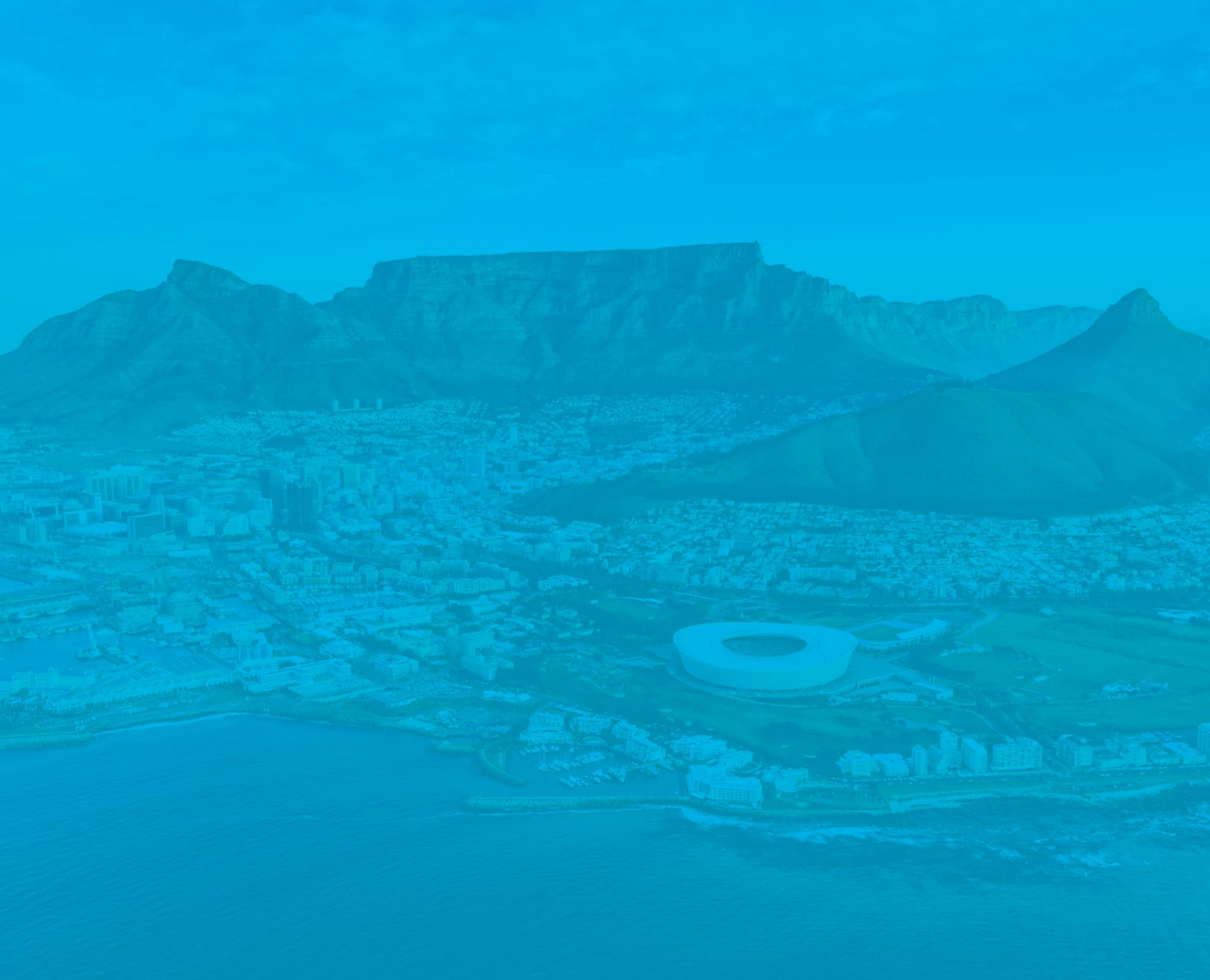
2.3 Social media insights from China

Table 4 provides an analysis of the leading Chinese social media platforms for inspiring travel, which tourism and key related stakeholders should consider when promoting Cape Town and the Western Cape to the Chinese market.

Table 4: Leading Chinese social media platforms for inspiring travel

APP	Description	
Weibo	• Known as the Chinese version of X, a real-time, open social platform where users follow trending news, celebrities and public discussions, widely used for mass content dissemination and PR campaigns.	• Total Users: 650million • Monthly Active Users: 590 million • Daily Active Users: 260 million
WeChat	• Comparable to WhatsApp + Facebook + Paypal+ Instagram • Chinese unique "Super App," Private Social & Commerce Loop, B2C & O2O Integration, used for messaging, content sharing, mobile payment, and brand engagement — a daily essential for almost all Chinese internet users.	• Total Users: 1400 million • Monthly Active Users: 1380 million • Daily Active Users: 980 million
Bilibili	• Comparable to YouTube + Reddit, a youth-centric video community (Gen Z), used by high engagement, long-form content, niche interests, and rising spending power, subcultures, anime, and gaming — known for high user loyalty and engagement.	• Total Users: 340 million • Monthly Active Users: 368 million • Daily Active Users: 107 million
Xiaohongshu (red)	• "Instagram meets Pinterest and TripAdvisor": highly influential for lifestyle, reviews, and aspirational UGC content, e-commerce female-dominated.	• Total Users: 300 million • Monthly Active Users: 350 million • Daily Active Users: 408 million
TikTok (Douyin)	• TikTok's Chinese version, a dominant short-video platform, is highly addictive, excels in UGC viral content and social commerce, and is highly effective for storytelling, trends, and consumer engagement.	• Total Users: 1000 million • Monthly Active Users: 755 million • Daily Active Users: 408 million

Source: Adapted from SA Tourism (2025); cited by Wesgro (2026)



3. Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) Tourists Visiting South Africa, Cape Town and the Western Cape

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3.1 Tourism highlights

Table 5: Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) travel trends, 2024 / 2025

Travel Trends (2024 / 2025)	
South Africa	**Western Cape**
Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) Tourist Arrivals	
Jan–Dec 2025: 38 064 (-8.61% decrease compared to 2024)	**Jan–Dec 2025:** 10 212 26.83% share of China tourist arrivals in SA (-17.02% decrease compared to 2024)
Total Foreign Direct Spend	
Jan–Dec 2025: R887.2 million -8.79% decrease compared to 2024	**Jan–Dec 2025**: R176.9 million 19.9% share of China's TFDS in SA -14.39% decrease compared to 2024
Length of Stay	
Jan–Dec 2025: 14.2 nights -13.1% decrease compared to 2024	**Jan–Dec 2024**: 10.9 nights -20.2% decrease compared to 2023

**Note: Western Cape full year 2025 data cuts on length of stay have not been released.*
**TFDS – Total Foreign Direct Spend*
**SA – South Africa*

Top 3 age groups of Chinese arrivals in SA in 2025:

- 35–40 years
- 31–34 years
- 41–50 years

Top 3 purposes of visit for Chinese tourists in SA in 2025:

- Visiting friends and relatives
- Travelling for business
- MICE

Top 5 accommodation types used by Chinese tourists in SA in 2025:

- Friends & Family
- Hotel
- Self-catering
- Guest house
- Game lodge

Repeat visits by Chinese tourists in SA in 2025

- First-timers: 30.6%
- 2–3 times: 20.7%
- 6–9 times: 20.7%

Top 3 activities undertaken by Chinese tourists in SA in 2025:

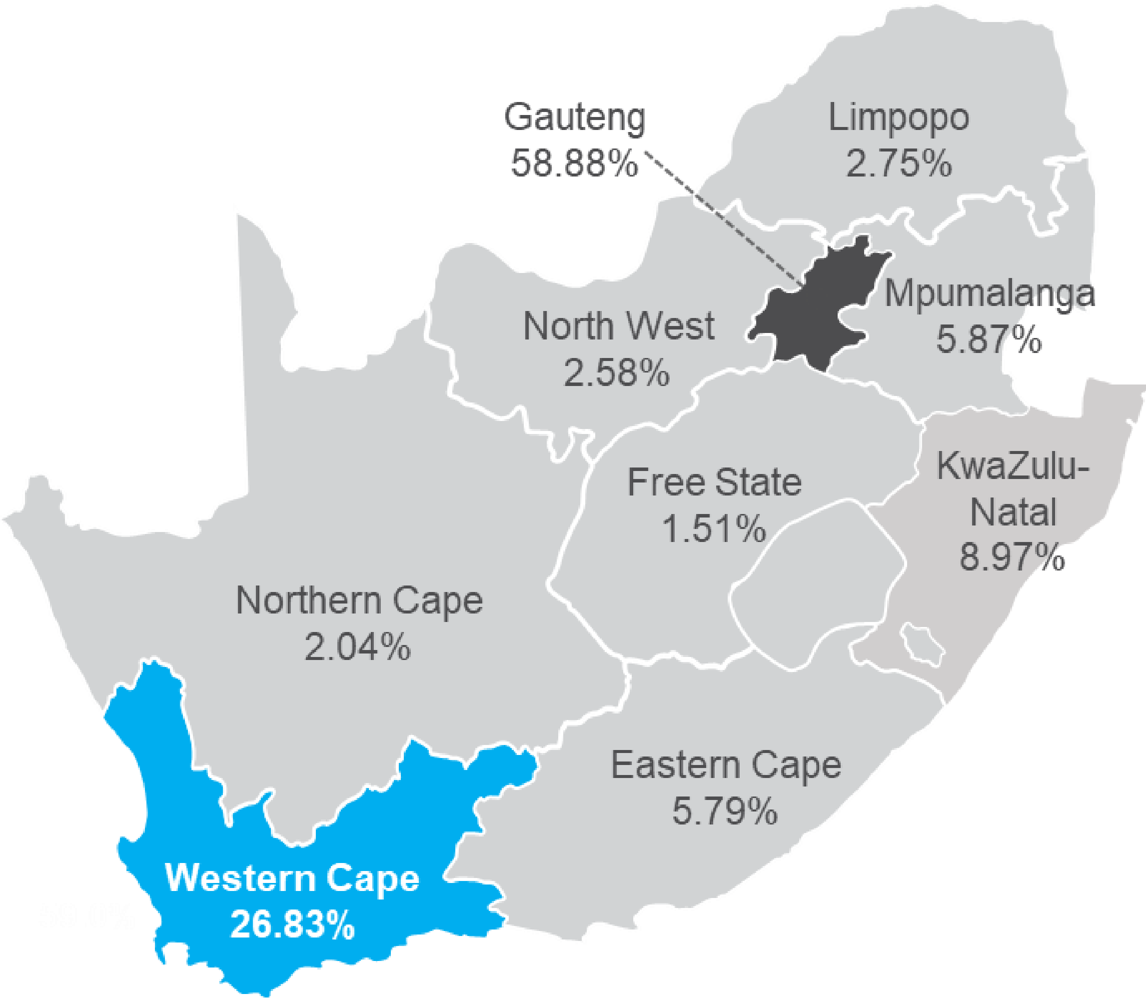
- Business
- Cultural, historical and heritage
- Theme parks

**SA – South Africa*

Source: SA Tourism (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

3.2 Provincial distribution of Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourist arrivals in South Africa, 2025

➢ In 2025, the Western Cape ranked second as the province of choice for Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourists in South Africa, as can be seen in Figure 7.



Top five attractions visited by Chinese tourists in the Western Cape in 2025:

- V&A Waterfront (Victoria and Alfred Waterfront)
- Cape Town Central City
- Table Mountain National Park: Boulders
- Camps Bay
- Cape Point

Source: SA Tourism (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

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3.3(a) Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourist trends

3.3.1 Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourist arrivals in Cape Town and the Western Cape

- China (incl. Hong Kong) was the second-largest source market for tourist arrivals from Asia in Cape Town and the Western Cape, accounting for 17.10% of all Asian arrivals in the Western Cape in 2025.

- As seen in Figure 8, the province welcomed 10,212 Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourists in 2025, with total foreign visitor spend reaching ZAR R176.9 million (see Figure 10), representing a 19% share of South Africa's total Asian visitor spend (ZAR 934.7 million) recorded in 2025.

- Figure 11 shows that Cape Town and the Western Cape were further boosted by an average expenditure of ZAR R18 000 per Chinese tourist in 2025 and extended stays of 10.9 nights in 2024 (see Figure 9), and total bed nights reached 130,354 in 2024 (see Figure 12).

Figure 8: Chinese tourist arrivals in South Africa and the Western Cape, 2019–2025

	Tourist Arrivals in South Africa	Tourist Arrivals in Western Cape	WC % Share of SA Arrivals	WC YoY % Change
2019	93,370	55,816	59.8%	–3.55%
2020	12,637	6,191	49.0%	–88.91%
2021	6,579	3,495	53.1%	–43.55%
2022	12,219	3,246	26.6%	–7.12%
2023	37,334	11,134	29.8%	243.01%
2024	41,651	12,306	29.6%	10.53%
2025	38,064	10,212	26.8%	–17.02%

Figure 9: Chinese tourist length of stay in South Africa and the Western Cape, 2019–2024/2025

	LOS in SA	LOS in WC	WC YoY % Change
2019	19.1 nights	13.8 nights	*SAT 2018 Provincial data cuts not available*
2020	18.5 nights	12.7 nights	–7.51%
2021	27.8 nights	11.4 nights	–10.24%
2022	21.3 nights	17.8 nights	55.91%
2023	20.8 nights	13.7 nights	–23.15%
2024	16.3 nights	10.9 nights	–20.23%
2025	14.2 nights	*SAT full –year 2025 Provincial data cuts for LOS not released*	

Source: SA Tourism (2019–2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)
**LOS – Length of stay*
**SA – South Africa*
**WC – Western Cape*

3.3(b) Chinese (incl. Hong Kong) tourist trends

Figure 10: Chinese total foreign direct spend (TFDS) in the Western Cape, 2022–2025

	TFDS in WC	WC % Share of SA TFDS	YoY % Change
2022	R64.0m	22.54%	*SAT 2021 Provincial data cuts not available
2023	R188.9m	18.02%	195.22%
2024	R206.8m	21.25%	9.47%
2025	R177.0m	19.95%	–14.39%

Source: SA Tourism (2022–2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

**SA – South Africa; WC – Western Cape; TFDS – Total Foreign Direct Spend*

Figure 11: Chinese average spend in the Western Cape, 2022–2025

	Avg. Spend in WC	WC % Share of SA Avg. Spend	YoY % Change
2022	18,600	60.00%	39.85%
2023	17,700	57.65%	–4.84%
2024	17,400	69.32%	–1.69%
2025	18,000	68.97%	3.45%

Source: SA Tourism (2022–2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)

**SA – South Africa, WC – Western Cape; Avg. – Average*

Figure 12: Chinese bed nights in the Western Cape, 2022–2024

	Bed Nights in WC	WC % Share of SA Bed Nights	YoY % Change
2022	56,100	14.70%	*SAT 2021 Provincial data cuts not available
2023	147,392	20.70%	162.73%
2024	130,354	20.60%	–11.56%
2025	*SAT full –year 2025 Provincial data cuts not released		

Source: SA Tourism (2022–2025); cited by Wesgro (2026)

**SA – South Africa; WC – Western Cape*

3.4 Key opportunities

3.4.1 Key growth opportunities for Cape Town and the Western Cape

Cape Town and the Western Cape boast a diverse range of niche tourism areas that present significant growth potential for attracting Chinese tourists across different generations or age groups. These include:

Cultural and heritage tourism:
- This niche area showcases the rich history and traditions of the region, appealing to those interested in immersive cultural experiences.

Bleisure tourism:
- This concept combines business travel with leisure activities, allowing professionals to enjoy leisure experiences alongside their business commitments.

Luxury experiences:
- The Western Cape is home to upscale wine estates, premium accommodations and world-class conference venues, catering to those seeking high-end travel experiences.

Community-based and township tourism:
- This offers tourists authentic interactions with local communities.

Adventure tourism:
- For thrill-seekers, the region offers an array of outdoor activities that can attract adventure enthusiasts.

Nature-based tourism:
- With its stunning landscapes and wildlife, the Western Cape is ideal for nature lovers looking to explore the great outdoors.

Gastronomy tourism:
- Food lovers can indulge in the rich culinary offerings available in the region.

Wellness tourism:
- The province needs to feature wellness retreats that focus on health and relaxation, appealing to those seeking rejuvenation.

Accessibility and air connectivity:
- Establishing direct flight routes from China to Cape Town would facilitate easier access for travellers.

MICE infrastructure:
- By leveraging the world-class facilities at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), the province can attract corporate events with premium, all-inclusive packages.

Digital presence:
- Maintaining a strong online presence on Chinese social media platforms and collaborating with influencers can help create authentic content and targeted messaging. There is a need for awareness about Cape Town and the Western Cape, and its appeal as a leisure and business travel destination.

Source: Wesgro (2025)

3.5 Target segments

- Table 6 provides an overview of the target segments identified by South African Tourism, for which tourism stakeholders in Cape Town and the Western Cape need to keep a lookout when tailoring and promoting key tourism offerings and experiences to the Chinese market.

Table 6: Identified target segments by SA Tourism, 2025

Segment	Profile	Average length of stay	Preferences	Booking habits
MICE	➢ Corporate executives ➢ Business leaders ➢ Primarily high-end customised corporate groups	2 weeks	➢ Catering for both team-building and high-end experiential needs ➢ Reliant on comprehensive one-stop services ➢ High per capita spending ➢ Preference for luxury hotels	➢ Frequent use of official websites / online travel agencies (OTAs) for direct bookings, commonly booked within 6 months prior to departure.
Business travel	➢ Business-oriented itineraries ➢ Key sectors: multinational corporations	Trade: 2 weeks	➢ Efficient transportation arrangements paired with leisure activities ➢ Significant expenditures on accommodation, dining and shopping ➢ Preference for upscale business-oriented hotels	➢ Commonly booked in the same month as travel. ➢ Frequent use of tailor-made or MICE trade
Group leisure	➢ Targeting middle-to-high-income families and affluent retirees	8–10 days	➢ Preference for curated classic itineraries with a touch of understated luxury. ➢ Emphasis on safety and convenience. ➢ High shopping expenditure ratio. ➢ Accommodation leans toward upscale chain hotels.	➢ Reliant on professional guide services from travel agencies. ➢ ➢ Preference for Chinese-speaking local ground teams.
Free independent travellers (FIT)	➢ Primarily targeting the age group of 25–45. ➢ Travelling solo or with a partner/spouse.	10–15 days	➢ Specialised tours (photography, self-drive road trips, adventure tourism). ➢ Active social media sharing of experiences. ➢ Preference for flexible itineraries. ➢ Substantial spending on premium accommodations.	➢ Commonly booked within 3 months of travel.

Source: Adopted from SA Tourism (2025)

3.6 Barriers

3.6.1 Key barriers to attracting Chinese travellers to Cape Town and the Western Cape

Safety and security perceptions:

- Concern about safety in South Africa is a major barrier for Chinese travellers.
- Cape Town and the Western Cape are viewed as safer compared to other parts of South Africa.
- Proactive communication about safety measures and hospitality is essential.

Accessibility and air connectivity:

- Limited direct air access between China and South Africa affects travel volume.
- Chinese travellers often route through Middle Eastern hubs, increasing travel time and costs.
- Direct flights from mainland China would improve accessibility for Cape Town.

Language and cultural readiness:

- Language barriers present challenges, particularly in leisure and MICE segments.
- A need exists for Mandarin-speaking guides and translated collateral to enhance visitor experience.
- Gaps in training staff for cultural sensitivity could affect traveller satisfaction.

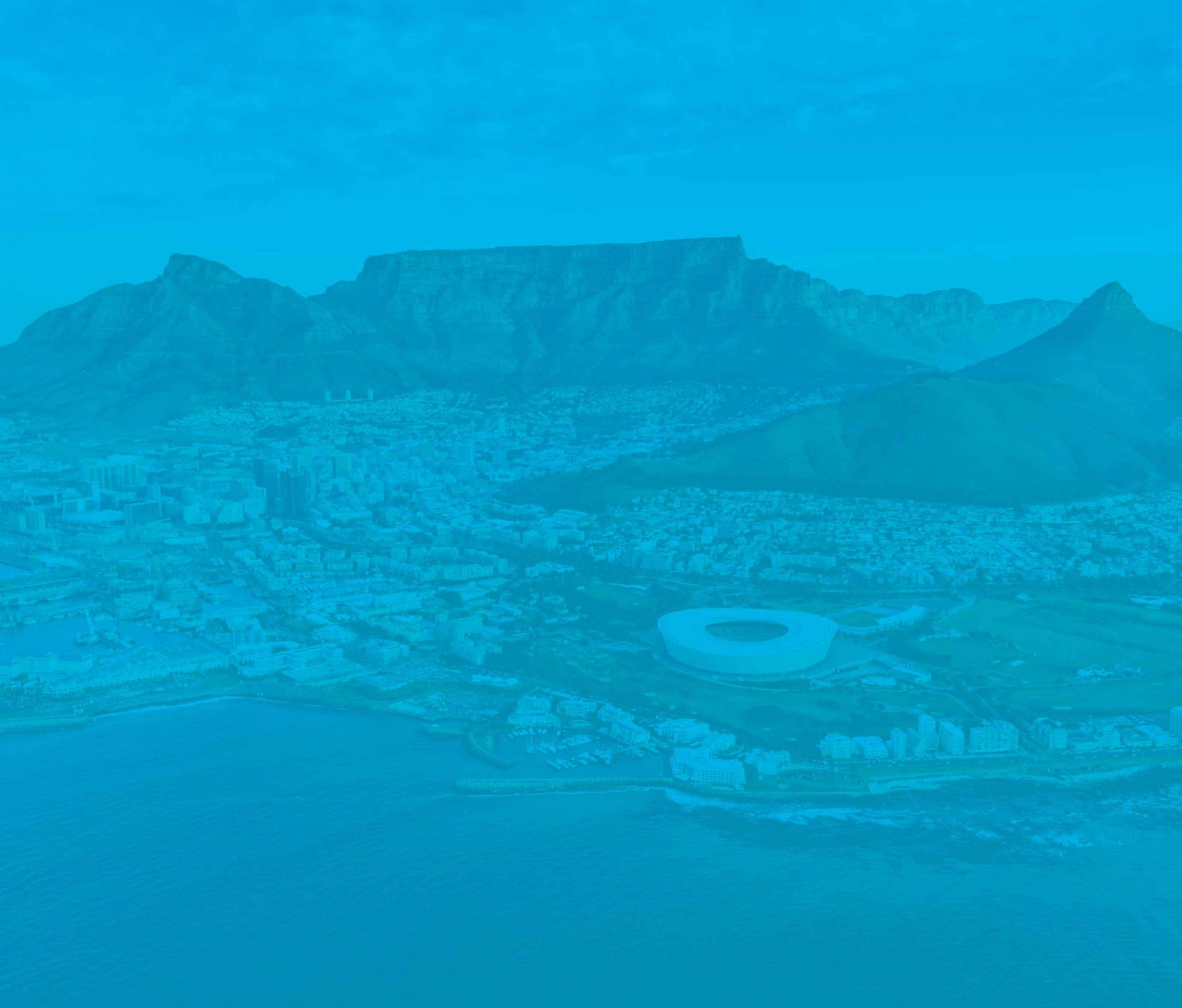
Competition from other long-haul destinations:

- There is competition in targeting Chinese travellers from other long-haul destinations like Australasia (Australia and New Zealand) and other parts of Europe.
- Egypt poses significant competition with its cultural attractions.
- To remain competitive, Cape Town and the Western Cape must highlight its unique offerings, including word-class MICE infrastructure and natural beauty, cultural depth and value for money.

Limited digital visibility in China:

- South African Tourism's presence in digital platforms is growing, but awareness remains low.
- A lack of localised digital storytelling and engagement with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) risks overshadowing Cape Town and the Western Cape as destinations for the Chinese market.
- A strong online presence is crucial to compete effectively against other destinations.

Source: Wesgro (2025)



4. Chinese Air Travel Trends

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4.1 Getting to Cape Town, Western Cape

4.1.1 Chinese arrivals in Cape Town (via air)

Cape Town International Airport recorded a total of 6,872 tourist arrivals from China between January and December 2025, as illustrated in Table 7. Historical data reveals a marked peak in arrivals during several months prior to the pandemic, including January 2019, with 2,120 arrivals; February 2019, with 2,193 arrivals; and November 2019, with 2,050 arrivals. There was an increase in January 2020, with 2,507 arrivals, indicating a growing trend in Chinese arrivals in Cape Town at that time.

However, post-pandemic figures show a decline in arrivals, with only 894 recorded in November 2023, increasing slightly to 905 in May 2024, followed by 856 in May 2025, as illustrated in Figure 13. This suggests that while the overall numbers are down, there exists a potential for recovery and growth in upcoming years.

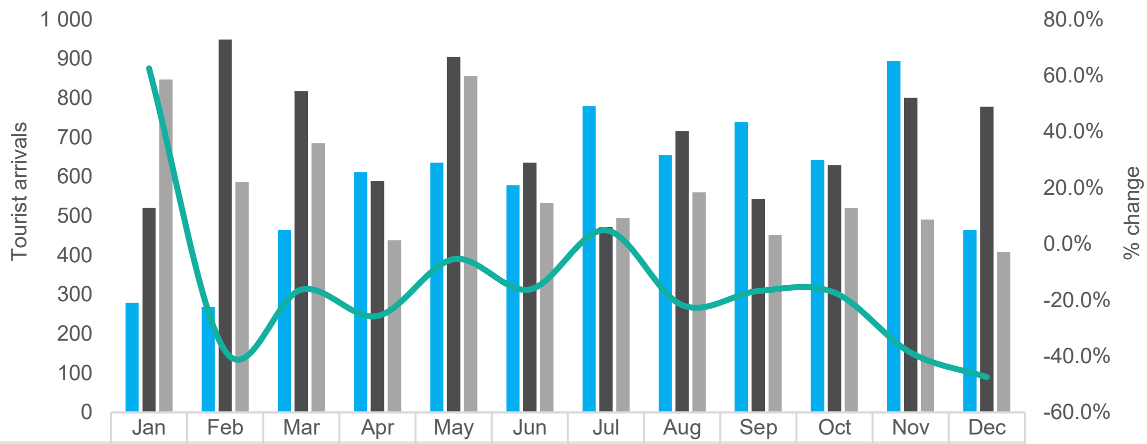
An opportunity therefore exists for local businesses, tourism operators, and Cape Town and the Western Cape destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to innovate and adapt their strategies in order to attract more Chinese visitors through focused marketing, tailored travel experiences and enhanced cultural exchanges.

Table 7: Air arrivals from China in Cape Town, 2019–2025

Year/Month	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Tourist arrivals	18 960	2 887	209	1 097	7 013	8 356	6 872
YoY change percentage*	7.45%	-84.77%	-92.76%	424.88%	539.29%	19.15%	-17.78%

Source: Stats SA (2019–2025)
**Growth compared to the same period in the previous year.*
**Note: Stats SA data represents tourist arrivals through Cape Town International Airport and not total passenger movement through the airport.*

Figure 13: Air arrivals from China in Cape Town by month, 2023–2025



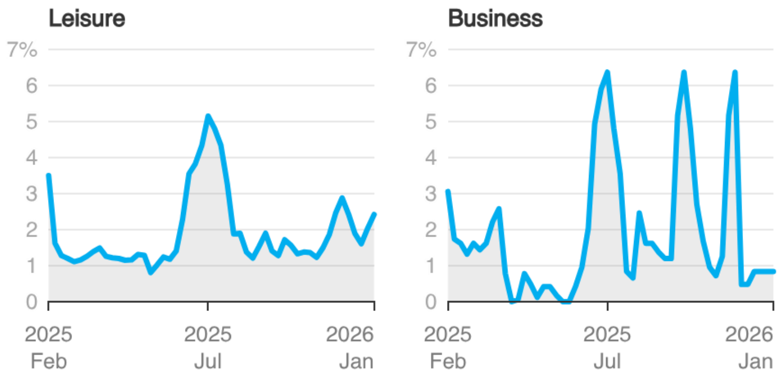
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2023	279	269	464	611	636	578	780	655	739	643	894	465
2024	521	949	818	589	905	636	471	716	543	629	801	778
2025	847	587	685	438	856	533	494	560	452	520	491	409
2024/25 % Change	62.6%	-38.1%	-16.3%	-25.6%	-5.4%	-16.2%	4.9%	-21.8%	-16.8%	-17.3%	-38.7%	-47.4%

Source: Statistics South Africa (2023–2025); cited by Wesgro (2026)
**Note: Stats SA data represents tourist arrivals through Cape Town International Airport and not total passenger movement through the airport.*

4.1.2 Leisure and business seasonality trends

From February 2024 to February 2025, Cape Town witnessed a positive y-o-y growth from Chinese tourists, both in leisure and business arrivals, as shown in Figure 14. In July 2025, business arrivals increased by 19.23%, 17.55% in October 2025, and 13.76% in December 2025. This growth was likely due to a concentration of significant business events and MICE activities hosted in Cape Town. Meanwhile, leisure arrivals increased by 16.86% y-o-y in July 2025, 14.29% in August 2025, and 11.15% in December 2025.

Figure 14: Leisure and business Chinese arrivals in Cape Town over the last 12 months (Feb 2025 to Jan 2026)



Source: ForwardKeys (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)
Growth compared to Feb 2024 to Feb 2025.
**Data extracted on 11/02/2026*

4.1.3 Marketing Planning

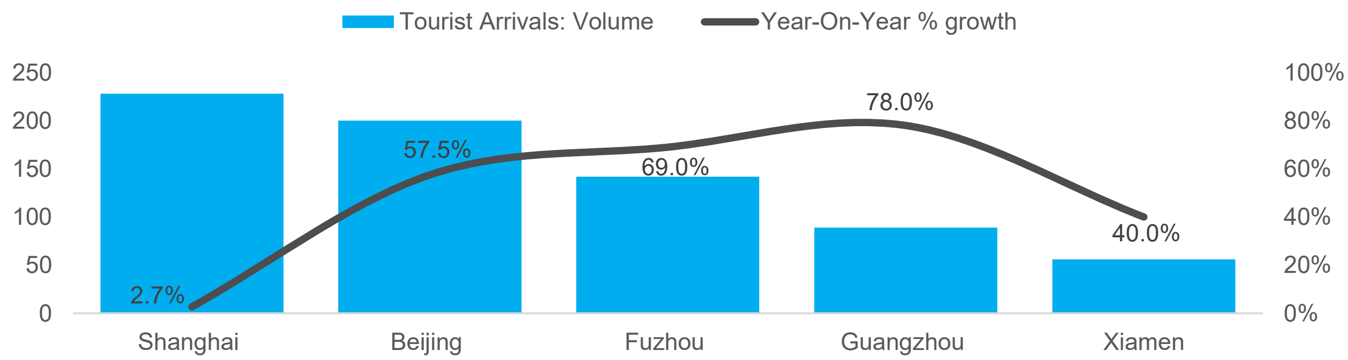
Cape Town ranked **#191** among preferred outbound destinations from China.	
Average Lead Time for Flight Bookings 32 days	**Trip Purpose** 90% share of leisure trips +40.2% YoY increase
Group Size 2.4 travellers	**Average Length of Stay** 27.4 nights

Source: ForwardKeys (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)
**Period: February 2025 to February 2026*
**Data extracted on 11/02/2026*

4.1.4 Origin cities for Chinese visitors in Cape Town

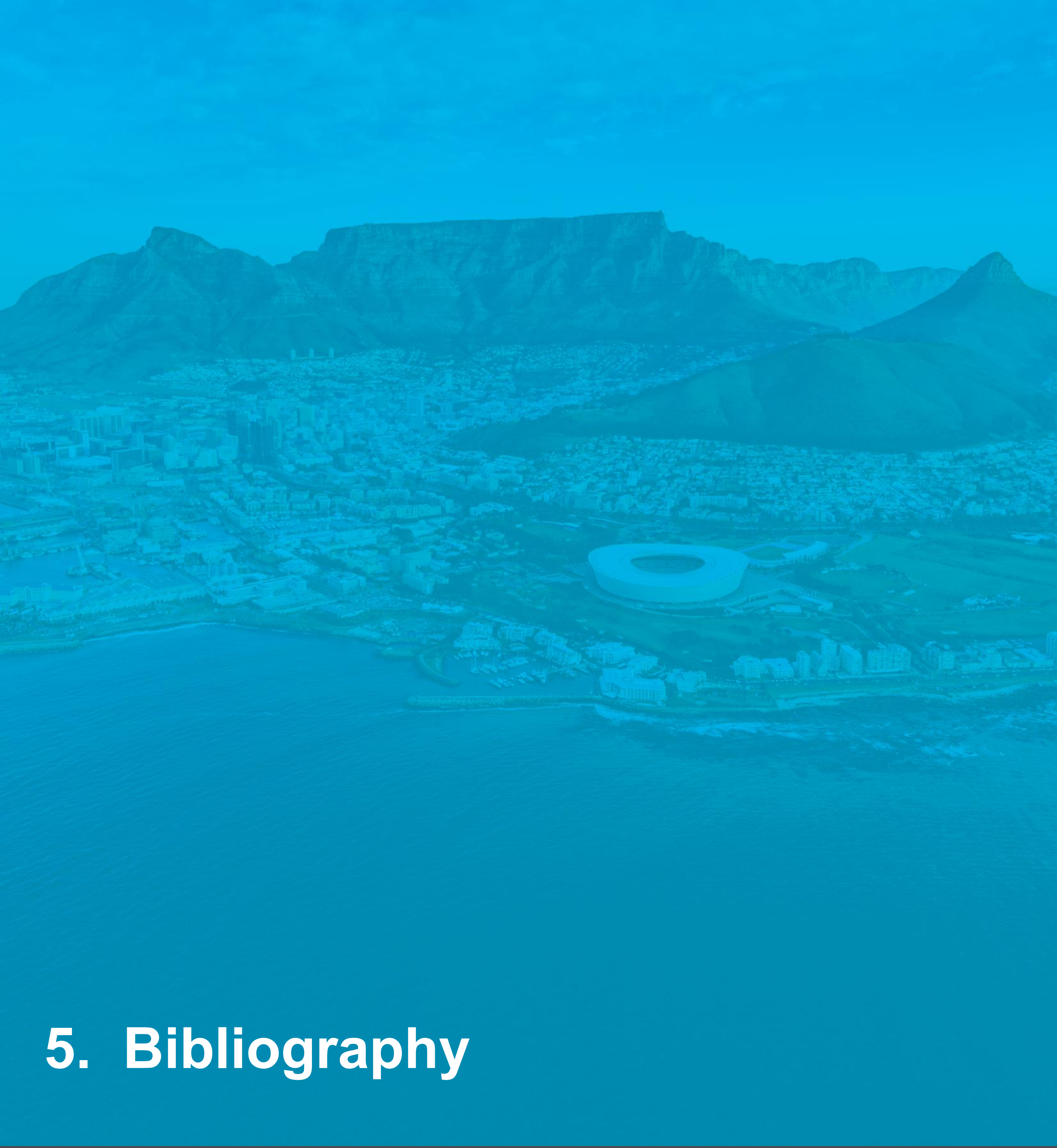
As illustrated in Figure 15, between January and December 2025, arrivals from China in Cape Town showed a positive upward trend, particularly from major cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Fuzhou. In addition, the y-o-y performance indicates the emergence of new markets, including Guangzhou and Xiamen, reflecting an increasing interest and appetite for travel to Cape Town compared to the previous 12 months (January to December 2024).

Figure 15: Origin cities of Chinese travellers visiting Cape Town between January 2025 and December 2025



Source: ForwardKeys (2026); cited by Wesgro (2026)
**Ranking based on volume of tourist arrivals*
**Growth compared to January 2024 to December 2024*
**Data extracted on 11/02/2026*

Note: Data represented on this slide is sourced from the ForwardKeys (an Amadeus company) Destination Gateway portal. Statistics reflected illustrate historical data for tourist arrivals during travel dates between January and December 2025, based on the ForwardKeys Total Air Market (TAM) dataset.



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