

China lifts ban on group tours to US, Japan, other destinations

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 10 August, 2023



Dhaka: China has lifted pandemic-era restrictions on group tours for more countries, including key markets such as the United States, Japan, South Korea and Australia in a potential boon for their tourism industries.

The decision was announced by China's culture and tourism ministry on August 10, effective immediately.

Prior to the pandemic, mainland Chinese tourists spent more than any other country's tourists when abroad, clocking up a combined USD 255 billion in 2019 with group tours estimated to account for roughly 60 per cent of that.

Their absence since the pandemic has led to financial troubles for many tourism-dependent businesses around the globe.

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Germany and Britain were also among the countries for which restrictions were lifted but Canada, which has had especially politically fraught relations with China of late, was not reinstated.

It was China's third list of countries to receive approvals. The first batch approved in January included 20 countries such as Thailand, Russia, Cuba and Argentina. The second batch in March included 40 countries, among them Nepal, France, Portugal and Brazil.

International flights in and out of China have recovered to only 53 per cent of 2019 levels as of July, 2023.

That is in large part due to staffing issues for many global airlines that have limited the flying of more routes, slow visa issuance for Chinese travellers amid backlogs in many Western countries as well as a sputtering domestic economy that is discouraging many holidaying Chinese from spending big.

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