Chinese tourists discover real America

2017-04-26

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco |   
 chinadaily.com.cn |  
 Updated: 2017-04-26 11:02

Try a locally flavored meal, get your shoes shined, mail a postcard or just grab some groceries. More and more Chinese family travelers are opting to taste the flavor of old Los Angeles at a legendary farmers market.  
"They are increasingly open to explore real stories of American people," said Lexie Wei, a Los Angeles-based tourism consultant. "Chinese tourists' interest and tastes have improved. They want stories."  
Wei's recent WeChat blog on the Original Farmers Market, an old farmers market in Los Angeles city, has generated more than 60,000 views in just a few weeks.   
An article introducing the market's history and stories behind its shops and restaurants turned out to be a hit with the Chinese audience.  
"It's not just an average farmers market. It has a rich history. It is a microcosm of the American culture, and represents the vicissitudes of Los Angeles and even the history of Chinese immigration," said Wei.   
Established in 1934, the open-air market has more than 100 different shops, restaurants and grocers. It evolved from a traditional farmers market, where farmers sold their vegetables and produce to local customers, to a tourist destination. Two Chinese restaurants have been there for decades.  
"The market is a unique place with a lot of history and charm. It's a cultural landmark in Los Angeles," said Maritza Cerrato, marketing and tourism specialist with the Original Farmers Market.   
"Ninety percent of the shops are family owned and operated. You can meet the owners, and in many shops you can see multi-generations of families working side-by-side," said Cerrato. "Local people come here and sit at the same table every day, read newspapers and talk about the news with their friends. This is a place for visitors and locals to meet."  
Meeting local people and learning stories of human interest are the top reasons the farmers market is gaining popularity among Chinese travelers.   
"There is a sandwich shop run by the original owner in his 90s, a toy store operated by a veteran and an Asian restaurant run by an American couple who had lived in Singapore for many years," said Wei.   
The US tour operators need to dig deep and present these stories to Chinese visitors, because in the future travelers aged 25 to 35 will make up the majority of the overseas Chinese tourists and they tend to focus on the cultural experience, said Wei.  
"A combination of nature, stories and urban development will mostly resonate with Chinese visitors," she said.   
The Original Farmers Market started noticing the increase in Chinese visitors a year ago.   
"We have been proactively reaching out to the Chinese travel market and welcoming Chinese visitors for a number of years," said Cerrato.  
The market is a "China Ready" program designation, which means they offer Chinese-language brochures, a Chinese-version website and accept UnionPay, a popular bank card in China.  
Not top market yet, China is definitely a fast growing market, with 20 to 30 percent of international tourists Chinese, according to Cerrato.   
In January the market celebrated the Chinese Lunar New Year with Chinese cuisine and traditional performances for the first time.   
A hand-crafted steel rooster sculpture made by the market's own craftsmen was displayed at the Farmers Market Plaza next to the iconic Clock Tower to celebrate the Year of Rooster. The 430-pound, 5-foot-tall sculpture will be a permanent display.  
"It was so much fun and we will do it again next year to welcome more Chinese," said Cerrato.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201704/26/WS59bb8c5ba310d4d9ab7e9fd1.html