South Dakota beckons tourists from China

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By Paul Welitzkin in New York |   
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A state that is best known for a massive sculpture of four famous US presidents carved into a mountain and regarded as one of the best places in North America for pheasant hunting thinks it can lure Chinese tourists.  
South Dakota, which was recently named the "Most Promising Destination" in the US by a Chinese tourism group, has hired a marketing company in China to try to attract some of the millions of Chinese tourists who come to America every year.  
"China is one of the fastest-growing countries for international travel," Wanda Goodman, deputy secretary of the South Dakota Department of Tourism, told the Argus Leader of Sioux Falls.  
The South Dakota Department of Tourism has been working with East West Marketing, a China-based company for about a year.  
"Working with East-West Marketing helps South Dakota to build new business and media partnerships, in-country reps (representatives) extend the flexibility to attend training and workshops in China, and we have first-hand insight and knowledge into travel trends and market research," Alexa Dorn of the state tourism department wrote in an email.  
According to Elfie Yang of East West, South Dakota possesses natural outdoor resources which can be attractive to a targeted Chinese audience.  
"We worked with Didi, which is a powerful car rental platform, to promote the scenic byways and road trip itineraries in South Dakota," Yang said. "The target audience group (in China) is young and (enjoys) outdoor activities. South Dakota also attracts the audience who is interested in the old Western culture of the US."  
Also known as the Mount Rushmore State, South Dakota is located in the Midwest with a population of nearly 870,000, according to a 2017 estimate from the US Census Bureau. It's best known attraction is Mount Rushmore, the iconic depiction of four revered American presidents.  
Rushmore features 60-foot sculptures of the heads of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt that occupy a granite mountain in the Black Hills region of the state. It drew nearly 2.5 million visitors in 2016, according to the National Park Service.  
Yang said Mount Rushmore is a world-class travel attraction that is also famous in China.  
Yang said South Dakota is a new destination for the China audience. In addition to Rushmore, "we promote South Dakota in the China market (and) Chinese readers know more about South Dakota," said Yang.  
Besides Rushmore, the state has other tourist attractions such as Deadwood, a Wild West frontier town, and Badlands National Park, over 240,000 acres of striking landscape that includes a maze of buttes and canyons and abundant wildlife.  
Dorn said South Dakota saw nearly 14 million tourists in 2016 and visitor spending totaled about $3.88 billion. She said the department does not break down visitor attendance by country of origin.  
The contract with East-West costs the state about $20,000, she said.  
paulwelitzkin@chinadailyusa.com

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