

SPORTS

## Four trends from China's outdoor leisure boom

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*Mainlanders' love affair with the great outdoors shows no sign of slowing. Image credit: Shutterstock*

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Since Li Nan, manager of The Primitive Sports Club in Beijing, started new programs such as frisbee training and flag football games, his club had seen a rise in popularity.

"I engage clients from both social media platforms and offline campaigns," he said. "I hire professional photographers to take photos for Gen-Z customers so they can show off online."

Mr. Li's is just one of many businesses in China playing to the popularity of outdoor leisure among young customers that has been surging since the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. During these times, citizens were reminded of delight in the natural world, while luxury, fashion and outdoor adjacent companies were afforded many unexpected business opportunities.

Global management consulting firm Kearney's recent report says the mainland's outdoor sports market is expected to grow to nearly **\$90 billion (605.7 billion RMB) by 2025**. The majority of enthusiasts are young people.

In fact, **according to BeijingNews.com**, nearly 46 percent of those searching on Chinese search engine Baidu for glamping content were ages 30-39, and 40 percent are even younger.

Here, *Jing Daily* highlights four trends that outdoor market players cannot afford to miss out on.

### Top-tier cities are game

Consumers living in first-second-tier cities make up the major purchasing power of outdoor products and services. **This group**, accounting for 34 percent of the total customers, contributes to about 41 percent of total consumption in the country.

In big cities such as Shenzhen, Beijing and Shanghai, parks, mountains and lakes around urban areas are increasingly becoming places for folk to work out, play sports or just enjoy the fresh air.

Provincial capital cities too, such as Xi'an and Qingdao, are also following this trend. During the May Day holiday week, the search results for camping in the former increased by 18 times as much.

Such momentum in top-tier cities is becoming even stronger among young customers.

Per the data by Xiaohongshu, even with a sport with a high comparison base such as cycling which is generally more entrenched as a way of life related searches still increased 2.4 times year-on-year in June. The search volume increase among the younger generations in Beijing and Shanghai was even more significant.

### **Niche sports heat up**

As outdoor activities help Gen Z relax, get closer to nature and keep up with their social lives, leisure activities are becoming more about lifestyle. This means traditional, high-action sports such as soccer, basketball and tennis are not on their list.

Niche sports activities such as glamping, frisbee, flag football, stand-up paddling and outdoor yoga are the chosen ones currently.

Data disclosed from the lifestyle platform Xiaohongshu reveals that glamping-related searches surged 623 percent year-on-year in April 2022, compared to the year-on-year growth of 360 percent in April 2021.

In June, searches connected to "frisbee" on Xiaohongshu increased by about 98 times year on year, while searches associated with "paddleboard" increased by about 11 times year on year.

Local sportswear giant Anta Sports has benefited both from this outdoor leisure craze and the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

Retail sales of Anta-branded products recorded an increase of nearly 40 percent to \$7.3 billion, with high-teens positive growth in the first quarter in 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.

### **Social buzz matters**

Social media is the arena where youth get to celebrate and flaunt their outdoor leisure memories.

However, Gen Z consumers not only use social platforms to check friends' and KOLs' pics and tips, but also purchase sportswear and camping equipment, such as tents, camping chairs, sunglasses, coffee cups and other small bits of gear through ecommerce portals.

In the first four months of 2022, more than 10 brands including Decathlon, Explorer, Mobi Garden, Norke, Camel, Primitive Man, Beishan Wolf and DOD appeared among the top 30 search results for tents on Xiaohongshu up from only two companies in the same timeframe in 2021. This has, in turn, attracted a growing presence of businesses on the marketplace as they seek to connect with these users.

### **Diversified consumption scenarios**

The fad for the outdoors is also bringing about an awareness of diverse products and services, and the names behind them.

"There are countless verticals for outdoor activities," said Da Chun, Xiaohongshu operations manager. "From tents, trolleys, coffee cups, to athleisure outfits and more, you name it. These different purchasing scenarios enable brands to tell stories and sell."

Because glamping often takes place in the outskirts of cities where participants live meaning, of course, the scenery is no longer quite as novel as it was in the beginning the demands of customers have shifted from "what to see" to "what to do."

Outdoor activities that can be paired with sports are gaining more interest, such as frisbee, lure fishing, flag football, hiking and paddle boarding.

Comefly Outdoor doing business as Mobi Garden focuses on both domestic business and original equipment manufacturing. Its 2022 **first-quarter financial report** showed that revenues increased 56 percent year-on-year, reaching roughly \$50 million (335.9 million RMB) in 2022. Its product portfolio includes high-altitude camping, hiking camping, park leisure, exquisite camping and traveling, professional equipment, tent products and clothing.

Eric Hor, managing director with Accenture Strategy and Consulting in Greater China, told *Jing Daily* that young people's pursuit of a diversified lifestyle is actually a prime reason behind the outdoor consumption trend.

"They hope to experience leisure time with their best friends, working out and enjoying nature," he said. "It doesn't have to be expensive, but the vibe of the scenario matters."

Luxury should keep this top of mind if entering the playing field.

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