

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Why the rise of “micro-vacations” in China could have global implications

October 19, 2022



Short-haul coastal and river cruises are proving increasingly popular in the era of "dynamic COVID." Image credit: Shutterstock

By **Avery Booker**

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**  
Plus: Just released  
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

With no sign that Chinese travelers will return to far-flung destinations in pre-pandemic numbers any time soon largely preferring to travel domestically for **a litany of reasons** one of the country's latest travel trends is the "micro-vacation."

Generally defined as a three-to-five-day getaway, the micro-vacation has gained pace in 2022 owing to China's sporadic COVID-19 lockdowns and confusing **patchwork of travel policies** in different cities throughout the country.

This March, the rise of the micro-vacation was highlighted in a tourism green paper published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which noted that short trips near travelers' home cities currently is the lead contributor to the recovery of China's domestic travel market.

While this could be bad news for department stores in Paris or London, these compressed micro-vacations could offer huge opportunities for luxury brands and high-end travel companies.

A recent report by ILTM/Altiant noted that even if more affluent Chinese travelers opt for a short domestic tour rather than an international shopping spree, most plan to spend more on their trips over the next 12 months. They are also more likely than tourists from other Asia-Pacific countries to take more extravagant trips over the same time period.

This means a rising number of tourists taking highly compressed, often well-funded and occasionally very luxurious trips in the months ahead. This also means massive revenue potential for experience-based companies well-positioned for rapid-fire tourist turnover think wellness retreats, cruise operators and higher-end campsites.

While wellness retreats and **branded spas** have enjoyed an extended boom over the past two years via a steady stream of stressed-out urbanites, the popularity of short-term luxury cruises among younger travelers is a more recent phenomenon.

This has been a welcome boost for companies such as Viking Cruises China, a joint venture between Norway's Viking Cruises and China Merchants Group, which **focuses** on domestic coastal and river cruises.

The company's five-day cruises, which depart from and return to Shenzhen with a stopover in Xiamen, have proven popular with micro-vacationers.

Viking noted a significant rise in the number of younger travelers and newlyweds over the course of this summer, a marked change from its bread-and-butter demographics of retired seniors or families.

The new generation of short-term cruise enthusiasts increasingly includes young key opinion leaders (KOLs) intent on making the activity look aspirational to burnt-out urbanites worried about unpredictable COVID lockdowns.

One such influencer, Guangzhou-based Gao Shengyi, splashed out on the aforementioned Shenzhen-Xiamen cruise, opting for an upgraded package that cost the blogger around 10,000 yuan (\$1,388).

As Mr. Gao [told China Daily](#), "I sat at the ship's bow and savored some fantastic European breakfasts, besides spectacular sunrises and sunsets as seen from the sea. I never experienced such memorable moments ever before, so they were unique in that sense. I also loved having ordered breakfasts in my room. I spent a lot of time at the bars on the ship, where musicians put on different performances. Truth to tell, I didn't want to disembark the cruise ship when the trip ended."

Domestic cruises and other popular micro-vacations benefit from the way Chinese tourists now book their plans, which is to say with far less lead time than before the pandemic.

Traditionally, Viking notes, travelers generally made their reservations at least two weeks in advance. But now, due to worries about lightning-fast COVID lockdowns, they book their trips "a few days beforehand."

Despite the huge potential for experience-based companies to attract young, big-spending travelers, a key concern is whether the popularity of micro-vacations will stick after China ends its current "dynamic zero" policy which is to say, [if and when it does](#).

Once they are less stressed about the possibility of [finding themselves stranded](#) in a tourist destination, many more Chinese tourists will certainly return to long-haul international travel. The question is how their behavior may have changed by then. Could this mean more cruise-loving travelers eager to participate in a Caribbean tour or European river cruise? If companies such as Viking play their cards right, it certainly could.

*Published with permission from [Jing Daily](#). Adapted for clarity and style.*