

VFS Global Releases 2025 Visa Trends Insights: ‘Deep Experience’ and Personalization Drive New Demand for China's Outbound Travelers

- China's outbound visa applications maintained steady growth in 2025, with double-digit growth.
- Travelers' preferences are shifting towards premium small-group tours and in-depth cultural experiences, with seniors emerging as a core growth driver.
- Travel demand has expanded beyond first-tier cities to emerging cities, while niche destinations such as Nordic countries are soaring in popularity.
- Personalized services are becoming mainstream, driving the upgrade of convenient and tailored service experiences.

CHINA – VFS Global, the world’s leading provider of outsourcing and technology services for governments and diplomatic missions, recently released its *2025 China Visa Trends Insights*. The insights reveal that Chinese visa applicants have entered a new “Deep Experience and Interest Exploration” phase, characterized by significant diversification in traveler preferences, application cities, and destination choices. This shift, coupled with a growing demand for personalized services, has driven a steady year-on-year growth in visa application volumes in 2025.

Evolving Traveler Profile: Seniors Drive Growth, Premium Small-Group Tours Become Mainstream

China's outbound tourism demographic is undergoing a structural shift. Senior travelers have emerged as a key growth engine, with retirees accounting for over one-third of visa applicants based on application observations. This group prefers long-haul, in-depth cultural tours in Europe or comfortable cruise itineraries. This trend is fueled by China's aging population, coupled with retirees' greater economic security, leisure time, improved health, and pursuit of high-quality experiences.

Meanwhile, flexible and high-experience premium small-group tours have largely replaced traditional large-scale group tours as the mainstream trend in the market. Demand varies across different seasons: during the peak summer period, family-friendly itineraries and education-related travel visas see particularly strong demand, highlighting the mainstream trends of family travel and education-focused journeys.

Market Expansion: Emerging Cities and Niche Destinations Gain Prominence

Outbound travel demand is now radiating beyond traditional first-tier hubs. While Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou remain leaders, emerging cities like Hangzhou, Shenzhen, Wuhan, and Xi'an are becoming new growth hubs, showing significant year-on-year growth in applications. This expansion is driven by these cities' rapid economic development, expanding international flight connectivity, and the growing outbound consumption power of their middle-class populations.

In terms of destination, short-haul travel remains stable, with continued interest in neighboring countries such as South Korea. Long-haul travel continues to be dominated by traditional destinations including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, largely driven by study, family, and business purposes. (listed in alphabetical order).

Schengen visa applications continue to grow, with Germany and Italy leading demand due to their rich cultural heritage and business opportunities and showing significant growth momentum. Nordic countries such as Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have emerged as new popular destinations, with notable increases in visa application volumes in 2025. European countries like Austria and Switzerland also maintain strong appeal. Several other European destinations have experienced notable growth in application volumes, including Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Malta, Poland, and Portugal. (listed in alphabetical order).

The Philippines and Brazil, as newly added destinations with dedicated visa application centers, have received positive visa application volumes, reflecting expanding interest in emerging intercontinental destinations.

New Demand Driven by Personalization

In response to these evolving traveler needs, VFS Global is advancing its services with a focus on personalization, digitization, and accessibility. In 2025, the mainstreaming of value-added services became particularly evident, with demand for once-niche specialized services growing significantly—a trend that reflects both the natural extension of China's consumption upgrade in the travel services sector and travelers' pursuit of high-quality visa application experiences.

Among these, the optional "Visa at Your Doorstep (VAYD)" service, now covering 16 destinations including the UK, Switzerland, and multiple Schengen countries, allows applicants to submit visa materials and complete biometric enrollment at a preferred location, precisely meeting the needs of applicants who value privacy and premium service quality.

Additionally, for applicants visiting Visa Application Centres, VFS Global offers comprehensive "VIP Premium Services," providing dedicated one-on-one assistance to meet the needs of those

seeking high-quality experiences, including the newly launched Platinum Lounge services in Guangzhou in 2025. These innovative initiatives directly respond to the market's demand for differentiated services amid increasingly diverse travel needs. Data from Visa Application Centres across China indicates a steady increase in the overall demand share for these value-added services.

Smart Travel Planning: Key Advice for 2026

To ensure a smooth visa application process, VFS Global provides the following guidance based on historical trends and application patterns:

- **Understand Peak Seasons:** Visa application demand enters a sustained high-volume period starting each April, with the April to September window representing the annual peak season for outbound travel planning.
- **Apply Early:** Travelers are strongly advised to initiate their visa applications at least 3 months before their intended departure date. Most destinations accept applications up to 90 days in advance, while Schengen visas can be submitted up to 6 months prior to travel.
- **Use Official Channels & Beware of Fraud:** VFS Global emphasizes that all visa appointments are free of charge and allocated strictly on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants should only make appointments through the official VFS Global website and remain vigilant against any fraudulent offers for “paid expedited services” or “guaranteed appointments.”

About VFS Global

As the global leader in trusted technology services, empowering secure mobility for governments and citizens, VFS Global embraces technological innovation, including AI, to support governments and diplomatic missions worldwide. The company manages non-judgmental and administrative tasks related to applications for visa, passport, and consular services for its client governments, increasing productivity and enabling them to focus entirely on the critical task of assessment.

With a responsible approach to technology development, adoption and integration, the company prioritises ethical practices and sustainability while serving as the trusted partner to 69 client governments. Operating over 4,000 Application Centres in 166 countries, VFS Global has efficiently processed more than 528 million transactions* since 2001.

*Comprised of 332 million transactions by VFS Global and 196 million transactions by CiX Citizen Experience