

Eight countries in 10 days

More Asians are visiting Europe | By Sven Hansen

Japanese tourists have long been a fixture on the streets of Europe's historic cities. They are now being joined by increasing numbers of Chinese, Indians and South Koreans – for whom shopping is at least as important as sightseeing.

It's normal for Chinese tourists and business people to visit four German cities in one day, says Cui Xiaoyue, a Bremen-based tour guide. "They spend the morning seeing the Römer in Frankfurt, then the German Corner in Koblenz afterward, Beethoven's house in Bonn a little later and then the Cologne Cathedral in the afternoon," he said. "Half an hour at each site is all they need, so that they can take pictures. What is important for the Chinese is that they appear in the photos."

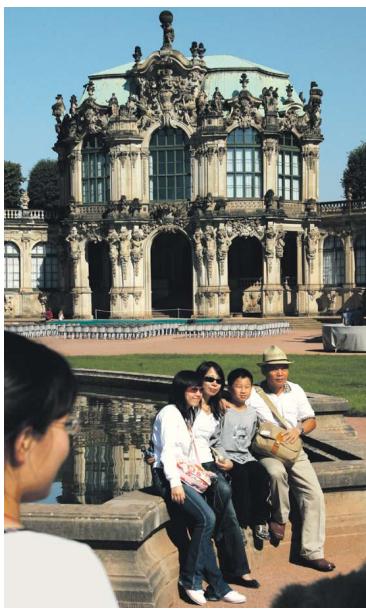
Cui has been a tourist guide since 1985 after coming to Germany to study. Later, he guided Germans through China – and has been guiding Chinese through Europe for the past 12 years. "The typical tour is eight European countries in 10 days," he said, adding that the traveling preferences of the two peoples vary enormously.

"Germans are more individual, well prepared and more interested in history," he noted. "They'd rather take pictures of monuments without any tourists standing in front of them. The Chinese want to take pictures of themselves so that they can show them to people back home."

Trips to Europe continue to be something special for the Chinese. The government in Beijing only allows travel in groups – be it tourist groups, business delegations or officials for whom sightseeing is part of their agenda.

The Chinese come mainly because of Europe, not Germany itself, says Sylvia Lott, author of a guide published by the German Chamber of Commerce. "On average, Chinese visitors only spend two days in Germany," she said. "They want to see what they have already heard of."

Lott says that most Chinese know little about Germany. Accordingly, Chinese visitors are often surprised that this traditionally industrial country also boasts beautiful scenery. But shopping



This time, Dresden serves as the backdrop.

remains the most important thing: Brand-name products cost up to 30 percent less in Germany than they do in China.

China's growing prosperity means that the number of people traveling abroad is also rising rapidly. About 31 million Chinese toured other countries in 2005, compared to 9 million in 1999. About 441,000 visited Germany in 2006, more than double the 214,000 who did in 2000. The German Tourist Board in Frankfurt expects one million Chinese visitors annually by 2010.

Wolfgang Art, professor for tourism management and director of the China Outbound Tourism Research Project at the Westküste College of Higher Education in Heide, estimates that 150 million Chinese will be going abroad in the next 20 years. And the Chinese spend more on shopping than they do on the trip itself, according to Horst Lommatzsch, the Asia manager for the German Tourist Board: "They save money on accommodations so that they can do more shopping."

According to Global Refund, a Düsseldorf-based tax-free shopping service company, the Chinese are second only to the Russians regarding shopping in Germany. Their average purchase receipt totaled €195 in 2006. "The Chinese buy everything with a label on it," said Ilka Stitz, spokesperson for Global Refund. She says that the most important thing for them is buying brand-name products in Europe, not in China. This enhances the status and protects them from buying fakes.

Global Refund says 42 percent of all purchases by Chinese visitors to Germany are made in Frankfurt, which has Germany's largest airport. Surprisingly, the small town of Metzingen, which lies south of Stuttgart, earns as much money from the Chinese as Hamburg, Germany's second-largest city, Hamburg. Home to the fashion label Hugo Boss, Metzingen boasts 60 international fashion factory outlets. For Asian tourists, it's the Mecca of shopping in Germany.

"Indians like shopping, too," said Lommatzsch. In his view,

Indians, unlike the Chinese, generally travel individually, are more experienced and visit fewer countries. "They are also willing to pay more for good lodgings," he added. In the past, they used to mostly go to Great Britain but then Switzerland became popular, because several Bollywood films are set there. Indian people have since discovered other countries. The first half of 2007 saw a rise of 36.5 percent in the number of overnight stays by Indian visitors in Germany, the highest for any Asian nationality.

For the Chinese, communism is a draw, which is why Germany's oldest town Trier is so popular with them: Karl Marx was born in this city. The Chinese also like Montargis, 100 kilometers south of Paris: This is where Chinese intellectuals prepared the founding of China's Communist Party in the 1920s.

Asians particularly like visiting cities, first and foremost Paris and Rome. As for German destinations, Munich and Bavaria's Neuschwanstein castle, and a boat trip along the castles of the Rhine are the most popular. The Japanese also flock to Meissen, home of a famous porcelain factory.

The Japanese were the first Asian tourists in Europe. Like the Chinese today, they mostly came in groups in the 1970s and 1980s. Even tourists from Japan initially wanted to see as much as possible in just a couple of days – like those from the United States, who had already discovered Europe in droves in the 1960s.

Since then, both Japanese and American tourists have been visiting fewer countries per trip. The Japanese are very interested in classical music but visitor numbers have fallen. Experts allude to factors internal to Japan and to the unfavorable exchange rate. By comparison, the number of tourists from South Korea is on the rise. Lommatzsch finds them especially open and more interested in the countryside and nature.

Many Asians have their difficulties with European food. "German soups are often too salty for them," Lommatzsch said. Stefanie Lyngbye from German-Chinese tour operator Caissa in Hamburg says that the Chinese do not like German breakfasts. "We only book hotels

for our groups that offer a breakfast buffet," she said. "That way the Chinese can start the day with a warm meal. They go to Chinese restaurants for lunch and dinner." A visit to a Munich brewery represents an exception to that rule. The hearty atmosphere, considered loud and loudish, appeals to Chinese visitors.

According to a survey of 15,000 European hoteliers, the reserved Japanese are the most popular guests while Indians are the least liked as they are notorious for leaving their hotel rooms in a mess. Miserly with their tips, even the Chinese are not well liked in European restaurants. Inversely, the Chinese are irritated that hotels in Europe do not adapt to their needs and that employees do not smile enough.

"The Chinese prefer a modern hotel with a big lobby and a pianist," said Lyngbye. "A tasteful, old building that Germans prefer is considered old-fashioned by the Chinese."

Cui says that only 10 years ago, the



looked up to Germany as modern. In his view, they remain impressed by the cleanliness, safety and social order but have since become disappointed that Chinese provincial cities already have more high-rise buildings and bigger traffic jams than Germany's urban areas.

According to Lott, an understanding of modernity as witnessed in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s is coming to dominate in China where even historical buildings are mercilessly razed to the ground: "The Chinese increasingly think of Europe as an open-air museum with an adjacent shopping mall."

Sven Hansen is the editor for the Asia-Pacific region at the Berlin daily taz, die tageszeitung.

■ A Nobel year for Germany

It was a banner year for German science with two scientists honored with Nobel Prizes in this round. Gerhard Ertl, a researcher at Berlin's Fritz Haber Institute was awarded the 2007 Nobel Prize in chemistry. His research deals with chemical reactions on solid surfaces and helps explain the damage to the earth's ozone layer. Besides the accolades, Ertl will receive €1.1 million in prize money. The other German who won science's most prestigious award was Peter Grünberg, 68. He was honored the Nobel prize in physics along with French colleague Albert Fert for work on "giant magneto-resistance," which has led to the miniaturization of hard disks for computers and music players. "I was completely overwhelmed though I'd secretly hoped to win the prize one day," said Grünberg, who is officially retired from the Institute of Solid State Research in Jülich, Germany but continues working. The awards are a push for German science, which has long watched researchers from the U.S. collect Nobel awards.

■ Kids wanted

Between 2001 and 2006, German men's desire for children rose dramatically according to a survey carried out by the European Commission. In 2001, a survey asked what people considered the ideal number of children was. The average among German men was 1.7. By spring of 2006, that number had jumped to 2.2.

Such a rapid increase raised eyebrows among demographers but no serious errors in the survey were found. One theory attributes the change in male attitudes to the debate over Germany's need for more children. The change among women was far less pronounced.

■ Germany's 'Average Joe'

The average German watches 13 hours, 14 minutes of television a week, spends four hours, 21 minutes reading, names their kids Leon or Marie and gets married at 30 if female, 33 if male. The average German also likes to sing: 1,652,012 of Germany's 80-plus million people are active members of one of the country's 21,499 choirs.

These and other nuggets of information are available in the 2007 edition of the Statistical Yearbook, published by Germany's statistics office. It is a 740-page, door-stop-size compendium of graphs, charts and numbers that provide a snapshot of the country's society and politics. Another factoid: The average person in the land of poets and thinkers spent €49 on books in 2005, an amount insufficient for the Statistical Yearbook: It costs €71.

■ Fewer suicides

The number of suicides in Germany fell for the third year in a row last year, according to numbers released by the Federal Statistical Office. In 2006, 7,225 men and 2,540 women took their own lives. The suicide rate reached its peak in 1982, with 32.9 suicides per 100,000 residents. By 2006, it had fallen to 11.9 per 100,000.

Globalization has long since become a feature of athletics. The number of foreign players improving the performance of German clubs in many different sports is growing – including stars from Asia.



Xu Huaiwen, China
Badminton: 1. BC Bischmisheim

She is a top player in the women's badminton league. Xu Huaiwen is a tough nut to crack when she takes to the court with her club, BC Bischmisheim. Born in the province of Guizhou, the 32-year-old has been German champion twice; something made possible by her having held German nationality since November 2003. In the 2005 World Championships, she won bronze for Germany in the singles.

She first came to Germany in September 2000 after simply having sent e-mails to German clubs. VfB Friedrichshafen took her. Xu had been unhappy in China because, although she was in the Chinese national training camp, she was never allowed to take part in international competitions. "With my height of 1.6 meters, I was just too small," she says. "I had to train the whole day without reward." In Germany, as a pro, she trains just as hard, and here she is rewarded.



Shao Jiayi, China
Football: FC Energie Cottbus

He is a sensitive and outstanding technician. Shao Jiayi scored a spectacular goal for his Bundesliga club, FC Energie Cottbus. The 27-year-old midfielder also scores for the Chinese national team. He has played 37 matches for China and is considered an important part of the team. But criticism hits him hard. When Petrik Sander, the then coach at Energie Cottbus, once gave him a good dressing down, the midfielder was shaken up for days.

Shao's rating in China is so high that the criticism even caused an uproar there. The Chinese football newspaper Tiaan wrote: "The criticism has caused a great deal of upset." No wonder he's a big name: Shao played from 1985 to 2002 for Beijing Guoan. In 2003, he transferred to Germany's TSV 1860 Munich. In 2006, he joined Energie Cottbus. A small comfort for the Chinese player: the club has since fired Petrik Sander.



Kyung-Shin Yoon, South Korea
Handball: HSV Hamburg

His throws are feared throughout the handball league. Almost nobody else throws more accurately and harder than 34-year-old Kyung-Shin Yoon from HSV Hamburg. The South Korean has been the highest scorer in the first division seven times already, as evidenced by his outstanding ranking. He played a big role in HSV Hamburg becoming European Cup champions. The 34-year-old has been a high-profile league player for many years. But after this season he's quitting.

In South Korea, he has the opportunity to play handball for another three years and, at the same time, pursue a study in sports marketing. After that, he will take over a top job in the South Korean handball federation. In Germany, he is a pure professional. "He would have happily remained with us but he had to seize the opportunities in his home country," said HSV director Peter Krebs. "But he will still play a great season for us." Yoon laughs in agreement.