

Chinese guides boost business for Helsinki

According to airport operator Finavia, Helsinki Airport served 300,000 Chinese passengers last year, up 50% year-on-year, prompting the employment of Chinese-speaking guides.



Having started the guide service in early June, Finavia aims to make it easier for Chinese travellers to navigate Helsinki Airport, as well as encouraging them to use its commercial services and helping with airport shopping.

Between June and July, the guides have personally met nearly 20,000 travellers, most of whom have been Chinese. The number has been a positive surprise for Finavia.

Being met by a guide who can speak Chinese has been a pleasant surprise for Chinese travellers, as they often face a language barrier," says Finavia. "The guides make it easier for travellers to navigate the airport and they also bring more sales for the airport businesses – Finnish products like berry powders and littala are especially popular."



Besides working as a Chinese-speaking service guide at the airport, Li is also the founder and CEO of Lenoni Oy, a company that specialises in Chinese culture and consumers.

"Some 300,000 Chinese passed through Helsinki Airport last year, an increase of about 50% over the previous year," says Finavia Director Jukka Isomäki. "For the first time ever, the Chinese eclipsed the Russians in number. For us, Chinese customers are an important group that we wish to serve to the best of our abilities.

COMMERCIAL OPERATORS EXPRESS GRATITUDE

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"It has been great to see that the Chinese travellers have discovered our guide service. The commercial operators at the airport have also expressed their gratitude, as their sales have improved thanks to the Chinese travellers being helped by the service."

According to Finavia, the Chinese spend more money at the airport than any other nationality, and a lot of the guides' work has to do with commercial services. Among other things, the guides can recommend souvenirs and gifts, assist with tax free matters and know which credit cards and payment methods can be used at the airport.



Having started the guide service in early June, Finavia aims to make it easier for Chinese travellers to navigate Helsinki Airport.

"Chinese travellers wish to buy Finnish products as souvenirs, but cannot tell which products are Finnish and are often unable to request assistance in English from the sales staff," says Zhouyan Li, one of the guides at the airport.

"Many questions are indeed about Finnish products and ideas for gifts. For travellers, the service in Chinese comes as a pleasant surprise."

According to Li, a popular Chinese actor brought her own littala tableware on to the set of the most watched TV series in China. At the same time other TC series started featuring the brand. As a result the brand became very popular in China, and now everyone is after littala products.

BOOSTING FINNISH BRANDS

"Finnish health products, like berry powders and fish oils, are also popular, as the Chinese appreciate the clean air and nature of Finland," Li continues.

Besides working as a Chinese-speaking service guide at the airport, Li is also the founder and CEO of Lenoni Oy, a company that specialises in Chinese culture and consumers. The guide service is a joint venture between Finavia and Lenoni.



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For now, the service will continue at Helsinki Airport until the end of 2016, after which its future need will be reviewed.

“Wishes for even more personal service have been expressed,” says Isomäki. “If we continue the service, we might expand it to include Personal Shopping Assistant style service and also other languages.”

GROWTH ORIENTED TOWARDS ASIA

Finavia says its future growth is heavily oriented towards Asia and the number of Chinese travellers in particular is expected to grow rapidly.

In early 2016, Finavia signed a co-operation agreement with Capital Airports Holding Company (CAH), China's largest airport operator, aimed at developing the connections between Finland and China, in particular the connection between the Helsinki and Beijing airports.



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In addition to the guides, Chinese-speaking personnel are available at the information and parking service points. More signage in Chinese has also been added. The Helsinki airport website and mobile application are available in Chinese. In May 2016, Finavia opened an account for Helsinki Airport on Weibo, the Chinese social media site.

Helsinki Airport ranks as the fifth largest in Europe by the number of Asian connections. In 2016, Helsinki Airport services 17 direct destinations in Asia. Five of them are in China.