**ADS: Approved Destination Status policy**

The emphasis of the Chinese government is clearly on developing inbound and domestic travel. The holiday economy is focused on promoting consumer spending within the country. Inbound tourism has priority, as it brings in foreign currency.

As for outbound private travel (tourism), the policy is chiefly concerned with controlling and regulating the travel trade and maintaining a sustainable gradual development of this sector.

ADS was first introduced in the early 1990s for destinations in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia. Prior to ADS, travelling abroad was only allowed for business purposes and official visits, with government approval needed for every single visit. ADS policy was created to account for the growing interest of Chinese citizens in foreign travel and the sharp increase in disposable income.

ADS is granted to overseas destinations through a bilateral government agreement. ADS only concerns tourism groups are handled by assigned local Chinese travel agencies. Business and official travel to overseas destinations are not included in ADS agreements.

The purpose of ADS is to have a control mechanism on the organising parties on both sides (local travel agencies and international tour operators) in order to guarantee safe and reliable tourism services for their Chinese customers.

An important issue within ADS is to avoid possible illegal immigration through tourism channels. All tourism groups travelling within the ADS framework are supposed to be monitored by both Chinese and foreign authorities to ensure they return to China. Embassies and consulates apply different methods to monitor the return of Chinese tourists. Whenever a tourism group member does not return to China, the local travel agency is held responsible and sanctions are applied.

Only certified ADS travel agencies are allowed to promote and organise tourist groups including visa application and payment of foreign currency to foreign parties. Each of the certified travel agencies must assign special couriers to handle the visa application procedure.

Countries without an ADS agreement are not allowed to receive tourist groups from China or to promote their destination in China for tourism and are restricted to business and official travel groups only.

The CNTA keeps a list of approved tour operators for outbound travel and publishes it on their website in Chinese for every destination country (www.mct.gov.cn). Being listed with CNTA might simplify the procedure regarding guarantees, payments and visa applications. Each country in Europe has differing methods of selecting approved inbound operators to submit to CNTA. The online directory is not updated regularly and is normally several months behind.

More than 146 different countries and territories have signed an ADS tourism agreement with the Chinese government, and over 127 countries were actively engaged in tourism promotion as of 2013. The reason for this discrepancy is that after signing the agreement, the two countries then negotiate the details of operating and monitoring the tourist groups and agree on an implementation date.

All the EU member states are included in the ADS agreement as concluded in 2004. The United Kingdom was the last EU member state to sign an ADS agreement with China in January 2004 and began operation from the end of July 2005.

Switzerland, Norway and Iceland have separate bilateral ADS agreements with China as non-EU members.

The USA signed a bilateral tourism agreement (akin to ADS) in December 2007, which took effect in July 2008. Canada got its ADS in 2010.