

Tahoe learning to attract international traveler

By Kathryn Reed

Catering to the international tourist means understanding their culture in order to show respect and to ensure they are not unintentionally insulted; it means being able to communicate with them via translation apps on phones or having an employee who speaks the language or material printed in their language; it means going a step beyond the day-to-day routines.

This was the message delivered April 18 by Daniel Crain, vice president of education and training at BRIC Marketing, a San Francisco-based strategy consulting firm.

Crain was the keynote speaker at Tuesday's annual tourism breakfast put on by the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel. Also speaking was Kristine Tsusaki-Reddick, Visit California's director of client relations for Northern California.



Lake Tahoe is a big draw for foreign travelers.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Germany, Canada, United Kingdom and China represent the top countries where people are coming from to visit South Lake Tahoe.

California set a record in 2016 with 268 million visitors, a 2 percent increase from 2015. The forecast is for 287 million visitors in 2020 and to top 300 million in 2022. The economic impact was \$125.7 billion in 2016, a 2.8 percent increase from the prior year.

Forty-two percent of Visit California's budget focuses on the international traveler, with 13 countries being the main emphasis. This traveler stays longer and spends more.

Crain spent most of his time focused on China and its 1.4 billion inhabitants. And while only 7 percent of the population has a passport, more get them every day.

"The No. 1 complaint of the Chinese traveler is Wifi because

in China it's everywhere," Crain said. Being connected is important to them. They are constantly taking selfies and sending photos home – electronically.

One thing Tahoe can market is its air – the quality of it, Crain said. This is something Oregon has started to do. Most parts of China are socked in day-after-day with smog. Fresh air is a reason to visit someplace.

Chinese are also big shoppers because goods are 30 to 40 percent less expensive here. They are interested in clothing, footwear, fragrances and electronics. Their favorite places to shop – outlet malls, boutique stores, Costco, Apple, and tax free shopping.

"The visitor expects to be treated with respect and politeness," Crain said. Chinese are prideful people who don't interact in the same bullish, confrontational way Americans do.



With so much of China awash in bad air, touting Tahoe's clean air could be a selling point. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Having the ability to heat water and have tea in a room should

be standard for Chinese guests.

Knowing that the number 8 is a sign of luck and number 4 is dreaded in Chinese culture can help with which floor to place them on in a hotel and how to price goods. Paying attention to red meaning happiness and good luck, gold a symbol of prosperity and luxury, and black and white funeral colors are ways to further cater to this clientele.

Crain mentioned how few Chinese travel with cash. They like to use WeChat to pay via their smart phones. It's an application almost no one in the room had heard of. It's a way Crain said his company functions globally.

It was noted with Beijing hosting the 2022 Winter Olympics the Chinese government has launched an outdoor initiative to get people involved in outdoor sports and trained. That would seem to be a natural draw for Tahoe – right along with the pristine mountain air.