

# Understanding Chinese Travelers: Key Factors Influencing 2–4 Star Hotel Selection in Thailand

*Chinese leisure travelers being welcomed in Bangkok with garlands in early 2023 – a testament to Thailand's popularity among Chinese tourists.* In 2019, nearly **11 million** Chinese tourists visited Thailand, making China Thailand's top source of visitors. After a pandemic lull, Chinese outbound travel is rebounding, with **75%** of surveyed Chinese consumers planning to travel abroad in 2025. Notably, a **shift towards independent travel** is underway: about **83%** of Chinese travelers now prefer traveling independently rather than in group tours. This has big implications for Thailand's hospitality sector. Budget and mid-range hotels (2–4 star) need to understand Chinese leisure travelers' **decision-making process, preferences, and expectations** in order to attract this segment. Key factors include the platforms they use to book, the amenities and services they value, cultural and language needs, price sensitivity, location choices, the role of online reviews, and even loyalty program influences. Below is a detailed look at these factors, followed by actionable strategies for Thai hotels to better cater to Chinese guests (with a focus on the budget and mid-range category).

## Chinese Leisure Travel to Thailand: An Overview

Thailand has long been a favorite destination for Chinese tourists, thanks to its proximity, affordability, and rich culture. Even as more countries compete for Chinese visitors, Thailand remains highly favored – bolstered by factors like visa-on-arrival convenience and widespread acceptance of Chinese mobile payments. Chinese travelers' top Thai destinations include **Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Koh Samui, and Pattaya**, reflecting a mix of urban and resort locales.

Post-pandemic trends show Chinese tourists returning in large numbers, but with *different travel patterns*. There's a **greater emphasis on quality experiences** over rushed package tours. More young, tech-savvy Chinese are traveling solo or in small family units, crafting their own itineraries instead of relying on pre-set group tour schedules. Tour groups have **waned in popularity**, while tailor-made trips and unique local experiences are on the rise. At the same time, economic factors have made Chinese travelers more value-conscious: China's middle class faces headwinds (like a real estate downturn and higher unemployment) which has tempered some travel demand. Those who do travel abroad are carefully considering how to get the **best value for their money**, especially in mid-range accommodations.

Importantly, **safety perceptions** now play a role in destination choice. Safety is the top concern for Chinese planning outbound trips. Recent surveys indicate that many Chinese have reservations about Thailand's safety – **over half** viewed Thailand as unsafe in 2024–2025 polls, due to media reports of scams or crime. This means Chinese travelers may scrutinize location and security when picking Thai hotels. In summary, Chinese leisure travelers coming to Thailand

today tend to be independent, digitally savvy, value-driven, and mindful of safety and comfort. They gravitate towards hotels that can meet their expectations without breaking the bank.

## Key Decision Factors for Chinese Travelers Choosing 2–4 Star Hotels

### Extensive Online Research and Trip Planning

Chinese travelers are famously thorough in planning their trips. On average, they spend about **12 days** researching online and typically start planning **1–2 months** before departure. During this phase, they consult a wealth of online resources – travel websites, blogs, and especially social media. Much of this research is in Chinese on platforms that cater to their needs. For inspiration and information, **user-generated content is king**. Platforms like **Xiaohongshu (RED)**, a popular social app, have become “*the most important source of travel information for under-35s*”. Travelers scour posts on Xiaohongshu where peers share travel tips, hotel reviews, and photos. Short video apps like **Douyin (TikTok)** and influencer vlogs also heavily shape their ideas of where to go and stay. Online travel communities such as **Mafengwo** and **Qyer** (often dubbed China’s TripAdvisor equivalents) host countless reviews and itineraries, which Chinese tourists trust for honest advice.

Crucially, **word-of-mouth** (including social media buzz) and **online reviews** drive decision-making. A survey of Chinese millennials found that **44%** rely on travel review sites or word-of-mouth recommendations when making travel decisions – outranking official travel agents by far. In fact, social media and peer recommendations are just behind those in influence (about 30% cited social media as a key decision input). This means a Chinese traveler deciding on a Bangkok hotel will likely read through dozens of comments from previous guests (preferably in Chinese) before booking. High ratings and positive reviews (especially from other Chinese travelers) give them confidence to choose a particular 3-star hotel over another. A recent industry report noted that Chinese tourists’ shift to independent travel is reinforced by what they see online – “*a study of social media star ratings and reviews*” has supported the move away from tour groups to independent choices.

Given this research-intensive process, **Chinese travelers are well-informed** by the time they book. They will know the exact amenities a hotel offers, see photos of the bathrooms and breakfast, compare prices across sites, and even learn a bit about the neighborhood – all from online sources. For Thai hotels, this means that maintaining a **strong online presence and reputation** on Chinese platforms is absolutely critical. If a mid-range hotel in Thailand lacks reviews or information in Chinese, it will simply be bypassed during that lengthy research phase.

### Booking Channels and Platforms Used

When it comes to booking accommodations, Chinese leisure travelers favor their own ecosystem of travel platforms. The **top booking channels** for hotels among Chinese tourists are dominated by Chinese companies. A Thailand-focused survey in 2020 (just before the pandemic) found the

**five most preferred hotel booking channels** were: **Ctrip (Trip.com)** at #1 by a wide margin, followed by **Fliggy** (Alibaba’s travel platform), then the **hotel’s official website**, **Booking.com**, and **WeChat** mini-programs. Ctrip/Trip.com is especially crucial – well over half of Chinese respondents chose it as their go-to site for booking Thai hotels. This reflects Trip.com Group’s dominance in China; many travelers use the Trip.com mobile app or its Chinese version Ctrip, which offers Chinese language interfaces, Chinese payment options, and a vast inventory of Thai hotels. **Fliggy** is another popular option, particularly for younger travelers who use Alipay – it integrates travel booking with Alibaba’s ecosystem. **WeChat** has also become a booking avenue: some hotels or agencies run WeChat “mini-apps” where users can directly book, and WeChat’s travel search can surface hotel deals.

Global OTAs like **Booking.com** and **Agoda** (which is popular in Asia) do get some usage, but often Chinese travelers still access these via Chinese portals or after comparing with Chinese sites. Many mid-range Chinese travelers will check multiple platforms – for example, comparing prices between Trip.com and Booking.com – but ultimately prefer to book on a platform that supports **Chinese language and payment**. Notably, a huge proportion of bookings are made on **mobile devices**. By 2018, roughly 75% of online hotel bookings in China were made by millennials via mobile apps. Today in 2025, we can assume mobile booking is even more ubiquitous. This means a **mobile-friendly, Chinese-friendly booking experience** is essential.

For Thai hotels, the implication is clear: to capture Chinese guests, one must be **present and visible on Chinese OTAs** and ensure the hotel information (descriptions, amenities, photos, directions) is well translated and appealing. Connectivity to these platforms (either directly or through channel managers) is important to keep inventory and prices updated. Additionally, offering **direct booking in Chinese** on the hotel’s own website (or via WeChat) can help attract those 10-15% of travelers who prefer booking directly if they trust the brand. However, given the strong pull of OTAs for convenience and loyalty points, most hotels find more leverage in working with the big Chinese intermediaries. Being on Ctrip with good reviews can effectively “put the hotel on the map” for Chinese visitors planning a Thailand trip.

## **Price Sensitivity and Value for Money**

**Price is a pivotal factor** for Chinese leisure travelers in the 2–4 star range. Overall, China is still considered a very price-sensitive travel market – “**deals**” **tend to be the #1 reason Chinese consumers follow or favor a travel brand**. Many travelers carefully evaluate whether a hotel offers good value relative to its price. This doesn’t necessarily mean all Chinese travelers always choose the absolute cheapest option; rather, they weigh the price against location, comfort, and reviews to ensure they get their money’s worth.

Historically, Chinese tourists allocated a relatively small portion of their budget to hotels. Pre-pandemic data showed outbound Chinese travelers spent only **~15% of their travel budget on lodging**, prioritizing spending on shopping, dining and attractions instead. In one analysis, most Chinese tourists preferred *not* to stay in luxury hotels so they could save more budget for brand-name shopping; in 2012, for example, Chinese tourists spent 34% of total trip expenses on shopping versus 22% on transport and only a modest share on accommodation. This frugal

approach to hotels has traditionally funneled Chinese guests into economy and mid-range hotels when abroad. Even today, many group tours from China use 3-star hotels to keep package prices low.

However, there is a **gradual shift upward in accommodation preferences** as Chinese travelers become more experienced and affluent. Recent surveys by Morgan Stanley in early 2023 found that **37%** of Chinese consumers now **prefer higher star-rated hotels**, a jump from just 18% in 2020. Higher-income travelers showed an even stronger appetite for upscale hotels (nearly half preferred luxury tier). This indicates that an increasing segment is willing to pay more for better quality and comfort than before. In fact, Chinese travelers appear more willing post-Covid to increase spending on hotels – 20% said accommodation would be their top travel expense, slightly up from pre-Covid surveys.

For the **budget and mid-range category**, this means competition can be stiff: travelers want *“five-star experience at three-star prices.”* They are likely to compare prices across platforms (visiting at least one price-comparison or meta-search site during their 12-day research) to ensure they aren’t overpaying. They also respond strongly to promotions – a flash sale or a coupon on a booking site can sway their choice of hotel. Many Chinese OTAs have VIP membership tiers that give discounts or perks, and Chinese travelers do utilize those to save money.

While Chinese guests are cost-conscious, they also **expect certain standards** even at lower price points. They typically won’t compromise on cleanliness or basic comfort just to save a few dollars. So, a reasonably priced 3-star hotel that offers a clean, convenient stay with good reviews will beat a slightly cheaper but poorly reviewed hotel almost every time. **Value for money** is the guiding principle: if a 4-star hotel is, say, only marginally more expensive than a 3-star but offers a significantly better location or reputation, many Chinese travelers will choose the 4-star.

It’s also worth noting that **seasonality and timing** affect their price sensitivity. Chinese travel peaks during Golden Week and Chinese New Year, when prices in Thailand are high; some budget travelers avoid these periods and travel off-peak for better deals. Others, constrained by holiday schedules, will travel during peak times but then economize by choosing mid-range hotels rather than luxury ones. In summary, Thai hotels targeting Chinese guests should remain competitively priced and highlight the **value proposition** (what amenities or advantages justify the price). Being on deal-friendly platforms and offering occasional discounts for Chinese holidays can attract this deal-conscious demographic.

## **Location, Accessibility, and Safety Considerations**

**Location is a key criterion** when Chinese travelers choose a hotel. Many Chinese leisure tourists are unfamiliar with Thai geography, so they rely on landmarks and district names they’ve read about. They often prefer hotels that are **conveniently located near tourist attractions or shopping areas**. For example, in Bangkok, areas like Siam/Pratunam (for shopping malls and markets) or along the BTS Skytrain line are popular picks. Travelers frequently mention in reviews how easy (or not) it was to get around from the hotel. Proximity to public transport (BTS/MRT stations or shuttle services) can be a selling point, especially for independent

travelers who plan to explore on their own. Conversely, hard-to-reach hotels or those in very remote areas might be avoided by those not on group tours.

Chinese travelers also value being near **food options** (including Chinese restaurants if they need a taste of home during a long trip) and convenience stores. It's common to see Chinese reviews praising a hotel that has a 7-Eleven next door or a night market down the street. In beach destinations like Phuket or Koh Samui, **beachfront or near-beach location** is a draw for leisure travelers, so a 3-star resort a short walk from the beach might trump a 4-star property that's inland.

**Safety and neighborhood environment** weigh in more now than before. With the recent media coverage of incidents, Chinese tourists are paying attention to whether an area is perceived as safe. They might prefer hotels in well-lit, busy areas over those down a quiet alley, for instance. As mentioned, only about **19%** of Chinese surveyed in 2025 felt Thailand was “safe”, which implies a majority have some safety reservations. Many will look for cues of security – such as the hotel being in a reputable district, having security guards, or requiring key-cards for elevator access. Group tour members used to be less concerned since the tour handled safety, but independent travelers are making these judgments themselves.

For group travelers (still a portion of Chinese visitors), the **location choice might be out of their hands** – tour packages often use partner hotels, sometimes outside city centers to save cost. But as more travelers go independent or semi-independent, **location becomes a personal choice** and thus a competitive factor hotels can leverage. A mid-range Thai hotel that markets its convenient location (e.g., “5 minutes from the Grand Palace” or “next to Platinum Fashion Mall”) in Chinese marketing materials can attract those doing research.

In summary, Chinese leisure travelers favor hotels that are **centrally located, easy to access, in safe and tourist-friendly areas**, and near the activities they came for (be it sightseeing, shopping, or the beach). They will often map out the hotel relative to points of interest. Thai hotels should highlight these aspects in listings – for instance, mentioning distance to popular spots in **kilometers and minutes** (since Chinese may not be familiar with local transit, giving an approximate walking time or stating if a free shuttle is available helps). By reassuring on location and safety, hotels can address two major selection factors for this audience.

## Amenities and Services Valued by Chinese Guests

Chinese travelers may be far from home, but they carry certain **expectations of comfort** that even budget hotels in China would meet. For Thai hotels in the 2–4 star range, providing these core amenities can significantly enhance appeal:

- **Free Wi-Fi:** This is essentially non-negotiable. Chinese guests rely on Wi-Fi to keep in touch (often via WeChat), share photos, and even translate information on the go. They will universally expect fast, stable **Wi-Fi in rooms and lobby** – it's often the first thing they check. A hotel without free Wi-Fi or with poor internet will receive immediate negative feedback, as connectivity is seen as a basic utility.



- **In-Room Kettle and Hot Water:** Hot drinking water is a daily necessity for many Chinese. They may want to make tea or instant noodles, or simply prefer hot/warm water to drink (rather than cold water). Thus, an electric **kettle** or water boiler in the room is highly valued – indeed, surveys note that Chinese visitors actively “*seek in-room tea and coffee making facilities*”. In one Thai hostel, the top request from Chinese guests was for **hot water** access. Hotels should ensure kettles (plus tea bags and instant coffee sachets) are provided in every room, or at least have hot water dispensers available.
- **Slippers and Toiletries:** Chinese travelers are accustomed to hotels (even inexpensive ones in China) providing slippers for in-room use, as well as basic toiletries (toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, shampoo, body wash). They are often pleasantly surprised when overseas hotels do the same, because many Western hotels do not provide disposable toothbrushes by default. Providing **disposable slippers** and a dental kit can earn a hotel bonus points in Chinese reviews. In fact, **slippers** were noted among the top 3 items Chinese tourists ask for if not present. It’s a small cost for the hotel but makes guests feel at home.
- **Bathroom Style:** While a luxury hotel might impress with a bathtub, many Chinese travelers in mid-range hotels prioritize a **good shower**. Preferences lean towards a *separate standing shower* (ideally with an overhead rain shower) and a well-designed bathroom that doesn’t flood the whole floor when showering. A survey even found Chinese travelers prefer **dual sinks and overhead showers** to reduce waiting times and increase convenience, especially when sharing rooms. Essentially, a clean, modern bathroom with strong water pressure is valued; fancy Jacuzzi tubs are less important than a practical layout.
- **Air Conditioning and Climate Control:** Given Thailand’s tropical climate, air-conditioned rooms are expected (and thankfully standard in most Thai hotels). Chinese guests will definitely use the AC, often setting it quite cool. Conversely, if visiting cooler parts of Thailand or during the cool season, they might appreciate if the AC can be turned off or if an extra blanket is available – flexibility in controlling room temperature matters.
- **Room Size and Bed Configuration:** Chinese travelers, especially friends or family traveling together, often prefer **twin-bed rooms** (two separate beds) to share, rather than one large bed. Hotels that have a good number of twin rooms will find favor with tour groups and independent friend pairs. Additionally, while they don’t expect suites for a budget price, having a bit of space to open luggage and not feel cramped is appreciated. In Chinese reviews, you’ll frequently see mentions if a room was “spacious” or conversely “too small to open two suitcases,” indicating this is noticed.
- **Cleanliness and Housekeeping:** Cleanliness is absolutely crucial – possibly the *single most important* quality factor. Chinese guests will check linens, bathrooms, and even corners of the room for cleanliness. Any sign of mold, stains, or pests (e.g., a mosquito infestation) will likely be called out online. Mid-range hotels must maintain diligent housekeeping. Even a simple, older hotel can earn great reviews if it is immaculately

clean. Providing daily housekeeping, fresh towels, and bottled water daily are standard expectations.

- **Breakfast and Food:** Many Chinese leisure travelers prefer hotels that include **breakfast**, as it's convenient and can be economical. They typically enjoy a buffet with a mix of Asian and Western items. While they don't demand a fully Chinese breakfast, having a few familiar hot dishes can make a difference. Items like rice porridge (congee), boiled eggs, steamed buns or dumplings, or even instant noodles available, alongside Thai and Western offerings, will cater to Chinese palates. If breakfast isn't provided, having an on-site restaurant or room service menu with some Asian options (or at least fried rice, etc.) can be a plus. Budget hotels without dining facilities might offer a kettle and perhaps partner with nearby eateries – but they should be ready to recommend where guests can get breakfast nearby if not on-site.
- **Other in-room amenities:** A small fridge in the room is appreciated (to store fruits or drinks), as is a safe (Chinese tourists often carry cash or multiple passports for family). Many also make use of TV but often just to have some background noise – providing at least one Chinese-language channel (like CCTV-4 or a Chinese news channel) could earn appreciation, though it's not a deal-breaker if absent, since younger travelers stream content on their phones or iPads.
- **Laundry and Drying Facilities:** As noted, a **clothes rack** or some means to dry clothes is a common request. Chinese tourists on multi-stop Asia trips might hand-wash clothes in the hotel. Budget hotels could simply provide more hangers or a retractable clothesline in the bathroom. Some hotels even dedicate a space on the balcony or a drying rack which Chinese guests would find very convenient. Offering laundry service (paid) is fine, but many budget-conscious travelers prefer to do a quick wash themselves.
- **No Need for Chinese Theme:** It's interesting that while Chinese guests want amenities that suit their lifestyle, they **do not necessarily want a “Chinese-themed” hotel experience**. They've come to Thailand to experience something different. As one analysis put it, Chinese tourists *“do not wish to stay in Chinese-themed hotels since they want to experience something different from hotels they can visit in China”*. So it's not about putting Chinese decor or signage everywhere, but about meeting their needs while still offering Thai hospitality and ambiance.

In essence, **Thai hotels that get the basics right – cleanliness, comfort, Wi-Fi, hot water, and a friendly face – will meet or exceed Chinese travelers' expectations in the 2–4 star segment.** Amenities like a pool or gym are nice-to-haves but not top priorities for this segment; many Chinese itineraries are full of sightseeing, leaving little time to use a hotel gym. They care more that, after a long day out, the room is comfortable and equipped for them to relax (and perhaps heat up a late-night snack or cup of tea). By aligning offerings with these preferences, hotels can significantly boost satisfaction for Chinese guests.

## Language and Cultural Considerations

One of the biggest hurdles for Chinese tourists abroad is the **language barrier**. Unlike many European travelers, Chinese travelers cannot rely on English as a lingua franca – English proficiency in China, while improving among youth, is not widespread. Thus, when choosing hotels, many Chinese leisure travelers will check if the hotel offers any Chinese-language support. In fact, about **66%** of surveyed Chinese millennial travelers said they *appreciate* hotels that offer a tailored experience (such as Chinese-language services and signage), even if not all deem it absolutely mandatory. About **20%** said that having such Chinese-language support was “*mandatory*” before they’d book a hotel. These numbers show that while Chinese-friendly communication isn’t expected at every hotel, it definitely provides a competitive edge.

**During the booking phase**, having information in Chinese is important. If a Chinese traveler can read the hotel description, policies, and even reviews in their own language, they’ll feel more confident. Chinese OTAs like Trip.com handle a lot of this by translating content. Some hotel chains also have Chinese versions of their websites. A direct outcome is that hotels which **provide Chinese translations** (for example, a Mandarin version of their webpage or a listing on Fliggy with Chinese text) are more likely to be chosen.

At the hotel, **Chinese language skills among staff** can greatly enhance the guest experience. Naturally, not every Thai hotel will have Mandarin-speaking staff, especially in the budget range. However, many hotels do make an effort – perhaps one front-desk agent per shift knows basic Mandarin, or they hire Chinese interns. Even a little goes a long way: simple greetings like “你好 (ni hao)” or “欢迎 (welcome)” make guests feel seen. On the flip side, miscommunication can lead to frustration. An interview with a Thai hostel manager noted frequent issues because “*most hotel staff can’t speak Chinese, which often leads to miscommunication and affects the guest experience.*” In their case, they would ask any Chinese-speaking person (even another guest) to help translate house rules for Chinese guests – highlighting the lengths to which staff might go when language is a barrier.

**Translation technology** is a helpful backup. Some hotels equip their front desk with a translation app or device – for instance, using apps on a tablet where the guest can type in Chinese and it appears in Thai/English and vice versa. Voice translator gadgets are also available. There are even AI-driven voice assistants that support Chinese; in fact, it’s suggested that chatbots or voice assistants can assist Chinese guests in-room (answering common questions in Mandarin) if human staff cannot. Embracing such tech can mitigate language issues and show Chinese guests that the hotel cares about communicating with them.

Beyond language, **cultural understanding** is part of good service. Small cultural gestures are noticed by Chinese travelers. For example, during Chinese New Year (which often sees a large influx of Chinese tourists), some Thai hotels now put up Chinese New Year decorations, give out symbolic red envelopes (often empty or with a small chocolate coin as a token), or organize a lion dance. These efforts delight guests, as they feel a bit of home during important festivities. Hotels have also learned to avoid certain cultural faux pas – for instance, **the number 4** is considered unlucky in Chinese (sounding like the word for “death”), so some hotels may skip a 4th floor or not assign a Chinese guest to Room 4. This level of detail might be more common in



higher-end hotels, but even mid-range hotels could consider it if they have many Chinese patrons.

Another cultural note: Chinese social etiquette around hotels might differ. For instance, Chinese guests might not be familiar with concepts like quietly queueing or keeping voice volumes low in lobby areas (especially if traveling in family groups). Rather than enforce rules harshly, culturally aware hotels handle any issues with polite communication (ideally in Chinese).

Providing **house rules in Chinese** (as the hostel did) is a smart approach – e.g., a sign in Chinese asking for silence after 10pm or no smoking in rooms (since some Chinese older travelers may attempt to smoke indoors if not clearly instructed otherwise).

**Payment culture** is another aspect of Chinese travel. As mentioned, Chinese tourists heavily use **mobile payments** at home – apps like **Alipay** and **WeChat Pay** are ubiquitous in China for everything from groceries to taxis. They carry that expectation abroad. Thailand has been at the forefront of accommodating this: Alipay (through Alipay+) is now integrated across many Thai merchants, and major hotel chains in Thailand have started accepting Alipay as well. Chinese travelers feel more comfortable when they see they can pay in their usual way. A travel tech company noted, *“visitors from China have a strong preference for Alipay... supporting this service and just putting out an Alipay sign at the shopfront will catch their eyes right away.”* For hotels, offering **Alipay/WeChat Pay at check-out** for settling the bill or deposits is a huge plus. It not only is convenient but also psychologically reassuring – they don’t have to worry about currency conversion or credit card issues. Many Chinese also carry **UnionPay** credit/debit cards, so having a point-of-sale system that accepts UnionPay is important (most Thai ATMs and many hotels do support UnionPay). Essentially, a Chinese guest should be able to check in without needing to pull out cash or fret about their China-issued card not being accepted.

In summary, language and cultural considerations can be the *make-or-break* between a merely satisfactory stay and an excellent one for Chinese travelers. Hotels that invest in **Chinese-friendly communication** (people or technology) and demonstrate **cultural respect** will distinguish themselves. Even at the budget level, a simple translated welcome letter in the room and staff who can say “thank you” in Chinese will leave a positive impression. These efforts often translate into better online reviews, as Chinese guests will specifically mention and praise hotels that “had Chinese-speaking staff” or “provided instructions in Chinese,” which in turn attracts more travelers.

## **Influence of Online Reviews and Social Media**

For Chinese travelers, online reviews are not just a formality – they are a **crucial part of the hotel selection process**, as touched on earlier. The ecosystem of Chinese travel reviews is vast and somewhat separate from Western platforms like TripAdvisor. Chinese tourists trust reviews on **Trip.com (Ctrip)**, where hotels have scores and thousands of comments, as well as on platforms like **Mafengwo**, **Qyer**, **Tongcheng-Elong**, and even general apps like **Dianping** (which started for food but also hosts hotel reviews). Before booking a 2- or 3-star hotel, a Chinese traveler might read recent comments to ensure there are no red flags like theft incidents or cleanliness issues.

The **authenticity** of reviews is key – Chinese users are aware that some reviews can be fake or overly positive, so they tend to read a spread of opinions and look for detailed ones, especially those with photos taken by guests. They also consult **social media for real experiences**. It's common for travelers to search on **WeChat** or **Weibo** for the hotel name to see if anyone has written a blog or post about it. As Dragon Trail's research highlighted, Chinese travelers' digital journey from inspiration to sharing is heavily intertwined with social media. A young traveler might discover a boutique hostel in Chiang Mai from a Xiaohongshu post, then book it on Ctrip, and later share her own review on Xiaohongshu or WeChat Moments, continuing the cycle.

For Chinese travelers evaluating hotels, **rating scores** matter as an initial filter. They often set a minimum rating (for instance, many will only consider hotels rated 4.5/5 or above on Trip.com). Then they delve into comments, prioritizing those written in Chinese for relevance. **Negative reviews** carry a lot of weight – a few bad reviews among many good ones won't necessarily deter booking, but if they see recurring complaints (e.g., "air conditioner didn't work" or "staff were rude to Chinese guests"), they'll likely move on to another option. Conversely, specific praises like "the staff helped us with Chinese translation" or "they have a hot water kettle which was great" can make a hotel very appealing.

Chinese travelers also love to share their own experiences. Many feel a sense of obligation to post a review or travelogue to help others, just as they benefited from others' reviews. After staying in Thailand, a leisure traveler might write a long blog on Mafengwo or upload a video on Bilibili/Douyin detailing their trip and highlighting good hotels. This user-generated content often reaches thousands of prospective tourists. As a result, hotels that **consistently meet Chinese travelers' expectations often become "internet famous" (网红)** within Chinese travel circles, leading to more bookings. We've seen cases where a particular hotel or hostel becomes trendy among Chinese backpackers because it was featured by a well-known travel vlogger.

It's worth noting that Chinese travelers also consult **international reviews** sometimes (especially more experienced ones who might check TripAdvisor or Google reviews for cross-reference), but by and large, **Chinese-language feedback** is most influential because it's directly relevant and accessible.

For Thai hotels, managing online reputation on Chinese platforms is vital. This includes responding to reviews (ideally in Chinese, which some hotels do via staff or using translation) on Trip.com or Fliggy. A polite management response to a negative review – in Chinese – can actually impress readers that the hotel cares. Moreover, hotels can engage via Chinese social media, perhaps by reposting positive guest stories (with permission) or working with influencers to showcase the hotel. The power of a recommendation by a travel KOL (Key Opinion Leader) on platforms like Weibo or Xiaohongshu can be immense – a single post can drive a surge of bookings if the hotel fits the audience's taste.

In conclusion, online reviews and social media narratives significantly shape Chinese tourists' hotel choices. The **digital word-of-mouth** effect in China is strong. Thai hotels that maintain high ratings and actively court positive online feedback will find it much easier to win over new

Chinese customers. Essentially, every Chinese guest is not just a customer but also a potential ambassador whose WeChat post or Trip.com review could influence many others.

## Role of Loyalty Programs and Brand Loyalty

Loyalty programs traditionally have not been the primary driver for Chinese leisure travelers in the way they are for some Western frequent travelers, but they are becoming more relevant. The Chinese travel market is interesting because, as one analysis pointed out, China has **one of the highest sign-up rates for hotel/airline loyalty programs in the world**. Chinese travelers are very willing to sign up for memberships – whether it’s a hotel chain’s program or an OTA’s rewards system. For instance, millions of Chinese consumers have joined programs like Marriott Bonvoy, Hilton Honors, IHG Rewards, and domestic ones like **Huazhu’s H Rewards** or Trip.com’s tiered membership. However, the way they engage with loyalty is somewhat unique.

Chinese travelers tend to be **loyal to benefits, not brands** per se. They might sign up for many programs to take advantage of any available perks. A marketing expert quipped that Chinese can be “loyal” to multiple brands at once and will readily switch if it suits them. In fact, a study found **75% of Chinese consumers had switched providers (brands) in the past year**, reflecting low long-term loyalty. This means that while a Chinese traveler may have a favourite hotel brand, if another hotel offers a better deal or if their preferred brand is not available at the destination, they won’t hesitate to choose an alternative.

That said, loyalty programs can still influence decisions at the margin. For example, a Chinese traveler who has attained a Gold status with Marriott (perhaps through a credit card or previous trips) might lean towards booking a Marriott-family hotel in Thailand (like a Four Points or Sheraton in the 4-star range) to enjoy member benefits such as free breakfast or upgrades. The promise of those perks makes them feel they get extra value – and remember, value is very important. Similarly, many Chinese use the **Trip.com (Ctrip) loyalty program**, where frequent bookers get higher tiers that grant discounts or VIP customer service. A traveler who is a VIP2 or VIP3 on Trip.com might try to book all trip components on that platform to maximize their benefits and points.

There’s also a growing segment of affluent Chinese who are **brand-conscious** and trust certain international brands for quality. For instance, they might prefer Hilton, InterContinental, or Accor hotels in the mid-range category because of global reputation and their past positive experiences. Brand trust can be a proxy for reliability when trying a new hotel abroad. However, for many leisure travelers doing one-off vacation trips, loyalty programs are secondary; price, location, and reviews remain top factors.

We should note the effort by some hotel groups to create **Chinese-specific loyalty initiatives**. For example, Radisson Hotel Group launched a program called “Guan Xin” to welcome Chinese travelers, which dovetails with their global Radisson Rewards but adds touches tailored for Chinese guests (like Chinese breakfast options, translation services, etc.). Other big chains have partnerships: Marriott has liaised with Alipay and WeChat for seamless integration into its loyalty app, and Accor at one point partnered with Huazhu (a Chinese hotel chain) to cross-honor

memberships. These moves indicate the industry's recognition that capturing Chinese loyalty requires some localization.

For non-chain, independent Thai hotels, traditional loyalty programs may not be feasible, but they can still tap into loyalty behaviors by, say, collaborating with airline programs (earning miles for stays) or being active on OTA loyalty platforms (for instance, offering extra points or special coupons to Trip.com members).

In summary, **loyalty program influence on Chinese travelers is present but not paramount**. Many Chinese will happily use their memberships if it aligns with a good choice, but few will blindly follow a brand if it doesn't meet their other criteria. Price-sensitive as they are, they often treat memberships as a way to get additional discounts or privileges (instant gratification) rather than long-term loyalty for its own sake. Hotels can encourage loyalty from Chinese guests by ensuring that members from China feel recognized (e.g., welcome notes in Chinese for elite members, or small gifts), which can translate into positive reviews and repeat stays if they return to Thailand.

## Strategies for Thai Hotels to Attract and Satisfy Chinese Leisure Travelers

Given the above insights into Chinese travelers' preferences and decision drivers, Thai hotels – especially those in the 2- to 4-star range – can implement several **actionable strategies** to better appeal to this market. Below are key strategies, each aimed at aligning the hotel's offering with what Chinese guests value:

- **Establish a Strong Presence on Chinese Booking Platforms:** Make sure your hotel is listed on all major Chinese travel platforms like Trip.com (Ctrip), Fliggy, Qunar, and Meituan. Use high-quality photos and ensure descriptions are well-translated into Chinese. Highlight features that Chinese travelers care about (free Wi-Fi, location highlights, etc.) in the listing. It's worthwhile to monitor and respond to reviews on these platforms – thanking guests or addressing issues in Chinese shows you care about this clientele. Also, consider participating in promotional campaigns on these OTAs during peak booking seasons (e.g., Golden Week sales) to boost visibility.
- **Leverage Chinese Social Media and Influencers:** Since inspiration often comes from social channels, build a modest marketing presence in Chinese social media. For instance, create an official **WeChat** account where you post hotel news or local travel tips in Chinese. Engage a Chinese **KOL (Key Opinion Leader)** or travel blogger to visit and review your hotel – their endorsement can reach thousands of potential guests. Posting short videos on **Douyin (TikTok)** or beautiful images on **Xiaohongshu** showcasing your property (perhaps the breakfast spread or a room tour) can generate interest. Importantly, encourage your Chinese guests to share their positive experiences online; something as simple as a Instagrammable spot in the lobby or a nice welcome gift can prompt social sharing.

- **Offer Chinese-Friendly Payment Options:** Embrace the mobile payment trend that Chinese travelers live by. Partner with payment providers to accept **Alipay and WeChat Pay** at your front desk and restaurants. Display the Alipay/WeChat Pay logos at reception – as noted, just seeing those signs instantly makes Chinese guests feel welcome and at ease. Ensure your POS system also accepts **China UnionPay** cards, and train staff on processing these payments. By removing friction in payment, you not only improve guest satisfaction but possibly encourage guests to spend more on ancillary services (dining, spa, etc.) since they can pay conveniently.
- **Provide Key Amenities that Chinese Guests Value:** Do an inventory of in-room amenities and add anything commonly expected by Chinese travelers. Top of the list: put a **kettle with tea/coffee setup** in every room, and make sure housekeeping knows to replace tea bags daily. Stock plenty of **slippers** and have toothbrush/toothpaste kits available (even if not in-room by default, have them ready at reception upon request). These small items greatly impact comfort. Double-check your Wi-Fi quality – perhaps set up a secondary Wi-Fi network name in Chinese (for example, “酒店WiFi” which means “hotel WiFi”) or include Chinese instructions for the password. If your rooms lack ample hanging space, consider adding a simple **drying rack** or extra hangers, anticipating that guests might hand-wash clothes. For any amenities you can’t provide in a budget setting (like a mini-fridge or safe), be transparent in listings so guests know beforehand.
- **Enhance Communication in Chinese:** Break the language barrier as much as possible. Hire at least one **Mandarin-speaking front desk staff** (or even a part-timer/on-call translator) if you consistently have many Chinese guests. If hiring is tough, invest in a good translation app or device for the front office. Provide important information in written Chinese: e.g., a **welcome letter** or guide in the room that explains how to use the phone, Wi-Fi, breakfast time, and includes a few local tips in Chinese. Make sure emergency and safety information (like exit routes, or a note that says “for any help, call 0 on the phone”) is in Chinese too – this not only helps guests but also shows you care about their well-being. For hotels with TV, adding a Chinese news channel or offering Chinese-language movies could be a nice touch.
- **Culturally Tailor the Guest Experience:** Without turning your hotel into “Chinatown,” implement subtle cultural adaptations. Train your staff on a few basic **Chinese customs** – for example, the concept of saving face (meaning staff should handle complaints politely and discreetly), or that pushing to the front of a line might be normal to some Chinese guests (so manage with patience). In dining, if you have a buffet, label some items in Chinese (e.g., porridge 粥, noodle 面条) to help guests identify food. Ensure hot water is available in the restaurant (many Chinese prefer warm water to drink, not ice water). If you know a tour group from China is arriving, prepare a brief **welcome announcement in Chinese** over the PA or a welcome sign in Chinese at the lobby. During Chinese holidays, you could place a few decorations (like lanterns or banners for Chinese New Year) and greet guests with “新年快乐” (Happy New Year). These gestures create a memorable experience that they’ll likely mention in reviews.



- **Emphasize Value-Added Services and Deals:** To appeal to the price-sensitive nature, structure your offerings to **give more value for a fair price**. For instance, include breakfast in the room rate for Chinese bookings if possible (Chinese travelers often filter hotels by “with breakfast” for convenience). Create special packages for Chinese guests – maybe a “China Special” that includes breakfast and a free airport pick-up if they stay 3+ nights, timed around Golden Week. Partner with local tour providers to offer Chinese-language day tours or provide info on such tours at your front desk; being helpful in planning activities (maybe through a Chinese brochure of local attractions) adds value to their stay. Offering a small souvenir or gift upon check-out (even a keychain or Thai snack) can leave a positive final impression – Chinese culture appreciates parting gifts, and this could encourage them to recommend your hotel to friends.
- **Train and Sensitize Your Staff:** Host a cultural training session for your team about Chinese traveler preferences and do’s/don’ts. Teach them a few simple Mandarin phrases like hello (你好), thank you (谢谢), and sorry for the wait (不好意思). Emphasize hospitality basics that Chinese guests particularly note: prompt service (Chinese guests can be impatient if kept waiting too long at check-in), cleanliness, and not disturbing guests unnecessarily (some Chinese may not want daily room cleaning unless asked). Also, brief the staff on handling group dynamics – if a tour group overwhelms the lobby, manage it efficiently so independent travelers aren’t turned off. By preparing your staff, you ensure smoother interactions. Employees who manage to delight Chinese guests (say, by remembering a guest’s surname and addressing them as “Wang Xiansheng (Mr. Wang)”) should be recognized, as this encourages continued attentiveness.
- **Highlight Safety and Trustworthiness:** Given the safety concerns some Chinese have, proactively **market your hotel’s safety features**. On your Chinese listings or website, mention things like “24-hour front desk and security,” “secure key-card access elevators,” “located in a safe, well-lit area.” If your hotel has obtained any safety or hygiene certifications (especially post-Covid cleanliness labels), display those logos. You can also provide a short note (in Chinese) in the room or at check-in that says, for instance, “For your safety, we have CCTV in operation and a night manager on duty. In case of emergency, here’s a number to call....” This kind of assurance can greatly comfort guests traveling far from home. Additionally, combat any negative perceptions by maintaining high standards – e.g., ensure airport pickup drivers are vetted and official (so guests feel safe on the ride). Building a reputation as a **safe and reliable** establishment will spread in online reviews, countering fear-driven hesitation some might have.
- **Engage in Loyalty and Rewards (Smartly):** If you’re part of a chain or group, make sure Chinese members can **earn and redeem loyalty points** at your property. Train your front desk to recognize Chinese elite members (maybe prepare a welcome card in Chinese for them). If you’re an independent hotel, you can still foster “soft loyalty” by collecting guest emails/WeChat and staying in touch (send a thank-you message in Chinese after their stay, or a holiday greeting). You might consider partnering with Chinese loyalty platforms – for example, some hotels join programs like **Hotels.com**

**Rewards or Expedia VIP Access** which Chinese also use, or collaborate with **Air China/China Southern** mileage programs to give miles for stays. Such partnerships can entice repeat bookings. Importantly, focus on delivering such a good experience that the guest would want to come back regardless. Chinese travelers, while not singularly loyal, do remember places fondly – if a family had a great stay at your hotel in Bangkok, they might book it again on their next visit or tell their relatives to book it.

Implementing these strategies can significantly enhance a hotel's appeal to Chinese leisure travelers. Many of these steps are low-cost adjustments (e.g. adding a kettle or translating a sign) but can yield high returns in guest satisfaction. The overarching goal is to **make Chinese guests feel welcome, comfortable, and understood** during their stay – without compromising the local Thai character that makes their trip exotic and fun. If Thai hotels can strike that balance, they will likely see more bookings, better reviews, and repeat visits from China's vast and growing pool of outbound tourists.

## Conclusion

Chinese outbound tourism to Thailand is poised to remain robust, especially as travel continues to normalize in 2025 and beyond. Budget and mid-range hotels stand to gain substantially from this market if they align with Chinese travelers' preferences and decision-making habits. Chinese leisure travelers meticulously choose hotels based on factors like online reputation, location, amenities, price, and cultural comfort. They bring with them expectations formed by their experiences at home and the extensive research they conduct. By understanding these expectations – from needing a kettle of hot water to the convenience of Alipay, from reading dozens of peer reviews to valuing a friendly greeting in Chinese – Thai hotels can tailor their offerings and services to meet and exceed Chinese guests' needs.

In practice, this means **being present on the platforms Chinese use, offering the creature comforts and connectivity they expect, bridging language gaps, and demonstrating genuine hospitality and respect for their culture**. Hotels that do so have reported higher satisfaction scores and an increase in Chinese clientele. And when Chinese guests are happy, they tend to spread the word enthusiastically online, creating a virtuous cycle of positive exposure.

As Thailand welcomes back Chinese tourists in large numbers, hotels that have adapted to these trends will be in the best position to capture this important segment. With millions of Chinese travelers eyeing Thailand for its mix of affordability, beauty, and now improved tourist infrastructure, catering to them is not just an optional extra – it's becoming a **key business strategy** for sustained success in Thailand's hospitality industry. By focusing on what Chinese travelers consider in their hotel choices and implementing the strategies above, Thai 2–4 star hotels can create win-win outcomes: delighted Chinese guests and a thriving, resilient business tapping into Asia's biggest outbound tourism market.

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