

Analysis of the Impact of the 240 Hour Visa Free Policy on Inbound Tourism in Shaanxi Province

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ABSTRACT

The 240 hour transit visa free policy implemented from December 17, 2024, has brought new development opportunities to the inbound tourism market in Shaanxi. This article is based on the entry and exit data of Xi'an Port and the actual situation of the tourism market, systematically analyzing the impact of policies on inbound tourism in Shaanxi. Research has found that after the implementation of the policy, the number of inbound tourists in Shaanxi has significantly increased, and the sources of tourists have become more diverse. However, at the same time, it faces challenges such as increased pressure on tourism services, intensified market competition, and increased difficulty in safety management. By building an innovative tourism product system, optimizing service quality, and strengthening safety management strategies, Shaanxi inbound tourism can grasp policy dividends and achieve high-quality development.

KEYWORDS

240 hour visa free policy; Shaanxi inbound tourism; Tourism safety management; Tourism Development Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current fiercely competitive global tourism market, China continues to optimize its inbound tourism policies to enhance its international tourism competitiveness. On December 17, 2024, the National Immigration Administration implemented a new policy of 240 hour transit visa free, significantly extending the transit visa free period from 72 hours and 144 hours to 240 hours, adding 21 new ports and expanding the activity area [1]. Shaanxi, as a major historical and cultural province, and Xi'an, as the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, have become key areas benefiting from policies due to their abundant cultural and tourism resources. As an important open port, Xi'an Xianyang International Airport has brought unprecedented development opportunities and new challenges to the inbound tourism market in Shaanxi after the implementation of policies.

This study aims to deeply analyze the impact of the 240 hour visa free policy on inbound tourism in Shaanxi, explore market changes and potential opportunities, analyze existing problems and challenges, and propose targeted development strategies. The research results will help Shaanxi tourism management departments and enterprises grasp policy dividends, optimize tourism products and services, and enhance international tourism competitiveness; At the same time, it provides reference examples for policy implementation and market development for similar tourist destinations, enriching the theoretical research on tourism policies and regional tourism development.

2. INTERPRETATION OF THE 240 HOUR VISA FREE POLICY

2.1. Overview of the Main Content of the Policy

The 240 hour transit visa free policy allows eligible personnel from 54 countries to come to China without visa from any of the 60 open ports in 24 provinces (districts, cities) of China, and stay in the specified area for no more than 240 hours. The core of policy adjustment lies in extending the stay time, adding transit ports, and expanding the scope of activities. As an important port, Xi'an Xianyang International Airport in Shaanxi Province allows foreign tourists to enter the country through this policy and travel freely throughout the province to deeply experience Shaanxi's history, culture, natural landscapes, and folk customs [2].

2.2. Background and Objectives of Policy Adjustment

In the process of global tourism market recovery, countries have introduced preferential policies to attract international tourists. In order to increase the market share of inbound tourism, promote international cultural exchange and tourism economic development, China has optimized its visa free transit policy. Its goal is not only to increase the number of inbound tourists, but also to enhance the tourist experience, promote high-quality development of the tourism market, and showcase China's rich cultural resources and development achievements to the world. As an important birthplace of Chinese civilization, Shaanxi carries the important mission of spreading Chinese culture, and policy implementation helps it occupy a more advantageous position in the international tourism market [3].

2.3. Comparative Analysis With the Original Visa Free Policy

The 240 hour visa free policy has been fully upgraded, with significant breakthroughs in four key dimensions. The duration of stay has been extended from 72 or 144 hours to 240 hours (10 days), providing more ample time for international tourists; The number of ports opened has increased from 39 to 60, expanding the coverage of entry channels; Cancel the restrictions on activity areas and expand the stay range from core cities such as Xi'an and Xianyang to the entire Shaanxi Province; Promote the upgrading of tourism methods and encourage tourists to transition from transit sightseeing to deep cultural experiences. The dual expansion of "time+space" enhances the quality of tourism consumption and reconstructs the value chain of inbound tourism. Data shows that after the implementation of the new policy, the average length of stay for tourists increased by 67%, and the cross city mobility rate reached 82%, confirming that policy upgrades have substantially changed tourism behavior patterns. The new policy has nearly doubled the length of stay, significantly increased the number of open ports, and expanded the tourist activity areas in Shaanxi from local cities to the whole province. These changes have significantly enhanced policy attractiveness, providing foreign tourists with more ample time and broader space to explore Shaanxi's tourism resources in depth [4].

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF SHAANXI INBOUND TOURISM UNDER THE 240 HOUR VISA FREE POLICY

3.1. Changes in Entry and Exit Data at Xi'an Port

In 2024, Shaanxi Border Inspection Station inspected 1.4007 million inbound and outbound personnel and 10200 flights, an increase of 126.6% and 77.4% year-on-year. After the implementation of the policy, there will be 60000 visa free foreigners from December 17, 2024 to the end of the year; From January to May 2025, there will be more than 96000 inbound foreigners, up 136% year on year, including 72000 visa free arrivals, up 348% year on year. During the Dragon Boat Festival holiday in 2025, there will be approximately 15000 inbound and outbound passengers at Xi'an Port, with an

expected increase of 73% compared to the average daily passenger flow in 2024. The data shows that policies have a significant effect on attracting foreign tourists.

In the initial stage of policy implementation, the number of tourists showed explosive growth, reflecting the immediate attractiveness of the policy. With the passage of time, the growth trend remains stable and there is room for improvement. During holidays, such as the Dragon Boat Festival holiday in 2025, there has been a significant increase in passenger flow, indicating that the combined effects of policies and holidays further stimulate tourists' willingness to travel [5]. The expected increase in tourist numbers during peak tourism seasons such as summer vacation will provide sustained development momentum for the tourism market.

3.2. Changes in the Distribution of Foreign Tourist Sources

Under the original visa free policy, Xi'an's main source countries were concentrated in some Asian and European countries. After policy adjustments, the number of tourists from these countries has significantly increased. Taking South Korea as an example, as a traditional source country for Shaanxi, the number of tourists visiting Shaanxi has continued to increase after the implementation of the 240 hour visa free policy. Korean tourists have always maintained a strong interest in Shaanxi's history and culture, such as the Terra Cotta Warriors, the ancient city wall of Xi'an and other attractions, and their longer stay enables them to experience Shaanxi culture more deeply [6]. In Europe, the number of British tourists has increased significantly. British tourists have shown a strong desire to explore cultural tourism resources such as archaeological sites and museums in Shaanxi. After policy adjustments, they have more time to visit historical and cultural attractions throughout Shaanxi and experience the charm of ancient Chinese civilization.

In addition to traditional source countries, some emerging source countries have emerged after the implementation of policies. Brazilian tourists are full of longing for the unique natural landscapes of Shaanxi, such as the steepness of Mount Hua and the spectacular Hukou Waterfall. The 240 hour stay allows them to arrange more diverse travel itineraries, combining natural landscapes with historical and cultural attractions. In addition, the number of South African tourists from Africa has also increased. They have a strong interest in Shaanxi's folk culture and specialty cuisine. During their stay in Shaanxi, they actively participate in local folk activities, taste various Shaanxi cuisine, and experience different Chinese culture. The emergence of these emerging source countries has enriched the tourist structure of inbound tourism in Shaanxi and brought new vitality to the tourism market.

3.3. Analysis of Foreign Tourists' Travel Behavior and Preferences in Shaanxi

The historical and cultural classic routes are the most popular, accounting for about 45%. Tourists hope to experience the glory of ancient Chinese civilization by visiting historical relics; The proportion of natural and cultural integration routes is 30%, meeting the dual needs of tourists for nature and culture; The folk characteristic experience line and niche exploration line also attract some tourists, accounting for 15% and 10% respectively.

Foreign tourists in Shaanxi have a diverse consumption structure, with dining consumption accounting for up to 35%. They have a strong interest in traditional cuisine and innovative Shaanxi cuisine; 25% of the accommodation tends towards specialty homestays; 20% of shopping consumption purchases cultural and creative products, as well as handicrafts; Entertainment consumption accounts for 20%, with a preference for live performances and folk experience activities [7].

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHAANXI INBOUND TOURISM UNDER THE 240 HOUR VISA FREE POLICY

4.1. The Scale of the Tourism Market is Expanding

Before the implementation of the policy, many foreign tourists used Shaanxi as a temporary transit point due to restrictions on their stay time. After the implementation of the new policy, a large number of tourists who were originally interested in Shaanxi's tourism resources but were limited by time have included Shaanxi as a tourist destination. According to predictions, the potential foreign tourist population in Shaanxi is expected to continue to grow in the coming years, laying the foundation for expanding the market size [8].

Shaanxi can leverage its policy advantages to strengthen cooperation with domestic and foreign tourism enterprises, and develop characteristic tourism products for different source countries. To launch historical and cultural in-depth tours and Silk Road themed tours for the European and American markets; Develop food culture experience tours and natural leisure tours for the Asian market. At the same time, the policy attracts the attention of international tourism organizations and media, and enhances the international visibility of Shaanxi's tourism brand and expands market space through participating in international tourism exhibitions, holding promotional events, and other activities [9].

4.2. Limitations of Sample Selection

In terms of the design and development of historical and cultural tourism products, a special tourism project called "Archaeological Exploration Deep Tour" can be carefully planned and launched, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in historical sites and cultural relics. Through on-site visits, professional explanations, and interactive experiences, they can fully experience the charm and profound historical accumulation of ancient civilization. For natural landscape tourism products, it is necessary to closely integrate the resource characteristics of each scenic spot, create a series of outdoor adventure activities and ecological science popularization tourism projects according to local conditions, so that tourists can not only get close to nature, appreciate magnificent mountains and rivers and unique landforms, but also learn relevant knowledge of ecological protection and enhance environmental awareness. The development of folk culture tourism products can focus on local traditional customs and folk culture, and design a unique "Folk Culture Life Experience Week", allowing tourists to participate in various traditional festival activities, handicraft production, and folk performances, and immerse themselves in the authentic local way of life and customs. As for modern urban tourism products, efforts should be made to integrate technological elements with cultural and artistic elements, creating innovative and dynamic tourist routes, such as visiting high-tech enterprises, experiencing virtual reality technology, and visiting urban cultural and creative parks, showcasing the unique charm and diverse cultural atmosphere of modern cities.

In addition to traditional sightseeing tourism, Shaanxi's tourism products are developing towards diversified directions such as cultural experiences, leisure vacations, business exhibitions, and study tours. Developing business tourism products in Xi'an High tech Zone, providing enterprise visits, inspections, and business negotiation services for business tourists; Construct a leisure and vacation tourism area at the northern foot of Qinling Mountains, providing hot spring therapy and forest health services [10]. Diversified products meet the needs of different tourist groups and enhance market competitiveness.

4.3. Opportunities for Improving The Quality of Tourism Services

To meet the growing demand of tourists, Shaanxi has increased investment in infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation, and catering. In terms of transportation, we will strengthen the

connection between airports and scenic spots, and open tourist shuttle buses and high-speed rail tourist trains; In terms of accommodation, encourage the construction of international standard hotels and characteristic homestays; In terms of catering, standardize the market, improve food safety standards, and increase the supply of international cuisine [11].

The scenic area will strengthen the construction of a multilingual identification system, improve the quality of explanation services, and carry out foreign language and service skills training for practitioners. Improve the tourism information platform, provide multilingual information query and booking services, enhance the internationalization level of tourism services, and strengthen the international image of Shaanxi tourism.

5. CHALLENGES FACED BY SHAANXI INBOUND TOURISM UNDER THE 240 HOUR VISA FREE POLICY

5.1. Increased Pressure on Tourism Services

As In the peak tourist season, the popular scenic spots such as Terra Cotta Warriors and the city wall in Xi'an are full of tourists, and the carrying capacity of the scenic spot is facing a test. A large number of tourists have caused congestion in the scenic area, resulting in a decrease in the visiting experience; Traffic congestion around the scenic area, insufficient public transportation capacity, and tight parking spaces. Catering and accommodation are in short supply, with price fluctuations affecting the tourist experience.

The sharp increase in the number of tourists has made it more difficult to ensure the quality of tourism services. Foreign language tour guides are in short supply, and some tour guides have low service levels; Neglecting service quality, hygiene and service standards during the peak season of the accommodation industry; The catering industry lowers the quality of dishes to cater to tourists. The unstable service quality affects tourist satisfaction and the reputation of Shaanxi tourism [12].

5.2. Intensifying Competition in the Tourism Market

Beijing and Shanghai attract high-end tourists with their international urban resources; Sichuan and Yunnan attract ecotourism visitors with their unique natural scenery and folk culture; Henan, relying on its rich historical and cultural resources and geographical advantages in the Central Plains, directly competes with Shaanxi. These regions have created differentiated competitive pressures on the Shaanxi tourism market in three dimensions: modern facilities, natural landscapes, and historical culture. This has prompted Shaanxi to further strengthen the uniqueness of the "Zhou Qin Han Tang" cultural IP and optimize the structure of tourism products to cope with challenges [13].

Thailand, Japan, and South Korea, as the main international competitors in the Shaanxi tourism market, have each formed differentiated competitive advantages. Thailand attracts cost-effective tourists with its tropical scenery and Buddhist culture; Japan has won a high-end customer base through the perfect integration of traditional culture and modern technology, as well as high-quality services; South Korea occupies the young market through popular culture exports and convenient tourism facilities. These three countries compete with Shaanxi's inbound tourism market in terms of natural landscapes, cultural and technological integration, and modern tourism experience, respectively, competing for international tourist resources [14].

5.3. Tourism Safety and Management Issues

The increase in the number of foreign tourists has led to an increase in tourism safety risks. Language communication barriers can lead to poor transmission of safety information, and tourists may be in danger due to a lack of understanding of safety tips in the scenic area. Cultural differences lead to

conflicts between tourists' behavior habits and local norms, such as touching cultural relics and taking photos in non designated areas, which may damage cultural relics or cause safety accidents [15]. In addition, densely populated scenic spots are prone to safety incidents such as trampling and theft, which puts higher demands on tourism safety management [16].

After the implementation of the visa free policy, tourism management involves collaboration among multiple departments, including border inspection, customs, transportation, cultural tourism, etc. The efficiency of information sharing and collaboration among departments is insufficient, which affects management effectiveness. The process of handling complaints from foreign tourists is complex, involving issues such as language translation and legal application, making it difficult to handle. At the same time, the difficulty of regulating the order of the tourism market has increased, and phenomena such as illegal tour guides and overcharging may occur due to the increase in tourists, which may damage the tourism image of Shaanxi.

6. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF SHAANXI INBOUND TOURISM UNDER THE 240 HOUR VISA FREE POLICY

6.1. Optimize the Supply of Tourism Products

Integrate Shaanxi's historical and cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and folk resources to create a unique product system such as the "Zhou Qin Han Tang Cultural Exploration Tour", "Qinling Ecological Leisure Tour", and "Shaanbei Folk Customs Tour". Develop themed tourism routes, such as the "Silk Road Starting Point Cultural Experience Line", connecting scenic spots along Xi'an, Baoji, and Hanzhong; "Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Experience Tour" is designed to allow tourists to participate in intangible cultural heritage projects such as Paper Cuttings and shadow puppet making.

In combination with the development of science and technology, immersive tourism products are launched, and VR/AR technology is used to restore historical scenes, such as setting up a virtual archaeological experience area in the Terra Cotta Warriors scenic spot. Develop customized tourism products that cater to the needs of different source countries and tourist groups, providing personalized itinerary planning and services. For example, designing in-depth historical and cultural research products for European and American tourists, and creating leisure vacation products that combine food and nature for Asian tourists.

6.2. Improving the Quality of Tourism Services

Increase investment in transportation infrastructure, optimize the route network of Xi'an Xianyang International Airport, and increase the frequency of international flights. Improve the internal transportation facilities of the scenic area, build tourist transfer centers in popular scenic areas, and alleviate the traffic pressure around the scenic area. Strengthen the construction of accommodation facilities, improve the service quality of star rated hotels, standardize the management of characteristic homestays, and formulate unified service standards. Improve the dining environment, create a specialty food district, promote the "Bright Kitchen and Stove" project, and ensure food safety.

Establish a tourism talent training base, carry out professional training courses such as foreign language tour guides and tourism services, and enhance the foreign language proficiency and service skills of practitioners. Cooperate with universities to establish tourism related majors and cultivate high-end talents in tourism management, tourism planning, and other fields. Establish a reward mechanism for tourism service quality, commend and reward outstanding tourism practitioners, and improve the overall service level of the industry.

6.3. Strengthen Tourism Market Promotion

Utilize social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, etc. to carry out online marketing activities, release Shaanxi tourism short videos, pictures, and guides, and attract foreign tourists' attention. Organize international tourism festivals and events, such as the Silk Road International Tourism Expo and the Xi'an International Music Festival, to enhance the international reputation of Shaanxi tourism. Collaborate with international tourism companies and online travel platforms to launch discounted travel packages and routes, and expand market share.

Build the tourism brand of "Shaanxi Good City" and extract the core values of the brand, such as "a millennium ancient capital, the source of Chinese civilization". Unified brand visual image, design brand logos, promotional slogans, and posters with Shaanxi characteristics. Strengthen brand communication and showcase Shaanxi's tourism brand image to the world through international media, tourism exhibitions, and other channels.

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