



Each Chinese visitor spends about \$US1800 shopping, and their numbers are rising by 15pc a year.

Photo: AP

Chinese flock to Paris

Steven Erlanger PARIS

It was once the Americans, then the Japanese, then the Russians. Now it's the Chinese.

In recent months Paris has been dominated by the Chinese, who have begun to travel abroad in large numbers and come here less to eat than to shop.

According to Atout France, the French tourism development agency, individual visas are still expensive and restricted for Chinese visitors, so they come mostly on bus tours organised back home, usually for trips of 10 to 15 days that often start in Germany, with stops in Switzerland, Italy or the Netherlands.

They almost always end in Paris, and it is in Paris that most do their shopping. In 2010, Chinese visitors spent about \$US890 million in France, 60 per cent more than in 2009, according to Atout France.

More Americans than Chinese come to Paris but they spend less. An American's shopping expenditures run to 40 per cent of a Chinese visitor's. Only the Russian tourist spends more than the Chinese one, and only slightly.

The Chinese come, for the most part, to the large department stores, the *grands magasins* like Galeries Lafayette and Au Printemps, which sit side by side on the Boulevard Haussmann,

each with its own glorious, stained-glass domes, two churches of capitalism.

The Chinese market has become very important to both stores. Both advertise heavily in China, both work assiduously with tour operators and travel agents there and both have good relations with the Chinese Embassy and business organisations to get the VIP shopper as well.

Printemps has a special entrance for Chinese groups and

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provides a short Chinese-language briefing about the store, says its director of the international customer department, Laurent Schenten. There are public-address announcements in Chinese. The store offers a digital card, so a customer who only has a set amount of time does not have to wait at each boutique for purchases, which are collected for them for a single payment.

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Schenten says. Chinese customers spend an average of \$US1660 each at Printemps. "We work to get them to spend here and not on Avenue Montaigne or Galeries Lafayette," he says.

Chinese tourism in France is rising by more than 15 per cent a year. Atout France says about 550,000 Chinese visited in 2010. The average Chinese tourist is male, about 45, lives in a large city and visits the obvious places: Eiffel Tower, Louvre and, of course, the shops. They spend about \$US1800 each on shopping, 60 per cent of their travel budget, according to Global Blue, an international company that handles tax refunds for international shoppers.

In general, Chinese tour groups stay in large, cheaper hotels outside Paris and eat pre-planned meals in Chinese restaurants.

But they buy luxury brands for themselves and their friends — especially items that have logos and which they know are not fakes.

In China, such goods can cost 20 to 30 per cent more.

"France is distant but we know her well," says Nong Kang, who works for Atout France in China.

"Our greatest writers spent years in France and everyone here has read a book of Balzac or seen a movie starring Alain Delon."

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