



The recent Ai Weiwei: *According to What?* retrospective told a compelling story through sculpture, photography, video and more at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (photo courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art).

Chinese Connections

By Symone C. Skrzycki

A Taste of Home Helps Attract Foreign Travelers

While it can be fun to get “lost” in new places on vacation, sometimes small touches from your familiar home can put you at ease. The same holds true for those visiting Indiana.

Tourists around the globe pour millions of dollars into shopping, sightseeing, sports, dining and other attractions every year. But at its core, tourism isn’t just about revenue and economic impact (although that’s vitally important). It’s about exploring different cultures and new experiences. In short – it’s about people.

“Tourism, unlike many other industries, is not just ‘buy and sell.’ Everybody is a touch point in a tourist experience,” declares Liping Cai, professor and director of the Purdue Tourism & Hospitality Research Center and director of the Purdue University China Center. “We need to go beyond the transactional buyer-seller mentality (in bringing more visitors to Indiana). It’s not just (a way to) exchange their money for our attractions. Tourists also exchange emotions and feelings.”

Chinese tourism in the United States is on the rise. Approximately two million Chinese tourists are expected to visit the country this year – up more than 25% from 2012, according to the *Kiplinger* business newsletter. That number is expected to climb to nearly four million by 2017.

“The number of Chinese tourists that can afford to take a trip to the U.S. is much greater than before and is continuing to grow fairly rapidly,” observes Dave Carini, executive director of the America China Society of Indiana (ACSI), which promotes economic development, trade and investment opportunities between Indiana and China.

Mark Newman, executive director of the Indiana Office of Tourism Development, also sees strong potential with the growing Chinese market.

“I think the whole industry is developing around the idea of engaging the Chinese and attracting them to various destinations across the United States,” he asserts. “When Chinese business people come to the United States, they’re looking for that different experience, that signature American experience.

“What Indiana has that distinguishes it from other states and what our capital city has to offer is its location. The rural appeal of our state – it’s one of the ways we in the Heartland are able to compete with the assets and attractions on either coast.”

Cai chimes in, “(Many) Chinese travelers are in fact already here. Business travelers are looking for investment and trade opportunities in small groups, as well as in large delegations from China. The students

and their families are already here too, with major universities as the hubs.”

Culture on display

Ready for a history lesson and a little “time travel”?

A trip to The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis (the world’s largest) and Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) – both located just north of the city’s downtown – can satisfy that taste for adventure. Each showcases customs and practices that have shaped societies across the globe.

Starting in May 2014, The Children’s Museum will highlight Asia with *Take Me There: China* – featuring music, food, a tea shop, ancient medicine and more – and *Terra Cotta Warriors: The Emperor’s Painted Army*, which will include 100-plus artifacts. China’s first (and youngest) emperor, who began his reign at age 13, created the thousands of clay soldiers to protect him in the afterlife.

“It’s all about, ‘How do we reach out and help Hoosiers understand different perspectives and different places?’ ” reflects president and CEO Jeff Patchen. “For *Take Me There: Egypt*, we reached out to the Muslim and Islamic community and engaged them. We’re doing the same thing for *Take Me There: China*.”

Why China for the next destination?

“Indiana’s economic relationship with China has grown significantly. There are a large number of Indiana companies with a facility, office or a distributor in China, as well as Indiana companies with Chinese ownership. All of this is important.”

Patchen notes that in recent years (including during the recession), 35% to 40% of the museum’s annual visitation has come from farther than 100 miles away (beyond Indiana).

“Having iconic objects from other countries makes good economic sense. Cultural tourism is good for the economy because folks – particularly coming from over 100 miles away – are usually staying overnight. That means lodging. That means food (and other opportunities for local spending).”

Meanwhile, the IMA houses a permanent collection of more than 54,000 works of art chronicling 5,000 years. Its other features (which stretch across 152 acres) include an outdoor art and nature park. The IMA also runs Miller House and Garden, known for its innovative architecture, in Columbus.

Katie Zarich, head of public affairs, describes Chinese tourism in Indiana as “an untapped market.”

“I think it’s a huge opportunity for growth,” she says. “We’re trying to grow our attendance, and we know that Chinese tourists are on the rise. We see it as a big opportunity.”

This summer, visitors explored Chinese culture, history, politics and tradition through the *Ai Weiwei: According to What?* retrospective spotlighting 20-plus years of the activist’s work.

Zarich observes that the Chinese are also generally interested

in European and contemporary art.

“All of the big names you would expect to draw a good audience – or a sizeable audience for an exhibition – (Claude) Monet, (Pablo) Picasso, (Vincent) van Gogh, our (Henri) Matisse exhibition coming up in the fall (*Matisse, Life In Color: Masterworks from The Baltimore Museum of Art*). Those exhibitions also tend to do very well with Chinese audiences.”

Enjoy your stay

They call it “Hoosier Hospitality” for a reason.

Luxury hotels such as the Conrad Indianapolis emphasize service culture training for staff to make guests feel at home. Interactions with foreign visitors range from casual overnight stays to business meetings to banquet and event services.

First impressions set the stage.

Sitting atop the front desk in the main lobby, for example, are an American flag and the visiting party’s flag.

“We get a lot of very nice feedback on that,” comments general manager Greg Tinsley.

Exchanging business cards correctly, especially with



Take Me There: Egypt, which wrapped up a four-year run at The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis in August, attracted more than 3.4 million visitors.

Japanese and Chinese visitors, also can have a lasting impact.

“They’ll (often) have their business card in a protective case, and it’s very disrespectful if you just reach in your pocket and rifle through four or five cards and find yours,” Tinsley explains. “It’s important that you face your card toward them, let them place their card over yours when you exchange them, that you pass and receive that card with both hands and take a moment to read that card in front of them.”

In addition, the hotel caters to cultural preferences. For Chinese guests, that may include room/floor assignments (based on the significance of odd and even numbers) and amenities (providing an electric kettle and specialty teas). In addition, Middle Eastern visitors often request specific news and entertainment television channels.

Historic attractions such as Conner Prairie are an important part of Indiana's international tourism scene.



2012 International Visitors

	Country	Visitors	2012 Growth
1.	Canada	22.7 million	6%
2.	Mexico	14.5 million	8%
3.	U.K.	3.8 million	-2%
4.	Japan	3.7 million	14%
5.	Germany	1.9 million	3%
6.	Brazil	1.8 million	19%
7.	China	1.5 million	35%
8.	France	1.5 million	-3%
9.	South Korea	1.3 million	9%
10.	Australia	1.1 million	8%

Canada: Accounts for 34% of total visitors to U.S.
Mexico: Accounts for 21.5% of total visitors to U.S.
U.K.: Down from 2000 peak of 4.7 million
Japan: Well below 1997 record of 5.4 million
Germany: Record visitors were 2.0 million in 1996

More than 250 guests attended the America China Society of Indiana's Year of the Snake Annual Gala 2013. On the menu: performances by the Indianapolis Chinese Community Center, Inc. and a Chinese-inspired dinner.

2012 International Visitors Spending

	Country	Visitors	2012 Growth
1.	Canada	\$26.1 billion	9%
2.	Japan	\$16.6 billion	12%
3.	U.K.	\$13.0 billion	9%
4.	Mexico	\$10.1 billion	9%
5.	Brazil	\$9.3 billion	10%
6.	China	\$9.2 billion	19%
7.	Germany	\$7.0 billion	10%
8.	Australia	\$5.5 billion	11%
9.	France	\$5.3 billion	7%
10.	India	\$4.9 billion	11%



Although the hotel often hosts dignitaries during local events with an international flavor, Tinsley notes that the Conrad regularly accommodates foreign business leaders.

"We have a need to drive this level of service multiple times a month," he declares. "Honda is a great example. When their leadership comes from abroad, we have the opportunity to host them here."

Higher education: A family affair

Enrollment at Purdue University included 8,562 international students (China led the way with 3,934) during the 2012-13 academic year. The number of international students attending Indiana University's campuses during the same semester soared to 7,785 – up 70% since 2005. The majority hailed from East Asia.

"The greatest potential (in boosting the state's international tourism) lies with our universities," Newman asserts. "Indiana is home to some of the largest international student populations in the country. Our ability to engage that population and to in turn – when their families come to visit – give them opportunities for leisure experiences is pretty significant."

Cai adds that more collaborations among universities, communities and tourist organizations must take place.

"The students themselves are the tourists who have chosen to come on our doorsteps. We are not doing enough to get them out of university campuses and into our main streets and our communities that are potentially their adopted or second hometowns," he relates. "Not only are we losing the economic benefits from their tourist spending, we are missing the opportunity to cultivate their connections and loyalty to our universities and state."

One of the first steps is to raise awareness of what Indiana has to offer: The world-renowned Indianapolis 500 and other racing events held at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Cultural and culinary attractions. Shopping destinations (the No. 1 spending category for Chinese tourists). These are just a few key draws.

“We may not have tourist attractions and destinations that have established recognition like Disney World, Vegas or Washington D.C., but we do have (places) that offer similar, but unique experiences,” Cai reflects, citing Holiday World in Santa Claus and French Lick as examples.

Newman concludes: “I think we have a great future in international tourism. We’re not there yet. We have to check some things off the list before we’re truly able to immerse ourselves in that market, but I think it will provide some great return for us when we’re able to do it.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Liping Cai, Purdue Tourism & Hospitality Research Center and Purdue University China Center, at www.purdue.edu/tourism or www.ippu.purdue.edu/china

Jeff Patchen, The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, at www.childrensmuseum.org

Katie Zarich, Indianapolis Museum of Art, at www.imamuseum.org

Dave Carini, America China Society of Indiana, at www.americachinasociety.org

Mark Newman, Indiana Office of Tourism Development, at www.VisitIndiana.com

Greg Tinsley, Conrad Indianapolis, at www.conradhotels.hilton.com