

## USS Missouri's decks welcome Chinese visitors - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

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### USS Missouri's decks welcome Chinese visitors

The ship is seeing an influx of tourists as it expands its online outreach

By William Cole

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Sep 22, 2013



The number of Chinese-speaking visitors making a stop at the Battleship Missouri Memorial is rising meteorically as many head for history and shopping in Hawaii rather than the waves.

The battleship museum, the site of Japan's World War II surrender in Tokyo Bay on Sept. 2, 1945, saw 2,004 visitors make reservations for Chinese guided tours in 2011, 5,796 in 2012 and 10,447 through August of this year, officials said.

ShuFen Chang, head of Chinese programs for the Mighty Mo, which is docked in Pearl Harbor, said some of those visitors are from Taiwan and other locations, but 85 percent are from mainland China.

The Missouri launched a concerted Chinese visitor program earlier this year, setting up a Chinese-language informational website where reservations can be made as well as a Chinese Facebook page. It also is microblogging on China's Weibo service.

"With China being one of our fastest-growing tourism markets, we wanted to offer Chinese-speaking visitors easy access to information about the USS Missouri and its history, and more importantly, provide them with the tools to communicate with us," said Michael Carr, president and chief operating officer for the Missouri.

Six Chinese-speaking tour guides are on staff.

The Missouri noted that the battleship is significant in China's history as well, with Gen. Hsu Yung-Chang signing Japan's "Instrument of Surrender" in 1945 on behalf of China aboard the Missouri, bringing an end to World War II.

The big ship also is popular with the Chinese for its starring role in the 2012 Universal Pictures sci-fi movie "Battleship."

"I think that helped as well" with the visitor counts, said Missouri spokeswoman Jaclyn Hawse. "(The movie) was actually a big hit in the Chinese market and topped their list of movies, and so I think the interest lies there as well with them wanting to see the actual place where it was filmed."

Hawse added, "That's more for the younger generation, and then the history buffs come simply because of the history and (China's) presence here at the end of World War II."

Chinese visitors are on a steady rise, but the numbers from Japan are still much greater overall.

The Missouri reported 20,125 visitors seeking Japanese tours in 2011, 24,939 in 2012 and 16,649 through August.

In 2012, a visa waiver program made it easier for Taiwanese to visit the United States, and some airlines offer direct flights to Hawaii from Taiwan and mainland China, Hawse said. Hawaiian Airlines received approval for flights between Honolulu and Beijing in 2014.

China has been identified by the Hawai'i Tourism Authority as a major growth market.

Many Chinese forgo the beach for bustling days of shopping and sightseeing at the Battleship Missouri and Pearl Harbor's other museums, including the USS Arizona Memorial, Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor and USS Bowfin Submarine Museum and Park.

"There's no doubt shopping is the No. 1 activity," CJ Chen, managing director of Hawaiiwedding.cn, said back in June.

Chinese are the top daily spenders in Hawaii, shelling out an average of nearly \$400 a day compared to Japanese, the second highest group, who spend \$290 daily.

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Star-Advertiser reporter Allison Schaefer contributed to this story.

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