

When a journey becomes a job

British expat turns her wanderlust into a business opportunity in China, **Zhou Xiaoli** and **Zhang Jianhua** report.

Beijing-based British entrepreneur, Sarah Keenlyside, has tailored thousands of trips for celebrities, senior business managers and other international visitors to China. Her client list includes American singer Katy Perry, actor Matt Damon, as well as several board members of WPP, a well-known advertising agency.

Keenlyside's knowledge about Beijing and China may surprise many local residents.

It's been eight years since she founded Bespoke Travel, a company that offers customized tour services for international visitors to China.

The company received more than 260 bookings from overseas visitors last year, and Keenlyside plans to expand her business further by establishing an office in Japan.

Before coming to China, Keenlyside, who was born and raised in England, was a journalist with the Sunday Times newspaper in London, and she knew very little about China when she first came to the country.

On her first trip in February 2005, she was overwhelmed by the surroundings and found it difficult to even order meals.

"My first impression of Beijing was wonderful. It was a real feast for the senses. Everything was so different from things in England and anywhere in the West," she says.

Eight months after the trip, Keenlyside decided to quit her job and move to China.

Seize the chance

The first job Keenlyside got

was as an editor for the city magazine, Time Out Beijing. This gave her plenty of opportunity to explore the Chinese capital, discovering new shops and reviewing new restaurants and bars.

"It forced me to really learn about the city. I had to go all over Beijing, to every corner, and really know everything about it. I really started to love this city," she says.

Keenlyside recalled that Beijing underwent a rapid transformation before the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Changes were taking place so quickly that many foreign visitors found it difficult to navigate their way through the city if they religiously followed guidebooks — even those published just the year before.

"Many guidebooks were irrelevant; the subway lines weren't right; venues had closed down," Keenlyside says. "A lot of foreigners using the guidebooks were getting lost and struggling."

As Beijing's reputation led to a flood of international visitors post-Olympics, Keenlyside saw an increasing demand from independent overseas travelers for up-to-date information and timely assistance. So, she hit upon the idea of setting up her own travel company.

"There needed to be something besides the useless guidebooks and the package tours," she says. "So, I decided to seize the opportunity, try to start this company and see what happened."

A bridge that connects

Since entering the travel industry, Keenlyside and her company have tailored tours



British entrepreneur Sarah Keenlyside (front right) participates in a fun photo shoot to re-create the children's book, *Where's Waldo*, at the Forbidden City in 2014. ELIZABETH PHUNG / FOR CHINA DAILY

for a large number of international visitors to China. Among her clients, however, Keenlyside was most impressed by Katy Perry.

In 2014, Perry was in Beijing to perform at the Infiniti China Brand Festival at the Olympic Stadium, and she set aside time to see the city with her family and friends, says Keenlyside.

Keenlyside said they took her to the Great Wall, Nanluoguxiang alley and Panjiayuan Antique Market. Perry posted a photo on Instagram of herself doing a split on the Great Wall and the photo received more than 360,000 likes.

Thanks to the tours arranged by Keenlyside and her team, many overseas visitors have been able to not only visit the city's famous tourist attractions, but also explore some hidden gems, such as

the White Stupa Temple and the Temple of Ancient Monarchs.

"China is one of the most misunderstood countries on the planet," she says, adding that the one thing Bespoke Travel has done is to show international visitors what modern China looks like. "There is much more to see than the panda, the Terracotta Army and rice paddies."

"You don't really have the right to have an opinion, unless you see things with your own eyes," says Keenlyside, adding that her aim is to help her clients form their own opinion about China based on reality.

High spirits & optimism

Keenlyside says that alongside the rapid transformation of the city landscape, people living in Beijing tend to hold a more optimistic view of the

future, and that she is able to absorb this energy through her interactions with the people around her.

She also says there is an entrepreneurial spirit among the Chinese that she has not seen back home.

"As China is rising, people tend to think they can do something, or at least give it a try."

Keenlyside says she is amazed by China's high-speed railway technology and the flourishing digital economy. "Beijing is now a really exciting place where technology is booming, and there are lots of first-time things here," she says.

According to a report released by the China Tourism Academy recently, there were 29.1 million foreign visitors to China in 2017, up 3.6 percent year-on-year and bringing in \$69.5 billion in revenue.

Also, according to statistics from the CTA, the tourism industry contributed 9.13 trillion yuan (\$1.32 trillion) to China's gross domestic production in 2017, accounting for 11 percent of total economic output. China is the world's fourth largest destination for inbound tourists, receiving 139 million inbound trips in 2017.

"I think people's interest in China will only continue to grow," Keenlyside says, adding that an increasing number of people are now aware of the significance of understanding China.

"If you don't understand it, you are going to be left behind, because what's happening in Beijing and Shanghai now is what will happen in America in two years' time," she says.

XINHUA

Online education builds strong connections between China, US

DALLAS, TEXAS — It may be challenging for Americans to teach Chinese students English online, but the experience of learning and sharing cultures with Chinese families is much more fulfilling.

This is the view shared by more than 300 teachers who gathered on Aug 9 in Dallas, Texas, in the United States, for VIPKID's second regional conference.

Founded in 2013, the Chinese online education company has hired about 60,000 native speakers in North America, mostly in the US, to teach English online mainly to children under 12. Teachers

can publish schedules online based on their own time arrangements, and teach classes from wherever there is internet access.

For many of the teachers, a relationship is built not only personally, but also culturally, as they get a chance to learn more about China when teaching Chinese children English. US teacher Joan Grabowski told that she became interested in Chinese culture and history through lessons provided by the company.

To her, teaching seven Chinese kids English is a good experience, during which she "builds personal connections

with families on the other side of the world".

The online English learning service has been welcomed by Chinese parents over the past two years and is building a bridge between cultural differences by meeting demand from both China and overseas.

With a number of online English learning companies for children emerging, the number of customers is expected to reach nearly 8 million and the market value may exceed 5 billion yuan (\$730 million) in 2019, according to a report by China's consulting company, iResearch, in 2017. Besides English learning,



US teachers, who teach Chinese students online with VIPKID, attend a regional conference in Dallas, Texas. Many of them have started their interest in Chinese language and culture too in the process. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

VIPKID launched an online Chinese learning service last year, and has more than 10,000 students now, many of which are children of the company's English teaching staff. Kris Hiwell is a good exam-

ple of the bonds being forged. A special education teacher, he was introduced to the company by his wife who had been teaching there for more than a year. His 12-year-old son is learn-

ing Chinese through the company's program, Lingo Bus. "They say the language of the future is Mandarin and my son is learning it already," he said.

Hiwell and his wife are considering moving to China to be full-time English teachers in order to give their son a better language environment.

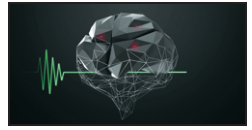
Keven Klein, VIPKID's global director of community, said that the company aims to create global citizens, both in the US and in China, by bridging the gap between the two countries.

"Kids in China are growing up seeing teachers in the US and understanding the US culture, and American teachers who have never been outside of the country before, all of a sudden, appreciate Chinese culture," she said.

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Playlist

ART Science reflections



In 2015, artist Zou Cao started to focus on art and technology. Now, Zou's latest show at the Beijing Art Now Gallery features an installation which shows the artist's take on big data. It consists of two brain-like sculptures and a big computer screen to show how a man's thoughts get transformed into an artwork on screen. So, when a visitor writes what they're thinking about on a screen inserted in the brain sculpture, a unique artwork, based on his or her words, is created via an algorithm. The show, which runs through Sept 1, also features Zou's previous installations inspired by Chinese ink painting. Zou earned a degree of philosophy at Jilin University and holds three patents on science.

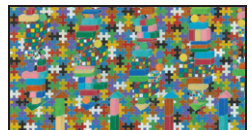
Rare paintings



An ongoing exhibition at Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang features 85 rare ancient Chinese ink paintings and works of calligraphy from its collection. Among them are many works seldom seen by the public, such as *Auspicious Cranes* by Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), an emperor who was regarded as a talented painter and calligrapher. Pu Yi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), had planned to take this painting out of China when he fled to Japan, but failed.

The show, which will run until mid-November, showcases a tiny part of the museum's huge collection that spans four dynasties, and it marks the start of a series to display the museum's 10,000 works to the public.

New ink works



Artist Peng Jian, regarded as a representative of the new ink painting movement in China, is holding his first solo show in London at the HdM gallery. On display are his paintings and installations, including his *Puzzle* series that uses Rubik's cubes, stacked books and boxes. His bold use of colors is influenced by traditional Chinese heavy-color painting techniques, as well as Japanese woodblock printing. As the number of artists in China with ink painting skills declines, Peng offers a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Chinese art genre.

DENG ZHANGYU

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