



JINGDAILY:CHINA POISED TO BECOME WORLD'S LARGEST LUXURY E-COMMERCE MARKET BY 2015

With China's burgeoning luxury e-commerce market expected to surpass US\$3 billion this year, fashion retailers like Net-A-Porter and Neiman Marcus, designers like Alexander Wang and brands like J. Crew aren't the only companies hoping to tap China's wealthier consumer. As more Chinese outbound tourists hit the world stage – they're expected to take 80 million trips this year – high-end travel is rapidly becoming another online battleground for startups.

Joining Trip TM (recently acquired by Ctrip) and the ultra-luxury-baiting Zanadu, a new startup, Quafrica hopes to cash in by going niche. Tapping a growing interest in Africa among the more seasoned or adventurous of Chinese travelers, Shanghai-based Quafrica specializes in adventure tours to one of nine countries throughout the continent: Kenya, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Rwanda, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana and South Africa.

Via Tech in Asia:

The Quafrica.com service – in both English and Chinese – currently has travel packages that encompass six differing themes, such as “culture,” “work retreat,” and the more obvious “safari.” A culture-oriented trip, for example, could be something like its five-day “bushmen of the western Kalahari,” in which the intrepid travelers will live with – and learn from – the desert people in an authentic village. Everything included, that costs 72,000 RMB (US\$11,300) for two people. But for that price you won't be roughing it à la Bear Grylls, as Quafrica ensures customers that even in the vast Kalahari desert there'll be all-included “house wine” and a “laundry service.”

Quafrica's Dominica Drazal tells us that the startup has had seed funding from the Shanghai-based investment group TZG Partners (note: that site is down for me at present), and that the six-person team is “focused exclusively on the Africa business and then also leverages the management at TZG Partners.”

The “niche-ification” of China's e-commerce market — whether it be startups focused on bespoke fashion, accessories, health or tourism — is an important development to watch. Progressing from the early “big-box” platforms like Taobao to specialized sites doing one thing (hopefully) well, niche sites may find themselves in a better position when and if the crowded luxury e-commerce market in China sees a broader industry shakeout. For its part, Tech in Asia notes that Quafrica's next niche move will be a standalone site called Quoasis, which will be oriented around “wellness” — offering spa treatments, yoga and other therapeutic packages. (Probably a smart move, as therapeutic tourism is becoming an emerging trend in itself.)