Do your research

Speak to industry experts

This includes Tourism Australia and your local state tourism organisation, regional tourism organisation or industry bodies such as ATEC. It is also valuable to talk to leaders in the market.

Ryan Zaknich from Two Feet & A Heartbeat walking tours, who have successfully engaged with a number of Asian markets, recommends talking to tourism operators who deal with your target market to understand whether your product is suitable for their clients.

Look locally

Speak to Inbound Tour Operators (ITOs) who are based in Australia about your product. You could also get involved in your target market’s local community in Australia as this can provide some good insight into what the market is looking for and can create positive relationships for your business.

The ‘Visiting Friends and Relatives’ market should not be overlooked.
Become aware of cultural differences and ways of doing business in Asia

Although Asian social attitudes are becoming ‘westernised’ they are not as individualised as Australian social attitudes, mainly because of its education system and Confucian culture as well as strict expectations from society, family and government (backed by legal responsibilities) on their social behaviour.

Australian Chamber of Commerce in Korea

Gain an understanding of where your customers come from

It is crucial to understand that each market in Asia is unique and a person’s culture can influence their perceptions and decision making process.

Fleur Ulbrick of AAT Kings, emphasises how important it is to understand the concepts of ‘face’ and networking and relationships (known as ‘guanxi’ in Chinese culture). These concepts are present across all Asian markets, though there are some differences.

Be aware of culturally sensitive topics that are best to avoid. For instance, Chinese people are aware of the environmental issues such as pollution that affect their country so pointing this out directly can be perceived as criticism and therefore cause them to lose face.

Be open to change

Sharon Livingston of Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises believes small changes can go a long way. She recommends a flexible approach and willingness to adjust your product and service delivery for your target market.

Communication

When dealing with international markets, it is important to be aware of differences in communication. Seniority and hierarchy are important in Asian cultures, so make sure that you greet and speak to the most senior person/people first.

Austrade suggests the following approach to overcome potential barriers in communication:

‘Make sure you are understood. Speak slowly and clearly and repeat any points that you want to emphasise. It may be worthwhile exchanging notes (minutes) after the meeting further ensuring that each other has been understood.’

‘The word ‘Yes’ can simply mean, ‘Yes, I hear you’ and not ‘Yes, I agree’. Ensure that the message has been fully understood.’

This can range from the way you pass over your business card and shake hands, to the expectations and preferences of Asian tourists who visit your establishment.

It is a good idea to approach the Asian market with openness to learning, as each market is unique.
Building relationships is important in Asian culture, and it can take time

Make overseas visits to your market as it is important in Asian culture to maintain relationships. Make sure you keep in touch with your agents to maintain the relationship, and be mindful that you may have to make repeat visits when you’re establishing the relationship.

Paul Brown of Kangaroo Island Wilderness Tours, has found that it takes longer to build relationships in the eastern market compared to the west, as trust and ‘face’ are important. Be aware that working with Asian markets can be a slow process and it may take some time before you see results.
Tips for doing business

The following tips come from a range of Australian tourism operators who deal with Asian markets.

- Understand the culture and customer expectations of your target market
- Hiring bilingual staff can assist in product delivery and customer service as well as educating other staff members about the culture of your target market
- Ensure that you understand the market including distribution channels and life cycle and aim to get your product included in brochures
- Create small differences to set yourself apart
- Work with Tourism Australia and your local state tourism organisation
- Take a long-term view to investing your time today
- Work with your industry and state and territory governments to promote your destination
- Participate in events through Tourism Australia such as the Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE) where you can meet with many agents at once
- Be realistic about the issues you face, particularly if you are in regional Australia, then work to remove them or find ways around them
- Understand the market and make sure that there is an opportunity for your product
- Find ways to give your product a competitive edge, such as including a free gift
- Translating signage at your business can go a long way in making visitors feel welcome
- Be aware of the holiday periods in your target country, especially when planning a visit
- Think outside the square and try to work together with nearby attractions
- Consider your low season and whether targeting specific markets would be complementary to visitation during this time
- If your product involves history or an aspect that could be potentially uncomfortable for a visitor from your target market, think of ways to be culturally sensitive to avoid a loss of ‘face’
- Hosting famils (especially for journalists and senior staff) can be a good way to promote your business to people who are in a good position to market your product
- Communicate with your visitors before they arrive and make arrangements to accommodate language requirements if necessary
- You may need to rethink your strategy depending on the maturity of the market you are dealing with
- When working with companies in overseas markets, it is important to understand their business structure and who their key decision makers are – sometimes it may be more than one person

An expert’s view on how to woo the Asian market:

Expert advice on the best ways to lure Asian visitors to our shores was given to the 2012 Australian Tourism Directions Conference by noted Singaporean writer and editor, Yeoh Siew Hoon. Her presentation offered five practical ideas on how to sell an Australian escape to the Asian traveller.