

0 Striving Towards a Modern Coastal Metropolis

# Capturing the Global Camping Market with Quality and Strategy

By Jin Lu

Escaping the urban hustle and embracing nature through camping has become a global lifestyle trend. In China, the popularity of "glamping" is on the rise, driven by the appeal of a comfortable experience, novelty, and its photogenic nature. Against this backdrop, Chinese outdoor brands are thriving, successfully navigating through international competition to carve out a presence in the global market.

Naturehike, an outdoor gear company from Ningbo, stands out as a leader in this field. In April 2022, for the first time, Naturehike secured nearly 100 million yuan in external financing. According to Shoptop's "2023 Outdoor Camping Industry White Paper", Naturehike's annual global sales growth exceeds 40%.

## Success in China and on Global Markets

Naturehike founder Ji Jinning had previously worked in outdoor gear manufacturing and is an avid outdoor enthusiast. "I didn't want China to be a mere manufacturer for foreign brands," he said, describing his motivation for founding Naturehike in 2010. Leveraging his extensive experience in global trade, Ji set his sights on the international market, consistently optimizing the supply chain, improving quality management, and boosting investment in product development. Eventually, by utilizing platforms such as Tmall and Taobao Global, Naturehike transformed from a Chinese manufacturer to a respected Chinese brand. With products priced at about one-third of other international brands, Naturehike has drawn a significant number of loyal overseas customers.

When "glamping" first gained traction overseas, Naturehike quickly caught onto the trend. "Outdoor activities



Camping has become a global lifestyle trend. [Photo by Shi Dandan]

are becoming a popular lifestyle abroad in recent years," Ji said, "They are opportunities for socialization that are strongly associated fashionable lifestyles, which is why we want our products to be on top of the latest trends." There are tens of thousands of exporters in Ningbo. The twelve-year-old Naturehike is considered a newcomer. However, unlike more established companies, Naturehike has focused on product research and design from the outset. The brand was registered in 2013, and the company entered Tmall shortly thereafter. To date, Naturehike has secured nearly 200 utility model and design patents.

"In the early years, we were primarily selling to the domestic Chinese market," recalled Hong Chen, Naturehike's sales director.

As Naturehike's reputation grew, an increasing number of vendors began distributing its products on cross-border platforms, garnering positive feedback from customers. Some overseas vendors even sought to become the company's sales agents. In response, Naturehike took the initiative in 2017 to list its products on international e-commerce sites like

Amazon, AliExpress, and Shopify. They started with a professional tent and gradually expanded their range. Today, Naturehike's products are available in over 80 countries and regions.

Since 2019, Naturehike has increased its investment in response to this trend, receiving widespread acclaim for its glamping-related products like cotton tents, canopies, wooden tables, chairs, cookware, and ambient lighting in China and around the world.

## Accurately Predicting a Major Trend

Today, Chinese social media platforms like Weibo, Douyin, and WeChat Moments are filled with images of people enjoying the outdoors, seated on folding chairs under canopies, cooking food on portable stoves atop collapsible tables, with the sunset as a backdrop. In China, glamping embodies a sense of sophistication and comfort. According to iiMedia Research, the core market size of China's camping economy reached 74.75 billion yuan in 2021, a 62.5% increase from the previous year.

The core market size is expected to grow to 248.32 billion yuan by 2025.

Attracted by a market with less competition, tens of thousands of companies are getting into the camping gear game. But Naturehike has always been a step ahead of the latecomers. "Back in 2019, by observing the Japanese and Korean markets, we predicted that glamping would eventually be popular in China, thus securing a 'first-mover advantage'," said Hong.

Although 2020 is widely recognized as the first year of the outdoors industry in China, the global camping market has a much longer history. Hiking and backpacking have long been popular in Europe and the U.S., but these activities remained niche in China. Meanwhile, in neighboring Japan and South Korea, glamping began gaining popularity between 2015 and 2018. This form of camping is designed to be comfortable and photogenic, with gear that is easy to pack and carry, making it appealing even to outdoor amateurs.

This observation significantly influenced Naturehike's

strategy. In 2018, after frequent overseas trips to study international markets and participating in professional exhibitions like the Japan Camping Car Show, the company became more confident in its future plans for China. "The popularity of camping is closely tied to a region's economic development and per capita income," said Hong. "Once per capita GDP exceeds a certain value, people will start to embrace glamping. We believe glamping is the future of the Chinese market."

Good marketing can drive short-term success, but long-term success relies on quality products. Although Naturehike's achievements might appear to be a result of seizing the right opportunities, the company had been strategically planning all along. By developing its brand image and investing in research and design, Naturehike ensured its sustained growth.

With camping gear now a booming industry in China, Naturehike aims to build on this foundation to continue expanding globally while promoting a positive image of China.

0 SPOTLIGHT

## Transcending Borders! Overseas Employees of Ningbo Enterprises Long to Visit

By Yan Yiran

"I've always heard Ningbo is a beautiful city, but I didn't expect its cultural and sports facilities to be so impressive. I really want to see them for myself," said an employee at Shenzhou International's Cambodia factory during the recent "Ningbo in Photographs: An Exhibition Series in Global Companies". This event, part of Ningbo's plans to organize 100 photography exhibitions at 100 overseas factories, attracted a large number of visitors.

Shenzhou International Holdings Limited, a leader in China's textile and garment industry, is the world's largest vertically integrated knitwear manufacturer and distributor. Based in Ningbo, it is a major supplier to Nike and other renowned sports brands. With around 95,000 employees globally, Shenzhou employs about 20,000 in Cambodia and operates Southeast Asia's largest textile and garment factory in Vietnam, with over 30,000 workers.

Inside the factory, workers paused to admire photos showcasing Ningbo's urban vistas: Sanjiangkou, Ningbo's downtown area lit up at night, futuristic high-rises, ancient temples, and the Ningbo Zhoushan Port.

Many employees, getting to know Ningbo for the first time, praised its rich history, landscapes, and vibrant city life. Ningbo's new identity as a City of Olympic Champions, highlighted by sports-themed photos, drew special attention.

At the exhibition, the photo of Ningbo Olympic Sports Center sparked discussions among employees.

"Ningbo has so many top-notch modern facilities and sports venues. It's a vibrant city. If I have a chance, I want to experience the sports atmosphere there," said Ribek, an employee.

The exhibition also featured a special section on Ningbo's Buddhist culture, as demonstrated by the serene smile of the giant Maitreya Buddha statue. This smile captivated the employees because it is reminiscent of Cambodia's iconic "Khmer Smile" at Angkor Wat. This cross-cultural resonance fostered a sense of closeness among all. "I'm looking forward to visiting Ningbo to see the Buddha statue," said Tomiy, another employee.

0 SPOTLIGHT

## More Opportunities for Ningbo as Australia and New Zealand Gain Visa-Free Access to China

By Dong Na

On June 17, China announced that it would include Australia as a unilateral visa-free country, following a similar announcement for New Zealand on June 13.

Australia and New Zealand have close business ties and cultural exchanges with Ningbo. These visa waivers are set to bolster trade and cultural exchanges between Ningbo and these two nations, bringing more opportunities for Ningbo, a city with a globally-oriented economy.

Zheng Qiu, a Ningbo-based export trader specializing in consumer products, highlighted the positive impact of

the visa waiver on his business. Previously, his Australian clients had to submit complicated application materials and wait for up to three to four weeks before obtaining a Chinese visa. With the visa waiver, Zheng expects a significant increase in Australian customers visiting Ningbo this year.

As a RCEP member country, Australia is an important trade partner of Ningbo. In the first five months of this year, Ningbo's port handled 34.91 billion yuan in trade with Australia, a 26.9% year-on-year increase.

The visa waiver news, coupled with recent tariff adjustments, has boosted the confidence of Ningbo's con-

sumer goods importers.

"Australian wines account for a sizable share of the Chinese market and are favored by Chinese consumers for their sweet, rich taste," said Wang Hua, head of a local wine import company. "The visa waiver will help more Australian wines to enter the Chinese market. It will allow Australian winery owners and winemakers to visit China more frequently to seek business opportunities."

Miao Jing, who works for a company providing digital marketing and consulting services to prestigious schools including the University of New South Wales in Australia and the University of Auckland in New Zealand, also sees the visa



Sydney Opera House. [Photo by Li Xinyu]

waiver as a boon. In her opinion, this policy will increase the willingness of individuals from Australia and New Zealand to visit China for science, education, cultural exchanges, and tourism, spreading the latest developments from China to the world.

"With the visa waiver, it will

be easier for Ningbo's organizations to engage in talks with their partners from Australia and New Zealand, fast-tracking the implementation of cooperation projects. With more frequent contact, there will definitely be more opportunities for Ningbo's exporters and service providers," Miao said.

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