

Skift.

SPONSORED



Skift Take

Hotels are developing WeChat mini-programs to drive digital bookings among Chinese travelers. Club Med is one such company that has seen success in its WeChat mini-program strategy, developed by DerbySoft.

— *DerbySoft*

DerbySoft

WeChat “mini-programs” are starting to take off in China’s social media world, where the messaging platform dominates the market. Some hotels developing mini-programs find they rank among their best-performing direct channels, bringing in a large number of bookings from outbound Chinese travelers.

While little-known outside the country, the messaging and social media app WeChat is one of the world’s largest mobile messaging services, with similar transaction volume as WhatsApp and Facebook. According to the Economist, WeChat has more than 900 million daily users who send 38 billion messages per day. Fast Company calls WeChat China’s “app for everything” — in a country where credit cards are rare, and cash has been king, people use WeChat to shop online, pay for purchases at physical stores, book tickets, make appointments, pay their utility bills, and more.

WeChat mini-programs act like apps — except they live in the cloud and don’t have

to be downloaded, so users save on data and storage space. They're inserted or embedded in a WeChat promotional article easily, just as you would paste a URL link. There are more than 400 million total WeChat mini-program users, 170 million of them daily users.

Case Study: How DerbySoft Built a Successful WeChat Mini-Program for Club Med

DerbySoft, a company that provides high-performance distribution services across the hospitality sector, used WeChat mini-programs to develop real-time booking and online payment functionality for Club Med and helped the brand tap into China. By connecting Club Med's mini-program to the resort's real-time availability, room rates, and inventory, users can search, book, and make online payments to 16 Club Med resorts across China, Asia, and the Indian Ocean through the WeChat app.

As Olivia Chen, vice president of marketing & omni channel China, at Club Med, explained, "DerbySoft took only three weeks to develop the WeChat mini-program, integrating with Club Med's central reservation system to connect the resorts' real-time available rates and inventory to the WeChat mini-program. ... Our global customers can search and book any of our resorts by using the mini-program."

Three months after DerbySoft helped Club Med launch the new WeChat mini-program, average monthly traffic had taken off. Traffic increased 40 percent per month and provided a very high ROI. "The mini-program has led to the rapid growth of our WeChat direct sales, and collaboration with DerbySoft has led to a win-win situation for both sides," said Chen.

WeChat Mini-Programs for Hotels

WeChat mini-programs offer a promising distribution model for hotels to drive bookings among Chinese travelers. However, to act as a direct sales channel, they must connect to the hotel's central reservation system to provide accurate, real-time availability, room rates, and inventory.

Because of this, there are important considerations that hotels should make before hiring someone to create a WeChat mini-program. The developer must be qualified and able to carefully and thoughtfully plan functions such as user interface design, search, booking, and cancellation features.

It's also beneficial to have a localized availability cache. When a hotel promotes its mini-program through a high-volume media channel, a significant amount of traffic flows in a very short time from the mini-program to the central reservation system. A localized caching service can redirect this surge of traffic to caching servers, and reduce direct impact on the central reservation system. Just before

confirming a booking, the system performs a live check between the cached and live central reservation system data to make sure there are no price discrepancies. When a WeChat user confirms the booking, the information is sent to the central reservation system.

A mini-program developer must also be up on online network data security – all online businesses must follow both Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI) certification and GDPR, which guide data security and privacy for users – as well as integration between the mini-program and the brand's loyalty program, and currency conversion and settlement.

Currently, WeChat only supports settlement in RMB – the official currency of the People's Republic of China – so foreign hotels wanting to be part of a WeChat mini-program need currency conversion. DerbySoft can both convert various currencies to RMB and also help hotels make an RMB settlement.

Having proven their success in China as effective selling channels for hotels, WeChat mini-programs seem poised for even more growth. Digital Boot Camp Asia, a marketing company that specializes in companies doing business in Asia, asserts that WeChat mini-programs currently have almost limitless potential in China.

This content was created collaboratively by DerbySoft and Skift's branded content studio, SkiftX.

Tags: chinese traveler, Derbysoft, hotels, wechat