

# Research on Chinese Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers' Behavior Characteristics and the Discussion of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel's Development

Xuan Niu

School of Management, Shanghai University, Shanghai, 201900, China

**Abstract:** With the unique way of traveling, Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel in China has attracted more and more young people. As a new way of travel, the emergence and problems it contains become a new hot spot in academic research. This paper takes the Youth Hostel volunteer travelers as the research object, through the way of questionnaire analysis, from the characteristics of travelers' behavior motivation, space-time characteristics, travel motivation, etc., and summarizes that China Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers and Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel present the characteristics and problems such as young liberalization, experience development, large geographical span and lack of security guarantee, then provides some suggestions for the development of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, making a good safety protection mechanism, and forming a systematic and standardized management model, which has important guidance and reference value for promoting the healthy development of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel.

**Keywords:** Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel; Behavior Characteristic; Youth Hostel Volunteer Traveler

## 1. Introduction

When backpackers went into China, the wind of "Poor Tourism" woke up Chinese young tourist groups, with the development of youth hostels in China and the spread of volunteer travel, a new form of travel appeared in China--the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, this mode of travel has some features of "holiday-working" travel. From some relevant articles and combined its current development, Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel is kind of tourism that "tourists based on the motivation to travel in a certain place, in order to save money, have deep experience, expand social relations, so choose a favorite youth hostel, contribute their talents and skills to help the youth hostels, so that they can obtain accommodations and other needs without paying money. Unlike the holiday-working or some other jobs, tourists and the youth hostel owners reach an agreement, tourists are not to find a job, so they don't need salary, the owners don't need to pay them salary, but they should help the tourists finish their travel in local. This type of travel is called "Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel", the duration of travel is usually from half a month to a month, generally, it has limited places, and unpaid work. altruistic behavior, short time, etc. characteristics.

In the era of individualized tourism, traditional travel like card-punching tourism cannot meet modern tourists' need, more and more people want to have deeper travel experience and have their own individualized travel arrangements. Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel can satisfy travelers' needs, they can travel deep into destinations, slow down the travel pace, and have a deeper experience of travel. At the same time, judging from the two major elements of travel----"having time" and "having money", Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel in food, accommodation, transportation and other aspects has greatly reduced the travel expenses, it is a powerful assistance for tourists on economic condition. Meeting the needs of travelers' experience and solving the financial problems, Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel attracts more and more people to choose this new way to travel.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel

Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, which originated from German---the birthplace of youth hostel, has been extended from hostel to farms, inns, remote mountainous areas, etc[1] In China, due to the concept was introduced for a short time, China's Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel mainly relies on the youth hostels, residential a ccommo-

dition, inns and some bookstores ,coffee shops, and belongs to a new way of travel.

Currently in China, people refer to Youth Hostel Volunteer Tourism as "volunteer Tourism" directly, and confuse the conceptions of "Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel" with "Volunteer Tourism". indeed, the two are quite different. Volunteer Tourism is that "Tourists devote their time, money and labor to destinations far away from their own living environment and take unique culture, environment, and spiritual as harvest [2]". For participants, volunteer travel is the intersection of pluralistic goals such as tourism leisure, cost saving, experience participation, horizon expansion, self-improvement and social value identification. For the service objects, Volunteer Tourism has the function of protecting, rescuing and helping development. Volunteer Tourism is usually characterized by "Public welfare + Tourism" double motivation, free work, altruistic behavior, short time and no fixed place. The concept and property definition of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel are now mixed.

Combined with the definition of "Obligation work" by Hongkong Voluntary Development Bureau---anyone who volunteers to contribute their time and energy, and who provides services for the betterment of society without any material remuneration, and who engages in voluntary service activities, is known as volunteers or volunteer workers(1994). The definition of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel by Xiamen Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel Research Group with very high recognition from Douban was that "A person ,for the purpose of traveling or experiencing life, gains room and board by working in a youth hostel for a short period of time[1]",and in view of the fact that the volunteer travelers' remuneration and labour acquired are not in line with the community economy principles, It may be considered that the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel has the nature of Volunteer Tourism. At the same time ,the definition of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel that "based on tourism or experience life, people who have contributed their time, skills, labor and so on for a youth hostel, not for the purpose of economic compensation[3] " also confirm that the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel belongs to Volunteer Tourism in nature, Therefore, this article considers that the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel is within the category of Volunteer Tourism.

At the same time, it should be noted that from the perspective of the basic concept of "tourism" and "travel" in the academic , Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel is quite different from the "holiday-working "which is popular in New Zealand and Australia's, Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers' giving is not about getting paid. While holiday-working in New Zealand and Australia is a "work ", the biggest goal is to work and to obtain salary ,then if they have time or motivation, they can join tourism activities[4].

At present, the intensive study on Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel is still insufficient in China, especially there are few studies on the behavioral characteristics and behavioral patterns of the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers, which needs to be further explored, and in this paper will from the perspective of volunteer travel to have a simple literature review about Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel.

Harg Luh Sin conducted depth interviews with 11 volunteer travelers in Singapore, found that the "travel" motivation of volunteer tourists was far beyond the "contribution", volunteers engaged in volunteer activities in the local was more like a kind of travel, they could experience something that the usual way of travel cannot have[5]. But in other case, the main motivation for tourists is not tourism but volunteering, voluntary activities were more like jobs rather than being a tourist[6] Zong Yuan is an earlier scholar in China to study "Welfare Tourism" and "Volunteer Tourism", she used qualitative research and found that the travel motivation of Volunteer Tourists can be divided into: Altruism, Learning communication, Spiritual relaxation[7-8], and there were other volunteer tourists who had the motivations like exploring the unknown, learning knowledge, less based on altruism[9]. In terms of the perception of Volunteer Tourism, Dai Yuxiu[10] pointed out that Shanghai University students' awareness of Volunteer Tourism was generally low, while college students think that Volunteer Tourism is valuable and meaningful, but there are only a few people know or participate it ,and they think the volunteer activities take a long time, it's difficult for them to have opportunity to participate in formal volunteer tourism activities[11].

In view of the current situation of Chinese Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, for now, the related organizations and platforms about Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel include the FOOTSTEP NET, the Gapper International Volunteer Tourism, XingYing traveling, the Volunteer Tourism Big Alliance and so on, Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel is only small part of their operation activities, most of the organizations are dependent on Wechat, Webo, Douban and other social network platforms to publish information,. Currently, these third-party platforms lack specialization, refinement, and standardization as a whole.

## 2.2. Characteristics of tourism behavior

The research on the characteristics of tourists' behavior is a relatively mature topic. As early as the 20th century 60-70th decades, foreign scholars have begun to study the behavior of tourists, such as tourism motivation, decision-making behavior, satisfaction. etc., mainly from the sociology, anthropology and other disciplines .At the same time, there were a few researches about the specific tourist groups, Kim[12] has found that the behavioral preferences between students in Asia and American were

strikingly similar, and through clustering methods, he concluded that affected factors included age, gender, income, marital status and so on.

The study of tourist behavior characteristics in China was in the 80-90th decade of 20th century, the representative researcher was Baojigang[13], his studies were from the spatial flow of geography and the choice of behavior, then he pointed that the study of tourists behavior characteristics should focus on destinations choice, tourism decision-making, tourism motivations, tourists' preferences and other aspects. Subsequently, scholars from psychology, consumer behavior and other disciplines and take many other methods to start to study the behavior characteristics of tourists.

As a result of the development of tourism market, the researches on specific groups are also gradually enriched, Wang Zhangxiu and other researchers[14] used GPS data and content analysis to study the behavior patterns, groups and cognition of hiking tourists, then they concluded that "hiking tourism shows a trend of popularization, however, there are still obvious differences with the mass tourism ", ZengJing with other scholars[15] aimed at backpackers' travel motivation, consumption behavior and behavioral preference, in the end, they put forward some suggestions for the development of Yuexi County's rural backpack tourism . These researches on specific tourist groups have accumulated a large number of research cases about tourist behavior characteristics, also help the public have better understanding about the new social tourism phenomenons , but at present, there is lack of thorough study on the behavioral characteristics of the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel.

In summary, the domestic and foreign researches on the behavior of tourists has been relatively mature, theoretical research, case content and research methods are more abundant and perfect. However, in view of the emerging tourism phenomenons and the new tourist groups, for example the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, the discussion is not much. This article targets on the current development of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, bases on

the questionnaire survey, try to analyze the traveler's decision-making behavior, space-time behavior, travel motivation, satisfaction and so on, which may provide academic basis for the development of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel and promotes the sustainable and vigorous development of this new type of tourism.

**3. Research Methods and Data Collection**

This research uses questionnaire survey method and carries on the large-scale questionnaire to collect the sample quantity through the network. The questionnaire contains four parts, the first part is the basic information, the second part is the individual characteristic, the third part is the travel motivation, and the forth part is the behavior after traveling.

To carry on the characteristic analysis of the common behavior of the travelers of the Youth Hostel Volunteer, as for it is a new way of travel, not a mass tourism. So research objects have certain limit. In order to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the investigation, questionnaires were distributed through the network platform, using Sina Weibo, micro-letter and the travelers who had taken the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel to complete the questionnaire. In this study, 202 questionnaires were issued and 201 questionnaires were available.

**4. Behavior Characteristics**

**4.1. Basic characteristics**

According to the survey data, a few people (28.36%) were the first time to participate Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, nearly half people(47.26%) were the second time to go on a Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, the figures for these two parts were as high as 75.62%, and even there were one fourth people had more than three times. Among them, there were more data show that some people had done 9 times 10 Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel. Specific analysis of the social characteristics of travelers can be found in the table below:

**Table 1. The basic personality characteristics analysis of the respondents**

Information category	factor	sample size /person	%
Sex	male	63	31.34%
	female	138	68.66%
Age	18and under18years old	9	4.48%
	19~22 years old	94	47.77%
	23~26years old	71	35.32%
	27and over 27years old	27	13.43%
Education level	Senior and below	3	1.49%
	College and undergraduate	159	79.1%
	Master's degree and above	38	18.91%
	other	1	0.5%
occupation	student	125	62.19%
	public functionary	3	1.49%
	Staff of enterprises and institutions	32	15.92%
	Individual businessman	7	3.48%

	liberal professions	21	10.45%
	retiree	0	0%
	other	13	6.47%
Average monthly earnings	1000RMB and below	76	37.81%
	1001RMB--2000RMB	35	17.41%
	2001RMB--3500RMB	39	19.4%
	3501RMB--5000RMB	19	9.45%
	5001RMB--8000RMB	20	9.95%
	8001RMB and above	12	5.97%

More female travelers than male, and travelers' age concentrated in the young group, and spread to the early-youth and middle-aged groups. Among the respondents, 63 were male and 138 were female, accounting for 31.34% and 68.66%, respectively, reaching the gender ratio of 1:2. In terms of age, the distribution was concentrated in the age stage of undergraduate and master's degree, as low as some senior high school students, as high as over 40 years old. In Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel girls like this way of travel more than boys. ,because of that Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel has the characteristics of low cost, good environment, sociable, less labor, slow travel and so on, which make girls are more attracted to it. Meanwhile, the expansion of the age reflects the expansion of the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel. More and more people understand and accept Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel as a new mode of travel. The travelers were concentrated in highly educated groups. In terms of educational level, 79.1% of travelers have college degree and undergraduate degree, and 18.91% have master's degree or above. The proportion of travelers with higher education is 98.01%. As a new form of travel, Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel was spread among young social groups firstly, especially these high educated people, who aspire to freedom, personality, curiosity and exploration, and having a higher level of education makes them be the first group to accept and practice this mode of travel. In terms of occupation and income, the largest proportion of travelers are still students, the data reached 62.19%,followed by those working in enterprises and institutions accounted for 15.92%, freelance groups were 10.45%. At the same time, 55.22% of the people earn less than 2000 RMB each month, in which the income of 1000RMB each month and even below was 37.81%, this was very consistent with the data of occupation and education level. At the same time, 25.37% of the people have an average monthly income of 3500 RMB or more. The two basic factors of tourism motivation formation are "having money" and "having time". The college students are in the stage of "having time". The Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel has saved a very large portion of the cost of food and accommodation, which is one of the main reasons for attracting college students and young people; for the higher income group, they have higher

level of education, that's why they can understand this mode of travel and are willing to accept it.

**4.2. Access to Information**

Travel network communication and social communication are the two important ways for travelers to obtain information. At present, most of the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel are carried out by We Chat Subscriptions, Weibo, Douban, etc. As many as 67.16% of travelers used Weibo, We Chat and other social networking platforms to get information about the trip.(see figure 1).This has a great relationship with the fact that the traveler are college students and higher education degree. These people use or play We Chat, Weibo and other network platform and mobile APPs very frequently, this explains that the high percent people choose WeChat, Weibo, Douban and other networking platforms. Based on the accuracy of information and trust in friends, around 23.39% of people will choose professional websites and the introduction from their friends or relatives.

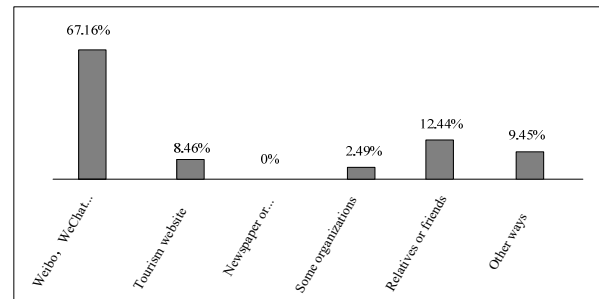


Figure 1. Access to Information for this Youth Hostel Volunteer travel

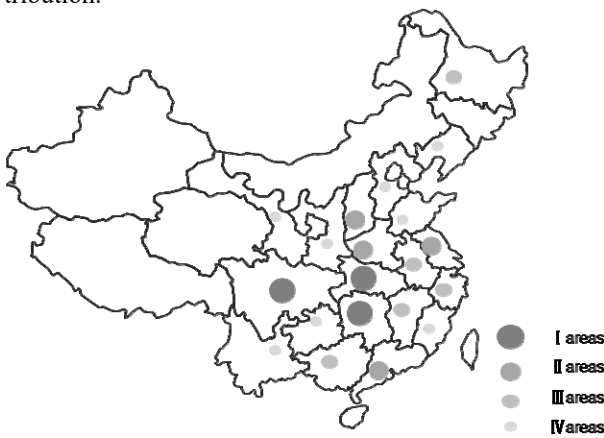
**4.3. Characteristics of Travel Time**

For a specific trip ,the vast majority of people traveled about 15 days to 30 days, in which the proportion of half a month or so was 31.34% and the proportion of one month was 43.28%. The travel time concentrated in July and August, especially for student groups who have summer and winter vacations to meet their needs for longer travel. In reality, most youth hostels require the volunteers one month, in order to keep the "staff stability" . At the same time, in China statutory holidays, the Spring Festival and National Day are the pretty long hol-

iday ,they are also the peak holidays for domestic travel, and the youth hostels keepers need more volunteers during the 7-days holidays. But for many people who love to travel, a week-long volunteer trip is the most appropriate way, with nearly 18.91% of people chosen this option.

**4.4. Characteristics of Space Distribution.**

The questionnaire is distributed randomly on the network social platform. According to the existing survey data, the generating provinces distribution of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers presents the characteristics of "Gathering in central areas,and east is more than west" (see Figure 3). The main representatives of the central cities are Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, and the other provinces such as Henan, Shanxi. Eastern cities concentrated in Guangdong, Jiangsu and so on, and the northeast also has distribution.



**Figure 2. The distribution of travelers generating provinces**

Then analyze the volunteer travelers’ destination provinces distribution and numbers, the overall distribution shows the characteristics of "Tibetan and its eastern areas, and south is more than north". The characteristics of "Tibetan and its eastern areas" including the area of Tibet region, Tibetan Plateau and eastern areas of Tibetan Plateau, “South is more than north” means that travelers prefer southern cities to do Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel than the north (see Figure 4).At the same time, the eastern coastal region is also the choice of the Youth Hostel Volunteer Traveler preference places. According to the network data, the top three cities in the number of youth hostels in China are Guangdong, Sichuan, Yunnan. Guangdong is the first province to introduce the International Youth Hostel , and it is the biggest market on outdoor bicycle riding in China, so the number of Youth Hostel in Guangdong ranked first has no surprise. For Sichuan and Yunnan, the development of Youth Hostel is inseparable from the development of local tourism industry. In combination with the figure below, the most popular tourist destination is Yunnan, Guangxi, Sichuan, and

mainly because of the city's natural scenery, the folk customs and something attractive.



**Figure 3. The distribution of travelers destination provinces**

Comparing the traveler generating provinces and destination provinces (see table 2),it can be found that, in addition to Sichuan and Jiangsu, the distribution between traveler generating provinces and destination provinces is obviously different. The traveler generating provinces gather in middle part of China, destination provinces distribute in China southwest and northwest areas with scattered dot shape.

Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers will choose other provinces which one he or she never been to, even though the distance is pretty far to travel. In this case, the travelers will choose the most cost-effective way to solve the traffic problems, 34.83% of people chose train hard berth to travel to the destination, followed by 27.86% of people chose the plane, which is the most direct proof of the youth hostel volunteer travel is not poor tourism. Travelers will take into account the safety and the pursuit of travel of the self enjoyment.

**5. Motivation**

Dividing the motivation of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel into three categories and comparing them(see figure 4),among them, the emotional motivation average score was the lowest, and the personal development motivation was the most intense. Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers’ need has beyond former need, they are not satisfied with wandering around simply. They are more likely to travel long distances, just because they want to exercise themselves more, going to a far place, an unvisited destination, getting on with strangers, living in a youth hostel, these all are unknown ,but these all are also full of challenge and excitement. For Youth Hostel Volunteer Travelers, they enjoy the coexistence of risk and freshness, they want to grow up in travel, and realize the common value of travel with themselves.



The pursuit of natural scenery, folk customs is the constant motivation of travel. Travelers choose Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, more reason is they want to have a deeper understanding and experience about the destinations. Travelers choose destinations far away from their

habitual living environment, and because they are attracted by the tourist environment of the destination, the top 10 destinations above are well-known tourist cities in China.

Table 2. Top 10 provinces of traveler generating & destination

Top 10 traveler generating provinces	Top 10 travel destination provinces
Hubei Province	Guangxi Province
Sichuan Province	Yunnan Province
Guangdong Province	Sichuan Province
Hunan Province	Tibet
Henan Province	Fujian Province
Shanxi Province	Qinghai Province
Jiangsu Province	Shandong Province
Jiangxi Province	Gansu Province
Guangxi Province	Jiangsu Province
Anhui Province	Shanxi Province

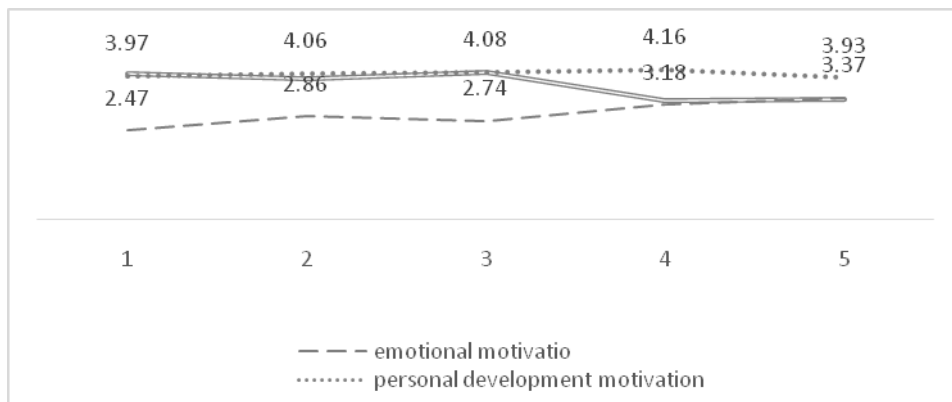


Figure 4. Comparative analysis of three kinds of travel motivation

6. Satisfaction

About "The biggest worry before the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel"(see Fig.5), the survey showed that the order of proportions from high to low was: 1. be deceived or false intermediary information about this travel (26.47%), 2.youth hostel quality is not good, do not meet

the expected (14.12%),3. insufficient funds (13.53%), 4.youth hostel owner is difficult to get along with (12.35%), 5.the destination is far away, traffic safety problems (10.59%), 6.eating and living dissatisfaction, the work will be too tired (9.41%)and other four options.

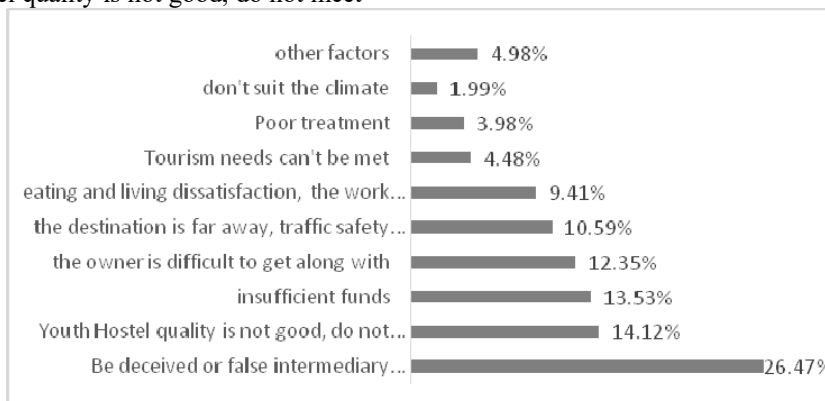


Figure 5. Bar chart of travel worry factors analysis before youth hostel volunteer travel

For the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, after the trip, 75.88% of the people felt satisfaction, of which 72.35% of travelers were satisfied with the youth hostel, 71.18% of the travelers were satisfied with the owner, 74.11% of the travelers were satisfied with the city where they do Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel. Based on such a high degree of satisfaction, up to 78.82% of the people said that if they had time, they would go on a Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel next time, 73.53% of the people would recommend friends around them to have a try.

The data also showed that only 53.53% of the travelers were satisfied with intermediaries, which means that the biggest problem with the development of Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel is the interruption of information between volunteers and owners, lack normative organization to manage it.

## 7. Conclusion

On a large scale, Volunteer Travel, as a new form of tourism, the development is in its infancy. Specifically, for Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, it just has emerged in the last two or three years. The whole market has just been developed and the foundation is weak. There are also problems in the management of youth hostels, the interests between volunteers and youth hostels keeper are difficult to coordinate. Through this investigation about Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, this paper puts forward the following views on the future development of the Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel, which can also be used for the development of volunteer travel and other forms of volunteer travel.

Establishing information channel management system. Nowadays, the most information about Youth Hostel Volunteer Travel are carried out by intermediary organizations, Volunteer travelers contact the youth hostel keepers need through the intermediary organizations. There is no strong ways and trust mechanism for security to protect volunteer travelers and youth hostel keepers. In addition, the information conveyed by intermediary has subjectivity and one-sidedness, strong inductive, affecting the choice of volunteers.

Improving the management of Youth Hostel. At present, the youth hostel blooms everywhere in China, the quality is intermingled, which makes it difficult to supervise. On the one hand, the intermediary platform does not have the supervision qualification, only from the subjective examination then publish the information to volunteer travelers, it is difficult to guarantee the quality of the youth hostels, and easy to cause cheating events. On the other hand, the Haus International Hostel Alliance has franchises in the world, and only the franchisee or entity can

use the trademarks and brands. However, in China, not all youth hostels join the Youth Hostel Alliance through formal channels. Strengthen the management of youth hostel t so that volunteer travel could have a better environment.

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