

LIFE

Walking the capital’s streets is first step to happiness

I find it hard to be positive when discussing Sanlitun, one of Beijing’s trendiest shopping districts. Like many of the city’s expats, I would often find myself there at the weekend. But a visit can be exhausting, ending with the vow not to return for a while. However, I would be drawn back by the wide choice of bars, restaurants and shops. Despite the packed subway to get there and throngs of



Corrie Knight
Second Thoughts

people once I arrived, I relied on Sanlitun for shopping and eating and paid the premium. But those days are done. I had a taste of a different Sanlitun during the darkest days of China’s COVID-19 outbreak. Back in February, I wrote of the silence shrouding the city’s restaurants. Forcing the public health emergency to the back of my mind, I went out and enjoyed the peace. On the subway, I often had the carriage to myself and at normally busy shops, I received instant service. When city life slowly began to return to normal, I knew I

couldn’t go back to the old routine. Since my arrival in Beijing 18 months ago, I’ve relied almost exclusively on the subway for navigating the city. Now it’s busier again and I want to practice social distancing for a while yet. My choices were limited; use taxis or start walking. Buses are not yet an option because there is no bilingual signage and my Chinese skills are elementary. I knew taxis would prove to be expensive but I figured Beijing, a city of almost 22 million, was too big to walk. However, I decided to test that

assumption by walking along the Line 10 subway route. Having been a regular subway passenger for so long, I had no idea how near or far places were from each other. To my surprise, I found it only takes 20 minutes on average to walk between stations. After that, I quickly gained confidence in making my way around Beijing on foot. I now marvel at how many areas of the city remain quiet — and how a select few stay busy. I had forgotten that there is so much more to see when walking. There are many districts I had written off as featureless because of my

ignorance. It feels good to build up a detailed knowledge of nearby neighborhoods. Here began my retreat from Sanlitun, I don’t need it anymore now I know quieter places to go. As a challenge, I’m trying to avoid Sanlitun for the rest of 2020. I can now take a detached view of its character, which is in stark contrast to most of Beijing. The one thing I love about Beijing is that it’s a very traditional Chinese city. It has an individuality that plenty of cities across the world lack due to globalization. By staying out, I will buy fewer

international brands and spend more at local retailers. This, I hope, will help me develop a better knowledge of Beijing and, to a lesser extent, Chinese culture. I’m also sure that walking the city will add to my integration efforts. I don’t accept that hordes of people are part and parcel of life in the capital. Despite it being a bustling metropolis, I have found a comforting peace in Beijing’s twisting hutongs and sprawling boulevards. Contact the writer at corrie@chinadaily.com.cn

Candid camera: Light entertainment



A field, bathed in laser light with a water-sprinkler system, provides a perfect playground for children in Nanbin Park, Wanzhou district, Chongqing, as evening falls on June 25. The park, after a general upgrade with revamped leisure areas, has become a haven for local residents to escape the intense summer heat. RAN MENGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Rock climbers rescale heights of satisfaction as tourists return

GUIYANG — This year was the first time in more than a decade that 40-year-old Luo Dengping, from the Miao ethnic group in Guizhou province, had not rock climbed for tourists. “We did not perform from February to April, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and some reconstruction work in this scenic area,” Luo says. Luo lives in a small village located at the gate of the Getu River Scenic Spot. She works there and her job is to perform rock climbing for tourists. To the Miao people in this area, someone who is good at rock climbing is known as a “spider-man” or “spider-woman”. It was a tradition that when the Miao people’s ancestors died, their coffins were carried and placed onto cliffs or rock walls in caves and the people who did the work passed on the climbing skills to the next generation.

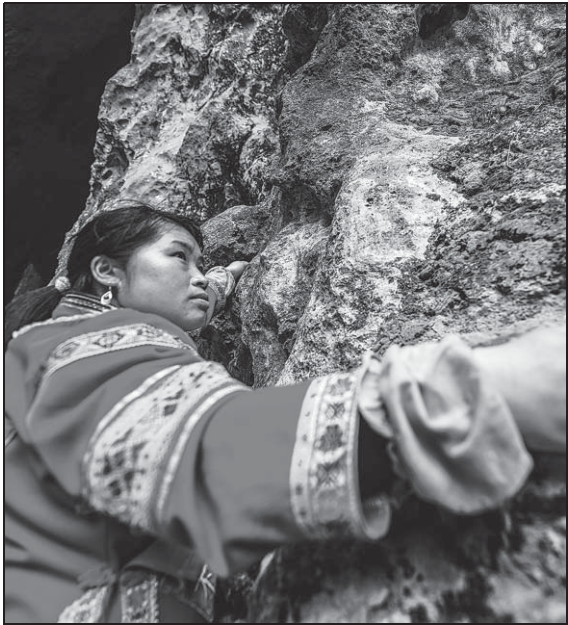
After that, they return to the starting point. The whole process takes no more than 20 minutes. “I feel happy when I see people climbed for tourists. She receives a salary of \$420 per month. But things changed after the pandemic. The scenic spot postponed reopening for almost a month, and the reconstruction work cut off access to the cave. It lasted for three months.

“It’s risky ... This sport needs courage, and every time we climb, we must assess the surroundings and our body condition.” Luo Dengping, Miao ethnic group “spider-woman”

Luo’s father is an excellent climber who taught Luo the skills required. “When I was a child, I was obsessed with this sport. Every time I saw my father practice it, I begged him to teach me, but he refused, until he once found that I climbed up a rock wall sneakily following his steps,” Luo says. “It’s risky. We climb just with our hands and that is why my father was reluctant to teach me at the beginning,” Luo adds. “This sport needs courage, and every time we climb, we must assess the surroundings and our body condition.” Climb according to one’s ability while being bold and careful is the key piece of advice Luo learned from her father. She gradually turned professional and was hired as a spider-woman by the local authority. In addition to Luo, five spider-men were hired. They perform in a cave where tens of thousands of swallows nest. Firstly, they need to row a bamboo raft into the cave. Then they climb the rock walls up to a height of around 100 meters.

“When you get used to performing for the tourists, you feel uncomfortable not doing it for three months,” says Huang Xiaobao, a 58-year-old spider-man, adding that, in order to keep in shape, they occasionally practiced rock climbing after finishing their temporary cleaning work. “I am getting old and I hope to see more people participate in it,” Huang adds. “Life is unpredictable just like this pandemic, what people should do is to take time to do what they like.” Li Wensong, deputy general manager of the company running the scenic spot, says that the area will attract more tourists after the reconstruction work is finished, which will give rise to a surge in interest in rock climbing. “In the end, the pandemic will disappear. I am looking forward to seeing the sport become more popular along with the development of this scenic spot,” Luo says.

XINHUA

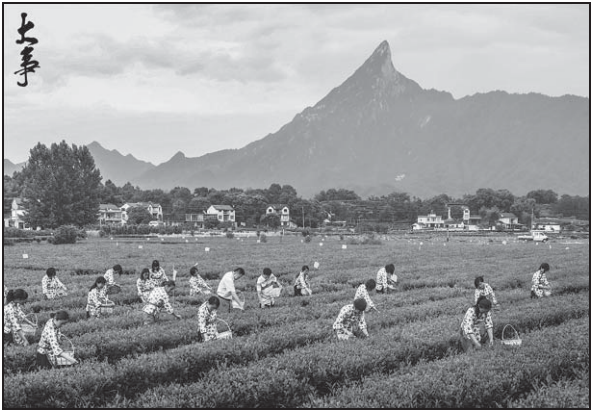
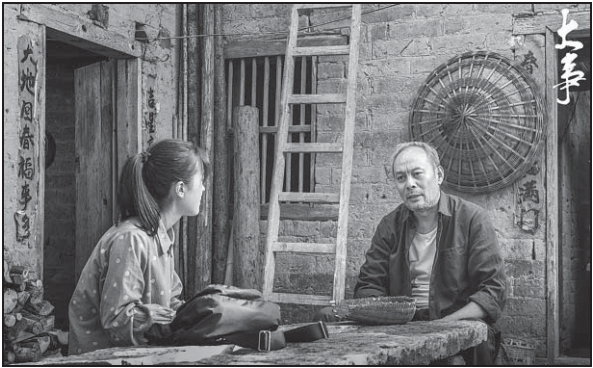


Luo Dengping, 40-year-old “spider-woman” of the Miao ethnic group, performs rock climbing for tourists at Getu River Scenic Spot in Guizhou province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Director’s lens focuses on lessons of history

By XU FAN
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Director Chen Maolin planned to stay in Beijing for around three weeks to supervise post-production of his latest feature-length film, *Great Things*. However, Chen — from Shandong province — was forced to leave merely five days after he arrived in the Chinese capital on June 7. After reading the news that Xinfadi — the city’s largest wholesale market for agricultural and seafood products — was linked to a new cluster of COVID-19 cases, Chen quickly decided to purchase a train ticket to return to Qingdao. Chen had lived in a neighborhood near the Xinfadi market for a period after he graduated as a literature major from Beijing Film Academy in 2012. “It is a sprawling market that is very densely populated, so I could imagine how serious the situation might become,” he says. Now relying on the internet to remotely guide the Beijing film editors, Chen says he has kept a close eye on the COVID-19 news, and feels inspired by Beijing’s swift response and its all-out effort to combat the pandemic. Unlike some of his fellow filmmakers, Chen — who was born in the 1990s — says he has long been interested in adapting real life events for screen productions which reflect the country’s development or look back at the history of the Communist Party of China. *Great Things* is a perfect example. A highlighted project backed by Anhui provincial government to mark China’s commitment to building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, the film turns the lens to the grassroots efforts of cadres to help locals escape poverty. Starring veteran actor Zhang Guangbei, known for hits such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Drawing Sword*, *Great Things*



Top: Veteran actor Zhang Guangbei (right) and actress Yun Lan star in the film *Great Things*. Above: One scene features local villagers harvesting tea. Left: Director Chen Maolin (left) on the film set in Anhui province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

mountain, as a part of local government’s effort to alleviate poverty. Thanks to a persistent and patient official, he is persuaded to move, unraveling a secret that has been hidden for more than seven decades.

recounts a simple yet heartwarming story. A stubborn villager, portrayed by Zhang, is reluctant to be relocated from his decrepit home on Dabie Mountain to a more convenient neighborhood near the foot of the

The female lead is played by Yun Lan, a debutant actress who was selected from more than 20 candidates. The movie was scheduled to start shooting in early February, but was postponed until April due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Hubei province. As some areas in China had reported new coronavirus cases in April, Chen recalls he and his crew felt a bit nervous on their flight from Qingdao to Hefei, the capital of Anhui province. “We shot the movie in Yuexi town in the city of Anqing, just one-and-a-half hour’s drive from Wuhan (the hardest-hit city in China),” recalls Chen. Through interviews with local elderly villagers, Chen came to learn that they used to trek for an entire day, climbing over hills, to reach the nearest town. “Now the town has completely got rid of poverty. With a concrete road accessible to all households, it takes just around 20 minutes to drive there,” he notes. Chen has earned a reputation in showbiz circles by serving as one of the creators behind the biographical TV series *My Uncle Zhou Enlai*, which chronicles Zhou, New China’s first premier who died in 1976. Later, he accumulated more recognition through directing the hit TV series *The Fight of Changsha*, about the milestone battle during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), and the war romance film *The Sword and the Flag in the Fog*, set during the eve of the liberation of Beijing in 1949. “I’ve learned a lot about how modern China has been shaped and the revolutionary history of the Communist Party through research for these flicks,” says Chen. “So personally, filmmaking is a very interesting job that not only helps me to travel to a lot of places, but also enriches my knowledge.”