



The Yellow River flows in the west and south of Shanxi and has nurtured its flourishing local economy and culture. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

History and culture critical to Shanxi tourism success



More travel routes to be designed so more people can visit key sites and attractions

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Touring Shanxi is crucial for studying the long history and rich culture of ancient China, a top leader of the province was recently quoted as saying.

Lou Yangsheng, Party secretary of Shanxi, made the remarks at the launch ceremony for the cultural tourism promotion campaign called "Touring Shanxi, Learning Chinese History" held in the northern Shanxi city of Datong on Aug 11.

According to Lou, while promoting Shanxi's many cultural attractions, the campaign also aims to raise the local people's confidence in their own culture and help to develop a strong cultural tourism industry in Shanxi.

"The strength of Shanxi's tourism industry lies in its long and storied history that has played an important role in China's historical development in the past millennia," the Party chief said.

He noted Shanxi's history dates back more than 5,000 years ago and is home of such Chinese forefathers as Shennong and Emperor Shun.

He mentioned how China's mother river — the Yellow River, which flows in the west and south of Shanxi and is a landmark attraction in the province — has nurtured a brilliant culture and flourishing economy in the region.

"For millennia, residents along the river have used its water to irrigate their farmlands. However, the river sometimes destroyed their land and properties and even took their lives when severe floods happened.

"Therefore, the river was sometimes praised as the hope and glory of the nation and sometimes cursed when it brought disaster and despair," Lou said.

Lou said Shanxi had stood at the forefront of conflicts and exchanges between Han people and northern nomads.

"The Great Wall in Shanxi is the silent witness to many significant historical events in China. In times of

peace, Great Wall passes are the venues of exchange between Han people and nomads in the north.

"When wars took place, high hopes were pinned on the wall in the defense against invaders. And if the wall was captured by the enemies, it was always disastrous for the nation," Lou said.

He also mentioned Datong, saying Shanxi is one of the provinces and regions in China with the largest number of cultural sites, and Datong's Yungang Grottoes is a representative of all the ancient cultural assets in Shanxi.

A classical masterpiece of Chinese Buddhist art, Yungang Grottoes played an important role among early Oriental Buddhist grottoes with a far-reaching effect on Buddhist cave art in China and East Asia, according to Lou.

Citing the history of renowned Shanxi merchants or *Jinshang*, the senior local leader said the history of Shanxi has been created by ordinary people, instead of emperors and rulers.

Shanxi is known for its historical commerce that was developed by the *Jinshang* merchants, who were said to have dominated commercial circles in North China for about 500 years since the 14th century.

However, many of these successful merchants started out as small vendors who traveled as far as Russia, selling tea, silk and other commodities.

"The success of Jinshang merchants was closely related to their qualities of hard work, endurance, perseverance and entrepreneurship, which are still the spiritual wealth of today's Shanxi people," Lou said.

The Party chief said Shanxi should make full use of its historical and cultural legacies to increase its appeal to tourists and develop itself into an internationally renowned destination with greater influence and stronger competitiveness.

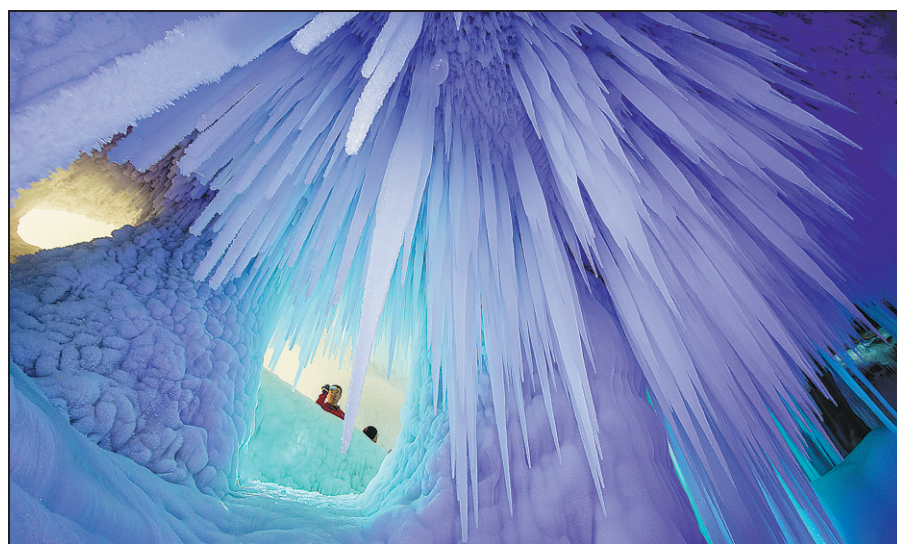
"For those who are interested in China's 5,000 years of history and the country's wealth of natural wonders, Shanxi will definitely be a favored destination," Lou said.

According to the Shanxi Cultural and Tourism Department, the province will design 10 cultural routes for tourists, guiding them to more than 60 sites of historical and cultural interest and 30 historical research sites. And a number of branding and promotional events will be held at home and abroad to make Shanxi attractions better known to tourists.

Li Yu contributed to this story.

Festive time

For tourists who want to escape the summer heat, the Ice Cave in Ningwu county, Shanxi province, is an ideal destination. At an altitude of 2,300 meters above sea level, the cave is located in Chunjingwa village some 50 kilometers to the west of the county seat. Researchers from the Institute of Geology and Geophysics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences asserted that the cave was formed some 3 million years ago during the Quaternary Glacial period. It became a national geopark in 2005 and was rated as a 4A tourist destination by the nation's tourism authorities in 2011. CAO JIANGUO / FOR CHINA DAILY



So much to see away from the crowds

By NATASHA JARDINE-BINSTEAD

Chinese people have a good understanding of their country's natural, historical and cultural treasures. They plan family trips to these special sites over school holidays, sometimes saving up for a lifetime to make sure they have experienced the ancient wonders of China.

Foreigners, however, usually have a very narrow view of what interesting sightseeing this vast country has to offer. Many tourists opt only for visiting areas of the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace in Beijing, which are always teeming with excited crowds of both foreigners and Chinese. These are indeed iconic places but those looking for a fuller and richer traveling experience should include places in the heart of China too.

I was indeed one of those foreigners that had before seen the famous attractions in Beijing when visiting China. I did not possess the knowledge of the lesser publicized, yet astonishing landmarks. Luckily however my family and I were able



Natasha Jardine-Binstead

relocate to Shanxi province in 2018. My husband and I were both employed as English teachers at Shanxi University in the capital city of the province, Taiyuan.

The university invited us on a trip to Datong, Shanxi province. What we encountered on that trip was surprising, illuminating and remarkable in equal measure. We were treated to some exceptional sights that I believe not many foreigners have traveled to or have even heard of.

The highlights for me, remembering that we were accompanied by our 5-year-old son at the time, were definitely the Hanging Monastery or Xuankong Temple, the Yungang Grottoes and the walled city of Datong itself.

Xuankong Temple is a sight that leaves you breathless. The ancient wooden-structured temple cleaves onto the sheer cliffs of Mount Hengshan. Looking at it from the ground, it appears to defy the laws of gravity. Exploring its narrow walkways from the top terrifies and enlivens your soul.

The temple is over 1,500 years old and it is magic to behold. It is also a sight so few outsiders to China have ever been privileged enough to gaze upon.

The Yungang Grottoes is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are 252 caves with approximately 51,000 carved statues of Buddha. The caves date back to about 1,600 years ago. We spent most of the day there walking through the sprawling grounds and admiring the abundant artifacts on display. The caves are extensive and labyrinthine and

the carved statues are elaborate and detailed. One gigantic Buddha towers above guests at 17 meters. There he sits serenely, in the cool shade of his cave smiling peacefully. I feel truly honored to have visited this historic place.

The last leg of our trip was spending time in the city of Datong. It is a city as noisy and busy as any major city in China. It brims with modern China's unstoppable expansion and its intensive neon commerce. Yet, this metropolis incorporates its past into its present. A break from the bustle can be found by walking on the historical wall that still stands and snakes through the streets. It silently cradles the old city in its embrace while anchoring new generations to their history. Datong is a city certainly worth seeing.

I will always be grateful that Shanxi University took the time to show us a different China and open our eyes to parts of Shanxi's treasure trove. I sincerely wish more foreigners have the opportunity to adventure into little known places in China. Datong is a fascinating area to begin that sort of adventure. I look forward to visiting more of the incredible Shanxi, which is now my home.

The writer is a South African working at Shanxi University.

Province hits the gas to diversify economy

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The first hydrogen-electric hybrid vehicle in Shanxi — a blue and white bus — rolled off the production line of Dezhi Times New Energy Vehicle Corp in Taiyuan on Aug 8. The occasion marked the moment when the province entered the "hydrogen era" of automobile manufacturing, according to company executives.

To support the operation of the new energy vehicles, four hydrogen filling stations will be built in the city, according to local officials. The facilities can collectively fuel 50 vehicles at the same time.

With zero emissions and high efficiency, hydrogen fuel represents a breakthrough in new energy development for vehicles. Using its local hydrogen resources converted from coke and coal-bed methane, Shanxi is planning to step up the development of hydrogen-powered vehicles, according to local officials and industry insiders.

Yu Zhiyuan, general manager of Dezhi Times, said the prominent advantage of hydrogen-electric hybrid vehicles is the brief refueling time. The charging time for a pure electric vehicle is much longer.

"It takes less than 10 minutes to fully fill a hydrogen-electric hybrid vehicle, which enables the vehicle to run about 320 kilometers," Yu said.

The executive said the company is also developing a new-generation hydrogen-combustion engine, which is expected to increase power output by 25 percent.

Yu noted that the success of the new vehicle development is a result of the company's strength in research and development.

He said the company has nearly 200 people engaged in R&D, led by three top scientists from the Chinese Academy of Engineering and overseas academies, as well as dozens of other leading experts.

"In addition to the one in Taiyuan, we also have R&D facilities in Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou in Jiangsu province and Shenzhen in Guangdong province to make use of the technological resources in these cities," Yu said.

New energy development is a part of the Shanxi strategy to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on coal, according to Li Dezhi, board chairman and founder of the company.

"Shanxi is promoting a revolutionary transformation of its energy industry. The development of hydrogen as vehicular fuel is a new breakthrough," Li said.

He said the hydrogen is converted from coal-bed methane and gas produced in the coking process.

"Coal-bed gas and coke gas used to be lesser-used byproducts of the coal industry. Hydrogen development is an innovative inheritance of the traditional industry by improving the coal's utilization efficiency," Li noted.

He said his company has an annual production capacity of 10,000 large and medium-sized hydrogen-electric hybrid buses as well as 30,000 other special vehicles.

"We are planning to expand our industrial chain to cover such fields as hydrogen storage, transportation and filling, in addition to vehicle production," Li added.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



The first hydrogen-electric hybrid bus built by Dezhhi Times New Energy Vehicles Corp. GUO YANJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Folk songs to highlight mountain beauty spot

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Zuoquan county in Shanxi province is promoting its main attractions by holding an international folk song festival in the Lianhuayan Scenic Area.

Scheduled to open on Aug 24, the festival will include a singing contest with more than 100 participants from home and abroad, according to Zhao Hui, an official with the county's publicity department.

Lianhuayan, the venue, will be a highlight of local tourist promotion, Zhao said.

Lianhuayan, which literally means "lotus-shaped rocks", is located at the heart of the Taihang Mountains in the east of Shanxi province.

"The area features a *danxia* landform. The cliffs here consist of layers of red-colored and lotus-petal-like rocks as a result of water erosion over millions of years," Zhao said. He added that the huge rocks also come in the shape of frogs, turtles and tigers.

However, the area was known by few tourists because of poor road connectivity and its location in a landlocked mountainous area. In 2009, local authorities began to

develop facilities and publicize the destination to tourists.

During the past decade, the scenic area has held a number of promotional campaigns, including photography contests and other tourism events. Several movies were also shot on location there, according to Zhao.

The scenic area, which is situated in a valley and covers about 800 hectares, is now connected to the county seat some 30 kilometers away with a new road.

In addition to the lotus-shaped rocks, another selling point of the area are the cave dwellings in the cliffs.

According to Zhao, dozens of cave dwellings have been discovered in Lianhuayan. The caves are 6-20 square meters in space, each comprising one to three rooms.

Jiang Haixiao was one of the visitors to the scenic area. "I'm a native of Zuoquan but I left my hometown when I graduated from a local high school. I learned about the attraction only recently.

"The scenery here is overwhelming, even for a native like me. I recommend the place to my friends," Jiang said.

Li Yali contributed to this story.



Lianhuayan, featuring lotus-shaped rocks, is an emerging tourist destination in Zuoquan county. XING LANFU / FOR CHINA DAILY