

# HOLIDAYTRAVEL



**Left:** Summer at Changbaishan Luneng International Resort presents opportunities for many activities.



**Right:** Tourists slide at Wanda White Mountain Resort.

## Mountain retreats create innovative models as they prepare for 2022 Winter Games

By CAO YIN, ZHOU HUIYING and LIU MINGTAI in Fusong, Jilin

Awaking from their long coronavirus nightmare, resorts at the foot of Changbai Mountain in Fusong county, Baishan city of Jilin province are developing in innovative new patterns.

They're ready to provide visitors with richer entertainment opportunities, more professional training and higher quality services. And that goes for everyone, from ordinary tourists to top athletes.

"Our winter activities and some winter sports competitions were affected by our lack of visitors in the first few months of this year, but the pandemic has also inspired us to find more and new ways to boost our business and improve the experience for visitors," said Yang Zhe, a representative of Wanda White Mountain Resort.

The resort provides a range of hotels, hot springs, a water park and various winter and summer attractions for ordinary visitors. It also has professional facilities, fields and services for athletes.

"We're trying to implement a two-sided business model, one that meets both the demands of tourists who are enthusiastic about participating in winter sports and the urgent needs of athletes striving to upgrade their skills for the upcoming 2022 Winter Olympic Games," Yang said.

A report released by the China Tourism Academy earlier this year said that about 224 million domestic visits were made to destinations featuring snow activities during the winter of 2018-19, up 13.7 percent year-on-year.

Representatives from Qunar, a travel service provider based in Beijing, said the company's customers are more willing to travel to Songyuan city and to Changbai Mountain in Jilin because of their richer winter tourism resources, including ski resorts.

### New business models

Not far from Yang's workplace, Changbaishan Luneng International Resort has also been developing similar business models. It has seen a boom in tourism after hosting snow and ice games in the past few years. It has also explored more extreme sports in the summer for those with an appetite for intensity, and built hotels with a flavor of northeastern Chinese villages to give visitors a slice of real life in Jilin.

"It's a place for dreaming, where people from home and abroad can enjoy activities on snow and improve their sports skills," said Wei Bo, deputy general manager of Manjiang Ecology and Tourism Development Co of the Luneng Group in Jilin. "It's also a wonderland where they can experience summer camping and rock climbing."

The resort has contributed to Fusong's economic growth and enriched ice and snow training for athletes preparing for international competitions. It has also helped local residents rise out of poverty by providing new job opportunities.

### "Walking on two legs"

The coronavirus pandemic, which hit the country at the beginning of this year, forced some winter sports teams at the provincial and national levels to hunker down at Wanda White Mountain Resort. "That gave them more space and time to be trained and enjoy the snowy wonderland," Yang said.

Since last year, in fact, the 2,100-hectare resort has increased its contributions to the 2022 Winter Olympic Games by holding more international competitions and making full use of winter resources



Autumn scenery accents Changbaishan Luneng International Resort in Fusong county of Baishan, Jilin province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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**Yang Zhe**, a representative of Wanda White Mountain Resort

for the training of athletes.

According to the resort, some 400 athletes, including those participating in slope style, big air and snowboard cross events, came to the resort for training between November and May.

"We want to make our snow sports facilities more professional and fully capable of supporting athletic training," Yang said. "In chasing that goal, we've renovated our ski trails and half-pipe while transforming two business shops as venues to give participants physical and technical training."

Although the outbreak interfered with plans to hold a few international competitions at the resort earlier this year, Yang said, the resort will not give up. "We will continue our efforts to bid for winter events."

The resort has also recently built a dry slope big air jump with a landing air bag capable of supporting athletic training during the summer. The facility, which drops an



Tourists experience a utility terrain vehicle (UTV) in the snow park of Changbaishan Luneng International Resort in Fusong county.

impressive 44 meters, is the largest one of its kind in China, Yang said.

To meet the requirements of global sports events, the snow-making system at the resort is being upgraded, and supporting facilities, including apartments and dining halls for the athletes, are also being renovated.

"In addition, we're looking to employ talented people as training assistants for winter sports athletes, such as those who provide basic ski knowledge for tourists, although people helping athletes in training should be more professional," he said.

"In short, we hope to improve the resort as a place of dreams not only for visitors to have fun in winter and summer but also for athletes to train and attend international sports events."

### Regional characteristics

To alleviate the effect of the outbreak, revive its popularity and

stimulate consumption, Wanda White Mountain Resort implemented a series of preferential policies and offered cheap hotel packages for residents living in Baishan in recent weeks.

Wang Mingju was one of the local visitors taking advantage of the discount. She said she had started to look forward to her next journey to Wanda after finishing a two-day holiday with her husband and their 5-year-old son at the resort.

"When I heard the resort was offering a special treatment for residents in Jilin, I immediately made a reservation," said Wang, 32, a civil servant in Baishan. "We spent 239 yuan (\$35) on a hotel package, including a Holiday Inn Express room, water park, sightseeing gondola lift and rental bikes. The resort has complete support facilities, such as a restaurant, movie theater and recreational activities, which is ideal for family travel. My son really loves it."

While the Wanda resort has attracted visitors with its policies, the Luneng resort has been promoting its business to appeal to snow sports experts and Olympic athletes. Its recent renovations include improvements to its 32 hectares of snow fields, 15 ski trails, 12 kilometers of cross-country ski trails and an 80,000-square-meter theme park for fun snow games.

The Luneng resort has also worked to offer more choices for visitors, such as special hotels with rural features, and enriched tourism projects during warm seasons.

On cool winter evenings, parents can take their children to camp or live in a motorhome at the resort to gaze at stars and enjoy the campfire. During the day, they can spend family time rock climbing or experiencing other extreme sports, according to Wang Shitong, who is responsible for camping-related projects at the resort.

"If tourists want to see real rural life in China's northeastern areas, the accommodations with strong characteristics of Jilin villages at our resort will be an outstanding choice," said Wei, the deputy general manager. The venue's 50 rooms can host up to 130 people at a time.

With its hanging red lanterns and heated brick beds, it provides visitors with a taste of the original home style of Jilin villages, with activities loaded with local customs and cultures, such as paper-cutting for window decoration, he added.

### Better jobs, better lives

As Luneng resort develops more tourism projects, it also helps many local residents improve their lives by providing them with employment opportunities.

According to Wei, the resort has provided about 4,000 jobs, helping people who live around the mountain with traffic difficulties move out of the rural areas and achieve *xiaokang*, or moderately prosperous lives, under the guidance of the Fusong government.

Qiao Changlei, a 34-year-old from Fenglin village, has benefited from the move. He is now the gondola lift department manager for Luneng's ski slope. He said the past winter was his busiest period since he became a Luneng staff member in 2016.

"Before 2016, I spent half a year planting a hectare of corn, bringing my family about 15,000 yuan annually. After the autumn harvest, I had to seek odd jobs at factories and construction sites," said Qiao of the life he left behind. "The annual income of my family was usually less than 30,000 yuan."

Qiao got a job opportunity thanks to priority given to local residents when Luneng began operation at the end of 2016. The resort also offers temporary jobs, such as cleaners in hotels, so local residents can earn more money and also keep up with demand during peak tourist seasons.

Qiao said that when he was put in charge of daily maintenance of the gondola and became accustomed to having a steady job, he realized he should think more about self-improvement to make a better life on his own.

In his spare time he studied gondola lifts and improved his technical knowledge. He earned five professional certificates related to cableways, including safety management, mechanical maintenance, electrical maintenance and driving.

The hard work and professional skills helped him qualify for a higher position and salary.

"I can earn more than 10,000 yuan per month and bring my family a life that was unimaginable before," he said.

As a sign of his new standard of living, he moved from the village to a two-bedroom apartment in the county's downtown area.

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## Gem of Jilin offers a taste of its unique traditions

By ZHOU HUIYING and LIU MINGTAI in Fusong, Jilin

At the foot of Changbai Mountain in Jilin province lies Jinjiang village, surrounded by forest and grassland and one of the few places with traditional Manchu wooden houses.

The rare houses, known as *mukeleng*, are built of logs coated with mud. They're warm during the winter, cool in summer and bring a unique flavor to the village in Fusong county.

Jinjiang dates back to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It was listed among the province's key cultural relics protection units in 2012 and was added to the Traditional Chinese Villages Catalog in 2013.

Chi Yuxi, Party secretary of the village, said most of the existing 50 Manchu houses were built in the 1930s.

Once remote, the village attracts tourists nowadays. "They come to see the unusual residences and enjoy farmhouse meals," he said.

Since the creation of a village cooperative focusing on folk cultural tourism in 2015, the industry has been booming. In the spring of 2015, the county government launched a restoration project, completing renovation work on all the Manchu wooden houses by autumn 2018, according to Chi.

At the same time, with government support, the village spent around 20 million yuan (\$2.95 million) to change its appearance. That included renovating roads, adding parking lots and a green area of 1,200 square meters that complements the natural surroundings, he said.

Yu Yanxia, owner of a homestay accommodation in the village, said tourists from southern provinces, such as Guangdong, turn the little village into a hot spot in summer and winter. "They really enjoy the Manchu ethnic flavor and the northeast cuisine," she said.

Yu, 60, and her husband started their business with the help of their son and daughter-in-law in 2013.

Before that, the family made a living by planting a half-hectare of land and picking mushrooms and wild vegetables in the mountains. Their annual income was less than 20,000 yuan.

These days, their homestay attracts more than 10,000 travelers a year, bringing the family a net profit of around 100,000 yuan.

There are 13 similar homestays in the village.

Under the guidance of the cooperative, some residents demonstrate the traditional techniques of the Manchu people to visitors in their houses, such as making tofu, baking pancakes and decocting herbal soups. It's a taste of local life from at least 100 years ago.

Jinjiang received more than 30,000 tourist visits last year, bringing in revenue of around 1.2 million yuan, data from the local government showed.

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A popular activity is riding a cattle-drawn sled in snow-covered Jinjiang village.