

# Campers find fun in glamp life

Pursuit of outdoor recreation fuels growth in high-end tent sites, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

For the upcoming Labor Day holiday, Dai Zheng has already received bookings for more than 80 percent of tents at his glamping business in Shanghai. This quick turnaround is not something that Dai expected.

“The pandemic has changed the way people travel and brought us great opportunities for development,” Dai says.

The longing to get back out into nature in wake of the pandemic and the pursuit of slow leisure has fueled the domestic glamping market. Businesses like Dai’s have experienced a boom in booking numbers, and industry estimates predict that this will only continue to grow.

Years of working in the tourism industry has helped Dai observe the changes in tourism trends and he soon had his eyes fixed on the camping sector.

Two years ago, Dai founded Morning Glamping to provide a platform for people to socialize and pursue a leisurely outdoor life. When operations began at his first glamping site in the picturesque Bashang Grassland in Chengde city of Hebei province, it became an instant hit.

“At that time, if you wanted to go to the campsite during peak season or on weekends, you had to book two to three months in advance,” Dai says.

However, Dai’s business was soon severely affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

At first, Dai was anxious like his business counterparts in the tourism sector, but it did not take long for him to regain faith in the camping sector and find a new niche in the market.

“Because of the pandemic, people had to stay at home. Adults felt suffocated, let alone the children,” Dai says.

“They are eager to let off steam, but they can’t go too far. They can only travel around the city, so this is a business opportunity in the camping sector.”

After studying the trends of campers in China and abroad, Dai found that Chinese campers prefer well-furnished camping experiences, which do not require them to purchase camping equipment.

Dai explains that campers can enjoy the scenery at the spots that the service providers have already picked out, and they can curate their own camping experience.

“This kind of camping experience allows them to have more recreation space at their will,” Dai says.

Dai runs two glampsites at the Qianxiaoju Creative Farm and Changxing Island Country Park in Shanghai. Those sites offer full camping kits, including outdoor lamps and barbecue grills.

“They are different from the small tents you can get from most sports retailers. They are movable and light, giant in size and offer comfort,” says Dai of glamping tents.

Yoga sessions, bonfire parties and open-air cinemas are activities also available at Dai’s glampsites to enhance the experience of glampers.

“We were fully booked during the Qingming and Labor Day holidays last year,” Dai says. He adds that it was the



**Clockwise from top:** A glamping site at Shanghai Changxing Island Country Park. A tent hotel in Lijiang, Yunnan province. Dai Zheng’s company holds a promotional event in Shanghai. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

positive market feedback that made him determined to continue exploring the glamping sector.

Wang Xinsheng, an official with the Changxing Island Country Park, says an increasing number of visitors have been coming to country parks during the “new normal”, and they needed activities to attract visitors. The park began collaborating with Dai on his glampsite last year.

“Glamping is very attractive to families with children in Shanghai,” says Wang, adding that it also brings liveliness to the park.

Shen Guohui from outdoor lifestyle social platform Camplus noticed a significant increase in photos of tents on his WeChat Moments. Camplus was founded three years ago to bring

together diverse products and people through camping.

Shen believes the camping business is on the verge of explosive growth, as a large number of people experience the outdoors.

Industry experts are expecting a boom in the camping and caravan sectors, which is expected to be fueled by this year’s camping themed reality shows. *Star Chaser* features a celebrity cast visiting scenic spots around the country and *I Told Spring About You* showcases the country’s landscapes and gourmet food through camping.

According to this year’s spring and summer season fashion report on China’s Generation Z, or those under the age of 25, by Bilibili, Tmall and

Alibaba’s online marketing platform Alimama, social distancing has encouraged young people to be closer to nature.

The surge in interest in camping and glamping has been shown with a 160 percent year-on-year increase in views of camping related video content on Bilibili. The video streaming platform has also become a popular site for Gen Z to share their camping experiences and tips.

After two years in the business and closely studying the needs of young Chinese campers, Dai knows what he wants to achieve.

“Glamping should have a theme, rather than simply renting a tent,” Dai says.

He explains that themes vary with

the seasons and activities are arranged throughout the camping trip.

Currently, Dai and his team are working to promote glamping across the country.

They have opened camping themed cafes and restaurants in Shanghai, and all of them have grown to be popular with the patrons.

“The glamping market is especially hot this year,” Dai says.

With the glamping market continuing to grow, tents are now in short supply. Many villages and rural farms have also approached Dai for cooperation.

“We will definitely be able to explore a Chinese glamping path,” he says.

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## Peony business helps Heze bloom

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Peonies do not just offer a visual feast in East China, but are also growing into an industry that revitalizes rural areas in Heze, Shandong province.

In mid-April, the bright colorful expanse of peony blossoms in Caozhou Peony Garden in Heze attracted flocks of tourists to take photos with blooms of purple, pink, yellow and red.

Zhang Tingxian, a Heze local, spent a morning walking among the flowers in the garden along with his family members. He bought three potted peonies at the gate of the garden.

“The best place and best time to smell the flowers,” he says. He takes his parents, wife and children to the garden every April, which he says is the best time to appreciate the peonies and enjoy leisure time with family.

As he travels a lot on business trips, Zhang does not have time to tend the family’s farmland, so he transferred the right of using some of the family’s farmland to a company to plant peonies.

“My family members can tend to the peonies for the company and earn a good income,” he says.

Heze was named the “peony capital of China” by the China Flower Association in 2012, and it has a history of cultivating peonies dating back almost 1,400 years.

The city has been working hard to pass down the traditions of peony cultivation so as to develop the flower business that can help revitalize the rural areas. Heze now has an area of 32,400 hectares growing peonies.

When the peonies blossom in April, the city’s government says about 5,000 people visit Caozhou Peony Garden every day. The garden is one of nine major peony gardens built in Heze for sightseeing.

Not far away from Caozhou Peony

Garden, some farmers were busy picking peony flowers for sale at Wangqiao village, Huangzhen community, in the city’s peony district. Some farmers were also holding livestreaming sessions to promote the flowers.

“Based on the traditional techniques of growing peonies, we have also developed new techniques to cultivate peony species that can grow well in pots and their flowers are suitable to be used in flower arrangements,” says Xing Shiguo, an official of Huangzhen.

Statistics from the city’s government show that the city has cultivated more than 1,200 species of peonies.

“Almost every household in Wangqiao village grows peonies. More than 20 million fresh peonies are sold through online platforms every year,” he says.

The fresh flowers in the village are also being sold to countries including the Netherlands and Belgium through cross-border e-commerce platforms.

Annual e-commerce sales of peony products including fresh flowers and seeds have surpassed 300 million yuan (\$46 million).

In addition to sightseeing, the city has extended its flower business by developing various peony related products which include seed oil, tea and dried flowers.

Peony seeds are used to make cooking oil, and petal extracts are used in cosmetics, perfumes and essential oils. The pistils are made into tea and the roots can be used in Chinese herbal medicine.

According to the Peony Industry Development Center of Heze, the city now has 14 enterprises engaged in developing peony products. More than 240 kinds of peony products are now being sold in the markets.

However, compared with the peony sightseeing business which has already bloomed, the peony processing business is developing at a slow pace, says Chen Xuexiang, deputy director of the center.



Caozhou Peony Garden in Heze, Shandong province, attracts tourists to take photos with the blooms. As one of the nine major peony gardens in Heze, it receives about 5,000 people every day in April.

ZONG LAISONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

“Many people have no idea that the cooking oil produced from peony seeds is very healthy, since it contains a lot of alpha-linolenic acid, which is very helpful to brain cells,” he says.

Chen adds that the next step will

be to place greater effort into developing more market-oriented peony products to make the peony business bloom not only in the cultural and tourism sector, but also in the agricultural and processing sectors to bring more benefits to farmers.