

# Tourism provides boost to nighttime economy



Renovated ancient county seat brings visitors back in time

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Walking on the streets of the ancient Taiyuan county seat in the evenings can sometimes give people an experience as if they were walking through history.

They would be transported back to the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties when they see the centuries-old streets and traditional folk shows being performed.

However, with the modern lighting along the streets they are quickly reminded they are still in the 21st century.

It is the combination of antiquity and modernity that has brought prosperity to this tourist attraction that only reopened several months ago.

The ancient Taiyuan county seat, which is also called Old Taiyuan, should be the city center of today's Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi province, if not for a devastating fire in the early Song Dynasty (960-1279).

In ancient times, Taiyuan was called Jinyang, and was a city built more than 2,500 years ago.

After nearly 1,500 years of prosperity, the old city was razed by Zhao Guangyi, the second emperor of the Song Dynasty.

Several years later, a newer city was built some 10 kilometers to its north-east, which is today's city of Taiyuan.

During the early Ming Dynasty, local officials built a smaller city on



Yingze Avenue is one of the areas in Taiyuan where the nighttime economy is thriving. LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

the location of the fire-destroyed site, to act as the seat of Taiyuan county, an administrative region under the jurisdiction of Taiyuan city.

Like many ancient cities in China, Old Taiyuan is no longer intact after wars, winds and rains over the last six centuries. Most of its city walls are gone and many ancient structures destroyed.

In 2013, a renovation project was launched, aimed at restoring Old Taiyuan to its former glory.

After eight years, "new" Old Taiyuan was opened to visitors on May 1.

With city walls rebuilt based on their original appearance and

ancient structures inside the city repaired, Old Taiyuan immediately became a new attraction for both tourists and locals.

The number of visitors to the site has grown at such a fast pace that the operators say "this is something beyond their expectations".

"Since May 1, we have received more than 4 million visits," said Su Yawei, deputy general manager of Old Taiyuan Scenic Area.

The executive said the prosperity has been driven by nighttime visits. He noted that nighttime visits can usually account for about two-thirds of the whole-day numbers.

He said there is a trend that visitors tend to spend more at night than in the daytime.

"Our revenue in the past four months was 60 million yuan (\$9.27 million), which means a per capita expenditure of 15 yuan based on the total number of 4 million visits," Su said. "But our statistics show that a nighttime visitor spends about 25 yuan on average."

Xia Wenwu, an official at the Taiyuan bureau of commerce, predicted the whole-year revenue of Old Taiyuan can surpass 200 million yuan, making it a new driver for Taiyuan's tourism growth.

He added that Old Taiyuan is driving the nighttime economy in neighboring areas.

"Old Taiyuan is adjacent to such attractions as the Jinyang Lake, Jinyangli scenic area, Jinci Temple and Taishan Mountain," Xia said. "The latter sites are benefiting from the spillover effect of Old Taiyuan's booming nighttime business."

He said that those adjacent attractions have also developed their own nighttime operations when receiving visitors from Old Taiyuan.

"A nighttime economic circle is now taking shape in areas centering on Old Taiyuan," Xia said.

Wu Limin, a researcher at Shanxi Academy of Social Sciences, said the nighttime economy is booming in a number of areas in Taiyuan.

"A nighttime economy cannot develop on its own," Wu said. "It should grow based on the incorporation of resources in commerce, tourism, culture and other sectors."

She noted that such resources can enrich visitor experience and thus bring more revenue.

While Old Taiyuan is using its cultural and historical resources to empower its nighttime economy, Taiyuan Wanxiang Town, a commercial district in the city, has used its resources in commerce, catering and entertainment to develop its nighttime economy.

"This is a place that people can enjoy shopping, dining in restaurants and watching colorful shows on the streets," said one visitor to the area. "It offers relaxing experiences for both children and adults."

Wu said Old Taiyuan and Taiyuan Wanxiang Town represents two options of the nighttime economy that target various customer groups.

While the former is aimed at tourists and nostalgic locals, the latter focuses on the younger generation in the city, Wu said.

Xia of the Taiyuan bureau of commerce said the key to developing Taiyuan's nighttime economy is that the city should have more options for consumers to choose from.

The officials said there are seven sites of the nighttime economy in Taiyuan and another six are planned to be developed this year.

To promote the nighttime economy, Wu suggested the government make efforts in two aspects — offering incentives for businesses to lower operational costs and creating a friendly environment for customers.

*Xue Lin contributed to this story.*

## Government takes steps to lure global investment

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Amid growing competition from investment destinations nationwide, authorities in various regions in Shanxi have intensified their efforts to lure investment by implementing innovative measures.

In Jinzhong, a city in central Shanxi, the local government is delegating administrative powers to simplify business registration procedures.

One of its initiatives is to assign the government's project assessment rights to specialist organizations.

Lu Guibin, chief of the Jinzhong administrative approval bureau, said such a practice can lead to a greater improvement in efficiency and a substantial decrease in administrative cost.

"In the past, such assessment was done by the government," Lu said. "But as government officials were not specialists on every detailed industrial sector, we have to invite industrial experts to do the job."

As a result of establishing a board of experts to assess every investment project, the appraisal process could be much lengthier and the annual cost for appraisal could reach 4 million yuan (\$618,910) a year, according to Lu.

He added after the practice was implemented at the end of last year, the government's cost in project assessment was about 160,000 yuan in the past eight months, spending on some strategic projects requiring government appraisal, which accounted for less than 7 percent of the total.

As more officials are freed from project assessment, they are able to offer more tailored services to investors, according to Lu.

In the city of Jincheng in southwestern Shanxi, the local government is offering innovative

assistance services to investors.

Xu Shaokang, an official in Jincheng Economic and Technological Development Zone, is one of the people providing the assistance.

His job is to complete all the producers ranging from business registration and land acquisition to project construction and operation, on behalf of the investing company he is assigned to.

"All the services are free of charge," Xu said. "And we must make sure every problem arising from the processes can be solved."

Qi Jinjun, another official at the zone, said most of the investors came from regions other than Shanxi.

"As strangers in Shanxi, they must have difficulties in dealing with an unfamiliar environment and unfamiliar people," Qi said. "Our whole-process assistance service is designed to help them solve all problems."

Like Jincheng, the neighboring city of Changzhi has a similar practice, which officials call the "family butler service".

"When investors decide to invest in Changzhi, we welcome them as our family members who have returned home from afar," said Liu Yanlin, deputy chief of the administrative approval bureau at Changzhi High-Tech Zone.

In the zone, there are 18 officials offering "butler" services to investors.

Local official Zhao Xueqin is one of these "butlers". Her responsibility is to help investors finish all the procedures needed for a project's operation.

She said as the "butlers" are more familiar with local administrative institutions, they can ensure that all producers be completed with greater efficiency.

*Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.*



The city of Linfen has become an attractive investment destination in Shanxi thanks to the local authorities' efforts in improving the business environment. WANG PEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Farmers in Shanxi benefit from vocational training

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When trying to develop their own businesses, farmers in Shanxi are increasingly aware of the importance of training in an era that features rapidly emerging technologies, techniques and operational models.

Chen Bingzheng is a resident in Datong's Jijiazhuang township. He is engaged in the farming of the day lily cash crop.

Now in his 60s, Chen believed he might not be able to use modern ways of marketing, like e-commerce and livestreaming.

But when seeing his neighbors receive orders through their mobile phones, he decided to try the process out for himself.

He applied for a training course at a local vocational school and learned how to conduct business online through e-commerce.

Several months later, Chen had mastered all the necessary skills for online sales. Using his smartphone camera and his strong Shanxi dialect, Chen is now getting more "likes" and orders from online buyers.

"Now my family can earn about



The rural economy is prospering in the city of Yuncheng as farmers grasp new techniques like greenhouse farming. XUE JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

160,000 yuan (\$24,760) a year from selling day lily flowers and other produce online," Chen said.

Also cashing in on vocational training are Zhang Shiyuan and Wang Yongfeng, two brothers in the city of Xinzhou.

They had been engaged in growing organic black corn for about a decade. Despite its high quality, the produce did not sell well or earn them much money because of its higher price.

"Buyers were not aware that the

price is matched with its quality as organic food," Zhang Shiyuan said. "They just compared it with ordinary corns."

To solve this problem, the brothers became the pioneers in their village in learning e-commerce.

They began operating their online store in 2015, and their business began to grow once they used livestreaming to display the quality of their produce. They recorded and showed videos over the entire process of the crop's growth.

Known as the "corn brothers" among buyers, they now operate a large farm of 100 hectares.

In addition to e-commerce, training for modern farming technologies is becoming popular.

Hu Tianni, for instance, is the operator of a modern farm of 53 hectares in the county of Ruicheng.

After learning to operate various farming machines, Hu, 50, began to equip her farm with an intelligent irrigation system, a spraying drone and other machines.

"In the past, farming on 53 hectares of land required more than 100 laborers," Hu said. "Now a farm of this size is operated by my family with the help of modern equipment."

Liu Zhijie, chief of the Shanxi Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said the province will continue its efforts to promote vocational training for farmers.

He revealed that the Shanxi government will invest more than 400 million yuan in vocational training for about 250,000 farmers this year.

*Wu Jia contributed to this story.*

## Reopening of Bell Tower Street brings joy to residents

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When he prepared for the Mid-Autumn Festival on the evening of Sept 19, Zhao Yun, a senior resident in Taiyuan's Cayuanhou community, heard a bell ringing from his neighborhood.

The old man immediately recognized that the sound was from the Bell Tower, a place he was familiar with in his childhood but had disappeared from his life for several decades.

The bell-ringing also reminded him of other sounds unique to the area called Bell Tower Street from his childhood: the sound of rain hitting the cobblestones on the street and the hawking of vendors.

"Yes, everything in my memory is coming back," he told his neighbors, when hearing news that the old street will be reopened on Sept 19 after a renovation lasting about 18 months.

In the past, the towers of bell and drum were standard to many cities in China. And the areas near the two towers were usually booming business districts of the cities.

This was also the case in Taiyuan. But the Bell Tower was gone by the late 1930s and many ancient structures were destroyed



Thousands of people come to see the old Bell Tower Street, which was reopened on Sept 19 after an 18-month renovation project. MI GUOWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

in the years that followed.

To better preserve Taiyuan's historical streets and ancient structures, the city launched a restoration project for the Bell Street and its neighboring areas in April 2020.

According to Pu Jing, president of Taiyuan Architecture Design Institute, the restoration project, covering an area of 16 hectares, was implemented on the principle of "restoring old-time memories and inheriting historical cultures".

In addition to the rebuilding of the Bell Tower, a total of 32 old buildings were restored to their original appearances.

"The main characteristic of the ancient streets is a feature unique to the Republic of China period (1912-49), which gives people a nostalgic retrospective to their childhood," Pu said. "But structures in the later times still remain to reflect the evolution of history."

Bell Tower Street is not only a touring site, but also a venue for

commercial development, especially for time-honored brands.

Kaiming Photo Studio, for instance, is a century-old firm in the area. It recently moved back to its original site.

The reopening of its studio attracted a great number of customers, who were waiting in front of the gate to take photos just as they or their parents did in past times.

*Shi Hui contributed to this story.*