

Shanxi promotes tourism with celebrations

Gala night and conference in Changzhi bring province's magnificence and charm into spotlight



Featuring rising cliffs, lush woods and clear streams, the Taihang Mountains that stretch some 400 kilometers from the north to south, are a major attraction in Shanxi province. LI CHANGQING / FOR CHINA DAILY



By YUAN SHENGGAO

The city of Changzhi in the southeast of Shanxi province hosted a gala night to promote cultural tourism on Sept 26, the same day the seventh Shanxi Conference on Tourism Development started in the city.

The gala, which took place by Zhangze Lake, offered dances, acrobatics, local operas and poem recitals. It demonstrated the beautiful scenery of the Taihang Mountains and revolutionary spirits of local people defined by courage and perseverance, the event's organizers said.

The Taihang Mountains extend about 400 kilometers and cover regions in Beijing municipality, Hebei, Shanxi and Henan provinces. Changzhi, near the heart of the mountains, boasts forest-covered hills, waterfalls, springs and creeks.

Noted scenic areas in the city include Baiquan Gorge, Tongtian Gorge, and Xiantang Mountain. It also includes the ancient Yuejiazhai village, which is known as a retreat away from the world, and the Zhangze Lake wetland park.

It is among the earliest regions in which human activity was discovered. It is home to Chinese legends such as Nyuwa, the goddess who created humans and mended the broken sky, and a legendary bird called Jingwei, which kept picking up stones and tree branches to fill up the sea.



Clockwise from left: Tongtian Gorge, a part of the Taihang Mountains, is one of the top tourist destinations in Changzhi. LI ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY Zhangze Lake Wetland Park is the venue where the seventh Shanxi Conference on Tourism Development took place. SUN BINGBING / FOR CHINA DAILY Artists perform a traditional dance during the gala night on Sept 26. FU YUPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Changzhi also houses one-third of the country's architectural structures built before the Song Dynasty (960-1279), known as a museum of ancient culture and architecture.

The city was also home to the headquarters of the Eighth Route Army, which was led by the Communist Party of China during the War of

Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

Zhang Qiong, director of the city's culture and tourism bureau, said Changzhi boasts one scenic area rated as 5A — the highest rank for China's tourist attractions, as well as 12 4A-rated scenic areas and an ecological culture and tourism demonstration area.



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Bai Yansheng, renowned television anchor and image ambassador of Shanxi's culture and tourism, was invited to host the gala night.

Changzhi can represent some of the best prospects of Shanxi's tourism development, Bai said, adding that he would help showcase the city's and the province's magnificence and charm.

The conference, which ended on Sept 28, offered diverse activities, such as a gala night, an arts and handicraft products trade fair, a summit for innovative talents in the cultural and creative industry, an Eighth Route Army-themed culture and tourism festival and a promotional event for recreational vehicles.

The conference also had its own mascot whose design is based on the local handmade tiger toy called Lihou, a craft included on the national intangible cultural heritage protection list.

Items related to the mascot have been used to decorate Changzhi's streets and alleys, along with welcome scrolls hung on overpasses and pictures of Changzhi scenery in bus stations.

A variety of other events were also held around the conference. Among them were a marathon along Zhangze Lake, which attracted 3,000 athletes nationwide on Sept 19, a mountain climbing activity and a rock climbing competition held on Sept 19-20 as well as an exhibition of intangible cultural heritage.

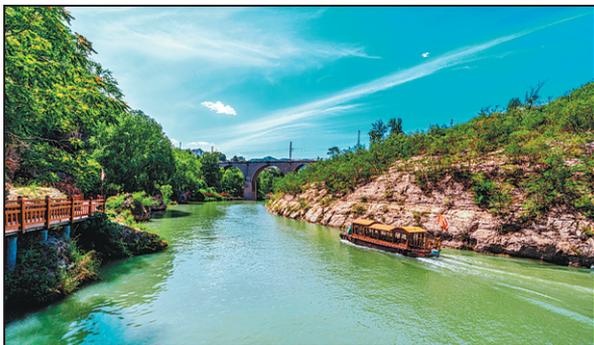
Chen Yan, a tourist from Shanxi's capital Taiyuan, said: "I have sensed the strong ambience of the conference and hospitality of Changzhi people since I stepped out of the high-speed train."

"I've heard Zhangze Lake in autumn is picturesque and I will enjoy it."

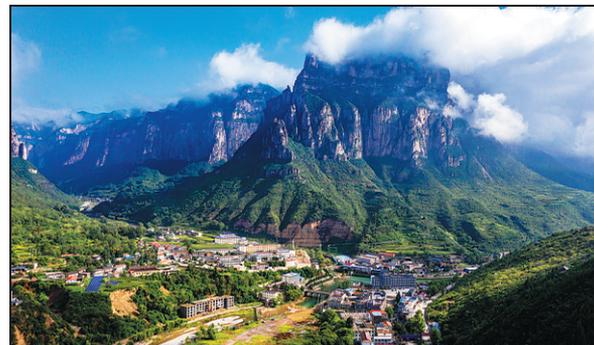
A local taxi driver surnamed Li said the conference is a great and joyful event for Changzhi. "Everyone can be the city's image spokesperson and I will offer warm and polite service to help display its new image," Li said.

Wang Aiqin, head of the Shanxi Culture and Tourism Department, said the province has made culture and tourism integration an important means of improving development and promoted itself to become a cross-industry tourism demonstration area in recent years.

Sun Ruisheng contributed to this story.



From left: Tourists have a boat tour of the Niangziguan village in Pingding county. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Songmiao village in the county of Lingchuan is known as a convalescent destination that offers 'sleep-aiding' tours. WANG JIANJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY Qiaoshang in Huguang county is recognized as one of the most beautiful and livable tourism villages in Shanxi. SONG XIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY



Villages capitalize on rural beauty to improve local economies

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On a sunny autumn day, Jia Baocheng sat in front of his three-floor inn in Qiaoshang village, greeting the backpackers who climbed mountains in the early morning.

Surrounded by flowers and lush green hills, the inn with 12 rooms has seen a boom in business despite its location in the middle of a mountain valley.

Qiaoshang is located in the heart of the Taihang Mountains and was once a poverty-stricken village in Huguang county, Shanxi province. The ancient village boasts beautiful natural scenery like a grand gorge with flowing water and dense forests, but had long been little-known due to poor road connectivity and public infrastructure.

It was the emerging rural tourism

industry that made changes happen. In recent years, Qiaoshang has gained support from provincial authorities for tourism-based poverty reduction, and made many efforts to improve infrastructural facilities and develop natural attractions.

The village is now recognized as one of the most beautiful and livable tourism villages in Shanxi. The lives of local residents have also changed dramatically.

In Shanxi, tourism resources in rural areas account for 70 percent of the province's total. Making use of its natural advantages, Shanxi has promoted the rapid development of sightseeing, relaxation, bed-and-breakfast accommodations and other tourism-related businesses in its villages. It has made heavy investments in building public infrastructure such as roads, water supply

facilities, parking lots and public toilets in rural areas.

Yuejiazhai in Pingshun county is another village benefiting from the development of rural tourism. The village, covering an area of 16 square kilometers, is famous for its stone buildings, waterfalls, rainbows and misty clouds.

However, Yuejiazhai had no chance to show these breathtaking sceneries to the outside world until 2009, when it completed the construction of a road network. Since then, the village has vigorously developed the tourism industry featuring ecological agriculture, leisure, sightseeing and local traditional craftsmanship.

"To date, we have received about 1 million tourist visits from people attracted by the scenic spots, and earned a total of 100 million yuan

(\$15.48 million) in tourism income," said Yue Xianlai, secretary of the village's Party branch.

"We have also boosted tourism and economic development of the nearby villages, and made contributions to the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy," he added.

Since then, more villages have turned clear waters and green mountains into "mountains of gold and silver," said Wang Aiqin, chief of the Shanxi Culture and Tourism Department. The official said rural tourism has become an important way to realize the province's rural revitalization, and equal attention has gone to the quantity and quality of the industry's development.

The department will continue to help strengthen sightseeing tourism in the years to come, Wang said. It will also develop leisure and recrea-

tional activities at the same time.

Another focus is the combination of rural tourism and healthcare, according to the department. "Shanxi has unique terrain, climate, food and traditional Chinese medicines, which are all conducive to the integrated development of the two industries. Their combination is one of the best choices to diversify tourism services and extend the tourism industrial chain," Wang said.

Songmiao village in Lingchuan county, for example, has successfully helped farmers beef up their income by developing tourism and healthcare industries. The ancient village has planted 680 mu (45 hectares) of medical herbs and boasts a forest coverage rate of 95 percent.

This year, the village cooperated with Xuanwu Hospital in Beijing to set up a convalescent facility for

relieving sleep disorders. It has developed "sleep-aiding" tours by providing herbal baths, and building roads and facilities friendly for hiking, cycling and walking.

During this year's Labor Day holiday from May 1 to 5, Songmiao received 50,000 visits and its tourism revenue totaled 1 million yuan.

In the coming five years, Shanxi plans to build a group of communities and villages with health tours as their main characteristics. It also wants to build a healthcare industrial cluster integrating tourism, accommodations, leisure and medical care, which is expected to generate 100 billion yuan in revenue through 2025, according to the provincial government.

Sang Liyuan contributed to this story.