



1) A Miao ethnic woman attends the recent Zimei Jie (Sisters' Day), a five-day festival similar to Valentine's Day, in Taijiang county, Guizhou province. 2) Miao ethnic people of all ages dress in festive costumes and wearing silver, gather at the Zimei Jie (Sisters' Day) festivities. 3) A foreign tourist takes a photo of the Sisters' Day festival in Taijiang county. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOURISM

Colors of Miao infuse life into Taijiang tourism

A festival similar to Valentine's Day helps boost an ethnic area in Guizhou

By XINHUA in Guiyang

"Zimei Jie" (Sisters' Day), a five-day festival similar to Valentine's Day, is helping boost tourism in an ethnic county in Southwest China.

Chinese of Miao ethnicity in Guizhou's Taijiang county, in which 97 percent of the 168,000 residents are Miao, concluded the annual event on April 19-23, with tens of thousands of locals donning traditional attire in parades, musicians playing the reed-pipe lusheng, and performers presenting drum dances. Group weddings and bullfights were also held, according to the county government.

According to folklore, a Miao couple were not given permission to be together by their parents and tribe leaders. They continued their romance regardless and when they met in secret, the girl would give her lover a bowl of glutinous rice, known as Sister's Rice.

The two overcame adversity and became an official couple. Sisters' Day is celebrated annually in honor of their love.

The occasion, which reportedly reflects the ancient lives of the Miao people during the transition to patriarchy from matriarchy, drew more than 50,000 tourists this year.

"The stories are so romantic," said Xia Xiaohui, a painter from east China's Zhejiang province. "The distinctive Miao culture is really inspirational."

For tour guide Li Mei, Sisters' Day gives tourists the opportunity to "have a

“We plan to invest more in our ethnic culture, such as Miao silverware and embroidery.”

Du Xianwei, mayor of Taijiang county, Guizhou province

glimpse of Miao culture.”

"In recent years, many foreign visitors have come to Taijiang to admire the culture," she said.

Daniel, an Italian tourist, said he came to Taijiang to enjoy the "colorful glutinous rice."

"I was curious about Miao folklore," he said. "This is the first time that I have seen Miao people, I just adore their culture."

The event was also great for local businesses.

Wu Dongxiong, who operates a silverware store on Sisters' Street in the county, said tourists swarmed his store to buy souvenirs.

"I have sold a pretty good amount of silverware this year," said the silversmith. "Because tourism has exploded in recent years, all of my 12 siblings now work in the souvenir business."

The local government named Wu an "inheritor of intangible cultural heritage" to encourage him to pass on the craftsmanship to the next generation and to attract

more young people to the industry.

"I have accepted six apprentices recently," he said.

Liu Yongying, another local, chose to cash in on another unique product — Miao embroidery. Liu said she usually collects handmade embroidery from local women and sells it during Sisters' Day. This year her embroidery was snapped up very quickly.

"Tourists love Miao embroidery, which usually features goats, dogs, snowflakes and swallows," Liu said.

Sisters' Day was named a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006.

In the first three months of 2016 alone, Qiongdongnan Prefecture, which administers Taijiang, has welcomed more than 14 million tourists, a year-on-year increase of 57.6 percent, according to official statistics. Tourism revenue rose 62.6 percent to 12.4 billion yuan (\$1.9 billion).

To take Taijiang's tourism to the next level, the local government decided to bring in more investment, with 13 projects worth almost 1.2 billion yuan already inked at this year's event.

The projects will help develop tourism, agriculture and health recovery industry, according to the government.

"We plan to invest more in our ethnic culture, such as Miao silverware and embroidery," said county mayor Du Xianwei. "We will also develop 'mountain tourism,' featuring mountain lakes and parks."

Li Feiyue, Qiongdongnan's Party chief, said events like Sisters' Day are not just about boosting economic growth.

"I hope similar festivals will pass on the Miao culture and traditions," Li said.

RAILWAY

Trains linking China, Europe on the fast track for growth

By XINHUA in Wuhan

Caravans of camels carrying silk, jewels and spices along the Silk Road are long gone, but cargo trains linking Chinese cities with Europe are taking the ancient road into a brand-new future. Lin Zheng-peng's electronics products used to take 40 days to reach Poland by sea. Now, with a new train route linking Europe and Wuhan City where his company is based, it takes just two weeks.

"Our efficiency with trains is much higher than shipping, and the cost is lower than airfreight," Liu said. A direct freight train linking Wuhan in central China and Lyons in France began running last week.

China now has three rail channels to Europe — a western route through the Alataw Pass in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Kazakhstan, a middle path via Erenhot to

Mongolia, and through Manzhouli in the northeast to Russia. Many cities now have freight trains to European cities including Hamburg, Lyons and Madrid.

Such train networks have flourished since the launch of the Silk Road Economic Belt in 2013 to improve cooperation between countries along the ancient Silk Road.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, trade between China and "Belt and Road" countries totaled \$995 billion in 2015, about a quarter of the national trade volume. The western municipality of Chongqing sent 490 trains to Europe in 2015; Zhengzhou more than 300, representing over \$1.4 billion of goods.

Exports are only half the story. In northeast China, where a freight train began running to Europe last year, Russian imports are all the rage.

"I often buy Russian flour,"

Liu Ruiguo said as he ladled flour into a sack in a grocery store in Changchun, capital of Jilin province. "The noodles and dumplings made with it have a better texture," he said, surrounded by a cornucopia of Russian commodities.

The Changchun-Manzhouli-Europe line has transported cargo worth more than 35 million euros since August, and in return the trains have brought novel, cheap goods like vodka, tiramisu and wild Siberian honey. In a Russian store in Changchun, a bottle of vodka costs only 45 yuan (\$6.9), while fresh tiramisu costs only 30 yuan. Some items like flour are even cheaper than their Chinese counterparts.

"China has a trade surplus with many countries, but the China-Europe trains can help foreign countries exploit the Chinese market," said Lan Jianping, head of the Zhejiang Industry and Economy Research Institute.

TRAVEL

Chinese help revive local businesses in Egypt

By XINHUA in LUXOR, Egypt

The bazaar before the ancient Karnak Temple in Upper Egypt's Luxor tourist city bustled with a substantial number of Chinese tourists visiting the city, following months of acute recession.

"Business died as most foreign tourists stopped visiting the city lately," Wael Ahmed, an owner of a bazaar in Luxor said. "However, business improved after Chinese tourists started visiting Luxor."

An increasing number of Chinese tourists are visiting Egypt following President Xi Jinping's recent visit, reviving Egypt's tourism industry.

Tourism in Egypt was dealt a heavy blow following the Russian airplane crash in North Sinai last October, after which several countries, including Britain and Russia, suspended their flights to Egypt.

This further augmented the recession in the country's already ailing tourism sector which is a major source of its national income and foreign currency reserves.

However, even before the plane crash, Egypt suffered a sharp decline in tourism due to three years of political turmoil, including two mass uprisings which toppled two presidents, forcing several countries to ban their citizens from visiting Egypt for safety reasons.

Luxor, once an Ancient Egyptian capital, suffered



A man goes by a billboard advertising Egypt's tourism in Wangfujing Street, downtown Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

similarly as with Egyptian tourist cities.

However, the industry has recently improved as hundreds of Chinese tourists visit the city daily.

"As you can see, Chinese tourists are everywhere in Luxor," Ahmed said. "I was going to close my shop a month ago but I changed my mind after Chinese tourists started coming."

He added that Chinese tourists also frequent restaurants, coffee shops, bazaars and malls nearly as much as American and European tourists did, though they've recently stopped visiting Luxor.

Egypt, the most populous Arab country, with its rich culture, now pins immense hope on China and is eager to

tap into the China's tourism market.

During a recent interview with Xinhua, former Egyptian Tourism Minister, Hisham Zaazou, said that Egypt received 35 percent additional tourists from China immediately following president Xi's visit to Egypt.

"The number of Chinese tourists increased from 65,000 to 135,000 in 2015," Zaazou said, adding that he believes the number could rise to between half a million and a million shortly, once flights from China to Egypt increase.

To encourage more tourists to visit the country, Egypt exempted Chinese tourists from visa requirements, allowing for visa-upon-arrival if they are sponsored by a tourist agency and are financially comfortable.

Apparently, these measures as well as Luxor's charm attract Chinese tourists looking for tranquility surrounded by breathtaking ancient ruins scattered throughout the city.

Luxor is home to Tutankhamen's tomb in the Valley of the Kings and its magnificent sunset at the majestic Karnak and Luxor temples are a perfect choice for culture-based tourism.

"It is very pleasant here amongst the city's old temples, with lovely weather, and it is quite safe," said a 17-year-old Chinese girl called Helen, as she toured the Temple of

Karnak.

Helen is visiting Egypt with her family for the first time, but she said it will not be her last.

"We prefer Luxor as it is a historical city and we learn so much about Egypt's history since it is one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, comparable to China," Helen's mother said.

Helen's mother also said visiting Egypt is much cheaper than neighboring countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon or Jordan, therefore it is more attractive to Chinese tourists.

Chinese and Egyptian tourist agencies promote Luxor to Chinese tourists as a great city to visit in Egypt.

"Egypt in general and Luxor in particular are rather special. Luxor's 7,000 year-old history attracts Chinese tourists who single out Egypt for its rich history, and they also want to learn more about its local culture," said Yang Lili, a Chinese leader of a tourist group during a tour of Karnak Temple.

Yang said Chinese tourists were very scared to visit Egypt at first due to the country's political and security situation, but they were encouraged following the Chinese president's visit earlier this year.

"We don't worry too much about security as it is very safe here, and not as dangerous as the news portrays it," she said.



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