

# Reliving Chongqing's wartime past

A film-set remake of China's scenic former capital proves a hit with TV drama fans and history buffs alike. **Tan Yingzi** reports.

Surrounded by two rivers, the mountain city of Chongqing attracts droves of tourists with its blend of 360-degree landscapes, spectacular night views and delicious spicy food. But just a one-hour drive from the city's downtown lies another side to Chongqing at Liangjiang International Movie City, which preserves its illustrious past as China's wartime capital during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

In 1937, the Kuomintang government led by Chiang Kai-shek established Chongqing as China's capital and the southwestern city began to play a critical role in the Asian theater of World War II.

During that time, the inland city witnessed a sudden influx of government officials, bankers, businessmen, scholars, diplomats, writers and other social elites from the rest of China.

The former Soviet Union was the first country that submitted a request to set up an embassy in the wartime capital. The Soviet move was followed by similar requests from more than 30 other countries, including the United States.

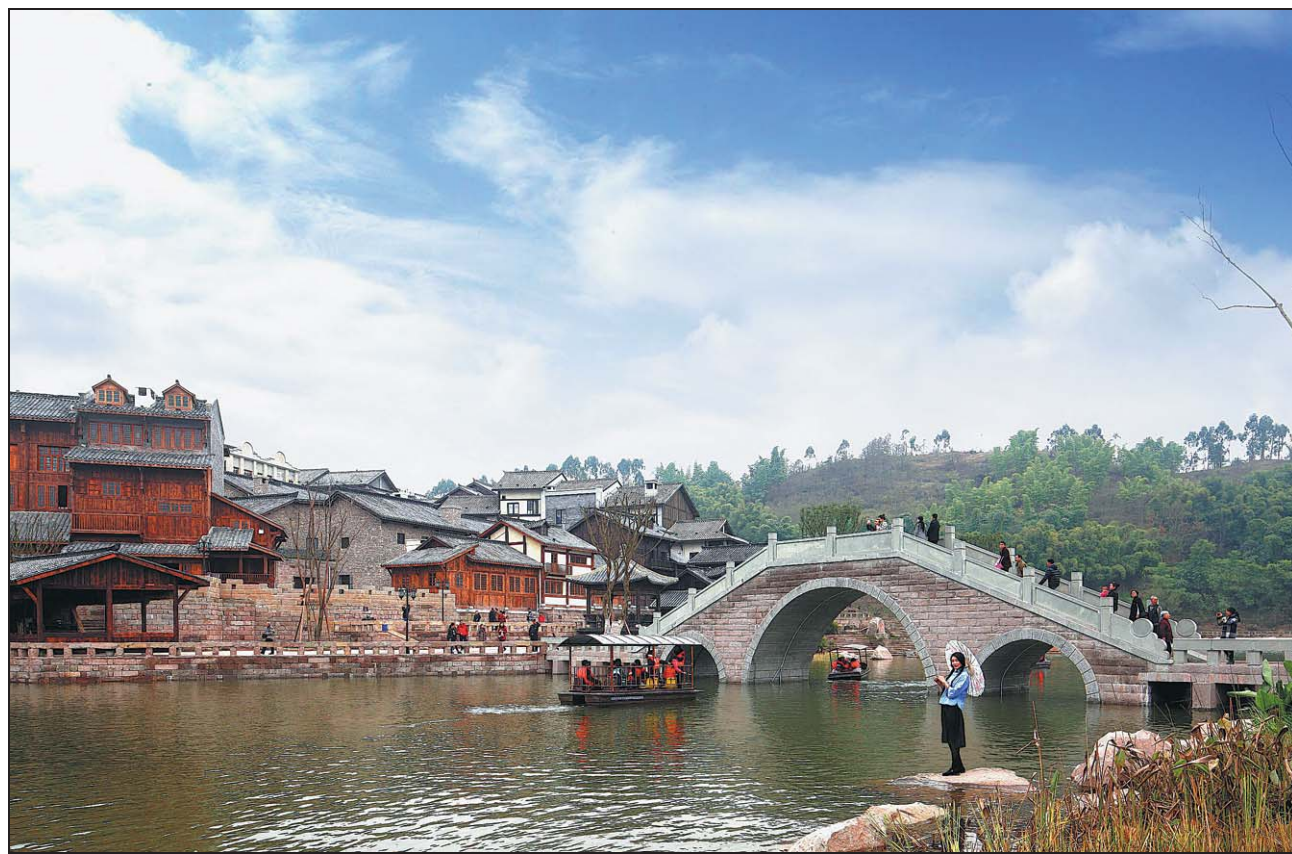
The city soon became the new center for the country's politics and culture, and quickly developed into a dynamic metropolis.

Opening last December, the movie city features a replica of six Chongqing main street blocks from the 1930s containing over 220 historical buildings, as well as riverside neighborhoods featuring wooden houses and docks from the era, and sections of the city's ancient walls.

The shops, cafes and restaurants around the scenic area offer authentic food and drinks from the 1930s, while a range of cultural activities are offered to help evoke memories of the old days.

A trip to the movie city is like traveling back in time.

To enhance the experience, many visitors rent period costumes used in the dozens of TV dramas and movies shot there. Visitors can dress up as



The Liangjiang International Movie City in Chongqing, China's wartime capital during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), features replicas of old streets and historical buildings that bring visitors back to the 1930s. Many people rent costumes to dress up as residents or even movie stars of that time as they walk around the city. PHOTOS BY TAN YINGZI / CHINA DAILY

generals, soldiers, policemen, students or even movie stars to start their role playing adventure as they walk around the city.

The 1942 Historical Block, the setting for numerous movies and TV dramas, is the most popular highlight. The grand two-story building on a plaza called the President's Mansion

hosted the Kuomintang government in the wartime years. Visitors can learn about the history of the city and the war there.

The office building of Xinhua Daily is a good place to learn more about the Communist Party of China during the war. The newspaper, founded by former premier

Zhou Enlai in 1938, was the Party's first official national newspaper.

The Monument of Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression was once the tallest building in Chongqing and has been a prominent landmark since 1947. It is the only monument in China to commemorate the

victory and although the movie city features a faithful replica, the original still stands on the Liberation Square in downtown Chongqing.

The nearby Camera Museum is an interesting place to visit and features dozens of old models from all over the world.

In addition to sightseeing,

visitors can taste all kinds of local delicacies from the vendors and shops lining the streets, such as Chongqing noodle, rice cake and hotpot.

After lunch at Chaotianmen Port, people often rent a boat or relax on a river cruise.

At the Cathay Theater, a famous cultural center in wartime Chongqing, visitors can

“**Movie city reflects the deep culture and history of this ancient city.**”

**Zhou Yong**, director, Chongqing Research Center for the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in the Unoccupied Area

watch screenings of foreign movies shown in China during the 1930s.

If you are lucky, you can catch a traditional local wedding ceremony taking place on the streets.

On one of Chongqing's many rainy days, you can join the locals at one of the city's many tea houses. Records show that in 1938 there were about 3,000 tea houses in Chongqing.

Featuring square wooden tables and long benches, traditional tea houses serve up infusions in a covered bowl through a series of specific rituals.

After a tea break, the Six Countries restaurant is a good place to sample local dishes such as chili chicken.

Nightlife in the movie city is vibrant too. The famous Queen's Dance Hall was a major social meeting place in the wartime capital and visitors can still listen to old songs and dance on the beautifully preserved floor there.

If it's getting late, you can stay at the Flying Tigers Inn named after the legendary US armed force volunteers who fought the Japanese in defense of China.

“Movie city reflects the deep culture and history of this ancient city,” says Zhou Yong, director of the Chongqing Research Center for the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in the Unoccupied Area.

“Chongqing is a great city which witnessed victory in the war against the Japanese invasion and is an important part of modern world history.”

Since its opening, Liangjiang International Movie City has attracted over 5 million visitors.

“Today I brought my son here to educate him about the history of our hometown,” says Tang Li, 49, a local businesswoman.

“Movie city is also a good place to show friends from other places in China the authentic culture of Chongqing.”

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## Chinese couple drives through 19 countries in vintage car

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Driving between their hometown in Southwest China's Guizhou province and London, a couple has left tracks in dozens of countries over the past seven years, and plans to continue their dream of driving around the world in a vintage car.

Luo Chang and his wife, Ding Jie, were both born in Guiyang, the provincial capital. They met in high school and went to Shanghai to work after graduating from university.

They both love travel and have driven around China, accumulating considerable experience in self-drive travel. In April 2011, Luo got the job of an automobile engineer in London. After carefully studying the feasibility, he and Ding decided to drive to the British capital along the ancient Silk Road.

“Once we make a decision we don't get overtaken by fear. Going full steam ahead is our style. Our parents, relatives

and friends are familiar with that and support our decisions,” says Ding.

It was hard to see a car with Chinese plates going abroad in 2011. The couple were stuck at Horgos customs in the country's northwest for three days and finally went through with a temporary import and export permit.

“Fortunately we did not experience such tedious customs process after that,” says Luo.

The journey to London was difficult, but they enjoyed themselves on the road.

At that time, foreign tourists were rare in Iran, especially those driving a car with Chinese plates.

“But Iranians were hospitable. They even shared CDs with us in traffic jams so we could enjoy Persian music,” says Ding. From there, they headed into the heartland of Turkey — Cappadocia — which consists of a high plateau at over 1,000 meters that is pierced by volcanic peaks.

Many tourists visit the area in hot-air balloons to see the



**Luo Chang**, his wife **Ding Jie** and their 4-year-old daughter **Luo Xiaoya** arrive in their hometown Guiyang in June after traveling through 19 countries in the 32-year-old car. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

special landform that seems like the surface of the moon.

They then spent two months getting to London.

Later, their car was spotted by an overseas Chinese on

London Bridge and pictures of the couple and their car went viral on the internet.

Netizens thought the couple must be rich to afford self-drive travel of over 20,000

kilometers.

But Luo started work the day after they arrived in London.

The birth of their daughter Luo Xiaoya did not stop their travels.

“**Once we make a decision we don't get overtaken by fear.**”

**Ding Jie**, woman from Guizhou province, on the long road trip

After working for nearly six years in London, Luo quit his job in March and decided to continue traveling with their 4-year-old daughter.

“Are you crazy?” one neighbor asked when he heard that the family of three would travel in a 32-year-old Tin Snail, a classic Citroen 2CV, which Luo had bought in London and mended for nine months. The vintage car had been out of production since the 1990s.

“We want to do something meaningful together before our girl goes to school,” says Luo.

The trip was to start from London and would take them across the Eurasian land mass. One month before departure, they entrusted a travel agency with the paperwork to get them back to China.

To enable their daughter to travel comfortably, they allowed for plenty of time to rest during the trip.

They also tried to choose families with children to stay with along the way as they couchsurf.

After traveling through 19 countries, they arrived in Guiyang on June 26.

During the trip, the couple raised 24,000 yuan (\$3,607) for China Rural Kids Care, a public welfare fund in China, to help children in rural areas of the country.

Now the family has started planning for another journey. They will ship the car to North America and then start a 10-month journey across the Americas.

*Zhao Yandi contributed to the story.*