

## CHINA

# Astronomy a growing draw for tourists

Traveling for stargazing, observatories and museums becomes more popular

By CAO CHEN in Shanghai  
caochen@chinadaily.com.cn

## Top Astronomy Destinations

- FAST, the world's largest radio telescope, Guizhou province
- China's first Mars simulation base, Qinghai province
- Daocheng county's Yading, Sichuan province
- The Kubuqi Desert, Inner Mongolia autonomous region
- The Hulunbuir Grassland, Inner Mongolia autonomous region
- National Astronomical Observatories, Beijing
- Purple Mountain Observatory, Jiangsu province
- Beijing Planetarium, Beijing
- Wenchang Space Launch Center, Hainan province
- The Tengger Desert, Inner Mongolia autonomous region

The first image of a black hole, which was released on Wednesday, may continue to spark Chinese people's growing curiosity for outer space.

According to a report released by China's online travel agency Ctrip on Thursday, the number of tourists searching for and making reservations for travel involving astronomy surged by 60 percent on its online platform in 2018, compared with 2017.

Popular activities include stargazing, visits to observatories or astronomical museums, observing the northern lights, and space camps, the report said.

Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Nanjing are among the top 10 cities with the most tourists opting for such sightseeing.

Pingtang county, Southwest China's Guizhou province, attracted the most tourists last year, said Zhang Qi, who is responsible for domestic travel at Ctrip.

The county is home to the world's largest radio telescope called the Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Telescope (FAST), and has seen a surge in tourism since trial operations began in 2016.

Official statistics show total tourism revenue exceeded 5.5 billion yuan (\$820 million) in the county in the first half of 2018, a year-on-year increase of 38 percent. The county attracted over 5.1 million visitors during that period.

Apart from observatories, areas suitable for stargazing, like deserts, grasslands and plateaus, as well as planetariums, have also boosted the tourism industry in the county in the first half of 2018, a year-on-year increase of 38 percent. The county attracted over 5.1 million visitors during that period.

“The number of students attending activities held by astronomical societies has been increasing too, although there is no hard data,” said Li Zhaoyu, an associate professor at School of Physics and Astronomy at Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Aside from curiosity for the unknown, technological advances

in observation tools play a key role by making things in deep space appear clear and close to people on Earth, Li said.

“Development of public transportation also enables people to visit various places suitable for observation and photography.”

Arts and literature are also critical contributing factors to broaden the public's imagination, he added.

Among those works, the *Three-body Problem* by Chinese author Liu Cixin has brought striking international attention to Chinese science fiction, as it became the first Chinese book to win the prestigious Hugo Award in 2015.

This year, the Chinese sci-fi movie adapted from the book, *Wandering Earth*, has earned more than 4.3 billion yuan at the box office since its opening on Feb 5. So far it has ranked second at the box office of all domestic blockbusters.

“It may be an opportune time to spread more knowledge about astronomy to the public,” said Zuo Wenwen, a staff member from the information office at Shanghai Astronomical Observatory.

“Shanghai Astronomical Observatory will provide support for organizations interested in holding exhibition tours on the topic,” Zuo added.

## Picking out a future



Experts provide career counseling for job seekers at a fair held at Shaanxi University of Science and Technology campus in Weiyang district of Xi'an. The job fair is mostly for graduates coming from economically disadvantaged families. ZHANG BOWEN/ XINHUA

By ZHENG CAIXIONG

in Guangzhou  
zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Customs officers have seized more than 160 metric tons of smuggled bird's nests worth about 2 billion yuan (\$298 million) in a special operation.

The smuggled bird's nests were

estimated to have dodged taxes valued at more than 320 million yuan, according to a statement released by Shantou Customs in the eastern part of Guangdong province on Friday.

The special operation code-named “1901” that involved more than 200 customs and police officers was launched simultaneously



Rescue workers search for missing people on Friday after a sudden heavy storm hit Shenzhen, Guangdong province, which caused the deaths of at least nine people. ZHENG ERQI / CHINA DAILY

# Sudden rainstorm kills at least nine, with others still missing

By CHAI HUA in Shenzhen  
grace@chinadailyhk.com

At least nine people died and two are still missing after a sudden heavy storm hit Shenzhen, Guangdong province, local authorities announced on Friday.

At about 8 pm on Thursday, local authorities issued hail and storm warnings and at 9:40 pm, rainfall started to pour in the city. Warnings were canceled at around 11 pm.

The city recorded about 30 millimeters of precipitation in 30 minutes.

The sudden hailstorm caused flooding, and it rushed into some river culverts in Luohu and Futian districts, where workers were dredging and cleaning.

Chen Rugui, mayor of Shenzhen,

said the government will do everything possible to save lives and prevent the occurrence of secondary disasters.

Five people were saved at about 11 pm on Thursday. Hundreds of rescuers are still searching for the missing by combing up and down waterways, but continuous rain has added extra difficulty.

Dozens of firefighters walked through waterways hand-in-hand to search for lives in Donghu Park, where some of the water was up to their necks. Vessels and drones were also sent for the rescue work.

According to the China Insurance Regulatory Commission Shenzhen Bureau, families of the deceased are eligible for compensation up to 270,000 yuan (\$40,200).

Yin Xuekang, deputy director of

Water Supply Bureau in Futian, stated firms of water-related construction projects underestimated the intensity of the rain, leading to evacuation delays.

He said all ongoing water projects were suspended and a detailed investigation is about to be conducted.

The National Meteorological Center has forecast hailstorms and thunderstorms in several southern provinces over the following two days, including Guangdong, Guizhou and Hunan, because of strong convective weather.

Such weather usually causes thunder, hail and strong rain in a very short period of time with massive destructive power. The center reminds residents in these areas to pay close attention to weather warnings and information.

## 70 YEARS ON | FROM THE GRASSROOTS

# Traditional area brought back to life

By YANG FEIYUE

yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Efforts have restored the capital's Caochang area back to a culture hot spot and a comfortable living space.

Nestled in the east of Beijing's Qianmen district, Caochang covers an area of about 16 hectares and is home to 17 *hutong*.

Traditional single-story houses featuring gray walls and black-tiled roofs sit neatly next to each other. Old-fashioned stone bricks and granite pave the road.

Green trees and blossoms emerge from here and there as one walks deeper into the alleys.

All assume a look of primitive simplicity, which is in stark contrast with the hustle and bustle of the metropolitan life that never seems to end in the city.

Caochang, which literally means “grass factory”, was home to many mat-weaving businesses in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

As time moved on, such problems as overpopulation, poor hygiene and obsolete facilities began to emerge.

“We have to overcome problems of narrow alleys and improve infrastructure,” said Duan Jinmei, deputy manager of Tianjie Group, which is in charge of the Caochang restoration and renovation project.

Rainwater and wastewater has been separated since 2015 to improve local hygiene and environment.

All the internet and phone cables hanging in a disorderly manner in the air were all moved underground.

As for the overpopulation, a relocation program was launched to free up more space.

The per capita living space was 5 square meters in the old times, according to Duan.

“We designed a series of settlement options for locals,” Duan said.

The residents whose houses were too small or worn-out to live in could either get compensation and buy new government-subsidized houses, or choose to move to better houses in the neighborhood, according to Duan.

As a result, there are nearly 1,000 households in the Caochang area.

Green space and logistics services have been added afterward.

Home produced waste is collected at regular intervals on a daily basis to ensure a clean environment.

A food market and barber's shop have opened to make local life more convenient.

Special care has been given to seniors who live alone, and domestic maintenance service is also available.

“Every *hutong* looks different from another,” Duan explained, adding that every detail, from the brick layout to landscaping design, is based on each *hutong*'s breadth and characteristics.

One could see historical buildings of various times in the area, such as the Huizhou guild hall carrying distinctive southern China elements.

For architecture that was completely ruined, restoration was based on its original features, Duan said.

The idea is to present the original taste of *hutong* culture.

Public chairs have been put out,

and the backs of air conditioners are covered by decorative boxes that are used to hold flowerpots.

“This way, the whole *hutong* would look very nice,” she said.

The Caochang project is part of the protection and restoration plan for the eastern part of the Qianmen area.

The eastern part covers an area of 58.6 hectares and mostly serves as a residential area. It has witnessed a lot of changes over the years and carries traditional culture of the city, including commerce, folk customs and opera.

The plan officially kicked off in 2005 and has aimed to protect local antiques and cultural heritage, and improve local living conditions.

Li Xiaojing has been living in the Caochang Sitiao Hutong for a decade. The 56-year-old moved here from the Tongle Hutong, a little north of her current home. Her old place had an area of only 12 square meters and had no kitchen or bathroom.

“The road was bumpy in the past and you could smell the public toilet from a long distance,” she recalled. “The sky was blocked by the overhead lines.”

Li now lives with her husband in a 24-square-meter room and has her own kitchen and bathroom.

She enjoys the neighborhood very much, with shopping and leisure facilities all within walking distance.

“The public toilet now is very clean and you can't smell it anymore,” she says.

“I could even fly a kite in the alley when I have time.”

## Briefly

BEIJING

### Japan's FM to begin 3-day visit to China

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono will pay an official three-day visit to China starting on Saturday, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang said on Friday.

During the visit, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Kono will co-chair the 5th China-Japan High-level Economic Dialogue in Beijing, which will be attended by officials of economic and other departments from both countries, Lu said. They will also attend the opening ceremony of China-Japan Youth Exchange Promotion Year, he added.

### Nation's air quality improves in March

Most cities in the country saw an improvement in air quality last month, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment said on Friday. In the 337 cities measured, an average of 88.3 percent of the days in March recorded good air quality, an increase of 5.1 percentage points compared to March last year. The report said the average PM2.5 density nationwide fell by 4.7 percent year-on-year to 41 micrograms per cubic meter. In the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei cluster, an average of 74.5 percent of the days in March had good air quality, up 20.8 percentage points over March last year.

HENAN

### Six confirmed dead in freight derailment

Six people, including four crew members and two villagers, were confirmed dead after a freight train owned by China's largest State-owned aluminum producer flew off the rails in Gongyi, Henan province, at 10 pm on Wednesday, according to the local publicity department. The train lost control on a railway siding due to a brake failure and collided with a house located at the end of the siding, train owner Aluminum Corporation of China Limited told Jiemian News on Thursday. The cause of the accident is under investigation.

TIBET

### Eco-friendly toilet set for Mt. Qomolangma

China is to add an eco-friendly toilet at the camp 7,028 meters up the north slope of Mount Qomolangma during the climbing season this spring, local officials told Xinhua. Similar facilities will also be installed at camps 5,200 meters, 5,800 meters and 6,500 meters up the mountain. All the toilets will be removed at the end of the climbing season. China has vowed to follow the “Leave No Trace” principle and remove all rubbish and human waste from the mountain when the season ends.

SHANGHAI

### Metropolis issues e-stamp service

Shanghai's e-government service office announced that an online e-stamp platform has been put into use for the public. The city will provide e-stamp production and management services for legal persons and individuals to satisfy the growing demand for e-signatures in electronic documents, said the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Economy and Information Technology. Enterprises and individuals can log into the e-stamp platform via either digital certificates for legal persons or real name authentication, and apply for services including producing, filing, inquiring, altering, canceling or freezing an e-signature.

CHINA DAILY — XINHUA

# Customs in Guangdong smashes international bird's nest smuggling ring

By ZHENG CAIXIONG

in Guangzhou  
zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Customs officers have seized more than 160 metric tons of smuggled bird's nests worth about 2 billion yuan (\$298 million) in a special operation.

The smuggled bird's nests were

estimated to have dodged taxes valued at more than 320 million yuan, according to a statement released by Shantou Customs in the eastern part of Guangdong province on Friday.

The special operation code-named “1901” that involved more than 200 customs and police officers was launched simultaneously

in Shantou, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province and Nanning, Pingxiang in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region in the early morning on Thursday after several months of investigations, the statement said.

A total of 18 suspects were detained on the spot after officers swooped into 25 warehouses, houses

and stores, the statement said.

“In addition to the large amount of bird's nests, many different kinds of certificates, documents, electronic evidences, bank books and cash were seized,” said the statement.

A number of bank accounts have also been frozen, the statement said.

Meanwhile, eight smuggling gangs that used to be active in

Guangdong and Fujian provinces and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region have been busted, and a special channel used to smuggle bird's nests from Southeast Asian nations to Guangxi via Vietnam was also destroyed, the statement said.

Insiders said bird's nests, which are believed to help people maintain beauty and stay young, are usually

expensive in prosperous Guangdong and other coastal areas.

Wang Sheng, director and Party chief of Shantou Customs, said officers from Shantou Customs will “spare no effort to further expand exchanges and cooperation with counterparts at home and abroad in fighting against smuggling events in the months ahead”.