

LIFE

# Virtual visits reveal museums' magic

Chinese stuck at home are traveling from afar to visit museums around the world without going anywhere but online, **Xu Lin** reports.

Chinese confined to their homes amid the outbreak have been exploring museums around the globe as virtual tours have grown in popularity during the epidemic.

They can use their phones to enjoy a range of activities whenever they wish, such as viewing photos and videos of relics, touring virtual exhibitions online, watching experts' livestreams, buying special cultural products, taking quizzes and exchanging views with others on social platforms.

Sina Weibo recently concluded its one-month activity, A Virtual Trip to Museums. Over 100 museums from home and abroad participated, and 17 offered prizes for guessing games.

Online influencers have shared their knowledge of museums and made recommendations. Numerous netizens have joined the discussions.

The activity has generated nearly 400 million views, with more than 7,000 original posts from museums, media accounts and netizens on Sina Weibo.

It has promoted museum appreciation among the public, enriched people's quarantines and working-from-home conditions, and inspired potential museum visitors.

Yuan Tai, an online influencer in the field of history, has been posting photos and introductions about museum exhibits on her Sina Weibo account, which has over 3.72 million followers.

"It's about using the advantages of the internet and microbloggers' expertise in their fields to reshape netizens' understandings of cultural artifacts and museums," Yuan says.

"You can put photos about different museums' exhibits with the same theme or from the same dynasty in one post for detailed comparisons. It tests a microblogger's expertise because you need to have your own thoughts, and these posts are very popular."

She takes as an example the ancient Shu state that existed roughly 2,600 to 4,800 years ago, with its last capital in today's Chengdu, Sichuan province.

She says one can put photos about cultural relics from Sanxingdui Museum and Jinsha Site Museum together in one post, enabling netizens to more comprehensively understand the state's great civilization.



"When you visit a brick-and-mortar museum, you can see the real cultural artifacts but can only observe them from a distance, since they're often in glass display cases. Now, you can view them more clearly via online photos and enjoy their beauty when you're confined to your house," she says.

She says the introductions on museums' nameplates are often simple. Online posts can elucidate the incredible stories behind the displays.

"During the epidemic, I take the time to sort out numerous photos that I've taken in museums at home and abroad, reminding me of the pleasant memories of my previous trips. I also learned about other

museums through social media posts," says Su Su, a travel influencer with more than 11.8 million followers on Sina Weibo.

Her most popular museum photos were of the world-celebrated destinations like the Louvre in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and some niche museums.

"Virtual museum tours nourish the mind and ease pressure, especially for people in regions where the epidemic has had a greater impact," says Mao Yan, deputy curator of Suzhou Museum in Jiangsu province.

"We've done a lot of work to digitalize our exhibits in recent years, making it easier for us to hold virtu-

al exhibitions online. Audiences can also play games, such as doing jigsaw puzzles of famous paintings on their smartphones."

She says the virtual-travel activity has encouraged the museum to put more effort into livestreams to appeal to youth. The latest plan is to regularly livestream on the video-sharing platform Bilibili to promote the museum from various aspects and to continue after the epidemic.

Audiences can witness scenes in livestreams that they can rarely see on actual trips to Suzhou Museum.

They can watch professional interpretations of curators and interviews with experts, such as those who repair ancient books or paintings, to know about muse-

ums' inner workings.

"The virtual-travel activity has helped Sichuan Museum to build its image, strengthen its communication with the public and arouse curiosity about the museum," says Zhang Heng, who's in charge of marketing of the museum in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

He says the online interactions have attracted new fans, some of whom are outside the province. Many comment that they want to actually visit the museum in the future.

"When the museum was closed, its inner operations and management continued with more procedures like increased disinfection and staff temperature checks," he says.

A magnitude-5.1 earthquake struck Chengdu in early February, and the museum's staff checked that all the relics and storehouses were safe and later announced it online.

Suzhou Museum and Chengdu Museum are among the many museums that have reopened since last week as the epidemic situation improves.

Suzhou Museum's visitors must present ID cards and health QR codes.

A robot checks their temperatures at the entrance, and another robot inside supervises tourist flows in real time to restrict the number to no more than 200.

It has trained staff, improved the booking system to limit daily visits, improved hygiene and disinfection and performed an emergency drill, Mao says.

Zhang from Sichuan Museum agrees that it's essential to restrict daily visits to lower infection risks. Staff members explain this to on-site guests and promote prevention education.

Sichuan Museum is hosting two temporary exhibitions. One shows 134 artifacts from the Italian Archaeological Park of Paestum that presents the ancient Greek period's culture. The other displays over 200 relics that Chengdu Customs has recovered from smuggling rings in recent years.

Zhang says tourists become interested in the exhibitions after learning about them online before visiting, so the museum decided to extend the shows until May 10.



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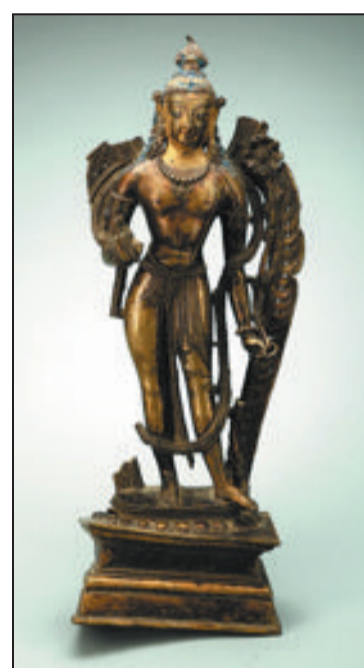
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PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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A growing number of tourism spots are reopening and travel restrictions are being loosened as the COVID-19 epidemic increasingly comes under control in China.

The National Health Commission received reports of 39 new confirmed cases on the Chinese mainland on Monday, all of which were imported. No new domestically transmitted cases were reported.

A total of eight museums, including Shenyang Palace Museum, the imperial palace of several Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) emperors, reopened to the public last week in Shenyang, capital of Northeast China's Liaoning province, after months of being shut down.

However, with the threat of cross-infection still a danger, visitors must have their temperatures checked on arrival, maintain a mutual distance of no less than 1.5 meters in lines and wear masks.

Museum authorities also took such measures as requiring real-time reservations, controlling visitor numbers and limiting opening hours to avoid overcrowding. Daily visitor numbers have been capped at 4,000.

"I feel assured by the museum's preventive measures," says Shenyang resident Zhao Yan.

"My family canceled our travel plans during the Spring Festival holiday. When the outbreak is over, we want to travel and relax."

Over 100 destinations have resumed normal operations in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Many ski resorts have exempted or halved

## Attractions continue to reopen nationwide



entrance fees to attract visitors.

Many provincial-level regions have introduced a health-code monitoring system to control people's movements.

"The tourists with green codes can make reservations online and enjoy free skiing if they stay in certain hotels," says Liang Jing, manager of Jiangjunshan ski resort.

Liang says the resort is temporarily closed to visitors who came from areas where the virus hit hard or have returned from abroad in the previous two weeks.

Most of Shanghai's top tourist

attractions and all of its libraries had resumed business as of Wednesday. In early March, Shanghai Disney Resort partially resumed operations, with each of the reopened attractions running at limited visitor capacity and reduced hours.

On Wednesday, the Ningxia Hui autonomous region issued a guideline allowing package-tour businesses among low-risk cities and counties within the region to return to normal. It also suggested allowing outdoor cultural venues, including tourist attractions and stadiums, to reopen, while indoor

theaters, ballrooms and internet bars must remain shuttered.

Tourism is among the industries hit hardest by the epidemic.



The China Tourism Academy estimates that domestic visits will drop by 932 million in 2020 while the number will plummet most sharply in the first quarter — a negative growth of 56 percent compared with 2019. Tourism-driven revenues will drop by 1.18 trillion yuan (\$166 billion) this year.

Known for its picturesque karst mountains and beautiful rivers, Yangshuo county in the Guangxi

Zhuang autonomous region on Wednesday launched six measures to assist the industry. They include exempting or reducing rents for tourism enterprises, providing subsidies for reopened sites, and cutting taxes and fees for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Shanghai has provided financial aid for culture and tourism industries, including refunding deposits for travel agencies, allocating special funds for cultural and tourism development, and providing aid for loans.

Companies and individuals in the sector also took measures to save

themselves. Livestreaming platforms and travel agencies have teamed up with attractions to make online sightseeing more accessible.

China's largest online travel agency, Trip.com, launched presale products in March, including more than 1,000 travel routes and tickets to over 300 attractions. It also started a revival plan involving 1 billion yuan for the industry with partners at home and abroad.

Xu Zihui, who owns a homestay near Huangshan Mountain, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in eastern China's Anhui province, has allowed customers to book discounted rooms for the period before June next year. She has received over 100 orders so far.

Industry experts say domestic tourism will take the lead in recovering despite the fact that the epidemic has not ended and the global tourism market is reeling.

China Tourism Academy president Dai Bin says the general management and emergency capacity of China's tourism sector have been enhanced during the epidemic prevention and control.

Jin Jianping, deputy general manager of Liaoning Tourism Investment Group, says: "The cultural and tourism industries are trying to use preferential policies to seize the opportunities presented by the upcoming holidays. Travelers will gradually come back, and the tourism market in China will enter a new phase of development after the epidemic."

XINHUA