

HOLIDAY TRAVEL

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

From city to seaside, or mountain to prairie, a growing number of Chinese tourists from a diverse range of ages and backgrounds are enjoying a wide variety of homestays and bed & breakfasts that are springing up all over the country.



Top: A guest room with bamboos and batik elements at Shuidong Rural Homestay in Kaiyang county of Guizhou province. **Above:** Guests can experience farmyard life at the homestay. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

City dwellers attracted to charm of rural idyll

By YANG FEIYUE in Beijing and YANG JUN in Guiyang
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A lotus pond, a small bridge and gentle streams greet the eyes of visitors when they arrive in Longguang village, Kaiyang county, in southwestern Guizhou province.

Rows of wooden houses face down into the valley, built into the steep mountainside.

Thanks to the county's tourist boom, Longguang has also seen an increasing number of visitors in recent years.

Chen Xingzhong had his two-story house transformed into a homestay featuring batik elements last year. The distinctive ethnic Miao costumes and works of embroidery adorning its walls also lend a local family touch to the guesthouse.

The work was undertaken by the Shuidong Rural Homestay Tourism Development, a company that specializes in turning vacant rural houses into distinctive rural homestays to meet the needs of travelers and boost the incomes of local villagers.

"This old house of mine had not been used for a while," says Chen. "Now, the house has received a face-lift, it can bring in a considerable profit every year."

Chen has made 20,000 yuan (\$2,800) so far this year from the house.

Longguang belongs to Kaiyang's Ten-Mile Gallery scenic spot, home to more than 10 villages.

The locals are mostly Miao and Buyi people. The diverse ethnic influences and languid pastoral scenery has helped to turn the

rural idyll into a tourism hot spot.

Many people now go there to enjoy rural cuisine, pick fruit and experience farming life, says Xiao Jintao, vice general manager with Shuidong.

"They can plant rice seedlings and join in with the harvest as part of their visit to Ten-Mile Gallery and Nanjiang Grand Valley," Xiao says.

"Almost every visitor tries their hand at one of these experiences when they come here."

To date, Shuidong has completed more than 40 rural houses in the scenic area.

The developer has also encouraged locals to offer other services to visitors.

Intangible culture heritage programs have been launched to offer travelers the chance to experience making local batiks and works of embroidery.

Visitors can learn about the traditional arts and make their own souvenirs.

More than 500 local villagers have benefited from the tourism boom — including Hou Junying, who now teaches batik-making in Longguang.

Every household here used to make batiks for their own use, but now locals can sell them to tourists and teach them at the same time.

"When they're happy, we're happy too," Hou says.

The 56-year-old makes 3,000 to 4,000 yuan a month through her batik and embroidery work.

As life continues to improve, Hou is now focusing on passing on local arts to young people.

"I want to prevent our traditional culture from disappearing in the future," Hou says.

Courtyard hotel offers cultural haven

By DU JUAN in Beijing
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"Let us provide an exquisite experience of ancient China with a contemporary flair," says Li Jin, 50, a local Beijing entrepreneur who manages a luxury boutique hotel in the capital's downtown.

Located within Beijing's Second Ring Road in Weijia Hutong, Dongcheng district, the Cours et Pavillons Hotel is a little hard to find thanks to its low-key entrance.

But after being greeted by one of the butlers, guests will be able to take in the hotel's unique ambience, its traditional Chinese architectural style and its exquisite attention to detail.

Entering the courtyard, visitors can't help but notice two large ceramic goldfish ponds decorated in the lustrous blue glaze of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) style. In one of the hotel rooms, a beautiful antique carpet imported from Nepal around 150 years old adorns the floor.

In the same room, sits a table made from a precious wood dating back to the Qing Dynasty. Most importantly, these objects are not just decorations or historical relics put on display — they are actually there to be used by the guests.

The hotel lobby serves afternoon tea while the restaurant provides French cuisine.

"Our hotel is a perfect mixture of Chinese and Western cultures," Li, the general manager of the hotel says. "I love travel and have been to many European countries, which made me believe that the beauty of history — no matter whether it is Chinese or Western — is something we all have in common."

"Our guests can absorb the history of this space through its layout, atmosphere and furniture," she says.

The hotel has been converted from a traditional Beijing courtyard house. With only four rooms measuring between 50 and 115 square meters, it can only accommodate up to eight adult guests at the same time.

A staff of up to 20 waiters and waitresses, as well as domestic and



A guest room at the Cours et Pavillons Hotel in Beijing. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY



A waiter serves the afternoon tea for guests at the boutique hotel. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

British-style butlers, deliver private and individually tailored services for the guests.

"We pride ourselves on providing the ultimate guest experience, and privacy is one of the important elements for our clientele," Li says.

"When they need us, we are always there. When they don't, we are 'invisible.'"

Many of my guests like to spend the day sitting on the bench in the hotel's courtyard, sipping tea and enjoying the time rather than going outside.

"Once you enter our courtyard, you are completely separated from the hustle and bustle outside. They are left only with the peaceful environment of the trees, flowers and fine food," she adds.

Rooms at the Cours et Pavillons Hotel cost between 2,200 yuan (\$315) and 5,000 yuan a night, — considerably more than the average for five-star hotel in Beijing.

However, Li was surprised to find that not just wealthy businesspeople come to stay at the hotel. An increasing number of young customers aged between 20 and 35 stay at the hotel.

"Many of the young people come to our courtyard to enjoy the French restaurant and our unique rooms," she says. "They have a strong interest in exploring traditional Chinese culture."

She believes that unique, boutique hotels are a growing industry trend with a bright future, as contemporary travelers to place greater importance on individuality and tailored experiences.

Tourists clamor for a slice of island life

By ZHANG XIAOMIN in Dalian
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More visitors are coming to Changhai County of Dalian, Liaoning province, for beautiful island scenery, delicious seafood, and even dolphin-spotting.

"We're thinking of opening regular dolphin-spotting tours next year," says Guo Chengjin, who is running a Chinese-style bed-and-breakfast business, or *minsu*, with her mother.

"In recent years, the dolphins have been seen in the local waters around April and they stay until November. It's not difficult to find them. By taking a boat trip people sometimes see pods of more than 100 dolphins," she says.

With the name of Haide Jijie, or seasons of the sea, Guo's homestay has 30 rooms near the seaside on the Dachangshan Island, one of the biggest of the 252 islands comprising Changhai County.

Changhai is located on the Yellow Sea, facing the east of the Korean Peninsula. It is the closest point to



Guo Chengjin plays with her pet dog Lala on the roof deck of the Haide Jijie in Dalian, Liaoning province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Japan and the Republic of Korea in Northeast China.

Every summer, tens of thousands of tourists vacation on the islands, making the most of local homestays, inns and hotels.

The Haide Jijie ranks highly on Ctrip, China's largest online travel agency.

"My family had a wonderful short getaway. Everyone is satisfied with our stay here. This place is like a northeastern version of Phuket, Thailand," one user writes on the Ctrip website.

"We really enjoyed the delicious and fresh seafood, especially the oysters and scallops," she adds.

Changhai is famous for its authentic and tasty seafood, including trepang (a kind of precious sea cucumber), abalone and sea urchin.

According to Guo, their *minsu* can provide set meals for guests. They can also order separately or buy fresh seafood from local markets or the fishing port to bring back to cook.

"The seafood here tastes really good. More importantly, it is of high quality and inexpensive," writes another Ctrip user, who went there twice this summer.

It's a seaside paradise, with some visitors digging clams or picking up little crabs and sea snails in the flats at low tide, while others enjoy sea fishing and boat tours.

Some, however, just want to sunbathe on the sandy beach or frolic in the ocean.

For those who prefer their animal entertainment to be based on land, Guo's pets — an Alaskan Malamute and 12 cats — love the attention of the guests at the *minsu*.



The infinity pool at Brandon Shanhaiyunsu in Jinhua, Zhejiang province blends into the nearby hills and creeks. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Mountain retreat offers a natural welcome

By MA ZHENHUAN in Jinhua, Zhejiang province
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At every organized homestay or B&B in the rustic Zhejiang villages hidden in the mountains, tourists are welcomed as family. Here you can laugh, talk, enjoy the clear air, clean water and ancient mountains, finding a retreat from the busy urban life.

Brandon Shanhaiyunsu in Jinhua is no doubt one of the best. Located at the Hengla village of Jindong district, it is nestled in the nearby hills,

making the rustic homestay a pearl among the floating clouds around the mountains.

The operator of the B&B, Zhang Jinlin decided to maintain an original Jiangnan-style design — indicative of dwellings south of the Yangtze River. Inside, visitors will find a lot of antiques and old bric-a-brac that Zhang has collected over the past 10 years, such as a wooden puppet from India, carvings from Africa, bestowing each room with its own distinctive decor.

Sitting with the window open,

you can enjoy the nearby mountain views, and a panorama of Jinhua city, which is around 10 kilometers away from the village.

Li Jin, an IT manager who works in Hangzhou, says his family has formed a habit of traveling to the retreat during weekends, especially during summertime.

"The altitude here is higher in Hangzhou, so my wife and I can find a precious cool and refreshing breeze away from the summer heat," he says. "We usually take the high-speed train, within one hour we will be in

Jinhua to start our summer holidays," he adds.

He says what impressed them most is the infinity pool, situated right in front of the B&B.

"You feel like you're being embraced by mother nature, watching the clouds drifting above, it's like swimming in the Mediterranean."

Shao Yongquan, Party head of Hengla Village, adds "All the rooms in Brandon Shanhaiyunsu and its nearby B&B are fully booked nowadays, with more farmers coming to us asking for help in building such facilities."