

The Xiaokong scenic area in Libo county, Guizhou province, is a captivating destination for nature lovers. LEI SHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Visual artists from around the world recently explored the beauty and uniqueness of Guizhou province in Southwest China at the five-day Visual@China Guizhou 2024 trip, which was jointly held by China Daily and the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Guizhou Provincial Committee. The artists used pictures, photos and videos to present and promote the region that abounds with picturesque natural scenery and cultural heritage.

GUIZHOU'S ANCIENT BEAUTY A MAGNET FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

By LI FUSHENG
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Ahead of his first trip to China in September, Benjamin Thomas Kirchner, an illustrator from Bath, England, was intrigued by the magical, fairy tale-like beauty of the country's landscape and architecture, as depicted in ancient scrolls and modern films.

Kirchner had convinced himself the landscape and buildings surely wouldn't measure up to what he imagined, but that all changed when he visited Yunshantun village in Anshun of Guizhou province. Upon seeing the 600-year-old former military post, perched high on a hill and framed by white clouds against a breathtaking blue sky, he exclaimed: "I realized that what I thought was a fantasy or an exaggerated vision of Chinese rural scenery was very much a real thing."

As an illustrator who travels a lot and whose work is regularly seen in major international publications like The New York Times and The Washington Post, Kirchner said seeing the scenery of Guizhou with his own eyes was "incredibly stimulating and inspiring" — just like the fairy tale China of his imagination. "It has been a joy to photograph and sketch the surroundings, and I know this will inspire my creative work for a long time after this visit," he said.

Kirchner was part of a recent trip called Visual@China Guizhou 2024, composed of 31 photographers, illustrators, designers and filmmakers from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, Peru, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Bhutan and China. William Adlington was another. As head of a media company in the UK, he has visited China many times, but most of his destinations are big cities. He was impressed by Yunshantun's houses and buildings, and expressed great admiration for the wood carvings and craftsmanship.

"This village is a good example of the countryside, with amazing and beautiful buildings. A very original and authentic village," Adlington said.

Villagers in Yunshantun are descendants of soldiers who were sent by the first Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) emperor to ensure regional peace, and their dialect, attire, diet and customs have changed little over the centuries. Adlington was also wowed by the Xiaokong Scenic Area in Libo county. This enchanting national park, which is included on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, is known for its unique karst landscape and magnificent water features. Xiaokong, which literally means "seven small arches", is surrounded by lush greenery and a crystal clear river, creating a dreamlike atmosphere.

Walking the narrow paths, visitors to Xiaokong are treated to breathtaking views of cascading waterfalls,

emerald pools and limestone formations. Adlington was especially impressed by the waterfalls and different species of butterflies. "I have never seen such butterflies back in the UK. For those who love nature, I would recommend they come to Guizhou," he said.

Yaoshan village, an ethnic Yao settlement in Libo, also drew praise from the international travelers. Local residents create and sell products that feature both modern aesthetic elements and their ethnic features, without having to leave parents and children behind to work in plants in big cities. Richard Max Gavrich, a professor at the California College of the Arts, praised that approach, saying it is one of the best ways to keep ethnic culture and traditions alive.

Guizhou is much more than natural scenery and ethnic charm. The mountainous province is also home to nearly half of the world's 100 highest bridges, including the Baling River Bridge, which stands 370 meters and extends approximately 2,237 meters. It has become a hot destination for extreme sports, including bungee jumping and high-altitude swings. The commercial bungee jumping site at Baling River Bridge has been certified by Guinness World Records as the world's highest.

James Anthony Gensheimer, a photographer from the US, expressed his astonishment at the development of cities in Guizhou province and said the advanced bridges and technologies were beyond his expectations. "I knew little about China and nothing about Guizhou, but by standing here, I feel it is really different from what I learn from the media," said Gensheimer.

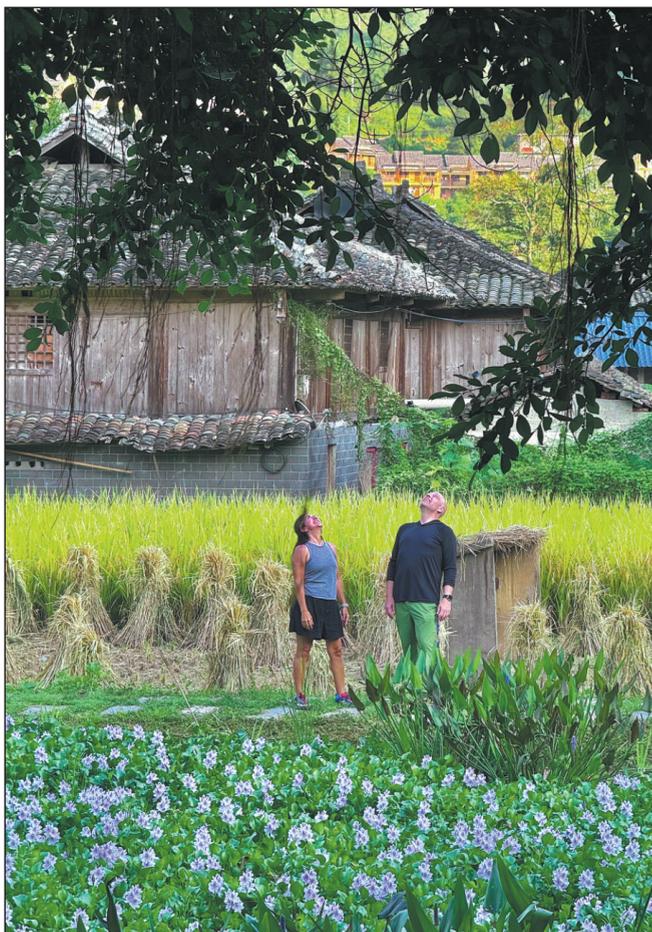
In recent months, China has rolled out several visa-free policies and measures to facilitate inbound tourism, leading to an influx of global travelers to popular destinations including Guizhou.

The inland province has sought to further expand its market presence. It has organized promotional events, focusing on culture, tourism as well as trade, in key markets, including France, the US, Canada, Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Singapore, Japan and South Korea. These initiatives have boosted cooperation between Guizhou and these important sources of tourists.

The event, Visual@China Guizhou 2024, represents an innovative exploration in visual expression and global communication by Guizhou.

Based on what they have seen and experienced in the province, the experts are creating a series of artistic works that reflect their individual styles.

Via their lens and brushes, the beauty of Guizhou, with its lush landscapes and vibrant ethnic culture, as well as its openness and vitality, will be seen by a larger audience in the world, presenting a more authentic, multidimensional, and comprehensive image of China.



Foreign guests enjoy the natural scenery in Guizhou during the Visual@China Guizhou 2024 trip. WANG WENLAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Anticlockwise from left bottom: With the meticulous arrangements of the Guiyang section at China Railway Chengdu Group, Robert Bruce Montgomery II, a documentary producer from the United States and first-time visitor to China, celebrates his 60th birthday on the Guiyang-Nanning High-speed Railway. YANG JUN / CHINA DAILY. A view from a hotel in Guizhou's Libo county. LAN HONGGUANG / FOR CHINA DAILY. Tie-dyes of the Yao ethnic group aired by residents in Libo's Yaoshan ancient village. LIU HEXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



From left: William Adlington, general manager at a UK-based media company, browses at a handicrafts stall in Yaoshan ancient village on Sept 13. ZHOU LIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY. A visitor poses in front of a waterfall in Guizhou. JAMES ANTHONY GENSHIMER / FOR CHINA DAILY



An illustration of Guizhou's Baling River Bridge by Anja Margareta Elisabeth Nolte, an illustrator from Germany. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A picture drawn by Zhao Chunging, a member of the China Artists Association, in Yaoshan ancient village in Guizhou's Libo county. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



An illustration of a visitor in Guizhou by Cristina Martinez Byvik, an illustrator from the United States. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

What they say

I think it (the most memorable thing) is the waterfall. We saw a lot of waterfalls and very green water and nice colors, shades of greens. I love to see the Chinese people. I found them very interesting and very friendly. And I love this village as well. It's very impressive for its ancient story and I saw very nice photos of, like, two children dancing in ancient times and nice costumes.

Anja Margareta Elisabeth Nolte,
illustrator from Germany



When we first arrived at Yunshan(tun) village, I looked up and there was a temple perched on top of the hill, through the gate. That was an amazing scene, an amazing sight for me.

I'd have to say (for the most memorable friend I made in Guizhou) Cristina has been nice to me. Because we both are illustrators, we have been swapping ideas and sharing our perspectives on the things that we're seeing. So, yeah, that's definitely one person. I've made many friends at this trip, but, yeah, that's definitely one person that has been fun to get to know.

Benjamin Thomas Kirchner,
illustrator from the United Kingdom



The thing that impressed me the most was the Baling River Bridge, because I'm not really a huge fan of bridges, but when I got to the bridge, it took my breath away. It was so stunning, big and beautiful. So that was my favorite thing so far (during the trip).

The person that has most impressed me or that is my friend would be Li Min, because she is another illustrator like me and we bonded over that. And her work is just beautiful and inspiring.

Cristina Martinez Byvik,
illustrator from the United States



I have taken so many pictures, so it's hard to remember which ones (images of Guizhou) would be my favorite. But what comes to mind is the most recent. This morning I went out and walked around town, and all the schoolchildren were going back to school on the back of their family motorbike. And I just always enjoy watching people ride on their motorbikes and I take lots of pictures of that. So it's just a kind of fun.

James Anthony Gensheimer,
independent photographer from the US



It's my first time in China and I was really impressed with the landscape and mountains, a passion that I have to do water color paintings. And as soon as I saw, leaving the airport, the beautiful range of mountains, I was really impressed and I wanted to get closer and see more of the landscape.

I really enjoyed seeing some of the villages and the work that is being done to restore to the original way that life was like here, back in time. And I also really enjoyed the food, the local food. I like spicy (food), I like to experiment and I like to try new things, so it was really lovely to, sometimes yidao-cai (a dish), and try different dishes.

About the friends, I made some new friends and I reconnected with friends that I met many years ago at conferences. So it was really great to meet new people.

Lucie Lacava,
design consultant from Canada



The most impressive place for me from this tour, it was the village Yunshantun. That's very, very pretty. I saw all the efforts on how to recover the ancient culture. Then this is memorable for me because you feel the vibes, the vibes of how people lived from that time, 600 years ago. It's impressive, really.

This (Guizhou) is a place where you come for the first time, but is not the last time. You have to come back again. It is a wonderful place. Really everybody will love it.

Luis Alberto Chumpitaz Gonzales,
information graphics designer from Peru



This morning when we were going to the nature park (the Xiaokong scenic area), I mean, it was so beautiful. I compare it to some of the very few things I've seen around the world that have kind of washed over me like that and really caught my attention. I'm not a big photo taker because I'm not very good at it, but I don't think I've taken that many pictures anywhere in my life. So, a few hours in the nature park with the waterfalls and just beautiful color of the river and the mountains behind it were stunning.

William Patrick Gaspard,
designer from the US

