

Stopping to visit Confucius

It is worth hopping off the Beijing-Shanghai high-speed railway to see the Great Sage's hometown, and the trip back in time should be remembered with a literary souvenir, **Pauline D Loh** reports.

On weekends, the Confucius Temple and the Kong Family Mansion in Qufu are packed with swarms of tourists in never-ending processions. Everywhere, the din from guides speaking through megaphones and the cacophony of chatter is ear-splitting. I can imagine Confucius holding his head in pain. On a July weekend after the opening of the high-speed railway linking Beijing and Shanghai, the city in Shandong province was experiencing a big increase in visitors.

All the budget hotels were booked, and we ended up staying in the best suite of a three-star hotel — the only room available if we wanted to remain within the city limits.

Its three-star ranking was, however, debatable. But fortunately for this UNESCO-listed World Cultural Heritage city, the scenario is changing. Zhang Xinjie, vice-director of the Qufu City Council publicity department, said international hotel chains had moved in as soon as Qufu was confirmed as one of the stops along the high-speed railway route.

The Shangri-La group is building a hotel, while another five-star establishment from Hong Kong has one on the drawing board. Also planned is a 5,000-room budget hostel to cater to group tours.

The city has plenty to attract visitors. Apart from the three main attractions — the Confucius Mausoleum, his temple and the Kong Family Mansion — Qufu is home to a host of historical celebrities, including China's first deified king, Huang Di (the Yellow Emperor), and his son, Shao Hao.

Shen Nong, the legendary farmer's god and the first herbologist, reputedly started his agricultural experiments here.

Guan Yu, the famed warrior of the Three Kingdoms (AD 220-280), was believed to be entombed here as well — or at least his head was given full burial honors by Cao Cao, his sworn enemy.

For history buffs, going to Qufu is like taking a walk through thousands of years to the beginning of China's recorded history.

We soon became friends of the Sage's

family. Our guide was his great-grandson of the 72nd generation. The master craftsman who carved our Nishan rock seals was also a 72nd generation great-grandson.

In Qufu, nearly 60 percent of the population has the surname Kong, after their Great Sage Ancestor, Confucius.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the sprawling Confucius family mausoleum, where generations of Kongs are buried. Even now, the various branches of the family tree still command their individual burial plots, and simple headstones among tombs are eroded by age. Exposure to the elements distinguishes the old and new.

A walk through the cemetery can reveal a lot about the family, but the slightly voyeuristic view may make a visitor uncomfortable.

The Sage's legacy lives on in the tourist attractions, a profusion of restaurants offering Confucian family cuisine, a huge liquor factory bearing the family name and countless descendants in Shandong province, throughout China and in another 118 countries, according to Qufu City Council publicity department.

It was the discovery of a seal-making shop just outside the mausoleum entrance that made my day.

Inside the rather dark shop, a small treasure trove of little rocks and chops wait to be carved into personal seals, the mark of a Chinese scholar. We admired a selection of brown Nishan rock seals, all with darker markings that suggested shapes of pine trees and mountains. Nishan (Mud Mountain) is where people



WEI FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Confucius is still remembered in rituals and ceremonies performed in the Confucian Forest in Qufu, Shandong province.

say Confucius was born. As legend has it, his mother went into labor while on the way home and gave birth in a cave by the hillside. The place has become a tourist attraction, of course, and the site of a Confucian studies center.

After you have chosen your piece of Nishan

rock, you can choose the script used to carve your name. If in doubt, consult the experts.

Our seal-master was Kong Xianhai, an award-winning craftsman with a calligraphic style that would do his ancestor proud. He chose a running script for my name, and said

it suited the rather archaic characters.

In the end, we bought seals for the whole family, fitting souvenirs from the home of the Sage. Expatriates can also ask for help in translating names, and here at least, they can be assured of a classical interpretation.

View to a thrill

By ERIK NILSSON

To learn more about Confucius and — climb one of the world's greatest mountains to boot — head to Shandong province.

Separated from Beijing by a small slice of Hebei province to the south, Shandong offers a week's worth of wonderment that is refreshingly different from the Chinese capital. Majestic mountains and splashing springs make the provincial capital, Jinan, a common launching pad for excursions throughout Shandong.

The urban sprawl of the city of 1.9 million packs the cracks among Mount Taishan's foothills, creating a cityscape in which craggy peaks compete with shiny high-rises for lordship over the skyline.

Here are five highlights:

Qufu

As the hometown of Confucius and Mencius, Qufu's main claim to fame is having shaped two sages of the ages.

Today, the tiny town of Qufu is essentially a Confucius museum where visitors can see the house he was raised, the graveyard where he was buried and the temple built to honor him.

The Confucius Temple houses several pagoda-covered inscriptions, the only dragon-carved columns found outside of the Forbidden City during ancient times and courtyards populated with centuries-old cypresses. Spanning some 220,000 square meters, the 466 buildings in this walled temple take up one-fifth of the area of the city.

At the Kong Family Mansion, visitors can see the opulence in which Confucius' descendants lived after their ancestor's destitute death.

Confucian Forest or Confucius Mausoleum

North of town in Qufu, visitors can bike the Confucian Forest. This graveyard for Confucius and his descendants spans more than 2 square kilometers and is shaded by thousands of ancient trees said to have been planted by the Sage's disciples.

Those looking to make more than a day out of Qufu can also visit the Duke of Zhou Temple (Zhougongmiao), the Duke of the State of Liang Woods (Liangonglin), the Mother of Mencius Woods (Mengmulin) and the ruins of the ancient city of the Ducal State of Lu. Travel in Qufu is best done on foot.

Qianfoshan

The summit most worthy of ascent in southern Jinan is Qianfoshan (Thousand Buddha Mountain), where tens of thousands



LI MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

An archway on Mount Taishan marks an important place in the story of Confucius. Upon reaching the spot and taking in the view, the Sage said: "The world is small!"

of Buddhas populate this 258-meter peak.

Some 23,000 stone-carved Buddhas, bodhisattvas, disciples and guardian kings lurk in Wanfo Cave — Qianfoshan's biggest burrow — alone. The southernmost cliff face is beaded with 130 carved Buddhas and pocked with the openings of the Longquan, Jile, Qianlou and Luzhu caves.

Visitors can ride a cable car most of the way up the mountainside and return to base on a sled, rocketing along an 87-meter metal half-pipe winding down the mountainside. Spring seekers have long looked to the city as an oasis in the semiarid province.

Baotu Spring

While the aquifer upon which Jinan is built spurts through the bedrock in several spots, Baotu Spring is the most famous of these once-fantastic fountains.

Industrialization and overpopulation, however, have absorbed much of Baotu Spring's momentum and for most of the year, the spring gurgles rather than gushes.

But a picturesque park built in the style of southern China and a pair of playful seals splashing in one of its pools make visiting Baotu Spring worthwhile.

Jade Emperor's Peak

Thousands of years ago, Confucius scaled Taishan and from its heights declared: "The world is small!" Today, sun worshippers flock daily to Mount Taishan's tallest summit, Jade Emperor's Peak, to see the sun rise and set from above the clouds.

According to many ancient Chinese creation myths, Taishan was the point from which the world originated. According to the legends, every day began with the sun rising from Taishan to start its westward journey across the world. Today, the mountain is still revered

as a peak for Buddhism and as a Taoist god.

Those hoping for a journey of historical proportions should follow the Imperial Route up the mountainside. Here, more than 6,000 steps snake up China's greatest topographic treasure. Carved calligraphy serves as testimonial to past cameos by China's most acclaimed literati and rulers.

Those seeking something a bit more off the beaten path can slug up the wilder Western Route. However, they'll come across few historically significant spots, aside from the Longevity Bridge, which spans a small waterfall feeding the Black Dragon Pool.

Reserved for real-deal adventurers is the treacherous Tianzhu Peak Route. This summit takes its name from the resemblance it bears to a candle, upon which stands a lone pine that is reminiscent of a flame.

This track winds under the shadows of centuries-old pines and several other peaks, including General Peak and Small Tianzhu Peak. The most impressive site found along the way is the Eight Immortals Cave.

Those who are unable or unwilling to abuse their feet can catch a bus (18 yuan, \$2.80) up the mountain to Zhongtianmen (Middle Heaven's Gate), which is also the destination point of the Western Route.

Upon reaching Zhongtianmen, visitors can take an 11-minute cable car ride over mountain valleys to Jade Emperor's Peak for 45 yuan.

The western side of Jade Emperor's Peak is a great place to watch the setting sun sinking into the clouds below. Upon taking a stone bridge eastward, travelers will find something resembling a small but bustling town.

Among the traditionally styled structures is an army of sun worshippers clad in People's Liberation Army jackets, which can be rented for as little as 5 yuan per night, to seal out the chilly mountaintop winds.

Growing renown for Changyu wines

winespecial

By ERIC JOU

The author Robert Louis Stevenson once said that "wine is bottled poetry" — verse that is beginning to transcend languages and cultures for Changyu Pioneer Wine Co.

Founded in 1892 by Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) diplomat Zhang Bishi near the tip of eastern China's Shandong Peninsula, Changyu's appellations have since traveled the globe to grace the glasses of diplomats, heads of state and business leaders.

Zhang Qihang, the winery's outreach director, said Changyu is now growing exponentially and through strict care producing increasingly fine wines.

"Changyu's grapes are of the highest quality and we adhere to very strict self-imposed regulations in our efforts to grow the best," said Zhang.

Australian Sommelier Christopher Coughlan began working at Changyu in 1997.

Now responsible for wine education, Coughlan said that over the course of his time in China he has seen Changyu grow both as a company as a winemaker.

"When I was young, Australians didn't drink wine — Australians were beer and rum drinkers, but probably in the last 25 years it has really taken off," said Coughlan. "It's now happening here."

His goal is not to just enhance the reputation of Changyu, but to drive awareness and consumption of wine in general in China.

"You can't stop baijiu Chinese liquor — it's the national drink," he says.

"But you can change the ratio of the drinks consumed," says Coughlan. "Our philosophy is to get people to drink more red wine. It doesn't matter which brand, and when they start drinking red wine, give them Changyu."

The hilly, sandy land in company's home city Yantai has proven over the past century to produce top-quality grapes.

Changyu employs about 800 local villagers to tend its 156-hectare vineyard, among them Lei Cheng, who has been working at the site for more than three years.

A farmer most of his life, Lei says the land in Yantai is ideal for growing grapes.

"We gather about 1,000 tons of grapes each harvest," said Lei. "When we have drier weather we grow some of the best because the lower water content means more sugar in the smaller, but sweeter grapes — perfect for making wine."

Both Zhang and Lei say the 2010 harvest was perhaps the best in recent memory, and believe that this year's harvest in late October will yield similar if not better results due to sparse rainfall.



Processing the harvest at Changyu.

JU CHUANJIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY