

BIG PICTURE



LAND OF STONE



Houses made of volcanic stones and giant vats for water storage. PHOTOS BY JIANG JURONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

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On the outskirts of Haikou, the capital of Hainan province, a cluster of villages is scattered around National Geological Volcano Park, on the site of a dormant volcano that last erupted about 11,500 years ago.

The name of Haikou's Shishan ("rock mountain") district comes from the volcanic rock that can be found everywhere. All the houses, walls and roads in the villages are made from it, adding a distinctive dark color to the area. The rock is porous and fairly light, which provides excellent thermal mass and insulation to keep the

interiors comfortable throughout the long hot season on the island province. After hundreds of years of rain and wind, a number of the rock houses have worn smooth on the outside.

While the volcanoes in the area provided building materials, they also make it hard to drill wells for water. Large water storage vats can be found in each house. It is said that when people settled in the area, they installed giant vats to save water, and these came to be seen as a sign of wealth.

Now the villages are largely home to elderly people, as the young move to cities. However, more visitors are being attracted to the area by the distinctive landscape and culture.



Banyan trees at the entrance to the village, under which villagers gather for leisure activities and talks.