

Island promotes small-town sojourns



The Dongzhaigang Mangrove Forest Reserve, in Haikou, Hainan province, is one of the province's scenic highlights and the country's largest mangrove forest reserve. LONG QUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Along with its beach appeal, Hainan has another side to its charm that it wants to show to the world, as **Su Zhou** and **Huang Yi-ming** reports.

The tropical island Hainan aims to be a top international tourism destination by 2020. One of the ways it intends to do this is by popularizing the natural charms of the small towns and villages scattered across the island.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1911), many Chinese ventured into Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia to make a living. When they returned from their travels in Nanyang, as the region was known, they sought to recreate elements of the lifestyles and culture they had encountered. Today, the small towns in South China's Hainan province still bear traces of their sojourns.

In Zhongyuan in Qionghai city, residents live in *qilou*, or arcade houses, enjoying their afternoons drinking coffee, eating snacks and chatting with friends. After a comprehensive upgrade in 2013, the town, full of Nanyang elements, has become a popular attraction for visitors from across the country.

Wu Jieguang who runs a Traditional Chinese Medicine clinic in Zhongyuan town has experienced the changes first-hand.

"Before, the majority of my clients were local residents in Qionghai. Now I have clients from Northeast China, who are here on vacation," said Wu.

According to the overall plan for the province's village-themed tourism industry from 2014 to 2020, Hainan will develop its villages as tourism destinations and produce souvenirs and related products related to the villages' distinct characteristics.

It is predicted that towns and villages in Hainan will receive 8 million visitors, and the indirect income they generate will be more than 2.5 billion yuan (\$390 million) by 2016.

Wang Xiaokun, director of the Hainan village-themed tourism association, said Hainan should not just focus on its appeal as an island holiday destination when developing its tourism industry.



Cycling through Sanya's rural areas is a popular way to enjoy the leisure destination. CHEN LIHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Developing tourism in the villages and towns can help the residents make a living without leaving their homes and boost the quality of life in their hometowns at the same time," he said.

"This should be one of the most important focuses for the development of Hainan's tourism industry in the next decade," he added.

A town whose name is known around the world is Bo'ao, which is home to the permanent headquarters of the Boao Forum for Asia. Since 2001, the small fishing village has slowly come alive and developed into a small city.

Despite that, it's the natural scenery of Meiya Country Park and Meiya coastal bar park that are the village's main attractions.

Another town that has benefited from its location is Tanmen.

In the last two years, the fishing port of Tanmen, located on the eastern part of the island, attracted 4,000 visitors a day on average, and more than 10,000 during the weekends, with its fresh seafood and well-known shell crafts.

Recently, the China National Tourism Administration and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development released a list of 337 model tourist

towns and villages. Zhongyuan, Bo'ao and Tanmen were included on the list; and two Hainan villages known for their ethnic cultures were also selected.

Hainan province is home to many ethnic groups, with the Li and Miao people particularly prominent on the island. The Li were the earliest settlers of Hainan, with their first-recorded appearance on the island traced back 3,000 years ago.

The distinctive Li and Miao villages have been described as untouched paradises by tourists.

Wang Yanyong, director of the Tourism Development and Planning Research Center of Beijing Jiaotong University, said beautiful villages are the mainstay of a beautiful China.

"The beauty of small towns and villages is that they remind many people of where they grew up," said Wang.

"Visiting these places allows city residents to revisit their childhoods."

"This national style can have global appeal, if these towns and villages focus on their own unique characters," added Wang.

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What they say

"Hainan Island is as good as more famous resorts in Southeast Asia. I think Hainan is even better when talking about certain tourism resources. There are direct air links with Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Russia, as well as Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and other places. We also have convenient inbound procedures with a visa-free policy covering 26 countries."

Chen Tiejun, deputy director of the Hainan Provincial Commission of Tourism Development



"Shishan town of Haikou has unique tourism resources featuring a culture based on the volcano. We will promote Shishan town and Haikou city tourism resources through the Internet, to achieve a leap forward in development."

Shi Xiangrong, chief planner with the Haikou Commission of Tourism Development



"Qionghai boasts simple folk customs and good public order. These are the two basic elements to develop village tourism. Tourists will naturally come if the local residents enjoy happy lives. Qionghai is first of all the happy home of local residents and then a resort for tourists from home and abroad."

Yang Fen, director of the Qionghai Commission of Tourism Development



"Wanning has profound tourism resources, including the blue ocean, green tropical rain forest and colorful culture. Xinglong of Wanning, is called 'the small United Nations' because it boasts many Southeast Asia elements. Riyue Bay, or the Sun and Moon Bay, is one of the best places for surfing in China. It attracts a lot of overseas visitors in the winter."

Chen Hongyue, director of the Wanning Tourism Bureau



"Sanya, as a coastal city, has abundant coastal tourism resources. In recent years, the cruise and yacht industry has enjoyed rapid growth in Sanya. A new cruise terminal will be established in 2016 to accommodate cruise ships up to 225,000 metric tons. We have more than 2,000 berths for yachts and 50 five-star hotels. Sanya offers rich and varied tourism services, including low-altitude helicopter sightseeing tours, ship cruises as well as a broad variety of land-based entertainment facilities."

Zhou Chunhua, director of the Sanya Commission of Tourism Development



First lady brings fame to Beireng

By **HUANG YIMING**
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Beireng village in Qionghai city, Hainan province, attracts many visitors due to its picturesque views, rural lifestyle and surrounding scenic spots such as the Guantang Hot Spring.

Only eight kilometers from the city center, the village won overnight fame when Peng Liyuan, President Xi Jinping's wife, and the wives of some foreign leaders visited in March.

Peng invited the first ladies who had accompanied their husbands to the Boao Forum for Asia to tour the village and enjoy coffee and local snacks at the Thatch Cafe.

"Madame Peng said the coffee I made was



Beireng village in Qionghai has gained popularity since first lady Peng Liyuan visited in March. HUANG YIMING / CHINA DAILY

delicious and reporters called it 'Madame Coffee'. It sells very well," says the cafe's owner Wang Qiuxiang.

Wang worked in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, for 17 years, but quit her job to open the cafe with an investment of 500,000 yuan (\$78,030).

In May 2014, the Qionghai city government started to rebuild Beireng village as a tourism attraction and invited experts to do the designs. There are cycling routes, farmstays, cafes and a bookstore that make visitors' experiences more colorful.

The village's new look has inspired villagers such as Wang to return to start their own businesses, and she believes her success can be an example for other residents.

In the village, 36 households are now operating businesses related to tourism, with 122 people working in tourism-related industries such as dining, bike rentals and souvenir sales. Last year, the number of visits to the village was 220,000 and the net per capita income was 25,500 yuan.

According to the village's Party branch secretary Li Zhaoliang, 80 percent of the villagers have a stake in rural tourism programs. As they can start their own businesses at home to make money, they don't want to go to big cities to be migrant workers anymore.

He said they can not only earn a monthly salary of 1,700 yuan by working at a farmstay, they can also sell homegrown vegetables and homebred chickens to the business.

Retreat to a village in the clouds

By **HUANG YIMING**
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Located at an altitude of more than 600 meters, Shihan village nestles among clouds on a mountain in Qiongzong county, in the central part of Hainan province.

With its natural scenery and ethnic cultures, it is the perfect getaway from the stresses and strains of city life.

The village has more than 300 ethnic Miao and 200 ethnic Li. It used to be the most impoverished village in the county due to inconvenient transport, remote location and a backward economy.

However, since 2009, thanks to financial support from the provincial and county governments, the village has taken on an entire new look, with the repairing of dilapidated houses and construction of public facilities such as a square, inns, fishing area and barbecue area.

Nowadays, the residents live in new houses and have extra rooms they can use as homestays.

Although many rooms have no air conditioners, the village is an ideal place to



Shihan village in Qiongzong, with its natural scenery and ethnic cultures, is the perfect getaway from the stresses of city life. HUANG YIMING / CHINA DAILY

escape the summer heat as it is cool at night due to its altitude.

The village receives about 200 visitors a day and villager Li Zhengfu said, "Sometimes there are not sufficient beds for visitors."

In all, the village offers 15 homestay rooms, with prices ranging from 80 (\$12.50) to 100 yuan per day, and two inns with 70 beds in total, with rooms priced between 80 and 198 yuan per day. Visitors can also camp in the open air for 50 yuan per night.

Wang Guomin, who owns a homestay in the village, said he hosted about 100 visitors during the Spring Festival, and made more than 5,000 yuan in one day from meals.

Travelers can enjoy authentic Miao and Li delicacies, including wild vegetables and bamboo shoots fresh from the mountain, along with rice wine.

It's also an ideal location to enjoy performances of dancing, embroidery, archery and other skills of the Miao and Li ethnic minorities.