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Located at the southern tip of the Chinese mainland, Zhanjiang in Guangdong province is a renowned seafood production region.

More than 1,000 fish species can be found in Zhanjiang and the neighboring South China Sea, with more than 30 species having high economic value.

In comparison, the number of fish species in the Yellow and Bohai seas in the north is about 250, with about a dozen having high economic value.

Compared to production sites in the temperate and cold zones, seafood produced in Zhanjiang, which is within a subtropical zone, features less fat and more protein, meaning it's more pleasant to eat and is healthier.

The city is located in an ancient volcanic zone, with rivers and streams bringing volcanic ash with rich minerals and microelements to the sea, resulting in a marine ecology featuring far more plankton than most oceanic regions.

Zhanjiang's marine ecology also features the largest mangrove area in the country, offering a unique haven for plankton, fish and other marine species.

The mangroves have played an important role in purifying the seawater, meaning seafood from Zhanjiang is among the cleanest in the country.

The pointed purple clam produced in Wuchuan is the most unique produce. The city is also the nation's leading prawn production base, ranking

MARINE HAVEN BUILDS ON ITS FRESH FOODS



first in cultivation area, output and exports. It currently accounts for about two-thirds of China's total prawn output.

Other local products that have been favored by consumers also include abalones and lobsters from Luzhou Island, an ancient volcanic site.

Based on its rich resources, a number of seafood processing enterprises have gained national and international renown.

Zhanjiang Guolian Aquatic Products Co is China's largest exporter of prawns to the United States, accounting for about 40 percent of China's exports of the product to the US.

Zhanjiang is leading the fishing and aquaculture industry in Guangdong province, with a complete industrial chain from research, breeding, cultivation, processing, storage to exports.

To showcase its high-quality seafood and enhance international cooperation, Zhanjiang will host the 2016 China International Aquatic Products Expo from July 18 to 20.

The expo is designed to build a platform for local companies to expand international markets and use international resources to upgrade the local industry.

A highlight of this year's expo is the 2016 China Seafood Procurement Fair from June 18 to 19 that is aimed to help buyers from home and abroad discuss cooperation directly with local suppliers.

There will also be a China Seafood Gourmets' Festival, where about 1,500 diners will be served every day during the festival.



Zhanjiang will organize a seafood procurement fair to market its unique seafood cuisine. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Seafood trade, skills have rich history

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Zhanjiang was one of China's earliest hubs for the ancient maritime Silk Road, according to historical documents that indicated trade with Southeast Asia and Indian Ocean-rim countries took place more than 2,000 years ago.

But archaeological findings show that production and trade in seafood began much earlier. Even today, the coastal city is remembered for its variety and high quality of seafood.

In 1982, Neolithic ruins were discovered in Zhanjiang's Suixi county. At the site, archaeologists found fossil remains of fish and shellfish species, both cooked and uncooked, as well as fishing tools, indicating seafood production there has a history of more than 7,000 years.

Production and trade developed further during the Qin (221-207 BC) and Han (202 BC-AD 220) dynasties, with the use of boats and a range of fishing tools. Oysters were among the most popular catches of that period.

In the Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279), large quantities of yellow croaker were exported to foreign countries.

During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, high-quality abalones from the region were transported to Beijing as tributes to the emperors.

Whale fishing, a highly skilled and technical trade, flourished during the period. Whale fat, which was used by nobles as lamp fuel, became another



Thousands of chefs from Zhanjiang currently work in China and abroad, according to the city government.

renowned local tribute to the royal family. The number of whaling ships surpassed 100 at the trade's peak between the late Ming and early Qing dynasties.

Fishing on the sea is still popular among local fishermen, though aquaculture has become increasingly important in seafood production.

People from Zhanjiang love the sea, seafood and fishing and their seafaring tradition has grown into an important part of the local culture that is reflected in the folk songs and poems popular among locals.

The popular folk songs are closely related to the local seafood production and the songs are embedded in everyday life. Important rituals like weddings are usually accompanied by songs about fishing.

Famous Song Dynasty poet Su Dongpo, who visited the region during his trip to Hainan, described the local life in one of his poems:

"Seafood trading is usually made by females / Wherever they gather, there is a temporary fair / There will be three to four such fairs a day as they move / And the majority of the goods are commonly seen fish and shrimps."

Zhanjiang has been the cradle of China's top seafood chefs in history. Today, thousands of chefs from the city have been working throughout China and the world, promoting their local cuisine, brands and a seafood-related culture.

Local statistics show that more than 1,000 Zhanjiang chefs are working overseas, including more than 300 in Japan.

The local catering industry has played an important role in cultivating top seafood chefs.

Zhanjiang Jinhai Hotel, for instance, has a bonus system based on customer satisfaction, encouraging them to improve skills to meet the diversified demands of clients, said Lin Jianzhong, general manager of the hotel.

Based on the city's rich and unique seafood resources, Lin said the local culinary industry has long featured a highly natural way of cooking but now has more sophisticated cooking styles.



Zhanjiang's seafood dishes exhibit the city's high standards in technique and quality.

Center markets region's range of culinary styles

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A brand development center is helping make Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, hailed as China's capital of seafood cuisines, more appealing to visitors.

The Zhanjiang Seafood Brand Development Center, since its establishment in 2011, has organized four seafood festivals in the city with the local culinary association and TV station.

The events have attracted more than 2 million visitors from Zhanjiang and across the country and generated sales revenue of 50 million yuan (\$7.63 million), according to the center.

The city's growing popularity saw the number of visitors grow by double digits year-on-year. In 2015 Zhanjiang welcomed 32.27 million tourists.

With the help of local authorities, the center has organized a number of campaigns to select top-level restaurants, chefs and signature dishes.

The rankings have helped create brands for the local seafood cuisine and make them easier for visitors to remember, said the center.

In conjunction with the local culinary association, the center has held three cooking competitions where 36 teams from across the nation showcased their seafood cooking skills.

Because Zhanjiang is known for its seafood, local culinary professionals have been invited to cook nationwide. The center said at least 10,000 Zhanjiang cooks are currently cooking seafood across the country and overseas.

The center has also organized a couple of seafood procurement fairs, attracting more than 300 professional procurers and generating combined sales revenue of more than 36 million yuan. It has also conducted brand-building exchanges with food associations from cities such as Chongqing, Liuzhou and Hong Kong.

It has built an editorial team to run a food magazine to promote the local cuisine.

As the government proposes to boost coastal tourism and the private sector, experts at the center are presenting a new plan to promote the seafood industry.

It will build a personnel team that consists of think tanks that will offer ideas for the industry's development, research institutes that can provide technical support and schools that will train managers and technicians.

The center will enhance brand-building by establishing a system of standards and registering trademarks about China's seafood capital.

It will make use of financial institutions to attract investment to boost the industry's development. Supportive facilities, such as seafood futures trading offices and intermediate agencies, will be built.

The center will also enhance its publicity and sales through forums, websites, smartphone apps and partnerships with universities.

With the help of the government, it is planning to establish an investment company to ensure that the center is operated professionally.

It also plans to start a number of projects to build a complete chain, including a seafood museum, seafood-themed restaurants, seafood supplies, seafood insurance and logistics, and a cultural park on seafood.



A seafood restaurant in Zhanjiang blends both Chinese and Western cuisines.