A winter refuge from the cold and smog

Island province proves popular with retirees, residents of northern cities hit by winter air pollution

By MA ZHIDING in Haikou
mziding@chinadaily.com.cn

City, December 11

Widespread smog in many of China’s northern cities is driving ever-larger crowds of winter tourists south to the island province of Hainan in search of cleaner air.

Located on the 19th parallel north, the same line of latitude as Kinshasa in Kinshasa, Hainan’s tropical climate has long been prized by Chinese as a winter retreat.

“The threads that smog has woven cannot be cut. The winter tourists driven up air ticket prices recently in the backbone cities of Hainan, and Sanya, a well-known resort on the southernmost part of the island,” said an official from the Haikou city government.

“Ticket sales are at times so high that prices rise by nearly 30% compared to the same period last year.”

In the past, tourists flocked to northern Chinese cities to escape the cold and smog. But as the island is now established as a tropical paradise, Chinese people as a winter resort.

“Hainan is a paradise for vacationers,” said He Dongni, vice-president and CEO of Ritz-Carlton Co, which recently opened a hotel in Haikou earlier this month.

“It is a paradise for families,” said Wang Hua, a tourism official from Haikou.

“Truly, Hainan is a paradise for food lovers—Wenchang chicken, Jaiji duck, Hele crab etc...”

Senior vacationers enjoy the sunshine in a park in Sanya, Hainan province. (Sha Xiaofeng / Xinhua)

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