



Local people perform a ritual dance for good fortune and a plentiful harvest in Daotian Park in Taiyuan. Daotian literally means rice field.
PHOTOS BY WU LIUHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Dancing in the street: Shanxi marks special Spring Festival

Taiyuan plays host to more than 150 cultural events, which attracts almost 1.5 million people



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Regions across North China's Shanxi province offered a variety of events during Spring Festival, which spanned Jan 21-27, for residents and tourists to celebrate this most important and traditional holiday in China.

In the provincial capital of Taiyuan, there were a total of 153 cultural events, both online and offline, on offer.

Snow and ice sports and other related activities in the city's Daotian Park were a highlight of the events.

Liu Yu, a resident of Taiyuan, took his son to the park on Jan 25. His 9-year-old son was immediately enticed by the sights, which transformed the park into a winter wonderland.

The pair had an enjoyable experience practicing skiing and riding snowmobiles. "That was something exciting for both the adults and children," Liu said.

This winter, Daotian Park was turned into the largest ice and snow amusement park in Taiyuan. Its more than 70,000 square meters of dedicated venues are able to accom-



Visitors take pictures with the God of Fortune and other characters in Daotian Park.

modate about 10,000 visitors to experience multiple ice and snow activities.

A huge skating rink is located near the main entrance of the park, offering an ideal venue for beginners to learn. Even those who have no skills can have fun riding sleds.

There are 20-plus ski tracks for skiing enthusiasts and there are also a number of facilities for children, like snow tubes, toboggans and sleighs.

Liu Qian is a native of Beijing. She spent this Spring Festival in Taiyuan, which is her husband's hometown.

She said when the family visited Daotian Park, her 7-year-old daugh-

ter was excited by the varieties of snow and ice sports.

"We found snow tubing was our favorite," Liu Qian said. "You don't need to control the tube, just letting it slide down and turn around randomly is a fun experience for any child."

In addition to skating and skiing, the park has other facilities for children, like carousels, slides and roller coasters.

There are also interactive shows promoting local cultural heritage, like shadow puppetry and the making of sticky rice dumplings — the signature food for Lantern Festival which falls on the 15th day of the first lunar month.

The old county seat of Taiyuan, a popular tourist attraction in the city that is also known as Old Taiyuan, was another major venue for Spring Festival celebrations.

A cultural festival is being held in Old Taiyuan from Jan 20 to Feb 5. It consists of lantern shows, a Spring Festival fair and folk art performances. Local administrators said it received more than 240,000 visits during the holiday.

The Spring Festival fair had more than 10,000 varieties of goods — which were sourced from about 100 counties, cities and districts in Shanxi — and offered many options for shoppers.

The folk arts show is an important part of the Old Taiyuan cultural festival. It shows visitors how Spring Festival was celebrated in the past times with performances of opera, dance and music featuring ancient costumes and many rituals.

Other cultural activities in Taiyuan during the holiday included an online exhibition of calligraphic works and Chinese paintings held by the Taiyuan Museum of Fine Arts, and magic shows hosted by the Taiyuan Cultural Center.

Statistics from the Taiyuan bureau of culture and tourism show that the city's tourism sites received more than 1.46 million visits during the holiday, increasing 31.8 percent from the Lunar New Year holiday in 2022.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

New Year celebrations help to highlight city's history

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Datong in northern Shanxi, a historical city known for its rich cultural assets like the Buddhist arts treasure house of Yungang Grottoes; the old city wall and moat; and a number of ancient temples; streets and blocks, is attracting tourists with its grand Spring Festival celebrations.

The series of celebratory activities started on Jan 20 and will last to Feb 22, giving tourists an opportunity to experience the unique charm of how this important traditional Chinese festival is celebrated just as it was in the past.

The ancient streets and blocks of Datong, with Huayan Buddhist Temple at its center, have dedicated a great number of venues to the celebrations.

"We have planned a total of 106 events for the celebrations," said Meng Dechang, head of the Datong bureau of culture and tourism. "And most of the activities are being held in the ancient streets and blocks, including shows of folk arts, rituals related to Lunar New Year and food-tasting events."



Performers at Huayan Buddhist Temple, which is the main venue of celebrations in Datong. ZHAO WENGUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

The city is the most attractive to visitors when night falls and colorful lights and lanterns are lit.

The lanterns, featuring auspicious patterns and animals, have attracted many visitors to take pictures. As this year is the Year of the Rabbit in China, sculptures and lanterns featuring this cute animal can be seen everywhere in Datong.

The night is also host to various shows. Under the lanterns on the streets, craftsmen gather to demonstrate their skills in making items that have been around for many centuries, like sugar paintings and flour figurines. Performances of umbrella dancing, stilt walking, land-boating and float parades have also attracted a great number of visitors.

There are also performances of local operas, telling the long and brilliant history of Datong.

Datong is an ancient city of more than 2,000 years. It was at the forefront of cultural exchanges between the farming Han people and the nomads in the north and west.

Many of its well-preserved historical relics have stood witness to the unique ethnic and cultural exchanges. The Yungang Grottoes, one of the top three Buddhist cave art venues in China, for instance, showcased how Buddhist culture and arts evolved when the religion came all the way from India to China and then went to other countries in East Asia.

Zhang Qiang, mayor of Datong, said the city was in one of the first batches of historical and cultural cities in China recognized by State authorities.

He said the city is trying to retain its historical charms by protecting its ancient cultural assets and combining historical elements with modern life.

Zhao Zhicheng and Li Qiang contributed to this story.

Cultural heritage artist a cut above the rest

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A small piece of paper-cut is one of the greatest embodiments of Chinese culture. That's what foreign student Mansour Mohamad recognized after he visited a renowned paper-cutting artist in Shanxi during the recent Spring Festival.

Mansour from Syria is a post-graduate student in Taiyuan University of Technology based in the Shanxi provincial capital of Taiyuan. He planned a visit to Zhang Ning, an inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of paper-cutting, in the county of Fushan during the Lunar New Year holiday, trying to learn about the history and culture relating to the art and to learn to do the craft himself.

When talking about the culture of paper-cutting, Zhang told Mansour that the centuries-old art has always been associated with traditional Chinese festivals.

"That's why we usually use auspicious colors and patterns to make paper-cuts," Zhang said.

He further explained that red paper is the most favored for paper-cutting as the color symbolizes prosperity and vitality in Chinese culture.

Mansour also learned some basic paper-cutting skills from Zhang. His first piece of work is the God of fortune, which he said he would

put on the wall of his dormitory. "That would ensure me a year of good fortune," he said.

Zhang is a paper-cutting artist with a provincewide reputation. Many of his works have won awards in Shanxi and have been acquired by private collectors and museums like the Shanxi Museum of Fine Arts.

He told Mansour that the secret behind a successful paper-cutter is persistent enthusiasm.

"Before I became a professional artist, I devoted almost all my spare time to this art," Zhang said. "I would draw various patterns and cut them when I was free."

He also told his guest the history of the art, saying that it can be traced back to the prehistoric period. It reached its first peak during the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties where it was frequently mentioned in poems and other literature of those periods.

The county of Fushan is known for its paper-cutting art throughout the country. It was recognized as "the hometown of paper-cutting" in 2006 by the then Ministry of Culture. Fushan's paper-cutting art was included on Shanxi's provincial list of intangible cultural heritage items in 2009.

Li Shu contributed to this story.



Mansour Mohamad visits the studio of paper-cutting artist Zhang Ning in the county of Fushan. LI SHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hopes of fast recovery as tourist figures swell

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The North China province of Shanxi welcomed a large number of tourists during the seven-day Spring Festival, demonstrating a strong recovery of the local tourism industry after three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a tourism operator.

Shanxi Cultural and Tourism Group, one of the leading tourism operators in the province, said all of the cultural tourism projects it runs received more than 150,000 visits during the holiday. As a result, its tourism revenue surpassed 15 million yuan (\$2.22 million).

In the ancient city of Pingyao, an interactive show titled Seeing Pingyao Again, which is produced by the SCTG, proved to be a draw for tourists. The show includes ancient Chinese costume parades, traditional weddings and stories about the famed Shanxi merchants. It is on the must-see list among tourists who want to have a better understanding of the city's history, according to an SCTG executive in charge of the show.

He said it, together with a related show, had received 27,300 customers, garnering a business revenue of nearly 5 million yuan during the Spring Festival holiday. "The audience and revenue num-

bers are roughly 80.5 percent that of the Spring Festival holiday before the pandemic," he added.

The Grand Courtyard of the Qiao Family, a major SCTG-operated tourist destination in Qixian county, received 14,486 tourists on Jan 26 alone.

Wang Zaipan, an SCTG executive in charge of the destination, said the number is a "big surprise," as it marked a sharp contrast to previous days.

"We were a little bit worried when we received only 428 visits on Jan 21, the Lunar New Year Eve," Wang said. "But the skyrocketing increase in the following days makes us believe we can have a fast recovery this year."

He said the number of tourists to the destination during this Spring Festival holiday is expected to grow by about 520 percent from the same period of 2022, close to the level of 2019.

The SCTG also announced that the hotels it operates received more than 23,700 guests during the holiday. Their combined business revenue amounted to 3.68 million yuan, growing 63.5 percent from the Spring Festival of 2022.

Zhang Ting contributed to this story.



Local residents perform a dragon dance on one of the ancient streets in Pingyao. LIANG SHENGGREN / FOR CHINA DAILY