

Holiday experiences a fun lesson in culture

Foreign guests from across the world invited to stay with Shanxi families over Spring Festival

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Spending Spring Festival with families in China is a fun experience for foreigners and a valuable opportunity to learn about Chinese culture.

This is especially true in North China's Shanxi province, which is renowned for its folk traditions, rituals and unique dishes, when people celebrate this most important Chinese festival.

On Jan 21, Chinese New Year's Eve, the family of Yu Yanping, a resident in the village of Dongkaizhang in Yongji city, was busy preparing a big dinner. They welcomed two foreign guests — Pinas Lloyd Lucien from Suriname, South America, and Nahla Karay from Tunisia, North Africa — to their home.

Among dishes on Yu's menu were *jiaozi* (dumplings), fried bean curd and hotpot.

"*Jiaozi* is the No 1 food for a Spring Festival Eve dinner and our local version with a beef stuffing is renowned throughout the country," Yu said. "So we are going to give a special treat to our foreign guests with beef-stuffed *jiaozi*."

The preparation of *jiaozi* during Spring Festival usually involves the participation of all family members and guests. Lloyd and Nahla joined in to make this traditional food by learning from Yu's family.

When making the dumplings, Nahla said: "I like cooking and tasting the food of various regions. And making *jiaozi* is a really fun experience."

Making *jiaozi* reminded her of preparing dishes with her family at New Year in Tunisia. She told the hosts that couscous is the signature food for New Year's Day celebrations in her home country.

Couscous is made from the North



African variety of millet. Nahla noted that Shanxi is a globally renowned producer of millet and the province has a big portfolio of food with millet as an ingredient.

Yongji is part of the southwestern Shanxi city of Yuncheng. During this Spring Festival holiday, Yuncheng invited a great number of foreign guests from countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Tunisia and Egypt to spend time with local families.

These foreigners were offered a rare opportunity to experience local lives. They enjoyed Lunar New Year dishes, watched the CCTV Spring Festival Evening Gala and took part in many traditional celebrations during the holiday.

In Hejin, another city under the administration of Yuncheng, foreign guests attended community fire-holding parades, rode in wedding wagons, learned to walk on stilts and played traditional Chinese musical instruments like the gong and drum.

One exception was Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi, which has the largest community of expatriates in the province. As such, it is common that foreigners are seen at various celebratory activities for Spring Festival.

The central Shanxi county of Pingyao is among the favored destinations for foreign tourists in Shanxi. During the recent Spring Festival holiday, it held 27 events relating to folk traditions, giving foreign visitors a glimpse into local culture with a history spanning thousands of years.

Shanxi has also promoted its Spring Festival-related culture to the world through various online platforms.

Shanxi Radio and Television Station, for instance, produced a Spring Festival program for foreign audiences, with a focus on local food. The program was shown on international social media outlets like YouTube, Twitter and Facebook.

The province also held Spring Festival celebrations in foreign countries. On Jan 14, the Shanxi Chamber of Commerce in the United Arab Emirates hosted a Spring Festival celebration in Dubai. The event included such activities as dragon and lion dances, a fashion show featuring cheongsam and Chinese-style decorated umbrellas. There was also a rabbit-themed parade performed by children to mark the Year of the Rabbit.

Chen Jiqing, chairwoman of the Shanxi CoC in the UAE, said she hoped this celebration could bring luck and fortune to all the Chinese expats in the country and help Chinese culture, especially that of Shanxi, be better known in the country.

A number of organizations for Shanxi's businesses and natives in Canada hosted a Spring Festival evening gala in the city of Toronto on Jan 27. About 500 people, including Chinese and Canadians, attended the event.

The Shanxi Chamber of Commerce in Singapore hosted a similar event on Lunar New Year's Day. More than 300 people joined the celebration.

Meanwhile, Shanxi's medical assistance teams in the African countries of Djibouti, Cameroon and Togo held Spring Festival celebrations in local communities. The medics sent gifts to local people and treated them to Chinese food like *jiaozi*.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Rallying behind shared heritage



Nearly 50 expatriates from Shanxi province and local Chinese-American gathered in Arcadia, a city in California, the United States, on Feb 4, to celebrate Chinese Lantern Festival. People at the event included octogenarians, new immigrants to the US and Chinese students in local universities and colleges. The event was organized by the Shanxi Chinese-American Association. Participants said that they are happy to see that, while playing a role in promoting the harmony of local communities by integrating with Western society, the Chinese-American and expats have made the millennia-old culture of Shanxi better known to the US people. SHANSHAN ZHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shopping streets across province come alive with influx of visitors

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The major commercial streets in Shanxi's large and medium-sized cities, especially pedestrian streets, welcomed a growing number of visitors and secured increasing revenues during the recent Spring Festival period. The results offer evidence of a strong recovery in the consumer market.

Data from the Shanxi Bureau of Commerce show the nine major pedestrian streets in Shanxi received more than 7.44 million visits and netted a combined business revenue of 520 million yuan (\$75.97 million) from Chinese New Year's Day on Jan 22 through Lantern Festival on Feb 5.

"The figures are almost on a par with those during the same period of 2019," said Guo Xiaozhong, an official at the bureau.

In China, the consumer market has been among the hardest-hit during an economic slowdown resulting from the three-year COVID-19 pandemic which began at the end of 2019 and subsided at the end of 2022, Guo said.

Shanxi has developed nine pedestrian streets over the past years, with three in the provincial capital of Taiyuan and another six in Datong, Xinzhou, Yangquan, Jincheng, Pingyao and Changzhi. The province made the developments in hopes of creating new landmarks of commerce and offsetting the impact of COVID-19.

"On Shanxi's map of commerce, the nine streets have been among the fastest to recover because of their convenient transport systems, standardized operational environments and solid reputations," Guo said.

He added that local consumption has also risen after the venues hosted a number of promotional events, including shopping festivals, food galas and exhibitions of characteristic commodities to offer



A pedestrian street in Taiyuan is crowded with visitors during the Spring Festival holiday. WU LIUHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

cost-effective options and immersive experiences to customers.

The Old County Seat of Taiyuan is both a renowned tourist destination and a favored commercial block in Taiyuan. During the Spring Festival period, its number of tourists and business revenue amount both increased about 56 percent from the same period last year.

This place is the venue where the blockbuster movie *Full River Red* was shot. The film's premiere during the holiday helped to push its daily visits to more than 10,000, according to Guo.

The Bell Tower Street, another major pedestrian street in Taiyuan, saw an even faster increase in visitors during the period.

According to local officials, the locale received 1.15 million visits during the half-month period from Lunar New Year to Lantern Festival, increasing 187 percent from the same period last year.

An official in charge of the street said Bell Tower Street is the long-standing shopping venue of Spring Festival goods for Taiyuan's local residents. He added that this year the promotional events on the

street were designed to meet both the traditional and modern tastes of shoppers.

"For the people who came to buy Spring Festival goods, there was a traditional temple fair," the official said. "There was also a fair for shoppers of fashionable goods."

Another pedestrian street in Taiyuan, Zhongzheng Tianjie, tallied 161,000 visits from Jan 21-27, up 95 percent year-on-year.

Xinzhou Old Town, a commercial block in the city of Xinzhou, received nearly 1.40 million visits from Jan 22 to Feb 5, growing 10.54 percent from the same period last year.

The Nandajie pedestrian street in Jincheng notched 1.03 million visits during the same period, increasing 50 percent year-on-year. Its total business revenue reached 35 million yuan, up 20 percent.

Guo said he believes these pedestrian streets, as well as other commercial districts in Shanxi, will see stronger growth for the rest of this year as officials further optimize measures for pandemic prevention and control.

Yan Jie contributed to this story.



Clockwise from top: Foreigners learn to write the Chinese character of *fu*, or fortune, in a community of Yuncheng. LI ZHIQIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY Expatriates play percussion instruments during a celebration in Yuncheng. WU YONGMEI / FOR CHINA DAILY Pinas Lloyd Lucien (second from right) and Nahla Karay join in making *jiaozi* dumplings at Yu Yanping's home in Yongji. LI ZHIQIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Coal and energy industries safer and cleaner thanks to tech improvements

By YUAN SHENGGAO

With the application of digital, intelligent technologies, Shanxi's coal mining and energy industries are becoming cleaner, safer and more efficient.

The Shanxi Energy Administration reported that the province now has a total of 993 coal-mining shafts with smart, connected and automatic operation.

Changcun coal mine, a subsidiary of Lu'an Chemicals Group based in the city of Changzhi, has seen its shafts included on the list.

The coal mine's operations are now mostly controlled by intelligent devices at an operational center above ground.

Bao Fuping, a foreman of one of the shafts, said coal cutting and conveying are now made possible by pushing a controlling lever at the center. "This has made our work more efficient and safer."

The provincial energy adminis-

tration's data show that about 80 percent of the coal output was produced by advanced facilities with cleaner, safer and more efficient operations.

Shanxi has been one of the leading coal producers in China. Its 2022 coal output reached 1.3 billion metric tons, ranking first in the country, according to the bureau.

It transported about 620 million tons of coal to power generation enterprises across the rest of the country last year, playing an important role in national energy security.

Shanxi's coal mining and energy enterprises are also actively responding to the nation's strategy in carbon neutrality by implementing environmentally friendly practices.

Tunlan Coal Mine, a subsidiary of Xishan Coal and Electricity Group, has devoted its efforts to environmental protection by developing a coal-transporting pipeline system to the nearby



A hydrogen production facility established by Pengfei Group in the city of Xiaoyi. LI SHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Gujiao Power Plant, which is another subsidiary of Xishan.

An executive of Tunlan said that near-mine power plants are a new trend of environmentally friendly energy production, as the short dis-

tance between the mines and plants substantially cuts coal dust pollution in transportation. "And the pollution is further reduced with our pipelines," the executive said.

Another initiative for clean and

safe energy production is the extraction and use of coal-bed methane.

Coal-bed methane is a form of natural gas and a type of clean fuel. Almost no exhaust gases are produced after coal-bed methane combustion, according to industry insiders. However, the gas presents a danger inside coal mines. It can explode if the concentration of the gas reaches 16 percent.

Safe extraction of the gas can help to prevent coal mine accidents by reducing the concentration of gas. The extracted coal-bed methane can then be used as a clean energy resource.

Shanxi is one of the provinces in China with the richest coal-bed methane resources and is a pioneer for the safe development of the gas.

Jinneng Holding Group is one of the forerunners in the field. It has operated a national laboratory for simultaneous extraction of coal and coal-bed methane. The technique is currently one of most advanced in

the industry worldwide.

"Our solutions have helped Shanxi extract a total of 128 million cubic meters of coal-bed methane in recent years," said Li Chao, a senior researcher at the lab.

In addition to upgrading its coal-mining and coal-fired power-generating facilities, Shanxi has also strengthened the development of clean energy resources like wind and solar power as well as hydrogen.

The Shanxi Energy Administration's statistics show that the province's total installed capacity of new-energy power plants reached 49 million kilowatts, accounting for 40.25 percent of Shanxi's total.

The administration has predicted that the ratio will reach 54 percent in five years and that the proportion of coal output produced by advanced facilities will reach 95 percent in the same period.

Hu Jian and Qiao Dong contributed to this story.