Suzhou special



Suzhou's elegant, easy lifestyle beckons visitors

Friendly, welcoming nature part of local character and culture

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A city with a history of 2,500 years and a noted economic boomtown of today's China, Suzhou has much that is unique to offer tourists.

Visitors to the city have the opportunity to experience both the old and new: classical gar-

dens and ancient streets that are part of a metropolis also full of modern entertainment and pleasures What makes Suzhou stand

out from other cities is its elegant and laidback lifestyle, which has become a selling point for its tourism industry. "The essence of travel, after all, is life. To find a new place



Picking fresh fruit such as plums in the suburbs of Suzhou is a new experience for many visitors to the city. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Many tourists to Suzhou line up for a boat trip on one of the many streams in the ancient city. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



and start a short period of a new life," said Zhu Guoqiang, head of the city's tourism administration. Zhu said the objective of

this innovative move is to let tourists experience authentic "Suzhou life", to present the city as a destination where visitors can share culture and make lasting memories with local residents.

Sustainable tourism

Suzhou is known for its variety of ancient buildings and other cultural relics. Tourism experts say a sustainable way to develop the city's tourism is to renovate old buildings, protect traditional culture and allow tourists to experience the authentic Suzhou lifestyle.

That lifestyle, according to Chinese traditional culture scholars, is one that features classical gardens, ancient streets and tasty Suzhou snacks.

Some 80 percent of residents in Pingjiang Road, one of many ancient streets in the city, are native residents. Urban planners devised a comprehensive renovation plan for the street and its buildings, including even the lighting, to try to maintain the traditions of the local residents.

Just as they would have done 20 or 30 years ago, children play in the street after their school days, and elderly grandmothers sell tea eggs in front of their houses. Tourists can stay at the

Pingjiang Inn, the former residence of a historic figure. Waking up to the sight and scent of spring blossoms in the yard outside their rooms, guests may feel that they are lost in time

Zhu said that visitors to the city should slow their pace and enjoy every part of Suzhou. In addition to its ancient

streets, Suzhou has classical gardens that appeal to tourists from around the world. Among its about 60 gardens,

the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Lingering Garden are listed by the State Council as two of the top four famous gardens in China. Both, together with another seven classical gardens in Suzhou, are on the UNESCO World Cul-

tural Heritage List. Cao Guangshu, deputy director of the city's gardens administration, said the classical gardens used to be private mansions and represent an ideal lifestyle. Tourists are also drawn to

Suzhou for its picturesque natural landscapes, and its healthy and laidback country lifestyle The Taihu Lake Scenic

fresh air. Sitting by the lake, enjoying a cup of local green tea, a plate of Suzhou snacks, the region's fresh fruits and the famous Yangcheng Lake crabs, tourists can find the appeals of the location hard to resist.

The Wuzhong Taihu Lake Scenic Area, officially opened in 2013, is a 5A scenic area.

Wuzhong district is also working on developing new tourist routes through villages to make the district a soughtafter resort destination.

While enjoying the sights of one of China's largest and most beautiful lakes, tourists can also experience the rustic life of the area - dining on delicious fish from the lake or picking fresh fruit such as plums in nearby orchards.

A boom in business travel is also boosting the city's tourism.

Suzhou Industrial Park was recognized as the first and only National Demonstration Area of Business Travel in 2010.

The industrial park's iconic Jinji Lake Scenic Area has picturesque natural landscapes and also advanced entertainment facilities.

There is also a business travel festival in the lake area featuring a variety of cultural activities

The industrial park is home to another two of the city's famous lakes, Yangcheng Lake and Dushu Lake. Each of these is home to a range of unique business and entertainment facilities.

Friendly service

Suzhou's residents are known for their friendly, welcoming nature and the city's tourism includes such warmth in its services.

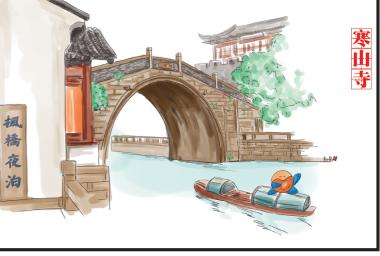
The tourism administration, cooperating with a local IC card company, has released a travel pass for tourists to the city. Visitors can swipe the pass to pay for public transportation, dining, accommodation and tickets to selected scenic spots with some discounts available.

During the 2015 World Table Tennis Championships from April 26 to May 3, the tourism administration issued a special edition of the travel pass. which is good for several tour routes

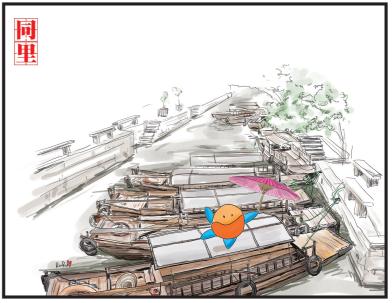
Suzhou has also extended its car rental service since last year. Tourists can rent a car when they arrive and choose their own travel routes around the city.

The tourism administration said cars could be rented at railway stations, major scenic spots and shopping malls.

Visitors can also apply online



The Maple Bridge and Cold Mountain Temple are famed because of a poem called A Night Mooring by Maple Bridge, an expression of homesickness of a lone traveler who was awakened by the temple bell on a cold, quiet night. ILLUSTRATION BY JIA RU / FOR CHINA DAILY



The town of Tongli, about 18 km from Suzhou city center, is an age-old but well preserved water township with a history of more than 1,000 years. ILLUSTRATION BY JIA RU / FOR CHINA DAILY



The local Kunqu Opera is representative of Chinese opera with its elegant style. ILLUSTRATION BY JIA RU

Foreign tourists enjoy Suzhou's local teas to experience the city's relaxing lifestyle. provided to CHINA DAIL

rea in Wuzhong district, fo instance, has recently attracted many travelers. Gao said Wuzhong district

has the "most beautiful part of the Taihu Lake", with rolling hills, lush foliage and clean,

eling to the city. With that pass, they can also receive a discount if renting a car.

The tourism administration has also issued a guidebook for self-driving travelers

'Butlers' provide customized travel services

By FU CHAO

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Ten tourists from Shandong province were the first to experience a new travel butler service recently in Suzhou. During their three-day stay, their "butlers" helped them book travel tickets, hotel rooms and restaurants and accompanied them to tourism spots as travel guides

The travel butler service, launched by local travel agency Gusu Tourism Operation Center, is a tour guide service customized for individual travelers.

In addition to booking ser-vices, the butlers also recommended tourism spots, dining options and shopping choices as requested. The butler servicvere available at all times. Unlike travel guides for group tours, the travel butler customizes travel plans to suit individual tourists and only accompany them when needed.

According to the travel agency, the current travel butlers are mainly employees of the agency, part-time workers and volunteers.

In recent years, independent

travel and customized routes are becoming more popular with domestic tourists. Wang Yuanchun, marketing director of Suzhou Shantang Cultural and Tourism Development, said data shows that 90 percent of 224,500 tourists visiting the Shantang Street Scenic Area are independent travelers.

Wang said the travel butler service has been well received among tourists and more professional butlers are needed as the independent travel market is booming.

The Gusu Tourism Opera-

tion Center started the recruitment of part-time travel butlers in March. People who love Suzhou and know a lot about the city's culture, tradition, transportation, food and tourism spots, as well as being capable of devising interesting travel routes, can apply for the position. The butler team also wel-

comes people who are passionate about traveling and exploring the city to join.

Wang said he hopes more people will join the travel butler team to help present Suzhou culture to the world.



An ink wash painting depicting the water city of Suzhou, which is likened to Venice, Italy. PROVIDED TO