



Fewer tourists make the historic village of Anchang a visitor's delight.

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Ancient pleasures await in Anchang

If you are looking for a less-crowded historical village to explore, this is the place, **Bian Yi** reports.

Spending a weekend in an ancient town near Shanghai has been a popular way for city dwellers to escape the hustle and bustle. But because of their growing popularity with overseas and domestic tours, some ancient towns like Zhouzhuang and Zhujiajiao have become too crowded to offer a real sense of escape.

Anchang, an ancient town 12 kilometers west of the city of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, with its untouched historical beauty, tranquility and elegance, is a good alternative to those overcrowded destinations.

The history of Anchang dates back more than 4,000 years when it was a muddy riverside village where locals made a living fishing and making salt. The local economy improved in 1489 during the Ming Dynasty, when the local government opened a market and promised each investor four baked cakes, a good incentive at the time.

The once-isolated fishing village

gradually developed into a trading center with clothing, and cooking oil and other agricultural processing industries. By the early days of the Republic of China, Anchang was one of the most famous towns in Shaoxing. The textile products made in the village were known throughout the country and exported overseas.

As water was the most convenient form of transportation in ancient China, the town, like other ancient towns along the Yangtze River, gradually expanded, with 17 stone bridges helping villagers cross the river. The structural pattern of the town has remained unchanged since those times.

Upon entering the town and strolling along its stone streets, visitors will see women washing clothes beside the river, ducks swimming and dogs sleeping on the doorsteps of stores — none bothered by the presence of strangers.

The typical residential buildings in Shaoxing county are

called *taimen*. They feature black tiles, white walls, stone doorsteps, stone-carved windows, several courtyards and dozens of rooms. Big families usually shared these centuries-old buildings. Judging from its scale and social status of its owner, Shi Taimen is one of the best examples and will familiarize visitors with the local architectural style. Shi Taimen was the former residence of Zhu Xieyuan, a minister in Ming Dynasty, who is also a famous historical identity in the Anchang area.

After walking and admiring the old buildings, a roadside teahouse is the perfect place to rest, snack and even nap. Some are very small, only big enough for five tables. At the teahouse where I stopped, the waiter said the house had a history of more than 300 years and even the chair where I sat was 80 years old.

On the stove there are many thermos containers. Customers can refill their cups with no limits. The teahouse also provides dishes

IF YOU GO

From Shanghai, take a train or long-distance bus to Shaoxing (30 yuan for train and 73 yuan for buses). Take bus No 118 or No 208 for the ride to Anchang. A standard room in an Anchang Hotel is about 100 yuan. Visitors can also stay in small inns or with local families for about 40 yuan for one room. Try Shaoxing wine, *niangao* and locally-made sausage.

like fried *niangao* (glutinous rice cake), cooked vegetables and dried sausages.

For just 2 yuan, I spent the whole afternoon in the teahouse, taking a short nap, listening to conversations between local villagers and watching people stroll along the riverfront.

Taking a boat to tour around the ancient town is a must. A *Wupeng* is an old-style black-roof boat that is a distinctive feature in the Shaoxing area.

Wearing a black felt hat, the 76-

year-old boatman was experienced in his craft. He controlled the speed with an oar under his feet and the direction with a rudder in one hand. The oar fluttered up and down so fast that even young people would have a hard time competing with him. The views aboard the *Wupeng* transport visitors back in time to a quieter, simpler time.

If forgetting about the worries back home and basking in traditional life is what you're looking for, Anchang will provide that experience.

Anchang also offers many traditional activities such as boat weddings, temple fairs and craft demonstrations. Visitors also have the opportunity to watch Shexi opera, a kind of village theatrical performance popular during ancient times in Shaoxing. These days there are only a few amateur opera troupes in Shaoxing. These troupes travel around villages and towns in Shaoxing throughout the year and Anchang is one of their favorite destinations.