



Pictured here is an aerial night view of Chengdu, a modern city rich in tourism resources.

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Chengdu is the land of the giant panda.

## Sichuan capital attracts with its ancient charm

By HAO NAN

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Home of giant pandas, archaeological wonders and renowned cuisine, Chengdu is a city with a wealth of tourism resources, which local leaders say are crucial to boosting the city's economy as well as gaining influence abroad.

One of China's famous historical and cultural centers, Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan province, has been recognized by the National Tourism Administration as one of the nation's best tourism destinations.

It is also the fifth Chinese observation site that the United Nations World Tourism Organization has established to promote sustainable tourism. The center gathers and reports data to measure the environmental, cultural, social and economic impacts of tourism based on the UNWTO's sustainable tourism indicators.

Of the five observation sites, Chengdu is the only urban area, and it is an important regional tourism hub for China's southwest.

A UNWTO official said they chose Chengdu to find ways tourism could slow the pace of life in a place where society and the economy are developing so quickly.

Moreover, Chengdu is also an ancient city that has never moved or changed its name during the past two millennia, which is a rarity among the developmental histories of cities worldwide.

Chengdu has a rich history and a profound cultural legacy. Its leisurely lifestyle and the idyllic scenery of rural areas also add to the allure of the city.

Chengdu is the land of the giant panda, a highly endangered species — fewer than 2,000 remain the world.

Some 10 kilometers from the downtown a giant panda breeding research center houses around 100 giant pandas in a free and simulated wild environment. It is a perfect place for people to observe and have close contact with the iconic animals.

The center also breeds other endangered species, such as the red panda and the black-necked crane.

The panda center may be mainly attractive to kids and animal lovers, but the city also has many historical relics to impress other visitors.

In 2001, the remains of the 3,000-year-old Jinsha civilization were dug out at the city's western suburb, which is widely believed to have been the capital of the ancient Shu state.

The site, covering an area of 5 square kilometers, has been hailed as one of the major archeological discoveries in China in the 21st century.

One of the unearthed Jinsha relics is a gold foil of the divine solar bird, which is now the symbol of Chengdu and its Chinese cultural heritage.

Other artifacts made from ivory, jade, bronze, gold and stone have also been found at the site, reflecting the mystery and glory of the ancient Shu state.

Chengdu is also home to Qingcheng Mountain and the Dujiangyan irrigation system. The mountain has long been recognized as the birthplace of Taoism, China's ancient indigenous religion, and Dujiangyan is considered to be the oldest functioning water-control project in the world.

According to the historical records, the Dujiangyan system was built in 256 BC by a local official to tame frequent flooding of the Minjiang River. It survived the disastrous Wenchuan earthquake almost unscathed in 2008.

These two tourist spots were both included on the list of UNESCO world heritage sites in 2000.

In addition, the city also has 17 national intangible cultural heritages and hosts the world's only related theme festival approved by the State Council.

Chengdu is also famous for its spicy, flavorful cuisine. It has more than 6,000 dishes, and its signature dish is Sichuan hotpot.

In 2010, Chengdu became the first city in Asia to be recognized by UNESCO as a "world capital of gourmet food".

# Chengdu tourism strategy pays off

### Visitors report high satisfaction as city improves services in this key industry



By ZHANG ZHAO

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For the third consecutive year, Chengdu was among the top five in a national ranking of cities based on tourist satisfaction, according to an annual survey by the China Tourism Academy.

The 2012 rankings, which were unveiled earlier this month, surveyed 60 domestic cities, and Chengdu ranked fifth after Suzhou, Shanghai, Huangshan and Nanjing. The city took fifth for the first time in 2010 and fourth in 2011.

The survey also rated Chengdu the highest among cities in the central and western region.

The local tourism authority estimated that the city received 122 million tourists over the last year, increasing 26.1 percent compared with 2011. More than 1.5 million of them were from overseas, up 27.7 percent year-on-year.

Last year, the tourism industry grew by 30 percent and generated 105 billion yuan (\$17 billion).

The government of Chengdu is working to improve tourism management, policies and services to make the city into a world-renowned sightseeing destination.

#### Driving engine

Tourism strategies have been a focal point of the city's overall development plan since 2010, when it was named as one of the nation's first pilot cities for comprehensive tourism reforms.

The tourism authority has customized policies for each tourism site in the city in addition to establishing a promotional organization and a database of major projects.

The city government also has optimized land management policies related to tourism. In 2011, it unveiled new subsidies to major tourism projects and service infrastructure.

Tourism administrations have been established in 11 counties. Top city officials and county governments are involved in the management, including resources deployment, attracting investment and marketing strategies.

Longmen Mountain and Longquan Mountain have been designated as two pilot zones for ecological tourism-based industries.

With registered capital totaling 220 million yuan and a 5-billion-yuan loan from Bank of China, the governments of six counties bordering the Longmen Mountain, together with Chengdu Culture and Tourism Group, have founded a company to develop and manage the tourism site.

The company has invested 123 million yuan in the ancient township of Pingle, a tourism attraction some 90 kilometers southwest of Chengdu. It also plans to launch another project in Jiezi town, which is estimated to be worth 1 billion yuan.

Similar companies have been founded in a number of counties and districts.

The city established information centers in South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. It does promotion and marketing in seven major overseas tourist sources, including Japan and Singapore.

High-tech approaches are also employed to enhance tourists' experience.

Thanks to cooperation between local tourism authorities and the three major Chinese telecommunication operators, tourists from outside Chengdu receive a welcome message upon arrival in the city.



Old-style homes line a quiet stream in a classic example of Chengdu's idyllic rural lifestyle.



Qingcheng Mountains, birthplace of Taoism.



Renowned Sichuan hotpot is widely available in Chengdu, the provincial capital.

Smart tourism information retrieval systems are installed in any hotel with a three-star ranking or higher. The system is supported by a database of around 400,000 entries about the city's tourism sites and related services.

In the near future, the government will focus on developing a number of competitive products for tourists, and will strive to make its tourism marketing more customer oriented.

In addition, the city plans to build a tourism call center to deal with inquiries, complaints and emergency response.

However, Chengdu is not only a city of tourism but also a burgeoning economy.

It is expected to become one of the country's economic powerhouses over the next decade, local officials say.

Considerable investment has already been drawn to the city, which now hosts more than 200 Fortune 500 companies, including IBM, Dell and Intel.

It also ranks first in the southwestern region in terms of the number of foreign banks and consulates.

Chengdu will host this year's Fortune Global Forum, making it the first southwestern venue to hold the grand event, which was previously hosted by Shanghai and Hong Kong.

## NUMBERS

### 5th

Chengdu's place in a ranking of 60 Chinese cities according to tourist satisfaction.

### 122

million

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### 105

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### 11

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### 123

million yuan

has been invested in the ancient township of Pingle, a tourism attraction southwest of Chengdu.

### 400k

entries on the city's tourism sites and related services are accessible through smart tourism information retrieval systems installed in hotels across Chengdu.