

Protecting the cultures of Guizhou's ethnic groups

By XU LIN

After two years of research by experts, Southwest China's Guizhou province has defined

17 items that represent cultures and traditions for ethnic groups that have lived in the region for generations. The items include traditional

dances, festivals, clothing and headwear.

Guizhou actually has 48 ethnic groups that comprise 38.9 percent of the province's population.

"The selection is to promote and preserve the cultures of Guizhou's ethnic groups. We will apply for patents on 17 cultural symbols for the better development of the local ethnic culture industry," said Wu Jun, director of the Guizhou Ethnic Affairs Commission.

The provincial government had invested 919.89 million yuan (\$144 million) in "cultural infrastructure" by the end of 2010 so that most ethnic peoples now have access to books and radio in their native languages.

At present, 1,349 schools and universities provide bilingual education to 15,150 students in Chinese and other languages such as Miao, Yi and Yao.

According to a policy to preserve ethnic settlements,



Participants in the games now underway in Guizhou come from diverse backgrounds. The province has 48 ethnic groups.

WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



Athletes in colorful costumes at the opening ceremony of the ninth National Traditional Ethnic Sports Games in Guizhou.

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20 ancient towns are now protected, including Xijiang, one of the largest Miao towns in China.

The Guizhou Ethnic Affairs Commission and Department of Culture are also working to preserve 500 characteristic ethnic villages along with ancient books and festivals while building museums.

Among the traditions names, two are widely known

and popular with tourists:

Yao herbal bath

The Yao people in the deep mountains have long enjoyed a form of herbal spa.

Old or young, male or female — all take a hot herbal bath in a wooden bathing bucket every day, which they believe keeps them healthy, eliminates fatigue and improves a woman's looks.

After finishing a day's labor, the first thing they do is boil

herbs in a big pot and prepare for the bath.

Guests are the first to have a bath, followed by oldest male and the oldest female. Even newborn babies are included.

Qiang New Year

On the first day of the 10th lunar month — or November — usually the Qiang people stop farming and stay at home for three to five days and make flour dough in the shape of ox,

sheep and chicken to offer as sacrifice to their ancestors and gods.

Wear newly crafted traditional clothes, they also make traditional foods, drink homemade wine in bamboo tubes, sing to urge others to drink, and play the traditional Qiang flute to celebrate the harvest.

In the night, they dance around a bonfire and young men dress up as cattle and sheep for mock fights.

Journey to the southwest: A visit to China's highest waterfall

By TIFFANY TAN

Guizhou's geography is punctuated by hills and forests, but is perhaps best known among the Chinese for having the country's highest waterfall.

The 77.8-meter Huangguoshu Falls also figures prominently in Chinese fiction as home to one of the lead characters in the classic *Journey to the West*.

Two hours by bus from the

capital Guiyang, the waterfall is part of a 450-square-kilometer cave and karst complex in the western city of Anshun.

Tour guides try to save the best for last, so visitors are taken on a roundabout route to the falls — through limestone formations amid streams and forests, as well as to a bonsai garden with numerous plant varieties.

An amusing part of the first part of the trip are the narrow stone steps jutting out

of streams with metal plates bearing the 365 days of the year.

"Find your birthday, take a photo and then make a wish," said my colleague and companion Xu Lin.

The photo ops invariably cause foot traffic jams, but fortunately the crowds in autumn aren't as big as they are in summer.

Two hours after the tour started, our group finally spotted Huangguoshu Falls, which

are named for the yellow fruit trees — or huangguoshu — that surround it.

"That's not the main waterfall, is it?" Xu asked another tourist as we got closer to the cascades.

"It is," he said. "Huh? It's quite small!" The waterfall was another victim of the drought, another colleague later explained.

Guizhou, as well as the provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi and the municipal-

ity of Chongqing, have been in need of rainfall for several months.

The drought has left more than 12.6 million people in the region short of drinking water and 3 million hectares of farmland parched, according to the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters, the nation's top drought-relief authority.

A distinctive feature of Huangguoshu Falls is

Water Curtain Cave that enables tourists to stand behind the falls and feel the water rush from the mountains to the pool below.

The 134-meter-long cave is said to be the home of the fictional Monkey King, one of the companions of the Buddhist monk Tripitaka in the comic adventure classic written during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

There's something majestic and soothing about waterfalls, no matter how big or small.

There are viewing platforms and seats along the mountain path leading to Huangguoshu, and a contemplative minute or two will make the trek worthwhile. Cranes flit on the rocks surrounding the waterfall pool, then bask in the mist, sunshine and fresh air.