



Breathtaking Tianchi Lake, or Heaven Lake, a lake which was formed in the crater of the volcano, in the Changbai Mountains.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Chagan Lake ice fishing yields an annual bounty

By YANG YAYI

Lamas wearing purple Mongolian robes arrive at frozen Chagan Lake to thundering gongs, drums and cow horns.

They are followed by Mongolian maidens holding ceremonial hada silk and heavyset fishermen clad in sheepskin coats whose horses pull sledges loaded with fishing gear.

The lamas begin chanting to ask for a good catch. They also make sacrificial offerings and burn incense as fishermen feast on cheese and wine to prepare for the annual winter fishing festival.

Located in Songyuan, Jilin province, Chagan Lake is the country's seventh-largest freshwater lake.

It is also referred to as Holy Water Lake, the only place in China where traditional Mongolian fishing methods dating back to prehistoric times are still practiced today.

The unique skills required for Chagan Lake winter fishing are now listed among the China's intangible cultural heritage.

According to Cao Baoming, deputy chairman of the Chinese Folk Artists Association, Chagan Lake winter fishing remains the only surviving fishing culture of its kind.

"The traditional fishing method has a comprehensive display of all what human beings can achieve when trying to survive," Cao says. "Its preservation is the preservation of human culture and memory."

### From prehistoric times

In the late stage of the Paleolithic period about 13,000 years ago, humans started migrating to Qingtuo Mountain near Chagan Lake. They survived by fishing and hunting.

As their society developed and the population increased, their traditional nomadic lifestyle was replaced by planting crops and raising livestock. It combines with fishing to form today's Chagan Lake culture.

Winter fishing begins around mid-December each year when the lake freezes over with meter-thick ice.

A wizened veteran fisherman signals the spot where fish schools gather and more than 400 holes are drilled 60 meters apart around the spot.

A large net 2,000 meters long is cast under the ice through holes and horses haul it in. More than 60 fishermen participate.

Local fishermen say the advantages of traditional fishing means that it doesn't damage the ecosystem. Present-day winter fishing methods using modern machines powered by gasoline can leak and pollute the water.

The holes in the net are relatively large. "It catches adult fish and smaller fry escape," said a local fisherman. "In this way we sustain the ecology and go fishing every year."

Over the past decade, the annual catch during the 20-day fishing period has averaged at least 150,000 kilograms. About 66.7 hectares of fish breeding waters sustain and promote the traditional fishing culture.

Shan Junguo, deputy secretary of the Chagan Lake Party committee for fishing, said that in recent years there has been a continual increase in fish fry released, with 800,000 kilograms released in 2011, equivalent to the winter catch.

In 2006, a Guinness World Record was set at the lake when a single net yielded 104,500 kilograms of fish. The record was broken with a 168,000-kilogram haul in 2009 — again at Chagan Lake.



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CAO BAOMING  
DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE CHINESE FOLK ARTISTS ASSOCIATION

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DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE CHAGAN LAKE PARTY COMMITTEE FOR FISHING

**The advantages of traditional fishing means that it doesn't damage the ecosystem. Present-day winter fishing methods use modern machines powered by gasoline that could leak and pollute the water."**

LOCAL FISHERMEN

# Jilin province: A winter wonderland of NE China

Northeast China offers a wide array of winter activities for cold weather enthusiasts that range from skiing to ice fishing and so much more

By YANG YAYI

Jilin province in the heart of northeast China is a wonderland of ice and snow. Literally meaning "auspicious forest", it is a kaleidoscope of colors and sounds offering visitors a wide variety of experiences that will leave behind warm memories.

### Changbai Mountains

The Changbai Mountains on the border between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has snow-wrapped peaks, steep cliffs, bubbling hot springs and rare fauna and flora that have veiled the locale in mystery and made it appealing to tourists and explorers from around the globe. Ski enthusiasts come for the slopes — snow starts falling in September and doesn't end until May.

### Rime

The ice crystals that condense on tree branches when frost meets water vapor is variously known as rime, snow willow or ice flowers. The phenomenon, common in Jilin's winters, is due to super-cold weather and surrounding warmer waters. Jilin rime is considered one of the "four natural wonders of China" together with the mountains and water of Guilin, the Stone Forest of Yunnan and the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River.

### Skiing

Jilin's ski resorts are located not far from urban centers with convenient transportation. The Beidahu Ski Resort in Jilin city is the country's largest and most advanced, and the host of the 2007 Asian Winter Games and 2012 National Winter Games.

### Winter fishing

One of the nation's 10 largest fresh water lakes, Chagan Lake in the city of Songyuan is the only place where traditional fishing methods traced back to the Liao and Jin dynasties (907-1234) are still practiced. Each year in mid-December when the lake freezes over, winter fishing begins anew. Fishermen drill holes through the thick ice and place nets underneath.

The lake has been the setting for two Guinness World Records for the biggest haul from a single fishing net. The ancient activity is listed among China's national intangible cultural heritage.

### Hot springs

Bathing in open-air hot springs with snow falling and steam spiraling upward is an invigorating experience, with minerals and beneficial elements cleansing away both dust and fatigue. Temperatures in the hot springs can range from 60 to 82 degrees Celsius, hot enough to cook eggs.

### Spring Festival customs

Spring Festival brings out the best northeast China's culture. Heart-warming activities include a cozy night's sleep on a kang — heated brick bed — along with the festive er ren zhuan song-and-dance duet, lighting fireworks, putting up red couplets on doors, offering sacrifices to the kitchen god, and wrapping dumplings and steaming buns.



### COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

- Skiing on the slopes of Beidahu Ski Resort.
- Rafting in Lushuihe, a scenic spot in Jilin, the only hunting ground in the province.
- Jilin rime is considered one of the 'four natural wonders of China'.
- Snow-capped scenery exudes a special charm in the winter.
- 'A bounty harvest in this year's winter fishing in Chagan Lake!'

