

A trip back in time

It is worth hopping off the Beijing-Shanghai high-speed railway to see the Great Sage's hometown, and the trip back in time should be remembered with a literary souvenir, **Pauline D Loh** reports.

On weekends, the Confucius Temple and the Kong Family Mansion in Qufu are packed with swarms of tourists in never-ending processions. Everywhere, the din from guides speaking through megaphones and the cacophony of chatter is ear-splitting. I can imagine Confucius holding his head in pain. On a July weekend after the opening of the high-speed railway linking Beijing and Shanghai, the city in Shandong province was experiencing a big increase in visitors.

All the budget hotels were booked, and we ended up staying in the best suite of a three-star hotel — the only room available if we wanted to remain within the city limits.

Its three-star ranking was, however, debatable. But fortunately for this UNESCO-listed World Cultural Heritage city, the scenario is changing. Zhang Xinjie, vice-director of the Qufu City Council publicity department, said international hotel chains had moved in as soon as Qufu was confirmed as one of the stops along the high-speed railway route.

The Shangri-La group is building a hotel, while another five-star establishment from Hong Kong has one on the drawing board. Also planned is a 5,000-room budget hostel to cater to group tours.

The city has plenty to attract visitors. Apart from the three main attractions — the Confucius Mausoleum, his temple and the Kong Family Mansion — Qufu is home to a host of historical celebrities, including China's first deified king, Huang Di (the Yellow Emperor), and his son, Shao Hao.

Shen Nong, the legendary farmer's god and the first herbologist, reputedly started his agricultural experiments here.

Guan Yu, the famed warrior of the Three Kingdoms (AD 220-280), was believed to be entombed here as well —

or at least his head was given full burial honors by Cao Cao, his sworn enemy.

For history buffs, going to Qufu is like taking a walk through thousands of years to the beginning of China's recorded history.

We soon became friends of the Sage's family. Our guide was his great-grandson of the 72nd generation. The master craftsman who carved our Nishan rock seals was also a 72nd generation great-grandson.

In Qufu, nearly 60 percent of the population has the surname Kong, after their Great Sage Ancestor, Confucius.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the sprawling Confucius family mausoleum, where generations of Kongs are buried. Even now, the various branches of the family tree still command their individual burial plots, and simple headstones among tombs are eroded by age. Exposure to the elements distinguishes the old and new.

A walk through the cemetery can reveal a lot about the family, but the slightly voyeuristic view may make a visitor uncomfortable.

The Sage's legacy lives on in the tourist attractions, a profusion of restaurants offering Confucian family cuisine, a huge liquor factory bearing the family name and countless descendants in Shandong province, throughout China and in another 118 countries, according



WEI FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Confucius is still remembered in rituals and ceremonies performed in the Confucian Forest in Qufu, Shandong province.

to Qufu City Council publicity department.

It was the discovery of a seal-making shop just outside the mausoleum entrance that made my day.

Inside the rather dark shop, a small treasure trove of little rocks and chops wait to be carved into personal seals, the mark of a Chinese scholar. We admired a selection of brown Nishan rock seals, all with darker markings that suggested shapes of pine trees and mountains.

Nishan (Mud Mountain) is where people say Confucius was born. As legend has it, his mother went into labor while on the way home and gave birth in a cave by the hillside. The place has become a tourist attraction, of course, and the site of a Confucian studies center.

After you have chosen your piece of Nishan rock, you can choose the script used to carve your name. If in doubt, consult the experts.

Our seal-master was Kong Xianhai, an award-winning craftsman with a calligraphic style that would do his ancestor proud. He chose a running script for my name, and said it suited the rather archaic characters.

In the end, we bought seals for the whole family, fitting souvenirs from the home of the Sage. Expatriates can also ask for help in translating names, and here at least, they can be assured of a classical interpretation.

View to a thrill

By **ERIK NILSSON**

To learn more about Confucius — and climb one of the world's greatest mountains to boot — head to Shandong province.

Shandong offers a week's worth of wonderment that is refreshingly different from the Chinese capital. Majestic mountains and splashing springs make the provincial capital, Jinan, a common launching pad for excursions throughout Shandong.

The urban sprawl of the city of 1.9 million packs the cracks among Mount Taishan's foothills, creating a cityscape in which craggy peaks compete with shiny highrises for lordship over the skyline. Here are some highlights:

Qufu

As the hometown of Confucius and Mencius, Qufu's main claim to fame is having shaped two sages of the ages.

Today, the tiny town of Qufu is essentially a Confucius museum where visitors can see the house he was raised, the graveyard where he was buried and the temple built to honor him.

The Confucius Temple houses several pagoda-covered inscriptions, the only dragon-carved columns found outside of the Forbidden City during ancient times and courtyards populated with centuries-old cypresses.

Spanning some 220,000 square meters, the 466 buildings in this walled temple take up one-fifth of the area of the city.

At the Kong Family Mansion, visitors can see the opulence in which Confucius' descendants lived after their ancestor's destitute death.

Confucian Forest (Mausoleum)

North of town in Qufu, visitors can bike the Confucian Forest. This graveyard for Confucius and his descendants spans more than 2 square kilometers and is shaded by thousands of ancient trees said to have been planted by the Sage's disciples.

Those looking to make more than a day out of Qufu can also visit the Duke of Zhou Temple (Zhougongmiao), the Duke of the State of Liang Woods (Lianggonglin), the Mother of Mencius Woods (Mengmulin) and the ruins of the ancient city of the Ducal State of Lu. Travel in Qufu is best done on foot.

Baotu Spring

While the aquifer upon which Jinan

is built spurts through the bedrock in several spots, Baotu Spring is the most famous of these once-fantastic fountains.

Industrialization and overpopulation, however, have absorbed much of Baotu Spring's momentum and for most of the year, the spring gurgles rather than gushes.

But a picturesque park built in the style of southern China and a pair of playful seals splashing in one of its pools make visiting Baotu Spring worthwhile.

Jade Emperor's Peak

Thousands of years ago, Confucius scaled Taishan and from its heights declared: "The world is small!"

Today, sun worshipers flock daily to Mount Taishan's tallest summit, Jade Emperor's Peak, to see the sun rise and set from above the clouds.

According to many ancient Chinese creation myths, Taishan was the point from which the world originated. According to the legends, every day began with the sun rising from Taishan to start its westward journey across the world. Today, the mountain is still revered as a peak for Buddhism and as a Taoist god.

Those hoping for a journey of historical proportions should follow the Imperial Route up the mountainside. Here, more than 6,000 steps snake up China's greatest topographic treasure. Carved calligraphy serves as testimonial to past cameos by China's most acclaimed literati and rulers.

Reserved for real-deal adventurers is the treacherous Tianzhu Peak Route. This summit takes its name from the resemblance it bears to a candle, upon which stands a lone pine that is reminiscent of a flame.

Those who are unable or unwilling to abuse their feet can catch a bus up the mountain to Zhongtianmen (Middle Heaven's Gate), which is also the destination point of the Western Route. From Zhongtianmen, visitors can take an 11-minute cable car ride over mountain valleys to Jade Emperor Peak.

The western side of Jade Emperor's Peak is a great place to watch the setting sun. Upon taking a stone bridge eastward, travelers will find something resembling a small but bustling town.

Among the traditionally styled structures is an army of sun worshipers clad in People's Liberation Army jackets, which can be rented for as little as 5 yuan per night, to seal out the chilly mountaintop winds.

Ripening respect for Changyu

winespecial

By **Todd Balazovic**

When Barack Obama sipped wine at his Beijing State dinner last year, observers could be forgiven for thinking he was savoring a French vintage or even a homegrown Californian shiraz.

But the U.S. President was actually relishing a wine produced in Yantai, China's answer to the Napa Valley.

Nestled between the blue waters of Bohai Bay and the sprawling mountain ranges along Shandong province's northern coast, Yantai is the nation's winemaking center and home to Changyu Pioneer Wine Co., China's oldest and largest vintner.

The city hosted the fifth Yantai International Wine Festival late September, offering Changyu the chance to stand shoulder to shoulder with some of the most revered brands from across the globe.

More than 200 exhibitors from top-wine producing countries, ranging from Australia and South Africa to Chile, traveled to Asia's only International Grape and Wine City — a title awarded by the International Office of Vine and Wine — and showcased their wines to the event's 10,000 participants.

The festival also provided Changyu an opportunity to offer a sneak peak at its latest high-end wines.

'It's definitely good'

"It's definitely good — one of the most well-known Chinese wines," said Mike Tanner, sales manager for Belvedere, an Australian wine producer and exporter.

"Chinese wine culture is changing so fast," he said. "Chinese people are starting to appreciate better wines and becoming better at winemaking techniques."

Fortunately, not all wine enthusiasts have to travel to Yantai in order to get a taste of the good stuff.

With four chateaus — two in China and two overseas in New Zealand and Canada — Changyu exports to more than 28 countries, though it may be a while before its products are a common sight on store shelves internationally.

But that's not because the product can't compete. There's simply not enough of it.

"We just don't make enough wine," said Changyu's Chief Sommelier Chris Coughlan.

But plans to boost production are already in place as Changyu pushes to meet demand.

Three more chateaus and a vast expansion in Xinjiang's fertile growing region are planned.

"It will be one of the main wine producing areas of the world," Coughlan said.

Developing the brand

Back in Yantai, Changyu is focused on developing its own brand, opting to focus on quality over quantity. With roughly a dozen vineyards peppering mountains outside the eastern coastal city, the company is doing for Yantai what zinfandel did for Napa Valley.

Changyu has spent the last decade developing its own viticulture to produce high-quality wines that can contend in the fiercely competitive international market. With more than 16,000 hectares under cultivation, 6,000 of it in Yantai, the company produces nearly a quarter of all China's wine.

About an hour's drive from Yantai's downtown district, the 155-hectare Daliuhang vineyard yields some of the company's highest-quality grapes under the watchful eye of manager Lei Cheng.

The plot is dedicated to growing what Lei calls "long dragon" grapes used to make cabernet at Changyu's Castel Chateau just a short drive down the road.



JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

Changyu's new vineyard in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Changyu's effort to grow its own grapes for high-end wines began in 1892 when founder Zhang Bishi imported more than 500,000 young vines from Europe.

Today, modern growing techniques are closely monitored to ensure the best quality, said Lei, a 50-year-old Yantai native.

Lei and his team, all contracted by Changyu, meticulously tend the vineyard perched on a range of hills overlooking Bohai Bay before harvesting more than 1,000 tons grapes to be transformed into Changyu's Cabernet Gernischt.

Later harvest

The 30-year farming veteran said the harvest date is usually more than a week later than most growers because he allows the grapes to ripen further to meet the sugar levels required by Changyu — and more sugar means higher alcohol content.

The location's combination of sand and bedrock is crucial for draining unwanted water during picking season during the relatively mild temperatures throughout October, he added.

Lei said the village is lucky to have such growing conditions, as the money brought in by contracts with Changyu has allowed the area to flourish.

He said before growing

grapes for wine production, an average family would only bring in a maximum of 20,000 yuan (\$2,941) a year.

After grape cultivation expanded to the village 10 years ago, some families are now able to earn up to 200,000 yuan a year.

Wine culture

And if the thousands of tourists visiting Changyu's Wine Museum each month — 99 percent of them Chinese — are an indicator, there has been a surprising increase in the number of locals interested in wine culture.

"Ten years ago when you came here, the average salary would probably be 400 yuan a month and a bottle of wine was 800 yuan — there weren't a lot of people who could afford it," Coughlan said.

The chief sommelier said with the average income now around 2,500 yuan a month and good imported wines selling for as little as 80 yuan a bottle, it's no longer a matter of affordability, just about educating people about wine.

"Education is all I do," Coughlan said.

"Our philosophy is to first get people to drink wine, it doesn't matter which. When they start drinking wine — those are the people that we want to target."