



Heavily festooned dragon boats race along a 1,200-meter water course lined with spectators and cheering squads.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Dynamic Duanwu Festival underway in Hangzhou

Colorful races, events at Xixi Wetland Park

By ZHUANG TI
zhuanti@chinadaily.com.cn

The fifth day of the fifth lunar month, which falls on June 23 this year, is the date of the traditional Duanwu Festival celebrated by Chinese at home and abroad with a feast of glutinous rice delicacies called *zongzi* and the colorful intensity of dragon boat races.

It is turning into a highly international event at Xixi Westland Park in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, where increasing numbers of expat teams compete in dragon boat races and foreign families enjoy a range of colorful events that enliven the senses.

Organized by the Hangzhou municipal government and its districts, the Xixi Park Dragon Boat Carnival began on June 9 and will last a month.

Called "Our Festival: Duanwu", the city of Hangzhou has organized and packaged this year's festival as a place for savoring traditional culture, promoting international exchanges, a venue for teen spirit and showtime for famed Chinese and foreign companies.

The series of creative cultural shows and exhibitions make "Our Festival" a golden time for Hangzhou tourism, said the organizing committee.

Chinese people have been celebrating the festival for thousands of years. The most-popular version of its origins says that the festival dates from the dramatic death of celebrated poet and patriot Qu Yuan during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

After he was banished by the king, the author of *The Songs of Chu* drowned himself in despair in the Miluo River in Hunan province. Upon hearing the news, nearby fishermen who loved the



The Duanwu Festival is now an internationalized event at Xixi Westland Park in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, where increasing numbers of expat teams compete in dragon boat races while foreign families enjoy a range of colorful events.

wise man and were eager to save him raced in their boats to search for him. They also threw sticky rice balls into the water to feed the fish, attempting to keep Qu's body intact.

The tradition of boat racing and *zongzi* glutinous rice dumplings was born.

Boat races

The Xixi International Dragon Boat Race enters its fifth year with 32 teams from various countries made up of employees from foreign companies and foreign residents in Hangzhou and Shanghai. The finals will be held on Saturday.

Ten teams will row dragon boats along a 1,200-meter water course lined with spectators and cheering squads. Other participants can try their hand at making *zongzi* wrapped in bamboo or tree leaves with rice and

various fillings inside.

Sixty percent of participants in this year's boat race are foreigners due to efforts by organizers leading up to the festival, which included weekend races designed for companies in Hangzhou and Shanghai to work on team building and to provide recreation.

To make a stronger single event, "Our Festival" now combines traditional Duanwu celebrations that were before held separately in Xihu and Yuhang districts.

As well, Wuchang Harbor's dragon boats race in Xixi wetlands holds an elaborate sacrifice to the Dragon King, said to be protector of fishing boats. The vibrant celebration that includes beating drums, waving flags and battle cries was placed on the list of national intangible cultural heritage in 2008.

Formal races are thought to have begun in the Tang Dynasty (AD618-907), then flourished in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) and given the royal title "Spectacular Event of Dragon Boat Race" by Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) when he visited south of the Yangtze River.

A line from a local folk song says "dragon boat racing is good for health and a celebration of harvest — watching dragon boat races is lucky, auspicious and blessed in peace".

The races in Xixi wetland differ slightly from other parts of the country with varied forms such as fully-loaded, half-loaded, bare-chested and sprinkled with water.

The boats are also rowed in various ways and speed is not the only goal. In addition to international com-



中国最佳旅游城市
The Best Tourism City of China

petitions, other races will be held for university teams and local companies. Every year the race among China's top schools welcomes new participants, and this year a competition will be added for universities based in Hangzhou.

Other activities

The festival also offers participation in the cyber world. Online surfing will reveal links to virtual boat races, free ticket offers or the chance to contribute old photos of festivals in the past.

Back in Xixi, visitors can also indulge themselves in shopping or make local products and traditional Chinese handicrafts at the Exhibition for Intangible Cultural Heritage. Students and experts from art schools will create artwork for use on the boats' dragonheads or on T-shirts. Visitors are invited to have a try.

Local artists will also show how to make the traditional scent sachets associated with the festival.

Away from the bustling crowd, a family boat ride through the wetland is offered by the Xixi Night Cruise that includes meals and drinks back on land

SPECIAL REPORT ON HANGZHOU THE BEST TOURISM CITY IN CHINA

HIGHLIGHTS

OUR FESTIVAL: DUANWU
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Opening ceremony for the 2012 Xixi Dragon Boat Cultural Festival

Time: 9:00-13:00, June 23

Location: Deep Pool scenic spot and Yanwu Court

Official launch includes performances and sacrifices to honor the festivity

2012 International Dragon Boat Race

Time: June 9-23

Location: Deep Pool and Qiangjinyang scenic spots

Competition of foreign teams

Haichuang Yuan Cup

Time: May 14- June 23

Location: University campus and Wuchang Harbor at Xixi Wetland

Competition of Chinese university teams

Creating dragon boat T-shirts

Time: June

Location: Hezhu Plaza

Artists create T-shirts, with the first 50 visitors eligible for free T-shirts

Photo exhibition of old Xixi dragon boat images

Time: June 23-July 23

Location: Great Hall at Hezhu Street

Photos submitted by residents

Making Xixi-themed scent sachets

Time: June 9-23

Location: Hezhu Street

Get your own sachet

Glutinous rice dumpling (zongzi) contest

Time: June 9-23

Location: Hezhu Street and hotels

See if you can make the best zongzi

Xixi Culture and Folk Tradition Show

Time: June 23

Location: Deep Pool and Hezhu Street

Display of traditional martial arts, Yue opera and folk arts

Photo Exhibition for Festival for Animals and Nature

Time: June 23-July 8

Location: Hong Garden

As part of the fifth Film Festival for Animals and Nature, the exhibition shows photos of animals and nature taken by celebrities to promote environmental awareness

Dragon boat-related performances

Time: Every weekend from June 10-24

Location: Square Pond at Hong Garden

Valuing and maintaining the cultural tradition

Dragon boat tour for companies

Time: June-September

Location: Second section of Xixi Wetland

Promoting Xixi's development into a training center for company dragon boat teams



Celebrating win in the boat races.