

Lijiang opens first direct flight to HK

By LI YINGQING
and GUO ANFEI in Lijiang, Yunnan

Lijiang, a prefecture-level hotspot of tourism in the northwest of Yunnan province, formally opened its first direct flight to Hong Kong on May 31, greatly shortening the travel time between the two cities.

The flight, operated by Sichuan Airlines Co Ltd, will fly every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Before the route opened, passengers from Hong Kong to Lijiang had to fly to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, or stop over neighboring cities. It takes eight hours to ride by bus on a mountainous road from Kunming to Lijiang.

Lijiang is also planning new flights to other national tourist sites and Southeast Asian countries, including Japan, Korea and Thailand.

On March 6, Lijiang airport was approved to operate as a hub airport, the third in the province after Kunming and Xishuangbanna.

The airport connects Tibet, Sichuan and Chongqing to the north; Laos, Thailand and Singapore to the south; India to the west; and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan to the east.

As early as December 2003, Lijiang had a direct chartered flight for some special tourists to Hong Kong. From January to February 2006, the city again had 18 direct chartered flights to Hong Kong. After the Lijiang airport was approved as a hub airport, Lijiang held discussions with airlines, such as China Eastern Airlines, Sichuan Airlines, Thai Airways, Orient Thai Airlines and the Korean Air Company about opening inter-



GUO ANFEI / CHINA DAILY

The Lijiang airport, which expanded recently to become the second largest airport of the province, can transport more than 4 million passengers a year.

national flights to the city.

A flight from Lijiang to Bangkok is scheduled to open by the end of June, and a route to Seoul is also being discussed.

Yang Chengxin, a senior official of the Lijiang government, said the city will improve facilities supporting the Lijiang airport and open more domestic and international flights to

make Yunnan into Southeast Asia's gateway.

The Lijiang airport, which expanded recently to become the second largest airport of the province, can transport more than 4 million passengers a year. The airport started construction in 1992 and was put into operation in July 1995.

The robust growth of Lijiang's

tourism market has been boosting the amount of air traffic. The airport transported less than 20,000 passengers in 1995, and the number has since risen to more than 2 million. And the number of routes has grown from one in 1995 to 16 in 2011.

To meet the increasing demand, Lijiang airport underwent two expansions — one in 1998 and the

second in 2007. After completing the recent expansion, the airport has a designed capacity of transporting 4.5 million passengers a year and 16,000 tons of freight.

The old terminal was transformed into an international terminal with an area of 5,300 square meters.

Lijiang is working to open flights to China's Taiwan province, Thai-

land, Korea and Japan as soon as possible and to make sure at least two international flights would open within this year. The tourist city is also considering opening flights to five UNESCO-listed World Heritage Sites, including Huangshan Mountain, Jiuzhaigou, Zhangjiajie, Guilin and the Pingyao Old Town.

By 2015, Lijiang airport will have more than 35 domestic routes and at least five international routes, local officials said. And the airport will transport more than 4 million tourists, including more than 400,000 foreign tourists, and about 20,000 tons of freight. By then, the airport will serve as a top-class airport in the Pan-Asian area.

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IF YOU GO

Airline company
Sichuan Airlines Co Ltd

Aircraft Type
Airbus 319 (A319)

Flight number and round trip time

From Lijiang to Hong Kong:
3U8519, 16:15-18:40

From Hong Kong to Lijiang:
3U8520, 20:15-22:55

Flight schedule
Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

City's natural beauty bolsters tourism industry

By ZHUANTI
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Lijiang, a popular destination in Yunnan province, plans to provide more travel services, facilities and other products to attract more visitors, especially foreigners, local tourism officials said.

Lijiang aims to increase its number of tourists from 11.8 million in 2011 to 16 million by 2015, 10 percent of whom are expected to come from foreign countries, according to a local report on tourism development during the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2011-2015).

Most foreign visitors come from Japan, Korea, the United States and European countries. Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan visitors also account for a large part.

In order to maintain a constant increase in the number of foreign visitors, the city government will expand the market by doing more promotional work in countries in South Asia, Africa and North America.

"The tourism industry plays an important role in boosting the whole economy," said



The well-preserved environment is the guarantee of local tourism and the root of development. Though many construction programs will begin soon, we must pay more attention to environmental protection."

WANG JUNZHENG
PARTY SECRETARY OF LIJIANG

Wang Junzheng, Party secretary of Lijiang. "The service sector contributed 32.8 percent of local economic growth in 2011."

"Lijiang's tourism income reached 15.2 billion yuan (\$2.39 billion) in 2011, accounting for the main portion of local revenue. By the end of 2015, it will grow to 25.7

billion yuan. Thus, its stimulating effect on economic growth will be seen," Wang said.

The city is considered a natural wonderland blessed with fresh air, clear rivers, breathtaking snow mountains and an undisturbed landscape inhabited by a friendly ethnic group. These features are expected to bring about an annual increase in visitors of 12 percent in the next three years.

The Old Town of Lijiang, a well preserved ancient town with a history going back more than 800 years, has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997 for its dramatic landscape that demonstrates different cultural traditions.

Its architecture is noteworthy for its blend of different cultural elements from a variety of eras in antiquity, and its ancient water supply system still functions effectively today.

For tourists seeking an exotic experience, a visit to the Mosuo ethnic group beside Lugu Lake is a must.

They are called the last "Kingdom of Women" on earth. People here do not have traditional marriages, and property is passed down

through women.

Tourists with a love of superlative natural scenery can take a trip to Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, which provides a majestic backdrop to the Moon-Embracing Pavilion at Black Dragon Pond.

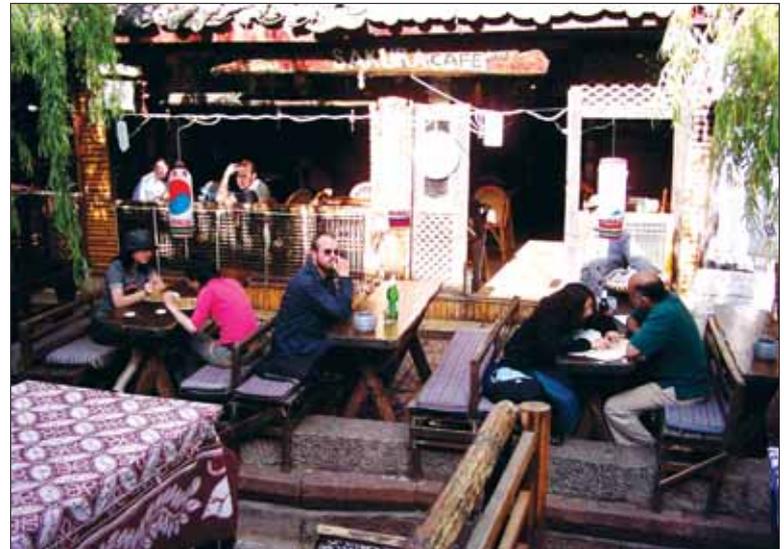
With a forward-looking view of the vital role of tourism in the city, the local government has set up new development programs to fully utilize these rich tourism resources to make the area a world-famous tourist resort.

They will optimize the tourism infrastructure over the course of the next few years. Travelers will be able to enjoy more services and products, such as relaxing in a clean environment, playing golf or participating in large meetings in the city's newly built convention centers.

"We have decided to implement a series of measures to boost local tourism," said He Lianghui, mayor of Lijiang.

Infrastructure programs aiming to further develop the current sites will begin operations, providing sound service for tourists.

Additionally, transportation



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Old Town of Lijiang attracts many domestic and foreign tourists.

infrastructure construction is under way, including airports at Lugu Lake and Lijiang Airport.

Authorities are planning more railways to connect major inland cities with this tourism city.

In cities that have direct flights to Lijiang, more promotional programs will be started. Closer cooperation with travel agencies there will provide updated information and favorable policies for travelers from these places.

"The well-preserved environment is the guarantee of local tourism and the root of development," said Wang. "Though many construction programs will begin soon, we must pay more attention to environmental protection."



Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, with an elevation of 5,596 meters, is renowned for its loftiness, magnificence and mysteriousness.