

Leshan hosts international travel expo

Focus on trade, opening-up and Silk Road cooperation

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Exhibitors from more than 40 countries and regions were in Leshan in Sichuan province on Friday for the second Sichuan International Travel Expo, one of the province's most important tourism events and one of three themed expos by the Sichuan provincial Party committee and government.

After the first travel expo in September 2014, the Sichuan government designated Emeishan, a region in Leshan city, as the event's permanent site.

Echoing the nation's Belt and Road Initiative, the expo this year, lasting through to Wednesday, focused on the theme of "tourism and trade, opening-up and cooperation — boosting the revitalization of the Silk Road Economic Belt".

Sichuan Governor Wei Hong said the provincial government attaches great importance to the development of tourism.

"We see tourism as a most important industry," Wei said. "We are building a world-class tourist destination centering on the provincial capital Chengdu."

Zhang Tong, mayor of Leshan, said the government used its experience of last year's expo to make improvements in all areas "from form to content".

With a goal to build a tourism gala with global reputation and influence, the organizing committee made efforts to build a platform for tourism products and services trade as well as industry exchange.

The city of Leshan is also expected to gain competitiveness as an international



The scene of the Sichuan International Travel Expo Center, where the travel expo is being held from last Friday to Wednesday in Leshan. CHEN XIAOYIN FOR CHINA DAILY



ars from home and abroad, as well as entrepreneurs involved in the business.

The themes of the forum and its sub-forums included integration of culture and tourism, the development of tourism in Sichuan's mountainous areas and the sustainable development of tourism. Experts and industry insiders shared ideas on the latest business trends at the forums.

A number of research results and reports were released, including China's Most Beautiful Landscape Avenue 318/317: Report on Development of Sichuan and Tibet as World Tourism Destinations, by the UNWTO; and the Report on Mountain Tourism Development — Taking Sichuan as an Example, by the PATA.

Delegates were also organized to visit some of Sichuan's best-known sites to find out more about the province's tourism industry.

There are exhibition areas for counties and districts of Leshan to showcase their tourism highlights and local specialties.

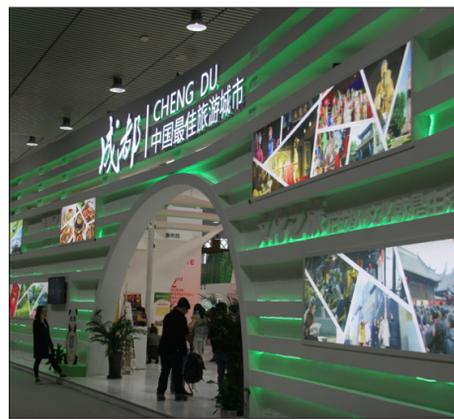
Other activities were held during the expo, including a Sichuan Food Carnival, the Leshan section of the Tour of China International Road Cycling Race, an annual Contemporary Art Exhibition, the "Mount Emei Cup" National Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition and a series of themed performances.

The expo was open to the public from Sept 27 to 30.

With smart travel highlighted in the expo, a section themed Internet Plus was set to display the results and development trends of the "Internet plus tourism" model. The event's official website offers online tours of the expo.



Left: The opening ceremony of the travel expo; center: Chengdu, capital city of Sichuan province, promotes its tourism resources at the expo; right: The 48-meter-high golden statue of Puxian on Emei Mountain, Leshan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



tourist destination with tourism contributing more to the city's economy, according to the organizers, who added that the expo allows international exhibitors to showcase their products and find

partners. A buyer team of 18 domestic and 411 overseas tourism companies was matched by a seller team of 419 companies from across the province, to have "one-on-one" trade with

total value of more than 3.5 billion yuan (\$548.5 million). Contracts worth more than 60 billion yuan were signed for projects in Sichuan, including nearly 20 billion yuan for projects in Leshan.

The province signed about 200 projects at last year's expo, covering a wide range of sectors including tourism infrastructure, cultural tourism and hotels.

The Emei Summit Forum was held as part of the expo, inviting officials from the World Tourism Organization, the Pacific Asia Travel Association and the United Nations World Travel and Tourism Council, experts and schol-

Sichuan province boasts world-class tourism resources

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Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, won the bid to host the 22nd General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Organization in 2017 at the organization's 21st general assembly in Medellin in Colombia on Sept 15.

Li Shihong, vice-minister of the National Tourism Administration of China, submitted the Chinese government's bid application to the assembly. Fu Yonglin, vice-mayor of Chengdu, made a presentation on behalf of the bid city and showed a publicity video about Chengdu. The assembly delegates unanimously passed the resolution of granting Chengdu the host rights for the next meeting. Taleb Rafai, general secretary of the World Tourism Organization awarded the resolution book to Li Jinzao, minister of the National Tourism Administration of China, at the meeting.

The meeting is held every two years and Beijing was host in 2003. Chengdu will become the second city in China to host the event.

Analysts said that the decision to hold the world's top tourism organization's general assembly in west China indicates the growing importance the international community is attaching to the fast development of the region. Successfully hosting the event is of great importance to Chengdu, and Sichuan province, in their pursuit of greater international influence, stronger tourism economy and becoming a world tourist destination.

In the first half of this year, Sichuan welcomed 1.06 million tourists from abroad, up 15.5 percent year-on-year, an 11 percent faster growth rate than the national average.

In the past 10 months, panda lovers from six European countries of Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Austria and Spain traveled about 21,000 kilometers across 13 countries on the Eurasian continent to reach Sichuan, the home of the giant panda.

The Sichuan government organized a series of promotional activities about the province's tourism, culture and business along the international trade route connecting Sichuan with Asia, the Middle East



The giant panda fans' route from Europe to Sichuan province in China

1.06
million

tourists from abroad visited Sichuan in the first half of this year, up 15.5 percent year-on-year and an 11 percent faster growth than the national average

307
billion yuan

tourist revenue in the first half of this year



Left: Panda admirers from Europe dance with the girls of the Yi ethnic group in Sichuan province; right: Panda fans from Europe take part in a driving tour from Europe to Sichuan province. They are seen here in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.



and Europe, called the Southern Silk Road. The National Tourism Administration praised the activity as "an innovative trail of tourism promotion" as it uses the ancient Silk Road to deepen mutual understanding of different cultures.

More than 120 foreign media, including Agence France Presse, the Daily Telegraph and the Times, as well as 30 domestic media outlets, including People's Daily

and Xinhua News Agency, reported on the event, which tries to send out the message that "Sichuan is more than pandas".

During the tourism promotional activities, travel agencies from Sichuan signed 10 cooperation agreements with counterparts in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey and India. The agreements are expected to bring about 40,000 foreign tourists in 210 groups to Sichuan.

Sichuan's rich tourism resources and robust tourism economy, which accounts for about 8 percent of the province's annual gross domestic product, also attracts investors. Wang Jianlin, founder and president of Wanda Group, is one of them.

"Sichuan's annual personal average tourism revenue is only about 900 yuan (\$150). There is great potential for Sichuan people to enjoy more profit from tourism with the

upgrading of the industry," said Wang. His group plans to invest about 200 billion yuan in tourism-related projects in the province.

"Losing the opportunities in Sichuan means losing the next 20 years (for investors)," said Wang during his visit to the province on April 24.

On July 23, Sichuan government hosted the first China (Sichuan) International Tourism Investment Conference, themed "Invest in Sichuan, invest in the future", in Chengdu. Twelve cities and prefectures in Sichuan signed 20 cooperation agreements, worth 39.37 billion yuan in all, with a host of tourism agencies, banks and investment enterprises.

During his keynote speech at the conference opening ceremony, Sichuan Party chief Wang Dongming pointed out that investment is still an important driving force for boosting the growth of the Chinese economy. Tourism is a promising sunrise industry, he said. Sichuan has exceptional advantages in tourism resources, so investing in the province, especially the tourism industry, is a promising investment option, he added.

Last year, Sichuan's overall tourism revenue hit 489.1 billion yuan, up 26.1 percent year-on-year. In the first half of this year, tourism revenue reached 307 billion yuan, an increase of 28.6 percent.

China is now the world's third-largest tourist destination and national tourism accounted for more than 10 percent of China's GDP last year.