

POLICY REVIEW

‘Themed’ urban blocks to lift tourism

Development of cultural and historical areas is urged to increase visitor numbers

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Urban entertainment blocks that highlight local culture, history and heritage and have themed tourist attractions are being encouraged under a new government policy.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism recently issued standards for rating tourist attractions and the establishment of leisure blocks, which will come into effect next month.

Under the policy, precincts should have distinctive cultural themes or geographical features that offer sight-seeing, dining, shopping, accommodation and entertainment, and satisfy the leisure needs of both residents and visitors.

The blocks should have effective and unified management, focus on green development and blend in with the local community, the policy said. Local culture or creative arts should constitute at least 40 percent of a precinct’s operations. Emergency response systems — such as firefighting equipment and medical facilities — must also be available.

Tourist centers, toilets and multi-language road signs should be in place to accommodate both domestic and overseas visitors, the policy said.

Blocks that receive at least 800,000 tourist visits a year will be classified as national level, while those with a minimum of 500,000 visits will be designated as provincial level.

The policy meets both the requirements of the industry and its clients, said Liu Jianming, head of the Tourism Quality Supervision and Management Institute at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

It not only helps the integration of local culture and the tourism industry, but also satisfies the diverse needs of tourists, Liu said.

Special events

Huang Gang has been working with his team on new attractions for visitors at a historical block dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) at the Qingyan ancient town in Guiyang, Guizhou province.

“We’ve launched a couple of themed events before and will refine them to find possible integration with other elements,” Huang said.

Last year, the local authority restored images of Ming warriors and staged a parade featuring Han costumes and traditional performances, which gave tourists a taste of the block’s ancient culture.

Military camps, teahouses and taverns with Ming Dynasty elements were erected, while a Peking Opera, acrobatics, *guzheng* (Chinese zither) and puppetry performances were staged to spice up the visitor experience for tourists.

Huang believes their initiatives are on the right track and in line with the ministry’s new policy.

Last October, development of national tourism and leisure cities and blocks with distinctive cultural



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

characteristics was proposed as a long-range goal for 2035 and passed at the fifth plenary session of the 19th Communist Party of China’s Central Committee.

According to the new policy, tourism and leisure blocks should also seek to attract foreign tourists for repeat visits. It also attaches great importance to the development of night tourism and requires that more than 80 percent of business operations stay open till 9 pm during peak tourism seasons.

Liu said that tourism and leisure blocks should tap into their special identities and make full use of their histories, cultural heritage and geological features to attract tourists.

The Qingyan town authority, for instance, has invested in the restora-

tion of historical buildings and temples, and the Ming block development has helped it welcome 1 million tourists since last August.

Capital improvements

Beijing implemented its history and cultural protection regulation at the beginning of this month. Historical blocks, architecture and *hutong*, or alleys, all fall under the regulation.

Ling Ming, deputy chief of the Beijing Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage, said the leisure environment in the southern section of Beijing has been upgraded through relocation of cultural relics, restoration work and environmental improvements.

The city will next try to utilize its cultural relic exhibitions, protect its

historical blocks and upgrade urban areas to attract visitors, Ling said.

The regulation also encourages historical buildings to house libraries, museums, bookstores and cultural heritage exhibitions.

At 751 D-Park in Beijing’s Chaoyang district, a block featuring trains has been developed to mark its industrial heritage. Three trains with 20 compartments were introduced to the block in 2019, which was once a site for coal hauling.

Yan Mingdan, deputy general manager of the park, said, “We combined the original railway track with the green train cars and built a fashionable block for cultural consumption.”

Along with other industrial relics, such as pipelines, storage tanks and factories, the trains have add-

ed to the park’s industrial landscape and managed to draw younger visitors, Yan said. Visitors can enjoy music, food and beverages, watch films in the train compartments and browse in shops offering vintage wares.

The block stages about 500 events a year and attracts 2 million visitors annually, Yan said. The park is now in discussions with well-known businesses to try and settle in the precinct, and more trains will soon be added to the attractions, Yan said.

Liu Min, a professor at the Tourism College of Beijing Union University, said the policy comes at a time when there is a need to transform the domestic tourism market and leisure block development needs to be standardized.

Quality rating system will help preserve culture at tourist sites

By HE YUN’AO



He Yun’ao

China’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism was established in 2018 to better plan and regulate the country’s cultural and tourism development. However, culture and tourism have been tandem concepts long before they were brought together in governmental structure.

After all, without its unique culture and history, why would tourists come?

However, many Chinese people once complained that some tourist areas that are supposed to represent the nation’s diverse cultures in different regions look too similar.

Every place, every city, has its own cultural characteristics that have been shaped by history, based on how local people have lived alongside specific geographic conditions, resources and other elements.

If these characteristics are mimicked or even duplicated in other places merely to boost tourism, they cease to be unique.

In the upcoming quality rating system of (national-level and provincial-level) leisure street blocks for tourism, which is set by the ministry, several points deserve our particular attention.

Managers of tourism in these street blocks are urged to explore cultural characteristics and integrate them into different tourism experiences. Specific symbols should be displayed on each of these streets to showcase their unique cultural landscape.

Exhibitions of intangible cultural heritages — including local festivals as well as performances, foods and products that depict a city’s traditional lifestyle and folklore — are also required in the rating system.

The impending implementation of the system reflects the trend in recent years of highlighting cultural

heritages. We have seen a systematic plan to enhance their importance in the country’s overall development, particularly after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

Archaeologists, historians and cultural heritage experts now have more say in the planning of tourism areas, which used to be dominated by architects, artists and urban planners.

A project developing a historical neighborhood into a tourism area should be complex and requires interdisciplinary research instead of fully relying on opinions from one field. It cannot be treated as a pure business.

Consequently, in many recent projects for tourism development, a principle of minimum intervention was the standard during renovations of old structures. With stronger support from national policies, many of our once “impractical ideas” can now be realized.

The basic ideas are to provide

strong protection of an original culture and improve a tourist area’s environment and service facilities, not to create a new look that follows certain popular elements in traditional culture.

Suzhou in Jiangsu province is a good example. The ancient gardens, which are UNESCO World Heritage sites, are not the only reason tourists go there. When you wander around the ancient streets, you can see they are renovated, but the old look of the bricks and tiles remain. Furthermore, you can see the local people’s traditional lifestyle in the communities.

Authenticity is the key. When real history is there, tourists will naturally come.

If culture is the soul, tourism is the body. We don’t want a body without a soul, nor a soul without a body. How to revitalize traditional Chinese culture through tourism is a focus for us researchers and conservators of the heritages.

Apart from tourism spots in cities,

such as the leisure streets in historical neighborhoods, the next step is to focus on how to turn rich cultures in rural areas into popular destinations.

In the past, developing tourism in villages was often left to real estate developers or tourism companies. When villagers moved to new residential communities, certain aspects were duplicated in each place.

But going forward, I think scholars of history from colleges and research institutes will participate more often in such development and scientifically draft their tailored plans to respect local culture. Current emphasis on rural vitalization in our country gives many opportunities for exploration.

He Yun’ao is a member of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, a professor at the School of History of Nanjing University.

Wang Kaihao contributed to this story.

Policy Digest

Customs cracks down on IPR infringement

The General Administration of Customs has launched a campaign to crack down on intellectual property rights infringement.

During the campaign, efforts will be made to enhance supervision over IPR infringement of goods transported to North America, Europe, South America, Africa and countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, said the country’s top customs authority.

Goods prone to IPR infringement such as food, medicine and personal care products transported to North America, Europe and Japan will also be closely monitored, it said.

According to the administration, efforts will also be made to strengthen cooperation among local customs authorities and promote information sharing among different departments.

Customs seized 6,280 batches of goods that infringed on intellectual property rights in the first two months of this year, up 237 percent year-on-year, according to GAC data.

Meanwhile, in January and February, customs nationwide approved 2,862 applications for IPR protection, up 5 percent from the same period last year.

Ministry to boost high-quality NEVs

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said on Thursday that it will strengthen quality supervision of new energy vehicles and promote the integration of technologies such as electrification and intelligent networking in order to boost the high-quality development of NEVs.

According to the ministry, efforts will be made to unite NEV and battery companies, industrial institutions, colleges and universities to jointly make breakthroughs in related technologies.

It will also improve services related to the recharging and parking of NEVs and promote cooperation to effectively boost the level of supporting industrial chains.

According to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, China’s auto sales rose 364.8 percent year-on-year to 1.455 million units in February, with the figure for NEVs surging 584.7 percent to 110,000 units.

Xiao Yaqing, head of the ministry, said earlier this month that the ministry and related departments had jointly published over 60 policies and measures to support the development of the NEV industry in recent years, with substantive breakthroughs being achieved.

While the development of NEVs has good momentum, the sector is still in a critical period and faced with fierce market competition. Efforts also need to be made to improve user experience, Xiao said.

Greater protection for key wildlife species

China will work out special protection plans for key wildlife species including Hainan gibbons and pangolins, as the country sets out to formulate a conservation plan for animals and plants from this year to 2025.

The National Forestry and Grassland Administration said on March 3 that it will increase efforts in evaluating and identifying the key habitats of terrestrial wild animals.

According to the administration, the country has so far seen stable captive breeding of more than 100 rare and endangered wild animals.

The number of wild giant pandas in China has increased to 1,864, and the number of wild and captive crested ibises has surpassed 5,000, with the populations of both species achieving restorative growth.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of China joining the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.