

Guideline aims to boost camping

Measures promote growth as activity gains popularity with Chinese travelers

By CHENG SI
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China recently released a guideline to encourage the orderly development of camping as interest in the activity grows and as more camping equipment becomes available on the market.

The guideline, which was released by 14 central departments including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the National Development and Reform Commission, is aimed at promoting a healthier, environmentally friendly travel experience and expanding tourism and leisure.

Under the guideline, tourism authorities are required to plan camping sites in a more scientific manner with adequate infrastructure and fully equipped facilities. Urban parks are encouraged to open grassland, and unused areas to day campers.

In addition, golf courses and rural homestays that go out of business are encouraged to use their land to offer camping services to travelers. Tourism sites, resorts, rural parks and sporting grounds can also offer space to campers.

More diversified camping sites, such as those that can accommodate travelers driving recreational vehicles, will also be made available to the public, and tourism companies and camping sites operators are encouraged to introduce cultural elements to their services to enrich the experience.

The guideline also outlined management requirements. Operators should obtain health, food and fire safety permits and endeavor to better ensure personal safety.

Camping site operators are also required to sell products or offer services with clearly marked prices and precise information.

Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy, said that the reuse of land that was once home to failed business ventures such as golf courses and rural homestays will help meet the demand for campsites and also help create a new tourism and leisure landscape. China has seen rapid growth in

camping tours as well as the camping economy, which used to be a niche activity among young people.

Sun Jiandong, president of Sun-area Group, a tourism company focused on outdoor leisure activities in Beijing, said in an interview with the tourism ministry's news outlet China Culture Daily that he has witnessed the development of the camping industry over the past 16 years. He said that in the past, the camping park his company operates only had about a dozen sites for campers, but now it has 300.

Sun said that people who camp can make better use of the natural resources in rural areas, breathing life into an industry that could motivate talented young individuals to stay in their hometowns to work and develop their local economies. He said that the guideline provides sound support to the camping industry's future development by helping regulate concerns such as fire safety and land use.

Fang Zexi, an analyst from Trip.com Group, an online travel agency, said the company is reaping the benefits of the growth of camping. She said that orders for camping products on the platform were 30 times higher this year than in 2021, and the average amount of money spent on camping offerings is 1,027 yuan (\$143.6), a year-on-year rise of over 10 percent. So far, the platform is offering camping in 152 domestic cities.

Consultancy company iiMedia Research, which is based in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, has a bullish outlook for China's camping economy.

It said that the domestic market value of camping-related products increased to 16.8 billion yuan in 2020 from 7.7 billion yuan back in 2014, with a compound annual growth rate of around 13.9 percent over the period. It estimates that the camping market will be valued at about 35.46 billion yuan this year, thanks to the current preference for short-distance trips and the intimacy of nature.

Jinlv Consulting, a travel research agency, projects even more ambitious development of the sector in the coming years. In a

recently released report, the agency stated that the domestic camping market is stronger than ever this year and will continue to grow rapidly in the near future.

It predicted that the domestic camping market will be valued at over 178.1 billion yuan by the end of 2023, up 46.3 percent year-on-year.

Naturehike, a company focusing on sales of camping and outdoor gear in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, said that the business first boomed in February 2020. Hong Chen, the company's sales manager, told Xinhua News Agency that the annual growth that year was about 40 percent higher than in 2010, the year the company was established, while revenue growth was 100 percent higher than in 2019.

Hong said that the company's sales volume in the first quarter of this year saw a year-on-year increase of 160 percent, and it projects a sales volume of over 1 billion yuan this year.



People working more, have more leisure time

By CHENG SI

Urban residents are spending more time both working and enjoying leisure activities due to shortened commutes and increasing remote working opportunities.

A recent report by the China Tourism Academy showed that city dwellers worked 192.6 hours more this year compared with 2021, but they also had 66.6 more hours of leisure time.

Still, maintaining a good work-life balance remains a challenge since many people have shifted to working from home because of epidemic control policies, the report said.

Li Xue, an associate researcher at the academy, said that the research team divided residents' days into five parts, including work time, leisure time and time spent commuting. The team concluded that on average, residents spend 3.89 to 5.66 hours per day on leisure.

Not surprisingly, the length of leisure time is closely related to time outside working hours. For example, people spend about 4.8 hours of leisure time on the weekends and 4.6 hours on holidays, but they only have about 3.9 hours of leisure time on working days.

Rural inhabitants have more leisure time on working days, roughly 4.14 hours per day, and retirees have the most — 5.66 hours per day on average, according to the report.

Li said that leisure time generally consists of four types of activities — shopping, cultural activities such as visiting a museum, playing sports and staying at home. Of the four, shopping is the most popular, with 60 to 70 percent of people surveyed favoring it over other leisure activities.

She said that people have shown a greater preference for outdoor leisure activities amid the epidemic. Figures from the report show that the proportion of people who prefer to stay at home for leisure these days has dropped by 5.26 percentage points among urban residents compared with that of 2019, before COVID-19 hit.

"Staying at home doing nothing was my favorite activity before the epidemic; it was the best way for me to relax after my busy workdays. But now, I prefer taking a walk outside when I have time for leisure because I've worked from home for nearly two months due to COVID-19 control policies," said Chen Xiye, who works in public relations at a tourism company in Beijing.

She said that breathing fresh air in a park or visiting an art exhibition are now her favorite leisure activities.

"Spending one or two hours in exhibition halls viewing art is relaxing. I often choose exhibitions near my home because I don't like spending too much time traveling," she added.

Chen is not alone. The academy's report said that most residents preferred leisure activities near their living or working places this year, and that preference has increased in the three years since the epidemic began.

According to the report, about 64 percent of urban residents surveyed preferred engaging in leisure activities at places 1 to 3 kilometers away from their homes this year. Back in 2019, the figure was around 32 percent.

Furthermore, the proportion of surveyed urban residents preferring leisure activities in places more than 3 kilometers from their homes fell to 13.8 percent this year, compared with about 42 percent in 2019.

Li Xue, the associate researcher, said that people are showing a stronger desire for leisure thanks to supporting policies from the government and improved leisure options being offered, so it's very important for the government to continue to optimize the environment and for companies to continue to come up with new offerings to enrich the leisure experience in the future.

Policy Digest

Ministry looks to curb effects of La Nina

The General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has issued a plan to tackle La Nina and reduce crop loss caused by the weather phenomenon, which the ministry said will increase the risks of extreme weather events in China this winter and spring.

The ministry revealed the plan in an online news release on Dec 15, saying that local authorities have been urged to strengthen monitoring and early warning efforts and take preventive measures against possible weather-related disasters.

The plan laid out major steps for authorities to take in northern China, where winter wheat is growing, to guard against both frost damage to wheat crops in winter and drought in spring.

The plan requires Northeast China authorities to be prepared for possible flooding and drought in the spring, and has tasked officials in southern parts of the country with tackling the potential threat of long-term drought by taking steps like exploring new water sources and building agricultural facilities to collect rainwater.

Program launched to help homeless

The General Office of the Ministry of Civil Affairs has launched

an annual program to support homeless people and help them get through the winter, tasking civil affairs authorities at the provincial level with ensuring their basic well-being.

Local civil affairs officials should strengthen collaboration with public security and urban management authorities to patrol streets, the notice said, tasking them with carrying out additional patrols at night and during holidays, also when temperatures drop and when it snows or rains.

Authorities should attempt to persuade homeless minors and disabled people that they find on the streets to take shelter at relief centers, and help those who are seriously ill seek treatment at hospitals.

Authorities should provide homeless individuals who don't want to go to relief centers with food, clothing and COVID-19 prevention supplies, and inform them of ways to seek help, the notice said, adding that centers should ensure their hotlines are open 24 hours a day.

In addition, they should provide shelter for people in emergency situations, such as victims of domestic violence, the unemployed and victims of robbery, and work with other departments to provide psychological

counseling, legal aid and employment consultation, according to the notice.

Banks should strive to keep branches open

Banks and insurance companies should try their best to continue providing basic financial services by keeping as many branches open as possible while also protecting the health of their employees and clients, China's banking and insurance watchdog said as the country optimizes its COVID-19 prevention measures.

Branches outside of high-risk zones should not close without any reason nor limit the number of employees working, according to a notice issued by the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission.

They should take the temperatures of people entering, ensure they are wearing masks and disinfect the premises, the notice said, asking them to provide "fast track" services for vulnerable clients, such as the elderly, to reduce their wait time and lower their chances of contracting COVID-19.

Banks should also encourage clients to perform transactions online and promote employees' awareness of COVID-19 prevention measures, the notice said.