

# China B&Bs enjoy a roaring trade

Sharing economy powers growth of the lodging concept that has long been popular in Europe

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Sitting on the windowsill, Zhang Qihua sipped champagne and drank in the sights of a picturesque rural setting. Fluffy white clouds floated languidly in azure skies above the green hills. Her 8-year-old daughter played beside her king-size bed.

For once, life seemed blissful. Time appeared to stand still — and even the sound of dogs barking blended in with the cicadas in the surrounding forest.

For accountant Zhang, this was the perfect getaway after 12 consecutive days of stressful work. She was staying at a bed and breakfast, or B&B, facility in a bamboo village in Tonglu, a two-hour drive from Hangzhou, the capital of East China's Zhejiang province.

The three-room villa charges about 800 yuan (\$123) per room on weekdays and 1,400 yuan on weekends. It is a price comparable to hotels in Zhejiang.

"I booked the room four months in advance because B&B is so popular now that you have to book early," Zhang said.

The village boasts more than a dozen such B&Bs. All are doing roaring trade.

"Summer is often the peak season for us, and we need to hire part-time housekeepers and cooks," said Huang Fenya, one of the B&B hostesses.

In recent years, however, the peak season extended beyond summer, she said. The most popular bamboo villa with double king-size beds, which can host a large family, is fully booked until the end of the year.

"We are having more guests this year, and we expect there will be more next year as guests help promote our place through word of mouth," she said.

As the legitimacy of the sharing economy as a growth-driver gains wide acceptance, B&B is fast becoming a popular option for Chinese tourists such as Zhang.

In August 2016, travel agency websites saw a spike in searches for "B&B" that surpassed "hotel".

Young couples and families are seeking affordable accommodation that can also pack in experiences beyond standard fare offered by hotels, hostels and conducted tours.

So, spare rooms at rural homes in tourist spots are getting converted into B&B units for visitors who want to mingle with their hosts, make new friends, experience the local culture and lifestyle, savor homemade food, and feel at home outside home.

Hosts are often happy, too, to serve as local tour guides or drivers.

According to the China Hospitality Association (CHA), B&B facilities in China surged 78 percent from 30,231 in 2014 to 53,852 by the end of June, and are expected to surpass 55,000 by the end of 2017.

Some repeat customers even pick their favorite B&B as a venue for significant days such as anniversaries, birthdays or

