

Warm welcome in chilly winter

Heilongjiang builds on success of ice festival with rich cultural attractions and beautiful landscapes

By YANG FEIYUE

yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Heilongjiang launched an upgraded winter tourism package for the upcoming holiday season, offering a host of new travel routes, cultural festivals and hundreds of events to ensure winter fun for visitors coming from far and wide.

The routes take in all the winter tourism spots across the northeastern province, and feature ice-and-snow landscape scenery and art, forest expeditions, winter hunting, hot springs and study tours, said Hou Wei, deputy director of the Heilongjiang tourism development commission.

Heilongjiang received nearly 115 million visitors in the first three quarters this year, an increase of 12.5 percent compared to the same period last year, according to the provincial tourism authority.

Domestic tourism income reached 145.35 billion yuan (\$22 billion) for the same period, a rise of about 23 percent.

A total of 145 million travelers paid visits to the province in 2016, an increase of more than 11 percent year-on-year, and they spent 160 billion yuan, up nearly 18 percent.

Heilongjiang's winter appeal is forged by its freezing temperatures and ice formations. The province is host to the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival, the snow sculpture exhibition at Sun Island and world-class ski events at the Yabuli resort.

For nature lovers, the province has a wealth of natural beauty, such as Zhalong National Nature Reserve — a haven for the protected red-crowned crane — and Yichun, home to China's largest redpine forests.

The frozen waterfalls at Jingpo Lake and the exquisite rime-glazed landscapes at Kurbin are also a big draw for tourists.

This year, provincial tourism officials have teamed up with online group-buying and service provider Meituan to stage winter carnivals and promote tourism in the region.

So far, nearly 1 million people have bought Heilongjiang tour products via Meituan, said Huang Lin, vice-general manager of Meituan's travel destination marketing center.

Sales have surpassed 200 million yuan via the platform.

"We will continue to work with Heilongjiang to launch online travel products and offer quality products at favorable rates for the winter season," said Huang.

Many new events have been added this year to spice up the visitor experience, especially in the province's capital, Harbin.



A night scene of Harbin in winter with St Sophia Cathedral in the background. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The newly built Harbin Grand Theater.



The Songhua River in Harbin turns into a playground for visitors in winter.

Nearly 4,000 performances of classical music, folk songs, opera and acrobatics will be staged at major scenic spots, including Wudalianchi and Mohe, according to Rao Qing, product manager with China CYTS Tours Holding.

The Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival offers large-scale ice sculptures, light shows and a variety of winter-recreation events. It will partner with e-commerce giant Tencent's role-playing mobile game, King of Glory, to build a 15,000-square-meter arena that will integrate winter sports with online games.

For sports fans, professional ice hockey matches and international winter swimming competitions will also take place in Harbin.

For those with children, the Harbin Polar Museum offers accommodation where children can watch wildlife, such as penguins and polar bears, from the comfort of their rooms.

CYTS Tours has also launched a

winter camp for parents and children in the provincial capital to cater to families.

The recently opened Harbin Wanda Culture Tourism City, home to China's biggest indoor-skiing facility, will stage an "ice lantern" festival and dancing shows, and also offer "fairy tale" night tours.

In addition, the Harbin festival's ice kingdom opened on Dec 20. Visitors can enjoy views of the spectacular winter wonderland that features prehistoric glaciers and ice cascades. Sleigh races will also take place.

Five routes departing from Harbin to other parts of Heilongjiang province have also been developed for those who want to extend their holiday.

Tourists can stop at China's largest ski resort on their way to Xuexiang village in Mudanjiang city. Yabuli Ski Resort boasts 46 ski tracks that run for a total of 88 kilometers, providing slopes for skiers of all abilities.

Eye-catching views of snow-clad houses of all shapes and sizes can

be seen at Xuexiang, as the route from Harbin to Jingpo Lake follows in the tracks of the century-old Chinese Eastern Railway.

Hengdaohezi town used to be a gathering place for Russians who came to China more than a century ago during the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, and it still retains more than 200 Russian-style buildings.

Jingpo Lake offers a magnificent frozen waterfall that can stretch for hundreds of meters. The annual mass ice fishing festival is also held at the lake. Visitors can ride cross-country vehicles to feed wild boars or hunt in nearby forests.

Hot springs, volcanoes and wetlands are found along the route from Harbin that passes through Daqing and Qiqihar to Wudalianchi. Daqing abounds with hot springs, and the city organizes thrilling car races on the frozen lake at Amuta Mongolian Island.

Visitors can spot red-crowned cranes at Qiqihar and enjoy volcanic

and mineral hot springs at Wudalianchi.

All the scenic spots at Wudalianchi will be open to the public for free until the end of 2018, Rao said.

Tourists can take in views of the snowcapped Lesser Khingan Mountains en route from Harbin to Kurbin as they pass through Yichun.

Taoshan hunting field was the first of its kind in China, which opened in 1984. Here you can pick up a hunting rifle and hike through primitive forests and experience the life of a huntsman.

The 15-km rime-tinged mountain range never fails to draw thousands of photographers every year.

The last route leads to Mohe county, the location of Beiji village — China's northernmost point. Visitors here can enjoy the Christmas decorations at the village and even experience the aurora borealis, or northern lights.

With all the ongoing preparations, Heilongjiang promises warm hospitality in the midst of its chilly winter.