

# Events enrich friendship as sultanate welcomes Xi

Cultural exhibits, stories and histories warmed people's feelings toward China ahead of visit

By WEN ZONGDUO

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In Brunei's capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan, Awang Tikom Yapik was happy to see his handmade crafts displayed on Nov 15 at one of the cultural events held prior to Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to the country.

Timok's household utensils are made from the veins of *bengkaung* leaves. He also has products made of paper and wood.

Sitting nearby, Omar was among dozens of visitors viewing exhibits from China including silk-making and calligraphy, and pictures about the two countries.

Guo Weimin, Chinese vice-minister of the State Council Information Office, introduced the exhibits and

pictures to Major General (Retired) Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin Pehin Orang Kaya Saiful Mulok Dato Seri Paduka Haji Abidin, Brunei minister of culture, youth and sports. Their temporary interpreter happened to be Chinese Ambassador to Brunei Yang Jian.

Firdaus Rahman, president of the Brunei-China Friendship Association, said the countries not only share a long history of exchanges, but also have a broader space for cooperation for the future. He said he believed that with mutual efforts, bilateral friendship and cooperation will "step onto another floor of the building".

Brunei actor and singer Wu Chun, who has fans in China, said he was feeling excited about the Chinese president's visit. "It will further upgrade cultural exchange and the



Guo Weimin, vice-minister of the State Council Information Office, shakes hands with Brunei craftsman Awang Tikom Yapik at the Splendid Chapters of Silk Road Cultures exhibition in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei's capital, on Nov 15. The exhibition was part of a series of cultural exchanges prior to Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit. TANG XIAOTANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

two countries' friendship," Wu said. "I'm really happy about it."

Events held in Bandar Seri Begawan in the days leading up to Xi's visit included the launch ceremony of the Splendid Chapters of Silk Road Cultures exhibition, a China-Brunei Media Dialogue, and China-Brunei Friendly Exchange.

These events would help to deepen understanding between the peoples of both countries and facilitate people-to-people exchanges, said Guo.

As Bandar Seri Begawan stepped up preparations — ahead of Xi's first state visits to Brunei and the Philippines from Nov 18 to 21 — flags were raised along a main avenue and a tent was being erected at Brunei's

royal palace. The president's visit to Brunei will be a continuation of friendship between the two nations, Omar said.

People were telling stories and histories of Chinese-Brunei exchanges, tracing the spread of kung fu in Brunei or the introduction of Brunei cuisine, singing and education to China.

Li Hui, a Chinese coach of traditional martial arts, said he has helped train a number of Brunei athletes who have gone on to win competitions in the region for the nation of about 400,000 people.

These stories are expected to enrich the peoples' feelings about each other and help strengthen tra-

ditional friendship and partnership, said Guo.

Ambassador Yang noted that an increasing number of local students are coming to study in China as both countries speed up cultural programs. More Brunei professionals are also making trips to China.

Brunei boasts excellent infrastructure and a good investment environment, said the ambassador, adding that the two countries share broad prospects in cooperation within both bilateral and multilateral frameworks.

More Chinese tourists are traveling to Brunei, enjoying its beautiful nature, rich Islamic culture and well preserved tradition.

## Brunei a growing tourism destination

Direct flights, relaxed visa rules, a rich cultural heritage and popular cuisine draw more Chinese mainland travelers to the Southeast Asian nation

By WEN ZONGDUO

Along the banks of the Brunei River, amid the hustle and bustle of modern communities in the capital Bandar Seri Begawan, people in the centuries-old waterborne villages known as Kampong Ayer go about their daily lives placidly.

These village houses, built in an ancient style but supported by steel and cement stilts, line the river and are a huge attraction for tourists from China, said Liang Jie, a tourism agency manager from Guangzhou, South China's Guangdong province.

The cluster of villages, listed as a major historical and cultural heritage, is now equipped with a police station, a fire brigade and several schools, among other facilities.

Despite progress in modern technology, some villages still hang on to their traditional ways of life. Others, however, are embracing tourism.

Brunei emerged as a popular tourism destination for Chinese travelers in 2000, with inbound arrivals on the rise since.

"The well-preserved livelihoods on water, the seashore and tropical forests, the rich Islamic culture, the royal palace and museums are all making Brunei Darussalam a special attraction," said Liang.

China's Ambassador to Brunei Yang Jian noted that in recent years people-to-people exchanges have also intensified. She said that Brunei citizens have enjoyed visa-free entry to China since 2003, and Brunei has been offering a visa on arrival to Chi-

nese travelers since 2016.

With more and more cities in China launching direct flights to Brunei, around 52,000 Chinese tourists visited the Southeast Asian country in 2017, setting a new record and making China its biggest source of international visitors.

Brunei is geographically located in the central area of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the core of the East ASEAN Growth Area, Yang told Xinhua News Agency. The country is also an important partner to China in the building of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Liang noted that the influx of Chinese tourists is partly due to Brunei authorities easing restrictions.

Lily Wu Xian, a young Chinese



Brunei actor and singer Wu Chun, who enjoys huge popularity in the Chinese mainland, speaks at the China-Brunei Friendly Exchange forum on Nov 15. WANG TIEGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

producer of cultural programs, said she enjoyed her visit to Bandar Seri Begawan and was particularly fond of the local snacks and seafood.

Hardy Long, deputy general manager of The Garden Hotel Guangzhou, found himself drawn to the Bruneian cuisine.

"After I first entered the catering sector at a young age, my tutor demonstrated a popular Brunei dish named *nasi lemak*, which was made of rice steeped in coconut juice," Long said. "I was just amazed and determined to trace its origin here in Brunei."