



Gubei water town in Beijing's Miyun district, which features buildings of the Ming and Qing dynasties' styles and a section of the Great Wall, celebrates Christmas until Dec 31 with traditional festive activities. PHOTOS BY XU LIN / CHINA DAILY

Christmas comes to Gubei

A jolly place all year, Beijing's water town is decking its halls for the holiday season

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Santa Claus is coming to town — Beijing's Gubei water town, that is. The attraction, also known as Beijing WTown, is celebrating the Christmas season until Dec 31 with traditional decorations and festive activities for visitors, especially families.

It is hosting parades, a Christmas market with snacks and homemade gifts, and outdoor Christmas-tree lighting ceremonies.

A choir sings carols in a hilltop church. Kids can make cupcakes and decorate trees and enjoy children's stage plays at night.

Santa passes out gifts. Visitors write him letters or send him postcards. Lucky guests will get replies.

Gubei will also host traditional temple-fair activities starting from the Western New Year on Jan 1 to prepare for the upcoming Chinese

Spring Festival, including paper-cutting, shadow-puppet shows and cross-talk comedy.

The 430,000-square-meter water town opened in 2014. Its buildings follow the styles of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, as well as the early 20th century.

It is located at the foot of the Simatai section of the Great Wall in suburban Miyun district's Gubeikou town. Simatai is known for its precipitous landscape. Its undulating terrain and geographic location made it an important military fortification in ancient times.

The 5.4-kilometer-long wall with 35 guard towers is one of the few stretches of unrestored Ming-era Great Wall. Some bricks are inscribed with characters that indicate who created them centuries ago. Tourists can also take a 15-minute ride in a helicopter to have a bird's-eye view of the zigzagging Great Wall in the mountains.

The town is 120 kilometers from

Beijing's downtown and 80 kilometers from downtown Chengde, in North China's Hebei province. Buses travel between Beijing's Dongzhimen and Gubei water town.

Visitors who stay overnight are advised to book hotels in advance, especially during weekends and holidays, since there are only 1,378 rooms. Some travelers stay in guesthouses run by nearby farmers.

The canal-laced town resembles those south of the Yangtze River but incorporates some northern Chinese elements. Some components like wooden window frames and decorations are authentic and were brought from old buildings in other provinces.

The water town's scenery changes throughout the year. Visitors can enjoy flowers in spring, boat rides and starry nights in summer, red leaves in autumn and snow in winter.

Travelers visit such places as a traditional distillery and dye workshops

to learn about historical industries and to make their own liquor and colorful cloth. They can also buy traditional oil paper umbrellas, kites and lanterns.

Visitors can also visit *biaoju* — establishments that offered armed security for the transport of valuables over long distances centuries ago.

A traditional academy shows how Chinese people were educated in ancient times.

Guests can also enjoy such street foods as roasted sweet potatoes, candied-haw skewers and barbecue. And they may encounter lion dancers or acrobats performing on the streets.

Restaurants serve Cantonese food, Peking duck and beefsteak. Some offer views of the Great Wall. Shutterbugs enjoy snapping photos of sunrises and sunsets over the bulwark.

Night tours by lantern light explore the town's streets and then head up to the Great Wall, from which viewers can take in a panorama of the town sparkling below.

The town's dancing fountain lights up with a nighttime show in which water jets and colored lights change with the music, and 3D images of phoenixes and other iconic images are projected onto the mist.

Visitors can also soak in the indoor and outdoor hot springs. Different pools are different colors to indicate their supposed health benefits.

Indeed, Christmas is just one of many reasons to visit the water town this season. Those who make the journey will discover it is a jolly place all year.

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