



Tuva people's traditional houses are covered with snow in Hemu village in Kanas in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

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Xinjiang shows its chill

A growing number of travelers are discovering a winter wonderland

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Tourism in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is set to heat up this winter, as new events, policies and routes make it a hotter destination during the colder months.

More than 130 tourism activities will be staged from Oct 14 through March at a winter-tourism festival in the region's capital, Urumqi, and a winter-industry expo in Altay.

"Many prefectures and cities in Xinjiang are vigorously developing winter tourism to enable tourists to better savor the charms of snow and ice," Hou Hanmin, a senior official with Xinjiang's tourism development commission, said at an earlier event in Beijing.

Last year, the autonomous region developed 436 tourism projects with investments totaling 20.5 billion yuan (\$2.9 billion).

"We will build tourism into a pillar industry and a new engine for high-quality development in Xinjiang," Hou said.

The Altay Mountain Wild Snow Park hosted a ski event in mid-October that featured a performance with traditional fur skis.

Visitors can also explore the wilderness on a horse-drawn sleigh or helicopter.

Koktokay will offer hot air balloon flights, ethnic Kazak folk-culture performances and rime festivals.

Urumqi's ancient ecology park will offer opportunities for horse riders to engage in the region's equestrian



Visitors have fun on the slopes at a ski resort in Xinjiang, which offers a range of winter sports.

culture during holidays like Spring Festival, which falls on Feb 5, and Valentine's Day.

The city's Tianshan Grand Canyon will host New Year celebrations, while the botanical garden will offer snowy landscapes and local snacks for families.

Celebrities will join tourists at an international snow festival featuring Silk Road elements, sightseeing and sports in late December. The event will also offer gourmet and shopping experiences.

Xinjiang, an important node on the ancient Silk Road, hosts the Gobi, prairies, forests, wetlands and glaciers. It is home to over 1,100 officially recognized scenic spots, including 12 top-rated national attractions, seven national geoparks and 17 national forests.

It also hosts 37 large ski resorts.

Altay prefecture in the region's north is covered with premium snow for up to 180 days a year. It is sometimes likened to the Swiss Alps. The snowy scenes of Tianshi Lake and Urumqi Nanshan Ski Resort are particularly dazzling.

Nearly 106 million tourists visited Xinjiang during the first eight months of the year, up roughly 41 percent compared with the same period of 2017, the tourism commission reports.

Tourism consumption reached nearly 172 billion yuan during the period, a roughly 43 percent increase.

About 100 new policies have been adopted to boost winter tourism.

Free and discounted skiing and dining tickets will be offered at Urumqi's 20-day snow-art carnival around the Spring Festival.

Travelers can receive gifts and Xin-

jiang specialties at an "agritainment" food competition and hiking event around the capital's Grand Bazaar. And they can get free or discounted access to Silk Road International Ski Resort's light shows, skiing competition and music festival.

All top-grade scenic spots will offer lower winter ticket prices up to March 31. Chartered plane and tourism train travelers will receive monetary incentives, as will travel agencies that bring large numbers of visitors to Xinjiang during the period.

The region has also launched a 10-day, "platinum" winter travel route. Its itinerary includes Turpan, Tianshi Lake, Hemu, Kanas, Burqin and Altay.

Travelers can explore the region's history at Urumqi's Xinjiang Museum and learn about Silk Road cul-

ture by watching *Myth of the Silk Road*, a film by acclaimed director Lu Chuan.

Fuhai county will host a mass ice-fishing event, featuring an all-fish banquet afterward. Visitors to Kanas can stay in Tuva people's traditional houses.

Locals still use skis made from pine and fur, a style which may date back 12,000 years. They also host annual competitions using the footwear.

Hemu offers various contemporary winter sports.

Xinjiang introduced six special tourism trains and 10 driving routes earlier this year. These serve travelers well, since attractions are scattered across the vast region.

The tourism commission is hosting a winter itinerary design competition. It has invited agencies, tour customizers and experienced travelers to integrate folk customs, sports and food in ways that present the best of winter in Xinjiang.

The results were released on Nov 1, and the winning routes will be promoted afterward.

Indeed, they may blaze new trails that show why traveling through Xinjiang is sometimes best done through the snow.