

dujiangyanspecial

Quake-struck town rises to new glory out of the ashes

By ZHANG ZHAO

Dujiangyan, in Sichuan province, wants to use its relics, pandas, Taoist history, and mountains to turn itself into an international tourist destination, local authorities have said.

It was badly affected by the major earthquake of May 2008, and the city government had to look for ways to improve infrastructure and tourism.

It had nearly 11.6 million tourists last year, an increase of 20 percent from 2009, and earned about 5.1 billion yuan (\$781 million) from that, a 21-percent increase.

Now, its ambitious goal, up to 2015, is 18 million tourists annually, with more than 500,000 of them foreigners. The tourism sector is expected to bring in around 13 billion yuan, and the service industry, including tourism, to contribute more than 60 percent to the regional GDP.

"We've felt the pain of the earthquake and are still standing, and want to convey a feeling of beauty, harmony, and strength to tourists," said Liu Junlin, the city's Party chief.

There is a dam nearby, from which the city takes its name, which was part of an irrigation system that went back at least 2,200 years ago. It is about 40 kilometers west of the provincial capital, Chengdu, and is still working. But it actually functions more as a tourist attraction, a water control museum, amidst the splendid natural beauty.

Nearby Qingcheng Mountain is considered the birthplace of Taoism and has dozens of temples and pavilions — the earliest of them dating back more than 1,800 years. So, it is a repository of classical scripts and relics.

The mountain is covered with thick forest on a 15-square-kilometer area and looks out over a plain.

The Dujiangyan irrigation system and the mountain were together designated a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site, in 2000, and a World Natural Heritage site six years later, because it is part of the panda's natural habitat.



ZENG XINLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

The city's Xuanhua Gate, one of the most popular tourist sites, all lit up at night.



GAO MINGXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Opening ceremony on one reconstructed street.

The dam and some wooden structures on the mountain were slightly damaged by the 2008 quake, but the area was already open to tourists a mere four months afterwards.

The local government plans to restore the damaged buildings, using the original construction techniques, and build more roads to key tourist attractions. It also wants to develop



YAN YONGGONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Aerial view of farmland and villages in the surrounding countryside.

new sites, such as the Longchi National Forest Park, Longxi-Hongkou National Nature Reserve, and a museum with a water theme.

Eight new 4A scenic spots are

planned for the next five years.

Cultural events are also being organized, such as a Taoist cultural festival, an international beer festival and a bicycle race, and the area's



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DUJIANGYAN'S PARTY CHIEF

artists have staged some shows at Qingcheng and Dujiangyan.

One of these, an opera called Qingcheng, is a love story based on local folk tales. It cost nearly 30 million yuan to stage and integrated music, dance, martial arts, and Taoist elements, using some 500 performers.

Even the dam had a role, although, in this case, an abandoned dam was used for the stage and background, to show a magical land of peace and harmony between nature and man.

Meanwhile, authorities are also looking to host some conventions, or international forums on the panda, kiwi fruit industry, and health.

They plan to improve services and things such as road signs, information offices, shops and bus stops. Emergency facilities are also part of the plan, and a helicopter landing pad, hospital and refugee shelter.

And, five-star hotels are not being left out. The city is looking at a Crowne Plaza, Shangri-La, and César Ritz, and wants five or six five-star hotels by next year, and 10 by 2015.

Sports and leisure will be another area of interest, with plans to build sports parks and facilities for rock climbing, skiing, mountain biking -- and, of all things, beach volleyball.

Authorities are thinking of partnerships with overseas tourist agencies to promote themselves globally, with ad campaigns and offices in Hong Kong, Taipei, Tokyo, Seoul and Singapore.