

THE VILLAGE IS ALIVE

Surrounded by mountains, Zhujiayu is a rustic holiday destination with buildings dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. **Ju Chuanjiang** and **Wang Qian** visit the village and are charmed by the unpolished gem.

Zhujiayu, a 600-year-old mountainous village in Zhangqiu, Shandong province, is a good place for some tranquility and to get in touch with nature. Lying in a valley surrounded by green mountains, Zhujiayu was rated as one of the 24 Famous Chinese Historical and Cultural Villages in 2005 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. The village is about one-hour drive from capital Jinan. With a population of only 2,000 even in its prime time, the isolated rural village is renowned for the preservation of its historical buildings dating to the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911).

Zhujiayu is divided into old and new village, which is encircled by a huge ancient wall built with vast rocks.

As we enter into the old village through an arched doorway, numerous traditional buildings greet us against the pleasant scenery of the background mountains. Walking through the thoroughfare feels as though we are back in ancient times.

Because of the local geology, the buildings in the old village are mostly built from stones and rocks from its nearby mountains.

There are about 300 residential houses, temples, pavilions, bridges and courtyards from the Ming and Qing dynasties perched on mountainside, surrounded by endless forests, fields coated with blooming flowers.

Most buildings are only one or two stories high. Although some of houses look shabby and the paint has faded, visitors can still feel the village's former glory from the exquisite carvings on the windows and roofs.

Rivers and creeks flow down from the surrounding mountains, winding through the whole village. Owing to this, more than 90 quaint stone bridges have been built during the past centuries, each with different design and style.

Among them, the well-preserved Zhaojia Bridge dating back to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) stands out. The single-arched bridge is about 5 meters high and is completely made of natural stones. It is composed of two levels of roads, one on top of the other.

Two temples in the village catch our attention. They are said to be built in the late Qing Dynasty. One house the statue of Wenchang and the other, statue of Kuixing — both considered the gods of literature in Chinese mythology. The two temples are special because most temples in rural areas are places of worship for the god of wealth, or Guanyin, the goddess of mercy.

"Education has long been valued in Zhujiayu, judging from the number of *sishu* or



The mountainous village Zhujiayu is renowned for the preservation of its historical buildings dating to the Ming and Qing dynasties.

old-style private institution in the village. There used to be as many as 17 *sishu*, and the first female-only school in Shandong province," explains Zhai Bocheng, secretary-general of Zhangqiu Cultural and History Research Institute.

One of the *sishu* of the Qing Dynasty is still there in the vil-

lage. The main building comprising a bedroom, a study room and a kitchen, remain in good condition, but a two-story hall which used to store books looks dilapidated.

The tutor, Zhu Fengyin, was rated as jinshi, a successful candidate at an imperial examination during the reign of the

Qing emperor of Guangxu. A tablet inscribed by the emperor to praise his talents is still hung on the wall.

Zhu's 94-year-old granddaughter-in-law, Ma Yuying, still lives in the simple house. Her sons have tried persuading her to live with them in the city center, but she is not keen.

"I love the village and can't leave here. The air is good and the spring water tastes sweet. Every time my children come to see me, they will always bring several empty barrels to collect water to bring home," Ma says with a smile.

Like Ma, many of the elderly in the village lead a traditional lifestyle. They grow peanut and Chinese walnut on the mountains, process grains with stone mill, and cook with spring water.

But most young and middle-aged people have moved to the big cities, leaving their houses empty.

"There are now only 200 people living in the old village and most of them are over the age of 70," says Zhao Zhongwen, director of Zhujiayu Village Office.

As we wander around the village, we witness many worn-out and neglected houses with cracked walls.

Even so, when a private company offered to develop the village and build villas here several years ago, the local government rejected the proposal.

"Many historic villages have given way to modernization, but Zhujiayu, with its labyrinth of narrow streets and ancient buildings, still conjures up an image of ancient China," says Zhao with pride.

"We don't want to lose our original identity, which is also the most valuable thing to have," he says.

Its natural and traditional ambience has already brought fame to Zhujiayu. The village has become a popular spot where more than 20 films and TV drama have been shot since 2008.

"Streams of tourists now file past the ancient residential houses every weekend. The village receives more than 20,000 visitors from all over the country annually," says Zhao.

To further promote cultural tourism, the local government is planning to invest 80 million yuan (\$12.9 million) to protect the village in the long run. Last year alone, a total of 30 million yuan has been allocated to repair houses and historic sites, and build basic facilities.

A museum of antique architectural style is under construction, to showcase the history, culture and anecdotes of the village.

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The 94-year-old Ma Yuying lives in the simple house and prefers village life.



The Qing Dynasty single-arched stone-made bridge is composed of two levels of roads, one on top of the other.



The Zhu Family ancestral hall built in the Qing Dynasty remains in good condition.

IF YOU GO

Zhujiayu Village is located in the county-level city of Zhangqiu, about 45 km to the east of Jinan, capital of Shandong province.

High-speed trains to Jinan from Beijing and Shanghai run every couple of hours. It can be reached from Beijing in a little over two hours and from Shanghai in 3.5 hours. From Jinan downtown, take bus line K301 or a taxi.

Driving from Jinan and Zibo of Shandong province along national highway 309 to the village will take about one hour.

Entrance ticket to the old village is 20 yuan (\$3.20). The opening time is from 8 am to 6 pm.

You'd better set aside about four hours for your trip and it's more fun to have lunch in family restaurants run by local farmers.

The best time to visit is from April to October when the leaves change color and springs gush out from mountains.

Rural reverie isn't far from the capital

By **LI JING**
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In the northern suburbs of Beijing, the Yanqing county features several villages that offer tourists a peek at the traditional rural life of North China. Shatangou and Liugou, two villages hidden deep in the commanding prospect of the Yanshan Mountains, are among the most popular countryside tourist destinations.

A concrete road diverts visitors from the freeway, snaking its lonely way to the village, Shatangou.

Except for the road and a two-story office building, the village is a facade of stones. By stacking them up like blocks, farmers have made houses from rocks carved from mountains and held together with an age-old mixture of yellow mud and dried grass. The houses are connected with cobblestone roads, which form a big Chinese character *ren* (people).

On the stone steps, you will often see elderly women sit and enjoy the sunshine. The village is primitive and tranquil, with the quietness broken with the occasional sound of dogs barking and cocks crowing.

An office building stands out among the farmers' houses with a board hanging prominently — inscribed "Pingbei Hongse Diycun", which literally translates "The first red village in Pingbei".

Pingbei is the former name of the area, bordering Beijing, Zhangjiakou and Chengde. The village was the first to set up a Party branch in the area.

A series of switchbacks along edges of terraced groves end at a hill trail. A slow-moving stream, covered now with thick layers of dried leaves, runs along it. The hill looks a little gray as winter slowly gives way to spring, but leaf buds sporting lovely bronze-green color are already crowding the branches.

Massive rocks dominate the mountaintop, coated with sand, weathered by wind. On the peak a pine tree stubbornly breaks through the rock, its roots extended in search of the limited soil.

The peak overlooks villages and there is a rock carved with the three characters *xiaoxishu*, which bears witness to the village's "revolutionary" history.

A countryside tour would not be complete without taking part in a farm family dinner and sleeping on a *kang*, a traditional heatable brick bed that is only seen in northern villages.

Just two hills beyond is the Liugou village, which is famous for a specialty tofu banquet featuring a hotpot atop burning charcoal with different kinds of tofu — fresh, frozen and deep fried — added to streaky bacon and Chinese cabbage.

Accompanying the cauldron is a spectacular spread of more than 30 dishes, the ingredients freshly harvested from the farms.

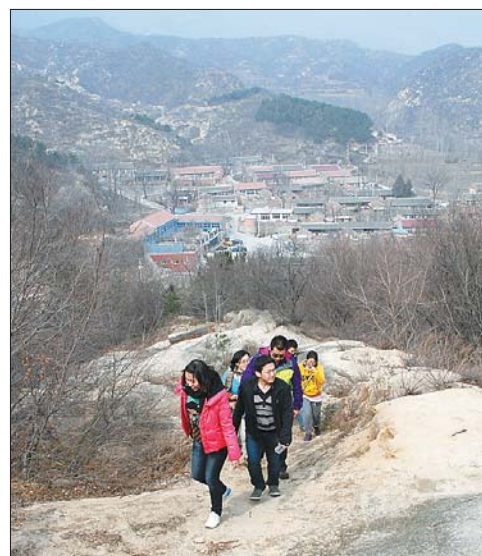
You can also find these traditional beds in local farmers' homes. The *kang*, taking up a large portion of the room, is much larger than typical beds and a flue leads to the outside to take away the charcoal fumes that could be toxic if trapped inside. Inside each bricked platform is an area for firewood, and after hours of burning, the rising heat warms the bed.

Lying on the bare bed feels like a hot-stone spa treatment, comfortable and amazing.

After some time, though, it's a little hard to relax, as you have to toss and turn restlessly to cool down.

The fire is put out after dark and the heat is maintained throughout the night, making for a snug sleep.

Locals get up early in the morning to the songs of birds. The village is in a foggy mist, rather than the haze of the city. It's a peaceful reverie, and urban noise seem far, far away.



BI JINGLAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Giant rocks dominate the mountaintop around Shatangou and Liugou villages.

IF YOU GO

Shatangou: Take bus line 919 at Deshengmen in Xicheng district to Yanqing. Transfer to bus line 925 and get off at the stop of Bailongtan. Liugou village is reached by bus line 920 from Yanqing.



Airline news and deals

• **China Southern Airline** will launch a flash sale from April 17 to 19 to offer discounted international round-trip tickets.

The prices range from 490 to 2,990 yuan (\$79-482) to cities around the world. Travel dates are from May 17 to Oct 26. www.csair.com.

• **Shenzhen Airlines** has reopened its route between Jieyang of Guangdong province and Wuxi of Jiangsu province from April 10. It adds a daily flight between Jieyang and Haikou of Hainan province, offering discounts of up to 60 percent for round-trip tickets. www.shenzhenair.com.

• With the launch of Little Red flights on April 9, **Virgin Atlantic** unveils its new UK domestic service. It offers multiple daily flights from London to Manchester, Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

It also marks the connection to the rest of the world from UK, including to Shanghai in China. www.virgin-atlantic.com.