

SHANGHAI NOW

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A woman takes AI-powered selfies in an upgraded phone booth in Shanghai yesterday.
— Jiang Xiaowei



Shanghai finds new romance in digital arena

Zhu Shenshen

JEWELRY, flowers and chocolate, or fine dining for Valentine's Day? This year, Shanghai people are finding new romance in the digital arena.

They're taking artificial intelligence-powered selfies in updated phone booths, seeking cosmic romance with "space roses" and their digital counterparts, and asking ChatGPT, an AI-generated chatbot for advice on celebration.

On some local streets, Shanghai's iconic red public telephone booths carry a certain nostalgia for people of a certain age, while bringing

user-friendly functions and 5G networks after recent upgrades.

A new function called "AI photography" made its debut on Valentine's Day, which supports romantic selfies and AI-powered matchmaking services for singles. For example, AI can predict the appearance of your preferred other half.

Now the service is available in several smartphone booths, including one on Nanjing Road W.

Lucky attendants can get free roses, said China Telecom's Shanghai branch, an operator of the booths.

Besides the new romance, the upgraded phone booths

feature various services such as phone charging, 3-minute free calls and one-click button for car-hailing etc.

A cosmic romance gift and related digital counterparts in the virtual world have also attracted people's attention, reflecting the booming development and potential for innovations in metaverse and blockchain technology.

Huifu and Futurespace jointly released "space rose" gifts, whose seeds have been to space, and virtual roses NFR, or Non-Fungible Rights, digital certificates based on blockchain tech. The packages cost 214 yuan (US\$31.5) for a rose only, and 520 yuan with digital certificates.

World awaits return of Chinese tourists

Jinith de Silva

BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic, China was the world's most important source of international travelers, and Chinese tourists were the biggest overseas spenders. According to the United Nations' World Tourism Organization, Chinese tourists spent US\$255 billion overseas and made 166 million overseas trips in 2019.

During the past three years, however, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted many Chinese people to forgo international travel and cut household spending. But now that the suppressed spending power is likely to be unleashed thanks to China easing the prevention and control measures.

The pace of China's reopening is of significance to the global tourism industry. Tourism officials and professionals in many countries are looking forward to the mass return of Chinese tourists as early as possible.

Several Southeast Asian countries have kept entry rules relatively relaxed for Chinese tourists. They include Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

The resumption of outbound travel by the Chinese people, which used to be a considerable source of revenue for economies that depend heavily on tourism, will help revive the tourism sector and promote cultural exchanges at the international level.

(The author is the president of Sri Lanka China Society.)

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