

Weekday *minsu* packages on offer to tap non-weekend economy in Qingpu

Hu Min

Shanghai resident Jeff Qian had a sip of tea and snacks while enjoying spring sunshine with friends under a tent in Zhoujiagang Village in Qingpu District.

It was a workday, but Qian and his two friends managed to strike a work-life balance.

At Ledao Xintian, a camping spot near Zhujiagiao watertown, they had the whole lawn to themselves, making the experience better than weekends.

"I enjoy camping," Qian said. "See, we are making tea on a fire. That's life."

They rented an entire villa, known as *minsu*, the Chinese version of B&B, at the site.

Qian said they drove one hour from downtown Putuo District.

"We came here to experience rural Shanghai. Beautiful surroundings. Lovely weather. Good facilities. It is just perfect," he said.

"Compared with weekends, there are fewer people now, which allows us to have a better experience."

Qingpu District's culture and tourism authorities have announced a campaign to promote a "non-weekend *minsu* economy" (Mondays to Thursdays) in the post-COVID-19 era, including non-weekend *minsu* packages with a plum

blossom theme for tourists from Shanghai and the Yangtze River Delta.

The program includes more than 20 district-licensed *minsu*.

Taqing, literally "stepping on the green," is a popular spring outing activity.

"The itineraries target those with flexible work schedules, new retirees, tourists and companies with team-building needs," said Xu Ruiguo, deputy director of Qingpu District Culture and Tourism Bureau.

According to Xu, *minsu* in the district are only 5 percent occupied from Mondays through Thursdays, but 70 percent on weekends.

A three-day non-weekend itinerary includes a tour of Zhujiagiao watertown, afternoon tea, Jiangnan (regions south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River) freshwater delicacies, Qingxi Countryside Park, *nongjiale* (literally "agritainment") in Lianhu Village, and a visit to Shanghai Daguan Yuan (Grand View Garden) to enjoy the plum blossoms.

Also recommended in the activity are fruit-picking, cycling around Dianshan Lake, and a hot spring experience at Sun Island Resorts Shanghai.

Travel agencies are offering packages at half price or lower to attract visitors, both offline and online.

Minsu has been gaining popularity, and non-weekend trip provides a more relaxing experience. Four rural *minsu* in Qingpu received "star" status last year.

They provide a variety of leisure activities, ranging from camping and outdoor sports to intangible cultural heritage experiences such as "apo tea," in which grannies sip tea together in the afternoon — a tradition that has been passed down for more than 700 years — *jiaobai* (wild rice shoots) leaf weaving and rice cake making, allowing tourists to sample authentic Jiangnan watertown charm.

"The goal is not to increase the number of *minsu* but to improve them, which requires policy support and service upgrades," Xu explained. "How to fill *minsu* up on workdays is what needs to be worked on."

With plum blossoms in full bloom, several tourist attractions in the district, including Shanghai Daguan Yuan, are overrun with visitors on weekends.

"Non-weekend travel will provide a more satisfying experience," Xu said.

More diverse options for these packages designed for different seasons will be introduced, as will more cultural and tourist resources in the district, he said.

"The ultimate goal is to stimulate the

non-weekend economy and rural revitalization," he said.

Luo Danhong, general manager of Shanghai Qingzhuzhou Tourism Development Co, which runs Ledao Xintian, said: "Minsu's business model is becoming more diverse, with varied functions and target groups."

Families, companies with team-building needs, retirees and even people doing livestream all use the site. The site has a restaurant, a teahouse and outdoor sports areas. It also sells local agricultural specialties. It hosts a variety of DIY and outdoor events.

"Unlike hotels, *minsu* vary in rooms and facilities, and many lack the skills to run the business," said Lu Zhengde, vice general manager of Shanghai Menglongyuan Tourism Development Co, which designs and sells tourist packages.

"We hope to attract those new retirees who gather frequently to play mah-jong and line dance," he added.

Preparations for the construction of one or two *minsu* resorts in Qingpu will start this year, and regulations promoting high-quality industry development will be issued.

"We are tapping non-weekend *minsu* economy, and we are confident about it," the culture and tourism bureau's Xu said.



A bird's-eye view of the *minsu* at Ledao Xintian



The living and dining area of a *minsu* at Ledao Xintian



Rice field in Zhoujiagang Village in Qingpu District. — Ti Gong