

# Trying everything under the sun to escape hazardous ultraviolet rays

Li Qian and Ke Jiayun

The forecast is for a sticky 36-degree Celsius day. Zhang Ming, 38, arrives at work in battle gear against the hazards of ultraviolet rays.

She is dressed head-to-toe in UV-protective clothing: a wide brim hat, sunglasses, a face mask, long sleeves and pants. To prevent sunstroke, she has a small portable fan attached around her neck.

“Sun protection is an utmost priority on these summer days,” she said.

Zhang is no oddity on Shanghai streets. What has come to be called “mummy-style dressing” or “hardcore sun protection” is a trendy topic on Chinese social media in this summer of abnormally sweltering heat.

China has seen a record number of days of temperatures hitting 35 degrees Celsius or above. Worst hit is northern China, where Beijing logged 14 excessive heat days in June.

It’s a global phenomenon, with fierce heat also hitting parts of North America and Europe. Last month, our planet recorded the hottest June on record. The onset of El Niño this year is expected to exacerbate the effects of global warming.

The World Meteorological Organization has predicted a 90 percent chance that the El Niño event, which warms the waters of the Pacific Ocean, will show moderate or higher strength through the end of this year.

Excessive heat may be a curse to most people, but it’s a boon to the sun-proofing industry. Retail sales of sun-proof clothing on domestic online shopping platforms exceeded 600 million yuan (US\$83 million) in May, a surge of about 350 percent from a



Visitors at the Palace Museum in Beijing shield themselves from the sun's rays. — Photos by IC



A woman cools on in a pool with a facekini and long-sleeved swim suit.



In the heat of summer, scooter riders in Hebei Province cover every inch of themselves.

year earlier, according to e-commerce big data analysis platform Shangzhizhen.

The Zhiyanzhan Industry Research Institute predicts China’s sun-care industry will double in value to nearly 40

billion yuan by 2029.

When extreme heatwave hit the UK last summer, sun-care sales jumped 66 percent in just four weeks, the BBC reported, with consumers rushing out to buy fans, sunscreen lotions, paddle pools and bottles of water.

The Chinese, unlike many people in North America and Europe, aren’t fixated on sun-tans as symbols of beauty. But it isn’t just lying on a beach that poses risks. The sun’s rays penetrate daily life, and, in general, the closer you live to the equator, the higher the UV levels.

China’s average UV index is higher than that in Northern Europe, according to a research paper from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research in New Zealand.

Excessive sun exposure is a major cause of skin cancer. The highest incidence of such cancers is in Australia and New Zealand, followed by Western Europe, North America and Northern Europe, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Cancer councils across the world recommend sunscreens

when tanning.

“Sunscreen should be reapplied on an hourly basis to ensure it works, but I don’t need to worry about that if I cover myself with a hat and long-sleeved shirts and pants,” 28-year-old Cynthia Chu said.

A netizen who identified herself only by the surname Wu, said in an online post, “My outer layer of skin is thinner than most. In the past, I didn’t think much about sun care and had some spots on my face. My skin was damaged, and I was diagnosed with a form of eczema called seborrheic dermatitis. That’s when I started ‘hardcore sun-screening’.”

After wearing large-brim hats, sunscreen masks and sunglasses for a year, the condition abated.

Even men, who are traditionally considered less likely to protect themselves from the ravages of UV rays, are becoming emerging consumers of sunproof products.

Sales on e-commerce platforms of men’s items, such as fishing hats and jackets, doubled from a year earlier in June, according to China Central Television.

Alex Ju, 35, first took notice of sun care about five years ago, when he developed skin problems.

“Strong sunlight made my face itch, and some tiny red spots popped up around my eyes and on my forehead,” he told Shanghai Daily. “I had solar dermatitis.”

Ju said many of his male friends use sun-care products.

“They can be divided into two categories,” he said. “One relates to those with sensitive skin, like me; the other are those awakening to the risks of sun exposure.”

Zhang Yi, chief executive of iiMedia Research, said the increased attention to ultraviolet ray damage is part of a larger trend toward more healthy lifestyles.

The increasing demand has produced a great diversity of products.

One of the more recent hits with consumers is an upgraded version of a “facekini,” which covers the entire head, from face to neck, except for the eyes.

Yiwu, a leader in small “made-in-China” commodities, is pumping up production of facekinis, China Central Television reported.

The online retail platform Taobao has a special section on sunproof products, selling sunscreen creams and sprays, and “hardcore sunscreen equipment” such as cloak-style sunscreen jackets, masks and hats with long veils, and facekinis.

In an interview with China Business Journal, Bai Yunhu, a domestic expert in cosmetics, said sunscreen ingredients have been added to diversified cosmetic products, which are customized for various target groups, such as men, children, and pregnant women.