

Throw away the guidebooks and explore lesser-known sites in China

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When considering travel destinations in China, most foreign tourists immediately think of the terra-cotta army in Xi'an, the Forbidden City and the Great Wall in Beijing or the famous Bund in Shanghai.

With such iconic spots always packed with tourists, China is promoting the less-traveled roads after fully reopening inbound tourism following the COVID pandemic.

Recently on TikTok and Instagram, tags related to traveling in China have attracted millions of viewers — both foreign and even domestic — to destinations sometimes under the radar.

A video entitled “Places you won’t believe are REAL: China Edition” is one example.

The 15-second video, which attracted more than 20 million views, showcased three places: the city of Guilin in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Furong ancient town in Hunan Province and Zhongshuge Bookstore in the city of Chengdu, Sichuan Province.

Guilin sits amid the splendor of a river and karst landscape. Furong is built around a grand waterfall, and the bookstore resembles a scene right out of pages of the magic world of “Harry Potter.”

Another video, which drew more than



Mexican travel content creator Cynthia Corona at Xianshou Rainbow Bridge in Fujian Province. She has visited more than 18 provinces in China.

— Jens Herrmann



Furong is called the town “hanging on a waterfall.” — IC

23 million clicks, shows the Flying Kiss attraction in Chongqing, which features rotating observation decks at the top of two giant statues “blowing” kisses into the air.

“My wife, who has been in Australia for five years, is from Chongqing, but even she doesn’t even know about this,” commented a user with the screenname “ohno6895.” “It’s beautiful!”

In fact, tourists to China and expats living in the country seem eager to explore beyond what’s in standard guidebooks.

Cynthia Corona from Mexico is one of them. Living in Shanghai with her husband for five years, Corona is a travel content creator who focuses on exploring different, more out-of-the-way places.

She has accumulated more than 330,000 followers on social media, such as Instagram and WeChat, and she also runs a website to introduce the sights of less-developed areas.

“I’ve been to 18 provinces in China and my favorite places are Guangxi and Yunnan,” she told Shanghai Daily. “I would revisit them any time.”

Specifically, Dali and its surrounding area in Yunnan Province is a Corona favorite. Although she doesn’t remember the exact name of the famous lake there — it’s Erhai — she remains impressed

by its tranquility, calling it one of the “coolest” places she has ever visited in the world.

“You can always find so many quiet places around the lake and hear the birds singing,” she said. “The lake is also very close to Shaxi, a little town with so much charm.”

The second-largest lake in Yunnan, Erhai leans up against Cangshan Mountain, providing a view of primitive forestland beyond the splendor of the lake. Visitors can either take a boat ride on the lake or drive through charming towns on its periphery. Along the way, they can experience the culture and delicacies of the local Bai ethnic people.

The 2,400-year-old town of Shaxi has preserved much of its ancient look and is less known than popular destinations such as Lijiang and Dali in Yunnan. A Buddhist temple dating back more than 600 years old is the main attraction there.

Corona hasn’t ignored the city where she now lives in creating travel content.

Her Shanghai tour guide for foreign visitors highlights lesser-known small museums and parks, alongside popular sites like the Bund and Yuyuan Garden.

Corona said her favorite spot in



Praised as the most beautiful bookstore in Chengdu, Zhongshuge has a magical vibe. — IC

Shanghai is Longhua Temple and its pagoda in Xuhui District.

“It’s a very unique pagoda in Shanghai, and every time I go there, I feel very peaceful,” she said. “Also, you can enjoy vegetarian noodles there at a very fair price.”

Trip.com, one of the major travel service platforms in China, said that overseas visitors seem drawn to smaller cities and towns since full inbound tourism was restored in March.

Bookings for trips to Jinghong in Yunnan Province, Yanji in Jilin Province and Yancheng in Jiangsu Province increased up to 60 percent over 2019, before the pandemic struck.

“Apart from China’s Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, most inbound tourists are from Southeast Asia, Europe, Japan and Australia,” said Sun Bowen, general manager of inbound tourism at Trip.com. “Foreign tourists love to roam around northern cities or spend their time in well-equipped resorts.”

Sretko Becarevic, a Serbian-born Canadian now living in Shanghai, told Shanghai Daily that he spent a recent vacation at the Changbai Mountains resort in Jilin.

“It was really good,” he said. “I liked the outdoor exercise and the beautiful scenery. The resort was very well organized, very modern and very convenient.”