

HOMETOWN OF CONFUCIUS, FRIENDLY SHANDONG

SHANDONG BLENDS HISTORY, SCENERY AND FLAVOR

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Situated along the lower reaches of the Yellow River and on the eastern edge of the North China Plain, Shandong province has long been renowned for its rich resources, profound historical heritage and diverse cultures.

From multiple historical sites and breathtaking landscapes to appetizing local cuisine, the province offers a broad array of attractions and experiences that captivate tourists from home and abroad.

Natural beauty

The provincial capital Jinan is known as the “city of springs” for its abundant water resources.

The most famous is the Baotu Spring in the city’s downtown area, which has been celebrated in poetry and art over the centuries for its crystal clear, bubbling water.

The spring flows northward into Daming Lake — another renowned scenic attraction in the city. Tourists can take a boat tour and explore the historical sites on the shoreline.

Next to southern Jinan is Taian city, where stands the majestic Mount Tai with an altitude of 1,545 meters.

Reaching the mountain’s pinnacle Jade Emperor Peak requires visitors to conquer a challenging ascent of nearly 8,000 steps. Yet the arduous effort is rewarded at the top with a stunning vista of ancient temples, towering pines, and steep cliffs piercing through a sea of clouds.

Shandong also boasts a long coastline of about 3,500 kilometers, offering tourists impressive sea views, various water sports and fresh seafood delicacies. One of the most popular seaside cities is Qingdao, which is noted for its charming beaches and historical European-style architecture. The Golden Beach, named for its sands, is ideal for sunbathing and swimming, while the Shilaoren Beach offers a per-

fect viewpoint for watching the sunrise over the sea.

The coastal city of Dongying is where the Yellow River, China’s mother river, joins the Bohai Sea, creating a unique estuary wetland.

Spanning more than 150,000 hectares, the Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve in Dongying is home to nearly 400 species of birds, some of which are under first-class national protection such as the Oriental stork, the hooded crane and the red-crowned crane.

Based on the reserve, the city has set up the Yellow River Estuary Ecotourism Area, allowing nature enthusiasts to admire bird flocks, beautiful wetlands and the spectacular dividing line between the Yellow River and the Bohai Sea.

Cultural heritage

As one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization, Shandong has been a vital cultural and political center for millennia.

From the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-771 BC) to the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), the region was home to the two powerful states of Qi and Lu. That’s why Shandong is known as “the Land of Qilu” today.

The Lu State was also the home of the great philosopher and educator Confucius, or Kong Qiu, whose teachings have profoundly shaped Chinese culture and society for centuries.

The Temple of Confucius in Qufu, Shandong, along with the Confucius Cemetery and the Kong Family Mansion, was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994. Visitors can gain a deeper understanding of Confucius’ life and philosophy at the site while admiring exquisite ancient buildings.

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site in Shandong is the Great Wall of Qi. Dating back more than 2,600 years, it is one of the oldest Great Wall sections in China with well-preserved conditions, earning it the nickname “father of the Great Wall”.

The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, the world’s longest ancient canal, runs 643 km in Shandong, passing through the five cities of Dezhou, Liaocheng, Taian, Jining and Zaozhuang.

Based on the natural beauty and cultures of different regions, the province has released 10 Grand Canal cultural and tourism routes, with themes such as canal scenery, ancient cities along the canal and the inheritance of canal culture.

Taierzhuang Ancient Town in Zaozhuang city, for example, is rich in intangible cultural heritage and traditional handicraft resources. The town still retains numerous ancient streets, lanes and buildings, earning it the title of “Living Ancient Canal” by the World Tourism Organization.

Shanxi-Shaanxi Guild Hall, located on the west bank of the ancient canal in Liaocheng, used to be the place where Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants gathered, conducted business, stored goods and entertained during the mid to late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It is the only well-preserved commercial guild hall in the city.

Currently, Shandong has more than 800 museums, including 32 designated as national first-level museums.

The Shandong Museum, located in Jinan, possesses a collection of more than 400,000 artifacts.

Its most famous exhibits include a black pottery high-stem goblet from the Neolithic period, the Ya Chou bronze battle-axe from the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC), and the nine-tasseled crown that was unearthed from the tomb of Zhu Tan (1370-89), the son of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) founder Zhu Yuanzhang.

Additionally, a total of 186 cultural items from Shandong have been recognized as national intangible heritage including kite-making techniques from Weifang, shadow puppet plays from Jinan and paper-cutting from Yantai.

From Mount Tai to Confucius’ heritage and diverse delicacies, the province offers rich culture, natural beauty and unforgettable experiences

Folk activities

Shandong province offers tourists brilliant festivals and traditional cultural activities throughout the year, showcasing its vibrant artistic creativity and cultural diversity.

Every April, kite-flying masters from around the world gather in Weifang city for the international kite festival.

During the festival, the sky becomes a blue canvas dotted with colorful kites of all shapes and sizes, ranging from traditional designs such as intricate centipedes and dragons to modern artistic innovations and giant three-dimensional designs like buildings and cartoon characters. This year’s event attracted 257 teams from 51 countries and regions, highlighting cultural exchanges and the global appeal of kite-flying traditions.

Held annually in summer, Qingdao International Beer Festival is Asia’s biggest beer party.

The 35th session of the event, lasting one month from July to August, featured more than 2,300 domestic and international beer brands and, for the first time, introduced an “exclusive festival beer” to give visitors a truly unique tasting experience. About 22.48 million people took part in the festival this year, consuming more than 3,000 metric tons of beer.

Other international festivals hosted by Shandong include the Heze International Peony Cultural Tourism Festival, the Yantai International Wine Exposition and the Mount Tai International Mountain Climbing Festival.

Shandong also holds a variety of folk activities including the Dongyue temple fair in Taian, the Huji Shuhui, a festival celebrating multiple forms of narrative and singing folk arts and the fish lantern festival, which is mainly popular in fishing villages of Yantai.

Rural tourism

Shandong is as an ideal destination for people who are looking to escape from the relentless hustle and bustle of cities, as it boasts a multitude of picturesque, tranquil villages.

Zhuquan village in Linyi, Shandong province, has a history of more than 400 years. In Chinese, *zhu* literally means bamboo and *quan* means springs, reflecting the two major landscapes of the village.

In 2019, the village was inducted into China’s first batch of key villages for rural tourism. Visitors can take a casual stroll along the bamboo-lined paths, stay in traditional stone dwellings, and partake in activities such as fruit picking in order to enjoy the slow-paced, leisurely village life.

At Houshanwang village in Rizhao, travelers can explore rolling mountains, pick tea leaves and sip some fresh tea amid a breathtaking landscape of vibrant green.

Meanwhile, at Dongchudao village in the city of Rongcheng, they can wander the streets dotted with ancient buildings, have a close encounter with seagulls and fish with local residents.

Transportation, accommodation

Shandong has been improving its transport system in recent years to offer tourists better services and boost the tourism industry.

The province now has five international airports in Jinan, Qingdao, Yantai, Weihai and Linyi, with direct flights to the United Kingdom, Russia, Australia, Japan and South Korea, among other countries and regions.

These airports are equipped with modern facilities and high-quality services, ensuring a hassle-free travel experience.

During the first half of this year, the number of inbound tourists to Shandong reached 705,000, up 72.1 percent year-on-year, thanks to China’s visa-free policy and the increasing number of international flights.

Also, there is an extensive highway network and well-connected high-speed railways in the province, which enable tourists to travel efficiently between its major tourism cities.

For example, the high-speed rail journey from Qingdao to Weihai takes just over one hour. Departing from Jinan, travelers can reach Bei-

jing in only one and a half hours and Shanghai in about three hours via the Beijing-Shanghai High-Speed Railway.

Visitors are also offered a diverse selection of accommodation, from luxury hotels and cozy homestays to rustic countryside inns and traditional guesthouses. Some cities have built special hotels close to scenic attractions, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in natural beauty and enjoy a pleasant stay. Tourists should not miss the seaside Confucianism-themed hotel, the Lahu Qingdao, and the Bright Qi Hotels and Resort in Zibo, which features an awe-inspiring landscape due to its location on an 800-meter-high cliff.

Culinary delights

Shandong’s waters supply its people with abundant seafood like sea cucumbers, abalones, and prawns, while its inland regions with fertile land offer high-quality grains, vegetables, and poultry.

As one of China’s eight major culinary schools, Shandong cuisine, or Lu cuisine, has a history spanning over 2,500 years. It is celebrated for its fresh, salty flavors, meticulous cooking techniques, and emphasis on dining rituals.

One signature dish is sweet and sour carp, made with a fresh carp from Shandong’s lakes or rivers. The fish is carefully prepared with parallel cuts across its body, marinated, coated in a light batter, and deep-fried until its skin turns golden and crisp, while the flesh remains tender.

What elevates it is the smooth sweet-and-sour sauce: a perfect mix of vinegar, sugar, soy sauce and starch water, sometimes with black fungus and bamboo shoots, simmered to a thick consistency and poured over the carp.

In addition, nearly every city in Shandong boasts its own local specialties and street food. Famous examples include braised chicken from Dezhou, *shaobing* (a type of crispy baked flatbread) from Zhoucun district in Zibo, and *bazirou* (pork belly stewed with soy sauce) from Jinan.

