

Top tourism province Yunnan goes harsh on kickbacks

Southwest China's Yunnan, the top province for tourists, rolled out harsh regulations to tackle tourist scams.

Yunnan is the top tourist province in China, receiving over 431 million domestic and overseas tourists in 2016, about 10 percent of the national total. It boasts rich tourism resources, including unparalleled natural scenery, ethnic culture and world heritage sites such as Lijiang.

However, it has faced increasing public criticism after incidents such as forced shopping excursions, scams, and the humiliation and beating of tourists.

Statistics from the National Tourism Administration and web resources show Yunnan frequently ranks top in the number of complaints filed by tourists.

In February, complaints against Yunnan tour operators accounted for about 34.8 percent of the national total. Most of the complaints were related to cheap tours and forced shopping.

"The new regulation was made to separate tours from shopping, and we aim to restore tourism market order within a year," said Yu Fan, director of the provincial tourism development commission at a press conference on Monday.

Shops at tourist destinations often sell overpriced goods of shoddy quality. According to the new regulation, which comes into effect on April 15, these shops will turn into supermarket-style shops with proper pricing and fall under day-to-day supervision by tourism and commerce authorities.

The regulation bans kickbacks or commissions, which had come under the guise of "parking fees" or "tea fees" for bus or taxi drivers, and "head-count fees" for guides.

"The new regulation removes the source of profit for tour operators," said Mou Xuemei, director of the tourist guide association in Lijiang, Yunnan.

"It means guides can no longer receive commissions, and their earnings will solely depend on whether their clients are happy," Mou said.

In Lijiang, there are about 2,000 tourist guides.

"The new policy will greatly impact them, and I have heard them talking about the policy since word of it came out," she said.

"Kickbacks are a national problem. Everyone will look and see how tourism reform in Yunnan goes," she said.

According to a tourism industry report, some shops sell jade, medicine and

Pu'er tea at ten times the price of purchase. Fifty to 90 percent of the money goes back to travel companies, which then give kickbacks to their guides accordingly.

“Commissions based on shopping tours are dysfunctional and distort the proper enjoyment of the travel experience,” said Garry Crockett, global executive chairman of China Ready & Accredited, a tourism consulting firm.

“The new regulation brings China’s domestic tourism policy into harmony with international best practice. Most Western travellers expect transparency in tour arrangement and like to be provided with freedom to choose which shop they patronize during their travels,” he said.

Yunnan will establish a rating system for tourist guides and increase supervision of guides. It will also establish a blacklist for discredited tour operators.

Avian flu under spotlight



The central government has urged local authorities to tackle the outbreak of H7N9 avian influenza. [Photo/China Daily]

The central government has urged local authorities to tackle the outbreak of

H7N9 avian influenza by taking more effective measures to prevent the virus from spreading.

The move was decided at an executive meeting of the State Council, China's Cabinet, which was presided over by Premier Li Keqiang on Feb 22.

Li was briefed on prevention and control measures against the lethal virus. He called for local governments to monitor the epidemic and punctually disclose relevant information to the public.

Since the first case of a human infected with the virus in China in 2013, it has killed thousands of people across the globe.

The number of patients infected with the H7N9 strain in China has increased rapidly since December and more than 16 provinces have reported an outbreak of the epidemic since the beginning of this year.

The virus claimed 79 lives in January, more than triple the death toll for December, and far surpassing the number of deaths in the same month over recent years, the National Health and Family Planning Commission reported on Feb 15.

After the meeting, regions such as Beijing, Anhui and Guizhou provinces took swift action to control the disease and ensure public health. The number of those infected dropped to 160, with 61 fatalities in February, according to the commission.

According to a statement released after the meeting, live poultry markets where infected birds are detected will be immediately closed, as exposure to infected poultry is one of the main causes of human infection.

The meeting decided to upgrade the sector in areas where markets have been hit by the virus by ordering that poultry be raised in large factories, before being slaughtered in designated sites and transported via cold-chain logistics to supermarkets. By doing this, consumer safety will be further ensured as they will not be exposed to live infected poultry.

The statement said sufficient medical supplies and funds will be provided for all emergency and necessary treatment. Patients will get their medical bills reimbursed through the medical insurance system.

Shu Yuelong, director of the National Center for Influenza, said there was no evidence to show the virus can be easily transmitted among humans. He added that people should avoid touching infected poultry, or exposure to any live poultry markets, which are two of the most common reasons for human infection.

Prevention measures start with source-stringent control over live poultry so the meeting decided to impose stricter surveillance over the breeding and transporting of live poultry. Disinfection and quarantine measures will also be strengthened. Local markets that detect an outbreak must be closed as soon as possible and the animals destroyed, the statement said.

China has invested huge funds in surveillance and management of the virus since 2013, said a communiqué released by the World Organization for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on March 17. However, obvious symptoms take time to become apparent after infection, making prevention and control measures more complicated, the document said.

The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention said on March 17 that the outbreak will not be large-scale as it is difficult for humans to pass it on.

The past four years have seen a new outbreak of the virus and each year saw fatalities, said Du Zhengyu, a disease-control doctor in Anqing, Anhui province.

“The government is taking market-management measures by shutting down live poultry markets that impose potential threats to people living nearby. More importantly, the public should be cautious themselves,” he said.

Du suggested that individuals should be alert to any direct contact with live poultry and hesitant to buy live animals such as chickens. In addition, anyone who has cold-like symptoms should go to hospital for a checkup and treatment, he added.

[Official seeks connection with tech giant on social media](#)

A Chinese official has used an unlikely networking method to get in contact with Lei Jun, CEO of China’s tech giant Xiaomi, posting a notice on social media seeking business cooperation with the company.

Ji Xiang, vice mayor of Ma’anshan in Anhui Province, has come under the spotlight after his handwritten notice seeking contact with a tech mogul posted on his WeChat friends’ circle went viral.

“If anyone in my ‘omnipotent’ friends’ circle can reach Lei Jun, please introduce us as the city wants to work with him on a project,” wrote the 47-year-old official.

Within 10 minutes, said Ji, 10 friends offered to help, out of his circle of over 5,000 friends, ranging from senior government leaders to blue-collar workers, on the social media platform.

“We are now communicating with senior executives in Xiaomi Inc. via a WeChat group to discuss potential cooperation,” he said. Ji claimed social media had greatly boosted work efficiency and helped consolidate resources within a

large circle of “friends.”

The vice mayor publishes an average of up to 70 posts a day, including his updates as well as shared news and articles.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has told officials to heed public opinion using the internet and has encouraged them to make greater use of the internet to learn about the concerns and wishes of the people.

Ban on pets stirs up controversy



The community places several nets as threatening signs for wandering dogs. [Photo/cqcb.com]

A ban on pets in a residential community in Xiaoshan of Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province, has stirred up controversy, especially over whether the property management office’s action is legitimate.

According to the notice issued by the office, in order to provide a

"comfortable, safe and tidy environment" for all residents, the community had responded to the wishes of a wide range of property owners and would no longer allow pets in the compound. Those already owning pets were told to get rid of them within 15 days regardless of what method they used.

"I'm opposed to the way people raise their dogs," said an anonymous security guard in the community.

He went on, "Dog excrement is ubiquitous –on the lawns, gardens, elevator doorways, stairways or even underground parking lots. On some rainy days, people walked their dogs underground, where the stinky odor suffocated me, especially in the sultry summer in August, and I had to clean the room."

A property management office staff member surnamed Chen said the issue of the notice was a reluctant choice as many residents had complained their lives had been severely affected by the noise and waste of the pets.

"Although we cannot interfere with the ownerships of the pets that have been legitimized by registrations and issuance of certificates, we indeed hope that the pets they raise should not be allowed to cause environmental contamination and neighborhood disturbance," he said.

After the notice was issued, the community placed several nets as threatening signs for wandering dogs, even though there is little chance for any animal to get caught, as few residents walk their pets anymore.

One dog owner commented online, "I can hardly imagine the ramifications of the notice concerning how the property management office will act against the pets after 15 days. It is ludicrous for a notice like that which bans us all to walk with pets simply because of the troubles caused by some irresponsible owners."

The community, however is divided, with other residents supporting the decision of the property management office.

"I was scared one night when a dog of colossal size threw its entire weight on my car and almost overturned it," another resident commented online. "The ferocious dogs raised in the community jeopardize the safety of residents."

Zhang Jinfang, a lawyer from Zhejiang Tianfu Attorney Office, said that the right to raise pets is acceptable as long as they are well controlled, so that policies such as an arbitrary ban on pets were illegitimate and cruel.

However, the attorney also emphasized that people with legally-registered dogs that have been inoculated against diseases should always make sure that their dogs are kept on a leash outside, not allowed to bark beyond 30 to 50 decibels and should be kept away from children and pregnant women.

In addition, the owners should clear away any excrement in a timely manner to ensure clean public surroundings.

4 fired, 13 held in probe of care center

Lei Wenfeng, a 15-year-old with autism, was found dead after staying at a squalid care center three months after he wandered away from his father. [Photo/boyangcongpeople]

The investigation of the death of an autistic teenager at a care center in Guangdong province has led to the dismissal of four local officials and criminal detention of 13 people, and the central government called on Monday for better care of homeless people.

A joint investigation group formed by various authorities of Guangdong has found that some officials in the city of Shaoguan and its Xinfeng county failed to perform their duties.

The joint group decided to sack Chen Jinghui, Party chief of Xinfeng where the care center is located, and Lai Qixin, deputy director of Shaoguan's civil affairs bureau, which is supposed to review applications from such care agencies and supervise their operations.

The other two who were removed are Long Yongwen, former civil affairs bureau chief of Shaoguan and now head of the city's water bureau, and Liu Xiangtie, chief of Xinfeng's civil affairs bureau, Xinhua reported on Monday.

The probe was triggered by the death of Lei Wenfeng, a 15-year-old autistic boy who got lost and stayed more than a month in the Lianxi care center before dying in December. The center, which is privately operated under contract with local civil affairs authorities, cares for people of all ages.

Investigators have also found that some local officials gave irresponsible approval to the Lianxi care center project and earned money illegally from its operation.

Four officials, including former head of the Xinfeng civil affairs bureau Li Cuiqiong and former deputy head Pan Zhong'ai, are being investigated for abuse of power. Five other officials, including Yi Biheng, another former head of the county's civil affairs bureau, are being investigated for dereliction of duty.

All nine are under criminal coercive measures, a judicial term for restriction or denial of personal rights. Of them, Li, Pan and Yi have also been put in criminal detention, according to the release.

In addition, local police have put in criminal detention two executives and eight staff members of the care center. Investigators found that those who ran the care center misused government funds that were supposed to have been used to help the homeless and maltreated some of those being cared for in the

center.

Also on Monday, the Ministry of Civil Affairs held a nationwide teleconference to strengthen inspection of all aid stations for the homeless across the country. Such stations, usually government-run, provide care to a person for three months, after which time the person is transferred to a care center.

The ministry required that those who need from 10 to 90 days' care should be cared for at the aid stations, rather than being transferred to a care center operated by a third party.

Local civil affairs officers should make serious efforts to help these people search for family members.