

Old town agrees to improve services



Lijiang Old Town [File photo]

The Old Town of Lijiang, a national 5-A scenic spot in Southwest China's Yunnan province, posted a statement on its official micro blog on Saturday afternoon, saying it was willing to accept punishment by the China National Tourism Administration and work to resolve issues with the services it provides.

"We apologize for our insufficient work. We are open to tourists' criticism and suggestions, and will make things right," said the government of Gucheng district, where the town is located, in the post.

The post came after the National Tourism Administration issued warnings to three 5-A scenic spots on Saturday morning, including the Old Town of Lijiang, demanding rectification of issues within six months.

The other two scenic spots are Jingpo Lake in Mudanjiang city, Heilongjiang province, and Laohutan Ocean Park in Dalian, Liaoning province.

Peng Decheng, director of the administration's Planning and Finance Department, said the number of tourist complaints about Lijiang has remained high, with frequent incidents relating to tourists' personal safety or property.

"Local residents have had serious conflicts with tourists," Peng said. "The scenic spot has failed to maintain quality equipment and services."

In recent years, there have been many reports of tourists being overcharged or being forced to shop in Lijiang.

This year alone, there have already been at least three incidents involving tourists being beaten in Lijiang. In one incident, a female tourist lost her purse and was disfigured after being beaten by a dozen people at a restaurant.

These high-profile incidents have attracted widespread public attention and put the town, well-known for its long history and as home to several ethnic groups, at the center of controversy.

Zheng Yi, mayor of Lijiang, said in a Government Work Report during the ongoing Lijiang People's Congress that Lijiang has gained a bad reputation for insufficient supervision and administration, as well as unsatisfactory services and public security.

Zheng requested that relevant departments shoulder responsibility and make efforts to solve the issues.

Liu Jian, a 31-year-old Beijing resident who traveled to the old town in September 2015, said: "I was lucky compared with some tourists who were beaten, as I was only overcharged there. But the experiences were enough to leave me with a bad impression.

"I'm glad to hear that the old town will start to rectify its issues and I hope it will be reformed."

[24 detained over Nanchang hotel fire that killed 10](#)



Emergency workers treat a victim after arriving at the scene of a fire at a hotel in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on Saturday.[Photo provided to China Daily]

24 people have been detained by the police in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province in connection with a hotel fire on Saturday, which killed 10 people.

14 others were injured in the blaze and have been hospitalized, with three still in critical conditions.

The fire affected 1,500 square metres of the first two floors of the building, which also housed a karaoke bar which was under renovation.

An initial investigation has suggested that the fire may have been caused by the cutting of renovation materials.

Of those arrested, two are said to be contractors of the construction project, along with 14 construction workers, seven shareholders and one porter from the karaoke bar. Eight other suspects are still being sought.

H7N9 virus might become drug-resistant



A worker disinfects poultry cages at a market in Suichuan county, Jiangxi province, on Sunday. The county has ordered the closure of local poultry markets from Saturday to March 10. [Li Jianping/For China Daily]

The new strain of H7N9 bird flu virus confirmed earlier this month could become drug-resistant, experts say, while a leading specialist in respiratory diseases warns that it might be resistant already.

Human cases have been rising in China.

The new strain, two human cases of which were reported in Guangdong province, shows resistance to oseltamivir phosphate, a commonly used drug in the prevention and treatment of flu, said Zhong Nanshan, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, according to a report published on Sunday by Nanfang Daily, a newspaper in the provincial capital of Guangzhou.

Although the two patients are resistant to the drug, oseltamivir phosphate has been effective for most human H7N9 cases, Zhong was reported as saying. "This shows most H7N9 viruses have not mutated to the new strain," he said.

He Jianfeng, chief expert in infectious disease at the Guangdong Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said that although the new H7N9 strain shows resistance to the drug, the drug could still have an effect on the strain.

"Both patients have used oseltamivir phosphate before, so it is not known whether the drug resistance is caused by previous use of the drug or by a mutation of the virus," He told Nanfang Daily. "But the possible drug-resistant nature of the new strain deserves more attention."

Much of China has seen the H7N9 outbreak since the start of winter. In most cases, it has been linked to exposure to live poultry. In January alone, the Chinese mainland reported 192 human cases of the virus, including 79 deaths, making it the worst outbreak since the virus was first reported in China in 2013, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

The total number of human cases this year increased to 296, including 94 deaths, as of Sunday, covering more than half of all provincial areas in China, China Central Television reported.

The new strain is more dangerous to poultry, but poses no new threat to humans, and it is not more infectious to humans at the moment, according to a statement by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention on Feb 19. Current research shows that the H7N9 virus is not easily transmitted between humans, according to the World Health Organization.

Zhong could not be reached for comment on Sunday.

He Xiong, deputy director of the Beijing Center for Disease Prevention and Control, said the new strain does not result in increased risk of human-to-human transmission of the virus, but unlike other H7N9 viruses, it can cause diseases in poultry, which should be studied further.

Only two human H7N9 cases have been reported in Beijing this year, and both of them involve patients who are from other parts of China and were transferred to Beijing for treatment, He Xiong said.

"There may be sporadic cases, but the possibility of a large-scale outbreak in Beijing is slim, as authorities and the public are well prepared," he said, adding that scientists are still conducting research into the virus to ascertain whether it is linked to climate, to ensure better prevention and control.

China sees sharp decline in ivory smuggling in 2016

The amount of smuggled ivory tracked down in China fell 80 percent in 2016 from previous peak years, the State Forestry Administration (SFA) said Sunday.

Liu Dongsheng, deputy head of the SFA, made the remarks at the opening ceremony of a wildlife protection campaign, without specifying detailed numbers.

China will stop commercial processing and sales of ivory by the end of this year. Last year, it imposed a three-year ban on ivory imports in an escalated fight against illegal trading of wild animals and plants.

The number of illegal wildlife trade cases has been on the decline since last year, said Liu.

Meanwhile, the numbers of critically endangered species in China, including giant pandas, crested ibis, Yangtze alligators and Tibetan antelopes, have been increasing steadily, he said.

China's newly-revised law on wild animal protection took effect at the start of this year, imposing harsher punishment on overkilling and illegal utilization of wild animals.

Over 800 seized for crimes related to underground banks

Chinese police seized more than 800 suspects in 380 major cases worth 900 billion yuan (US\$131 billion) related to underground banks in 2016, said the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) on Sunday.

A campaign against underground banks to maintain financial order and security is helping the country's anti-corruption drive recover the assets of fugitive officials, said the ministry.

In 2016, the ministry worked with the central bank and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange to crack down on the transfer of illicit money via offshore companies and underground banks.

Officials with the MPS said that the ministry will continue action against illegal private banks in cooperation with the central bank and the foreign exchanges regulator in 2017.

“For a long time, underground banks have become a fast channel to transfer money, for they are anonymous and hidden. Many criminals have taken advantage of the channel to transfer their illegal gains to the overseas,” said Zhang Niannian, an official with the central bank.

Underground banks have also offered a quick passageway for corrupt officials to transfer their properties, Zhang added.

The central bank will track and analyze new methods of crimes, especially in special non-financial institutions and sector, and improve measures of anti-money laundering, Zhang said.

Shu Jianping, head of the anti-money laundering office of the economic crime investigation division of the MPS, said that cases related to underground banks covered several industries, including foreign trade and real estates.

Harms of underground banks are increasing, Shu said, adding that local public security organs were urged to continue the campaign against underground banks.