



Jinjiang Wulin traditional village has quietly transformed into a “Nyonya village”. Since March this year, with the unfolding of the second Singapore Peranakan Festival, Wulin village has been drawing tourists from all over the world to experience the unique “one day in Nanyang”.

Data show that from January to August, the number of tourists visiting Wulin is over 800,000, far exceeding the target set up three years ago of 400,000 visitors by 2023. In July this year, Wulin was successfully listed as a national 4A tourist attraction.

From the creation of the festivals to the shaping of the cultural tourism brand, Wulin found a new way to shape the Peranakan cultural tourism IP and activate the cultural tourism economy after the series of “Chinese New Year in Minnan” went viral on CCTV.



Nyonya culture blooming in Wulin

Being a one-day “little Nyonya”

To be a one-day “little Nyonya”, Dada rushed to Wulin from Fuqing with her daughter and five friends.

Dressed in beautiful Nyonya costumes—light gauzy Kebaya tops, tight and shapely sarongs, shiny beaded shoes—they wandered around the Chaodong Building and Minnan ancient houses, walking on the stone paths, taking pictures with bright smiles.

“It’s such a unique experience to be a ‘little Nyonya’ here in Wulin,” said Dada. She was so attracted to those postings about Wulin’s Nyonya culture on social media like WeChat and Xiaohongshu (or Red). One night when gathering with friends, she mentioned her longing for this unique dressing-up experience and got echoed immediately. And they came here the next day.

Wandering among this one-square-kilometer hamlet featuring Romanesque, Gothic, and ancient Minnan elements, immersing themselves in the enchanting exotic atmosphere, they found this trip extremely worthwhile.

The word “Nyonya” is derived from the “Baba Nyonya” ethnic group in Southeast Asia.

During the Ming Dynasty, following Admiral Zheng He’s voyages to the Western Ocean, a large number of Chinese, especially those from southern Fujian, began to go to Nanyang or South of the ocean (the traditional Chinese term for Southeast Asia). In Malaysia, Malacca became a Chinese settlement. Some of them gradually intermarried with the local people, and the children they gave birth to were called Baba for males and Nyonya for females. The Nyonya, in particular, have maintained their Chinese heritage in terms of religion, food, dress and marriage customs, which has been developed into a unique culture through centuries of cultural blending.

“Why are tourists so attracted to Wulin to experience Nyonya culture? One of the main reasons is its unique ambience of overseas Chinese villages,” explained Hong Mianmian, deputy general manager of Jinjiang Wulin Qingpu Operation Company. She pointed out that Wulin’s architectural complex combining Chinese and Western cultures created a proper cultural field for Nyonya dressing-up.

Where to shoot the most beautiful photos? When to have the best light? On social media such as Douyin (or Tiktok) and Xiaohongshu, visitors are sharing their dressing-up experience in Wulin.

Not long ago, “Friends Together”, the show produced by Youku.com, came to this century-old overseas Chinese village for filming. Three young celebrities – Zhang Tianai, Liu Lian, and Zhang Li—spent a day in Wulin, and experienced the daily life of “little Nyonya” in an all-round and immersive way.

From locals to out-of-towners, from tourists to celebrities, everyone’s wondering about this unique experience. Being a one-day “little Nyonya” in Wulin has become a new fad in the cultural tourism market.



Why Wulin?

Nyonya culture experiencing activities in Wulin are welcomed and loved by the tourists who show their passion for heritages. Zhuang Xiaofang, CPC Working Committee Secretary of Xintang Community, is not surprised by this recent tourism hit in Wulin. Wulin is home to more than 1,800 villagers and the place of ancestry of about 15,000 Chinese living abroad. It’s a rural settlement featuring foreign architecture dating back roughly a century ago. They were built by Chinese who returned from Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. Since 2022, the official Wulin has co-branded with the Singapore Tourism Board (or STB) to launch two consecutive festival activities featuring Peranakan culture.

Since 2021, the official has sought its way to turn the village into a getaway that offers immersion in Southeast Asian and southern Fujianese cultures. At that time, Singapore was also in need of sparking a new tourism boom and a new wave of cultural understanding under the pandemic, then figured out that its iconic Peranakan culture would play an indispensable role in revitalizing its tourism market.

With the recommendation by *Sanlian Life Weekly*, Mr. Pan Zhengzhi, Chief Representative and Executive Director of the STB Greater China, inked a 3-year partnership deal with the authority after his visit to Wulin. The partnership deals aim to activate both Wulin and Singapore’s tourism market. Under the partnership, the first Singapore-Wulin Peranakan Festival was successfully launched on March 8, 2022, the International Women’s Day. That was because Nyonya are the female Peranakans who epitomize the history of Chinese migrating to Southeast Asia in a time span of several hundred years.

During the festival, the rich Nyonya culture was presented to the public in forms of culinary, accommodation, art exhibition, and architecture, providing visitors with an immersive cultural experience.

Driven by the activities of the cultural season, several businesses with southeastern elements, such as Nanyang Café, Wang Yue Restaurant, and Quanshang Dress Experience Pavilion, have been introduced to Wulin to create the public a multi-dimensional and vivid Nyonya cultural experience.

On March 8 this year, the second Singapore-Wulin Peranakan Festival was launched as scheduled. This year, the organizers joined hands with Changxin Media, the producer of the blockbuster “Little Nyonya”, to hold an exhibition to showcase various artifacts featuring Nyonya culture.

At the opening ceremony, the Fujian Overseas Chinese Federation awarded Wulin as “Cross-cultural Communication Platform for Overseas Chinese”.

“With the transition of tourism from a traditional one to a modern one, tourism with high-quality and immersive cultural experiences has become the core product in the market. And this explains why the multi-dimensional Nyonya cultural experience activities in Wulin became a hit”, added by Yang Xueshan, co-founder and CEO of Qingpu Cultural Vacation.

Now, preparations for the third Singapore-Wulin Peranakan Festival have begun. At that time, Wulin and the Singapore Tourism Board are expected to reach more collaborations in the promotion of culture, fashion, cuisine, and other businesses.



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Tourist traffic activates the market

The increasing popularity of Wulin Nyonya cultural experiences has incessantly brought tourist traffic and has contributed to a new round of craze for cultural travel entrepreneurship and employment.

Yao Shufang, owner of a Nyonya dress experience shop, found that the shop received approximately 10 to 300 customers every day since opening in March this year. Business flourished with the increase of tourists.

To meet customer demand, the shop increased its collection of Nyonya clothing from about 50 sets to about 300, with four more employees hired. Combined with the experience of Gaojia Opera and Tea Art, the shop also set up a branch in the Minnan Culture Experience Pavilion.

The experience market is not only hot within scenic spots but also beneficial to the residents of Wulin Community.

Zheng Mingzhu, one of the residents engaged in the clothing industry, has sensed the business opportunities.

Before the Dragon Boat Festival this year, Zheng applied for a business license, installed fire protection facilities, and opened a Nyonya dress experience shop at home. “It’s nice to be able to do business on your doorstep,” Zheng said with a big smile.

So far, at least five dress experience shops have opened in Wulin, some are run by the residents, others are rented.

Optimistic about the development of Nyonya catering business opportunities, this year, Chen Chunlei and his friends invested in one of the most popular restaurants in Wulin, “Little Nyonya”, transformed and upgraded it into a brand new “Nyonya Gourmet Kitchen” serving exquisite Nyonya cuisine.

“Focusing on the style of Nanyang cuisine, we have comprehensively upgraded the dishes and decoration, hoping that visitors to Wulin can better taste the Nyonya food culture in the atmosphere of Nanyang customs,” said Chen Chunlei. According to Chen, the restaurant can receive 20 or 30 tables of guests every day since the trial opening on August 25, and better business can be expected.

Photographers found business opportunities in this market, too. Chen Xiaozhen takes his daily trip from Xiamen to Wulin. Thanks to this hot new market, he receives 2 to 4 orders per day for shooting Nyonya costumes in Wulin, which brings him a daily income of about two thousand yuan.

“We look forward to more cultural exchanges, cultural tourism, and economic interactions, bringing more exciting sparks to Wulin,” said Zhuang Xiaofang. She also added that relying on the high recognition of the local architecture, the multi-gene of the overseas Chinese culture, and the advantage of the three-dimensional transportation of “rail, road and air”, Wulin will be committed to creating a more flexible and promising Minnan vacation resort rich in overseas Chinese culture, and strive to become a center of tourism and leisure in southern Fujian.

