

# China's First Tourism-Focused Outlets Opens in Ningbo

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The Ningbo Qianwan Century Outlets.

With its glazed pagodas, illuminated fountains, and sweeping Tang Dynasty-style rooftops, the Ningbo Qianwan Century Outlets (also known as Ningbo Qianwan Splendid City Culture & Tourism Outlets or Shengshili) opened on June 28 in the Ningbo Qianwan New Area, unveiling a bold fusion of retail ambition and historical pageantry.

The launch followed a four-day soft opening in May that drew more than 300,000 visitors and generated over 28 million yuan (approximately \$3.9 million) in sales. Spanning 220,000 square meters and backed by nearly 2 billion yuan in investment, the complex is billed as China's first outlet mall built around a cultural tourism IP model — part shopping destination, part immersive cultural experience.

But beyond the ornate facades and theatrical design lies a larger ambition: to reposition Qianwan as a rising tourism engine. Long defined by its industrial identity, the area is now seeking to reinvent itself through a new mix of retail and recreation. The Outlets' arrival marks a key step in that transformation — and a broader signal of how Chinese cities are reimagining the convergence of commerce, culture, and leisure in an evolving era.

## 1 A Cultural Mall with a Tourist Soul

At the center of the Outlets' appeal is its striking visual language: Tang Dynasty-inspired towers finished with colored glaze, a central promenade, and a handful of stage-ready open plazas designed for performances and seasonal markets. Yet the content goes beyond aesthetics.

Inside the complex are a number of firsts: a Chinese National Geography "MagZone" that transforms the household magazine into immersive exhibits; a fairy tale-themed chocolate park aimed at families; and a beer museum concept store. More than 30 brands launched new flagship experiences on opening day, with over 30 percent entering the region for the first time.

While the outlets sell fashion, streetwear, and designer home goods, the focus is not just on transactions, but transformation — of place, of consumer behavior, and of the cultural identity of the region itself.

"We are seeing tourism shift from simply seeing and buying to experiencing," said a retail analyst. "Qianwan is experimenting with this idea in a very complete way."

## 2 Linking Scattered Attractions into a New Identity

Century Outlets isn't designed to stand alone. The Outlets connects physically and thematically with nearby sites in the Ningbo Qianwan New Area: the Fantawild theme parks, the vast Hangzhou Bay National Wetland Park, and a growing number of cultural and recreational facilities, including the soon-to-open Qianwan Library and the Haiquanwan resort complex.

Together, they form an increasingly coherent ecosystem — one that's been years in the making. Between 2021 and May 2025, the Ningbo Qianwan New Area received 22.03 million visitors and generated 3.28 billion yuan in cultural and tourism revenue, injecting new energy and innovative experiences into the Yangtze River Delta's tourism market.

"Just off the highway, Tang Dynasty-style towers come into view, while a glance back reveals graceful egrets wading in the wetlands," says Lin, a visitor from Shanghai who took a full set of snapshots from thrilling rides on the Fantawild roller coaster to lively scenes at the Hanfu market in the Outlets. Thanks to the G15 Expressway and the soon-to-open Suzhou-Jiaxing-Ningbo cross-sea railway, the Ningbo Qianwan New Area is now part of a seamless one-hour travel circle linking Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Ningbo. It's now easy to "explore the wetlands in the morn-

ing, shop your favorite brands in the afternoon, and soak up Tang Dynasty vibes by night."

What distinguishes Qianwan from neighboring destinations, however, is its emphasis on cultural IP as a commercial driver. The Chinese National Geography "MagZone", for instance, blends science education with interactive storytelling, allowing visitors to walk through China's topography. At the nearby open-air Hanfu markets, visitors browse artisanal crafts, try traditional calligraphy, and rent period costumes — all of which appeal to the rising generation of experience-hungry, culturally curious consumers.

This attention to narrative is paying off. Of the crowds that visited during the soft opening, 62 percent were between the ages of 25 and 40. Families accounted for another 31 percent. Zhang, visiting from Hangzhou, watched his daughter at Fantawild Oriental Dawn as she made DIY treats at the Hans Christian Andersen Chocolate Wonderland. "It's incredibly fun here — the kids can move between different worlds all day," a visitor with child said. This unique mix of theme parks, wetlands, and cultural shopping has elevated Qianwan from a quick day trip to a full-fledged overnight destination, with families accounting for 31% of visitors during the soft launch.

## 3 Regional Tourism, Redrawn

"It's become the kind of place where you can easily spend two full days—right in our own backyard," said Chen, a visitor from Suzhou, as he paused to watch a traditional artisan crafting sugar paintings at the Century Outlets. After a whirlwind family trip through Shanghai Disneyland and Hangzhou's West Lake, they had arrived in Qianwan just the night before. With seamless connections to major destinations across the Yangtze River Delta, the Ningbo Qianwan New Area may emerge as a key stop on the region's tourism map.

At the construction site of the Suzhou-Jiaxing-Ningbo cross-sea railway, cranes rise beside the sweeping span of

the Hangzhou Bay Bridge, sketching a vision of the near future. "Soon, visitors from Shanghai will be able to get here in the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee," said a local official.

From the crowds that packed its soft launch to the growing word-of-mouth among travelers across the delta, Qianwan is proving what's possible when commercial space is infused with cultural depth. This is more than just a shopping destination—it's a place where retail meets storytelling, tradition blends with trend, and a city reimagines itself through immersive experiences. In the process, Ningbo may have turned a new mall into a new model.