

Maritime Silk Road Culture and Tourism Expo: Ten Years of Reading, Travel, and Cultural Fusion in Ningbo

Striving towards a modern
coastal metropolis
建设现代化滨海大都市

As the curtain fell on the 2025 Maritime Silk Road Culture and Tourism Expo in Ningbo on October 26, the city once again affirmed its status as one of China's leading cultural hubs. Over three vibrant days, the Ningbo International Conference and Exhibition Center transformed into a living crossroads of books, culture, and travel, embodying this year's theme: "Explore Culture through Pages and Steps."

This year's Expo marked a milestone: the second edition of the "three fairs in one" model and the tenth anniversary of the Zhejiang Book Fair, the Maritime Silk Road Culture and Tourism Expo, and the Ningbo International Tourism Expo. Organizers described the integrated format as a "power-of-ten-cubed" synergy, an effect that multiplied cultural influence across industries and audiences.



The 10th Zhejiang Book Fair.

A Cultural Convergence Ten Years in the Making

Spanning six exhibition halls and over 40,000 square meters, the Expo gathered 500 exhibitors and drew hundreds of thousands of visitors. With 3 million yuan in consumption vouchers issued, it successfully bridged traditional reading culture, digital innovation, and tourism.

The opening ceremony set the tone with the release of the *Zhejiang Book Fair Annual Recommended Booklist*, featuring 50 titles across six categories, alongside new digital reading programs, tourism product launches, and initiatives connecting literature with the creative economy.

Jointly organized by the Zhejiang Publishing United Group, Zhejiang Publication Distribution Association, Ningbo Daily Group, and Ningbo Culture Tourism & Exhibition Group, the event represented a new phase in Ningbo's cultural strategy—deepening its role in the "Belt and Road" cultural exchange network and strengthening its identity as a youth-friendly cultural destination in the Yangtze River Delta.

The 10th Zhejiang Book Fair reaffirmed that reading remains

central to Zhejiang's cultural DNA. Ten themed pavilions and five special zones showcased over 200,000 books, hosted 70 events, and connected with 100 branch venues across the province for 1,000-plus reading activities.

At the Classic Heritage Pavilion, visitors discovered national-level publishing projects, alongside exhibits exploring the legacy of Chinese thought. A nostalgic tenth-anniversary zone featured posters, photos, and readers' handwritten reflections from past fairs.

The Youth Book Pavilion, co-created by 11 Ningbo universities, offered a refreshing twist: flash readings of literary classics, a "Living Library," and a role-play game called Book University Carnival.

New this year was the "Book Fair Night Market," open until 8:30 p.m. on weekends, turning evening book browsing into a social ritual. "Every year I come for the author talks," said Yan Chengji, a 21-year-old student who traveled from Suzhou. "And with the discounts, I finally bought the hardcovers I'd been hesitating over. It shows paper books still have irreplaceable value."

When the Maritime Silk Road Meets the Digital Age

Next door, the 10th Maritime Silk Road Culture and Tourism Expo transformed the halls into a world map of creativity. Spanning 15,000 square meters, it featured more than 200 cultural enterprises and 20 themed zones, including pavilions representing Central and Eastern Europe and Serbia, each showcasing unique artistic traditions and crafts.

Ningbo's maritime heritage took center stage at the Mingzhou Intangible Heritage Workshop, where artisans demonstrated centuries-old skills, while modern designers reimagined sea waves and port cranes as fashion motifs.

Technology brought new energy to tradition. Digital twin recreations of

ancient port scenes, XR immersive theaters, and metaverse experiences allowed visitors to step into virtual Silk Road journeys. The opening of the Ningbo Digital Cultural Industry Park underscored the city's ambition to become a leading hub for "culture-tech integration."

Adding a pop-culture spark, the first-ever Maritime Anime and Game Carnival drew top creators and digital artists, reflecting China's rising "new cultural trio": online literature, web dramas, and digital games. "Technology gives culture new life," said Liu Yifan, a college student after trying the VR theater. "It's like walking into history itself."

Travel, Experience, and the Spirit of the Silk Road

The 10th Ningbo International Tourism Expo, themed "In Ningbo, Enjoy", bridged tourism and local culture. Exhibitors from across China—Hangzhou, Nanjing, Haixi, and Kuqa among them—showcased travel routes, heritage crafts, and culinary delights. To coincide with Ningbo's first autumn school holiday, agencies launched family-friendly short trips and cultural packages.

Airlines such as China Eastern and Air Macau offered nearly 50 discounted international routes, connecting Ningbo with destinations like Singapore, Bangkok, Jeju, Tokyo, and Macau. Interactive exhibits like "The Boundless Journey" used VR to make history come alive, while city-wide events—from the "100 Bowls of Ningbo Cuisine" food festival to creative night markets—extended the Expo's cultural atmosphere beyond the exhibition halls.

Yet beyond the numbers, the event's true significance lay in its spirit of exchange, a fusion of inheritance and innovation. For 80-year-old Chen,

a long-time attendee clutching a worn copy of *Zhuangzi*, that spirit was deeply personal. "I've read all the great classics," he said. "Now my eyes are weaker, but I listen to audio-books. Young people should read the classics—they help you see life clearly."

Over ten years, the Maritime Silk Road Culture and Tourism Expo has grown from a regional fair into an international brand, one that threads books, art, and travel into a single narrative of openness. As booths emptied and lights dimmed, what remained were not just sales or figures, but stories, ideas, and inspiration carried home by thousands of visitors.

"Books are still the spiritual nourishment of Ningbo people," said one exhibitor who sold over 50 titles to a single buyer. "As long as that love for knowledge continues, the Silk Road spirit will keep sailing forward."

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