

“First Time, So Special, Simply Stunning!”

International Seafarers Experience Chinese New Year in Ningbo

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On the 11th day of the first lunar month, Ningbo, a dynamic international port city already back in full swing after the Spring Festival holiday, still brimmed with a strong festive spirit. The glowing lanterns adorning Chenghuang Temple, the tempting local delicacies at Drum Tower, the lively hum of daily life and the warm, joyous New Year ambiance not only drew locals and tourists alike, but also enchanted a group of international visitors. Recently, TICC (Tangyuan International Communication Center) joined hands with Ningbo Entry- Exit Border Inspection Station to host a special "Chinese Traditional Culture Experience" tour for seafarers whose ship had just docked at the Daxie Port Area of Ningbo Zhoushan Port. For these mariners traveling the globe, the tour offered a delightful chance to experience the authentic Chinese New Year by wandering through the city's streets and savoring its local flavors, and for many of them, it marked their first real encounter with Ningbo, a vibrant port city that bridges China with the world.

Xiushui Street, a iconic block that encapsulates Ningbo's profound historical and cultural heritage, was chosen as the first stop of the journey. As the foreign seafarers wandered along the winding lanes, they were immediately struck by the unique residential culture of Ningbo, which has been passed down and evolved from the Ming Dynasty to modern times, visible in every detail from the smooth stone-paved roads to the elegant horsehead walls lining the street. What made the stop even more memorable was a creative fusion of East and West: Chinese medicine coffee. This special drink allowed them to get an interesting first-hand glimpse in-



Group photo of seafarers.

to the time-honored theories of traditional Chinese medicine and the properties of its medicinal herbs, in a way that felt both familiar and surprising.

"Coffee is a drink we all know and love, but none of us could have imagined it would blend so beautifully with Chinese medicine here. It's such a unique and amazing experience," several seafarers remarked with delight. As they sipped the special coffee, they felt for the very first time the magical creative integration of Chinese and Western cultures in a single cup, a small but vivid symbol of cultural exchange that left a lasting impression.

After bidding farewell to the time-honored charm of Xiushui Street, the seafarers made their way to Ningbo Chenghuang Temple, stepping into a world of "Ningbo on the tip of the tongue". The bustling snack street there was filled with the aroma of local treats, and they first tried the authentic braised vegetable rice cake, a classic Ningbo delicacy with a soft, glutinous texture and rich, savory taste that brought them immense delight. "Rice cake, or nian gao in Chinese, has a homophonic meaning of 'rising higher year after year', symbolizing good luck, career advancement and peace and prosperity for everyone," a police officer accompanying the tour explained the cultural connotation behind the beloved snack. Intrigued by the meaningful custom, the seafarers all took out their phones, ea-

ger to capture this precious taste of China in their photos and seal the sweet memory on their taste buds.

As dusk fell and night descended, Ningbo was bathed in the warm glow of thousands of twinkling lanterns, turning the city into a magical wonderland. The seafarers strolled leisurely among the splendid lanterns at Chenghuang Temple, where a stunning array of lantern designs rich in oriental charm greeted them: a majestic soaring golden dragon, lively and delicate fairy foxes, a chubby and benevolent God of Wealth, and many more exquisite creations. These vivid lanterns formed a dazzling night tour route that wove together Ningbo's long historical context, legendary Maritime Silk Road stories, exquisite intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship and the exuberant, joyful spirit of the Chinese New Year into a beautiful tapestry of light and shadow. Amazed by the breathtaking scenery, the foreign seafarers could not help but keep their phones raised, constantly taking photos and videos to document their own unforgettable "Chinese New Year moments" in Ningbo.

"This lantern show is absolutely incredible and breathtakingly beautiful. It has let me deeply feel the unique and profound charm of Chinese civilization, as well as the genuine warmth and hospitality of the Ningbo people," said KROKHMALIUK HENNADII, a Ukrainian seafarer. Having sailed to

Ningbo five times with his ship, this was the first time he had the chance to step off the ship and explore the city itself, and the distinctive allure of this oriental port city — a perfect blend of history and modernity, tradition and vitality — deeply touched him and his fellow seafarers. Under the shimmering bright lights, they gathered in front of the exquisite lantern installations, smiling and taking group photos and individual shots, eager to keep the wonderful moments forever.

"We hope to take the opportunity of the Lantern Festival, an important traditional Chinese festival, to let the seafarers who have traveled thousands of miles to come here experience the strong and authentic atmosphere of Chinese traditional festivals in an immersive way," said Li Yulu, Deputy Section Chief of the 7th Duty Team of Ningbo Entry- Exit Border Inspection Station. As one of the world's most famous and busiest international ports, Ningbo is not only a hub of global maritime trade, but also an important window for foreigners from all over the world to perceive and experience the unique charm of China and Chinese culture. The "Exchange and Mutual Learning Among 100,000 Seafarers" campaign is one of Ningbo's most representative international cultural exchange initiatives, built on the city's deep maritime heritage. Launched in 2024, the campaign has achieved remarkable results: Ningbo Entry- Exit Border Inspection Station has carried out on-board exchange activities for more than 260 ship calls, covering vessels from more than 40 countries and regions including France, India and Romania, and has invited seafarers to go ashore to participate in nearly 100 cultural exchange and folk custom experience activities like this one. These activities have been widely welcomed and highly recognized by seafarers from all corners of the globe, building a warm bridge of friendship and cultural exchange between Ningbo and the world through the universal language of culture and kindness.



Seafarers taste Ningbo rice cake.

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