

# Chengdu report

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Chengdu is famed for Sichuan cuisine, a culinary excellence it shares with sister city Montpellier.

## Long-standing French affair

By HAO NAN

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At last year's Western China International Fair held from Oct 23 to Nov 3, the French city Montpellier again showed its robust friendship with Chengdu.

The city on the Mediterranean brought diverse contributions to the fair ranging from a photographic exhibition of scenery to a primary school project and a sports event as it sought more cooperation opportunities in the host city Chengdu.

The sister relationship with the Sichuan provincial capital started in 1981, the first pairing of sister cities in France and China.

Since then, Chengdu and Montpellier held frequent exchanges at all levels as cooperation expanded from healthcare into culture, education, trade and sports.

The first cooperative project that bonded the two cities was related to traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture.

In 2007, the Chengdu healthcare administration cooperated with a medical school in Montpellier, the oldest of its kind in Europe, to create Europe's first college diploma in traditional Chinese medical treatment.

Seven years later, the two cities saw another milestone in cooperation in the field as a research center for diabetes and senility jointly built by the Chengdu Hospital Authority and the medical center at Montpellier University, opened in Chengdu, aiming to integrate medical resources of the two cities and offer better medical services.

"I will recommend Chengdu to the French government as the first choice to carry out Sino-French medical cooperation," said Helene Mandroux, former mayor of Montpellier.

In education, Chengdu and Montpellier have had Chinese and French language classes at each other's primary and middle schools for decades. The French city now has six Chinese-language courses covering primary to high school.

The two also established primary schools named after each other's city. Chengdu Primary School opened in Montpellier in 2013. Montpellier Primary School opened in Chengdu last October.

### Extreme Games

In sports, Chengdu became the first city in China to host the International Extreme Games. Held in October last year with the help of Montpellier, the event was so popular that attracted nearly 100,000 locals.

"The sports event originated in Montpellier, and the city made a significant contribution for us to win the bid," said a spokesman at the Chengdu government's foreign affairs office.

Chengdu will also host the event this year and in 2016. Moreover, with Chengdu becoming increasingly international, more locals are incorporating overseas cultural elements into their local lifestyle such as a growing affinity for French wine. One of the world's largest

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winegrowing areas, Montpellier has encouraged local producers to attend trade expos in Chengdu to boost wine exports.

In 2007 a Montpellier wine delegation participated in Chengdu's first international agricultural expo. In 2012, a delegation held a wine tasting of its home products at the Chengdu sweet food and alcoholic drink fair.

It also signed with the Chengdu EU Project Innovation Center to set up wine promotion channels in 2012.

Another way to strengthen Chengdu-Montpellier relations and boost communication is the Home of Montpellier, an organization in Chengdu sponsored by the two city governments set up in 2006 and now located at the high-tech industrial area.

Chantal Marion, vice-president of economic development for the Montpellier Region, said at the ninth EU-China Business & Technology Cooperation Fair last year that Montpellier has built cooperation relationships with other Chinese cities such as Beijing and Shanghai but Chengdu is "the most important partner".

Also, the two cities have many similarities that help strengthened the ties. Both famous for beautiful girls and delicious cuisine, she said.

Chengdu is now home to operations of 158 companies and more than 4,000 students from Montpellier.

The close partnership between the two cities is a reflection of the flourishing ties between Chengdu and France.

Local officials in Chengdu believe that increasing economic globalization and China's new strategy for the Silk Road Economic Belt, which will improve communications among nations along the ancient trade route, will bring new opportunities to Sino-French cooperation.

At present, Chengdu is home to operations by a large number of French companies including 21 Fortune 500 companies like Groupama, Auchan, Carrefour and Lafarge. The companies are involved in a wide range of fields covering finance, retailing, R&D, manufacturing and public utilities.

The French consulate general that opened in 2006 in Chengdu has played an important role in promoting the business links between Chengdu and France.

The West China railway logistics center in Chengdu is bustling like never before.

Most significant of its cargo could be the goods transported by the Chengdu-Europe Express that began operation in 2013.

The goods are no more remarkable than those in many other trains, but it is the journey itself that stands out.

Items ranging from shoes to auto parts and computers are collected from around the country and shipped overland to Europe in only 12 days. When the return commercial leg begins operation in March, it will bring back European specialties such as wine that are welcomed by the local markets.

The express train now offers "the most convenient channel linking China and Europe with the shortest travel time," said officials, yet it is just one route managed by the logistics center.

At the intersection of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Yangtze River Economic Belt, Chengdu itself is "running on a fast track" just like the express, said local officials.

The link to Europe has become yet another driving force in the city's contribution to China's globalization.

Last year, Chengdu registered 8.8 percent economic growth, which is expected to boost its GDP above 1 trillion yuan (\$161.1 billion) for the first time.

The electronics and IT industry alone generated 280 billion yuan, while auto industry contributed 130 billion yuan.

Chengdu now produces 20 percent of the world's computers and two-thirds of the iPads. Half of the world's laptop computer chips are also encapsulated and tested in the city.

More than 260 Fortune 500 companies have opened offices in Chengdu including more than 40 in the IT sector. It also has 13 of the world's top 20 software makers.

The emerging big data business is also an attraction for the world giants.

On Dec 3, Intel Corp announced that it would invest \$1.6 billion over the next 15 years to upgrade its semiconductor plant in Chengdu and introduce its latest advanced testing technology.

Auto making is another pillar industry in the city. It makes more than 1 million vehicles a year with models that include passenger cars, trucks, SUVs and special-purpose vehicles, according to local officials.

Investors include Geely-Volvo, Dongfeng Peugeot Citroen, FAW-Volkswagen and FAW-Toyota as well as many automotive component suppliers.

### Tianfu New Area

Another milestone is the Tianfu New Area was approved by the

## Riding the Chengdu-Europe Express



### Cargo rail link to Europe yet another driving force in the city's globalization, Zhang Zhao reports

Long known for its quality of life, Chengdu has also developed into a regional hub for transportation, finance, trade and manufacturing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

State Council in October 2014 as China's 11th national-level development area. It is expected to become a major modern industrial base and help increase Chengdu's competitiveness.

Local officials said despite its inland location, the area will be a hub open to the outside world and a regional center of high-end services. As a national innovation hub, it will focus on high technology and advanced manufacturing.

The area will also be a center for

finance, trade, conferences and exhibitions, R&D, creative industries, tourism and fashion, officials said.

It has already attracted more than 100 projects with a combined investment of 106.6 billion yuan. One of its zones, the Singapore-Sichuan Hi-Tech Innovation Park, has alone attracted more than 20 billion yuan in investment.

Walter Dias, managing director for United Airlines Greater China and South Korea, said that the city is transforming from an inland city far

from the sea to an internationalized metropolis.

The company launched nonstop 14-hour service between Chengdu and San Francisco in June 2014. The 80 percent occupancy rate in business class was "far beyond" their expectations, he said.

### Aviation hub

Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport handles 37.5 million travelers a year. It has 78 international routes including 23 direct passenger flights.

It takes four hours to reach Southeast Asia and six to 10 hours to the Middle East and Europe.

The city is the fourth in China offering a 72-hour visa-free policy that allows passengers from 51 countries to spend three days in the city if they have valid third-country visas and onward flight tickets.

The city's transportation authority said that its next focus will be a combined highway and rail transport model.

It will partner with cities and

regions including Shanghai, Shenzhen, Horgos, the Qinzhou bonded area and Lodz in Poland.

The efforts in both land and air transportation have helped the city overcome inland constraints as it emerges as a competitive international logistics hub, said local officials.

For 11 consecutive years, Chengdu has been named one of the "Most Recommendable Mainland Cities" by the Taiwan Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association. It ranked

third for global image in a survey by the Gallup China Consulting Organization.

It also topped a list by Forbes magazine of the next decade's fastest-growing cities.

Andy Serwer, managing editor of Fortune magazine, said that it was "not an accident that we picked this city in West China" as the host of the 2013 Fortune Global Forum.

"As the forum highlights the 'new future of China,' Chengdu represents so many trends," he said.



The two cargo train routes linked to Europe and Central Asia make Chengdu an important hub for land transportation.



The characters for "Chengdu" made up of the logos of multinational companies in the city.



Delegates from Montpellier and Chengdu signed an agreement last year on opening the Montpellier Primary School in Chengdu.

## Colorful host to well-known names and political leaders

By SONG MENGXING

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The ancient city of Chengdu has some interesting diplomatic exchanges in recent times including a colorful visit by French President Jacques Chirac in 2004.

The capital of Southwest China's Sichuan province was Chirac's first stop when he visited China in October that year.

"I have longed for a visit to the home province of Deng Xiaoping, who initiated China's reform and opening-up, and now my wish comes true," the president said.

When Chirac arrived at Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport on Oct 8, he was warmly welcomed by the local people including students and Sichuan Opera performers.

The airport on that day became a stage where the "face-changing" skill of Sichuan Opera and local folk songs and dances were performed to Chirac's obvious amusement.

Crowds of people gathered at the intersections near the hotel where Chirac stayed to welcome him.

"He frequently leaned out of the car window and waved to the crowd," Chirac's escorts recalled.

At a Sino-French economic exchange meeting on Oct 9, Chirac even quoted a line by Li Bai, a noted poet in the Tang

Dynasty (AD 618-907) — "It is easier to climb to heaven than take the road to Sichuan".

After the meeting, he visited the residence of another poet in the Tang Dynasty, Du Fu. In Du's thatched cottage, Chirac wrote an inscription "to express great admiration and respect to the great poet".

Chirac said he has long admired the Ba and Shu cultures — ancient kingdoms in today's Sichuan and neighboring Chongqing — where people created brilliant civilizations more than 2,000 years ago.

"After I saw today's Sichuan, I also appreciate its modernization and vitality," Chirac said.

When he left Chengdu, it took him almost 15 minutes to cover the 50-meter-long red carpet to his airplane as he shook the many hands of locals who saw him off.

Helene Mandroux, former mayor of Montpellier, was another foreign politician that visited Chengdu.

Montpellier, a renowned wine production area in southern France, became its first sister city in 1981.

In March last year Mandroux paid her fifth visit to Chengdu to further boost cooperation between the two cities.

When she was mayor of Montpellier from 2004 to 2014, the two cities had far more exchanges.



French President Jacques Chirac visited Du Fu's thatched cottage during his tour of Chengdu in 2004.

## Strong support for hosting world-class events

By ZHUAN TI

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As the first city in western China to host the Michelin Challenge Bibendum, last November Chengdu welcomed some 3,000 participants from around the world who shared insights on the theme of "innovation in mobility at the heart of growth and urban well-being".

It was further confirmation that the capital of Sichuan province has won greater recognition from international business circles.

Philippe Verneuil, president of Michelin China, and Patrick Oliva, corporate vice-president of the French tire maker, both agreed that Chengdu's urban development accords with the theme of the event.

Verneuil said that Chengdu deeply impressed him when he was at the Fortune Global Forum in the city in 2013.

"The Sichuan and Chengdu governments provide strong support for hosting such major global events. It is a key factor why we put the event here," he said.

In recent years, Chengdu's economy has shown great growth momentum despite slowing growth nationwide. It has steadily climbed the list of top Chinese cities ranked by size of their economy.

Western China is becoming the most dynamic region of the country thanks to China's "Go West" campaign and the national strategy to develop the Silk

Road Economic Belt. Ideally positioned to serve as a hub in the western part of the country, Chengdu has become a regional center for trading, finance and logistics, as well as science and technologies.

Chengdu is also China's third-largest automobile manufacturing base. In 2013, the output of its automobile industry grew more than 40 percent compared with the year previous.

According to Jean-Dominique Senard, CEO of Michelin Group, the company will strengthen cooperation, including that on R&D, with cities in western China, especially Chengdu.

### Solid foundation

Chengdu has a solid foundation in the automobile industry and provides access to the huge western China market, making it a perfect place to hold the Michelin Challenge Bibendum, Senard said at a press conference for the event in November.

"China faces problems in sustainable mobility due to the rapid economic development in recent years. As a fast-developing city, Chengdu is also of much research value," he said.

A so-called Green Paper released by the event introduced technological innovations by many enterprises, which are expected to contribute to the global sustainable development.

Chengdu's great market potential and ideal geographical location are attractive

for car manufactures, said Qiu Xiandong, general manager of Dongfeng Peugeot Citroen Automobile Co, a joint venture by China's Dongfeng Motor and French company Citroen.

The company chose Chengdu as the location of its fourth factory at an investment of 12.3 billion yuan (\$1.98 billion). It will become operational in 2016 and has a planned capacity of 360,000 automobiles a year.

In 2013, Schneider Electric, a global Fortune 500 company from France, established its first branch in Southwest China in Chengdu's High-tech Zone.

"Western China is going to take an increasingly bigger share of Schneider China's market in the future. Chengdu will be a key city for us, and that's why we chose to build our first branch in Southwest China in the city," said Jean-Pascal Tricoire, CEO of Schneider Electric.

In October, a delegation from the Champagne-Ardenne region in France visited the urban planning exhibition center in Chengdu's Tianfu New Area.

With Tianfu approved as a national-level new area, it is expected to embrace important development opportunities in business, technology, and environmental conservation.

According to Jean-Paul Bachy, president of the Champagne-Ardenne region, Tianfu New Area will serve as an ideal platform for French enterprises, especially medium and small-sized operations, to enter the China market.



Dubbed the "eastern Alps", the Western Snow Range offers a European-style tourism for visitors to Chengdu.