

Italian Expat Decodes Common Prosperity in Yuyao Suburbs



Photo by Jiang Hanxin, Yan Yongjie

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

On a warm winter day in mid-January, Nanni Corbia had a fantastic half-day getaway in Hengkantou Village of Yuyao City, Ningbo. Formerly a poverty-stricken village, Hengkantou has now emerged as a popular tourist destination and a well-off and civilized rural neighborhood where people's livelihood has seen remarkable improvement. How did the village take a turn to achieve common prosperity? Through sightseeing, museum exploring, and making and savoring local delicacies, Nanni decoded the secret to the transformation of this fair village.

Hailing from Italy, Nanni has been living in Yuyao for 9 years. Before finally settling here for love, lifestyle and business, he had spent years in New York City, USA. "China is the last stop of my adventure." Nanni now owns a bar living a satisfying life in Yuyao, but his passion for exploration is not fading. "Life is all about new experiences," remarked Nanni who was itchy for a trip to Yuyao's rural areas: "they help you to understand different ways of thinking."

Then, he arrived there.

At the central hall of Hengkantou Village, Nanni met with the head of local collective enterprises, Sun Zichun. Under Sun's guidance, a sightseeing cruise ushered in the half-day trip. "You know, I'm from Sardinia." The beautiful landscape along the road — crystal-clear waters wave gently with rays of sunlight, the rolling hills covered with green, yellow and red vegetation are a backdrop to the white-

wall- and- black-tile houses — reminded Nanni of his hometown in Sardinia, an Italian island of emerald sea, unspoiled nature, and age-old traditions. "This village has pretty different views, of course, but it is also vigorous, and peaceful," Nanni pointed out the window and smiled: "the best place to unwind."

After 3 minutes' drive, we pulled over at the local museum where Nanni learned about the history regarding the revolution of the region in the early 1940s. Walking down the aisle, Nanni viewed the exhibits — including plaques, stone tablets, ancient maps and books and ragged military uniforms — while listening to the stories of their original owners. "Those people are heroes." He paid great tribute to the fighters who were devoted to expelling the barbaric intruders while liberating the general public: "What a great story!"

Nanni's comment sat absolutely on the right side of Hengkantou's history, for the development of this village marks another great inspirational story. At the gateway leading to the village's residential area, Nanni encountered the deputy chief of the local village committee, Qiu Minbo. Strolling around the residential area with Qiu, Nanni gained an insight into how the village shook off poverty and grew into prosperity. "It's a story of mind and heart." In vivid language, the behind-the-scenes history was unfolded.

Located at an old revolutionary base, Hengkantou Village suffered from poor transport and living conditions at the beginning of the century. The dream ticket to change its destiny dawned ahead of Chinese New Year in 2003 when President Xi Jinping (the then Secretary of the CPC Zhejiang Provincial Committee in 2003)

visited Hengkantou and showed its people the way to build a prosperous village. Over the past two decades, villagers have taken advantage of the natural and cultural resources to develop agriculture and rural tourism under the guidance of local administration. "We grow fruits such as cherries, kiwis, and waxberries." Qiu claimed that local farms integrate retailing and entertainment with agricultural and catering businesses, attracting a large number of customers during the picking season: "Urban residents can place orders to customize the type of vegetables they wish to grow in our farms with our help." As businesses continued to expand, the village set up collective enterprises to share the fruits of development.

"Look at these villas with stone walls and wooden gates!" Nanni was stunned by the well-designed houses along the path. "Now that the village has grown more affluent, we want our villagers to share the benefits and live in a better environment." Qiu explained: "After all, historically, Hengkantou has a tradition of putting people first." Since 2018, locals have been working hard to turn the village into a model for leisure travel. Thanks to their efforts in improving the infrastructure and the surrounding ecological system, the village — renowned for its beautiful natural landscapes and cultural abundance — now hosts millions of tourists from different parts of China every year.

But what else can take credit for adding to the village's charm? Food! Liang-nong Rice Cake, in particular. "It's made from glutinous rice, bean powder, and red bean paste." Upon learning about this traditional pastry, Nanni could not wait to try and make one on his own. Following the local chef step by step, he filled the rice

and bean powder into a mold, evened up the powder, shaped it into 16 equal squares with a steel ruler, squeezed and injected the red bean paste in each square, and decorated them by using the food pattern-stamp. TA-DA! The pastries were ready for the oven! After a few minutes' waiting, the steaming hot rice cake was fresh out of the oven. "Delicious! It's agreeably sweet." Nanni took a bite of the cake: "A bit sticky. But it won't stay on your teeth. Amazing!"

At noon, Nanni was invited for lunch at a local diner. "Usually, I don't eat too much fish." He showed great love for the braised Siming Lake fish: "But this dish tastes fresh and succulent without an unpleasant fishy smell." As tourism has developed in the region, an increasing number of restaurants have risen to serve the braised taro, the Siming Lake fish head, and other signature local delicacies to appease everyone's appetite and enchant tourists flocking here for a bite.

"If you don't come, you'll miss something important." At the end of the tour, Nanni concluded that this village is "a must-visit place".

Just like our Italian expat and all the other people out there who are struggling to thrive through ups and downs, Hengkantou Village has braved winds and storms and proved to the world: Hard work pays off. Therefore, another key ingredient of the village's success in achieving common prosperity eventually unveils: the relentless joint efforts made by each of Hengkantou's individuals.

Reporter: Pan Wenjie
Proofreaders: Puyang Rong, Yao Zhanhong, Jason Mowbray

分类信息
56118880
办理地址
海曙区: 横街62号(都市仁和中心) 20楼2011室
鄞州区: 宁东路901号 宁波报业传媒大厦一楼

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