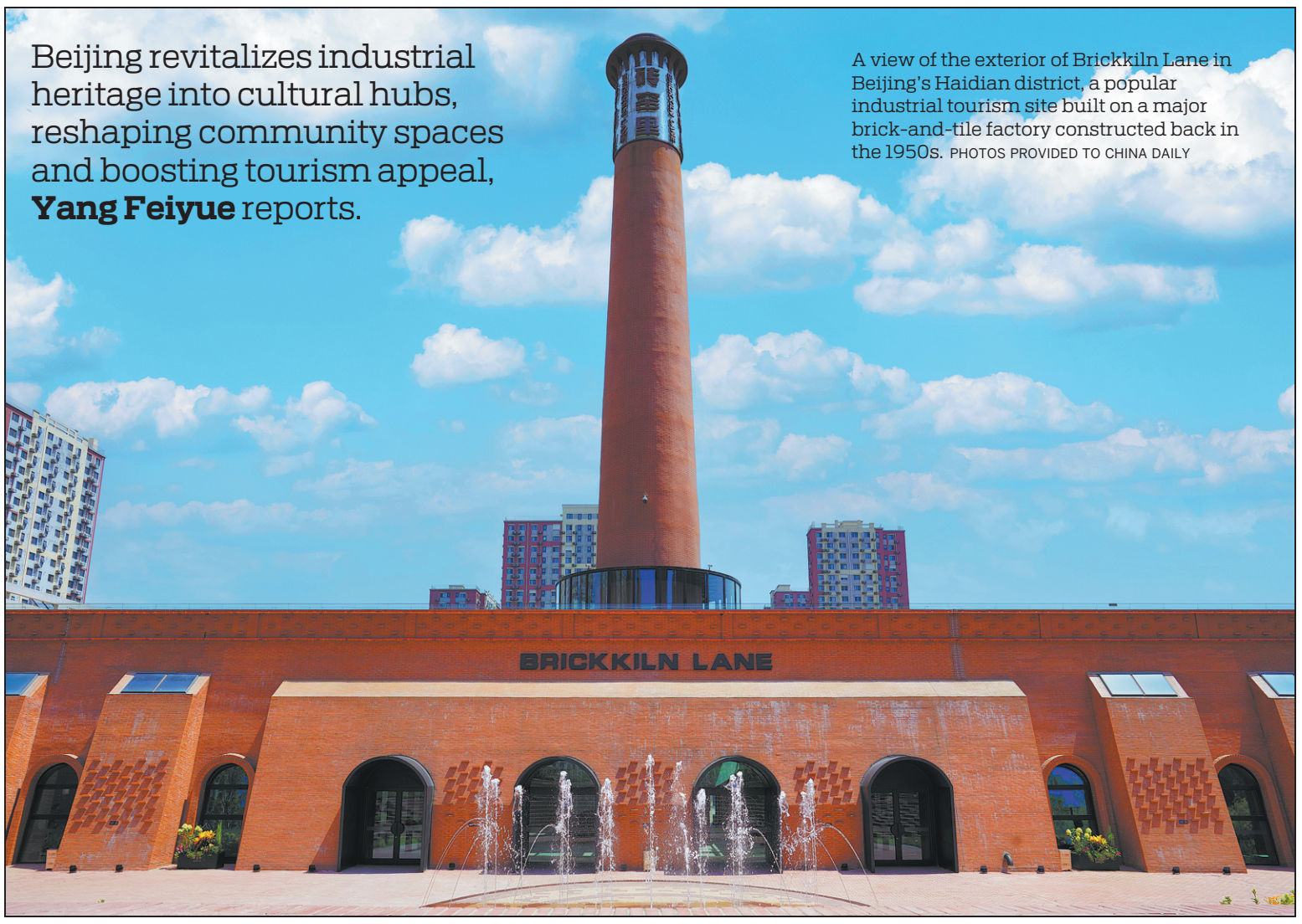
LIFE

Beijing revitalizes industrial heritage into cultural hubs, reshaping community spaces and boosting tourism appeal, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



A view of the exterior of Brickkiln Lane in Beijing's Haidian district, a popular industrial tourism site built on a major brick-and-tile factory constructed back in the 1950s. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Breathing creativity back into rusty factories

In Brickkiln Lane tucked away in Beijing's Haidian district, several visitors line up on a crisp November afternoon, waiting for robot-crafted lattes topped with delicate foam art.

Inside the spacious, modern public culture and arts complex, other guests sip coffee while admiring contemporary art exhibitions displayed beneath arched brick corridors.

It's hard to imagine that it once served as a major brick-and-tile factory built back in the 1950s.

"You can tell the reactions from first-time visitors are often very genuine," says Liu Hongyin, the assistant general manager of the facility's administration.

"Former factory workers gaze at the familiar kilns and towering chimneys with a touch of nostalgia, while younger guests eagerly snap photos to share online moments later," Liu observes.

Approximately 70 percent of the visitors are local residents, a number Liu believes demonstrates how deeply the site has become embedded in daily community life.

Since it opened in September 2024, this brick factory-turned public cultural space has welcomed over 440,000 visitors.

During the renovation, the team adhered to a "repair the old as old" philosophy, preserving 80 percent of the original walls and reinforcing only the load-bearing structures.

The 40-meter-high redbrick chimney has been innovatively repurposed into a holographic projection space, while the 54 arched kiln doors now host cultural events based on different themes.

A theater and art galleries have also been arranged, integrating industrial heritage seamlessly with contemporary cultural services.

"Our program is designed around the actual needs of the community," he explains. For instance, a bookstore draws resources from the National Library of China to provide a space for reading, while the theater regularly hosts stand-up comedy and open-air film screenings that are "hugely popular with residents", he adds.

To date, the venue has organized over 300 events, more than half of which were independently curated.

"We have made full use of the unique spatial advantages here, blending traditional opera with the industrial setting. Many audience members left comments on the distinctive charm of experiencing performing arts in such an environment," Liu says.

Today, longtime residents proudly bring friends and family to Brickkiln Lane, treating it almost as a local landmark, Liu notes.

"They introduce it as their community's own cultural living room."

Brickkiln Lane is among 11 new industrial tourism demonstration sites recently accredited by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism and the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology.

"As an emerging format within the cultural and tourism convergence, industrial tourism is radiating vigorous vitality and unlimited potential," says Zhang Jing, director of the resource development department of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism.

To date, the capital city has cultivated and officially designated 30 industrial tourism demonstration sites.





Left: Robot-made coffee is a highlight at Brickkiln Lane. **Right:** A visitor interacts with a robot at an event promoting industrial tourism in Beijing in November.

"They represent the essence distilled from Beijing's rich industrial heritage, and advanced technological manufacturing," Zhang says, adding that the city plans to deepen this transformation. "We aim to optimize products, strengthen resource coordination, and encourage integration with creative, technological, and educational sectors."

In Beijing, an increasing number of industrial heritage sites have been transformed into cultural, commercial, and technology parks, shifting from "industrial rust" to "vibrant life belts".

In the well-known 798 and 751 art zones of Chaoyang district, visitors board bright yellow smart sightseeing vehicles equipped with intelligent audio guides.

These mobile "guides" carry guests through a landscape of striking Bauhaus-style architecture, narrating the area's storied past.

Spanning more than 500,000 square meters, the 798 area was originally an electronics factory, while the 751 section once served as one of Beijing's three major gas supply plants.

"After more than two decades of development, the zone is now home to over 100 top galleries, artists' studios, and design centers, as well as tech enterprises like the Volkswagen R&D center and GeekPark (an innovator community platform), building a unique creative ecosystem," says Yan Mingdan, general manager of 798 Culture and Technology Company that runs the two art zones.

Former industrial landmarks such as redbrick workshops and towering chimneys have been preserved, forming a distinctive visual identity. Building on this heritage, the zone has introduced diverse formats including art, design, technology, retail, and exhibitions, turning into a vibrant cultural and creative hub.

For instance, the former iconic gas storage Tank 79 has been redesigned as an international fashion venue hosting major events such as China Fashion Week and brand launches.

Similarly, disused train carriages and tracks have been reimagined as dining and cultural retail spots that particularly appeal to younger audiences.

Outdoor heritage routes allow visitors to explore historical industrial equipment and learn how the factories once functioned. Educational programs introduce younger participants to intangible cultural heritage crafts and garment design, bridging artistry with historical context.

Yan emphasizes that when organizations move into the zone, the administration provides guidance to ensure the integrity of architectural heritage.

"Whether it's a gallery, a pop-up exhibition, a trendy cafe, or a restaurant, each space retains the imprint of industrial history. Walking through the area feels like exploring a large, living museum of industrial heritage," she adds.

Visitor numbers in the first three quarters of this year have already approached 12 million, according to local administration data.

In 2024, the zone welcomed 12.57 million visitors, with international guests accounting for about 30 percent.

According to Li Peng, director of the industrial economy research center under the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology, approximately 15 million tourists engaged in industrial tourism in Beijing in 2024, accounting for approximately 4 percent of the city's total tourist visits and generating around 1.7 billion yuan ($240.9 million) in revenue.

In October, Beijing authorities issued an implementation plan for promoting the high-quality development of industrial tourism (2025-27), which aims to attract 20 million industrial tourist visits annually, generating 3 billion yuan in revenue by 2027.

The plan outlines efforts to develop a high-quality industrial tourism product system, enhance service standards throughout the visitor experience, create an efficient support system for industrial tourism, and introduce safeguard measures to ensure sustainable development.

As a birthplace of modern Chinese industry, a key formation ground for New China's industrial system, and a pioneer in advancing new industrialization, Beijing possesses a rich industrial culture blending historical depth with innovation, Li explains.

"We aim to activate and utilize these resources, making them a crucial breakthrough for fostering new quality productive forces and new growth points," Li says.

Zhang from the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism notes that the designated industrial tourism demonstration sites span all districts of the capital.

Starting from the urban core, the Beijing Enamel Factory in Dongcheng district upholds royal craftsmanship and intangible cultural heritage experiences, while Tianning No 1 Cultural and Technological Innovation Park in Xicheng merges industrial relics from an old thermal power plant, including old water pumps, electric motors, and steam turbines, with leisure and cultural experiences.

In Fengtai district, the Erqi Locomotive Factory retains its industrial style and historical traces while welcoming fashion studios, and creative and handicraft workshops. Shougang Park in Shijingshan district has transformed itself from a steel giant into an Olympic heritage and creative cultural spot.

"These examples are merely a glimpse into Beijing's rich repository of industrial tourism potential," Zhang says.

"Collectively, they prove that factory workshops can be classrooms, production lines can be landscapes, and industrial culture can be compelling, thought-provoking tourism products," he adds.

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'Telling' movies for every viewer with care



Physically and visually impaired people communicate after a film screening at Trojan Fairy restaurant in Beijing on Oct 26. The event featured narrated audio descriptions to help visually impaired participants visualize scenes. YIN GANG / XINHUA

On a cold, sunny Wednesday morning in Beijing, Xu Wei, who is visually impaired, joined about 40 other attendees, including people with different disabilities, at a community center in Xicheng district to "watch" the Chinese street dance film *One and Only*.

The experience inside the screening room differed from a regular movie showing. During gaps between dialogue and sound cues in the film, detailed audio descriptions explained what was happening — describing the scenery, the action and even the actors' body language.

The version screened that day was created by Guangming Cinema, which takes its name from the Chinese words for "light and brightness". The volunteer-run nonprofit organization focuses on producing accessible films for people with visual impairments.

"I've come here four times to enjoy these films. It really means a lot," Xu says. "The audio-described version allows not only people with vision loss, but also others with physical or cognitive challenges, to experience movies fully." Xu, now in his 50s, was born with a visual impairment.

The screening in Beijing was part of a nationwide program marking International Day of Persons with Disabilities, observed on Dec 3 each year. This year, Guangming Cinema partnered with more than 100 community cultural centers across the country to host accessible film events.

China is home to over 17 million individuals with visual impairments, one of the largest such populations in the world, underscoring the scale and importance of such initiatives in the country.

What audiences experience at Guangming Cinema screenings may look simple — but the work behind it is anything but straightforward.

Founded in December 2017 by volunteers from the Communication University of China, Guangming Cinema has involved more than 800 faculty members and students over the past eight years in producing, promoting, and distributing accessible films.

To adapt a single 90-minute movie, the team first watches it 10 times, studying every detail. They then draft a narration script of 20,000 to 30,000 characters, explains Fu Haizheng, one of the program's initiators and a teacher at CUC.

Three student volunteers, two mentors and one visually impaired participant then work together for 28 days to complete an accessible version. Guangming Cinema has produced more than 800 such films.

However, it is never easy to "tell" a movie to people with visual impairments. Hu Fang, a project volunteer, still recalls a simple yet unforgettable question from a child in the audience: "What is the color red?"

That moment made her realize just how little sighted narrators understand about the experience of visually impaired moviegoers. "What we take for granted may be completely unfamiliar to them," she says. Since then, Hu and her colleagues have worked to ensure their descriptions not only match the visuals, but also the way audiences perceive the world through sound.

"The improvements have been remarkable," praises Cao Jun, a visually impaired film enthusiast and deputy chair of the Beijing Association of the Blind. "The narration quality has improved rapidly — and the sound design is now more immersive and three-dimensional. The range of films has expanded from classics and blockbusters to animations, thrillers and more. Distribution has also grown from being limited to Beijing to reaching audiences across the country."

Over the years, the team has organized numerous screenings nationwide. To reach as many people as possible, Guangming Cinema's volunteers work closely with local disability organizations and schools. After creating an accessible film, they provide both the content and support, while partners host the screenings and connect with local audiences. Many films are also available for free on cable and online platforms.

The initiative has reached all 2,244 special education schools across China. "Each year, we send every school a secure hard drive containing our accessible films for the students," says Fu.

These screenings offer more than just entertainment — they deliver a valuable social experience. "Accessible cinema adds color to our lives and gives us a reason to go out. Chatting with other visually impaired friends at these events is enjoyable, and it also gives us more to share with sighted people," Cao notes.

According to Fu, their surveys show that the willingness of visually impaired people to watch Guangming Cinema films has increased from 13 percent to 63 percent within just a few years.

Looking ahead, Fu hopes that increased accessible guidance and support will allow people with various disabilities, not just the visually impaired, to better enjoy films, exhibitions, museums and other cultural experiences, giving everyone equal access to the arts.

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