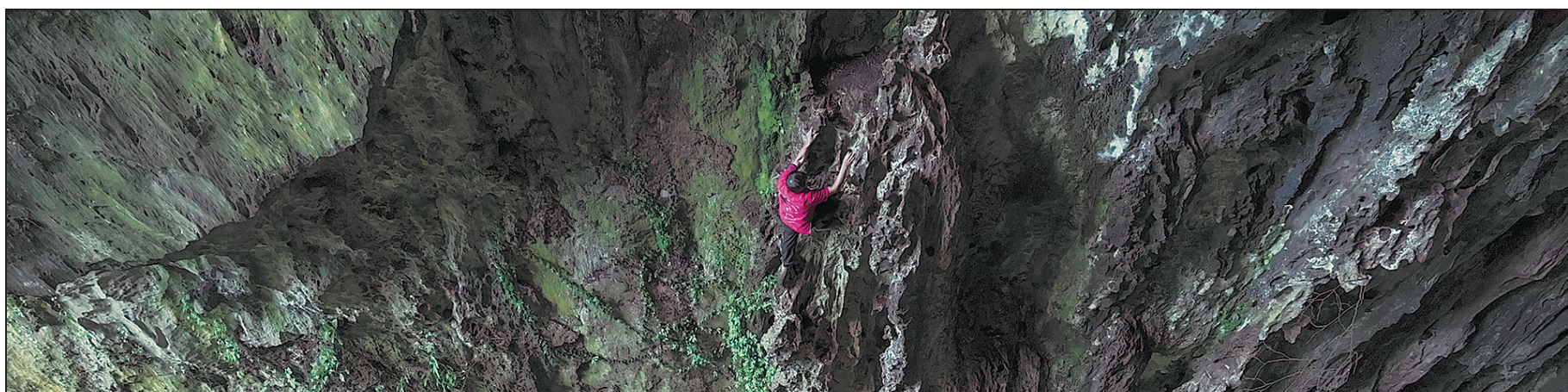


# HOLIDAYSPO RTS

## CLIMBING



# A GREAT SPOT TO HANG OUT



Guizhou's Getu River has become a hot spot for folks seeking a steep challenge

As climbers from around the world competed in the 2024 Guizhou Rocktrip Rock Climbing Carnival at Getu River Scenic Area in Ziyun county, 120 kilometers southwest of Guiyang, 58-year-old Luo Xiaoguo, a Miao ethnic *goro* and traditional climber, performed a solo free climb on a 100-meter-high sheer cliff in a karst cave.

In the Miao language, *goro* refers to a type of climber that locals have also vividly nicknamed "spidermen". In Ziyun county, where karst landscapes dominate, the techniques for traversing the steep, local topography have been passed down for centuries and predate the sport of modern rock climbing that emerged in the Alps in the 18th century.

The earliest *goro* were the mysterious coffin artisans who hung caskets on cliffs. Later, the term came to describe workers who collected swallows' nests and guano from these heights.

About 20 years ago, the Getu River Scenic Area was established, and spidermen like Wang Xiaoguo became part of the tourist experience, employed by the park.

Entering the Getu River area, visitors are immediately struck by the dramatic limestone caves formed by collapsed karst systems. The most spectacular among them is a pierced cave where morning sunlight often creates ethereal beams through the ceiling. There are also a lot of knife-edged karst cliffs, towering upward for hundreds of meters.

They were all once the workplaces of the *goro*.

To modern rock climbers, these landscapes represent ideal big-wall routes and dream challenges. French mountaineering guide Olivier Balma visited the Getu River in 2007 and was immediately captivated by the cliffs and caves, recognizing their immense potential as new climbing routes.

"It looked like it might be a continuous 300-meter roof climb here! It's insane, but definitely not a joke," an international climber comment-

ed on route database Mountain Project in 2009.

The *goro* were still climbing bare-foot when they first encountered overseas climbers. Some gave Wang a few pairs of climbing shoes.

Reflecting on the experience, Wang said: "Those shoes were too tight. I still prefer wearing rubber shoes."

Today, Wang still wears the military-style green canvas "liberation shoes" commonly used in the mountainous regions of southwest China, even outpacing two overseas climbers in a speed climbing competition.

While climbers point out that the *goro* routes have more hand and footholds, and are therefore considered less difficult in the sporting context of modern climbing, none deny their courage and skill.

Today, nearly all of Ziyun's youth have eschewed this ancient profession. Now, only a handful of *goro* remain.

Whether they serve as coffin artisans or park employees, climbing has always been about survival in extreme environments. As economic conditions improve and career options expand, the decline of the *goro* is unsurprising.

Modern competitive climbing, however, has rekindled the Getu River's centuries-old culture.

In 2011, Petzl, a globally renowned climbing gear manufacturer, brought over 600 climbers from around the world to Ziyun as part of their famed Petzl Rocktrip series. It was the first time such an event had been held in China.

Choosing Getu River demonstrated the international climbing community's enthusiasm for this emerging sport climbing destination.

Among them was famed Spanish climber Dani Andrada, who, along with his partner, made the first ascent of a multi-pitch, 210-meter roof climb in Chuangshang Cave.

Climbing website UKClimbing at the time called it "maybe the hardest continual overhanging sport route in the world".

The first ascenders named the



**From top:** Sheer karst cliffs abound at Guizhou's Getu River Scenic Area; Climbers take on the Heart of Dreams, a multi-pitch, 210m roof climb in the scenic area's Chuangshang Cave; Local *goro* Wang Xiaoguo is among the few climbers left who still practice ancient climbing techniques; Climbers scale the karst caves in the Getu River Scenic Area. XINHUA



Local *goro* Wang Xiaoguo prefers to climb in his traditional canvas "liberation shoes", rather than modern climbing boots. XINHUA

route Corazon de Ensueno, meaning "Heart of Dreams".

"Climbing such a route is a dream for every climber who wants to challenge themselves. A multi-pitch route with continuous difficulty ranging from 8B to 9A is entirely different from a single-pitch, high-difficulty route. For me, this is the future of climbing," Andrada said in a recorded interview.

Beyond high-difficulty routes like Heart of Dreams, the Getu River area offers a wide range of climbing spots that cater to everyone, from beginners to elite climbers.

In the months surrounding the Petzl event, over 300 new routes were established, and more than 250 of them remain well-maintained today.

The nature of the activity means that climbers often stay for days or even months, contributing to local income through accommodation, food and climbing fees.

The Getu River Scenic Area and the local government see climbing as a potential economic driver, and both are keen to revitalize the ancient climbing culture.

In 2018, sport climbing made its debut at the Youth Olympic Games. That same year, the Getu River Climbing Base, equipped with artificial competition walls, was built and hosted a leg of the Chinese Climbing League. In 2019, several primary schools in Ziyun county also built climbing walls and held specialized climbing courses.

Climbing, which began with the ancient *goro*, has found its young inheritors in Ziyun county.

During August's 2024 IFSC Youth World Climbing Championships, which were held in Guiyang, Ziyun county invited more than 50 young athletes from over 20 countries and regions to experience outdoor climbing at the Getu River. Following that, the 2024 Guizhou Rocktrip Rock Climbing Carnival took place in the area last month.

Many climbers at these events praised the Chuangshang Cave for its unique climbing environment.

"We come almost every year," said Wang Lingyun, a climber from Chongqing. "The natural cave shelters us from wind and rain, making climbing less dependent on weather, and there are routes of varying difficulties, suitable for all levels."

Some climbers also offered suggestions for the future development of the sport at Getu River.

One climber on Chinese mountaineering forum 8264 noted, "Getu River climbing is internationally famous, but for over a decade, it's been 'famous abroad, but unknown at home.' It would be great to have better online promotion of Getu climbing."

To transform Ziyun's Getu Valley, with its rich history and vast potential, into a representative sports and cultural tourism brand is a goal that passionate people are striving to meet.