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## Tourists flocking to site with Mars theme

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A Mars-themed tourism site in Northwest China has garnered renewed interest during the Spring Festival holiday, as science-based travel gains popularity among families and young visitors, reflecting a broader shift in how traditional holidays are experienced.

Mars Base 1 Camp, located in Jinchang, Gansu province, saw strong visitor interest during the holiday period, as travelers sought alternatives to conventional temple fairs and urban sightseeing. Built on red-rock terrain in the Gobi Desert that closely resembles the Martian surface, the site offers immersive space-themed experiences combining science education with cultural celebration.

During the holiday, the base hosted a space-themed new year blessing ceremony, where visitors wrote wishes and attached them to model rockets that were launched into the desert sky.

Traditional dragon and lion dances were also staged against the stark landscape, while digital activities such as virtual lantern lighting and augmented reality red envelope games blended festive customs with technology.

Local authorities said the site's rapid growth highlights the rising appeal of experiential and science-themed tourism. Mars Base 1 Camp recorded 503,000 visits in 2025, nearly double its attendance in 2024, making it one of the fastest-growing cultural tourism destinations in the region, according to local authorities.

"We are reinterpreting traditional blessing rituals through aerospace technology, allowing visitors to experience the festive spirit in an interstellar setting," said Chen Guohai, deputy director of Jinchang's culture and tourism bureau, adding that the new era calls for new ways to celebrate Spring Festival.

"By launching rockets carrying wishes for national strength and personal happiness, we also carry forward traditional culture and explore how technology can empower cultural tourism development," he said.

Located about 30 minutes from downtown Jinchang, the base is China's first immersive Mars-themed real-scene experience center. Developed with support from aerospace research institutions, it recreates simulated Mars living and training environments, featuring habitat cabins, rover models and mission-based activity zones.

Beyond tourism, the facility also serves educational and research functions. The Mars field research route has been designated by the School of Earth and Space Sciences at Peking University as a multidisciplinary teaching base, allowing students to conduct fieldwork and simulations in extreme environmental conditions.

Founder Bai Fan said the project was designed to promote public engagement with space science while creating an immersive learning environment. Visitors can explore a simulated survival center, observe hydroponic plant systems and participate in hands-on astronaut training scenarios.

For families, the appeal lies in combining education, entertainment and meaningful holiday traditions. A young visitor said watching his written wish rise into the sky made the experience especially meaningful. "I wrote down my wish, and when the rocket lifted into the air, I felt it was something truly special," he said.

The site's rapid growth reflects a broader shift in China's tourism sector, where destinations centered on science, technology and immersive experiences are emerging as new engines of cultural consumption.

Local authorities have integrated the site into a broader Spring Festival consumption campaign that connects scenic spots, winter sports venues and dining promotions. Discounts and vouchers were also introduced to stimulate holiday spending, Chen said.

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