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Feature: Egypt anticipates return of Chinese tourists after epidemic

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Chinese tourists are seen in the Khan el-Khalili bazaar market in Cairo, Egypt on Dec. 8, 2019. Due to an outbreak of the novel coronavirus pneumonia, which originated in China's central city of Wuhan late last year, many Chinese tourists who had planned to travel abroad during the week-long Spring Festival holiday chose instead to stay at home. Despite the apparent impact from the declining number of Chinese visitors right now, the Egyptian people have expressed their confidence in China's ability to overcome the disease and voiced hopes for the return of Chinese travelers as soon as possible.

(Photo by Ahmed Gomaa/Xinhua)

by Marwa Yahya and Ahmad Afyouny

LUXOR, Egypt, Feb. 14 (Xinhua) -- Egypt, an ancient country with abundant tourism resources from grand pyramids and

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Due to an outbreak of the novel coronavirus pneumonia, which originated in China's central city of Wuhan late last year, many Chinese tourists who had planned to travel abroad during the week-long Spring Festival holiday chose instead to stay at home.

Despite the apparent impact from the declining number of Chinese visitors right now, the Egyptian people have expressed their confidence in China's ability to overcome the disease and voiced hopes for the return of Chinese travelers as soon as possible.

"It's going to be a tough few months for the tourism industry in Luxor that highly depends on the Chinese tourists," said Mahmoud al-Nouby, a 32-year-old receptionist at a floating hotel in the heart of Upper Egypt's monument-rich city.

As tour groups from China booked for his hotel for February were all cancelled, the current occupancy in his hotel is only at 20 percent, a sharp drop from the almost 100 percent occupancy of early and mid-January.

Financial implications aside, al-Nouby said that he hopes China, which has taken rigorous, comprehensive and unprecedented measures to combat the virus, is able to overcome the epidemic very soon.

The number of Chinese tourists visiting foreign countries has soared in the past two decades. China is the world's largest market for outbound travel, witnessing its outbound travelers skyrocketing from 4.5 million in 2000 to 150 million in 2018, according to a 2019 World Tourism Organization report.

As for Egypt, in the past three years, the number of Chinese visitors has been growing at over 30 percent on average annually, far higher than the overall growth of overseas trips by Chinese tourists.

With a perfect mix of historical civilization and beautiful natural scenery, Egypt attracts hundreds of thousands of travelers from China every year, especially in winter. The capital Cairo, the Nile cities of Luxor and Aswan, and coastal resorts such as Alexandria, Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada are their major destinations.

After Egypt's travel agencies decided to cancel Chinese travel operators' reservations in several cities and its national airline EgyptAir suspended flights between the two countries in late January, its tourism industry has been badly impacted.

Fathy Saber, 40, owner of a bazaar near the Luxor Temple, said his daily income in February has hardly been reaching 450 Egyptian pounds (28.6 U.S. dollars), compared to more than 5,000 Egyptian pounds (318.6 dollars) before the cancellations.

"I was preparing myself for the Chinese flows in their Spring Festival," Saber said, adding that he is now praying for China to overcome the epidemic.

Mostafa Alham, governor of Luxor, told Xinhua that Chinese tourists are an important pillar for Egypt in general, and the city of Nile in particular.

The governor said he believes that China has the capability to deal with the challenge and win the battle against the virus in a timely manner.

Mohamed Othman, chairman of the Cultural Tourism Marketing Committee and deputy to the Tourism Companies Chamber in Upper Egypt, said, "it's a pity to miss the Chinese tourists this season."

"I wish to see the Chinese tourists very soon in Egypt after their great country recovers," Othman added.

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