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# M01: Manager of Local Cable Network

During the Chongming Flower Expo, M01 observed significant developments, noting the introduction of new facilities such as observation decks in the Xisha Wetland and the refurbishment of existing pathways. They remarked that these upgrades aimed to enhance visitor experiences and promote tourism on the island. Despite these improvements, M01 reported a moderate turnout during the expo, with most attendees being organised groups rather than voluntary visitors. This observation suggested that while efforts were being made to attract tourists, there was still room for growth in terms of individual visitor engagement and promotion.

Delving into Chongming's tourism patterns, M01 highlighted seasonal variations in visitor numbers, with holidays and long weekends attracting the highest footfall. However, they noted a decline in weekend tourism compared to previous years, attributing it to changing travel preferences and the waning effects of the pandemic. This shift in tourist behaviour underscored the need for continuous adaptation and innovation in the island's tourism offerings to maintain visitor interest and engagement.

In terms of Chongming's core competencies, M01 emphasised the island's abundant natural resources and unique homestay offerings. They observed a proliferation of homestays, ranging from boutique accommodations to community-driven initiatives, which contributed to tourism growth and generated employment opportunities for local residents.

However, M01 also highlighted challenges facing Chongming's tourism sector, include the lack of standardized dining options and fast-food chains, with most establishments being rustic farmhouses. Furthermore, there's a need for better planning and personalized designs to capitalize on the island's natural resources and attract influential figures to promote it. Transportation constraints, including heavy reliance on automobiles and limited public transportation options, pose challenges to tourists, especially in accessing remote scenic spots. Economic disparities also exist, with Chongming's contribution to Shanghai's economy constrained by restrictions on industrial development.

Regarding Chongming's ecological environment, M01 remarked on the island's relatively high environmental quality, with clean air being a notable feature. Despite an increase in tourist numbers, the impact on the environment remained minimal, thanks to the island's vast expanse and dispersed tourist locations. Efforts to maintain and preserve Chongming's ecological integrity were ongoing, with initiatives aimed at balancing tourism development with environmental conservation. This delicate balance between tourism promotion and environmental stewardship underscored the island's commitment to sustainable tourism practices and long-term ecological preservation.

# M02: Former Director of Local Television Station

M02 mentioned that Chongming's tourism primarily attracted day-trippers, budget travellers, and retirees, often arriving via tourist buses from Shanghai. The majority of tourists were locals or residents of Shanghai, with few visitors coming from other regions, although the development of interprovincial high-speed rail in the future might change this dynamic. Family tourism was also prevalent, with retired individuals typically opting for low-cost trips during weekdays due to affordability. Conversely, high-end tourism was more common during weekends and public holidays, driving up prices due to peak demand. Transportation on the island was mainly reliant on self-driving or guided tours via large buses.

Regarding Chongming's distinctive features, M02 highlighted its cuisine, particularly the popularity of local vegetables. Specialized stores selling Chongming's unique products were well-received in downtown Shanghai, with some items even having established brands managed through agricultural cooperatives. Furthermore, most factories on the island were involved in processing agricultural and sideliner products.

M02 observed improvements in the local environment and environmental protection efforts. They noted the clarity of the island's waterways and the rigorous regulations in place for wastewater treatment, with designated personnel responsible for each river. Each river has designated individuals responsible for its management, with retirees often appointed to these roles. Waste management has also seen improvements, with local factories implementing waste classification and centralised processing. The initiation of ecological construction in 2000 led to increased green space and the closure of polluting factories, resulting in stricter pollution standards and improved ecological grades.

However, local residents expressed concerns about the negative impacts of tourism, such as rising prices following the completion of bridges, leading to increased costs for local specialties and aquatic products. Additionally, housing prices surged, gradually aligning with those in downtown Shanghai while local incomes remained stagnant.

Despite these challenges, M02 perceived limited attractiveness in Chongming as a tourist destination, citing the absence of significant historical or cultural landmarks apart from the wetlands. Moreover, major tourist areas were primarily designated for construction use, leading to traffic congestion on access roads and restrictions on cruise ships. During the COVID-19 pandemic, local tourism surged due to restrictions on international travel, resulting in high demand for accommodations like guesthouses and hotels.

Population loss was a significant issue on the island, particularly between 2000 and 2007, when recruitment of residents was challenging. However, since 2007, some individuals have begun returning to the island. Despite concerns about education, local schools were synchronized with those in Shanghai, and students had access to quality education up to high school level, although tertiary education options were limited locally.

# M03: Visitor

During the interview, M03 expressed disappointment with the underutilisation of Chongming's natural resources as tourist attractions. He emphasised that despite the island's abundance of beautiful natural sites, they often go unnoticed or lack proper promotion to visitors. For example, he recounted stumbling upon a stunning lavender field while casually driving around the island. However, this scenic spot lacked any signage or proper infrastructure to attract tourists, which he found regrettable.

Another issue M03 highlighted was the lack of thoughtful design for most tourist attractions. He shared his experience at the Flower Expo. Despite the event's significance, he noted several shortcomings that hindered his enjoyment. Specifically, he mentioned the inconvenience of navigating between different exhibition halls during the summer heat, exacerbated by the absence of shaded areas and outdated decor that deterred visitors from capturing photos.

In essence, M03 emphasised the untapped potential of Chongming's natural beauty and the need for improved promotion and infrastructure development to enhance the island's appeal to tourists. He suggested that with better marketing and investment in amenities, Chongming could become a more attractive destination for travellers seeking immersive experiences in nature.

# M04: Head of Agriculture of a Town Council

M04 provided detailed insights into the agricultural development and population dynamics of a town in Chongming. Regarding agricultural development, M04 discussed the transition in management from the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Agriculture to the Agricultural, Industrial, and Commercial Group, and eventually to the Guangming Group. The establishment of administrative districts in 2008 led to the formation of two towns comprising eight farms, with a total of 100,000 mu of paddy fields. While labour supply is not a significant issue due to the absence of local enterprises, mechanisation is prevalent in farming activities, primarily undertaken by individuals aged 60 and above. However, the cultivation of vegetables and fruits is limited in these towns due to the labour-intensive nature of the process.

The marketing of agricultural products primarily involves primary processing, with limited deep processing activities. Notably, the production of Chongming cakes has emerged as a successful venture, bridging the gap between primary and deep processing. Sales channels include tourist-led purchases, wholesaling to retailers like Hema Fresh and supermarkets, with recent increases attributed to the pandemic.

In terms of demographics, individuals aged 60 and above constitute over 45% of the Town's population, with approximately 70% involved in actual work. While there has been a slight increase in the number of young people in recent years, population migration remains minimal, with few newcomers to Chongming. The pace of life in Chongming is perceived as slower compared to Shanghai, attracting those seeking a more relaxed lifestyle. The implementation of ecological positions provides a safety net for residents, with monthly expenses covered by the minimum wage standard.

Regarding tourism, the town M04’s lived has unique challenges due to the absence of residential land for constructing accommodations. Also, the pace of tourism development has been impeded by factors such as irregular industry practices, inflated prices, and inadequate infrastructure, particularly from 2009 to 2018.

Looking ahead, the tourism in Chongming prospects hinge on addressing issues such as scattered management and a lack of core attractions. While efforts to develop the elderly care industry and enhance agricultural tourism show promise, achieving balanced and sustainable growth remains a challenge due to disparities in development, inconsistent service standards, and regulatory constraints.

Overall, M04's analysis sheds light on the complexities and opportunities associated with agricultural development, demographic shifts, and tourism dynamics in Chongming, offering valuable insights for future planning and policy formulation.

# M05: Owner of Family-Run Farm Catering and Accommodation

Chongming's tourism patterns and visitor demographics vary depending on the season and occasion. In spring, particularly in March and April when the flowers bloom, the countryside sees a surge in visitors, especially during holidays and long weekends. Most visitors stay for one or two days, though weekends tend to experience traffic congestion, especially on Friday nights and Sunday evenings. The majority of our guests are families, often accompanied by elderly relatives and children. Post-March, some Shanghai locals or out-of-towners working in Shanghai opt to send their elderly family members to stay with us for a few weeks, taking advantage of the mild weather. This trend reflects a form of elderly care through leisure tourism.

With ten guest rooms available, our occupancy rates skyrocket during holidays, reaching full capacity, while weekdays typically see a 30% occupancy rate, mostly comprising repeat customers who directly book accommodations and meals through WeChat or online platforms.

Regarding ecotourism, Chongming has transformed into an ecological tourist destination, with all heavy industries phased out to make way for eco-friendly tourism. Consequently, local cuisine predominantly consists of locally grown produce, which appeals to Shanghai and out-of-town visitors seeking authentic rural flavours. Government initiatives, such as the installation of smoke exhaust filters, strict waste management policies, and emphasis on greenery, have contributed to the island's ecological preservation efforts.

However, the promotion of Chongming as an international ecological island coincided with the onset of the pandemic, impacting business adversely due to the proliferation of new eateries and intense competition. Furthermore, the ban on seafood harvesting after March and the demolition of chicken and duck coops in rural areas have reshaped the local agricultural landscape. We now source our vegetables directly from local farmers, ensuring freshness and authenticity in our offerings.

The past two years have been particularly challenging due to the pandemic, resulting in a significant downturn in business. Staffing levels have been reduced by half, and market demand for produce has plummeted. Many locals, including my friend who previously operated a taxi service, have shifted to establishing guesthouses with hopes of government subsidies. Unfortunately, their investments have not yielded significant returns, leaving them in financial distress.

The Shanghai Flower Expo led to a surge in hotel and restaurant openings, heightening tourism expectations. However, traffic restrictions during the expo limited visitor influx, and subsequent foot traffic did not meet anticipated levels due to increased competition. Despite a slight recovery post-expo, obtaining bookings still requires reputation and networking efforts. The lack of government support and subsidies during the pandemic has compounded challenges for businesses like ours. For instance, there has been no coordinated mosquito control effort during the summer months, and all COVID-19 prevention measures, such as temperature checks, have been financed independently.

Moving forward, I plan to renovate and upgrade our guest rooms this year to stay competitive in the evolving tourism landscape. I aim to engage external design and renovation teams to modernize our accommodations and enhance guest experiences. Ultimately, our business relies on reputation, word of mouth, and quality to attract visitors. After the renovation, we will invest in advertising to justify a price increase. For instance, our current rates are 200 yuan per day on weekends and 100 yuan per day on weekdays. Following the renovation, we aim to increase prices to 268 yuan per day and promote them online for direct bookings.

# M06: Manager of Large-Scale Farmhouse with Multiple Services

Agritourism has flourished on Chongming Island over the past decade, with establishments like M06's homestay expanding their offerings to include dining, lodging, farm activities, and locally-produced rice wine. This shift has propelled the island from a destination for spot tourism to one of holistic exploration, providing visitors with a diverse array of authentic experiences.

M06 summarised the evolution of the development of agritourism on Chongming Island resulting in four main B&B models:

1. Boutique Homestays: These are individually operated establishments that prioritize uniqueness and character. They cater to niche markets and offer specialized experiences tailored to guests' preferences.

2. Private Ventures: Some homestays are initiated by individual proprietors seeking to capitalize on the island's tourism potential. These ventures often focus on creating personalized experiences and fostering a sense of community.

3. Corporate Enterprises: Larger companies, such as the Guangming Group, have entered the agritourism market on Chongming Island. They develop comprehensive tourism complexes that include homestays along with complementary amenities like themed villages.

4. Community-driven Initiatives: Examples include M06’s homestay, which operates under a shared ownership model involving local villagers. These initiatives prioritize community empowerment and aim to revitalize rural areas through sustainable tourism practices.

Despite the government's efforts to incentivize agritourism, operators face challenges such as high fees and stringent regulations. Unlike in the past, when farmers received subsidies for cultivating their land, homestay operators must now contend with substantial costs without corresponding support. For instance, registration fees, sanitation inspections, and information management expenses have all increased significantly, placing a financial strain on operators.

The shift towards upscale tourism, driven by government directives to develop high-end boutique homestays, risks alienating traditional visitors and transforming Chongming Island into an exclusive destination. This could lead to a decline in overall visitor numbers and undermine the island's accessibility to a broader demographic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought both opportunities and risks for agritourism operators on Chongming Island. While there has been an increase in visitor traffic during the pandemic, operators face the risk of closures due to oversupply and inadequate support mechanisms. For instance, the island experienced significant losses during the 2019 lockdown, highlighting the vulnerability of the tourism sector to external shocks.

In response to these challenges, M06's homestay adopts a strategic approach focused on service excellence, differentiation, and community empowerment. Despite obstacles like outdated infrastructure and regulatory hurdles, M06's team is committed to continuous improvement and collaboration to ensure the long-term viability of their operation.

Additionally, M06 emphasises the importance of preserving the island's cultural heritage and natural beauty while developing its tourism sector. They believe that maintaining a balance between economic growth and environmental conservation is crucial for long-term sustainability.

In their pursuit of excellence, M06's homestay focuses on enhancing guest experiences through innovative services and amenities. They continually seek ways to differentiate themselves from competitors and provide personalised, high-quality offerings to meet the diverse needs of their clientele. Moreover, M06 recognises the significance of community involvement and collaboration in driving the success of agritourism initiatives. By engaging local residents as partners and stakeholders, they aim to foster a sense of ownership and pride in the development of their homestay and the broader tourism industry.

Looking forward, M06 remains committed to advocating for policies and initiatives that support the growth and resilience of Chongming Island's agritourism sector. They believe that by harnessing the collective efforts of government, businesses, and local communities, they can create a sustainable and inclusive tourism ecosystem that benefits all stakeholders.

In conclusion, M06's homestay serves as a beacon of innovation and resilience in Chongming Island's evolving agritourism landscape. Through strategic planning, community engagement, and a steadfast commitment to excellence, they strive to shape a brighter future for the island's tourism industry.

# M07: Chef of a Small Farm Restaurant

M07, the chef of a small farm restaurant, takes pride in showcasing Chongming's culinary delights, with a primary focus on locally sourced ingredients such as fresh fish, succulent crabs, and flavourful river shrimp. These dishes offer a distinctive taste that sets them apart from the offerings found in downtown Shanghai, appealing to both locals and tourists seeking an authentic gastronomic experience. While the restaurant refrains from extensive online promotion due to the prohibitive costs of platform advertising, it relies on the power of word-of-mouth recommendations and positive customer experiences to attract and retain clientele.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented formidable challenges for the restaurant, particularly during the initial outbreak in 2019 and 2020. Mandated closures and travel restrictions resulted in a significant downturn in business, leading to considerable food wastage and financial losses. The cancellation of bookings, especially during the bustling Chinese New Year period, dealt a severe blow to revenue streams. In response, the restaurant was compelled to streamline operations, reducing staff to a bare minimum to control costs and weather the economic storm.

Despite the adversity posed by the pandemic, a silver lining emerged as domestic travel restrictions prompted a surge in weekend tourism to Chongming. The influx of visitors from Shanghai revitalized the restaurant's weekend business, with the establishment often operating at full capacity. However, weekdays remained relatively subdued, reflecting the ebb and flow of tourist activity dictated by holiday schedules and work commitments.

Looking ahead, M07 recognizes the imperative of safeguarding and bolstering the restaurant's reputation amidst intensifying competition. The proliferation of dining establishments in the area, coupled with the aggressive marketing strategies employed by larger competitors, underscores the need for differentiation and customer loyalty. As neighbouring restaurants succumb to the pressures of the market, M07 emphasises the importance of delivering exceptional culinary experiences and attentive service to retain patrons and sustain profitability.

Moreover, the restaurant grapples with the demographic challenges posed by an aging workforce. With most staff members aged 60 and above, the recruitment and retention of younger talent present ongoing difficulties. The perception of service industry roles as physically demanding and financially unrewarding dissuades younger individuals from pursuing employment opportunities, exacerbating staffing shortages and operational strains.

In navigating these complexities, M07 remains committed to adapting and innovating to stay relevant in a dynamic and competitive culinary landscape. By prioritizing customer satisfaction, fostering a welcoming ambiance, and exploring strategic partnerships with local businesses and tourism agencies, the restaurant endeavours to carve out a niche and thrive in the evolving hospitality industry.

# M08: Catering Manager of a Large State-Owned Resort

The predominant clientele at the resort consists of families, particularly those with children. During the summer months of July and August, family vacations are prevalent, with parents bringing along one or two children or even extended family members. The resort also caters to occasional business travellers, with corporate events and meetings typically scheduled during year-end and mid-year periods. With approximately 230 guest rooms, the resort experiences varying occupancy rates throughout the year. Weekdays during the off-peak season witness a 10-20% occupancy rate, while weekends see a surge to around 85%. Unlike urban hotels, the resort thrives on weekend and holiday bookings, capitalising on its appeal as a leisure destination.

M08 argued that Chongming's allure lies primarily in its natural landscapes and tranquil ambiance rather than conventional tourist attractions. Visitors seek respite from urban life, craving relaxation, and rejuvenation amidst pristine surroundings. While the island lacks iconic landmarks, its appeal lies in providing a peaceful retreat where guests can unwind and immerse themselves in a serene environment. The resort, nestled within Chongming's verdant landscapes, epitomises this idyllic escape, offering guests a sanctuary to unwind and recharge. Guests are drawn to the resort's lush surroundings, tranquil ambiance, and commitment to providing a serene haven away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on tourism dynamics, reshaping visitor trends and market conditions. While the pandemic initially led to a downturn in travel, resulting in decreased corporate events and group bookings, it also spurred a surge in domestic tourism during periods of restricted mobility. The Flower Expo, while introducing new hotel options, has intensified competition within the local hospitality sector. The division of the tourism market among numerous players has necessitated a focus on service quality and differentiation to maintain competitiveness. Post-pandemic recovery poses challenges as well, with the potential for a decline in visitor numbers once travel restrictions ease. The resort acknowledges the need to adapt and innovate to sustain its appeal in a post-pandemic landscape characterized by heightened competition and shifting consumer preferences.

M08 believed effective collaboration between the government and the private sector is crucial to enhancing Chongming's tourism appeal and infrastructure. The development of new tourist attractions and transportation networks is essential to attract visitors and stimulate economic growth. He argued that the vision of establishing Chongming as a world-class ecological island hinges on the creation of unique and compelling attractions that set it apart from other destinations. The resort advocates for the development of distinctive offerings that showcase Chongming's natural beauty and ecological diversity, thereby attracting a diverse range of visitors.

The resort M08 worked in has undergone significant expansion over the past decade, evolving into a prominent leisure destination renowned for its scenic beauty and impeccable service. Despite facing competition from boutique accommodations and homestays, the resort capitalises on its unique selling points, including its serene ambiance, gourmet cuisine, and stringent quality standards. The resort's commitment to excellence has earned it a loyal customer base, predominantly comprising discerning travellers seeking a refined and tranquil retreat. By leveraging its strengths and maintaining a focus on delivering exceptional guest experiences, the resort remains poised for sustained success in the competitive hospitality landscape.

Recruiting and retaining skilled personnel poses challenges in the hospitality industry, exacerbated by labour shortages and changing workforce demographics. While the resort primarily relies on interns and seasonal staff to meet operational needs, attracting and retaining talent remains a priority. Efforts to enhance employee satisfaction and provide opportunities for career advancement are essential to fostering a motivated and dedicated workforce. Additionally, the resort emphasizes the importance of training and professional development initiatives to equip staff with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their roles.

Government support and strategic planning are integral to Chongming's future development as a premier tourism destination. The resort advocates for policies that promote sustainable tourism practices and foster collaboration between stakeholders to unlock the island's full potential as a leisure and eco-tourism hub.

# M09: Manager of Local History Museum

At the local history museum where M09 is employed, the primary visitors consist of parents accompanied by their children. Moreover, the museum actively collaborates with schools in the Shanghai area, serving as a hub for educational activities. This collaborative effort often entails hosting school field trips for elementary and middle school students, providing them with enriching experiences through interactive exhibits and guided tours aimed at deepening their understanding of history and culture.

M09 holds the belief that Chongming Island, despite its natural splendour, grapples with the challenge of spotlighting significant cultural and historical landmarks. Unlike ancient cities boasting well-preserved historical sites and cultural legacies, Chongming lacks prominent architectural marvels or deeply rooted cultural traditions. While the island's allure predominantly emanates from its breath-taking natural landscapes, such as the Xisha Wetland, many of its attractions are man-made and lack inherent historical significance, thereby constraining their appeal.

Recognising the need to augment Chongming's cultural appeal, M09 emphasizes the importance of leveraging existing cultural resources and implementing supportive policies. While environmental improvements have enhanced the island's overall ambiance, sustainable tourism development should encompass a broader spectrum, encompassing cultural heritage preservation and promotion.

The recruitment of a skilled workforce presents a formidable challenge on Chongming Island, with young individuals often disinclined to pursue employment opportunities due to inadequate wages. In response to this issue, M09 advocates for the implementation of policies designed not only to raise wages but also to enhance job satisfaction and provide avenues for career advancement. Government support is paramount in fostering a motivated and skilled workforce committed to safeguarding and promoting Chongming's cultural heritage.

Regarding the Post-Covid, M09 had additional concerns about the resilience of Chongming's tourism industry. The pandemic has disrupted travel patterns and consumer behaviours, raising uncertainties about the future of tourism on the island. Challenges such as reduced visitor numbers, changes in travel preferences, and economic downturns may exacerbate existing issues and necessitate adaptive strategies for recovery and growth. Therefore, it is imperative for stakeholders to remain vigilant and proactive in navigating the evolving landscape of post-pandemic tourism.

# F01: Visitor

F01, an amateur photographer, visited Chongming Island several times, primarily drawn by the allure of tasting local farm cuisine and capturing picturesque moments with her friends. Her impressions of Chongming Island were shaped by its vast expanses, which necessitated self-driving for exploration. She found the island's abundance of natural landscapes particularly appealing, as they offered ample opportunities for photography.

Interestingly, F01 tended to steer clear of tourist attractions on the island due to the crowds and high admission fees, opting instead to uncover hidden gems while traversing Chongming's roads. However, F01 noted the absence of official tour guides on Chongming, which could have enhanced visitors' experiences by providing recommended driving or cycling routes, for instance.

She observed a surge in Chongming's tourism scene during the pandemic, likely fuelled by travel restrictions elsewhere, which prompted more people to explore the island. Looking ahead, F01 expressed a willingness to consider alternative travel destinations post-pandemic, suggesting that Chongming may face competition from other locales once travel restrictions ease.

Regarding accommodation, F01 highlighted significant disparities in both quality and pricing among lodging options on Chongming Island. While some upscale accommodations commanded hefty fees of several thousand yuan per night, she underscored the availability of budget-friendly accommodations in converted farmhouse settings, offering basic amenities at a fraction of the cost.

Overall, F01's experience demonstrated that Chongming Island was attractive to food and photography enthusiasts but less attractive to tourist attractions and lacked official tourist guides. She also mentioned the changing needs of tourists during the pandemic and the heavily differentiated tourist accommodations.

# F02: Visitor

F02, a local resident of Shanghai and a college student, visited Chongming Island with her parents for the first time. Her family planned to travel back and forth the same day and not stay overnight because B&B prices were too expensive. Despite being a native of Shanghai, she initially perceived Chongming as a rural area, somewhat backward, but renowned for its fresh produce. She mentioned that her grandmother often bought vegetables from Chongming due to their high quality and affordability.

During her visit to Chongming Island, F02 only explored the forest park and indulged in farm-style cuisine. She found the forest park to be somewhat average in terms of attractions but praised the quality of the food. Overall, she characterised Chongming's tourism as primarily focused on relaxation, but hampered by insufficiently accessible infrastructure. For instance, she noted the scarcity of convenience stores on the island.

Moreover, F02 observed a concentration of vendors near tourist attractions, while other areas appeared relatively underdeveloped. Based on her personal experience, she believed there was ample room for improvement in Chongming's tourism offerings. She suggested that more effort could be invested in enhancing attractions within the tourist areas.

In conclusion, F02's perspective highlights the potential for further development in Chongming's tourism sector, particularly in improving infrastructure and diversifying attractions beyond the popular spots.

# F03: Local Farmer, Growing Saffron

She mentioned Chongming Island boasts a significant saffron production, accounting for approximately 90% of the country's output. This is largely attributed to the island's unique soil composition and favourable climate, which are ideal for saffron cultivation. Presently, most saffron cultivation takes place indoors in specialised cultivation rooms, where modern techniques have significantly enhanced both yield and efficiency.

However, despite the booming saffron industry, local farmers face several challenges, primarily stemming from the aging workforce and labour shortages. While Chongming remains one of China's largest saffron-producing regions, the agricultural sector struggles to attract young laborers. With industries in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai being more developed, many young individuals are reluctant to engage in agricultural production, leaving the task predominantly to elderly villagers. This demographic trend, coupled with the lengthy cultivation process of saffron, exacerbates labour shortages within the industry.

Additionally, the high output of saffron comes with substantial input costs for farmers. Cultivating saffron requires specific soil conditions, namely loose and well-drained sandy loam, which adds to the complexity and cost of production. Moreover, the uncertainties surrounding soil quality further intensify the challenges faced by saffron farmers.

In terms of sales, the majority of saffron products are distributed to hospitals, pharmacies, and medicinal markets, primarily for use in traditional Chinese medicine and health supplements. In recent years, there has been a diversification in product offerings, with the development of saffron-based skincare products such as face masks, catering to the general public. While there has been a noticeable increase in tourists visiting Chongming Island in recent years, direct sales from farmers to tourists remain relatively low. Most tourists still rely on pharmaceutical companies and local markets for saffron purchases, limiting the direct economic benefits for saffron farmers from the tourism influx. She expressed hope that they could expand their sales channels, such as through online shopping, to increase sales. However, due to age-related constraints, they have not been able to explore this avenue fully. The cost and time required for learning online marketing are relatively large. She suggested that government support in the form of training programs or market development initiatives would be beneficial in addressing this challenge and tapping into new sales opportunities.

# F04: Rooms Division Manager of a State-Owned Orchard Tourist Attraction

The orchard covers an area of 1,500 acres (approximately 100 hectares) and was previously primarily a forestry site. It is now divided into different functional zones that fulfil different roles, including education, attractions, event organisation, catering and accommodation. In terms of advantages, the orchard boasts a vast area with abundant fruit varieties and enjoys a certain level of fame. Its extensive facilities and appealing environment distinguish it from typical farmhouse settings.

In the past, successful events such as the Peach Blossom Festival and Rapeseed Flower Festival were held, attracting numerous visitors. The orchard boasts a diverse range of fruit trees, ensuring that there are fruits available for picking throughout the year. Moreover, the orchard serves as an educational base for students, hosting agricultural learning activities and fieldwork for schools from both the local county and nearby city. Additionally, local kindergartens often organise spring and autumn outings to the orchard. Activities such as fishing, and barbecues are available within the orchard premises. Accommodation and dining reservations are primarily made online through platforms like Ctrip and Meituan, and the orchard also has its own official WeChat public account.

Regarding employment, both local and non-local staff are employed, with accommodation and dining areas predominantly staffed by non-local workers. The company provides dormitories and dining facilities for its employees. Recruitment standards are relatively high, and the stability and benefits offered by state-owned enterprises make them attractive to recent graduates. Local employment opportunities are primarily related to horticultural maintenance and miscellaneous fieldwork, providing employment opportunities for middle-aged and elderly locals and fulfilling the company's social responsibility obligations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected visitor numbers, with weekends remaining relatively busy compared to weekdays. The orchard is committed to green fruit certification, ensuring compliance with environmental standards. Subsidies are primarily directed towards forestry, supporting the orchard's sustainability initiatives.

Future development plans include the establishment of a wisteria garden and upgrades to accommodation facilities. The orchard aims to enhance visitor experiences and attract more group tours, particularly focusing on family-oriented and team-building activities. Collaborative initiatives with other subsidiaries within the company aim to offer comprehensive tourism experiences, such as combining stays at different locations for multi-day tours. Challenges include aging fruit trees and transportation constraints due to the orchard's location on the western side of Chongming Island. Additionally, there is a lack of official tourism routes, resulting in visitors mainly staying overnight at the orchard while exploring other attractions during the day.

# F05: Rooms Division Manager of Large-Scale Private Investment Farmhouses

As the Rooms Division Manager of Large-Scale Private Investment Farmhouses, my role encompasses overseeing the accommodation and hospitality services offered within our expansive farmhouse properties. Our farmhouses are part of a significant private investment initiative aimed at transforming traditional rural properties into modern and luxurious retreats for urban dwellers seeking a countryside escape. Our farmhouse is characterised by its expansive grounds and offers guests a peaceful, immersive countryside experience. The owner hired a team of professionals to remodel and design the rooms with a blend of modern comforts and rustic charm, with modern amenities and equipment in the rooms. In addition to accommodation, our farmhouse offers a variety of leisure services to suit the preferences of our diverse guests. We also have a specialised chef who cooks farmhouse meals, which are quite tasty.

Over the past few years, our business has experienced such a surge in demand that we have struggled to keep pace with it. Particularly on weekends, the guest room department has been operating at full capacity, with all rooms booked to capacity. As a result, guests often need to make reservations at least a month in advance to secure accommodation. The high demand has left the staff in the guest room department feeling exhausted due to the constant influx of guests and the need to manage the overwhelming workload. F05 is a local resident (aged 40-50). Except for the front desk, most of the staff here are elderly individuals. They are mainly responsible for cleaning the guest rooms. The salary is average, but the work is very tiring. Young people are not willing to do it, so they can only rely on the elderly to do it.

Whilst the B&Bs now enjoying buoyant business and strong demand, F05 remain concerned about the post-Pandemic 19 situation and its impact on the market. The pandemic undoubtedly reshaped the tourism and hospitality industry, and she anticipated that people will be keen to explore new destinations, so demand may be significantly reduced in the future. Additionally, there is the challenge of adapting to new health and safety protocols to ensure the well-being of both guests and staff. Implementing rigorous cleaning and sanitation measures, enforcing social distancing guidelines, and providing adequate protective equipment are essential steps in regaining consumer trust and confidence in our accommodations.

As the number of B&Bs has increased dramatically over the years, agribusinesses must differentiate themselves from their competitors and must continue to innovate and enhance what we have to offer, which may require investing in unique amenities, experiences or services that set us apart and appeal to our target demographic. In addition, as the market becomes more crowded, pricing strategies become critical, all of which require constant learning.

# F06: Manager of a State-Owned Tourism Investment Company

Currently, we manage two main scenic areas: Dongping National Forest Park and Xisha Mingzhu Lake Scenic Area. The merger of Xisha Wetland and Mingzhu Lake Park was aimed at creating a 5A scenic area, with the goal of stimulating the entire region through integrated management. Annually, our system receives approximately 2 million visitors, with Dongping Forest Park accounting for around 700,000 visitors per year. However, overnight stays are relatively fewer in number, especially in the forest park. Initially, Xisha Wetland was open to the public for free, attracting a large number of visitors.

Our hotel properties span from east to west: Yindong Resort Village on the eastern side, followed by Jinxiu Hotel and Huabo Welcome Hotel in the central region, and a caravan campsite near the forest park. The caravan campsite houses 90 trailers, catering mainly to families with children who come to enjoy nature and outdoor activities during the day and stay overnight for a barbecue experience. In the western part, there are two hotels: Mingzhu Lake Resort, catering to high-end business clientele, and Tian'e Garden Resort, offering a more affordable option.

Our company's development has been rapid in the past three to five years. Established in July 2009, our company initially managed only Dongping Forest Park and Xisha Mingzhu Lake Park. The development of hotels followed gradually. While progress was slow in the first five to six years, the pace accelerated in the recent five to six years, thanks to successful infrastructure development.

Regarding Chongming's tourism model, our observations indicate that the majority of travelers are aged between 30 and 40, often accompanied by children, grandparents, or friends. Self-driving is the primary mode of transportation, with online bookings being prevalent, particularly through platforms like Dianping. Due to travel restrictions, visitors mainly come from urban areas, especially since the pandemic. Weather significantly affects tourism patterns, with peak seasons occurring during spring and autumn, while summers witness the development of new tourism products. Despite the fluctuating demand, hotel occupancy during holidays reaches full capacity, with weekday occupancy rates averaging between 20% and 30%.

In response to changing tourist demands, our focus is shifting towards providing a holistic resort experience rather than mere accommodation. We aim to offer diverse amenities and services cantered around our hotels, radiating out to surrounding areas within a one to two-hour radius. While the appeal of tourist attractions may be declining, well-designed hotels are in high demand. We have observed a rising trend in guest expectations for quality accommodations and innovative experiences. Repeat guests are drawn to Chongming for its pristine environment, comfortable accommodations, and fresh, delicious local cuisine.

Looking ahead, we plan to diversify our offerings by introducing unique dining experiences and experiential activities, such as pet-friendly hotels and themed events. Additionally, we aspire to establish a prominent hotel brand with multiple properties, providing guests with varied experiences across different regions.

However, we face challenges in talent acquisition, with an aging workforce and a shortage of skilled professionals. Despite efforts to recruit and train staff, there remains a need for ongoing skill development and training, particularly in customer service. To address these challenges and drive sustainable growth, we are exploring partnerships with local communities and implementing initiatives to enhance environmental conservation. By leveraging our strengths and addressing key areas of improvement, we are confident in our ability to navigate the evolving tourism landscape and continue contributing to Chongming's development as a premier tourist destination.

# F07: Deputy Head of a Village Council

F07, as the Deputy Head of the Village Council, provided insights into the establishment of Happy Farm and homestay accommodations in her village. Happy Farm was initiated by a Taiwanese owner who leased land from three production teams in the village. Beginning operations in 2017, the farm required an initial investment of 50 million RMB. It leased 13 village houses for accommodation, paying an annual rent of only 30,000 RMB. The farm's attractions included leisure picking, technical demonstrations, and product marketing, complemented by activities such as parent-child activities, farm animal feeding, fruit picking (particularly popular in summer), horseback riding, and autumn maple leaf viewing.

The primary demographic of tourists consists of families, especially those with children, as well as wedding parties and conference attendees. Families often book entire buildings for their stay, typically making reservations online, with weekends and holidays being the peak periods.

Over the past three years, tourism development has accelerated, although the farm initially operated at a loss with low room occupancy rates. However, recent three years have seen gradual improvements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a surge in demand for accommodation during holidays, with over 40 rooms fully booked. To attract more visitors during weekdays, promotional discounts were offered, and most guests stayed for one to two days.

F07 believed that the Island's appeal to Shanghai residents lies in its slower pace of life and rural atmosphere, offering a refreshing contrast to the fast-paced urban lifestyle. Visitors seek to experience the fresh air and serene environment, with the village resembling a garden or forest sanctuary. Besides, the designation of F07’s village as a National Civilised Village has also contributed to improvements in infrastructure and landscaping, attracting urbanites seeking leisurely holidays in a picturesque setting.

The tourism industry has had a positive impact on the village, primarily through land and house rental income, employment opportunities for local residents, and the sale of agricultural products to Happy Farm. While the village committee has not directly benefited financially from the land lease to Happy Farm, it has contributed to solving various issues for local residents. Land leasing and house rentals provide additional income for villagers, especially for those with limited agricultural resources.

In terms of future planning, the village council aims to leverage the success of Happy Farm to encourage local residents to develop their own homestay businesses, leveraging their existing resources and infrastructure. This approach would lower costs for villagers and potentially boost rural tourism in the area. Improving villagers' incomes and living standards remains a priority for the village council. Although the village's infrastructure has been significantly improved in recent years, there is still room for further enhancement, particularly in environmental and living conditions. Exploring opportunities for collective economic development and maximizing the village's collective assets are key considerations for the future. A new project called "Happy Farm No. 2" was recently initiated, aiming to refurbish and renovate 12 buildings as a public-private partnership. With an investment of over 10 million RMB, the project is currently only open to the public on weekends. Projects like No. 2, which utilise village-owned land, have the potential to generate additional income for the village through increased rent and economic activity.

The village council envisions future collaborations among neighbouring villages to create unique tourism experiences, such as offering multi-day stays or themed tours. However, given the similarities between villages, she thought the differentiation may be a challenge.

# F08: Administrative Staff of a Village Council

Traditionally, our village relied on agriculture, with a focus on growing vegetables and fruits. However, with the emergence of tourism, entrepreneurs have shown interest in leasing our land and houses to convert them into homestay accommodations. The appeal of Chongming Island lies in its relatively low cost of living, making it an attractive option for investors. The houses leased for homestay accommodations are typically vacant properties owned by elderly residents. Renting out these properties provides a modest source of income for them, albeit at lower rates. Undertaking homestay renovations independently would incur high costs, especially given the trend towards boutique and themed accommodations favored by younger tourists. Professional design teams and extensive renovations are required, which are financially prohibitive for most villagers. Additionally, the budget end of the homestay market faces stiff competition, resulting in low profit margins.

Our village grapples with a significant aging population and a shortage of young residents. Elderly villagers contribute to the homestay industry by undertaking basic tasks such as dishwashing and cleaning, as younger individuals are reluctant to engage in such manual labor. Despite their involvement, the economic benefits for villagers remain limited, with the bulk of profits accruing to the business owners. While the tourism industry has brought some improvements to our village, particularly in terms of environmental quality and infrastructure, the economic benefits for local residents are less pronounced. The influx of tourists has led to an enhancement of our living environment, but the financial gains have primarily been enjoyed by investors rather than villagers.

However, it is undeniable that the development of ecotourism has resulted in tangible improvements to our village's environment and infrastructure. Residents have benefited from enhanced living conditions, signalling a positive impact of tourism on our community.

Looking ahead, it is crucial to address the challenges associated with tourism development while maximising the benefits for local residents. Efforts should be made to ensure that economic gains are distributed more equitably among villagers, and initiatives to engage and empower the younger generation should be prioritised.

# F09: Head of Local Government Tourism Industry Regulation

F09 is responsible for managing and regulating tourism activities on Chongming Island. Her duties are mainly to regulate and discipline traders in the tourism industry.

F09 believed that unlike traditional tourist destinations, tourism on Chongming Island mainly offers a relaxing and leisurely mode of travelling. She considered that Chongming Island's attraction lies mainly in its pure ecological experience, such as visiting Dongping Forest Park to admire ancient fir trees and strolling through Xisha Wetland to observe the reed marshes. Due to the lack of exciting attractions, leisure activities have become the mainstay of the tourism industry, with tourists travelling mainly for the culinary experience and to stay in attractive B&Bs.

In preparation for the Flower Expo, the local government took proactive measures to promote tourism and increase the number of accommodations on Chongming Island. Recognising the potential influx of visitors during the event, authorities worked closely with stakeholders to expand accommodation options to meet the anticipated demand. Not only have many large state-owned hotels been added, but local villagers have been encouraged to convert their rooms to open B&Bs. This has led to a significant increase in the number of B&B on the island.

The tourism industry on Chongming Island performed relatively well during the epidemic, thanks to its geographic location and tourism restraint policies. Although Chongming Island was largely unaffected by the COVID-19 cases, the epidemic changed people's travel behaviour, prompting Shanghai residents to seek out domestic destinations like Chongming for weekend getaways. Demand for accommodation on the island surged after the Flora Expo, especially for well-equipped homestays. Prices for these well-appointed and attractive B&Bs exceed those of five-star hotels, reflecting tourists' willingness to pay high prices for unique and immersive experiences. Tourists span a wide age range, with family travelling being particularly common. In addition, budget B&Bs attracted retirees looking for an affordable holiday, which boosted weekday occupancy rates, especially for lower-priced accommodation.

However, she mentioned transportation disruptions, particularly during the Flower Expo period, posed challenges for both local and non-local visitors. Traffic restrictions hindered access to the island, affecting both local and non-local tourists' ability to reach their accommodations and tourist attractions. The availability of efficient transportation infrastructure, including high-speed rail and subway connections, was crucial for Chongming's tourism development. Previous attempts to promote organised group travel, such as shuttle services from Shanghai to Chongming during the Flower Expo, encountered limited success due to prevailing preferences for self-drive travel. Despite potential logistical challenges, exploring alternative transportation solutions remained essential for enhancing accessibility and attracting a broader visitor base.

# F10: Administrative Staff of Local Government Tourism Planning

F10 mentioned that the strategic roadmap for Chongming aims to position Chongming as a global leisure and tourism island, with a focus on eco-tourism, culinary experiences and accommodation options.

However, F10 also recognised several challenges that needed to be addressed. Firstly, there were concerns regarding the vibrancy of the cultural market. F10 argued that the lack of high-quality cultural products and professionals, coupled with a disparity in cultural consumption habits between local residents and those in central urban areas, hindered the development of the cultural industry. Additionally, the inadequacy of public cultural facilities, particularly at the town and village levels, restricted access to cultural amenities for residents.

Moreover, F10 observed that Chongming Island lacked major, impactful, and long-term tourism projects that could significantly drive tourism growth. Factors such as land availability and infrastructure constraints made it challenging to attract large-scale tourism investments, leading to limited tourism appeal and brand influence. Furthermore, transportation remained a bottleneck for tourism development, with high transportation costs and congestion during holidays adversely affecting visitor experiences.

To address these challenges, the focus shifted towards the development of key tourist attractions, with Dongping National Forest Park and the Flora Expo Cultural Park serving as core destinations. Emphasis was placed on developing forest and floral leisure tourism around these areas. Additionally, efforts were made to transform selected villages into cultural and tourism hubs, with 20 villages identified for targeted development. The promotion of the homestay industry was also prioritised, with initiatives aimed at enhancing quality, clustering, branding, and differentiation within the sector.