

Reading and Writing

1 What do you know about Xu Xiake and his travels?

2 Read the following article and answer this question: How do you think modern tourism differs from tourism in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)?

XU XIAKE'S GUILIN

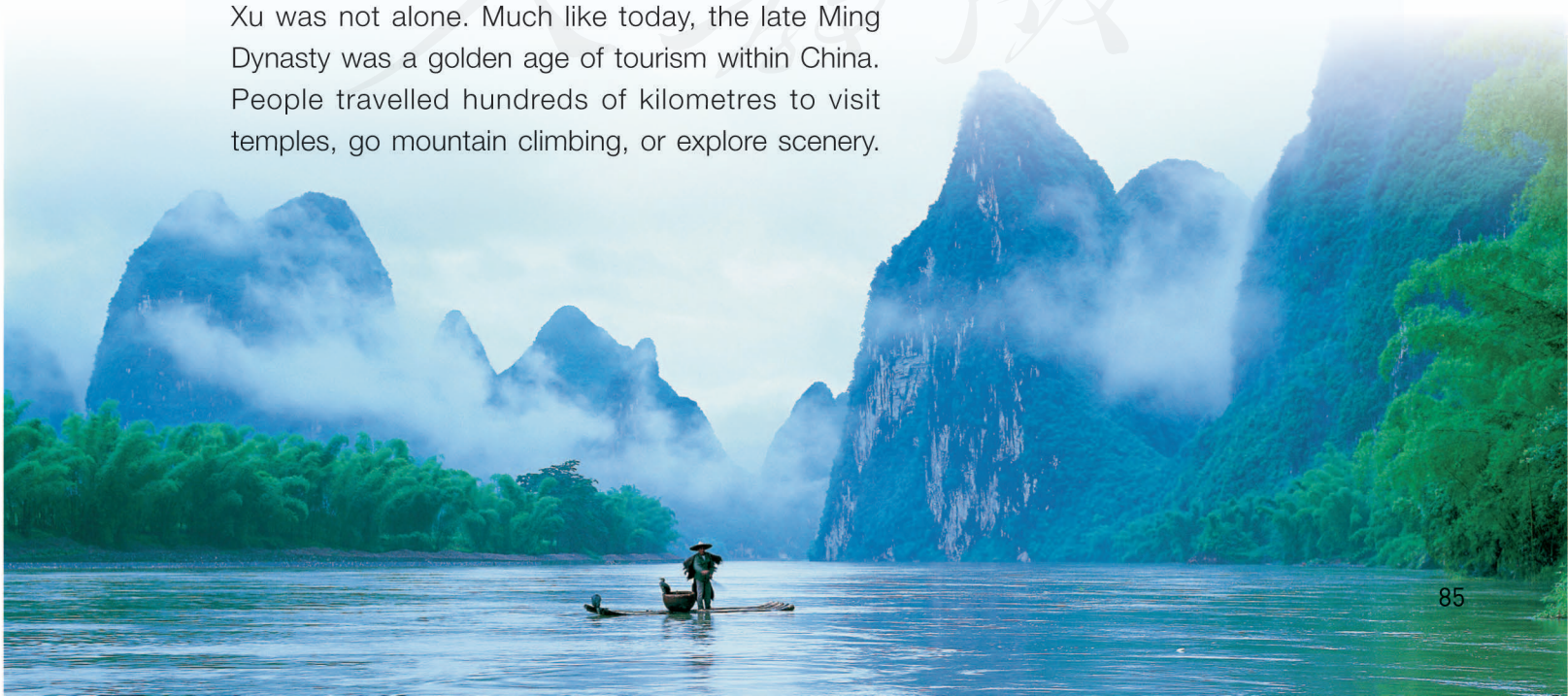
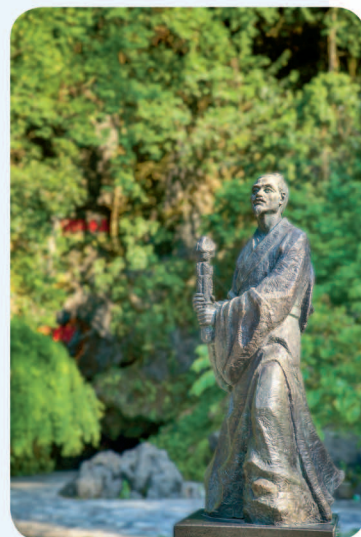
It is 10 in the morning, and I am travelling by raft down the Li River. The sun is already burning hot even though it has not yet reached full strength, but a calm breeze cools my skin. So far the day is wonderful, but the purpose of my trip is not just to have fun: I am following in the footsteps of Xu Xiake (1587–1641), the famous Chinese travel writer and geographer. Though Xu was from Jiangsu, he spent more than 30 years travelling throughout the country, and greatly admired my destination today—Ox Gorge.

As we flow down the river, we are surrounded by steep hills sticking up into the sky—karsts. Unique among mountains, karsts were formed over thousands of years as rain drained into the acidic soil and melted the soft rock, leaving the harder rock behind. Guangxi is full of karsts, giving it some of the most interesting—and beautiful—scenery in the world. Xu was one of the first people to make a careful study of Guilin's karsts and their related cave systems. He, like many people today, found them fascinating.

Suddenly, our raft hits some rapids, and I find myself covered in water. I turn to my raftsmen and we share a laugh. The water not only keeps us cool, but it is all part of the adventure.

What made someone like Xu spend years travelling thousands of kilometres away from home? Perhaps it's the same reason as mine: to explore the world and to discover new things. As Xu wrote, "A great man should in the morning be at the blue sea, and in the evening at Mount Cangwu. Why should I restrict myself to one corner of the world?"

Xu was not alone. Much like today, the late Ming Dynasty was a golden age of tourism within China. People travelled hundreds of kilometres to visit temples, go mountain climbing, or explore scenery.





Yet, perhaps no one in China travelled farther or longer than Xu Xiake. At least, if anyone did they did not write about it.

When our raft reaches Ox Gorge, it proves to be every bit as beautiful as I expected—a watery heaven on earth. The raft is tied up, and then I head out to explore. That afternoon, I find a cave on the river. I wade into it and the water grows shallower, until finally I am walking on dry land. Up ahead I see a light and hear laughter echoing

off the cave walls. There is a large pool of mud, and a group of young people are jumping into it and swimming around. I run and join them. Soon, like my new friends, I am covered in gray mud from head to toe. After an hour of play, I head back out of the cave and take a swim in the river to get clean. And I wonder, when Xu Xiake came here nearly five hundred years ago, did he examine the mud like a scientist? Or did he jump in?

Of course he jumped in. You know he did.

3 Read the article again and answer the questions.

- 1 Why did the author decide to go to Guilin?
- 2 How are karsts and their related cave systems formed?
- 3 According to the author, why did Xu Xiake like to travel?
- 4 What did the author do in the cave?
- 5 Do you agree with the author that Xu Xiake probably played in the mud? Why or why not?

4 In groups, discuss why Xu Xiake liked to go on long journeys, what difficulties he probably faced, and what things he enjoyed.

5 Imagine that you are a modern-day Xu Xiake and wish to go on a long journey somewhere in the world. Write a short essay telling:

- where you intend to visit.
- why you wish to go there.
- what you hope to learn.
- what difficulties you might face.
- what you would enjoy on your journey.

You may use the beginning and ending below to help you in your writing.

My plan is to go hiking in ..., as I want to see the beautiful scenery ...

...

... It's true that it might be a little dangerous hiking in such a place, but to be alone under the open sky will fill me with great peace and allow me to clear my mind and focus on the positive things in my life. And to challenge myself with the difficulty seems like a wonderful experience ...

I think we can learn a great deal from travelling as Xu Xiake did.