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## Spring Summer Fall Winter

The arrival of spring in early February often coincides with the start of the Chinese Lunar New Year, or Spring Festival - China's most important holiday.

The festival lasts 15 days and is celebrated with a family feast, visits to the homes of family and friends, and the lighting of firecrackers. Each year is dedicated to one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, and 1990 is the year of the horse.

In early spring the temperature fluctuates between 20 and 30 degrees centigrade. Cold air occasionally sweeps down from the north, but the days overall become warmer.

In early spring the farmers prepare their fields for planting. In March they plant the first rice crop, and in early April the newly sprung rice seedlings are transplanted to new fields to give them more room to grow.

In early April the sugarcane is planted. The farmers bury small pieces of cut cane in long orderly rows in the fields. Crops such as sweet potatoes, peanuts, and green vegetables are also planted.

Summer begins the first week of May. With each passing day the mid-day sun grows warmer and fiercer.

The farmers wear wide-brimmed straw hats to protect their skin from the sun. The villagers say too much sun is unhealthy and will darken their skin. Many Chinese believe that light skin is more attractive than dark skin.

In July, the villagers start to harvest the year's first rice crop. The work is hard and the hours long. The sun beats down relentlessly but the work must get done.

On the hottest days, storm clouds gather in the late afternoon sky. The sky darkens and thunder and lightning sweep across the land. A drenching rain falls for a few minutes and then the sky clears and the wet fields and lanes glisten in the returning sun.

It's these dramatic thunderstorms that give the region its name: Lei Zhou (Thunder State) Peninsula.

The nights can be unbearably hot but a cool breeze sweeps in from the South China Sea, making sleeping more comfortable.

After the rice has been cut, threshed, dried, and packed in sacks, the year's second rice crop is planted.

The villagers keep a wary eye on the weather and typhoons that brew in the sea off the Philippines. If a typhoon is too strong and the rain too heavy, the rice crop can be destroyed, especially if it's close to harvest time.

Autumn arrives in late September or October. The days grow cooler but the weather is still warm and sunny. In autumn the weather is close to perfect, with temperatures neither too warm nor too cold.

Although some species of trees shed leaves in autumn, most of the vegetation is perennial.

In October, the villagers harvest the year's second rice crop.

In autumn they celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival or Moon Festival. The

date of the festival is different each year and is determined by the lunar calendar.

On the night of the Moon Festival, families gather at home for a dinner and go outside to gaze at the full moon.

Winter begins in mid-November. The cold air sweeps down from the north and the days turn chilly.

Although the wind sometimes blows cold and steady, the winter temperature is mild compared with northern regions. The cold weather lasts for a week or two at a time. The coldest days - when temperatures reach as low as 10 degrees centigrade - are damp and rainy, making it hard to stay warm and dry even inside.

The villagers feel no need to light fires to keep warm on cold winter days, saying the damp unpleasant weather doesn't last long enough to warrant lighting a fire.

In winter the sugarcane harvest begins. Entire families ride out to the cane fields in ox-drawn carts to collect the cane.

The villagers cut the cane plants with small machetes and pile it onto their carts. After it has been harvested, it is carried to a sugarcane factory in Shuixi County.

In winter the farmers burn their fields to prepare for the spring planting.

















