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Introducing China's "mountaincore" fashion

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"Mountaincore" describes the urban outdoor aesthetic that has taken social media by storm. Local buyer stores and homegrown labels are rushing to cater to consumers' growing appetite for this new youth trend. Image credit: Mountain Fever

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Think earthy-tone safari jackets, multi-pocket vests, cargo pants and drawstring bucket hats. This is the typical mood board of the mainland's latest fashion buzzword, "(mountain style outfits)" or #mountaincore.

A look that mixes camping-inspired utility wear with urban chic, mountaincore is the newest manifestation of the outdoor boom in young, hip China.

Although the term already existed in the early 2010s to describe Japan's urban outdoor trend "Yama Style," #mountaincore had not hit the mainstream until COVID-19 pushed millions of young Chinese to spend their holidays hiking and camping up nearby mountains instead of traveling abroad.

As a result, searches for "glamping" surged 623 percent year-on-year in April 2022, according to Xiaohongshu. A recent report from the platform also listed #mountaincore life () as one of the top 10 emerging lifestyle trends in 2022.

Today, Xiaohongshu's #mountaincore hashtag is filled with more than 30,000 users showing followers how to combine utility shirts, stretchy jeans, logo caps and technical sandals to create looks that could be just at home on camping weekends as a stroll in the city's coolest neighborhoods.

Often mixed with streetwear fare and a genderless attitude, mountaincore fashion resembles many young Chinese's ideal selves: nature-loving, relaxed and free.

"COVID is definitely a strong motivator for the rise of mountaincore," said Xingya Chen (@xinyaya), an outdoor fashion blogger on Xiaohongshu. "Traveling abroad is still far from possible. Even traveling across provinces inside China can be difficult, because we never know where the next lockdown is going to hit. Camping in nature therefore becomes popular because it allows people to relax while still keeping a safe distance from others."

Fashion has become the natural byproduct of the mainstreaming of outdoor living trends.

"When this started a year or two ago, most of the community knew only about big brands like Timberland, Patagonia, Arc'teryx, or at best, some insiders might talk about the North Face's Purple label," Mr. Chen said. "Today, the

discussion is much more sophisticated. Camping heads will talk about technical differences between Scandi, American and Japanese professional camping gear. Outdoor groups will do professional reviews of hiking sneakers. People are more knowledgeable and demanding now."

The outdoor boom accelerated by the pandemic is having ripple effects, as China's young urban dwellers look for new ways to engage with nature, resulting in expanding stores and brand launches.

ABC Camping Country, a camping lifestyle collective store founded in 2020, has since quickly expanded to five Chinese cities, selling high-end gear from Snowpeak's tents and Barebones's dining sets to Kavu's outdoor fashion accessories.

In Shanghai, a wave of glamping equipment shops such as Outland, Element Outdoor and Mountropolitan exploded after 2020 to sell lifestyle merchandise that is both travel-ready and street-appropriate.

"Young Chinese consumers are more conscious about the overall aesthetic side of things than actual activities which made the culture what it is, and they are treating some of the activities such as **frisbee**, flag football and camping as accessories to highlight their image and to socialize with others," Jun Chan, founder of the Chinese outdoor media Mounster, tells *Jing Daily*. "But this is also a good way to attract attention for others to participate, and many of them are growing fond of the culture and starting to cultivate their own brands of the (mountaincore) lifestyle."

An emerging host of homegrown names have since tapped into young consumers' need to integrate aspects of the trend into daily fashion statements. Mountain Fever, a Guangzhou-based camping fashion line founded in 2018, makes active streetwear such as adjustable nylon skirts, multi-pocket gilets, and foldable windbreakers.

Army Logic, a Shenzhen-based menswear outfit, specializes in stylish, cross-functional clothing that mixes Chinese heritage patterns with performance fabrics.

As a lifestyle extension of the outdoor boom, mountaincore speaks to young-gen locals' growing demand to include outdoor elements in all aspects of their lives.

On-screen, the mountaincore aesthetic has continued to infiltrate entertainment content. In 2021, two popular TV reality shows, *Star Chaser* and *I Told Spring About You*, started to feature celebrities as they camp and travel across China's countryside.

The growing interest in heading outdoors is also reflected in retail spaces.

Yanwai, a fine dining restaurant in Shanghai, serves customers tasting plates in a glamping decor furnished with premium camping furniture and cutlery.

Shopping malls across first-tier cities have hosted "mountaincore lifestyle festivals" to bring tents, camping chairs and plants to attract young-gen consumers.

Since last year, an increasing number of luxury houses from Gucci to Prada have **embraced the outdoor craze** by opening nature-themed pop-ups.

For businesses, the rise of mountaincore proves that outdoor culture, already relevant in the domestic youth market, will continue to grow and broaden to reach more lifestyle areas beyond fashion.

"Brands that can satisfy consumers' growing demand in their everyday routine will garner a steady fan base," said Mounster's Ms. Chan. "Consumers are not only looking for products that can highlight their fashion sense, but ones that are versatile, and also fitting of their environmental-friendly philosophies."

To further tap into #mountaincore's social momentum, labels should explore collaborations and product opportunities to highlight adaptability an essential trait for consumers looking to move between forests and the streets.

For China's expanding outdoor fans, the concept of nature is beyond wilderness. Instead, it is a state of mind.

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