

Giant pandas arrive in Finland in Chinese charm offensive

January 18 2018



Jin BaoBao (Flurry) and Hua Bao (Snow) were greeted by a Chinese and Finnish delegation at Helsinki Airport

Finland on Thursday welcomed a panda pair after a long plane ride from

their native China, which leased the fluffy animals to the Nordic nation to strengthen ties.

As part of "Panda Diplomacy"—China's historic use of the charming creatures to foster relations with trade partners—Jin BaoBao (Flurry) and Hua Bao (Snow) were greeted by a Chinese and Finnish delegation at the Helsinki Airport, before making their way to the Ahtari Zoo, 325 kilometres (200 miles) north of the capital.

A zookeeper and a veterinarian accompanied the pair to make sure the 6,500 kilometre voyage from China's southwestern Sichuan province to Helsinki was as pleasant as possible, the Ahtari Zoo said in a statement.

"During the trip, the pandas also got food and drink, naturally. Their packed lunch included their favourite foods: bamboo, carrot, apple and panda cakes," panda keeper Anna Palmroth said.

The animals will live in an indoor enclosure. The public will be able to meet the cuddly mammals for the first time on February 17.

"They get to go to their own indoor enclosures where they have fresh bamboo to make their adaptation easier," Palmroth said.

The Finnish climate resembles that of the panda's natural habitat in China's Qionglai Mountains, where the animals are used to snow.

"During the first few days, we will monitor the pandas' behaviour and appetite intensively," she added.

In the first visit by a Chinese leader to Finland since 1995, President Xi Jinping in 2017 announced China would lease the pandas to the zoo for 15 years to mark Finland's 100th anniversary of its independence.

China is Finland's fifth largest trading partner.

There are an estimated 1,864 [giant pandas](#) left in the wild, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and they can only be found in certain parts of south central China.

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