

Guilin - City of Landscapes

The sweet smell of osmanthus trees fills the air and flowers flourish everywhere but nice as Guilin appears, it functions primarily as a gateway to the surrounding scenery. Tourists pour into this southern city and following on their heels are clever opportunists who seem to hype every possible angle; Sell you a room? Sell you a tour? Sell you a meal?...and so on.

Guilin is one of China's most attractive urban areas. Situated in the heart of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous region, this pleasant city is a perfect base from which to enjoy south China's stunning natural scenery. Two crystal-clear rivers meander through the city, which are encircled by mountains with unusual & bizarre rock formations and caves.

This region's characteristic limestone karst landscape draws visitors from all over the world. They are easily accessible by bike or river boat cruise from the urban centre of Guilin. Guilin's unique peaks were formed between 180 and 200 million years ago, when the shifting crust of the earth thrust limestone sediment from the sea bottom to the surface. The remaining hills have been eroded over the millennia, and now provide footing for the lush forests so common in the region. In fact, the name 'Guilin' refers to this deep, green vegetation. The name means 'Forest of Sweet Osmanthus.' Alongside Kunming, Guilin is the most popular location for back-packers in China. Visitors come to explore the hills and caves that can be found between Guilin and the famous village of Yangshuo.

For more than two thousand years, from the Song to the Qing Dynasty, Guilin has been the political, economic, and cultural center of Guangxi, formerly a province and now an autonomous region. Located in the northeastern part of Guangxi, Guilin has long laid claim to having the most beautiful scenery in China. With its mild subtropical climate, it is a pleasant place to visit at any time of the year. In autumn, when the sweet osmanthus is in bloom, the fragrance of the blossoms pervades the air. The shrub grows everywhere in and around the city; the name Guilin, in fact, means "forest of sweet osmanthus."

The area around Guilin is dotted with weirdly shaped karst pinnacles that appear to have sprung up straight from the ground. They look like elephants, camels, horses, lions, lotus, bamboo shoots, and even emerald hairpins.

The city itself abounds in fantastic hills with spectacular caves. The best known of these are Reed Flute Cave (Ludiyan) and Seven Star Cave (Qixingyan), with their stalagmites and stalagmites of stroking shapes and colors.

Guilin has many waterways. The Lijiang River and the Peach Blossom Rive (Taohuajiang) wind their way through the hills. An attractive park surrounds two glistening lakes - Banyan Lake (Ronghu) and Fire Tree Lake (Shanhu). The boat ride from Guilin down the Lijiang to Yangshuo is one of the highlights of a visit to this beautiful area; the river is so clear that the astonishing peaks along its banks are reflected in the water as in a mirror.

Guilin has excellent transportation facilities, with railway links to all parts of the country and air flights to Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Changsha, Guangzhou, Guiyang, Chongqing, and Kunming. There is also a direct air route between Guilin and Hong Kong. Special boats for touring the Lijiang are available and there are bus excursions to various scenic spots. Taxis are also available.

Must-see Attractions:

Karsts

Scientists have no trouble explaining the origination of these strange-looking limestone cones and cylinders, or the equally-bizarre below-ground cave and cavern counterparts. But their beauty is no less impressive. For centuries Chinese poets and artists have depicted the sometimes eerie, mist-shrouded karsts.

Solitary Beauty Hill (Duxiufeng)

This is a majestic, solitary peak, steep and precipitous, rising at the very centre of the city. It has been called the "pillar of the Southern Sky." In the haze of dawn or the glow of sunset the peak is purple or gold. A climb up the 306 stone steps to the top is rewarded by a panoramic view of the city.

Elephant Trunk Hill (Xiangbishan)

This peak is located at the confluence of the Yangjiang River and the Lijiang. The entire hill looks like a drinking elephant with its long trunk and the body of the elephant is a big cave called Water Moon Cave (Shuiyuedong), below which is a deep pool that connects with the Lijiang and on which pleasure boats can cruise when water is abundant. Here the quality of the

water is so good that the famed Guilin wines are made from it. The cave looks like a full moon floating on the surface of the water with the moonlight reflected on the waves. The so-called "elephant hill and water moon" are a famous sight in Guilin.

Ripple Riding Hill (Fuboshan)

In the northeast of the city with the Lijiang to the east and an arc peak touching the ground in the west, Ripple Riding Hill has a cave, which retains water and forms a pond. The cave contains stone carvings on rock faces and ceilings -- more than two hundred statues of Buddha from the Tang Dynasty and over a hundred poems and other compositions by scholars and poets of the Tang and Song dynasties. The hill was said to be a Buddhist shrine in the Tang Dynasty. Another cave, called Return the Pearl (Huanzhudong), is brightly lit in the glow of the morning sun, looking very much like a crystal place. A folktale says that once a fisherman entered the cave and saw an old man sleeping with a pearly by his side. The fisherman stole the pearl and took it home. Someone told him that the pearl belonged to the Dragon king got angry. Hence the cave is called Return the Pearly Cave. By the river is a rock on which legend says the emperor tested his swords for sharpness and so cleft the rock.

Seven-Star Cave (Qixingyan)

A visit to Guilin would not be complete without a visit to this cave and Reed Flute Cave -- the two largest, most fascinating, and best-known caves in China. Seven-Star Cave is more than one and a half kilometers long. It penetrates several main peaks of Putuo Mountain and can accommodate tens of thousands of people. About a million years ago, it was an underground river channel, which, with the movement of the earth's crust, rose above the surface to become a cavern. The cave is divided into three rock strata. The top stratum is eight to twelve meters higher than the middle stratum, with traces still somewhat visible. The lower stratum is an underground river, course, ten to fifteen meters lower than the bottom of the middle stratum. It is this middle stratum that has become a tourist attraction -- an underground gallery of stalactites and stalagmites in formations suggestive of forests or animals. The tunnel is 814 meters long, 43 meters at its widest point, and 27 meters at its highest. In-cave temperature is about 20 °C. The cave has been a sightseeing spot since the Sui and Tang dynasties more than 1,300 years ago. Over the centuries many poems and other inscriptions have been left behind on its walls by visitors.

Reed Flute Cave (Ludiyuan)

A typical Guilin tour must include Reed Flute Cave. It is one of the most famous and invaluable underground treasures in Guilin, and even China. Its name is derived from reed grasses which grow in front of the cave and is used to make flutes. (lu = reed; di = flute)

Reed Flute Cave (Ludi Cave) is a U-shaped limestone cave 5 km northwest from the centre of Guilin. It is 240 meters in length. However your tour can last 500 meters inside the cave. It was discovered in 1959 and opened to public in 1962.

Inside the Cave:

You need to take extra care in this underground Guilin tour. The cave is dark, wet and with winding staircases, though not slippery. However, you are advised to walk and mind your steps; stop and view the scenery. You would expect to get a little wet as water drips down. Some places are more open while some others are narrow. You would find underground streams and ponds. The calm waters reflections make the place even more spectacular. Reed Flute Cave is illuminated by lots of Chinese styled colour lightings. They are only on when you are there, and off when you pass by. The lightings are beautiful, however making the place over artificial.

Reed Flute Cave – A Fairyland on Earth

The cave contains an overwhelming abundance of beautiful stalactites (grow downwards from ceiling), stalagmites (grow upwards from ground), stone columns, stone curtains, stone pillars in fantastic shapes. It is subject to your imagination of how to name them.

Guilin tour guides don't like to talk about the formation of caves. Instead they like to invent names for the bizarre rocks such as Hill of Flowers and Fruits, Crystal Palace, Rosy Dawn in the Lion Hill, Round-topped Mosquito Net, Dragon-shaped Pagoda and so on.

I don't like these names personally. However the numerous remarkable scenes in the Reed Flute Cave are extremely splendid. They'll undoubtedly leave you with unforgettable beautiful memories for your Guilin travel in China.

South Creek Hill (Nanxishan)

This hill by the river in the southern suburb of the city has two towering peaks, one east and the other west. The rosy clouds and purple mists that float above the valley after a morning rain are an unforgettable sight.

Legend says that more than a thousand years ago a Taoist named Liu Jing concocted pills of immortality in a hillside cavern here. The stories told about the many caves in the hill relate mostly to Liu the Immortal. There is a park at the northern foot of the hill with groves of bamboo, pine, and cypress. "Dragon Spring" is found here, whose fine spring-water was sent as a tribute to the Imperial Court in ancient times.

Crescent Hill (Yueyashan)

Located in the eastern part of the city, this hill is formed by three southern peaks of Seven-Star Hill. Its name comes from the crescent-shaped cave halfway up the hill. There is a park at the foot of the hill with a forest of sweet osmanthus.

Banyan Lake (Ronghu) and Fir Tree Lake (Shanhu)

These two lakes are part of a beautiful park in the central district of the city. They are connected

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with each other but divided by a bridge. Shanhu Lake named for the fir trees that used to be planted along its banks is east of the bridge. Ronghu Lake, where ancient banyans grew, is west of the bridge.

Lijiang River

This river, the highlight of Guilin's attractions, is one of the most famous places in China for tourists. This section, the most beautiful of the entire river, is 83km long and flows from Guilin to Yangshuo.

The Longji Terraces

The Longji (Dragon's Backbone) Terraces, located about 2 hours drive from Guilin in Southeast Longshen county, was started during the Yuan dynasty and finished during the Qing dynasty.

Daxu Ancient Town

Daxu town, located on the north Lijiang River bank about 29km from Guilin, is one of the four famous historical towns of Guangxi province dating back over 1,000 years since 200 B.

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