

Chapter Four Landscape

Introduction

China is a vast country with different scenery. The scenery in north of China is magnificent, while the scenery in the south is beautiful and charming. In this chapter, some representative places of interest in China would be introduced from the perspective of the Southern part and the Northern part.

Lesson One Spots in South

1. The Lingering Garden in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province

The Lingering Garden was listed from the first as cultural relics of national importance in 1961. With an area of 23,300 sq.m, it is celebrated for its artistic way of dealing with the spaces between various kinds of architectural form. Buildings make up one third of the total area of the garden, the hall of which being the most remarkable in Suzhou. The garden is separated into the middle, eastern, northern and western parts. The ancestral temple and the house lie to the south of the garden.



Featuring man-made mountain and lake scenery in the west and garden courts in the east, the middle part of the garden is the original site of the Xu's East Garden and the Liu's Hanbi Villa, and is regarded as the best part of the whole garden. The eastern, northern and western parts are the extensions of the Sheng's Garden. The eastern part is noted for its strangely shaped lime-stones, the northern part idyllic

scenes, and the western part the delights of woody hills.

A winding roofed walkway behind the small entrance of the garden, while leading to the places of quietude, shows the masterly use of contrast between big and small, straight and zigzag, and light and shade. After strolling for about 50 meters, one can catch a glimpse of lattice-windows revealing a half visible landscape garden behind. Interestingly enough, the view is changing at every step.

The middle part of the garden is centered upon a lake with man-made mountain in the north-west and a number of attractive buildings in the southwest, such as the Hanbi Mountain Villa, the Pellucid Tower, the Green Shade Pavilion, the Zigzag Stream Tower, the Hao Pu Pavilion, and the Refreshing Breeze Pavilion by the lake. The mountains made mainly of yellow stones and earth, believed to be designed and piled up by Zhou Binzhong, look very much archaic and splendiferous. The admirable Crane House, the Small Garden of Stone Forest, the Return-to-Read Study in the east with the Celestial Hall of Five Peaks as the chief structure are laid out in such a way that the indoor spaces have been brought into perfect harmony with the outdoor spaces. With an evocation of infinity, they are successfully made to be labyrinthine.

Flanked by the Auspicious Cloud and Mountainous Cloud peaks, the 6.5-meter-high Cloud-Capped Peak, the highest limestone in the classical gardens of Suzhou, is believed to be left behind by the imperial collector of the Northern Song Dynasty. Mass of buildings, including the Old Hermit Scholars' House, the Cloud-Capped Tower, the Cloud-Capped Terrace and the Storing Cloud Temple, are put up to give emphasis to the Cloud-Capped Tower, the northern part is now a bonsai garden in which about 500 valuable bonsai are put on display.

The western part of the garden sets a fine example of good-looking earthen hills studded with yellow stones and covered with maple trees. There is a winding brook lined with peach trees and weeping willows. The number of stelae in the Lingering Garden has never been surpassed by any other gardens in Suzhou. Superbly inscribed with the works of more than a hundred calligraphers in the Jin, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, these invaluable stelae bring to light the evolutionary course of Chinese calligraphy in the past 1,000 years. The whole garden possesses with pride 42

rooms and halls, a 680-meter-long corridor, 200 lattice-windows of different kinds, 44 parallel couplets and stone carvings, 379 stelae, and 17 such valuable old trees as ginkgoes, southern wisteria, etc.

2. The West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province

Located in Hangzhou, provincial seat of Zhejiang province, the West Lake is one of the most famed tourist attractions in China. For centuries, the West Lake has been well known both for its picturesque landscape and for cultural heritage surviving yet illustrating the past dynasties.

The landscape area of the West Lake includes the surrounding hills and nearby historical sites as well as the lake itself. The lake area covers around 60 square kilometers consisting of 5.68 square kilometers of water area. The West Lake is the centerpiece of the natural fascination with bluish hills on three sides, serene and charming. Along the Lake, there stand lines of willows with ancient bridges leaping over them. Mist now veils the whole landscape, now just perches lightly on the green and luxuriant hills in the vicinity with tiny streams winding in deep valleys.



More than ninety theme parks and scenic spots are dotted around the lake area such as the Ten Views of West Lake and ten-odd newly named tourist attractions. Rain or shine, the West Lake holds great attraction to tourists in all seasons.

Besides its impressive scenery, the West Lake boasts of abundant cultural heritage and legends passed from generation to generation, commingling natural features, past personages, history, and art in the local area. Thanks to its long history and historic importance, the West Lake is also a cultural resort with 5 major historical monuments

and cultural relics under state protection, 35 under province protection, 25 under municipal protection as well as 39 theme museums and cultural spots under a protection system. In the whole landscape area, there are more than one hundred scenic spots open to the tourists at present. Each year there are 0.5 million of foreign guests and 12 million domestic visitors coming to Hangzhou.

Hangzhou West Lake landscape is divided into the south, north and lake areas. Lingyin Temple, Crooked Courtyard and the Temple of General Yue Fei are the framework of the north area; Flower Harbor, Tiger Spring and Liuhe (Six Harmonies) Pagoda are the representation of the south area; Gu Hill (Solitary Island) and Three Pools Mirroring the Moon are the essence of the mid-lake area.

The West Lake used to be known for its two pagodas: the Baochu Pagoda on the north and the Leifeng (Thunder Peak) Pagoda on the other side of the lake. Landscape projects in the last five decades have basically improved the general outlook of the West Lake landscape as a whole and greatly enriched scenes and scenery. The south area, however, is not as thriving as the north area due to the collapse of Lei Feng Tower in 1924. In order to further tap the scenic resources of West Lake, restoring the Afternoon View of Lei Feng has been taken into consideration. Currently, Tsinghua University, Zhejiang University, South East University and some institutes are working on a design for the reconstruction of the Leifeng Pagoda respectively. One of their designs will soon be chosen by local residents and experts and translated into reality. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, more than twenty scenic spots around the West Lake have been elaborately designed and constructed according to their histories and characters to have the distinct themes. Among them are Viewing Fish at the Flower Harbor, Lotus in the Breeze at the Crooked Courtyard, Viewing Winter-sweet Trees at the Ling Peak, Tiger Spring, Jade Spring, Jade Emperor Mountain, Hangzhou Flower Garden, Master Ruan Isle, Crown Prince Bay Park, Three Caves with Mist and Glow, Scenic Spots around West Lake, and etc.

3. The Tianmen Mountain in Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province

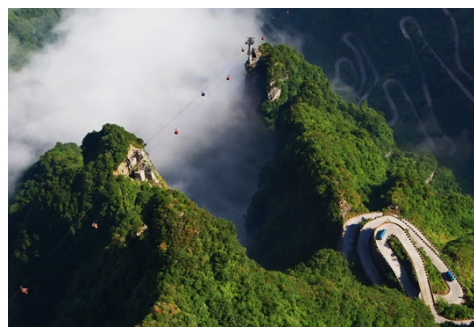
Tianmen Mountain, a famous mountain first recorded in the history of Zhangjiajie, has an elevation of 1518.6 meters. It is only 8 kilometers far from the downtown and is one

of the most representative natural sceneries of Zhangjiajie. For a long time, Tianmen Mountain not only attracts the attention of the people by its miraculous and unique geographic landform and unparalleled natural landscape, but also well known for its profound cultural connotations and famous colorful humanistic sites. It is revered as the soul of culture and spirit of Zhangjiajie and reputed as Number One Miraculous Mountain in Western Hunan.

The main body of Tianmen Mountain is uniquely sky-scraping and domineering. Tianmen Cave the natural mountain-penetrating karst cave with the highest elevation in the world, hangs on the towering cliff. The cave becomes the unique sight under heaven and breeds the profound and grand Heaven Culture and Culture of Fairy Mountain in the local area. Tianmen Mountain is the second national forest park in Zhangjiajie. On the mountaintop are intact sub-primitive forests with overflowing wild



atmosphere in all the seasons. In addition, the densely populated karst hillocks and karrens plus the mating of strange rocks and graceful trees create a grand garden of bonsai as if blessed by the God. Tianmen Mountain Temple, with an area of over 10000 square meters, enjoys a booming pilgrimage ever since the Ming Dynasty. It is the Buddhist center of Western Hunan. The six unresolved mysteries in the past hundreds of years such as Opening of Tianmen Cave, Shadow of Guigu, and Auspicious Unicorn have added the mysterious and elusive atmosphere for Tianmen Mountain .



The tourist traffic design of Tianmen Mountain is worth the title of world-shocking masterpiece. It will bring shocking and unforgettable experiences for the tourists. Tianmen Mountain Cableway, Heaven-Linking Avenue, Tianmen Cave and Bonsai Garden in the Air are reputed as the four great wonders. Tianmen Mountain Cableway, the longest one-way recycling passenger cableway in the world, has a length of 7455 meters and a height gap of 1279 meters. It takes the tourists from the atmosphere of modern city directly to the hug of the primitive garden in the air. During the running of cableway, the landscape transforms into a kaleidoscope, making the tourists experience a miraculous feeling of flying angels in the sky as well as of being blended into a long grand painting of landscape. The mountain-winding highway of Tianmen Mountain, nicknamed as Heaven-Linking Avenue, has a total length of less than 11 kilometers. Yet the elevation of it rises sharply from 200 meters to 1300 meters. The avenue rises steeply according to the form of mountain. The 99 blends link closely with each other and pile up in layers, making a pattern of a circling flying dragon reaching the skyline. Tourists marvel at it, which is worth the title of the Top Highway Wonder in the World.

4. Huangguoshu National Park in Anshun, Guizhou Province

Located in west Guizhou, Huangguoshu National Park of China is 128 km from Guiyang and 45 km from Anshun, a tourist destination in West China. The park is traversed with Yunnan-Guizhou railway, Zhuzhou-Liupanshui II Track Railway, National Road #320, and Guiyang-Huangguoshu High Grade Road, etc and encompasses the Huangguoshu Airport and the newly-built Qingzhen-Huangguoshu Freeway. The park centers at Huangguoshu Waterfall (height: 77.8m, width: 101.0m) and is scatted with 18 waterfalls of varied sizes, some precipitous and majestic, others picturesque and fantastic. All the waterfalls form a great “family”, which is ranked as the largest in the world in the Guinness Book of World Records. The giant Huangguoshu Waterfall is the most magnificent member in the family and the only waterfall that can be viewed from above, below, front, back, left and right in the world. It is also with a water curtain cave in the back through which tourists can hear, view, and touch the waterfall. The great Ming traveler Xu Xiake, when investigating the waterfall, remarked, “the sprays burst

apart like pearls and jades and the foams rise like a mist. The waterfall is with such a momentum that even the couplet ‘a screen of pearl released from hooks/or silk that hangs on faraway peaks’ cannot describe to the full its majesty. I have seen waterfalls that are much higher and more precipitous, but never a waterfall with such a width and magnificent.”



Centering at Huangguoshu Waterfall Resort, the Huangguoshu National Park of China encompasses such resorts as Stone Village, Tianxing Bridge, Dripping Shoal, Balinghe River Valley with the site of the ancient post path, Doupotang, and langgong, etc. It is among the first batch of national key scenic spots and of AAAA resorts ranked by the government. The resort has been successively designated as the national popular science education base, “National”, and “Most Charming Tourist Resort in West China”. In 2005, it was ranked as the “most beautiful place in China” by Chinese National Geography, “10 Tourist Resorts of Customer Satisfaction in China” by People’s Daily, and “10 European Tourists’ Favorite Resorts in China”, etc.

Huangguoshu Tourist Resort features beautiful natural environment, refreshing air (with over 28,000 negative oxygen ions per cubic centimeter according to the statistics of the provincial environmental protection department), a pleasant climate (with the annual average temperature at 16°C), long historical and cultural tradition, and complete supporting facilities. It is an ideal resort for amusement, rehabilitation, sightseeing, and “lung-washing”.

5. The Leshan Giant Buddha in Leshan, Sichuan Province

In Buddhism, a Bodhisattva ranks only lower than the Buddha and is a figure assisting the Buddha in spreading his teaching and relieving all living creatures of earthly sufferings. There are four great Buddhist Bodhisattva, namely Ksitigarbha (Bodhisattva of earth treasury), Samantabhadra (Bodhisattva of universal worthy), Manjushri (Bodhisattva of wisdom) and Avalokiteshvara (the Bodhisattva of compassion). Chinese Buddhism followers constructed sacred abodes for all these Bodhidharma, namely Manjushri's abode on Mount Wutai in Shanxi Province, Samantabhadra's abode on Mount Emei in Sichuan province, Avalokiteshvara's abode on Mount Putuo in Zhejiang Province and Ksitigarbh's abode on Mount Jiuhua in Anhui Province.

Mount Emei is the abode of Samantabhadra, however the Leshan Giant Buddha is more impressive and magnificent. On December 6th, 1996, the Mount Emei Scenic Area, including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area was in indoctrinated into UNESCO World Heritage List as a cultural and natural heritage item.

Carved out of a hillside that lines at the confluence of the Minjiang, Qingyi and Dadu rivers, the Leshan Giant Buddha is the world's largest stone sculpture of a seated Maitreya Buddha. Construction of the Buddha began in the first year of Emperor Xuanzong's rule in the Tang Dynasty. The undertaking was led by a Chinese monk named Haitong who collected labors, goods and funding to construct the Buddha with the hope of taming turbulent waters and rescuing all creatures. After his death, however, the construction was unexpectedly suspended. Many years later, Zhangchou Jianqiong and Wei Gao, two jiedushi in Sichuan Province resumed the construction which was eventually completed in the 19th year of Emperor Dezong of the Tang Dynasty. Altogether, the construction lasted for 90 years. The Leshan Giant Buddha is extraordinary spectacular and was extolled by people with the saying "The mountain is the Buddha and the Buddha is a mountain".

Carved with a perfect symmetry, the giant Buddha sits solemnly overlooking the river, with his head reaching the hilltop and feet resting above the rivers. At 71 meters high, the Buddha has a head measuring 14.7 meters tall. His ears are 6.7 meters long, shoulders 24 meters wide, fingers 8.3 meters long. He's 9-meter wide insteps are able to accommodate over 100 people sitting around in concentric circles. On the two cliffs

on the left and right sides of the Buddha are carved to 16-meter statues of Heavenly Kings, forming a pattern called “one Buddha and two Heavenly Kings”.



In addition, there are hundreds of niches accommodating over a thousand stone statues, constituting an art complex of Buddhist stone-carving. Descending along Dongtian (a cave where the sky can be seen from a fissure on the top) on the left side of the Buddha is the beginning part of the 500-meter Lingyun plank road built in modern times. Built in the Tang Dynasty when the construction was started, the Jiuqu plank road on the right side of the Buddha was the passage used for transporting construction materials and worshipping Buddha. Upon completion of the Buddha state, a 7-story pavilion was once built, which was called the Giant Buddha Pavilion in the Tang Dynasty, Lingyun Pavilion in the Song Dynasty and Baohong Pavilion in the Yuan Dynasty. Unfortunately, the pavilion was not preserved to present day. Nevertheless, we can still discover traces of its eaves from cliffs on the two sides of the Buddha.

Walking downward in the Lingyun plank road, one can directly reach the base of the giant Buddha. Looking up at the border, from here, one can be profoundly impressed by its considerable height. Climbing up the mandarin Jiuqu plank road built on the right-side cliff, people can ascend to the top of the of the road, namely the right side of the border head and also the summit of Lingyun mountain where people can admire the sculpturing skills manifested by the head of the Buddha. Viewed at a distance, the 1,055 chignons on the crown of the Buddha seem to be a monolithic whole, but were actually inlaid in late one after another.

Questions:

1. Where is The Lingering Garden located?
2. Have you ever been to the West Lake? Do you like the scenery there?
3. Do you know the elevation of the Tianmen Mountain? Give the accurate figures.
4. What's your impression of Huangguoshu National Park after the relevant learning?
5. When was the Leshan Giant Buddha indoctrinated into the World Heritage List?