

DISCOVER CHINA NATURAL WONDERS



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自然卷

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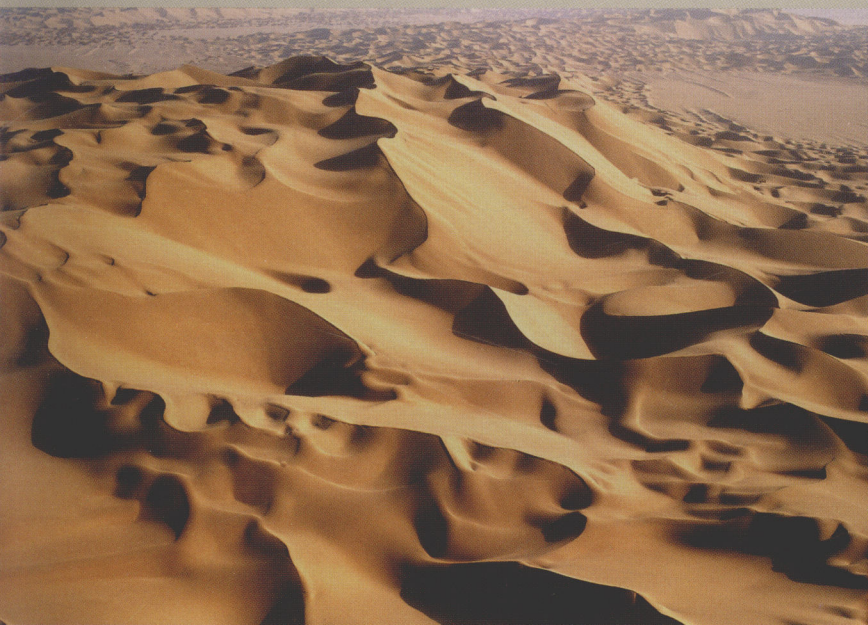
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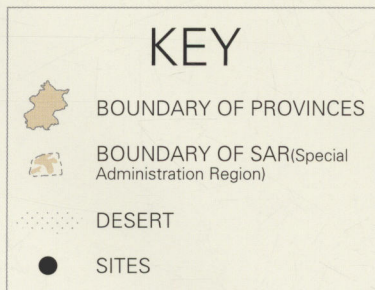
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MAP OF NATURAL SITES







Above: The Yellow River surges through rock formations at the intersection of Shanxi Province and Shaanxi Province, creating the Hukou Waterfalls, the second largest in China.



THE NATURAL HERITAGE OF CHINA

China's land area is 9.6 million square kilometres, with an additional 3 million square kilometres of sea. Lying in the east of the continent of Asia, it extends from 65 degrees to 130 degrees east longitude and 20 degrees to 45 degrees north latitude. China is the largest country in Asia and the third largest in the world, after Russia and Canada. The country also has a wide range of elevations, giving it a great variety of topographic features: plateaus, mountains and hills, basins, plains, deserts and islands. Climate also varies radically. From north to south, there are six temperature zones: cold temperate, mid temperate, warm temperate, subtropical, tropical and a special Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau climate zone. The extensive territory, varied topography and complicated climate all contribute to the rich, complex and unusual natural scenery of China.

From 800 million to 40 million years ago, the whole of the east Asian continent, and especially China, was formed over many crustal movements. Most recent, at 40 million years ago, was the Himalayan movement, which swiftly and violently raised the western part of China. This not only helped to bring about the Himalayan arc system and its highest point, Qomolangma Peak (8848 m), known in the west as Mount Everest, but also formed the overall topographic feature of the country: a giant terrace higher in the west and lower in the east.

This vast landform can be divided into three main levels of elevation, separated in the west by the Kunlun-Qilian-Minshan-Qionglai-Hengduan mountain system, and on the east by the Da Hinggan Ling-Taihang-Wushan-Xuefeng mountain system. Echoing the overall three-level northeast-southwest terrace trend, the land can be divided north and south by mountains that run east to west: the Tianshan-Yinshan mountains are the farthest north and the Nanling the farthest south, with the Qinling mountains standing as an important demarcation in the middle.

Influenced by the terrain, the rainfall drops gradually from the southeastern coastal areas to the northwest inland areas, dividing the country into four parts based on precipitation. East China, North China and the northeast of Northeast China are the wet area; the Northeast Plain, North China Plain, the south of the Loess Plateau and the southeast of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau form the semi-wet area; the Nei Mongol Plateau, the Loess Plateau and most of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau belong to the semi-dry area; Xinjiang, the west Nei Mongol Plateau and the northwest Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau make up the dry area. These differences create huge variation in the scenery, species structure, even the social economy of each region.

The Yellow River and the Yangtze River, the two 'mother rivers' of the Chinese nation, are the cradles of Chinese civilization. Rising from the Yueguzonglie Basin on the northern slope of the Bayankala Mountains and flowing about 5464 kilometres with a drop of 4480 metres, the Yellow River zigzags its way through Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, Ningxia, Nei Mongol, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan and Shandong, and finally empties into the Bohai Sea in the east. The river has a drainage area of 795,000 square kilometres, making it the second largest river in China, both in length and watershed. Its chief

Opposite: The Giant Panda is perhaps China's most internationally recognized natural wonder, and a symbol of conservation worldwide.





tributaries in the upper reaches are the Taohe and Huangshui rivers, and those in the middle reaches are the Wuding, Yanhe, Fenhe and Weihe rivers.

Originating on the southwest ridge of Dongxue Peak in the Tanggula Mountains on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and covering a distance of 6300 kilometres, the Yangtze River is the longest in China and third longest in the world after the Nile in Africa and the Amazon in South America. The river traverses Qinghai, Tibet, Sichuan, Yunnan, Chongqing, Hubei, Hunnan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Jiangsu and Shanghai, altogether eleven provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities under the jurisdiction of the central government, and finally empties into the East Sea at Chongming Island. The several hundred tributaries of the river, including the Yalong, Minjiang, Jialing, Wujiang, Xiangjiang, Hanjiang and Ganjiang rivers, receive the smaller rivers and lakes north and south and form a giant dendritic river net, draining a basin of 1.8 million square kilometres, which occupies one-fifth of the land area of the country. As the leading rivers of the north and the south in China, both the Yellow River and the Yangtze River flow west to east, and form the Pacific river system together with the Heilong, Zhujiang, Liaohe, Haihe, Huaihe, Qiantang and Minjiang rivers. In contrast, by flowing north to south, the Nujiang, Lancang and Yarlung Zangbo rivers join other rivers in neighbouring countries to form the Indian river system. The Ergis River in Xinjiang flows east to west into the Arctic river system through Kazakhstan and Russia.

The north

The northern region of China covers the vast areas east of the Helan-Bayankala mountains and north of Qinling Mountain-Huaihe River, encompassing the Northeast Plain, North China Plain, the Da Hinggan Ling, the Changbai Shan, the Shandong Hills and the East Liaoning Hills. The region is dominated by the temperate continental monsoon climate: it is warm and rainy in summer, cold and dry in winter. The areas north of the Da Hinggan Ling belong to the cool temperate zone, those north of the Great Wall belong to the mid temperate zone, while those in the middle and lower Yellow River region belong to the warm temperate zone.

Of the five sacred mountains long-worshipped in China, four are located in this region: Taishan Mountain (Shandong province), Huashan Mountain (Shaanxi), Songshan Mountain (Henan) and Hengshan Mountain (Shanxi). **Taishan Mountain** and **Huangshan Mountain** in Anhui province have been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as sites of international significance for their cultural and natural values. The **Changbai Shan** in southeast Jilin province has been a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve since 1980 and is well-known internationally for its rare Korean pine-broad-leaved mixed forests. In this place, ancient forests flourish with mountain lakes, waterfalls, rivers and mists.

The Hinggan deciduous forests north of the **Da Hinggan Ling**, along with the marshlands of the Songhua, Heilong and Ussuri River Plain and the Liaohe Delta, Xingkai Lake and the Wudalianchi volcano landform in Heilong River, the **Hukou Waterfalls** and the **Incense Burner Monastery** in the middle reaches of the Yellow River all reflect the natural and cultural scenery of this fascinating region. It is also home to many iconic species such as the **Red-crowned Crane**, **Crested Ibis**, **Manchurian Tiger**, **Sika Deer**, Relic Gull, Oriental White Stork and wolverine (*Gulo gulo*).

The south

The vast areas east of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and south of Qinling Mountains-Huaihe River, comprise the southern region of China, including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Located on the second and third elevation levels of the vast terrace system that forms the Chinese mainland, the

Opposite: Da Hinggan Ling is home to the largest deciduous forest in China, along with many plant and animal species.

region has wide variations in altitude and topography. Dominated by tropical and subtropical monsoon climates, southern China has four distinct seasons, with mild winters and hot summers and an average annual rainfall of over 800 mm. The belt 30 degrees north latitude along the Yangtze River and the neighbouring areas are home to many world-famous natural scenic areas. From west to east, there are, first, the UNESCO World Natural Heritage Sites: the Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong scenic areas in Sichuan, the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas, and Wulingyuan Scenic Area in Hunan. There is also the World Cultural Scenery Heritage site of **Lushan Mountain** in Jiangxi, and the World Cultural Heritage sites of Qingcheng Mountain in Sichuan, **Hengshan Mountain** (Hunan), and the **Three Gorges** of the Yangtze River between Chongqing and Hubei.

In addition, many other scenic spots in southern China are attracting interest nationally and internationally for their natural values and importance. They include **Gongga Mountain**, the Siguniang (Four Girls) Snow Mountain, Lugou Lake and West Sichuan alpine-frigid grasslands in Sichuan province, **Meili**, Yulong and Baima snow mountains and the Tiger Leaping Gorge in Yunnan. There is also the Alley of Natural Beauty that runs dozens of miles along the Wujiang River, the Xiaozhai Sky Pit, the Tianjinxia Crack in the Earth and the Leye Sky Pit in Fengjie County in Chongqing, and the Shennongjia Nature Reserve in Hubei.

The Central China karst zone is located in this region and is one of the three largest karst zones in the world. This immense karst zone creates many exceptional and breathtaking landscapes, such as the Lunan Stone Forest in Yunnan, the Zhijin Limestone Cave in Guizhou, the scenes of the Lijiang River in Guilin, the Geo-park of **Danxia Mountain** at the juncture of Hunan, Jiangxi and Guangdong provinces, and the Scene of Red Mountain and Green Water at Dajin Lake in Taining county of Fujian province.

The criss-cross network of rivers and lakes is another feature of the southern region. The Dongting, Poyang, Hongze, Taihu, Chaohu lakes in the middle and lower courses of the Yangtze River have enjoyed great fame among visitors since ancient times. Dianchi Lake in Kunming, Yunnan province, East Lake in Wuhan (Hubei), West Lake in Hangzhou (Zhejiang) and **Sun Moon Lake**, one of the eight most famous scenic spots in Taiwan, have long been highly acclaimed.

The Zhujiang Delta, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan offer many tropical and subtropical scenic areas, including **Xisha Islands**, the **Weizhou Island**, the **Detian and Jiulong (Nine Dragon)** waterfalls in Guangxi, the Red Woods at Dongzhai Harbor, the tropical rainforests at Xinfeng Mountain, Sanya, and **Yalong Bay** in Hainan, Taiping Mountain in Hong Kong, Heisha Bay in Macao, and the wild willow woods and Penghu Islands in Taiwan. In these subtropical evergreen broad-leaved forests and tropical monsoon rainforests, as well as on the rivers and lakes, rare animals are seen, treasured and conserved. Animals such as the **Giant Panda**, South China Tiger, Leopard, **Sichuan Golden Monkey**, White Crane, Crocodile, Muntjacs, Python, White-necked King Pheasants, **Chinese White Dolphin**, Formosan Macaque Monkey, Blue Pheasant and Black King Pheasant.

The northwest

The northwestern region of China, mainly situated on the second elevation level, includes the non-monsoon areas west of the Da Hinggan Ling-Helan mountains and north of the Kunlun-Qilian mountains. The Nei Mongol Plateau, which consists of the Hetao Plain, the Ningxia Plain and the Hexi Corridor, has typical temperate grasslands in its west and mostly temperate deserts in its central and western parts. In Xinjiang, the Kunlun Mountains in the south, the Altay in the north, the Tianshan in the middle, the Tarim Basin and the Junggar Basin respectively to the south and north of Tianshan form the special topographical feature of three valleys and two basins.

Opposite: The weird and wonderful karst landscape of the Zhangjiajie Scenic Area, northwest Hunan province.