

Zhangye Danxia Landform

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The Zhangye Danxia landform is also known as the eye candy of Zhangye. Many artists admire this masterpiece as it appears like a perfect painting on canvas. This 400-square-kilometer attraction is located in Linze (临泽县) and Sunan (肃南) counties in Gansu Province in central north China.

Features

Magnificence

It is composed of lots of precipitous cliffs, most of which are several hundred meters high. All of these cliffs are smooth and sharp, standing in the plains and riversides, looking grand and magnificent, vigorous and virile. Even the low pinnacles look powerful.

Uniqueness

Across the Danxia landform zone, a kaleidoscope of numerous red rocky outcrops resemble weird and wonderful shapes like castles, cones, towers, as well as humans, creatures, birds and beasts. They are as vivid and organized as the Millennium Castle and, especially with their peaks peeping through the mist and clouds, produce mirage-like scenery of fantastic mountains and pavilions.

Precipitousness

The mountains there are always perpendicular or have very steep slopes which people regard in awe and many appear unclimbable.

Formation

The formation of Zhangye Danxia Landform dates back to 6 million years ago. The Danxia geological structure was formed by the erosion of red sandstone, forming the isolated peaks and steep outcrops. Its special geological structure, combined with long-term weathering, freeze-thaw peeling, and wind and water erosion gave rise to its present appearance.

It is mainly horizontal and low diagonal red strata, mainly belonging to the Jurassic and Tertiary eras. Danxia is the generic term for various kinds of landforms formed from vertical joint development in thick red sandstone and conglomerates.

Zhangye Qianlian Shan (张掖祁连山) Danxia is mainly composed of red gravel, sandstone and mudstone. It is typical of an arid or semi-arid climate and is a singular outcrop with cross layers, steep walls, vertical joints, and gorgeous colors.

Geologists believe that Danxia topography is formed as a result of movement in the earth's crust. This makes rock layers appear in different colors, textures, shapes, sizes, and patterns. The combination of differences in density and erosion creates towering peaks, cave holes and stone halls.

Danxia formations are green, yellow, blue and many other colors, though their appellation comes from the red rocks of Mount Danxia in Guangdong. Experts say that they are the result of red sandstone and other rocks undergoing metamorphic processes for millions of years.

The Guardian featured Zhangye's Danxia Landforms in pictures, and called this fantastic landscape: "China's rainbow mountains". See

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2013/aug/01/rainbow-mountains-china-in-pictures>.

The Three Danxia Landform Areas in Zhangye

The Zhangye Danxia Landforms are divided into three areas:

- Danxia National Geological Park, a.k.a. Linze Danxia Scenic Area (临泽丹霞景区),

- Sunan Danxia Scenic Area (肃南丹霞景区)
- Binggou Danxia Scenic Area (冰沟丹霞景区).

Zhangye Danxia Landform Geological Park 临泽丹霞景区

Zhangye Danxia Landform Geological Park (Linze Danxia Scenic Area) is 40 kilometers from Zhangye City and 20 kilometers from Linze County Town. It is the most developed and most frequented one among the three. There are four viewing platforms.

The first viewing platform is the nearest and best viewing platform, 10 minutes' walk from the entrance.

The second viewing platform has its base about 10 minutes' walk from the premier viewing platform, but it takes a lot of effort to get to the top. Being the highest viewing platform, with 666 steps which require about 30 minutes' climbing, a panorama of the scenic area can be enjoyed.

The third viewing platform allows a view of the famous 'seven-color fan'.

The fourth viewing platform is the largest viewing platform. It is on the ridge which runs from east to west. Standing on the ridge and looking south you can feast your eyes on the variegated colors of

Qicai Shan (七彩山 'Seven-Color Mountain'). It is the perfect place for catching pictures of a sunrise and sunset.

Transportation Inside the Park

There are sightseeing cars available within the park where other tourist buses are not allowed to go. The distance between the four viewing platforms is around eight kilometers and it takes about one hour to finish the whole trip when taking the sightseeing cars.

The sightseeing cars go between these four viewing platforms departing regularly, and you can decide how long you want to stay at each viewing platform.

If you have the time, you can hike some of the way instead of taking the sightseeing cars, but remember that the last sightseeing car back from the fourth viewing platform is at 20:30. However, it may be earlier according to the season and the weather. If you are on a tour with us your tour guide will make sure you have transport.

Location: Nantaizi Village, Nijiaying County, Zhangye Prefecture 张掖市倪家营乡南台子村

Entrance fee: 60 RMB, which includes the entrance ticket of 40 RMB and the sightseeing car cost of 20 RMB. People over 70 years old can enjoy free admission after showing their credentials. Children less than 1.2 meters in height can also enter free.

Powered hang glider rides: 200 RMB for 3-4 minutes, 300 RMB for 5-7 minutes, and 500 RMB for 10-12 minutes.

Opening times: 5:30am–8:30pm in summer, 8am–6pm in winter.

Sunan Danxia Scenic Area 肃南丹霞景区

Located in Ganjun District, to the west of Zhangye and south of Linze, it is bigger than Linze Danxia Scenic Area, with fewer tourists and more beautiful scenery. There are no sightseeing cars in this scenic area, but other cars are allowed to go inside. You can see Linze Danxia Scenic Area from Sunan Scenic Area.

Entrance fee: 40 RMB

Binggou Danxia Scenic Area 冰沟丹霞景区

Binggou Danxia Scenic Area lies in Kangle District, Sunan Uygur Autonomous County, 20 kilometers from Sunan Danxia Scenic Area. It is a place that few people know about. Geologists call it "window lattice and palace-shaped Danxia topography". It looks amazing and is shaped like a camel, a palace and a shrine. It is not very developed, without any completely constructed roads.

Best Times to Visit the Zhangye Danxia Landforms

It is best to visit Binggou Danxia Scenic Area in the morning and during sunset, especially sunset, when the colors change continuously, showing yellow and red layers covered by a light gray layer. They are well defined with circuitous lines and, if it rains the day before, this color will be more gorgeous. Try not to go when it is cloudy or raining as only when there is sunshine will these mountains show you their gorgeous colors.

Zhangye is located in the middle part of the Hexi Corridor, and it is cold and dry with strong winds in winter, so going in winter is not recommended.

The sun rises at 6 am in the morning and sets at 8 pm in the evening during July to September, so choose your times and viewpoints accordingly.

What to Bring

Take a coat even in summer to wear in the morning and in the evening as the temperature drops rapidly at night. A face mask or scarf will help protect against the strong, dry and dusty wind. Wear a hat, sunscreen and good walking shoes. Shoes with low-cut uppers are not suggested as there is sandy soil.

Remember to take water because there are no shops in the more remote Danxia areas.

Other Zhangye Attractions

Zhangye is not only rich in natural scenery. It also boasts many man-made tourist attractions. Many tourists include these spots on their itineraries.

Great Buddha Temple

Zhangye Grand Buddha Temple was first built 900 years ago during the first year of the Yong'an Era of Emperor Chong of Western Hsia. The name of the Grand Buddha Temple has changed several times. Over the years, it has been called "Jiaye Rulai Temple", "Baojue Temple", "Hongren Temple", among other names. China's largest indoor reclining Buddha, the Nirvan of Sakyamuni Buddha, lies peacefully in this temple on a 1.2-meter-high altar in the center of the hall. The length of the body of the Buddha is 34.5 meters, the shoulders are 7.5 meters wide, the ears are 4 meters long and the feet are 5.2 meters long. A man could lie on the middle finger of the Buddha, while eight people could sit shoulder-to-shoulder on the Buddha's ear. This makes it easy to imagine the sheer magnitude of the sculpture.

The current structures in the Grand Buddha Temple are the Grand Buddha Hall, the Sutra Depository and the Earth Tower. The Grand Buddha Hall is huge in scale, at 33 meters in height and as long as nine rooms. There are two engraved bricks on both sides of the gate of the palace. The left side displays an inscription, "Reaching the Elysian Fields" and "Western Paradise". The right side has inscribed "Three Buddha in the Nirvana" and "Respect the Elysian and Develop the Sutra". There is also a clay sculpture with wooden roughcast that is 34.5 meters long, has shoulders 7.5 meters wide, feet that are 4 meters long and ears that are 2 meters long. The figure is covered with gold leaf and is painted in various colors, making it so vivid that it seems awake. However, if you try to call on it, the sculpture seems to be sleeping. There are ten students behind the lying Buddha. Next to the two houses stand 18 arches. The frescos on the walls represent descriptions of the stories "Journey to the West" and "Shan Hai Classic" (a book on ancient Chinese geography). More than six thousand Buddha Sutras were granted by Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty in the Depository of Buddhism. Zhangye served as an important stop on the ancient Silk Road.

How to Get there?

Buses leaving on an hourly basis are available between the two cities in the East Station of Zhangye. Tourists can also charter a motor tricycle in Shandan County, which costs 8 yuan round-trip. On the way back, tourists can visit Aili Museum and other sites.

Opening Hours:

08:30—18:00

More Tips:

Best Time to Travel These scenic spots are mainly indoor ones, so tourists can take a trip there around the year. However, it is least recommended to go there in the spring, since the sand dust is relatively frequent in that period and the weather is dry. Summer is the second least recommended

time for travel, as it is very hot in summer there and it is necessary to take along a lot of water while traveling. Autumn is the best time around the year to take a trip there, when tourists can take a good picture of the crows at the white tower behind the Grand Buddha Temple. It is also a good choice to go there when it snows in the winter.

The Bell and Drum Tower

The Bell and Drum Tower is also called Zhenyuan Tower. It was created to resemble Xi'an's bell tower and is the Hexi Corridor's biggest drum tower. This man-made attraction is housed in a three-story building. It shows off traditional Chinese architecture. The building has aesthetic carvings and a splendid cornice.

Bell and Drum Tower is located at the center of Zhangye City, where four main streets converge. The tower also known as Jingyuan Tower is the largest well preserved tower in Gansu Corridor (the historical route in Gansu province, passing Lanzhou, Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan, Dunhuang).

Bell and Drum Tower was built during the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1507). The 30-meter-high base of the building is made up of brick: 32 meters in width and 9 meters in length.

The tower consists of three-tier wood-pyramid structure that has delicate design and majestic model. It is definitely a traditional ethnic architecture building of China.

After stepping at the top of the tower, you will find four traditional Chinese carved panels covered with brush calligraphy of famous artists.

The clock tower is situated on the southeast of Bell and Drum Tower, which was used for time telling or fire alarming. The clock tower owns a height of 1.3 meter and diameter of 1.15 meter, weighing more than 600 kilograms. The most important thing is the clock tower was made up of copper alloy. Therefore, it produces sonorous jow that can be heard in every corner of the whole city.

Location:

At the center of Zhangye City

Wooden Pagoda Temple

This temple was formerly located along the South Street of Zhangye city and now the site is within the campus of Zhangye middle school. It was initially built in Northern Zhou Dynasty, and then underwent renovation in 1926.

The Wooden Pagoda Temple has nine floors, each of which is decorated with woodcut of Chinese pattern dragon head. Commonly, each of them contains one pearl over their mouths. They are highly praised as the integrity of carpentry and portrait artists by tourists.

People name it as the Wooden Pagoda Temple, because it is totally built in wood structure, even the eaves. Come and have a close look, you will be surprised to find that the pagoda use no nail or riveting to connect the whole building. Only a couple of crossbeams are used to hold the pagoda.

Standing at the top of pagoda, you can get a bird's eye view of the city.

Besides enjoying beautiful view, you still can have delicious Zhangye cuisine. There is one famous street called "Huayi Street", where you can taste varied kinds of northern noodles, meat, soups and local snacks.

Location:

Inside the campus of Zhangye middle school.

How to Get There?

Take a taxi, which will take you directly to your destination.

Ticket Price:

5 Yuan / person

Mati Temple Grotto

Mati Temple grotto is located in the Gu Minority Autonomous County in Su'nan, about 65 kilometers to the Zhangye City in the south. The road situation is good for self-drive tourism from North Zhangye to Su'nan. Though the distance is only about 70 kilometers, the trip will take more than one hour due to the steep road. Public buses to Su'nan are also available in the Nanguan Long-distance Bus Station of Zhangye. After arrival at Su'nan, a tourist can take a taxi to Mati Temple.

Mati Temple is also called Puguang Temple. The whole grotto is composed of Shenguo Temple, Puguang Temple, Qianfo Cave, Jinta Temple, Upper Guanyin Cave, Middle Guanyin Cave and Lower Guanyin Cave. First built in the northern Liang period, Mati Temple boasts more than 70 caves and

shrines. According to the legend, a horse from the heaven once left a mark of horse hooves here, and thus the temple got its name. The legendary print of the horse hooves now exists in the Mati Hall in Puguang Temple, serving as an indispensable treasure of the temple. The uniqueness of Mati Temple Grotto lies in the grand scale of Buddhist towers, caves and shrines in Qianfo Cave, with a total number of more than 500; the large-scale sculpture of Apsaras in Jinta Temple is of primitive simplicity and elegance, which is unique in China; the Thirty-three-heavens Cave in Puguang Temple has a total of 21 grottoes ranked in 5 levels. These grottoes are arranged in the form of a pagoda, with Buddhist halls inside and corridors outside. The total number of caves and shrines both inside and outside is up to 49, all of which are of unique designs. The surroundings of Mati Temple are very beautiful, and the verdant hills, green waters, unusual peaks and peculiar caves are the most famous things of Mati Temple. Tourists can also stay in the tent of Yugu Minority, enjoying the pure Chang and the delicious big chunks of stewed lamb and experiencing the unique living style and the cultural characteristics of the nomadic people.