

Travel: Explore Lichuan's Forests and Caves

Finding beautiful, off-beat locations devoid of throngs and bus-loads of tourists in China is not impossible. Lichuan, in the Hubei province in the west of the country, is such a place.

Lichuan is known largely for two major attractions. The first of these is the large expanse of metasequoia trees, which are related to the giant redwoods of North America. The second is the world's longest karst limestone cave system. Also dotted with gorges, dams, temples and other attractions nearby, Lichuan is bound to give you unforgettable experiences.



Lichuan's Off-Beat Attractions

The Metasequoia Forests: Nearly all of the Lichuan wetlands and hills that have not been built upon are covered by Metasequoia trees. These trees were first discovered in 1941 as a fossil from the Mesozoic era. But two years later Moudao town in Lichuan became the first known home of this species of trees that exist nowhere else. The Metasequoia mostly grow in small groups of about 30. However, if you head to the Xiaohe valley, you will find the largest grove of about 5400 trees.

Tenglong Cavern: Located a few miles from Lichuan, the Tenglong Cave (meaning the 'soaring dragon cave') has an entrance that will tell you why it is named so. The entrance is 74 meters tall and 64 meters wide. It leads to nearly 60 kilometers of passageways, making it the longest karst cave system on the planet. It also has a network of underground streams that go on for a whopping 16.8 kilometers. This is the cave where the Qingjiang River begins. No matter the time of year you visit, you'll find the temperatures inside remain between 16 and 18 °C.



Enshi Grand Canyon Scenic Area: Enshi is the capital of the Hubei province, and likely to be a stop for those visiting Lichuan. The city itself is vibrant and thriving; but head out into the deep canyons, soaring mountains, cascading waterfalls and meandering rivers and you'll find yourself in another world

altogether. You can get to the canyon and its mountain village Tunbao by a 2 hour car ride from the city.

The canyon is 108 kilometers long, spreading across 300 square kilometers. It is lush in comparison to the US Grand Canyon. The view from the tops of the five precipices of what is known as China's Grand Canyon is awe-inspiring, with clouds within your reach and giant stone pillars pointing to the sky. Elders hike up and down the mountains each day, set up camp along the way, and offer boiled eggs, cooked potatoes and cold drinks to refresh you on your way down. The Enshi Canyon makes for an excellent day trip.



Other Attractions

When in Lichuan, also find a guide to take you around to the unexplored natural beauties of the Yulong Cavern (Lishu country), the Qiyue Mountains (west of Lichuan), the Sanyuan Taoist temple (Zhonglu town), Fubao Mountain (Wangying town), the Ganxi Forest Park (southwest of Lichuan) and the ancient buildings of Dashuijing in Boyangba town.

Other attractions that await you on your visit to Lichuan and the Hubei province include the 700 AD Tusi Castle in Enshi and the Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan City. Both will give you an idea of local culture, history, legends and art.

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