

GUILIN (桂林)



Thanks to its idyllic scenery and abundance of tourist attractions, a visit to Guilin has become a must for many visitors to China. Located in the northeast of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guilin's clean city centre, relaxed atmosphere and subtropical climate offer visitors a breath of fresh air (literally) and a new perspective of China from the bustling metropolises of the north. Though beautiful all year round, the best time to visit is between April and October, when the temperature is comfortable and the scenery the most enchanting.



Attractions

Guilin boasts a number of stunning natural sights both in and around the city that are enough to keep visitors busy for a few days. Below are the top things to see and do in the city.

Longsheng Rice Terraces: located a few hours drive from Guilin City, Longsheng county is home to one of Asia's most stunning rice terraces; the Dragon's Backbone Fields (Longji). Here not only can you see some incredible sights, but also interact with and witness the way of life of some of China's minority groups, who live amongst the fields.



Once you arrive in Longsheng county, you will have the choice between visiting the touristy Ping'an fields, or the more rural and less crowded Jinkeng terraces. Both offer incredible views over the towering fields and the various villages and viewpoints are well sign-posted throughout.

Li River: The Li River, which runs between the Mao'er Mountains and Pingle, is has become one of the most photographed and popular attractions of Guilin and its impressive views of the iconic karst mountains make it easy to see why. The best stretch of the river is undoubtedly that between Guilin and Yangshuo and you won't need to look far to find a boat tour to take you on this journey!

The most popular way to do the journey is by bamboo raft, however the 83 kilometer stretch means that these boats are motor powered and the noise does slightly take away from the idyllic scenery. If you are looking for a true bamboo rafting experience, it may be worth doing so in Yangshuo (see Yangshuo guide for more info), however that doesn't mean this journey isn't worth doing!



Folded Brocade Hill: One of the city's most popular attractions, Folded Brocade Hill offers some fantastic views over the Li River, Guilin City and the surrounding mountains. To reach the view-points,

you will need to do a short, but steep climb, but the numerous pavilions, ancient inscriptions and the Wind Cave along the way make for a welcome break.

Daxu Ancient Town: For anyone looking for a taste of ancient culture, Daxu ancient town is a must. Situated around 20km southeast of Guilin, this area is known for its well-preserved buildings, long history and traditional culture. Though small, Daxu offers several interesting sights, including an ancient street, a handful of temples and a traditional market.



Food

Guilin's location means that its cuisine has been strongly influenced by that of nearby provinces, like Guangdong, Sichuan, Hunan, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Fujian. Food from each of these provinces can be easily found in Guilin, as well as some local specialities:

Guilin rice noodles (mifen), which are fine white noodles served in a soup made from several ingredients and spices, such as dried tangerine peel, cinnamon, and ginger. The dish does not have a uniform recipe, so they are likely to taste slightly different in different restaurants.



Stewed duck with ginkgo is a traditional dish thought to be a remedy for lung problems. Ginkgo, cubes of duck meat, ham slices, and other ingredients are steamed in braising cups and the result is light but savoury soup in which the tender duck meat contrasts pleasantly with the smooth, slightly slimy texture of the ginkgo.

Lipu taro pork is one of Guilin's specialty dishes and is very popular at weddings. It is made by combining Lipu taro root and streaky pork with mashed onion, cooking wine and various other ingredients to produce soft and flavoursome meat. This dish is said to reduce inflammation in your body and improve your complexion.



Below are some of the most popular restaurants among locals in Guilin:

Guilin Bravo Hotel Restaurant

Location: No.14 Rong Hu South Road

Style: Sichuan cuisine

Tong Lai Guan

Location: No. 4, Zhongshan Middle Road, opposite to Guilin Hotel

Style: Local snacks and traditional dishes

Western food is becoming more and more widespread across China and it's never hard to find western chains such as McDonalds and KFC. Guilin also offers a couple of locally owned western restaurants:

Sharon's Coffee

Location: Chuanshan South Road

Style: Western; salads, baguette, burgers, schnitzel, steaks, pizza and different types of coffee & espresso.

Weixiao Eatery

Location: Zhongshan Middle Road

Style: New Zealand steak

Accommodation

As a popular tourist city, Guilin offers a wide range of budget, mid- and high-end accommodation. Below are some recommended places:

Sky Palace Hostel: Its affordable price, friendly staff and clean, comfortable rooms almost make this hostel too good to be true. Sky Palace Hostel offers both dorm and private air-conditioned rooms, cheap, tasty food and boasts a gorgeous rooftop terrace. This hidden gem should be on the top of any budget travellers list!

Ming Palace Youth Hostel: Located in downtown Guilin, a few minutes' walk from the Li River, Ming Palace offers a range of reasonably priced dorm and private accommodation. Hostel staff frequently lay on a range of activities, such as dumpling making and hiking trips, as well as a spacious social area, perfect for meeting fellow travellers.

Entertainment

As well as offering a range of daytime activities, Guilin also offers a variety of things to do in the evening. Whether you are looking for culture, bars or a river cruise, you won't be disappointed.

Bars

Amani Bar: Located along the busy Zhenyang Pedestrian Street, Amani bar is a popular evening spot, known for its good Western food and its cosy and casual interior.

Baidu Bar: Baidu Bar combines both Chinese and European nightlife culture to create one of the leading entertainment centres in Guilin. Sitting alongside the Li River, Baidu Bar houses two floors, the first of which is a European style bar and the second a KTV.



Yixing Bar (Grotesque Bar): Don't be scared off by the grotesque decorations in this popular bar – otherwise you'll miss out on a big surprise!

Performances

Guishan Zhi Xiu (the Beauty of Guishan)

Location: Minghua Palace, Guishan Hotel, No.1 Chuanshan Road

This is a performance which uses song and dance to portray parts of Guangxi ethnic minority culture, such as a wedding and harvest dance and an ethnic costume show. The show is very colourful and gives the audience a true sense of the Zhuang, Miao, Dong and Yao ethnic minority cultures.



Huayuan Zhi Ye (Garden Night)

Location: Guilin Royal Garden Hotel, No.186-1 Linjiang Road

Here you can watch fascinating performances by local ethnic minority groups, which include singing and dancing performances and Chinese acrobatics. Whilst watching the performance, visitors can enjoy delicious local food and wine. This nightly performance is set in the elegant gardens of the 5-star Royal Garden Hotel and is a fantastic cultural experience.

Impression Sanjie Liu

Location: Yangshuo

Impression Sanjie Liu is the most famous performance of the area and is set on a stage of water before Yangshuo's beautiful mountainous landscape. This 60-minute long show tells a story through seven 'chapters' and gives the audience an impression of what life is like for those living around the Li River and for Sanjie, the fairy singer from the myths and legends of the Zhuang minority.

As the show takes place in Yangshuo, you will need to take a bus/boat to the town in order to watch it.



Getting around Guilin

Guilin operates an extensive bus network, making travel around the city very affordable and convenient. Tickets cost either 1 or 2 RMB, depending on which type of bus you take (air conditioned or non-air conditioned). The price will be marked clearly when you enter the bus.

Taxis in Guilin, though more expensive than travelling by bus, are an affordable way of getting around. When you do take a taxi, ensure it is a city licensed one (pictured) and that the driver agrees to go by the meter.



The city has developed a comprehensive bike sharing system and has over 2,00 bike rental stations and over 7,000 bicycles around the city. Guilin's beautiful scenery make it an enjoyable city in which to cycle, however if you intend to do so in the city centre you should be extremely careful of cars and electric bikes.

Travel

There are many transport options to/from Guilin, making onward travel very straightforward.

Guilin has two main train stations (Guilin Railway Station and North Railway Station), which connect the city with various places in China. Guilin is one of the main hubs along the Hunan-Guangxi Railway and the Guiyang-Guilin-Guangzhou High Speed Railway.

Guilin – Changsha: 4 hrs

Guilin – Shenzhen: 3 hrs

Guilin – Chengdu: 25 hrs

Guilin – Shanghai: 10-20 hrs

Long distance bus is another way to travel between cities in this area, but road conditions are not always great and journeys can take several hours, though tickets are cheap. Lines run to several smaller towns and cities in the area, so it's worth checking the bus schedules on <http://www.chinabusguide.com> to see if your route is served.

Guilin has an international airport, located around 28 kilometres from the city centre, which operates daily flights to and from many major Chinese cities, such as Beijing, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Guiyang, Haikou, Hangzhou, Qingdao, Sanya, Shanghai and Chengdu, as well as foreign countries like Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. For those looking to travel from cities in China, it is worth considering a flight, as this drastically reduces travel times between cities.

The airport can be reached either by taxi (approx. 80 RMB), or by shuttle bus (20 RMB). This runs daily between 6:30 to 20:00 and leaves every 30 minutes from the Civil Aviation Mansion.