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Huanglong Scenic Area

Summary

Huanglong Scenic Area, also known as the Huanglong National Park and commonly referred to as Huanglong, is located in Songpan County, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, near the famous Jiuzhaigou. Renowned for its spectacular travertine pools, Huanglong is often described as a “Fairyland on Earth.” It is China’s only well-preserved highland wetland and has been recognized as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site.

Huanglong Valley ranges in altitude from 1,700 meters to 5,588 meters. Its peaks are snow-capped year-round and host the easternmost glaciers in China. The area features mineral-rich lakes, waterfalls, forests, and gorges, along with rich hot spring resources. Its diverse forest ecosystems provide habitats for rare wildlife, including giant pandas and golden snub-nosed monkeys.

Why Is Huanglong Famous?

Huanglong is best known for its extraordinary travertine landscape, one of the finest and largest of its kind in the world. Over thousands of years, mineral-rich water flowing down the valley has created terraces, pools, waterfalls, and limestone formations that resemble a giant golden dragon winding through the mountains, which is how Huanglong (Yellow Dragon in Chinese) got its name.

What makes Huanglong truly remarkable is the color of its pools. Although the water itself is crystal clear, minerals deposited on the pool floors reflect sunlight in different ways, creating shades of turquoise, emerald green, sapphire blue, and golden yellow. The colors change throughout the day and across the seasons, making every visit unique.

Many geologists regard Huanglong as one of the world’s most outstanding examples of high-altitude travertine formations. The combination of colorful pools, cascading terraces, and mountain scenery creates a landscape unlike anywhere else in China.

Main Attractions of Huanglong

Huanglong is home to numerous attractions, each with its own unique charm. Highlights include Welcome Pond, Zhengyan Pond, and Brilliant Flying Waterfall, among other travertine pools, together forming a complete highland travertine landscape system. These sites offer not just sightseeing, but also opportunities for hiking, photography, and appreciating highland ecology. The most popular attractions are:

Five-Color Pond

Five-color pond

The Five-Color Pond is the most famous spot in Huanglong and a must-visit for all travelers. The terraced pools cascade down the valley, with crystal-clear water reflecting mineral deposits that create shades of blue, green, yellow, and white, resembling a natural palette or gemstones embedded in the mountains.

Visitors often look forward to this pond the most. Even during the dry season, when water levels drop, the colors remain vivid, and the overall landscape retains its layered and mystical charm. The colors change throughout the day and from different viewing angles, giving this highland travertine area a nearly dreamlike visual effect.

Huanglong Ancient Temple (Snow Mountain Temple)

Built in the Ming Dynasty over 600 years ago, Huanglong Ancient Temple occupies about 2,100 square meters. Its architecture is simple yet solemn, with exquisitely carved statues, reflecting a harmonious blend of Tibetan and Han cultures. The temple offers a humanistic contrast to the surrounding pool landscapes.

Legend has it that a local master, known as Huanglong Zhenren, practiced here before ascending to immortality. In his honor, the temple was built facing the colorful pools, backed by snow-capped mountains. Every year from the 13th to the 15th day of the sixth lunar month, a temple festival is held, attracting pilgrims from Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai, including Tibetan, Qiang, Hui, and Han communities.

Here, visitors can rest and absorb the peaceful fusion of Tibetan religious culture with highland scenery.

Golden Sand Terrace

Golden Sand Terrace

Gold Sand Terrace is a 1,300-meter-long travertine slope formed over time by mineral deposition. Its golden or light brown surface glistens under sunlight, as a ribbon of gold stretched across the valley.

From above, the terrace rises and falls like a dragon’s spine winding through the mountains. Sunlight enhances the shimmering golden hues, explaining its poetic name, “Golden Sand Terrace.”