

Heavenly Jiuzhai Valley



by
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MY wife and I enjoyed a pleasant trip to the very scenic Jiuzhai Valley (or Jiuzhaigou) National Park, China, back in September. It is located in Jiuzhai County, which is one of the 13 counties of the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Northern Sichuan Province. “Jiuzhai” means “Nine Tribes”. However, only three Tibetan villages are found in the Y-shaped valley of more than 80km long.

The park is best known for its fabled blue and green lakes (118 in total), springs, streams, rivers, spectacular waterfalls and shoals linked to each other. It is on the edge of the Tibetan Himalayan Plateau where the Himalayas drop down from Tibet into the Sichuan Basin, thus providing ample source of crystal clear water to feed the valley. The Jiuzhai Valley (once under sea water) has evolved from the Paleozoic period of some 400 million years ago to its current

state as a result of crust transformation, glacial movement, karst landform and travertine accretion. It also has unique wildlife such as giant pandas and golden monkeys in the hinterland.

Jiuzhai Valley was only recently discovered and listed as a state-level nature reserve in 1978. It entered the UNESCO World Nature Heritage List in 1992. The heavenly feeling of being there was beyond words. The photograph shows a scenic view of the harmony of mountains, hills, trees and water. No amount of photographs could fully capture the marvellous natural beauty of the valley. We experienced an immense sense of peace, serenity harmony and joy. I was overwhelmed and moved to proclaim “How Great Thou Art” to the creator of this universe.

Jiuzhai Valley is normally approached 460km northward from Chengdu via often narrow, steep and winding roads. The journey can take up to 10 hours. Due to the recent opening of the Huanglong Airport, we could reach there via a 45-minute flight from Chengdu. Nevertheless, air travel there can be unpredictable. Delay due to frequent changing weather conditions is not uncommon. Our 7.30 a.m. flight only departed three hours later.

While one can easily enjoy this nature’s gift in relative comfort and convenience, one must not overlook the role of engineers, planners and environmentalists in ensuring the sustainability of such exquisite scenic sites. The airport was marvellously built on a 3000m above sea level plateau amidst surrounding mountains. Major access roads hug the hillslopes with minimum cut and fill. Pinewood boarded walkways provide safe and comfortable walk to kilometres of foot access to all the scenic spots. Even steel roadside parapets were treated with log-like finishes. Specially designed low-carbon emission coaches ply the main access roads in an effort to maintain the pristine unpolluted environment.

Although some other far flung places of the world may also lay claim to unique nature sceneries, Jiuzhai Valley certainly represents a spectacular nature’s gift to humankind that can be readily accessed all year round. I leave you with the local claim that “upon one’s return from Jiuzhai Valley, one will never want to look at another water feature again”. Well, I certainly harbour the thought of a return visit, perhaps during a different season. ■

