



The cliffs rising perpendicularly from the valleys are called “iron walls of Taihang”. The term is also a tribute to the heroes who protected the nation by fighting the Japanese invaders seven decades ago.
QIN HONGYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Mountains promoted as major attraction



Sightseers praise wealth of natural beauty, history, culture

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Extending more than 400 kilometers from north to south, the Taihang Mountains are one of the largest mountain ranges in North China and is where the name of Shanxi province comes from.

Shanxi — which means “to the west of the mountains” — is so called because it located to the west of Taihang.

The mountains constitute the border among Shanxi, Hebei and Henan provinces.

Because of its precipitous peaks, steep cliffs, strange rocks, lush forests and clean waters, Taihang is seen by

many sightseers as a destination that can be visited many times.

Serving as the natural border of the Loess Plateau in the west and the North China Plain in the east, Taihang also held a strategic position in ancient China in times of conflicts. The relics and legends left by past-day battles make it a favorite for tourists with special interest in China’s history and culture.

Zuoquan county in the east of Shanxi is known for its Taihong valleys which are called the “50-km gallery of picturesque landscape” by tourism industry insiders.

One of the most imposing sights in the area are the cliffs rising perpendicularly from the valleys.

The cliffs are often called the “iron walls of Taihang”.

In the eyes of the locals, the term “iron walls of Taihang” is not only a description of the landscape, but also a tribute to the heroes who protected the nation by fighting the Japanese invaders seven decades ago.

During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Agression, the Taihang Mountains were an important



Tourists take in a view of the Taihang Mountains on top of the main peak of Wangmangling. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

base for the Eighth Route Army led by the Communist Party of China.

When the nation and the people were at their most critical moment, the warriors of the army pledged to “build a new Great Wall with their very flesh and blood”.

General Zuo Quan (1905-42), deputy chief of staff of the army, honored the promise by sacrificing his life during a battle in the county in 1942.

To pay homage to this great hero,

the local people changed the name of the county to Zuoquan from its original name of Liaoxian in the same year of his death.

“You can understand the true meaning of ‘iron walls of Taihang’ only after you have toured Zuoquan and learned about the stories of the heroes who contributed their lives to protecting the nation,” said Chang Jinmin, a local tourism official.

Another site that perfectly com-

bines natural wonders and human efforts is the Wangmangling Scenic Area.

The core of the scenic area is the Wangmangling main peak. Standing 1,665 meters above sea level, it is the highest peak in the southern part of the Taihang Mountains.

The peak’s top is flat, with four watchtowers on it, showing it had been a strategic place in ancient times.

However, the most impressive part of the scenic area is a road in the middle of the cliffs.

The road was built by local construction workers two decades ago by cutting into the cliffs inch by inch, aiming to offer a passage for the residents at the heart of Taihang to reach the outside and for tourists to get in.

After a riding tour of the road, Stefano Cappello, an Italian tourist, said: “The road is definitely one of the miracles in modern civil engineering, considering it was built mostly by manpower. Now I understand how the Great Wall was built in ancient times.”

The hanging road is a favorite of

many self-driving tourists.

“I was told the cliff-hanging road in Wangmangling is among the most attractive roads in the world, so I planned a tour of the road during Dragon Boat Festival at the end of June,” said Gao Yuan, a resident in Taiyuan, capital city of Shanxi province.

There are six other similar cliff-hanging roads in the Taihang Mountains region.

Seeing the Taihang Mountains’ great potential on the tourist market, the authorities of Shanxi have rolled out a plan to develop Taihang into one of China’s top three touring routes along with the Great Wall and the Yellow River.

In the plan, Taihang is positioned as an international destination for mountain sightseeing and recreation, as well as a destination for historical and cultural tours.

A new sightseeing highway extending from north to south is now under construction, which is expected to link hundreds of scenic spots in and around the mountains.

Li Yali contributed to this story.



The Taihang No 1 Highway, which links the major destinations and villages in and near the Taihang Mountains, is expected to offer convenience to tourists and boost local growth. CAO YANG / XINHUA

Highway provides more travel routes for visitors

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When mentioning a road that can provide self-driving tourists with a sightseeing experience of a long range of spectacular mountains, one may easily think of the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Appalachian Mountains in the United States, which inspired John Denver to write his famous song *Take Me Home, Country Road*.

And now, Shanxi province in North China is expected to have a similar road in the near future in its Taihang Mountains region.

Taihang, rising up to 3,000 meters above the adjacent North China Plain and serving as the natural border among Shanxi, Hebei and Henan provinces, is an obstacle to the east-west transport in the region.

However, travels to both sides of the mountains have never been hindered throughout thousands of years thanks to the river valleys in the mountains.

Taihang is the watershed for streams running to the Yellow River in the west and streams flowing into the Bohai Bay in the east.

The renowned “Eight Paths of Taihang” in history are the ancient roads built along the valleys, offering passage for travelers to and from Shanxi.

In modern times, highways and railways have been built on the ancient passageways, further facilitating the flow of people and commodities.

But the east-west roads are still not enough for travelers who want to have in-depth tours of the mountains that extend more than 400 kilometers from north to south.

To meet the new demands of tourists, authorities of Shanxi decided to build a special road to the Taihang Mountains in 2018.

Yan Chenxi, head of the Shanxi Department of Transportation, said the road, which is called “Taihang No 1 Highway”, is designed to offer a slow-paced and in-depth travel experience of the mountains to tourists.

The 1,257-km main stretch of the highway runs from Xinzhou in the north to Jincheng in the south.

The main road, together with about 3,500 km of branch roads, will link hundreds of tourist desti-

nations in 29 counties and districts in six cities in Shanxi, according to Yan.

“Shanxi boasts nearly 60 percent of the total area of Taihang, with hundreds of scenic spots scattered around like pearls,” Yan said.

He added that “Taihang No 1 will serve as a chain linking the pearls together, offering better access for tourists and bringing new opportunities for locals to get richer”.

The Qinshui county section of the Taihang No 1 became operational in October 2019. And the ease of traffic brought by the highway was immediately felt by the locals and tourists.

The Residence of the Liu Family in Xiwenxing village, an ancient building complex with more than 100 rooms, is a renowned attraction in the county.

However, travel from the village to the county seat used to require a drive of 1.5 hours on rugged roads, according to Hou Jie, chief of the county’s culture and tourism bureau.

Hou said it now takes half an hour to reach the residence thanks to the completion of the local stretch of Taihang No 1.

The entire artery of Taihang No 1 is scheduled to be completed within this year, according to the provincial plan for the road.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Famous scenic spots in Taihang

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Baquan Valley

Located in Huguan county in the southern part of the Taihang Mountains, Baquan Valley became a 5A scenic area — the highest-rank destination rating by the national tourism authority — on Jan 8.

Baqun, which means eight springs, is so called because of eight springs that formed a torrential brook in the valley.

With a length of 13 kilometers and a width ranging from 3 to 20 meters, the narrow valley is surrounded by peaks rising up to 1,100 m from the valley floor.

In addition to dozens of waterfalls and several karst caves, the most impressive sight is the area called Yixiantian — which literally means one-line sky — in the narrowest part of the valley. It is so called because the sky is narrowed to a line seen from the bottom of the valley.

Niangziguan Great Wall

Niangziguan, which means “female general’s pass”, is located in Pingding county in the central part of Taihang. It is one of the strategic fortresses along the Great Wall.

The fortress is so called because it is said to have been built by Princess Pingyang during the early Tang Dynasty (618-907). Legends also have it that the first military force stationed there were an army of female warriors led by the princess.

The existing fortress and the Great Wall were built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), with two gate towers and a 500-m wall still kept intact.

The Niangziguan Pass, controlling one of the important passageways between Hebei and Shanxi provinces, was a strategic stronghold in times of conflict and thus is a silent witness to many wars in history.

Huangcheng Xiangfu

Huangcheng Xiangfu, which literally means “imperial prime minister’s residence”, is located in Huangcheng village of Yangcheng county.

It was the residence of Chen Tingjing, a renowned prime minister during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).



A heart-shaped sky is viewed from the bottom of Baquan Valley. SANG XIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chen was the teacher of Emperor Kangxi and was the country’s prime minister for about half a century.

As it offered accommodation to Kangxi when he visited Shanxi, the scale of the residence is among the largest of all officials’ residences in China.

Covering 36,580 square meters, the complex has 16 courtyards and 640 rooms.

Impressive monuments and scenic spots in this tourist destination include an imposing stone archway with exquisite engravings, well-decorated rooms, classical gardens, an ancestral temple and a private school.

Mount Wutai

With its five flat-top peaks, Mount Wutai is a sacred Buddhist mountain located in Xinzhou city in northern Shanxi.

The cultural landscape is home to 41 Buddhist temples.

Among them is the Foguang Temple, with its eastern main hall being the longest surviving wooden structure in China. The hall was built during the late Tang Dynasty, with life-size clay statues.

Mount Wutai also features the Ming Dynasty Shuxiang Temple with a huge complex of 500 statues representing Buddhist stories woven into three-dimensional pictures.

Wutai is the holy mountain specially dedicated to Manjusri — the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. With temples built from the 1st century AD to the early 20th century, it has a far-reaching influence on China’s Buddhism.

Mount Wutai is also the highest mountain in North China with its main peak standing 3,061 m above sea level.