

Scenery steeped in legend

Well-known for its link to folklore, Jiyuan offers rich tourism resources amid mountainous landscapes

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Majestic mountains, links with ancient Chinese civilization and a huge flood-control project give Jiyuan a special identity — charm combined with engineering. The city, in northwestern Henan province in Central China, is also less frequented by travelers than many other places.

Jiyuan has a link to folklore that is familiar to practically every household in China.

“The city got its name for being the origin of the ancient Jishui River,” said local guide Chang Shiyu. The river used to be on par with the Yangtze, Yellow and Huaihe rivers, although it has mostly been overshadowed by the Yellow River.

Beyond its name, the city is steeped in the spirit of Yugong, whose story has been told to every Chinese person for generations.

Yugong was determined to move the towering mountains that stood in his way, stone by stone, and believed that the job would be completed by his descendants continuing his work. His diligence and perseverance impressed the gods, who later granted his wish.

Wangwu is one of the two mountains.

Ancient lore has it that the Yellow Emperor, who is regarded as the common ancestor of all Chinese, worshipped the gods here after uniting the people. The mountain covers an area of 270 square kilometers, with its summit at 1,715 meters.

Many Taoist temples dot the mountain, which also boasts geological marvels. It became a world geological park in 2006.

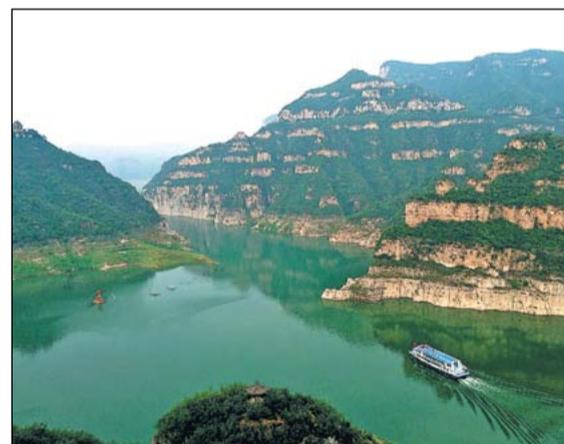
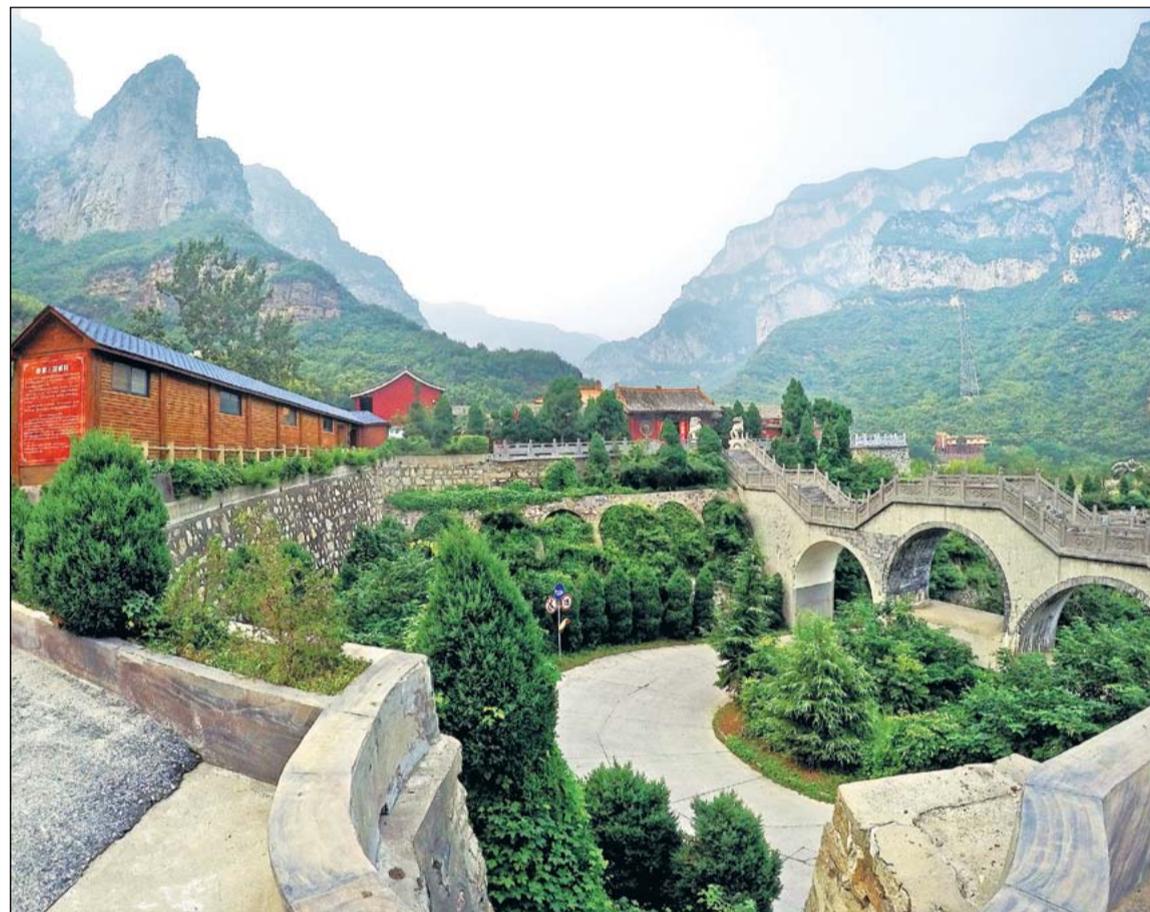
With its imposing stone gate and pillars, a grand plaza greets visitors at the foot of the mountain.

The site, which takes 90 minutes to reach from the downtown area, holds sculptures showcasing an ancient worship ceremony by the Yellow Emperor.

As visitors climb the steps, Yangtai Palace presents itself, but several giant cypress trees with luxuriant foliage block the full view of the palace. The trees are all more than 1,000 years old.

The palace has three halls. The anterior hall is believed to be the biggest timber structure of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in Henan.

The reliefs on the stones in the hall feature dragons, birds, flowers



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PHOTOS BY YANG FEIYUE / CHINA DAILY

and fairy figures. Inside, visitors offer incense and pray, while outside, a funicular car ascends to the top of the mountain. Hiking up the peak takes roughly two hours.

Everything on the peak is surrounded in white mist, giving the area a mystical atmosphere. The cliffs and the view down below are magnificent, especially when the wind dispels the mist for a brief moment.

Monkeys can be seen occasionally swaggering in and out of the temple. They do not seem too bothered by human presence.

“Monkeys here are used to humans and they are here to find food,” Chang said.

Roughly 40 minutes from the city center is the Xiaolangdi hydrojunction, the largest water-control project on the Yellow River. The giant water gate and red stone levee keeps the once-unruly Yellow River in check.

The river used to wreak havoc across the country during the flood season. Now birds can be seen flying over the serene water. Cherry trees have been planted around the reservoir.

The area is popular with tourists in June and July when the dam is opened for water and sediment regulation. To learn more about the history of the dam, a detailed video plays at the local auditorium for visitors.

From Xiaolangdi, visitors can take a cruise to the Yellow River's Three Gorges. Most have heard of the Yangtze's Three Gorges, but not many might know there are Three Gorges in Jiyuan.

Seen from above, the gorges resemble Qiandao Lake in East China's Zhejiang province.

Mountains with yellow rocks and



If you go

From Beijing, a high-speed train takes 2.5 hours to reach Anyang in Central China's Henan province. Jiyuan is then a two-hour drive from Anyang.

green grass can be seen during the cruise. Each of the gorges has unique characteristics. Gushan Gorge looks like a grotesque artwork, Longfeng Gorge features twists and turns, and Bali Gorge has sharp cliffs.

After sightseeing, rafting at Yezhulin is a nice change of pace. The course runs over 6 kilometers, with a 158-meter drop and many sections offering galloping rapids. In some buffering zones, paddling is required.

With its rich tourism resources, Jiyuan has gone all out to upgrade its infrastructure.

Liu Huihua, an official with the Jiyuan tourism development commission, said: “The mountain area takes up more than 80 percent of Jiyuan, which gives the city huge potential to develop tourism.”

So, the local government has earmarked more than 300 million yuan (\$45 million) to build facilities.

Highways connecting it to surrounding cities, including Luoyang and Yangcheng, are under construction, and the Hohhot-Nanning high-speed rail line will include a stop at Jiyuan. An airport is also being planned.

In recent years, a total of 40 million yuan has been spent annually for tourism promotion, subsidies and tourism business development.

Meanwhile, work on a Taoist park at Wangwu Mountain is now under way, and Taoist music and rural tourism festivals also take place.

A cycling greenway and pedestrian lane are being developed for tourists, and dozens of agriculture parks and farms are being built for visitors who desire rural leisure.