



By J Keith Howie

INTERNATIONAL LIVING - I've photographed in over 40 countries but on a recent trip to China, I found what I believe may be the most picturesque place on earth.

I was on an extended trip to Asia with my camera, hoping to photograph some of the Mysterious East's beauty spots. What I found stands firmly in my mind as one of the most exotic and incredible landscapes I have ever seen.

Guilin, which means “Osmanthus Forest”, is one of the best-known tourist destinations in [China](#). It's hailed across the country as one of the most photogenic landscapes in the world. Yet it remains relatively unknown in the West. I wanted to find out for myself.

But Guilin wouldn't be easy to get to. I had to take a 24-hour train ride from Shanghai to get there.

Guilin has been populated since around 300 BC and its central city is built around interconnected rivers and lakes.

The waterways are traversed by numerous distinctive bridges that have a way of making you want to wander across and experience the other side. Weathered limestone pinnacles rise sharply into the clear blue sky from the dense green vegetation that surrounds them. These otherworldly formations are sometimes up to 650 feet tall and are found in only a handful of places in the world.

The incredibly beautiful Li River is the beating heart of Guilin and the focal point for much of the region’s tourism. The 50-mile-long waterway from Guilin to nearby Yangshuo is like a beautifully painted masterpiece that seems like it was lifted right out of a Chinese scroll painting. You just can’t take your eyes off it.

The landscape is peppered with towering limestone columns, mysterious cave systems and small rural villages all banked by vast forests of lush, green bamboo.

People here still travel the river on low bamboo rafts and locals use trained cormorants to catch fish from the waters of the Li. It’s like stepping back in time. I viewed the scene from the deck of a large river boat. Cruises take about six hours and if you ever choose to take one, I promise it will be something you will never forget.

My camera could barely keep up with the incredible photo opportunities. I filled my camera’s memory card with images of landscape after landscape.

For me, this was more than just a pleasure cruise. I uploaded my images to microstock photo websites that have accepted my work over the years. From there, people who need photos of this area can buy copies of my images. They use them for sales brochures for hotels...or tour company posters...or on travel websites. Each time someone buys an image, I get a commission. It’s a great way to earn money from my favorite pastime.