

## WONDERS OF THE WORLD

## GUILIN

## A silk ribbon through jade hairpins

The mesmerizing karst region along the Li River rivals the Great Wall and the Forbidden City

MARGIE GOLDSMITH  
GUILIN, CHINA

Cruise up the Li River from Guilin – floating past the lush countryside, gazing at layer after layer of misty pinnacles – and you feel as if you're travelling back through time. "The river winds like a green silk ribbon, while the hills are like jade hairpins," Han Yu, a Tang dynasty poet, wrote (loosely translated, of course) in the 700s.

Guilin means "forest of sweet osmanthus," and it is named after the large number of those fragrant trees that line the streets of this city, the political, economic and cultural centre of Guangxi in Southern China. But that's not why you come. You are here to see a wonder more spectacular than the Great Wall, more extraordinary than Xian's Terracotta Army or even Beijing's Forbidden City.

You will not see scenery like this anywhere else in the world – a landscape so serene it is hard to believe it is real. As the cruise winds down the river, through forests of bamboo and willow forests, you pass peasants working in rice paddies, water buffalo standing guard and fishermen in small boats. But the main attraction is the karst topography – limestone peaks rising everywhere in the distance. They are heart-stopping under a cloudless blue sky, but even better when shrouded in fog.

I stood mesmerized at the boat's railing, drinking in scenery right out of a brush painting.

A group of Chinese tourists stood next to me. "Neehow," (hello) I said, one of only two words I know in Chinese. They began to talk to me at once, apparently certain I was fluent in their language.

No matter: I didn't need to know Mandarin to appreciate the surrounding hills and mountains boasting fantastical



The beautiful countryside near Guilin, with its rice farms and karst mountains, is on full display during a cruise up the Li River – so serene it seems unreal. ALAMY

names such as Moon over the Water, Painting Brush Peak, and Five Tigers Catch a Goat. When we cruised by the Longevity Buddha Pagoda on Pagoda Hill, the guide said it dated to the Ming Dynasty, which began in the 1300s.

We disembarked at Yangshuo, a quaint town of old streets and bustling stalls. I bought a pair of traditional pajamas for just \$10.

I wish I had purchased more. After repeated washings, they still look new. But more importantly, everytime I wear them, I am transported once again to that fairyland of peaks.

Special to *The Globe and Mail*

## IF YOU GO

**What it is:** The Li River from Guilin to Yangzhou is China's most picturesque region, with almost mystical layers of limestone mountains known as karsts everywhere in the distance.

**Where it is:** Guangxi Province in Southern China.

**How to get there:** Fly into Beijing or Shanghai. Air China ([airchina.com](http://airchina.com)) flies direct to Guilin from both those cities.

**How to see it:** Ker & Downey ([kerdowney.com](http://kerdowney.com)) can arrange

a bespoke trip to the major attractions of China, including Guilin. The travel agent will arrange for a driver, and for an English-speaking guide on the passenger ferry. Three-day/two-night tours start at \$600 a person a day.

**Where to stay:** The Shangri-La Guilin overlooks fragrant gardens and unobstructed views of the crystal-clear Li River. Rooms from \$146 a night; [shangri-la.com/guilin/shangri-la](http://shangri-la.com/guilin/shangri-la).

Margie Goldsmith



Solitude.  
Not isolation.



Places roads  
can't take you.



Let me tell you  
what I saw.

WE HAVE A LOT OF GROUND TO COVER.



EXTRAORDINARY SIGHTS ARE A PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES. ADVENTURE AWAITS IN NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE, DAY OR NIGHT. PADDLE WINDING WATERWAYS THROUGH CARVED-OUT PATHS AT THE BASE OF ANCIENT TOWERING CLIFFS. BILLIONS OF STARS IN THE NIGHT SKY PROVIDE A DRAMATIC CANVAS FOR THE AURORA BOREALIS' DANCING RIBBONS OF COLOUR. ONE MOMENT IT FEELS LIKE NATURE STANDS STILL AROUND YOU, THE NEXT IT IS ALIVE WITH ENERGY. NO TWO EXPERIENCES ARE EVER THE SAME. WHAT STORY WILL YOU TAKE HOME TO TELL?

PLAN YOUR OWN SPECTACULAR NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ADVENTURE AT [SPECTACULARNWT.COM](http://SPECTACULARNWT.COM)

  
Northwest Territories  
CANADA



**CORAL TRIANGLE**

# An underwater rainbow

A scuba diver's paradise off Indonesia boasts world's highest marine biodiversity



**BE PART OF THE SERIES**

This is the first instalment of a five-week look at lesser-known wonders of the world.

**On Instagram**

What site wowed you on your travels? Follow [globeandmail](#) on Instagram and share your pictures with the hashtag [#globeandmail](#) and we'll publish our favourites.

**On [globeandmail.com](#)**

To see more pictures of the Coral Triangle and Guilin, and share the stories on social media, visit: [tgam.ca/travel](#)

**DARRYL LENIUK**  
THE CORAL TRIANGLE, INDONESIA

Schools of orange and purple fairy basslets pulse in and out of staghorn coral with the rhythm of the waves. Shafts of sunlight shimmer on tuna and trevally hovering farther off in the blue. A turtle cruises past, oblivious to the bubble-blowing divers. Fifteen metres down, this prolific reef in eastern Indonesia is more mesmerizing than any aquarium.

The Coral Triangle, the species-rich region bounded by the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, has the highest marine biodiversity on earth: more than 3,000 species of fish, six of the world's seven marine turtles and nearly 600 species of hard coral – 10 times more than the Caribbean. Scientists have called the area a giant species factory, an underwater Amazon.

But the Coral Triangle is under threat. With heavily populated countries depending on its bounty, destructive practices such as dynamite fishing are common. The good news is that dozens of marine parks have been created throughout the triangle, so divers can still experience its splendour.

Bunaken National Park, in Indonesia's northern Sulawesi, was in dire straits in the 1990s. A strong management plan and an entrance-fee system helped support conservation efforts and revived its rich ecosystem. Today, Bunaken is known for its vibrant reefs and sheer underwater walls. On a dive there I swam amid Volkswagen-sized barrel sponges covered in orange and yellow feather stars throwing their tentacles into the current like bursts of fireworks. Inside the feather stars exists a microcosm of the larger reef: elegant squat lobsters, crinoid shrimps and clingfish, perfectly matching the colour of their hosts.

Further east, the reefs of Raja Ampat, in Indonesia's West Papua province, are even more spectac-



Many regard the coral reefs of Raja Ampat in eastern Indonesia as the epicentre of the Coral Triangle. DARRYL LENIUK FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

ular. Many regard this to be the epicentre of the Coral Triangle. New species are still being discovered here, including a shark that walks on its fins. I saw a family of pygmy seahorses – barely the size of a grain of rice – on a gorgonian fan coral. They camouflaged so well I would never have spotted them without the dive master's help.

While most divers visit the Coral Triangle to see the reefs, the area is also known for the best “muck diving” in the world. On volcanic, black-sand bottoms live the weird and wonderfully cryptic creatures not found on coral reefs: harlequin ghost pipefish, devil scorpionfish, hairy frogfish and flying gurnards.

The unofficial capital of muck diving is the 12-kilometre long Lembeh Strait in northeast Sulawesi. Diving here is like a treasure hunt. After several minutes of poking around, I found a neon-orange frogfish. Fist-sized and cartoon-like in appearance, it clambered over clumps of sponge using its pectoral fins as feet. Also called an anglerfish because of the small lure on its head, the frogfish is a fish that fishes. Prey attracted to its bait is inhaled into its gaping mouth with a reflex action that takes only six-thousandths of a second. As I lay on the bottom, it cast its lure toward me. It definitely caught my attention.

*Special to The Globe and Mail*

**IF YOU GO**

**What it is:** The Coral Triangle is most species-rich marine environment in the world – and a place where tourism could be a force for good. Sustainable ecotourism projects and activities such as scuba diving will benefit local communities and help preserve these special reefs.

**Where it is:** It includes the waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and Solomon Islands.

**How to get there:** To get to Bunaken National Park, SilkAir ([silkair.com](#)) offers direct flights from Singapore. To get to Raja Ampat, travel-

lers must make flight connections through either Bali or Jakarta.

**How to see it:** Both live-aboard dive vessels and land-based dive operators are found in countries throughout the Coral Triangle. At Raja Ampat, try Kararu Dive Voyages ([kararu.com](#)). Rates from \$320 a person a day, based on double occupancy.

**Where to stay:** At Bunaken National Park, try Murex Dive Resort in Manado ([murexdive.com](#)). Room rates from \$57 a person, based on double occupancy.

*Darryl Leniuk*

Join the conversation and follow us on Facebook and Twitter

[Facebook.com/SpectacularNWT](#)



[@SpectacularNWT](#)



**Find your Nahanni!**

This UNESCO world heritage site boasts Canada's deepest river canyons, greatest waterfall, most exhilarating adventures, stunning peaks and plateaus, and priceless legends of headless prospectors and lost adventurers.

Nahanni National Park Reserve  
1-867-695-7750  
[WWW.PC.GC.CA/NAHANNI](#)



**The Great Canadian Travel Company Ltd.**

Specialists in individual and group travel to Arctic Canada for over 30 years.

- Flight and Hotel Packages
- Expedition Cruises
- Customized Itineraries

1-800-661-3830  
[GREATCANADIANTRAVEL.COM](#)



**Black Feather Adventures**

Amazing canoe trips on the Nahanni and other NWT rivers. Great guides, equipment and yummy food. Over 40 years of experience.

Starting at  
**\$4,895** +gst per person  
(10 day all inclusive, From Fort Simpson.)

1-888-849-7668  
[WWW.BLACKFEATHER.COM](#)  
[WWW.NAHANNIRIVER.CA](#)



**Visit Our Yellowknife**

There is always something to do outdoors, with spectacular viewing of Aurora, fun family activities and year-round festivals. Enjoy Our Yellowknife with the relaxed urban vibe, shopping, camping and everything in between.

1-877-881-4264  
[info@visityellowknife.com](#)  
[VISITYELLOWKNIFE.COM](#)



**Nahanni Mountain Lodge**

Imagine sitting on the beach just outside the cabin on your own private lake. Nahanni Mountain Lodge is that remote, private, wilderness paradise.

1-867-695-2505  
[info@simpsonair.ca](#)  
[SIMPSONAIR.CA](#)

[SPECTACULARNWT.COM/WHERETOEXPLORE/DEHCHO](#)



**DEH CHO REGION**

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VACATION IN THE DEH CHO REGION. BE SURE TO TAKE A DAY TO DO THE FLIGHTSEEING TOUR OF THE ICONIC NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE WHEN YOU ARE IN THE REGION. ENJOY THE STUNNING MOUNTAIN SCENERY AND BREATHTAKING RIVER CANYONS FROM A FLOATPLANE, WHICH WILL LAND AT THE SPECTACULAR VIRGINIA FALLS.



TF: 1-800-665-0240  
[INFO@SPECTACULARNWT.COM](#),  
[SPECTACULARNWT.COM/WHERETOEXPLORE/DEHCHO](#)

Looking for more information on the Northwest Territories? Download our FREE NWT Explorers' Guide!

[spectacularnwt.com/guides](#)



## YELLOWKNIFE

**SPECIAL OFFER\*** Only Air Canada offers daily flights from both Calgary and Edmonton to Yellowknife with easy connections from all over Canada. Earn AeroMiles on every flight. **Save 10% on Tango fares. Book online at [aircanada.com/NWT](#)**

\*Use the special promotion code provided at [aircanada.com/NWT](#) or call your travel agent. Offer is available on new bookings only. The discount applies exclusively to Air Canada published Tango fares for travel from anywhere in Canada served by Air Canada to Yellowknife and cannot be combined with any other offer. The discount applies to the base fare only and all other air transportation charges, including surcharges, and applicable taxes and fees are not discounted. An advance purchase may be required. Tickets must be purchased by October 28, 2013, for travel between October 26, 2013 and February 28, 2014. For complete details visit [aircanada.com/NWT](#)