



Natural Giant Panda habitats are in only a few areas of China today, and one is in the central mountain areas, primarily in the provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu. In order to preserve the highly-endangered animal, the Chinese government maintains a protected station, which includes a Giant Panda breeding facility and visitor center in the Bifeng Valley in Sichuan.

They're located in picturesque areas some 900 miles from Beijing. There are frequent flights, bus and train excursions from the nation's capital and other Chinese cities to the Bifeng Valley. There are also convenient hotels near the Giant Panda facility, including the Hongzhu, Beite Xingyue Binguan (Moonstar) and even a familiar-sounding Super 8 motel, called the Yibin Lu Neng.

Local hotels and motels offer transportation and one-day visits to the Giant Panda facility and surrounding natural grounds. Tour prices range from about \$150 to \$200 a person. Note of your eating caution: Because the hotels and local restaurants are all in Sichuan province, visitors should be aware of the area's famed extremely spicy foods. Rumors are that they make Mexican food seem bland by comparison.

As for the Giant Pandas, the large black and white teddy-bear look-alikes, their diets in the wild are almost entirely of young green bamboo shoots that grow in their habitat. In the preserve they're fed bamboo shoots, as well as a more balanced nutritious menu that may include bananas, oranges, boiled eggs, yams, fish and the favorite of every type of bear in the world: honey.

The Giant Panda Ecological Park in the Bifeng Valley opened its visitor center ten years ago. Entry fee to the park and science buildings is 100 yuan (about \$15), plus 80 (\$12) yuan to enter the Giant Panda research center, lecture hall and living quarters.

Flash photography and video is permitted in most areas except where there are newborn cubs. Giant Pandas in the wild live in seasonal snow-covered mountains, and have keen senses of smell, hearing and sight. However, they are very sensitive to intense light, particularly the cubs when their eyes are just opening.

The Bifeng Valley facilities encompass first ecological animal park in China. In addition to the Giant Panda areas, there are regular zoo facilities, some where animals roam in natural habitats. There are individual zones for lions, tigers and other large wild animals. There are also

areas for smaller animals, including wolves, reptiles, birds and the Giant Panda's little cousin, the Red Panda.

For more information about visiting the Giant Panda facilities in the Bifeng Valley, check with the Chinese Embassy in Washington (202-338-6688) or email at www.china-embassy.org. You may also contact Chinese consulate offices in New York (212-967-2336), Chicago (573-3070), Houston (713-520-1462), San Francisco (415-674-2900) and Los Angeles (213-807-9088). If you prefer, check with your local or online travel agency to consider flights and tour schedules that involve the Bifeng Valley Giant Panda facility.