



The world's few habitats for the rare species are in China. One is in the mountains of Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu. To preserve the highly-endangered animal, the Chinese government maintains a Giant Panda breeding facility and visitor center in the Bifeng Valley in Sichuan.

They're located in picturesque areas 900 miles from Beijing. There are flights, riverboat cruises, bus and train excursions from the nation's capital and other Chinese cities to the Bifeng Valley. Hotels near the Giant Panda facility include the Hongzhu, Beite Xingyue Binguan (Moonstar) and Super 8 Yibin Lu Neng. Hotels offer transportation to the Giant Panda facility and surrounding natural grounds. Tour prices range from about \$150 to \$200 a person.

The large black and white teddy-bear look-alikes dine 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, including bananas, oranges, boiled eggs, yams, fish and the favorite of all bears, honey.

Fees vary, but some include park and science buildings 100 yuan (about \$15). It costs another 80 (\$12) yuan to enter the Giant Panda research center, lecture hall and dens.

Flash photos and video are permitted in most areas except for newborn cubs. Giant Pandas in the wild live in seasonal snow-covered mountains, and have keen senses of smell, hearing and sight. They're very sensitive to intense light, particularly cubs when 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, including individual zones for lions, tigers and other large wild animals. There are also areas for wolves, reptiles, birds and the Giant Panda's little cousin, the Red Panda.

For more info, check with your travel agent or go to www.yangtzeriver.org/yaan/bifeng-gorge-panda-base