



Sitting atop a ridge in the mountains of southern Yunnan province lies the hill top town of Yuanyang. It's about a seven hour bus ride south towards the Lao border from the provincial capital of Kunming, but it couldn't be further from the metropolis of shiny new buildings and department stores that Kunming has become. So far this breathtakingly beautiful region of China has somehow

escaped the hoards of both Chinese and Western tourist found elsewhere. Mentioned in very few guidebooks, an omission that appears set to change, given gearing up of the fledging tourism industry here. There are already a number of hotels that line the northern edge of the city looking out over the adjacent valley. However, English is hardly spoken as evidence by the sign above my Hotel, the Yuanyang Chen Family Hotel, which brags: "Insuppose: Sign between single during two person between collective." What that is suppose to mean I have know idea. I might have asked the friendly proprietor when I sat down with him and his friends for an all too full bottle of *bi-jo* (a rice wiskey that tastes something like a cross between very bad sake and very bad vodka, with an alcohol content closer to the latter). However, that level of inquisition was beyond my simple poorly pronounced Chinese phrases. Our conversation was limited to exchanges of "ganbei!" the Chinese equivalent of "cheers."

But I digress, what is bringing more and more tourist to this once little visited corner of Yunnan is the spectacular terraced rice fields that were painstakingly built over centuries by the local colorfully dressed minority people. The endless views of water filled terraces





stretching down and then out across the valleys are a photographer's paradise. So it is no surprise that it seems among first to discover this region are the Chinese photographers who line the famous overlooks with their forest of tripods at sunrise and sunset. It's easy to escape the relative masses with a little walking. Yuanyang is the kind of place where you just start out walking and

you'll eventually wander into an expanse of terraces, hill side villages, or colorfully garbed local women working in the fields or bringing home piles of firewood that must weigh more than they do. It's a great place to not be in a hurry. Take a walk in the morning or afternoon. Maybe higher a motor tricycle, and visit some farther a field regions. Over midday, wonder the market filled with people from all the surrounding villages wearing there distinctive colorfully embroidered dress, and grab a filling meal at one of the many bustling restaurants for \$2-3. Combine that with a two bedroom suite hotel room that overlooks the adjacent valley for under \$8 a night and you can see how it's easy to stay a while.





