

TOP 5 DAZU ROCK CARVINGS

1 TEACHER OF DESIGNS
Dazu's version of Vairocana, the celestial Buddha, differs from most depictions with a face that has a distinctively Chinese appearance; many earlier Buddhas had a more Western or Indian look. This sculpture is among the more than 10,000 rock formations in Baodingshan, the primary attraction at Dazu, where the carving work was led by Buddhist monk Zhao Zhifeng between 1174 and 1252.

FINNAIR FLIES to Chongqing four times weekly.

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DAZU'S UNESCO-PROTECTED ROCK CARVINGS, LOCATED ABOUT A TWO-HOUR DRIVE FROM THE MEGACITY OF CHONGQING, ARE A STUNNING RECORD OF CHINA'S BUDDHIST, TAOIST AND CONFUCIAN HISTORY. THE OLDEST DATE BACK TO AD 650, BUT MOST WERE CARVED SOMETIME BETWEEN THE 800s AND THE 1200s. STOP AT THESE FIVE TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VISIT.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JOHAN AUGUSTIN

2 THE YUANJUE CAVE OF DAFOWAN
The largest cave in Dazu, measuring six metres in height, nine in width and twelve in depth, was man-made during the Southern Song dynasty. The well-preserved red and brown colouring on the Buddhas, who appear to be made of wood, comes from local minerals and plants.



3 THE TEN ASCETERITIES OF LIU BENZUN
This gold-faced statue represents Liu Benzun – Sichuan practitioner of Tantric Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 BC). Liu Benzun is 5.2 metres high and surrounded by five apprentices holding up papers that describe the development and practice of asceticism. This particular carving is valued among academics studying esoteric Buddhism.



4 THREE SAINTS OF HUAYAN SECT
Dafowan cave is considered the most impressive section of Baodingshan in Dazu. These three figures representing enlightened beings stand seven metres tall on a ledge built during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). In the middle stands the central figure: Shakyamuni Buddha. On his right stands Samantabhadra Bodhisattva and on his left Manjusri Bodhisattva holding up a pagoda weighing 500 kilos. Behind them are 81 shrines with miniature Buddhas.



5 SLEEPING BUDDHA
This 31-metre-long, reclining figure with its eyes closed represents Buddha after he has attained nirvana, an ultimate state of peace; this is the famous and most difficult stage to achieve in the Buddhist faith. This image of the peaceful, reclining Buddha is commonly seen in religious art.