



JINPING

Jinping county, located in the Southeast of Yunnan province and bordering Vietnam, is one of the most diverse and authentic ethnic minority regions in China. Yao, Hmong, Dai, Hani, Yi, Lahu, Pu and Alu people live here. Plus several of these hill tribes have numerous distinct subdivisions.



People show up in their beautiful traditional dress on market days, coming down from their fields to sell their produce, buy necessities, go to see the doctor or dentist, chat and gossip, have a drink. They are great lively colorful gatherings.

Markets take place in more than 20 of Jinping's towns and villages. I have been market-hopping numerous times and even the 6th, 7th, 8th trip still offered something new.



Added travel charm and excitement

Added travel charm in this remote corner of Yunnan comes from encounters with usually helpful but occasionally annoying local officials; and with sometimes suspicious but always correct police. And from roads turned impassable.

Full marks to the always helpful staff at the Jinping bus station. And to the people in Dazhai (no accommodation available) who let me stay in the guesthouse for passing officials. No such luck in another out of the way village without a place to stay and eat. The village head invited me for some cold leftovers: dog meat, green leaves and rice. And he put me up in the school's office. But then he turned unpleasant and rapacious.

Police check up on foreigners more than elsewhere, maybe because of proximity to the border, maybe because they are a rare sight in this region.

Once in Ma'andi, travelling with a group of six, we were initially almost booted out. But it ended with a friendly-fanatic basketball match between officers and our bunch. And permission to go anywhere in their district, including hiking to the border in Dixibei.

First time in Zhemi, registering at the police station I was served tea and peanuts. But this courtesy was dropped when I became a bit of a regular. They couldn't understand why I kept returning. I just loved the market, and on non-market days I loved the place because nothing ever seems to go on – but normal daily life.

I remember the young soldier at the check point on the old bridge across the Red River crossing into Jinping. Sent to this outpost two thousand miles away from home and family he felt homesick sometimes. Whenever I passed by and he was on duty we used to have our little chat about his native Beijing.

I got stuck once in Wuyaping. An accident had blocked the narrow cobbled road back to Mengla. It turned out there was one other dirt road, a long and mountainous detour. Escape was great, among Hmong traders on top of their merchandise on the back of their truck. Views were awesome. At dusk when it got cold they pulled out blankets. Clear crisp starry night. One of those days when travel brings bliss.



Also of interest

Jinping town, the county capital, has a war cemetery. Fallen from the 1979 war with Vietnam lay buried here. A new museum was opened in 2013.

Ma'andi district attracts butterfly lovers.

There are a few funny border crossings where on market days local people cross to and from Vietnam.

All of Jinping is mountainous and scenery is pretty. Rice and tea are grown and there are a lot of rubber and banana plantations.



Working out the details: where and when are markets?

Detailed knowledge is required for a successful ethnic minority trip in Jinping. I can provide the information, whether for a short few day visit; or for a trip of several weeks giving an in-depth view. With this information you can then travel independently. Or I can arrange your trip.

It is essential to visit on market days, so it is crucial to know the when and where of the markets, and how they compare to each other.

They are held in the towns / villages of Adebo, Dapingtai, Dazhai, Dixibei, Jinping, Laojizhai, Laomeng, Ma'andi, Mengla, Mengping, Mengqiao, Nafa aka Jinshuihe, Nanke, Reshuitan, Sanjia, Shayipo, Shilicun, Sankeshu, Tongchang, Wuyaping aka Tianfang, Yingpan, Zhemi plus a few small places.

Many markets follow the traditional Chinese calendar. Just as there is a cycle of twelve years with the signs of the Chinese zodiac (e.g. year of the dragon, of the horse, of the monkey) so is there a cycle of twelve days. This usually works out in southeastern Yunnan as market coming to a place every fourth day (e.g. Tiger-Horse-Dog) or sixth day (e.g. Pig-Snake). But to confuse things there are also markets rotating according to the western calendar on a fixed day of the week. So it is always a puzzle to find the best combination of markets at the time of your stay.

(In case you are also headed to the southwestern opposite side of Yunnan: most of the markets there are on a five day rhythm, using no calendar at all.)

You will also want to know which minorities (and subdivisions, because they can be so different) visit which market. And some market towns are more lively and colorful than others.

And then there is practical information. Is a public bus running? What about places to stay in the market town? Or can the market be reached from the Jinping county town?

I can provide all the information you need.

