

Hunan Province

Húnán Shěng 湖南省

63.55 million est. 2007 pop. 210,000 square km

The southern inland province of Hunan, about twice the size of Iceland, is well-known for its natural beauty, agricultural products (it is China's largest producer of rice), cuisine, history, tourist attractions, and native citizens, notably Mao Zedong. It is a province rich in natural resources, although these are under considerable strain.

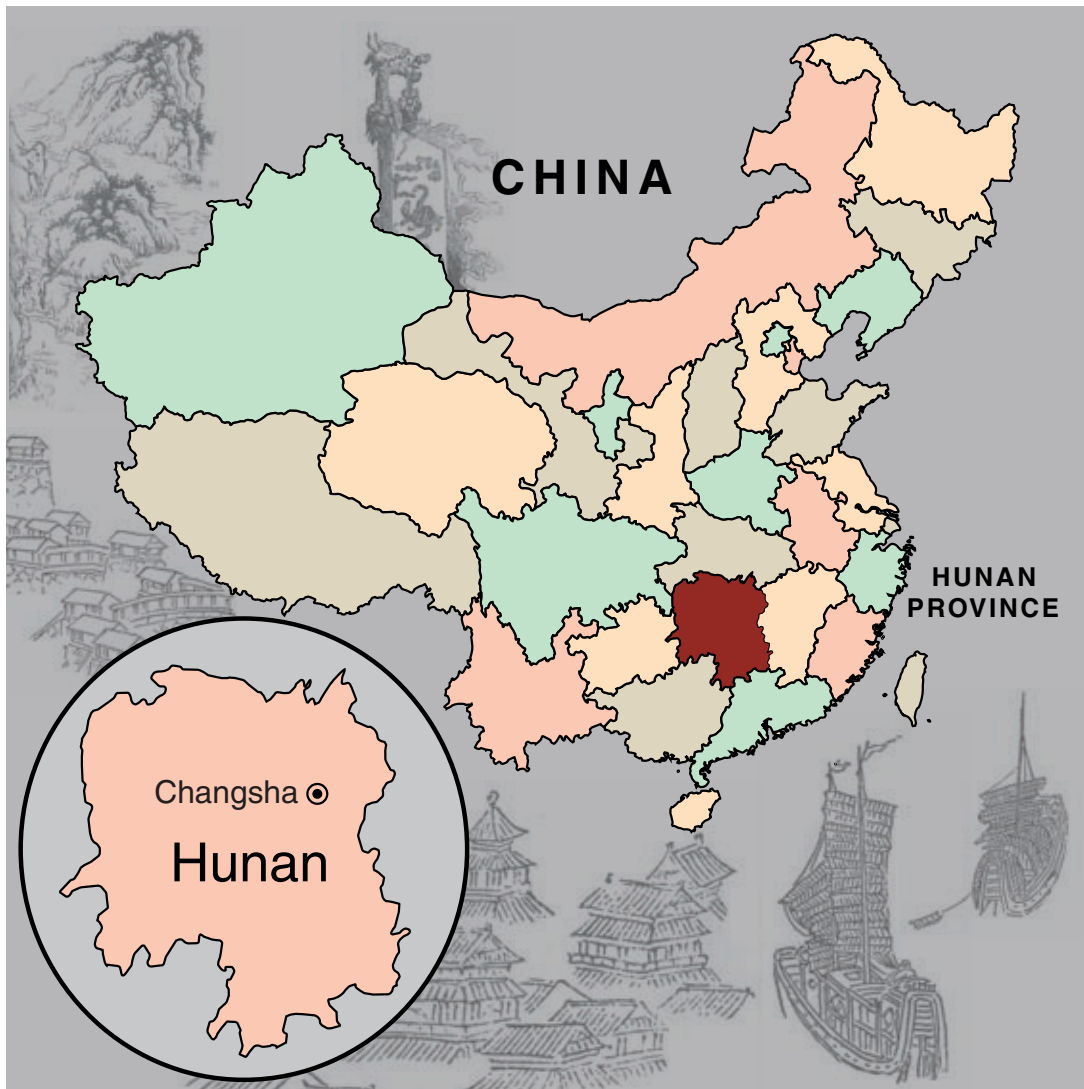
Hunan Province is located in south central China in the middle reaches of the Yangzi (Chang) River. The province has an area of 210,000 square kilometers (approximately twice the size of Iceland, although with over 200 times the population), with 136 counties and 13 cities. The provincial capital is Changsha (estimated 2007 population 6.53 million), a city recognized in Chinese history for more than 3,000 years; today it is a major river port on the Xiang River and commercial center. More than fifty minorities, including Miao, Tujia, Yao, and Hui, live in Hunan, but the majority of the population is Han Chinese.

The name "Hunan" comes from the fact that most of the province is located south of Dongting Lake, the second largest freshwater lake in China (after Poyang Lake): *hu* means "lake" and *nan* translates as "south." The longest river within Hunan Province is the Xiang River; because of this "Xiang" is often used as an abbreviation for Hunan.

With Dongting Lake to the north, the remainder of the province is surrounded by mountains and hills: the Wuling Mountains to the northeast, the Xuefeng Mountains to the west, the Nanling Mountains to the south, and the Luoxiao Mountains to the east.

The economy of Hunan is primarily agricultural; it is sometimes called "a land of fish and rice" because many of its products (such as rice, tea, corn, sweet potatoes, barley, potatoes, buckwheat, rapeseed, fruits, and tobacco leaf) are considered the best in the country. Hunan is the largest producer in China of rice, the second largest producer of tea, and the third largest producer of oranges. The Dongting Lake area has been important for its supply of freshwater fish; it is also a major center for the production of ramie, one of the world's oldest fiber crops. However, the Dongting Lake, one of the most famous lakes in Chinese history, has been polluted by a number of companies near the lake. Since 2001, the lake's water has ranked the fifth degree level, meaning that almost no wildlife is able to survive. (A first degree level means no pollution while a fifth degree level means severe pollution in which wildlife is unable to live.)

Hunan cuisine is justifiably admired around the world. Like Szechuan cuisine from neighboring Sichuan Province to the west, Hunan cuisine is very spicy, making considerable use of chile peppers. Because Hunan is quite distant from the sea, with access to freshwater fish but not much seafood, Hunan cooks tend to use a lot of rice, meat, bean curd, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and forest products. Elaborate preparation is also a hallmark of Hunan cookery.



Tourist Destination

Hunan Province has become a popular tourist destination as a result of its natural beauty. In addition, about 900 historic sites exist in Hunan Province, some of them dating back 8,000 years.

In 1988, the Chinese government established its first national forest in western Hunan—Zhangjiajie National Forest Park. Making up part of the Wulingyuan Scenic and Historic Interest Area, the forest park is well-known for its quartz-sandstone rock formations, sculpted through erosion and set among a forest of dense green with frequent inundations by clouds. The entire park is covered with more than 3,000 sandstone pillars (many more than 200

meters high), as well as caves, pools, waterfalls, streams, and other natural wonders. It was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1992 as a World Natural Heritage Site.

In southern Hunan, Mount Heng of the South is one of the five sacred mountains of Daoism, but it is also a sacred mountain to Buddhists; its summer resorts are also popular with people seeking mental and psychological treatment. To the north, Dongting Lake is frequently mist-covered in the early morning and very picturesque, despite its pollution. Located on the shores of Dongting Lake, Yueyang City is home to one of China's most famous towers, the Yueyang Pavilion. Originally built during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), the unique architecture of

this three-story building has attracted not only tourists, but poets and romantic scholars for a thousand years. To the east is Mawangdui, an archeological site containing the tombs of an aristocratic family dating from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Excavated in the early 1970s, thousands of relics have been unearthed, many preserved in near-perfect condition, including a mummified two-thousand-year-old female body.

Hunan is also the birthplace of a number of well known figures in Chinese history, including the poet Qu Yuan (340–278 BCE); the supposed inventor of paper, Cai Lun (50–121 CE); the painter Qi Baishi (1864–1957); and several twentieth-century revolutionaries and politicians of the People's Republic of China, most notably Mao Zedong (1893–1976), but also Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969), Peng Dehuai (1898–1974), Ren Bishi (1904–1950), He Long (1896–1969) and Zhu Rongji (b. 1928). Today, Shaoshan, where Mao was born, is a historic site for the Chinese Communist Party.

Unryu SUGANUMA

Further Reading

- A brief account of Zhangjiajie. (n.d.). Retrieved on January 11, 2009, from <http://www.zhangjiajie.com.cn/english/jianjie.asp>
- Changsha, Hunan Province. (2004, May 28). Hunan Dili Huangjing [Geography and Environment in Hunan]. *Jiangsu News*. Retrieved on January 13, 2009, from <http://www.jschina.com.cn/gb/jschina/2003/24/node6217/node6220/node6233/userobject1ai457872.html>
- Chen Xuejian, Jin Yongji, & Zhou Xinghua (Eds.). (2008). *Travel around China: The guide to exploring the sites, the cities, the provinces, and more*. New York: Collins.
- Kirk, M. (Ed.). (2009). *China by numbers 2009*. Hong Kong: China Economic Review Publishing.
- Parkinson, R. (2009). Hot in Hunan. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from <http://chinesefood.about.com/od/regionalchinesecuisine/p/hunan.htm>

Notoriety travels
farther away.

臭名远扬

Chòu míng yuǎn yáng