

## Blog 35 – Stone Forest

Our first stop in the trip was KunMing, the provincial capital of YunNan. In the suburb of KunMing, there's a forest park with no trees, but only stones; they call it the Stone Forest. This stone forest is two hundred and seventy million years old. There are many legends and fairy tales about the Stone Forest and its history. The people that are living in the area are called Sani people, a branch of the Yi ethnic group.



More than Three hundred million years ago, YunNan was under the sea! Over these millions of years, natural disasters including tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes and typhoons engraved and made many “ancient marks of nature” in these stones, forming them into what they look like now. The Stone Forest is an art camp filled with immense natural treasures, allowing visitors to observe, to discover and imagine. To me, the park is not only a forest, but a “zoo”! People use their imagination to make these stones come alive. One rock looks like an eagle with his wings open; another resembles an elephant; a few have the shape of a turtle and even of the famous Tom and Jerry figures!! One time, our whole family looked at a giant rock, trying to make out what it looks like. My dad said it looked like an eagle, my mom thought it looked like a dog and I insisted that it was a fish! Three animals in one rock -- isn't that so much better than a zoo? :) In addition to animals, some rocks look like mushrooms, flowers and different plants.

Not only did these grotesque rocks spark people's imagination, but some were also endowed with legends. One of the most well-known is the story of a beautiful Sani girl named Ashima. Ashima and her handsome and brave boyfriend Ahei were about to marry with each other when an evil landlord's son forced her to marry him. Ashima furiously fought back and was eventually rescued by her beloved Ahei. Unfortunately, when they were escaping to their home, Ashima was drowned in a rapid river. Days after, Ahei found out that his Ashima had turned into a stone. The Stone Forest then became Ashima's home forever. “Ashima” is now a common name used by the Sani people—it represents loving, beautiful and brave women.



*(“Ashima” and me)*

Living in the area for more than 2000 years, Sani people have recognized Stone Forest as part of their home. During our visit, a beautiful Sani girl was our tour guide. She lives in the near by village and graduated from college a year ago. Walking next to her, I couldn't help but stare at her outfit. It consist many layers of colorful fabric and a beautiful head piece. According to her, the head piece is the most important part of the outfit. People can tell whether the girl is married or not by looking at the head piece's decoration. I was really interested in the Sani people's traditional clothing and even tried one on myself! Putting the clothes on and taking the pictures didn't take any more than twenty minutes. But in such a short time, all that clothing and the headpiece weighed me down in the scorching hot weather; the big sun caused a lot of sweat to trickle down my face. I couldn't even imagine how the tour guide can stand it everyday, especially in the summer!



*In front of the “Ashima”, I took a picture with our tour guide in the Sani traditional cloth.*

Even though we only stayed in KunMing for one short day, the Stone Forest, the story of Ashima and the traditional Sani people gave me a deep impression. I like the beginning of our YunNan trip! ☺