

Guǎngxī 广西



Vastly outshone in GDP rankings and cosmopolitan kudos by neighbouring Guǎngdōng – from where most global Chinatowns draw their migrants and Cantonese cuisine – Guǎngxī is hands down the superior travel experience. Money-spinning Guǎngdōng to the east may bask in the lucrative glow of Hong Kong and Shēnzhèn, but in terms of sheer good looks, Guǎngxī's astonishing landscape effortlessly puts its famous neighbour in the shade.

The province conveniently bundles its must-see sights in the northeast, so travellers can breeze from one destination to the next with minimum effort. Famed throughout China and beyond, Guílín perhaps needs little introduction, but it's nearby Yángshuò that could have you writing a flurry of postcards. Fugitives from China's countless quirks are rapidly won over by the village's folksy charms: a cappuccino or two later and they're ready to admire the out-of-this-world karst scenery, take up kung fu, learn Mandarin, chinwag with the locals, recharge their batteries and prepare to plunge once more into the 'real China'. The Dong villages of Sānjiāng and the rice terraces of Lóngshèng need to be earmarked for earnest exploration, but make sure you also find time to be overwhelmed by the magnificent Detian Waterfall on the Vietnamese border.

Linguists will enjoy being tongue-tied. The *lingua franca* may be Mandarin, but the wooden northern dialect runs into stiff resistance from the sing-song melodies of Cantonese, the patois of choice for many Guǎngxī locals. Off-the-beaten-track forays can result in unforgettable encounters with folk who have never clapped eyes on foreigners, so be on your best behaviour!

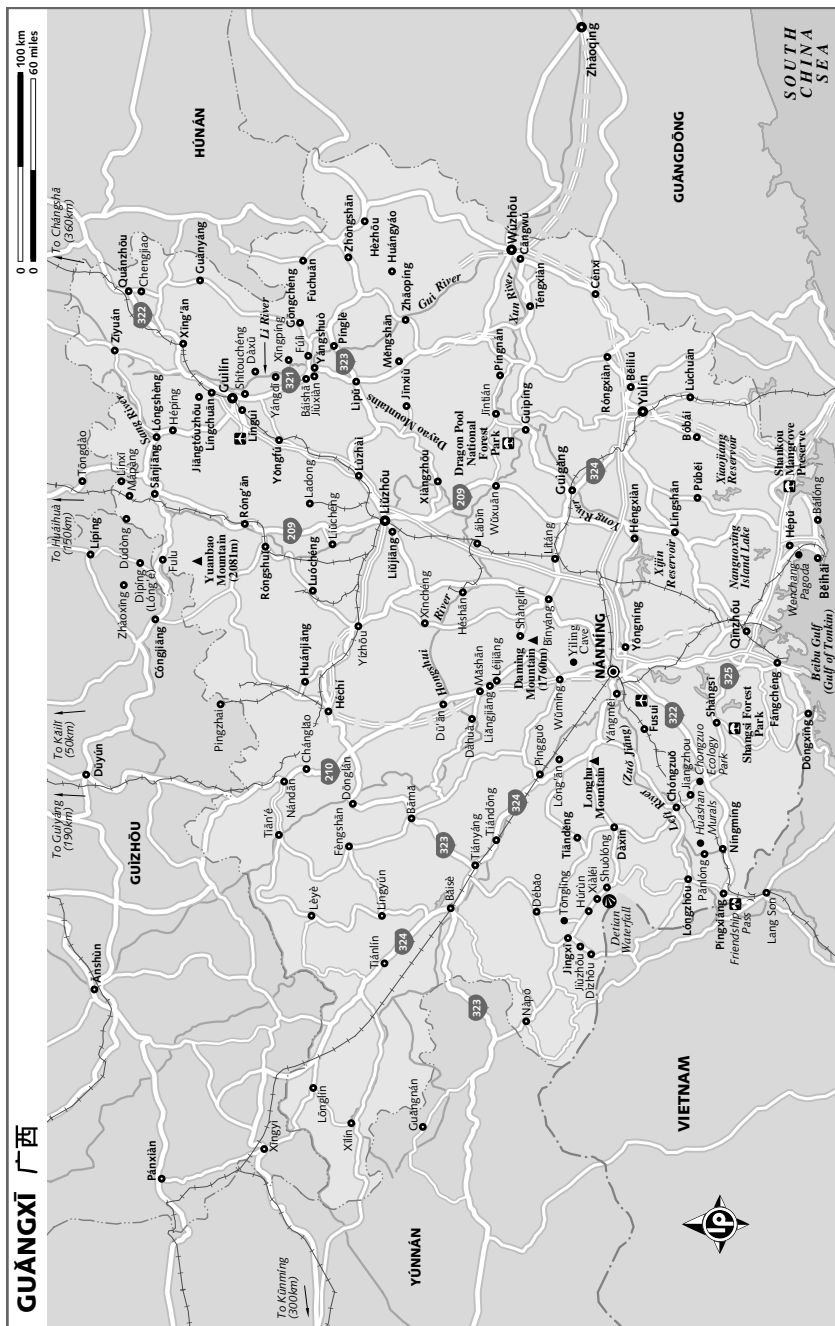
HIGHLIGHTS

- Warm to archetypal backpacker culture and China's most dreamlike scenery at **Yángshuò** (p166)
- Get a rush (and bars of Vietnamese coconut candy) alongside the crashing green waters and stupefying scenery of the **Detian Waterfall** (p208)
- Village hop above one of China's most photogenic vistas at Lóngshèng's **Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces** (p181)
- Trek through a string of Dong villages north of **Sānjiāng** (p184) and swoon before the region's fabulous wind-and-rain bridges
- Dine on Guilin Rice Noodles in **Guílín** (p154), possibly China's most celebrated tourist city



■ POPULATION: 44.19 MILLION

■ AREA: 236,300 SQ KM



HISTORY

Guǎngxī first came under Chinese sovereignty when a Qin dynasty army conquered what is now Guǎngdōng province and eastern Guǎngxī. Like the rest of the Southwest, the region had never been firmly under Chinese control; the eastern and southern parts of Guǎngxī were occupied by the Chinese, while a system of indirect rule through chieftains of the aboriginal Zhuang prevailed in the west.

The situation was complicated in the northern regions by the Yao (Mien) and Miao (Hmong) tribespeople, who had been driven there from their homelands in Húnán and Jiǎngxī by the advance of Han Chinese settlers. Unlike the Zhuang, who easily assimilated Chinese customs, the Yao and Miao remained in the hill regions, and were often cruelly oppressed by the Han. The tribes and the Han were involved in continuous conflicts. There was a major uprising in the 1830s, and another coincided with the Taiping Rebellion, which began in Guǎngxī.

Today the Zhuang people are China's largest minority group, with well over 15 million people concentrated in Guǎngxī. In 1955 Guǎngxī province was reconstituted as the Guǎngxī Zhuang Autonomous Region. The Zhuang are, however, virtually indistinguishable from the Han Chinese, the last outward vestige of their original identity being their linguistic links with the Thai people. Besides the Zhuang, Miao and Yao minorities, Guǎngxī is home to smaller numbers of Dong, Maonan, Mulao, Jing (Vietnamese Gin) and Yi peoples. Until very recently, 75% of Guǎngxī's population was non-Han.

China's first canal was built in Guǎngxī during the Qin dynasty, but the scattered Han were unable to use it for economic advantage and the province remained comparatively poor until the 20th century. The first attempts to modernise Guǎngxī were made in 1926–27 when the 'Guǎngxī Clique' (the main opposition to Chiang Kaishek within the Kuomintang) controlled much of Guǎngdōng, Húnán, Guǎngxī and Húběi. After the outbreak of war with Japan, the province was the scene of major battles and substantial destruction.

Despite recent improvements in the quality of life in Guǎngxī, the province remains one of China's less affluent areas, although the Chinese government's 'develop the west' programme has resulted in large public works

expenditure on roads, communications, water conservation and housing.

CLIMATE

Latitudinally, Guǎngxī may approximate balmy Florida in the USA, but don't just pack sunscreen and a bathing suit. Average temperatures range from 13°C in January to 28°C in August and pockets of malaria-carrying mosquitoes pose a year-round risk, but there's a clear north-south divide. On the edge of the Yúnnán-Guǐzhōu Plateau, Guǎngxī province slopes from a higher elevation in the northwest to the lower-lying southeast. Though still subtropical, highlands in the north of the province are more temperate than the steamier south, and winters can be cold and miserable. Much of the annual 150cm to 200cm of rain falls from June to August; less heavy (but more constant) early rains in March bring dismal, cold damp. Note that coastal regions can get hit by typhoons starting in summer. May, September and October are generally the best times to visit.

FESTIVALS

In the region of Sǎnjiǎng, popular festivals include the Bamboo Instrument Competition in Sǎnjiǎng and Dúdòng (first day of the first lunar month), Firecracker and Opera Festivals in Chéngyǎng (seventh day of the first lunar month), Méilín (second day of the second lunar month), Dòujiǎng (15th day of the second lunar month), Fùlù/Gǔyǐ (third day of third lunar month) and Shàiyǐ (fourth day of third lunar month). Bullfighting in Píngliú and Bǎxié is staged from the 15th to the 16th of the sixth lunar month. Festivals around Róngshuǐ include the Bamboo Instrument Festival in Róngshuǐ (13th day of the first lunar month), the Ancient Dragon Hill Festival in Xiǎngfēn (16th day of the first lunar month) and the New Tree Festival at Yuánbǎo Shān (sixth day of the sixth lunar month).

LANGUAGE

Travellers with knowledge of Mandarin will have few problems navigating Guǎngxī's linguistic universe, although the stubborn insistence on local dialects in small villages and rural backwaters can occasionally leave you speechless. Cantonese (Guǎngdōngghuà) speakers will be on the same wavelength as the locals in Nǎnníng, Guǐpíng, Wúzhōu, Chóngzuò, Píngxiáng, Dàxīn and Bǎisè,

although you won't hear it spoken in the northeast around Guilín, Lóngshèng or around Sānjiāng. The accent and vocabulary of Guǎngxī Cantonese may have Hong Kong Chinese getting all snooty, but mutual comprehension in towns as far-flung as Bǎisè is painless. In Guǎngxī, Cantonese is called *báihuà* (*baakwa* in Cantonese), literally 'white speech', which means 'common speech' as opposed to the *pūtōnghuà* (Mandarin). You will also see bilingual Chinese–Vietnamese signs in areas nearing Vietnam, and the Zhuang Romanisation system is prominently displayed; it looks like badly spelled pinyin. Rounding out the linguistic patchwork are the numerous minority languages, such as Zhuang, Dong, Xiang, Hmong, Lakkia, Sui, Hakka, Jing (Vietnamese) and Yi, as well as the Chinese Hakka dialect. Stiff resistance to the English language continues unabated, but locals in backpacker ghettos such as Yángshuò compensate with an astonishing grasp of colloquial argot and international slang.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Airports at Guilín, Liǔzhōu, Běihǎi and Nánning provide air links with the rest of China. Arriving in Guilín by air brings you immediately to Guǎngxī's most intriguing region, putting Yángshuò, Sānjiāng and Lóngshèng within easy reach. International flights from Guilín go to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul and Fukuoka. You can arrive in Guilín and Nánning (and to a lesser extent Liǔzhōu) by air from all over China.

Guǎngxī's principal rail junctions are at Liǔzhōu and Nánning, through which the province is linked to the rest of China via Húnán, Guizhōu, Yúnnán and Guǎngdōng. Vietnam is linked to Nánning by train, which passes through Chóngzuǒ, Níngmíng and Píngxiáng. Bus connections from Guǎngxī run to neighbouring Guǎngdōng, Yúnnán, Guizhōu, Húnán and beyond.

Despite its southern coastline, boats are only useful for reaching Hǎinán Island from Běihǎi.

GETTING AROUND

Guilín, Sānjiāng, Róngshuǐ, Bǎisè, Chóngzuǒ, Níngmíng and Píngxiáng are towns that can all be reached by train. Buses fan out across the entire province, following a network of expressways to the principal cities and taking

smaller roads for more peripheral destinations. Much of the eastern part of Guǎngxī cannot be reached by rail, so long and painful bus rides are the order of the day. Boats run from Běihǎi to the nearby island of Wéizhōu (p204).

GUILÍN 桂林

☎ 0773 / pop 690,000

Eulogised in fantastic terms by Chinese tourist literature and hyped into superstardom by an advertising machine that magnifies its each and every charm (see p202), Guilín takes its position among the aristocracy of China's top sights with confidence and more than a measure of complacency.

The city of Guilín is certainly attractive and is a pleasant enough first port of call in Guǎngxī province, although you may only fleetingly glimpse the heavenly beauty cooked up by the ad men and will find that precious few historic relics have survived to the present. For those aching to explore the fabulous karst scenery that undulates in otherworldly fashion across the surrounding countryside, Guilín's magic is frequently eclipsed by scenic Yángshuò to the south, where there are sure-fire opportunities for lazy exploration in a dreamlike landscape and a friendlier and more finely tuned tourist industry that gaily sets about looking after Western travellers.

A wealthy city enjoying a climate of economic prosperity, Guilín needs – like all other Chinese tourist cities – to strike the right balance between its evident charms and a booming tourist trade that is ever more in-your-face and relentless in its attentions. Touts and hawkers are highly motivated by the tinkle of tourist capital and some of the towns' sights are both expensive and mediocre, all of which results in a glut of 'best of/worst of' tales of Guilín.

Nonetheless, Guilín is pleasantly embroidered with greenery and Osmanthus trees, while the leafy city's extensive air, rail and bus connections make it an excellent base for exploring the northeast of Guǎngxī, where dozens of minority cultures, including large populations of Zhuang, Yao, Miao, Hui and Dong, intermingle and add their stamp to the gorgeous countryside.

The average temperature seems balmy at 20°C, but don't let that fool you. Come winter (December to February) Guilín can be

chilly, miserable and exceedingly damp, with 1900mm of annual precipitation.

History

The prefecture was established in 214 BC during the Qin dynasty but the city was not founded until 111 BC. It developed as a transport centre with the building of the Ling Canal linking the important Pearl and Yangzi river systems. Under the Ming it was the provincial capital, a status it retained until 1914 when Nánning became the capital. During the 1930s and throughout WWII, Guilín was a communist stronghold, and its population grew from about 100,000 to more than a million as people sought refuge here. Today it's home to around 690,000 people.

Orientation

The bulk of Guilín occupies the western bank of the Li River (漓江; Lǐ Jiāng). The main artery is Zhongshan Lu – divided into southern, middle and northern sections (Zhongshan Nanlu, Zhongshan Zhonglu and Zhongshan Beilu respectively) – running roughly parallel to the Li River on its western side. Guilín's main train station is situated at the southern end of Zhongshan Lu, with the main bus station to its north.

Closer to the heart of town is Rong Lake (Róng Hú), west of Zhongshan Zhonglu, and Shan Lake (Shān Hú) – the latter of these is romantically graced with charming pagodas – to the east. Northeast of the lakes is Central Sq (Zhōngxīn Guǎngchǎng), the city's focal point and principal shopping and eating district. Many of Guilín's most popular restaurants and cafés lie scattered along pedestrianised Zhengyang Lu and partially pedestrianised Yiren Lu to the east of Central Sq.

The ancient walled enclosure surrounding Guilín's Ming dynasty palace (Wáng Chéng) can be found to the north of Jiefang Lu, which crosses Zhongshan Zhonglu at right angles. Heading east, Jiefang Lu traverses Liberation Bridge (解放桥; Jiěfàng Qiáo) to the massive Seven Stars Park. Most of the limestone pinnacles form a circle around the town, though a few of these pop up within the city limits.

Maps

Several reliable maps for Guilín are hawked citywide, including the *Tour and Communication Map of Guilín* (Y6), which includes some English. Maps of town are also

available at Guilín Book City and Daofeng Bookshop.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Daofeng Bookshop (Dǎofēng Shūdiàn; 18 Binjiang Lu; ☎ 9am–10.30pm) Located next to Little Italian, this smart bookstore has a decent range of books, movies and music. Some English titles are in the travel section where a good selection of maps can be found.

Guilín Book City (Guilín Shūchéng; Zhongshan Zhonglu) Selection of English-language titles on the 3rd floor.

INTERNET ACCESS

Some cafés around town, such as Little Italian (p162) and **Global Mini Café** (Dìqiúcūn Kǎfēi Xiǎowū; ☎ 292 7227; 138-2 Zhengyang Lu), offer free internet access. Numerous internet cafés can be found in the alleys near the Jinfeng Hotel, north of Central Sq. Prices kick off from around Y1.5 per hour.

Botanical Garden Internet Bar (Yuánlín Wǎngbǎ; Zhongshan Nanlu; per hr Y1.5; ☎ 24hr)

Jinhu Internet Café (Jīnhú Wǎngbǎ; Zhongshan Zhonglu; per hr Y0.8–2; ☎ 24hr)

Wenchang Internet Café (Wēnchāng Wǎngbǎ; Nanhuan Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr)

INTERNET RESOURCES

A good source of information on the town is www.guilin.com.cn.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Guoyao Pharmacy (Guóyào Dàiyàofáng; 19 Nanhuan Lu; ☎ 8am–8pm)

People's Hospital (Rénmín Yīyuàn; Wenming Lu)

MONEY

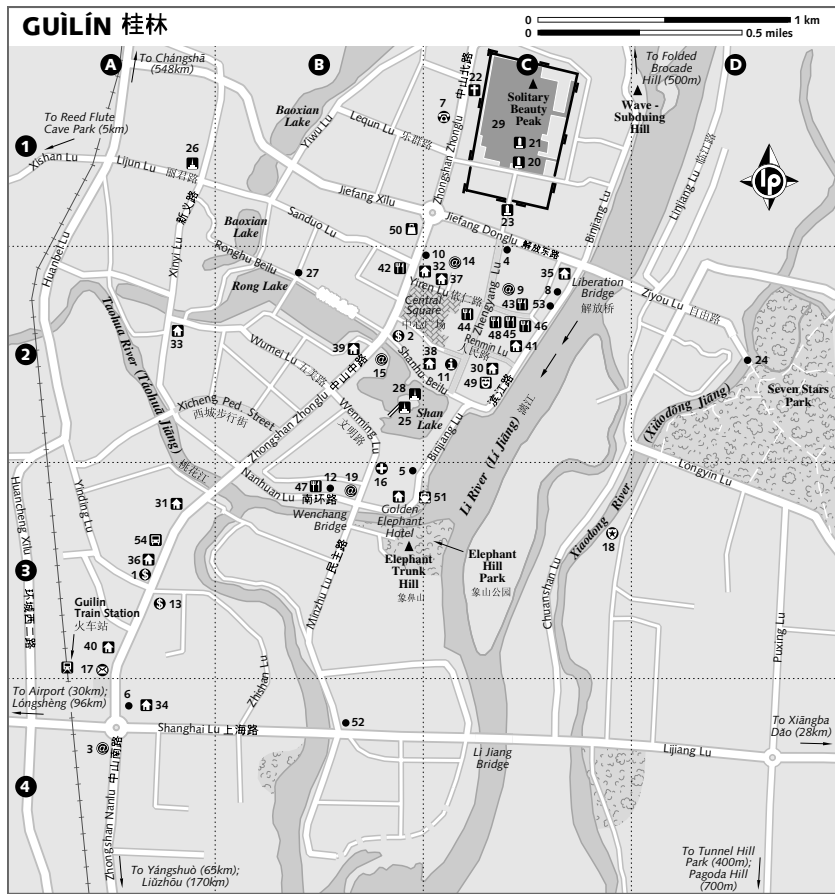
The Bank of China and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China generally have ATMs that accept international cards. An ATM that takes international cards can be found at the Lijiang Waterfall Hotel (p160).

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Zhongshan Nanlu; north of train station) Foreign exchange; ATM taking international cards. There also a branch with a foreign exchange on Zhongshan Zhonglu.

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (Gōngshāng Yínháng; Zhongshan Nanlu) ATM taking international cards.

PHOTOGRAPHY

CD Burning (Wǎngchéng Bǎihuò; Jiefang Donglu) Several computer kiosks on the 4th floor burn CDs for Y20 per disc.



POST & COMMUNICATIONS

China Telecom (Zhōngguó Diànxìn; 53 Zhongshan Zhonglu; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm) IC cards are available to buy here.

Post Office (Yóujú; 57 Zhongshan Zhonglu; ☎ 8am-7pm) The post office is just north of China Telecom. There's a branch of China Eastern (Dōngfāng Hángkōng; ☎ 311 7788) on the 2nd floor of this post office building. There's also a handy post office branch that can be found just north of the train station on Zhongshan Nanlu.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (Gōngānjū; ☎ 582 9930; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) This is found on the east side of the Li River (Lǐ Jiāng) and is south off Longyin Lu. This office offers visa extensions.

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

There are plenty of Guilin Tourist Information Service Centers (Guilín Lǎyóu Zìxún Fúwù Zhōngxīn) around town, but they may simply hose a young girl chatting on her mobile alongside wilting flyers for city tours, so don't get too excited. One of the better examples can be found next to the South Gate and an efficient counter can also be found at Liangjiang Airport. CITS offices are everywhere, even cropping up downstairs from the Guilin Flowers Youth Hostel (p160).

CITS (Zhōngguó Guójī Lǔxīngshè; ☎ 286 1623; www.guilintravel.com; 41 Binjiang Beilu) Offers tours, including day-long city tours (Y400) and a full-day Li River tour (Y450). **Guilin Tourist Information Hotline** (☎ 280 0318)

INFORMATION

- Bank of China 中国银行.....1 A3
- Bank of China 中国银行.....2 B2
- Botanical Garden Internet Bar
- 园林网吧.....3 A4
- CD Burning 王城百货.....4 C2
- China International Travel Service 中国国际旅行社.....5 B3
- China International Travel Service 中国国际旅行社.....6 A4
- China Telecom 中国电信.....7 C1
- Daofeng Bookshop 刀锋书店.....8 C2
- Global Mini Café
- 地球村咖啡小屋.....9 C2
- Guilin Book City 桂林书城.....10 C2
- Guilin Tourist Information Service Center 桂林旅游咨询服务中心...11 C2
- Guilin Tourist Information Service Center 桂林旅游咨询服务中心 (see 27)
- Guoyao Pharmacy 国药大药房.....12 B3
- Industrial and Commercial Bank of China 工商银行.....13 A3
- Internet Cafés 网吧.....14 C2
- Jinhu Internet Café 江湖网吧.....15 B2
- People's Hospital 人民医院.....16 B3
- Post Office 邮局.....17 A3
- Post Office 邮局 (see 7)
- PSB 公安局.....18 C3
- Wenchang Internet Café
- 文昌网吧.....19 B3

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- Chengyun Gate 承运门.....20 C1
- Chengyun Hall 承运殿.....21 C1
- Christian Church 基督教教堂.....22 C1
- 园林 Gate 端礼门.....23 C1
- Flower Bridge 花桥.....24 D2
- Moon Pagoda 月塔.....25 B2
- Nengren Temple 能仁禅寺.....26 A1
- South Gate 南门.....27 B2
- Sun Pagoda 日塔.....28 B2
- Wáng Chéng 王城.....29 C1

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- Aunt 好大妈.....42 B2
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- Inaka Japanese Restaurant 田舍回转寿司.....45 C2
- Little Italian 这里.....(see 8)
- Nengren Vegetarian Restaurant 能仁斋馆.....(see 26)
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- Yiyuan Restaurant 怡园饭店.....47 B3
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- Backstreet Youth Hostel 后街国际青年旅舍.....30 C2
- City Garden Hotel 城市花园酒店.....31 A3
- Fengyuan Hotel 丰源酒店.....32 C2
- Guilin Bravo Hotel 桂林宾馆.....33 A2
- Guilin Flowers Youth Hostel 花满楼国际青年旅舍.....34 A4
- Hotel Universal 环球大酒店.....35 C2
- Huali Hotel 华丽酒店.....36 A3
- Jinfeng Hotel 金丰宾馆.....37 C2
- Lijiang Waterfall Hotel 漓江大瀑布饭店.....38 C2
- Lixin Hotel 立新饭店.....39 B2
- Ocean Hotel 奥森酒店.....40 A3
- Sheraton Guilin 大宇大饭店.....41 C2

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ENTERTAINMENT

- Lijiang Theatre 漓江剧场.....49 C2

SHOPPING

- Guilin Niko Niko Do Plaza 微笑堂商厦50 B1

TRANSPORT

- Boats to Yangshuo.....51 C3
- CAAC Office 中国民航.....52 B4
- Dragonair 港龙航空.....(see 33)
- Guilin Air Service Co Ltd 桂林旅游航空服务有限公司53 C2
- Main Bus Station 客运站.....54 A3

Dangers & Annoyances

Whether it's a price hike in the cost of a meal or a wildly circuitous taxi ride, many travellers can count on having to deal with overcharging. Stay alert to potential rip-offs and calmly negotiate prices first. Ignore taxi drivers who insist the hotel you plan to stay in is either bad value, run down or full, and come up with alternatives; they are commissioned to take you to pre-arranged hotels. Don't be drawn into even taking a look at the hotel room and insist on choosing somewhere yourself. And keep the word 'calm' in mind no matter what – it's easy to lose your cool and that makes things worse.

Be wary of students wanting to practise English with you. Signs of possible scam artists include a willingness to discuss ways of spending your money. Also, be alert to pickpockets, especially around the train station. We receive a steady stream of letters from fellow travellers warning of scam tour guides and bad experiences in Guilin.

The explosion of touts in Guilin has meant that offers of massages, escort services and sex have skyrocketed. Males walking down Zhengyang Lu will have to fend off offers of massage and sex at every turn and it can become tiring.

Sights & Activities

SOLITARY BEAUTY PEAK 独秀峰
At the centre of town, the 152m **pinnacle** (Dúxiù Fēng; ☎ 285 2203; 1 Wāngchéng; 王城1号; admission Y50; ☎ 8am-6pm) affords steep climbs topped with excellent views over Guilin, the river and surrounding peaks. The entrance fee includes admission to **Wáng Chéng** (靖江王府; Jìngjiāng Wángfǔ; 1 Wāngchéng), also known as Jingjiang Prince's City, a 14th-century Ming prince's mansion, dating back to the reign of Hongwu, that was built by the nephew of the emperor, Jing Jiang, and is now home to Guangxi Normal University. During the Qing dynasty, the palace served as the Guangxi Provincial Examination House, and later Sun Zhongshan commandeered the grounds for his northern expedition from here. The entrance to Wáng Chéng is via **Chengyun Gate** on the palace's southern perimeter, which leads to the single-eaved **Chengyun Hall** behind, an examination hall with Solitary Beauty Peak to the north, as well as a small **Confucius Temple** (孔庙; Kǒng Miào). Chengyun Gate itself is accessed via two historic gates, **Zunyi Gate** in the west and **Tiren Gate** to the east. The gate to the south of the palace is **Duanli Gate**, marking the north-south line that runs through the complex.

Buses 1 and 11 go up Zhongshan Beilu past the western side of the peak. Alternatively, take bus 2, which goes past the eastern side along the river. Both buses leave from Guilín train station.

WAVE-SUBDUING HILL 伏波山

Close to Solitary Beauty Peak and beside the western bank of the Li River, this **peak** (Fúbō Shān; admission Y15; ☞ dusk to dawn) offers fine views of the town. Upon entering through the gate, look out for the large rice pot left behind from the Dingyue Temple – it's big enough to cook rice for 1000 people.

On the southern slope of the hill is **Returned Pearl Cave** (Huánzhū Dòng). The story goes that the cave was illuminated by a single pearl and inhabited by a dragon; one day a fisherman stole the pearl but he was overcome by shame and returned it. A 1000-year-old Buddha image is etched into the wall somewhere in the cave, along with more than 200 other images of the Buddha, most dating from the Song and Tang dynasties. Somewhere, too, is a portrait and autograph by Mi Fu, a famous calligrapher of the Song dynasty. A sad sight is the Sword Testing Stones, which are remnants of stalactites hacked off by soldiers of a warlord showing off their metal and mettle.

Nearby is **Thousand Buddha Cave** (千佛岩; Qiānfó Yán), though the name's an exaggeration – there seem to be a couple of dozen statues at most, dating from the Tang and Song dynasties.

Bus 2 runs past the hill.

FOLDED BROCADE HILL 叠彩山

This **hill** (Diécǎi Shān; admission Y20) affords some of Guilín's best views, complemented by restored pavilions, some originally dating from the Ming dynasty. Climb the stone pathway that leads you through the cooling relief of Wind Cave (风洞; Fēng Dòng), its walls decked with inscriptions and Buddhist sculptures, some damaged during the Cultural Revolution. Buses 1 and 2 run past the hill.

SEVEN STARS PARK 七星公园

Voted by some travellers as one of Guilín's star attractions, 137-hectare **Seven Stars Park** (Qīxīng Gōngyuán; park admission Y35, Seven Star Cave admission Y30; ☞ park 6am–9.30pm, caves 8am–5.30pm) sits on the eastern side of the Li River. Cross Liberation Bridge and continue to the end of Jiefang Donglu.

Traversing **Flower Bridge** (花桥; Huā Qiáo) into the park from the main gate, one of the first things you will notice is a political slogan carved deeply and ineradicably into the rock on your left at the end of the bridge; the characters proclaim 'Long Live Mao Zedong Thought' (毛泽东思想万岁). To the north, **Qixia Temple** (Qixia Si) is one of Guilín's few Buddhist temples, although it is a late-20th-century restoration (it was frequently a victim of war and revolt).

The park was one of the original tourist spots in China's Southwest, and was first opened to sightseers as far back as the Sui dynasty. It takes its name from its seven peaks, which are supposed to resemble the Ursa Major (Big Dipper) constellation. Much of the park is characterised by somewhat disingenuous effects: sculpted rocks, fake waterfalls, concrete paths and swings where you can sit for a photo framed by two peacocks (Y10), but attractive trails wind in and around the hills and you can picnic on the sprawling lawns. Copious English signs steer you around the park to the major sights, or head up to **Round Viewing Pavilion** (Kuànguān Tíng) to get your bearings and a view of the park.

The park's two highlights are **Seven Star Cave** (七星岩; Qīxīng Yán) – its stalagmites and stalactites coloured by floodlights – and **Dark Dragon Cave** (龙脊洞; Lóngjǐ Dòng), with inscribed stelae that date back more than 1500 years. A further attraction is **Camel Peak** (Luòtuō Shān), which indeed resembles a ruminating ship of the desert. View the hill from the front for its two-hump Bactrian camel impersonation or from the rear for its impression of a single-hump dromedary camel. In front of Camel Peak is a weather-beaten podium used by ex-President Bill Clinton when making a speech here; nearby is a sad-looking zoo, eager for both investment and visitors.

For Y50 you can get your wedding photo taken in the park. There is even a small mosque in the grounds.

To reach the park, take bus 10 or 11 from the train station. From the park, free bus 58 runs to Wave-Subduing Hill, Folded Brocade Hill and Reed Flute Cave.

TUNNEL HILL PARK 穿山公园

South of Seven Stars Park and still on the eastern side of the Li River, this **park** (Chuānshān Gōngyuán; admission Y45) is expensive, but rates a mention as many locals insist its cave is

superior to those of Seven Stars Park. If you tire of the cave, you can cross the Xiaodong River (小东江; Xiǎodōng Jiāng) – a small branch of the Li – and hike up to a fairly interesting pagoda on **Pagoda Hill** (塔山; Tǎ Shān). Near the summit of the hill is a wind-eroded chasm that supposedly resembles a moonscape from afar.

REED FLUTE CAVE PARK 芦笛公园

Resembling a set from *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and the garish highlight of the park, **Reed Flute Cave** (Lúdí Gōngyuán; admission Y60; ☞ 8am–6pm) is a huge cave of multicoloured lighting and fantastic stalactites, stalagmites and other geological curiosities. The entrance to the cave was once distinguished by clumps of reeds used by locals to fashion musical instruments, hence the name.

The **Crystal Palace of the Dragon King** grotto can comfortably hold about 1000 people, though many more crammed in here during the war when the cave was used as an air-raid shelter to protect the locals.

Entry is pricey and you may want to try and slip away from the tiresome tour to explore by yourself. Surrounding walks in the park, including those up to Half-Hill Pavilion and across to Lotus Pond, are pleasant.

The park is on the northwestern outskirts of town. Take bus 3 (Y1.50) from the train station to the last stop or hop on free bus 58. Alternatively, it's a pleasant half-hour bicycle ride. Follow the bus route along Lijun Lu, which runs into Xishan Lu and then Taohua Jiang Lu. The latter parallels the small Taohua River (桃花江; Tāohuā Jiāng) and winds through fields and karst peaks. At Ludi Lu turn left and continue for another 1.2km.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At the southern end of Guilín where the Li River and the Taohua River converge, one of Guilín's best-promoted sights is **Elephant Hill Park**, where **Elephant Trunk Hill** (Xiāngbí Shān; admission Y25) – unlike other misshapen lumps of rock with tenuous names extracted from Chinese myth – indeed resembles a proboscidean mammal dipping its snout into the Li River. Visit Water Moon Cave and head up the peak walk to Puxian Pagoda (Pǔxián Tǎ) for views of the park and the picturesque Li River. Cormorant fishing in the Li River is a popular tourist drawcard (Y10). Take bus 2 or freebie buses 57 or 58 to the hill.

The heavily promoted and badly named **Water System in Guilín (Two Rivers and Four Lakes)** (两江四湖; Liǎngjiāng Sìhú; ☎ 288 5898) waterborne tour (advertises carpet the entire city) conveys visitors along a circuit of Guilín's lakeside and riverside scenery. **Boats** (standard boat adult/child Y149/75, air-con boat adult/child Y155/78, deluxe boat adult/child Y175/88; trip duration 90min) run between the hours of 8am and 10.30pm, departing from Liberation Bridge, nosing up the Li River and under Mulong Bridge to Mulong Lake (木龙湖; Mùlóng Hú), through Baoxian Lake (宝贤湖; Bǎoxián Hú) to Rong Lake and the pagodas of Shan Lake, before drifting down the Taohua River to Wenchang Bridge (文昌桥; Wénchāng Qiáo). Departure and destination points can vary according to the season. Further **boats** (standard boat adult/child Y180/90, air-con boat adult/child Y185/98; trip duration 60min) make briefer circular trips from Mulong Lake to Rong and Shan Lakes. Tickets for both boat trips are available at agents across the city or from the ticket office at the Sun and Moon Twin Pagodas.

A popular tourist trip from Guilín is the boat to Yángshuò down the Li River. Budget travellers have been put off by the exorbitant ticket prices, presently standing at more than Y400, including lunch and the bus trip back to Guilín from Yángshuò. If you don't mind joining a Chinese tour group, then you will only have to pay around Y200 for the same service, just without the English-speaking guide.

During the summer, morning tour boats depart from Guilín from a jetty across the road from the Golden Elephant Hotel at around 8am, although when the water is low you have to take a shuttle bus to Zhújiāng, Mópánshān wharf or Yángdi downriver. For trips booked through hotels, buses usually pick you up at around 7.30am to 8am and take you to the boat. The ticket office for the trip is across the road from the park entrance, on the same side of the street as the Golden Elephant Hotel. The trip lasts all day, and some people find that the time drags towards the end. It's probably not worth it if you're going to be spending any length of time in Yángshuò, where you can organise personalised trips through villagers and more picturesque boat trips to nearby villages.

Famed more for its natural wonders than for its spiritual civilisation, Guilín has few Buddhist temples of note. A modern-looking

and rather gaunt grey stone **Christian Church** (Jídù Jiàotáng) can be found at 50 Zhongshan Zhonglu. The **Sun and Moon Twin Pagodas** (Rìyuè Shuāng Tǎ; admission Y20; ☎ 8am-10.30pm) elegantly embellish the scenery of Shan Lake. Octagonal seven-storey Moon Pagoda (Yuè Tǎ) is connected to Sun Pagoda (Rì Tǎ) – the world's tallest copper pagoda – by an underwater tunnel. Constructed from a staggering 350 tons of copper (don't climb during lightning storms unless you want to be truly illuminated), the 41m-high Sun Pagoda has nine floors; one of the world's few pagodas equipped with a lift. Artful Chinese *gǔzhēng* (zither) performances are held in the choicely positioned teahouse near the base of Sun Pagoda.

On the northern shore of Rong Lake, the **South Gate** (Nán Mén; 13 Ronghu Beilu) is all that remains of the old city wall. Strikingly illuminated, the gate is one of the features of a pleasant lakeside walk around the shores of Rong and Shan Lakes.

At 8.30pm a nightly artificial **waterfall show** is performed on the north side of the **Lijiang Waterfall Hotel** (Lǐjiāng Dàpǔbù Fǎndiàn; ☎ 282 2881; 1 Shanhu Beilu; 杉湖北路1号). If you want to watch early-morning taichi practitioners performing their slow-motion routines to music blaring from speakers, Central Sq is the place.

Tours

There's no shortage of tour operators offering half- or full-day tours of Guilín's major sights. Ask at any of the towns' plentiful travel agencies, many of which can be found around the train and bus stations and along Binjiang Lu. Prices usually do not include admission fees to individual sights. Alternatively, hire a bicycle or taxi (see p164) for the day to take you around the sights at your own pace.

Festivals & Events

The annual **Dragon Boat Festival** (Duānwǔ Jié), held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, sees spectacular dragon boat races along the Li River. Superfit cycling aficionados may like to consider the **Yaoshan Race** (尧山登山赛; Yáoshān Dēngshānsài; ☎ 286 9331; www.guilinyaoshan.com), a gruelling bike race to the top of nearby Yáoshān (尧山) in the east of town.

Sleeping

Hotels are all around the train station area, but few offer comfort or style and the district is devoid of charm. The area on and around

Binjiang Lu and Central Sq is more congenial and puts you closer to the sights and restaurants. In virtually every respect, Yángshuò is a more pleasant place to spend the night.

BUDGET

Backstreet Youth Hostel (Hòujiē Guójī Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 281 9936; guilinhostel@hotmail.com; 3 Renmin Lu; 人民路3号; 6- & 7-bed dm Y40, s & d Y110, tr Y160; ☎ ☎) Way out ahead of other budget competitors, this hostel stands out for its winning location in the heart of things on Renmin Lu, a small street just south of the Sheraton poking west off Binjiang Lu. There's a welcoming lobby area, with rooms arranged with reproduction antique Chinese dark-wood furniture, huge beds in the doubles and pleasant touches such as traditional Chinese knockers on doors. DVDs are available in the foyer for communal viewing on comfy seating. Internet is Y10 for 10 minutes; bike rental is Y20 per day. No phones in rooms. Offers discounts to members.

Guilin Flowers Youth Hostel (Huāmàn Lóu Guójī Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 383 9625; www.yhaguilin.com; Block 2, 6 Shangzhi Lane, off Zhongshan Nanlu; 中山南路尚智巷6号2楼; dm Y40, s/d/tw without shower Y55/90/90, d & tw with shower Y120; ☎ ☎) Not nearly as pleasant as the Backstreet, this place is at least handy to the train and bus stations, although the district is charmless. The lobby is bright and strewn with comfy sofas draped in throws, and the staff is welcoming. It's a bit hard to find: look out for the Xingye Hotel opposite the train station and follow the alley behind. Bike rental (per half/full day Y15/25, deposit Y250), internet access (three terminals; per hour Y5), pool table, DVDs, wi-fi, bar, small library of unwanted books, laundry room. Offers discounts to members.

Ocean Hotel (Aosēn Jiūdiàn; ☎ 383 5349; fax 382 5818; 95 Zhongshan Nanlu; 中山南路95号; d Y120) This undersized and unassuming two-star place has surprisingly spacious doubles and twins, discounted temptingly to around Y70 in slacker months. Located north of the train station.

Huali Hotel (Huáli Jiūdiàn; ☎ 383 6409; fax 382 7103; 257 Zhongshan Nanlu; 中山南路257号; s/d/tr Y220/280/380) One of the better budget hotels in the area, this convenient and popular hotel is well kept, quiet and clean, with doubles often discounted to around Y140. It's located south of the bus station.

Lixin Hotel (Lìxīn Fǎndiàn; ☎ 282 2605; 19 Zhongshan Zhonglu; 中山中路19号; s & d Y260, tr Y280) Go for rooms with the best views (called *guānjǐng*

fáng; 观景房) out over Shan Lake to the pagodas. The hotel is located on bustling Zhongshan Zhonglu, with the night market right on your doorstep, although the raucous music from the adjacent shop is a letdown. Rooms are fresh and recently refitted, with fake-wood flooring. Discounts see doubles typically tumble to around Y120.

MIDRANGE

Fengyuan Hotel (Fēngyuán Jiūdiàn; ☎ 282 7262; 26 Zhongshan Zhonglu; 中山中路26号; d/ste Y280/380; ☎ ☎) A standard but affordable and decent midrange hotel with clean rooms and bathrooms, polite service and a good location on the northern cusp of Central Sq at the intersection of Zhongshan Zhonglu and Yiren Lu. Rooms are on the 5th, 6th and 7th floors. Air ticketing available.

Jinfeng Hotel (Jīnfēng Bīngguǎn; ☎ 288 2781; fax 288 2781; north of Yiren Lu & Central Sq; s/d/tr Y388/488/580; ☎ ☎) Its central location, tucked away down an alley north of Central Sq, spacious rooms with bathroom, and good discounts (doubles down to around Y150 to Y180), make this place worth considering. The cafés and restaurants of Zhengyang Lu and Yiren Lu are a short walk away.

City Garden Hotel (Chéngshì Huāyuán Jiūdiàn; ☎ 386 1888; fax 386 1000; 75 Zhongshan Nanlu; 中山南路75号; s/d/ste Y398/498/780; ☎ ☎) There's a clean, recently renovated feel at this fresh three-star place spanning eight floors. It has English-speaking staff, a smart lobby area and plush rooms with recently redone bathrooms. Doubles generally drop to around Y200. Just north of the bus station.

TOP END

Hotel Universal (Huánqiú Dǎjiūdiàn; ☎ 282 8228; htlnivis@public.glpptt.gx.cn; 1 Jiefang Donglu; 解放东路1号; r with garden-view Y664, r/ste with Li River-view Y830/1245; ☎ ☎) Decorated with reproduction traditional furniture, the stylish lobby interior doesn't extend effectively to the rest of the hotel, where dated rooms and corridors need attention. Take a look at the room first to ensure it has the view you are after as some simply look out onto the road. There's bike rental (per hour/day Y8/50, deposit Y500), though readers have said bikes need attention.

Guilin Bravo Hotel (Guilín Bīngguǎn; ☎ 289 8888; fax 289 3999; www.glbavohotel.com; 14 Ronghu Nanlu; 榕湖南路14号; d Y1050; ☎ ☎) There's a predominantly Chinese feel to this hotel and it remains one of Guilín's best, with comfortable rooms and a decent selection of restaurants. Inspect

river-view rooms before paying your deposit as trees growing on the Li River's banks can obscure the view.

Sheraton Guilin (Guilín Dàyuè Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 282 5588; www.sheraton.com/guilin; 15 Binjiang Lu; 滨江路15号; d/ste Y1245/2370; ☎ ☎ ☎) It's an old hotel with a dated feel and a thorough refit is needed to add sparkle, but the five-star Sheraton remains one of the better hotels in town with an excellent location. Outdoor swimming pool, gym and sauna. Branch of Air Macau (☎ 286 5400). Wheelchair accessible.

Eating

Celebrated Guilín dishes include Guilín rice noodles (桂林米粉; *Guilín mǐfěn*) – found all over China but only true to form here – nun's vegetarian noodles (尼姑素面; *nígū sùmiàn*), Lijiang fish with pine nuts (松子漓江鱼; *sōngzǐ Lǐjiāng yú*), water chestnut cake (马蹄糕; *mǎtí gāo*), beer duck (啤酒鸭; *píjiǔ yā*), Guilín lotus leaf duck (桂林荷叶鸭; *Guilín héyè yā*) and Guilín snails (*Guilín tiánluó*). Dog meat (狗肉; *gǒuròu*) is highly popular, so check what you are ordering if you want to avoid accidentally devouring Fido and family (see p193). A Qing dynasty speciality, white fermented bean curd is often used to make a sauce for dipping roast pork or chicken. Sanhua wine, actually more like mellow rice firewater, is a favourite local drink, as is local oil tea (油茶; *yóuchá*), which is actually quite salty, with flecks of rice in it. Generally the most exotic food you will come across is eel, catfish, pigeon and dog, although delicacies such as wild boar, lynx, bamboo partridge, giant salamander, crocodile and bamboo rat still crop up on menus.

Wander lively Yiren Lu to the north and east of Central Sq for a great selection of restaurants, cafés and hole-in-the-wall eateries.

Guilin Ren (☎ 281 0545; www.glr.com.cn; Yiren Lu; 依仁路; from Y5; ☎ 7am-midnight) Cheap set local meals at this ever-popular and handy restaurant designed with a fast-food, no-nonsense approach. Orange-and-white-clad employees even go through motivational songs to boost morale and foster team spirit. There's no English menu, but dishes include three-flavours hotpot (三鲜火锅; *sānxiān Huǒguō*; Y12) and black pepper beef with rice (黑椒牛柳砂钵饭; *hēijiāo niúliú shābō fàn*; Y13). Instant coffee served.

Nengren Vegetarian Restaurant (Néngrén Zhāiguǎn; ☎ 286 8845; 6 Lijun Lu; 丽君路6号; meals from Y10;

☎ 9.30am-2pm & 4.30-8pm; ❶) Fantabulous veggie dishes cooked up within chanting range of the main hall of the Nengren Buddhist Temple on the corner of Xinyi Lu and Lijun Lu. Let the vast menu (Chinese only) take your tastebuds to Nirvana and sample the Nengren vegetable dumplings (能仁斋饺子; *néng rén zhāi jiǎozi*; Y4), the ample curry mock beef noodles (咖喱素牛肉面; *gā lí sù niúròu miàn*; Y5) or the straightforward traditional vegetable noodles (传统素面; *chuántǒng sùmiàn*; Y2).

Baiwei Dumpling Restaurant (Bǎiwèi Jiǎoziguǎn; ☎ 210 6743; 9-5 Libin Lu; 漓滨路9-5号; meals Y15-20; ☎ 6.30am-11pm) Lively, popular and centrally located pocket-sized place busy with diners and a decent menu of wholesome, steaming *jiǎozi* (饺子; dumplings). No English menu.

Yiyuan Restaurant (Yīyuán Fàndiàn; ☎ 282 0470; Nanhuan Lu; 南环路; dishes from Y18; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-9.30pm) This outstanding, inexpensive Sichuanese restaurant on Nanhuan Lu has a tasteful all-wood exterior and an English menu. The owner imports all her spices from Sichuan and you can taste the difference. Try the stir-fried eel with dried chilli and Sichuan spices (Y22).

Aunt (Hāodāmā; ☎ 286 9999; 中山中路, 八桂大厦; 4th fl, Bagui Mansion, Zhongshan Zhonglu; meals Y20; ☎ 11am-9pm) Take a pew in this cavernous dining hall and a waitress (some English-speaking) will hand you a card; convey it to the counter of your choice, point and choose from the arranged dishes and your choice goes down on the card – couldn't be simpler. A cornucopia of Chinese and Asian dishes is on view, from *roti prata* (bread; Y12) to scrummy *tāng bāo* (汤包; Y8), lamb kebabs (羊肉串; *yáng ròu chuàn*; Y3), local Lijiang mussels (Y5 per bowl), stewed carp (烧鲤鱼; *shāo lǐyú*; Y20 each), lashings of *jiǎozi* and fiery bowls of *dan dan* noodles (担担面; *dàn dàn miàn*; Y4). Pot of green tea Y1.

Little Italian (Zhēlì; ☎ 311 1068; 18 Binjiang Lu; 滨江路18号; meals Y25; ☎ 10am-midnight) A simple, modern and relaxing pit stop offering a small mezzanine area, a quiet bar area, pastas, tasty salads, sandwiches and a range of coffees. There's free internet access but you may have to join a queue for the sole terminal. English spoken, plus English menu.

Zhengyang Tangcheng (☎ 285 8553; Zhengyang Lu; 正阳路; meals Y25; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5-10pm) Brightly lit and popular soup restaurant with a large selection of local dishes. English menu.

Rosemary Café (Mídiéxiāng; ☎ 281 0063; 1-1 Yiren Lu; 依仁路1-1号; meals Y30) For honest and homely charms, this popular café is a warm beacon to disorientated visitors, with an extensive, heart-warming menu of travellers' favourites and a nightly flock of expat regulars. The Western menu runs dependably to tasty tomato soup, shepherd's pie (Y24), pizza, fish and chips and beyond. Recommended by travellers.

Inaka Japanese Restaurant (Tiānshè Huìzhǔhuàn Shòusì; ☎ 139 773 980 85; Yiren Lu; 依仁路) Micro-sized, neat eatery with conveyor-belt sushi creeping past the young and cosmopolitan well-fed of Guilin; dishes discounted after 9.30pm. It's a short walk along from Rosemary Café in the middle of Yiren Lu at the end of the block of stalls.

Drinking & Entertainment

Ragazza Pub (Yī Rén; ☎ 282 2222; 27 Yiren Lu; 依仁路27号; ☎ 8pm-2am) Funky and loud with mind-swirling lights and regular live music, this nifty bar on Yiren Lu has been luring Guilin's young drinkers for more than a decade.

Lijiang Theatre (Lǐjiāng Jùchǎng; ☎ 285 1280; Binjiang Lu; 滨江路; tickets Y120-180; ☎ performances 8pm) Show with music, acrobatics and dance, aimed squarely at tourists.

Shopping

For jewellery, clothing, souvenirs and pretty much anything else you can think of, check out Guilin's cavorting Zhongshan Lu Night Market (桂林市中山路夜市; Guilinshi Zhōngshān Lù Yèshì). Lit up with bright lights every night from 7pm to 11.30pm along an extensive strip of Zhongshan Zhonglu, all the way from Wumei Lu, north to Jiefang Xilu, there's a strip of stalls selling jade, jewellery, clothing, bags, name chops, perfume and tons of other consumables and trinkets.

Another tourist night market sets up towards the southern end of Zhengyang Lu, but you will have to contend with the persistent *xiǎojiě* (young girls) latching onto males and asking if 'massagey' or, more bluntly, 'sex' is required. For department store shopping, the **Guilin Niko Niko Do Plaza** (on Zhongshan Zhonglu & Jiefang Xilu) has a good range of useful stores.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air tickets can be purchased from the **CAAC Office** (☎ 384 3918 or 384 7252; ☎ 7.30am-8.30pm) on the corner of Shanghai Lu and Minzhu Lu.

You'll find **Dragonair** (☎ 282 5588, ext 8895) in the Guilin Bravo Hotel.

Guilin is very well connected to the rest of China (and beyond) by air. Destinations include Beijing (Y1920), Chengdū (Y1100), Chóngqing (Y860), Hāikǒu (Y840), Guǎngzhōu (Y790), Guiyáng (Y710), Hong Kong (Y1895), Kūnmíng (Y970), Shànghǎi (Y1430) and Xī'ān (Y1220). Seats may be available for next-day purchase; you'll need to shop around at different travel agents for discount tickets.

International destinations include regular flights to Seoul (Shǒu'ěr) and Fukuoka, Japan (Fúgāng). Less frequent flights also go to Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur; more and more international flights are being added.

Tickets can also be booked through **Guilin Air Service Co Ltd** (17-4 Binjiang Lu), just south of Little Italian.

BUS

Guilin has numerous connections to a number of destinations in Guangxi, Guangdong and as far away as Xiàmén, Fúzhōu and Sānyà from the **main bus station** (Guilin Keyùn Zōngzhàn; ☎ 382 2666) on Zhongshan Nanlu. For short local runs (such as to Yángshuò and Xīng'ān), buses depart from in front of the train station as well as from the bus station. Left luggage is open from 6.30am to 11.30pm and costs from Y3.

TRAIN

Guilin is not as convenient as Nánning or Liǔzhōu for train connections (not much starts here) and tickets are harder to come by. Outside national holidays you should have luck, but be prepared to wait an extra day or two for hard sleeper tickets. Guilin has a main train station and a north train station.

Direct train services from **Guilin train station** (Guilin Huòchēzhàn; ☎ 383 3124) include train T6 to Beijing West (Y401 to Y430, 22 hours, 3.06pm), the K150 to Shànghǎi (Y330 to Y353, 25 hours, 10.11am), the K38 to Guǎngzhōu (Y201 to Y215, 11 hours, 6pm), the K316 to Xī'ān (Y372 to Y399, 25 hours, 5.25pm), the 2055 to Kūnmíng (Y156 to Y169, 22 hours, 8.52am) and the 1557 to Zhànjiāng (hard seat Y76). Other trains run to Liǔzhōu (hard seat Y29), Nánning (hard seat Y69), Quánzhōu (hard seat Y20) and Xīnxiāng (Y59 to Y67). For Chóngqing and Chengdū change trains at Guiyáng.

You can also catch trains K181 and 1337, which depart from Guilin's **northern station** (Guilin Běizhàn; ☎ 216 2222), but these are pretty slow, so it might be worth your while going to Nánning first and buying a ticket there for the direct Nánkūn line to Kūnmíng (15 hours).

Window 7 (☎ 8am to noon and 3pm to 5.30pm) is advertised as welcoming 'foreign guests'.

BUSES FROM GUILIN

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Bāisè | 155 | 9 | 9pm |
| Běihǎi | 170 | 7 | 4 per day |
| Chéngdū | 375-395 | 22 | 4pm |
| Chóngqing | 360 | 16 | 3pm & 7pm |
| Guǎngzhōu | 160 | 11 | 4 per day |
| Guipíng | 110 | 6½ | 9.30am & 4.30pm |
| Guiyáng | 240 | 11 | 8pm & 9.30pm |
| Huáihuà | 98 | 10 | 2pm |
| Liǔzhōu | 47 | 2½ | every 20min (7am-9.30pm) |
| Lóngshèng | 23 | 2 | every 30min (6.50am-7pm) |
| Nánning | 88-98 | 4 | every 20min (6.30am-10pm) |
| Róngshuǐ | 38 | 5 | 12.30pm |
| Sānjiāng | 27 | 5 | 8 per day |
| Wúzhōu | 110 | 6 | 6 per day |
| Xīng'ān | 12 | 1 | every 30min (7am-9pm) |
| Yángshuò | 15 | 1 | every 30min (7.10am-8pm) |
| Zīyuán | 25 | 2 | every hr (7.30am-5pm) |

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Guilín's Liangjiang International Airport (两江国际机场; Liǎngjiāng Guójì Jīchǎng) is 30km west of the city. CAAC runs buses from the **CAAC Office** (nr Shanghai Lu & Minzhu Lu) to the airport for Y20, leaving half-hourly from 6.30am to 8.30pm. From the airport, buses run the same hours but may depart later as flights arrive; buses run to the CAAC Office and the Aviation Hotel, via the Tian'e Hotel on Cuizhu Lu. A taxi to the airport costs about Y90 and takes around 40 minutes.

BICYCLE

One of the best ways to get around town is to rent a bike. The youth hostels rent out bikes for around Y20 a day, with a deposit; larger hotels charge more (around Y50 per day). Other bike rental outfits can be found near the bus and train stations and there's another one next to the Overseas Chinese Hotel. The CITS branch downstairs from the Guilin Flowers Youth Hostel rents out bikes (per half/whole day Y15/25). To protect your deposit, always check the bike carefully before renting.

BUS

Most of the city buses that stop in front of Guilín's bus and train stations will get you to the major sights. Buses 51 to 58 are free buses.

Bus 2 Runs from South Stream Park through town passing Elephant Hill Park, Seven Stars Park, Wave-Subduing Hill, Folded Silk Streamers Hill and Guānyīn Pavilion.

Bus 3 Runs from Guilin train station past the bus station to Xishan Park and on to Reed Flute Cave Park.

Bus 9 Runs from Guilin train station along Jiefang Donglu to Seven Stars Park.

Bus 11 Runs from Seven Stars Park across Liberation Bridge, down to the bus and train stations and on to Ping Shan.

Bus 51 From Guilin train station past the main bus station to Central Sq and on to Beiji Sq (北极广场; Běiji Guǎngchǎng) and beyond.

Bus 58 From South Stream Park via Elephant Trunk Hill, Seven Stars Park, Wave-Subduing Hill, Folded Silk Streamers Hill and on to Reed Flute Cave.

A shuttle bus (景点穿梭巴士; jǐngdiǎn chuānsuō bāshì; Y10) runs every 20 minutes between 8.10am and 5.55pm from the CITS office across from the train station, travelling to Elephant Trunk Park, Wave-Subduing Hill, Reed Flute Park, Central Sq, Folk Culture

Park, Seven Stars Park and back to the train station.

TAXI

Taxi flagfall is Y7, plus a Y1 petrol charge. If you like the look of a taxi driver, book him or her for the day to whisk you around Guilín's sights. A car will cost around Y100 for a day-long tour if you don't have the time or the inclination to take to public transport, but remember that few taxi drivers speak any English.

AROUND GUILÍN

Jiāngtóuzhōu 江头洲

pop 800

With its gorgeous narrow cobblestone alleyways, bucolic rhythms and pastoral aspect, this peaceful village – located in a region where dialects seem to differ from village to village – has splendid panoramas of ancient houses, ancient lanes and old barns, surrounded by gorgeous countryside and karst peaks. The village – whose inhabitants are all surnamed Zhou (周) – is more than 1000 years old, but it was during the Qing dynasty that the village became famed for its large population of virtuous and righteous officials, who bequeathed Jiāngtóuzhōu its rich architectural heritage. Native sons include the northern Song philosopher and man of ideas, Zhou Dunyi.

Constructed of neatly finished bricks and lining the village's maze of small alleys, Jiāngtóuzhōu's old homesteads are typically characterised by their huge wooden gates, inscribed horizontal boards and spacious courtyards. Look out for faded portraits of Mao Zedong on doorways. On the edges of the village, buildings are simply made of mud bricks.

At the edge of the village as you approach from Jiūwū and spanning the small Hulung River is the ancient and misshapen arched **Hulung Bridge** (Hùlóng Qiáo), alongside a recently built small brick pagoda. At the head of the village not far from the bridge is the **Ailian Family Temple** (爱莲家祠; Ailián Jiācí; admission Y10), the local ancestral shrine. Within the temple is a huge courtyard containing a couple of dishevelled *bixi* (mythical tortoiselike dragons); lovely views extend from the upstairs gallery.

Looking at the temple from outside the gate you are faced with Chinese political slogans

from a bygone age: the faded Chinese reads 'The Communist Party forever' and 'Chairman Mao forever'. Throughout the village, other residences are open so you can poke your head around the door for a look-see and appreciate plenty of richly decorated woodwork. Several notable houses can be found along Jinshi Jie (进士街), including the former home of Zhou Ruiqi, a former student leader of the May 4th Movement, at No 38. Inscribed on the doors of the home of Zhou Zerun is another slogan from the Cultural Revolution days.

A popular time to visit the village is during the **Girl's Festival** (姑娘节; Gūniang Jié), held on the 13th day of the 6th lunar month, when the village women dress up in their Sunday best.

If you want to overnight in Jiāngtóuzhōu, the modest **Láishānlǐ Fànzuāng** (来山里饭庄; ☎ 138 783 119 07; dm Y20) has simple fan rooms without loo. It's on the corner of the road around 500m from the village on the way to Jiūwū.

To get to Jiāngtóuzhōu, first take bus 100 from Guilin train station or Guilin bus station to Guilin Běizhàn (桂林北站) on Zhongshan Beilu, north of Beiji Sq (北极广场; Běiji Guǎngchǎng). From Guilin Běizhàn take a bus through the miserable industrial periphery of Guilin to the bus station at Língchuān (灵川; Y2, 30 minutes) and transfer to a bus across arable land to Jiūwū (九屋; Y3, 35 minutes), around 20km from Língchuān. Buses run from between Língchuān and Jiūwū every 10 minutes between 7am and 5.30pm. From Jiūwū, it's a 10- to 15-minute walk to Jiāngtóuzhōu.

Dàxū 大圩 (大墟)

Pleasantly situated 18km south of Guilín on the east bank of the Li River, Dàxū is a river-side Ming and Qing dynasty town that warrants a morning or afternoon's exploration of its characteristic narrow alleyways.

Although the old town originally dates to 200 AD, its commercial history as a river port dates to the Song dynasty, with its greatest period of prosperity arriving with the Ming and Qing dynasties. By the time of the Republic the town had eight major streets.

The area you want to explore is the **Daxu Old Town** (大圩古镇; Dàxū Gǔzhèn), echoing the rattle of mah-jong pieces and the grunting of pigs and replete with absorbing historic

textures, rather than the more modern and characterless part of town. To reach the old town, head south from the bus drop-off point and walk under the railway bridge.

Jiefang Jie (解放街) is a rewarding street of ancient merchant shops and flagstones. The medicine shop at No 40 is worth a look for its medicinal materials and preparations. The **Wanshou Bridge** (万寿桥; Wànshòu Qiáo) is a marvellous old structure with a couple of trees growing out of its side. Originally dating to the Ming dynasty, it was washed away and rebuilt during the reign of Qing emperor Guangxu, events recorded on several plinths along the side of the bridge.

Dongfang Jie (东方街), running from the other side of the bridge, is a similar strip of old shops and houses, running on to the modest brick Yongan Gate. One of the best-preserved residences, the **Former Residence of Liao Jiuli** (廖毓利故居; Liào Jiùlì Gùjū; admission Y5) at No 47 is a substantial rice merchant's house with a spacious upstairs chamber where the rice was loaded.

Note the number of *bànxīn bànlǎo*, hybridised 'half-new, half-old' houses, as locals call them – old houses with recently grafted-on ugly conversions. Elderly Dàxū residents also avow to a magnificent old gate that once stood at Gulou Matou (Drum Tower Dock) that was tragically pulled down during the Cultural Revolution.

Other interesting streets worth browsing include Minzhu Jie (民主街), with its small alleys threading down to the docks. Several small family-run hostels can be found here if you want to spend the night, including a very basic *kèzhàn* (客栈) at 28 Minzhu Jie with simple beds for Y10.

To reach Dàxū from Guilín, take a bus (Y5, 30 minutes, every 30 minutes) from the local bus depot around 200m behind the bus station on Zhongshan Nanlu. Alternatively, from the bus station take a Guānyān-bound bus (Y5) that passes by Dàxū. There are also buses (Y10) to Dàxū from the bus station in Língchuān, if you want to combine a trip to Jiāngtóuzhōu and Dàxū. It is also possible to reach Dàxū by bus from Xīngpíng and Yángshuò.

Ling Canal 灵渠

In Xīng'ān County, about 70km north of Guilín, the Ling Canal (Líng Qú) is described by locals in fabulous terms: 'The

north has the Great Wall, the south has the Ling Canal'. Built between 219 and 214 BC during the reign of the first Qin emperor (Qin Shihuang) to transport supplies to his army, the canal is – from a technical point of view – counted among the three great feats of Chinese engineering (along with the Great Wall and the Du Jiang irrigation system in Sichuan).

The 34km canal links the Xiāng Hé – which flows into the Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) and the Li River, which flows into the Zhū Jiāng – thus connecting two of China's major waterways and aiding China's expansion into the Southwest.

You can see the Ling Canal at the market town of Xīng'ān (兴安). Two branches of the canal flow through the town, at the northern and southern ends. Come springtime, you'll be elbow to elbow with photographers jockeying for position to snap shots of the peach blossoms lining the canals and spillway.

From Guilin, buses going to Xīng'ān depart every half hour until 6.30pm (Y8 to Y12, two hours) and hourly express buses going to Quánzhōu (Y10, one hour) also pass through Xīng'ān.

Crown Cave 冠岩

If you need a further subterranean fix, 29km south of Guilin near Cǎopíng Village (草坪), this cave (Guàn Yán; admission Y60) is a 12km-long attraction heavily peddled by Guilin travel agents. Either walk to the entrance of the cave from the car park or ride the high-speed train cart (Y30) the 3.2km into the cavern. Once inside you can clamber aboard a tourist train, an elevator, or navigate along the 3km of waterways by canoe. If you are lucky enough you may even have time to admire some limestone formations.

South of Crown Cave, Xiāngbā Dǎo (多吧岛; admission Y20), in the middle of the Li River, is a monolithic theme park of more traditional character focusing on the province's ethnic minority folklore and customs. The island is studded with traditional minority architecture, a central performance area, craft shops, minority-cuisine restaurants, workshops and an entertainment stadium.

Xiāngbā Dǎo is 500m south of Crown Cave and can be accessed by boat from the cave. Some of the Li River tour boats stop off at both the cave and island on their way to Yángshuò.

LI RIVER 漓江

This beautiful river is the shimmering link between Guilin and Yángshuò and one of the main tourist attractions of the area. A thousand years ago a poet enthused about the scenery around Yángshuò: 'The river forms a green gauze belt, the mountains are like blue jade hairpins'. The 83km stretch between the towns may not quite match this psychedelic vision, but some extraordinary peaks, sprays of bamboo lining the river banks, fishers in small boats and picturesque villages jostle for your attention.

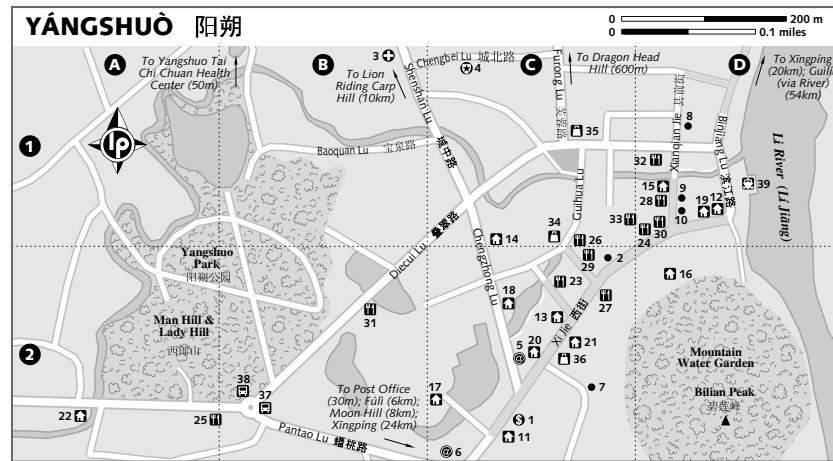
As is the Chinese habit, every feature along the route has been named with a moniker from myth, legend or fancy. **Paint Brush Hill** juts straight up from the ground with a pointed tip like a Chinese writing brush. **Cock-Fighting Hills** stand face to face like two cocks about to engage in battle. **Nine Horse Mural Hill**, past the small town of Yángdì, is a sheer cliff rising abruptly out of the water; there are supposed to be the images of nine horses in the weathered patterns on the cliff face.

A shorter version of this trip can be made between Cǎopíng (草坪) and Xīngpíng (兴坪; see p178), from where buses run regularly to Yángshuò. Take a bus to Cǎopíng (Y8) from the local bus depot around 200m behind the bus station on Zhongshan Nanlu in Guilin and find a boat owner down by the Li River. Boats take around an hour and a half and cost in the region of Y100 per person. If you take the bus to Cǎopíng, you can stop off at Dàxū (p165) en route.

YÁNGSHUÒ 阳朔

A well-stocked bastion of Western backpacker civilisation, few travellers can voyage around China's Southwest without constant bulletins about Yángshuò. Everyone and his dog has an opinion. Some arrivals groan that Yángshuò is overdone and swamped with tourist mayhem; you will also rapidly gather that the village is not the 'real China' (whatever that means). Indeed some disillusioned sightseers strive to put as much distance between themselves and this small pocket of Guǎngxī as possible.

But for every put-down there's an ebullient paean for its luxurious karst backdrop, its generous bundle of activities, unflagging sense of fun, varied cuisine (read 'backpacker menu'), with-it attitude (a far larger percentage of locals speak good English compared to Shànghǎi or Běijīng), old Banyan trees and Yángshuò's



| | | | | | |
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| Jiangxi Guildhall 江西会馆..... (see 27) | Yangshuo Li River Hotel | Jiangxi Guildhall 江西会馆.....9 D1 | TRANSPORT | | |
| Karst Cafe.....9 D1 | 阳朔漓江饭店.....22 A2 | Lizard Lounge.....10 D1 | Bus Station 客运总站.....37 B2 | | |
| Spider Man Climbing 蜘蛛人攀岩 (see 15) | | EATING 🍴 | Private Buses to Guilin, Fuli, Yángdì & Xīngpíng 往桂林, 福利, 杨堤, 兴坪的班车.....38 B2 | | |
| | | Bar 98 98酒吧.....23 C2 | Wharf 码头.....39 D1 | | |

excellent ear for the Red Hot Chilli Peppers and other emissaries of Western rock.

If you want your China experience totally unadulterated by Western fads and fashions, Yángshuò will be a nightmare incarnate and the last place to drop your backpack. If, however, you are angling for fun and some of China's most spectacular scenery, Yángshuò could put you in seventh heaven. And with increasing numbers of travellers flocking to Yángshuò on a long-term basis to train in taichi and kung fu in idyllic surrounds, turn their hand to Chinese cooking, grapple with Mandarin in the popular language courses on

offer, or scurry out of town on rock climbing jaunts up stunning karst peaks, there's more than enough to fill your travel calendar and you could be here till the cows come home.

Orientation

Yángshuò proper is small and very easy to navigate. The principal street and hub of Yángshuò's tourist cosmos is Xi Jie (西街; West Street) also called 'Foreigner Street', running northeast to the Li River and lined with Western-style cafés, hotels and tourist shops. Just west of the Paradise Yangshuo Resort, Xi Jie loops west, parallel to Pantao

LOCAL VOICES *Jiang Yue*

Originally from Sùzhōu in Jiāngsū province, I headed to Guǎngzhōu to be a freelance writer – the media market there was well developed. I loved travelling and used to come to Yǎngshuò for weekends as things here were much cheaper than in Guǎngzhōu. After being here a couple of times, I really loved the place.

In the beginning I was running a bar with someone else as I didn't have enough money, but later I bought the other guy out. Most of my customers are Chinese but quite a few foreigners pitch up as well, although most of these are Japanese and Koreans.

My ambition? To work here for another three years to get some more cash together so I can go to England to set up a restaurant!

On the tourist front, locals here really welcome tourists as it brings in a lot of revenue. Although Yǎngshuò is pretty commercialised, the natural scenery certainly pulls in more and more visitors as far as I can tell and tourists haven't spoiled the surroundings.

Jiang Yue, owner of Tian Ya Bar & Cafe on Xi Jie in Yǎngshuò

Lu for a short distance of stalls and shops. Heading northeast from Xi Jie is Chengzhong Lu, with a similar collection of hotels, restaurants and shops and itself intersected by busy Diecui Lu. Linked to the southern extremity of Xi Jie, Pantao Lu forms the southwestern boundary of Yǎngshuò centre and is the main artery to/from Guilin. The further you go from Xi Jie or from Pantao Lu at its intersection with Xi Jie, the closer you get to Chinese group-tour reality.

Xi Jie is a pedestrian mall, free from bicycles and other traffic.

Dangers & Annoyances

As with Guilin, rigorously fend off touts who aim to take you on tours or steer you in a half-nelson towards hotels of their choosing. Yǎngshuò is small with most decent hotels (all English-speaking) clumped together along and off Xi Jie, so finding one that suits you is a piece of cake. Most sights can be visited solo without assistance from pushy guides.

Information

Travel agencies can be found all over Yǎngshuò and all backpacker-oriented cafés and bars can dispense advice to guests. Also ask at your hotel, but shop around for the best deals.

Bank of China (West end of Xi Jie; ☎ 9am–5pm)

Foreign exchange and ATM that takes international cards.

Café Too & Hostel (☎ 132-3783 1208; 7 Chengzhong Lu; local beer ¥7; ☎ 8am–midnight) Selection of English paperback fiction.

Dr Lily Li (☎ 881 4625; next to Bar 98 on Guihua Xiang) Acupuncture, therapeutic massage, hot cupping, reflexology. Recommended by several readers.

Kodak Express (Xi Jie)

People's Hospital (Renmin Yiyuan; Shenshan Lu)

Post office (yóujú; Pantao Lu; ☎ 8am–5pm) Has

English-speaking staff and long-distance phone services.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú; Chengbei Lu)

This PSB is well versed in dealing with travellers and has several fluent English speakers. That said, always be calm if taking in a complaint about a local business; losing your cool will get you nowhere. If you need a visa extension you'll have to head further afield; this office doesn't issue them.

Red Cherry Internet Café (Hóngyīngtáo Wǎngbā; 2nd fl, same block as Cloud 9 Restaurant, Chengzhong Lu; per hr ¥5; ☎ 24hr) Pricey.

Xingji Internet Café (Xīngjǐ Wǎngbā; Pantao Lu; per hr ¥1.5 8am–6pm, per hr ¥2 6pm–midnight; ☎ 8am–midnight)

Sights

Travellers come to Yǎngshuò to get out of town and into the countryside that envelops it, but there's loads to do in Yǎngshuò itself; see opposite for details.

In the southeastern corner of town is Yǎngshuò's main peak, **Bilian Peak** (Bilián Fēng; admission ¥30). Because it has a flat northern face that is supposed to resemble an ancient bronze mirror, it is also called Bronze Mirror Peak (Tóngjǐng Fēng). The peak rises up next to the Li River, in the **Mountain Water Garden** (Shānshuǐ Yuán).

Yangshuo Park (Yǎngshuò Gōngyuán; admission ¥6) is in the western part of town, and here you'll find **Man Hill** (Xīláng Shān; admission ¥9), which is supposed to resemble a young man bowing and scraping to a shy young girl represented by **Lady Hill** (Xiǎogū Shān). Other hills nearby are named after animals: **Lion Riding Carp Hill**

(Shìzi Qí Lìyú Shān), **Dragon Head Hill** (Lóngtóu Shān) and the like.

It's amazing how many travellers come to Yǎngshuò and don't really see the town, but the area north of Xi Jie and off Chengzhong Lu and Diecui Lu has some great small-town trekking opportunities: back alleys, small markets and throngs of Chinese tourists poking around dozens of shops. The **Former Residence of Xu Beihong** (Xú Bēihóng Gùjū; 17 Xianqian Jie) is one of Yǎngshuò's few cultural landmarks. Innovative Chinese artist Xu Beihong (1895–1953) is best remembered for his galloping horses that injected dynamism into previously static forms of Chinese brushwork. Admirers of Chinese guildhall architecture can glean something from a visit to the Hongfu Palace Hotel and Le Vôte Café, both of which occupy sections of the former **Jiangxi Guildhall** (Jiāngxī Huìguǎn), a notable vestige from the Qing dynasty occupying a site along Xi Jie.

A popular evening activity is to take in the **cormorant fishing** on the Li River that usually begins around 7pm to 7.30pm. It is a show for the tourists, but is still entertaining, although the river supports an ever-dwindling supply of fish. Hotels and restaurants usually charge around ¥25 per person.

Courses & Activities

Once you have exhausted the splendid countryside, Yǎngshuò is a premier place to sit back and educate yourself with a course or two.

TAICHI & KUNG FU

With its traditional picture-perfect karst peaks, Yǎngshuò is a popular place to glean the fundamentals of taichi (*tàijíquán*; see p170). The **Yangshuo Tai Chi Chuan Health Centre** (Baoqan Lu; ☎ 890 0125; www.southchina-taichi.com; ☎ office 7-10am & 4-6.30pm) runs an impressive gamut of taichi routines, from Chen and Yang style forms to push hands and weapons forms, including the sword and sabre. *Qigong* is also taught. The principal teacher is Wang Zhiping – whose training was essentially in the vigorous Chen style but who is also adept at Shaolin boxing – who introduces students to taichi via the simplified Yang form. Tuition consists of four hours every day (apart from Sundays) and costs ¥40 per hour, ¥600 per week or ¥1800 per month. Chinese-language lessons are also offered. There's an English speaker available during office hours. The school can also arrange accommodation, but you can of course do that

independently. Another popular martial arts school is the **Budizhen International Kungfu School** (☎ 139 773 503 77; budizhenbooking@gmail.com; website under construction; 62 Lotus Lane) where you can get to grips with its distinctive style of Budizhen (步地真) Kung fu (*gōngfū*) taught by Mr Gao. Training – also in taichi and *qigong* – is seven days a week, from 9am to 11am and in the evenings from 6pm to 7.30pm.

CLIMBING

Climbing in Yǎngshuò has mushroomed in popularity over the past decade. There are plenty of climbing outfits in town, and most are ebullient about the rock-climbing potential here, with constant discoveries of new and better peaks. In all around 300 routes can be chosen from, including around 200 bolted routes in the area.

Autumn is the best season for clambering up the karst towers. Across the road from the MC Blues, **Lizard Lounge** (☎ 881 1033; www.chinaclimb.com; 45 Xianqian Jie) is an excellent bar-cum-climbing centre with its own small bouldering wall. Half-day climbs are ¥300, including equipment, transport, food, water and guides. **Karst Café** (www.karstclimber.com; 45 Xianqian Jie), just down the road, has one- to 10-day climbing excursions. **Spider Man Climbing** (Zhizhūrén Pānyán; ☎ 881 2339; www.s-climbing.com; 36 Xianqian Jie) offers half- or whole-day climbing expeditions for ¥180 and ¥300 respectively. For experienced climbers, multipitch climbs are also offered for ¥300, as well as three-day, one week and two-week climbs (¥700/1600/2500). Prices include transport, shoe hire, equipment and guides. You can also pick up equipment here as well as a copy of *Yangshuo Rock Climbing* (¥80). Ask about climbs in the White Mountain area, Baby Frog area and Copper door area. Other rock climbing outfits can be found along Guihua Jie.

CYCLING

In most cases you just need to hire a bike from any of the myriad outlets and head out into the countryside (see p65). If you want to hire a decent and well-maintained mountain bike or join a biking tour, try **Bike Asia** (☎ 882 6521; www.bikeasia.net; 2nd fl, 42 Guihua Lu, above Bar 98), which arranges outings from half-day expeditions to three-day adventures. Two- to four-week cycling expeditions are also arranged through China, Mongolia, Laos, Cambodia, Tibet and Nepal.

KAYAKING

Some travellers identify kayaking trips on the Li River as the highlight of their Yángshuò trip. Putting yourself in a kayak and paddling for three or more hours along a glistening band of water to Yángshuò gives you the freedom to immerse yourself in the lazy Li River

panoramas at your own pace. Ask at any of the travel agents or your hotel for details.

COOKING

Cloud 9 Restaurant (Jùfú Lóu; cloud9restaurant03@yahoo.com; Chengzhong Lu) to the south of the Seventh Heaven hotel offers morning or afternoon

cooking classes for Y80 a person. Each class starts off with a trip to the Farmers' Trading Market (p174) for fresh ingredients. There are two classes per day, from 9.30am to 11.30am and from 4pm to 8pm.

The **Yangshuo Cooking School** (☎ 137-8843 7286) helps you chuck together a tasty Beer Fish and other local specialities from farmhouse surrounds after going on trips to local markets for ingredients.

LANGUAGE COURSES

With one in two people on earth conversant in either English or Chinese, the time has come to learn Mandarin, so why not do it in Yángshuò? With subsistence costs so low and with all that Yángshuò has to offer, language schools are all the rage. Teaching English is also popular, with schools such as the **Owen Language College** (☎ 881 8555; www.owencollege.com) exchanging free accommodation and meals in exchange for a commitment to teaching students. It's worth considering if you want to stay in Yángshuò for a while.

Sleeping

Travellers tend to arrive in Yángshuò expecting bargain room prices, but remember that it's the market that dictates. Competition generally keeps things somewhat sane, but show up in high season (summer) and you may have to pay the asking price for a bed. In winter, negotiation seems to re-enter the picture in most places. Whatever you do, avoid turning up during the big holiday seasons (first week of May and October and the Spring Festival) – otherwise known as 'Gold Week' (Huángjīn Zhōu) – when rooms prices go through the roof.

The most popular hotels are along Xi Jie, although this can be quite noisy because of late-night drinking binges by travellers in the cafés below, other hotels are more quietly tucked away down small alleys off the main drag. This area definitely has a monopoly on charm, although considerable variety exists among hotels. The Chinese section of town has more white-tiled, midrange options available, but they have little character and neither does the area.

Most of the budget backpacker options on Xi Jie offer very reasonably priced midrange options, and it's generally not essential to book ahead unless it's the holiday period. A number of travellers complain that many of

the older hostels suffer from winter damp. To avoid this, check out your room thoroughly before dumping your bags. It seems like every other shop in the streets around Xi Jie has a 'room available' (有房; yǒufáng) so pop in and ask, if other places are full. Laundry service is available at most hotels; alternatively, laundries are not difficult to find.

If you want a comfortable sojourn, before you dive into *the* most expensive accommodation option, note that cheap backpacker-friendly hotels have staff with superior and more colloquial English-language skills and sophisticated social skills with foreigners than many of their midrange equivalents that cater more to the Chinese crowd.

BUDGET

Monkey Jane's Guesthouse (Běibào Kèzhàn; ☎ 882 1603; monkeyjaneguesthouse@yahoo.com; 28 Lianfeng Zhongxiang; 莲峰中巷28号; dm Y20, s from Y40, tw Y70; 🍽️) Set back from the Xi Jie action around 80m down Lianfeng Zhongxiang (follow the signs) run-of-the-mill rooms are spread out here over numerous floors, but a worthwhile rooftop bar with good views (with towering peak right behind) is an arm-twister. All rooms come with air-con. Laundry costs Y10 per kg.

Bamboo House Inn & Café (Zhúlín Fāndiàn; ☎ 881 5758 or 882 3222; bamboohouse23@hotmail.com; Guihua Xiang, 23 Guihua Lu; 桂花巷桂花路23号; 5-bed dm with air-con Y20, s/d Y50/60, s/d with air-con Y60/70, s/d with balcony Y80; 🍽️ 🍷) Down a small lane off Xi Jie, this quiet place has pleasant staff. Dorms are simple and the bathrooms are somewhat primitive but there's laundry (per kg Y12), bike rental (Y10) and free internet. At the time of writing, single and double rooms were undergoing renovation. If a more comfortable stay tops your agenda, try its sister, Bamboo House & Hotel (p172), and enquire about its soon-to-open accommodation in the 20-room block on the other side of Xi Jie.

Backstreet Hostel (Guihuaxiàng Guójī Qīngnián Lǚguǎn; ☎ 881 4077; 60 Guihua Nanxiang; 桂花南巷60号; 4-6 bed dm Y25, d Y80) An average kind of place needing a dose of tender loving care, with OK rooms, tucked away next to Red Star Express off Xi Jie. Internet (per hour Y3), laundry, kitchen, bike rental (per day Y10), rock climbing (per half day Y180). Doubles are typically Y70, apart from during the feverish holiday season.

West Street International Youth Hostel (Xījīe Guójī Qīngnián Lǚguǎn; ☎ 882 0933; fax 882 0988; 102 Xi Jie;

THE SECRETS OF TAICHI

Characterised by its lithe and graceful movements, *tàijíquán* (太极拳; literally 'Fist of the Supreme Ultimate'), also known as taichi, is an ancient Chinese physical discipline practised by legions of Chinese the land over.

Considerable confusion exists about taichi – is it a martial art, a form of meditation, a *qigōng* (气功) style or an exercise? In fact, taichi can be each and all of these, depending on what you seek from the art and how deep you dig into its mysteries.

As a straightforward health regimen, taichi strengthens the leg muscles, exercises the joints, gives the heart and cardiovascular system a good workout and promotes flexibility. It also relaxes the body, dissolving stress, loosening the joints and generating a feel of wellbeing.

It may not look demanding, but the 108 movement, 20-minute Yang-style long form is tiring, while the low postures of the Chen style of taichi – closest in essence of all the taichi styles to Shaolin boxing – can be excruciatingly strenuous to perform, and will have your legs shaking with the strain.

Taichi is a superlative system of *qigōng*, and despite being a moving sequence of *qigōng* moves, the art is also taught with stationary exercises to circulate *qi*. All of the benefits associated with *qigōng* come with the practice of taichi.

As a system of meditation, taichi promotes relaxation and makes practitioners feel both centred and focused. Taichi will also introduce you to the meditation techniques of the Taoists as the art is closely allied to the philosophy of Taoism.

Taichi can be trained as a martial art as all the movements are ultimately traceable to the martial arts of the Shaolin Temple, although its effective use as a fighting style requires considerable time and patience, compared with other more direct martial arts. In order to use taichi effectively, the student must learn to relax the body during confrontation, and this involves suppressing instincts to tense up when threatened. Martial arts practice commences with 'push hands', a two-person routine where one student tries to unbalance the other. Push hands develops sensitivity in the hands and teaches the student to relax the body in all situations. If adept at taichi, it is far easier to learn other martial arts, as the student will have learned a way of moving that is common to all of the fighting arts.

Taichi students outdo each other with fables of superhuman exploits by legendary taichi masters, with anecdotes increasingly implausible with each retelling. Stories abound of masters who can crush pieces of ceramic between their fingers, fling their opponents 9m across the room with a shrug or return hardened karate practitioners to square one. Such anecdotes dangle tempting carrots in front of students on their gruelling and elusive path to mastery of their art.

If taking up taichi, a few useful pointers will help you progress in your practice:

- When executing a movement, motion is directed by the waist before moving to the hands (observe a skilled practitioner and see how movement reaches the hands last). The hands never lead the movement.
- When performing a form (as the moving sets are called), keep your head on a level, neither rising nor dipping.
- Practise taichi as if suspended by an invisible thread from a point at the top of your head.
- Don't lean forward or backwards and keep your body vertical.
- Relax your shoulders and let your weight sink downwards.

西街1-2号; dm Y25, s & d Y120; ㊚ ㊚) Rather tatty and unkempt, this functional place could do with a visit from Mrs Mop and a shot of character, but dorm beds are low cost and worth earmarking if other places are jam-packed. Internet access available (per hour Y3).

Bamboo House & Hotel (Zhūlín Fāndiàn; Longmu Xiang, off Xi Jie; 龙母巷, 西街; d Y100-150, family r Y120-180; ㊚ ㊚) Tucked quietly away down Longmu Alley (Dragon Mother Alley) towards the eastern extremity of Xi Jie, this second branch of the Bamboo Inn (p171) hits all the right notes, with friendly and approachable staff and fine rooms. The granite-clad bathrooms may be an odd selection, but welcome to the comfiest mattresses in Yángshuò's budget domain. Internet access and laundry service available. Its staff speak excellent English and offer good travel advice.

MIDRANGE

Seventh Heaven (㊚ 882 6101; fax 882 6101; the7th heavencafe@hotmail.com; 2 Chengzhong Lu; 城中路2号; r Y200-250; ㊚ ㊚) Tucked away off the main Xi Jie drag, this enjoyable place has pleasant, clean rooms decked out with attractive drapery. There's a bar and restaurant downstairs. All rooms come with balcony, shower, air-con and TV. Free internet use. No phones in rooms.

White Lion Hotel (Wéilái'ēn Fāndiàn; ㊚ 882 7778; www.whitelionchina.com; 103 Xi Jie; 西街103号; s/tw/tr Y288/368/488; ㊚) Owned by an American who donates money to support kids in education, this agreeable hotel has a courtyard-style interior and although rooms are showing their age, they are pleasant enough with showers, and wooden floors, and baths in the pricier rooms. Discounts see singles fall to Y120 and twins to Y150.

Hotel Explorer (Wénhuà Fāndiàn; ㊚ 882 8116; fax 882 7816; jimmyqin@hotmail.com; 40 Xianqian Jie; 县前街40号; s/d/tr with bathroom & air-con Y368/418/548; ㊚) Attractively presented in the quaint-old-courtyard look, this popular hotel has fine rooms with large bathrooms and friendly staff. The location off Xi Jie muffles the decibels, and discounts make rooms affordable at all but the busiest times.

Hongfu Palace Hotel (Hóngfú Fāndiàn; ㊚ 882 9489; fax 882 9499; 79 Xi Jie; 西街79号; d Y380-480, tr Y660; ㊚) Located in part of the historic Jiāngxī Guildhall (p169) on Xi Jie, this pleasant courtyard-style residence maintains its Qing dynasty appearance with original features and spacious doubles. Internet access; ask for discounts.

Aiyuan Hotel (Aiyuán Bīnguǎn; ㊚ 881 1966; fax 881 1916; 115 Xi Jie; 西街115号; d Y480; ㊚) Friendly staff, a neat disposition and crisp rooms with clean bathrooms make this hotel at the western foot of Xi Jie worth considering, although the adjacent KFC can be noisy. Rooms with hill view are pricier. Discounts bring doubles down to around Y200.

Venice Hotel (Wēinísī Jiūdiàn; ㊚ 881 5898 or 881 5889; 20 Xi Jie; 西街20号; d/tr/ste Y580/680/780; ㊚) With elegant and well-maintained rooms, including particularly spacious and stylishly designed family rooms, this hotel at the eastern, quiet cusp of Xi Jie welcomes with a bright and airy courtyard-style lobby area. During slack and slow months, prices of doubles sink affordably to Y120.

Yangshuo Li River Hotel (Yángshuò Lǐjiāng Fāndiàn; ㊚ 881 6966; fax 881 6919; 93 Pantao Lu; 蟠桃路93号; s/d/tr Y680/880/980; ㊚) If you want a clean mid-range double with safe, mini-bar, hair dryer and a reasonably smart hotel ambience, this newish place does the trick. But it lacks the ease with foreigners that'll wow you along Xi Jie, and the Pantao Lu area is a bit grim and charmless.

TOP END

Paradise Yangshuo Resort (Yángshuò Bǎilái Dìjià Fāndiàn; ㊚ 822 2109; www.paradiseyangshuo.com; 116 Xi Jie; 西街116号; d standard/deluxe Y664/913; ㊚ ㊚) Fine if you want the synthetic Yángshuò experience. Rooms are immaculate and provide a tempting zone of comfort, but the swimming pool, karaoke lounge, massage parlour scream tour group, as do photos of visiting presidents and dignitaries in the lobby. Fish for discounts.

Eating & Drinking

Xi Jie teems with small cafés and bars offering a smorgasbord of Western and Chinese cuisine and perennial travellers' favourites. For anyone who has been on the road around China for a period it's a good excuse to ditch the oily, stir-fried vegetables, *yóutiáo* (fried bread sticks) and weak tea and grab a steaming cup of coffee and a Continental(-ish) breakfast. Cafés tend to open at around 7.30am, serving set breakfasts and serenading hungover guests with soft music, morphing at night into late-night bars, with live music, lashings of alcohol and garrulous crowds.

Most cafés serve reasonable to good fare and travellers will be attracted by their atmosphere.

Some specialities (eg French cuisine) can be found. Keep an eye and a nostril out for Uighur chefs from Xinjiāng who serve up late-night roast lamb kebabs (羊肉串; *yáng ròuchuàn*) on Xi Jie. Also look out for street vendors with copper kettles selling black sesame paste (黑芝麻糊; *hēi zhīma hú*), a very sweet and glutinous concoction which will set you back only Y3 per bowl. The vendor puts in the ingredients (osmanthus, lotus seeds, peanuts, black sesame, walnuts and wolfberry) and slops in hot water from the kettle, gives it a stir and there you go. Also look out for sellers of ginger sweets (姜糖; *jiāngtáng*).

As with accommodation, most travellers gravitate to the more laid-back part of town down Xie Jie, where all of Yángshuò's personality is concentrated. Sheer numbers make for fierce competition – and the standard of spoken English is unusually good for China. However, Xi Jie now so seethes with tour groups and touts that quiet alfresco evening dining is pretty much history.

Normally Yángshuò would be too small to warrant a KFC, but Colonel Sanders' empire has given it the thumbs up thanks to the steady stream of tourists; the branch is next to the Bank of China on Xi Jie.

A massive **night market** (Diécū Lu; ㊚ from 6pm) gets going across from the bus station. With tents, tables and chairs you can settle in for a sampling of local delicacies such as *tiánluóniàng* (stuffed field snails) whatever the weather. Another smaller night market sets up on Chengzhong Lu. Useful stalls set up during the day across from the bus station on the forecourt in front of Yangshuo Park, selling *píjiǔ yú* (啤酒鱼; beer fish), *málàtàng* (麻辣烫; spicy soup) and clumps of fruit. If you are looking for Chinese restaurants, you can find a cluster at the west end of Xi Jie.

Bars can be safely divided into those that attract Chinese drinkers and those aimed squarely at Westerners, although crossovers exist and some spots cater to foreign diners during the day but lure Chinese punters in the evening. Beers include the unavoidable Guangxi-brewed Lìquan (漓泉啤酒), plus a foreign gaggle of brews from Heineken to Corona. Western bars run out of steam roughly at the intersection of Chengzhong Lu and Xi Jie, from where Chinese restaurants take the baton.

Bar 98 (Jiǔbā Jiǔbā; ㊚ 881 4605; 42 Guihua Lu; 桂花路42号; Lìquan beer Y7, large Tsingtao Y12) All-day

breakfasts (Y20 to Y24), veggie burgers (Y18), salads and pizzas (Y18 to Y28), no-nonsense ambience and pool table.

Café Too & Hostel (㊚ 132-3783 1208; johnnylu668@yahoo.com; 7 Chengzhong Lu; 城中路7号; local beer Y7; ㊚ 8am-midnight) This comfortable spot is run by Mr Lu, the resourceful English-speaking owner who has put up a wall or two of English paperback fiction. There's free internet for guests and rooms upstairs (twins with air-con and shower Y70 to Y80) for those keen to dwell beyond earshot of Xi Jie.

MC Blues (Dàpéngchē Zhōngxī Cǎntīng; ㊚ 882 9222; 40 Xianqian Jie; 县前街40号; local beer Y10, large Tsingtao Y18; ㊚ 7am-midnight) Whether it's an early-morning big breakfast or an evening dose of music and chinwagging, this remains one of Yángshuò's most popular venues. The MC Blues Breakfast (Y25) is a serious mouthful: two fried eggs, two slices of toast, bacon, mushrooms, tomatoes, chips, coffee and juice. Pizzas from Y20. The long and lengthy cocktail list runs to grasshopper (Y25); nights draw garrulous crowds.

Meiyou Café (Měiyóu Fāndiàn; ㊚ 881 3676; 86 Xi Jie; 西街86号; local beer Y10) With one of the longest lineages in Yángshuò – which says something at the very least – the Meiyou concocts Western traveller fare and a smattering of Chinese dishes, plus a range of coffees (Blue Mountain coffee, Kaihua etc) and not bad breakfasts. The sign outside saying 'Meiyou Pay FEC' ('No FEC') puts its history in context – FEC (Foreign Exchange Certificates) became extinct in the mid-1990s.

Ming Yuan (Míng Yuán Jīngpīn Kǎfēi; ㊚ 134 573 69 680; 50 Xi Jie; 西街50号; minimum charge per person Y15; ㊚ 9am-midnight) If the constant bustle of Yángshuò gets too much, creep into this small café. The downstairs tables are a bit cramped, but it's still a quiet slice of civilisation and the cream-of-the-crop for coffee, with a rich range of blends including some more obscure offerings. Short/tall cappuccino Y24/27, short/tall caffè mocha Y27/30, iced coffees and waffles (from Y15). Peaceful mezzanine floor upstairs.

Kaya Bar (Káyá; ㊚ 398 0180; 47 Guihua Lu; 桂花路47号; beer Y15) Yángshuò had to have a reggae bar, and this is it. Decouple from the village's more hyper drinking holes and decelerate to looped Bob Marley and the occasional reggae party.

Red Star Express (Hóngxīng Bǐsà; 56 Guihua Lu; 桂花路56号; meals Y30) Top pizzas from this eatery newly relocated from its old haunt on Xi Jie.

Splash on the Tabasco, line up a Corona (Y15) or three and sit back to enjoy some wholesome ingredients. For herbivores there's the vegetarian pizza (Y26) while the default option for carnivores is most likely the chilli beef pizza (Y28). The menu continues on into burger, burrito and sandwich territory. If you need to sleep off your pizza, upstairs doubles (with shower and air-con) are Y100.

Green Lotus Café (Niánqīngérn Káféidiàn; ☎ 881 2791; 102 Xi Jie; 西街102号; meals from Y18; ☎ 7.30am-midnight) Its walls are covered with the drunken scrawls of travellers, and early morning hangovers get soothed back to normality by soft jazz music. For specialist tastes there's a very brief Israeli menu, otherwise it's standard breakfast fare (Y18 to Y25) with freshly squeezed orange juice and local specialities such as beer fish (Y40).

Drifter's (Lǚxíngzhě; ☎ 882 1715; 58 Xi Jie; 西街58号; ☎ 7.30am-midnight) Does a good morning cuppa and serves Indonesian coffee, otherwise largely indistinguishable from other cafés along Xi Jie.

Le Vötre (Lèdé Fāshì Cāntīng; ☎ 882 8040; 79 Xi Jie; 西街79号; ☎ 8am-midnight) With its impressive interior (part of the Jiangxi Guildhall) flanked by a dazzling array of Buddhist bodhisattva statues (including a suitably portly Milefo and a large effigy of Guanyin) and hung with portraits of the Marx brothers (Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai), this is Yángshuò's sole French restaurant.

Pure Lotus Vegetarian Restaurant (Ānxiāng Shūyīng Sùcǎiguǎn; 叠翠路; Diecui Lu; meals Y50; ☎ 9.30am-10pm; Ⅴ) Aimed at the wealthier tourist bracket, with semipicturesque views from the terrace at the rear. Pricy Buddhist vegetarian dishes, including Lo Han Zhai (Y35) and braised vegetable balls (Y18).

Farmers Trading Market (Nóngmào Shìchǎng; Pantao Lu) On Pantao Lu, through the archway, this place is open all day and late into the evenings. *Pijīyú* (beer fish; per kg Y30) is Yángshuò's most famous dish and in fact this may be the best budget place to buy it. Local Li River fish are cooked up with chillies, spring onion, tomato, ginger and beer. You can find all sorts of stuff here, but you may have to put up with the sight of dogs being skinned, so be prepared.

Entertainment

The top show in town is **Impressions Liu Sanjie** (印象刘三姐; Yǐnxiàng Liú Sānjiē; ☎ 881 1982; C/B tickets Y188/320, A tickets Y480-680; ☎ 8-9pm). Directed by movie-maker Zhang Yimou, 600 performers,

including local fishermen, take to the Li River and a backdrop of karst hillocks nightly. Twelve surrounding karst peaks are illuminated as part of the show Zhang describes as a 'folk musical'. Travellers give it universal raves. Book through your accommodation and you can usually get tickets for around Y150 to Y180. Most seats are open air and only the most expensive are sheltered – if it's raining you get a plastic raincoat. The show is tweaked every six months or so to keep it fresh.

Shopping

As Yángshuò grapples with the English language, you will note weird shop signs such as 'The case wraps up the person' and other surreal messages. North of Xi Jie a new retail zone called **Sunshine 100** (Guìhua Lu; cnr Furong Lu & Diecui Lu), is further commercialising the town.

Yángshuò is a premier tourist bonanza aimed at *wàidiren* (outsiders) flocking here to haemorrhage cash all over the place. Bargain your socks off. Best buys include silk jackets (at much cheaper prices than in Hong Kong), hand-painted T-shirts, scroll paintings, batiks (from Guizhōu) and name chops. Most travellers suggest shopping in the early evening after all the tour groups have thinned out and prices ease.

Don't forget too that Yángshuò is not simply Xi Jie. Wander around the backstreets, especially north along Binjiang Lu around the Bank of China. There are many places that may not be better than what you'll find on Xi Jie, but they offer the shopper lots more choice. Some of the smarter shops take credit cards.

Vanishing Tribes (☎ 882 6655; www.vanishingtribes.com; 104 Xi Jie; ☎ 9am-midnight) Attractive handicrafts from Dong, Miao, Yao and other ethnic groups, including hand-embroidered shoes and bags, amid piles of glistening, elaborate silver jewellery. It's not cheap (children's shoes start at around Y200), but push for the wholesale price to get bargaining under way.

Getting There & Away

Most travellers arrive in Yángshuò via Guilín, from where good connections radiate to domestic and even international destinations.

AIR

The closest airport is in Guilín, and any of the numerous CITS outlets and cafés dispense air tickets relatively cheaply. Check p162 for de-

BUSES FROM YÁNGSHUÒ

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Fúli | 2.5 | 15min | every 5min |
| Guǎngzhōu | 98 | 10hr | 8pm |
| Guilín | 10 | 80min | every 10min |
| Liǔzhōu | 32 | 3½hr | 6.30am & 2.40pm |
| Nánníng | 110 | 6hr | 8am & 9am |
| Shāzi | 5 | 30min | every 20min |
| Xíngpíng | 5.5 | 1hr | every 15min |
| Yángdī | 8 | 90min | every 20min |

tails on available flights. Cafés and hotels can organise taxi rides from Yángshuò directly to the airport (Y150, one hour).

BUS

Yángshuò's **bus station** (☎ 882 2188) is in the west of Yángshuò at the intersection of Diecui Lu and Pantao Lu, opposite the gate to Yangshuo Park. Regular buses and minibuses run between Yángshuò and Guilín throughout the day. Buses also head to destinations in Guǎngdōng province. Buses to Guilín go via Pútáo (Y5); buses to Liǔzhōu go via Lìpǔ (Y8).

TRAIN

Yángshuò has no train station, but train tickets for services from Guilín, Liǔzhōu and Nánning can be booked at travel agents along Xi Jie or from your hotel. Expect a service charge of anything from Y40 to Y60. Hard sleepers for high-demand routes such as Guilín to Kūnmíng will cost around Y170 to Y270 (depending on the time of year), but to get tickets like these, you'll have to book at least two to three days in advance – and even further ahead during holidays.

Getting Around

Destinations within town are most easily reached on foot. Single and tandem bike hire is straightforward in Yángshuò and for those with an aversion to exercise, you can even rent electric scooters (Y60; but they have a limited range of around 60km, so check). Most hotels rent out bikes, otherwise you will find rental outlets all over the place, with prices typically ranging from around Y10 to Y15 per day (plus deposit). Think twice if you're asked to fork out a Y400 deposit, waived only if you agree to a 'private' bike tour costing anywhere from Y20 to Y60. Some travellers who've agreed say they've felt hijacked by the guides who were

paid to take them to particular sights whether the travellers wanted to see them or not.

AROUND YÁNGSHUÒ

There are weeks and weeks of possible exploration out there for travellers, including bike, boat, foot or any combination thereof. Summer swimming in the Li River is naturally a temptation, although finding the best and cleanest spot can be tricky and can require foraging around (ask at your hotel).

Moon Hill 月亮山

A limestone pinnacle with a moon-shaped hole, **Moon Hill** (Yuèliang Shān; admission Y9) has some mindblowing views of the surrounding karst countryside. To get to Moon Hill by bicycle, take the highway out of town towards the river and turn right onto the road about 200m before the bridge; Moon Hill is 8.5km from town on your right.

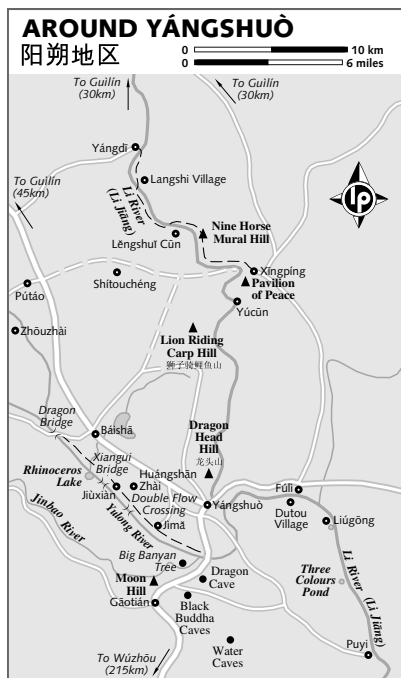
It's a hot and sweaty climb to the top of the 320m peak (with 1251 steps, so reports one focused Frenchman). Once here, you can see **Moon Hill Village** and the 1500-year-old **Big Banyan Tree** (ask the postcard hawkers to point it out).

Black Buddha Caves and Water Caves

黑佛洞和水岩

Not far from Moon Hill are the **Black Buddha Caves** (Hēifó Dòng; half/full tour Y80/120) and **Water Caves** (Shuǐ Yán; half/full tour Y78/108), and you will undoubtedly be intercepted by touts and invited to explore the caverns. Both cave systems are worth a visit and Water Caves have become especially popular.

It is quite easy to get to the caves on a bike, but you can also join one of the many two- and four-hour tours from Yángshuò, which generally include transport, entry and equipment. Keep in mind that official entrance fees



and tours to these caves are just a guideline so bargain all you want.

Other tours can cost from Y25 per head depending on the size of your group and the length of time spent in the caves. At Black Buddha Caves – located just before you reach Moon Hill when coming from Yángshuò – you work your way through caves to subterranean pools and will get completely covered in a vast pool of mud, a squelchy highlight of the expedition. Tours into Water Caves – located several kilometres beyond Moon Hill – enter by boat and take in an underground waterfall and subterranean pools.

Yulong River 遇龙河

The scenery along here equals or even beats that of the Li River. This is the place that usually leaves the biggest impression on most visitors to Yángshuò. Whether it is just meandering along a small farmers' path between the rice paddies or sitting by the river taking in the rural and karst landscape, most travellers fondly remember their time in this river valley.

It is possible to embark on a full-day bike tour of the Yulong River (Yúlóng Hé) and

neighbouring sights, including **Double Flow Crossing** (双流渡; Shuāngliúdù), **Xiangui Bridge** (仙桂桥; Xiāngguì Qiáo), nearby **Rhinoceros Lake** (犀牛湖; Xīniú Hú), **Dragon Bridge** and the village of **Jiùxiàn**.

If you seem to be going around in circles, then just ask one of the locals the way back to Yángshuò or follow one of the other independent guides who frequent this area. If you don't fancy heading off independently, then this is a popular trek with Yángshuò's guides who will take you out for the day and even sometimes stop at their home for lunch. This is a good way to see the scenery with an informed local.

If cycling, take care riding along some of those bumpy narrow paths between paddy fields, as it only takes one mistake to end up covered in mud! If you find yourself stranded on the wrong side of the river, look out for bamboo rafts that can ferry you to the other side for around Y5.

DRAGON BRIDGE 遇龙桥

With its higgledy-piggledy steps, this lovely arched **bridge** (Yúlóng Qiáo) was built in 1412 during the Ming dynasty and is among Guǎngxī's largest at 59m long, 5m wide and 9m high. Note how the walls of the bridge lean inwards with age.

It would take a full day to head up to Dragon Bridge and come back on the trails by bike, but definitely worth it. Pack your lunch and some water and enjoy a picnic along the banks of the Yulong River. From Yángshuò, head out towards Moon Hill and, before crossing the bridge over the Yulong River, turn right down the dirt trail.

It is possible to continue along this path (in its variety of forms) and take it all the way to the Dragon Bridge and Báishā (白沙). Don't worry too much if you take a wrong turn as there are innumerable paths running between the Yulong River and the Yángshuò–Báishā road.

Don't be tempted by the Báishā road as it's busy, noisy and dusty. The best part of this trip is not worrying about whether you're wandering down the wrong path, but just enjoying the scenery.

If you want to take the bus to Dragon Bridge, jump on a bus to Jǐnbào (金宝) from the Yángshuò bus station and ask to get off at the bridge after it stops in Báishā (Y5, 35 minutes).

SHÍTOU CHÉNG, GUǎNGXĪ *Eilis Quinn*

When I first visited Shítou Chéng, it was just after a rainfall. Villagers scampered up and down the hills – it looked so easy despite the slicks of mud. The farmer who agreed to show me around looked at my footwear, shook his head and told me to change into a pair of his rubber boots. Confident in my expensive, state-of-the-art hiking boots, I said no and off we went. Or rather, off he went. Twenty minutes into the ascent I got stuck in the mud and couldn't step out. Muttering 'I told you sos' he came down to pull me out. Ten minutes later, I stepped on a slippery mud patch and slid two metres backwards down the trail. The farmer threw his hands in the air, made exasperated noises and disappeared into the woods. He came out with a long stick, attacked it with his hunting knife, and a few minutes later proudly presented me with a walking stick. I'd like to say it kept me upright for the rest of the walk, but I'd be lying. When we came down from the hill three hours later I was caked in mud. The farmer took me to meet his wife in their orchard and they filled my backpack with apples. 'Tell your friends to come' he said. 'But not after rainfall. It's too much work to stop *lǎowài* [foreigners] from always falling down.'

JIÙXIÀN 旧县

Well worth visiting south of Dragon Bridge is this historic **village** amid the glistening fields not far from Xiangui Bridge; if you haven't brought your bike, it's around Y25 on the back of a motorbike from the bridge or you can fork out around Y150 for a bamboo raft to take you downriver to Jiùxiàn.

The village is well worth exploring for its ancient textures and stony charm. Many of the houses have carved doors, horse-head gables and distinctive rooftop decorations. Old village residents may drag you to their houses for a look, but may also demand money, in which case hand over no more than a few *yuán*. Houses of note include No 88 with a wooden door and large entrance hall. One of the principal structures in this Ming and Qing dynasty village is the **Li Family Ancestral Temple** (黎氏宗祠; Lǐshì Zōngcí), guarded by village elders. Next to the temple is the **Farmer's Restaurant** (黎氏老根农家饭店; Lǐshì Lǎogēn Nóngjiā Fàndiàn; ☎ 0773-877 2715; d with air-con and toilet Y60) if you want to overnight in the area; there is also a terrace restaurant here.

The nearby single-arched 25.8m-long Xiangui Bridge originally dates back to 1123.

Further along the river towards Yángshuò, you may meet guides who offer to take you up to the village remains of **Huángshān Zhài** (黄山寨; Y20) atop a nearby karst peak.

Shítou Chéng 石头城

A fascinating and unusual foray into the countryside to the northwest of Yángshuò accompanies a day trip to this interesting village. Perched among karst peaks to the northeast of Pútáo (葡萄), Shítou Chéng's

gates and walls are largely intact, crowning a limestone peak.

Because of its strategic geography high up in the hills, the village was once a garrison town. Others attest that the walls once housed Qing gangsters who used them as a base from which to extort protection money from villages below. Locals avow that the Japanese decided not to take the village in 1944 as it appeared so imposing.

It's a steep 30- to 50-minute climb up the hill from the village's 'new town' to the 'old town' where the wall begins. Once at the top, it will take another four to five hours to walk around to all four gates.

All the houses in the village are fashioned from the same stone, hence the name of the village (literally 'Stone Town'). The settlement has four main gates at each of the compass points and 18 lesser gates (originally there were 24); little, however, that remains of the soldier's barracks, except a couple of ancient temples, can be hunted down. Seek out a villager to act as a guide to show you around the village as there is usually someone willing to take on the task for a fee of Y30 to Y40. Be warned that visiting Shítou Chéng during or after rain will guarantee a very muddy experience.

To reach Shítou Chéng, take a bus to Pútáo (Y5) from Yángshuò bus station; alternatively, stand on Chengxi Lu and flag down anything heading in the direction of Guilin and ask to get off at Pútáo. It's also possible to get off at Pútáo on any bus heading to Yángshuò from Guilin. Once you disembark, you should see a long dirt road heading east. It's another 8km or so to Shítou Chéng, so taking a motorcycle

(Y20) or tractor (Y30) the rest of the way is advisable, which takes around 30 minutes along bumpy, windy, uphill dirt roads. Walking is possible, but the way is unmarked and after a few kilometres people and houses are scarce. If you reach a fork in the road, don't move until someone wanders by who you can ask.

There'll be no stores or restaurants on your way here so bring water and snacks.

You should be able to get a motorcycle ride back to Pútáo from your guide or one of the other villagers after which you can flag down a south-bound bus back to Yángshuò.

Also reachable by motorcycle from Pútáo are the villages of Zhōu Zhài (周寨) and Dōngguā Zhài (东瓜寨).

Li River Excursions

If you're keen on river trips, ask around. There are dozens of touts and guides who will chat to you on the streets of Yángshuò, so ask them for advice on the good, bad and boring stretches of the river.

FÚLÌ 福利

A number of attractive riverside villages are scattered well within range of Yángshuò. A popular trip is to the historic village of **Fúli**, a picturesque if rather decrepit river town a short distance down the Li River, with stone houses and cobbled lanes. In the old town, Lao Jie (老街; Old Street) is a pleasant strip of houses built from neat brickwork. Cows and calves wander down the alleyways, nosing past tourists. Poke your head into old house interiors, frequently hung with portraits of Chairman Mao. In the south of the village is **Tiānhòu Gōng** (天后宫), a small temple to Mazu. Also known as Tianhou, the goddess Mazu is the patron deity of seafarers and those who make their living on the water. Within the shrine sits a statue of Mazu, and a painted wooden effigy of Guanyin to the rear. Other roads of character in the village are Lingbèi Jiē (岭背街), Xinglóng Jiē (兴隆街) and Zhèndōng Jiē (镇东街). As in the rest of China, even the most ramshackle and impoverished dwellings sport cheerful red couplets that hang vertically on either side of front doors, especially during the Spring Festival. Fúli is famed for its locally made fans, which you will see on sale. Half the population of Fúli's considerable population of grandmothers appears to be engaged in

the production of knitted hats and shoes, available for sale everywhere.

Look out for vendors of *yùtóu gāo* (芋头糕; tasty, crisp and sweet taro cakes; Y1).

A few expensive daily boats go to Fúli from Yángshuò; ask in travel agents for better deals and bargains. The most popular way to reach Fúli is by bike, a trip that takes around an hour. First cycle to Dutou village (渡头村; Dùtóu cūn) on the other side of the river and jump onto one of the regular ferries across the water (Y5). It's also possible to reach Fúli from Xingping by bike. In the summer months you can also reach Fúli and other villages along the river by inner tube, which can be found from travel agents along Xi Jie in Yángshuò. It takes around three or four hours to get to Fúli this way. Several places also offer rafting trips and kayak hire, which are both popular options in the warm summer months. Ask at your hotel, at one of the restaurants or at agents in town. A more functional alternative is to take one of the regular buses to Fúli (Y3, 15 minutes) from Yángshuò bus station. From the drop-off, take a pedicab (Y5) to the old town, or walk.

Market days are good times to visit Fúli (every third day from the second of each month), but be wary of pickpockets; young males work in groups of three or four, brushing up against travellers and snatching belongings. The eighth day of the fifth lunar month is temple fair day in Fúli, a fun time to visit.

XINGPING & YANGDI 兴坪和楊堤

Cafés and travel agents also organise boat trips to **Yángdi** and **Xingping**, about three hours upstream from Yángshuò. The mountain scenery around Xingping is even more breathtaking than around Yángshuò, and there are many caves.

As with other traditional villages, wandering around the old section of **Xingping** takes you past historic residences, but you may have to shake off hawkers in relentless pursuit. Xin Jiē (新街) leads away from the drop off point to Lao Jie (老街), at the end of which is a pleasant café called **This Old Place** (老地方; Lǎo Dìfāng; ☎ 138-7737 8290; 46 Lao Jie) where you can get a bite to eat in relaxing surroundings.

Also within the village is a small **Guandi Temple** (关帝庙; Guāndi Miào), dedicated to the Taoist God of War, dating to the reign of the Qing-dynasty Qianlong emperor. Tucked away down a side street stands an elegant **old stage** (古戏台; Gǔ Xitái).

From Xingping boats depart for the small, ancient village of **Yú Cūn** (渔村; admission Y25) downriver, although boats (Y30, 20 minutes) leave infrequently if there are not enough people. Alternatively you can fork out Y60 for a bamboo raft to take you there or take the long road behind the hill on foot to the village. Less-visited than Xingping, the village is an attractive settlement of ancient Qing-dynasty houses and narrow alleys.

The authorities have cracked down on private boats between Yángshuò, Xingping and Yángdi, but boats can still be found in Xingping for the round trip to Yángdi (Y50, three hours); if boats are running, touts will hunt you down in town. From Yángdi, you can either walk back to Xingping on the five-hour hike or take a bus back to Yángshuò (Y8, 90 minutes, every 30 minutes); the last bus leaves at 6pm. Alternatively, take a bus (Y8) to Yángdi from Yángshuò bus station and hike or take a boat to Xingping and then bus it back to Yángshuò (last bus 7pm).

To reach Xingping from Yángshuò, either cycle or catch a local bus to Xingping (Y5.5, one hour) from the bus station in Yángshuò.

If you want to spend the night in Xingping, several small *nóngjiā* (农家; family home-stead hotels) can be found near the river. During the busy season, they tend to fill up rapidly. The **Riverview Hotel** (Wǎngjiāng Fāndiàn; ☎ 870 2276; q per person Y30, tw Y80) is reasonably priced. If you can't find a bed elsewhere, try the **Xingping Inn** (兴坪客栈; Xingping Kèzhàn; ☎ 870 3089; s & d from Y50) with small and tidy rooms with squat toilets. It's not near the river but several of the rooms have balconies with limestone peak views.

A 24km **hike** from Yángdi to Xingping, crossing the river at three points, takes you past some of the most superlative views in the region. The entrance fee is Y16 and a moderately fit person can complete it in four to five hours. There are villages and the occasional inn (客栈; kèzhàn) along the way where you can pick up essentials, but take water and snacks as little may be open outside of high season.

Set off from the wharf (码头; mǎtóu) at Yángdi, first crossing the river (Y2) and then walking for around 20 minutes along the river to **Langshi village** (浪石村; Làngshí Cūn), a charming village notable for its ancient buildings. Around half-an-hour from

Langshi village you need to cross the Li River again (Y4), from where it's another 30 minutes or so to another small village, beyond which a road leads past some fabulous river scenery. You'll see **Nine Horse Mural Hill** (九马画山; Jiǔmǎ Huàshān) on the far side of the river as you arrive at the village of **Léngshuǐ Cūn** (冷水村), where you cross the river once more at the ferry crossing (Y4) and on to Xingping, a long walk through splendid river scenery.

MARKET DAYS

The villages around Yángshuò are best visited on market days, which tend to work on a three-day, monthly cycle. Markets take place every three days starting on the first of the month in Yángdi and Báishā (1, 4, 7 etc) and every three days starting on the second of the month in Fúli and Pútáo (2, 5, 8 etc), and every three days starting on the third of the month in Yángshuò and Xingping (3, 6, 9 etc). However, sometimes after every third market the next one is in four days, not three. There are no markets on the 10th, 20th, 30th and 31st of the month. If this sounds confusing, you should ask at your hotel or at a café in Yángshuò.

HUÁNGYÁO 黄姚

Found not far from the Guǎngxī–Húnán–Guǎngdōng border and east of the Gui River (桂江; Guì Jiāng), this delightful 900-year old village (admission Y30) lies enveloped in historic charm, its intact architecture, riverside scenes, bridges, ponds, ancient trees, temples, pavilions and spellbinding karst scenery generating an exquisite rural beauty. Guǎngdōng-bound travellers, or those aiming to explore the less-travelled eastern rural fringes of Guǎngxī province, will find the area riveting. Film crews long ago latched onto Huángyáo's good looks, and artists and photographers under the aesthetic spell of the village are a common sight.

The village gets its name from the two families that lived here – one surnamed Huang (黄), the other named Yao (姚). The settlement originally dates way back to the Song dynasty but most buildings go no further back than the Ming, while true prosperity arrived with the Qing dynasty, which bequeathed most of the architecture.

Wandering the maze of stone streets is the best way to explore the village, replete with expertly constructed, painted one-

storey brick homesteads, ancestral shrines and fantastically preserved Qing-dynasty buildings. Standout chunks of Ming and Qing architecture include the **Wenming Pavilion** (文明阁; Wénmíng Gé), **Wuyu Temple** (吴宇祠; Wúyǔ Cí), **Dailong Bridge** (带龙桥; Dàilóng Qiáo), **Xingning Temple** (兴宁庙; Xīngníng Miào) and a magnificent **old stage** (古戏台; Gǔ Xitái). Local opera and songs are performed on the stage on the third day of the third lunar month.

Famed for its *dòufu* (tofu), Huángyáo has a few small restaurants where you can get a bite to eat. If you want to spend the night, numerous hostels in the village can put you up for around Y20 a night. The simple **Huángyáo Yíng Bīnguǎn** (黄姚迎宾馆; ☎ 0774-672 2119) has beds in double rooms for Y20. But if you are looking for something more comfortable, you'll need to overnight in Hèzhōu.

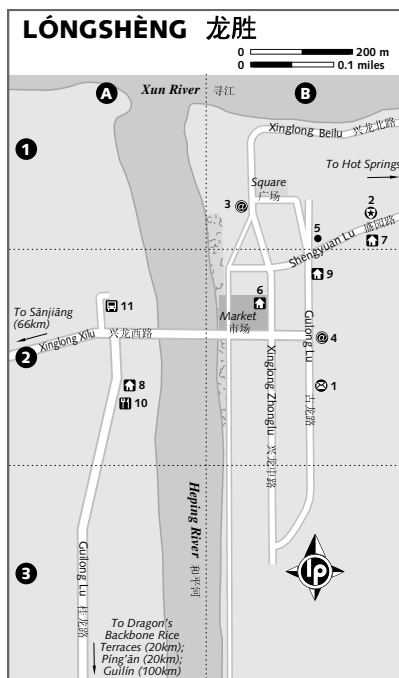
Getting There & Away

Direct buses run every half hour to Huángyáo from Guilín bus station. The nearest major town to Huángyáo is Hèzhōu (贺州), also called Bābù (八步), which can be reached by bus from Liúzhōu (Y83) departing at 12.40pm. From Hèzhōu, take a bus (Y6, one hour) to Zhōngshān then jump on a bus (Y8, two hours) to Gōngqiáo (巩桥), which passes Huángyáo. Alternatively, one bus (Y8) daily from Hèzhōu heads over the hills to Gōngqiáo 66km away, from where you can jump on a motorised three-wheeler (Y1) to take you the remaining distance to Huángyáo. If coming from the west, it's far more convenient to change buses in Zhōngshān than to continue on to Hèzhōu. A taxi from Hèzhōu to Huángyáo costs around Y100. Zhōngshān can also be reached by bus (Y30, six hours) from Yángshuò, as can Hèzhōu.

LÓNGSHÈNG 龙胜

☎ 0773

The culmination of a two-hour bus trip northwest of Guilín, the small town of Lóngshèng is the functional and unattractive gateway to one of China's most archetypal and photographed landscapes: the splendidly named Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces. Sparkling layers of waterlogged terraced fields stubbornly ascend the hillsides in defiance of the region's mountainous terrain, which has compelled generations of farmers to eke out every available scrap of cultivable



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| Public Security Bureau 公安局 | 2 B1 |
| Qunxing Internet Café 群兴网吧 | 3 B1 |
| Xinhua Bookstore 新华书店 | (see 4) |
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land. The landscape is viewable in a day, but you can spend the night in the village of Ping'an at the heart of the Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces and allow yourself more time to visit the sights and make the long trek to the village of Dàzhài.

Well within the geographic and cultural orbit of Guizhōu and Húnán, the Lóngshèng region is a beguiling patchwork of Dong, Zhuang, Yao and Miao minority villages. Other villages can be visited en route to the less interesting hot springs; jump off the bus (Y5) around 6km from the hot springs and take off into the hills for exploration. One of the very few sights in Lóngshèng itself is the Qing-dynasty **Chúnán Guǎn** on the corner of Shengyuan Lu and Gulong Lu, a traditional Chinese guildhall built in 1882 by the merchant community.

Information

There's no Bank of China in Lóngshèng and nowhere to change money; change money before you arrive so as not to be caught short.

China Post (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Gulong Lu)

Longsheng Tourism and Information Service

Center (Lóngshèng Lǚyóu Xìxún Fúwù Zhōngxīn; next door to the Tourism Hotel on Gulong Lu) Shut at the time of writing.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjū; 5 Shengyuan Lu) Opposite the entrance to the Longsheng Hotel.

Qunxing Internet Café (Qúnxīng Wǎngbā; Xinglong Zhonglu; per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-midnight)

Xinhua Bookstore (Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; Gulong Lu)

Xinhua Internet Café (Xīnhuá Wǎngbā; Gulong Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-midnight) Behind the Xinhua Bookstore.

Sights

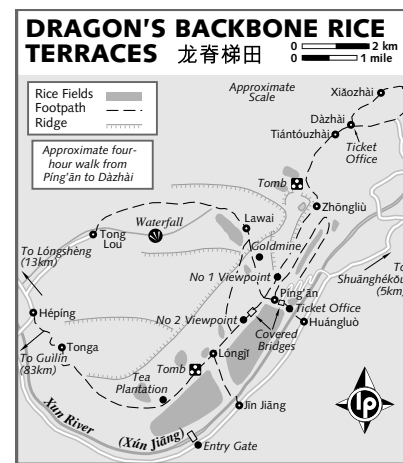
DRAGON'S BACKBONE RICE TERRACES

龙脊梯田

The region around Lóngshèng may be heavily striated with rice fields, but it is only at the Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces (Lóngjǐ Títíán) that these feats of farm engineering reach their apogee, layering their way up a string of 500m peaks. A half-hour climb to the top delivers unblemished vistas stepping down the terraced fields below.

Summer rains give the fields their full sparkle, although some travellers have remarked at the beauty of the terraces covered in snow or in October, when the fields are stunningly golden. If visiting in winter and early spring, however, prepare yourself for banks of heavy fog and mist that shroud everything in an impenetrable curtain.

The entrance fee to the terraces (Y50) is collected on the main road along the valley bottom and checked just before the covered bridge.



Timetables are liable to fluctuate according to the season, but buses (Y6.5) typically leave from the bus station at Lóngshèng for Píng'ān daily at 7.40am, 9.20am, 11am, 1pm, 3pm and 5pm; in the other direction, buses depart for Lóngshèng from Píng'ān at 7.30am, 9am, 11am, 1pm, 3pm and 5pm, but there may be a later bus leaving at 6.10pm. The trip is only about 20km, however some buses stop midway at the town of Héping to try to pull in more passengers, occasionally dragging the trip out to 1½ hours. During the summer, minibuses also regularly leave for the terraces from Lóngshèng between around 7am and 5pm. The bus runs to Huángluò before running wildly uphill to the drop-off point, from where it's a further 15-minute walk uphill to Píng'ān.

PÍNG'ĀN 平安

The lovely Zhuang village of Píng'ān is the centre of operations for any trips around the terraces and hikes into the hills. Uphill from the bus drop-off point, the village is worth exploring prior to launching yourself into the surrounding countryside. There are lovely dry stone walls and reams of tourist souvenirs (including buffalo-horn combs), and Zhuang women standing over cold slabs of *dòufu*. If your feet need revitalising, there are even places in the village offering foot massages. Several signposts to nearby sights can be found around Píng'ān, but they dwindle the further you get away from the village and the lookouts.

Hunt down the fading Maoist slogan on the rear wall of the building just below the Longji Foggy Resort (龙脊云雾山庄; Lóngjǐ Yúnwù Shānzhuāng) which boastfully declares in faint, red characters: ‘突出政治用毛泽东思想统帅一切’ (*tūchū zhèngzhì yòng Máo Zédōng Sīxiǎng tǒngshuài yīqiè*), which literally means ‘Stress politics by commanding everything according to Mao Zedong Thought’. The slogan does not appear to have been deliberately artificially preserved through retouching (as is often the case, eg in Chuāndìxià, outside Běijīng), but seems to have just been left to fade away. To find the house with the ghostly characters, take the right fork past the Li Qing Guesthouse and bear right past the school and the Yānzi Shānzhuāng (燕子山庄; Yānzi Hotel), round the corner to the Longji Foggy Resort and you will find it.

Internet access is available at **View Place Inn** (Lányuè Gé; ☎ 0773-758 3005; per hr Y10) on the way up to the No 2 Viewpoint above the village and at the Ping’an Hotel (per hour Y10).

For accommodation, **Countryside Inn** (乡村旅馆; Xiāngcūn Lǚguǎn; ☎ 0773-758 3020; d with shower Y120) is pretty much the first place you come across on the right hand side of the path. This clean and all-wood place has great, new doubles (no air-con, phone or TV), frequently discounted to around Y80 (and even Y50 to Y60 in winter) and there’s a good café serving pizza (Y20 to Y25), French toast (Y12), omelettes (Y6 to Y14), coffee, hot chocolate and other travellers dishes.

Other places include the 16-room **Long Teng Hotel** (龙腾阁; Lóngténg Gé; ☎ 758 3008; d with fan Y15-30, tr with fan Y30), up the steps behind the Countryside Inn, and the nearby **Li Qing Guesthouse** (丽晴旅馆; Lìqíng Lǚguǎn; ☎ 0773-758 3048; fax 0773-758 3021), with outside terrace, rooms with showers and loos and good views, and run by a Zhuang family. Further up towards the No 2 Viewpoint, the **Ping’an Hotel** (平安酒店; Píng’ān Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 0773-758 3198; d Y180-200; ☎) has internet access and rooms with air-con, showers and heating, often discounted to Y100.

PÍNG’ĀN TO DÀZHÀI 平安到大寨

Above Ping’an are the two lookouts, the No 1 Viewpoint, identified by path signs as Nine Dragons and Five Tigers, and the No 2 Viewpoint, also called Seven Stars with Moon. It’s a 20- to 30-minute walk up to the No 2 Viewpoint, from where it is a further half an hour

to walk to Viewpoint No 1. Accommodation options can be found not far from each spot with beds for around Y70.

From here you can embark on a long and invigorating walk past mountain goats and fabulous scenery all the way to Dàzhài (大寨), from where you can jump aboard a bus back to Lóngshèng. The path to Zhōngliù is pretty straightforward, but from Zhōngliù on there are a few potentially disorientating forks in the road. If you don’t want to walk all the way to Zhōngliù and Dàzhài, take the steps down from No 1 Viewpoint and back to Píng’ān. Alternatively, signposts in the other direction lead to the old Zhuang village of Lóngjǐ and onto Héping.

To walk to Dàzhài from No 1 Viewpoint, look out for the signpost that is over a small rise pointing the way to the Yao village of Zhōngliù (中六寨; Zhōngliù Zhài), a small village of wooden houses around 90 minutes away on the path. Follow the stone road through the trees, passing a small wooden pavilion where the stone path peters out before you arrive in a delightful valley. Once here you will need to cross a small wooden bridge before passing another pavilion; at the fork in the road further along, take the lower road that leads downhill to the river; cross the river and continue to the village of Zhōngliù. In Zhōngliù, bear right up the steep steps and out of the village. From this point on, you may have to ask a local or two for directions past the few forks in the road; if you want a local to guide you all the way, there will be no shortage of offers, but you will have to pay (Y20 to Y25). Bank on around two hours (or more for a leisurely walk) for getting from Zhōngliù to Dàzhài.

The next village you will come across is the small Yao village of Tiántouzhài (田头寨) where a few guesthouses can be found, including the **V8 Hostel** (☎ 0773-758 5655), which has simple rooms for Y20 to Y25. Exiting the village, take the path downhill and after half a kilometre or so there’s an alternative path leading up to the No 3 Viewpoint, Golden Buddha Summit (金佛顶; Jīnfó Dǐng). Continuing down the path brings you to the Yao village of Dàzhài, where there was considerable building work going on at the time of research. A ticket office in Dàzhài means you can effectively enter at this point and walk all the way to Píng’ān. It is possible to overnight in Dàzhài where there are several inns

(客棧; kèzhàn), such as the **Dazhai Inn** (Dàzhài Kèzhàn; ☎ 0773-758 5601). From Dàzhài, buses run every 30 minutes to Lóngshèng (Y7; 80 minutes) between 7.30am and 5.30pm.

HOT SPRINGS 温泉

Not far northeast from Lóngshèng, the hot springs (*wēnquán*) are a rather tacky tourist highlight and can be safely missed by the visitor, although buses (Y5) running out there pass through rolling hills sculptured with rice terraces and studded with Yao and Zhuang minority villages. It is possible to desert the bus around 6km to 7km from the hot springs and take off into the hills for some exploring. Beyond the hot springs is the **Longsheng Hot Springs National Forest** (龙胜温泉国家森林公园; Lóngshèng Wēnquán Guójiā Sēnlín Gōngyuán; admission Y20).

Sleeping

It is infinitely preferable to spend the night in the charming village of Píng’ān, rather than overnighting in the town of Lóngshèng, but if you arrive at odd hours, you can try one of the following.

Riverside Hotel (Kāikāi Lǚshè; ☎ 751 1335; 5 Guilong Lu; 桂龙路5号; s/d/tr Y15/20/30) Run by a helpful English teacher, rooms are very basic indeed and frigid in winter (although air-con rooms with warm air are possibly in the pipeline). The downstairs restaurant has a simple and basic menu with spare ribs (Y12), sweet and sour pork (Y10) and a smattering of Western items. Ask here about trips to the village of Diling.

Jindū Bīngquǎn (☎ 741 7649 or 751 7649; Xinglong Zhonglu; 兴龙中路; s & d w shower Y30; ☎) Spotless linen, bright and clean rooms, shower and squat toilets. Cross the bridge from the bus station and take the first turn on your left along Xinglong Zhonglu – it’s around 70m down on the left hand side. More expensive doubles with bath also available (Y50).

Tourism Hotel (Lǚyóu Bīngquǎn; ☎ 751 7206; 11 Guilong Lu; 古龙街11号; s/d/tr Y120/140/180; ☎) This midrange place has much pricier, large, clean, tiled rooms from the 4th floor up; all have shower but not all have air-con. Rooms are typically substantially discounted, so ask.

Longsheng Hotel (Lóngshèng Bīngquǎn; ☎ 751 2503; Shengyuan Lu; 盛园路; d/tr Y160/300, s/d deluxe Y268/288; ☎) Rooms are perhaps a bit dark, but are pleasant, spacious, well-kept and comfortable enough at this decent two-star hotel; it’s easy

enough to pick up a double here for Y100 outside of the very busy season.

Eating

In line with its ugly housing, Lóngshèng is unremarkable from a culinary point of view. Street stalls appear around midevening along Xinglong Xilu, offering point-and-choose meals. The Riverside Hotel has a simple menu of Western dishes and Chinese dishes popular with travellers.

Meiwei Lamb Restaurant (Měiwèi Yángròu Guǎn; ☎ 751 8661; Guilong Lu; 桂龙路; hotpot Y28) Not to be confused with the *shuān yángròu*, Mongolian hotpots served in Běijīng and the north of China where you scald thin strips of lamb in a boiling broth, the hotpot lamb here is chewier and less flavoursome, but still heart-warming for winter visits. It’s a short walk south from the Riverside Hotel.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave Lóngshèng **bus station** (☎ 751 6097) every 20 minutes for Guilín (Y22, two hours); hourly departures head to Sānjiāng (Y10, two to three hours) between 6.30am and 6pm.

ZIYUÁN 资源

While most tourists come to Guilín to float placidly down the Li River, more adrenaline-inducing rides can be made at Ziyuán. Located 107km northeast of Guilín near Māo’ér Shān (猫儿山; Cat Mountains), Ziyuán is the jump-off point for the wild rafting trip along the Wūpái Hé. This takes you floating or roaring – depending on water levels – on a trip of around 30km with a drop of about 300m. Another trip of up to 90km along the Zǐ Jiāng passes lots of villages, cliffs and caves, but requires an overnight stop. Those who don’t want to go rafting can visit nearby **Baoding Falls** (宝鼎瀑布; Bǎodǐng Pùbù).

Hotels in Guilín offer one- and two-day tours to Ziyuán during the warmer months for anything from Y200 for a one-day trip and Y350 for an overnight; weekends are more expensive. Prices are often higher during summer, but it is easier to hook up with a larger tour group. Otherwise head for Ziyuán during summer and make inquiries with some of the tour operators in town.

Buses to Ziyuán (Y25, two hours) depart hourly from the Guilín bus station. You might also consider heading to Lóngshèng from Ziyuán if you’ve already visited Guilín.

SĀNJIĀNG DONG MINORITY AUTONOMOUS COUNTY 三江侗族自治县

☎ 0772

Arriving in the run-of-the-mill township of Sānjiāng (capital of the Sānjiāng Dong Minority Autonomous County) may make you want to jump on the first bus in the return direction, but persist – this is a trip worth taking, as long as you venture out of town. Approximately 20km to the north of town, Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge and the surrounding Dong villages are peaceful and attractive and make for fascinating exploration, although they are very poor and a reminder of the endemic poverty still afflicting this region of China. Sānjiāng also draws in travellers village-hopping their way into Guizhōu province. About five hours by bus from Guilin, Sānjiāng is inhabited mostly by the Dong minority, who comprise more than 50% of the county's population (see p139).

There are few sights in the township of Sānjiāng, although the huge and recently built **Drum Tower** (admission ¥10; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm) overlooking the river from its elevated perch on the east bank of the Xun River (寻江; Xún Jiāng) can be climbed for views of the town.

Information

The town of Sānjiāng is devoid of a bank where you can change money so make sure you bring enough cash with you. The **Ruyi Internet Cafe** (如意网吧; Rùyì Wǎngbā; Furong Lu; per hr ¥2; ☎ 24hr) is up from the Sanjiang Hotel.

Orientation

Sānjiāng township is divided into east and west by the Xun River. Sānjiāng has two bus stations: Hedong bus station (河东站; Hédōng zhàn) is on the east side of the river on Yagu Lu (雅谷路); the Hexi bus station is over the bridge on the west side of the river, just off Xingyi Lu (兴宜路) as it meets the road from the bridge. Sānjiāng's streets are confusingly devoid of street signs.

Chengyang Wind & Rain Bridge

程阳桥

Overlooking a lush valley dotted with Dong villages and water wheels, this 78m-long, elegant covered **bridge** (Chéngyáng Qiáo; admission ¥30) was built in 1912 and is considered by the Dong to be the finest of the 108 such structures in Sānjiāng county. It took villagers 12 years to build. Magnificently hewn from huge, dark fir logs, the bridge's five towers feature

multiple storeys with exquisite eaves, and were apparently made without nails. The bridges are characterised by design flexibility, allowing them to be built on any topography. The surrounding terraced fields on either side are irrigated by Dong water wheels, some of which are around 6m tall. The inevitable minority women hawking wares are here as well.

Aimed squarely at tourists, a cultural dance (Mínzú Gēwǔ Biǎoyǎn) takes place in the Ma'an Drum Tower every day at 11am and 3.30pm.

Chéngyáng is a great place to base yourself for a couple of days to explore the surrounding countryside and minority villages. Chengyang Bridge National Hotel (see p186) is a good accommodation option.

From the Sānjiāng bus station, you can catch hourly buses to Línxi, which pass scattered collections of riverside Dong buildings and go right past the bridge, or otherwise take one of the frequent minivan taxis (Y3) that gather outside the bus station. Bus services stop around 6pm in each direction, so if you need to get back to Sānjiāng later than that you'll have to hitch. The first bus of the day to Sānjiāng passes by the bridge around 7.40am.

NEARBY VILLAGES

An excellent walk that leads you through a series of authentic Dong villages can be made after crossing the Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge. Traversing the bridge immediately brings you to Dong buildings in the villages of **Mǎ'ān Zhài** (马鞍寨) and **Yánzhài** (岩寨). As most of the buildings are made of fir wood, note the ever-present signs in Chinese warning villagers to be constantly vigilant against fire – a constant hazard in these combustible villages; despite this, the old men of the village have few qualms about firing up a vast flaming brazier for heat in the **Ma'an Drum Tower** (马鞍鼓楼; Mǎ'ān Gǔlóu) during winter.

Walking north from Mǎ'ān Zhài soon brings you to the delightful **Helong Bridge** (合龙桥; Hélong Qiáo), next to the small **Dragon Bridge Dong Hotel** (☎ 133 248 207 06; d ¥20–30), which has simple rooms right by the river but no air-con or English spoken. Before crossing the bridge you can carry on into Yánzhài proper, with its ramshackle dwellings offset by a newly constructed drum tower, fashioned from recently felled wood. Further west along the path is the village of **Píngtǎn Zhài** (平坦寨).

Crossing the Helong Bridge, you may be approached by guardians to make a voluntary contribution to the upkeep of the structure. For Y10 and above you get your name carved in a stone plinth. A diverting notice in Chinese on the bridge lists various prohibitions, including a regulation against frying fish within 50m of the bridge. On the other side of the river are fields of crops and the hamlet of **Píngzhài** (平寨), a lovely village with an old pavilion in its square and flagstone alleyways (so narrow the roofs almost touch). Note the abundance of fire hydrants.

Continue north – along either the riverside path or the main road – for a further 10 minutes or so to **Dōng Zhài** (东寨), passing another recently built drum tower (called the Pingdong Drum Tower). Look out for the the Chengyang Drum Tower just before you reach the bridge over the stream. A substantial old edifice on your right, its interior is hung with a portrait of Mao Zedong (as many drum towers are).

Ahead in Dàzhài (大寨) you can cross west over the **Chengyang Puji Bridge** (程阳普济桥; Chéngyáng Pǔjì Qiáo), but you may be once again coerced into contributing restoration funds. There's not much on the other side of the river but a few Dong houses, although a path leads back to Yánzhài if you want to return this way.

Píngpǔ Zhài (平埔寨) is a further 20-minute walk north along the main road, but you can also take the riverside path beside the fields that commence alongside the west bank of the river from Jichang Bridge at the turnoff to the village of **Jíchāng** (吉昌), itself a kilometre or so to the west.

Píngpǔ Zhài is not that pretty and is badly dilapidated, but there are two ancient drum towers here as well as an old theatre stage. The children here are very poor and may follow you in pursuit of loose change.

To get back to Sānjiāng, just flag down any bus (Y5) heading south on the main road.

To Dú dòng 到独洞

For an invigorating and attractive outing that could take you the better part of a day, a walk to the north of Sānjiāng town takes you through a pleasant succession of Dong villages to Dú dòng, which is virtually on the border with Guizhōu and Húnán. Take a bus from the Hexi bus station in Sānjiāng town to Dú dòng and ask the driver to drop you off at

Zuòlóng (座龙), one hour north of town. The road to Zuòlóng is rough in parts but passes an attractive backdrop of hills contoured with tea bushes.

From the turn-off to Zuòlóng, walk around 500m down the road to the village on the other side of the river, crossable via a string of rocks serving as stepping stones. Among the village's delightful alleys are two **drum towers**, one of which stands near an old theatrical stage (戏台; xìtái) that leans at an awkward angle. At the sight of foreigners and outsiders, children and village elders congregate at the windows of nearby houses. If you want you can continue along the road on the other side of the river to the nearby settlement of Lóng'an (龙安).

Return to the main road and walk a few kilometres north to **Bāxié** (八协), the next village. As you round the corner into Bāxié, you will arrive at the first of several wind-and-rain bridges. With four towers, the bridge (**Gōngfú Qiáo**; 巩福桥) is attractively designed with cross beams decorated with floral motifs. Further along the road, take the stone steps up through the pavilion to your left to the village's seven-eaved drum tower, standing on a small square, topped with a carved bird and facing a traditionally fashioned theatrical stage. Take the steps up to the west of the drum tower for views over the village.

Further along the road is the **Píngliú Cífú Bridge** (平流赐福桥; Píngliú Cífú Qiáo), which dates to 1861 and the reign of the Qing emperor, Xianfeng. The bridge leads you a short distance ahead to the village of **Píngliú** (平流), where Chinese slogans on walls remind villagers it is a crime not to take their children to school. The local drum tower stands out amid a collection of traditional Dong buildings and houses of more recent construction.

A short walk brings you to **Huáliàn** (华练), with its namesake bridge (dating originally to 1857) and drum tower rising above the village. At the time of writing, the local wood masons were industriously assembling a new drum tower from fir wood, the material of choice.

Around six kilometres north of Huáliàn is the settlement of **Bātuán** (罢团). It's quite a walk, but you can jump aboard a passing minibus (Y2). At the village, take the steps down to the magnificent **Batuán Wind and Rain Bridge** (罢团风雨桥; Bātuán Fēngyǔ Qiáo), a black-and-white edifice spanning the river. With fields on either side and superb views

downriver, the solidly constructed bridge contains a small shrine to Guandi (here called Guangong), the Taoist God of War. The village also has two drum towers and is currently building a third.

A further 4km from Bātuán, much of it uphill (the walk takes around 50 minutes), **Dúdòng** (独洞) is a busy and rundown town with several restaurants and with pigs roaming its muddy streets. Although much of Dúdòng is modern, a handful of historic buildings can be found in town, including a drum tower, a stage, the Xiapei building (夏培楼; Xiàpéi Lóu) and a bridge. If you want to spend the night, you can check into the **Sky Lake Hotel** (天湖旅馆; Tiānhú Lǚguǎn; ☎ 0772-862 2728) on the main road on the left just before you reach the marketplace after entering the village, which has simple rooms. Ten kilometres north of town the relaxing Dong village of **Gāodìng** (高定) is worth exploring. A motorbike will take you there for around Y10; ask at any of the restaurants in Dúdòng. Buses in the return direction leave hourly from 6am for the journey back to Sānjiāng, past mountains cloaked in firs.

Sleeping

Hotels are plentiful enough in Sānjiāng town, although it is far more pleasant to stay in one of the growing cluster of hotels found by and around the Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge.

SĀNJIĀNG

Xingliánxīn Hotel (兴连新宾馆; Xīngliánxīn Bīnguǎn; ☎ 862 6988; 11 Furong Lu; 芙蓉路11号; s/d/tr/q Y50/78/98/128; 🚻) Cheap and clean rooms with air-con, shower (squat loo), TV and heating in this new outfit just up from the Sanjiang Hotel. Look for the sign that simply says 'hotel', next to a Lianhua supermarket branch. Modest discounts available.

Chengyang Qiao Hotel (程阳桥宾馆; Chéngyáng-qiáo Bīnguǎn; ☎ 861 7431; s Y108-118, d Y138-158; 🚻) Next to the Agricultural Bank of China, scuffed rooms are OK here with tiled floor, shower room, air-con and TV, although the road outside can be noisy; rooms can usually be wangled for Y70.

Sanjiang Hotel (三江饭店; Sānjiāng Fàndiàn; ☎ 862 6888; fax 862 6385; 2 Xinhua Lu; 新华路2号; s & d Y218; 🚻) On the other side of the river, this smart enough, modern three-star hotel has decent rooms, typically discounted to Y130.

OTHER VILLAGES

Hotels can be found to the west of the Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge and there's a mushrooming brood in the villages of Yánzhài and Mǎ'ān Zhài just east of the bridge.

Countryside International Hotel (乡村国际旅馆; Xiāngcūn Guójī Lǚguǎn; ☎ 0772-858 2813; fax 858 2813; tw with shower Y30, tr without shower Y30; 🚻) After crossing the bridge, turn right and it's straight ahead on your left on the cusp of the small village of Yánzhài. Twin rooms are clean in this newly built place, staff speak English and there's an English menu but no river views. Internet access is Y5 per hour.

Dong Village Hotel (侗家旅馆; Dòngjiā Lǚguǎn; ☎ 0772-858 2421; d with/without shower Y50/40) Excellently located over Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge and a short walk to the west, with nearby Dong water wheels adding to its riverine charms, this newly built place has neat doubles with first-rate views. No air-con.

Chengyang Bridge National Hostel (程阳桥招待所; Chéngyángqiáo Zhāodàisù; ☎ 0772-858 2468; fax 0772-858 2798; d/tr without shower; Y40/60; 🚻) Just to the left of the far side of the bridge and fabulously positioned next to the river, this fine place operates from an original nail-less Dong building (run a metal detector over the woodwork if you want) and is run by amiable manager, Mr Wu Xiaolin. Hydrophiles can swim and bathe in the river during summer months. Laundry service available. Internet access Y5 per hour.

Eating

A strong selection of restaurants lies along Furong Lu (芙蓉路) in the east of Sānjiāng town.

Dòngxiāng Gé (侗乡阁; ☎ 862 5622; 24 Furong Lu; 芙蓉路24号; meals Y50) A welcoming and brightly lit Dong-style restaurant run by an entrepreneur with an eye on the tourist trade. Prices are steeper than you would expect in Sānjiāng, but dishes are appetizing. Square up to a Dong-style beef hotpot (侗家牛排火锅; Dòngjiā niúpái huǒguō; Y38) and Dong-style oil tea fish (侗家油茶鱼; Dòngjiā yóuchá yú; Y38), wave your chopsticks at rabbit hotpot (Y28) or brave a dog-meat hotpot (Y25).

Getting There & Away BUS

At the time of writing, buses to Sānjiāng town from Lóngshèng were taking around 2½ to three hours on a road that has been two years

BUS TIMETABLE

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Dúdòng | 10 | 2 | 9 per day (7.30am-4.20pm) |
| Guǎngzhōu | 152 | 12 | 4pm |
| Guilín | 84 | 5 | 7 per day |
| Línxī | 6 | 1 | frequent |
| Liúzhōu | 35 | 4 | 11 per day |
| Lóngshèng | 20 | 3 | 21 per day (6.30am-6pm) |
| Róng'ān | 15 | 1½ | 18 per day (7.10am-4.50pm) |
| Róngshuǐ | 19 | 2 | 1.30pm |
| Tónglè | 8.50 | 1½ | 13 per day (7.20am-5.10pm) |
| Wúzhōu | 110 | 10 | 3pm |

in the re-laying. Hedong bus station on the east side of the river in Sānjiāng town has buses serving Guilín, Wúzhōu, Lóngshèng and Liúzhōu. Buses from Lóngshèng arrive at the Hedong bus station; it's a Y2 motor tricycle ride between the two bus stations. Buses to Guǎngzhōu and local destinations such as Línxī and Dúdòng depart from the **Hexi bus station** (河西站; Héxī Zhàn; ☎ 861 2202 or 861 2929) on the west side of the river. With only one bus daily to Róngshuǐ, it is more convenient to first take a bus to Róngān and then take a local minivan to Róngshuǐ.

TRAIN

Sānjiāng's train station is located several kilometres west of town, linked to the town centre by minibuses that run every half-hour throughout the day. Huáihuà, Jíshǒu and Zhāngjiājiè in Húnán (see p212) are accessible by train, putting you within reach of Fènghuáng, Déháng and Wúlíngyuán; to the south, the rail line connects with the transport hub of Liúzhōu.

SĀNJIĀNG TO KǎILǐ

If you have time on your hands, it's worth entering Guizhōu province through the back door. From Sānjiāng's Hexi bus station parking lot, minibuses leave when full for Dípíng (Lóng'é; Y14 to Y20), just across the Guizhōu border. Though the journey takes approximately three hours, prepare for delays that could leave you stranded in Dípíng for the night. Frequent buses depart Dípíng for Lípíng (黎平; Y22, five hours).

The journey to Lípíng passes through some beautiful mountains, as well as the fabulous Dong village of Zhàoxīng (p138), the highlight of the trip and definitely worth a visit.

There are also frequent buses from Sānjiāng to Cóngjiāng (从江) in Guizhōu. The road is good but the route isn't as pretty. However, if you're in a hurry to reach Kǎilǐ, there are numerous onward connections that can be made from Cóngjiāng.

Another possibility is to take a train to Tóngdào in Húnán province and from there travel on by bus to Lípíng.

RÓNGSHUǐ 融水

☎ 0772 / pop 450,000

Another town central to Guǎngxī's minority culture, Róngshuǐ is a possible third node on a Lóngshèng-Sānjiāng-Róngshuǐ loop out of Guilín for travellers not crossing into Guizhōu. Thirteen minority groups are represented in this county, with Miao making up 37% of the total. Large numbers of Yao, Zhuang and Dong also live in the county.

Apart from the minority cultural experience, Róngshuǐ's most famous attraction is Yuánbǎo Shān, a couple of hours to the north-west, a rustic mountain with some gorgeous sunrises. While you plan your getaway to surrounding areas, the town itself has a quickly climbed Buddhist mountain.

Orientation

Róngshuǐ is a small town situated on the Rong River (融江; Róng Jiāng). The town's two main streets are the intersecting Shouxīng Lu (寿星路) and Chaoyang Lu (朝阳路). None of the roads in town have street signs.

The train line hugs the northern part of town with the station in the northwest about a 20-minute walk west from the centre. The bus station is on Xiangshan Lu (香山路) in the southwest.

Information

A handful of internet cafés for visitors can be found on the corner of Shouxing Lu and Chaoyang Lu.

Sights

Lǎozǐ Shān 老子山

The only sight within the town proper is this hillock (admission Y2) on the southern edge of the central part of town. A short walk uphill from the ticket office brings you past some crudely carved figures of *luòhàn* (Buddhist monks) to the **Tianwang Hall** (天王殿; Tiānwáng Diàn), behind which rises the recently built **Shouxing Temple** (寿星寺; Shòuxīng Sì). You can reach the top of the hill in around 20 minutes for views of the fields and peaks around Róngshuǐ.

To get there, head southeast from the town's only traffic roundabout until the road ends, then local paths will take you by pretty riverside scenes and through village gardens. After 10 minutes you'll cross a stream and see the first of the hawkers at the entrance. Local bus 2 also passes by Lǎozǐ Shān.

MINORITY VILLAGES 少数民族村落

Many minority villages can be accessed only via waterways from the pier in Róngshuǐ, which is not so easy to do for solo travellers (it can be very expensive) or if you arrive out of season. An alternative you can try is to book one of the minivans outside the bus station to take you around; drivers will charge around Y150 per day (plus fuel). As there's no shortage of Miao culture in the countryside, pick a local bus to anywhere north and you'll be likely to pass at least relatively close to a Miao village; just jump off the bus and look around. Alternatively, you can take an organised tour through one of the travel agents in town; these tours tend to visit villages such as Tiántou Cūn (田头村), the Miao villages of Gōutān (勾滩; Gōutān) and Chánglài (长赖); tours cost from around Y100 for a day tour and they include some tourist-oriented singing and dancing performances and horse fighting shows; boating and rafting trips along the Bei River (贝江; Bèi Jiāng) are also possible.

Sleeping

Bǎotōng Bīnguǎn (宝通宾馆; ☎ 512 9888; 217 Xiāngshān Lu; 香山路217号; s Y70, s & d with computer Y120; ☺ ☎) The clean rooms at this handy

hotel all come with air-con, DVD player, hot water and a shower. Pricier rooms are also equipped with computer terminals and negotiated discounts typically bring rooms down by 30%.

Getting There & Away

BUS

There are buses from the bus station on Xiangshan Lu to Liǔzhōu (Y22, frequent), Nánning (Y70 to Y85, five per day), Guilin (Y30, nine per day) and Sānjiāng (Y18, 8.30am). As there's only one daily bus to Sānjiāng it is better to share a ride in a minivan taxi to Ròng'ān (Y5, 50 minutes, morning to late afternoon) and then jump on one of the regular buses that connect Ròng'ān and Sānjiāng (Y10, 1½ hours). A taxi from Róngshuǐ to Ròng'ān costs around Y35.

TRAIN

Róngshuǐ is served by trains between Ròng'ān to the north and destinations in Húnán, and Liǔzhōu to the south. Departures to Nánning (Y28 hard seat), Xiāngfán (Y67 hard seat), Zhāngjiājìè (Y39 hard seat), Jíshǒu (Y31 hard seat) and Huáihuà (Y25 hard seat) all leave in the very early hours of the morning, with the ticket office only open sporadically between 11.30pm and 5.10am.

Getting Around

Most motorcycle-taxi rides in Róngshuǐ cost Y1 to Y2; from the train station to the bus station is Y3, as it's 2km west of the town centre. Otherwise the town is small enough to walk around.

AROUND RÓNGSHUǐ

Yuánbǎo Shān 元宝山

About 75km from Róngshuǐ, the summit of Yuánbǎo Shān rises 2100m over the surrounding plain. Climbable in four to six hours, the peak is surrounded by 3900 hectares of national park, featuring several ambitious trails (lots of steps) and plenty of waterfalls. A highlight is the 'Sea of Clouds', which often shrouds the summit overnight. At dawn, when the clouds clear, Yuánbǎo reddens in what is arguably Guǎngxī's best sunrise scene.

You will probably have to overnight at one of the **wooden huts** (beds Y15-20) on the mountain, since exploring the mountain and getting back in a day is a tall order.

Travel agents in Róngshuǐ can get you on pricey group tours to the mountain (reckon on around Y360 for a three-day tour), otherwise travel there independently, but take adequate food and water.

To get to Yuánbǎo Shān, catch the daily bus departing at noon from Róngshuǐ to the park entrance town of Xiǎosāng (Y10, two hours).

LIǔZHŌU 柳州

☎ 0772 / pop 782,000

The largest city on the Liu River (柳江; Liǔ Jiāng), Liǔzhōu is one of the Southwest's most important train junctions. Attractive karst scenery decorates the outskirts of town and the Liǔzhōu is a modern and wealthy city, but travellers generally find themselves here en route somewhere else.

Information

Several internet cafés can be found in the Yinxing Shāngyè Chéng on Fei'e Lu west of the south bus station. The Bank of China on Longcheng Lu can change money; the handy Bank of China branch on Fei'e Lu has an ATM. The China Post & Telecom office is next to the Lijing Hotel on Longcheng Lu.

Sights

Liǔzhōu has some pleasant parks, including **Liuzhou Park** (Liǔzhōu Gōngyuán; admission Y3) in the north of the city, **Yufeng Mountain Park** (Yúfēng Shān Gōngyuán) along Fei'e Lu near the main bus station and adjacent to **Ma'an Shan Park** (Mǎ'ān Shān Gōngyuán; admission Y3).

At the time of research, the new **Liuzhou Museum** (Liǔzhōu Bówùguǎn; www.lzwbw.com; cnr Guangchang Lu & Jiefang Beilu) on the northeast corner of Liuzhou Sq had yet to open.

Sleeping

Liúnán Lǔshè (☎ 361 8813; dm with fan Y10, s with fan Y22-70, tr with fan per bed Y20, d Y70-90) Opposite the train station there's no English sign here, but singles are clean and comfortable enough. Pricier single rooms come with bath and woodstrip flooring; concrete-floored dorms are more spartan.

Nanjiang Hotel (Nánjiāng Fàndiàn; ☎ 361 2988; 304 Fei'e Lu; 飞鹅路304号; s & d Y268-318, tr Y368; ☺) Also near the train station is this midrange, three-star outfit with good comfy single rooms, women-only rooms (Y298 to Y348) and discounts.



INFORMATION

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| Bank of China 中国银行 | 1 | B2 |
| Bank of China 中国银行 | 2 | B2 |
| China Post & Telephone Office 中国邮政&中国电信 | 3 | B1 |
| Industrial and Commercial Bank of China 工商银行 | 4 | B1 |
| Internet Cafés 网吧 | 5 | A2 |
| Kodak Express 柯达 | 6 | B1 |

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

| | | |
|----------------------------|----|----|
| Liuzhou Park 柳州公园 | 7 | B1 |
| Liuzhou Museum 柳州博物馆 | 8 | B1 |
| Ma'an Shan Park | 9 | B2 |
| Yufeng Mountain Park 鱼峰山公园 | 10 | B2 |

SLEEPING

| | | |
|---------------------|----|----|
| Lijing Hotel 丽晶大酒店 | 11 | B2 |
| Liúnán Lǔshè 柳南旅舍 | 12 | A2 |
| Nanjiang Hotel 南疆饭店 | 13 | A2 |

EATING

| | | |
|---------------------------------|----|----|
| Beijing Jiaozi Restaurant 北京饺子馆 | 14 | A2 |
|---------------------------------|----|----|

TRANSPORT

| | | |
|--------------------------|----|----|
| CAAC ticket office 民航售票处 | 15 | A2 |
| Main Bus Station 客运总站 | 16 | B2 |
| South Bus Station 客运南站 | 17 | A2 |

Lijing Hotel (Lijing Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 280 8888; fax 280 8882; 32 Longcheng Lu; 龙城路32号; d Y388-478; ☺) Smart, with efficient and polite staff, this four-star hotel is right in the city centre, on the other side of the Liu River. Good English is spoken here and discounts typically bring prices down by 20%.

Eating

Beijing Jiaozi Restaurant (Běijīng Jiǎoziguǎn; ☎ 361 0563; 81 Fei'e Lu; 飞鹅路81号; meals Y15) Bustling and busy dumpling restaurant with bus-loads of

jiāozì, handily located just west of the south bus station.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are flights from Liǔzhōu's Bǎilián Airport (白莲机场; Bǎilián Jīchǎng) to Běijīng, Shànghǎi, Guǎngzhōu, Chéngdū, Kūnmíng and other cities. Tickets for flights from here and from Guílín and Nǎnníng can be bought from the **CAAC ticket office** (Mínháng Shòupiàochù; ☎ 381 0000; 122 Fe'è Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm). Bus 21 runs to the airport.

BUS

Liǔzhōu has two bus stations; the main bus station (Kèyùn Zōngzhàn) is located on Wenbi Lu in the south of town. The south bus station (Kèyùn Nánzhàn; ☎ 367 0988) is located east of the train station on Fe'è Lu and serves similar destinations as the main bus station, including two buses to Yángshuò (Y29, 8.50am and 3.30pm) and a bus to Sānjiāng (Y35, 7.25am) and Kǎili (Y122, 3.40pm). The table below refers to trips from the main bus station.

TRAIN

A major rail junction, Liǔzhōu has excellent connections to Chóngqìng (Y75, 6.33am), Běijīng West (Y190, 10.49pm), Guílín North (Y26 hard seat), Nǎnníng (Y51, 8.55am and 4.52pm), Chéngdū (Y99, 9.15pm), Kūnmíng (Y82, 9.55pm), Shànghǎi (Y159, 12.32pm) and Xī'ān (Y122, 2.02pm). Prices are for hard sleepers (midbunk) unless indicated. Connections into Húnán include Zhāngjiājiè (Y53, 10.38pm), Huáihuà (Y40 hard seat) and Jìshǒu (Y47 hard seat).

Getting Around

Liǔzhōu boasts a new fleet of Hyundai taxis; taxis are Y3 at flagfall (plus Y1 petrol tax).

Nǎnníng 南宁

☎ 0771 / pop 807,000

Many of China's provincial capitals – think Héfěi, Fúzhōu or Nánchāng – are notoriously humdrum and Nǎnníng is no exception. It ticks all the usual boxes: it's rapidly modernising, increasingly wealthy and in the throes of transformation. The city is green and pleasant enough and waylays visitors queuing visas en route to Vietnam, but aside from its excellent museum and a handful of surrounding sights, there's little to deter visitors from pressing on to more scenic parts of the province.

Orientation

Nǎnníng's grids require only a few blocks to work out. In the north is the train station, from where the main artery – Chaoyang Lu – runs roughly north-south towards the Yong River (Yǒng Jiāng), which bisects the city. Halfway down Chaoyang Lu is Chaoyang Garden (Cháoyáng Huāyuán), the geographic centre of town. This is a good place for people-watching and for bus connections to scenic sights outside town. Just north of the river Chaoyang Lu splits into Jiangnan Lu, heading over the Yong Jiang Bridge, and Minzu Dadao, which races east towards the provincial museum and Langdong bus station. Xingning Lu and the west part of Minsheng Lu is pedestrianised.

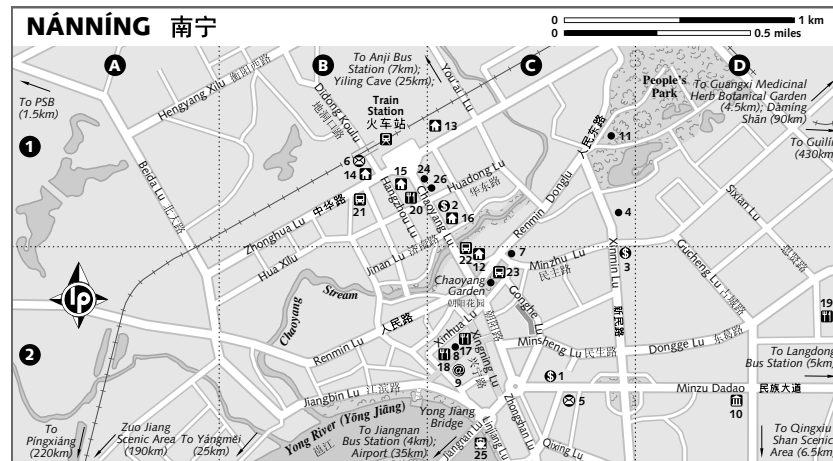
Information BOOKSHOPS

Foreign Languages Bookstore (Wàiwén Shūdiàn; Minzhu Lu; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) The usual stale slabs of classic novels peppered with slices of trash fiction and pulp paperbacks.

Xinhua Bookshop (Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; Xinhua Lu)

INTERNET ACCESS

Several internet cafés can be found around the train station area and along pedestrianised Minsheng Lu.



INFORMATION

| | |
|---|------|
| Bank of China 中国银行 | 1 C2 |
| Bank of China 中国银行 | 2 C1 |
| Bank of China 中国银行 | 3 C2 |
| China International Travel Service 中国国际旅行社 | 4 C1 |
| China Post 中国邮政 | 5 C2 |
| China Post 中国邮政 | 6 B1 |
| Foreign Languages Bookstore 外文书店 | 7 C2 |
| Xinhua Bookshop 新华书店 | 8 C2 |
| Xinxing Internet Café 新星网吧 | 9 C2 |

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Guangxi Provincial Museum | 10 D2 |
| Guangxi Provincial Museum | 10 D2 |
| Zhenning Fort 镇宁炮台 | 11 C1 |
| SLEEPING | |
| Baohai Hotel 宝海宾馆 | 12 C2 |
| High Class Hotel 海格拉斯大酒店 | 13 C1 |
| Railway Hotel 铁道饭店 | 14 B1 |
| Yingbin Hotel 迎宾饭店 | 15 B1 |
| Yutong Hotel 宇通宾馆 | 16 C1 |
| EATING | |
| Aomén Shìjiē 澳门食街 | 17 C2 |
| Muslim Restaurant 清真饭店 | 18 C2 |

Shaoshanchong Xiang Restaurant

| | |
|--|-------|
| 韶山冲湘菜馆 | 19 D2 |
| Tianhong Northeast Jiaozi Restaurant 天宏东北饺子 | 20 B1 |
| TRANSPORT | |
| Buses to Yángmèi 到扬美的公共车 | 21 B1 |
| Buses to Yángmèi 到扬美的公共车 | 22 C2 |
| Chaoyang Garden Bus Stop 朝阳花园 | 23 C2 |
| Civil Aviation Administration of China 中国民航 | 24 B1 |
| Ferry Dock 南宁客运码头 | 25 C2 |
| Langdong Bus Station Ticket Office 琅东客运站售票处 | 26 C1 |

Xinxing Internet Café (Xīnxīng Wǎngbā; 2nd fl, Minsheng Lu, per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) Opposite the south door of Aomén Shìjiē (p193).

MONEY

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; south of Nanfang Hotel, Chaoyang Lu) ATM that takes Visa, Amex, JCB and Diner's Club cards. The branch on Minzhu Lu gives credit card advances and changes travellers' cheques and cash.

POST & COMMUNICATIONS

China Post (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Minzhu Dadao) A handier branch for posting letters is just west of the train station.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (Gōngānjū; ☎ 289 1260; Keyuan Dadao; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) The Foreign Affairs office of the PSB is northwest of the city centre, north of the zoo.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójí Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 284 5147; 40 Xinmin Lu; ☎ 8.30am-

5.30pm Mon-Fri) Only an OK place for independent travellers to get information. Also issues one-month Vietnamese visas (1-/2-/3- day processing Y650/550/450)

Dangers & Annoyances

Child beggars – remotely controlled and guided to their target by grown-up mentors – are common in parts of Chaoyang Lu, even making audacious raids into McDonald's and other fast-food outlets to harass diners.

Sights & Activities

GUANGXI PROVINCIAL MUSEUM 广西壮族自治区博物馆

On Minzhu Dadao, the highlight of this fascinating museum (Guǎngxī Zìzhìqū Bówùguǎn; admission Y8; ☎ 8.30-11.50am & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) is its magnificent exhibition of ancient Dong bronze drums. Used as sacrificial and ritual vessels and as symbols of power as well as serving as musical instruments, the drums vary in size but are almost all robust and

BUSES FROM LIǔZHŌU

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Bǎisè | 124 | 8 | 8.20am & 3.50pm |
| Běihǎi | 110 | 5 | 6 per day |
| Guílín | 45 | 2½ | every 30min (7am-9.30pm) |
| Guipíng | 51 | 5 | 6 per day |
| Nǎnníng | 64 | 2½ | every 10-20min (6am-10pm) |
| Róngshuǐ | 29 | 2½ | every 30min (6.40am-7.40pm) |
| Yángshuò | 30 | 3½ | 7.45am |

imposing and finely wrought, with the largest 165cm high. Many of the designs are vivid and realistic, displaying a highly developed knowledge of bronze work. The drums follow a basic type: cylindrical in shape, decorated with frogs, birds, figures and other animals and ornamented with lines radiating concentrically on the lid from a central sun design. Drums are divided into male and female types, with the male drum generating a deeper timbre. Male and female drums can be distinguished by the length of the solar rays and the diameter of the solar design. On view are many different styles of drum, from Lingshan drums with their piggyback-style frog motifs to the Shizhaishan drum type from Yúnnán with its highly decorated patterns. Also on view is a drum mould.

The Guangxi Minority Exhibition has exhibits of the province's plentiful minorities and their traditions, customs and textiles. Learn how the Shui use a water calendar (rather than a solar or lunar calendar) and how a Yao brides cries during her wedding.

In the tree-filled rear garden sit several full-size examples of Dong and Miao houses and a nail-less bridge, complete with pond.

The museum is a quiet, relaxing break from the hectic city streets. There are some English descriptions or you may chance upon one of the English-speaking guides. To get there, walk or take bus 6.

PEOPLE'S PARK 人民公园

Also known as White Dragon Park, this park (Rénmín Gōngyuán; 1 Renmin Donglu; admission Y2; ☎ 9am-6pm) is a pleasant spot for a stroll. Steps facing you as you enter take you up to **Zhenning Fort** (Zhènníng Pàotái; admission Y1) where you can inspect a rusty 122mm **German cannon** on rails, manufactured in the 19th century, taking aim at the southwest. Also within the fort are a couple of smallish smooth-faced *bixi* (turtlelike dragons) and a Ming dynasty bell. As the blurb insists (with not entirely watertight logic): 'He who has not reached the Zhenning Fort has not reached the Nanning People's Park', and you can't argue with that. There's also the small Shady Botanical Gardens, which features some rare herbs, exotic flowers, a hothouse with local flower varieties, and the requisite 1000-year-old banyan tree. You can also go boating on the lake or take your chances on the roller-skating rink.

QINGXIU SHAN SCENIC AREA

青秀山风景区

This largish scenic area (Qīngxiù Shān Fēngjǐng Qū) to the southwest of Nánning on the Yōng Jiāng offers lakes, ponds, pavilions, cable cars, viewing platforms and foraging tour groups. A favourite summer retreat since the Sui and Tang dynasties, the park has verdant woods, springs and landscaped gardens with modest but scenic peaks of up to 180m that can be easily scaled.

Local buses 10 and 33 go to the park from the train station, but you still have a fair walk to the entrance. Buses depart when full from the northern side of Chaoyang Garden. It costs Y3 to the front gate or Y11 into the park including admission.

GUANGXI MEDICINAL HERB BOTANICAL GARDEN 广西药用植物园

广西药用植物园

This fascinating **garden** (Guǎngxī Yàoyòng Zhīwùyuán; admission Y10; ☎ dawn to dusk) is the largest of its kind in China, with more than 2400 species of medicinal plants (Guǎngxī alone has 5000 species). The botanical gardens will be especially impressive if you are lucky enough to tag along with one of the centre's few English speakers. Stuck in an industrial wasteland northeast of the city, it takes about 30 minutes to get there on bus 101 or 102 from Chaoyang Garden. A taxi from town costs about Y25.

DRAGON BOAT RACES

As in other parts of the Southwest (and Guǎngdōng and Macau), Nánning stages dragon boat races on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month (sometime in June), when large numbers of sightseers cheer the decorated rowing vessels along the Yōng Jiāng. The rowers pull to a steady cadence of drum beats maintained by a crew member at one end of the boat.

Sleeping BUDGET

If you don't object to scuzziness, it's worth poking your head into one of the cheap Chinese guesthouses (招待所; *zhāodàisù*) around the train station area and along Chaoyang Lu. They offer beds for as little as Y10 in a shared room, although not all welcome foreigners.

Yingbin Hotel (Yīngbīn Fāndiàn; ☎ 211 6288; www.ybfd.com; 71 Chaoyang Lu; 朝阳路71号; s Y90-130, d Y100-140, tr/q Y180/200; r with computer Y170-190; ☎)

Rates dip as low as Y40 for a standard single or Y98 for a computer-equipped version, the latter advertised with free internet, free laundry and free shoe-cleaning. All rooms have air-con, phone, TV and shower except for the cheapie singles and doubles which have fan, TV and shower.

Yutong Hotel (Yùtōng Bīnguǎn; ☎ 242 3285; cnr Jinan Lu & Chaoyang Lu; 济南路和朝阳路交界; s/d Y128/148; ☎) A fresh business hotel of the newly built breed with smart, clean rooms but precious little character. Single rooms come with clean wood floors, digital TV and swish bathrooms with undersink cabinets. Limited English spoken; discounts of around 15% the norm. Look for the modern-looking tower at the intersection of Jinan Lu and Chaoyang Lu.

Railway Hotel (Tiēdào Fāndiàn; ☎ 232 3188; fax 242 2572; 84 Zhonghua Lu; 中华路84号; s Y168-188, d Y120-210, tw Y170; ☎) It's service with a scowl at this place, but the location is handy for the train stations, and rooms pass muster, with discounts on the cheapest rooms deflating prices to around Y80. The pricier doubles are large and tidy with bath, but at this price you might as well pay a bit extra and treat yourself at the excellent High Class Hotel opposite.

MIDRANGE

Baohai Hotel (Bǎohǎi Bīnguǎn; ☎ 576 5008; fax 576 5008; 68 Chaoyang Lu; s/d Y300/320; ☎) Once you've recovered from the crummy lift and weird layout with guest rooms lodged away on the 4th and 5th floors of a separate block adjacent to reception, you'll find rooms with acres of space with huge bathrooms; 50% discounts not uncommon.

High Class Hotel (Hāigēlāsī Dàjiūdiàn; ☎ 579 6888; fax 579 6998; 76 Zhonghua Lu; s & d Y380; ☎) Lovely and spacious double rooms with spotless wood strip floors, smart furniture, supportive mat-

tresses and accommodating staff make this well turned-out hotel the best choice in the train station area. The free breakfast is Chinese-style, and worth it. Discounts regularly bring rooms down to Y160. Highly recommended.

Eating

Nánning is celebrated for its dog hotpot (狗肉火锅; *gǒuròu huǒguō*). Wander down Zhongshan Lu for durian, lychee, melons, squid kebabs (Y1), stinky tofu (臭豆腐; *chòu dòufu*), porridge, endless barbecued meat outlets, dog cadavers spiced in two and swinging from hooks, and roasted sparrows (*shāo diqū*). Also look out for *juàntóngfēn* (steamed noodle pancake wrap with pork and coriander filling served in steaming broth), *lǎoyǒumiàn* and *lǎoyǒufěn* (literally 'old friend' wheat or rice noodles). Several restaurants serving dumplings from China's northeast can be found along Huadong Lu near the intersection with Chaoyang Lu.

Tianhong Northeast Jiaozi Restaurant (Tiānhóng Dōngběi Jiǎozǐ; ☎ 242 8868; 2nd fl, 65 Chaoyang Lu; 朝阳路65号; meals from Y10) There's no English menu at this industrious dumpling restaurant, but don't let that deter you from trying its scrummy *jiǎozǐ*. The vegetable *jiǎozǐ* (素白菜馅; *sùbáicài xiàn*) come in at Y2 for six, the chive and egg version (韭菜鸡蛋; *jiǔcài jīdàn*) only Y2.5 for six; the lamb and onion (羊肉大葱馅; *yánròu dàcōng xiàn*) are good news at Y4 for a half dozen and, if you still have an appetite, further standard dishes from China's northeast fill out the menu.

Muslim Restaurant (Qīngzhèn Fāndiàn; ☎ 282 1381; 25 Xinhua Lu; 新华路25号; meals Y15-25) Popular and good-value eatery specialising in Chinese Muslim cuisine with a useful English menu.

Āomén Shǐjiē (☎ 261 2129; 19 Xinhua Lu; 新华路19号; meals Y25; ☎ 10am-10pm) Just along from

MAN BITES DOG

The history of dog meat (狗肉; *gǒuròu*; in Cantonese, *gauyeuk*) consumption in China dates back millennia. Famed among Middle Kingdom residents for its medicinal qualities, canine flesh is especially popular in winter months, as the meat is believed to generate heat and promote bodily warmth. After a spell in Guǎngxī you will get used to the sight of freshly skinned mutts being blow-torched at the wayside, or man's best friend – limbs stiff from rigor mortis – hanging rigidly from hooks in night markets.

Dog meat may make it to the menu across much of China, but not all Chinese participate. The Manchu from China's hearty northeast eschew dog meat because a much-revered pooch once saved the life of Nurhachi, founder of the Manchu state. But travellers to China's Southwest will find dog a standard feature of restaurant kitchens.

the Xinhua bookstore, this gigantic dining hall is lined with hatches where you order your dish, a waitress in tow while you make your choice. There's no English menu, but the wall-mounted photo menu makes ordering a piece of cake. Try the peppery *má pò dòu fu* (麻辣豆腐; spicy tofu with crumbs of pork; ¥10) or the more straightforward *gōng bǎo jī dǐng fàn* (宫爆鸡丁饭; spicy chicken chunks with rice; ¥12) or the tasty *méi cài kòu ròu bāo* (pork with cabbage; ¥15). Dishes are discounted between 2pm and 5pm.

Shaoshanchong Xiang Restaurant (Shǎoshānchōng Xiāngcǎiguǎn; ☎ 587 1059; 2-16 Sixian Lu; 思贤路2-16号; meals ¥30) For sheer OTT novelty and dubious tastefulness, check out this nostalgic Húnán restaurant where signature chili-infused dishes from the home province of Chairman Mao are delivered by gaggles of cheeky, pig-tailed girls in Red Guard uniforms.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Domestic airlines fly all over China from Nǎnníng, with multiple departures daily to Běijīng (Y2050, three hours five minutes, six per day), Xī'ān (Y1800, three hours 20 minutes, two per day), Shànghǎi (Y1660, two hours 20 minutes, four per day), Kūnmíng (Y630, one hour 10 minutes, two per day), Nánjīng (Y1480, three hours, one per day), Chóngqīng (Y940, one hour 20 minutes, one per day), Guǎngzhōu (Y730, one hour five minutes, frequent) and Guiyáng (Y630, one hour, two per day). Less frequent departures include Chéngdū (Y1030, 1½ hours, three weekly), Qīngdǎo (Y1940, three hours 55 minutes, three weekly) and Hong Kong (Y1900, one hour 10 minutes, three weekly). At the time of writing, the occasional flights to Hanoi (Hénnèi) had been suspended.

Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 243 1459; 82-1 Chaoyang Lu; ☎ 24hr) is generally efficient, though travel agencies on the street or in your hotel will have lower prices. From 8pm to 8am doors are barred shut and tickets are sold from the window round the side of the building.

BUS

A **ticket office** (☎ 242 9654 or 242 7619; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm) for buses from Langdong bus station is located a short walk along Huadong Lu, near the corner of Huadong Lu and Chaoyang Lu, where you can purchase tickets up to 15 days in advance. Just north along Chaoyang Lu and on the same side of the road is a similar **ticket office** (☎ 210 2334; ☎ 6.30am-10pm).

Langdong Bus Station

This **bus station** (垌东客运站; Làngdōng Kèyùnzhan; ☎ 550 8332, 550 8329) is inconveniently located in the far east of Nǎnníng. A taxi will cost around ¥25 from the train station area; give yourself around 30 minutes to get there; more if it's rush hour.

Vietnam-bound travellers can catch the daily Hanoi-bound bus (Y120, 6½ hours, 8.10am). It will take you to Friendship Pass, after which you cross into Vietnam on foot and then board a Vietnamese bus the rest of the way to Hanoi.

Jiangnan Bus Station

This **bus station** (江南客运站; Jiāngnán Kèyùnzhan; ☎ 451 9999; 236 Xingguang Dadao) is similarly located out on a limb, way down in the south of town over the Yong River. As well as destinations listed in the table below, numerous destinations in Guǎngdōng province are also served. Bus 41 connects Anji Bus Station with Jiangnan Bus Station.

BUSES FROM JIANGNAN BUS STATION

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Bǎisè | 65 | 4 | 4 per day |
| Běihǎi | 58 | 2½ | every 30min (7.30am-9.30pm) |
| Chóngqīng | 260 | 18 | 5pm & 6.40pm |
| Chóngzuó | 25 | 1½ | Every 40min (8am-6.30pm) |
| Guilín | 88 | 4½ | frequent |
| Hong Kong | 300 | 13 | 9pm |
| Liúzhōu | 60 | 3 | every 30min (7.30am-9pm) |
| Yángshuò | 100 | 5½ | 4.30pm |

BUSES FROM LANGDONG BUS STATION

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|------------------|----------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Bǎisè | 50 | 3½ | 7 per day |
| Běihǎi | 58 | 3 | every 20min (7am-9.30pm) |
| Chéngdū | 300 | 18 | 2.30pm |
| Chóngqīng | 260 | 15 | 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 6.30pm |
| Chóngzuó | 20 | 1½ | every 40min |
| Dàxīn | 40 | 2½ | 5 per day |
| Detian Waterfall | 90 | 3½ | 9am |
| Friendship Pass | 68 | 2½ | 8.10am |
| Guǎngzhōu | 182 | 9 | frequent |
| Guilín | 90-100 | 4½ | every 20min (7.30am-11.30pm) |
| Guipíng | 50 | 3½ | frequent |
| Guiyáng | 160 | 8 | 9 per day |
| Hanoi (Hénnèi) | 120 | 6½ | 8.10am |
| Hèzhōu | 130 | 8 | 9 per day |
| Hong Kong | 350 | 11 | 9.10am |
| Kǎilǐ | 130 | 12 | 3.40pm |
| Liúzhōu | 60 | 2½ | frequent |
| Pingxiáng | 60 | 2½ | frequent |
| Róngshuǐ | 85 | 7 | 8.30am & 2pm |
| Zhōngshān | 180 | 9 | frequent |
| Ziyuán | 90 | 7 | 9.40am |
| Zūnyì | 200 | 10 | 4 per day |

Anji Bus Station

Buses leave Anji Bus Station (安吉站; Ānjī Zhàn), north of town, every 15 minutes for Wǔmíng, useful for travellers heading to Yiling Cave (p196). Bus 41 runs between Anji station and Jiangnan station.

TRAIN

Important rail links from the **train station** (☎ 222 2222) include Běijīng (Y499, T6, 28 hours, 9.50am), Chéngdū (Y363, K142, 36 hours, 5.51pm), Guǎngzhōu (Y185, K366, 14 hours, 11.55pm), Kūnmíng (Y195, K393, 14 hours, 6.10pm), Shànghǎi (Y418, K182, 30½ hours, 9.26am), Xī'ān (Y406, K316, 34½ hours, 10.47am) and Guilín (Y65, N802, five hours, 8.25am).

The T6 for Běijīng also passes through Liúzhōu (three hours), Guilín (five hours), Wúhàn (17 hours), Zhèngzhōu (22 hours) and Shìjiāzhuāng (26 hours). The K142 to Chéngdū passes through Guiyáng (19 hours) and Chóngqīng (29 hours). The 2012 to Zhāngjiājìe (16 hours) leaves at 7.30pm.

The T905/M2 from Nǎnníng to Dong Dang (Tóngdēng) in Vietnam departs at 9.15pm, but think twice before hopping

on. It takes forever with lengthy delays in Píngxiáng and at customs. The 5517 train for Pingxiáng leaves at 7.58am (four hours 50 minutes).

Getting next-day tickets at the train station doesn't seem to be too problematic. Foreigners can use any window, though technically No 15 is supposed to be 'the one'; window No 16 is the place to go to change tickets.

Getting Around

A CAAC **shuttle bus** (☎ 209 5307; ¥15) departs every 30 minutes between 5.30am and 10.30pm from the CAAC office (82-1 Chaoyang Lu) for the 40-minute trip to the airport.

AROUND NǎNNÍNG

Yángměi 扬美

This 17th-century traditional town has been beautifully preserved and has become a popular day trip from Nǎnníng for Chinese tourists. The town is just 26km west of Nǎnníng on the Yong River. You could spend a couple of hours just wandering the cobblestone streets admiring the beautiful, historic buildings. There are some descriptions of the

REVOLUTION IS NOT A DINNER PARTY

Mao Zedong's famous quip – 'Revolution is not a dinner party' – seemingly fell on a multitude of deaf ears during the chaotic Cultural Revolution. The most gruesome episode in the internecine upheaval, and a strictly taboo subject among Chinese historians, a shocking spate of cannibalism in Guǎngxī dragged the Chinese class war down to new depths.

As a result of his research including interviews with witnesses and participants of the atrocities, Chinese dissident novelist Zheng Yi reveals how class enemies were killed and publicly eaten in parts of Guǎngxī province during the period of political intoxication that convulsed China between 1966 and 1976. Zheng Yi was initially led to his research by the rumours of cannibalism while he was serving as a Red Guard in Guǎngxī during the 1960s.

In his shocking account *Scarlet Memorial: Tales of Cannibalism in Modern China* (Westview Press, 1996), Zheng recounts how a female teacher, Wu Shufang, was killed in May 1968 in Wuxuan County, and her liver cooked and devoured. Her case is but one of many instances of the murder and consumption of teachers, landlords and other members of the bourgeoisie.

The cannibalism was far from clandestine. Rather, it was publicly orchestrated in the form of feasts, with human flesh consumed not to satiate hunger but as the ultimate demonstration of the subjugation of political enemies.

Accusations of state approval remain conjectural and it is possible that these were simply acts of brutality in a corner of China where authority had broken down and nihilism was widespread. The depravity was also arguably an extreme consequence of the dehumanising class hatred and fanaticism instigated by Mao Zedong and his acolytes.

Lu Xun's paranoid protagonist in his seminal *Diary of a Madman* may have imagined himself menacingly surrounded by cannibals, but the modernist author would have been distraught at the presence of his disturbing tale.

history of the town's buildings, but not too much English. Guides will offer their services and you may be lucky to find someone who speaks some English. The best way to get around the town is to hire an ox cart for a half day (Y10). Lunch is available at a couple of restaurants in town or take a packed lunch.

The village used to be a pleasant boat trip away but now buses make the run. Buses leave from a bus stop just north of Chaoyang Garden or from a stop two blocks west of the train station, but only in high season. A taxi to the village will cost Y50 to Y60.

Yiling Cave 伊岭岩

Twenty-five kilometres to the north of Nánning is **Yiling Cave** (Yiling Yán; admission Y45; ☎ 8am-5pm). The Chinese rarely do caves *au naturel*, so brace yourself for coloured fluorescent lights and in-your-face commercialisation.

When you first arrive at the front gate, wait around for a group to form for a guided tour of the **Zhuang-minority Culture Park**, with its introduction to popular Zhuang culture. Entry is Y45; Chinese-speaking guided tours available.

If you have any time left, then the surrounding countryside is worth exploring.

Minibuses run from Chaoyang Garden most weekends (especially during summer). Alternatively, take bus 41 to the Anji bus station and catch a Wǔmíng (武鸣) bound bus (Y6; every 15 minutes, 6.15am to 10pm) to the cave.

North of Yiling Cave is **Lingshui Springs** (灵水泉; Lingshui Quán; admission Y6), essentially a large outdoor mineral swimming pool. To reach the springs, continue on the bus (Y10) past Yiling to Wǔmíng.

Daming Mountain 大明山

A further 1½ hours northeast of Wǔmíng, 90km from Nánning, **Daming Mountain** (Dàming Shān; admission Y20) averages 1200m above sea level, reaching a maximum altitude of 1760m. A popular vacation spot in summer, the temperate climate engenders a population of more than 1700 species of plants. There are several relatively easy walks to nearby scenic look-outs. Most people head up to Dàming Shān for the scenery: the deep valley of **Shēnshān Shāngǔ**; the ancient Song pine trees, **Wǔlǎosōng** and **Yíngkèsōng**; one of the three waterfalls; **Sacred Girl Peak (Shènnǚ Fēng)**; and of course the highest peak, Dàming Shān. Most scenic spots are accessible within a day's hike, however

many visitors organise a guide to show them around as paths are poorly marked.

The standard approach is to spend the night in the small forestry village of Dàmingshān at the foot of the mountain, although if arriving off season it's a good idea to phone ahead. Try the room reservation hotline: ☎ 985 1122.

The **Daming Shan Longteng Guesthouse** (大明山龙腾宾馆; Dàming Shān Lóngtēng Bīnguǎn; ☎ 1397 815 3459; r from Y150) is consistently staffed outside of high season, with average rooms but helpful service, and can help you arrange guides and transportation to the mountain.

From Nánning's Chaoyang Garden, a daily public bus (Y14, 3pm) leaves from Renmin Lu. The bus terminates at Dàmingshān where you'll find the ticket office, accommodation and a small shop. It is, however, another 27km from here to the top (and Daming Shan Resort) and the bus will only continue up if there are enough paying passengers.

Consider hopping off the bus 5km earlier in **Léijiāng**, where you can find a room and arrange a motorbike (Y50) to take you up to the top early the next day. You can also reach Léijiāng on any Dàhuà-, Mǎshān- or Liǎngjiāng-bound buses from Wǔmíng or Nánning.

A bus returns to Nánning from Dàming Shān daily at 7.30am. There is sometimes a second bus on weekends.

GUÌPÍNG 桂平

☎ 0775

A friendly and relaxed town, Guiping is the modest gateway to the village of Jintián, birthplace of Taiping leader Hong Xiuquan and cradle of the bloodiest rebellions in history. Things are a bit slow in Guiping – the local cinema in 2007 was still screening films about the Sino-Vietnam conflict and the war against US forces in Korea – but locals are affable and climbs up Xishān get the heart going.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; 448 Guinan Beilu)

Foreign exchange and ATM.

China Post (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; cnr Renmin Zhonglu & Guigui Beilu) Internet access.

Guiping Tourism Information Service Centre

(Guiping Shì Lǚyóu Zǐxún Fúwù Zhōngxīn; ☎ 338 1833)

Just east of the town square; not staffed at time of research.

PSB Exit and Entry Administration Section

(Gōngānjú Chūrùjīng Guǎnlìkè; ☎ 457 2100; 2nd fl, 397

Renmin Zhonglu; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Can issue visa extensions.

People's Hospital (Rénmín Yīyuǎn; Renmin Xilu)

Xinhua Bookstore (Xīnhuá Shūdiǎn; Renmin Zhonglu)

Xingji Internet Café (星际网吧; Xīngjì Wǎngbā; Renmin Xilu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) Round the corner from the bus station.

Sights

The enjoyable climb up **Xishān** (西山; admission Y33) in the west of town can be done in 90 minutes or so; the walk is lovely, so there's little need for the cable car (up/down Y40/15). A succession of pavilions and Buddhist temples awaits ramblers on the way up, including the **Washing Stone Nunnery** (洗石庵; Xǐshí Ān; admission Y2) and the **Longhua Temple** (龙华寺; Lónghuá Sì; admission Y2), which originally dates to the Song dynasty. Note how the bark of the Longlin pine trees resembles the scales of a dragon. The local basketball team run up and down the hill, making you tired just watching them. At the summit is a TV transmitter and a small shrine to Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy. Hikes from here reach across to neighbouring peaks. Numerous vendors and shops at the base of the peak sell the famous Xishan tea. From the town square to the main gate



INFORMATION

| | |
|---|------|
| Bank of China 中国银行 | 1 B1 |
| China Post 中国邮政 | 2 B1 |
| Exit and Entry Administration Section of the PSB 公安局出入境管理科 | 3 B1 |
| Guiping Tourism Information Service Centre 桂平市旅游咨询服务中心 | 4 B1 |
| People's Hospital 人民医院 | 5 A1 |
| Xingji Internet Café 星际网吧 | 6 A1 |
| Xinhua Bookstore 新华书店 | 7 B1 |

SLEEPING

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Gangsheng Hotel 港盛旅馆 | (see 10) |
| Guiping Hotel 桂平饭店 | 8 B1 |
| Nóngyèjú Zhongxīn Zhàodàisù 农业局中心招待所 | 9 B1 |

TRANSPORT

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Bus Station 客运站 | 10 A1 |
|-----------------|-------|

is Y2 by three-wheeled motortaxi; otherwise take bus 8.

The attractive nine-storey Ming dynasty **East Pagoda** (东塔; Dōngtǎ) is around 20 minutes on bus 8 (Y2) east of town.

Sleeping

Down the scale of comfort, try any of the hostels near the bus station for beds from around Y10 to Y15.

Nóngyèjū Zhōngqīn Zhāodàisù (☎ 339 1866; Guigui Beilu; 桂贵北路; s with fan without toilet Y30, tr per bed with fan and toilet Y15, d per bed with fan and toilet Y20, tr per bed with air-con and toilet Y35, d per bed with air-con and toilet Y45; 🚻) Right opposite the bus station, this is one of several guesthouses in the vicinity, with cheap and functional rooms facing onto a large courtyard.

Gangsheng Hotel (Gāngshèng Lǚguǎn; ☎ 337 2338; Guigui Beilu; 桂贵北路; s/tw Y108/128; 🚻) Good hotel just north of the bus station with clean, tiled rooms with shower (squat loo); pricier rooms (Y168) come with computer. Discounts shave around 20% off prices.

Guiping Hotel (Guīpíng Fāndiàn; ☎ 336 9292; 7 Renmin Zhonglu; 人民中路7号; s & d Y220, tr Y250; 🚻) OK if you want reasonable comfort and a plate with Chairman Mao's portrait gazing at you from the shelf. Rooms are spacious and clean, with large shower rooms. Discounts bring rooms down to around Y160 at most times.

Gongde Villa (公德山庄; Gōngdé Shānzhūāng; ☎ 339 3399; Xihan Scenic Area; 西山风景区; s/d/tr Y298/338/368; 🚻) Tucked away at the foot of picturesque Xishān, this three-star hotel is the most pleasant place to stay, with landscaped gardens, a good restaurant and a ping-pong room.

Eating

Dàpáidàng (大排档; canteen style or small hole-in-the-wall eateries) are liberally scattered along Guigui Lu and Renmin Lu. Cheap claypot restaurants can be found just north of

the bus station exit on Guigui Lu where you can get a cheap claypot rice meal (沙锅饭; shāguō fàn) for about Y5. A string of Sichuan restaurants are just around the corner on the north side of Renmin Xilu, just west of the square, and there's a night market near the China Post office on Renmin Zhonglu.

Getting There & Away

Guipíng's **bus station** (Kèyùnzhan; ☎ 338 0032) is on Guigui Lu. To reach Běihǎi, take a bus (Y13) first to the bus station (☎ 0775 422 8007) in Guigāng, from where buses (Y75, 9.10am and 2.40pm) to Běihǎi take five hours.

Getting Around

Taxis start at Y3 for the first 2km.

AROUND GUÍPÍNG

Jintián 金田

Just 23km north of Guipíng is the town of Jintián, the birthplace of Hong Xiuquan. Hong was a schoolteacher who declared himself a brother of Jesus Christ and led an army of more than a million followers against the Qing dynasty in the Taiping Rebellion, which was one of the bloodiest civil wars in history. A **museum** (起义纪念馆; Qǐyì Jìniànguǎn; admission Y3; 🕒 8am-5pm) now stands at the site of Hong's home.

The museum has two neglected floors of artefacts and displays tracing the history of the movement. There are no English captions, but a few diagrams and maps will keep you guessing which army went where and when and the exploits of Hong and the God Worshipping Society. The assorted weaponry upstairs may keep you interested.

East of the museum stands a socialist-realist **statue of Hong** – inscribed with the characters 天王洪秀全 (Tiānwáng Hóng Xiùquán; Heavenly King Hong Xiuquan).

Nearby is the site of the **Ancient Barracks** (古营盘; Gǔ Yíngpán) and the **Pledge Rock**

OCEAN PERSON

Westerners without Chinese-language skills will be oblivious to the sheer variety of local slang for foreigners. *Lǎowài* (老外) – which literally means 'person from the outside' – or 'foreigner' – remains ubiquitous and you will hear the epithet repeatedly voiced, typically by Chinese men. Despite decades of exposure to Western films, the sudden appearance of Westerners can still spark considerable curiosity. *Wàiguórén* (literally 'person from a foreign country') is a politer alternative and is more popular with children. The most polite formal term is *wàibīn*, which means 'foreign guest'. You will also hear *wàiguólǎo* (外国佬), which also means 'person from a foreign country' but is more colloquial, or nation-specific terms, such as *yīngguólǎo* (英国佬), which means 'a person from England' but is derogatory. You may occasionally hear the Cantonese *saiyan* (西人; *xīrén*), which literally means Westerner, but Běihǎi folk (usually elderly) and Chinese from other areas of Cantonese-speaking Guǎngxī still refer to Westerners as *gwailo* (Mandarin 鬼佬; *guǐlǎo*), a derogatory term that means 'ghost person'. Variants on this are *hakgwai* (Mandarin 黑鬼; *hēiguǐ*; literally 'black ghost' for black people and *gwaipo* (Mandarin 鬼婆; *guǐpó*; literally 'ghost old woman') for western women. Elderly Chinese still refer to the Japanese as *Rìběn guizi* (日本鬼子; 'Japanese ghost people'). Perhaps the most courteous term is the seldom-used *yeungyan* (Mandarin 洋人; *yáng rén*), which means 'Ocean person', a historical term that identifies Westerners' overseas origins and their first maritime appearance. *Yeung* (Mandarin 洋; *yáng*; literally 'ocean') is sometimes used to describe a medley of objects that originated overseas, including matches (洋火; *yánghuǒ*; 'Western fire'), modern houses (洋房; *yángfáng*; 'Western houses'), Western or Arabic numerals (洋码子; *yángmǎzi*; 'Western numerals'), Western style (洋气; *yángqì*; 'Western air') and inevitably, Westerners (洋鬼子; *yáng guizi*; 'foreign ghosts').

(拜旗石; Bǎiqí Shí), where followers made a solemn pledge to join the insurgent ranks. Further along is the **Rhinoceros Pool** (犀牛潭; Xīniú Tán), where the Taiping hid their weapons.

Back 100m or so towards the village, then along a rough dirt road and into the brush is the decaying **old home** of Wei Cheng Hui, another leader of the movement. Here the plotters met and forged their weapons, using the cacophony of flocks of honking geese to mask the sounds of their hammering. The Qing army burned the house, and it wasn't until 1974 that artefacts and fragments of the group's efforts were unearthed. Most relics and memorabilia are kept in Nánjīng, the capital of the Taiping kingdom (1853–64). Today the house lies enshrouded in weeds, behind a locked iron gate.

To get to Jintián, hop on a bus from Guipíng bus station (Y4, 40 minutes, every 15 minutes) or from Renmin Lu just west of the square. From the bus drop-off in Jintián you'll have to backtrack 500m or so over the bridge to where motorcycle taxis are grouped. Go through the red gate there and continue another 4km – a pleasant walk if you've got the time (or Y10 for a round trip in a motorized three-wheeler). The last bus back to Guipíng departs around 6pm.

Dragon Pool National Forest Park 龙潭国家森林公园

Approximately 20km northwest of town, this **park** (Lóngtán Guójiā Sēnlín Gōngyuán; admission Y50) gives you the opportunity to delve into rustic wilderness and Guǎngxī's only remaining old-growth forest.

From Guipíng, get the bus to Jintiāncūn (Y2) and ask the driver to drop you off at the Dragon Pool Park access road (Longtan Lukou). Motorcycle taxis waiting at the intersection will take you to the park for about Y30. A two-day trip via the Forestry Department (☎ 338 0413) in Guipíng, including guide, food, transport and accommodation, costs about Y200.

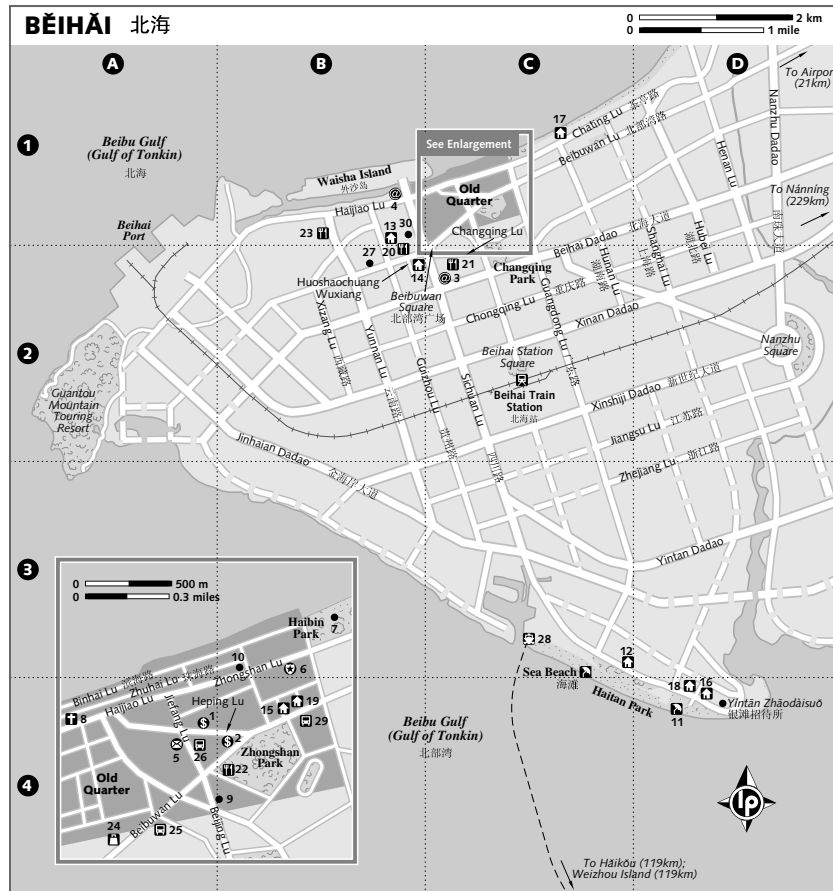
BĚIHǎI 北海

☎ 0779 / pop 322,000

An easy-going and friendly port city on the southern coastline of Guǎngxī, Běihǎi (literally 'North Sea') slots into the Chinese tourist consciousness for its Silver Beach, but is also worth visiting for the historic charms of its old quarter and the fun of bouncing over the waves to the island of Wéizhōu off the coast. The town, with its shady, expansive boulevards draped with wide-branched Small Leaf Banyan (小叶榕; *xiǎoyè róng*) trees and studded with palms, is leafy and green, and locals are amiable and welcoming.

BUSES FROM GUÍPÍNG

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Guǎngzhōu | 120 | 7½ | 3 per day |
| Guīgāng | 13 | 70min | frequent |
| Guǐlín | 110 | 5½ | 4.30pm |
| Liǔzhōu | 60 | 4 | 6 per day |
| Nǎnníng | 50 | 4 | every 3hr (7.30am-8.30pm) |
| Wúzhōu | 40 | 3 | 4 per day |



The centre of town is an increasingly affluent and commercially driven domain of department stores and eager young shoppers. Běihǎi may not have the charm of Qīngdǎo in Shāndōng, but the town knocks the spots off dreary Běidàihé in Héběi.

Orientation

Běihǎi sits on a small peninsula on the western end of a larger, east-to-west peninsula jutting off Guǎngxī. The northern coast of the town is home to the bus terminal, department stores and budget lodging options. The main commercial area centres on Beibuwan Sq, with its huge and bizarre Brancusi-esque sculpture ringed by muscled classical figures atop sea creatures.

The southern strip has the new International Ferry Terminal, a couple of upmarket hotels and Silver Beach.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; next to Gofar Hualian Hotel, 1 Beibuwan Xilu) Foreign exchange; ATM. There's another branch with ATM on Heping Lu.

Chonglang Internet Café (Chōnglǎng Wǎngbā; Sichuan Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-midnight)

Donghang Internet Café (Dōngháng Wǎngbā; Sichuan Lu; per hr Y1.5; ☎ 24hr)

Kodak Express (east of Gofar Hualian Hotel, Beibuwan Xilu; CD burning per disc Y10.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú; 213 Zhongshan Donglu; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm winter, 3-6pm Mon-Fri summer) Can extend visas.

INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行.....1 A4
Bank of China 中国银行.....2 B4
Chonglang Internet Café 冲浪网吧.....3 C2
Donghang Internet Café 东航网吧.....4 B1
Kodak Express 柯达.....(see 14)
Post Office 邮局.....5 A4
Public Security Bureau 公安局.....6 B3
Tianran Internet Café 天然网吧.....(see 24)
Xinhua Bookstore 新华书店.....(see 24)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Aquarium 水产展览馆.....7 B3
Beihai Christ Church 基督教礼拜堂.....8 A4
British Consulate Building
英国领事馆旧址.....9 B4
Former Post Office
大清邮政北海分局旧址.....10 B3

No 1 Middle School 一中.....(see 9)
Silver Beach 银滩.....11 D4

SLEEPING

Beach Hotel 海滩宾馆.....12 C3
Beihai Hangbiao Hotel
北海航标宾馆.....13 B1
Gofar Hualian Hotel 国发华联酒店.....14 B2
Nanning Binguān 南宁宾馆.....16 D4
Shangri-la Hotel 香格里拉大酒店.....17 C1
Sunshine Holiday Hotel 阳光大酒店.....18 D4

EATING

Běijīng Jiǎozǐ Wáng 北京饺子王.....20 B2
Coffee Garden 咖啡花园.....(see 17)

Dexing Restaurant 得兴酒楼.....21 C2
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Seafood Market 海产市场.....23 B1

SHOPPING

Xinli Bǎihuò 新力百货.....24 A4

TRANSPORT

Bus station 客运中心.....25 A4
Buses to Silver Beach 往银滩的汽车.....26 A4
CAAC Building 民航大厦.....27 B2
International Ferry Terminal
北海国际客运码头.....28 C3
Main Bus Station 客运总站.....29 B4
Passenger Ticket Service
客运售票大厅.....30 B1
Ticket Office.....(see 17)

Tianran Internet Café (Tiānrán Wǎngbā; 4th fl, Xinli Baihuo, Beibuwan Lu; per hr Y1-2.5; ☎ 24hr)

Xinhua Bookstore (Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; ☎ 303 7988; 3rd fl, Xinli Baihuo, Beibuwan Lu)

Sights & Activities

OLD QUARTER 北海老城

Leading away to the east as Sichuan Lu meets Waisha Island on Beibu Gulf, Zhuhai Lu – formerly a commercial street called Shengping Jie (升平街) – leads you immediately into Běihǎi's quaint and mouldering old quarter (*běihǎi lǎochéng*) of colonnaded streets, fish nets piled on the pavement, old Chinese shop signs composed in full-form Chinese characters and the intermittent rattle of mah jong pieces. Despite the absence of conservation efforts, the entire area has alluring shades reminiscent of Macau and is a rewarding area for a stroll.

A short walk along Zhuhai Lu brings you to the small **Beihai Christ Church** (Běihǎi Jīdūjiào Libàitáng; ☎ 202 4799; 117 Zhuhai Xilu) with its Chinese bibles for sale on the ground floor and small, modern upstairs chapel. Between No 1 and No 3 Zhuhai Xilu was the site of the Sanhuang Temple (三皇庙; Sānhuáng Miào), alas no more.

Zhongshan Lu is also worth wandering along. Dating from 1896, the attractive **former post office** (Dàiqing Yóuzhèng Běihǎi Fēnjú Jiùzhǐ; cnr Zhongshan Donglu & Haiguan Lu; admission Y5) now serves as a simple museum devoted to relics of the Qing dynasty postal system; no English captions.

Just to the southeast of Zhongshan Park as Wenning Lu intersects with Beijing Lu, stands the former **British Consulate Building** (Yīngguó Lǐngshìguǎn Jiùzhǐ), within the grounds of the **No 1 Middle School** (一中; Yīzhōng). Dating

from 1885, the imposing building is a lovely two-storey cream-coloured edifice with verandahs and shutters, flanked by palm trees. A further traditional building can be seen just to the rear, next to the newly built white-tile church. Bus 2 from the train station stops right outside. Nearby Zhongshan Park is a pleasantly green park with several amusement rides for children.

SILVER BEACH 银滩

Southern Thailand it sure ain't, but 1.6km-long **Silver Beach** (Yíntān; admission Y25), about 10km southeast of Běihǎi city centre in Silver Beach Park, has silvery-yellow sand, so-so waters and palm trees, not to mention eclectic architecture. China's mainland beaches are all oddly depressing places, so don't get too energized by the prospect of coming here. If you want, you can jump on a buggy (Y10) on a 6km route past some tacky sights or drive a motorised beach buggy along the sand (10 minutes, one person Y50, two people Y60). You can also get your photo taken while swinging in a suspended chair, with a sign above your head that classifies Silver Beach as 'The Number One Beach on Earth'. Take it or leave it. If you want to go for a swim, swimming areas (open 7am to 7pm) are marked by red buoys, but be warned that Běihǎi's waters can be polluted. Showers and lockers are available just off the boardwalk (Y10 each). On the souvenir front, you can buy a vast conch, a tacky sea-shell wind chime or a rabbit assembled from shells.

Just behind Silver Beach are numerous restaurants and hotels. All are reasonably cheap and simple. The liveliest time to visit is between May and September and during national holidays.

THE NUMBER ONE BEACH ON EARTH

Even Guilin – touted as the number one city in Guǎngxī – has to contend with the numbing reality of white-tile architecture that makes parts of the city totally indistinguishable from other Chinese towns. Much of the city's history has been obliterated, and apart from the palace at Wáng Chéng, the South Gate and the pavilions on Guilin's karst peaks, it can be tough to get a sense of history.

Tourist hype in China is a branch of mainstream propaganda, where good news is amplified out of proportion and bad domestic news goes unreported (just watch CCTV9). The result is widespread cliché in tourist literature and pervasive deception; rivers are no longer polluted eyesores but 'shimmering ribbons', while industrial towns are miraculously transformed into 'glittering pearls'.

Signs flung up by hawkers on Silver Beach in Běihǎi trumpet the modest strip of sand as 'The Number One Beach on Earth' (or more literally, 'The Number One Beach under Heaven'). It is, however, common knowledge that China has some of the dullest beaches on the planet (bar those on Hainán Island), Silver Beach included. In any honest global ranking, Silver Beach would raise incredulous eyebrows among surfers or sun seekers if it made it into the top 100. But on this southern shore of Guǎngxī province, in a land whose citizens still – in the main – rarely venture beyond national frontiers, the beach is served up as the cream of the crop.

The phenomenon can be seen all over China, where you'll be wading into 'The Number One Lake on Earth', jostling with the hordes on 'The Number One Mountain on Earth' and fending off crowds in 'The Number One Temple on Earth'. Just remember, when it comes to hype, China undoubtedly has the 'Number One Overstatement on Earth', so when soaking your toes in the brine off Silver Beach, take it all with a pinch of sea salt.

From Běihǎi, walk west from the bus station, bear right at Woping Lu, which branches off behind Běihǎi Yǐngbīnguǎn, and catch bus 3 on the corner of Jiefang Lu (Y2, 15 minutes). A taxi from the centre of town will cost Y20.

HĀIBĪN PARK 海滨公园

If the popular Zhongshan Park is too rocking with senior citizens disco dancing, then head northeast to the more derelict part of town and the northern waterfront where you will find little Haibin Park (Hāibīn Gōngyuán). Inside the park is an expensive **aquarium** (Běihǎi Hāidì Shìjì; ☎ 206 9973; admission Y75; 🕒 8am-5.30pm). Two buildings house seven spacious exhibition halls filled with tanks of strange and colourful fish. Most of the exhibits feature local marine life from the Gulf of Tonkin (Běibùwán).

Sleeping

Centrally located Huoshaochuang Wuxiang (火烧床五巷) is an alley that is literally stuffed with cheap *zhāodàisù* (招待所; guesthouses) where you can get a bed from around Y20 or an air-con double room for Y35. The alley is found south off Guizhou Lu, west of Beibuwan Sq and just east of the Mingdu Hotel.

BUDGET

Guihai Lüyèbù (☎ 203 0936; 北部湾中路16号; 16 Beibuwan Zhonglu; s with fan without toilet Y28-30, s with air-con and toilet Y40, d with air-con Y50; 🚻) Right opposite the main bus station, this handy hotel (no English sign) is simple but well-run, and although staff's English skills are limited it's cheaper than and an improvement on the Taoyuan Hotel round the corner. All rooms come with phone.

Taoyuan Hotel (Tāoyuán Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 202 0919; 北部湾中路; Beibuwan Zhonglu; s/d from Y70/80, on holidays Y180/200; 🚻) A cheap and distinctly average option where weird kitschy Van Gogh and Chen Yifei copies meet dodgy plumbing and a rather scuffed and wanting ambience. Follow the signs down a lane across from the main bus station.

Beihai Hangbiao Hotel (Běihǎi Hángbiāo Bīnguǎn; ☎ 308 8789; fax 308 8711; 20 Sanzhong Nanli Erxiang, Guizhou Lu; 贵州路三中南里二巷20号; s/d Y200/268; 🚻) Clean rooms at this tidy hotel here come with acres of space and cavernous bathrooms. Staff are polite and prices typically drop to around Y100, or Y90 per night for long stays. It's tucked away on the left of an alley off Guizhou Lu, north of the intersection with Beibuwan Lu.

MIDRANGE

Gofar Hualian Hotel (Guófā Huálián Jiùdiàn; ☎ 308 7888; fax 308 7889; 1 Beibuwan Xilu; 北部湾西路1号;

d Y398-468; 🚻 🚿) Despite the unpleasant brown carpets, rooms are comfortable here and discounts regularly bring the cheaper doubles down to around Y200. The location just down the road from Beibuwan Sq is the real reason to be here, but be warned that the late-night sounds of karaoke indeed 'Go Far'.

TOP END

Shangri-la Hotel (Xiānggēlǐlǎ Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 206 2288; www.shangri-la.com; 33 Chating Lu; 茶亭路33号; d with cityview/seaview Y805/863; 🚻 🚿) Běihǎi's most luxurious hotel, this lovely 364-room place is located east of the old quarter. It has top-notch service and frequently discounted rates, including perks such as complimentary meals and 6pm checkout. Staff are astonishingly helpful, there's an excellent choice of restaurants and the harbour-view doubles are a treat. Outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts.

SILVER BEACH

If you are visiting Běihǎi to watch the Chinese frolic in the sun, you can stay at Silver Beach. Cheapies such as the **Nanning Binguan** (☎ 221 3692; s/d/tr with air-con Y65/80/100; 🚻) in the vicinity of the bus 3 terminus draw in the budget crowd.

Sunshine Holiday Hotel (Yángguāng Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 389 5555; fax 389 5556; 2 Yintan Dadao; 银滩大道2号; s/d/tr Y438/468/488; 🚻) Newly built hotel with a fresh and sparkling feel, not far from the bus 3 terminus and within sprinting range of the beach. Outside the peak holiday season rooms typically fall to around Y120.

Eating

Waisha Island (Wàishā Dǎo) is simply awash with large and rather impersonal seafood restaurants and *dàpáidàng*, but prices can be steep in summer; in winter, chefs sit out back smoking and playing mah jong. In the northern section of Yunnan Lu, close to the wharf is Běihǎi's large **seafood market** (Yunnan Lu). This is the place to come if you need to get your hands on dried squid or any other seafood. Buses 2 and 8 from in front of the bus station pass by the market.

Come night time, hordes of cheap *dàpáidàng* operate along Changqing Lu (长青路). Also worth checking out are those along Guizhou Lu. For a hot chocolate, coffee or snack in the wee hours, the McDonald's on Beibuwan Lu is open 24 hours.

Běijīng Jiàoziwáng (☎ 306 3089; Beibuwan Xilu; 北部湾西路; meals Y25; 🕒 7am-2.30pm) For a

much-needed dumpling fix, come here for platefuls of dumplings in all shades, from lamb (羊肉饺子; *yáng ròu jiǎozi*; Y20), to mushroom (香菇饺子; *xiānggū jiǎozi*; Y16), pork and chives (猪肉韭菜饺子; *zhūròu jiǔcài jiǎozi*; Y12) and beyond.

Dexing Restaurant (Déxīng Jiùlǒu; ☎ 303 3199; 1 Sichuan Lu; 四川路1号; dim sum from Y2; 🕒 7am-1.30am) Ensnared on the south side of Beibuwan Sq, this huge restaurant is the place for the full-on Chinese dining experience. It's packed by 9am by punters crowding in to hoover up dim sum (点心; *diǎnxīn*) and other Cantonese favourites.

Coffee Garden (1st fl, Shangri-la Hotel, 33 Chating Lu; 茶亭路33号; meals Y70) If you need a pleasant alternative to the seafood restaurants, this smart restaurant has views over the hotel swimming pool to the Beibu Gulf, polite staff and a menu that includes wild mushroom soup (Y22), American beefburger (Y48) and other popular Western fare.

Getting There & Away

A helpful **ticket office** (☎ 202 8618; 🕒 8am-10pm) can be found on the ground floor of the Shangri-la Hotel, selling boat, bus, train and plane tickets. There are also many other travel agencies around town.

AIR

Flights leave throughout the week between Běihǎi and Běijīng (Y1930, daily), Guǎngzhōu (Y760, daily), Hǎikǒu (Y380, four per week), Kūnmíng (Y710, three per week) and Shànghǎi (Y1690, six per week).

BOAT

The **International Ferry Terminal** (Guójì Kèyùn Mǎtóu) serves Hǎikǒu on Hainan Island and nearby Weizhou Island. To Hainan Island, boats (one way; 1st class Y230, 2nd class Y130, 3rd class Y120, budget Y90) leave Běihǎi at 6pm and arrive at Hǎikǒu the following morning at 6am. In the return direction, boats leave Hǎikǒu at 6pm, reaching Běihǎi the following morning at 6am.

BUS

Běihǎi's **Main bus station** (Kèyùn Zōngzhàn; ☎ 202 2094) is located to the east of Zhongshan Park on Beibuwan Lu. As well as the buses listed below, numerous destinations in Guǎngdōng can be reached from Běihǎi. Regular buses to Nánning (Y50) also depart from the

BUSES FROM BĒIHǎI

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| Bǎisè | 120 | 7½ | 3.45pm & 8pm |
| Guǎngāng | 75 | 1hr 10min | 8.30am & 2.40pm |
| Guǐlín | 165 | 7 | 4 per day |
| Liúzhōu | 120 | 5½ | 6 per day |
| Nánning | 55-73 | 2hr 40min | every 20min from 6am |
| Píngxiáng | 90 | 7 | 9.10am & 2.50pm |
| Wúzhōu | 110 | 7 | 9am & 6pm |

central bus station (Kèyùn Zhōngxīn) to the east of Beibuwan Sq.

The bus to Běihǎi from Guipíng passes through Yùlín, with its solitary pagoda at the centre of town.

TRAIN

There are two trains a day to Nánning (Y40, three hours), from where you can connect to destinations beyond.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

CAAC buses (Y10, 30 minutes) meet arriving planes and leave two hours before flight departures from the **CAAC building** (Mínháng Dàshì; ☎ 305 1899; Beibuwan Xilu), where plane tickets can also be purchased.

BUS

Bus 1 connects Beibuwan Sq with the main bus station. Bus 2 runs from the train station along Beijing Lu, Beibuwan Lu, along Sichuan Lu and along Haijiao Lu to Dijiao. Bus 3 connects the main bus station with Silver Beach, running via Beibuwan Sq.

TAXI

Taxis are Y5 at flagfall. Getting to Beibuwan Sq from the bus station will cost Y2 by motorbike, Y3 by pedicab or Y6 by taxi. Bus 1 connects Beibuwan Sq with the main bus station.

AROUND BĒIHǎI

Weizhou Island 涠洲岛

Thirty-six nautical miles from Běihǎi, the island of Wéizhōu (www.weizhou.net) is China's largest volcanic island and a tremendous getaway in the Beibu Gulf. Boats from Běihǎi pull in at the wharf at Nanwan Port (南湾港; Nánwān Gǎng), the main settlement in the south of the island from where roads radi-

ate out across the lava-encrusted isle. The island is 6.5km long and 6km wide, so make it a day trip; accommodation is available in Nanwan Port if you miss the last boat back to Běihǎi.

The waters around Wéizhōu contain some of the most diverse coral communities in the area; ask in Nanwan Port about motorboat rides and diving opportunities. Beyond the island's beaches, caves, corals and dormant volcanic scenery, visitors will find a handful of historic sights awaiting exploration. Within Nanwan Port – the former volcanic nucleus of the island – is the **Three Old Women Temple** (三婆庙; Sānpó Miào), but of more interest are the two French-built churches on Wéizhōu, which date to the 19th century. In the northeast of the island is the village of Shèngtáng (盛塘), where the white-washed **Catholic Church** (天主堂; Tiānzhǔ Táng) still attracts worshippers. Roughly on the same latitude but found in a spot towards the other side of the island is the **Holy Mother Church** (圣母堂; Shèngmǔ Táng) in the village of Chéngzǎi (城仔), built in 1880.

The smaller **Xieyang Island** (斜阳岛; Xiéyáng Dǎo) sits in the sea 9 nautical miles to the southeast of Weizhou Island, and can be reached by boat from Nanwan Port.

Tickets for boats to Weizhou Island can be most easily purchased from the **Passenger Ticket Service** (Kèyùn Shòupiào Dàtīng; ☎ 306 6829 or 388 0711) located on Sichuan Lu near the intersection with Beibuwan Lu. Fast boats (one way 1st class Y100, 2nd class Y90, 3rd class Y85) depart at 8.30am, arriving at the island at 10am. Two slow boats (one way Y55 to Y65) depart at 8.30am and arrive at 10.40am and 11.30am. The fast boat returns from Weizhou Island at 3.45pm, arriving in Běihǎi at 5.15pm. The two slow boats leave Weizhou Island at 3.30pm, reaching Běihǎi at 5.40pm and 6.30pm.

Other Sights

Northeast of Běihǎi, a road crosses the peninsula via Hépu (合浦), where you can arrange transport to **Shankou Mangrove Reserve** (红树林; Hóngshù Lín), a Unesco-designated Biosphere Reserve.

Halfway along the road between Běihǎi and the reserve, head south towards the coastal town of **Báilóng** (白龙), also called 'Pearl City', where some traditional architecture survives.

You can also take the Nánning Highway to the north of Běihǎi, and detour 10km east to **Nanguoxing Island Lake** (南国星岛湖; Nánguóxīng Dǎohú). This iridescent-blue body of water is dotted with verdant, sand-edged islands.

At Hépu, you can visit **Dongpo Pavilion** (东坡亭; Dōngpó Tīng), 2km to the north, and then head 2km south to **Wenchang Pagoda** (文昌塔; Wénchāng Tǎ). The pavilion was constructed in memory of the famous Song-dynasty scholar and poet, Su Dongpo. Wénchāng Pagoda stands 36m high and was built more than 300 years ago, during the Ming dynasty. Both sites are easily accessible by motorbike taxi (Y5).

CHÓNGZUǒ 崇左

☎ 0771 / pop 330,000 / www.chongzuo.net

At the 122km point along the train line from Nánning to Píngxiáng is this pleasant, manageable city, well worth a stop for its Ecology Park, distinctive leaning pagoda and Stone Forest.

Orientation

Chóngzuǒ is largely situated south of the Zuo River (左江; Zuǒjiāng) as it loops through town. Jiangnan Lu (江南路; Jiāngnán Lù), the principal road running east-west, is intersected at right angles by busy Xinmin Lu (新民路; Xīnmín Lù). The long-distance bus station is on Yanshan Lu (沿山路; Yánshān Lù), south of the train station on Jiangnan Lu.

Information

Agricultural Bank of China (农业银行; Nóngyè Yínháng; Jiangnan Lu, west of intersection with Xinmin Lu) Can change large units of currency.

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (工商银行; Gōngshāng Yínháng; west of the train station, Jiangnan Lu) ATM.

Post Office (邮局; Yóujú; Xinmin Lu)

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōngānjú; 22 Xinmin Lu) Just beyond the bridge to the north along Xinmin Lu.

Xiuxian Internet Café (休闲网吧; Xiūxián Wǎngbā; east side of train station concourse; per hr Y3; ☎ 24hr)

Sights

ZUOJIANG LEANING PAGODA 左江斜塔

This sublime and highly photogenic **pagoda** (zuǒjiāng xiétǎ; admission Y5; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), also known as Guilong Pagoda (Guǐlóng Tǎ) or Water Pagoda (Shuǐ Tǎ), is approximately 5km northeast of town on Phoenix Lake. Built in 1621 and one of only eight of its kind in the world – leaning, that is – the 18m tower sits atop a rocky outcrop in the lake, a short walk from the entrance.

The tower's 1m lean is evident to observers from the shore. To reach the pagoda, take a skiff (Y2) piloted by an old boat hand across the water; he may even take you for a float around the lake. Once on land, climb up to the pagoda, a white and reddish-brown tiled five-storey tower capped with a Buddhist spire, and ascend the white-washed and brick interior until you can go no higher. Be sure to mind your head on the way down – taller travellers are quite likely to pick up a cranial knock or two if they're not almost bent over double.

Winter can see the water level in the lake so low that the area can be disappointing.

A motorcycle taxi costs about Y10 for the bumpy 25-minute journey to the pagoda, but you may want to arrange for your driver to wait for you.

CHONGZUO ECOLOGY PARK 崇左生态公园

A definite highlight for ecotourists, this excellent **park** (Chóngzuǒ Shēngtài Gōngyuán; ☎ 0771 782 1328; admission Y40) is for the protection of the white-headed leaf-monkey (*Trachypithecus francoisi leucocephalus*), whose numbers exceed around 800 in the nature reserve. Accommodation can be found at the park, which can be reached by taking a Shàngsi-bound bus (Y8, one hour) from Chongzuo bus station.

STONE FOREST 石林

About 4.5km from town, Chóngzuǒ's diminutive **Stone Forest** (Shílín; admission Y10) is a rather contrived geological attraction of jagged limestone formations, but the maze of rocks can be surprisingly tranquil, especially if you visit late in the afternoon. It's more than an hour's walk from town. A motorcycle taxi is about Y5.

Sleeping

A few decent hotels can be found near the long-distance bus and train stations.

Jinyuán Lǚguǎn (金源旅馆; ☎ 783 0894; Jiangnan Lu; 江南路; s Y20-50, tw Y30; 🚻) Very simple rooms, the very cheapest without luo or air-con. It's around 30m on your right on Jiangnan Lu as you exit the train station.

Longhua Hotel (隆华宾馆; Lónghuá Bīnguǎn; ☎ 783 5022; fax 783 5260; Yanshan Lu; 沿山路; s Y40-80, d Y90; 🚻) Handily located just to the west of the long-distance bus station, this place has affordable and clean rooms, the cheapest without air-con.

Yangguang Hotel (阳光大酒店; Yángguāng Dàjiǔdiàn; ☎ 784 0501; fax 784 8498; 36 Jiangnan Lu; 江南路36号; s/d Y218/228, d with computer Y368; 🚻) Reasonable two-star comfort can be found here, with clean and well-furnished rooms and polite staff; the hotel is just east of the train station. Discounts bring singles and doubles down to Y120.

Eating

There's a string of handy, small restaurants on Yanshan Lu across from the Longhua Hotel and the long-distance bus station.

Jiālèjī (家乐基; Jiangnan Lu; meals Y20) Local fast-food style chicken restaurant with tasty, filling burgers, instant coffee and Hollywood movies on looped DVDs; directly opposite the train station.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses to Nánning, Níngmíng and Píngxiáng are more frequent than the train.

The long-distance **bus station** (☎ 782 7995) is located on the north side of Yanshan Lu. As well as the departures listed below, high-speed buses (Y33, two hours) also depart for Nánning every 40 minutes from 7.50am to 7.30pm.

BUSES FROM CHÓNGZUǒ

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dàxīn | 17 | 2 | every 15min (6.50am-4.30pm) |
| Guǎngzhōu | 130 | 8 | 4pm |
| Níngmíng | 12 | 2 | every 30min (7.30am-5pm) |
| Nánning | 20-26 | 2½ | every 40min (7.30am-8.40pm) |
| Píngxiáng | 21 | 1hr 10min | hourly (8.10am-7.10pm) |
| Shàngsī | 22 | 3½ | 11.40am |
| Shuǒlóng | 15 | 3 | 12.40pm & 4.30pm |

TRAIN

The train station is located on Jiangnan Lu; the **ticket office** (☎ 8.50-9.50am, 11am-1.30pm & 3-4.15pm) is open irregular hours. Chóngzuǒ is accessible by train from Nánning and Píngxiáng.

From Nánning, the 8.00am 5517 leaves Chóngzuǒ at 9.50am, reaching Níngmíng (Y3.50 to Y10) at 10.43am and Píngxiáng (Y7 to Y14) at 11.30am. The slower 8511 sets off from Nánning at 10.50am, arriving in Chóngzuǒ at 1.34pm, before departing Níngmíng at 2.55pm and arriving in Píngxiáng at 4.10pm.

In the other direction, the 5518 departs Píngxiáng at 2.45pm, arriving in Níngmíng at 3.25pm, Chóngzuǒ at 4.18pm and Nánning (Y9 to Y18) at 6.05pm.

The 8512 departs Píngxiáng at 10am, Níngmíng at 11.11am and Chóngzuǒ at 12.30pm and reaches Nánning at 3.25pm.

Getting Around

Taxi fares start at Y3. Motorcycle taxis can get you to most parts of town for Y2.

ZUO JIANG SCENIC AREA

左江风景区

Roughly 190km southwest of Nánning, Zuǒjiāng Scenic Area (Zuǒjiāng Fēngjǐngqū) provides opportunities to view karst formations, with the added attraction that the region is home to around 80 groups of Zhuang-minority **rock paintings**. The area is also one of the last remaining habitats of the rare white-headed leaf monkey.

Níngmíng 宁明

There's no reason to dwell in Níngmíng. The town is the launching point for a Zuǒjiāng adventure but, to be brutally honest, you do not want to spend any longer here than is absolutely necessary.

The River Route

If travelling off season (winter), check that the murals are open as they can close for repair during what is called a restoration period (维修期间; *wéixiū qījiān*), meaning it is not possible to climb up onto the path to inspect them at close quarters.

The river scenery commences unspectacularly, with flat and low-lying river banks and a few fields thrown out on either side. Locals tend vegetable and flower plots in riverside pools edged with bamboo, while kids splash about in the mud and oxen graze. You will soon pass under the railway bridge and see the hills rising up in the distance. About 45 minutes from Tuólóng, the mountain cliffs suddenly appear directly ahead in a series of monumental and striated slabs of rock.

Just over an hour into the pattering boat journey is the village of Pānlóng, where you can visit the **Huashan Ethnic Culture Village** (花山民族山寨度假村; Huāshān Mínzú Shānzhài Dūjiàcūn; ☎ 862 8195; cabins Y120), which is more of a low-key tourist resort with a holiday-camp feel that offers pleasant enough rooms in Dong-style wooden cabins that come with shower, verandah and mosquito-repellent vaporisers (no fan). Tents are also in the pipeline. Hot water for showering is available in the evening. Try to avoid national holidays as the crowds can get noisy. When there is enough of a crowd it is possible to see some traditional Zhuang dancing. A restaurant on site serves traditional local fare for about Y25 per person.

The **Longrui Nature Reserve** (陇瑞自然保护区; Lǒngruì Zìrán Bǎohùqū; admission Y20) is directly behind the village. Hiking opportunities here are excellent, although not all parts of the reserve are open. There are some tough sections, but you could definitely spend a whole day poking around in this reserve. Most tourists come with the hope of spying the rare **white-headed leaf monkey** (*báitóu yèhóu*), also known as the white-headed langur. The resort can easily arrange a guide if you wish (Y30). Ask at the Huashan Ethnic Culture Village about cabins for overnighting within the reserve itself.

The most significant collection of Zhuang paintings is in the **Huashan Murals** (Huāshān Bìhuà; admission Y13) area, another hour's boat ride along the river. A fresco, 170m high and 90m across, groups nearly 2000 reddish figures of hunters, farmers and animals on the brown rock. It is now believed that the Luoyue, the ancestors of the Zhuang, painted these cliffs

2000 years ago during the early Han period (AD 25-220), although it's unclear why. The images are simple, primitive and animistic and rise to a certain height up the cliff face before stopping. It takes five minutes to walk along a path to the end of the cliff. On the 2nd floor of the administration building is a small, dilapidated **museum** (admission Y5) with displays explaining the history of the site, but they're all in Chinese and run down. As mentioned earlier, make sure the murals are open before making the trip, otherwise your boat will simply circle at a considerable distance.

Boat Tours

Boat trips from Tuólóng range from around Y100 to Y200 depending on how many people you're travelling with (and the season). Expect to negotiate extra if you want to stop in Pānlóng. Note that some boat hands only speak Cantonese, but they know you will want to go to Huāshān (花山; *fasan*, in Cantonese). To save you lugging your bags around, leave them at Níngmíng's bus station before your boat trip.

Sleeping & Eating

If you need to spend the night, accommodation can be found either in Níngmíng or upriver in Pānlóng. Food stalls are strung out at night along Dehua Jie (德华街) towards Xingyuan Jie (兴远街) and cheap and convenient eateries can be found on Dehua Jie near the bus station.

Qìchēzhàn Zhāodàisùǒ (汽车站招待所; ☎ 862 5616; Dehua Jie; 德华街; d/tr with fan per bed Y25/20, d with air-con Y60; 🚻) Cheap and conveniently located guesthouse, but you may be woken by early-morning bus departures as it's right next to the bus station.

Yínxīng Bīnguǎn (银兴宾馆; ☎ 0771-863 2688; 38 Dehua Jie; 德华街38号; s Y68-88, d/tr Y98/108; 🚻) A short walk west of the bus station on the far side of Dehua Jie, the clean and well-kept tiled-floor rooms come with comfy beds, digital TV, air-con and squat loos. No English sign.

Getting There & Around

If coming from Níngmíng, jump on a motorcycle taxi for the short haul to the bridge at Tuólóng (驮龙) and walk down to the river bank, where rows of boats await. The train from Nánning and Píngxiáng also stops at Tuólóng train station, from where it's a short

walk to the bridge – continue straight along the main road and wander down the path to the right of the bridge. From the bus terminal catch a motorcycle taxi (Y2) and ask the driver to take you to Tuólóng or Huāshān chuán mǎtóu (花山船码头).

From Níngmíng's wharf it is a 1½ hour boat journey to Pānlóng and another hour downstream to Huāshān. Bank on a round trip of around five hours, including time at the cliff face, but excluding time at Pānlóng and the Lóngrui Nature Reserve.

If you are pressed for time or dislike puttering boats, a road runs along the river from Níngmíng to Pānlóng. A taxi takes about 20 minutes (Y30). Frequent buses run the 43km distance from Níngmíng to Pingxiáng (Y8, every 15 minutes) from 6.40am to 6pm. Buses also depart for Chóngzuǒ (Y12, two hours, 68km, every 20 minutes) from 6.40am to 5pm. To reach Nǎnníng by bus, go first to Chóngzuǒ and change or take the train from Tuólóng. See p206 for details of trains to Nǎnníng and Pingxiáng. Air tickets for flights from Nǎnníng can be bought at the Ningming long-distance bus station (☎ 0771-853 7668 or 0771-852 1808). The Ningming bus station is a Y2 motor-taxi ride from the train station.

PÍNGXIÁNG 凭祥

☎ 0771 / pop 100,000

The staging post for onward transport to Vietnam, Pingxiáng is a border trading town rife with bustling markets but little else to see.

Banks are commonplace in Pingxiáng, and changing money is no problem. The **Bank of China** (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng) is on the corner of Yinxing Jie, just south of the bus station. To find the **Tongle Internet Café** (同乐网吧; Tónglè Wǎngbā; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr), come out of the bus station, turn right and take the first turning on your right and it's a short walk up on your right hand side.

If you're heading into China, after crossing the Vietnamese border catch one of the minibuses into Pingxiáng to the bus station, from where there are buses into Guǎngxī. The bus station (qīchēzhàn) is a five-minute walk north of Pingxiáng's northern train station, from where there are regular buses to Nǎnníng (Y70, 2½ hours) between 6.40am and 8.30pm, regular departures to Chóngzuǒ (Y25, 70 minutes) between 7.40am and 6.40pm and regular buses to Níngmíng (Y10, 1½ hours) between 6.50am and 6.30pm.

Minibuses, taxis and motorised pedicabs run to **Friendship Pass** (Yóuyī Guān) from near the bus and train stations and cost Y10 to Y20, depending on the number of passengers. From Friendship Pass it's another 600m to the Vietnamese border post. Onward transport to Hanoi by train or bus is via the Vietnamese town of Lang Son (Liàngshān), 18km from the Friendship Pass. Remember that Vietnam is one hour behind China; at the time of writing the border post was open till 7pm Vietnam time.

Although there is no real reason to spend the night in Pingxiáng, accommodation is plentiful near the bus station and it's not hard to score a bed in a triple for around Y20; just look for signs saying 'yǒu fáng' (有房). **Yóuyī Bīnguǎn** (☎ 597 0901; Yinxing Jie; 银兴街; tr per bed Y25, s Y50-60, d Y60-70; ☑) down the alley right opposite the bus station has OK rooms and free internet.

The sit-down **Caidiexuan Bakery** (彩蝶轩蛋糕; Cǎidíxuǎn Dàngāo; ☎ 853 4879; 2 Yinxing Jie; 银兴街2号) next to the Bank of China has filling red-bean-paste buns (红豆包; hóngdòu bāo), egg tarts, some sandwiches and coffee, plus a range of breads and cakes.

DETIAN WATERFALL 德天瀑布

The world's second-largest transnational cataract with a total width of 200m, **Detian Waterfall** (Détian Pùbù; ☎ 0771-263 6808; www.detian.com; admission Y80; ☎ dawn to dusk) is Asia's largest. It may not be Niagara Falls, but the waterfall is still fantastic and the setting sublime, with its descending levels and powerful cacophony of water. On top of viewing the gorgeous falls spilling down in huge pleats of water into secondary and tertiary cascades, there's the spectacle of the surrounding green hillocks of karst peaks and the added frisson of being on the Vietnamese border.

At the 53rd boundary marker between China and Vietnam, the waterfall drops only 40m, but makes up for it by a more than modest breadth. The Vietnamese got the short end of the cascade stick, with a paltry few ribbons of water falling on their side of the border, while the Chinese have the earth-shaking lion's share of water flow. Despite the tourist pitch which accentuates each season's strong point, the best time to visit is July when you'll be swept away by the waterflow, though water levels are fairly high from May to late September. Show up in November or December and be underwhelmed by the lack of water and constant cloud and fog.

From the entrance, a sightseeing road runs along the river and several trails descend to the banks, where you'll be gently harassed by raft operators offering to take you right into the spray (Y10), but observe the 'no swimming' signs and resist the temptation to breaststroke your way into Vietnam. The Vietnamese segment of the falls, the Ban Gioc Waterfalls (板约瀑布; Bǎnyuē Pùbù), can be seen to the west.

Further up the path are the upper tiers of the waterfall; the air around the **two-step waterfall** (二级瀑布; èrjī pùbù) is said to contain 17,000 negative ions/cu metre – enough perhaps to give you a rush and open your sinuses. Further up is the three-step waterfall where the waters gush into a pool and the green river water cascades beautifully into ribbons.

The trail also follows the river a short distance away from the falls before hooking up with the sightseeing road again. Continue along the road and you will pass a small shrine to Guanyin; further along are steps leading up an old cannon platform, one of 130 built after the Sino-French war. The gun placement is on the top of Yinpán Shān (银盘山), a 90-minute walk uphill.

Further ahead is another cluster of hawkers selling Vietnamese coconut candy, coffee and cigarettes, Vietnamese currency, pirated perfume and aftershave, lumps of marble or tanks made from rifle cartridges. You can also pick up a huge wooden pig for Y500. This is where you will find the **boundary marker** (中越界碑; zhōngyuè jièbēi), also called the Chinese-Vietnamese Number 53rd Boundary Marker (中越53号界碑; zhōngyuè 53 hào jièbēi) between the two countries. The marker is inscribed with the characters '中国广西界' and the French 'Frontiere Sino Annamite'. At the time of writing there was also a sign up in Chinese warning transnationals against introducing bird flu.

For those in a mad rush, buggies can whisk you from the main gate to the boundary marker (single/return Y5/10). If you don't reach the falls till late in the day note that the road has no lights, but you can beg the guard to admit you on the same ticket the next morning if you want to spend the night in the village.

Sleeping & Eating

There's loads of cheap accommodation in the village of Détian Tún (德天屯) just below the main gate to the falls, but check the rooms first

as some can be quite grim. A tourist hotel with views of the falls is inside the main gate. Several *dàpáidàng* litter the road leading to the main gate – some of which also offer rooms as well as meals. Several of the local hotels also have restaurants.

Détian Lǚguǎn (德天旅馆; ☎ 0771-377 5098 or 137 685 904 97; 39 Détian Tún; 德天屯39号) Being renovated at the time of writing, this place is next to a hotel of the same name a short walk down from the main gate.

Détian Nóngjiā Cǎiguǎn (德天农家菜馆; ☎ 0771-377 3620; 37 Détian Tún; 德天屯37号; r Y50) Worth considering only if other places are full or if you need to reserve ahead, as some of its simple rooms have dodgy plumbing. Restaurant downstairs.

Détian Shānzhuāng (德天山庄; ☎ 377 3570; tw/tr Y500/600, deluxe q Y780; ☎) With the best rooms and views of the falls, this is the most exclusive choice. It's the gates of the scenic area in front of the falls. Expect 20% discounts in winter and quiet periods.

Getting There & Away

Coming from Nǎnníng or Chóngzuǒ you'll probably need to first get to Dàxīn (大新) and arrange transport from there. The road from Chóngzuǒ to Dàxīn passes through some stunning karst scenery. From Dàxīn, take a pedicab (Y2) to the congregation point at the intersection of Minsheng Jie (民生街) and Lunli Lu (伦理路) for buses to Xiàléi (下雷) which pass through Shuòlóng (硕龙; Y7, one hour), which is where you want to get off. At Shuòlóng jump into a taxivan (Y3) to Détian (德天). For travellers coming from Jingxī, any bus to Dàxīn should pass through Shuòlóng, but verify this before getting on. In Shuòlóng, the bus will probably deposit you in front of the 'minibus tree', where rattletrap minibuses or motorcycle taxis run the final lovely 14km, full of eye-catching coloured pools, to Détian (德天; Y3, 20 minutes). If you're the only passenger going all the way to the falls the driver will probably ask for Y20.

In the return direction, minivans depart Détian from the car park in Détian Tún from around midmorning but in the quiet season you may have to wait or book a vehicle for yourself (Y20). If you do want to leave in the evening, you can never really be sure when buses to/from Shuòlóng stop running. There isn't much movement after 5pm.

From Shuòlóng, stand by the road and wait for a bus to pass – there's no way to tell when the next one's coming. Semiregular service is found towards Dàxīn, and therefore Nánning, but if you want to go towards Jìngxī, the best thing to do is leapfrog villages. First take a Y4 minibus northwest to Xiàléi and then a Y3 minibus to Húrùn (湖润; pronounced Fuyuan here). From there you can get a proper bus for the hour-long ride to Jìngxī. All up, the trip should take around two hours, though taking three hours isn't unheard of.

AROUND DĒTIĀN

Dàxīn 大新

☎ 0771 / pop 350,000

Dàxīn is the usual staging point for Detian Waterfall. A sleepy town, there's not much to see here besides the falls, but you can overnight if you miss the last bus to Shuòlóng. On the western edge of town, left at the big intersection, is the **South Gate** (南门; Nánmén), which locals claim dates from the Zhou dynasty. You can change money at the **Agricultural Bank of China** (农业银行; Nóngyè Yínháng; ☎ 362 3730) on Lunli Lu.

SLEEPING & EATING

Rónghuá Zhāodàisù (荣华招待所; ☎ 362 5271; Minsheng Jie; 民生街; s Y25, d/tr/q per bed Y20/15/6) Very simple place just to the south of the bus station, with no English sign. Pricier rooms have their own loo, all have fan.

Xīndū Dàjiùdiàn (☎ 362 2011; fax 362 1845; 5 Minsheng Jie; 民生街5号; s/d/tr Y80/70/90) This is a clean and friendly place 100m past the first intersection. It has an abundance of friendly, non-English-speaking staff.

Táoyuán Dàjiùdiàn (☎ 362 1018; fax 362 1098; 24 Minsheng Lu; 民生路24号; s Y108-128, d Y138; ☑) Rooms are spacious and clean enough at this more midrange option further down the street.

There are heaps of places to eat – mostly point-and-choose stir-fries and hotpot – out on the street.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

At the time of writing, the bus station at Dàxīn was undergoing renovation and some buses were not running. Express buses to Nánning (Y40, three hours) should flow pretty much constantly from 5am to 5.30pm. Buses to Xiàléi, which get you to Shuòlóng and Detian Waterfall, depart half hourly (see p209).

Jìngxī & AROUND

☎ 0776 / pop 570,000

With its fine karst scenery, Jìngxī sits somewhat isolated midway between Detian Waterfall and Bǎisè. It looks ugly coming in from the south, but a stroll along the main drag reveals it to be modestly well off, if rather unkempt. Jìngxī has nothing much in the centre of town itself, but nearby are some interesting sights.

Tónglíng, 32km east of Jìngxī, is a scenic valley with impressive scenery boasting cascades, rock formations, waterfalls, natural pools, canyons and boating. To get there catch any bus going to Húrùn, Xiàléi or Dàxīn. Ask the driver to drop you off at the entrance to Tónglíng (Y7) and make sure it is not at the nearby town of Xīnqún. You will need to head back around 4pm as buses are less frequent after that.

Another trip you might consider is to the semipreserved town of **Jiùzhōu**, 16km south of Jìngxī along the road to Dizhōu. The main attraction is **Jiùzhōu Pavilion** (Jiùzhōu Wénchāng Gé). This is the pagoda you'll see on lots of murals in Jìngxī and across the entire county. To get to Jiùzhōu, hop on the frequent (every 15 minutes) local bus 1 from the intersection next to the Xīngyuán Dàjiùdiàn (Y2, 15 minutes). The bus drops you off just a short walk from the village.

Calling Rock (Jiāohǎnyán; admission Y6) is another popular local site. It's an impressive limestone cave full of caverns, stalactites, stalagmites and fluorescent lights.

If you need some fresh air after the cave, continue along the main road over the hill to **Goose Spring** (Équán; admission Y6), a natural spring where you can sit and drink tea while absorbing the surroundings and watching the fish in the spring.

Calling Rock and Goose Spring are both reached on local bus 2, which leaves every 30 minutes (Y1.50, 15 minutes). Just ask the driver to drop you off at the cave and then it's a 600m walk to the entrance.

Getting There & Away

There are two bus stations in Jìngxī: northern and southern. The southern is for local or regional buses and you may be dropped off there. The northern station is more long-distance oriented and has departures to Bǎisè every 20 minutes (Y25, four hours) or hourly express buses (Y35, 3½ hours). There are also

frequent buses to Nánning (Y70, five hours). The entrance is to the right past the reception for the station's hostel.

Most nonexpress buses that depart from the northern station pass by the southern station on their way out of town. It may be just as easy to wait around out the front for your bus. Useful departures from the southern station include: Xiàléi, Dàxīn (for Detian Waterfall) and Húrùn (for Tónglíng).

Bǎisè 百色

☎ 0776 / pop 92,000

Worth a swift stopover, the trim and ambitious city of Bǎisè has a minor buzz to it and a handful of intriguing sights. Its historical significance as a revolutionary base (Deng Xiaoping and the Seventh Route Army established its base of operations in Bǎisè on 11 December 1929) assures it flocks of domestic tourists doing communist heritage sights, but the city is a pleasant pit stop for travellers taking the train to Kùnmíng or in transit to explorations of the minority towns north of Bǎisè towards Língyún.

Orientation

Cradled in a nook at the confluence of the Dengbi River (澄碧河; Chéngbì Hé) and the You River (右江; Yòujiāng), the city centre is quite compact, laid out in a quadrant that basically runs northwest to southeast, with Xiangyang Lu running through the centre. The bus station sits at the top of the quadrant. The train station is inconveniently located 6km east of downtown.

Information

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Zhongshan Yilu) Foreign exchange and ATM.

Dove (多芬; Duōfēn; ☎ 282 9868; 34 Zhongshan Yilu; CD burning per disc Y15)

Post Office (邮局; Yóujú; Zhongshan Yilu; ☎ 8am-6pm) Near the corner of Jiefang Jie.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōngānjú; cnr Zhongshan Lu & Zhongshan Yilu; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri)

Youzheng Internet Café (邮政网吧; Yóuzhèng Wǎngbā; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) Next to the post office on Zhongshan Yilu.

Xinhua Bookstore (新华书店; Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; Zhongshan Yilu; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Xiuxianzhe Internet Cafe (休闲者网吧; Xiūxiánzhě Wǎngbā; Chengbei Yilu; per hr Y2.5; ☎ 24hr) Just east of the Bǎisè bus station.

Sights

Wandering the older section of town between Zhongshan Yilu and Aixin Jie is a diversion, as is the historical colonnaded road of Jiefang Jie, from where steps lead down to riverside docks. Before the 1949 revolution this street was the business-activity centre for visiting traders from Guǎngdōng.

On Jiefang Jie, the **Baise Uprising Museum** (粤东会馆; Yuèdōng Huìguǎn; admission Y15; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) traces the movements of Deng Xiaoping and the Seventh Red Army during the 1920s and 1930s, but another reason to visit is to examine the gorgeous architecture of this traditional guildhall that dates from 1720, with its harmonious arrangement of rooms. With their gold figures on a dark red background, the carved cross beams outside the main door are magnificent. Also look up at the ceramic figures arrayed along the roof ridges, still in their original colours. Keep any eye out for the decorative motifs such as bats, plums and carved fish emerging from the walls. The revolutionary displays are rather incidental, unless the period fires you up.

At the corner of Jiefang Lu Jie and Zhongshan Yilu is the **Lingzhou Guildhall** (灵州会馆; Língzhōu Huìguǎn), now housing an assortment of travel agents. Deng Xiaoping used the Qingfeng Building, down an alley off Xiangyang Lu, as an office when holed up in Bǎisè.

Over the bridge on the far side of the Dengbi River and up the hill to the east of the **Baise Uprising Memorial** (Bǎisè Qǐyì Jìniànbēi; 百色起义纪念碑), the **Youjiang Minorities Museum** (右江民族博物馆; Yòujiāng Mínzú Bówùguǎn; admission free; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm) welcomes visitors with a poster of President Hu Jin Tao visiting Bǎisè in 2002. The displays of clothes, customs, traditions and musical instruments of regional minorities are hampered by no English captions. Adjacent to the museum is a hall devoted to a diorama of modern Bǎisè.

Sleeping

Yunshu Gongsi Lushè (运输公司旅社; ☎ 289 4604; 80 Jiefang Jie; 解放街80号; bed in five-bed dm Y6, bed in tr Y7, s Y10-30, d Y16-35) Cheapest of the cheap, this basic hostel tests the lower boundaries of budget and will delight even the stingiest of arrivals. It has scruffy, thin walls and spartan, fan-only rooms, but the location on historic Jiefang Jie can't be beaten.

Jindu Hotel (金都大酒店; Jīndū Dàjiǔdiàn; ☎ 288 1188; fax 288 1193; 29 Chengbei Yilu; 城北一路29号; tw Y228, luxury s/tw Y298/268; 🍴) A cut above the rest, the spacious twins at this three-star hotel by the Bǎisè bus station are decent with commodious wardrobes and well-presented shower rooms where hair driers and carefully folded towels are thoughtful touches.

Eating

The KFC on Zhongshan Yilu can be recommended if only for its super-sonic Panasonic hand driers.

Jinfenghua Coffee Shop (金丰华餐馆; Jīnfēnghuá Cānguǎn; ☎ 282 8080; Xiangyang Lu; 向阳路; meals Y25; ☎ 9am-12.30am) Sit on a window-side swinging seat and flick through the English menu which runs to steaks (from Y28), sandwiches (from Y12), spaghetti (from Y15) and baked rice in bamboo tube (from Y18). The piped muzak is a colossal shame.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The **Bǎisè bus station** (百色客运站; Bǎisè Keyùnzhan; ☎ 288 1290) is by the intersection of Chengbei Yilu (城北一路) and Xiangyang Lu (向阳路).

TRAIN

Bǎisè has daily connections that will go to Nánning (1166, 2006, 5514 and 8566, four hours), Kūnmíng (1165 and 2005, 11 hours) and Guǎngzhōu (1166, 21 hours). The train station is found way out of town, so try to buy your tickets from your hotel, if possible. Bus 1 connects the bus and train stations, via Zhongshan Yilu.

Getting Around

Taxis are Y4 at flagfall. Pedicabs are plentiful, with most trips around the centre of town costing Y2.

AROUND Bǎisè

Língyún 凌云

A scenic two-hour drive through the mountains following the Chengbi River 80km north of Bǎisè takes you past some stunning scenery full of attractive minority villages. The town of Língyún is a useful staging post for trips to nearby caves, tea plantations and colourful minority villages. If you have more time, continue on north to the karst landscape of Lèyè (乐业) county. Buses (Y25) leave Bǎisè hourly for the 90-minute journey.

SIDE TRIP TO HÚNÁN

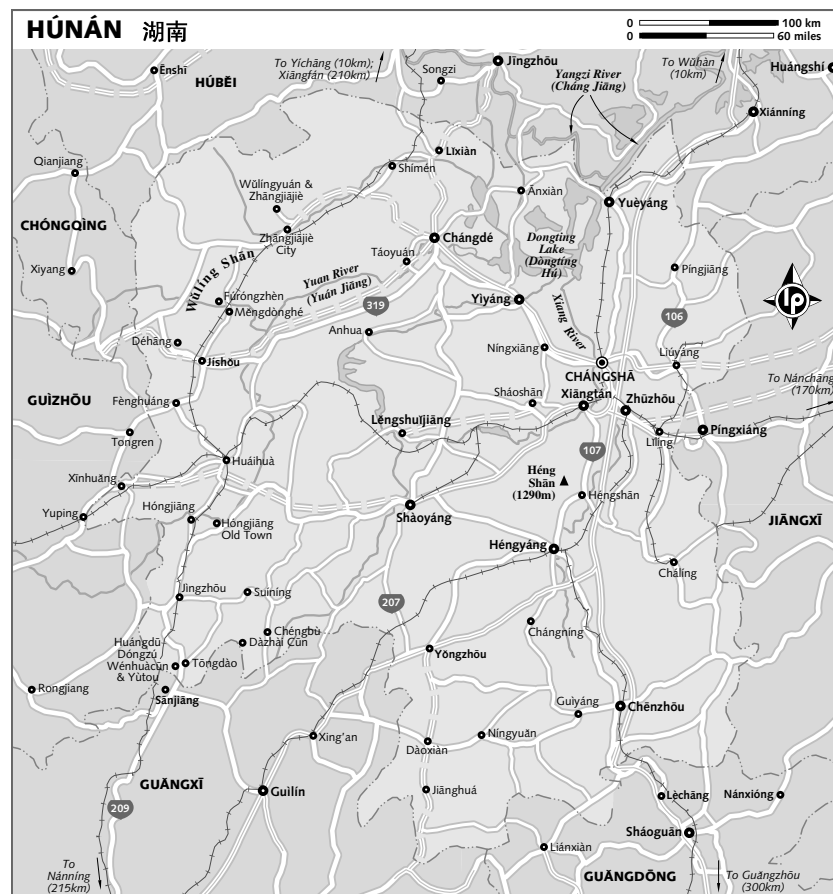
Travellers doing the northeast of Guǎngxī can delve into southwestern and western Húnán (湖南) province to the north for some more forays into minority villages, crumbling riverside towns and the spectacular landscapes of Wúlingyuán.

Minority Villages 侗寨和苗寨

Dong and Miao villages are abundantly scattered around southwest Húnán, some with simple hotels for overnighting travellers. Villages near the border with Guǎngxī include the lovely riverine Dong village of **Dàzhài Cūn** (大寨村), 70km or so from the town of Chéngbù (城步). A short minibus ride (Y2) from the town of Tōngdào (also called Shuāngjiāng; 双江) in southwestern Húnán (just over the border with Guǎngxī), the Dong village of **Huángdū Dōngzú Wénhuàcūn** (皇都侗族文化村) is also worth exploring for its drum tower and wind-and-rain bridge panoramas. A further Dong settlement near Tōngdào is the lovely village of **Yútouzài** (芋头寨), 9km outside Bǎisè.

Fènghuáng 凤凰

A fascinating riverside town of ancient city walls and gate towers, Fènghuáng contains houses on stilts overlooking the river and



hoary temples dotted about the old town, Fènghuáng can easily fill a couple of days. Home to a lively population of the Miao and Tujia minorities, Fènghuáng's architectural legacy shows distressing signs of neglect, so get to it before it crumbles away. Accommodation is everywhere, from youth hostels to the ubiquitous guesthouses overlooking the Tuo River.

SIGHTS

Strolling willy-nilly around Fènghuáng's old town is the best way to see it. Many of its back alleys maintain an intriguing charm, a treasure trove of old family pharmacists, traditional shops, temples, ancestral halls and crumbling dwellings. Restored fragments of

the city wall lie along the south bank of the Tuo River in the old town and a few dilapidated chunks survive elsewhere.

Several sights can only be visited if you buy the through ticket (Y98), which includes entrance to the **Yang Family Ancestral Hall**, the **Former Home of Shen Congwen**, the **Former Home of Xiong Xiling**, a **boat ride** along the Tuo River, the **East Gate Tower** and other sights. If you don't want to fork out for this, you can still see much of Fènghuáng for free and you can take a boat trip along the river for Y30 from the North Gate Tower. Sights are generally open from 8am to 5.30pm.

Wander along Fènghuáng's restored salmon-coloured **city wall** (城墙; Chéngqiáng) with its defensive aspect along the

BUSES FROM BǎISÈ

| Destination | Fare (Y) | Duration (hours) | Departure Time |
|-------------|----------|------------------|------------------------|
| Běihài | 138 | 7 | 7.05am & 4pm |
| Guilín | 190 | 9 | 9.20am |
| Jīngxī | 52 | 3½ | hourly (7am-4.40pm) |
| Língyún | 25 | 1½ | hourly (6.40am-6.30pm) |
| Liúzhōu | 150 | 8 | 7.40am & 5pm |
| Nánning | 60 | 4 | frequent (6.30am-8pm) |

southern bank of the Tuo River. Half way along its length, the **North Gate Tower** (北门城楼; Běimén Chénglóu) is in a tragic state of neglect, but it remains a magnificent structure. Spanning the river is the magnificent and covered **Hong Bridge** (Hóng Qiáo; admission free). Other significant buildings in the southern part of the old town include the 18th-century walled **Confucian Temple** (Wén Miào; Wenxing Jie) and the **Chaoyang Temple** (Cháoyáng Gōng; 41 Wenxing Jie; admission Y15).

Excellent views of Fènghuáng's riverside buildings on stilts can be seen from the north side of the river. Crossing the river over the stepping stones or the wooden foot bridge brings you to Laoying Shao, a street of bars, cafés and inns overlooking the river.

The **Tian Family Ancestral Temple** (Laoying Shao; admission Y10) is overgrown with weeds. Further along, **Wanshou Temple** (Wànshòu Gōng; admission Y50) is not far from the distinctive **Wanming Pagoda** (Wànmíng Tǎ; admission free), erected right on the river bank.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses from Jíshǒu (Y12, one hour, every 20 minutes) leave from the long-distance bus station on Wuling Donglu. Buses to and from Jíshǒu (吉首; Y12, one hour, frequent) depart from and arrive at the bus station (*Kèyùn zhàn*) on Juyuan Lu in the new part of Fènghuáng.

Buses from Huáihuà (Y26, 2½ hours, hourly from 7.30am to 5.30pm) depart from the West bus station (*Kèyùn Xizhàn*) on Zhi-jiang Lu. Buses to Huáihuà (Y25, two hours, every 20 minutes) depart from the Minsuyuan bus station (Mínsúyuán Tíngchēchǎng) on Jiangbei Donglu in the north of Fènghuáng. There is one bus a day from Guilin to Huáihuà (Y92, 12 hours). Trains run from Huáihuà and Jíshǒu to Sǎnjiāng and Lüzhōu in Guǎngxī.

Déhāng 德夯

Its seductive riverine setting overlooked by towering, other-worldly karst peaks, the Miao hamlet of Déhāng (admission Y60) northwest of Jíshǒu in western Húnán province offers a tantalising spectrum of treks into picturesque countryside. Rising into columns, splinters and huge foreheads of stone, the local karst geology climbs over verdant valleys layered with terraced fields and flushed by clear streams. Side-stepping

Déhāng's bovine traffic and occasional cow-pats might be the only thing that takes your eyes off the gorgeous scenery.

The village itself has been partially dolled up for domestic tourism, but on its fringes the feeling of a pleasant riverside Miao village survives. Highly affordable hotels built from wood also make Déhāng an inexpensive and alluring retreat. Surplus to its charming village views, Déhāng is located within a 164 sq km geological park where magnificent treks thread into the hills.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The best way to reach Déhāng is to travel via Jíshǒu, south of the village. Buses to Déhāng (Y6, 50 minutes, regular) leave from outside Jíshǒu train station, arriving at and departing (every 20 minutes) from the square/parking lot in Déhāng.

WǔLÍNGYUÁN & ZhāngJIājìè

武陵源和张家界

☎ 0744

Rising sublimely from the misty subtropical forest of northwest Húnán are 243 peaks surrounded by more than 3000 karst upthrusts, a concentration not seen elsewhere in the world. The picture is completed by waterfalls, limestone caves and rivers suitable for organised rafting trips. Nearly two dozen rare species of flora and fauna call the region home and botanists delight in the 3000-odd plant species within this park. Amateur wildlife spotters may even get a gander at a clouded leopard or a pangolin.

Known collectively as the **Wulingyuan Scenic Area** (Wǔlíngyuán Fēngjǐngqū; www.zhangjiajie.com.cn, www.zjtrip.net), the region encompasses the localities of Zhāngjiājìè, Tiānzǐshān and Suǒxīyú. Zhāngjiājìè is the best known, and many Chinese refer to this area by that name. Recognised by Unesco in 1990 as a World Heritage Site, Wǔlíngyuán is home to three minority peoples: Tujia, Miao and Bai.

A mighty fee of Y245 (students Y165), good for two days with extension, must be paid at the Zhāngjiājìè forest reserve's main entrance just past the village. Admission to other sights within the park can cost extra.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The most popular access points are Zhangjiajie city (Zhāngjiājìè shì) and Zhāngjiājìè village (Zhāngjiājìè cūn). The city is near the

railway line, while the village is situated nearly 600m above sea level in the Wǔlíng foothills, surrounded by sheer cliffs and vertical rock outcrops.

Zhangjiajie **airport** (☎ 825 3177) is 4km southwest of Zhāngjiājìè city and 40km from the park entrance; a taxi should cost around Y100 to the park. Daily flights include Běijīng (Y1340), Shànghǎi (Y1330), Guǎngzhōu (Y860), Chóngqīng (Y580), Chángshā (Y580) and Xī'ān (Y690).

The train station is 8km southeast of the city. Trains run to numerous destinations, including

Yíchāng, Jíshǒu (Y22 hard seat) and Huáihuà (Y15 to Y37 hard seat, four to 5½ hours).

Minibuses to Zhāngjiājìè village (Y8, 40 minutes) pick up incoming passengers at the car park in front of the train station but can be slow departing; otherwise, take bus 2 to the long-distance **bus station** (☎ 822 2417) on Huilong Lu where buses leave every 15 minutes to Zhāngjiājìè village (Y8). Buses also leave from here for Chángshā (Y120, 11 hours, twice daily), Fènghuáng (Y47, four hours, 8.30am and 2.30pm) and Jíshǒu (Y44, 2½ hours, hourly).

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