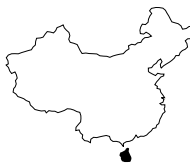


Hǎinán 海南



It's taken more than 2000 years, but the Chinese have finally started to see Hǎinán Dao (Hainan Island) as more than a 'gate of hell', a place to which recalcitrant officials were banished to a fate marginally better than death. Indeed, the rehabilitation of Hǎinán's reputation has been so fast and so complete that a visit to 'China's Hawaii' has become a status symbol in itself.

Feeding directly off China's booming economy, the country's smallest province now sees about 80% of its income washed ashore by tourism. But it's not just middle-class Chinese wearing Hawaiian-style shirt and shorts combos who are coming. London travel agencies are now offering Hǎinán packages alongside those to the Costa del Sol, and a growing number of independent travellers are finding that a side trip to China's best beaches is a wonderful way to punctuate a trip to this vast country.

Hǎinán is in many ways more like Indochina than the polluted skies, freezing winters and two billion elbows that are often hard to escape on the mainland. And as a traveller, it's hard not to appreciate that this is one of the few places where you can engage with Chinese unashamedly kicking back and having a good time.

Of course, it's not all falling coconuts and tanning oil, and the more adventurous will find their trip much enhanced by a little exploration into the central highlands, which have moderate temperatures, thick canopies of forest, and Li and Miao villages. Prices are generally higher in Hǎinán, but avoid the winter rush for some very attractive discounts on hotel accommodation.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ride a wave on the long and virtually deserted beaches of **Shimei Bay** (p628)
- Enjoy delicious, cheap seafood and wonderful people-watching at **Sānyà's Number 1 Market** (p632)
- Soak up the sun, sand and cocktails in one of **Yalong Bay's** (p630) plush resorts
- Watch the Chinese having fun as they run, kick and dance their way around **Haikou Park** (p624)
- Explore the minority villages around **Wūzhishān** (p634)

■ POPULATION: 8.2 MILLION



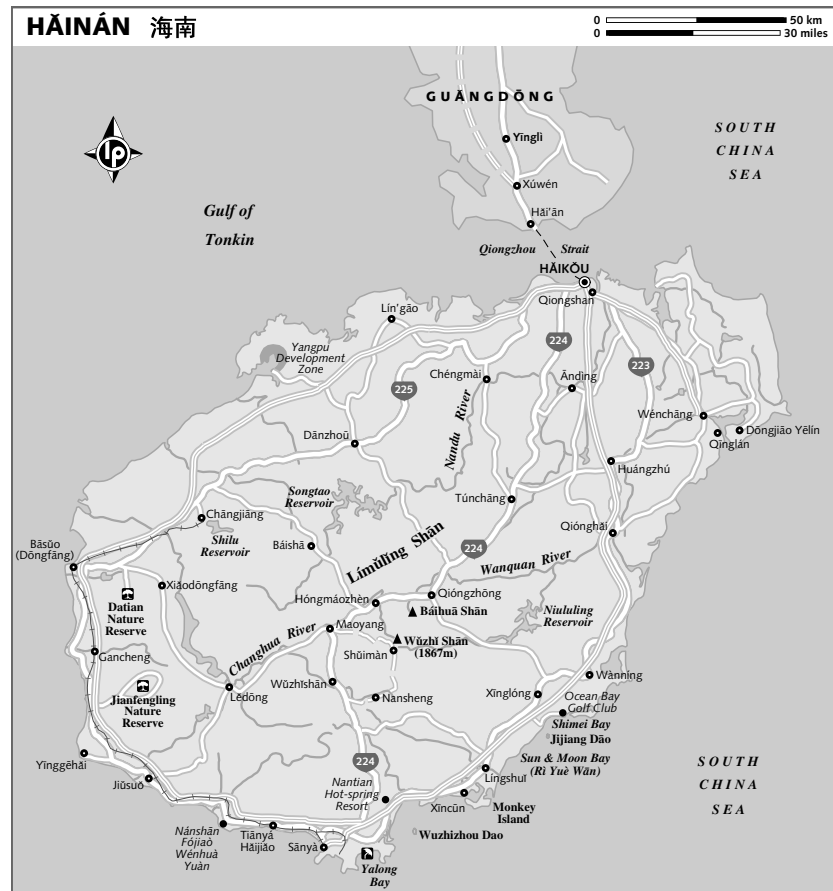
History

Until the economic boom of the last 20 years, Hǎinán had been a backwater of the Chinese empire since the first Han settlements appeared on the coast almost 2000 years ago. Largely ignored by a series of dynasties, Hǎinán was known as the 'tail of the dragon', a place at the furthest reaches of the empire that was best used as a repository for occasional high-profile exiles.

But while the island has played only the most peripheral part in Chinese history, it has been home to the ethnic Li for more than two millennia. Looked down upon by the Han, the Li lived a relatively primitive, subsistence existence and generally minded their own business. As long as the Han remained con-

finned to their small communities on the coast it was a strategy that seemed to work. Indeed, groups of Li living as hunter-gatherers were found in the mountainous interior of Hǎinán as recently as the 1930s.

This lack of exploration comes as little surprise when you consider that Hǎinán was known mainly as a place of exile for most of the last 1000 years. When Li Deyu, a prime minister of the Tang dynasty, was exiled to Hǎinán he dubbed it 'the gate of hell'. So bad was the island's reputation that only 18 tourists are purported to have come to Hǎinán of their own volition during the entire Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties (almost 700 years)! That's about the rate per minute during winter nowadays.



Su Dongpo and Hai Rui are other notable exiles, both of whom have modest memorials in Hǎikǒu (opposite). More recently China's first communist cell was formed here in the 1920s, and the island was heavily bombed and finally occupied by the Japanese during WWII. During the war Li and Han Chinese guerrillas waged an effective campaign to harass the Japanese forces. The Japanese retaliation, however, was brutal – they executed a third of the island's male population. And despite fighting alongside the communists the Li remain, together with a small population of Miao (H'mong), far the poorest people on Hǎinán.

In 1988 the entire island of Hǎinán was taken away from Guǎngdōng and established as a province and Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Before long it had emerged as an enclave of free-market bedlam operating on the periphery of the law. Unplanned, uneducated and unbridled development followed, with everyone keen to cash in on the soon-to-be tourism mecca. Alas, many were ahead of their time and until recently the carcasses of half-finished and abandoned tourist developments could be found littering the coast.

Today, however, mainland China has caught up and concrete is being poured, palm trees planted and vast pools dug at a truly alarming rate.

Climate

Excluding the disputed south sea islands (see p627), Hǎinán is the southernmost tip of China. Sǎnyà, in the south, is roughly on the same latitude as the southern reaches of Hawaii and Hanoi in Vietnam, so it can be relied upon to be warm even when the rest of China is freezing.

THE LI & MIAO

Thirty-nine minority groups live on Hǎinán, including the original inhabitants of the island, the Li and Miao, who live in the tropical forests covering Límǔlǐng Shān (Mother of the Li Mountain Range). The Li probably migrated to Hǎinán from Fújiàn 3000 years ago and today number about one million on the island.

Despite a long history of rebellion against the Chinese, the Li aided the communist guerrillas on the island during the war with the Japanese. Perhaps for this reason the island's centre was made an 'autonomous' region after the communist takeover, though this didn't last (see Wúzhīshān, p634).

The Miao (H'mong) people spread from southern China across northern Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. In China they moved south into Hǎinán as a result of the Chinese emigrations from the north, and now occupy some of the most rugged terrain on the island. Today there are some 60,000 Miao living on Hǎinán.

Weather is best from about November to early March, when average temperatures of 21°C (69.8°F) prevail; the yearly average is 25.4°C (77.7°F). Not surprisingly, this is also the busiest time. From March/April to October/November is not nearly as busy because it can be so diabolically hot and humid that you're liable to dissolve into a greasy spot. The pay off is in heavily discounted hotel prices.

Hǎinán is hit by at least one typhoon a year, usually between May and October. And while it seldom gets the worst of the winds, even the edge of the typhoon can cripple transport and communication with the mainland.

Language

Hainanese is a broad term for the baker's dozen local dialects of Hǎinán Mǐn (it's known by many other names), most of which are also spoken in Guǎngdōng. There is also a large population of Hakka speakers, and while the Li and Miao can usually speak some Mandarin they prefer to use their own languages.

Getting Around

Getting around Hǎinán is both cheap and easy. Hǎikǒu and Sǎnyà are linked by Hǎinán's three main highways: the eastern expressway via Wǎnníng and the coast (only three hours by bus); the central and much slower route via Qióngzhōng and Wúzhīshān (also known as Tōngzhá); and the less popular western expressway via Dǎnzhōu (also known as Nàdà), Bāsū (Dōngfāng) and Yínggēhǎi.

The roads are great, bus services comfortable and departures regular, but for now the vast majority of visitors fly directly to Sǎnyà on a range of cheap domestic flights. Of those who do come via Hǎikǒu, most take the fast

but relatively boring eastern expressway to Sǎnyà. The central route is slower but much more interesting, passing through the central highlands and Li and Miao villages.

Buses come in two main classes: the larger, pink buses are air-conditioned, have almost business-class leg room and stop less frequently; green buses are window-conditioned and stop everywhere, but aren't much cheaper.

There are Japanese-era railways marked on the Hǎinán map and oft-talked-about plans to build a rail line right around the island, but as yet there are no useful train services on Hǎinán. There is, however, a train from Hǎikǒu to Guǎngzhōu (p626).

Few travellers hire cars on Hǎinán, but a growing number are choosing to take short trips out of Sǎnyà by motorbike. You can hire 125cc motorbikes for Y100 to Y250 per day.

Hǎikǒu 海口

☎ 0898 / pop 1.6 million

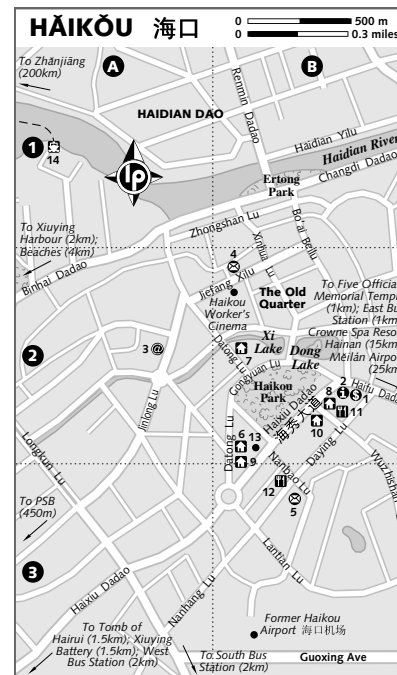
Hǎikǒu means 'Mouth of the Sea', but while sea trade remains relatively important, the buzzing provincial capital at the northern tip of Hǎinán is most notable for its boom-

ing economy. New and restarted construction projects are everywhere, and it's hard to avoid the conclusion that, ironically enough in 'communist China', capitalism is running almost out of control in Hǎikǒu. All of this commerce has attracted people from right around China and finding someone who was actually born on the island can be difficult.

While there really isn't much worth seeing, it's a pleasant enough place for a night or two. Sure, the traffic is as busy as any other medium-sized Chinese city, but the shade trees, the steamy tropical climes and surprisingly affable locals (is it the warm weather?) afford Hǎikǒu a wholly different feel. And the nights are best. As one guy we met told us: 'In the day, Hǎikǒu is very hot, but at night it is beautiful. You must come out at night.' We couldn't say it better ourselves.

Orientation

All your life support systems, including hotels, banks, food and travel agents, are found in the area of central Hǎikǒu around Haikou Park. The few historical sights are spread a little further afield, though it's easy enough to get to them by bus or taxi. To the northwest are the port area and the city's beach zone. The main bus station is southwest of town and the airport is about 25km to the east.



INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1	B2
Bank of China 中国银行	(see 6)	
CTS 中国旅行社	2	B2
Internet Café 网吧	3	A2
Internet Café 网吧	(see 5)	
Post & Telephone Centre 中国电信	4	B2
Post & Telephone Office 邮局	5	B3

SLEEPING

Haikou International Financial Centre 国际金融大厦	6	B2
Huáqiáo Dàshà 华侨大厦	7	B2
Hǎikǒu Bīnguǎn 海口宾馆	8	B2
Hǎinán Mínháng Bīnguǎn 海南民航宾馆	9	B2
Songtáo Dàshà 松涛大厦	10	B2

EATING

Forever Café 天长地久	11	B2
Gansu Restaurant & Other Street Food	12	B3
Kuàihuólín 快活林	(see 10)	
Western Restaurant	(see 8)	
Yéfēngtáng 椰风堂	(see 8)	

TRANSPORT

China Southern Airlines 中国南方航空	13	B2
Xíngǎng Passenger Ferry Terminal 海口新港	14	A1

MAPS

The annually published *Hainan Tourism Transportation Map* has a pretty good city map of Hǎikǒu, a map of all of Hǎinán, and another of Sǎnyà and Dàdōnghǎi. Unfortunately, it's not entirely in English, but it's still worth buying (Y6) at the airport or from hotels.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

Internet café (wǎngbā; Nanbao Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-11.30pm) Look for the 163 sign.

Internet café (wǎngbā; 3rd fl, Jinzhou Hotel, 34 Jinlong Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-midnight) There's no English sign.

MONEY

There are plenty of banks in Hǎikǒu, dispensing cash through ATMs, including the following:
Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; 38 Datong Lu) Under the Haikou International Commercial Centre.
Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Haixiu Dadao & Haifu Dadao) Changes travellers cheques.

POST

Post & Telephone Centre (Yóudiàn Dàlóu; Jiefang Xilu)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information in English is hard to find in Hǎikǒu.

The **China Travel Service** (CTS; Zhōngguó Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 6530 6003; cnr Haifu Dadao & Haixiu Dadao; ☎ 8am-9pm) should be your first stop for travel info. The young, English-speaking staff can arrange plane, train and ferry tickets and tours around Hǎinán and give you the lowdown on schedules. If they don't have it, they'll call. Ask them nicely and they might direct you to the latest nightspots, and maybe even take you. More formal, but with less English, is the **China Travel Service** (CTS; Zhōngguó Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 6675 7455; fax 6623 1585; 17 Datong Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm) in the same building as Huáqiáo Dàshà.

Sights & Activities

Even when it's hotter than hell, strolling around Hǎikǒu is the top 'thing to do'. The picturesque and partly restored **old quarter** along Xinhua Lu is nice enough, but our favourite activity here is an early morning or, even better, late afternoon wander through **Hǎikǒu Park** (Hǎikǒu Gōngyuán). The joggers, badminton players, tai chi artists, kung fu kickers, chess players and people-watchers are a wonder to behold. Even if you can't speak a word of Mandarin,

just bowl up and you'll soon be communicating with the locals. And don't miss the dancers; the 80-something geezer we saw could have cut a rug with Fred Astaire.

Five Officials Memorial Temple (五公祠; Wúgōng Cí; 169 Haifu Dadao; admission Y15; ☎ 8am-6pm) is an attractive Ming temple (restored during the Qing dynasty) dedicated to five officials who were banished to Hǎinán in earlier times. The famous Song dynasty poet, Su Dongpo, was also banished to Hǎinán and is commemorated here. Take bus 11 or 12 and get off one stop after the east bus station.

The more attractive **Tomb of Hairui** (海瑞墓; Hǎirui Mù; ☎ 6892 2060; Shugang Dadao; admission Y5; ☎ 8am-6pm) was ravaged during the Cultural Revolution but has been restored in vibrant colour. Hairui was an incorruptible and popular Ming dynasty official who was eventually banished to the island after criticising the emperor. The tomb is in western Hǎikǒu, off Haixiu Dadao; take bus 2 and tell the driver 'Hairui Mu!', or watch for a turn-off marked by a blue sign in English and Chinese. From there it's a 1km walk south.

Kilometres of smooth **sand beach** stretch west of Xiuying Harbour. From Haixiu Dadao, bus 40 (Y2) terminates smack in the middle. If you're out this way, don't miss the **Xiuying Battery** (Xiuying Gǔpàoái; off Jingmao Dong Lu; admission Y10; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm), built by the German Krupp company in the late 19th century as part of a series of coastal forts designed to make European invaders think twice. There are some cool underground passageways and several cannons pointing out to sea, as well as a museum of weaponry. Take bus 1 or 32 to Shimao Wan Lu and go up the hill.

Sleeping

Unlike the more seasonal Sǎnyà, prices in Hǎikǒu tend to be greatly discounted from the published rates pretty much year-round, so it's the discounted rates we've listed here. Only during major holidays might you get a rude shock. Unless stated otherwise, all rooms have bathrooms and air-conditioning.

BUDGET

Huáqiáo Dàshà (Overseas Chinese Hotel; ☎ 6677 3288; fax 6677 2094; 17 Datong Lu; 大同路17号; s/d Y60/100) The giant-sized Huáqiáo Dàshà still displays three stars out the front, but a look at the rooms and rock-bottom rates suggests two of those have exploded like supernovae and subsequently

disappeared into the hotel-star black hole. That said, the cheery staff and central location make it a solid budget choice.

Songtao Dàshà (☎ 6672 9116; 5 Wuzhishan Lu; 五指山路5号; r Y80) Not far from Haikou Park, the Songtao is pretty basic but fair for the money. There's no English spoken and some rooms smell of smoke, but the staff were nice enough and it's hard to argue for this money.

Hǎinán Míngháng Bīnguǎn (Hainan Civil Aviation Hotel; ☎ 6650 6888; fax 6677 2610; 9 Haixiu Dadao; 海秀大道9号; r Y120-180) It's not setting any trends, but the location is unbeatable and the fading three-star rooms offer excellent value. As a bonus, the airport shuttle bus (Y15) starts and ends here.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

It's always worth inquiring about discounts (*zhèkòu*) at Hǎikǒu's midrange and top-end hotels. If you arrive in a peak period, expect to pay as much as double the rates we've listed here.

Hǎikǒu Bīnguǎn (☎ 6535 1234; www.haikouhotel.com; 4 Haifu Dadao; 海府大道4号; d/tw Y300-400, ste from Y600; ☎) Right in the middle of Hǎikǒu, the Haikou Hotel offers slick service and attractive rooms at reasonable prices. Service is several cuts above most of its competitors, and the rooms are stylish and without the usual cheesy touches. The restaurant is excellent.

Haikou International Financial Hotel (Hǎikǒu Guóji Shāngyè Dàshà; ☎ 6679 6999; www.hkjr-jasper.com.cn; 38 Datong Lu; 大同路38号; d/tw Y308-358; ☎) This business hotel has a great location, but also a faded '80s feel. Although the rooms need a makeover, the service and facilities

(down to the bowling alley) outstrip many of its newer competitors.

Crowne Spa Resort Hainan (Huángguān Bīnhǎi Wénquán Jiùdiàn; ☎ 6596 6888; www.crownespaorthainan.com; 1 Qiongsan Dadao; 琼山大道1号; r Y700-800, ste Y1600; ☎) Formerly the Crowne Plaza, this city state-sized resort, 15km east of Hǎikǒu and right on the beach, is a mix of luxury and gaudy kitsch. Done in a 17th-century French style, the hotel and hot-spring spa are very nice, if not quite as sharp as the competition in Yalong Bay. The spa's signature 'fish therapy' involves sitting in a pool while small fishes 'clean off the bacteria from your skin and improve your immunity and relax your soul and body by stimulating your nerve'. Do you have the nerve?

Eating & Drinking

A lot of evening eating is done in the refreshingly cool outdoors. In the city centre, Jiefang Lu, near the cinema, is good for cheap street food, while Daying Lu, between Wuzhishan Lu and Lantian Lu, has plenty of cheap but good Chinese cuisine, without English menus.

Gansu restaurant (cnr Daying Lu & Nanbao Lu; meals Y5-20) One of our favourites on Daying Lu is a nameless restaurant serving tasty Western Chinese dishes, including *tiàndòu shāo niúròu* (beef and potatoes), as well as its own noodles.

Kuàihuólín (1 Wuzhishan Lu; dishes Y10-30; ☎ 8am-9pm) Pick and choose your meal from dishes such as potstickers and green beans from the trolleys going around. There are also decent Western breakfasts (from Y14).

HAINAN FARE

There is a huge variety of Chinese cuisine available in Sǎnyà and Hǎikǒu, but don't forget to try Hǎinán's own famous four dishes. Even if you can't see them (or read them) on the menu, it's worth asking.

- **Dongshan mutton** (东山羊; *dōngshānyáng*) A black-wooled mountain goat fed camellias and orchids, and used in soups, stewed, roasted or cooked in coconut milk, or used in soups.
- **Hele crab** (和乐蟹; *hélè xiè*) Juicy crab, usually steamed but also roasted, from Hèlè near Wǎnníng; it's best eaten in autumn.
- **Jiaji duck** (加积鸭; *jiājī yā*) To-die-for roast duck from Jiaji (Jiājī), near Qióngǎi.
- **Wenchang chicken** (文昌鸡; *wénchāng jī*) Most famous of all and originally cooked up in coastal Wénchāng, it's succulent chicken raised on a diet of rice and peanuts.

There are myriad other seafood dishes available, most of them using imported fish and crustaceans – Hǎinán's fisheries having been largely fished out. When ordering, remember that prices are usually quoted in *jīn*, which is 500g, not 1kg.

Yéfēngtáng (Cocowind Restaurant; ☎ 6535 1234; 4 Haixiu Dadao; dishes from Y25; 🕒 11am-2am) This place is a long-established restaurant in the Hǎikǒu Bīnguǎn (p625), with a phonebook-sized menu of delicious Chinese dishes.

Western Restaurant (☎ 6538 7528; 4 Haixiu Dadao; meals Y30-60; 🕒 7am-10pm) Behind the Hǎikǒu Bīnguǎn, unsurprisingly this place serves decent Western food, such as New Zealand mutton stew and the dangerous-sounding 'asbestos curry' (Y23)! It also does healthy breakfasts (Y12 to Y22).

Forever Café (☎ 6532 4658; 4 Jichang Donglu; 🕒 10am-midnight) One of several café-bars in this area, this one is particularly popular with a trendy young set.

Entertainment

Hǎikǒu has matured somewhat from the wild frontier town it was a few years ago. Prostitution is nowhere near as in-your-face as it used to be, and crime rates in general are down. Having said that, karaoke parlours remain popular and inside most of these you wouldn't need a compass to find a 'professional escort'.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Hǎikǒu's **Měilán airport** (www.mlairport.com) is well connected to most of China's major cities. For English-speaking advice, head to the **CTS office** (Zhōngguó Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 6530 6003; cnr Haifu Dadao & Haixiu Dadao). Alternatively, the **China Southern Airlines** (☎ 6666 8355; Haixiu Dadao) office on the ground floor of Hǎinán Míngháng Bīnguǎn can book flights on most airlines.

Low-season, one-way fares are cheap, and include Běijīng (Y1010), Guǎngzhōu (Y350), Kūnmíng (Y500), Nánníng (Y610), Shànghǎi (Y790) and Shěnzhen (Y540). Prices to major cities can double in peak season.

There are also flights to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kaohsiung (Taiwan), Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Macau.

BOAT

Hǎikǒu has two harbours, but most departures are from **Xiuying Passenger Ferry Terminal** (☎ 6866 1943). Bus 3 goes to Xiuying Harbour. The other harbour is Xīngǎng, served by minibuses 212 and 218 (or buses 14 and 22) from the stop opposite Hǎikǒu Bīnguǎn. A taxi costs about Y20.

Ferries depart from Xiuying roughly every 1½ hours for Hǎi'ān (Y32, 1½ hours) on

Léizhōu Peninsula, where there are bus connections to just about everywhere, including Zhànjiāng and Guǎngzhōu. Boats leave at 4pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday for Guǎngzhōu (Y110 to Y450, 20 to 25 hours).

There are daily overnight boats from Xīngǎng to Běihǎi in Guǎngxī, departing at 6pm. Tickets cost from Y90 (seat) to Y230 (cabin).

Tickets can be arranged and departure times checked at the ever-useful **CTS office** (Zhōngguó Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 6530 6003; cnr Haifu Dadao & Haixiu Dadao). If you've got time, a sense of adventure and a desire to travel like few others do, it's possible to take a boat from Hainan Dao to Vietnam. Boats are scheduled to leave Xiuying Port at 7pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but departures are actually less regular so check it with the CTS office in Haikou (see p624) when you get there. If the boat is running, it's supposed to take 13 hours and cost Y200/133 for a three/six-person cabin.

BUS

The new **south bus station** (汽车南站; ☎ 6680 3800; Nanhai Lu) is the one you're most likely to use. It's home to most of the combination ferry/sleeper buses going to Guǎngzhōu and other mainland destinations, though you can also take the ferry to Hǎi'ān and pick up a bus there. It is also the place for buses to Sānyà (with/without air-con Y79/49, three hours) and Wūzhīshān (with/without air-con Y66/46, four to five hours, 223km, five daily from 8.15am to 3.15pm) and pretty much everywhere else. The latter two go via the eastern expressway.

TRAIN

A relatively new and relatively comfortable train runs from Hǎikǒu to Guǎngzhōu (seat/hard sleeper Y138/265, 12 hours), via Sānshuǐ, Zhàoqing, Mào míng and Zhànjiāng. For the trip across the Qiongzhou Strait to Hǎi'ān the whole train is bunted onto a ferry. It departs from Hǎikǒu daily at 6.48pm, and tickets can be bought at the train station, at the dedicated train counter in the **China Southern Airlines** (☎ 6666 8355; Haixiu Dadao) office, or most conveniently at (yes, you guessed it) the English-speaking **CTS office** (Zhōngguó Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 6530 6003; cnr Haifu Dadao & Haixiu Dadao).

Getting Around

Hǎikǒu's Měilán airport is 25km southeast of the city centre. An airport shuttle (Y15)

runs every half-hour between the airport and Hǎinán Míngháng Bīnguǎn on Haixiu Dadao in the city centre. Taxi drivers will mob you as you leave the terminal and charge about Y40 or Y50 for the ride into the city, depending on your bargaining skills.

Hǎikǒu's city centre is easy to walk around, but there is also a workable bus system (Y1 to Y2). There are thousands of taxis and they're cheap, starting at Y10 for the first 3km.

WÉNCHĀNG 文昌

☎ 0898

Wénchāng is best known for its famous chicken dish (see the boxed text, p625) and as the birthplace of the Soong sisters, Meiling and Qínglíng, who later became the wives of Chiang Kaishek and Sun Yatsen. For the traveller, however, it's the **Dōngjiāo Yēlín** (东郊椰林) coconut plantation, with cool, inviting pathways and glorious beaches, that makes Wénchāng attractive.

Dōngjiāo Yēlín has a wonderfully laid-back feel and, particularly in the low season when you'll have the beach virtually to yourself and room prices are low, it's an appealing alternative to Sānyà. There isn't the range of activities found further south, but just chilling out on the beach, wandering through the palms and sniffing out traditional meals in the nearby village should keep you from

getting bored. Those with a nose for history might find the WWII-era concrete bunkers dotted along the beach interesting.

Accommodation is provided by a couple of resorts, the pick of which is the **Hainan Prima Resort** (海南百莱玛度假酒店; ☎ 6353 8222; hprima@163.com; d & tw Y130-600), a wonderfully unpretentious place with one- and two-storey chalets priced by size and proximity to the beach. They are surprisingly stylish, comfortable and good value. There are two restaurants serving mainly Chinese cuisine, and cheaper food is available in the village. If the Prima isn't your bag, wander into the village where locals have been known to offer home stays.

Getting here is quite a trip. Frequent buses leave from Hǎikǒu (with/without air-con Y16/13, 1½ hours, 73km) between about 7am and 6pm. From Wénchāng's bus station, walk downhill and cross the canal, turn left and walk another five minutes or so to a newer bridge. From here, take a minibus to Qīnglán (about 20 minutes), from where regular ferries (Y2) or local boats (Y3) cross an inlet. Finally, take whatever transport is going through the plantation to the beach. Alternatively, a taxi from Hǎikǒu will cost about Y100, or from Wénchāng about Y75 – negotiate.

For Sānyà (Y50, four to five hours, 246km), buses leave Wénchāng five times daily between 7.40am and 1.40pm.

THE SPATLY SPAT

Were it not such a contentious piece of real estate, few people would have heard of the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands. On a map, look for a parcel of dots far, far south of China in the South China Sea, hemmed in by Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Vietnam. They, plus China, all claim the islands as their own.

Why the fuss over 53 specks of land, many of which are just reefs and shoals? The answer is oil, or at least the hope for oil.

China insists Han dynasty temples found on some islands validate its territorial rights. Vietnam has long disputed this claim and in 1933 its colonial French government annexed the islands, before losing them to Japan in 1939. Following Japan's WWII defeat, it was not until a Philippine claim in 1956 that the Taiwan-based Kuomintang government reasserted the traditional Chinese claim by occupying the largest of the islands, Taiping, where they remain. Vietnam thereafter hoisted a flag over the westernmost point of the islands. Things escalated in 1988 when the Chinese sank two Vietnamese patrol boats and forcibly occupied the islands. In 1995 the Philippine navy entered the fray at the appropriately named Mischief Reef, destroying a Chinese-built radar base there.

With several of the major players by now sporting bloodied noses, an agreement was reached to allow all nations access to the islands while individual disputes were settled. But it's unlikely that this fracas is finished for good. Given these countries' continuing military upgrades and China's desperation for fuel, the Spratly Islands remain one of the most potentially destabilising issues in Asia.

THE EAST COAST

Hainan's east coast is a series of spectacular palm-lined beaches, long bays and headlands. The towns are not that exciting, but each of those mentioned here acts as a transport hub, meaning it's slow but simple enough to hop along the coast by local minibus.

About 60km south of Wenchang, **Qionghai** (琼海) is famous as the place where China's first communist cell was formed in 1924. About 50km further south is unremarkable **Wanning** (万宁), and it's another 23km of expressway to **Xinglong** (兴隆), which is known as the home to more than 20,000 Chinese-Vietnamese and overseas Chinese refugees (mostly from Indonesia or Malaysia) who have settled at a cultural park known as the **Xinglong Overseas Chinese Farm** (兴隆华侨村; Xinglong Huáqiáo Cūn; ☎ 6225 1888, ext 8811; admission Y40; 🕒 7.30am-6pm). Here Chinese returnees dress in Southeast Asian costumes and demonstrate a variety of tropical agriculture techniques, including making rubber and coffee; Xinglong coffee is famous throughout China. Xinglong is also famous as the transsexual capital of China and for its touristy hot-spring hotels (nothing to rave about). From the bus stop to the hotels it costs Y3 by motorbike or Y5 by motor-tricycle.

Shimei Bay 石梅湾

Shimei Bay (Shímei Wān) is a stunning stretch of coast that has, for now, avoided the mass commercialisation visited upon the Sanya area. The wide, often palm-lined beaches are virtually deserted and, unlike their neighbours to the south, have real waves (see the boxed text, below).

For now, Shimei remains blessedly undeveloped. This looks set to change in coming years, but there is still time to get here before the hordes. And it's worth it. Heading south from Wanning get the minibus (Y5) to drop you at the Shimei Wān turn-off. From here, motorbike taxis run down to the beach, where a couple of creaky old seafood restaurants compete for business.

Here you'll find the surprisingly classy, Hong Kong-owned **Jiajing Café & Bar**, which also arranges trips to and activities on nearby **Jiajing Dao** (Jiajing Island) through the attached **Wanning Shi Mei Wan Diving Co** (☎ 6252 5166).

Be sure to get your motorbike guy's mobile number and, when you're ready to move on, call him for the trip up to the **Ocean Bay Golf Club** (海滨高尔夫俱乐部; ☎ 6252 5999; baygolf@163.com; Nanyan Wan Beach; d Y550-750, with golf & full board Y900), at the far north end of the bay. This is a nice enough place to stay catering mainly to golfers, who play the wonderfully well-maintained course spread out below. But it's also the scene of the best surfing in China (see below) and a really beautiful piece of the world.

Located a few kilometres south of the Shimei turnoff is **Sun and Moon Bay** (Rì Yuè Wān; 日月湾), where you will find more waves and more deserted beach. Get the minibus from either Shimei Bay or Lingshui to drop you on the expressway, from where it's a few hundred metres' walk.

If the minibus sounds too hard, a taxi from Sanya costs about Y300, or about Y75 from Wanning.

SURFING HAINAN

When young Chinese start taking to surfing in numbers, chances are Shimei Bay will be their ultimate domestic break. In the meantime anyone wanting to say they've surfed China should BYO board and get here first.

The place to come to is the headland jutting into the South China Sea beside the **Ocean Bay Golf Club**. Here 1m to 2m waves seem to roll in constantly on a 300m-long left-hand break. A few kilometres further south are several shorter beach breaks at **Sun and Moon Bay**, which are reported to be not quite as exhilarating but easier to get onto. Locals say the best waves are during the typhoon season, from May to November.

Occasional groups of local and expat surfers can be seen here, though unless things change fast, chances are the only people you'll see will be curious fishermen. That also means there is no gear for hire, so bring it all with you or, if you're desperate, ask around in Sanya and you might get lucky. For more information on surfing in China, and to check when the next **720 China Surf competition** is due (usually late in the year at Shimei Bay), check out **Wannasurf** (www.wannasurf.com) or **China Seas** (www.chinaseas.com).

Lingshui & Monkey Island

陵水、南湾猴岛

Lingshui is one of the oldest settlements on Hainan, with archaeological evidence suggesting it has been a trading port since the Han dynasty. These days its few streets are interesting to wander around for an hour or two, with crumbling history the order of the day. However, the main reason for coming is to visit nearby Monkey Island, home to a population of Guangxi monkeys (*Macaca mulatta*).

About a thousand macaque monkeys live on this hilly peninsula. The **government research park** (Nánwān Hóudǎo; ☎ 6671 7080; admission Y88; 🕒 8am-6.30pm) is a wildlife centre established to investigate the monkey business. It sounds tacky, but the preserve is peaceful if you avoid the tourist groups.

The animals are tame and anticipate tourist arrivals for snacks of peanuts. It's best not to touch them and to keep a tight grip on your camera – apparently some monkeys fancy themselves as photographers. Morning and evening are the best viewing times. During the mating season (February to May) males tend to be overly 'hospitable' and you might have to crowbar them off your leg.

To get there take an express bus from Sanya's long-distance bus station to Lingshui (Y16, 1½ hours, 74km), then a minibus (Y3) to near to the harbour. It's then a 1km walk to the cable-car station, where you also buy your tickets. The admission price includes a return cable-car trip, making hiring a boat from Xincun to the island no longer really viable.

SANYA 三亚

☎ 0898 / pop 490,000

Of all the newly developed tourist meccas in China, Sanya is arguably the most complete of the lot – it exists solely for tourism. Having stumbled over a few economic hurdles during the past 20 years it is absolutely booming now. The recent arrival of several international resorts has only confirmed that the Sanya area has become a fully paid-up member of the international resort world.

While the full 40km or so of coastline dedicated to tourism is usually referred to as Sanya, the region is actually made up of three distinctly different tourist zones. **Sanya Bay** (Sanya Wān) is the least impressive beach, home to the bustling city centre and a long

stretch of soulless new resorts aimed at mainland holidaymakers. More attractive **Dadonghai Bay** (Dādōnghǎi Wān) is about 3km southeast, beyond the Luhuitou Peninsula, and is home to several budget and midrange hotels and two very good backpacker hostels. A further 15km east, exclusive **Yalong Bay** has the most stunning beach and – quite literally – wall-to-wall plush international resorts.

There is no denying that the Sanya region is a modern construction in every way, with more than its fair share of cheesy attractions aimed at mainland tourists. Some would class the 2003, 2004 and 2005 Miss World pageants as pretty kitschy, too, but they certainly helped to put Sanya on the map. Despite (or partly because of) all this, the region is quite a lot of fun. Sanya is one of the few places where you can watch Chinese people (relatively) unselfconsciously having a good time, and it's hard not to get caught up in it when the air is clear, the sun is shining and everyone's enjoying themselves.

Of course, like any tourist haven, Sanya does have its irritations. The stalking taxi drivers, relatively high prices and usual menu of low-level scams are the downsides.

Orientation

Sanya city is oddly broken up. The bus station and a few tourist facilities are on the two main peninsulas protruding between Sanya Bay and Sanya River. Jiefang Lu runs north-south and is the main drag, where you'll find the long-distance bus station, banks, travel agencies, supermarkets and a few hotels. Most travellers, however, will pass straight through en route to either Dadonghai Bay or Yalong Bay.

Jiefang Lu is really the main road for the whole coast, branching into Gangmen Lu at its south end and then becoming Yuya Dadao as it heads southeast to Dādōnghǎi Bay. This road eventually leads around to Yalong Bay and transport is fairly regular in both directions. Phoenix airport is about 20km northwest of Sanya city. The *Sanya Hainan Island* map (Y6) is worth buying from hostels and hotels.

Information

There is the full gamut of internet cafés, banks and other life support systems in Sanya city, though most places listed here are in Dādōnghǎi because that's where most Western visitors stay.

INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

Most hotels and hostels are online and you can use their machines.

Ultra Speed Internet Café (wǎngbā; Haiyun Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-11.30pm) Next door to Chuányà Bīnguān.

MONEY

The following banks and many more have ATMs, as do the Yalong Bay resorts.

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Yuya Dadao, Dādōnghāi) Changes travellers cheques.

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Jiefang Lu, Sanya)

POST

Post & Telecommunications office (Jiefang Lu, Sanya Yōujiú) There is another office in Dādōnghāi, at the eastern end of Yuya Dadao.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (公安局; Gōngānjú; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) It can renew visas.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Your best bet for tourist information is your hotel, though if they don't see many English speakers, even they might not be much help.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

For air tickets, we've heard good reports about the online consolidator **Travel China** (☎ 400 810 1119; www.elong.net), which delivered cheap domestic tickets to the hotel room door within 1½ hours of being called. Alternatively, the English-speaking staff at **Sanya Adventure Tour** (☎ 8821 0053; www.sanya-adv.com; Haiyun Lu; ☎ 9am-8pm) can book tickets, hire bicycles (Y25/100 per hour/day) and motorbikes (Y250 per day), and arrange international calls for Y1 to Y2 per minute.

Sights & Activities

Unsurprisingly for a beach resort, the vast majority of things to see and do revolve around sand, sea and after-hours entertainment. The two main beaches are crescent-shaped **Dādōnghāi** (大东海) and the superb 7km-long strip of white sand at **Yalong Bay** (亚龙湾, Yálong Wān; Asian Dragon Bay). Dādōnghāi is convenient to the widest range of accommodation and eateries. It does get busy, however, and it's worth arriving reasonably early to secure one of those fixed umbrellas or risk being burned to a crisp – between March and November the sun can be blisteringly hot.

Yalong Bay is undoubtedly more attractive and less crowded, though with fewer shops and vendors budgeteers might want to bring their own food and water. Both beaches offer a wide range of activities, including jet-skiing, banana boats, snorkelling, diving and, at Dādōnghāi, parasailing. China's beaches are theoretically open to everyone but at Yalong Bay there is a quasi-official Y50 fee if you're not staying at one of the beachfront resorts. To avoid this, walk through one of the hotels rather than entering the beach from the main square.

Particularly at Dādōnghāi, one of the most entertaining activities is just to sit with a drink and people-watch. You will inevitably see that classic Sanya sight – the couple or family of holidaying mainlanders dressed in identical, Hawaiian-style shirt and shorts combinations. Wonderful stuff! Generally speaking, first-time visitors to Hainan wear these outfits, while more experienced travellers graduate to something more stylish.

Between Sanya and Dādōnghāi is the **Luhuitou Peninsula** (鹿回头), from where sunset views are nice enough, but the statue of the deer turning its head is of limited interest. The beaches on the peninsula are poor, but they're uncrowded!

Two islands, **Ximào Zhōu** and **Dōngmào Zhōu**, are visible off Sanya's coastline. Only Ximào Zhōu is open to visitors. At 2.6 sq km, it's fairly small, but you can hike around it or go snorkelling. Speak to Peter at Blue Sky International Youth Hostel (below) or Sanya Adventure Tour (left) to arrange a boat.

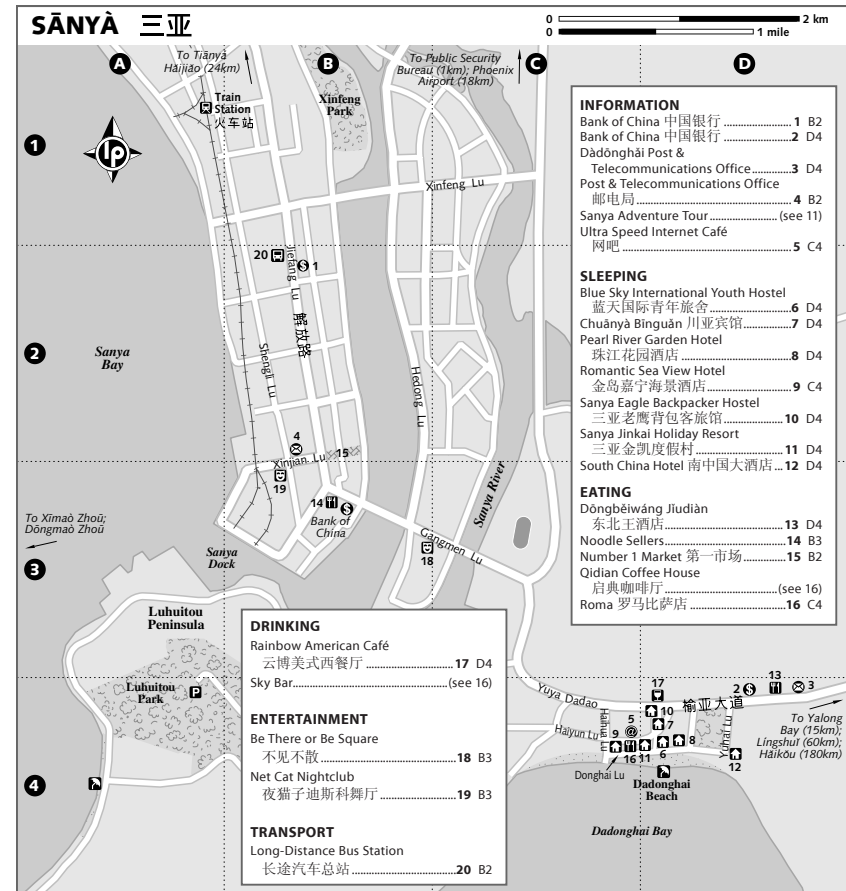
Sleeping

All options listed have air-conditioning, TV and hot-water bathrooms. For longer reviews, see the accommodation listings on the Lonely Planet website (www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation).

BUDGET

Dādōnghāi is the place to head for budget lodgings, with two excellent hostels and several cheap Chinese places in close proximity.

☑ **Blue Sky International Youth Hostel** (Lántiān Guōjī Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 8818 2320, 133-2209 8659; sy.youthhostel@gmail.com; Haiyun Lu, Dādōnghāi; 大东海海韵路夏日百货西侧; dms/tw/tr Y45/80/100/120; ☑) When we stayed here we met people whose main reason for coming to Sanya was to stay at Peter's place. That's a big call, but



it's hard to argue. The staff, the rooms, the chef and, most importantly, good-humoured and generous owner Peter give the Blue Sky a homey, welcoming and fun atmosphere. There are regular 'events', including a weekly DIY seafood barbecue (Y40) and free make-your-own dumpling sessions. There is also free wi-fi, limited free use of the fixed computers, and cheap motorbike hire, but only two double beds. It's in a lane running off Haiyun Lu – look for the blue HI sign. All up, highly recommended.

Sanya Eagle Backpackers Hostel (☎ 8821 8005, 139-7697 7924; bookhostel@163.com; 12th fl, Haitianhuiyuan Bldg, 96 Yuya Dadao, Dādōnghāi; 榆亚大道96号海天汇源大厦12楼; tw & tr per bed Y50; ☑) Sanya Backpackers is the perfect complement to the

more established Blue Sky. English-speaking manager Jane maintains a good vibe and 12 clean and comfortable rooms, including a triple that can act as a dorm. Jane organises diving trips and other tours. The entrance is around the back of the Kai Yuan Hotel.

Sanya Jinkai Holiday Resort (☎ 8821 0075; 71 Haiyun Lu; 海韵路71号; tw/f/Y60/120) This place is far from a resort and the rooms are worn, but they're also spacious and offer good value. The management don't speak English, but the staff in Sanya Adventure across the lobby should be able to help.

Chuányà Bīnguān (☎ 8822 7333; fax 8821 3568; Haiyun Lu; 海韵路; tw/tr/st Y60/100/150) If the hostels are full, this standby has basic but clean rooms and friendly service.

MIDRANGE

Most hotels in Dādōnghāi are midrange. High-season rates start at Y350 for a double (more in winter). Outside peak periods 30% to 50% discounts are common.

South China Hotel (Nánzhōngguó Dàjiǔdiàn; ☎ 8821 9888; www.southchinahotel.com; Yuhai Lu, Dādōnghāi; 大东海榆海路; d Y880-1280; ☑ ☑ ☑) The South China is not as sharp as it was when Jiang Zemin stayed back in 1993, but it is in one of the best positions in Dādōnghāi and offers reasonable value in the low season. Internet access on the clunky old computers in each room costs Y5 an hour.

Romantic Sea View Hotel (Jīn Dǎo Jiā Níng; ☎ 8821 6888; Haihua Lu, Dādōnghāi; 大东海花路; r Y880-1480; ☑) A reasonable midrange choice in a good location by the beach. Rooms are attractive, with soft beds, and prices usually start at Y240 during offpeak season, but in several windowless rooms there is no romantic view at all.

Pearl River Garden Hotel (Zhūjiāng Hūyayuan Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 8821 1888; www.prgardenhotel.com.cn; Donghai Lu, Dādōnghāi; 大东海东海路; r Y880-2000; ☑) This fading, older hotel has a great seafront location, but the rooms are fading and many smell of smoke. Ask for a room on an upper floor for the best views. Prices are more than 50% less out of season.

TOP END

The top-end resorts are on the beach at beautiful Yalong Bay. The only problem is there is nothing more than resorts here, meaning you need to come into Dādōnghāi or Sanya for local restaurants and shops. Big discounts are available from April to November. The region's true top-end resorts are all scattered along one nameless beachside street at beautiful Yalong Bay.

Sheraton Sanya Resort (喜来登度假酒店; ☎ 8855 8855; www.sheraton.com/sanya; r/ste from Y1500/2900; ☑ ☑ ☑) In its role as home to the Miss World contest from 2003 to 2005, this 511-room resort put Sanya on the map for many people outside China. It has excellent kids facilities and generally high standards, but it's already starting to wear a little.

Mangrove Tree Resort (红树林度假酒店; ☎ 8855 8888; www.mangrovetreeresort.com; r/ste from Y1500/3800; ☑ ☑ ☑) This stylish five-star resort is visually stunning, with 502 spacious and chic rooms set around a deep-blue lagoon pool. Rooms without a sea view have a shower on the balcony as a consolation.

Hilton Sanya Resort & Spa (希尔顿温泉度假酒店; ☎ 8858 8888; www.sanya.hilton.com; r/ste from Y1580/3080; ☑ ☑ ☑) From the vast open lobby to the super-stylish rooms and restaurants, the brand-new Hilton manages to present modern beachside luxury without losing sight of the fact that you're in China. The rooms are great, some with huge circular love tubs, and all with subtly concealed Bose sound systems, internet connections and attractive décor. The best views are from buildings 4 and 8. Only the service was a little disappointing, though this should improve.

Eating

Sanya is full of restaurants, most outdoor and boisterously casual; Shengli Lu has a good choice under the shade trees, and the south end of Jiefang Lu, just after the road splits, has plenty of noodle sellers. Dādōnghāi has a few international flavours to go with the Chinese places, while eating in Yalong Bay is limited to the hotel restaurants.

Number 1 Market (Dì yī shì chāng; 第一市场; Jiefang Lu, Sanya; 解放一路; ☎ 7.30-11.30pm) The outdoor seafood restaurants either side of this night market are a great place to immerse yourself in the full Chinese experience. The atmosphere is palpably up, the seafood is excellent, and while you're waiting for the meal you can wander off to shop for cheap lingerie, floral shirt sets or myriad other items.

Dōngběiwāng Jiǔdiàn (东北王酒店; King of the Northeast Restaurant; ☎ 8821 2192; 135 Yuya Dadao, Dādōnghāi; mains Y8-40; ☎ 11am-11pm) In this, one of Dādōnghāi's best restaurants (just see the parade of celebs on the wall as you go up the stairs), the food includes delicious northern Chinese dishes plus dumplings (Y20) and Wéngchāng chicken (Y50). It's on the 1st floor of the Zhōng Yáng Hotel.

Roma (☎ 8867 7871; Haiyun Lu, Dādōnghāi; 大东海海韵路; meals Y60-70; ☎ 12.30pm-1am) For something more European in a relatively refined atmosphere, try Roma's pasta and very tasty pizzas.

Qidian Coffee House (☎ 8867 7998; Haiyun Lu, Dādōnghāi; 大东海海韵路) For coffee, light meals and air-conditioning, this coffee house just next door to Roma is a safe option.

Drinking & Entertainment

Being a beachside resort, there is a reasonable range of after-hours entertainment. Most of the fun is in Sanya city and Dādōnghāi, while

the Yalong Bay hotels tend to have Filipino bands. The first two places listed here have a predominantly Western clientele, while the second two are mostly Chinese. Men can expect to be the subject of more attention than they might be used to – some of it from women looking for a paying gig. Remember, too, that bar and nightclub tastes change quickly, so ask around for what's hot when you're here.

Rainbow American Café (Yún Bó; Yuya Dadao, Dādōnghāi; ☎ 8pm-late) The most popular place among the backpacker crew when we passed, Rainbow has live music most nights, a pool table, dance floor and friendly staff. It also serves food.

Sky Bar (Haiyun Lu; ☎ 8pm-late) Loud but generally fun, Sky Bar tends to be the opening play of a night out in Dādōnghāi.

Be There or Be Square (Bù Jiān Bù Sān; Gangmen Lu, Sanya; ☎ 8pm-3am) Easy to find between the two bridges leading into Sanya, this place has a good vibe and a decent range of music but no real dance floor, meaning the mostly Chinese patrons tend to dance at their tables. Admission is free and beers are about Y20.

Net Cat Nightclub (Yè Māo Zì; nr Xinjan Lu & Shengli Lu, Sanya; ☎ 8pm-2am) A younger crowd than Be Square, with mainly techno music and a dance floor. Admission is free but your first purchase needs to be a minimum of Y100, which conveniently buys a 10-bottle bucket of beer – take your friends. It's busiest from 9pm to 11pm.

Shopping

Southern Hainan is famous for its cultured pearls and infamous for the persistent saleswomen who flog them on Dādōnghāi beach, though in fairness they're not that bad. Most of the pearls are genuine, if not good enough to make the export market, and sell for just a few dollars. But there are some cases of people being duped into paying for fine-looking plastic. If in doubt, scratch away at the pearl – if it's plastic, it should flake or chip; a real pearl won't.

Getting There & Away

Phoenix airport has flights to a small number of international destinations and a stack of domestic destinations, including Shēnzhèn, Guǎngzhōu, Běijīng, Shànghǎi, Xī'ān and Kūnmíng. Prices vary greatly depending on the season, the airline and even the time of

day, so it's worth shopping around. As a guide, a one-way flight to Shēnzhèn could cost as little as Y320 or as much as Y900. Check **Travel China** (☎ 400 810 1119; www.elong.net) for an idea of prices. Dādōnghāi is full of travel agencies, and the hostels and major hotels can also book plane tickets.

From Sanya's **long-distance bus station** (☎ 8827 2440; Jiefang Lu) there are frequent buses and minibuses to most parts of Hainan, including many deluxe buses to Hāikǒu (Y79, three to 3½ hours). Buses to Wūzhīshān Shì (slow/express Y17/20, 1½ to two hours) leave roughly every hour, and there are two departures daily for Qióngzhōng (about five hours) at 7.55am (Y35) and 8.40am (Y31).

Getting Around

Phoenix airport is 20km north of Sanya city and 25km from Dādōnghāi. A shuttle bus runs from the airport to the Number 1 Market in Sanya for Y10 but, for some weird reason, doesn't carry passengers back, so you'll need to take a taxi for about Y40/50/70 from Sanya/Dādōnghāi/Yalong Bay.

There are several options for travelling along the coast. The cheapest is by minibus, with minibuses 102 and 202 running frequently between Sanya and Dādōnghāi (Y1). Minibus 102 continues to Yalong Bay (Y3); the last minibus 102 departs from Yalong Bay just after 7pm. There is also a blue, double-decker tourist bus running between Underwater World in Yalong Bay and Tiānyà Hǎijìào every 30 minutes between about 7.40am and 6pm. It costs Y10 for the full trip, or Y5 between Sanya and either end.

Motorcycle sidecars and plain old motorbike taxis cruise the streets and always ask more than the going rate, which is Y3 to Y5 to most places. A taxi from Dādōnghāi to Sanya costs Y10, from Dādōnghāi to Yalong Bay is Y30 to Y40, and from Sanya to Yalong Bay Y40.

It's possible to hire a minibus and driver from near the long-distance bus station for Y300 for a full day, depending on how far you go.

AROUND SANYA

You can take several half- and full-day trips from the Sanya coast. Most are aimed squarely at the domestic tourism market and can be a bit too contrived for Western tastes. At these sights, and anything else calling itself

a 'cultural village', be sure to ask clearly how much it will cost you before going to see that 'traditional wedding' or other event, as once the deed is done you'll likely be pressured to 'donate' a hefty 'bride price' to the smiling villagers.

Tiányà Hǎijiǎo 天涯海角

Twenty-four kilometres northwest of Sānyà, **Tiányà Hǎijiǎo** (admission Y50; ☎ 7am-7pm) literally means 'edge of the sky, rim of the sea', but seems to be universally known as the 'end of the earth' in English. The site is best known for the large rocks protruding from the surf just off the coast, which were until recently featured on the Y2 note. The area around has been landscaped into an attractive garden, but in truth this is a tourist trap and a must-see for Chinese tourists only. If you can't resist, take any minibus (Y3, 40 minutes) north along the main road or the blue, double-decker tourist bus (Y5, see p633).

Nánshān Fójiào Wénhuà Yuàn

南山佛教文化苑

About 20km west of Tiányà Hǎijiǎo, **Nánshān Fójiào Wénhuà Yuàn** (Nanshan Buddhism Cultural Park; ☎ 8883 7888; admission adult/child 1.2-1.4m tall Y150/78, child shorter than 1.2m free; ☎ 8am-6pm) is another enormous tourist trap but at least there are some things worth seeing here. The most notable is the recently completed 108m-tall statue of A Ma, also known as Tin Hau (see the boxed text, p567), rising from the ocean at the end of a fancy causeway. That's 16m taller than the Statue of Liberty in New York, making it the tallest statue in the world. The rest of Nánshān is essentially a Buddhist theme park where you might find some spiritual enlightenment, but it might also lighten your wallet. Not a must-see, but definitely better than Tiányà Hǎijiǎo – there's a lot of walking, so give yourself at least two hours.

Nantian Hot-spring Resort 南田温泉

About 50km northeast of Sānyà **Nantian Hot-spring Resort** (Nán Tiān Wēn Quán; ☎ 8881 1681; admission Y168; ☎ 3pm-midnight) is hugely popular with Chinese visitors and makes an entertaining evening (not morning) if you fancy soaking in one of the 40 pools of differing temperatures. It's quite an attractive site, with pools spread around landscaped gardens that also contain a couple of restaurants. Your money buys you use of the change rooms, towels and lockers.

The best way to get here is on the free shuttle bus that leaves from the Pearl River Garden Hotel (see p632) at 2pm, 4pm and 6pm, returning at 3pm, 5pm, 9pm and 11pm. Discounts of Y40 are available if you book through some hotels, including the Blue Sky International Youth Hostel (p630).

Jiānfēnglíng Nature Reserve 尖峰岭自然保护区

Fifty years ago much of Hainan was blanketed by tropical jungle. These days a lot of that has been cut down, but you can get an idea of how beautiful it once was at the **Jiānfēnglíng Nature Reserve** (Jiānfēnglíng Zìrán Bǎohùqū; ☎ 136-3762 5356; www.jianfengling.com; admission Y40). About 115km west of Sānyà, this lush area is high above the humidity of the coastal plain and is home to hundreds of species of plants and insects, including some 400 species of butterfly. The reserve was established in 1992, after the lower slopes had already been cleared, so the main forest is near the top of the Jiānfēng range, the highest peak of which rises to a chilly 1412m. To really get a feel for the place, stay overnight and spend the day walking in the reserve and the surrounding area.

There are several hotels spread around a lake below the main forested area, including the **Tiānchǐ Bìshǔ Shānzhūāng** (天池避暑山庄; ☎ 136-7645 9921; tw Y100).

To get here, take one of the regular buses from Sānyà's long-distance bus station towards Bāsuo (Y30, 1½ hours) and get off at the Jiānfēng exit. Walk 100m east and get either the infrequent minibus (Y1) or a motorbike (Y50/80 for one/two people) to take you the 27km to the reserve, stopping to buy your ticket in Jiānfēng village on the way. The last bus to Sānyà departs from the highway at about 5.30pm.

Wūzhīshān 五指山市 (TONGSHI 通什)

☎ 0898

Up in the hills in the centre of Hainan, Wūzhīshān is one of the most interesting and genuine cities on the island. Wūzhīshān was until recently called Tōngzhá or Tōngshí, but its name was changed to that of a famous nearby mountain, Wūzhǐ Shān. It is China's smallest city, being given such status when it became the capital of the Li and Miao Autonomous Prefecture back in the '80s. The idea was that the region would be self-

THE LOOP

So you've soaked up more sun than you need, drunk enough happy-hour beer and feel like you need to see more of Hainan than the Sānyà strip alone. Well, get on yer bike – literally. By hired motorbike or by bus (see p633), the following is an easy, entertaining and thoroughly off-the-beaten-track trip. We're describing it as a three- or four-day event, though you can cut or add corners to your heart's content.

Pack light and start early in **Dādōnghāi**, Sānyà (p629), heading north to **Wūzhīshān** (opposite) along the very smooth middle highway. It's an interesting drive that invites random stops in small villages. Plan to spend the night in Wūzhīshān and, if your Mandarin isn't up to exploring solo, you could wander up Qióngzhōu University to meet some English-speaking students. If (and only if) they are keen and won't be missing too much in the way of classes, they might be willing to tag along to act as a translator when you walk or take a motorbike to a nearby Li village. Back in town, soak up some beer, food and dancing at Jia Jia Shao Kao Yuan.

Once you've shaken off your hangover, you have a couple of options. You could head out to **Wūzhǐ Shān** (p637), the mountain, for a look and a walk, or continue along Rte 224 to the town of **Qióngzhōng** (p637), from where the **Báihuā Shān waterfall** (p637) is an easy half-day trip. Stay the night in Qióngzhōng and enjoy the street-party atmosphere of the evenings, and head off early along the slow descent to the coast. It's a fun road, winding through terraced rice fields and tiny villages.

If you're on the bus, you're likely to go to Wànníng, but by bike it's better skipped. Either way, your destination is the beautiful and mostly deserted beaches of **Shimeí Bay** (p628). Riding along the coast here is incredibly liberating, as you can stop at any one of dozens of places for a swim and just take your unhurried time.

You're on the home stretch now, with Dādōnghāi only a couple of hours away by road. Head straight through or stop at **Monkey Island** (p629) for a few hours. If you choose to stay another night, both **Xinglóng** and **Lingshui** have hotels, or you might opt to stop into the hot-spring extravaganza at **Nantian Hot Spring Resort** (opposite) for an evening of soaking away the bumps of the road. Before you start be sure to pick up the *Sanya Hainan Island* map.

governing, giving the marginalised Li and Miao communities (see the boxed text, p622) an amount of control over themselves.

That situation, however, proved short-lived after newly empowered local politicians were done for corruption and money wasting on a scale remarkable even by Chinese standards. For evidence, look to the imposing and overly grand main building of **Qióngzhōu University**, overlooking the city, which was going to be the region's legislative assembly.

Bona fide sights are few. The **National Museum of Hainan** (Mínzú Bówùguǎn; ☎ 8862 2336; admission Y30; ☎ 8am-5.30pm), displaying a good range of Li and Miao artefacts plus the mandatory revolutionary propaganda, is the most notable, though the simple or nonexistent English labels can be frustrating.

But in many ways this lack of 'things to do' is central to Wūzhīshān's charm. It's the sort of laid-back place where you can happily spend a couple of days, getting to know some of the locals, drinking coffee and visiting surrounding villages (see the boxed text, p636).

If you don't speak Mandarin, you could consider employing an English student from the university. The English department is full of students keen to practice their English, and they might also be willing to guide you around the Wūzhīshān hotspots, including the lively **Jia Jia Shao Kao Yuan** area in the evenings, and the market and Jiefang Lu. It's best to arrange this the afternoon before you head out, and to clarify what if any payment will be involved – at the very least you should pay for their costs, such as transport, food and drink.

Orientation & Information

Wūzhīshān is built on either side of a horse-shoe bend in the Nansheng River. The city's main road is Hǎiyu Lu, which leads from the coast into the city then north across a bridge before bending west past the bus station. Both the university and the museum are directly behind the bus station, up a steep hill.

There's no Bank of China but the **China Construction Bank** (中国建设银行; Jiānshe Yíng Háng; 五指山假日酒店对面), opposite Wuzhishan

VISITING MINORITY VILLAGES

There are dozens of Li and Miao villages scattered around Wūzhīshān, as close as a couple of kilometres down the road or far up into the hills along local trails. Apart from one depressing tourist trap, none of these villages is specifically kitted out for tourism and you'd be very lucky indeed to find any English speakers. However, the villagers we met told us they were happy to see travellers, especially if there is some means of communication.

So to avoid creating an unsustainable 'tourist trail' we are not listing any villages by name. Instead, we say take a student translator, if you don't speak Chinese, and go forth and discover. If yours is anything like our experience, you'll be invited to lunch and endless rounds of rice wine, discussing the war against the Japanese and the merits of toothlessness ('it's much easier eating with no teeth than it was when I only had two') with an ancient Li woman, all without being pestered to buy tacky souvenirs.

Good places to start hikes are heading in a northeasterly direction past Tōngzhá Lǚyóu Shān-zhuāng, at the head of Shānzhūāng Lu, or climbing into the hills behind the university.

Holiday Inn, has ATMs. There is no shortage of internet cafés, including one on the 1st floor of the **Jinyuan Dajiudian** (金源大酒店; ☎ 8662 2942; Hǎiyu Lu; per hr ¥2; ☎ 8am-10pm).

Sleeping & Eating

Jinyuan Dajiudian (金源大酒店; ☎ 8662 2942; Hǎiyu Lu; 河北沿河西路; tw/t ¥100/120; ☎) This cheap and cheerful place is right opposite the bus station and very convenient. Rooms are bland but big and clean, and have squat toilets. Staff are happy to store luggage. Prices drop to ¥70 out of season.

Wuzhishan Holiday Inn (☎ 8663 2777; yangzhouwzq@yahoo.com.cn; 1 Shanzhuang Lu; 山庄路1号; s ¥100, d & tw ¥100-200, fm ¥300, ste ¥450) This stylish new hotel has nothing to do with the international chain, but does offer Wūzhīshān's best rooms at a budget price. It's right on the river and rooms have expansive views. The restaurant (meals about ¥70, open 7am to 9.30pm) serves the famous Li dish *shǔi mǎn yā* (boiled duck with rice and wine), plus a range of other Chinese cuisines. From the bus station, walk right and follow the road as it bends around to the left. The hotel is opposite the river.

Wuzhishan Resort Hotel (五指山旅游山庄; Wūzhīshān Luyou Shanzhuang; ☎ 8662 3188; www.wzs.gov.cn/sz; 38 Shanzhuang Lu; 山庄路38号; r from ¥200; ☎) In a quiet location on the edge of town this old government-run place is Chinese down to the faux tribal micro-mini skirts, karaoke and fishing pool (catch your dinner!). Take a motorbike taxi (¥1) or minivan taxi (¥5) from the bus station.

Jia Jia Shāo Kǎo Yuán (佳佳烧烤园; ☎ 6pm-late) It's at night that Wūzhīshān really comes alive

and this place, hidden away behind a building about 100m east of and opposite the bus station, offers a delicious array of Xinjiāng, Guilin and other barbeque options, all eaten at outdoor tables and washed down with icy beer. After dinner follow your ears and the students upstairs to the rooftop dance floor.

Elsewhere, the area around the bus station has numerous small kerbside restaurants. The **Lǚ Dǎo Coffee Shop** (☎ 8663 9886; ☎ 8am-midnight), right next door to the Jinyuan Dajiudian, serves great Hainanese coffee.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses depart every hour or so to and from Sānyà (slow/express Y17/ Y20, 1½ to two hours, 88km), the last leaving Wūzhīshān at 5.30pm. Five express air-con buses travel to Hǎikǒu (Y67, 3½ hours, 223km), via the eastern expressway, with the last departing at 3.30pm. There are frequent slow buses north to Qióngzhōng (Y16, two hours), but only two going all the way to Hǎikǒu (Y46, 5½ hours), via the scenic middle highway, at 12.45pm and 4.30pm.

To head deep into the highlands, catch one of the three daily buses to Báishā (Y17, 2½ hours), 99km northwest of Wūzhīshān, with the last at 1.20pm.

For trips around Wūzhīshān it's easiest to just hire a motorbike taxi or minivan taxi (about ¥100 to ¥150 a day). Get the hotel staff to help negotiate and explain where you want to go.

AROUND WŪZHĪSHĀN

The mountain after which Wūzhīshān is named rises 1867m out of the centre of

Hǎinán island about 30km northeast of the city. **Wūzhī Shān** (五指山; Five Fingers Mountain) is Hǎinán's highest, and perhaps because of this it is steeped in local lore, including that its five peaks represent the Li people's five most powerful gods.

It's possible to climb the mountain in about three hours, though the peak is often clouded in so don't count on fantastic views at the top. There is, in theory, an entrance ticket for ¥50, but there is rarely anyone to collect it. It's possible to stay at the bottom at **Wūzhīshān Bīnguǎn** (五指山宾馆), where basic rooms cost about ¥80 to ¥100 – take a bus from the city to Wuzhi Shan village, then whatever is going to the hotel. It's also possible to stay in Shūimǎn (水满), a dusty little village a bit further from the mountain, which has a couple of nicer places for similar prices.

There are two routes to the mountain. The first goes north along the highway and turns east off the highway just beyond Maoyang. The second and much preferable route heads south, turns east toward Nansheng, then runs north from there, via Shūimǎn. There is at least one minibus a day along the northern route to Wuzhi Shan village. To Shūimǎn you might need to take a couple of minibuses – ask at the bus station. Alternatively, hire a minivan or motorbike taxi.

QIÓNGZHŌNG 琼中

☎ 0898

The route between Wūzhīshān and Qióngzhōng passes through forested hills and small villages. It's certainly worth your while starting early in the day and getting off the bus at one of the villages, such as HóngmáoZhèn, taking a look around, then catching the next bus going through.

Qióngzhōng is a small, busy hill town that isn't much to look at but is surrounded by beautiful countryside. Like so many Chinese

towns, it's best in the evening when tables come out and the locals set about eating and socialising with quite some energy. Fortunately, much of the action is within crawling distance of the **bus station** (☎ 8622 2704) and hotels in the centre of town.

There are no real sights in Qióngzhōng, but the **waterfall** at **Báihuā Shān** (白花山), about 7km away, is quite beautiful as it drops more than 300m over three main cascades, the largest being about 75m high. Swimming is possible, if rather bracing much of the year. It's reachable by a bumpy motorcycle trip (¥50 return) in about 30 minutes; make sure your motorbike lady waits or it's a long walk back.

Most hotels are on Haiyi Lu, the main street, which is just below the bus station. The following two are both barely more than a minute from the bus station.

Jiāotōng Dàshà (交通大厦; Traffic Bldg; ☎ 8622 2615; 119 Haiyi Lu; 海怡路; r ¥150) has basic but clean rooms for ¥60 most of the year. Enter from the road sloping east from the bus station, about 100m along on the right.

The new, clean and smarter rooms at **Wàn Quán Bīnguǎn** (万泉宾馆; ☎ 3182 3777; Haiyi Lu; 海怡路; tw/d ¥120/150), just west of the bus station, are good value, especially in the low season when rates drop to ¥80. To find food, just wander the main street.

The middle highway links Qióngzhōng with Hǎikǒu (slow/express Y23/32, four hours, 137km) to the north, and Wūzhīshān (Y14, two hours) and Sānyà (Y30, four hours) to the south, though there are only two services direct to Sānyà, at 9.20am and 10.30am.

If you're on 'The Loop' (p635), you can take one of five daily buses on the scenic road to Wǎnníng (Y17, two hours, 93km), the last leaving mid-afternoon, and there are a couple of direct morning services to Wénchāng (Y30, four hours).

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