

Húběi 湖北



Lying at China's geographical heart and ringed by five provinces and the municipality of Chóngqing, Húběi has long been famed for its vital strategic significance. The province is inundated with water and lushly fertile, its landlocked panoramas flushed by the mighty Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) and its tributaries, which cleave the province into a mosaic of lakes, waterways and irrigated fields.

The flood-prone Yangzi has delivered periodic devastation but it has also ensured a prosperous trade route, while gouging out the scenic phenomenon of the Three Gorges. Gob-smacked tourists still funnel through Yíchāng for once-in-a-lifetime glimpses of these chasms, now visibly reduced by rising waters amassing behind the Three Gorges Dam. The Yangzi is the powerhouse behind the astonishing hydroelectric potential of the dam – Húběi's most controversial chunk of construction – which could meet a tenth (18,200 megawatts) of China's energy needs. The leviathan river has also increasingly obsessed the parched north of China, which seeks to slake an insatiable thirst by snatching its waters in a gargantuan south-north diversion project.

The bulk – more than 70% – of Húběi undulates aesthetically into hills and mountains, forcing farmers to sculpt the curved landscape into cultivable terraces, and providing slight relief from the summer scorch. The remaining 30% of the province, in the east, is a low-lying plain drained by the Yangzi and Han Rivers. It swivels around the dynamic provincial capital Wúhàn, a mighty city that simmers feverishly in hothouse temperatures from May to August.

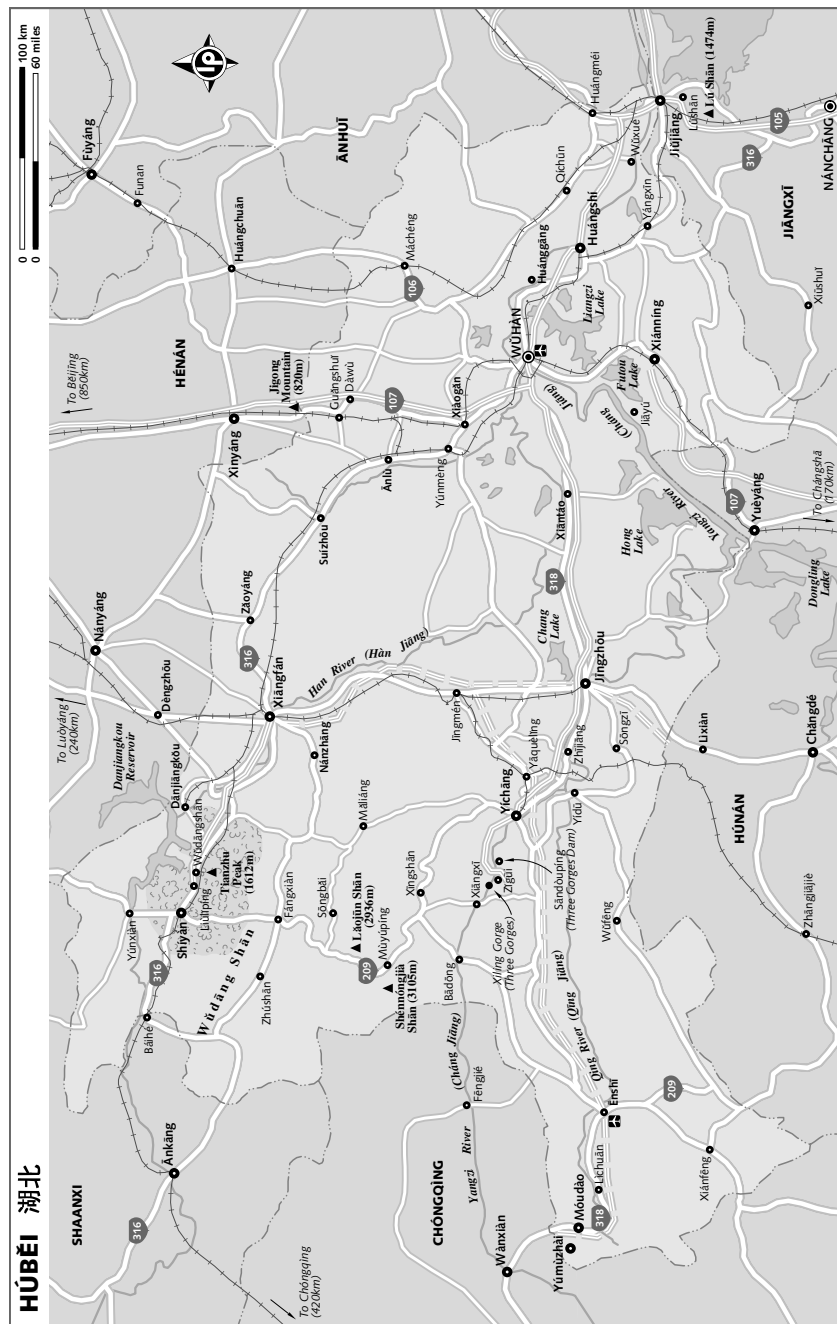
Away from the capital, travellers can put their heads literally into the clouds among the other-worldly Taoist peaks of Wúdāngshān, explore the scenic landscapes of Shénnóngjià or ferret out the distinctive architecture and ethnic culture of the Tujia minority in Yúmùzhài, in the hilly southwest.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Funnel upstream aboard a cruise through the dwarfing **Three Gorges** (p484) from Yíchāng
- Envelop yourself in the Taoist mysticism, mountain mists and stunning scenery of **Wúdāng Shān** (p481)
- Ferret through the forests of **Shénnóngjià** (p483), and perhaps stumble across the region's legendary ape-man
- Traipse through Wúhàn's Hànkǒu district on the trail of its splendid **historical buildings** (p478)
- Journey to sleepy **Yúmùzhài** (p486), a delightfully undisturbed Tujia village in the far-off southwest hills



■ POPULATION: 62.1 MILLION



History

Han Chinese settled the plain in 1000 BC. Following the demise of the Eastern Han dynasty in AD 220, warlords skirmished for control from the Yellow River (Huáng Hé) basin all the way through to the southwest regions. Initially weak, the warlords along the Yangzi River finally united and defeated military groups in what is modern-day Húběi. The resultant political manoeuvrings and continued armed struggle ultimately gave rise to the Three Kingdoms Period (AD 220–60). Around the 7th century the region was intensively settled and cultivated, and by the 11th century it was producing a rice surplus, an extraordinary agricultural output that still continues today. In the late 19th century Húběi was the first area in the Chinese interior to undergo significant industrialisation.

Climate

Wūhàn, the capital, is aptly dubbed one of the four 'Furnaces of China'; in July and August, it's abysmally hot and humid (above 40°C commonly) and no prevailing monsoon winds from the southeast make it this far. The western mountains are far more temperate.

Rainfall is heavy in the southeast (averaging 160cm annually), and decreasing north and west (a mere 80cm per annum average). Expect most of it April through July.

Language

Húběi officially has two dialects of Northern Mandarin – Southwest Mandarin and Lower-Mid Yangzi Mandarin – but these fragment into innumerable local variants. Southeastern Húběi has a number of Gàn (a dialect of Mandarin) speakers.

Getting There & Around

Three Gorges Dam construction has ended Wūhàn's wonderful reign as a river ferry stop-off, but you can still get to Chóngqìng by ferry. Wūhàn has one of the best-connected train stations in the country. The east of the province is wonderfully easy to get around, but the rugged west is another matter.

WŪHÀN 武汉

☎ 027 / pop 4,236,000

One of China's most massive and upbeat cities, Wūhàn is a sprawling and gargantuan alloy of three formerly independent cities: Wūchāng,

Hànkǒu and Hànyáng. Centuries of trade have flooded into Wūhàn along the irreplaceable Yangzi River, and the city's tight clutch of buildings on the waterway pump with levels of money and modernity to rival Shànghǎi. Indeed, the city carries numerous echoes of Shànghǎi: Hànkǒu's Bund and concession-era streetscapes; neon-splashed Jiangnan Lu, hopping with shoppers and fizzing with commercial energy; and the towering form of the Minsheng Bank Building (p478).

One of the Yangzi River summer swelter zones, Wūhàn's feverish temperatures start to climb on a steep and energy-sapping parabola from early summer.

History

Wūhàn's three mighty chunks trace their capital status back to the Han dynasty, with Wūchāng and Hànkǒu vying for political and economic sway. The city was first opened to foreign trade in the 19th century by the Treaty of Nanking. British, German, Russian, French and Japanese enclaves sprang up around Hànkǒu's present-day Zhongshan Dadao, where surrounding streets remain littered with concession-era banks, churches and residential architecture. Wūhàn is also strongly associated with Sun Zhongshan and the 1911 uprising, which left swathes of the city in ruins and eventually swept away the Qing dynasty. Wūchāng and Hànyáng were first linked by the enormous 110m-long and 80m-high Wuhan Yangzi River Big Bridge (Wūhàn Chángjiāng Dàqiáo), completed in 1957. Until then all traffic, including trains, had to be laboriously ferried across the river.

Orientation

Wūhàn is the only city on the Yangzi that can truly be said to lie on both sides of the river. Wūchāng on the southeastern bank is faced by Hànkǒu and Hànyáng, themselves divided by the smaller Han River. The city's fragments are stapled together by vast bridges, and ferries cross the Yangzi River throughout the day.

Wūhàn's centre of gravity is Hànkǒu, focussing around Zhongshan Dadao (and spreading northwest across Jiefang Dadao), where many of the city's famous hotels, historic buildings, department stores, restaurants and street markets are found. The enormous Hànkǒu train station is around 5km northwest of Zhongshan Dadao. The city's

main river port is also in Hānkǒu, as was, at the time of writing, Wūhàn's sole light rail line.

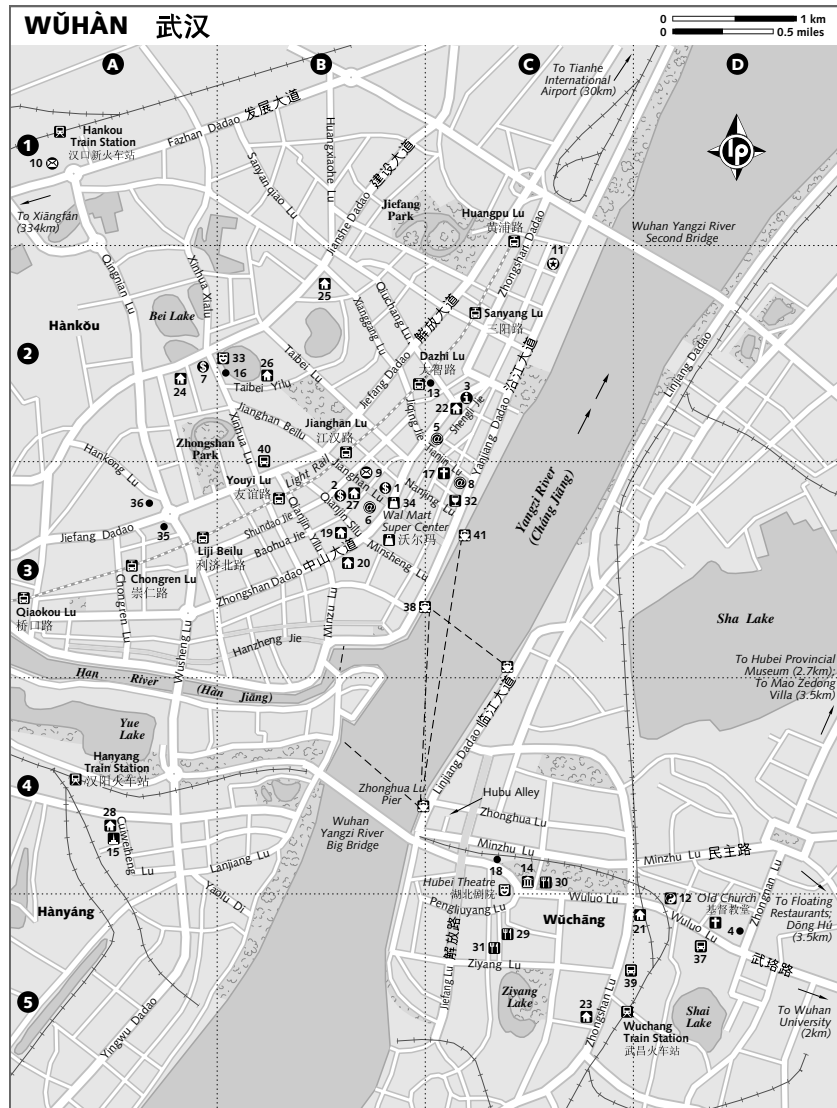
The Tianhe International Airport is about 30km north of Hānkǒu.

On the southeast side of the Yangzi River, Wūchāng is a modern district of long, wide avenues. Many recreational areas and the

Hubei Provincial Museum are here, as is the city's second train station.

MAPS

Maps can be bought from hawkers that swarm around tourist sights, or from newspaper kiosks around town. Ask at concierge desks at five-star hotels for English-language versions.



Information BOOKSHOPS

Foreign Languages Bookstore (Wàiwén Shūdiàn; Zhongnan Lu; ☎ 9am-8pm) Good selection of English language novels from Herman Hesse to John Grisham. To left of stairs on 2nd floor.

INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

Green Power Internet Café (Lǜsè Dònglǐ Wǎngbā; 64 Tianjin Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr)
Guangshengyuan Internet Café (Guānshēngyuán Wǎngbā; 117 Jiangnan Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) On second floor of fleapit hotel of same name.
Net Coffee Internet Café (cnr Tianjin Lu & Dongting Jie; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pu'an Pharmacy (Pǔ'ān Dàiyàofáng; cnr Jiangnan Lu & Jiangnan Silu; ☎ 24hr) Late night service through a hatch.

MONEY

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Zhongshan Dadao & Jiangnan Lu) Foreign exchange and credit card advances.
China Construction Bank (Jiangnan Erlu, Hānkǒu) Has an ATM.
HSBC (1st fl, New World Department Store, Jianshe Dadao) 24-hour ATM.

POST

Post office (Yóujú; 134 Jiangnan Lu) There is another branch outside the Hankou train station.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (Gōngānjú; ☎ 8271 2355; 306 Shengli Jie; ☎ 9-11.30am & 2-5pm) A 20-minute walk northeast of Jiangnan Lu. Visas generally take three days.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

In most cases it is best to ask at your hotel for tourist information.
China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójí Lóuxìngshè; ☎ 5151 5955; cnr Zhongshan Dadao & Yiyuan Lu) Marginally helpful.

Sights

YELLOW CRANE TOWER 黄鹤楼
 Once a military observation post, this landmark five-storey tower (Huánghè Lóu; ☎ 8887 5179; Wuluo Lu; admission Y50; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm, open till later in summer) first rose up during the Warring States period, although this is a Qing dynasty rebuild. The birds immortalised in Li Bai's snappy Tang-dynasty stanzas have long flown and the only cranes visible from here are the steel variety, wheeling slowly over construction sites citywide. **Ming Qing Street**, a brash tourist bazaar just inside the entrance, siphons

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| INFORMATION | Bank of China 中国银行..... 1 B3 | China Construction Bank 中国建设银行..... 2 B3 | CITS 中国国际旅行社..... 3 C2 | Foreign Languages Bookstore 外文书店..... 4 D5 | Green Power Internet Café 绿色动力网..... 5 C2 | Guangshengyuan Internet Café 冠生园网吧..... 6 B3 | HSBC 汇丰银行..... 7 A2 | Net Coffee Internet Café 网吧..... 8 C3 | Post Office 邮局..... 9 B3 | Post Office 邮局..... 10 A1 | PSB 公安局..... 11 C2 | Pu'an Pharmacy..... (see 9) | Minsheng Bank Building 民生银行大厦..... 16 B2 | Russian Orthodox Church 东正教堂..... 17 C3 | Yellow Crane Tower 黄鹤楼..... 18 C4 | SLEEPING | Chufeng Hotel 楚风宾馆..... 19 B3 | Dahua Hotel 大华饭店..... 20 B3 | Home Inn 如家..... 21 D5 | Jiangnan Hotel 江汉饭店..... 22 C2 | Marine Hotel 航海宾馆..... 23 C5 | Novotel 新华诺富特大饭店..... 24 A2 | Shangri-La Hotel 香格里拉大酒店..... 25 B2 | Swiss-belhotel on the Park 瑞雅国际酒店..... 26 B2 | Xuangong Hotel 璇宫饭店..... 27 B3 | Yangzi Jiang Hotel 扬子江饭店..... 28 A4 | EATING | Changchun Temple Vegetarian Restaurant 长春观素食餐厅..... (see 12) | Wuqiang Temple 归园寺..... 29 C5 | Mínyáng Shāobiǎng 民扬烧饼..... 30 C4 | Shouyi Garden Snack Street 首义园小吃街..... 31 C5 | DRINKING | Bordeaux Bar 波尔图..... 32 C3 | ENTERTAINMENT | Red Passion Club 红色恋人酒吧..... 33 B2 | SHOPPING | Night Market 夜市..... 34 B3 | TRANSPORT | CAAC 中国民航售票处..... 35 A3 | China Southern Airlines (Hānkǒu) 中国南方航空公司..... 36 A3 | Fujiapo Long-Distance Bus Station 傅家坡汽车客运站..... 37 D5 | Hankou-Wuchang Ferries 汉口武昌渡船..... 38 B3 | Hongji Long-Distance Bus Station 宏基长途汽车站..... 39 C5 | Long-Distance Bus Station (Hānkǒu) 长途汽车站..... 40 B2 | Wuhan Ferry Terminal 武汉港客运站..... 41 C3 | Wuhan Port Long-Distance Bus Station 武汉港长途汽车站..... (see 41) |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|--|---|

cash from the swelling crowds dismounting from tour buses. The double-decker bus 64 loops the city and stops near the tower; alternatively, take bus 1, 4 or 10.

HUBEI PROVINCIAL MUSEUM 湖北省博物馆 The highlight of this museum (Húběi Shěng Bówùguǎn; ☎ 8679 4127; 1856 Donghu Lu; admission Y30; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm summer, 11am-4pm rest of year) is its large collection of artefacts from the Zenghouyi Tomb, dating from 433 BC and unearthed in 1978 on the outskirts of the city of Suǐzhōu. It's well worth a slow exploration.

Of particular interest is the two-tone, seven-note scale produced by 64 bronze bells that are played using hammers and poles. Throughout the day musical performances on duplicate bells are introduced in English.

The museum is located beside the massive Dōng Hú Fēngjǐng Qū (East Lake Scenic Area) in Wūchāng, well worth exploring for

over a dozen scenic sights, including the hill of Mò Shān, overlooking the lake.

GUIYUAN TEMPLE 归元寺

A huge and rewarding Buddhist monastery complex, this temple (20 Cuīwēihéng Lù; Y10; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) extends from its front pond – decorated with two huge lotus flowers and swarming with turtles – through numerous halls and courtyards busy with worshippers. Among its relics is a Tang-dynasty tablet carved with an image of Guanyin holding a willow branch; it is housed in the Mahasattva Pavilion (Dàshì Gé). There's also a jade statue of Sakyamuni, Southeast Asian in style and sitting resplendently in the Sutra Collection Pavilion (Cāngjīng Gé), together with a large collection of *luòhàn* (arhat, or Buddhist saint) statues. A vegetarian restaurant can be found within the temple grounds.

Take tourist bus 401; public bus 6 also goes close.

NOTABLE BUILDINGS

Wūhàn's history of foreign influence has bequeathed a noble crop of heritage architecture dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in Hānkǒu. Hānkǒu's concession-era streetscapes hint at Shànghǎi's Bund district, despite the neglected condition of many buildings. Walk down Jianghan Lu (with its echoes of Shànghǎi's Nanjing Lu) and Yanjiang Dadao, where Hānkǒu's Bund is located. The imposing shell of the gutted, French-designed **former Hankou Railway Station**, at the north end of Chezhan Lu, dates from 1900 and remains decorated with green roofing, an eagle over its main door and a plaque that reads 'Hank'eu (Tatchemen)' (in modern pinyin parlance, Hankou Dazhimen). Other treats include the **Bank of China** at the corner of Jianghan Lu and Zhongshan Dadao and the **Russian Orthodox Church** (Dōngzhèng Jiàotáng; 11 Tianjin Lu, cnr Tianjin Lu & Poyang Jie), built in 1881. Newly restored, the church sits alongside a café – its crypt now serving as a nightclub!

Monumental old-world buildings – epitaphs to an increasingly distant age – push up against Yanjiang Dadao; look out for the former **Yokohama Syokin Bank** (dating from 1921) on the corner of Nanjing Lu and the **National City Bank of New York** (142 Yanjiang Dadao).

Near the Yellow Crane Tower in Wūchāng is the colonial-style red brick **Former Headquarters of the Wuchang Uprising** (Xīnhàigémíng Wūchāng Qīyì Jìniànguǎn; also known as Hóng Lóu; admission Y20; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), source of the final collapse of the Qing dynasty. Get in the mood by donning a full Republican officer's uniform (Y10) and brandishing a sword for a photo op.

Also in Wūchāng, **Wuhan University** (Wūhàn Dàxué), beside Luòjiā Shān in Wūchāng, was founded in 1913. The university was the site of the 1967 'Wuhan Incident' – a protracted battle during the Cultural Revolution, where machine gun nests were built on top of the library and supply tunnels were dug through the hill. The old church at 357 Wuluo Lu has been requisitioned by a tae kwon do club.

The **Mao Zedong Villa** (Máo Zédōng Biéshù; Donghu Lu; admission Y10; ☎ 8am-6pm) was one of the Chairman's boltholes and is a tourist fixture for Mao-ophiles.

Though there are scores of reminders of its past, Wūhàn, like China at large, has at all times one eye – and usually two – firmly fixed on the present. Currently the world's 18th-tallest building, the stunning 331m-high **Minsheng Bank Building** (Xīnhu Lu) generated controversy with experts warning that the soft geology of Wūhàn was unsuited to such a towering edifice.

CHANGCHUN TEMPLE 长春观

This charming Taoist temple (Chángchūn Guān; ☎ 8280 1399; admission Y5; ☎ 7.30am-5pm) in Wūchāng has roots poking down deep into the Han dynasty. A white-bearded steeple of the sagacious Laotzu (also called Taishang Laojun) sits in the Hall of Supreme Purity (Tàiqīng Diàn), assisted in his ministrations by an effigy of fellow scribe Zhuangzi. The Jade Emperor is worshipped by faithful in the rear hall, while other believers flock to the God of Wealth, seek guidance from Taoist soothsayers or dine at the ever popular vegetarian restaurant (p480) alongside.

Sleeping BUDGET

Chufeng Hotel (Chūfēng Bīnguǎn; ☎ 8586 2561; 23 Qianjin Silu; 前进四路23号; s/d/tr no shower Y48/78/98, s/d Y108/128; ☎) Acceptable rooms here are a bargain at this central Hānkǒu cheapie. There's neither English sign nor English spoken at reception, but sign language, production of passport and opening of wallet should convey the message.

Marine Hotel (Hǎnghǎi Bīnguǎn; ☎ 8804 3396; fax 8807 8717; 460 Zhongshan Lu; 中山路460号; s/d from Y128/138; ☎) Friendly and shipshape, the two-star Marine has welcoming rooms and handy positioning a short walk south across the road from Wūchāng train station. Rooms are comfy, clean and come with satellite TV. *Fúwùyuán* (attendants) are stationed helpfully on each floor.

MIDRANGE

Yangzi Jiang Hotel (Yángzǐ Jiāng Fāndiàn; ☎ 6884 9388; 16 Cuīwēihéng Lù; 翠微横路16号; d/Y188; ☎) Bright and tidy rooms with fresh furnishings, plastic wood flooring, clean showers and overall newness, just north of the Guiyuan Temple in Hānyáng. Two meals included per day; further branches around town.

Home Inn (Rújiā; ☎ 8586 1555; 161 Qianjin Yilu; s/d/st Y159/189/219; ☎) The McDonalds/Volkswagen Santana of the China hotel market, Home Inn is dependable albeit formulaic, aiming squarely at a middle-manager client base. It ensures fresh, bright, colourful (not very spacious) rooms, all with clean shower, plastic wood flooring, a value-for-money price tag, high turnover of guests and a reliable sense of security. Another branch in Wūchāng.

Dahua Hotel (Dàhuá Fāndiàn; ☎ 8566 3454; fax 8566 5076; 708 Zhongshan Dadao; 中山大道708号; d with

shared shower room Y150; s/d 330/380; ☎) A chunk of heritage architecture, the central Dahua has style and substance, with a variety of rooms to suit most budgets. Rooms are quite old, but vary in size with some extending to balconies.

Xuangong Hotel (Xuángōng Fāndiàn; ☎ 6882 2588; www.xuangonghotel.com; 57 Jianghan Yilu; 江汉一路57号; B' d/Y480, A' d/Y580, tr Y680; ☎) This heritage building dates from 1931, with an old-world dark style interior and an ace location off the pedestrian shopping street of Jianghan Lu. Rooms come with balcony, drinking water on tap and free internet, but aim for the south-facing and brighter front room (*qiánfáng*; 前房). Cheaper 'B' rooms are slightly shabbier but fixtures are modern looking and bargaining can secure good discounts all around.

Swiss-belhotel on the Park (Ruǐyǎ Guōjī Jiūdiàn; ☎ 6885 1888; www.swiss-belhotel.com; 9 Taibei Yilu; 台北一路9号; s/d from Y595/745, studio/apt Y915/1495-1990; ☎ ☎ ☎) International four-star boutique hotel offering excellent service, good-value business apartments, family suites and rooms, all with high-speed internet access. Rates include buffet breakfast. Good discounts offered.

TOP END

Jianghan Hotel (Jiāng Hān Fāndiàn; ☎ 8281 1600; www.jh hotel.com; 245 Shengli Jie; 胜利街245号; d/Y782; ☎ ☎) The erstwhile French embassy building, this rather scuffed up four-star hotel has failed to fully capitalise on its history and reputation, with cheap-looking restored wood paneling and flooring, and tacky oils on the walls.

Novotel (Xīnhuá Nuòfùtè Fāndiàn; ☎ 8555 1188; 558 Jiānshe Dadao; 建设大道558号; s/d/st Y1168/1248/1743; ☎ ☎) Near the New World Department Store in Hānkǒu, this five-star hotel offers excellent styling and top-end business comfort, with an excellent range of facilities including tennis courts and a brasserie.

Shangri-La Hotel (Xiānggélǎ Dàjiūdiàn; ☎ 8580 6868; www.shangri-la.com; 700 Jiānshe Dadao; 建设大道700号; d/st Y1242/2516; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The well-equipped Shangri-La maintains its trademark levels of service and facilities, with comfortable rooms aimed at business travellers, although the ground floor Coffee Garden is getting weary, suggesting refit time.

Eating & Drinking

Popular local snacks worth trying include fresh catfish from Dōng Hú in the east of

the city, and charcoal-grilled whole pigeons served with a sprinkling of chilli. You can try some of these dishes on the **floating restaurants** at the end of Bayi Lu on the shore of Dōng Hú. To douse the insufferable summer scorch, reach for cups of bubble tea (*nǎichá*; 奶茶; Y2) from roadside vendors and ask for it icy (*bīngde*; 冰的).

Minyáng Shāobīng (3 Wulou Lu; Y2) Also known as Chinese-style pizza, this simple hole-in-the-wall outlet serves up delicious, fragrant Tujia (土家) bread pizza (*shāobīng*; 烧饼; Y2) sprinkled with crumbs of meat and sesame seeds and aromatically seasoned with fried onion and cumin. Filling, cheap and very tasty, with other branches around town.

Night markets (*yèshìchǎng*) spring up east and west of the Jiangnan Lu pedestrian zone in Hānkǒu, along Minsheng Lu and on Jiqing Jie (吉庆街), and along Dazhi Lu as it meets Zhongshan Dadao. A boisterous swell of bright, busy *dàpáidàng* (大排档), Jiqing Jie is pungent with the aromas of barbecued live oysters (*shāokǎo shēngháo*; 烧烤生蚝; 15 for Y6), spicy crab hot pot (*xiānglǎnxiè huǒguō*; 香辣蟹火锅; around Y50), river snails (*fúshòulúo*; 福寿螺; portion Y25), prawn hotpot (*dàxiā huǒguō*; Y38 to Y48) and – at the less appealing end of the spectrum – cow hooves, duck feet, duck hearts and other miscellanea.

Shouyi Garden Snack Street (Shóuyiyuán Xiǎochíjiē; Wūchāng; meals Y20) Innumerable, highly popular food outlets with cuisine from Húnán to Yúnnán and beyond. Purchase cards with credits (minimum Y20, deposit Y5) from the booth and plunge in. It's south off Pengliuyang Lu.

Mǎojiāwǎn (☎ 8832 6525; 29 Shouyi Yuan; meal Y30) Elderly Chinese will be horrified, but Wūhàn's white-collar diners and *lǎowài* (foreigners) have few qualms about being served by corpulent Red Guards scampering to and fro with peppery platters from Mao's home province of Húnán. The overall concept may be in bad taste, but the *Máoshi Hóngshāoròu* (毛氏红烧肉) – a tender pile of plump pork chunks – is succulent, the rice arrives by the steaming bucket load and it's undeniably fun. No English sign.

Changchun Temple Vegetarian Restaurant (145 Wulou Lu; ☎ 8885 4229; 🍴 lunch & dinner; meal Y40) Steer your tummy onto the Taoist way at this celebrated veggie restaurant with Yin-Yang tablecloths and mock-meat dishes (photo

menu) and flush down the *chángchūn yú* (长春鱼; Changchun fish; Y38) or *tiěbǎn niúròu* (铁板牛肉; sizzling beef platter; Y18) with a shot of Double Dragon wine (双龙酒宝; Y5 per *liǎng*) from the cabinet of obscure medicinal liquors. Adjacent to the Changchun Temple.

Bordeaux Bar (Bōěrtú; ☎ 8277 8779; 147 Yanjiang Dadao; 🍷 9.30am-2am; bottle of Qingdao Y20) For a smart and relaxing evening sojourn, this soothing spot on Hānkǒu's Bund treats guests to outside seating, a strong-ish wine list and occasional live music ('jazz and punk,' the bartender declares).

Entertainment

Red Passion Club (Jianshe Dadao) This is the most central of many white-hot dance clubs in this zone; just follow the crowds to the others nearby.

Getting There & Away

The best way to get to eastern destinations such as Nánjīng and Shànghǎi is by air, rather than the circuitous rail route.

AIR

Tianhe International Airport (✈ 8581 8888) is 30km northwest of town. The ticket office of the **CAAC** (Civil Aviation Administration of China; Zhōngguó Mínháng; 1089 Jiefang Dadao) is in Hānkǒu, or simply book from the CAAC office in the Swiss-belhotel on the Park (see p479) or **China Southern Airlines** (Zhōngguó Nánfāng Hángkōng Gōngsī; ☎ 8361 1756; 1 Hankong Lu). Major daily flights include Běijīng (Y1080), Guǎngzhōu (Y930), Shànghǎi (Y700) and Xī'ān (Y690). Daily international flights go to Hong Kong (Y1850), and less regular ones to Bangkok, Fukuoka and Macau.

BOAT

There are daily boats to Chóngqīng from the Wuhan Ferry Terminal; boats to other destinations have largely given way to mushrooming air and bus transportation.

BUS

Wūhàn has several long-distance bus stations. The main **long-distance bus station** (chángtú qìchēzhàn; ☎ 8572 5507; Jiefang Dadao) is in Hānkǒu, between Xinhua Lu and Jiangnan Beilu, with regular daily departures to Nánchāng (Y106, seven hours), Yíchāng (Y116, three to four hours), Jiūjiāng (Y71), Xiāngfán (Y80 to Y90) and other destinations.

Destinations from **Wuhan Port long-distance bus station** (Wūhàn Gāng chángtú qìchēzhàn) include Yíchāng (Y90, three to four hours, regular), Jiūjiāng (Y55, three daily), Nánjīng (Y192, nine hours, three daily) and Shànghǎi (Y268, 12 hours, four daily).

In Wūchāng, the **Fujiapo long-distance bus station** (Fújiāpō qìchē kèyùnzhàn; ☎ 8727 4817) has buses to Yíchāng (Y70 to Y125, three to four hours, every half hour from 6.40am to 8pm), Xiāngfán (Y90, 4½ hours, regular), Wǎnzhōu (Y180, 18 hours, once daily), Nánjīng (Y192, 9½ hours, once daily), Shànghǎi (Y305, 12 hours, once daily) and Zhāngjiājiē (Y145, 11 hours, once daily). The **Hongji long-distance bus station** (☎ 8807 4048), 200m north of Wuchang train station, has buses going pretty much everywhere, including Shiyàn (Y140, seven hours, regular), Xiāngfán (Y93, regular), Yíchāng (Y71, four hours, regular), Zhāngjiājiē (Y146, 13 hours, once daily), Nánjīng (Y193, nine hours, regular) and Shànghǎi (Y306, 12 hours, once daily).

TRAIN

Wūhàn is on the main line between Běijīng and Guǎngzhōu; express trains to Kūnmíng, Xī'ān, Hong Kong (Kowloon; 九龍) and Lánzhōu run via the city. Trains to major destinations depart from either the Hānkǒu or Wūchāng train stations. Trains to Shànghǎi leave from the Wūchāng station. At Hānkǒu station, hard and soft sleepers must be booked in the small ticket office between the waiting hall and the main ticket office.

There is also a train ticket office in Hānkǒu adjacent to the long-distance bus station.

Tickets for trains originating from Wūchāng must be purchased at the Wūchāng station rather than the Hānkǒu station. You can also book tickets at the Wūchāng bus stations.

Hard sleeper ticket prices include Běijīng (Y248, 12 to 13 hours), Guǎngzhōu (Y257, 15 to 17 hours), Guílín (Y220, 11 to 12 hours), Shànghǎi (Y262, 17 hours) and Xī'ān (Y215, 15 to 16 hours).

Getting Around

As with all large Chinese cities, Wūhàn is undergoing a transport crisis as the streets become flooded with cars. The underused light rail is only a partial solution, and even motorbikes take to overhead walkways to get from A to B.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Airport shuttle buses to Tianhe International Airport (Tiānhé Feijīchǎng, Y15 to Y30, 40 minutes) leave regularly from several locations around town, including the Fujiapo long-distance bus station, Changjiang Guangchang (长江广场) in Hányáng, and Fanhu (范湖) in Hānkǒu. A taxi to the airport should cost about Y80 and take 30 minutes.

BUS

Wūhàn is staggeringly huge and although buses crisscross the city, it can be slow-going.

Tourist buses 401 and 402 (each Y5) run to the major attractions in the city, both running along the Hānkǒu riverfront and terminating in the Donghu Lake area.

Other useful buses include 603, passing Jiāng Hàn Fāndiàn to and from the Hānkǒu train station. Bus 9 runs from the train station down Xinhua Lu to the Wūhàn ferry terminal. Bus 10 connects both train stations.

FERRY

Ferries (Y1.50, every 20 minutes, from 6.30am to 8pm) make swift daily crossings of the Yangzi River between Zhonghua Lu pier in Wūchāng and the terminal in Hānkǒu.

LIGHT RAIL

Wūhàn's clean, cheap and efficient light rail (Y1.50 to Y2, every 9 minutes from 6.30am to 9.30pm) whizzes along a modest length of track through 10 stations from Huangpu Lu to Zongguan in Hānkǒu, conveniently collapsing foot-numbing distances and affording a usefully elevated view of the district. The link is to be eventually extended to Hányáng and Wūchāng.

TAXI

Flag fall is Y3, then Y1.4 per km thereafter.

WŪDĀNG SHĀN 武当山

☎ 0719

A Unesco World Heritage Site, the gorgeous mountains of **Wūdāng Shān** (entrance gate ☎ 566 7415; admission peak/off-peak Y110/80, insurance additional Y2; 🍴 6am-10pm) stretch for 400km across northwestern Hüběi attracting bands of Taoist worshippers and devotees of Chinese *nèijīā gōngfū* (internal kungfu). There are martial arts schools up here that travellers can join. Wūdāng Shān may not be one of the five most sacred Taoist mountains in China, but

an unmistakable religious aura envelops its temples and crags.

Information

Bank of China (Taihe Dadao) Opposite Laoying Hotel, near the river.

China Post (40 Yongle Lu)

PSB (Gōngānjū; ☎ 566 5541; cnr Wudang Lu & Yuxu Lu)

Wudangshan Hospital (Wūdāng Shān Yīyuàn; ☎ 566 9120; Taihe Dadao)

Wudangshan Tourist Centre (Nányán) Located at the start of the climb at Nányán; primarily aimed at Chinese tourists.

Xinhua Bookstore (Laoying Lu, off Buxing Jie)

Xinjisu Internet Cafe (Xinjisù Wǎngbā; Taihe Dadao;

per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) Go through the round arch next to the small post office and climb to the second floor.

Sights & Activities

Although it's tempting to fling oneself onto the first bus up the mountain, Wūdāng Shān town at the foot of the mountain is worth a wander. The tunnel at the tip of pedestrianised Buxing Jie (步行街) leads to the crumbling **Yuxu Temple** (Yùxū Gōng; 155 Gongyuan Lu; ☎ 8am-5.30pm), a colossal endeavour where two forlorn and roofless stele pavilions housing *bixi* (mythical tortoise-like creatures) stand in front of an impressive temple hall and a vast courtyard. In the east of town just over the bridge is the **Fire God Temple** (Huǒshén Miào; Taihe Dadao), the roof of one of its small halls jutting out on a level with the pavement. Ming emperors Chengzu and Zhenwu duelled to construct the most temples, most of which survive on the slopes of the mountain.

CLIMBING WŪDĀNG SHĀN

Most travellers climbing Wūdāng Shān hop aboard minivans (Y10, 45 minutes) from the main gate, around 1km east of town, for the 28km mountain journey to Nányán (南岩) and the start of the most popular trail. When the climb proper starts to turn your legs to jelly, draw strength from those around you: mothers carrying babies, children guiding grandparents, celestial-looking Taoist nuns with knapsacks and the faithful clutching five-foot long sticks of incense. Alternatively, grab a gnarled walking stick (Y5) or even recline into a sedan chair (Y100) and let someone else do the legwork. Otherwise clamber up and ponder some of the mountain's eternal mysteries (such as the signs that proclaim

'Efficaciousness in Wūdāng Shān will be everywhere in the world').

A 20-minute walk below Nányán on Soaring Flag Peak (Zhànqí Fēng) is the splendidly azure-tiled **Purple Cloud Temple** (紫霄宮; Zǐxiāo Gōng; admission Y15; ☎ 7am-6pm), on the other side of an ancient bridge vaulting a belt of green water. Rather than taking the road, take the small stone-stepped path from the temple to return up the hill to Nányán. The **Nanyan Temple** (南岩宮; Nányán Gōng) is near the beginning of the trail.

From Nányán it's a leg-sapping two- to three-hour hike up to the highest summit, the 1612m **Tianzhu Peak** (天柱峰; Heavenly Pillar Peak; Tiānzhù Fēng) or via the brick-red **Three Heavenly Gates**. On the ascent – an ancient stone staircase with zero cushioning – you first encounter the **Langmei Xian Temple** (Langmeixian Gong) where taichi enthusiasts pay homage to founder Zhang San Feng (see boxed text, below). After struggling past the small **Chaotian Temple** (Chāotiān Gōng) and the **Huixian Bridge** (Huìxiān Qiáo), prepare your quadriceps for the shockingly long flight of steps leading to a vanishing point and the **Second Gate of Heaven** (Èrtiān Mén).

Close to the summit, a regal and divine-looking Zhenwu, Ming emperor and Taoist deity, sits within the **Taihe Hall** (Tàihé Gōng), flanked by fearsome attendants. Above is the fortress-like walled bastion called the Forbidden City (Zǐjīnchéng), from where you can stagger to astonishing views from the **Golden Hall** (金殿; Jīn Diàn; admission Y20; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) at

THE FOUNDER OF THE FIST OF THE SUPREME ULTIMATE

Zhang San Feng, a Wūdāng Shān monk in the 13th or 14th century, is reputed to be the founder of the martial art *taijiquan*, or taichi (p63). A master of Shaolin boxing, Zhang grew dissatisfied with the 'hard' techniques of the Shaolin style and searched for something 'softer'. Sitting on his porch one day, he became inspired by a battle between a huge bird and a snake. The sinuous snake used flowing movements to evade the bird's attacks. The bird, exhausted, eventually gave up and flew away. Taichi is closely linked to Taoism, and virtually all of the Taoist priests on Wūdāng Shān practice some form of the art.

the pinnacle of Wūdāng Shān. Constructed entirely of bronze in 1416 and famed for 'the seahorses uttering fog' (according to the blurb), the small two-tiered hall enshrines a bronze statue of Zhenwu, here elevated to the rank of Taoist deity.

Minibuses to Nányán leave from around 6.30am and depart when full, but if you pitch up in late afternoon, you may have to hire an entire minivan (Y40 to Y50), so consider spending the night in Wūdāng Shān town. In the reverse direction, minivans depart Nányán for the main gate and Wūdāng Shān town when full (Y10). An alternative is to take a minivan (Y15) to the **cable car** (索道; suǒdào; one way peak/off-peak Y50/45, return peak/off-peak Y80/70; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat & Sun) at Qióngtái (琼台) from where it's a 30-minute ride to the summit on a two-person cable car.

The weather on Wūdāng Shān is notoriously fickle so pack warm layers (snow can fall as late as April) and take something waterproof and an umbrella to keep the mists at bay.

Sleeping

Hotels in town and on the mountain typically offer good discounts of around 50% except during the frantic holiday season (first weeks of May and October).

Taihe Hotel (Tàihé Jiùlù; ☎ 1347731 5236; Nányán; d Y40) One of a row of small family hotels down the road in Nányán, simple basement rooms here are without air-con and toilets are shared. A nearby hotel with the same English name but different Chinese name, Tàihé Bīngguǎn, has pricier rooms.

Jinlongdian Hotel (Jīnlóngdiàn Bīngguǎn; ☎ 566 8919; cnr Yongle Lu & Taihe Dadao; 近永乐路太和大道; tr without shower Y80, d/tr 160/180) Opposite the Wudangshan Hospital, rooms here (air-con, TV, squat toilet and shower) are OK, and 50% discounts are regularly in force.

Baihui Hotel (Bāihui Shānzhuāng; ☎ 568 9191; Nányán; d Y280, q no toilet Y160) With some rooms facing the mountain, discounts at this friendly two-star place typically hover at around 50%. It has a Chinese restaurant.

Laoying Hotel (Lǎoyīng Fāndiàn; ☎ 566 5347; Taihe Dadao; 太和大道; s/d/tr Y268/268/298) In an unattractive five-storey block set back from the road just west of the bridge over the river, doubles here are functional, with clean carpets, showers and ironing board. The staff are friendly.

Xuanwu Hotel (Xuánwú Bīngguǎn; ☎ 568 9175; Nányán; d/tr Y428/488) Perhaps because they were renovating, service was rather slack when we visited, but good discounts are generally available.

Many hotels can be found at Nányán on the mountain, including a batch of small family-owned hotels where rooms can be found for as little as Y40. Hotels can also be found in the area of the Qióng Tái cable car station.

Eating

Come evening in Wūdāng Shān town, lamb kebab vendors set up along Taihe Dadao. On Wenbo Lu (文博路), just off Taihe Dadao, is a small night market where kebab, fish and vegetable chefs cook up dishes on the spot. Although restaurants can be found at Nányán, pack snacks and water for the climb.

Getting There & Away

Wūdāng Shān town is on the railway line from Wūhàn to Chóngqīng. Most trains that stop here are slow trains, so you may have to take a minibus to/from either Shíyán (Y5, one hour) or Liúlǐping (one hour). Connections include Běijīng West (Y262, hard sleeper, 20 hours), Chóngqīng (hard seat Y91), Wūhàn (Wūchāng, hard seat/sleeper Y64/122, seven hours) and Xiāngfán (Y35, two hours).

The small Wūdāng Shān bus station is on Taihe Dadao, with regular departures to Shíyán (Y5 to Y10, one hour) and Xiāngfán (Y30, two to three hours). Slow buses connect with Wūhàn (Y120, 12 hours) and farther-flung destinations.

SHÉNNÓNGJIÀ 神农架

☎ 0719

The Shénnóngjià district in remote north-western Hübēi has the wildest scenery in the province, where old-growth stands of fir and pine flourish among more than 1300 species of medicinal plants. Indeed, the name commemorates a legendary emperor, Shennong, believed to be the founder of herbal medicine and agriculture.

A more modern legend talks of local wild, ape-like creatures – a Chinese equivalent of the yeti or bigfoot. Curiously, the creatures seem to be able to distinguish between peasants and scientists – molesting the former and evading the latter. More real, but just as elusive, are leopards, bears, wild boars and monkeys (including the endangered golden snub-nosed monkey).

Foreign travellers are allowed into the Shénnóngjiā district near **Mùyúping** (木鱼平), situated 200km northwest of Yíchāng. Two grand peaks, Shénnóngjiā Shān (3105m) and Lǎojūn Shān (2936m), dominate. It's an eight-hour bus ride to Mùyúping from Yíchāng (Y80), or you can take a boat to Xiāngxī on the Three Gorges (below; five hours) and from there it's a 90km ride to Mùyúping. From Mùyúping you will have to hire a car to get into the reserve.

CITS (see below) in Yíchāng arranges tours. Other local travel agencies are unaccustomed to travel restrictions for foreigners, leading to adventures with the police.

It may be possible to visit **Sōngbǎi** (松柏), an area in the reserve traditionally off limits to foreigners. Yíchāng CITS reports foreigners were allowed to visit the area when accompanied by tour guides. Check with the PSB in Yíchāng before heading out independently.

YÍCHĀNG 宜昌

☎ 0717 / pop 3.99 million

Slung out east of the Three Gorges Dam, Yíchāng is the gateway to the upper Yangzi and an embarkation point for upstream cruises through the gorges. Opened to foreign trade in 1877 by a treaty between Britain and China, little remains of its foreign concession heritage.

Orientation

Yíchāng spreads along a bend of the Yangzi River. Ferry terminals are located in the west of town and to the east of Yíchāng. Most of city proper is located between Dongshan Dadao to the north and Yanjiang Dadao running alongside the Yangzi River.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Shengli Silu) Near Longkang Lu.

China International Travel Centre (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójì Lǚxíngshè); Yunji Lu (☎ 625 3088; www.ycits.com; Yunji Lu); Longkang Lu (☎ 622 4388; 18 Longkang Lu) Three Gorges tours.

Post Office (yóujú; cnr Yunji Lu & Yiling Dadao)

PSB Exit/Entry Administration Section (Gōngānjú; 14 Xueyuan Jie; ☎ 8-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri)

Yinxing Internet Café (Yinxing Wǎngbā; Erma Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) On Erma Lu, north of the turning with Fusui Lu.

Sights

THREE GORGES DAM 三峡大坝

This vast **dam** (Sānxiá Shuǐlǐ Shùniǔ Gōngchéng; admission Y90) is a colossal and controversial feat of

engineering (see boxed text, p814). Tours visit the actual site (CITS offers tours for Y120); alternatively take bus 4 (Y1) from Sānmǎtǒu (三码头) by the Yichang Ferry Terminal to Yè míng zhū (夜明珠) and change to bus 8 (Y18 return) to the dam from where minibuses (Y20 return) and motorcycle taxis (Y10 return) take you to the top.

Sleeping

Railway Station Hotel (Tiělù Dàjiūdiàn; ☎ 861 6916; d, tr & q shared toilet & fan Y40, d/tr Y168/210; ☎) Next to the train station, this is one of few offering cheap, clean beds. Discounts are common, but cheap rooms are often booked out and it's a bit grim.

Yichang Hotel (Yíchāng Fàndiàn; Dongshan Dadao; 东山大道; s/d Y268/288; ☎) Smart and well-refitted hotel with style and comfort, an elegant foyer and lovely rooms laid out with dark wood furniture and sparkling bathrooms. Discounts are common.

Táohuālíng Fàndiàn (☎ 623 6666; fax 623 8888; 29 Yunji Lu; 云集路29号; d Y548; ☎) Pleasant enough four-star hotel with attractive garden, free internet, and rooms on 4th, 5th and 7th floors with their own computers.

Eating & Drinking

Yíchāng's lively bar and club scene is concentrated along Erma Lu and the surrounding alleys located just east of the southern end of Yunji Lu.

Fújì Cǎiguǎn (☎ 622 2586; 48 Fusui Lu) offers Hunan food in a clean and comfortable setting.

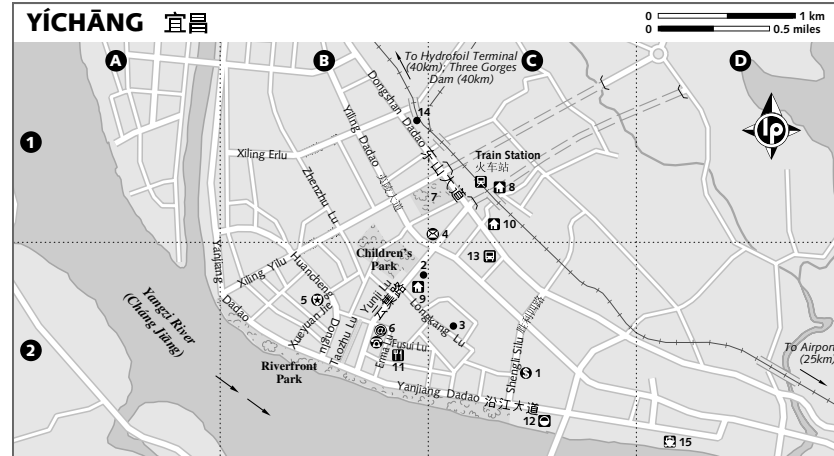
Getting There & Away

AIR

The Three Gorges Airport is 25km southeast of town, with daily flights to Běijīng (Y1300), Shànghǎi (Y1080), Xī'ān (Y840) and other cities. Ticket offices are dotted around near the train station and ferry terminals.

BOAT

Most river stop ferries stop at the **Yichang Ferry Terminal** (Yíchāng Gǎng Kèyùnzhàn; ☎ 622 4354), where tickets are sold. Upstream services include Wǎnzhōu and Chóngqīng (Y110 to Y770); downstream services are more unreliable and erratic but include Wǔhàn (Hànkǒu; Y46 to Y491, 23 hours), Jiǔjiāng (Y71 to Y703, 31 hours), Nánjīng (from Y104, 50 hours) and Shànghǎi (Y148 to Y1248, 65 hours).



River ferries also stop at the Dàgōngqiáo bus and ferry terminal west of the main ferry terminal.

A speedy hydrofoil service reaches Wǎnzhōu (six hours) and Chóngqīng (11 hours) from the hydrofoil terminal that is west of town (take bus 3, one hour); boats to Wǎnzhōu are more frequent as the expressway now links Wǎnzhōu with Chóngqīng. Tickets can be bought at either of the ferry terminals.

For full details on Yangzi River cruises, see p811.

BUS

Yíchāng's main **long-distance bus station** (chángtú qìchēzhàn; ☎ 644 5314; Dongshan Dadao) is located southeast of the train station. Services run to Wǔhàn (Hànkǒu and Wǔchāng; Y80 to Y115, regular), Lichuān (Y100, once daily), Xiāngfán (Y60, regular), Nánchāng (Y185, once daily), Chángshā (Y117, once daily) and Shànghǎi (Y350, once daily). Long-distance services also depart from the main ferry terminal; buses include Wǔhàn (Y60, hourly), Zhèngzhōu Y119, once daily) Shànghǎi (Y350, once daily) and the Dàgōngqiáo ferry terminal.

TRAIN

Yíchāng's train station sits atop a punishing flight of steps at the intersection of Dongshan Dadao and Yunji Lu.

Services run to Chángshā (Y194), Hàn kǒu (Y94), Xiāngfán (hard seat Y31), Zhāngjiājiē

INFORMATION

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| Bank of China 中国银行 | 1 | C2 |
| CITS 中国国际旅行社 | 2 | B2 |
| CITS 中国国际旅行社 | 3 | C2 |
| Post Office 邮局 | 4 | C1 |
| PSB / Exit/Entry Administration Section 公安局/出入境管理处 | 5 | B2 |
| Yinxing Internet Café 兴兴网吧 | 6 | B2 |

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

| | | |
|------------------|---|----|
| Yiling Park 夷陵广场 | 7 | C1 |
|------------------|---|----|

SLEEPING

| | | |
|-----------------------------|----|----|
| Railway Station Hotel 铁路大酒店 | 8 | C1 |
| Táohuālíng Fàndiàn 桃花岭饭店 | 9 | B2 |
| Yichang Hotel 宜昌饭店 | 10 | C1 |

EATING

| | | |
|-------------------|----|----|
| Fújì Cǎiguǎn 福记菜馆 | 11 | B2 |
|-------------------|----|----|

TRANSPORT

| | | |
|--|----|----|
| Dagongqiao Bus & Ferry Terminal 大桥客运站 | 12 | C2 |
| Long-Distance Bus Station 长途汽车站 | 13 | C2 |
| Qingjiang Dasha 清江大厦 | 14 | B1 |
| Yichang Ferry Terminal 宜昌港 | 15 | D2 |

(Y56), Luòyáng (Y90), Zhèngzhōu (Y145), Xī'ān (Y150), Běijīng West (Y298), Shànghǎi (Y330) and elsewhere.

Getting Around

Six airport shuttle buses (Y20, 30 minutes) depart daily from the Qingjiang Building (清江大厦; Qingjiāng Dàshà; cnr Dongshan Dadao & Xiling Erlu) between 5.40am and 8.30pm. Taxis to/from the airport cost Y80 to Y100.

YÚMÙZHÀI 鱼木寨

Pocketed away in the glorious hills of south-western Húběi province is Yúmùzhài (admission Y20), a sleepy and beautiful hamlet of glistening terraced fields tramped by water buffalo. The main inhabitants of Yúmùzhài, the Tujia (土家), are a minority without their own written language, but with strong traditions of conveying folk stories through song and opera.

If it's peace, quiet and an untrammelled rural setting you're after, Yúmùzhài is simply wallowing in it. The catch? Reaching it can be a rite of passage. The 18km road from the nearest settlement, Móudào (谋道), is falling apart and in bad need of resurfacing (it's due to be repaved in 2007).

The crumbling road to Yúmùzhài tapers fitfully to its terminus above a dramatic precipice, where totters a magnificent stone **gatehouse** – the sole portal to the village. Upon arrival at the gatehouse, simply inscribed with the characters for Yúmùzhài and looked after by a local family, a stone path threads down through the fields, past traditional Tujia buildings and stunning views. It takes several hours to fully explore this region; to wander around the numerous paths and trails, past gorgeous fields, precipitous drops, Tujia stone tablets, old tombs and carvings.

You can stay overnight here, as accommodation is simple but affordable. Beds at peasant homesteads (nóngjiā; 农家) in Yúmùzhài go for around Y20, although you could be directed to a simple bed cushioned with a mattress of straw. Meals are available from households that offer accommodation in the village. If you plan to stay overnight, also factor in the cost of having a driver come to pick you up and return you to Lichuān or Móudào.

Alternatively, more comfortable rooms are available at the **Lichuān Binguān** (☎ 0718 728 2047; 385 Jiiefang Lu; 解放路385号; d Y180) and other hotels in Lichuān (利川), but the town is not pretty.

Winters in Yúmùzhài are cold and damp, and dense banks of fog enclose the village in spring; summer and autumn are the best times to visit.

Getting There & Away

At the time of writing, reaching Yúmùzhài was tricky, but not impossible. The nearest airport is at Ēnshī. Take a slow sleeper bus through the hills from Yíchāng to Lichuān (Yíchāng to Lichuān Y100, 10 hours, 6.30pm; Lichuān to Yíchāng Y110, 12 hours, 5pm) in the weightily named Enshi Tujia and Miao Minority Autonomous Prefecture (恩施土家族苗族自治州; Ēnshī Tǔjiāzú Miáozú Zìzhìzhōu). Buses to Lichuān also run from Wànzhōu (Y20, two hours) and Fèngjié (Y35, three hours) in Chóngqing, a direction which allows for a journey through the Three Gorges by hydrofoil from Yíchāng to either Fèngjié or Wànzhōu, for the bus connection to Lichuān. From Lichuān you will have to negotiate a taxi or four-wheel drive (around Y150 to Y200 return) to take you to Yúmùzhài, around 60km away from Lichuān.

Avoid travel to Yúmùzhài during wet weather (eg during spring) as drivers will be loathe to traverse the road if it is muddy and you could be left high and dry. Public buses from Lichuān only go as far as Móudào (谋道; Y15), but Yúmùzhài is a further 18km away; you could be stuck if unable to find a car from Móudào, so it could be preferable to arrange a car from Lichuān.