

Yúnnán 云南



We've said it before and we'll say it again: if you have time for but one province in China, Yúnnán should be it. Strong words but hyperbole is remarkably understated when describing Yúnnán. No other province can rival Yúnnán's diversity in land and people. Guizhoù is also an ethnic mosaic, Sichuān's rivers garner much of the Southwest's glory and Guāngxí's scenery leaps from every encyclopaedia's entry on China. Yet Yúnnán can top 'em all.

Just gaze at a map. Yúnnán's majestic, and often sacred, peaks thrust from the Tibetan ranges to the north, lush jungle lies a two-day bus ride south and a fertile plain spreads through the rest of the province. It's also home to China's highest number of species of flora and fauna – including 2500 varieties of wild flowers and plants – and known for its mild climate year-round. Indeed, the province's nicknames include 'Kingdom of Plants' and 'Garden of Heavenly Marvellous Flowers'; the capital's nickname is 'Spring City'.

A huge attraction is the province's astonishingly diverse populace. Home to nearly half of all China's ethnic minorities, nearly 50% of the province is non-Han (Han are China's main ethnic group). Village-hop this breathtaking province and greet a new minority group each day, many in time-capsule towns that you'll never forget. Smacks of PR pulp? Well, just be prepared that if you start here, you may never get to another province. It has happened.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel your jaw hit your chest watching a sunrise or sunset over the **Yuanyang rice terraces** (p323)
- Glimpse the Tibet border, marvel at sublime Méilí Xuěshān, and find your own Shangri-la in the northwestern towns of **Déqín** (p294) and **Shangri-la (Xiānggǎ Lìlā)** (p287)
- Flee the freeze up north and get your Southeast Asia fix in **Xishuāngbǎnnà** (p324)
- Lose your way (and your cares) in the funky old towns of **Lǐjiāng** (p267) and **Dàlì** (p257), then strike out into the sublime countryside around them.
- Escape the hordes and explore the regional time-warp towns and villages of **Shāxī** (p277), **Wěishān** (p245), **Jiànchuān** (p274) and **Nuòdèng** (p248)
- Test your legs (and recharge your soul) trekking **Tiger Leaping Gorge** (p281), Southwest China's hiking rite of passage

■ AREA: 394,000 sq km ■ POP: 42.1 MILLION ■ www.yunnantourism.net



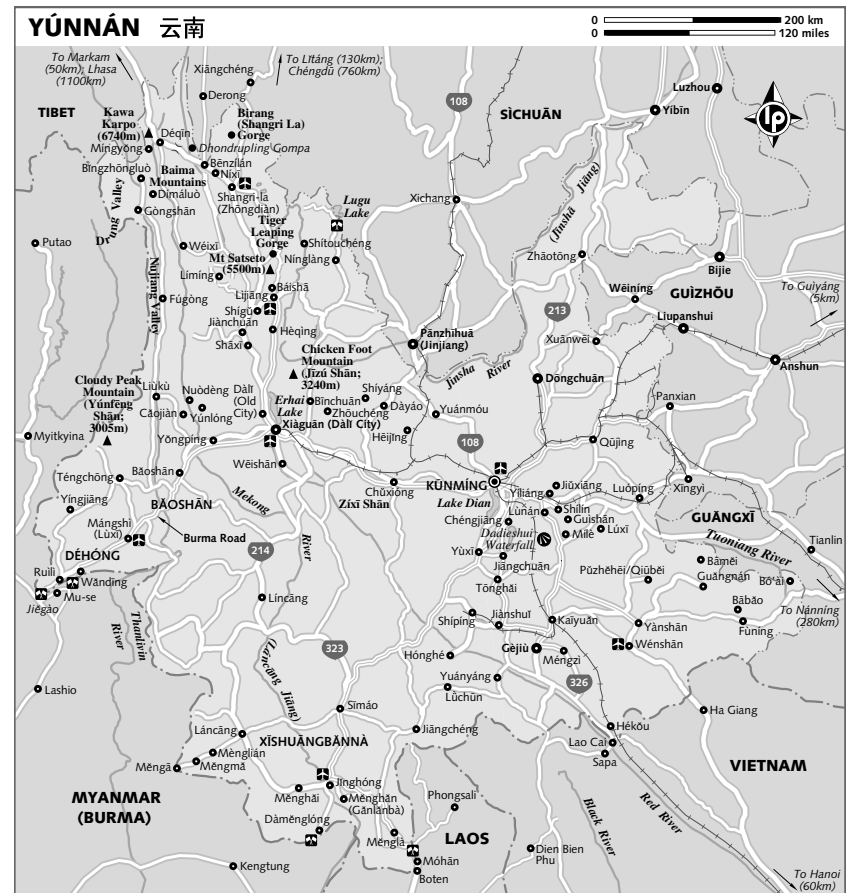
HISTORY

In the 1960s scientists rocked the anthropological world when they determined that fragments of humanlike teeth discovered by railway engineers in Yuánmóu, northwest of Kūnmíng, belonged to hominids who lived 1.75 million to 2.5 million years ago. This and further discoveries proved what was once considered a wild, isolated region was inhabited before any other in China.

Yúnnán's other great anthropological discovery was of sophisticated Bronze Age cultures around Diān Chí (Lake Dian). First discovered in the 1950s, excavations throughout southeast Yúnnán are filling gaps in a previously unknown period of the province.

It wasn't until the Warring States period (453–221 BC) that the rest of China became interested in the frontiers. Armies invaded twice before Chu general Zhuang Qiao put himself into power as the emperor of the Dian kingdom near Kūnmíng. Though regular contact with the rest of China was still a long way off, it was Zhuang who facilitated eventual expansion and the first large-scale migration.

Qin dynasty emperor Qin Shihuang extended a road from Sichuān to Qūjīng in northeast Yúnnán and established the first *jun* (prefecture). As the Qin dynasty ceded to the Han dynasty, western Yúnnán was organised within prefectures and the famed Southern Silk Route into Burma and India was established. Meanwhile, Yúnnán was



occupied by large numbers of non-Chinese aboriginal people. They lacked good political organisation and their chieftains either obeyed or ignored the emperor.

In the Three Kingdoms period (AD 220–280), a kingdom including parts of Sichuan was formed when a rebellion by Yúnnán's up-and-coming elite was put down. From this time and throughout the Western Jin period (AD 265–316), Yúnnán crept ever closer to consolidation, and came under the jurisdiction of some sort of Chinese control.

The power base of Yúnnán also shifted slowly – first eastward to Qūjìng, then westward. By the 7th century AD the Bai people had established a powerful kingdom, the Nanzhao, south of Dàlǐ. Initially allied with the Chinese against the Tibetans, this kingdom extended its power until, in the middle of the 8th century, it was able to challenge and defeat the Tang armies. It took control of a large slice of the Southwest and established itself as a fully independent entity, dominating trade routes from China to India and Burma.

The Nanzhao kingdom fell in the 10th century and was replaced by the kingdom of Dàlǐ, an independent state overrun by Kublai Khan and the Mongols in the mid-13th century. Kublai's armies also brought in many of Southwest China's Muslims, who were warriors from Central Asia.

The Ming dynasty purged the Mongols but Yúnnán resisted capitulation to the emperor's armies. Finally, after 15 centuries of resistance to northern rule, the Qing emperor cowed enough local power-brokers into submission to gain a modicum of control. In 1658 this part of the Southwest was finally integrated into the empire as the province of Yúnnán.

Even so it remained an isolated frontier region, with scattered Chinese garrisons and settlements in the valleys and basins, a mixed aboriginal population occupying the highlands, and various Dai (Thai) and other minorities along the Mekong River (Láncāng Jiāng). Like the rest of the Southwest, Yúnnán was always one of the first regions to break with the northern government. During China's countless political purges, fallen officials often found themselves exiled here, which added to the province's rebellious character.

Right up to the 20th century, Yúnnán looked as much to its neighbours Indochina and Burma as it did to the Chinese emperor.

Wracked by ethnic disturbances, including the bloody 1855 Muslim uprising and even bloodier Chinese army put-down, Yúnnán was exploited by local warlords, European powers along the border, and the emperor. It was the death of China, at least in the east, with the arrival of Japanese forces in 1937 that was to ironically augur a better future for Yúnnán. Strategically located away from Japan's forces in the east, the province was used to shuttle material for the Allied war machine. Later, the Red Army would be welcomed by a peasantry that felt it had been ignored long enough.

Today, Yúnnán province looks firmly back in the Chinese fold. It is a province of 42 million people, including a veritable constellation of minorities (25 registered): the Zhuang, Hui, Yi, Miao, Tibetans, Mongols, Yao, Bai, Hani, Dai, Lisu, Lahu, Wa, Naxi, Jingpo, Pumi, Nu, Achang, Bulang, Jinuo and Drung. These groups make up more than a third of the population, but they occupy two-thirds of the land.

CLIMATE

Yúnnán has a stunning range of geomorphology – 76.4m above sea level in Hékǒu to 6740m in the Tibetan plateau with an average of 2000m – and thus the official classification as 'subtropical highland monsoon' really translates as dozens of microclimates. In the grip of summer (June through August) you can freeze your tail off in the north, and in the midst of winter (mid-November through late February) you can get by with a light coat within a 12-hour ride south of Kūnmíng, the capital, which seemingly lacks 'weather', its mean temperature never fluctuating more than 10°C throughout the year. Dàlǐ is also blessed with an ideal temperature year-round, with temperatures rarely dipping below 4°C in the winter months or above 25°C in summer.

More detail about the worrisome extremes: in the frozen northwestern region around Déqīn and Shangri-la, winters reach chilling lows of -12°C and summer temperatures peak at highs of 19°C. And though Guǎngdōng's southernmost peninsula juts a bit further south than Yúnnán's own border with Laos, to most, Yúnnán is the real 'south' China. The Xīshuāngbǎnnà borderline with Laos lies on the 21° latitude – meaning steamy subtropics; here the summer months soar to 33°C.

FESTIVALS IN YÚNNÁN

Festival	Location	Lunar calendar	2008	2009	2010
Water-Splashing Festival	Jǐnghóng, Xīshuāngbǎnnà	(13-15 April fixed in Western calendar)			
Sanyuesan	Western Hills, Kūnmíng	3rd of 3rd	8 April	29 March	16 April
Fertility Festival	Lǐjiāng	13th of 3rd	18 April	8 April	26 April
Third Moon Fair	Dàlǐ	15th-21st of 3rd	20-26 April	10-16 April	28 April-4 May
Guanyin Pavilion Festival	Dàlǐ	19th of 3rd	24 April	14 April	2 May
Three Temples Festival	Dàlǐ	23rd-25th of 4th	27-29 May	17-19 May	5-7 June
Guanyin Pavilion Festival	Dàlǐ	19th of 6th	21 July	9 August	30 July
Torch Festival	Shílín, Dàlǐ, Lǐjiāng, Chūxióng	24th of 6th	26 July	14 August	4 August
Guanyin Pavilion Festival	Dàlǐ	19th of 9th	17 October	5 November	26 October

Note: Festival dates are subject to change – check ahead.

LANGUAGE

In addition to Mandarin (which here has been modified into Yunnanese, intelligible to native Mandarin speakers but often not to you!), the other major languages spoken in the Yúnnán province belong to the Tibeto-Burman family (eg the Naxi language), and the Sino-Tibetan family (eg the Lisu language). This, however, is a simplified classification – home to half of China's minority groups, in virtually every county of Yúnnán you pass through you encounter a different language or dialect.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Kūnmíng is served by all Chinese airlines and has daily flights to most cities. International destinations include but are by no means limited to Hong Kong, Hanoi, Vientiane, Chiang Mai/Bangkok, Rangoon, Osaka and Seoul.

Domestic airports in almost all corners of Yúnnán province are served by daily flights from Kūnmíng (and other major Chinese cities). Keep in mind that some of the following flights are seasonal – meaning you still may be forced to fly first to Kūnmíng and change planes.

The northwest is linked by Shangri-la, Dàlǐ and Lǐjiāng. Mǎngshì and Bǎoshān provide Déhóng prefecture in the southwest with an air link and Jǐnghóng is Xīshuāngbǎnnà's air link.

Dàlǐ airport has flights to Kūnmíng and Guǎngzhōu. From Lǐjiāng there are daily flights in high season to Chéngdū, Shànghǎi, Shēnzhèn and Guǎngzhōu (and occasionally Xīshuāngbǎnnà). From Shangri-la, Yunnan Airlines flies to Kūnmíng, Chéngdū, Lhasa, Guǎngzhōu, Shēnzhèn and Guiyáng.

Destinations from Jǐnghóng include Lǐjiāng, Shànghǎi, and Guǎngzhōu, as well as direct flights to Bangkok and Chiang Mai in Thailand. Mǎngshì currently only has flights to Kūnmíng, though at some point flights into Burma should be on offer.

The southeast is now only served by four flights per week to Wénshān on their way to Nǎnníng, though the flight is absurdly expensive compared to the bus.

Kūnmíng also recently saw the start up of the province's first budget airline – Lucky Air – which hopes to offer cheap flights to/from Dàlǐ and Jǐnghóng, if not other places. We'll see.

Boat

From 2004 to 2006 a number of adventurous foreigners managed to snag rides aboard cargo boats from Jǐnghóng in Xīshuāngbǎnnà to Chiang Saen in Thailand. Chinese authorities liked that not a bit and put a stop to it in October 2006. Coincidentally (?) at the same time a new high-speed passenger boat began running the same route (and stopping off at

six ports in between). For more details see the boxed text, p331.

Bus

Roadwise, Yünnán is what Sichuán only wishes it were, with a comprehensive and smooth bus network to all major destinations; no other province in Southwest China has laid new roads in the past 10 years as fast as Yünnán. A few curlicue ribbons still lurk out there if you're planning to head off the well-trodden paths, but these are generally of the serpentine mountain-road variety – you'll get a bit of queasiness perhaps but no tailbone smashing. (The worst are routes are between Jíngzhōng and the Dàlǐ, Bǎoshān or Déhóng – for Ruili – prefectures.)

Expressways link Kūnmíng with Dàlǐ (and will eventually link with Lǐjiāng), south to Bǎoshān and Jíngzhōng, and southeast to Gèjiù, Jiànshuǐ and virtually every other city nearby mentioned in this book. These expressway networks also link Kūnmíng with Sichuán, Guǐzhōu and Guǎngxī, and at the time of writing to the border with Laos (and ultimately Thailand). For Vietnam and Myanmar these cushy highways only get close.

Train

Arriving in (or departing from) Yünnán by train to Kūnmíng is generally a snap, though, as always, do not expect middle-berth hard-sleeper ticket miracles on short notice for the most popular routes.

Railways link Yünnán to Guǐzhōu, Guǎngxī and Sichuán and further afield throughout the country. Book early for trains to Chéngdū, probably the most popular route, and Guǐlín; for the latter, consider the eminently more easily nabbed ticket to Nánjīng on the Nán-kun Railway.

Development of the railways has been slower inside Yünnán than elsewhere in China; it was only a decade or so ago that the passenger line was extended west to gotta-go-there Dàlǐ (a further extension from Dàlǐ to Lǐjiāng was reportedly half-completed at the time of writing).

Yünnán once had a funky old narrow-gauge rail system for intraprovincial travel in its southeastern counties near Vietnam. This, however, has expired gradually due to ageing infrastructure (nearly a century old!) and chronic landslide issues; the death knell was the cancellation of the wonderfully

anachronistic meandering, chugging night train to Hékoù on the Vietnam border. The provincial government has announced plans to completely overhaul and upgrade the system, along with other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean; the members of which can't seem to agree on whose system to use as a base). This would also, officials claim, eventually include Myanmar, if they can event track from Kūnmíng to Ruili near the border.

KŪNMÍNG 昆明

☎ 0871 / pop 1.01 million

Yünnán means 'South of the Clouds', and Kūnmíng, with the apt moniker 'Spring City', couldn't be a better meteorological metaphor for a place far from inclement weather. Indeed, the climate is generally the first thing travellers notice about the place. At an elevation of 1890m, Kūnmíng has a milder climate than most other Chinese cities (and other areas of the province). Winters are short, sunny and dry, though definitely a bit chilly in the shade. Snow isn't entirely unheard of, though these spells are quite brief and it'll still be warmer than the north! In summer (June to August) Kūnmíng has more rain but it offers cool respite to anyone coming in from Chéngdū, Chóngqing or China's tropical neighbours to the south. Indeed, it will be this first breath of fresh air in a long while that will probably begin your infatuation with the city.

Given this fresh climate, it's not surprising that the capital of 'China's Greenhouse' is not unlike one big park, with tree- and flower-lined boulevards every which way. Sure, traffic is worsening by the minute – the Spring City's legendary breezes are having a harder time blowing away the resulting haze – and most of the city's quaint architecture has gone (neon is rare enough however that you can actually see a few stars at night in the heart of downtown), but in the end you'll likely find yourself quite cosy here and spend more time than you'd thought.

Another of Kūnmíng's immediately apparent pluses is the absolute refusal of the populace to be anything but laid-back. There literally is no sense of hurry-up here and the quotient of cell-phone yapping wannabes on boulevards and buses is thankfully on the low end.

Kūnmíng's total population is around 3.5 million, though only about a million inhabit the urban area. At most, minorities account for 6% of Kūnmíng's population, although the farm-

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

Internet Resources

- Go Kunming (<http://gokunming.com>) is run by expats in Yünnán, specifically Kūnmíng, this site either has what you need or a link to where you can find it.
- Letters from China (www.voyage.typepad.com/china/yunnan) is a good hub for links to governmental-, transport- and tourism-information sources.
- Yunnan Explorer (www.yunnanexplorer.com) is an outstanding resource with excellent background articles, maps, and thorough links.
- Yunnan Tourism (www.yunnantourism.net) is the official site of the Yünnán provincial government, it provides a good overview – though fairly basic – of all things touristy in the province.

Books

Consider the following brief list of eminent books for Yünnán- or China-centric reading:

- Anything by Jonathan Spence, in particular his books *The Search for Modern China* and *God's Chinese Son*.
- *South of the Clouds: Tales from Yunnan*, edited by Guo Xu and Lucien Miller. This fascinating anthology of Yünnán tales provides a wonderful thumbnail sketch of the cultural ethos of the province and its people.
- *Mr China's Son, A Villager's Life*, He Liyi. You cannot possibly be unmoved by this account of a simple man's ordeal during China's 20th-century upheavals. Mr He, a Bai from Dàlǐ, was unlucky enough to have studied English, a crime for which he later found himself sent to the countryside and otherwise persecuted for much of his life. In the end, he wound up sharing his wondrous outlook on life with foreign travellers in his café (now closed) in Dàlǐ.
- *Soul Mountain*, Gao Xingjian. The Nobel prize winner for literature, Gao weaves a search for his own 'soul mountain' as he wanders about the countryside of Southwest China. Brilliant.
- Anything by Joseph Rock. Seriously. *The Ancient Naxi Kingdom of Southwest China* is Joseph Rock's definitive work, along with his Naxi dictionary. For an insight into the man and his work, take a look at *In China's Border Provinces: The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer* by JB Sutton, or Rock's many archived articles for *National Geographic*.
- *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China*, Erik Mueggler. A compelling account of a Tibetan-Burmese minority community on the fringes – literally and figuratively – of the Han world in the 20th century.

ing areas are home to some Yí, Hui and Miao groups. There are also Vietnamese refugees-turned-immigrants who fled the Sino-Vietnamese border clashes that started in 1977.

It's an enormous municipality at some 6100 sq km. The city is surrounded on three sides by the mountain ranges of the Yünnán-Guǐzhōu Plateau; Diān Chí lies to the south.

History

The region of Kūnmíng has been inhabited for around 2000 years, though nearby areas have been populated for millions of years. The tomb excavations around Diān Chí, particularly at Shizhai Mountain near Jíning on the southern shore, have unearthed thousands of artefacts from the Bronze Age

– weapons, drums, paintings, and silver, jade and turquoise jewellery – that suggest a well-developed culture and provide clues to a very sketchy early history of the city.

During the Warring States period the kingdom of Dian was established close to present-day Kūnmíng. The first Chinese prefecture, the Yizhou Jun, was set up in Kūnmíng in 109 BC during the Western Han dynasty. Until the 8th century the town was a remote Chinese outpost, but the kingdom of Nanzhao, centred to the northwest of Kūnmíng at Dàlǐ, captured it and made it their second capital.

In 1274 the Mongols came through, sweeping all before them. Marco Polo gives us a fascinating picture of Kūnmíng's commerce in the late 13th century:



At the end of these five days journeys you arrive at the capital city, which is named Yachi, and is very great and noble. In it are found merchants and artisans, with a mixed population, consisting of idolaters, Nestorian Christians and Saracens or Moham-etans...The land is fertile in rice and

wheat...For money they employ the white porcelain shell, found in the sea, and which they also wear as ornaments about their necks. Eighty of the shells are equal in value to...two Venetian groats. In this country also there are salt springs...the duty levied on this salt produces large revenues to

INFORMATION		Yunnan Provincial Museum		DRINKING ☑	
Bank of China 中国银行	1 C4	云南省博物馆	22 B3	Café de Camel 骆驼咖啡馆	(see 39)
Bank of China 中国银行	2 B3			Kundu Night Market 昆都夜市	43 A3
Bank of China 中国银行	3 C2			Speakeasy 说吧	44 A2
China International Travel Service					
中国国际旅行社	4 D4	SLEEPING 🛏			
China Telecom 中国电信	5 C3	Camellia Hotel 茶花宾馆	23 D3		
International Post Office 国际邮局	6 C4	Greenland Hotel 绿洲大酒店	24 D3	SHOPPING 🛍	
International Post Office 国际邮局 (see 5)		Hump 驼峰客栈	25 B3	Flower & Bird Market 花鸟市场	45 B3
Lao Consulate 老挝领事馆 (see 23)		Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel	26 A3	Fú Lín Táng 福林堂	46 B3
Mandarin Books & CDs 五华书苑	7 A1	昆明青年大脚氏旅社	26 A3	Tian Fu Famous Teas 天福茗茶	47 C3
Myanmar Consulate 缅甸领事馆	8 B3	Kunming Hotel 昆明饭店	27 D3		
Shuanghe Pharmacy 双鹤大药房	9 C3	Kunming Youth Hostel			
Thai Consulate 泰国总领事馆	10 D3	昆明国际青年旅社	28 B2	TRANSPORT	
Vietnamese Consulate 越南领事馆	11 C4	Kúnhú Fāndiàn 昆湖饭店	29 C4	Bus Station 客运站	48 C5
Xinhua Bookstore 新华书店	12 B3	Mingdǒu Dàjiùdiàn 明都大酒店	30 D2	Dragonair 港龙航空	(see 11)
Yanan Hospital 延安医院	13 D2	Sakura Kunming 昆明樱花酒店	31 D3	Fat Tyres Bike Shop	49 A2
		Yúndà Bīnguǎn 云大宾馆	32 A1	Ko Wai Lin Travel 科威霖旅游	(see 23)
				Lao Aviation 老挝航空公司	(see 23)
				Long-Distance Bus Station	
				长途客运站	50 C5
				Malaysia Airlines	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES				Brothers Jiang 江氏兄弟	34 C3
Chuàngū Kù (The Loft)				Carrefour Supermarket	
创意艺术主题社区	14 A3			家乐福超级市场	35 B3
East Pagoda 东寺塔	15 B4			Hotpot Restaurant 火锅	36 D2
Kunming City Museum				Ma Ma Fu's 马马付餐厅	37 D3
昆明市博物馆	16 D3			Salvador's 萨尔瓦多咖啡馆	38 A1
Kunming Zoo 昆明动物园	17 B1			Wei's Pizzeria 哈哈餐厅	39 D3
Mosque 清真寺	18 C3			White Pagoda Dai Restaurant	
Mr Chen's Tours 陈先生旅游 (see 23)				白塔傣味厅	40 D3
Nancheng Mosque 南城清真寺	19 B3			Yuquanzhai Vegetarian Restaurant	41 B2
West Pagoda 西寺塔	20 B4			Zhènxíng Fāndiàn 振兴饭店	42 D3
Yuantong Temple 圆通寺	21 B1				

the Emperor. The natives do not consider it an injury done to them when others have connection with their wives, provided the act is voluntary on the woman's part. Here there is a lake almost a hundred miles in circuit, in which great quantities of fish are caught. The people are accustomed to eat the raw flesh of fowls, sheep, oxen and buffalo...the poorer sorts only dip it in a sauce of garlic...they eat it as well as we do the cooked.

In the 14th century the Ming set up shop in Yünnánfū, as Kūnmíng was then known, building a walled town on the present site. From the 17th century onwards, the history of the city becomes rather grisly. The last Ming resistance to the invading Manchu took place in Yünnán in the 1650s and was crushed by General Wu Sangui. Wu in turn rebelled against the king and held out until his death in 1678. His successor was overthrown by the Manchu emperor Kangxi and killed himself in Kūnmíng in 1681.

In the 19th century the city suffered several blood baths, as the rebel Muslim leader Du Wenxiu, the sultan of Dàli, attacked and be-

sieged the city several times between 1858 and 1868. It was not until 1873 that the rebellion was finally and bloodily crushed.

The intrusion of the West into Kūnmíng began in the middle of the 19th century and by 1900 Kūnmíng, Hékǒu, Simáo and Měngzǐ had been opened to foreign trade. The French were keen on exploiting the region's copper, tin and timber resources, and in 1910 their Indochina railway, started in 1898 at Hanoi, reached the city.

Kūnmíng's expansion began with WWII, when factories were established here and refugees fleeing the Japanese poured in from eastern China. In a bid to keep China from falling to Japan, Anglo-American forces sent supplies to Nationalist troops entrenched in Sìchuān and Yünnán. Supplies came overland on a dirt road carved out of the mountains in 1937–38 by 160,000 Chinese with virtually no equipment. This was the famous Burma Road, a 1000km haul from Lashio to Kūnmíng. Today, the western extension of Kūnmíng's Renmin Lu, leading in the direction of Heil-inpu, is the tail end of the road. For more on the Burma Road, see the boxed text, p347.

In early 1942 the Japanese captured Lashio, cutting the supply line. Kūnmíng continued

to handle most of the incoming aid during 1942–45, when US planes flew the dangerous mission of crossing the ‘Hump’, the towering 5000m mountain ranges between India and Yúnnán. A black market sprang up and medicines, canned food, petrol and other goods intended for the military and relief agencies were siphoned off.

The face of Kūnmíng has been radically altered since then, with streets widened and office buildings and housing projects constructed. With the coming of the railways, industry has expanded rapidly, and a surprising range of goods and machinery now bears a ‘Made in Yúnnán’ stamp. The city’s exports include steel, foodstuffs, trucks, machine tools, electrical equipment, textiles, chemicals, building materials and plastics.

Orientation

The jurisdiction of Kūnmíng includes four city districts and eight rural counties, which supply the city with fruit and vegetables. The centre of the city is the traffic circle at the intersection of Zhengyi Lu and Dongfeng Lu (this street is also for a few blocks called Nanping Jie).

To the southwest of the intersection, down to Jinbi Lu, the old quarter has given way to Kūnmíng’s only area of bustle and neon – best for people-watching. To the north of the intersection is Green Lake Park, a pleasant place for a wander; it contains Yuantong Temple and the Kunming Zoo.

To the east of the city centre intersection is Kūnmíng’s major road running north to south, Beijing Lu. At the southern end is the main train station and the long-distance bus station. At about the halfway point, Beijing Lu is intersected by Dongfeng Donglu. This used to be the foreign traveller ghetto where everyone wound up, but today the entire downtown area has somewhere to stay and eat and something to see and do.

MAPS

Scores of maps are available around the bus and train stations and in bookshops; sadly, those with a smattering of English names lack any real detail. The *Yunnan Communications and Tourist Map* (Y10) has got good English labels on the provincial map and on the Kūnmíng city map on the flip side, but this one has become extremely hard to find.

Information BOOKSHOPS

Mandarin Books & CDs (West Gate, Yunnan University; ☎ 220 6575; ☹ 9am–10pm) Has guidebooks, novels, magazines and a selection of travel writing in English, German, French, Dutch, Italian and some Spanish. Not exactly tons available, but it’s better than nothing.
Xinhua Bookstore (Nanping Jie) Provincial and city maps are also found here; most are in Chinese but you’ll find something helpful in English.

INTERNET ACCESS

Pretty much every hotel and café frequented by travellers offers email for Y4 to Y10 per hour; try the Camellia Hotel (p228) and the Hump (p228). (Rates at Kūnmíng’s zillion internet cafés are Y2 to Y4.) Cloudland International Youth Hostel (p228) has free, albeit occasionally iffy, access (and it’s wireless equipped).

MEDICAL SERVICES

Shuanghe Pharmacy (Shuānghè Dàoyàofāng; Tuodong Lu; ☹ 24hr) Opposite Yúnnán Airlines.

Yanan Hospital (Yán’ān Yīyuàn; ☎ 317 7499, ext 311; 1st fl, block 6, Renmin Donglu) Has a foreigners’ clinic.

MONEY

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; 448 Renmin Donglu; ☹ 9am–noon & 2–5pm) Changes travellers cheques and foreign currency and offers cash advances on credit cards. There is an ATM here. There are branches at Dongfeng Xilu and Huancheng Nanlu. A few other banks around town have ATMs which will accept foreign cards; your best bet is to look for branches of the Agricultural Bank of China (中国农业银行), where some travellers have had luck.

POST & TELEPHONE

China Telecom (Zhōngguó Diànxìng; cnr Beijing Lu & Dongfeng Donglu) You can make international calls here.
International Post Office (Guóji Yóujú; 231 Beijing Lu) The main office has a very efficient poste restante and parcel service (per letter Y3, ID required). It is also the city’s Express Mail Service (EMS) and Western Union agent.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (公安局; Gōngānjū; ☎ 571 7030; Jinxing Huáy-uán, Jinxing Lu; ☹ 9–11.30am & 1–5pm) The Foreign Affairs Branch will, with bureaucratic weariness, issue visa extensions in three to five days. The main entrance is off Erhuan Beilu. Buses 3, 25 and 57 will get you within a couple of blocks. Get off the bus at the Jinxing Ximén stop (金星西門站) on Jinjiang Lu, head east two blocks and turn left onto Yuanxi Xiang.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Almost all of the popular backpacker hotels and cafés can assist with travel queries and make ticket reservations (ranging from free to Y20 per ticket). The Camellia Hotel (p228) has four (at last count) agencies, including Mr Chen’s Tours (p228) and Ko Wai Lin Travel (p353), offering visa processing, tickets, and some intriguing (if pricey) tours to neighbouring countries.

China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guóji Lúxíngshì; ☎ 356 6730; 285 Huancheng Nanlu; ☹ 9am–5.30pm) Organises tours. It’s not big on dispensing free information, though. French and English spoken.

Tourist Complaint & Consultative Telephone (☎ 316 4961)

Dangers & Annoyances

Kūnmíng is one of the safest cities in China but take special precaution near the train and long-distance bus stations. The area can get seedy at night and there have been reports of travellers having their bags razored.

Sights

TANG DYNASTY PAGODAS 唐代塔

To the south of Jinbi Lu are two Tang pagodas. Neither can be climbed, nor are their temple complexes open, but both are fairly impressive since they age as gracefully as the neighbour-

hood gentrifies around them. **West Pagoda** (Xīsi Tǎ; Dōngsi Jie, 东寺街; admission Y2; ☹ 9am–6pm) is the more interesting. Attached is a compound that is a popular spot for older people to drink tea, chat and thwack mah jong tiles around (if not get a shave and a haircut).

East Pagoda (Dōngsi Tǎ; Shulin Jie, 书林街) – the one slightly off-plumb – was, according to Chinese sources, destroyed by an earthquake; Western sources say it was destroyed by the Muslim revolt.

YUANTONG TEMPLE 圓通寺

One piece of the perfect-for-a-daylong-stroll triumvirate, along with Green Lake Park and the Kunming Zoo (for the views if not the animals’ existence), this temple (Yuántōng Sì; Yuantong Jie; admission Y4; ☹ 8am–5pm) at the base of Luófēng Hill is the largest Buddhist complex in Kūnmíng and a rare and superb example of Tang dynasty design. Yes, it is pretty cool to wander amid a 1200-year-old temple complex that still draws a fair number of pilgrims. The central courtyard holds a large square pond intersected by walkways and bridges, and at the centre has a Ming dynasty octagonal pavilion which houses a 3m golden Maitreya statue.

To the rear of the temple a much newer hall enshrines a statue of Sakyamuni, a gift from the king of Thailand. Two dragon sculptures

OLD KŪNMÍNG

A day or two in the city and you may feel ‘old Kunming’ is oxymoronic. Nope, not here. Bull-dozed traditional architecture ranks among travellers’ pettest of peeves (though to be fair who wants to live in a 125-year-old building with rats and no indoor facilities?) and Kūnmíng is like most every other Chinese city in scrambling to save what little extant architecture remains. Besides the much-hyped Flower & Bird Market (see the boxed text, p231), a few pockets of ‘real’ Kūnmíng do exist.

One place to go to still see little old men pattering about in their funky blue Mao hats or donkey carts parked in front of temples, or even hear everyone speaking the lovely Kūnmíng-accented Yunnanese, is **Guāndù** (官渡). To be precise, one little slice of the district of the same name southeast of downtown – so ‘real’ that it’s technically now a protected national historic park. As one transplant to Kūnmíng aptly put it, ‘The only place in Kūnmíng where everyone in the neighbourhood was actually born there.’

Now, living museum this ain’t. As of late 2006, crews had pretty much white-tiled the circumferences of the neighbourhood. ‘Old’ flagstone alleys are being repaved in ‘new’ brick and ‘old’ wooden façades are giving way to new (à la the rest of China), and those locked-up pavilions look suspiciously draped in drop cloths for a garish paint job.

But still, it’s kind of a kick. When you get off bus 31 (train station all the way to the end), follow the donkey carts. They’ll take you to a very laid-back and yes, don’t worry, absolutely tourist-free, section of town. A handful of temples (admission to each Y5), pagodas and other historic structures are great fun to track down (new signs in English take away half the fun of pattering about searching for them).

here are a big attraction for pilgrims, and stories and poems about them have been carved into the temple walls.

Behind the hall is a cliff, Putuo Rock, with steps leading up and then inexplicably stopping (for some odd reason that's our favourite part of the temple). Along the way are carved scholastic inscriptions dating back to the Tang dynasty. A brick platform at the base covers two caves inhabited by dragons (it's said the temple was constructed in part to subdue the beasts). There's a wonderful vegetarian restaurant opposite the main temple entrance (see Yuquanzhai Vegetarian Restaurant, p230).

Watch out for pickpockets outside the temple. Whether photos are allowed or not depends on who's minding the place.

KUNMING ZOO 昆明动物园

Close to Yuántōng Sì is the **zoo** (Kūnmíng Dōngwūy-uán; admission Y10; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), and though the living conditions of the 750 animals are better than at most Chinese zoos (not saying much), obviously most travellers give it a miss. High up on a spiral-shaped hill, you can give the living areas wide berth and strike out into the verdant grounds, which offer commanding views over the city. If you do want a gander at regional fauna, residing here are such Yünnán rarities as Xīshuāngbànnà wild oxen, lesser (red) pandas, leaf monkeys and black-tail pythons; from greater China you'll get the obligatory pandas, tigers, Yangzi alligators, golden monkeys and others. The grounds also use existing city architecture, including a Ming dynasty city wall. The pavilions were constructed to feature all the architectural styles seen throughout Kūnmíng.

The main entrance is at the corner of Yuan-tong Jie and Qingnian Lu.

YUNNAN PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

云南省博物馆

At the time of writing, this **museum** (Yünnán Shěng Bówùguǎn; Wuyi Lu; admission Y10; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) was just having the finishing touches put on its much-needed face-lift; the previous incarnation was as much tomb as museum.

The museum's three major collections will still call this home. The **Bronze Drums Hall** has artefacts from tomb excavations at Jinníng (Diān Chí), Wanjiaba (Chūxióng) and Lijashan (near Jiāngchuān). The drums date from the Warring States and Western Han periods and are superb. Of 1600 such drums known to exist in the world, China has 1400

and Yünnán 400, most unearthed at Shizhai Shān near Diān Chí. The ancient drums are brought into a modern context by their use among minorities such as the Yi. For more on Yünnán's bronze drums see p47 and p191.

The **Ancient Buddhist Art Hall** has examples of the art at Shībǎoshān, near Dàlǐ, and the murals of Bǎishā outside Lijiang, which are useful if you are thinking of visiting either site.

The **Minority Nationality Hall** mostly consists of photos and fairly tacky shop mannequins (some with blonde hair!) dressed in minority clothes, with examples of embroidery, bags and hats. It gives an idea of Yünnán's ethnic diversity but you are better off going to Kūnmíng's Nationalities Museum (p237).

KUNMING CITY MUSEUM 昆明市博物馆

The left-hand hall of this **museum** (Kūnmíngshì Bówùguǎn; Tuodong Lu; admission Y5; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is packed with swords, spears and surprises like mini bronze ox heads excavated in the Kūnmíng area; you've got pot luck on English captioning (generally none). The right-hand hall houses the highlight of the whole shebang, worth the Y5 itself – an impressive 6.6m pillar engraved with Buddhist scriptures from the kingdom of Dali (AD 937-1253). It's said Prime Minister Yuan Douguang of the Dali kingdom had it constructed for Kūnmíng's military administrator Gao Mingsheng. A dinosaur exhibit inhabits the 2nd floor with the highlight, we kid you not, *Yunmanosaurus robustus*; this area is a bit middling, sadly underrepresenting Yünnán's paleontological importance.

GREEN LAKE PARK 翠湖公园

Get to this **park** (Cuihú Gōngyuán; Cuihu Nanlu; ☎ 6am-10pm) early in the morning to take a stroll (or

FOR THE BIRDS

Some 20 years ago, for whatever reason, red-beaked seagulls started descending on the Diān Chí (Lake Dian) region during their annual southerly migration, and in particular liked Green Lake Park so much that from November to late March they're now a fixture here, not to mention something of a local pet species. Actually, the most fun is when the seagulls arrive in mid- to late November, when you can watch Kunmingites 'flocking' to the waterside in absolute droves to fling bread crusts to the birds.

THE HUI

Wandering about Kūnmíng you can't help but note its Hui (Chinese Muslim) residents. Of the province's approximately 550,000 Hui, Kūnmíng holds the lion's share, with other populations centred in the counties of Xūndiàn and Wēishān (see p245).

In the 13th century Mongol forces swooped into the province to outflank the Song dynasty troops and were followed by Muslim traders, builders and craftsmen. Yünnán was the only region put under a Muslim leader immediately after Kublai Khan's armies arrived, when Sayyid Ajall was named governor in 1274.

Not long after, mosques all over China were simultaneously raised with the new Yuan dynasty banner. A Muslim was entrusted to build the first Mongol palace in Běijīng and an observatory based on Persian models was also constructed here. Dozens of Arabic texts were translated and consulted by Chinese scientists, influencing Chinese mathematics more than any other source. Yünnán's Muslims are rightfully proud of their legendary local-boy-done-good Cheng Ho (Zheng He), the famed eunuch admiral who opened up the Chinese sea channels to the Middle East (and who, some believe, may actually have been the first to voyage to the Americas).

Heavy land taxes and disputes between Muslims and Han Chinese over local gold and silver mines triggered a Muslim uprising in 1855, which lasted until 1873. The Muslims chose Dàlǐ (Xiàguān) as their base and laid siege to Kūnmíng, overrunning the city briefly in 1863. Du Wenxiu, the Muslim leader, proclaimed his newly established Kingdom of the Pacified South (Nán píng Guó) and took the name Sultan Suleyman.

But success was short-lived and in 1873 Dàlǐ was taken by Qing forces and Du Wenxiu was captured and executed. Up to one million people died in Yünnán alone, the death toll rising to 18 million nationwide. The uprisings were quelled, but they also had the lasting effect of eliciting sympathy from Burma.

perhaps dance with the retired ladies), then chill in one of the lakeside cafés. Sunday is the best time to come. Also try to pay a visit late September to early October for the Lantern Festival, when simply everyone in the city seems to set a paper lantern boat with candle inside adrift on the waters – outstanding photo op!

MOSQUES 清真寺

The oldest mosque in Kūnmíng (or at least on the site where a mosque has sat the longest), the 400-year-old **Nancheng Mosque** (Nánchéng Qīngzhēn Gūsi; 51 Zhengyi Lu) can be recognised by its telltale greenish onion domes, though the lower floors essentially look like the white-tiled offices that they are! Even worse, in 2005 the once-lively strip of Muslim restaurants and shops selling skullcaps, Arabic calligraphy and pictures of Mecca nearby got its marching orders from the city government and has slowly been dispersing throughout the city. Not much is left. To get to what's left of the Muslim area from the Zhengyi Lu roundabout, walk west past Chūnchéng Jiǔlóu (Spring City Hotel) and then bear left a half-block to a small alley.

Another **mosque** is nearby, wedged between Huguo Lu and Chongyun Jie, and is more

a historical landmark than place of active worship.

CHUANG KÙ (THE LOFT)

创库艺术主题社区

West of downtown in a disused factory district are a host of galleries of modern Chinese artists and photographers, along with a handful of restaurants and coffee shops (most rather pricey but worth a look-see for the artwork). The cornerstone of sorts is **TC/G Nordica** (诺地卡; Nuòdìkǎ; ☎ 411 4692; www.tcgnordica.com/en; 101 Xiba Lu; ☎ 5-11.30pm Mon, 1.30-11pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun), best described as a gallery-exhibition hall-cultural centre. There's even a relaxing restaurant with Scandinavian and Chinese food. (One founder was Swedish, another Chinese – hence the mix). Do check out Nordica's website for a full slate of performances and exhibitions; most weekends something is happening (though if you wish to eat, at times on Friday and Saturday evenings reservations are required).

Activities

The **Spring City Golf & Lake Resort** (春城湖畔度假村; Chūnchéng Húpán Dūjiàcūn; ☎ 767 1188; www.springcityresort.com), 48km from Kūnmíng on the northeastern shore of Lake Yangzong, is

arguably China's best golf course (can't wait to get furious letters from China's East Coast on that claim). Golf media absolutely gush over some of the signature holes. It features one championship 18-hole course designed by Jack Nicklaus and another designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr, as well as a five-star **resort** (s/d Y1270/1600, villas Y1800-2700) and water-sports centre. A round of 18 holes costs around US\$69/89 weekdays/weekends including cart and caddie if you are staying at the hotel, otherwise it's over double this (figure a cool US\$250). Club hire is an additional Y200. A one-way taxi from Kūnmíng costs around Y150.

There are plenty of sporting activities, including tennis, golf and boating, on offer at Haigeng Park (p237).

At the end of a hard day's sightseeing let the masseurs in front of Camellia Hotel (right; and many other locations throughout town) ease your aching limbs.

Tours

Several tour outfits cover Kūnmíng and its surrounding sights faster than public minibuses would, but be prepared to pay for them. They generally feature lots of sights most travellers find rather boring (including the ineluctable stopoffs for bathroom breaks in which the toilets just happen to sit at the far end of jade hawkers' corridors). Some tour operators refuse to take foreigners on their tours, claiming the language barrier causes too much trouble. When numbers allow, Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel (below) has tours.

More central sights like Yuantong Temple are just a short bicycle ride away – it hardly makes sense to join a tour to see them.

Mr Chen's Tours (☎ 318 8114; Room 3116, No 3 Bldg, Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Lu) can organise trips to almost anywhere you want to go, including flights and overland trips to Lhasa (see p233 for more details).

Sleeping

BUDGET

Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel (昆明青年大脚氏旅社; Kūnmíng Qīngnián Dǎjiāoshì Lǚshè; ☎ 410 3777; www.cloudland2004.com; cloudland2005@126.com; 23 Zhuantang Lu; 篆塘路23号; 6-/4-bed dm Y20/30; ☑) The newest of the city's hostels (run by a couple of oh-so-friendly inveterate travellers who know Yúnnán like the backs of

their hands), this place is absolutely charming with a staff that makes a tremendous effort for guests. Dorms are spanking new and comfortable; beds are soft and each comes with an individual locker. Free internet access and loads of extras – fresh cut flowers on the sinks! To get here from the train or long-distance bus station take city bus 64. Get off at the Yunnan Daily News stop (云南日报社站).

Hump (Tuófēng Kèzhàn; ☎ 364 0359; www.thehump hostel.com; Jinmabiji Sq, Jinbi Lu; 金碧路, 金马碧鸡广场; 8-bed dm Y25) Certainly seems like a logical budget option: dorms are enormous and come with individual lockers; there's a basketball court-sized common room and pool and Ping-Pong tables on the terrace; umpteen bars and discos are at your doorstep. What more do you need? Well, quiet for one. (Yeah, a mite thumpy at night.) The authorities also apparently keep a sharp eye on this place for rumoured heretofore bad behaviour, though it's not clear why.

Kunming Youth Hostel (Kūnmíng Guóji Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 517 5395; youthhostel.km@sohu.com; 94 Cuihu Lu; 翠湖路94号; dm Y25, d from Y80) Tucked along a lane beside the Zhengxie Hotel, right by Green Lake Park, the Kunming Youth Hostel is basic but clean and quiet. Dorms have a kind of institutional feel but the staff are friendly. It was slated for a makeover, so it may be a more relaxing environment by the time you read this.

Kūnhú Fāndiàn (☎ 314 3699; 202 Beijing Lu; 北京路202号; dm Y25, s & d Y128) Near the train and bus stations. A fair number of backpackers always end up here though note that the word on the street was that it was soon to close up shop or be renovated to garner another star or two. There are travel services on site and clean though beaten up old dorms. Singles are big but furnished with doll-sized beds – anyone over 1.6m will struggle getting comfortable. The hotel is two stops from the main train station on bus 2, 23 or 47, though it's easy enough to walk there.

Camellia Hotel (Cháhuā Bīngquǎn; ☎ 316 3000; fax 314 7033; www.kmcamelliahotel.com; 96 Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路96号; dm Y30, d Y188-288; ☑) This landmark budget option – long the only place backpackers would head for – is of the good news/bad news variety. The downside? Some grubby rooms on offer (though the toilets and showers are decent) and a staff trying (but not always successfully) not

to be weary of pesky budget travellers. But with travel services, bicycle hire, foreign exchange, reasonably priced laundry services, and a colossal breakfast buffet, it's all in all not a bad place to find yourself. To get here from the main train station, take bus 2 or 23 to Dongfeng Donglu, then change to bus 5 heading east and get off at the second stop.

MIDRANGE

Yúnda Bīngquǎn (Yunnan University Hotel; ☎ 503 3624; fax 514 8513; d from Y160; ☑) The university area – laden with foreign-student-centric restaurants, coffee shops, bookshops and the like – makes for a nice home base, and the standard doubles here are a good choice. Staff practically fall all over themselves to help. It's next to the university's west gate.

Míngdū Dàjiùdiàn (☎ 624 0666; fax 624 0898; 206 Baita Lu; 白塔路206号; s & d Y388, ste 688; ☑) A rarity in China – a hotel that seems to have given a modicum of thought to its design scheme. Rooms here are done up in a refreshing red-gold colour combo. Bathrooms are spacious and tidy save for the tubs. With decent amenities and service, if you get the usual discount, it's pretty good value.

TOP END

Kunming Hotel (Kūnmíng Fāndiàn; ☎ 316 2063; www.kunminghotel.com.cn; 52 Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路52号; s & d Y780, ste Y1419; ☑) Yet another rarity in China – a hotel that for more than a decade has garnered (quite justifiably) kudos from travellers for its superlative service and upkeep. It's a city-state-sized complex with everything you need and you won't do much better in town. Its most praised restaurant (one of a few) may be the one serving the cuisine of Cháozhōu (the coastal region in eastern Guǎngdōng – lots of veggies in light but delicious sauces).

Sakura Kunming (Kūnmíng Yīnghuā Jiùdiàn; ☎ 316 5888; 25 Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路25号; d from Y800; ☑) This radically revamped monster is opposite the Kunming Hotel; it's a needed step up from its previous incarnation as a fading Holiday Inn. It has some excellent restaurants (Thai and southwestern American-Mexican, along with a popular breakfast-lunch buffet), a Western-style pub, a small health club, pool, and a disco.

Greenland Hotel (Lǚzhōu Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 318 9999; www.greenlandhotel.com.cn; 80 Tuodong Lu; 拓东路80号; s & d incl breakfast from Y945; ste from Y1527; ☑)

On-the-spot attentive service and nicely appointed rooms are here. However, no room would really cut the mustard after would-be guests have wandered wide-eyed past a staggered fish-filled fountain on the way to the sparkling lobby.

Eating

Kūnmíng is home to all of Yúnnán's fabulous foods, especially in the snack line. Noodle shops will give you a bowl of rice noodles for around Y5 and a bewildering array of sauces with which to flavour the broth – most of them are hot and spicy. Noodles (rice or wheat) are absolutely the chief breakfast option, usually served in a meat broth with a chilli sauce. Everywhere you go in the province you'll find *pàrdu èrsī* (扒肉饵丝), basically interminably braised meat chunks laden atop noodles; toppings vary by shop but the best will have everything under the sun – even ground peanuts and fresh coriander (cilantro).

Regional specialities are *qìguōjī* (汽锅鸡; herb-infused chicken cooked in an earthenware steampot), *xuānwēi huǒtuǐ* (宣威火腿; Yúnnán ham), *guòqiáo mǐxiàn* (过桥米线; across-the-bridge noodles), *rǔbǐng* (乳饼; goat cheese) and various Muslim beef and mutton dishes. *Qìguōjī* is served in dark brown – or even rich purple – casserole pots from Jiànshuǐ County and is imbued with medicinal properties depending on the spices used; *chóngcǎo* (虫草; caterpillar fungus, or pseudo-ginseng) is one. Some travellers wax lyrical about toasted goat cheese – the cheese is actually quite bland and sticks to your teeth.

Gourmands may be interested in a whole banquet based on provincial fungi varieties, or 30 courses of cold mutton, not to mention fried grasshoppers or elephant trunk braised in soy sauce.

Do treat yourself to *mógú* (蘑菇; mushrooms) here. Yúnnán is blessed with infinite varieties, many rare and pricey in other provinces but delightfully common and dirt-cheap here. It's a bounty of 'shrooms come late spring and summer, but many are available year-round. Must try? The otherworldly *cháshùgū* (茶树菇; tea tree mushrooms) grow only in proximity to tea trees and are supposedly – we couldn't agree more – infused with their essence.

Zhènxíng Fāndiàn (Yunnan Typical Local Food Restaurant; cnr Baita Lu & Dongfeng Donglu; 白塔路与东风

ACROSS-THE-BRIDGE NOODLES 过桥米线

Yúnnán's best-known dish is across-the-bridge noodles. You are provided with a bowl of very hot soup (stewed with chicken, duck and spare ribs) on which a thin layer of oil is floating, along with a side dish of raw pork slivers (in classier places this might be chicken or fish), vegetables and egg, and a bowl of rice noodles. Diners place all of the ingredients quickly into the soup bowl, where they are cooked by the steamy broth. As the quote below proves, across-the-bridge noodles is the stuff of which fairy tales are made:

Once upon a time there was a scholar at the South Lake in Méngzi (Southern Yúnnán) who was attracted by the peace and quiet of an island there. He settled into a cottage on the island, in preparation for official examinations. His wife, meanwhile, had to cross a long wooden bridge over the lake to bring the bookworm his meals. The fodder was always cold in winter by the time she got to the study bower. Oversleeping one day, she made a curious discovery. She'd stewed a fat chicken and was puzzled to find the broth still hot, though it gave off no steam – the layer of oil on the surface had preserved the temperature of the broth. Subsequent experiments showed that she could cook the rest of the ingredients for her husband's meal in the hot broth after she crossed the bridge.

Prices generally vary from Y5 to Y15 depending on the side dishes. It's usually worth getting these, because with only one or two condiments the dish lacks zest.

东路交叉路口; dishes from Y5; ☎ 24hr) Come here for what China used to be like. No, not the food, which is exactly as the name suggests: local food done right in a simple atmosphere. Nah, it's the stonefaced (nay, utterly indifferent at times) service. A blast from the past for any old China hands.

White Pagoda Dai Restaurant (Báitā Dāiwèiting; 127 Shangyi Jie; 商义街127号; ☎ 317 2932; dishes from Y10; ☎ 9am-9pm) Dai cuisine moves north here, with a slew of fish dishes and, of course, standards such as pineapple sticky rice and spicy fish wrapped in bamboo shoots, all in a Bǎnnà-themed environment of bamboo and thatching.

Yuquanzhai Vegetarian Restaurant (Yúquánzhāi Cánting; Yuantong Jie; 圆通街; dishes from Y10; ㊄) Trust us – there is actually no meat in the dishes at this fabulous restaurant, but we know you're still going to write emails insisting there is. The menu – with English – is encyclopaedic, so feel free to ask for help (though there isn't much English spoken). It's across the road from Yuantong Temple.

Brothers Jiang (Jiāngshì Xiōngdì; Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路; noodles Y10-60) A local fave, this simple place has such good across-the-bridge noodles that there are now several branches throughout the city, most of which are filled to capacity at mealtimes. Pay upfront first at the cash register and make sure you get instructions on the eating process!

Salvador's (Sà'ěrwáduō Kāfēiguǎn; Wenhua Xiang; 文化巷; ☎ 822 5457; dishes

from Y15; ☎ early-late) Kūnmíng today is absolutely chock-a-block with Western-style cafés. Most are perfectly fine, but there's a reason this one is always filled. Outstanding coffee and a menu ranging from stick-to-your-ribs breakfast through more solid sustenance – even nod-worthy burritos.

Ma Ma Fu's 2 (Māmāfū Cánting; Baita Lu; 白塔路; dishes from Y15) This branch of the legendary Lijiāng café is right around the corner east of the Camellia Hotel (and there's a third branch now not far from the Wal-Mart, north of Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel). Chinese dishes are by far the best, but most people order Western fare like pizza and apple pie.

1910 La Gare du Sud (Huòchē Nánzhàn; ☎ 316 9486; dishes from Y20) Ensnared cosily in a neocolonial building down an alley south of Jinbi Lu, this place has luscious Yúnnán specialities done up in a classy but relaxed atmosphere. There's an English menu available.

Wei's Pizzeria (Hāhā Cánting; ☎ 316 6189; Tuodong Lu; 拓东路; ☎ 8.30am-9pm; pizzas from Y25, Chinese dishes from Y6) The granddaddy of Kūnmíng's Western-style cafés, down an alley off Tuodong Lu, Wei's has been a sanctuary for many a traveller for good reason: capacious interiors warmed by a wood-fired pizza oven, frosted beer steins, and outstanding food (Western and Chinese).

Hotpot Restaurant (Huòguō; Renmin Donglu; 人民东路) An absolute madhouse at peak mealtimes, you need to be very aggressive or very brave

to muscle your way through the throngs and eventually get fed at this restaurant. Nonetheless, with all the slick restaurant and eateries all over Kūnmíng these days, this is a breath of fresh air.

For self-catering try **Carrefour** (东风西路; Jiālèfú Chāoji Shìchāng; Dongfeng Xilu). This is a branch of the popular French supermarket chain. They're now in a duel with Wal-Mart (trust us, you'll find them too) so between the two you've got about eight floors of food to gorge yourself on.

Drinking

For laid-back atmosphere, the university area is where you want to be. Wenhua Xiang is a good place to start. Seemingly dozens of superloud bars at Jinmabiji Sq absolutely thump the night away. And for hardcore techno, outrageous prices and all around silliness, the Kundu Night Market along Xinwen Lu has dozens of discos frequented by the young, the rich and the (sometimes) weirdly dressed.

Other places to try:

Café de Camel (Luòtuō Kāfēiguǎn; Tuodong Lu; 拓东路; ☎ 9am-late) A legend started years ago by a Kūnmíng rock-and-roller (dunno if he's still in charge but the atmosphere is still cool), this restaurant-coffee shop doubles as a drinking den on weekends when tables are moved to one side and a DJ plays tunes until dawn.

Speakeasy (Shuōbā; Dongfeng Xilu) A great atmosphere here with a mix of expats and locals. It's not too pricey but

not a dive, and doesn't have much of a poseur quotient. It's down the stairs under the blue sign.

Shopping

Well, Kūnmíng isn't on any shopaholic's itinerary but it ain't a total wash. Yúnnán specialities are marble and batik from Dǎli, jade from Ruili, minority embroidery, musical instruments and spotted-brass utensils.

Other items that make good souvenirs: large bamboo water pipes for smoking angel-haired Yúnnán tobacco and local herbal medicines such as Yúnnán Bǎiyào (Yunnan White Medicine), which is a blend of over 100 herbs and is highly prized by Chinese throughout the world.

Yunnanese tea is also an excellent buy and comes in several varieties, from bowl-shaped bricks of smoked green tea called *tuóchá*, which have been around since at least Marco Polo's time, to leafy black tea that rivals some of India's best.

One teashop worth checking out is **Tian Fu Famous Teas** (Tiānfú Míngchá; cnr Shangyi Jie & Beijing Lu).

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Yunnan Airlines/CAAC (Yúnnán Hángkōng Gōngsī; ☎ 316 4270, 313 8562; Tuodong Lu; ☎ 24hr) issues tickets for any Chinese airline but the office only offers discounts on Yunnan Airlines flights. From 8pm to 8am buy your tickets from the small

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

The **Flower & Bird Market** (Huāniǎo Shìchāng; Tongdao Jie) has long been one of the more enjoyable and relaxing places to stroll in the city. It's also known as *lǎo jiē* (old street) and comprises several downtown blocks surrounded by buildings of immense, gleaming modernity and bustle. Flowers and birds most certainly aren't the main draw here anymore, though on weekends the chirping, yawping and cawing can still be heard a block or more away. This surreal hawkers' ghetto and its mazy neighbourhood walk of stalls is chock-full with flora and fauna (well, again, not so much of these anymore), endless curios, knick-knacks, and doo-dahs (the contents of someone's back hall, it seems, on more than one occasion), some occasionally fine rugs and handmade clothing; and a hell of a lot of weird stuff. (Kurt Cobain or KISS T-shirt? Hmmm.) And you can't help notice that the word 'jewellery' has somehow officially crept into the traditional 'bird and flower' name.

The highlight may lie one block west of the intersection of Guanghua Jie and the pedestrian-only Zhengyi Lu. Here in a creakingly old building is **Fú Lín Táng**, the city's oldest pharmacy. Yep, it's been dishing out the *sānqì* (the legendary Yunnanese cure-all root mixed into tea, which costs about Y20 to Y100 per gram) since 1857.

Ah yes, and 'antiques'. As you'll soon note, 'antiquing' here generally means pawing through layers of crap or fakes. For real antiques it's better to look in the privately run shops on Beijing Lu and Dongfeng Donglu.

ticket window on the left side of the building. Rates given here are posted rates – you rarely have to pay these outside of absolute peak periods. Going through travel agents is a good bet for discounts.

A good one-stop shop for booking flights is the **Sanye International Air Service** (Sānyè Guóji Hángkōng Fúwù Yóuxiàn Gōngsī; ☎ 353 0773; fax 354 3370; 66-68 Beijing Lu), next door to the long-distance bus station. The office deals with more than 20 international carriers and all the national ones.

Flights are scheduled to depart daily from Kūnmíng for Běijīng (Y1940), Chéngdū (Y830), Chóngqīng (Y840), Guǎngzhōu (Y1290), Guìyáng (Y570), Nánjīng (Y1680), Nánmíng (Y710), Shànghǎi (Y2030) and Shēnzhèn (Y1370), Qīngdǎo (Y1730) and Xī'ān (Y1100), among many others.

There is a thrice-weekly flight to Lhasa (Y1970), always via Shangri-la; expect fre-

quency to change often and unexpectedly, so plan ahead.

Within Yünnán province you can fly to Bǎoshān (Y640), Jīnghóng (Y780), Lǐjiāng (Y660), Mángshì/Déhóng (Y790), Xiàguān/Dàlǐ (Y520), and Shangri-la (Y770).

There are international flights from Kūnmíng flying to most major Asian cities including Hong Kong (Y2108, daily), Vientiane (Y985, Wednesday and Sunday) and Kuala Lumpur (Y2256). A new weekly flight to Osaka had also just been announced at the time of writing.

Foreign airline offices in Kūnmíng include the following:

Dragonair (Gānglóng Hángkōng; ☎ 356 1208, 356 1209; 2/F Kāihuá Guǎngchǎng, 157 Beijing Lu)

Lao Aviation (Lǎowō Hángkōng Gōngsī; Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Donglu)

Malaysia Airlines (Mǎlǎixīyà Hángkōng Gōngsī; ☎ 316 5888; Sakura Kunming, 25 Dongfeng Donglu) Office is

KŪNMÍNG BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Bǎoshān	171-202	7-8	4 daily	8am-9pm
Bǎoshān (sleeper)	142	11	2 daily	7.30pm, 8.30pm
Bīnchuān	77-104	6-8	5 daily	9am, 11am, 3pm, 7pm, 8pm
Chūxióng	36-41	3-4	half-hourly	7.40am-6pm
Dàlǐ	74-126	5-8	frequent	7.30am-7.30pm
Dàlǐ (sleeper)	95	9	2 daily	9pm, 9.30pm
Gējiù	64-77	3-4	hourly	8.40am-6.30pm
Jiànchuān	98-125	8	2 daily	8am, 7.30pm (sleeper)
Jiànshuǐ	50	3	half-hourly	7.30am-8pm
Jīnghóng	185-223	9	4 daily	9.30am, 6pm, 7.45pm, 8.30pm
Jīnghóng (sleeper)	165	10-11	half-hourly	4-8pm
Lǐjiāng	171	9	hourly	7.30am-7.30pm
Lǐjiāng (sleeper)	139	10-12	2 daily	8pm, 8.30pm
Liùkù	154	11	daily	6pm
Qiūbēi	68	6-7	5 daily	9am, 10.30am, noon, 2.30pm, 8.30pm
Ruǐlì	222	13	2 daily	10am, 6pm
Ruǐlì (sleeper)	209	15	daily	8pm
Shangri-la	142-161	13-15	1-3 daily	8am, 4.30pm, 6pm
Shangri-la (sleeper)	167	13-15	half-hourly	4-8.30pm
Shípíng	55	3-4	hourly	8am-5pm
Wénshān	86-110	6-7	4 daily	8.40am, 9.20am, 10.30am, 3.40pm
Yuányáng	73-82	6-7	4 daily	10.40am, noon, 7.30pm, 8pm

TRAINS FROM KŪNMÍNG

Destination	Cost (Y)	Train	Duration (hours)	Departs
Běijīng	558	T61	40	10.02pm
Chéngdū	215	K114	18	12.38pm
Dàlǐ	90	N987	9	11.26pm
Emei Town	196	K114	16	12.38pm
Guǎngzhōu	341	K363	25	10.40am
Guǐlín	230	T055	20	3.53pm
Nánmíng	175	K393	13½	7.03pm
Shànghǎi	502	K79	43	3.07pm
Xī'ān	334	K165	39	6.22pm

All prices listed are for a hard sleeper middle berth on the best (fastest and/or most comfortable) trains.

outside, on your right-hand side approaching the hotel entrance.

Thai Airways International (Tàiguó Guóji Hángkōng; ☎ 351 1515; 68 Beijing Lu) Next to the King World Hotel.

To Tibet

It's now possible to fly to Lhasa from Kūnmíng. However, the situation is the same as in Chéngdū and you must have the requisite permit and travel as part of a group. Mr Chen's Tour (p228) can sort you out with the necessary permits and sign you onto a tour. At the time of writing these packages cost around Y2750.

There are also flights from Shangri-la to Lhasa and it's recently become possible to travel overland from Shangri-la into Tibet (see p291). From Chéngdū Mr Chen can also organise overland travel to Tibet, although some travellers have reported his sales pitch to be better than his trips.

There are also trains to Tibet from Chéngdū for independent travel.

BUS

There seem to be buses leaving from everywhere in Kūnmíng and bus transport can be a little confusing at first. The long-distance bus station on Beijing Lu is the best place to organise bus tickets to almost anywhere in Yünnán or further afield.

Other stations are found all over the city, but if the main long-distance station doesn't have what you need, start with the east bus station or south bus station, each approximately 2km from the city centre.

Exceptions to this are more local destinations like Diān Chī or even southeastern Yünnán; see Around Kūnmíng p234 for more details on transport to individual attractions close to the city.

From the sleeper-bus stand closer to the train station you can get sleeper buses to most of the same destinations as the train. Buses tend to be older, so ticket prices are generally cheaper.

Buses to Shílín (Y30 to Y40, two hours, every 30 minutes, 8am to noon) leave from Kūnmíng's **bus station** (Beijing Lu), opposite the long-distance bus station. Make sure you don't get dragged onto one of the tourist buses, unless of course you want to spend the entire morning stopping off at various temples and market stalls en route.

TRAIN

You can buy train tickets up to 10 days in advance, which is good news because at peak times, especially public holidays, tickets sell out days ahead of departure.

Trains no longer serve Hèkǒu or anywhere else on the narrow-gauge railway that once served the southeast of the province, though China is working with neighbouring countries to agree on a once-and-for-all rail standard to start rejuvenating the network.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Buses 52 and 67 run between the centre of town and the airport. A taxi averages Y20, depending on where you're going.

GETTING TO VIETNAM

With the closing of the rail line, the most common way to get to Vietnam is by taking a bus from Kūnmíng to the border town of Hékou (Y119, 12 hours, 9.45am, 1.30pm, 7.30pm, 8.40pm) and then crossing. Note that some travellers have had their Lonely Planet guides confiscated by officials as they cross the border. We recommend you copy any essential details and cover your guide.

The border checkpoint on the Chinese side (☎ 0873-342 1655) is technically open from 8am to 11pm but don't bank on anything after 6pm.

BICYCLE

Many backpackers hotels and hostels rent bikes for around Y15 per day.

Fat Tyres Bike Shop (☎ 530 1755; 61 Qianju Jie; per day Y20) has a large stock of bicycles including some very good mountain bikes. It also organises Sunday morning bike rides – you need to make reservations ahead of time.

BUS

Bus 63 runs from the east bus station to Camellia Hotel and on to the main train station. Bus 23 runs from the north train station south down Beijing Lu to the main train station. Fares range from Y1 to Y4. The main city buses have no conductors and require exact change.

AROUND KŪNMÍNG

Wonderful sights lie within a 15km radius of Kūnmíng; sadly, however, local transport hasn't quite caught up with people's interest in visiting them. What is available is time-consuming, awkward and very, very crowded. There are few crossovers for combined touring, so it would take something like five return trips to see everything, which would consume three days or more.

Arranging a car and driver through your accommodation or seeing what tours your lodging offers is probably your best bet if you want to see everything fast.

If you don't have much time, the Bamboo Temple (Qióngzhú Sì) and Xī Shān (Western Hills) are probably the most interesting. Both have decent transport connections. Diān Chí (the southern end of the lake, particularly the southeast, is industrial.

a good map, hire a good bicycle and tour the area on two wheels (but be warned, there are some steep hills lurking out there...).

Bamboo Temple 箏竹寺

This temple (Qióngzhú Sì; admission Y10; ☎ 8am-6pm) is definitely one to be visited by sculptors as much as those interested in temple viewing.

Raised during the Tang dynasty, the temple nearly perished in a conflagration in the 15th century. Rebuilt, it wasn't truly restored until the late 19th century, when the abbot employed master Sichuanese sculptor Li Guangxiu and his apprentices to fashion 500 *luòhàn* (arhat; noble one). One wonders if he knew what he was getting himself into...

Because Li and his mates pretty much went gonzo in their excruciating, eight-year attempt to perfectly represent human existence in statuery, the result – a fascinating mish-mash of superb realism and head-scratching exaggerated surrealism – is stunning. How 'bout the 70-odd surfing Buddhas, riding the waves on a variety of mounts: blue dogs, giant crabs, shrimp, turtles and unicorns? That's got to be the highlight. The other realistic depictions resemble the impossible – done with the detail of a split-second photograph: a monk about to chomp into a large peach (the face contorted almost into a scream), a figure caught turning around to emphasise a discussion point, another about to clap two cymbals together, yet another cursing a pet monster. (And this is cool: count the *arhats* one by one to the right until you reach your age – that is the one that best details your inner self. Intriguing, isn't it?)

So lifelike are the sculptures that they were considered in bad taste by Li Guangxiu's contemporaries (some of whom no doubt appeared in caricature), and upon the project's completion he disappeared into thin air.

Unfortunately you have to make do with peering your head round the door as the hall has been closed to visitors to stop local tourists throwing coins at the statues – an act that is thought to bring them good luck (it obviously didn't work). If the temple is quiet when you visit (that's a funny thought) then friendly monks might be persuaded to let you in for a peek inside.

The temple is about 12km northwest of Kūnmíng. Minibuses (Y10, 30 minutes) leave when full from opposite the Yünnán

Fāndiàn from 7am. Minibuses return regularly to Kūnmíng. A taxi to the temple will cost around Y45.

Diān Chí 滇池

The shoreline of Diān Chí (Lake Dian), to the south of Kūnmíng, is dotted with settlements, farms and fishing enterprises; the western side is hilly, while the eastern side is flat country. The southern end of the lake, particularly the

southeast, is industrial. The lake is elongated – about 40km from north to south – and covers an area of 300 sq km. Plying the waters are *fānchuán* (pirate-sized junks with bamboo-battened canvas sails). It's mainly for scenic touring and hiking, and there are some fabulous aerial views from the ridges at Dragon Gate in Xī Shān; see below).

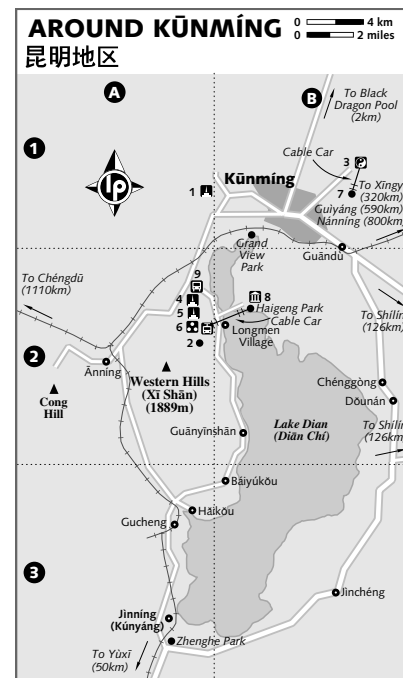
Grand View Park 大观公园

This park (Dàguān Gōngyuán; admission Y10) is at the northernmost tip of Diān Chí, 3km southwest of the city centre. It covers 60 hectares and includes a nursery, a children's playground, rowboats and pavilions. A Buddhist temple was originally constructed here in 1862. The **Grand View Tower** (Dàguān Lóu) provides good views. Its façades are inscribed with a 180-character poem by Qing poet Sun Ranweng, rapturously extolling the beauty of the lake.

Bus 4 runs to the park from Yuantong Temple via the city centre; bus 52 departs from near the Kunming Hotel. At the northeastern end of the park is a dock where you may be able to get a boat (Y5, 40 minutes) to Longmen Village (Lóngmén Cūn) and Haigeng Park (Hǎigēng Gōngyuán). From Longmen Village you can hike up the trail to Dragon Gate and Xī Shān, and catch a minibus back into town from near the summit at the Tomb of Nie Er. From Haigeng Park, take bus 44 to Kūnmíng's main train station.

Xī Shān 西山

Kunmingites like to give you the local creed: 'If you haven't seen Xī Shān, you haven't seen Kūnmíng'. And they have a point. Spread out across a long wedge of parkland on the western side of Diān Chí, Xī Shān (the Western Hills) make a perfectly lovely day trip, full of walking (some very steep sections), exploring and discovering all the temples and other cultural relics. Its hills are also called



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bamboo Temple 箏竹寺	1 A1
Dragon Gate 龙门	2 A2
Golden Temple 金殿	3 B1
Huating Temple 华亭寺	4 A2
Sānqīng Gé 三清阁	(see 6)
Taihua Temple 太华寺	5 A2
Tomb of Nie Er 聂耳墓	6 A2
World Horticultural Expo Garden 世界园艺博览园	7 B1
Yunnan Nationalities Museum 云南民族博物馆	8 B2

TRANSPORT

Gāoyáo Bus Station 高峣客运站	9 A2
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the 'Sleeping Beauty Hills', a reference to the undulating contours, which are thought to resemble a reclining woman with tresses of hair flowing into the sea. (This is certainly more of a draw than the original 'Sleeping Buddha Hills'!)

It's a steep approach from the north side. The hike from Gāoyáo bus station, at the foot of the hills, to Dragon Gate takes 2½ hours, though most people take a connecting bus from Gāoyáo to the top section, or take a minibus direct to the Tomb of Nie Er. It is also possible to cycle to the hills from the city centre in about an hour; to vary the trip,

THE LEGEND OF THE HILLS

The Chinese legend describing the creation of Xī Shān (Western Hills) is one of the most engaging and sad. Before they married, two young lovers who lived in Dragon Gate village at the foot of Luohan Mountain decided to chip stone from the mountain to form a dragon gate, emulating one in northern China.

For years the two toiled but just before completion, the man accidentally broke the tip of a calligraphy brush on a carving. Devastated, he leapt from the cliffs to his death. The young girl was so grief-stricken that her tears filled Diān Chí (Lake Dian). She lay down and turned to stone, forming the rest of Xī Shān.

consider doing the return route across the dikes of upper Diān Chí.

At the foot of the climb, about 15km from Kūnmíng, is **Huating Temple** (Huáting Sì; admission Y4), a country temple of the Nanzhao kingdom believed to have been constructed in the 11th century. It's one of the largest in the province and its numerous halls have more *arhats*.

The road from Huating Temple winds 2km from here up to the Ming dynasty **Taihua Temple** (Tāihuá Sì; admission Y3). The temple courtyard houses a fine collection of flowering trees, including magnolias and camellias.

Further along the road, near the minibus and cable car terminus, is the **Tomb of Nie Er** (Niè'ěr Zhǐmù; admission Y1). Nie Er (1912–36) was a talented Yúnnán musician who composed the national anthem of the People's Republic of China (PRC) before drowning in Japan en route to the Soviet Union for further training.

Sānqīng Gé, near the top of the mountain, was a country villa of a Yuan dynasty prince, and was later turned into a temple dedicated to the three main Taoist deities (*sānqīng* refers to the highest level of Taoist 'enlightenment').

From the tomb you can catch a **cable car** (one way/return Y15/30) if you want to skip the fairly steep ascent to the summit. Alternatively a tourist tram takes passengers up to the Dragon Gate for Y2.

Near the top of the mountain is **Dragon Gate** (Lóng Mén; admission Y30). That quote earlier about

the Western Hills has a second part: 'And if you haven't seen Lóng Mén, you haven't seen Xī Shān'. Again, there's some validity to this. This is a group of grottoes, sculptures, corridors and pavilions that were hacked from the cliff between 1781 and 1835 by a Taoist monk and coworkers, who must have been hanging up there by their fingertips. At least that's what the locals do when they visit, seeking out the most precarious perches for views of Diān Chí.

The tunnel along the outer cliff edge is so narrow that only one or two people can squeeze by at a time, so avoid public holidays and weekends! Entrance to the Dragon Gate area includes Sānqīng Gé. It's possible to walk up to the Dragon Gate along the cliff path and return via the back routes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses (one way/return Y10/20, one hour, 7.30am to 2pm) leave when full from opposite the Yúnnán Fàndiàn. The only trouble is you could be waiting for ages for the bus to fill up.

It's more reliable to use local buses: take bus 5 from the Kunming Hotel to the terminus at Liǎngjiāhé, and then change to bus 6, which will take you to Gāoyáo bus station at the foot of the hills. Minibuses (Y5) also leave from Liǎngjiāhé and drop passengers off at the Tomb of Nie Er.

To return to Kūnmíng take the bus or scramble down from the Dragon Gate area to the lakeside. Steps lead downhill a couple of hundred metres before Dragon Gate and the Sānqīng Gé area ticket office and end up in Longmen Village (Lóngmén Cūn), also known as Sānyì Cūn. When you reach the road, turn right and walk about 100m to a narrow spit of land leading across the lake. Continuing across the spit, you arrive at a narrow stretch of water and a small bridge. (You could also take the cable car across to Haigeng Park for Y30.) Walk through Haigeng Park's far entrance and catch bus 44 to Kūnmíng's main train station.

If you don't want to pay Y6 to cut through Haigeng Park, you'll have to walk 3km or so from the cable car to the entrance of the Yunnan Nationalities Village or take a taxi (Y10).

Alternatively, bus 33 runs along the western lake shore through Longmen Village, or you can take a boat from Grand View Park.

Yunnan Nationalities Museum 云南民族博物馆

On the northeastern side of the lake, the **Yunnan Nationalities Museum** (Yúnnán Mínzú Bówùguǎn) is worth a visit if you're interested in China's minority nationalities. Its halls display costumes, folk art, jewellery, handicrafts and musical instruments, as well as information – concerning social structure and popular festivals – on each of Yúnnán's 25 minority groups. Closed for renovations at the time of research, it will be reopened by the time you read this.

Golden Temple 金殿

Hidden amid a pine forest on Phoenix Song Mountain is **Golden Temple** (Jīn Diàn; admission Y20; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm), a Taoist temple – and actually made of bronze – that was the brainchild of General Wu Sangui. Wu was dispatched by the Manchus in 1659 to quell uprisings in the region but instead turned on the Manchus and set himself up as a rebel warlord, with the Golden Temple as his summer residence. The current structure dates back to 1671; the original Ming temple stood in the same spot but was carted off to Dàli. Out back, there's a 5m-high, 14-ton bell.

Bus 10 or 71 runs here from Kūnmíng's north train station or you can cycle. A cable car (one way/return Y15/25) runs from the temple to the World Horticultural Expo Garden.

World Horticultural Expo Garden

世界园艺博览园

This 218-hectare **garden complex** (Shìjiè Yuányi Bólänyuán; ☎ 501 2367; adult/student Y100/50; ☎ 8am–5pm, last entry at 4pm), about 10km northeast of Kūnmíng near the Golden Temple, was built in April 1999 for the World Horticultural Exposition. The gardens are a mix of pleasant Disney-style topiary work and strangely pointless exhibits left over from the expo; the place is worth a visit if you are interested in gardens and plants, otherwise give it a miss.

Take bus 10 to the terminal. A cable car (Y15) at the back of the gardens can take you to the Golden Temple.

Black Dragon Pool 黑龙潭

This is a rather mediocre **garden** (Hēilóng Tán; admission Y1), 11km north of Kūnmíng, with old cypresses, dull Taoist pavilions and no bubble in the springs. But the view of the surrounding mountains from the garden is inspiring.

Within walking distance is the **Kunming Botanical Institute**, where the flora collection might be of interest to specialists.

Take bus 9 from Kūnmíng's north train station.

Chénggōng County 呈贡县

This county (Chénggōng Xiàn) is an orchard region on the eastern side of Diān Chí. Flowers bloom year-round, with the 'flower tide' in January, February and March. This is the best time to visit, especially the diminutive Dòunán village nearby. Once one of Yúnnán's poorest villages, it now sells more than 400,000 sprays of flowers each day. The village's per capita income went from US\$13 to US\$415 in four years.

Many Western varieties of camellia, azalea, orchid and magnolia derive from southwestern Chinese varieties. They were introduced to the West by adventuring botanists who carted off samples in the 19th and 20th centuries. Azaleas are native to China; of the 800 varieties in the world, 650 are found in Yúnnán.

During the **Spring Festival** (January/February) a profusion of blooms can be found at temple sites in and around Kūnmíng, notably the temples of Tàihuá, Huáting, Yuántóng and the Golden Temple, as well as at Black Dragon Pool.

Take bus 5 heading east to the terminus at Júhuācūn, and change there for bus 12 to Chénggōng.

Zhenghe Park 郑和公园

At the southwest corner of Diān Chí, this park (Zhènghé Gōngyuán) commemorates the Ming dynasty navigator Zheng He (known as Admiral Cheng Ho outside China). A mausoleum here holds tablets with descriptions of his life and works. Zheng He, a Muslim, made seven voyages to more than 30 Asian and African countries in the 15th century, in command of a huge imperial fleet. For a bit more detail, see the Hui, p227.

From Xiaoximen bus station take the bus to Jīnníng; the park is on a hill overlooking the town.

Haigeng Park

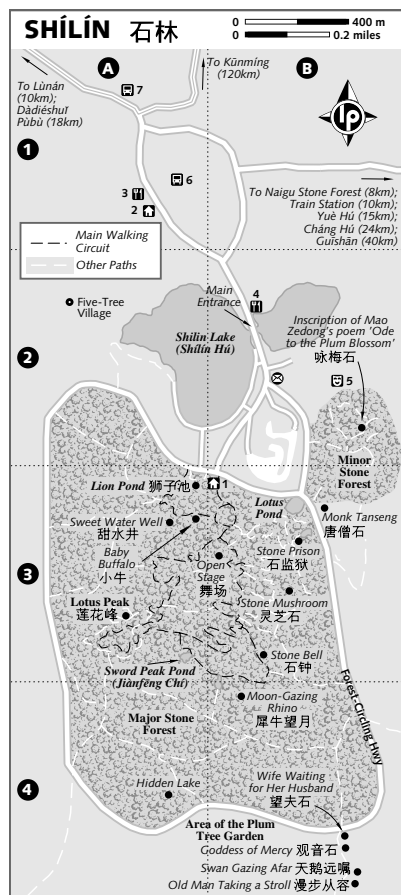
There are plenty of sporting activities at Haigeng Park – tennis costs Y20/30 per hour in the daytime/evening during the week, and Y24/43 per hour on the weekend. Racket hire

costs Y15. There's a driving range with all equipment for hire, and expensive boats available for hire.

SHÍLÍN 石林

☎ 0871

A conglomeration of utterly bizarre but stunning karst geology and a hell of a lot of tourists, this is equally one of the most visited but also most derided attractions in the province. **Shílín** (Stone Forest; ☎ 771 0316; admission Y140) is a massive collection of grey limestone pillars about 120km southeast of Kùnmíng. Split and eroded by wind and rainwater, the tallest of the pillars reaches 30m high. Legend has it that the immortals smashed a mountain into a labyrinth for lovers seeking privacy.



Of-bemoaned by travellers, Shílín is packed to the gills, every single rock is affixed with a lame name that reads like the purple prose of a high-schooler, and it's pricey. Yet its idyllic, secluded walks are within 2km of the centre and by sunset or moonlight the place becomes otherworldly.

Villages within walking distance from here are populated by the Sani branch of the Yi people and have all been tackily redone for tourists. Less caricaturelike is Lùnán (opposite).

Shílín can easily be done as a day trip from Kùnmíng.

Sleeping & Eating

Shílín doesn't have much in the way of accommodation and what it does offer is overpriced.

Stone Forest International Youth Hostel (Shílín Guóji Qīngnián Lǚquǎn; ☎ 771 0768; dm Y50, s & d small Y120, big Y140) Directly opposite where the buses drop you off, this hostel offers the cleanest, best-value accommodation you will find in Shílín.

Shílín Bishūyuán Bīnguǎn (☎ 771 1088; d/tr Y300/360) If you're looking to splash out then the rooms here are quiet and have some good views over Shílín, but you still don't get a lot for your money.

Several restaurants next to the bus stop specialise in duck roasted in extremely hot clay ovens with pine needles. A whole duck costs Y40 to Y50 and takes about 20 minutes to cook – have the restaurant staff put a beer in the freezer and it'll be just right when the duck comes out.

Near the main entrance is a cluster of restaurants and snack bars that are open from dawn to dusk. Check all prices before you order, as overcharging is not uncommon.

SLEEPING	
Shílín Bishūyuán Bīnguǎn 石林避暑园宾馆	1 B3
Stone Forest International Youth Hostel 石林国际青年旅馆	2 A1
EATING	
Restaurants 餐厅饭店	3 A1
Restaurants 餐厅饭店	4 B2
ENTERTAINMENT	
Stage 舞台	5 B2
TRANSPORT	
Bus Stop 客运站	6 A1
Horse Carts 马车	(see 7)
Minibuses to Lùnán 到路南的中巴车	7 A1

Entertainment

Sani song-and-dance evenings are organised when there are enough tourists. Shows normally start at around 8pm at a stage next to the Minor Stone Forest but there are sometimes extra performances, so ask at the hotels; performances are free.

There are also Sani performances during the day between 2pm and 3pm. During the **Torch Festival** (July/August), wrestling, bull-fighting, singing and dancing is held at a natural outdoor amphitheatre by Hidden Lake at the back of Shílín.

Getting There & Away

See p233 for details on travelling from Kùnmíng's bus station to Shílín. In the afternoon there are minibuses waiting at Shílín's car park, leaving when full (Y20).

Minibuses run between Lùnán and Shílín regularly (Y1, 10 minutes). At Shílín, they leave from a stand on the main road. Horse carts cost Y15.

AROUND SHÍLÍN

If you want to get away from the tourist crowds, there are less-visited sights around Shílín.

Larger (300-hectare) rock formations called the **Naigu Stone Forest** (乃古石林; Nǎigǔ Shílín; admission Y40), with karst caves, a large waterfall and an impressive causeway of black volcanic blocks (*nǎigǔ* means 'black' in the local Yi dialect), are 8km northeast of the Major Stone Forest. The easiest way to get to Nǎigǔ is to take a microbus (Y15 one way) or more relaxing horse cart (Y10 return, 45 minutes) from the main road.

Another day-trip option is the impressive **Dadiéshui Pùbù** (大叠水瀑布; Dadiéshui Waterfall; admission Y20), 18km from the Stone Forest. It's a modest 30m wide but it seems larger than its 88m height. Hire a microbus for Y30 from Lùnán, otherwise walk 2km southwest of Lùnán centre, turning left when you see a blue sign, to a small bus stand where minibuses leave for Bǎnqiáo (Y5) and then change for a less frequent microbus – unless it's high season let's say very infrequent – to the falls.

Other places include **Yuè Hú** (月湖; Moon Lake), 15km away and accessible only by hired minibus, and **Cháng Hú** (长湖; Long Lake; admission Y10). To get to Cháng Hú take a bus bound for Guishān or Lúxī, and get off at Wéizé, from where it's 1.5km to the lake.

Guishān (圭山), around 40km to the south-east, is an interesting town that has an excellent Sunday market full of Sani traders and is unfrequented by foreign tourists. There is also a remarkable blue church in town that looks like it's been lifted straight from St Petersburg.

LÙNÁN 路南

☎ 0871

Lùnán is a small market town about 10km from the Stone Forest. It's not worth making a special effort to visit, but if you do go, try to catch a market day (Wednesday or Saturday), when Lùnán becomes a colossal jam of donkeys, horse carts and bicycles. The streets are packed with produce, poultry and wares, and Sani women are dressed in their finest.

Sleeping & Eating

Kèxīng Bīnguǎn (客星宾馆; ☎ 779 6725; tr per person Y10, r Y50) On the southwest side of the roundabout is this good budget bet, though it's in need of renovation.

Stone Forest Hotel (石林大酒店; Shílín Dàjiǔdiàn; ☎ 779 8888; fax 779 4887; r incl breakfast Y228-368 + 15%) This high-profile place is right on the central roundabout and has three-star rooms, including transfer from the train station.

There are plenty of restaurants on the street next to the Stone Forest Hotel. The **Línlǎowū Fǎndiàn** (林老屋饭店; dishes from Y4) serves good food at bargain prices and there's plenty of fresh produce to point at.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses shuttle between Lùnán and Shílín regularly (Y3, 10 minutes). In Lùnán, flag down anything heading north of the main traffic circle.

Minibuses to Kùnmíng (Y14, 1½ hours) depart regularly from the west side of Lùnán's main roundabout until around 7pm. For Lúxī (Y12, two hours), catch a through bus at the southeast corner of the roundabout.

JǐUXIANG 九乡

The **Jiuxiang Scenic Area** (九乡风景区; Jiùxiāng Fēngjǐngqū; admission to caves Y30) consists of a series of caves, river gorges and waterfalls. Most visitors take a short boat trip through the Yincuixiá (Yincui Gorge) and then follow walkways into Jīnghúxiá (Jinghu Gorge). After that you enter the main cave hall and proceed through the complex, passing the

Cixiong Waterfall and some impressive limestone terraces. From the exit of the cave a cable car (Y15) takes visitors back to the entrance. There are several other caves in the area. Note that the admission price for this site may be raised, as it's become quite popular.

The area is best visited as a day trip but if you want to spend the night, the **Jiǔxiāng Bīnguǎn** (九乡宾馆; s & d Y80) has decent rooms.

In Yiliáng, 38km away, the **Shuānglǔ Dàjiǔdiàn** (双鲁酒馆; r Y80-260) on the main highway is a good bet if you can't get back to Kūnmíng. Rooms cost Y260 but may be discounted to as low as Y80.

To get to Jiǔxiāng take a minibus from Kūnmíng's east bus station to Yiliáng (Y8, one hour) and then another from Yiliáng bus station or the road junction to Jiǔxiāng (Y5, one hour). Tour buses occasionally lurk near the Kūnmíng railway station, though the vast majority of them are simply headed for Shílín. If you track one down, the two-hour ride costs Y15.

CHǔXIÓNG 楚雄

☎ 0878 / pop 99,840

Chǔxióng, 185km and two-plus hours west of Kūnmíng, is one of the towns that nearly every Yünnán visitor grazes transportationally as they whiz toward Dàlì, but it's actually not a bad place to hop off for an afternoon of wandering.

Visitors are most intrigued by its heady population of the Yi; indeed, it is the centre of the Yi minority in the county, of which Chǔxióng is the seat. Originally called Elu in the Yi language, the city is also known today as Lùchéng (Deer City). The Yi account for nearly 20% of the city's 400,000 residents; for

more information on the Yi see p434. Other minorities with significant populations here include Hui, Bai and Miao.

Chǔxióng's city sights include **Longjiang Park** (龙江公园) in the northern section of the city and **Elu Park** (峨碌公园) in the western part of town. The latter has good views.

Just south of town is the 25m-high **Yan Pagoda** (雁塔), based on the design of the Dayan Pagoda of Xi'an and dating from the Ming dynasty. It collapsed in an earthquake during the Qing dynasty and was rebuilt.

Buses (Y36 to Y41, three to four hours) depart every 30 minutes from 7.40am to 6pm.

The day trains between Xiàguān and Kūnmíng are the only ones that get you in at a decent time. They depart 8.55am from Kūnmíng and 9.35am from Xiàguān (Y20 hard seat from Kūnmíng) and take 3½ hours.

AROUND CHǔXIÓNG

Zìxī Shān 紫溪山

This isolated peak in a 12km-long range is 20km west of town. The source of much of Chǔxióng's drinking water, it's a picturesque place famous for the lush red colour of its ubiquitous camellia trees, the cultivation of which dates back more than a millennium (one tree in the park is in fact over 600 years old). The prime minister of the kingdom of Dàlì used the mountains as a retreat. When he retired, he built nearly 100 temples, pavilions and nunneries, but earthquakes and wars have left only one – Ziding Si.

Dàyáo 大姚

About 100km northwest of Chǔxióng is Dàyáo. The feature of this town is one of the oddest-looking pagodas you'll see – the **Bái**

Tǎ (白塔; White Pagoda) to the west in Bǎitǎ Shān. It's hard to ignore its phallic shape, designed to resemble a mallet used to strike an inverted Buddhist bell. The base is an octagonal *samara* (representation of the recurrence of life) while the upper level, reaching 18m, is organised into three structures. The pagoda has a small chink in it, rumoured to be for once-hidden treasure, dislodged during an earthquake.

Dàyáo Zhāodàisù (大姚招待所; ☎ 0878-621 3799; s & d from Y40) is typical of the very cheap local lodging options. Absolutely no frills whatsoever but decent. At least better than any other of the el cheapo options around.

It's easiest to catch a bus here from Chǔxióng, but Kūnmíng's main bus station does have one clunker of a bus per day (Y60, five hours, 7.30am) that heads there.

Shíyáng 石羊

A **Confucian Temple** (孔庙; Kǒng Miào) dating from the Ming dynasty is 33km northwest of Dàyáo, in Shíyáng. It's famed for having supposedly the only intact, original bronze temple statue of Confucius on mainland China. Built in 1709, it is impressive – 2.3m high and 2.5m wide.

Rúguī Fàndiàn (如归饭店; ☎ 0878-637 1089; s & d from Y50) gets most travellers – not that there are that many. Still, it's about as good as it's gonna get here. You can find a few other flop-house guesthouses in Shíyáng with beds from around Y20.

It might be a good idea to go to Xiàguān and/or Dàlì via Bīnchuān from Dàyáo if you don't want to slog all the way back to Chǔxióng or Kūnmíng. Bus times are unpredictable.

Yuanmou Earth Forest (Yuánmóu Tǔlín)

元谋土林

Located about 100km north of Chǔxióng, Yuánmóu is the site of famed anthropological excavations and this unique landform. Bizarrely striated sand and clay spires and pillars rise from the flat plains – some formations are so huge they actually resemble cathedrals – and they're given the usual weird names. It's one of Yünnán's "Three Forests" along with Kūnmíng's Stone Forest and Xīshuāngbǎnnà's Rain Forest. This freak geology can be found around the region, but is best at Bānguò, northwest of Yuánmóu, near the Dongsha River.

There is nowhere to stay at the forest, but Yuánmóu itself has quite a few options with beds from Y15 to Y20.

Buses depart from Yuánmóu for the Earth Forest. In summer you usually do the last leg in a donkey cart. Though Yuánmóu is technically in Chǔxióng County, it's just as close to Kūnmíng and is probably most easily accessed from the capital on any Chéngdū-bound train (hard seat Y35, 4½ hours). Buses don't run all the way to Chéngdū from here. You can also combine it with a trip to Hēijǐng via the train.

HĒIJǐNG 黑井

☎ 0878 / pop 16,155

Most folks' fancies certainly aren't tickled by the thought of visiting an old salt capital. Yet this town approximately 100km northwest of Kūnmíng (it's technically under the administrative umbrella of Chǔxióng County) is, despite the pains in getting there, one of the more perfectly preserved old towns in Yünnán. Even if the history of salt doesn't interest you, it's got outstanding extant buildings, cool old alleys, and you can even do some sweaty hiking to temples in the hills.

Hēijǐng has been a major producer of the white gold for over a millennium, reaching its zenith during the Ming dynasty, when it accounted for nearly 70% of the imperial salt. The Communist Revolution was pretty much the worst thing that could have happened to the town. After the merchants were driven out and/or executed, salt revenues fell in a big way.

Sights

When you arrive at the gate, you're hit up for the Y30 admission price, which includes entrance to the village, a guide (Chinese only for the nonce), **Dàlóng Cí** (大龙祠; the clan meeting hall) and **Gǔyán Fāng** (古盐坊; an old salt production facility).

This latter site is one of quite a few salt-centric sites in the village and is well worth a visit. You may be surprised how fascinating salt – its history, production, and biochemical necessity – really can be. Seriously. Here you can even pick up a salt souvenir. Earring? Pendant? Don't laugh – cooks from Kūnmíng actually come (or send a gofer) to pick up compressed bowl-shaped blocks of it; apparently, salt is affected geographically like wine – who knew? To get there, just

DIGGING IN THE DIRT

Budding palaeontologists and anthropologists will love the Chǔxióng region. Near Lǔfēng, in the region's east, bone fragments of palaeo-anthropoids two to eight million years old have been unearthed. Over 120 dinosaurs dating back up to 200 million years have also been found here in what is thought to be one of the world's largest dinosaur burial grounds, and a dinosaur museum has recently been established.

The famed Yuanmou Man was unearthed near Shangnabang village in Yuánmóu, bordering Chǔxióng County, dating Yünnán's earliest humanlike ancestor to 1.7 million years ago. A large-scale excavation near the Long River unearthed the Dadunzi Neolithic Village. In March 2001 fossilised tusk fragments from a stegodon, or sabre-toothed elephant, were unearthed in nearby Wēishān County.

Most Chinese museums have bronze drums and other relics from nearby Wanjiaba's 2500-year-old eastern Zhou excavation sites. Many of these sites can be visited, though transport is tricky.

walk east from the village's centre for 15 or so minutes.

Numerous other historical sights relating to sodium chloride are in or near the village, including absolutely pervasive old wells; if you wish, the best one to visit is the **Black Cow Well** (黑牛井; Hēiniú Jǐng) just south of Dǎlóng Cǐ.

Salt aside, just ambling the old flagstone alleys is worth the trip. Wonderfully preserved architecture is everywhere. Temples, ancient gates, old bridges, and on and on. A Ming dynasty **Confucian Temple** (孔庙; Kǒng Miào) is now a primary school. Yeah, the kids love it when a foreigner comes poking around, but there isn't much remaining of the temple itself.

You could also strike off into the hills rising behind the village. Walking northwest from the village centre you'll have to ask for directions to the steps leading up to **Feilai Temple** (飞来寺; Fēilái Sì), not much of a sight but with grand vistas of the river valley. (You can get to the top in 30 minutes or so.) From here you can head east along a ridgeline past a statue and then loop back down into town.

Head in on Sunday; the town has a great market.

Sleeping

One outstanding historic building, now an inn, is the must-stay spot in town, but there are a couple of other preserved courtyard structures that also take guests. Beyond that, more and more standard small family inns and guesthouses are also springing up, most of which have basic singles/doubles with bath from Y40.

Wang Family Courtyard (王家大院; Wángjiā Dàyuàn; ☎ 489 0358; s & d from Y80) A traditional home with courtyard that has been turned into an inn. This one is much more basic than the one listed next, but it's still got decent rooms for the money, especially given the discounts it usually offers.

Wu Family Courtyard (武家大院; Wǔjiā Dàyuàn; ☎ 489 0358; common tr Y120, s/d/ste Y120/180/220) This is the top place in town for good reason. This was the erstwhile home of salt magnate Wu Weiyang, who was executed by the communists in 1949 despite the fact that he had ransomed himself in perpetuity with a cache of silver in 1936. 'Home' may be an understatement – it once had 99 rooms and a propitious 108 entrances. It isn't nearly as

large now but it still holds a huge number of guests and the courtyard and grounds are gorgeous. Discounts are usual outside of summer.

Eating

Salt is the key, no? So you simply must try the *yánmèn jī* (盐焗鸡), chicken that's been soaked and braised epically long in a Hěijīng salt brine. You might also wish to try *huī dòufu* (灰豆腐), a kind of smoky beancurd, or *niúgānbā* (牛干巴), a local dried and salt-cured beef.

The village doesn't have all that many eateries, but along the one 'main' drag you'll find a handful, including the modest but clean **Jingxing Fandiàn** (井兴饭店; ☎ 489 0506; dishes from Y5), a good place to sample *yánmèn jī*.

Getting There & Away

Your best option from Kūnmíng, sadly, is a slow-ass local train, No 6162 headed for Pánzhīhuā (攀枝花), which leaves the capital at 7.43am and doesn't arrive in Hěijīng until 1.35pm. At least it only costs Y12. The return train passes through at 12.05pm.

If you want to head west you could switch trains in Guǎngtōng but you're looking at an overnight. From Guǎngtōng you could get on an evening train to Chéngdū but seats are scarce, let alone sleeper berths.

Buses to/from Hěijīng are a pain in the butt, requiring at least one change – again, Chūxióng is your best option. A half-dozen buses per day (Y12, two hours) run between Chūxióng and Hěijīng.

After getting off the train, indulge in the Y2 horse-cart rides – it's a long slog to the village if you're carrying a bag. From the entrance gate, you can easily walk to the village centre.

XIAGUĀN 下关

☎ 0872 / pop 136,000

An important FYI: Xiaguān, the capital of Dàli prefecture, is also referred to as Dàli on buses, maps and tickets. So when you hop off your bus, you're probably not in the 'real' Dàli (Dàli Gǔchéng) around 15km north. (Don't worry – if you try to book a hotel room here, you'll probably get asked, uncertainly, if you're sure about that.)

Xiaguān lies at the southern tip of Erhai Lake (Ērhǎi Hú), about 328km west of Kūnmíng. It was once an important staging post on the Burma Road and is still a key



INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行 1 B2
Public Security Bureau 公安局 2 B1

SLEEPING

Keyun Fandiàn 客饭店 3 B2
Xiaguān Binguǎn 下关宾馆 4 B2
Xiaguān Fandiàn 下关饭店 5 C2

TRANSPORT

Bus Station 汽车客运站 6 C2
Long-Distance Bus Station 长途客运站 7 B2

centre for transport in northwest Yunnan. There is no reason to stay in Xiaguān, you only need to come here in order to catch a bus or train.

To go straight to Dàli, upon arriving in Xiaguān, turn left out of the long-distance bus station, and left again at the first intersection. Just up from the corner is the station for local bus 4, which runs to the real Dàli (Y1.5, 30 minutes) until around 8pm. Bus 8 also runs from the centre of Xiaguān to Dàli's west gate. If you want to be sure, ask for Dàli Gǔchéng (Dali Old City). Both buses make loads of stops along the way, so it's a good way to catch the sights along the west side of Erhai Lake.

Information

The regional **Public Security Bureau** (PSB; Gōngānjú; 21 Tianbao Jie; ☎ 8-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) handles all visa extensions for Xiaguān and Dàli. The **Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Jianshe Donglu) changes money and travellers cheques and has an ATM that accepts all major credit cards.

Sights

As far as sights go, there are not many here, yet **Erhai Park** (Ērhǎi Gōngyuán) does have some worthy vistas of Erhai Lake and surrounding hills. You can reach the park on foot or by motor tricycle for around Y3. Bus 6 goes to the park from the centre of town.

Travel agents around the bus station also sell tickets for day trips up and down Erhai Lake, taking in all the major sights. Prices for the all-day tours start at Y80.

South of the Xi'er River, along Tianbao Jie, is Tianbao Gōngyuán (Tianbao Park), home to the usual brick pathways, old men with birdcages, retiree women exercising, and nary a belching bus in earshot. Most come here for the repaired tombs of the **Pit of 10,000 War Victims**.

The Tang dynasty emperor Tianbao sent wave after wave of troops here in attacks on the Nanzhao kingdom but they were wiped out each time. One general purportedly drowned himself in shame and his spirit haunts a cave on Xieyang Peak west of town (a temple here was built to give it refuge). A park has grown around the peak and it has good views of Xiaguān.

SNAKE-BONE PAGODA (SHÉGǔ Tǎ) 蛇骨塔

Good views from here, some 3km north of Xiaguān in Yangping village at the base of Ma'er Peak, but an even better tale. The pagoda was raised in memory of a legendary Bai man who strapped knives to his body and allowed a boa constrictor dragon terrorising Erhai Lake to

devour him, which killed the beast. Just south of here, at the base of Xieyang Peak, is **Bàoling Si**, which houses a statue of the local hero and the God of the White Dragon King he killed.

XIAGUAN HOT SPRING 下关温泉

Southwest of Xiàguān, a few kilometres in the suburbs, is this hot spring (Xiàguā Wēnquán) in the Si'er River valley. A small 'resort' with marble bathtubs below waterfalls has been built.

Sleeping

Some travellers stay a night in Xiàguān to catch an early bus from the long-distance bus station, but it's not strictly necessary as buses start from Dàlǐ to Xiàguān around 6.30am. Accommodation in Xiàguān is generally overpriced and midrange, though an excess of hotels at least means you can generally negotiate a pretty good deal, at least in the mid- to top-end places.

Kèyuan Fāndiàn (☎ 212 5286; s & d ¥60-120, s/d/tr without bathroom ¥30/50/60; 🚽) Right next to the main bus station, this place has dirt-cheap rooms with common bathroom and slightly better, though smallish, rooms with private bathroom. Don't expect much but at least the staff are somewhat familiar with foreign guests trying to live on the cheap.

Xiàguān Fāndiàn (Xiaguan Hotel; ☎ 216 1018; 58 Jian-she Lu; 建设路58号; s & d ¥100-168; 🚽) East of the main bus station, this fading place is still not a bad choice. The opposite of the typical lobby-is-better-than-the-rooms, here the lobby is grim but the rooms aren't bad, particularly if you can score the usual discount down to ¥80 or so.

Xiàguān Bīnguǎn (☎ 217 4933; 1 Renmin Lu; 人民路1号; s & d ¥150-288; 🚽) Almost directly opposite the main bus station is this option. Though it continually tries to remodel itself into glitz, it still is just better than most other midrange places in town.

Měidēng Dàjiǔdiàn (美登大酒店; ☎ 213 8999; Cangshan Lu, Middle Section; 苍山路中段; s & d ¥400-580; 🚽) This is one of the best luxury options. A bright lobby atrium leads into the 700-room complex with swimming pool, exercise gym, and restaurant with Chinese and Bai foods.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Xiàguān's airport is 15km from town. The Yunnan Airlines ticket office is inconveniently located near the train station. There are no public buses to the airport; taxis cost ¥50 from Xiàguān or ¥80 from Dàlǐ. There are three flights daily to Kūnmíng (¥430) and one to Guǎngzhōu (¥1540).

BUS

Xiàguān has five bus stations, which throws some travellers. Luckily, the two main ones are both on the same side of the street, approximately two blocks apart. You might get dropped off at either one. Both have departures throughout the province, so if the long-distance bus station doesn't have a good departure time for you, wander over to the other one.

For Shangri-la (¥50 to ¥60, eight to nine hours, every 20 minutes from 6.20am to 8pm) and local destinations you need to

catch your bus from the north bus station. Minibuses to Lijiāng also run regularly from Xiàguān.

To get to Jiànchuān (¥20, 3½ hours) buses run mostly from the north bus station every 15 minutes from 6.30am to 5pm though a few also leave from the main bus station.

Also from the north station but not the main station you can get buses to Bīnchuān for Jízú Shān. (A third downtown station near the traffic roundabout east of the main bus station also has buses there.)

To get to Wēishān you'll have to slog down to the miniscule south bus station via bus 12 (or a ¥8 taxi ride); it's opposite the Kunrui Hotel, near the expressway to Kūnmíng.

Tickets for nearly all destinations can be booked in Dàlǐ.

TRAIN

Four overnight sleeper trains (hard sleeper berths ¥67 to ¥95) leave Kūnmíng's main train station at 9.25pm, 10.36pm, 11pm and 11.30pm, all arriving in Xiàguān between 5.30am and 8.05am. One day train departs at 8.55am and arrives at 3.54pm; it's cheaper than the night train. Returning to Kūnmíng, trains leave Xiàguān at 8pm, 8.50pm, 9.30pm and 10.20pm. The day train leaves Xiàguān at 9.35am.

Bus 1 goes to the train station from the centre of town.

JÍZÚ SHĀN 鸡足山

Packed with temples and pagodas, **Jízú Shān** (Chicken-Foot Mountain; admission ¥60) is a major attraction for Buddhist pilgrims – both Chinese and Tibetan.

At the time of the Qing dynasty there were approximately 100 temples on the mountain and somewhere in the vicinity of 5000 resident monks. The Cultural Revolution's anarchic assault on the traditional past did away with much that was of interest on the mountain, although renovation work on the temples has been going on since 1979.

Today it's estimated more than 150,000 tourists and pilgrims clamber up the mountain every year to watch the sun rise. Jīndīng, the Golden Summit, is at a cool 3240m so make sure to bring warm clothing.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Sights along the way include **Zhusheng Temple** (祝圣寺; Zhùshèng Sì), the most important

temple on the mountain, about an hour's walk up from the bus stop at Shāzhǐ.

Just before the last ascent is the **Magnificent Head Gate** (华首门; Huáshǒu Mén). At the summit is **Lengyan Pagoda** (楞严塔; Lèngyán Tǎ), a 13-tier Tang dynasty pagoda that was restored in 1927.

A popular option for making the ascent is to hire a pony. Travellers who have done the trip claim it's a lot of fun. A **cable car** (admission ¥30) to the summit is a good way to cheat, though the ride only starts halfway up.

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation is available at the base of the mountain, about halfway up and on the summit. Prices average from ¥20 to ¥30 per bed. Food gets fairly expensive once you reach the summit so you may want to consider bringing some of your own. There is basic accommodation at **Golden Summit Temple** (金顶寺; Jīndǐng Sì), next to the pagoda – a sleeping bag might be a good idea at this altitude.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Xiàguān's north bus station or the bus station a few blocks east of the main bus station take a bus to Bīnchuān (¥11, two hours), from where you'll have to change for a bus or minibus to Shāzhǐ at the foot of the mountain (¥10, one hour).

On the way to Bīnchuān consider a stopover in **Zhōuchéng** (周城), once the administrative centre of the area and another of the important salt capitals. You can check out a 15th-century temple (with a Confucian temple added to it in the 17th century for good measure), ancient bridge and some residual old architecture.

WĒISHĀN 巍山

☎ 0872 / pop 20,670

Some 55km or so south of Xiàguān, Wēishān is the heart of a region populated by the Hui and the Yi. The town was once the nucleus of the powerful Nanzhao kingdom, and from here the Hui rebel Du Wenxiu led an army in revolt against the Qing in the 19th century. Today it's a charming small town with old architecture and strollworthy flagstone streets.

Orientation

The town's central point is the unmistakable **Gōngcháng Lóu** (拱长楼; Gongchang Tower). North and south of here are pedestrian zones.

XIAGUAN BUS TIMETABLE

Buses from Xiàguān's long-distance bus station:

Destination	Price (¥)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Bāoshān	48-58	2½	daily	10.30am
Jiànchuān	20	3½	every 15 min	6.30am-5pm
Jīnghóng	170	17	3 daily	noon, 2pm, 7.30pm
Kūnmíng	90-126	7	every 40 min	7.50am-7pm
Lijiāng	41-58	3	5 daily	8.30am, 10am, 2pm, 4pm, 7pm
Mángshì (Lùxi)	98	6-8	1 daily	6pm
Nínglàng	48	8	daily	8pm
Ruǐlǐ	117-131	10-12	2 daily	8.30am, 8.20pm
Téngchōng	85	6	2 daily	10am, 1pm
Yúnlóng	29	3½	every 50 min	7am-4.30pm

To the east five to 10 minutes is the bus station and the road to/from Xiàguān.

Information

No banks can help in town, so stock up in Dàli before you come. **China Post** 中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Weicheng Xilu; ☎ 8am-8pm) is just north of the corner of Xixin Jie, about a 10-minute walk west of the bus station. For internet at Y2 per hour, try the café on Weicheng Xilu, located just north of the post office on the opposite side of the street, or the one on Xixin Jie, a couple minutes' walk south.

Sights

Just wandering is all you'll need to do. Besides Gongchang Tower, two other (more modest) historic tower structures are in back alleys a bit north of the bus station. South from Gongchang Tower another 100m, after passing under **Xinggong Lou** (星拱楼; Xinggong Tower) you'll come to **Menghua Old Home** (蒙化老家; Ménghuà Lǎojiā; admission Y6; ☎ 9am-evening), the town's best preserved slice of architecture. Surrounding a Ming (with Qing additions) compound are rooms filled with the original inhabitants' belongings and other historical artefacts.

Sleeping

Wēishān has loads of options.

Wēishān Bīnguǎn (巍山宾馆; ☎ 0872-612 2655; 52 Dongxin Jie; 东新街52号; d Y40-160; 📶) This government-run place has the cheapest rooms. The lowest-priced ones are actually not that bad. It's a five-minute walk west of the bus station, close to the centre of town.

Yunxi Hotel (云溪会馆; Yúnxi Huìguǎn; ☎ 0872-612 5866; Dongxin Jie; 东新街; d/tr Y120/150; 📶) Not the cheapest in town but, as it had just opened two weeks prior to our visit, it has smashing fresh rooms (the bathrooms alone are larger than most hotel rooms!) and very friendly staff. Best of all – discounts to around Y60 make it a steal. It's just a hop and skip west of the bus station.

Eating & Drinking

There are quite literally no restaurants in this town other than of the cubbyhole variety. Not a problem, as they're all good. Head north or south of Gongchang Tower to find most of them. Our fave has no name (seriously!) but it's not far south of the tower; it's run by a friendly family. Wherever you are you may

see people indulging in a local Yi specialty, baked tea.

Oddly, you'll find a couple of trying-to-be-trendy bars here, including the Hǎntáng Jiǔbā (汉唐酒吧), along Ming Jie (明街) north of Gongchang Tower; a beer will be around Y15 at least.

Getting There & Away

Xiàguān's south bus station has buses (Y11, two hours) to Wēishān from 6am to 6pm.

AROUND WĒISHĀN

Wēibǎo Shān 巍宝山

Most tourists to Wēishān – not that there are all that many – are headed for the eminently worthy **Wēibǎo Shān** (Weibao Mountain; admission Y50), about 10km south of town, claimed to be the birthplace of the Nanzhao kingdom. It's a relatively easy hike to all two dozen temples and structures on the mountain (which peaks at around 2500m). During the Ming and Qing dynasties it was the zenith of China's Taoism and you'll find some superb Taoist murals; the most significant are at **Wénchāng Gōng** (文昌宫; Wenchang Palace; No 3 on your entrance ticket) and **Changchun Cave** (长春洞; Chángchūn Dòng; No 1). Along the way you can also espy 50 species of fauna including white pheasant and flying mouse (and the tallest camellia tree in China). Birders in particular go gaga over the mountain and, in fact, the entire county, a node on an international birding flyway.

There is no lodging at the mountain, because it's easy enough to get there from Wēishān.

To get to the mountain from Wēishān you can wait – interminably at times – for shared microvans to leave from a block west of the bus station. If you want to leave straight away, it's easier to just haggle a driver down to around Y40; for Y50 he'll wait there for you.

YÚNLÓNG 云龙

☎ 0872 / pop 8800

Around 150km northwest of Xiàguān and halfway to the Nu Jiang Region, Yúnlong lies nestled in among the Nu and Yun mountain ranges, populated by more than half a dozen ethnic groups including the Bai, Yi, Miao, Hui, Dai, Lisu and Acang. Most of the press you come across regarding the region mentions an awful lot of mining, but don't let this dissuade a visit. The entire county's scenery – particularly to the north and to the west of the town – can be spectacular; rolling clouds

formed from secondary evaporation impelled the name Yúnlong (literally, 'Cloud Dragon'). In the mountains throughout the county are literally dozens of caves, 'heavenly lakes' and hot springs (along with a lot of interesting ancient bridges). Trouble is, most of these sights are nearly impossible to get to on public transport without flagging something down.

Don't despair, within a handful of kilometres are a couple of outstanding sights: A naturally formed Yin-Yang figure and, further on, a fascinating millennium-old Bai village.

Orientation

Yúnlong has but a dozen streets and you can cover it in an hour or so. The Bi River (泚江; Bǐ Jiāng) runs along the west side of town north to south (with one tributary splitting off east to west) and everything is referenced to it. The bus station is in the south end of town. Bear left out of the bus station, follow the river, and it'll take you towards almost everything you need.

MAPS

The lovely map on the bus station wall is the only one you'll find – and its street names don't match those on the actual streets!

Information

Most services are found north of the bus station on Renmin Lu.

Agricultural Bank of China (中国农业银行; Zhōngguó Nóngyè Yínháng; Renmin Lu) They'll smile but be unable to help; stock up on cash before you get here.

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Renmin Lu) Just west of the PSB.

China Telecom (中国电信; Zhōngguó Diànxìn; Hushan Lu) Exit the bus station and head east 50m; it's on the left.

Jísù Wǎngbā (极速网吧; Jisu Internet Café; Wenbi Lu; per hr Y2) Opposite the Bijiāng Bīnguǎn (right).

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōngānjú; Renmin Lu; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) Unable to help with visa extensions but nice enough anyway.

Sights

If you've got some time to kill, just north of the bus station bearing to the left (before you cross the bridge) sits modestly proud **Panlong Temple** (潘龙寺; Pānlóng Sì), which was shut tight when we showed up.

In the dramatic eeries above the temple sits the town's sentinel **pagoda**, flanked by a **pavilion**. It's a tougher slog to get there than it looks, but the views are grand. In fact,

much of the town is ringed by similar heights and could make for a great day or two of exploring.

Sleeping & Eating

You'll have hardly any problem finding a cheap place to lay your head for the night in Yúnlong.

Ténglóng Bīnguǎn (腾龙宾馆; ☎ 552 2015; Wenbi Lu; 文笔路; s & d from Y40; 📶) It certainly doesn't seem like much, with a somewhat riotous canteen-style dining hall next to the reception and faded paint in the hallways. But the rooms themselves are actually perfectly fine and the staff quite helpful.

Bijiāng Bīnguǎn (泚江宾馆; ☎ 552 1462; Wenbi Lu; 文笔路; s & d from Y80; 📶) If you can snag the usual discount down to Y50 (they gave us a suite for this) this is a steal. Everything (usually) works and there's nary a cigarette burn in the carpet.

Yúnlong Bīnguǎn (云龙宾馆; ☎ 552 4928; Hushan Lu; 虎山路; s & d Y80-280; 📶) This hotel around 100m east of the bus station is where you'll be led if you stumble off a bus. Spacious compound and attempts at staff professionalism but rooms are the same as everywhere else. You can expect a standard room discounted to around Y60.

For eating, you'll notice an absence of any actual eateries. No problem. Simply walk east from the bus station along Hushan Lu, cross over the bridge and you'll see the town's impressive and laudable 'riverwalk', a flower-shrouded pathway along the dry bed of a Bi River tributary. It isn't a bad stroll, and for most of it you'll find the town's only real eateries – all simple holes-in-the-wall with standard Chinese fare, a few Muslim places, and, careful now, more than one that sells dog (狗肉; gǒuròu; Cantonese, *gauyeuk*). To say 'I don't want to eat dog meat' in Mandarin, it's: *Wǒ bù yào chī gǒu ròu* (我不要吃狗肉).

Getting There & Away

If you're heading for Liùkù in the Nujiang Valley (p297), you'll first have to get on one of two early morning buses for Cáojiàn (漕涧), at the far west end of the Dàli prefecture. From there you'll have to hike uphill one block from where the bus drops you off, turn right (east) and head about 10 more minutes to the highway running through town. From here you can flag down any number of buses

YÚNLÓNG BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Bāoshān	35	5	daily	8.20am
Jiānchuān	32	5	daily	8am
Kūnmíng	139	8-9	daily	6pm
Xiàguān	29	3½	16 daily	7am-3pm
Yōngpíng	16	3	2 daily	9.40am & 14.30pm

(Y13 to Y15, one to two hours) as they pass through. The bumpy and circuitous ride from Yúnlóng (Y22, four hours, 7.30am and 10am) along narrow county roads is a butt-killer, but damn it can be lovely in stretches!

AROUND YÚNLÓNG

Nuòdèng 诺邓

You'll hear much of the 'thousand-year-old village' around these parts, and it refers to this lovely anachronistic hamlet with one of the highest concentrations of Bai in Yúnnán. Nuòdèng, around 7km northwest of Yúnlóng, is unquestionably the highlight to any visit to the area. Ponies and donkeys huff and clop up cool narrow flagstone streets amid buildings which seemingly haven't changed a whole lot since they went up during the Ming and Qing dynasties. A Bai populace indeed – you'll hardly hear Mandarin, let alone English here. Among the myriad architecture you'll find temples, weathered but still proud gates, a Confucian temple now used as a school, ancient burial spots, and the most unretouched Bai courtyards of anywhere in Yúnnán.

And salt. Along with Hēijīng (p241), this village was one of the epicentres of the crucial salt trade. The old Tea Horse Trail (see p277) ponies were lugging not just leafy riches but also white gold as they headed for Tibet, Burma and India. Oh, and the millennial moniker is a bit misleading: the first salt well was set up here as far back as the Han dynasty in the 2nd century AD.

SIGHTS

Entering the village from Yúnlóng, you cross the river and hit the first of the town's many **salt wells**. Grubby today, perhaps, but it was once the lifeblood of dynastic ambition.

Ascending from here you start into your own personal architectural tour. The paths narrow and lead into a wondrous labyrinth of

more than 100 ancient dwellings. The village's **salt administration buildings** have got most of the exterior touch ups, not to mention the only English signage you'll see; the interiors, however, are sadly bare. But it's really the nameless dwellings – yeah, they still contain folks living with their chickens with drying peppers everywhere – that make the trip worthwhile. You'll likely be invited in to nose around a few places. Just remember to be polite and not get too animated with the camera.

Of the two shouldn't-be-missed historical spots in the village, first up comes the town's **Confucian Temple**, now home to a primary school. The kids'll eat up a visit from you, even as the teachers try to keep them from getting distracted by the *lǎowài* (foreigners). Further uphill is the grand old **Yuhuang Pavilion** (玉皇阁; Yùhuáng Gé), built in the 16th century and then rebuilt in the late Qing dynasty after it burned down.

SLEEPING

Gúcūn Chìzhùdiàn (古村吃住店; ☎ 552 5146; per bed Y10) Smack in the centre of the village, this shop-guesthouse (look for the place with the maps on the wall) doubles as a favourite tea-drinking spot for locals, who linger and slurp their *chá* (tea) in the shade of a big ol' tree. No frills to be sure but the beds and wash facilities are clean.

Fùjiǎ Liúfāngyuàn (复甲留芳苑; ☎ 552 5032; per bed Y15) At one of the highest points of the village, this original Bai courtyard building is now a cosy little inn-museum run by simply wondrous proprietors who are charming and solicitous. They'll likely pour loads of tea into you and give you a tour of the rooms containing lots of memorabilia and artefacts of the previous owners. More than one traveller has wound up lingering for a week, just wandering about the hills and exploring the old buildings.

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(Continued from page 248)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Yúnlóng, it's an easy and occasionally picturesque 7km walk to Nuòdèng: follow the river. From the bus station, bear left and walk north along the river. After 100m continue walking past a gas station on your right. After another 100m the road suddenly splits three ways; go the middle route (there will be a white-tiled building in the centre). Near the 2.5km point, you'll pass (but won't likely notice) Tàijítǔ (below). Note also that at the 3.5km point you'll see a sign with English pointing you to the village. Sadly, the arrow is pointing *the wrong way* (back to Yúnlóng)!

A three-wheeled motorcycle taxi ride there is around Y20.

Tàijítǔ 太极图

While waltzing along the Bi River towards Nuòdèng, you'll walk right past this amazing coincidence of nature and not even realise it. Or, even if you know it's there, from the ground you can hardly appreciate it.

This is where nature really can seem to be messing with you. The Bi River here is forced into a serpentine roll, and the result, seen from above, is a remarkable naturally formed Yin-Yang symbol. When the weather is right – cooler nights and warmer days, especially November through January according to locals – the mists here are preternaturally lovely. Best photo-op times are mid to late afternoon.

To get to the pavilion at the prime viewing point, you could theoretically hike the seven or so kilometres. The trouble is, it's a long, tedious slog uphill along a gravel road with endless switchbacks. (The rise is only 300m, but it seems like a lot more.) If you're up for it, at the gas station in town head west across the bridge. About 50m after you see a sign saying '天池 22km' go left and up a stone road and start the trek.

Or, more easily, take a three-wheeled motorcycle for Y20.

DÀLÌ 大理

☎ 0872 / pop approx 40,000

Ah, Dàli. Just say the name and watch old China hands grin, thinking of the first of Yúnnán's (nay, China's) backpacker sanctuaries decades ago. Yet today Dàli finds itself getting slagged by quite a few travellers. 'Touristy' has

become a cliché in backpacker discussions and online forums for both Dàli and Lijiang and the former is in a losing battle for the hearts and minds of travellers.

Yup, expect a constant friendly invasion of tourists clambering off tour-group buses, way too many souvenir shops, some misguided renovations of streets and structures, and uninterested guesthouse staff – the usual pitfalls of a town gone famous.

Then again, so what? It's still in a stunning location sandwiched between mountains and Erhai Lake and there are still endless fascinating possibilities for exploring and getting to know the region's Bai culture – seriously, if you can't find something to do here, you've got other problems. Just keep wandering the alleys to find your own nook, hike the trails above the town, get on a boat on Erhai Lake or, better, get your hands on a bike and get out of town.

History

Dàli lies on the western edge of Erhai Lake at an altitude of 1900m, with imposing 4000m-tall Cāng Shān (Jade Green Mountains) behind it. For much of the five centuries in which Yúnnán governed its own affairs, Dàli was the centre of operations, and the old city still retains a historical atmosphere that is hard to come by in other parts of China.

The main inhabitants of the region are the Bai, who number about 1.5 million. The Bai people have long-established roots in the Erhai Lake region, and are thought to have settled the area some 3000 years ago. In the early 8th century they grouped together and succeeded in defeating the Tang Imperial Army before establishing the Nanzhao kingdom.

The kingdom exerted considerable influence throughout southwest China and even, to a lesser degree, Southeast Asia, since it controlled upper Burma for much of the 9th century. This later established Dàli as an end node on the famed Burma Road. In the mid-13th century it fell before the invincible Mongol hordes of Kublai Khan.

The influx of Chinese tour groups is changing Dàli's character. The southern part of town has been radically renovated to create a new 'old Dàli', complete with original gates and renovated city walls. Fuxing Lu is now lined with shops catering to Chinese tourists led around by guides dressed up in Bai costumes.

Temple (Jingui Si) on the shore of Erhai Lake. The final day involves walking – or, occasionally, staggering, or cheating by getting in a horse cart – back to Dàlì by way of Majiuyi Temple.

Torch Festival (Huǒbǎ Jié) Held on the 24th day of the sixth lunar month (normally July), this festival is held throughout Yünnán and is always grand (a ready-made superb photo op if you've got the right lens and film). Flaming torches are paraded at night through homes and fields. Other events include fireworks displays (which go on ad infinitum) and deliriously fun-to-watch dragon-boat racing.

Sleeping

During peak summer months you should brace yourself for a long slog about town in search of a bed, and burnt-out guesthouse staff.

Friends Guesthouse (Dàlì Gúchéng Sānyóu Kèzhàn; ☎ 266 2888; friendsinn@hotmail.com; 1 Wenxian Lu; 文獻路1号; dm Y10, s & d Y50-80) Counting your yuán? Then head to this cheery longtime stand-by. For the price, have an open mind regarding upkeep.

No 3 Guesthouse (Disān Zhāodàisù; ☎ 266 4941; Huguo Lu; 护国路; dm Y20; 📺) A fab staff buzzes about, new wooden furniture fills the rooms with a pleasant pine-like smell, each bunk has a bamboo curtain for privacy, and facilities are immaculate.

MCA Guesthouse (☎ 267 3666; mcahouse@hotmail.com; Wenxian Lu; 文獻路; dm Y20, s/d Y100/120; 📺) Dorms and, well, pretty much everything sport lovely touches like wall art, hardwood floors, and furniture that's actually pleasant to look at; it's almost as if someone cares. Standard rooms have commanding lake views; or you may just wish to loll around the garden and pond. You can also book overland trips to Tibet leaving from Shangri-la here (see p291).

Lühéyuàn Qīngnián Lǚshè (☎ 267 0701; 415 Renmin Lu; 人民路415号; dm Y20, s & d Y100-200; 📺) Not much like it in town. Along with loads of extras, each room was designed by local artists and it shows – let's call it funky chic. You'll find a handful of other extras and attitude – of the good sort.

Tibetan Lodge (Dàlì Gúchéng Qīngnián Lǚguǎn; ☎ 266 4177; tibetan_lodge@yahoo.com; 58 Renmin Lu; 人民路58号; s/family ste Y60/160; 📺) The regular rooms here are a bit cramped (more than necessary space is taken up by those damned unavoidable TVs) but the family suites – ground-floor twins for kids and comfy lofts

for parents – make it worthwhile if you have littl'uns.

Jim's Peace Hotel (Jímǔ Héping Jiúdiàn; www.china-travel.nl; ☎ 267 7824; 13 Yuxiu Lu; 玉秀路中段13号; d Y200; 📺) Newly opened by a Dàlì longtimer, rooms are both sleek and cosy. There's a garden, a roof-top terrace and restaurant and bar below.

If you want the original, **Jim's Tibetan Guesthouse** (Jímǔ Zàngshì Jiúdiàn; ☎ 267 1822; 63 Boai Lu; 博爱路63号; s & d incl breakfast Y140-200) is still going strong nearby, and you have to check out the great food and company here. Travel services and tours can be booked at both.

Eating

Dàlì eateries seem to open almost weekly; and some close just as quickly. Bai food makes use of local flora and fauna – many of which are unrecognisable. However, there are a few things you will most definitely come across. *Ēr kuài* (饵块) are flattened and toasted rice 'cakes' with an assortment of toppings (or plain); these snacks are also found province-wide. 'Milk fan' (乳扇; *rǔshàn*) may not sound appetising, but this 'aired' yogurt/milk mixture (it ends up as a long, thin sheet) is a local specialty and is often fried or melted atop other foods – this is distinct from *rùbǐng* (乳饼; goat cheese), which is often the sort of cubed cheese you'll get with your tomatoes on salads. Given Erhai Lake's proximity, fish are unsurprisingly a mainstay of most menus. Try *shāguō yú* (沙锅鱼), a claypot fish casserole/stew made from salted Erhai Lake carp – as a Bai touch, magnolia petals might be added.

Bamboo Café (Zìzhúwū; ☎ 267 1898; 71 Renmin Lu; 人民路71号; dishes from Y5) Dimly lit and relaxing, this solid place seems to have one of the densest menus you'll find around – the world in a synopsis – but the local faves like Bai fish (Y25) are a great introduction to the local cuisine.

Yunnan Café & Bar (Yúnnán Kǎféiguǎn & Jiǔbā; Huguo Lu; 护国路; dishes from Y5) This town stalwart has always been raved about for its pizza, but you pretty much can't go wrong. The welcoming proprietors really make it special. The breakfasts are well worth the price, especially the Tibetan version (Y18).

Marley's Café (Mǎlì Kǎféiguǎn; ☎ 267 6651; 105 Boai Lu; 博爱路105号; dishes Y5-25) Marley's has always been a cornerstone of the town; now away from the Huguo Lu throngs, it's airier and

more relaxing. Well-done food, great service, helpful advice. Check out the Bai banquet on Sunday nights (reserve early).

Tibet Café (Xìzàng Kǎféi; ☎ 266 2391; 42 Huguo Lu; dishes from Y10) A hang-out and thus a good place to eavesdrop or just ask around about what's new, it's also got a solid mix of Tibetan, local and Western food. It's amazingly decorated; you'll feel like royalty sitting in the group dining area. Perhaps the best reason to frequent the place is its pursuits for sustainable development in the Tibetan Kham region.

Jim's Peace Café (Jímǔ Héping Cǎnting; ☎ 267 1822; jimsguesthouse@hotmail.com; 63 Boai Lu; 博爱路63号) Folks have always come here as much for laid-back Jim as for his great rooms and food. Still, the food is tops. The Tibetan banquet (Y30, minimum four people) in this café is not to be missed, especially when washed down with his 'No 1 special'. See also Jim's Tibetan Guesthouse (opposite).

Drinking

The Western-style restaurants mentioned earlier double as bars. Also worth trying is the **Birdbar** (Niǎobā; ☎ 266 1843; 22 Renmin Lu; 人民路22号), an off-the-main-drag watering hole with a pool table.

Shopping

Huguo Lu has become a smaller version of Bangkok's Khao San Rd. Dàlì is famous for its marble and for blue-and-white batik printed on cotton and silk. A lot of the batik is still made in Dàlì, and hidden behind many of the shopfronts sit vast vats of blue dye – it's worth asking around at some of the shops to see if you can have a look at how the batik is made. Most of the 'silver' jewellery sold in Dàlì is really brass. Occasionally it actually is silver, although this will be reflected in the price.

Most shopkeepers can also make clothes to your specifications – which will come as a relief when you see some of the items of ready-made clothing on offer.

Bargain. Firmly but politely. For those roving salespeople badgering you incessantly, don't feel bad for paying one-fifth of their asking price – that's what locals advise. For marble from street sellers, 40% to 50% is fair. In shops, two-thirds of the price is average. And don't fall for any 'expert' opinions; go back later on your own and deal.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport at nearby Xiàguān means Dàlì is a mere 45 minutes' flying time from Künmíng (see p244). A taxi from Dàlì to the airport will cost Y60-Y80 (depending on whether or not the driver thinks you know it's only worth Y60). Alternatively, you can take a bus to Xiàguān and pick up a taxi from there (Y50).

BUS

The golden rule for getting to Dàlì by bus is to find out in advance whether your bus is for Dàlì or Xiàguān. Many buses advertised to Dàlì only go as far as Xiàguān. Coming from Lijiāng, Xiàguān-bound buses stop at the eastern end of Dàlì, let passengers off, then continue to their final destination, from which it's a 20-minute walk to the main guesthouses.

For information on getting to Dàlì from Künmíng, see p233.

From the bus stop near the West Gate in Dàlì there are daily buses to Shangri-la (Y50, eight hours, every 30 minutes from 7.30am to 11am and 7.20pm, 8pm, 8.30pm) and express buses to Künmíng (Y106, 9.30am, 10.30am, 4.30pm and 9pm). A slow bus for Künmíng also leaves daily at 8am (Y65). Buses to Lijiāng (Y30 to Y50, every 30 minutes, 7.30am to 7.20pm) also leave from here.

A bus leaves for Shāpíng every Monday morning (Y5, one hour, 9.30am) for the market. At all other times, local buses run regularly to Shāpíng, Xìzhōu and other local destinations from opposite the bus station in Dàlì.

TRAIN

Probably the most popular means of getting to Dàlì is the overnight sleeper train from Künmíng to Xiàguān (hard sleeper Y93). For more details see p245. Bus 8 runs from Dàlì to Xiàguān's train station.

Getting Around

From Dàlì, a taxi to Xiàguān airport takes 45 minutes and costs around Y80; to Xiàguān's train station it costs Y30.

Bikes are the best way to get around (Y10 per day). Most of the guesthouses and several other places on Boai Lu rent bikes.

Bus 4 runs between Dàlì and central Xiàguān (Y1.50, 30 minutes) every 15 minutes from 6.30am, which means that unless your bus leaves Xiàguān earlier than 7.30am you won't have to stay the night there.

AROUND DÀLǐ Markets

Usually markets follow the lunar calendar, but shrewd local operators have coopted it into a regular scheme so that tourists have a market to go to nearly every day of the week. See p264 for information on the Monday Shāping market. Markets also take place in Shuāngláng (Tuesday), Shābā (Wednesday), Yòusuó (Friday; the largest in Yünnán) and Jiāngwēi (Saturday). Xìzhōu and Zhōuchéng have daily morning and afternoon markets respectively.

Wàsè also has a popular market every five days with trading from 9am to 4.30pm.

Most cafés and hotels in Dàlǐ offer tours or can arrange transportation to markets for around Y150 for a half day.

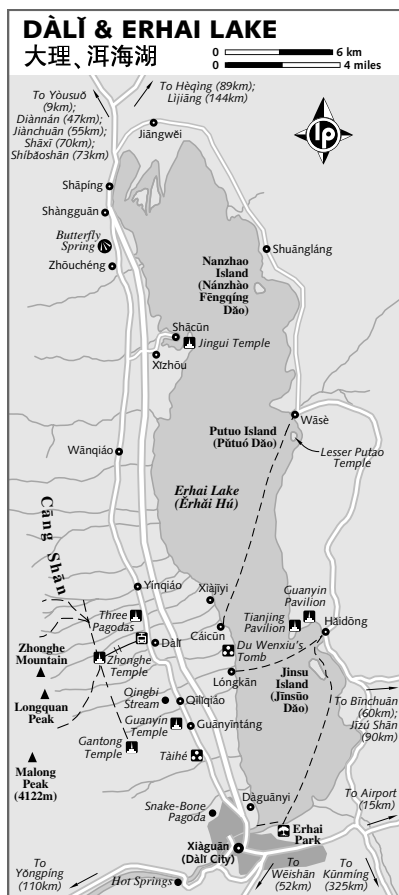
Erhai Lake 洱海湖

At the risk of exaggerative excess, this lake (Ērhǎi Hú; Ear-Shaped Lake) has always seemed to have some mystical power to it. Why else would everyone spend so much time cycling around it or ferrying across it? Or just paddling with a local fisher? The seventh-biggest freshwater lake in China at 1973m above sea level and covering 250 sq km, this lake is dotted with trails perfect for bike rides and villages to visit. It's a 50-minute walk from town or a 10-minute downhill jaunt on a bike. Along the way you'll come across funky old residual residential areas and probably get sidetracked there...

What to do, what to do. A great bike trip is from Dàlǐ to Shāping and it can be done in a day. Though the lakeside road may seem the most picturesque, it is too busy and congested to enjoy and you're better off on the secondary road, just to the west of the lakeside expressway. Stop in small villages along the way to buy food and water and you too, like legions before you, will stumble across a forlorn temple or splendid village vista.

Alternately, Cǎicūn is a pleasant little lakeside village east of Dàlǐ (Y2 on minibus 2) that has a nice local feel to it, as well as the cosy **Darling Harbour Inn** (s & d Y80), with a lovely setting amid camellias; it has a good lounge for relaxing too and the owner speaks some English.

From the village there are regular ferries to Wàsè (Y3 to Y5) on the other side of the lake, famed for its market (see above) and for its



traditional alleys. Plenty of locals take their bikes over. The village also has a few pleasant places to stay.

Ferries crisscross the lake at various points, so there could be some scope for extended touring. Close to Wàsè are **Pútuo Dǎo** (Putuo Island; admission to the cave Y12; around Y1 on ferry) and **Lesser Putuo Temple** (Xiǎopūtuo Sì), set on an extremely photogenic rocky outcrop that is said to have been created by a Bodhisattva (one worthy of nirvana but who remains on earth to help others attain enlightenment) who forgot to finish a bridge between the two islands.

On the eastern shore of Erhai Lake are two temples which couldn't be more different from each other. The somewhat garish

white-tiled **Tianjing Pavilion** (Tiānjīng Gé; admission Y5), also known as the Laotai Temple, wrapped in strings of gargantuan Christmas tree lights, is on a high spot with magnificent views of the lake, especially when the sun shines. Look for the fresco in the ceiling.

On the other side of the bulbous promontory and literally decaying in the weeds amid munching cattle is the better-known **Guanyin Pavilion** (Guānyīn Gé), also known as the Luoquan Temple. According to legend, this was the place where the clandestine lover of a Nanzhao princess was turned into a stone donkey by a master when the princess defied her father's arranged marriage.

Private boat owners at Cǎicūn offer return trips to Hǎidōng for about Y100 for the boat.

Just south of the two temples is tiny Jinsuo Island (Jīnsūo Dǎo), a canoe-shaped rock 800m by 2000m. It draws tourists mostly for its **Dragon Jade Palace** (admission incl guide Y12), a subterranean network of caves packed with the over-the-top kitsch that is tourist caving in China. Otherwise, just wander around the island through some fairly traditional alleys. After disembarking from your boat (fare Y1), follow the storefronts to the left, and then right on the first alley. You'll come to a small temple and home to a senior citizen centre where old men thwap their plastic checkers around.

North of all the hoopla around Hǎidōng is **Nánzhào Fēngqíng Dǎo** (Nanzhao Island; admission Y22), which has a 7m-high white Buddha and some fairly nice walking trails. It's just a short hop south of **Shuāngláng** village, a fishing hot spot also known as Double Corridor Village, with interesting old Bai architecture along its alleys. It's probably one of the better versions of a sleepy old Erhai Lake village remaining; those on the western side are pretty much invaded by tourists nonstop. Boats here cost Y50 return.

Other ferries run between Lóngkān and Hǎidōng, and between Xiāguān and Jīnsūo Dǎo (Jinsuo Island). Ferries leave early in the morning (for the market) and return around 4pm; timetables are flexible and departures are somewhat unreliable.

Roads now encircle the lake so it is possible to do a loop (or partial loop) of the lake by mountain bike. A few intrepid travellers have leapfrogged these villages, made for Shāping's market, then continued all the way around

the lake stopping at other markets on the way before boating themselves and their bicycles back to Dàlǐ. Even if you're not into markets you could still do a loop, or partial loop of the lake by mountain bike taking in Xìzhōu, Zhōuchéng, Shāping and Wàsè. You could ride around the lake clockwise from Dàlǐ to Hǎidōng and take the ferry back to Lóngkān. A shorter option would be to cycle to Wàsè (57km) and then return to Dàlǐ (via Cǎicūn) by ferry.

Plenty of cafés can arrange a horse-and-carriage ride to the lake, then a boat ride to Tianjing Pavilion and Guanyin Pavilion, then Jīnsūo Dǎo or whatever else you dream up. Shop around as prices vary. On the cheaper end, for around Y40 to Y50 per person in a group of around four you can get a round trip to Erhai Lake on a horse-cart, then transport to a couple of spots on the lake. Many possible routes exist, so ask around.

Zhonghe Temple 中和寺

This temple (Zhōnghé Sì; admission Y2) is a long, steep hike up the mountainside behind Dàlǐ. To reach the top take the **chairlift** (one way/return Y30/50) up **Zhōnghé Shān** (Zhonghe Mountain). Note that the temple may soon also charge Y30, which would keep it on par with the rest of China as it ramps up fees at every attraction in the country. You'll have no trouble whatsoever finding a guy offering pony rides around here; possible tours are infinite but figure on Y70 for a standard ride.

You can also hike up the hill, a sweaty two to three hours for those in moderately good shape (see also Dangers & Annoyances, p259). Walk about 200m north of the chairlift base to the riverbed (often dry). Follow the left bank for about 50m and walk through the cemetery. Follow the path zigzagging under the chairlift. When you reach some stone steps you know you are near the top. Naturally, however, there are oodles and oodles of horse and human paths, dead ends, dry creek beds and the like out there, so you could wind up either hopelessly lost or wonderfully challenged. In fact, this is half the fun of this area – there are tons of tourists around, but it's probably the easiest popular place in the province to lose the crowds.

Branching out from either side of the temple is a trail that winds along the face of the mountains, taking you in and out of steep, lush valleys and past streams and waterfalls.

From Zhōnghé it's an amazing 11km up-and-down hike south to Gantong Temple (below), which serves vegetarian meals for lunch, or to **Qingbi Stream** (Qingbi Xi), a scenic picnic spot near the village of Qilǐqiáo 3km from Dàli on the way to Xiāguān. Locals say it's the most picturesque of the 20 or so small creeks. After hiking 4km up a path running close to the river, you'll reach three ponds. There's also a new cable car between the two temples (one way/return Y52/82).

One peak south of Zhōnghé Shān is **Lóngquán Shān**, and halfway up that is Putuo Cliff and Phoenix Cave (Lóngfèngyǎn Dòng), which leads right through the back of the mountain. All in all it's about 9km if you walk from the south gate of Dàli to Lóngquán Shān and then up. There are no really good trails, so figure out how to get there before you go by having a chat with the people who run your guesthouse.

Alternatively, you can spend some more time here on the mountain and stay the night at **Higherland Inn** (Gāodì lǚguǎn; 高地旅馆; ☎ 266 1599; www.higherland.com; dm/s/d Y25/30/50), located just above Zhonghe Temple at 2590m. If you want to get away from the crowds in Dàli then this is the place to do it. The hostel has fabulous views, regular barbecues and bonfire parties and only a handful of rooms (seven), which means it's an incredibly relaxing place to stay. You can reserve rooms at the booking office near the northeast corner of Renmin Lu and Boai Lu in Dàli.

Guanyin Temple 观音堂

This temple (Guānyīn Tāng; Y10) is built over a large boulder that locals believe was placed there by Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, disguised as an old woman in order to block the advance of an invading enemy. On the 19th of the third, sixth and ninth lunar months, people flock here to worship Guānyīn. It is 5km south of Dàli at the base of Foding Peak. If you follow the path uphill for 3km you will come across another temple, **Gantong Temple** (Gántōng Sì). Built during the Tang dynasty, it once had three dozen subtemples, all of which were destroyed in Qing dynasty uprisings. Supposedly, many poets and government officials retired here as monks, and even an emperor of the Ming dynasty considered being a monk there (he wrote a poem about it instead).

Xìzhōu 喜洲

The sleepy town of Xìzhōu has always been a major stop for wanderers given its well-preserved Bai architecture. Not to mention its location, plunked along the main road north of Dàli. To be honest, this place has gone under the paintbrush quite a bit and is a popular spot for tour buses to unload their hordes to watch 'traditional' Bai dancing in old courtyards. Still, it's a nice place to just wander around. You can catch a local bus from the south gate in Dàli (Y3) or take a taxi (Y30 to Y35) to make the 18km trip. A bicycle trip with an overnight stop in Xìzhōu (there's accommodation in town) is also a good idea.

From here, the interesting town of **Zhōuchéng** (周城) is 7km further north; it too has basic accommodation. This pretty village is also right by the roadside and spreads uphill from a market square, which is dominated by several ancient trees. About 30m uphill along the main street a side alley leads off to the right. A house at the end of the lane on the left sells indigo cloth that it dyes on the spot.

Nearby **Shācūn** (沙村) village is one of the last places on the lake where you might find cormorant fishing. You could easily combine Xìzhōu with a bike trip to Zhōuchéng and Shāping market.

Shaping Market 沙坪赶集

Every Monday at Shāping, about 30km north of Dàli, there is a colourful **Bai market** (Shāping Gǎnji). The market cranks up around 10am and ends around 2.30pm. You can buy everything from tobacco, melon seeds and noodles to meat, jewellery and wardrobes. In the ethnic clothing line, you can look at shirts, headdresses, embroidered shoes and moneybelts, as well as local batik. Gentlefolks, start your bargaining engines.

Getting to Shaping Market from Dàli is fairly easy. Head out on the road to Lijiāng and flag down anything heading north. Some of the hotels and cafés in town also run minibuses. By bike it will take about two hours at a good clip.

Butterfly Spring 蝴蝶泉

Butterfly Spring (Húdié Quán) is about 30km north of Dàli. The inevitable legend associated with the spring is that two lovers committed suicide here to escape a cruel king.

After jumping into the bottomless pond, they turned into two of the butterflies that gather here en masse during May.

If you're energetic you could cycle to the spring but most people find it a bit of a tourist trap. Since it is only 4km from Shāping, you could also combine it with a visit to the Shāping market.

LĪJIĀNG 丽江

new town ☎ 08891, old town ☎ 0888 / old town pop 40,000

Lijiāng's maze of cobbled streets, rickety-looking wooden buildings and gushing canals suck in nearly 12% of Yúnnán's total tourist population. Yes, those same tour buses disgorging the hordes in Dàli also inevitably call here – and they all manage to get snarled up in epic waves of human jams in the town's tiny alleys.

THE NAXI 纳西

Lijiāng has been the base of the 286,000 strong Naxi (also spelt Nakhi and Nahi) minority for about the last 1400 years. The Naxi descend from ethnically Tibetan Qiang tribes and lived until recently in matrilineal families. Since local rulers were always male it wasn't truly matriarchal, but women still seem to run the show, certainly in the old part of Lijiāng.

The Naxi matriarchs maintained their hold over the men with flexible arrangements for love affairs. The *azhu* (friend) system allowed a couple to become lovers without setting up joint residence. Both partners would continue to live in their respective homes; the boyfriend would spend the nights at his girlfriend's house but return to live and work at his mother's house during the day. Any children born to the couple belonged to the woman, who was responsible for bringing them up. The man provided support, but once the relationship was over, so was the support. Children lived with their mothers, and no special effort was made to recognise paternity. Women inherited all property, and disputes were adjudicated by female elders.

There are strong matriarchal influences in the Naxi language. Nouns enlarge their meaning when the word for 'female' is added; conversely, the addition of the word for 'male' will decrease the meaning. For example, 'stone' plus 'female' conveys the idea of a boulder; 'stone' plus 'male' conveys the idea of a pebble.

Naxi women wear blue blouses and trousers covered by a blue or black apron. The T-shaped traditional cape not only stops the basket worn on the back from chafing, but also symbolises the heavens. Day and night are represented by the light and dark halves of the cape; seven embroidered circles symbolise the stars. Two larger circles, one on each shoulder, are used to depict the eyes of a frog, which until the 15th century was an important god to the Naxi. With the decline of animist beliefs, the frog eyes fell out of fashion, but the Naxi still call the cape by its original name, 'frog-eye sheepskin'.

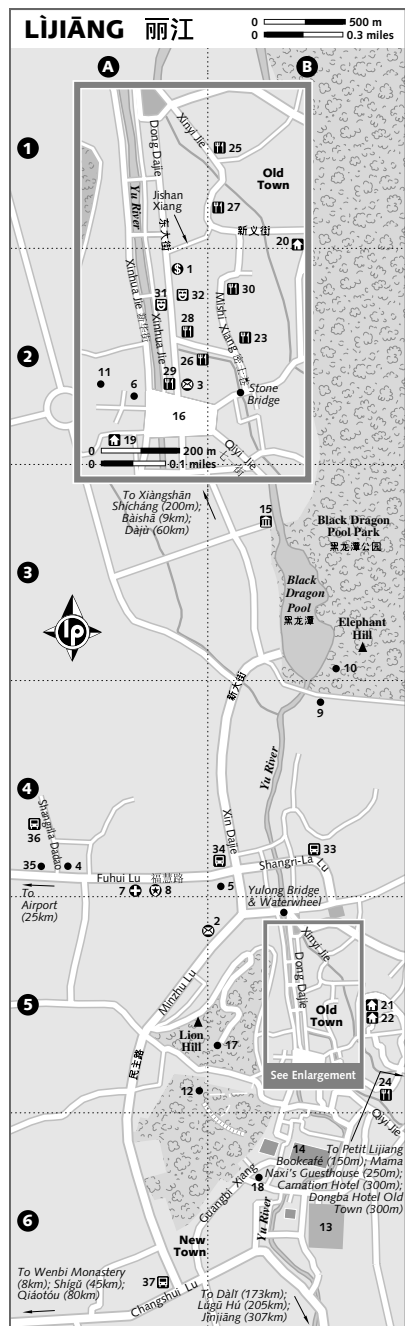
The Naxi created a written language over 1000 years ago using an extraordinary system of pictographs – the only hieroglyphic language still in use. The most famous Naxi text is the Dongba classic *Creation*, and ancient copies of it and other texts can still be found in Lijiāng, as well as in the archives of some US universities. The Dongba were Naxi shamans who were caretakers of the written language and mediators between the Naxi and the spirit world. The Dongba religion, itself an offshoot of Tibet's pre-Buddhist Bon religion, eventually developed into an amalgam of Tibetan Buddhism, Islam and Taoism. The Tibetan origins of the Naxi are confirmed by references in Naxi literature to Lake Manasarovar and Mt Kailash, both in western Tibet.

Useful phrases in the Naxi language are: '*nuar lala*' (hello) and '*jiu bai sai*' (thank you).

Seriously – it can at times be like being at a football match in the cheap seats.

But don't let the crowds or any bitchy travellers – and oh Lord are there enough of those – discourage a trip. Like every other tourist-overwhelmed spot on earth, there's still plenty of *there* there. If you look. Get up early enough and it will be just you and a few bun sellers. Then beat a retreat into the delightful labyrinth of the old streets. Soon it will be just you.

In 1996 an earthquake measuring over seven on the Richter scale rocked the Lijiāng area, killing more than 300 people and injuring 16,000. The Chinese government took note of how the traditional Naxi buildings held up and sank millions of yuán into rebuilding most of Lijiāng County with traditional Naxi architecture, replacing cement with cobblestone and



wood. The UN placed all of Lijiāng County on its World Heritage site list in 1999.

Orientation

Lijiāng, in northwest Yünnán, is separated into old and new towns which are starkly different. The approximate line of division is Shìzhī Shān (Lion Hill), the green hump in the middle of town that's topped by the Looking at the Past Pavilion. Everything west of the hill is the new town, and everything east is the old town. You *will* get lost in the old town; just

INFORMATION	
Bank of China 中国银行	1 A2
China Post 中国邮政	2 B5
China Post 中国邮政	3 A2
CITS 中国国际旅行社	4 A4
Kodak 柯达	5 B4
Mandarin Books & CDs 五华书苑	6 A2
People's Hospital 医院	7 A4
PSB 公安局	8 A4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Dongba Research Institute 东巴文化研究室	9 B4
Five Phoenix Hall 五凤楼	10 B3
Kegong Tower 科贡坊	11 A2
Looking at the Past Pavilion 望古楼	12 A5
Market 市场	13 B6
Mu Family Mansion 木氏土司府	14 B6
Museum of Naxi Dongba Culture 纳西东巴文化博物馆	15 B3
Old Market 四方街	16 A2
Radio Mast	17 B5
White Horse Dragon Pool 白马龙潭	18 B6
SLEEPING	
Good Luck Inn 鸿运客栈	19 A2
International Youth Hostel Lijiāng 丽江老谢车马店	20 B1
Moon Inn 新月阁客栈	21 B5
Zen Garden Hotel 瑞和园酒店	22 B5
EATING	
Blue Page Vegetarian Restaurant 蓝页素食屋	23 B2
Blue Papaya 蓝木瓜	24 B5
Lamu's House of Tibet 西藏屋西餐馆	25 B1
Mama Fu's 马付餐厅	26 A2
Naku Café 阿酷咖啡	27 B1
Prague Café 布拉格咖啡馆	28 A2
Sakura Café 樱花咖啡馆	29 A2
Well Bistro 井桌餐馆	30 B2
ENTERTAINMENT	
Dongba Palace 东巴宫	31 A2
Naxi Orchestra 纳西古乐会	32 A2
TRANSPORT	
Bus Station 客运站	33 B4
Buses to Yùlóng Xuěshān 到玉龙雪山的公共汽车	34 B4
CAAC 中国民航	35 A4
Express Bus Station 高速客运站	36 A4
Long-Distance Bus Station 长途客运站	37 A6
Minibuses to Bāishā 到白沙的中巴	(see 34)

follow a stream upstream, all of which lead back toward the centre.

MAPS

Map are everywhere you look, basically. You can get some lovely fold-out maps that are designed to look aged; these are amazingly detailed but, naturally, don't have much English.

Information

Lijiāng's cafés and backpacker inns are your best source of information on the area. Most have noticeboards and travellers books full of useful tips and advice on surrounding sights, especially the Tiger Leaping Gorge trek.

Bookshops don't have much but you might duck into a chichi hotel and keep an eye out for the *Lijiāng Travel Guide*, a tourist rag with relatively up-to-the-minute information on routes, prices and other practical information.

BOOKSHOPS

Mandarin Book & CDs (Lijiāng Wúhuá Shūyuàn; Xinhua Jie) Has a fantastic choice of English books and maps on Lijiāng and the region. Also German, French and other foreign language titles.

CD BURNING

Kodak (Fuhui Lu; per CD Y20)

INTERNET ACCESS

There are lots of places in the old town where you can go online. Prague Café (p269) charges Y5 per hour.

MONEY

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Dong Dajie) This branch is in the old town and has an ATM machine.

POST & TELEPHONE

Many of the backpacker cafés in the old town have IDD lines.

China Post (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Minzhu Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm) Offers Express Mail Service (EMS), so your postcards might actually make it home before you do. Another post office is in the old town just north of Old Market Sq.

China Telecom (Zhōngguó Diànxìn; Minzhu Lu) Next door to China Post; you can make international calls from here.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (Gōngānjū; ☎ 518 8437; Fuhui Lu; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Reputedly very speedy with visa extensions.

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

There's a slew of Travel Reception Centres all over the old town but they mostly arrange tours. The best place for info is your accommodation.

China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójí Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 516 0369; 3rd fl, Lifang Bldg, cnr Fuhui Lu & Shanggrila Dadao) Can arrange tours in and around Lijiāng.

Eco-tours (☎ 131-7078 0719; www.ecotourchina.com) Run by Zhao Fan at the Buena Vista Club (p274). He can organise tours to nearly anywhere you want to go in northern Yünnán, as well as trekking and camping trips in less well-known areas. Avid bike-riders should check out his free maps of Lijiāng-area cycling trails.

Dangers & Annoyances

It's a pickpocket heyday in the old town, so *always* keep an arm clamped on your valuables. Solo female travellers have also been accosted when walking alone at night in isolated areas of historic Lijiāng. Take care if travelling alone to isolated sights like Xiàng Shān (Elephant Hill) in Black Dragon Pool Park (Hēilóngtán Gōngyuán); there have been reports of muggings, a few of them violent.

Sights

An interesting local historical tidbit has it that the original Naxi chieftain would not allow the **old town** to be girdled by a city wall because drawing a box around the Chinese character of his family name would change the character from *mù* (wood) to *kún* (surrounded, or hard-pressed).

Hydrophiles will go absolutely gaga over this place. The old town is dissected by a web of arterylike canals that once brought the city's drinking water from Yuquan Spring, in what is now Black Dragon Pool Park. There are several wells and pools still in use around town. Where there are three pools, these were designated into pools for drinking, washing clothes and washing vegetables. A famous example of these is the **Báimǎ Lóngtán** (White Horse Dragon) pool in the south of the old town. You can see one of the original wells opposite the Well Bistro. (Sadly, the days – not too long ago – when you would see locals washing their veggies in the streams after heading home from the market are a bit unthinkable now.)

The town once had several water wheels, though the only one left now is Yulong Bridge

Waterwheel, a reconstructed model at the north edge of the old town. The nearby monument celebrates Lijiāng's status as a Unesco World Heritage site.

The focus of the old town is **Old Market Sq** (Sifāng Jiē) Once the haunt of Naxi traders, they've long since made way for tacky souvenir stalls. However, the view up the hill and the surrounding lanes are still extraordinary, just be prepared to share the experience with hundreds if not thousands of other people.

To the west of the square is the **Kegong Archway**, which is the scene of celebrations marking the birthday of the local god Sanduo on the eighth day of the second lunar month (March).

Above the old town is a beautiful **park** that can be reached on the path leading past the radio mast. Sit on the slope in the early morning and watch the mist clearing as the old town comes to life. Here acting as sentinel of sorts for the town, the **Looking at the Past Pavilion** (Wàngǔ Lóu; admission Y15) was raised for tourists at a cost of over one million yuán. It's famed for a unique design using dozens of four-storey pillars – unfortunately these were culled from northern Yünnán old-growth forests. A path (with English signs) leads from Old Market Sq.

MU FAMILY MANSION 木氏土司府

The former home of a Naxi chieftain, the **Mu Family Mansion** (Mùshì Tǔsī Fǔ; admission Y35; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) was heavily renovated (more like built from scratch) after the 1996 earthquake, using funds from the World Bank. The six main halls and courtyards were rebuilt to resemble a mini Forbidden City, some say deliberately, to reinforce historical Chinese ties to Lijiāng. The mansion backs onto Shìzi Shān. Inadequate captions help non-Chinese speakers not a bit but many travellers find the beautiful grounds reason enough to visit.

BLACK DRAGON POOL PARK 黑龙潭公园

On the northern edge of town is the **Black Dragon Pool Park** (Hēilóngtán Gōngyuán; Xin Dajie; admission Y60, free after 6pm; ☎ 7am-7pm). Apart from strolling around the pool – its view of Yúlóng Xuěshān (Jade Dragon Snow Mountain) is the most obligatory photo shoot in south-western China – you can visit the **Dongba Research Institute** (Dōngbā Wénhuà Yánjiūshì) which is part of a renovated complex on the

hillside. Here you can see Naxi cultural artefacts and scrolls featuring a unique pictograph script.

At the far side of the pool are buildings used for an art exhibition, a pavilion with its own bridge across the water and the Ming dynasty **Five Phoenix Hall** (Wǔfēng Lóu), a striking Naxi 20m-high edifice dating from 1601 but only moved to its current location in 1979. Its three roofs with eight eaves each are supposedly in the shape of phoenixes.

Trails lead straight up **Xiàng Shān** (Elephant Hill) to a dilapidated gazebo and then across a spiny ridge past a communications centre and back down the other side, making a nice morning hike. See also Dangers & Annoyances, p267.

The **Museum of Naxi Dongba Culture** (Nàxī Dōngbā Wénhuà Bówùguǎn; admission Y5; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) is at the park's northern entrance, and is worth a visit if you have the time. There are displays on Naxi dress and culture, Dōngbā script, Lijiāng's old town and the dubious claim that the region is the 'real' Shangri-la.

Festivals & Events

The 13th day of the third moon (late March or early April) is the traditional day to hold a **Fertility Festival**.

July brings the **Torch Festival** (Huǒbǎ Jié), also celebrated by the Bai in the Dàli region and the Yi all over the southwest. The origin of this festival can be traced back to the intrigues of the Nánzhào kingdom. A king desired the wife of a subject and so had the man burned to death. Rather than submit to his entreaties, she showed her loyalty by leaping into the fire and immolating herself. The festival isn't quite so sombre.

Sleeping

No shortage of charming Naxi-style lodgings here. It seems that every day a new place opens up (but not that many close). Note that prices can spike in July and August and especially during holidays.

Mama Naxi's Guesthouse (古城香格韵客栈; Gúchéng Xiānggéyùn Kèzhàn; ☎ 510 0700; 78 Wenhua Lane, Wuyi Jie; 五一街文化巷78号; dm Y15, s & d from Y50; ☑) This place's enormous popularity derives mainly from Mama's dynamic personality; you'll be glad to have her looking out for you (but go easy on her – she's exhausted). It's packed, a bit chaotic (though well run and clean) but eminently fun. Midnight curfew.

FYI: kitties pretty much have the run of the place.

International Youth Hostel Lijiang (丽江老谢车马店; Lìjiāng Lǎoxiè Chēmǎ Diàn; ☎ 511 6118; 25 Jishan Alley, Xinyi Jie; 新义街 积善巷25号; dm Y20, s Y40-120, d 100-140, tr 150-180) Well-kept rooms of every conceivable variation and touches like flowers or patterned bedspreads set it apart from the generic hostels in town. You can also rent bikes here for Y15 per day. Hot water from 6pm to 2am only.

Dongba Hotel Old Town (东巴客栈; Dōngbā Kèzhàn; ☎ 511 1237; www.dongbahotel.com; 109 Wenzhi Alley; 文治巷109号; dm Y25, s/d/tr from Y60; ☑) A number of the inns in this 'neighbourhood' of alleys are quite nice and this is the cheapest, which isn't to demean its quality. Good clean dorms and friendly service, well-recommended by numerous travellers.

Good Luck Inn (鸿运客栈; Hóngyùn Kèzhàn; ☎ 512 4748; 21 Huangshan Lane, Xinhua Jie; 新华街、黄山段21号; s & d Y50-80) The town is simply overloaded with 'family-style' inns, and this is a good option: it's hospitable, helpful (despite a dearth of English) and clean.

Carnation Hotel (康乃馨客栈; Kāngnǎixīn Kèzhàn; ☎ 511 1237, 511 7306; ewan_215@yahoo.com.cn; 134 Wenzhi Alley; 文治巷134号; s & d Y50-120, Jul-Aug Y150; ☑) Smack next to the Dongba Hotel Old Town, this is definitely one of the best in town, with solicitous owners – chatty with some English – and comfy rooms set around a large courtyard. Breakfasts also come recommended.

Moon Inn (新月阁客栈; Xīnyuègé Kèzhàn; ☎ 518 0520; mooninn@163.com; 34 Xingren Xiaduan, Wuyi Jie; 五一街、兴仁下段34号; s & d Y200; i) A casual but mod place, its bright and breezy rooms have wood furniture and fetching colours. The courtyard is lovely and there's a relaxing common room as well. Breakfast Y10, dinner Y20 per person.

Zen Garden Hotel (瑞和园酒店; Ruìhéyuán Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 518 9799; www.zengardenhotel.com; 36 Xingren Lane, Wuyi Jie; 五一街、兴仁段36号; d Y400, 'wedding rooms' Y1400) This sybaritic place, run by a Naxi teacher and decorated with help from her artist brother, is like a sumptuous museum with glittery night views of old Lijiāng. Amazing attention to detail.

Eating

The following rundown is by no means exhaustive. There are always several 'Naxi' items on the menu, including the famous

'Naxi omelette' and 'Naxi sandwich' (goat's cheese, tomato and fried egg between two pieces of local *bābā*). *Bābā* (粑粑) is the Lijiāng local speciality: thick flatbreads of wheat, served plain or stuffed with meats, vegetables or sweets. There is simply nothing on earth better for filling your gut before a long day of alley strolling or countryside biking (stick a couple in your pack for bus rides!).

More and more of these places offer free internet for customers; if they do charge, it's around Y5 per hour, though this too is dropping.

Prague Café (Bùlāgé Kāféiguǎn; 18 Mishi Xiang; 密士巷18号; dishes from Y6; ☎ from 7.30am) Heading off for the Tiger Leaping Gorge trek? You can't go wrong with the Naxi breakfast (Y22): fried goat cheese, ham and a potato pancake as big as your head will have you all set. Great staff, crowd and atmosphere.

Well Bistro (Jīngzhuō Cānguǎn; ☎ 518 6431; Mishi Xiang; 密士巷; dishes from Y6; ☎ 8.30am-late) This well-established landmark of sorts has been serving up solid from-scratch sustenance for going on a decade. Go for the homemade breads and desserts.

Petit Lijiang Bookcfe (☎ 511 1255; 50 Chongren Xiang, Qiyi Jie; 崇仁巷七一街50号; dishes from Y10) Owners Mei and Olivier (a Chinese-Belgian couple whose easygoing nature deftly fits Liliāng) are great sources of travel info, and the food and atmosphere are so superb you may never leave. Even better, the bookstore has an outstanding collection of English- and French-language titles focusing on Yünnán and elsewhere in China.

Lamu's House of Tibet (Xìzàngwū Xīcāntīng; ☎ 518 9000; 56 Xinyi Jie; 新义街; dishes from Y10) Lamu has been putting smiles and service before yuán for over a decade and after a few relocations, she has finally nailed her spot in this casual pine-and-bamboo place on the north side of the old town. The upstairs area is great for people-watching, and it's a UN menu; the Tibetan items are all you really need (though the Naxiburger rocks). Do make sure you save room for the desserts though – they are massive.

Blue Page Vegetarian Restaurant (Lányè Sùshí Wū; ☎ 518 5206; Mishi Xiang; 密士巷; dishes from Y10; ☎ 8.30am-midnight; ☑) Pretty much everything this place does, it does right. Find nouveau veggie dishes, along with Indian and Chinese, all in a quiet and relaxing atmosphere.

Sakura Café (Yīnghuā Kāféiguān; Xīnhuā Jiē; 新华街; ☎ 312 6766; dishes from ¥10; ☹; whenever they wake up till way late) This unbelievably raucous place has gone from subdued and relaxed to utterly *rè nào* (hot and noisy, the way Chinese like it) in half a decade. It is actually one of several other ‘Sakura Cafés’ also found along this lane; perfectly located to draw in tourists, they absolutely swell with customers at night. You’ll hardly hear yourself think at times, but the Korean *bimbab* set meal (¥23) is still outrageously good.

Mama Fu’s (Māmǎfū Cǎntīng; ☎ 512 2285; Mìshì Xiāng; 密士巷; dishes from ¥10) Streamside dining has been a tradition at Mama Fu’s pretty much forever – so popular has her place become she’s branched out into Kūnmíng. The Chinese food here is superior to the Western food.

Naku Café (Àkù Kāféi; ☎ 510 5321; 4 Jìshān Xiāng, Xīnyì Jiē; 新义街; dishes from ¥20) Not many folks seem to wander into this casual eatery run by some very shy but very friendly staff. Local Naxi dishes outshine the foreign items: the Naxi claypot needs salt but is packed with tofu, potato, turnip, carrots, broccoli and cabbage.

Blue Papaya (Lán Mùguā; ☎ 661 2114; www.thebluepapaya.com; 70 Xīnyì Jiē; 新义街70号; dishes from ¥30) One of the places many folks take the time to write about, this is among Lìjiāng’s top casual-chic places. The Italian-centric food – heavy on pasta and fish – is excellent with many, many creative flourishes. The restaurant is also home to a ‘cultural exchange academy’, offering courses on cooking, massage, taichi and more.

Entertainment

One of the few things you can do in the evening in Lìjiāng is attend performances of the **Naxi Orchestra** (Nǎxī Gǔyuè Huì; Naxi Music Academy; ☎ 512 7971; tickets ¥100-140; ☹; performances 8pm), located inside a beautiful building in the old town.

All members (26 at last count) are Naxi and play a type of Taoist temple music (known as *dòngjīng*) that has been lost elsewhere in China. The pieces they perform are supposedly faithful renditions of music from the Han, Song and Tang dynasties, and are played on original instruments, some of which were buried during the Cultural Revolution lest they be smashed.

Local historian of note Xuan Ke – he’s the guy who originally posited the Shangri-la-is-in-Yúnnán theory – usually speaks for the

group at performances (usually – the guy’s old, so cut him some slack if he’s a no-show; ditto with the drowsy musicians – they’re positively ancient and besides, that’s half the fun!). In any case, someone will explain each musical piece and describe the instruments. There are taped recordings of the music available; a set of two costs ¥30. If you’re interested, make sure you buy the tape at the show – tapes on sale at shops around town, and even in Kūnmíng, are often pirated copies.

The government-run **Dongba Palace** (Dōng Dǎjiē; tickets ¥100-140; ☹; performances 8pm) has a less authentic song-and-dance show.

Getting There & Away

No trains serve Lìjiāng. Yet. Apparently an extension from Dǎlǐ was half-finished as of late 2006 – it didn’t look it when we there.

AIR

Lìjiāng’s airport is 25km southwest of town. Tickets can be booked at the **CAAC** (Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 516 1289; cnr Fuhui Lu & Shangrila Dadao; ☹ 8.30am-9pm). Most hotels in the old town also offer an air-ticket booking service.

From Lìjiāng there are oodles of daily flights to Kūnmíng (Y660), three flights daily to Chéngdū (Y1010) and Shànghǎi (Y2560), two flights daily to Shēnzhèn (Y1760) and one daily to Guǎngzhōu (Y1790).

BUS

Lìjiāng has three bus stations: one just north of the old town; the main long-distance bus station in the south; and an express bus station to Kūnmíng and Xiàguān on Shangrila Dadao in the north of town.

From the express bus station there are daily departures to Kūnmíng (Y171 to Y193, 8am, 9am, 10am, 11am and 12.30pm). Two sleeper buses also leave daily for Kūnmíng at 8.30pm; one terminates at Kūnmíng’s west station, the other at its south station. Buses also leave here for Xiàguān (Y41 to Y58, 160km, 8am, 11.10am, noon, 2.10pm, 3.50pm and 6.10pm), and daily for Shangri-la (Y45, 8.40am and 2.30pm).

Many buses make the run to Jinjiāng (Y50), from where you can hop a train to Chéngdū (or Kūnmíng or Hēijīng), but the bus station where you may be dropped off in Jinjiāng is 20km from the train station. A bus between the two (there are many) costs ¥3.

LÌJIĀNG BUS TIMETABLES

Buses from the north bus station include the following:

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Jinjiāng	Y45-60	8	3 daily	7am, 8am, 11am
Kūnmíng	Y119	8	daily	8pm
Nínglàng	Y23	3-4	6 daily	8am, 9.30am, 10am, 12.30pm, 1.30pm, 2pm
Shangri-la	Y39	5	2 daily	7.50am, 11am
Xiàguān	Y35-37	3½	20 daily	7.30am-6pm

Buses from the long-distance bus station include the following:

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Jiànchuān	16	2-3	every 30-50min	7am-6pm
Kūnmíng	151	12	hourly	8.30-11.30am & 1pm
Kūnmíng (sleeper)	119	8	11 daily	6.30am-9pm
Lúgū Hú	63	7-8	1 daily	9.30am
Nínglàng	23	5	13 daily	8am-4.30pm
Qiáotóu	20	2	daily	1pm
Shangri-la	39	5	15 daily	7.30am-5pm
Wéixī	54	6	2 daily	7.30am, 8.30am
Xiàguān	35-50	3½	27 daily	7.10am-6.30pm

Getting Around

Buses to the airport (Y15) leave from outside the CAAC 90 minutes before flight departures.

Taxis start at Y6 in the new town and are not allowed into the old town (the whole of the old town is pedestrianised).

Bike hire is available at the International Youth Hostel Lìjiāng (p269; Y15 per day).

AROUND LÌJIĀNG

It is possible to see most of Lìjiāng’s environs on your own, but a few agencies do offer half- or full-day tours, starting from Y150 to Y200; it might be worth it if you take one that includes admission fees.

Monasteries

The monasteries around Lìjiāng are Tibetan in origin and belong to the Karmapa (Red Hat) sect. Most of the monasteries were extensively damaged during the Cultural Revolution and there’s not much monastic activity nowadays. Nevertheless, the splendid scenery hereabouts make it worth hopping on a bicycle and heading out of town for a look.

PUJI MONASTERY 普济寺

This monastery (Pǔjì Sì) is around 5km north-west of Lìjiāng (on a trail that passes the two

ponds to the north of town). The few monks here are usually happy to show the occasional stray traveller around.

FUGUO MONASTERY 富国寺

West of Báishā lies the remains of the temple (Fùguó Sì), once the largest of Lìjiāng’s monasteries. Much of it was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and a couple of remaining buildings were moved to Lìjiāng’s Black Dragon Pool Park. Look out for the **Hufa Hall** in the monastery compound; the interior walls have some interesting frescoes.

To get there head west from the main intersection in Báishā until you reach a small village. Turn right at the fork in the road, continue for around 500m then take the next left. Walk up the hill for about 30 minutes and you will come to the monastery ruins.

JADE PEAK MONASTERY 玉峰寺

This small lamasery (Yùfēng Sì) is on a hillside about 5km past Báishā. The last 3km of the track require a steep climb. Lock your bike if you leave it at the bottom.

The monastery sits at the far southwestern foot of Yúlóng Xuěshān (5500m) and was established in 1756. The monastery’s main attraction nowadays is the **Camellia Tree of 10,000**



Blossoms (Wànduǒ Shānchá). Ten thousand might be something of an exaggeration, but locals claim that the tree produces at least 4000 blossoms between February and April. A monk on the grounds risked his life to keep the tree secretly watered during the Cultural Revolution. One camellia in the northwest section is famed as being more than 500 years old.

Not far from Yūfēng Sì is the town of **Yù Hú** (Jade Lake), once the home of Joseph Rock (opposite; when the town was known as Nguluko, not a Chinese name).

On the way to Yūfēng, about 12km from Lijiāng, is Běiyuè village, the site of another Naxi temple – devoted to Sanduo, a guardian deity – dating from AD 780.

WENBI MONASTERY 文笔寺

Getting to this monastery (Wénbǐ Sì) requires a steep uphill ride 8km to the southwest of Lijiāng. There are also some good views and pleasant walks in the near vicinity. The monastery has some distinctive Tibetan features, and dates from 1733. Its two-dozen courtyards once housed 80 lamas. The hill behind the monastery has a sacred cave and spring. In

the cave there's a black rock on which a disciple of Sakyamuni is said to have laid a key, so pilgrims headed to Jìzǔ Shān (Chicken-Foot Mountain) come to the rock, burn joss, and 'borrow' the key to get to their destination.

ZHIYUN MONASTERY 指云寺

Along the road to Shígǔ, 18km from Lijiāng by the small Lashi Hai reservoir, is the Zhìyún Sì (Pointing to the Clouds Monastery), built in 1727. The nearby lake is a **wetland reserve** (admission ¥10) popular with birdwatchers, and you may get to see black stork and Chinese mergansers.

Frescoes

Lijiāng is famed for its temple frescoes. Most travellers probably won't want to spend a week or so traipsing around seeking them out, but it may be worth checking out one or two.

Most of the frescoes were painted during the 15th and 16th centuries by Tibetan, Naxi, Bai and Han artists. Many of them were restored during the later Qing dynasty. They depict various Taoist, Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist themes and can be found on the

JOSEPH ROCK

Travel around Yünnán long enough and you'll incessantly hear 'Luòkè' (洛克). It's a name – the Sinified version of Rock, Joseph Rock. Absolutely everywhere you go, locals will discuss how 'Luòkè' was here in (year)' or 'Luòkè stayed at my grandmother's parents' home'. Etc ad nauseam.

Yünnán was a hunting ground for famous, foreign plant-hunters such as Kingdon Ward and Joseph Rock. Rock lived in Lijiāng between 1922 and 1949, becoming the world's leading expert on Naxi culture and local botany. More than his academic pursuits, however, he will be remembered as one of the most enigmatic and eccentric characters to travel in western China.

Rock was born in Austria, the son of a domineering father who insisted he enter a seminary. A withdrawn child, he escaped into imagination and atlases, discovering a passion for China. An astonishing autodidact (he taught himself eight languages, including Sanskrit), he began learning Chinese at 13 years of age. He somehow wound up in Hawaii, and in time became the foremost authority on Hawaiian flora.

Asia always beckoned and he convinced the US Department of Agriculture, and later Harvard University, to sponsor his trips to collect flora for medicinal research. He devoted much of his life to studying Naxi culture, which he feared was being extinguished by the dominant Han culture. He became *National Geographic* magazine's 'man in China' and it was his exploits in northwestern Yünnán and Sichuān for the magazine that made him famous.

He sent over 80,000 plant specimens from China – two were named after him – along with 1600 birds and 60 mammals. Amazingly, he was taking and developing the first colour photographic plates in his field in the 1920s! Tragically, containerloads of his collections were lost in 1945 in the Arabian Sea when the boat was torpedoed.

Rock's caravans stretched for 800m, and included dozens of servants (including a cook trained in Austrian cuisine), trains of pack horses, and hundreds of mercenaries for protection against bandits, not to mention the gold dinner service and a collapsible bathtub.

Rock lived in Yù Hú village (called Nguluko when he was there) not far from Báishā. Many of his possessions are now local family heirlooms and his home is now a small **museum** (admission ¥5), which got kickstarted in 2004 with a concerted effort by and donations from the Austrian embassy in China. It's open whenever somebody is around.

The *Ancient Naxi Kingdom of Southwest China* (Harvard University Press, 1947) is Joseph Rock's definitive work. Immediately prior to his death, his Naxi dictionary was also finally prepared for publishing. For an insight into the man and his work, take a look at *In China's Border Provinces: The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer* (Hastings House, 1974) by JB Sutton, or Rock's many archived articles for *National Geographic*.

interior walls of temples in the area. However, the Red Guards came through here slashing and gouging during the Cultural Revolution, so there's not that much to see.

In Báishā the best frescoes can be found in **Dabaoji Palace** (Dàbǎoji Gōng; admission ¥15; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm), which also has quite nice Naxi artwork and scrolls for sale. Nearby, **Liuli Temple** (Liúlǐ Diàn) and **Dading Ge** also have some, and in the neighbouring village of Lóngquán, frescoes can be found on the interior walls of **Dajue Palace** (Dàjué Gōng).

BÁISHĀ 白沙

On a plain north of Lijiāng, near several old temples, Báishā is one of the best day trips out of Lijiāng, especially if you have a bike. Before Kublai Khan made it part of his Yuan empire

(1271–1368), Báishā was the capital of the Naxi kingdom. It's hardly changed since then – despite being visited by nearly everyone with a guidebook and a bike – and offers a close-up glimpse of Naxi culture for those willing to spend some time nosing around.

We may as well go ahead and name the place 'the Village of Dr Ho' (or He), who has become possibly as famous as any of Lijiāng County's other attractions. Looking the stereotype of a Taoist physician, he has a sign outside his door: 'The Clinic of Chinese Herbs in Jade Dragon Mountains of Lijiāng'. The author Bruce Chatwin propelled the good doctor into the limelight when he mythologised (nay, borderline romanticised) Dr Ho as the 'Taoist physician in the Jade Dragon Mountains of Lijiāng'. Journalists and

photographers (and we) started beating a path to his door, and the rest is quirky history. Kind of a Lijiāng must-do, and one must say that all the fame hasn't really gone to his head – he's still chatty and friendly and quite serious about listening and prescribing Chinese herbal medicines for what it ails you.

Almost directly opposite Dr Ho's clinic is **Café Buena Vista** (Nàhà Wéisítà Jùlèbù; ☎ 131-7078 0719; info@ecotour.com), a lovely little café-art gallery run by an artist, Zhao Fan, and his girlfriend. It is also a good place to get travel information (see Eco-tours, p267).

There are a couple of frescoes worth seeing in town and surrounding the area; see p272 for details.

Báishā is an easy 20- to 30-minute bike ride from Lijiāng. Otherwise take a minibus (Y15) from the corner of Minzu Lu and Fuhui Lu. From Báishā minibuses return to Lijiāng regularly (Y20).

YÜLÓNG XUĒSHĀN 玉龙雪山

Also known as Mt Satseto, **Yùlóng Xuěshān** (Jade Dragon Snow Mountain; admission adult/student Y80/60; protection fee Y40), 35km or so from Lijiāng, soars to some 5500m. Its peak was first climbed in 1963 by a research team from Běijīng but is pretty much now overrun daily by the Gore Tex-clad on a mammoth scale.

Dry Sea Meadow (甘海子; Gānhǎizi) is the first stop you come to if travelling by bus from Lijiāng. A **chairlift** (Y160) ascends to a large meadow at 3050m, which, according to geologists, was actually a lake 2000 years ago. It can often get freezing above even when warm down here at the base of the chairlift: warm coats can be rented for Y30, deposit Y300, oxygen tanks are Y40. (For information on altitude sickness, see p499.)

Cloud Fir Meadow (云杉坪; Yúnsānpíng) is the second stop and a **chairlift** (Y60) takes you up to 4506m where walkways lead to awesome glacier views. Horses can be hired here for Y80.

Views from the two Meadows are pretty impressive, but make sure you get here well before the first chair up at 8.30am. Unless you get a head start on the tour groups, prepare for up to an hour wait to get either up or down the mountain.

Around 60km from Lijiāng, or a 30-minute drive from Dry Sea Meadow, is **Yak Meadow** (牦牛坪; Mǎoniúping) where yet another **chairlift** (Y60) pulls visitors up to an altitude of 3500m

where there are ample hiking opportunities near Xuěhuā Hǎi (Snowflake Lake). Crowds and long waits are almost unheard of here.

And even if you're not a Tiger Woods-wannabe, consider a visit to the **Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Snow Resort** (☎ 573 1888), near the entrance to the mountain, where you can thump a little white ball over 400m at these altitudes! The thin air doesn't help yer slice, however.

At the time of research, camping in the area was not prohibited but it's better to check when you get there as regulations have a tendency to change quicker than the cloud cover.

Bus 7 (Y15 to Y20) leaves for all three spots from the intersection of Minzu Lu and Fuhui Lu in Lijiāng and passes by Báishā on the way. Returning to Lijiāng, buses leave fairly regularly but check with your driver to find out what time the last bus will depart.

If you enter the region from the north (Tiger Leaping Gorge) there's no ticket gate.

JIÀNCHUĀN 剑川

☎ 0871 / pop 9685

Travellers taking the alternate route between Lijiāng and Dàli may hop off the bus in Jiànchuān, head out of the bus station, see the trucks roaring by on busy National Hwy 214, and immediately plan to flag down the first vehicle out of town to the gorgeous mountains and villages surrounding the city.

Don't. Just a few blocks off the ugly main drag, Jiànchuān has some worthy sights of its own. Splendid Qing (and even Ming) architecture lies pretty much untouched – but still in fine shape. Epic tracts of green space offer some great hikes.

The seat of the eponymous county (the one with the highest percentage of Bai in China), Jiànchuān comes to mind for most Chinese as the hometown of Ah Peng, the Bai hero of the movie *The Five Golden Flowers*. Relics unearthed from Haimenkou, to the south, date to the earliest period of Yünnán's Bronze Age, something they like to brag about here.

Orientation & Information

National Hwy 214 splits the city north-south; you can't miss it for all the dust and traffic. The bus station is along the highway at the south end of town. Three blocks to the north of here is Huancheng Beilu. Most everything you need lies on or between these

A JIÀNCHUĀN SOUVENIR EXTRAORDINAIRE

While wandering the streets of Jiànchuān, keep your eyes peeled for finely detailed screens and wood carvings on doorways. Then stroll around the town and note all the shops selling these similarly fine pieces, some quite large. The city is legendary for its intricate carvings, dating back a millennium. The detailed wood screens are jaw-drop lovely and in shops you may meet interior designers, hotel managers and the like (many from around the world), all coming in to look for something distinctive. And superexpensive (you don't even wanna know – especially the shipping).

two roads, including the post office, which is a block north of the highway on Huancheng Beilu, then a block south. East along this same road three blocks is a hospital. Two blocks east of Jǐngfēng Gōngyuán (below) is the PSB office. We've yet to find an internet café anywhere in the vicinity; let us know if one pops up.

Sights & Activities

At the north end of Huancheng Beilu is **Jǐngfēng Gōngyuán** (景风公园; Jingfeng Park), a meander-worthy park of skyscrapesque (yet droopy) pines, flower-lined paths and some fine historic structures right near the entrance, including a somnolently proud pagoda, a Confucian temple, and a memorial hall to local Bai success stories.

The real highlight in town is the extant Ming and Qing architecture. Nearly two dozen residential courtyards are quite well preserved. An **architectural stroll** is lovely and easy as pie. From Jǐngfēng Gōngyuán's entrance, veer to the right as you exit and you'll come almost immediately to the little alley Xi Men (West Gate). Head south and just start wending your way up and down blue flagstone alleyways heading every which way. Gorgeous and all the real deal. People are superfriendly; we were invited in to have a look on three separate occasions in three blocks! (Keep in mind that these are people's homes, so don't just barge in and start snapping shots.)

From Jǐngfēng Gōngyuán, trails lead straight up into the hills, from where you

can supposedly hike (OK, we got lost) the five strenuous kilometres through stands of cypress to the **1000-Lion Mountain of Manxian Forest** (满贤林千狮山; Mǎnxiánlín Qiānshīshān), the name of which lies – it's actually some 3000, the tallest of which stands over 18m tall. It's fairly eerie to be surrounded in the twilight by 3000 lions, stone or not. (Along the way, look for orchids, for which the county is quite well known; three locally grown species have each sold for over Y100,000, though you're not likely to see those on the trails!)

Motorcycle taxi rides cost Y2 to Y3 to most places.

Sleeping & Eating

Ruihui Binguan (瑞辉宾馆; ☎ 452 1970; 214 National Highway; 214国道; d Y60, without bathroom Y40; ☺) Easy to find. Just head out the bus station door and cross the street, bearing to the right a bit. This place is relatively new, has a friendly staff who'll likely be wide-eyed seeing you waltz in, and offers spotless rooms for next to nothing. Thus, it's often full by midafternoon, so don't dawdle.

Jiànchuān Binguan (剑川宾馆; ☎ 452 1434; 1 Huancheng Beilu; 环城北路1号; d Y80-100, without bathroom Y50; ☺) Likely most people will point any foreigner in this direction first. Perfectly fine rooms and a helpful enough staff. It's a block south of Jǐngfēng Gōngyuán.

No special eateries stand out. There are perfectly fine restaurants, just not in the old town area. You'll have to head north of Huancheng Beilu to find any.

A few local delicacies are worth asking for. Given its citizenry's prowess at growing flowers, it's unsurprising that Jiànchuān County is purportedly the only place in China to dine on white azalea flowers (白杜鹃花; *bái dùjuān huā*). At most meals people eat another local speciality: kidney beans (芸豆; *yúndòu*), prepared in any number of ways. The Bai also make use of the entire bean plant, including the leaves, which are used for the sharp-tasting soup *dèlènmǔzī tāng* (得勒母资汤).

Getting There & Away

To get to Shāxi (Y7, one hour) and Shíbǎoshān (Y7, 45 minutes), take a small shared van; drivers sit in front of the bus station.

Rumour has it that a new expressway will run between Xiàguān and Shangri-la, passing through Jiànchuān in the near future. No

JIANCHUĀN BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Kūnmíng	97, 125 (sleeper)	11	roughly hourly	9am-5pm
Lǐjiāng	16	2-3	every 30-40 min	6.30am-4pm
Xiāguān	20	3-3½	every 15 min	6.30am-5pm
Yúnlóng	40	6-7	daily	6.40am

work had started as of yet, but if it does, expect delays on these times. (An extension of the train line being built between Dàli and Lǐjiāng may also stop here.)

Motorcycle taxi rides cost Y2 to Y3 for most destinations.

AROUND JIĀNCHUĀN

Shībǎoshān 石宝山

About 75km to the southwest of Lǐjiāng (or 110km to the northwest of Dàli) are the **Stone Treasure Mountain Grottoes** (Shībǎoshān Shíkū; admission Y30; ☞ dawn-dusk). The local tourism bureau loves to tout purported (but anonymous) scholars who compare them favourably with the grottoes of Dūnhuáng, Dàzú, and Dàtóng. We don't know anything about that, but this quite large – expansive but not that high – mountain is lovely, with tracts of old-growth cypress and some fabulous sights. And, yes, this is a Chinese mountain, so there are also the renegade bands of bandit monkeys out there.

There are three temple groups: **Stone Bell** (Shízhōng), the most famous; **Lion Pass** (Shǐzǐ Guān); and **Shadeng village** (Shādēng Cūn).

The Stone Bell monastery group includes some of the best Bai stone carvings in southern China and offer insights into life at the Nánzhào court of the 9th century. One of the best caves features images of Geluofeng, the fourth king of the Nánzhào kingdom. The sculpture of the Eight Kings in China is also among the finest works of Buddhist art in China. And then, ahem, the racy part for which the mountain is rather well known: carvings of female genitalia, which local women visit to boost their fertility. The local tourist PR words, not ours: 'This carving is the only case of engraved vulvas placed on equal terms with the Buddha and God in the world.' Goodness.

On the way to the complex, 6km from the Stone Bell monastery, is the **Bǎoxiāng Sì** (Baoxiang Temple), at the edge of an enormous cliff.

At least 1000 steps lead up to the **Golden Summit Temple** (Jīndǐng Sì) on top of the mountain.

From July 27 to August 1 by the lunar calendar the mountain is home to the genuinely touching **Festival of Songs**, a three-day stretch in which Bai youth come to the mountain and express their love for each other in song. These dates in the western calendar are 27–31 August 2008; 15–19 September 2009; and 5–8 September 2010.

SLEEPING

There is but one hotel on the mountain: **Shībǎoshān Bīnguǎn** (☎ 478 6093; d Y220; 石宝山宾馆; ☞) This relatively luxurious place at the mountain's gate is generally empty save for summer weekends, and in off-season you can get at least a 50% discount.

Otherwise, you're looking at extremely basic beds at Baoxiang Temple, halfway up the front of the mountain, or Shizong Temple, halfway up the back of mountain. These are often full.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Shībǎoshān, take a bus to Jiànchuān, then hope for a tiny shuttle van from in front of the bus station taking tourists to the mountain. If none are running, you can take one headed toward Shāxī (Y7, 30 minutes; see opposite) and get off at the entrance to the mountain, where you have a 2km hike uphill to the main entrance. (By the way, from where you hop off, look north and you can see both Haba Snow Mountain and Yúnlóng Xuěshān. And ignore the dilapidated bus stop here; those buses stopped yonks ago).

If you're coming from Dàli on the old Dàli–Lǐjiāng road, you'll have to take a Jiànchuān-bound bus, then get off at the small village of Diànnán, about 8km south of Jiànchuān, where a narrow road branches southwest to the village of Shāxī (opposite), 23km away. You'll just have to wait for a bus for this leg.

Shāxī 沙溪

Arrive in Shāxī and it seems just another dusty village. Walk one mere block east from the one paved road, however, and enter a wormhole. Every step is another decade into a bygone era, the clippety-clops of horse's hooves and bellows of traders highly imaginable. Raised eyebrows at statements such as these are natural, but trust us – this place retains all its centuries of residual charm.

Shāxī was heretofore a crucial node on one of the old tea-horse roads (more like 'caravan routes'), trails of commerce in Yünnán's precious green gold (especially *pú'ěr chá*; a variety of black tea) that stretched from Yünnán to Tibet, Nepal, Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and other parts of China. Starting as far back as the Tang dynasty, the routes reached their zenith in the Ming dynasty. Only three caravan oases remain, Shāxī being the best-preserved and the only one with a surviving market (which is on Fridays). Shāxī is endangered by encroaching modernity – a recurring theme for China, despite its historic past – and has been named by international preservationists as one of the world's 100 most precious endangered sites. A good place to get more information is www.shaxi.org.

SIGHTS

All you really need to know about the village is Sideng Jie (寺登街), the ancient town street leading east off the main road (and where all transports drops you off). From here it's a leisurely 10-minute walk to the edge of the village at the **East Gate** (东门; Dōngmén). Along the way you'll come to the central square with its distinctive blue-hued flagstones and pass by a couple of architectural wonders. **Xingjiao Temple** (兴教寺; Xīngjiào Sì) is the only Ming dynasty Bai Buddhist temple and has more than 20 fabulous frescoes, the highlight of which is one of Sakmayuni taming devils. Nearby is the imposing **Three Terraced Pavilion** (三层楼; Sāncénglóu), with graceful upturned eaves and overlapped corners; it's most salient feature, however, is its prominent theatrical **stage** (古戏台; gǔxìtái), a rarity in rural China. The absolute highlight, however, is the **Ouyang Courtyard** (欧阳大院; Ouyáng Dàyuàn), a superb example of three-in-one Bai folk-architecture in which one wall protected three yards/residences. This, the grandest of all in the village – and there were loads – once included one main house and numerous side

houses, a large garden, smaller courtyards, a small stage and even a stable. The stones you stand on date from the Tang dynasty; just think of that. One area today is a modest inn (see Sleeping, following). And this but scratches the surface. Everywhere you turn you'll find a temple or meeting hall, old gate or ancient dwelling still sporting Ming architecture.

But ya gotta get out to taste the real history of the place. The surrounding plains and hills are rife with endless walking opportunities. Exit the East Gate and head south along the Hui River (惠江; Huì Jiāng) five minutes, cross the ancient **Yujin Qiao** (玉津桥; Yujin Bridge) and you're walking the same trail as the horse caravans. (Look hard enough and you'll still be able to see hoofprints etched into the rock, or so it is claimed.)

From Sideng Jie, walk 20 minutes south along the main road coming into town and you'll come to a handful of other historic structures.

SLEEPING

The 'new' part of town along the main road has a couple of inns that are more or less traditional, but you only need them in a pinch. Instead, Sideng Jie has two superb places to place your head for the night.

Tea & Horse Caravan Trail Inn (古道客栈; Gùdào Kèzhàn; ☎ 0872-472 1051; 83 Sideng Jie; 寺等街83号; dm Y15) Garnering most of the few travellers passing through, this place has basic but spotless rooms and facilities and small but relaxing grounds. If any place in town knows what solo travellers are looking for, it's this one.

Ouyang Guesthouse (三家巷客栈; Sānjiāxiàng Kèzhàn; ☎ 0872-472 2171; Sideng Jie; 寺等街; beds Y15-30) Yes, we know the English sign doesn't match the Chinese one, but who's to quibble? This is one of the most historic structures in the village and the proprietors seem thrilled to be able to extol its virtues.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Whatever direction you come from you'll pass by Shībǎo Shān. From Jiànchuān you wait for a shared minivan ride (Y7, one hour) that also stops at Shībǎo Shān. Theoretically you could hike the last 10km from the mountain to Shāxī, though it isn't all that pretty. Definitely don't try to bicycle it because the rough stone will shred your tyres.

HÈQING 鹤庆

About 46km to the south of Lijiāng, Hèqing is just off the main Dàlǐ to Lijiāng highway. In the centre of the town is the wooden Yúnhé Pavilion, built during the Ming dynasty. You might be able to catch a glimpse of the pavilion as you speed by on the bus from Lijiāng to Dàlǐ.

Bǎoshān & Shítouchéng

宝山, 石头城

☎ 0888 / pop 108 families!

Bǎoshān is a fairly interesting (which is not to say aesthetically pleasant) Naxi village about 125km north of Lijiāng, but the real reason to endure the hassle of getting here is to continue 24km (one hour) on winding mountain roads to Shítouchéng (the Stone City), a positively charming, time-locked walled village of 108 families, perched on a ledge high above the Yangzi River. At a lower altitude, it's also got a much milder climate than Lijiāng; it can even get downright hot in summer.

Sights & Activities

From the end of the road there's a 20-minute descent (mostly steps but some stone paths laden with horse apples!) to the village. Once inside the walls, the first left and left again will take you up to a **viewing platform**. The village square at the foot of the entrance gates is the site of occasional Naxi dances in the evenings. The mountain to the north of the town has connections to Kublai Khan, who is said to have crossed the Yangzi here sometime around 1274. Lots of Joseph Rock (p273) lore around here, as well; pretty much every old-timer claims to have had a parent or grandparent assist the explorer on his Yangzi crossings here.

Many of the eaves of the Naxi houses have wooden fish decorating the eaves; one reason for this is that the Chinese for fish (*yú*) has the same sound as prosperity (*yí*).

Shítouchéng offers some interesting **treks** for adventurous travellers. Mu Shangwen, the owner of the Mu Family Guesthouse can act as a guide for three- to seven-day treks to Lúgū Lake for Y70 to Y80 per day (solo travellers may get a tiny break). Other guesthouses can arrange guides too. You shouldn't expect any English. You can stay in local houses for the shorter treks. Longer treks may require a tent and requisite gear. There are two main routes; north up the Yangzi River (known here as the

Jinshā Jiāng) to Lǎbó village and then over the mountains to Yǒngníng, or south to Wúmù and east to Cuiyù, from where you can catch a morning bus to the main Nínglǎng–Yǒngníng road.

If you're not planning to head for Lúgū Hú, plenty of day trips are out there as well. Simply striking off on your own in any direction you choose is probably the most common activity. Along the trail to Lúgū Hú some four hours from the Stone City is **Taizǐ Shān** (太子山), with a couple of caves and a small temple along the way. To get there exit the Stone City main gate (the one you entered when arriving). Cross the small square into the outer village. When you see a sign saying 'Green Food' take a right and then a left.

The path from here winds around a U-shaped bend in the valley and is fairly level. After about a half-hour to an hour, when you've looped back to about the same point as the Stone City, the path rises sharply and you'll encounter some dicey sections, ranging from rock to gravelly scree to you've-got-to-be-kidding goat path, with some precariously narrow parts. Must be great fun when raining.

Across the river lie some exceedingly diminutive Pumi villages. Your guesthouse can even ring up a boat to pick you up and show you around for the day, though those slopes are quite steep.

Sleeping

Mu Family Guesthouse (木家客栈; Mùjiā Kèzhàn; ☎ 135-7839 2658; beds Y15) This place in the walled town offers basic but clean rooms with sufficiently comfy beds, and excellent food for about the same price. Pretty much every foreigner who's come to the town – not many, actually – has likely stayed here, so the guesthouse is used to foreigners.

Shíchéng Diyijīā Kèzhàn (石城第一家客栈; ☎ 519 7511; d Y60, without bathroom Y40) A second guesthouse run by the friendly family of the shared-van driver and his truck-driver brother (see the boxed text, opposite) was just being finished when we visited (they hadn't even made a sign yet). They have a few cosy rooms with private bathroom and hot water and two cheaper rooms with shared bathroom. The balcony outside the rooms has stupendous views of the Yangzi River and the valley below; it's a relaxing place to stargaze and listen to the rush-

ing river. One thing, though: man, they really have some noisy roosters in the morning...

You can bet there will be even more inns by the time you read this. A few more – perfectly fine but without any of the atmosphere of staying inside the village – lie outside the main gate.

Getting There & Away

Only one public bus to Bǎoshān (Y35, five hours) leaves Lijiāng daily between 8am and 8.30am from the Xiàngshān Shìchǎng market, north of Lijiāng's Old Town. To get to the mar-

ket, bus 8 runs east along Fuhui Lu, then north along Xīn Dajie to Xiàngshān Donglu; the bus stop is opposite the market. From Bǎoshān it's another Y10 and one hour to Shítouchéng.

A small private van does leave from the market at the same time for the same price and goes all the way to the Stone City; it is much quicker, reaching the Stone City in some 5½ hours.

The trouble is that if not enough passengers show up, neither may run; summer weekends are about the only time you're guaranteed to have enough – if not too many.

LAND-SPEED RECORD Thomas Huhti

It was the usual. Get to the bus departure point, which my friend from Kūnmíng had assured me was still the place. *Méi yǒu* (没有; literally 'not have'). Of course. Run around trying to find out where it actually leaves from. An hour later, get to the real place – a grubby market. Bus today? *Méi yǒu*. Already left. What about the little van? *Méi yǒu*. I slurp some noodles while my friend guiltily haggles with a seems-to-be-friendly truck driver, who it turns out is going to the same village. (Also turns out to be the brother of the van driver, who isn't gonna drive up to the village today 'cause...well, just 'cause. 'Cause it's China.) Then he starts up with the old refrain: *mǎ shàng zǒu* (马上走; leaving soon, literally 'horse-on-move/walk'). After a few months in China, one learns to loathe that phrase.

Then the usual of any China journey: another hour of waiting. Troll the streets for an hour. Go to some house to pick up the cargo. No-one there. Wait a half-hour. Guy comes. No key. Fifteen minutes to get key. An hour for two rangy young guys to load literally a tonne of bags into the truck.

Which doesn't start. Monkey around for another half-hour. It coughs and finally chugs. The driver grins the inimitable driver grin.

Finally leave town, but after just 15 minutes, the driver stops and says we should get in back. Now, my paranoia kicks in and I get ready to get in his face, but my friend explains it's either that or we have to pay a Y120 fee for the park that we were going through but not stopping at, the unfairness of which really pisses off my friend. I say I'll pay for both (honestly, I suck at cheating, I'd be sleepless with guilt; plus, Y120 is a lot of money for him). My friend won't budge; he feels it's an insult to extort money from travellers. Now he's really worked up.

So in back we climb atop bags of...white...what? Salt? Chemicals? (The ol' paranoia again...) My friend – true Chinese – tastes it: rock salt for de-icing roads. Well, that's actually pretty cool, considering the pass we're gonna hit. Chug along for 20 minutes, stopping twice for 10 minutes each time so the driver could talk with a local bus driver who had pulled alongside and waved him over – the same bus each time. Who knows why? My friend is still pissed, so I try to assuage him by telling him of one of my other friends, who lives by the Kerouac mantra of 'Avoid the authorities,' but I think I stunk up the translation since I just got that befuddled look I always get.

By now we have another problem – carbon monoxide. Great, I'm in the one truck in China that's airtight. Am I sleepy from the ride, or am I DYING? Me, in a nutshell, there.

Finally hop out a half-hour later. Continue on, with the usual two-hour meal break, fix a flat – only one! – and then get stuck on a mountain road for 90 minutes because another truck had broken down on a hairpin turn. (At least pass out a bunch of smokes I always carry and make new friends – my fave part of China.)

Anyway, finally cross the pass into absolute majesty, two more hours to the village, which is drop-jaw lovely, and wind up staying with the truck driver's wonderful family, sitting on their balcony, drinking tea as they play mah-jong, looking down at the Yangzi River in the moonlight. Who cares if a five-hour trip had just taken nearly 10?

Otherwise, you'll have to do what locals do and hop aboard a supply truck at the same market; it also costs ¥35 but can take up to seven hours. Still, they're relatively spacious and fairly comfortable. Here's the huge catch: technically the road to Bāoshān crosses through the Yùlóng Xuēshān (Jade Dragon Snow Mountain) tourist zone and thus you're gonna get hit up for the ¥120 combination fee as you pass the entrance. (Unless, of course, your kindly truck driver offers to stick you in the back of the truck – for a little somethin' for the effort.) You can argue all you want, but park officials will not budge on this.

Vehicles back to Lijiāng depart Shítouchéng sometime between 8am and 9am (give yourself 30 minutes to haul yourself up the hill) but stop for at least an hour in Bāoshān to pick up passengers and freight (and eat lunch), finally leaving around 11am or 11.30am. (Line up your ride back when you arrive, just in case.)

An excellent way to leave Shítouchéng is to hike 3½ to four hours to Bāoshān. If you leave by 7.30am you should arrive in plenty of time to catch the bus from Bāoshān. The trail follows the Yangzi River past clumps of cacti and after about 1½ hours takes a side valley up to Bāoshān. After a further 30 minutes the trail crosses a humpbacked bridge to the true right side of the stream. The first half of the trail follows the cliff side and can be dangerous at times so it's a good idea to take a guide; Mu Shangwen (see p278) can act as a guide for around ¥30 or introduce you to someone else.

SHÍGǔ & THE FIRST BEND OF THE YANGZI 石鼓和长江第一弯

☎ 0887 / pop 5679

The small town of Shígǔ sits on the first bend of China's greatest river. Shígǔ means 'Stone Drum' and refers to a marble plaque shaped like a drum that commemorates a 16th-century Naxi victory over a Tibetan army. The original stone drum is attributed to Zhuge Liang, the 3rd-century military strategist who crossed the river here during one of his campaigns. Another plaque here celebrates the People's Army crossing of the river here in 1936 during the Long March to the north. Kublai Khan is also said to have crossed the river here on inflated sheepskins.

The view? Well, it is a bend all right and there is a rather nice view. That's about it,

THE MOST IMPORTANT HILL IN CHINA

As Simon Winchester notes in his book *The River at the Centre of the World*, China's history hangs in the balance at Cloud Hill, on the first bend of the Yangzi. This pile of rocks in the middle of the oncoming Yangzi River (known here as the Jinshā Jiāng) funnels China's greatest river north and east into the heartland of China instead of draining south out of China.

Chinese tradition assigns this dramatic U-turn to Yu the Great, China's mythological bureaucrat-deity in charge of water control. Without him, the Yangzi Valley, the cradle of the nation, would never have come into existence and the cultural development of China, and therefore the world, may have been profoundly different.

though. Some people love the fact that it isn't a touristified village; others snap a pic and immediately head out. There is a ¥4 admission price to the view, though some haven't been asked.

For Shígǔ (¥9, two hours) staff at Lijiāng's main bus station will likely throw you aboard one of the Jùdiàn (巨甸) bound buses that depart from 7.30am to 4pm. Alternatively, take a 7.30am or 8.30am departure to Wéixī and hop off. It's easily visited in a day. For the return, just wait by the road for any bus passing through. First bend fish are reportedly the tastiest in the region.

LÍMÍNG 黎明

☎ 0887

Halfway to Jùdiàn (巨甸) from Shígǔ a road leads to Líming and then continues to Líguāng, the heart of a 240-sq-km scenic area of freak geology, with steep flat-topped hills and crags of every conceivable colour vaulting from the river valley floor. There's plenty of hiking potential here, especially to the Qiāngui Shān (千龟山; 1000 Turtle Hill), a weird rock phenomenon that is said to resemble 1000 turtles marching off to the sky.

Occasional buses depart for Líming from the main bus station in Lijiāng. Alternatively take any bus bound for Jùdiàn or Wéixī get off at the turn-off (near Zhōngxīng village) and hitch. Accommodation is available at the bus stop in Líming.

WÉIXĪ COUNTY 维西县

☎ 0887 / pop (Wéixī town) 4288

Wéixī Lisu Autonomous County lies off the main road to Shangri-la and Dégǐn and so gets few visitors but you could visit it as an alternative route to or from Dégǐn, or just visit as a return trip from Lijiāng. It is slated for improvements but this has been said for years; for the moment it's mostly ribbons of roads alternating between decent narrow highway and the occasional place where it has degraded into rough track.

The route can be lovely at times but just be aware that though there are a few sights, practicalities are few and far between. A few bikers have mentioned it as lovely, but demanding. Wéixī itself is a bit of a yawner, except for being one of the few places in China to see the Pumi ethnic minority. The town has loads of cheap guesthouses and hotels, but little traffic and not enough bus tickets, so buy early.

Outside Wéixī, towns are more like microscopic villages – if that – and if there's a guesthouse it may be shut tight. Worse, sudden storms – of rain or especially snow – can leave the road impassable. In 2006 a group of travellers was stranded between Dégǐn and Wéixī by a snowstorm that came out of nowhere. They were stuck for four days before anyone even knew they were missing.

The road to Wéixī passes through Jùdiàn, a transport junction where you may have to change buses. Further along is Xīnzhǔ (新主) village in the Héngduàn Shān (横断山). These mountains are a treasure-trove of botany and have been pegged by Chinese scientists as one of the most diverse in the world. A **botanical garden** showcases the dozens of rare species and several thousand-year-old trees in the region.

Some 40km north of Jùdiàn is Tǎchéng (塔城), named for the towerlike mountains rising behind the village. Tǎchéng reportedly has many Neolithic ruins, but most tourists come for the cliffside **Bodhidharma Cave & Temple** (达摩祖师洞; Dámó Zǔshī Dòng or Damo Gumpa), often translated as the Damo Founder's Cave, 15km east at the elephant-shaped Dámó Shān. Tibetan pilgrims come to circumbulate the temple complex.

Wéixī is pretty much unexplored. The large county sports **Shuoguo Temple** (寿过寺; Shòuguò Sì) and **Pǎntiān Gé** (攀天阁), a pavilion 27km north of Wéixī. It also has some lovely Pumi and Lisu villages, including remote

Xiánuò village, just over the border in Dégǐn County, and Tónglè (同乐), near Yezhi (叶枝) town, famous for its minority *achimugua* dance, based on the movements of goats (a nod to the village's heritage).

TIGER LEAPING GORGE 虎跳峡

☎ 0887

Yúnnán's (no, Southwest China's) original trek, Tiger Leaping Gorge (Hǔtiào Xiá) is now the traveller's de facto rite of passage. For very, very good reason. One of the deepest in the world, it measures 16km long and is a giddy 3900m from the waters of Jinsha River (Jinshā Jiāng; popularly known as the Yangzi River) to the snowcapped mountaintops of Habā Shān (Haba Mountain) to the west and Yùlóng Xuēshān to the east. And it's preternaturally lovely pretty much everywhere. (The best time to come is May and the start of June, when the hills are afire with plant and flower life.)

Plan on three to four days away from Lijiāng doing the hike, though it can be done in two. Many travellers have lingered up to a week.

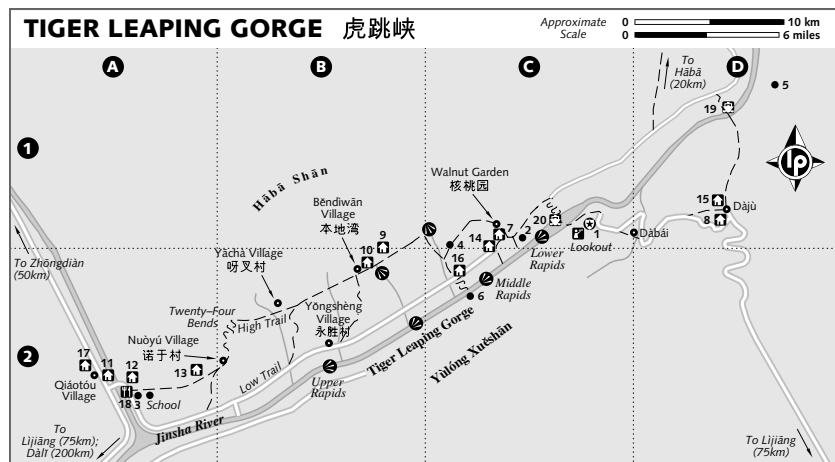
The first rule of business is figuring out what your route is. Finishing south in Qiǎotóu allows for quicker transport back to Lijiāng, but heading north towards Dàjù gives you the option of continuing on to Báishuítái. Most people take a Shangri-la-bound bus early in the morning, hop off in Qiǎotóu, and hike quickly to stay overnight in Walnut Garden.

You can still see the gorge (if you don't want to trek) by taking a bus to Qiǎotóu and then catching one of the ubiquitous micro-buses that shuttle people to the main viewpoint 10km away. Cost will depend on your bargaining skills but aim for as close to ¥15 as you can. You could even take a taxi (¥50) the 23km from Qiǎotóu to Walnut Garden and hitchhike back.

Admission to the gorge is ¥50. You can't miss the ticket offices at either end of the gorge.

Dangers & Annoyances

The gorge trek is not to be taken lightly. Even for those in good physical shape, it's a workout. The path constricts and crumbles; it certainly can wreck the knees. When it's raining (especially July and August), landslides and swollen waterfalls can block the paths, in particular on the low road. Half a dozen people – including a



INFORMATION

PSB 公安局	1	C1
Ticket Office 售票处	2	C1
Ticket Office 售票处	3	A2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bamboo Forest 竹林	4	C1
Pagoda 塔	5	D1
Tiger Leaping Stone 虎跳石	6	C2

SLEEPING

Chateau de Woody 山白脸旅馆	7	C1
Daju Longhu Inn 大具龙虎客栈	8	D1
Five Fingers Guesthouse 五指客栈	9	B1
Halfway Lodge 中途客栈	10	B2
Hotel 酒店	11	A2
Jane's Tibetan Guesthouse 峡谷行客栈	12	A2
Naxi Family Guesthouse 纳西雅阁	13	A2
Sean's Spring Guesthouse 山泉客栈	14	C1
Snowflake Hotel 雪花饭店	15	D1
Tina's Guest House 中峡客栈	16	C2
Youth Hostel 青年旅馆	17	A2

EATING

Gorged Tiger Café	18	A2
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TRANSPORT

Ferry 渡船	19	D1
New Ferry 新渡船	20	C1

Activities

GORGE TREK

There are two trails: the higher (the older route, known as the 24-bend path); and the lower, the new road, replete with belching tour buses. Only the high trail is worth hiking. Arrows help you avoid getting lost. Then again, as one of our all-time favourite traveller quotes goes, 'Remember the high road leaves less time for drinking beer in Walnut Garden'.

The following route starts at Qiátóu.

To get to the high road, after crossing through the gate, cross a small stream and go 150m. Take a left fork, go through the schoolyard's football pitch, and join the tractor road. Continue until the track ends and then follow the yellow arrows to the right. It's six hours to Bēndiwān or a strenuous eight hours to Walnut Garden. The following list of guesthouses is not exhaustive.

Naxi Family Guesthouse (Nàxī Kèzhàn; dm Y15) Eight kilometres into the trek, this place still gets rave reviews from travellers.

Five Fingers Guesthouse (Wúzhǐ Kèzhàn; dm Y15) Run by a friendly, enthusiastic family, you can eat with them for Y10.

Halfway Lodge (Zhōngtú Kèzhàn; ☎ 139 8870 0572; Bēndiwān; dm Y15) Once a simple home to a guy collecting medicinal herbs and his family, it's now a busy-busy – but cosy and well-run – operation.

Sean's Spring Guesthouse (Shānquán Kèzhàn; ☎ 880 6300; www.tigerleapinggorge.com; dm Y15) This is one of the original guesthouses on the trail and still

the spot for lively evenings and socialising. Sean's has electric blankets, mountain-bike hire (Y10 per hour) and can organise camping, guides, and horse trips.

Chateau de Woody (Shānbáilián Lǚguān; dm Y15) This other original is just fine too.

About 1½ hours from Bēndiwān you descend to the road to **Tina's Guest House** (Zhōngxiá Lǚdiàn; ☎ 880 6079; dm Y15). Budget more time if you are ascending. A good detour from here leads down 40 minutes to the middle rapids and **Tiger Leaping Stone**, where a tiger is once said to have leapt across the Yangzi, thus giving the gorge its name. The man who restored the path charges Y10.

From Tina's to Walnut Garden it is a 40-minute walk along the road. A new alternative trail to Walnut Garden keeps high where the path descends to Tina's, crosses a stream and a **bamboo forest** before descending into Walnut Garden.

The next day's walk is slightly shorter than the previous day's at four to six hours. There are two ferries and so two route options to get to Dàjù. After 45 minutes you'll see a red marker leading down to the new (winter) ferry (*xīn dùkǒu*; one way Y10); the descent includes one hairy section over planks with a sheer drop below.

Many trekkers call it a day when they reach the bottom and flag down anything heading back Qiátóu.

The road to Dàjù and the village itself are pretty uninteresting so you won't be missing anything if you skip it.

If you do decide to head on to Dàjù, it's a hard climb to the car park where you should register with the Lijiāng PSB (Gōngānjú). The PSB officer offers a car to take you into Dàjù for Y10, avoiding the dull 90-minute walk along the road.

The second, lesser-used option continues along the road from Walnut Garden until it reaches the permanent ferry crossing (Y10). From here paths lead to Dàjù.

If you're doing the walk the other way round and heading for Qiátóu, walk north through Dàjù, aiming for the white pagoda at the foot of the mountains.

TIGER LEAPING GORGE TO BÁISHUÍTÁI

An adventurous add-on to the gorge trek is to continue north all the way to Hābā village and the limestone terraces of Báishuítái. This turns it into a four-day trek from Qiátóu and

from here you can travel on to Shangri-la. From Walnut Garden to Hābā, via Jiāngbiān, it is seven to eight hours. From here to the Yi village of Sānbà is about the same, following trails. You could just follow the road and hitch with the occasional truck or tractor but it's longer and less scenic. Some hardy mountain bikers have followed the trail but this is really only fun from north to south, elevations being what they are. The best way would be to hire a guide in Walnut Garden for Y50 to Y100 per day, depending on the number of people. For Y100 to Y120 per day you should be able to get a horse and guide. Eventually buses will make the trip, but that is still some time off.

In Hābā most people stay at the **Haba Snow Mountain Inn** (Hābā Xuěshān Kèzhàn; dm Y15), which has toilets and showers. In Sānbà, beds can also be found for around Y15. From Sānbà there is an 8am bus to Shangri-la (Y40, five hours), or you could get off at the turn-off to Emerald Pagoda Lake (Bitá Hǎi) and hike there.

If you plan to try the route alone, assume you'll need all provisions and equipment for extremes of weather. Ask for local advice before setting out.

TIGER LEAPING GORGE VIEWPOINT

If you don't have time to trek the gorge, you can view it from its eastern end near Dàjù. From Dàjù it's a 5km walk to the entry gate or you can take a taxi for Y10. At the car park there's a Y2 entry fee and a walkway leads down to an observation platform.

Sleeping & Eating

Lodging options abound but in peak times – particularly late summer – up to 100 people per day can make the trek, so bed space is short. Be prepared to sleep in a back room somewhere. Supplies of bottled water can be chancy.

QIÁTÓU

Jane's Tibetan Guesthouse (Xiágǔxíng Kèzhàn; ☎ 880 6570; janetibetgh@hotmail.com; dm/s/d Y15/30/30; ☎) Jane is one of the gorge's true characters and has all the information on the trek. There are left-luggage facilities and internet access here. It's next to the school at the start of the trek.

Gorged Tiger Café (☎ 880 6300) Run by a local institution (an Australian woman named

few foreign travellers – have died in the gorge. Over the last decade, a few solo travellers have also been assaulted on the trail.

Check with cafés and lodgings in Lijiāng for trail and weather updates. Most have fairly detailed gorge maps; just remember they're not to scale and occasionally out of date.

Make sure you bring plenty of water on this hike, 2L to 3L is ideal, as well as plenty of sunscreen and lip balm.

THE END OF THE GORGE?

Development is taking its toll on Tiger Leaping Gorge. After three years of Herculean blasting and building, a road was built all the way through the gorge from Qiátóu to Walnut Garden and a dirt track swings north to Báishuítái, joining the road to Shangri-la. Tour buses shuttle up and down the gorge and kitschy stop-off points are always being constructed.

This currently isn't too much of an annoyance for trekkers as the high path climbs way above all of the activity. New plans for resorts, chairlifts, golf courses and the like have been endlessly bandied about.

If only the gorge's annoying new road and its ubiquitous shuttle buses were all. Tiger Leaping Gorge could disappear in a matter of years if plans to build eight dams along 564km of the upper reaches of the Yangzi River go ahead. This is but one of Yúnnán's most controversial dam projects; the other, in the Nujiang Valley (see p297), has put locals equally at odds with the government.

Once completed, the dams along the Yangzi River's upper reaches will flood more than 13,000 hectares of prime farmland, force over 100,000 people (some claim up to a million) to relocate and wash away local culture, history, unique architecture and indigenous plant and animal life.

Officials, naturally, claim that the dams are crucial to sating China's ever-increasing appetite for power. The proposed dams will also divert water to Kúnmíng to help alleviate chronic water shortages (of which anyone who's experienced the capital's 'water blackouts' during winter will be aware). Local officials also hope to garner around US\$50 million per annum in tax revenues – double the current figure.

Local opposition has been uniform and ferocious (there have been one or two reports of assaults against officials). They first point out that one of the project's major backers is Li Xi-aopeng, the son of Li Peng, the former prime minister who pushed through the controversial Three Gorges Dam project (p461).

But even with every environmental group in China and abroad lobbying against it, it's hard to believe that those in charge will take much notice. At the time of writing the Chinese media reported that preparatory work, including blasting, had already begun and proper construction on the dams was expected to begin by 2008. A good site to keep up to date on the project is www.irn.org.

Margo), this is a welcoming friendly place, though a few travellers have bemoaned the food. Great information source.

The **Youth Hostel** (Qingnián Lǚguǎn; dm/d Y15/50) on the village's main road is friendly but rooms are subpar at best. There's a **hotel** (d Y280) next to the Shangri-la-Qiaotou bus drop-off that seems appealing on the outside (what a shock) but they apparently forgot to include the rooms in its face-lift.

DÀJÙ

Snowflake Hotel (Xuěhuā Fāndiàn; s & d Y20) Rooms are spartan and a bit dark but its friendliness will snag most sweaty TLG trekkers.

Daju Longhu Inn (Dàjù Lónghú Kèzhàn; ☎ toll free 888 532 6040; d standard/deluxe without bathroom Y20/50) You may need to stick a smoke into your nostrils in the communal showers and toilets, and the budget rooms are nondescript, but the deluxe ones are quite impressively done up.

Getting There & Away

Transport is ever easier. From Lijiāng, buses run to Shangri-la every hour or so from 7.30am to 5pm from the long-distance bus station and pass through Qiátóu (Y20). The last bus to Shangri-la passes through at around 7pm.

At least two buses to Dàjù (Y24, four hours) run in the morning – if they feel like it – from just north of Lijiāng's old town, by the water-wheel. These return from Dàjù to Lijiāng at 7.30am and 1.30pm.

Returning to Lijiāng from Qiátóu, buses start running through from Shangri-la around 9am. The last one rolls through around 7.40pm (Y20).

Eventually the new highway through the gorge will link Qiátóu, Walnut Garden and the settlement across the river from Dàjù and then bend north to connect Báishuítái, allowing travellers to get to Shangri-la from here.

LÚGŪ HÚ 泸沽湖

☎ 0888

Tranquillity is fast beating a retreat from this forest-lined lake that overlaps the remote Yúnnán–Sichuān border. The lake, formed by two sinking faults, is fairly high at 2685m and is usually snowbound over the winter months. Villages are scattered around the lake but **Luòshuǐ** (落水) is the one heavily developed for tourism and is where your bus will drop you off. Essentially, the further you get from Luòshuǐ, the more 'pristine' and 'less tourist-ed' the experience.

Consider heading for Ligé (right), a much smaller village on the northwestern shore of the lake. Then again, we've already started getting letters mentioning that it too is becoming 'too touristy'. We politely disagree with that. For now, anyway. (True, maniacal building has started.)

Worry not – there are plenty of fabulous villages. In fact, villages are found throughout the area and it's fairly easy to get yourself lost (in a good way). If you're still looking for remoteness, then just keep village-hopping and you'll find yourself on the Sichuān side, where little of the action is. Just know that some of the roads around the lake to other villages are pretty rough. Top votes for alternate locations are **Luòwǎ** (洛瓦) and **Wǔzhīluó** (五支罗). Both almost directly opposite Luòshuǐ.

The area is home to several Tibetan, Yi and Mosu (a Naxi subgroup) villages. The Mosu are the last practising matriarchal society in the world (see the boxed text, p286) and many other Naxi customs lost in Lijiāng are still in evidence here.

The best times to visit the lake are April to May, and September to October, when the weather is dry and mild. Entrance to the lake is Y80.

Sights & Activities

From Luòshuǐ you can visit several islands on the lake by dugout canoe, which the Mosu call 'pig troughs' (*zhūcáo*). The canoes are rowed by Mosu who also serve as guides and usually take you out to **Liwúbǐ Dǎo** (里务比岛), the largest island. From here you can practically wade across to a spit of land in Sichuān. The second largest island is **Hēiwǎ Dǎo** (黑瓦俄岛). Canoes leave from a beach area to the south of the hotel strip in Luòshuǐ. In Ligé any of the hostels can help arrange boat trips. The

price will vary wildly, depending on exactly what you want to see, and how many people are in your group. If you're in a group of six to eight people expect to pay around Y10 per person.

Near the bus stop in Luòshuǐ is the worthwhile **Mosu Folk Custom Museum** (摩俗民族博物馆; Mósú Mínzú Bówùguǎn; admission Y20; ☎ hit & miss). The museum is set within the traditional home of a wealthy Mosu family and the obligatory guide will show you around and explain how the matriarchal society functions. There is also an interesting collection of photos taken by Joseph Rock (p273) in the 1920s.

In the outskirts of nearby Yǒngníng is **Zhamei Temple** (扎美寺; Zhāměi Sì), a Tibetan monastery with at least 20 lamas in residence. Admission is free, but a donation is expected. A private minivan costs Y15 per person for the half-hour ride. A bus passes through Luòshuǐ to Yǒngníng (Y5, roughly hourly), or you could opt to walk the 20km or so through pleasant scenery.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotels and guesthouses with doubles from around Y50 line the lakeside in Luòshuǐ. Most have attached restaurants that serve traditional Mosu foods including preserved pig's fat and salted sour fish – the latter being somewhat tastier.

Husi Teahouse (湖思茶屋; Húsi Cháwū; ☎ 588 1170; dm Y15; ☑) Run by Sichuaner Táng Bin since 1998, this is one of the original and still the best backpacker hang-outs on the lake. Showers are a bit of a hike from the guesthouse but he's got a fleet of computers with internet, killer coffee, a terrific bar-café and travel info galore. If you're lucky, you'll be in one of four rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the lake.

Mósū Dàjiǔdiàn (摩梭大酒店; ☎ 588 1185; d/cabins 160/400) The nearby Mosu guesthouses will likely have better doubles, but there's a handful of cabins away from the main building worth looking at. They don't have lake views, but each includes a living room, bedroom and bathroom.

LIGÉ 里格

With its velvet silence and vivid starry nights, arriving in this magical little village after Lijiāng feels like arriving at the very tranquil end of the earth. Most travellers don't get past Luòshuǐ, so if you do make the effort to come

here it will likely be just you, the Mosu and a handful of solo Chinese backpackers.

Set around a bay facing Ligé Dào (Lige Island), there's a day's worth of exploring to do either in the wilderness or on the lake, but a surprising number of travellers come and just chat, doodle and drink at one of the three waterside cafés.

But do get here as quick as you can. Construction plans are in the works here and one part of the bay looks like it's being readied for the construction of at least a half-dozen two-storey guesthouses.

Sleeping & Eating

Yàsè Dábā Lǚxíngzhě Zhìjiā (雅瑟达吧旅行者之家; ☎ 588 1196; dm/d/tr Y20/40/60; 🍷) Recently opened on the edge of the lake, this guesthouse has basic rooms with electric blankets, lovely owners and is just a spit away from the water. The cosy restaurant serves wonderful food: try Lúgū Hú fish (泸沽湖鱼; *Lúgū Hú yú*) or sausage (香肠; *xiāngcháng*) along with cold beer and an impressive choice of liqueurs (Baileys anyone?). It can also suggest activities or arrange pretty much any excursion you want here. Bikes cost Y20 per day.

Right around the corner from here, on the south side of this spit of land, is another terrific **guesthouse** (客栈; *kèzhàn*; ☎ 588 1015; d from Y30). Waves from the lake lick at the walls of this charming café, it's so close to the water.

It's all headed up by Susan, the fantastically friendly and relaxed owner.

Getting There & Away

Lijiāng's long-distance bus station has one direct bus a day to the lake (Y63, seven to eight hours, 9.30am) but buy your ticket at least one day in advance as they often sell out. Alternatively, you can go to Ninglàng (宁蒗) from Lijiāng's north bus station (Y23, three to four hours, six buses daily, 8am to 2pm). From Ninglàng, there's a daily bus to the lake (Y20, three to four hours, 12.30pm). For Ligé you will have to change for a minibus in Luòshuǐ (Y8 per person if there's a lot of you though normally they'll try to charge Y10 for the 20- to 25-minute ride).

Leaving Luòshuǐ, the direct bus to Lijiāng leaves daily at 10am. Again, tickets should be bought at least a day in advance. There's also a daily bus to Ninglàng (Y20, check time when you arrive). From Ninglàng, there's 13 buses daily to Lijiāng (Y25, 7.30am to 4pm) and one daily to Xiànguān (Y48, 7.50am).

At least one per day also makes the run to Jinjiāng (Y50), from where you can hop a train to Chéngdū, but the bus station where you may be dropped off is 20km from the train station. A bus between the two (there are many) costs Y3.

The daily bus to Xīchāng (西昌) leaves at 8am (Y60, seven to eight hours). There are also

dozens of minibuses that the prowl the villages around the lake on both the Sichuān and Yúnnán side if you want to go exploring.

SHANGRI-LA 香格里拉 (ZHONGDIAN 中甸)

☎ 0887 / pop 120,000 / elevation 3200m

Shangri-la (formerly known as Zhōngdiàn, which you'll also see and hear; its Tibetan name is Gyeltang or Gyalthang) is where you begin to breathe in the Tibetan world. (If you can breathe at all, given its altitude.)

One of the most important monasteries in China lies just north of town and the town offers a fantastic dose of Tibet if you can't make it to the real thing. Shangri-la is also the last stop in Yúnnán for more hardy travellers looking at a rough five- or six-day journey to Chéngdū via the Tibetan townships and rugged terrain of western Sichuān.

How times change. A mere decade ago, Shangri-la was literally a one-yak town, too high and remote to draw in many tourists. Pigs nibbled on garbage-strewn street corners; there was but one place to stay and pretty much nowhere to eat. Then, watching Lijiāng and Dǎli zoom into the tourism stratosphere based on their sublime geographic locations, local and provincial governments started to pay attention to the erstwhile Zhōngdiàn in serious fashion.

Officials declared the town (and by extension the rest of the country) the location of British writer James Hilton's fictional Shangri-la, described in his novel *The Lost Horizon*. Roll your eyes if you wish, but it has worked big time. This is a prime spot for all kinds of tourists – hence the airport and guesthouses springing up seasonally (and skyrocketing entrance fees). Still, it's a wondrous place and well worth a visit.

Plan your visit to this neck of the woods between April and October. There is no point coming here during winter as the city is practically shut down and transportation is often halted completely by snow storms.

Accommodation can be a bit tight around festivals times (see p288), so you may want to arrive a day or two early in order to secure a room.

Information

CD burning is available at Noah Café (p289) for Y10 per CD.

Agricultural Bank of China (Zhōngguó Nóngyè Yínháng; ☎ 822 2567; cnr Changzheng Lu & Xiangyang

Lu; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Can change cash, travellers cheques and usually gives cash advances on credit cards, though some travellers have reported being denied.

China Telecom (Changzheng Lu) There are two telephone offices along this road that offer cheap international phone calls.

Khampa Caravan (Kāngbā Shāngdào Tǎnxiǎn Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 828 8648; www.khampacaravan.com; Heping Lu) Organises some excellent adventures, from day treks in the surrounding countryside to week-long treks in the remote wilderness. It can also arrange overland travel into Tibet (see p291), as well as flights and permits from Shangri-la to Lhasa. The company also runs a lot of sustainable development programs within Tibetan communities. One of these projects, Trinyi Eco-lodge, is six kilometres southwest out of town and is easy to get to by bike.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú; ☎ 822 6834; Changzheng Lu; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm) Issues on-the-spot visa extensions.

Tibet Café (Xizàng Kǎféiguǎn; ☎ 823 0282; www.tibetcafeinn.com; Changzheng Lu; internet access per hr Y12) Another great place to go for travel information; it also organises overland travel to Tibet. A particularly worthwhile trip is a visit to its eco-farm, Shangbala, 40km from Shangri-la, where you can spend the evening with a Tibetan family (Y20 per person). All money goes directly to the Tibetan community.

Dangers & Annoyances

Altitude sickness is a real problem here and most travellers need at least a couple of days to acclimatise. Brutal winter weather can bring the town to a complete standstill so try to plan your visit between March and October. Note that with the boom in tourism has come a boom in thievery – pay close attention to your bags and neighbours on buses, especially for those early-in-the-morning dark departures.

Sights

About an hour's walk north of town is the **Ganden Sumtseing Gompa** (Sōngzǎnlín Sì; admission Y10; ☎ 7.30am-8pm), a 300-year-old Tibetan monastery complex with around 600 monks, though most of these live and actually work outside the temple. It is by far the most important in southwest China and definitely worth the trip.

Construction on the Gelukpa (Yellow Hat) monastery was initiated in 1679 by the fifth Dalai Lama. Shelled like everything else by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1959 it wasn't reopened until 1981. A half-dozen main buildings include eight colleges, all open – usually – to the public.

WALKING MARRIAGE

The Mosu are the last practising matriarchal society in the world. This system, whereby kinship and clan names, and social and political positions are passed on through the female line, has fascinated visitors since the area was developed for tourism in the early 1980s. What's proved to be the biggest draw, however, is the Mosu tradition of a 'walking marriage' (走婚; *zǒu hūn*).

Mosu women never marry nor cohabit; instead women are free to choose as many lovers as they like throughout their lives. Mosu women come of age when they reach 13, after which they no longer have to sleep in the communal living areas but are given their own bedroom. Her lover visits at night and leaves to return to his mother's home in the morning, hence the expression 'walking marriage'.

This idea of such free and easy love has been heavily publicised. Traditionally referred to as Nǚ Guó (Woman's Kingdom), the area of Lúgū Hú was renamed Nǚ'ér Guó (Girl's Kingdom) in order to spice up the romantic and exotic image of the local women.

It's a strategy that's worked. Thousands of tourists have ventured up to this remote area, resulting in the Mosu becoming the richest ethnic minority group in Yúnnán. But it's also had some damaging effects on their culture. 'Walking marriage' has become synonymous with 'one night stand' and many men, in particular Han Chinese, visit the area in the hope of having a walking marriage themselves. This in turn has seen a rise in prostitution in the area, and brothels disguised as karaoke bars now sit on the edge of Luòshuǐ town; the ultimate proof, if it was ever needed, that's there's no such thing as free love.



The monks are welcoming, even with more and more tourists coming in. If you're around during special occasions or festivals, you might see Cham, religious dances in which monks wear masks depicting deities, ghosts and animals. Bus 3 runs here from anywhere along Changzheng Lu (Y1). Be advised that the government is planning to raise the admission price to around Y30. It claims that the monastery is getting the bulk of this.

The view of town from the top is gorgeous, and a sunset from here is particularly picturesque among the tinkling bells and the fluttering prayer flags.

Hidden within the old town is the **Scripture Chamber** (Gúchéng Cánjīngtáng; admission Y5), formerly a memorial hall to the Red Army's Long

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March. Definitely not much to see here but its one room is worth a look. **Guishan Park** (Guishān Gōngyuán; admission Y3) is nearby and has a temple at the top with commanding views of the area.

Further south, just outside of and overlooking the old town from an eyrie, is another tiny **temple** presided over by two exceedingly friendly monks. To get here, walk south to the end of Changzheng Lu. Bear left, then take an immediate right. Paths run up across some gardens and along a hill, bypassing a pavilion.

Further north, atop a hill to the west of Changzheng Lu is a **chörten** (Tibetan stupa) with good views of the town.

Besides the sights listed here, Shangri-la is a wonderful place to get off the beaten track with plenty of trekking and horseback riding opportunities, as well as little-visited monasteries and villages. However, the remote sights are difficult to do independently given lack of public transport. You'll need to arrange a guide, or car and driver through your accommodation

Festivals & Events

In mid to late June Shangri-la plays host to a **horseracing festival** that sees several days of dancing, singing, eating and horseracing. Another new festival – usually in September – features minority artists of southwest China.

Sleeping

There are always interesting guesthouses and hostels popping up near the old town and city outskirts. Be aware, however, that despite Shangri-la's often glacial night temperatures, many guesthouses are neither heated nor have 24-hour hot water. Those listed here ostensibly stay open year-round, but verify this with them before you slog your bag down the street in the snow.

Dragoncloud Guesthouse (Lóngxíng Kèzhàn; ☎ 688 7573; www.dragoncloud.cn; 94 Beimen Jie, Jiantang Zhen; 建塘镇北门街94号; dm Y15-25, s & d Y80; ☑) Large and spacious, this guesthouse has tastefully understated modern rooms and everything is in great shape – including the restrooms and showers. The fireplace in the common area is a godsend. Internet (Y4 per hour) and interesting comings and goings from the nearby old town. Bike rental for Y15 per day.

Shangri-La Traveller Club (Dégīn Zàngdì Guójiā Qīngnián Lùshè; ☎ 822 8671; 98 Heping Lu; 和平路98号; dm/d Y20/50; ☑) The gregariousness of the staff here makes up (more than enough) for the only downside – the chilling dash from the outdoor shower to your room! You can rent bikes here (Y15 per day) and go online (Y6 per hour).

Kevin's Trekker Inn (Lóngmén Kèzhàn; ☎ 822 8178; www.kevintrekkerinn.com; Tuanjie Lu; 团结路; dm/d Y20/60; ☑) Run by a diehard traveller, this place has consistently garnered high praise from travellers for its helpful owners and cosy digs. Choose between a traditional Chinese house or a newer Tibetan building. Warmly lit common areas and loads of extras – best might be the flowers the proprietor insists on maintaining on the grounds.

International Youth Hostel (Guójiā Qīngnián Lùshè; ☎ 822 6948; Jiantang Lu; 建塘路; dm/d Y20/80) Spartan and on the chilly side at night, this hostel is in a quiet part of town and run by a lovely family who don't speak English but go out of their way to help.

Gyalthang Dzong Hotel (建塘宾馆; Jiàntáng Bīnguǎn; ☎ 822 3646; www.coloursofangsana.com/gyalthang; s & d in peak season US\$90; closed 1 Dec-1 Apr) It's honestly a rare pleasure to write about a high-end place in China that warrants the mention. This is one of them – a fabulous place and one of the best we've seen anywhere in China's Southwest. Some 3km east of town and backed against a 'protector' hill, it's got amazing rooms – call them spiritually chic in design, with subtle rusty oranges and maroons – and exquisite attention to detail throughout.

Eating & Drinking

The Tibet Café (p287) has a popular restaurant, though it's a bit pricey. It also has great bikes for rent.

Noah Café (Nuóyá Kāfēi; Changzheng Lu; 长征路; dishes from Y10) When the weather gets nippy – OK, downright freezing – you can be sure that most people are going to be here for their three squares – if they leave at all. Yup, at last check, this place seemed to be tops – good muesli and pancakes. You can also burn CDs here for Y10.

Cow Pub (Niúpéng Jiùbā; ☎ 828 5774; Jinlong Jie; 金龙街) The name itself warrants a poke-around in this place whose design scheme is dedicated to cowpokes (Tibetan or otherwise) or at least life in Old Tibet. Subdued but welcoming, you'll find it in the old town.

Artistic Space of the Sacred (Shèngdì Yìshù Kōngjiān; ☎ 823 1309; 16 Cangfang Jie; 仓房街16号) Not your run-of-the-mill joint, this place – is it a bar, an inn? – is run by an artist, and it shows, from the lighting to the colour coordination. Best of all are the inspiring views from the tiered outdoor terraces. A Ming has a gallery full of paintings upstairs and will show you if you ask. He's also set up a four-bed dorm with one of the most romantic views in the city.

Have a look around the old town and on Tuanjie Lu for Tibetan and Western restaurants and cafés. Also look out for locally produced Shangri-la wine. French missionaries working in the Mekong area taught the Tibetans wine-producing techniques, a tradition which has fortunately carried on through to today; look for the bottle with a picture of a church on the label.

Getting There & Away

Note that many of the roads leading out of Shangri-la, particularly the road to Emerald Pagoda Lake and Báishuítái, take you over 4000m-plus passes. If you fly in direct from Kūnmíng it's important that you give yourself a day or two to acclimatise in Shangri-la.

AIR

There are four flights daily to Kūnmíng (Y830), two a week to Guǎngzhōu (Y1880), and regular flights to Lhasa. Flights for other domestic destinations also leave from this airport but are completely irregular and destinations change from week to week. You can inquire about your destination or buy

SHANGRI-LA – FACT & FICTION

At first it seemed like a typically overstated tourist campaign: 'Shangri-la Found'. Only they weren't kidding. In November 1997 the *China Daily* reported that the Yúnnán Economy & Technology Research Centre had established with 'certainty' that the fabled 'Shangri-la' of James Hilton's 1933 best-seller *Lost Horizon* was, indeed, in Dēqín County.

Hilton's novel (later filmed by Frank Capra and starring Ronald Coleman, Jane Wyatt and John Gielgud) tells the story of four travellers who are hijacked and crash land in a mountain utopia ruled by a 163-year-old holy man. This 'Shangri-la' is in the Valley of the Blue Moon, a beautiful fertile valley capped by a perfect pyramid peak, Mt Karakul. According to Hilton's book, Shangri-la is reached by travelling 'southwest from Peking for many months', and is found 'a few hundred kilometres from a world's end market town...where Chinese coolies from Yúnnán transfer their loads of tea to the Tibetans'.

The Yúnnán Economy & Technology Research Centre based its claim primarily on the fact that Dēqín's Kawa Karpo peak perfectly resembles the 'pyramid-shaped' landmark of Mt Karakul. Also, the county's blood-red valleys with three parallel rivers fit a valley from *Lost Horizon*.

One certainly plausible theory is that Hilton, writing the novel in northwest London, based his descriptions of Shangri-la on articles by Joseph Rock he had read in *National Geographic* magazine detailing Rock's expeditions to remote parts of Lijiang, Mùlǐ and Dēqín. Others believe that Hilton's 'Shangri-la' may just have been a corruption of the word *Shambhala*, a mystical Buddhist paradise.

Tourism authorities wasted little time latching onto the Shangri-la phenomenon and today there are Shangri-la hotels, travel agencies and a Shangri-la airport. Sensing that 'there's money in them there Shangri-la hills', rival bids popped up around Yúnnán. Cízhōng in Wēxi County pointed out that its Catholic churches and Tibetan monasteries live side by side in the valley. One local was even told that she was the blood relative of one of the (fictional) characters! Meanwhile, Dàoichéng, just over the border in Sichuān, had a strong bid based around the pyramid peak of its mountain Channa Dorje and the fact that Rock wrote about the region in several articles. Then there's the town of Xióngǔ (雄古), a Naxi village 40km from Lijiang, which boasts a stone tablet from the Qing dynasty naming the town 'Xianggeli', from where the name Shangri-la is derived.

It's hard for us cynics not to believe that the whole thing has simply been manufactured as a money-making exercise. Provincial authorities had long been preparing for an invasion of tourists into the prefecture to provide an alternative income to the recently banned logging trade. Even Xuan Ke, the original proponent of the Shangri-la theory, laments that the concept has been hijacked for commercial purposes. No amount of reminding that Shangri-la is in a work of fiction will deter local Chinese who are proudly convinced of the authenticity.

And while it may even have been Shangri-la to Hilton and millions of readers, Shangri-la is at its heart surely a metaphor. As a skinny-dipping Jane Wyatt says in the film version of the book, 'I'm sure there's a wish for Shangri-la in everyone's heart...'

tickets at the **CAAC** (Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 822 9901; Wenming Jie).

The airport is 5km from town and is sometimes referred to as Dìqìng or Deqen – there is currently no airport at Dēqín. Don't expect to see any taxis here, they are rare around the airport. Shuttle buses (Y10) sometimes wait for incoming flights and will usually drop you right at your hotel. The drivers wear picture ID. If the shuttle bus isn't there you'll have to negotiate with the all the drivers of the black sedans in front of you or call your accommodation to try and arrange something.

BUS

Then, there's everyone's favourite bus-trek: the 'back' door (hardly seems like it with its popularity now) to Chéngdū in Sichuān, via Xiāngchéng, Lítáng and Kāngdìng. It may be the bee's knees as far as travellers' fave roughing-it trips, but be aware that it isn't always a picnic, so be prepared before you go.

You're looking at a minimum of five to six days' travel at some very high altitudes – you'll need warm clothes. Roads are also ass-killing. The first stage of the trip is Shangri-la to Xiāngchéng in Sichuān. From Xiāngchéng, your next destination is Lítáng, though

SHANGRI-LA BUS TIMETABLE

This list is not exhaustive. Loads of other buses ply local- and long-distance routes, most covered in other chapters. You could even take the extraordinary long-haul to Jīnjiāng in Sichuān from here on an endlessly long sleeper bus.

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Báishuītái	23	4	2 daily	9.10am, 2.10pm
Bēnzǐlán	17	3	2 daily	1pm, 2pm
Dēqín	38	6	4 daily	7.20am-noon
Dōngwàng	45	7-8	daily	7.30am
Kūnmíng	167	15	7 daily	4-7.30pm
Lǐjiāng	35	4½	13 daily	7.10am-5.40pm
Xiāguān	56	8	hourly	7am-12.30pm
Xiāngchéng	65	8-9	daily	7.30am

if roads are bad you may be forced to stay overnight in Dàoichéng. From Lítáng, it's on to Kāngdìng from where you can make your way west towards Chéngdū. For more details on these towns see Western Sichuān & the Road to Tibet (p387).

Few undertake the other options. Take the 8am bus north to Dōngwàng, get off where it turns off the main road and hitch from here. Another option is to take the daily early morning bus to Déróng (Y37), a town with a decent hotel and a couple of nice monasteries just over the border in Sichuān, and try to catch onward transport to the main Shangri-la-Lítáng road from there.

Note that roads out of Shangri-la can be temporarily blocked by snow at any time from November (or even October in some years) to March. If you are travelling at this time bring lots of warm clothes and a flexible itinerary.

For Bēnzǐlán you can also catch the Dēqín bus which passes through Bēnzǐlán on the way. See also individual local destinations for transport details.

TO TIBET

There are now flights from Shangri-la to Lhasa, however the situation is much the same as in Kūnmíng and Chéngdū and travellers must be part of an organised 'group' and have the necessary permits in order to travel. There are three companies in Shangri-la that sell 'packages' to Tibet (around Y2570 per person, including air ticket):

Khampa Caravan (☎ 828 8648; www.khampacaravan.com; Heping Lu)

Tibet Café (☎ 823 0019; www.tibetcafeinn.com; Changzheng Lu)

Tibet Tourism Bureau (Xizāng Lǚyóujú; ☎ 822 9028; yunnantibetour@yahoo.com.cn; Room 2206, Shangbala Hotel, 36 Changzheng Lu)

These same companies can also organise overland trips from Shangri-la into Tibet via either the northern or southern highway to Lhasa. Likewise, you need official permits in order to do this and these trips don't come cheap (from Y800 to Y1000 per vehicle per day). You're also looking at an eight- to 12-day journey at high altitudes. But holy smoke, what an adventure (and what scenery).

Trips – and costs – vary so it's worth shopping around to see what best suits you. Remember that permits take five days to organise. The Tibet Café has arranged for travellers to start the permit process in Dàlǐ courtesy of the MCA Guesthouse. Travellers can fax copies of their passports through to Shangri-la from the MCA Guesthouse so by the time they arrive in Shangri-la their permits will be ready to collect. Jim's Tibetan Guesthouse & Peace Café in Dàlǐ (p260) can also organise overland travel to Lhasa.

Getting Around

Buss 1 and 3 zip between the monastery and town (Y1).

AROUND SHANGRI-LA

Approximately 10km southeast of Shangri-la is the **Tiansheng Bridge** (天生桥; Tiānshēng Qiáo; admission Y15), a natural limestone formation, and further southeast, the subterranean **Xiagei hot springs** (下给温泉; Xiàgěi Wēnquán; admission Y15). If you can arrange transport, en route is the

Great Treasure Temple (大宝寺; Dàbǎo Sì), one of the earliest Buddhist temples in Yünnán.

These sites are wildly popular with Chinese tour groups but many foreign travellers seem uniformly underwhelmed.

Napa Lake (Nàpà Hǎi) 纳帕海

Some 7km northwest of Shangri-la you'll find this seasonal lake (admission Y30) fed by 10 streams and rivers, surrounded by a large grass meadow and mountains on three sides. Nine caves lie in the surrounding mountains; in the hills in the northwest corner of the lake lie the remains of a Ming dynasty temple with fine views.

Between September and March budding ornithologists will like the place: the 2000-sq-m Napa Hai Nature Reserve is home to myriad rare bird species, including a winter community of around 200 black-necked cranes. Autumn is lovely here – azure skies above golden meadows and yaks everywhere.

Outside of these months, the lake dries up and there is little reason to visit. It is worth a bike ride in summer, when you can also hire horses; the rest of the time it's just a marsh. Tents can be rented for around Y25 to Y30 per night in off-peak times (during a festival it may be Y150). The best views are from the high ground to the north and you'll get these from the bus to Déqin or Bēnzilán.

Emerald Pagoda Lake & Shudu Lake 碧塔海和属都海

Some 25km east of Shangri-la, the bus to Sānbà (see Báishuítái, following) can drop you along the highway for **Emerald Pagoda Lake** (Bìtǎ Hǎi; admission Y190), which is 8km down a trail (a half-hour by pony). Yes, this is an absolutely laughable admission price, and it was just being introduced at the time of writing. Hopefully there will be enough outcry (and subsequent drop in tourism) for officials to rethink this.

If you do decide to visit, there are lots of hiking options and ponies can be arranged at the lake (Y65 round-trip rides; Y25 to or from southern entrance to/from lake). There is a second, southern entrance, from where it is 2km to the lake. It's possible to rent boats between the two ends of the lake; a motorboat ride runs Y50 per person, or you can haggle down to Y100 or so for five if you're good. Rowboats are cheaper. Tourists come to photograph the island in the middle of the lake

that is ablaze with flowers in June and a riot of autumn colours in October. An intriguing sight in summer is the comatose fish that float unconscious for several minutes in the lake after feasting on azalea petals.

Basic **cabins** (Y15-30) are available at the western end of the lake.

The whopping new entrance fee is also due to the inclusion of Shudu Lake (Shūdū Hǎi), approximately 10km to the north. More birds, more scintillating blue – you know the deal. The lush carpets of forest are impressive, especially the dragon spruce and silver birch. The name means 'place where milk is found' in Tibetan because its pastures are reputedly the most fertile in northwestern Yünnán. There certainly is more livestock grazing here than anywhere else. It is possible to hike between the two lakes but it's easy to get lost, so be sure to get precise directions.

Too bad the entrance fee is so high, as it probably puts travellers off a trip to the gorgeous little Tibetan village of **Nírú** (尼徕) to the northeast, close to the border with Sichuān. (Even if you just wish to meander around those parts, you've gotta fork over the cash for the entrance fee if you're passing through.) One traveller reported hiking from Shudu Lake to Nírú in a day, though you definitely need help knowing where to go. You could also take a daily bus (3pm) to Luòjǐ (洛吉) and hike/hire a car from there.

Getting to the lake(s) is tricky. You usually have to catch the bus to Sānbà, get off at the turn-off and hitch. Getting back you can wait (sometimes forever) for a bus or hike to one of the entrances or main road and look out for taxis – these guys need a fare back to Shangri-la so you might negotiate a good deal. Emerald Pagoda Lake is one of the more ambitious destinations for a bicycle ride. A taxi will cost around Y200 for the return trip, including Shudu Lake.

Báishuítái 白水台

Breathtaking scenery, possible pony rides, and a splendid chain of Tibetan villages leads to **Báishuítái** (admission Y30), a limestone deposit plateau 108km southeast of Shangri-la. For good reason has this become probably the most popular slow route between Lijiāng and Shangri-la.

The terraces, reminiscent of those found in Pamukkale in Turkey or Huánglóng in Sichuān, are resplendent in sunlight, but can

be tough to get to if rainfall has made trails slick. The terraces are around the small Naxi village of Báidi. The highlight of the terraces is a 60m-tall cascade and rock cave. There are sometimes horses for hire up to the terraces for around Y25.

The region is also famed as the birthplace and heartland of Naxi Dongba culture (see p265 for more information) and thus is sacred to the Naxi, so tread ever so lightly.

One adventurous option is to combine a visit to Emerald Pagoda Lake with Báishuítái and trek all the way from here to Tiger Leaping Gorge via Sānbà and Hābà villages. You'll need local expertise to find the paths, though a rough road does lead between the villages. It is probably easier to do this route in reverse, since guesthouses in Walnut Grove along the Tiger Leaping Gorge trek can arrange horses and guides. See p283 for further information.

A couple of guesthouses at the nearby towns of Báidi and Sānbà have rooms with beds from Y25; in the off season these can go down to Y10 or so.

From Shangri-la there are two daily buses to Sānbà via Báishuítái at 9.10am and 2.10pm (Y23, four hours). Don't count on these always departing. The starting price to charter a microbus from Shangri-la to Báishuítái via Emerald Pagoda Lake is Y400 to Y500.

Bēnzilán & Níxī 奔子栏、尼西

Bēnzilán gets all the publicity for its wonderful Tibetan gompa, but along the way, roughly halfway to Bēnzilán and where the highway intersects with the road to Wéixī, consider hopping off in Níxī, famed for its pottery. Some three-quarters of the village's 100-plus families still make the 3km trip to and from local hills, where the clay is said to be sublime, and set to work as they have for centuries.

Bēnzilán, is the (roughly) halfway point on the way to Déqin. This laid-back Tibetan village makes an excellent base to explore the wonderful **Dhondruping Gompa** (东竹林寺; Dōngzhúlín Sì), 22km from Bēnzilán, heading northwest along the main road. This is one of the most important monasteries in the prefecture. The original temple, built in 1667, was up in Báimáng Xuěshān, but after being destroyed by the PLA in the 1950s, it was rebuilt here, in the lee of the mountain. At its peak, more than 700 monks and 10 'living Buddhas' resided here; now its main

assembly hall and several *kangtsang* (colleges) still house 300 monks and four living Buddhas. There is a **mask dance festival** here in November. There is no entry fee and photos can be taken.

There is lovely scenery in all directions and if you have time it's a great hike to Bēnzilán. Monks can show you the short cuts. If you enquire politely it might be possible to spend the night at the monastery.

Bēnzilán has plenty of restaurants and small hotels. All offer decent beds for Y25 to Y30.

Duōwén Lǚguǎn (多闻旅馆; bed Y25) is perhaps the best choice, around the bend in the northern end of town. This Tibetan-style place has a prayer wheel by the entrance and pleasant rooms but fetid toilets; there have been good reports about the family that runs it.

To get to Bēnzilán take any bus between Shangri-la and Déqin; buses pass through town between 11am and noon. There are two direct buses a day from Shangri-la (Y17, three hours, 1pm and 2pm). There are daily buses back to Shangri-la. Inquire about times when you arrive.

Birāng Xiágǔ 碧壤峡谷

Worth a visit if you've got loads of time, your butt hasn't been tenderised too much by western Sichuān buses, and you are well prepared, is impressive **Birāng Xiágǔ** (Birang Gorge; admission Y20), 100km north of Shangri-la. Biodiverse, seems something of an understatement when one takes a gander at the laundry list of flora and fauna contained within. Unesco went gaga when examining the region for placement on its World Heritage sites list in 2003.

It's recently been rechristened Shangri-la Gorge (Xiānggélǐlā Xiágǔ) – along, it seems, with half of the sights in northwest Yünnán. The gorge itself has dramatic 150m-high sheer walls but the best part is the trail that leads out from the gorge, giving a rare opportunity to do some hiking. Get here quick – shops and restaurants have just been built and the litter is starting to pile up.

Currently you need to stay the night at the gorge or hire your own transport for around Y300. Public buses at 8am from Shangri-la to Wēngshuǐ (翁水; Y30), just north of the gorge, are some of the most hopeless in China, taking up to five hours to cover the 100km and only returning the next morning. You could try and get off the bus to

Xiāngchéng in Sìchuān. You may be able to hitch back in the afternoon in summer.

There is basic accommodation at the **Báimǎ Fǎndiàn** (白马饭店; beds ¥10) with beds in what is essentially a barn. There is also accommodation at the main gate for Y20, which gets you a proper mattress at least. Bring a sleeping bag in winter and be prepared – we were marooned here for several days after heavy snowfalls in November.

DÉQĪN 德钦

☎ 0887 / pop 60,085 / elevation 3550m

Nestled in the wild west of Yúnnán, among ragged, snowy peaks, Déqīn is the last outpost before Tibet. For borderholics, to the east is Sìchuān, to the west is Tibet and to the south-west is Myanmar. There are sacred mountains seemingly every which way. Intrigued?

This, Yúnnán's northernmost county, is perched at an average altitude of 3550m. One of Yúnnán's – if not China's – most magical mountains, Kawa Karpo (often referred to as Méili Xuěshān) lies to the west of Déqīn. At 6740m, it is Yúnnán's highest peak and straddles the Yúnnán–Tibet border.

During the Tang dynasty, the prefecture was the seat of the Tangbo Tieqiao magistrate, but by the Ming dynasty, Lijiang's chieftain held sway. But far-flung Dìqīng prefecture was so isolated that it was never really controlled by anyone until the PLA came in force in 1957.

Sparsely populated Déqīn County has only 60,085 people. More than 80% are Tibetan, though a dozen other minorities also live here, including one of the few settlements of non-Hui Muslims in China. A series of recent excavations unearthed stone coffins and tombs with 16 levels dating from the late Han period.

Some travellers are disappointed with the town itself, which is a modern Chinese creation nestling in a side valley of the Mekong River (澜沧江; Lánkāng Jiāng), but there's a heavy Tibetan population (head to the market at the top end of town and shoot a few games of pool with the local Tibetans) enlivened by the occasional band of Khampa Tibetans down from the hills on a shopping expedition. And nobody comes here to stay in the town itself – head for the hills!

If you are travelling in winter you are crossing some serious ranges here and at any time from mid-October to late spring, heavy snows

can close the roads. Pack sensibly and plan for a snowbound emergency.

Confusingly, Déqīn is the name of the city and county; both are incorporated by the Dìqīng Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The county seat (and destination of the bus from Shangri-la) is spelled both ways, but you'll also see other variations on signs, maps, whatever. Plus, remember well – as if you could forget – that Déqīn County is also referred to as 'Shangri-la' in an effort to keep tourist dollars flowing up from the other Shangri-la (the erstwhile Zhōngdiàn).

Sleeping & Eating

Pretty much everyone heads for Fēilái Sì (opposite) and environs but the town has a few options.

Déqīn Tibet Hotel (德钦楼; Déqīn Lóu; 841 2031; dm/d ¥20/70) The most charming accommodation in town. There are bright murals on the walls and ceiling, some gorgeous views from the rooftop terrace rooms and a nice communal sitting area. You'll find this place 200m south of the bus station.

Déqīn Dasheng Hotel (德钦大声大酒店; Déqīn Dàshēng Dàjiǔdiàn; d ¥468) Up the street on your right after leaving the bus station, this hotel offers huge discounts and is a good choice for those wanting something a bit slicker. Rooms have modern bathrooms and electric blankets – a godsend during the chilly nights. There's an internet café across the street that serves free, bottomless cups of green tea while you surf or email (¥3 per hour).

Wéixī Nóngjiā Fēngwèi (维西农家风味; dishes from ¥5) Across from the Déqīn Dansheng Hotel, this hole-in-the-wall eatery has the cheapest and some of the best eats in town. It rarely sees tourists, and gets a regular crowd of boisterous locals, particularly for the 7pm news.

Getting There & Away

From Shangri-la to Déqīn, buses leave four times daily between 7.20am and noon (Y38, six hours). The same number of buses return to Shangri-la from Déqīn on a similar schedule.

There isn't any road to the Nujiang Valley (p297). Not yet, anyway. At the time of writing the governments of the Nujiang Valley and Déqīn had apparently goaded the provincial government into shelling out for a new road to link up with Gòngshān, but given the geography, this is probably a long way off.

YET ANOTHER TIBET BACK DOOR

Déqīn is also a jumping-off point for those looking to slip into Tibet by the back door. There are rumours that the Yúnnán route into Tibet will open up to individual travellers in coming years (of course we've been hearing this annually since 1997 when this town opened), but at the moment travellers can only go to Déqīn, not into Tibet. This route is quite dangerous and the Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōng'ānjū) keeps a vigilant eye out for foreigners trying to find their way across. Be warned that even if you find a driver to sneak you into Tibet, more than a few travellers have paid half the fare only to have the driver disappear. Just as importantly, if your driver gets caught smuggling you in he will face a large fine and likely confiscation of his driving license.

For details on border crossings into Tibet, see p291.

AROUND DÉQĪN

The Gelukpa (Yellow Hat) sect **Deqin Gumpa** is 3km south of Déqīn. The young monks are friendly but there's not a lot to see.

Fēilái Sì 飞来寺

Approximately 10km southwest of Déqīn is the small but interesting Tibetan Fēilái Sì (Feilai Temple; Naka Zhashi, or Trashī, Gumpa in Tibetan) devoted to the spirit of Kawa Karpo. There's no charge but leave a donation. No photos are allowed inside the tiny hall.

A further 800m along the main road brings you to a row of **chörten** (stupas) and, weather permitting, breathtaking views of the Méili Xuěshān range, including the 6740m-high **Kawa Karpo** (also known as Méili Xuěshān or Tàizi Shān). A small monument marks the tragic 1991 Sino–Japanese attempt on Kawa Karpo during which 17 people died. The even more beautiful peak to the south is 6054m **Miacimu** (Shěnnǚ in Chinese), whose spirit is the female counterpart of Kawa Karpo. Joseph Rock described Miacimu as 'the most glorious peak my eyes were ever privileged to see...like a castle of a dream, an ice palace of a fairy tale'. Locals come here to burn juniper incense to the wrathful spirit of the mountain.

SLEEPING & EATING

This place has gone from deserted to a Chinese backpacker ghetto in a decade. Currently a handful of guesthouses and ultra-laid-back eateries are found here; these come and go like the wind.

Meili Guesthouse (雪山山庄; Xuěshān Shānzhūāng; ☎ 139 8874 0590; www.meililive.com; dm ¥20, s & d ¥140) This has been around longer than most others

and it's still a well-run place; it's got fabulous views. But then again, everything here does.

Migratory Bird (季候鸟; Jìhòuniǎo; ☎ 689 5030; dishes from ¥8) Speaking of views, you are not going to find more breathtaking ones than here at this relaxing bar-café which is pretty much backpacker-central for these parts. If you need to know something, this is where you'll find out. It also does quite a bit of work with disabled Tibetan children.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get here from Déqīn a taxi will cost you ¥30; alternatively, head out onto the road and flag down anything that moves.

Mingyong Glacier 明永冰川

Tumbling off the side of Kawa Karpo peak is the 12km-long **Mingyong Glacier** (Míngyǒng Bīngchuān; admission ¥63, expect price spike if in high season). Over 13 sq km, it is not only the lowest glacier in China (around 2200m high) but also an oddity – it's a monsoon marine glacier, which basically means it has an ecosystem that couldn't possibly be more diverse: you'll see tundra, taiga, broadleaf forest and meadow, all in one hike. A conservation area has been created around the base of the peak. This sucker also hauls, moving an average of 530m per year (that would explain all the ice cracking and thundering). The best views of the glacier are from the road to Míngyǒng as it descends from Fēilái Sì.

For thousands of years the mountain has been a pilgrimage site and you'll still meet a few Tibetan pilgrims, some of whom circumambulate the mountain over seven days in autumn. Surrounding villages are known as 'heaven villages' because of the dense fog that hangs about in spring and summer, even permeating into homes.

Trails to the glacier lead up from Míngyǒng's central square marked by a new *chörten*. After 45 minutes a path splits off down to the (unimpressive) toe of the glacier. Continuing on, after another 45 minutes you get to Tibetan **Tàizǐ Miào** (太子庙), where there is a **guesthouse** (d low season Y100-120, high season Y180). A further 30 minutes along the trail is **Lotus Temple** (莲花庙; Liánhuā Miào), which offers fantastic views of the glacier framed by prayer flags and *chörten*. Horses can also be hired to go up to the glacier (Y150).

If you're coming from Yübēng (see boxed text, below), you could also hike to Míngyǒng from Xidāng in around three hours if you hoof it.

SLEEPING

Beds in all guesthouses are around Y25 to Y30 and toilet facilities are basic. Electricity is iffy so bring a torch or some candles. A handful of new claim-to-be-midrange hotels have gone

up in the last half-decade, most of which are uninspiring but still cost Y90 to Y250 for a standard room with bath.

Míngyǒng Shānzhūang (明永山庄) Up some steps from the main square, where the bus drops you off, is this government-run place with decent dorm rooms. There's a small restaurant here and a pit toilet a short walk out the back.

Biānmǎdìngzhǔ Kèzhàn Further still is this option. This place definitely has the best location in the lovely original settlement and there's a family feel to it.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Dèqín, minibuses to Míngyǒng regularly leave from the bridge near the market at the top end of town (Y14, one to two hours). You can also try to rent a car through your accommodation. Returning buses run fairly regularly.

The road from Dèqín descends into the dramatic Mekong Gorge. Six kilometres before

Míngyǒng the road crosses the Mekong River and branches off to Xidāng. Nearby is a small temple (Bǎishūlín Miào) and a *chörten*.

Báimǎ Xuēshān 白马雪山

Kawa Karpo gets all the press, but this mountain nature reserve, part of the Hengduan Mountain range, east of Dèqín is impressive. Established in 1985, it's the largest plant and animal reserve in Yünnán, famous for its dense primeval forests containing many threatened species, including the critically endangered Yünnán snub-nosed monkey. Botanical gardens and a handful of temples are still on the mountain.

If you are an experienced trekker with a tent, sleeping bag and stove you could get off the Shangri-la-Dèqín bus at the pass and make some fine hikes around the eastern slopes and valleys.

Cízhōng Catholic Church

茨中天主教堂

This unexpected church (Cízhōng Tiānzhǔ Jiàotáng), 80km south of Dèqín in the middle of a quiet village (Cízhōng), is based on the design of French cathedrals. (It actually isn't so surprising, given the number of churches to the west in the Nujiang Valley.) Built by French missionaries in 1867, it burned down in 1905 but was reconstructed by the local government over a period of 12 years. Wine is still made from vineyards planted by the missionaries. To get here take any bus bound for Wéixī. There were no guesthouses open (although there used to be one) on a last pass through.

Further south, near the village of **Yèzhī** (叶枝) is where in the 1920s the Lisu developed a syllabic script.

NUJIANG VALLEY

怒江大峡谷

☎ 0886

This epic 320km-long river gorge and its splendid trekking and sublime riverine views make it the most up-and-coming must-see spot in Yünnán. For the nonce transport is painless but requires lengthy backtracks. You trundle seven hours up the valley marvelling at the scenery, then head back the way you came. Authorities did announce

a plan in 2006 to blast a road from the far northern city of Gòngshān to Dèqín, and another from the village of Bingzhōngluò into Tibet. Both of these are, given the immense topographical challenges, probably quite a long way off.

Rewards are immense: explore one of the remotest corners of Yünnán, sandwiched between the Gǎolígòng Shān (Gaoligong Mountain) range and Myanmar to the west, Tibet to the north and the high Biluó Shān to the east. In addition to the churning Nù Jiāng (Nu River; the Chinese name means Raging River) the region holds nearly a quarter of China's flora and fauna species. The river is crisscrossed by daredevil suspension and cable bridges (in many places people still lug themselves over hand over hand) and the valley is speckled with traditional villages of thatched houses. Here too is yet another of China's controversial dam projects – this one to tame the Nu River, the longest undammed river left in China.

The valley holds an exotic mix of Han, Nu, Lisu, Drung and Tibetan nationalities and even the odd Burmese jade trader. There is a number of Catholic churches, the legacy of hardy French missionaries who arrived here in the 19th century.

The Jiaoye Pass in the west side of the valley was a major route marker for the Hump, the air supply route used during WWII. The remoteness of the region is highlighted by the C-53 plane that crashed in the Piànmǎ region of the valley in 1943 and that remained undiscovered until 1997. Today Piànmǎ is a border crossing (though not for foreigners) and trading post with Myanmar.

LIÙKÙ 六库

☎ 0886 / pop 7800

Liùkù is the humdrum but pleasant capital of the prefecture and an important transport hub, though it's of little intrinsic interest. (At least it's warm here.) You will need to get off the bus and register with a police checkpoint about 2km before town.

Information

China Telecom and China Post are in the town's north, both on Remin Lu. **Agricultural Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Nóngyè Yínháng; Chuangcheng Lu) This branch will possibly change money in a pinch but you are safest with US dollars. If the bank is closed try the Nùjiāng Tōngbào Dàjiùdiàn (p298).

THE YUBENG & KAWA KARPO TREKS

A trek to the fabulous **Yubeng Waterfall** (雨崩神瀑; Yübēng Shénpù) is an adventurous trip and fast becoming one of the most popular 'other' treks for those dismayed by the numbers of trekkers along the Tiger Leaping Gorge. At the bridge over the Mekong River the road leads 6km to Xidāng and another 3km or so to a hot spring. Then it's possible to arrange pony hire to take you 25km (four to six hours) to Yübēng village, where there are half a dozen basic guesthouses, including **Mystic Waterfall Lodge** (神瀑客栈; Shénpù Kèzhàn; ☎ 841 1082; dm Y20), run by a friendly guide named Aqinpu.

Now, you could – and many do – hike all the way here from Fēilái Sì using local roads and paths. Or use a combination of bus/pony/hiking, the easiest of which would be to bus to Xidāng, hire a pony (Y100) to the mountain pass two-thirds of the way to Yübēng village, then hike the rest.

From Yübēng village loads and loads of treks lie out there. (Aqinpu can give you the scoop on all of them.) It's a three- to four-hour trip on foot or horseback to the waterfall. Or, you could head south to a fabulous lake (it's around 4350m high and not easy to find, so take a guide).

Heading back to Xidāng you could hike east along the Yubeng River, passing through a few groupings of Tibetan huts; you then bend north when you reach the Mekong River and pass through three more 'settlements' before reaching Xidāng. It's a long, sweaty day and you may need to beg a bed in one of the local huts. Our local friends insist they've done it in around nine or 10 hours, but they're apparently superhuman. Also, it's tough and very easy to get lost in a few spots, so know before you go.

There is a 3pm minibus from Dèqín to Xidāng (Y14) that returns the next morning at 8am. You could also use the Míngyǒng bus to get back to Dèqín as it passes by Xidāng at around 3pm or 4pm. A taxi from Fēilái Sì to Xidāng is around a whopping Y150.

Then there's the legendary Kawa Karpo *kora*, a 12-day pilgrim circumambulation of Méilǐ Xuēshān. Sadly, half of it is in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, so you'll need a permit to do it; you'll definitely need a guide. Arranging these may be possible in Dèqín but it's not likely; you're better off checking this out in Shangri-la at any of the travel agencies or your accommodation. Better, in Kūnmíng, before heading north, go to the Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel (p228) and talk to the trekker owners; they can't help with permits but they can find out who can up north.

Jùlóng Wǎngbā (Chuangcheng Lu; internet access per hr Y2) From Chuangcheng Lu, take a right into the market north of Zhenxing Lu. Go up, take the second left and walk to the end.

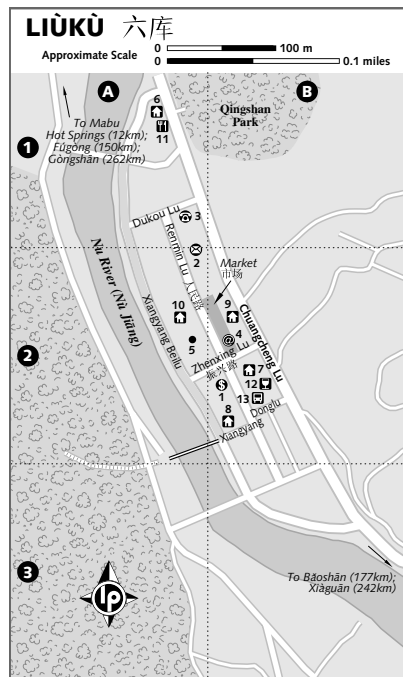
Xinhua Bookshop (Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; Renmin Lu) Maps but none in English.

Sights

About 2km along the road to Bǎoshān is the **golden Buddha** that overlooks the town. You'll have to cross the river and follow trails to the top, from where there are fine views of the valley. You can stroll across the foot-bridge west of the bus station and head up the steps into the hills; they're lit up brightly at night.

The best thing might be to just meander along the lovely **riverwalk** on the east side of the Nu River; everyone else in the city does at night (ethnic minorities practise dancing and singing many nights).

The **Mabu Hot Springs**, 12km north of town along the road to Fúgòng, has an attached hotel complex. A Lisu (hair-combing) **festival** is held here on the 15th of the 1st lunar month (March/April).



Sleeping

Loads of places exist; few are of much value. If the two budget options listed here don't tickle your fancy, just wander south of the bus station along Chuangcheng Lu and take your pick of a few others.

Zhèngfǔ Zhāodàisuǒ (Government Guesthouse; ☎ 362 2589; 153 Renmin Lu; 人民路153号; d Y70-148, s & d without bathroom Y40-50, tr without bathroom Y45-60; 🚻) This guesthouse has tattered everything and indifferent service, but it's the cheapest you'll find.

Yóudiàn Bīnguǎn (Post Hotel; ☎ 362 0500; 193 Chuangcheng Lu; 穿城路193号; s & d Y80-150, without bathroom Y60; 🚻) A tad pricier, but in noticeably better shape (save for the possibility of lingering aroma of smoke).

Shèngbǎolù Dàjiǔdiàn (☎ 363 7888; Xiangyang Lu; 向阳路; s & d incl breakfast Y250-480; 🚻) Superb midrange pricing (if they figure in the usual discount to Y130), a steal for the money, with shy but efficient staff. Rooms are mostly clean as a whistle but they'll let you check more than one if there's even a smidgen of mould.

The top-end choice is probably **Nùjiāng Tóngbǎo Dàjiǔdiàn** (☎ 351 3339; 90 Renmin Lu; 人民路90号; d Y260-420; 🚻), even though the **Nùjiāng Bīnguǎn** (☎ 362 6888; Chuangcheng Lu; 穿城路; d Y260-420) in the north of town ostensibly has one more star.

Eating & Drinking

Not much in the way of eateries. For some reason, the town loves its Sichuān-style **Lǎoyā Tāng** (literally 'Old Duck Soup'), a

INFORMATION	
Agricultural Bank of China 中国农业银行	1 B2
China Post 中国邮政	2 A2
China Telecom 中国电信	3 A1
Jùlóng Wǎngbā 巨龙网吧	4 B2
Xinhua Bookshop 新华书店	5 A2
SLEEPING	
Nùjiāng Bīnguǎn 怒江宾馆	6 A1
Nùjiāng Tóngbǎo Dàjiǔdiàn 怒江通宝大酒店	7 B2
Shèngbǎolù Dàjiǔdiàn 盛宝路大酒店	8 B2
Yóudiàn Bīnguǎn 邮电宾馆	9 B2
Zhèngfǔ Zhāodàisuǒ 政府招待所	10 A2
EATING	
Sichuān Lǎoyā Tāng 四川老鸭汤	11 A1
DRINKING	
Délāmù Xiūxiǎnbā 得拉姆休闲吧	12 B2
TRANSPORT	
Bus Station 客运站	13 B2

LIÜKÙ BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Bǎoshān	29	3-4	every 30 min	7.30am-3.30pm
Bīngzhōngluò	65	8	2 daily	6.20am, 8.20am
Fúgòng	23	3½	hourly	6.20am-4.30pm
Gōngshān	55	7	every 45 min	6.30am-1pm
Kūnmíng	157-167	10-11	4 daily	8.30am (express), 6.50pm, 7.30pm, 8.40pm (sleepers)
Xiàguān	52-69	4-6½	every 45 min	6.30am-3pm

stew of duck (natch), carrots, potatoes and other goodies. A good place for it is the aptly named **Sichuān Lǎoyā Tāng** (319 Chuangcheng Lu; 穿城路319号; soup meal for two Y35), north of the bus station.

Just outside the bus station, the trying-to-be-hip **Délāmù Xiūxiǎnbā** (145 Chuangcheng Lu; 穿城路145号; beers from Y15) has imported beers and is a decent place to relax.

Getting There & Away

The bus station has luggage storage for Y2 per day, which is useful if you want to travel light up the valley.

If you want to skip Xiàguān and take a side route to Lǐjiāng, check out Yǔnlóng (see p246), for which you'll likely have to switch buses, probably at Cǎojiàn (漕涧) or Yǒngping (永平) along the way to Xiàguān.

More buses leave for the Dèhóng region. Note that travel times to Bǎoshān (see the boxed text, above), and for Dèhóng, should be reduced as ongoing road projects are finished.

FÚGÒNG 福贡

☎ 0886 / pop 4200

Halfway up the valley, the scenery an hour's ride out of town in either direction is probably the best in the valley. The town itself is a scruffy mix of Lisu, Nu and Han Chinese, which bursts into colour every five days with one of Southwest China's best markets.

Activities

North of town the flyspeck village of **Làzán** (腊咱) is the starting point for one of the valley's best **treks**. From here – a node on one of the old tea-horse roads – you hike up and over the splendid Sǐjī Duōmǐ range, then descend to and cross the Mekong River to the equally microscopic hamlet of **Yán Wǎ** (岩瓦). *China Outdoor Exploration* magazine rated it tops in China in

2006. It's not feasible to do it yourself and you'll have a tough time organizing guides locally unless you speak Chinese. It's easier organised in Bīngzhōngluò (p301). Because of the changing situation with damworks, it's much better to see if your guesthouse in Kūnmíng, Dǎlì, Lǐjiāng, or Ruǐlì (or wherever), can do some phonework for you before you get there.

Sleeping & Eating

Zhèngfǔ Zhāodàisuǒ (政府招待所; ☎ 341 1660; Wadi Lu; 娃底路; s/d Y40/60, s & d without bathroom Y10-50, tr without bathroom Y20) Opposite the bus station. Ignore the tamped and threadbare blood-red carpet and you'll do fine. The manager's a cheery old chap amenable to negotiation.

Lèfú Bīnguǎn (乐福宾馆; Pashan Lu; 帕山路; s & d Y60; 🚻) Exit the bus station, turn right, go to the corner, right again and 50m on the opposite side is this better place.

Fúgòng Bīnguǎn (福贡宾馆; ☎ 341 1442; Wadi Lu; 娃底路; s & d Y120; 🚻) This one-star is about the best place in town; it's near the Zhèngfǔ Zhāodàisuǒ.

The best restaurants are right by the bus station and the Fúgòng Bīnguǎn. The **Kèyùn Fāndiàn** (客运饭店; Wadi Lu) just east of the bus station is run by a friendly Naxi woman.

Getting There & Away

Buses run hourly to Gōngshān (Y24, 3½ hours) from 10.30am to 4pm, and to Liùkù (Y31, four hours) from 6.30am to 4pm. You can also get buses to Bǎoshān and Xiàguān.

GÒNGSHĀN 贡山

☎ 0886 / pop 16,400

This friendly (if grubby) one-street town is a trading centre for the upper Nujiang Valley. Most people will decamp immediately to Bīngzhōngluò but it isn't a bad place to spend a (one) night.

ETHNIC GROUPS OF THE NUJIANG VALLEY

The largest ethnic group in the valley are the Lisu (587,000 in Yúnnán). The women are recognised by their black pleated skirt, crimson tunic buttoned to one side, hat of plastic shells and beads and ornamental belt. Lisu men sometimes wear black turbans. The Lisu language belongs to the Yi branch of the Sino-Tibetan group.

There are over a dozen clans, each with their own totems. A **hair-combing festival** is held in the first lunar month and a **harvest festival** in the 10th lunar month. The most spectacular festival is the **Kuoshi Festival** in the second lunar month, when Lisu braves climb barefoot up 30m-high poles, using sword blades as rungs.

The Nu give the valley its name, and number around 26,000. Like the Lisu, the scattered Nu communities grow fields of maize, buckwheat and beans on the hillside and wheat and rice along the valley floors. Also like the Lisu, religion is animist at its heart, with a 19th-century overlay of Catholicism.

The 5500 Drung are related to the Nu but retain a quite different lifestyle. In remoter areas the extended families live in long houses. Traditional dress consists of a toga of woven cloth wrapped over the shoulder. Facial tattooing, once common among older Drung to either gain beauty or luck, or avoid slavers, is slowly dying out. (Check out the fabulous photographs at the Cloudland International Youth Hostel, p228 in Kùnmíng taken by one intrepid photographer who has dedicated half a decade to sloggling through the valley to take pictures of the last few dozen women with facial markings.)

The Drung trade medicinal herbs and pelts but are fast being integrated into the modern economy. They have no written language but their spoken tongue is part of the Tibeto-Burman group. Traditionally Drung names consist of the name of the clan, the name of the child's father, a personal name and the infant's position in relation to his siblings. The main **spring festival** involves the sacrifice of a buffalo.

Information

There is a county tourism office kiosk on the west side of the road, north of the bus station. No English spoken here but they're friendly and there's a map of the region (in Chinese) on the wall.

There is one **internet café** (网吧; wǎngbā; per hr ¥3). From the bus stop walk back along the highway, cross the bridge and round the corner; it's on your left.

Sights

There is an interesting **Catholic church** (天主教堂) in the southwest of town. At the northern end of the main street is a square selling Nu, Lisu and Tibetan traditional clothes.

When returning to Fúgòng, watch out for the mountain peak with a huge gape in it in the shape of the moon. The crag is two hours south of Gòngshān, 10 minutes north of the village of Lishādi.

Sleeping

There's only one street. This stuff is easy to find.

Bus Station Hotel (交通宾馆; Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn; ☎ 351 1496; s & d ¥60, d without bathroom ¥30-40)

The front desk is the bus station so you can roll out of bed and onto a bus. Adequate rooms.

Intergalactic & Small Guesthouse (银河宾馆; Yínhé Bīnguǎn; ☎ 351 1853; s & d ¥50) We kid you not, this is the name of the place. Excitable youngsters staff the place and will fall all over themselves to get you to stay; one of them is a veteran of Shangri-la guesthouses and speaks a smattering of English. Cramped but spanking new rooms on an unnamed street.

Xiágú Dàjiǔdiàn (峡谷大酒店; ☎ 351 1666; s & d ¥200) Forget any other hotel for luxury. This monster opened during our visit. A few bugs were being worked out but rooms are great. Discounts to ¥120 are worth it.

There are a few restaurants in town but nothing to get excited about.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses leave every hour or so from 7am to 3.30pm for Fúgòng (¥24, 3½ hours). To Liùkù (¥55, seven hours) buses depart roughly hourly from 6.20am to 11am. There are cramped sleeper buses to Xiàguān (¥96, 14 hours) and Kùnmíng (¥150, forever) every day around 10am. Minibuses leave from north

THE NU RIVER DAM

In 2003 two bombshells – one great piece of news, the other not so great – hit this region. First, Unesco fell all over itself to place the Nu River Valley on its World-Heritage sites list, calling it one of the world's most precious ecosystems of its kind. Then, as is the wont in China, the government announced plans for a series of thirteen dams along the Nu River, the second-longest river in Southeast Asia and one of only two undammed rivers in China. The project would theoretically produce more electricity than even the Three Gorges Dam.

Opposition was immediate and ferocious, led by Unesco, which warned that such a project could warrant the area's delisting; they were joined by over 70 international environmental groups. More amazing was local opposition. Protesting dams in China is a growth industry in itself, but what shocked most was that after more than 50 prominent Chinese (from all walks of life – pop stars to business billionaires) in China spoke out against the dams, and the government was inundated by protests from citizens, they actually backed off in 2004. In 2006 the government, still trying to keep the plan a 'state secret,' announced that it may simply scale back the project to a mere eight dams. Clearly, they were testing the waters of local opinion to see if a compromise could be reached.

Apparently, the government's patience wore thin, because as this book was being prepared for publication, work had started up again in big-time fashion along the valley. And there's no escaping the fact that it will certainly have devastating effects on a region home to half of China's endangered species and 6000 species of flora and fauna. Worse will be the flooding of countless villages and the dislocation of many of the valley's 13 ethnic minority groups from their villages.

of the bus station for Bīngzhōngluò (¥10, one hour) from between 7am and 8am and 5pm or 6pm.

A road is planned from Gòngshān to Dēqín and someday, when it's finally blazed through, it will allow for a smashing loop-trip through northwestern Yúnnán.

AROUND GÒNGSHĀN Bīngzhōngluò 丙中洛

It's a smashing treat to head an extra hour (to 90 minutes) through dramatic scenery to this pleasant village, set in a wide and fertile bowl. Hikes around the village absolutely abound, either south along the main road for 2km to the impressive 'first bend' of the Salween River or north along a track more than 15km long that passes through a host of villages and impressive gorges. (Just keep in mind that after Nàqiàluò – 那恰洛 – you're technically entering Tibet, but this is not a border crossing.) But actually just pick a direction and you simply cannot go wrong; just wander down a road or path and enjoy the scenery. You'll find loads of temples and Tibetan Catholic churches and exceedingly friendly people. Another new road from here into Tibet is also in the works. South of the village you have to pay a ¥50 entrance fee as it's in a park zone. And do keep one

thing in mind if you're planning on trekking: this isn't Dali, Lijiang, or the Tiger Leaping Gorge. Very, very little English is spoken around here and no one is used to dealing with foreigners.

There are a handful of cheap guesthouses in the village. **Diyīwān Kèzhàn** (第一湾客栈; ☎ 358 1189; s & d without bathroom ¥30) is back toward Gòngshān along the main road. Simple rooms but clean.

The friendly, helpful **Chámǎ Kèzhàn** (茶马客栈; Tea Horse Inn; ☎ 358 1277; s & d ¥60, tr ¥80) has become the go-to spot for good reason. Great rooms and service and it has maps (in Chinese) of the area. There's one double without bathroom for ¥40.

Returning to Gòngshān just flag down a minibus (¥10, one hour) as it trolls the streets until around 4pm (or earlier). One bus straight to Liùkù leaves from in front of the Chámǎ Kèzhàn (¥65, eight hours) at around 7.30am or 8am.

Dímáluò & Báihànluò 迪麻洛和白汉洛

About two-thirds of the way between Gòngshān and Bīngzhōngluò, and a hefty hike across the river from the village of **Pěngdāng** (捧当) into the hills, is the fabulous village of Dímáluò (which is 80% Catholic).

TREKKING THE NUJIANG VALLEY REGION

Looking at maps, hiking over the mountains into the Mekong Valley, particularly from Gōngshān to Yèzhī or Yànmén in Déqin prefecture seems a snap, but once there it's clear that you need a trustworthy guide and camping equipment. One route from Fúgòng to Yán Wǎ (岩瓦) is covered in the Fúgòng section (see p299). Pilgrimage trekking routes lead from the north of the valley into Tibet to join a pilgrimage circuit of Kawa Karpo (see p296) but again you'd need to arrange this with an expert travel agency.

Excellent places to start for information are the Chámǎ Kèzhàn in Bīngzhōngluò (p301) and especially Alou's Tibetan Lodge in Dímǎluò (below).

Home to **Alou's Tibetan Lodge** (☎ 356 6182; alou.dekezhana@yahoo.com; per bed ¥10), it's possibly the best spot for a base of exploratory operations. Alou is a local Tibetan guide and conservationist and has been praised for his cultural and environmental-awareness treks. Meals can be had for ¥6 to ¥9. Guided treks average around ¥60 per day. This is the place to suss out any kind of trekking you want to do in the Nù Jiāng area, but before you head to Dímǎluò or Alou's Tibetan Lodge, check whether they are still there. Seriously, that area was slated to be among the first affected by a new dam. Phone/email before you wander into the hills!

A two-hour hike from Dímǎluò on the east side of the valley is Bǎihànluò, which has a 125-year-old Catholic church built in Tibetan style. You can extend this into a trek across the Biluo Mountains to Cizhōng (p297) along the Mekong River. Another lengthier trek leads from Dímǎluò north across the mountains toward Yúnling (云岭), also along the Mekong River. You'll definitely need guides for both.

Drung Valley (Dúlóng Jiāng) 独龙江

Separated from the Nujiang Valley by the high Gāolǐngōng Shān range and only reached by road in 1999, this is one of the remotest valleys in China. The valley is home to the Drung ethnic group (see the boxed text, p300). The Drung River actually flows out of China

into Myanmar, where it eventually joins the Irrawaddy.

At present there are no buses into the valley. You'd have to hire a minivan from Gōngshān for the rough 96km trip to the county capital Dúlóngjiāng. Beyond that, most travel is on foot. There is a County Guesthouse (Xiàn Zhàodàisuǒ) at Dúlóngjiāng.

SOUTHEAST YUNNAN

This little-visited corner of Yunnan has its fair share of interesting sights, a good infrastructure, and at its outer fringes some of the region's most traditional and off-the-beaten-track minority areas. For anyone who wants to avoid the hordes of travellers in Xishuāngbǎnà, Dǎlì and Lǐjiāng, this region's highlights – the Mongol community near Tōnghǎi, the traditional architecture of Jiànshuǐ, the golden rapeseed (canola) fields of Luóping, and the superb terraces of Yuányáng – may well rank as low-key favourites.

LUÓPING 罗平

☎ 0874 / pop 22,510

Coming from Guǎngxī or Guǐzhōu in February or March, travellers generally crane their necks out the bus or train windows in these parts, gawking at the resplendent yellows and golds suddenly exploding around them. A halcyon change from the otherwise same-thing-different-kilometre scenery.

That's Luóping. Or at least *yóucàihuā* (油菜花; canola/rapeseed), the gorgeous and ritously blooming plant for which the area is famed. These flowers also account for much of Southwest China's honey production.

Only that's not all. Outstanding day trips abound, including some of the best waterfalls in western China and worthy river trips where you can do your Huck Finn thing as you pole a raft past Buyi villages and waterwheels, and perhaps top it off with a riverboat cruise into Yunnan's 'Three Gorges'.

Getting here is easy: it's 240km east of Kùnmíng but it's on a major highway and is a stop on the Nankun Railway heading into Guǎngxī.

Orientation

The town is a bit large but still walkable. On the east end of town is the north-south Yungui Lu, where you'll find the bus station. Just

north of here Wenbi Lu runs west toward the main part of downtown (which you don't need), ending at Jiulong Dadao, which used to be the main drag but is kinda windswept and forlorn now. Three or so kilometres north of here is the train station. Everything you really need is within easy hoofing distance of the bus station.

MAPS

You can get decent maps of Luóping (Chinese only) at the bus and train stations.

Information

China Construction Bank (中国建设银行; Zhōngguó Jiànshè Yínháng; ☎ 821 5701; Wenbi Lu; 文笔路) West of the traffic circle along Wenbi Lu, friendly if unable to help much. Nor were other banks.

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Zhōngguó Yóujú; Hongxin Beijie) A block north of the PSB office.

Internet café (网吧; Wǎngbā Guānyin Gejie; per hr ¥3) It's not easy to find an internet café in town. The hastily scribbled sign on the window here just says *wǎngbā* (网吧). It's the closest you'll find to the bus station, along a side street between Baila Jie (白腊街) and Jiulong Dadao (九龙大道).



Luoping Tourist Office (罗平旅游局; Luóping Lǚyóu Jú; ☎ 821 3010; Zhenxing Jie; 振兴街) The staff don't speak English and won't know what to do with you, but they'll give it the old college try!

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōngānjú; Hongxing Beijie; 红星北街) Not equipped to deal with visa issues but nice enough.

Xinhua Bookshop (新华书店; Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; Zhenxing Jie; 振兴街) This bookshop is not worth much but it does have a few Chinese-only guidebooks.

Sights

Honestly, no one comes here for the city's somewhat drab aesthetics. If you've got time to kill, wander down to **Tàiyèhù Gōngyuán**, where you can paddle a boat or watch the old folk play checkers.

Sleeping & Eating

In February and March you will pay dearly for a room. Note also that massage parlour rows are everywhere and you can expect to hear, 'Hello! Hello!' a lot from the working girls on the street and on the phone in your room.

Yungui Lushè (云贵旅社; ☎ 821 2255; Yungui Lu, Alley 1; 云贵路1巷; s & d from ¥20) In a town of scuzzy guesthouses, this is a good choice. Basic but clean and friendly. And you absolutely needn't worry about security, as the proprietor – who chuckles in bemusement at the thought of having foreign guests – has a son on the local police force.

Shanhú Bīnguǎn (山湖宾馆; ☎ 821 2458; Wenbi Lu; 文笔路; s, d & tr ¥100-120; ☎) Not exactly an exuberant staff (hence the fading rooms), but it's still clean and not bad for the price. Discounts to ¥80 or so would make it more worthwhile.

Luoping Daijiudian (罗平大酒店; ☎ 822 5788; 336 Yungui Lu; 云贵路336号; s & d incl breakfast ¥160-380, without bathroom ¥100; ☎) A newer place that thankfully gets overlooked by tour groups, it's got very well-kept rooms, and a happy staff. Discounts to ¥100 are well worth it.

Yancào Bīnguǎn (烟草宾馆; ☎ 821 2967; 98 Wenbi Lu; 文笔路98号; s & d ¥228-388; ☎) Locals will tell you that the nicest hotels are found along Jiulong Dadao in the western part of town. They are mistaken. Recently renovated out of the erstwhile Hénghēng Bīnguǎn (恒升宾馆), which the signs outside still say, this place has very nice rooms and prompt service. As such, expect it to often be booked solid by tour groups.

Getting cheap eats in town is a snap. The problem is you've got to walk the massage parlour gauntlets to get near any of the eateries along Wenbi Lu west of Yungui Lu. Just west of the traffic circle is a night market that's named well: Barbecue Night Market (Shāokǎo Yèshì). Actually, only a dozen – if that – stalls are set up, but it's great anyway. Our favourite is stall No 4 (or is it 5?) on the left as you go in. It's run by a wonderful woman who sells outstanding noodles. As you move west and/or south from here, places become indoor joints, getting larger, noisier, and far pricier.

Getting There & Away BUS

The bus station (客运站) has everything you need for local and long-distance trips, including those to areas around Luóping mentioned on right. Buses to Kūnmíng (Y43, four hours) run roughly half-hourly from 7am to 5.30pm (if not later); this trip will likely be done more quickly in the future as seemingly incessant roadwork is completed.

Heading south, buses leave for Lúxí (Y22, two hours) at 9.05am, 10.30am, 11am, 11.45am and 12.25pm, with one or two more in the afternoon. You can get two buses daily to Qiūbēi (Y36, five hours), one at 7.30am and the other at 10.15; the former is a direct bus, the latter runs a more circuitous route via Yànshān (砚山).

You're within spitting distance of Guizhōu and Guǎngxī here as well, so buses run eastward regularly. The easiest thing to do is hop on one of the zillion buses to Xīngyì (Y22, two hours) in Guizhōu; they run every 20 minutes or so from 6am to around 6pm.

TRAIN

A half-dozen trains pass through the city each day, but most put you in at ungodly hours (especially when coming from Kūnmíng). From Guǎngxī your best bet is train 181, which passes through most of that province's major stations before dropping you here at 10.30am. The K337 train puts you in at 5am.

From Kūnmíng the best train is K366/3 (Y38 hard seat, 3½ hours), which departs the capital at 10.40am and arrives at 2.08pm.

Getting Around

Taxis cost Y5 to get anywhere. Bus 1 runs from the bus station to downtown.

AROUND LUÓPING Those Golden Fields of Rapeseed

You could pretty much pick any direction and not go wrong; after all, there's over 200 sq km of the stuff in the county. To kill two birds with one bus trip (as it were) you can hop off a bus to Bǎnqiáo at one of two bus stops along the expressway (remember, this is China) near the Golden Cock Hills (金雞峰丛; Jinji Fēngcóng) and strike off southward along paths winding around the karst peaks. Believe it or not, near the first bus stop coming from Luóping, a sign in English near the highway sign marking Km 30 actually points you in the right direction! From here you could hop aboard another Bǎnqiáo-bound bus for the Nine Dragon Waterfalls (below).

You could also hop a bus headed toward Niújiē (牛街), a dozen or so kilometres to the north, which has rapeseed fields and several rice terraces.

A caveat: show up in February and March and half of China seems to be here to see the same thing. Hotels are stratospherically priced if not booked out altogether. Buses are sardine tins. Worst – it's impossible not to get a shot of a fellow shutterbug in your camera.

But it's highly worth it. Seriously, this is some fantastic scenery.

Nine Dragon Waterfalls (Jiúlóng Pùbù) 九龙瀑布

Around 35km northwest of town and well worth a visit is this long series of **cascades** (admission Y50) – hence the name – each of which supposedly represents a dragon (there are actually 10 tiers). Dunno 'bout that, but they are definitely impressive, especially in the early morning mists, unless you come November through April, when water levels are low. It'll still be lovely, but a bit underwhelming.

The waterfalls thunder through a 4km-long valley. The entire drop is only a modest 200m, but the largest cascade is a respectable 110m wide and 56m high.

From the park entrance, you could hike the whole circuit in a couple of hours. Most of it is flat, but if you want to get an overview of all of it at once, some steep steps are involved. Still, the view is well worth it from the top. (A chairlift to the top was overgrown by weeds when we visited.)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A bit of a hassle, but still doable in a morning or afternoon. From the rear of the Luóping bus station tour buses (Y15) run in high season to the waterfalls. But you still may have a lengthy wait. Just hop a Bǎnqiáo bus (Y4, 30 minutes) right across the expressway and from there it's a Y5 shared-minivan ride to the entrance. Again, however, in low season, not many people are headed to the waterfalls, so between Bǎnqiáo and the gate (and the return) you may need to break down and just pay Y20 for a private ride, otherwise, it may be a long wait.

Duoyi River (Duōyì Hé) 多依河

Around 35km southeast of Luóping, the absolutely idyllic Duōyì Hé, fed by five underground springs, winds for a dozen kilometres over some 50 calcified shoals and through a picturesque karst landscape and groves of bamboo. Travellers come in droves to pole a Buyi-style raft (Y10) past villages and ever-present waterwheels. It's equally corny and cool.

To get here, minibuses (Y6, one hour) run from the rear of the Luóping bus station. You can also get tour bus shuttles in summer that include other sights.

Lubuge Three Gorges (Lǔbùgé Sānxiá) 鲁布革三峡

Six kilometres east of the Duoyi River is a hydroelectric plant atop yet another dam. The backed-up reservoir resulted in three gorges and you can take tour boat rides (Y60). **Dilíng Gorge** (滴灵峡; Diling Xiá), the best one, is downright lovely; the others – **Lion Gorge** (雄狮峡; Xióngshì Xiá) and **Two-Elephant Gorge** (双象峡; Shuāngxiàng Xiá) – are less so.

Shuttle buses run here from the Duoyi River.

LÚXÍ 泸西

☎ 0873 / pop 28,862

The capital of the eponymous county (of 298,000 people), which produces a wealth of coal and dried red peppers exported throughout China. You'll probably see dozens and dozens of market hawkers here, blankets everywhere, drying peppers in the sun.

Sights

In the northeast section of town stands **Xiushan Hill** (秀山; Xiù Shān), a park known

YÜNNÁN'S AMAZING BIODIVERSITY

Hands down, Yünnán is China's treasure-trove of plants and animals. Yünnán's timber reserves account for 10% of China's total, over a billion cubic metres of wood. Eighteen-thousand species of higher plants inhabit the province, well over half of China's total. There are 2500 species of ornamental plants, particularly flowers and herbs. In one Yünnán mountain range over half of China's azalea species can be found. The province's eight key flowers – camellia, azalea, primrose, *Gentiana scabra*, lily, magnolia, orchid and *Meconopsis integrifolia* – are prized throughout the world.

Yünnán is home to half of China's 1700 fauna species and 80 of the country's endangered species are found only in this province.

for its forests and scenery. A 25m-high Ming-dynasty hexagonal pavilion sits atop. Behind the park is the impressive **Confucius Temple** (文庙; Wénmiào), which is open weekdays.

The big feature in Lúxí is the **Alu Caves** (阿庐古洞; Ālú Gǔdòng; ☎ 8am-4.30pm; admission Y35, with student card Y25), 3km northwest of town. This set of caves lies ensconced within a large karst formation and takes its name from a resident tribe that inhabited the area during the Song dynasty. The main cavern stretches 3km and is broken into three caves and the crystal-clear Yusun subterranean stream coursing some 800m, 15m underground (look out for transparent fish). This is overall one of the more pleasant experiences in Yünnán. The last cave looks like a million melted candles.

To get to the caves take minibus 1 from the main Jiuhua Lu; it picks up at the exit of the last cave. Ticket sellers will want you to take a guide who will turn on the cave lights but if you take a torch and lose your group it's great fun exploring (the fenced-in path) by torchlight.

Sleeping & Eating

Zhōngxiù Bīnguǎn (钟秀宾馆; ☎ 662 1078; Jiuhua Lu; 九华路; tr per person Y40, d Y100-206; ☎) One long block from the bus station is this place, where you can generally count on to get doubles discounted by 50%. Best (if you can convince them to give you one) are the Y15 beds

in a quad in the No 7 Building just outside the main gate. The No 7 Building is officially known as the Xiàn Zhèngfǔ Zhāodǎisùo Qìhàolóu. There are a number of other hotels in town.

Alú Dàjiǔdiàn (阿庐大酒店; ☎ 662 5002; d Y200, d/q without bathroom Y55/75; ♿) At the entrance to the caves, this modestly posh option is slowly being renovated up, to three-star status, and it has only got a handful of common rooms left. In peak periods – weekends in summer and holidays – expect no discounts (if not higher prices than posted), otherwise you should get a room with bathroom for around Y150.

Yíngxiāng Fāndiàn, opposite the entrance to Building No 7, has good food. There is a group of barbecue places in the market north of the intersection leading to the Zhōngxiù Bīnguǎn.

Getting There & Away

From Lúxī there are lots of buses to Kūnmíng (Y30, 3½ hours) via Lúnán, as well as to other local destinations such as Gējiù and Qiúbēi. Coming from Kūnmíng you can explore the Stone Forest (Shílín; p238), and then either hop on a Lúxī-bound bus, or head into Lúnán, from where buses depart for Lúxī.

AROUND LÚXÌ

If you're heading south for other destinations in southeast Yunnan, maybe hop off for a look at **Mílè** (弥勒), about 45km southwest of Lúxī. A few temples dot the town, one of which is home to a huge Buddha, the 20m-high resplendently golden **Dàfó** (大佛). It's also famous for its Red River cigarette brand, produced from field to carton here. The Bǎilóng Dòng (White Dragon Cave) is another attraction.

CHÉNGJIĀNG 澄江

☎ 0877 / pop 30,618

On a highland plateau 65km southeast of Kūnmíng, Chéngjiāng is the seat of the county dubbed the 'Land of Milk and Honey' for its agricultural output. The H-shaped county's population is small – only around 125,000 people – and features sizable numbers of Hui, Miao and Yi. The town's picturesque old back alleys make it worth a visit, though it's a bit far from Kūnmíng to do as a day trip. Most Chinese tourists tie in a visit here with Jiāngchuān to the south via Fǔxiān and Xīngyún lakes,

and then perhaps on to Tōnghǎi and Jiànshuǐ. Tourists don't sleep or eat here.

On the east side of Chéngjiāng is a massive Ming dynasty **Confucian Temple** (文庙; Wénmiào). It takes up 20,000 sq metres and the Grand Hall of the Honoured Teacher is over 10m high with seven attached rooms.

Also in Chéngjiāng is **Fengshan Park** at the southern base of Feng Shān, built on the site of a long-disappeared Taoist temple.

For details on getting here from Kūnmíng see p231. Buses (Y15, one hour) from Kūnmíng run every 20 to 30 minutes from the main or east bus stations.

AROUND CHÉNGJIĀNG

The primary point of interest for travellers is **Fǔxiān Hú** (抚仙湖), a north-south oriented lake separating Chéngjiāng from Jiāngchuān. The north shore lies 5km south of Chéngjiāng. Fǔxiān is the deepest lake in Yunnan (second deepest in China) and though smaller than Diān Chí and Erhai Lake in Dǎlì, its volume is 12 times that of Diān, and six times that of Erhai. The bluish green hue comes from phosphorous deposits from surrounding soils.

The northern shore is the most developed. **Bōxī Bay** has a beach of sorts and is a popular resort.

Clockwise, starting from the northeast, is **Xiàngbīng Shān** (象鼻岭山) and once you see it you'll see why its English translation is 'Elephant's Trunk Mountain'. The east side has a number of sulphurous **hot springs** (温泉; wēnquán), some quite large, and even a warm-water river in Jiūcūn. As you continue south keep your eyes peeled for the **Serene Lake Bridge** (Hǎiyán Qiáo), 17.5km south of Chéngjiāng near Hǎikǒu, a Qing dynasty stone arch bridge also known as Haikou Bridge.

Further south on the western side, a tiny islet called **Solitary Hill** (Gūshān Dǎo) appears. The island was once filled with Ming dynasty temples, a pagoda, pavilions and nunneries, though not much is left (the pagoda was melted down for coins during an uprising). You can normally arrange a boat to take you across to the island.

At the southern tip of the lake, near the village of Hǎimén, a 1km-long river connects Fǔxiān Hú to neighbouring Xīngyún Hú. (What's interesting is that fish from both lakes swim to the confluence of the river and

Fǔxiān Hú, but they are said to never pass the point where a boundary rock overlooks the water.) To the west is **Yùsūn Shān** (Jade Bamboo Shoots Mountain), known for the platter-shaped rock atop the peak that purportedly is always wet.

Getting there is just a matter of flagging down a bus and asking if it's going there.

JIĀNGCHUĀN 江川

☎ 0877 / pop 43,520

Southeast of Yùxī, one hour by bus, lies Jiāngchuān, the seat of a tiny county of the same name. Occupied since the ancient Dian culture, it wasn't controlled by imperial China until well into the Han dynasty. Villages around Jiāngchuān are filled with Chinese archaeologists, as excavation sites here have unearthed prime sites of Dian, Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures, including 25 tombs of the Warring States period in Lǐjiāshān near Wēngkǐaxiāng village.

Located in a small circular basin surrounded by mountains, Yunnanese say the county's topography resembles the shape of a begonia leaf.

At the **Bronze Age Museum** (青铜器时代博物馆; Qīngtóngqì Shídài Bówùguǎn; admission Y10; ☎ 10.30am-4pm), the Lǐjiāshān excavation site is particularly highlighted, featuring the 25 tombs of the Warring States period and Western Han dynasty, from which nearly 1000 pristine Bronze Age relics were removed. The local cult of the bull is plain to see. The earliest coins used in Yunnan were also unearthed at the site. The museum is a five-minute walk along Xīngyún Lu west of the bus station. A big bull statue (a replica of one of the bronzes) sits out front.

The Jiāngchuān bus station is a bit chaotic; you'll have to wait for minibuses to regional destinations to fill. There are frequent departures to Yùxī (Y5, one hour) until around 8pm and to Chéngjiāng (Y15, two hours) every hour or so until early afternoon. Minivans to other destinations may leave from other corners in town, it's a maddening slog around to find them at times.

Coming from or going to Kūnmíng (Y19, two hours) there are a couple of daily services to/from Kūnmíng's east bus station, the last one departing at 4pm. Going to Yùxī (Y5, 45 minutes) first and then to Kūnmíng is easier because Yùxī-Kūnmíng buses run seemingly every 30 seconds.

AROUND JIĀNGCHUĀN

Oval-shaped and somewhat salty, **Xīngyún Hú** (星云湖) is known locally as the Sea of Broad Waves. The lake has a few hot springs along its shoreline, and is famous for its big-headed fish, which is supposedly very tasty in hotpot.

Try taking a motor tricycle from the centre of town to the **Lakeside Park** (滨海公园; Bīnhǎi Gōngyuán), 2km north of town.

TŌNGHǎI 通海

☎ 0877 / pop 44,520

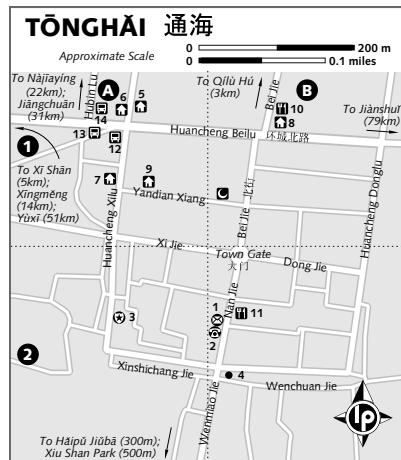
Tōnghǎi, occupied since the kingdom of Dian's inception, reached a zenith during the Nánzhào kingdom, when it was chosen as the military and economic centre of the kingdom that stretched from Tōnghǎi to Hékǒu. When the later Dǎlì kingdom was founded, the leaders came from Tōnghǎi.

Most Chinese visitors come for its lovely Xiu Shan Park, but for foreigners an added attraction is the fading but still visible traditional architecture of its charming avenues and back alleys. To the north 2km or so is the icy-looking, windswept lake, Qǐlù Hú, and a short distance (about 15km) west of town is Yúnnán's only remaining settlement of Mongols. Long famed for their metalworking, dozens of them now sell knives around the bus station.

Sights

Xiu Shan Park (秀山公园; Xiùshān Gōngyuán) is quite lovely – with a mist-shrouded, overgrown, mossy gundrop of a hill, lush with birds – and not too strenuous for the old ticker. Original construction of temples began as early as the Tang dynasty and by the Ming dynasty it was revered as one of southern China's most sacred Buddhist sites. Later, the **mountain** (admission Y15) became famous because the section behind the summit supposedly 'predicts' the weather.

It's only about 200m high but it has enough paths to occupy you for hours. Five temples, some Taoist Ming dynasty towers and over 20 pavilions provide lots of nooks and crannies. Tablets are marked with over 200 couplets left by ancient writers. The first building on the right is the **Sanyuangong Monastery**, freshly painted after a fire. The **Puguan Si** and **Yongjin Si**, higher up, contain a bonsai and camellia garden respectively. From the upper part of the hill a trail leads around the



INFORMATION

China Post 中国邮政	1	B2
China Telecom 中国电信	2	B2
PSB 公安局	3	A2
Xinhua Bookshop 新华书店	4	B2

SLEEPING

Jiàn huá Zhāo dǎi suǒ 建华招待所	5	A1
Jīn hú Lú guǎn 金湖旅馆	6	A1
Lǐ yuè Fàn diǎn 礼乐饭店	7	A1
Tōng Print Hotel 通印大酒店	8	B1
Yù héng Lú guǎn 钰恒旅馆	9	A1

EATING

Jiā yuán Dòu jiāng 家园豆浆	10	B1
Nán jiē Cān tīng 南街餐厅	11	B2

TRANSPORT

Bus Station 通海客运站	12	A1
Buses 公共汽车	13	A1
Microbuses to Jiāng chūān 到江川的中巴	14	A1

east side of the hill to the **Báilóng Sì** (White Dragon Monastery), a lovely complex with a small hotel that might make a peaceful place to stay a night.

The views of Qilù Hú and the town are great. Best of all, many of the temples have signs in passable English, giving an insight into the history of the mountain and regional folklore.

Xishān Park to the west of Tōnghǎi has more trails and a pagoda on its hilltop.

Sleeping

Bless the town for its honesty. This is one of the few places that doesn't slap 'binguǎn' on every place to stay and call them hotels.

Jiàn huá Zhāo dǎi suǒ (☎ 301 7707; Huāngchéng Xīlù; 环城西路; s/d Y40/50) A bit noisy hereabouts but the rooms here are holding up just fine, with bright rooms and good bathrooms.

Jīn hú Lú guǎn (☎ 301 0190; s & d Y50) Across the street from Jiàn huá Zhāo dǎi suǒ is this other clean and decent option. Play 'em off each other in your negotiation.

Yù héng Lú guǎn (☎ 301 0855; 10 Xi Yǎn diàn Xiàng; 盐店巷10号; s & d Y50) A fair bit closer to Xiù Shān and definitely in a more interesting neighbourhood – not far from the local mosque – this new place is tucked in an alley with spotless rooms and has a proprietor who seems thrilled to have foreign guests.

Lǐ yuè Fàn diǎn (☎ 301 1651; 56 Huāngchéng Xīlù; 环城西路56号; s/d with/without bathroom Y100/60, tr Y90; ☎) This longtime stand-by has slightly more upscale rooms and a cheery staff; the standard discounts to Y60 make it really worth the money.

Tōng Print Hotel (Tōng yīn Dà jǐ diǎn; ☎ 302 1666; fax 301 6474; North Gate; 北门; s & d Y288; ☎) In a windswept town is a bit of, well, plush comfort. Who'da thunk it? Facilities include a 16th-floor bar with views, a bowling alley, tennis court, sauna, and pool in summer.

Eating & Drinking

Hot and peppery stews cooked in Tōnghǎi-made copper pots are found around town. There are several Muslim restaurants about serving this and other dishes, especially around the main mosque. Itinerant musicians also sometimes sing at restaurants around town.

Nán jiē Cān tīng (7 Nán Jiē; 南街7号; dishes from Y2) Tōnghǎi's best-known eatery is along a busy small street leading to Xiù Shān. You pay a couple of yuán for a bowl of noodles served quickly at the back of the restaurant. Or, pick and point and they'll whip it up pronto. It's an excellent meal.

Jiā yuán Dòu jiāng (Bei Jiē; 北街; dishes from Y2) Wash down any lingering peppers with outstanding soy milk here; it also has excellent across-the-bridge noodles.

Albert's Bar (Xiū Shān Park Gate; 秀山公园大门; drinks from Y8) Albert, the gregarious proprietor at this place, speaks English and is a traveller's best friend, providing internet access and a nice atmosphere after a long day of mountain trudging. Sadly no-one was around when we last visited; hopefully he hasn't left for greener pastures.

YÜNNÁN & KUBLAI KHAN

Travellers to Tōnghǎi are surprised to discover distinct Mongolian dress and non-Han features throughout the town and region. (Not to mention the ornate knives and scabbards sold on every street corner.) In fact there are around 13,000 ethnic Mongolians in Yünnán; all descended from the army of the great Khan, Kublai.

As part of his campaign in southern China, Kublai and his armies had to enter what today is Yünnán, one of China's most isolated and long-unconquered regions. In fact, the Mongols thought it a separate country – their name Qandahar for the region is from an Indian language meaning 'Great Country'; it was also called Nánzhào or 'Southern Kingdom' in Chinese (Polo knew it as Caragan). Completely unprepared for the enormity of the land and population opposing them, the Mongol horsemen were also baffled by the strange river-valley topography. Yet Kublai's two armies managed to cross western China mountain by mountain, river by river, opposed by ethnic minority groups at every step. They converged on Dàlì and somehow nearly took it without shedding blood.

Khan's armies would not subdue the Song and southern China until 1279, some 70 years after they had made initial advances. In the process they brought Yünnán into the great Chinese fold. Indeed the inclusion of Yünnán into the country is considered one of Kublai Khan's greatest achievements as he established the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty. North and south China had been forced to find each other.

Kublai Khan's period was an intriguing one for Chinese culture and society. Kublai was much more open-minded than his Mongol counterparts. He realised Chinese culture had much to offer, and even moved his capital to Běijīng. Once in control in Yünnán he also left a number of Dai princes in autonomous control. The Chinese were prohibited from most high positions, those being reserved for Mongols. But as a hands-off emperor, Kublai also allowed many aspects of Chinese high culture to flower, the educated elite of Chinese society quietly 'retiring' and concentrating on artistic endeavours.

Getting There & Away

Tōnghǎi's bus station is just south of the Huāngchéng Bèilū and Huāngchéng Xīlù intersection. But most regional buses leave from a stop west around the corner along Huāngchéng Bèilū at the Hubin Lu intersection. Buses to Jiànshuǐ (Y12, 1½ hours), Gèjiù (Y31, three hours) and Yùxī (Y12, two hours) leave every half-hour or so when full. There are minibuses and plush expresses to Kūnmíng (Y20 to Y33, 2½ hours) every hour or 90 minutes from 8.20am to 6.30pm. To Shípíng (Y18, three hours) buses leave every half-hour or so from 8am to 5pm. Cramped minibuses leave for Jiāngchūān from across the road when full (Y6, one hour).

AROUND TŌNGHǎI

Qīlù Hú 杞麓湖

This indigo-blue lake, 1km north of town, was famed from Tang dynasty times as one of the emperor's eight favourite southeast Yünnán getaways. The lake once rose much higher along the cliffs of the eastern shoreline and legends tell of how an ancient monk poked a hole in the ground to drain the water for farmers; his story is told at a temple in Xiushan

Park, Tōnghǎi. The easiest option is to travel north of Tōnghǎi to a lakeside park around 3km north of town. You could walk, or a motorcycle taxi would cost around Y5.

Xīngméng 兴蒙

At the base of Feng Shān, in a compact village 14km west of Tōnghǎi just off the main highway, some 4000 Mongolian descendants of members of Kublai Khan's expeditionary force still reside. Over the last 700 years, most have switched from the nomadic rough-riding lifestyle to fishing on Qilù Hú, but dwindling water levels over the past three decades have forced most onto the land as farmers or builders. Some still forge copperware and a few still hit up likely tourists, trying to sell knives. The traditional stone and sun-dried brick village is still a nice place to wander.

The Mongolian faces and language have been diluted over the years but the dress is still distinct; most people wear green or blue tunics with brightly embroidered sleeves. An annual early-winter festival called **Nadaam** is held here every three years (next one scheduled for 2008), just as it is in summer on the grasslands several thousand kilometres north.

To get here you have to head to the cluster of small buses west of the Tōnghǎi bus station and have someone toss you on one passing through (or relatively near) there. If you're lucky there'll be a small shared van heading there for Y2 per person.

Nàjiāyíng Mosque (Nàjiāyíng Qīngzhēnsì) 纳家营清真寺

A half-hour by bus up the western shoreline of the lake is the village of Nàjiāyíng, home to one of the oldest mosques in Yúnnán, predating the Ming dynasty. The mosque's three sections include a gate, a courtyard, hall and two flanking rooms that total over 5000 sq metres. The mosque is most impressive if viewed from the heights descending along the road from Jiāngchuān. Any bus to Jiāngchuān from Tōnghǎi will pass through Nàjiāyíng.

JIÀNSHUǐ 建水

☎ 0873 / pop 17,347

Jiànshuǐ really sucks in the tourists with its old-style architecture, friendly folk and a dizzying array of historic sights.

Honestly, those funky old buildings are there. Somewhere. Though yes, you would hardly know it, given the typically polluted and congested outer arteries leading in, then the cheesy face-lift the main downtown streets have been given. Just wander about concentrically and you'll stumble across gems.

Known in ancient times as Butou or Badian, Jiànshuǐ's history dates back to the Western Jin period, when it was under the auspices of the Ningzhou kingdom. It was handed around to other authorities until its most important days as part of the Tōnghǎi Military Command of the Nánzhào kingdom. The Yuan dynasty established what would eventually become the contemporary town.

Jiànshuǐ figured prominently in the 1911 Revolution. On 1 November a group within the army staged a rebellion here inside the Tianjun Temple and established the military government of the Southern Garrison Army. Later, Marshal Zhu De would station his troops here.

Orientation

The eastern perimeter of the city consists of a curved line connecting all the Chaoyang Lūs circling the old town; they all link in the east at Chaoyang Gate. The main road downtown is Jinlinan Lu, leading southwest from

Chaoyang Gate. Walk due north on Yinghui Lu from Chaoyang Gate 3km to get to the bus station.

MAPS

Shops at the bus station have decent maps, as do several hotels. Most maps are in Chinese but a few now at least have English for streets.

And there's your headache – the street names on the maps don't always match those on the street signs. (Sigh.) Yup, there's been some upgrading of names of late, and even the locals aren't sure what to call the streets! In short, Jinlinan Jie and Jianzhong Lu are one and the same, as are Hanlin Jie/Jianxin Jie and Beizheng Jie/Wenyuan Jie.

Information

There are three no-name **internet cafés** (wǎngbā; per hr Y4) on Yongning Jie, just south of Jinlinan Jie (Jianzhong Lu). No banks yet have ATMs that accept foreign cards, though the many branches of the China Construction Bank (中国建设银行) are supposed to.

The **Jiànshuǐ Travel Agency** (Jiànshuǐ Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 765 2241) can help with information on the surrounding sights but there's little English spoken.

Sights

The following is absolutely not complete. You could spend days and days just poking around all the old buildings and such. Pick up a map and do some exploring.

CONFUCIAN TEMPLE

Jiànshuǐ's tourism lynchpin is this famous **temple** (Wénmiào; admission Y20; ☎ 7am-6pm) west of the town centre. Modelled after the temple in Confucius' hometown of Qūfù (Shāndōng province) and finished in 1285, it covers 7.5 hectares and is the third-largest Confucian temple in China. (Actually, some locals employ a flurry of Byzantine mathematics to prove it's the largest. You be the judge.)

The place is so large that you first walk through a gate on Jinlinan Jie (Jianzhong Lu) and all the way around Xue Lake (the Chinese word is actually 'sea') just to get to another gate, then up a walkway before the main structures loom magnificently before you. The structure includes a main hall, two side rooms, two central halls, two pavilions and eight glazed-tile archways. **Dacheng Hall**,

is supported by twenty-two 5m-pillars, two engraved with two dragons rising through the mist.

Remarkably, the temple has operated as a school for nearly 750 years and was so successful that over half of all Yúnnán's *jǔrén* (举人; successful candidates in imperial examinations) came from Jiànshuǐ. Many of the names of buildings in Jiànshuǐ use the ideogram *wén*, meaning 'literacy'.

ZHU FAMILY GARDEN

A 10-minute walk east from the Confucian Temple and then left down an alley is an outstanding example of a Qing dynasty traditional ancestral home. The spacious 20,000-sq-metre **complex** (Zhūjiā Huāyuán; ☎ 765 3028; admission Y20; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) comprises ancestral buildings, family homes, ponds and lovely gardens and took 30 years to build. Unsurprisingly, it's now been partially converted into an atmospheric inn.

Travellers will like the small museum in the rear, with dozens of photographs of local architecture, with a heavy focus on bridges. There is also an exhibit on the history of the Zhū family. The Zhū family made its name through its mill and tavern and dabbled in everything from tin in Gèjiù to opium in Hong Kong, eventually falling victim to the political chaos following the 1911 revolution.

ZHĪLÍN SÌ

One of the few remaining examples of intricate woodworking on a large scale, and the largest preserved wooden structure in Yúnnán, this monastery is tucked away in a tiny alley southwest of the Confucian Temple.

Built during the latter stages of the Yuan dynasty, the monastery's distinctive design feature is the brackets between columns and crossbeams. A set of 600-year-old frescoes were recently discovered here, though they have since been moved to local museums.

CHAOYANG GATE

Guarding the centre of town, Chaoyang Gate (Cháoyáng Lóu) – an imposing Ming edifice – was modelled on the Huanghe Tower in Wūhàn and Yueyang Tower in Húnán and bears more than a passing resemblance to Tiānānmén (Gate of Heavenly Peace) in Běijīng. (You will definitely be told of how it actually predates Tiānānmén.) Recent renovations have resulted in a nice sitting area where

you can grab a tea or beer, a pricier interior teahouse and an upper-floor **exhibit** (admission Y2) of local history. There's no charge to walk up into the gate and admire the building and views close up.

Architecture

Classic architecture surrounds you in Jiànshuǐ, and not just in the old-style back alleys either. Virtually every main street has a historically significant traditional structure. The architecture is especially intriguing because of the obvious mixture of central plans and local styles. Many old buildings, despite official decrees positing them as state treasures, have been co-opted for other purposes and the trick – and truthfully, the great fun – is trying to find them.

A good place to start your explorations is Chaoyang Gate. Head south and then right up a short hill. After 200m on the right is the Grain Bureau (Liángshì Jū). Walk confidently inside, past two old storehouses to the **Chóng-wén Tǎ**, an elegant 14-storey pagoda. From here continue round Guilin Jie and you'll come across four **wells** (井) and a shrine.

Back at Chaoyang Gate, head north and then east to the Workers Club (Gōngrén Jùlèbù). Around the back are several interlocking **lakes**, banked by a throng of elderly card players. A little further east is the former **Fúdōng Sì**, a temple which houses the town's education department.

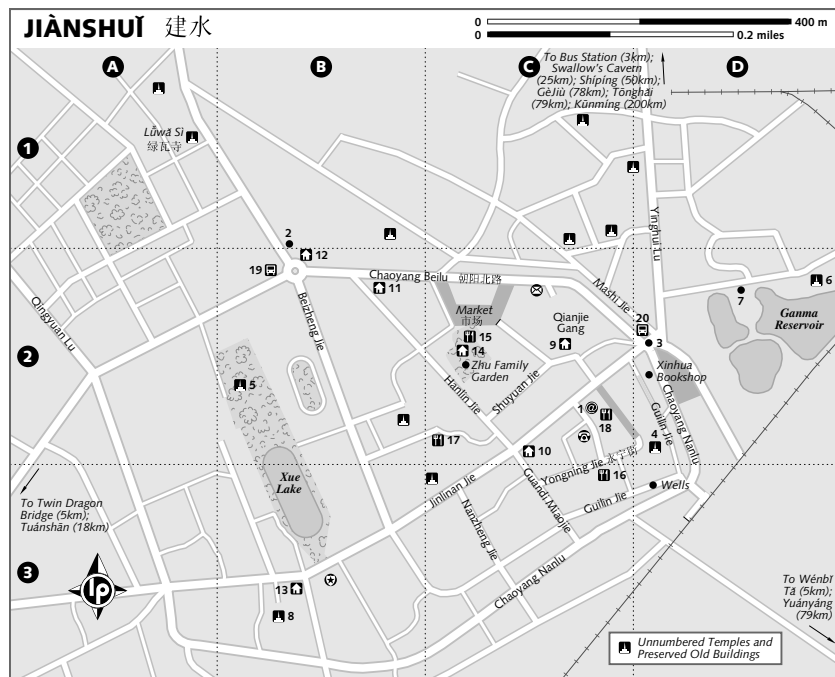
Sleeping

You'll find a dozen or so basic hotels near the bus station north of town, but who wants to stay there? You could also hoof it west of Chaoyang Gate to snoop out any number of cheap places.

BUDGET

Garden Hotel (Huāyuán Bīnguǎn; ☎ 765 6285; 36 Jinlinan Jie; 金临安街(建中路)36号; s & d Y50-80, without bathroom Y30, tr Y90) It's hit or miss with this place, the epically longtime traveller standby; some find it just fine, others grouse that it's overpriced. Do take a look at a few rooms, as things vary a lot here. Staff are pretty eager to get people back, so you're at an advantage. The street it's on is also known as Jianzhong Lu (建中路).

Wénmiào Bīnguǎn (Temple Hotel; ☎ 765 0996; 89 Ruyi Xiang, Jinlinan Jie; 如意巷、金临安街89号; s & d Y60, without bathroom Y30) One rarely used



option is this place. Oddly, rooms are good but it's kinda like a homestay otherwise (clamber around a motorbike to get to the rooms). Friendly service and it's near Zhilin Si.

MIDRANGE

There are several good midrange options that offer some character as well as comfort.

Lín'ān Jiūdiàn (☎ 765 1888; fax 765 4888; Chaoyang Beilu; 朝阳北路; d Y130-170; ㊦) A 10-minute walk west of the bus station along Chaoyang Beilu brings you to this place, set off the street and in pleasant gardens. Decent rooms, but not a very intriguing part of the town.

Cháoyáng Dàjiūdiàn (☎ 766 2401; 6 Chenghuang Miao Jie; 城隍庙街6号; s & d Y158-288; ㊦) An erstwhile cheapo guesthouse, it recently was revamped into a comfy three-star hotel with still-fresh-as-daisies rooms with nice detailings. (So get there fast.) The discounts it offers (to Y100 or so) in the off season are a steal. There's a nice restaurant in a traditional-style building, though it seems to hardly ever open.

Huáqīng Jiūdiàn (☎ 766 6166; 46 Hanlin Jie; 翰林街46号; s & d Y200; ㊦) A splendid new hotel,

it basically screams out to welcome foreign guests – hence the ubiquitous signs. It's certainly got the trappings of a cosy guesthouse – bike rental (Y25 per day), a quiet café, cheery staff – everything except cheap rooms. Still, the rooms are smashing, with lovely small patios, and the staff are great. The street it's on is also known as Jianxin Jie (建新街).

Zhūjiā Huāyuán Kèzhàn (☎ 766 7988; s & d Y220-280; ㊦) The classiest place in town is this option in the Zhu Family Gardens. Four of the courtyards have been converted into rooms for Y220 and Y280, which, although they are dark, have lovely furniture and traditional old-style beds. It's worth splashing out on the Y280 rooms, as the Y220 ones are really small and pokey.

Eating

Jiànshuǐ is legendary for its *qìguō* (汽锅), a stew made in the county's famed earthenware pots and often infused with medicinal herbs. The cook may make use of the local speciality: grass sprout (草芽; *cǎoyá*), also known as elephant's tooth grass root. It tastes like

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bamboo. Only found in Jiànshuǐ County, it's often used in broth or fried with liver or pork. Non-meat eaters might find a place that will substitute tofu.

Another local speciality is tonic soup made from bird nests from Swallow's Cavern – don't gulp at the price.

Our friends in Kūnmíng would howl if we were remiss in not touting the glories of Jiànshuǐ's barbecue (建水烧烤; *Jiànshuǐ shāokǎo*). And, true, everywhere you look, you'll find lots of cubbyhole restaurants full of braziers roasting meats, veggies, tofu and perhaps goat cheese. A perfect night out is a barbecued meal under the Jiànshuǐ stars with friends.

In the evenings Jinlinan Jie (Jianzhong Lu) becomes a pedestrian area with vendors offering sugar cane, skinned pineapples and kebabs.

Míngchéng Yùlè Zhōngxīn (Yongning Jie; 永宁街; dishes from Y8) serves duck and other local dishes in the shadow of a 1950s communist building.

A restaurant is at the back of the Zhu Family Gardens. In the heat of summer you can dine on a raised platform overlooking the garden. Prices are very reasonable at around Y10 per dish. If you book in advance you don't have to pay the gardens entry fee.

Getting There & Away

Jiànshuǐ has a couple of bus stations. The main one is 3km north of Chaoyang Gate. For very local destinations, you need to head to the second small (regional) bus station ten minutes' walk west at the corner of Chaoyang Beilu and Beizheng Jie.

From the main station there are buses continually leaving for Gèjiù (Y15 to 20, 1½ hours), Yuányáng (Y16, 2½ hours) and Tōnghǎi (Y12, 1½ hours), as well as Méngzì, Shípíng (Y12, one hour) and Kǎiyuǎn (Y12, one hour).

Further afield, Kūnmíng is served 7am to 3pm by frequent buses (Y50, three to four hours). Hékdǒu-bound travellers have four morning buses (Y47, five hours) between 6am and 11am. The masochistic can take one of the sleepers to Jìngzhōng (Y147, 17 hours), scheduled for 1.30pm and 4.30pm.

AROUND JIÀNSHUǐ

Swallow's Cavern 燕子洞

This freak of nature and ornithology is halfway between Jiànshuǐ and Gèjiù. The karst formations (the largest in Asia) are a lure, but what you'll want to see are the hundreds of thousands of swallows flying around in spring and summer. The **cave** (Yānzi Dòng; admission Y35) is split into two: high and dry, and low and wet. The higher one is so large that a three-storey pavilion and a tree fit inside. Plank walkways link up with other pavilions outside on the rock formations. Look out for the inscribed plaques hanging from the roof at the entrance to the cave. The Lu River runs through the lower cave for about 8km and you can tour the caverns in 'dragon boats'. The cacophony of river and bird is insane.

Getting to the cave is easy...if you can find a bus that takes local roads and not the expressway. Ask at the bus station for any bus bound for Méngzì, Kǎiyuǎn or Gèjiù that passes by the cavern. Forty-five minutes to an hour later and five to 10 minutes after you pass through Miàndiàn village, at the entrance to another tiny village, you should see signs saying 'Welcome to Swallow's Cave', among other things, all in English. The fare is Y5.

Twin Dragon Bridge 双龙桥

Traditionally styled bridges abound – check out the photos at the Zhu Family Garden (p311) – but you must see this bridge (Shuānglóng Qiáo) across the confluence of

the Lu and Tachong Rivers, 5km from the western edge of town. One of the 10 oldest in China, the bridge features 17 arches, so many that it took two periods of the Qing dynasty to complete the project. A three-storey pavilion sits in the middle, with two smaller ones at either end. In the right light at the right times, it's a great photo opportunity.

To get there take minibus 4 from the second bus station (Y1). Note that you have to ask the driver to tell you where to get off the bus and then point you in the right direction. Bus 4 continues to **Huánglóng Sì**, a small temple.

Tuánshān 团山

Some 13km west of the Twin Dragon Bridge is the **Zhang Family Gardens** (张家花园; Zhāngjiā Huāyuán) in Tuánshān. Fascinating little place, this. Some three quarters of the village's families are surnamed Zhang (long story), all descended from forbears who came during the Ming dynasty. Economically astute, they cleaned up in a variety of businesses throughout the Hónghé region, then came home and built exquisite homes famed – justifiably so – for their ornate woodcarvings, calligraphy and paintings. The village is filled with these places – oh yeah, there's one from an interloper family named Mao.

Getting there is a pain. You can wait eternally for a bus from Jiànshuǐ's second bus station; it's easier to plunk down Y28/50 for a one-way/return taxi ride.

Wénbǐ Tǎ 文笔塔

Southwest of town, a few kilometres on the road to Qinglóng (青龙), this Ming dynasty pagoda is certainly distinctive, shaped like a calligraphy brush. The perimeter of the base matches the height, exactly 31.4m. To get here take a Qinglóng-bound minibus (Y2) from the northwest side of Chaoyang Gate or take a taxi for Y10. It's a pleasant bicycle ride.

SHÍPÍNG 石屏

☎ 0873 / pop 12,832

Lying approximately 50km west of its better-known sister city Jiànshuǐ, Shíping has its own cool old town, where you can wander the flagstone streets and alleys. There are a few historical structures of note to scope out, but the real point of interest is Shíping's famed tofu (bean curd). For more than six centuries, this busy-as-a-bee town has been churning out tonne after tonne of the healthful product.

Many of the 'factories' are simply family-run hole-in-the-wall operations in structures that seem to date from the earliest days of the town. There's nothing quite like it elsewhere.

Orientation

The central part of downtown is a 10-minute walk northwest from the bus station along Huiyuan Lu (汇源路); that is, exit the bus station, cross the street, and turn left. Turn right at the main east-west road, Xishan Lu (西山路). Follow this straight ahead a few blocks till you get to the old town gate. Cross underneath and you'll see a gentrified – kind of – pedestrian area of shops. Turn right immediately and you should be on Xizheng Jie (西正街), which leads directly into the old part of town. The other street of note is Beizheng Jie (北正街)

MAPS

The only map you'll find of Shíping is at Xinhua Bookshops in other cities in the region. (Shíping's flyspeck Xinhua Bookshop in the old town is rather barren.) Look for a map titled *Tourist Map of Honghe*; it's got loads of town and city maps in southeast Yünnán on it, but only the title is in English.

Information

From the corner of Xishan Lu, head east along Huanwen Lu (焕文路) to find a China Post and China Telecom office.

Huazhong Internet Café (华众网吧; Huázhòng Wǎngbā; Xishan Lu, old town; per hour Y2) After passing through the old city gate, instead of turning right into the old town, continue straight ahead some 50m; this place will be on your left.

Sights

In addition to all the tofu goings-on, the town has a few historical architecture tidbits that are worth exploring, both along Beizheng Jie. First up is the **Confucius Temple** (孔庙; Kǒng Miào), which wasn't actually open for viewing at last visit – but the grounds are nice. And it's free. Further south is the extremely old (dating from the Qing dynasty) **No 1 Middle School** (北正街学校; Běizhēng Jiē Xuéxiào), still in use today.

Sleeping

Finding a cheap bed in town shouldn't be too much of a problem, but if you're aiming for mid- to top-end lodgings, Shíping's stars have

SHÍPÍNG TOFU

Shíping's tofu purportedly came with Mongol invaders during the Yuan dynasty and the place hasn't let up on producing the stuff since. Wherefore the big fuss? Apparently it's the water, the silky and primeval fresh spring water in these parts (they often tout how the tofu is 'dotted' with it and not grimy tap water or salt water like other places).

All the fun in town is just wandering about and scoping out the entire process. In the alley markets you'll see farmers wheeling in and endlessly haggling over the prices of sacks of soybeans. Guys lug pull-carts laden with pre-tofu beans in-between stages of production. The sound of machinery rattles on and on. And there's even some actual tofu being sold.

A few large-scale factories do exist. **Běimén Dòufu Chǎng** (北门豆腐厂; ☎ 485 8730; Ziyuan Jie) has been producing the stuff for over six centuries and is probably the most popular stop for belching tour buses and their hordes (they likely won't know what to make of a foreigner). But pretty much everywhere you look you'll find smaller medium-sized factories, and the best, mom-and-pop back-room operations. Just a note: some of the smaller places weren't too keen on visitors, seriously saying they had corporate espionage concerns. Still, most don't mind if you crane your head in a window and watch. Just don't get too frenetic with your camera. You should assume that taking photos of operations is NOT OK, unless they say otherwise.

been somewhat generously assigned. The first block of Xishan Lu east off Huiyuan Lu is the best place to look for cheap digs.

Jíyáng Bīnguǎn (吉祥宾馆; ☎ 485 7198; Xishan Lu; 西山路; s & d Y40-50, without bathroom Y20-30) Coming from the bus station, turn right (east) off Huiyuan Lu onto Xishan Lu, and this is one of the first budget places you'll come to (on the right side of the street). It has quite clean – very well-maintained – rooms, and management that seemed delighted to have foreign friends.

Xīkélái Bīnguǎn (喜客来宾馆; ☎ 485 1456; Xishan Lu; 西山路; s/d Y60/70, s & d without bathroom Y40) Neither as spiffy nor quite as friendly as the previous entry (across the street), it's got clean rooms and is popular enough that it's often booked out by early evening.

Shíping Bīnguǎn (石屏宾馆; ☎ 485 5566; 17 Huanwen Lu; 焕文路17号; s & d Y150-280; ☎) Loads of hotels are scattered through the downtown area, but this is the only even remotely non-dump (or obnoxiously overpriced) one we found, and it's a steal if you can get the standard discount down to Y100. Most rooms have been redone in the not-too-distant past and show actual – gasp – attention to detail. This may be the only bathroom in China that you actually want to spend time in.

Tobacco Hotel (烟草大厦; Yāncǎo Dàshà; ☎ 485 3456; cnr Huiyuan & Xishan Lu; 汇源西山路口; s/d/tr Y160-440; ☎) Remember this name, because this is what every taxi driver and every clerk in any hotel that can't/won't take you will say. Proudly hailed as the town's superlative

lodging option, it's perfectly fine and there's not a thing wrong with it, other than its rooms aren't any better than those of the Shíping Bīnguǎn and it's often booked solid with government officials and tour groups.

Eating

For all its tofu boasting, it can be hard to find a place in Shíping that actually serves the stuff. (After working with tofu all day, perhaps it's understandable people might wish to eat something else.) It's actually hard to find any restaurant outside of hotels. The best place to start is in the old town, where you'll find microscopic back-room eateries or street braziers grilling the stuff to smoky perfection. A couple of decent restaurants are also at the east end of Xishan Lu, near the old town gate, including the **Xīndà Jiǔjiā** (新大酒家; ☎ 685 4936; dishes from Y5).

If you do find a place, you're then confronted with the problem of which of the zillion preparations you wish to indulge in. The best thing to do is hit 'em up with your ever-improving Mandarin. Say *Wǒ yào chī Shíping dòufu* (我要吃石屏豆腐; 'I want to eat Shíping tofu') and *Qǐng gěi wǒ jièshào* (请给我介绍; 'Please recommend something').

Two ways you can't go wrong are the standards *shāguō dòufu* (砂锅豆腐; claypot beancurd) and *jiān dòufu* (煎豆腐; braised beancurd). One of the best we sampled was Shíping tofu braised in a sauce of honey and locally produced *báijiu* (moonshine). Otherworldly.

SHÍPÍNG BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Gèjiù	16	2	every 20 min	7am-6pm
Jiànshuǐ	12	1	every 20 min	7am-8pm
Jǐnghóng	130	15	2 daily	3.30pm & 6.30pm
Kūnmíng	55	3-4	15 daily	6am-9.30pm
Tōnghǎi	18	2-3	11 daily	8am-6pm
Yuányáng	52	4	daily	7am

Getting There & Away

To get to Shíping from Kūnmíng, you can take buses from the main bus station every half-hour to 90 minutes from 7.30am to 5pm. The ride takes three to four hours and costs Y55. Otherwise, buses from cities and towns in southeastern Yünnán leave for here fairly constantly, though be forewarned that they go to and from Tōnghǎi up and over mountains at a snail's pace (but the scenery is lovely).

AROUND SHÍPÍNG

If you've got extra time in Shíping, it might be worth nosing around the vicinity. Plenty of temples and lakeside vistas await. Most head for **Yilong Lake** (异龙湖) just east of town. To the west of town is the **Bǎoxiù** (宝秀) area, with a modest mountain area sporting temples and pagodas.

You can take a local minibus to Bǎoxiù (Y3, 45 minutes), which run regularly when full from the old bus station near the old town gate in Shíping, but from there to any sights it's a bit tough.

Chat to any taxi driver at the bus station and you can work out an all-day tour with them. It'll run around Y150 (at least) to hit the lake, Bǎoxiù, and Zhèngyíng Cūn (below). One reputable taxi driver/tour guide others have recommended – and we couldn't agree more – is **Liu Jing** (刘晶; ☎ 675 8917, 139 8730 8915). She speaks maybe three words of English but communicates admirably nonetheless and really takes care of you.

Zhèngyíng Cūn 郑营村

Just 10km west of Shíping, this pleasant village not far south of the road to Bǎoxiù (but a long walk if you're thinking of hopping off a Bǎoxiù-bound bus and hoofing it) is a funky anachronism. Find a variety of ancestral shrines, temples, pavilions and extant

family courtyards here. The architecture is honestly nothing you haven't seen in many other places in China, but the streetscapes are lovely and the populace entirely welcoming (we had one kindly old chap introduce himself, then lead us around for most of a morning letting us into otherwise inaccessible buildings).

Public buses run, but not often if at all, from the old bus station in Shíping near the old town gate. It's much quicker and easier to hire a taxi, which you can get for Y40 (round trip).

Lǎoxùdiàn 老旭甸

Around 55km south of Shíping, Lǎoxùdiàn is known as the Fossilised Castle Town. Indeed, the name is not a misnomer – the village features bizarre dwellings, as if the rich clay earth had risen from the ground in a transmigration of natural architecture. Trouble is, via local transport it isn't easy to get here.

KĀIYUǎN 开远

☎ 0873 / pop 19,248

Once a main transport hub in southeastern Yünnán, Kāiyuǎn has hit the skids to a certain extent since the demise of passenger rail in this part of the province. Even its narrow-gauge railroad museum's holdings were packed up *in toto* and shipped off to Kūnmíng (a hospital now occupies the train station). Until China and its Southeast Asian neighbours work out the details on the new regional railway network – which doesn't seem to be forthcoming anytime soon – Kāiyuǎn will continue to struggle along as a semibusy industrial city.

There's no real reason to stop here, other than the only local 'sight' **Nán Dòng** (南洞; South Cave) south of town, which was most aptly described by one local: 'Well, yeah, it's a cave, all right.' But if you're headed to

the Wénshān region from Jiànshuǐ, Gèjiù, Yuányáng or Shíping, you'll more than likely have to stop off here and wait for a bus. No biggie, it's got some pretty tree-lined streets and honestly friendly folks.

Sleeping & Eating

No problem at all for lodging. Exit the main bus station and turn left (south). Everything you need is in this direction.

Yuèshèng Bīnguǎn (月盛宾馆; ☎ 316 4676; 162 Xizhong Lu; 西中路162号; s & d Y80-150, s/d/tr without bathroom Y40/40/45; ☎) This is the first place you'll come to after the bus station; it's about a 10-minute walk from the bus station on your left. Frill-less but perfectly fine and the gregarious staff would love to have you.

Kāiyuǎn Bīnguǎn (开远宾馆; ☎ 316 1336; Nanzheng Jie; 南正街; s & d from Y60; ☎) If the Yuèshèng Bīnguǎn is full, then continue south to Lingquan Lu (灵泉路) and turn left. Walk ahead a few minutes to Nanzheng Jie. Turn right and 40m ahead on your right is a narrow entrance to this unassuming and slightly somnolent place. Still, it's clean and the staff solicitous.

Diànnán Dàjiùdiàn (滇南大酒店; ☎ 712 3396; Lingquan Lu; 灵泉路; s & d from Y200; ☎) A few blocks east of the Kāiyuǎn Bīnguǎn is this, the 'poshest' (quotes necessary) place in town. Rooms aren't exactly flash but at least they're spacious and bright, and service is above par.

A couple of alleys north of Nanzheng Jie along Lingquan Lu (on the southeast side) is a very clean, friendly noodle and dumpling shop that has smiling service and enormous fill-ups (of all varieties of noodles) for around Y4. Every diminutive eatery in this town, truth be told, has the most enormous bowls of noodles we've ever seen.

Getting There & Around

Kāiyuǎn actually has two bus stations: a south station (*nán zhàn*) for southern destinations and a north station (*běi zhàn*), the main one, for others, though there may be some overlap. A taxi ride between the two is all of Y4.

Regionally, the two stations have buses running to/from everywhere every 10 minutes or so. There are zillions of buses to Kūnmíng (Y50 to Y66, three to four hours). To Qiūběi (Y36, 5½ hours) there are buses at 8.10am and 1.05pm though you could also take a Yānshān bus (many departures) and switch there. To Lúxí (Y29, 4½ hours) buses

leave roughly hourly from 8.10am to 6.30pm. To Luóping (Y42, six hours) buses leave at 7.40am and 9.40am.

GÈJIÙ 个旧

☎ 0873 / pop 35,084

An alpine-esque town set against a backdrop of craggy cliffs. Vistas over a steely blue lake approaching picture-postcard realms. Yes, there's your Gèjiù, the 'Tin City'.

Howzat again? Yes, it is saddled with that grim moniker because of the ore that made it rich as the dickens. Then again, perish those images of mining dust and strip-mining trucks rumbling, for it's an attractive enough city with a European feel (ironic as the tropic of Cancer passes through the northern end of town). The lake is circled by a lovely promenade, there's lots of greenery, boating, and a teahouse or two perched above the water. A park in the southeastern section houses one of the most significant temples in southeast Yünnán.

Oh, and the tin. Extraction of tin dates from the Han dynasty, though the first commercial enterprise wasn't until 1883, during the Qing dynasty. Tin extraction and smelting still accounts for 95% of Gèjiù's economic base. And the price of tin must be pretty damned high, as you'll see from the costs of things around here.

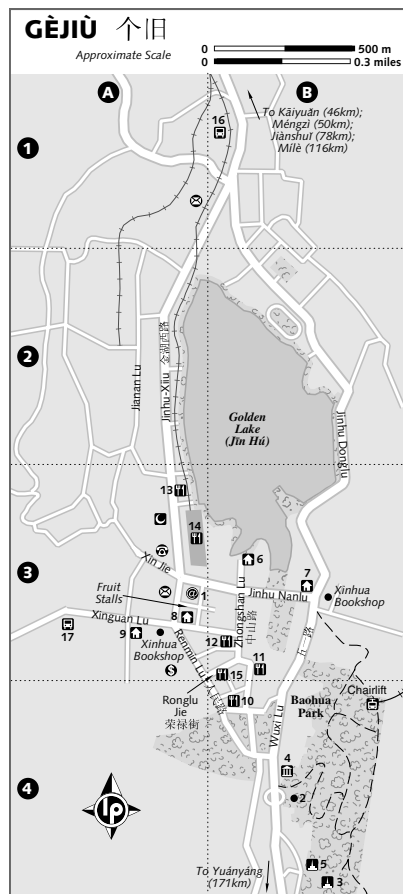
Orientation

Gèjiù is built on a north-south axis, divided by a lake, Jīn Hú. The bus station is nearly 1.5km from the city centre. The main artery, Jīnhu Xilu, branches along the west side of the lake; it becomes Renmin Lu at its first major intersection south of the lake. Jīnhu Nanlu leads east from here, along the south shore, 300m to the base of the hills. South of this is the real Gèjiù – three-quarters modern but with a few warrens of old-world architecture. The southern part of the city is buttressed by Baohua Park (Bǎohuá Gōngyuán), the site of Bǎohuá Sì (Baohua Temple).

No maps are to be found around the bus station or anywhere else.

Information

Close your eyes, walk 50m and you'll come across an internet café in Gèjiù; all average around Y3 per hour. The largest is the internet café along Jīnhu Nanlu on the south side, east of Jīnhu Xilu.



Sights

JIN HÚ 金湖

Otherwise known as Golden Lake, Jin Hú was created in 1954 when torrential rains created a sinkhole into a limestone cavern, swallowing half of the downtown area. You can hire boats or just take a lovely stroll around the lakeside promenade with every oldest in town.

RAIL LINE 铁路

By the time you read this the city may have made good on its plan to resurrect its defunct narrow-gauge railway line which once went towards Shíping for tourist excursions (though not all the way to Shíping). Apparently they're going to have carnival-type attractions at the terminus.

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BAOHUA PARK 宝华公园

On the southeastern outskirts of downtown Gèjiù, largish and pretty **Baohua Park** (Bāohuá Gōngyuán; admission Y2) butts up against Qiling Hill and is built around **Bāohuá Sì** (Baohua Temple).

The temple was constructed from 1670 to 1675 during the Qing dynasty by a Taoist monk. Later expansions took place in the 20th century. Many of the pavilions and temples have faded but the Linguan Pavilion, Liang Hall and Baiyuan Tower have all been preserved.

Footpaths wind through the park, taking in some gardens and memorials.

A **chairlift** (one way/return Y15/20; ☎ 10am-11pm) up Qiling Hill departs from near the northern entrance to the park. At the top is a restaurant. You could do some good ridge walks around here and walk back to town.

OTHER SIGHTS

If you are headed to Baohua Park, the old town offers interesting backstreets en route to Wuxi Lu. The **Gèjiù Museum** (Gèjiù Bówùguǎn) – which always seems to be closed – has some dull exhibits on local 2000-year-old Eastern Han dynasty excavations. The attached **Caishendian Temple** has some fine statues.

Just up the road, by the entrance to the Baohua Park, is the **Baohua Gate**, also known as the Línyún Gé, built in 1921 by the Republican government.

Sleeping

Budget accommodation is – and has always been – a problem in Gèjiù. Jinhu Nanlu and Xin Jie have a handful of cheap guesthouses, but none accept foreigners. Forget the upper-low end or midrange places you come across along Jinhu Nanlu – they're not worth the money.

Grand Hotel Honghe (红河大酒店; Hónghé Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 215 5598; Renmin Lu; 人民路; r Y60-280, without bathroom Y30-50; ☎) Has always been and still is the best budget option. There is a bewildering array of room choices and prices here – the rate sign looks like an airport departure board.

Jiaotong Binguan (交通宾馆; Traffic Hotel; ☎ 216 7028; Xinguan Lu; 新冠路; s/d Y70/80; ☎) This option, east of the city's regional bus station, seems a bit dark and grim when you enter, but the rooms are actually pretty nice if you want your own bathroom. Best of all, the manager here seems determined to prove the other hotels in town are 'overpriced'. Good sign.

Gejiu Binguan (☎ 212 2668; Jinhu Nanlu; 金湖南路; d & tr Y120-288; ☎) Best used as a last resort for midrange rooms but you can't beat the location.

Century Plaza (Shìjì Guāngchǎng Jiùdiàn; ☎ 216 8888; www.hh-sj.com; 6-21 Zhongshan Lu; 中山路6-21号; r Y388-1688; ☎) If you need any proof that the price of tin is high, look no further than the fact that the city has not one but two international-standard luxury hotels within a kilometre of each other. This, the newer one, offers stunning views of the lake in standard rooms and the staff fall all over themselves to help.

Eating

Cheap food is not that easy to find. This town loves its wannabe-chichi, seen-on-the-scene places. However, there are still a few buffet-

style restaurants where you pick out three or so dishes and rice for about Y5. The stalls set up around 11.30am and it's all over by 1.30pm. There is a place south of Jinhu Nanlu along Zhongshan Lu.

In the evening, roast beast (and veggies, tofu and goat cheese) can be found at the railway market (nicknamed the 'Barbecue Market') between the south shore of the lake and Jinhu Nanlu, the inside of which is lined with stalls offering braziers to roast your own. Many of these are Muslim.

Blue Baron (Lánjuéshì; ☎ 214 0177; 89 Zhongshan Lu; 中山路; dishes from Y6; ☎ 11.30am-9pm) This decade-old place serves up pseudo-Western fare and good Chinese, along with coffee, beer and some decent desserts.

French Café (Fǎguólóu Cāntīng; ☎ 213 3688; Jinhu Xilu; 金湖西路; dishes from Y15; ☎ 9am-noon & 2pm-5.30pm) Not a bit of English here. Or even French. But it does do decent French and Italian food, and the atmosphere is great, housed in an old railroad building (with a nice outside balcony for alfresco dining).

Restaurant of the Tin Metropolis (Xídù Fàndiàn; Ronglu Jie; 荣禄街; dishes from Y10) and **Běijīng Fàndiàn** (Renmin Lu; 人民路; dishes from Y5), both south of the lake in the rapidly gentrifying old-town district, are the only longtime stand-bys in town for solid Chinese food in a *rènào* (hot and noisy) environment, though sadly the crowds now frequent more chic and trendy places that are pervasive everywhere in this area.

Getting There & Away

To get to Qiūběi you'll have to switch in Kaiyuán.

For Jīnghóng in Xīshuāngbǎnnà buses are being phased out and you'll likely have to go

GÈJIÙ BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Hékǒu	36	5	hourly	7am-10am (& 3.20pm)
Jiànshuǐ	20	1½	every 10 min approx	6am-6pm
Kāiyuán	11	1	every 10 min approx	6am-6pm
Lúxī	34	4	hourly	8am-3.20pm
Tōnghǎi	31	2	3 daily	7.20am, 9.40am, 1.30pm
Wénshān	34	4½	daily	9am
Yuányáng	20	2	3 daily	7am, 7.20am, 7.40am (For Xīnjiē in Yuányáng be sure to specify Yuányáng's Xīnjiē as there's another Xīnjiē locally.)

first to Lùchūn (Y43, six hours) at 6.45am, though they also have epically slow sleepers at 9.10am and 7.30pm.

Buses going to Kūnmíng leave frequently from 6.20am to 10pm with a range of choices (Y30/Y40/48/60 regular/sleeper/Iveco van/luxury coach, five hours).

Another regional bus station is downtown on the southwest end of Xinyuan Lu, serving local sites.

Getting Around

Bus 3 runs from in front of Baohua Park's south entrance all the way along Wuxi Lu to the main bus station north of Jin Hú. Bus 1 runs north from downtown to the bus station. Bus 2 runs along the east side of Jin Hú.

AROUND GÈJIÙ

A day trip to Méngzì (蒙自) might be worth for the town's 200-year-old architecture. This town also claims – along with Jiànshuǐ – to being the source of Yúnnán's across-the-bridge noodles. Due to bad roads, the trip takes 1½ hours.

QIÜBĒI 邱北

☎ 0876 / pop 11,418

Qiüběi is, quite honestly, simply a pit stop on the way to Pūzhèhēi. Grim it isn't by any means. The locals are cheery and helpful and it's fairly relaxed. But given the landscape just outside of town, the ease of transport to get there, and the relative ease of lodging within the park, you'll probably get out as fast as you can.

Orientation & Information

Qiüběi is small enough to walk end to end in 20 minutes; give yourself a couple of hours and you'll have every inch of it reconnoitred. The bus station is on the far north side of town. To get downtown, simply exit the sta-

tion to the right; you're now on Dongzheng Jie (东正街). This becomes Xizheng Jie (西正街) at Caiyun Jie (彩云街). Paralleling Dong/Xizheng Jie is Renmin Lu (人民路); these two run all the way south to Puzhehei Dajie (普者黑大街). That's all you need to know.

We couldn't find one lousy internet café anywhere in this town; trust us, there's nothing else to do here and we spent way too much time looking for a log-in joint.

Sleeping & Eating

At least you'll have little problem finding a place to stay in town. Exit the bus station to the right and bear left at the first intersection. Immediately you'll see the first of the town's cheap guesthouses and hotels – enough for their own phone directory. Few are worth it.

Huifeng Binguǎn (汇丰宾馆; ☎ 412 8266; Dongzheng Jie; 东正街; s & d from Y60; ☹) Just a block straight ahead out of the bus station, this is among the better of the cheaper options in Qiüběi. Kinda dark interiors but it's clean and as quiet as anything nearby.

Ruihé Dàjiǔdiàn (瑞和大酒店; ☎ 412 5666; fax 412 6555; Renmin Lu; 人民路; s & d from Y130; ☹) Qiüběi's original luxury hotel, this is still your best bet for finding anything remotely luxurious. Singles are cramped but in very good shape; twins and doubles are a tad more spacious. Staff are more on the ball than at many similar hotels. To get here, just follow Dong/Xizheng Jie to Caiyun Jie, turn left, then your first left and you're there.

Foodwise, hope you like barbecue (烧烤; *shāokǎo*) because that's pretty much the only thing you'll find here: braziers flaring on the street, braziers smoking even in eateries. Redolence of searing meat, fish, tofu and veggies.

Our favourite place to eat is **Cāiyún Fàndiàn** (彩云饭店; Caiyun Jie; dishes from Y2), a lovely tiny

place run by a cheerful woman who'll help you sort out what you're hungry for. Plenty of veggies are here for non-meat eaters. You can also get steaming bowls of noodles. It's just north of the corner of Caiyun Jie and Puzhehei Dajie.

Getting There & Away

Note that to get to the Hóngghé region you'll need to switch buses in Kǎiyuǎn. For Luóping (Y32, five hours) one direct bus over scenic roads leaves at 7.30am while hourly buses from 10am to 3pm go via Yànshān and take a tad longer.

PŪZHÈHĒI 普者黑

☎ 0876

No time to head for Guilín or Yángshuò in Guǎngxī? Worry not, for if it's weird and wonderful natural topography (that freaky karst landscape so famed to the east) you're after, this is a grand backup spot. Just 12km outside of Qiüběi, it offers gorgeous scenery – there's nothing like being paddled in a traditional Yi flat-bottomed boat past endless chocolate-drop hillocks, and spelunking innumerable caves.

Now, keep in mind that there's a reason Guilín and its little sibling Yángshuò are in virtually every coffee-table picturebook the world round...and Pūzhèhēi ain't. But if you come in the right season – May through early August – it can come pretty close. Endless rivers and streams strewn with gazillions of lotus flowers, upthrusting peaks dense with greenery, and of course tourists chock-a-block on every square inch. (Honestly? Show up November through April and be thoroughly underwhelmed, with brown lotuses choking the waterways, the greenery retreating to reveal rock-scarred crags as if nature's giving you the finger, and stiff winds seemingly always in your face.)

Sights & Activities

Technically, the Pūzhèhēi region is a vast place, a 165-sq-km spread encompassing, let's see, over 280 karst peaks, five dozen lakes, 250 caves, waterfalls, valleys, ancient rock paintings, and several cremation tomb groups.

You'll only really probably see the main **park section** (admission May-Oct Y100, Nov-Apr Y60), which has but a handful of caves and peaks (embarrassingly adorned for the most part with communications towers) but some nice

waterways. You can probably trudge the whole park area along its few roads in a couple of hours, depending on how quickly/slowly you move. No need to walk, either, as your ticket includes a boat ride on a Yi flat-bottomed canoe and two cave entrances, and after that there are loads of horse carts plodding along whose drivers will endlessly beckon you to haggle for a ride (a couple of yuán is average). If you've done other Chinese caves, one cave is enough here. It's creepily cool and eerily lit as always but they're pretty much the same. The **Buddha Cave** purportedly has the longest reclining Buddha in China.

The rest of the surrounding area could make for some fine bicycle exploring – but you have to lug in your own wheels.

A good time to be here is during the seventh lunar month, when the Yi have their **Face-Painting Festival** blowout. After gorging on roast pig and chicken, everyone runs around to smear ink and soot on each other. The blacker, the better – it guarantees (somehow) a bountiful harvest and safe family. Don't worry – they do it pretty much daily May through the first week of October. Dates for upcoming festivals are: 26–29 July 2008; 14–17 August 2009; 4–7 August 2010.

Sleeping & Eating

Unless you arrive in Qiüběi late in the afternoon or early evening, there's no need to stay there, as the park does have accommodation – dirt-cheap through to apathetically maintained midrange. You can pretty much double any price listed here May through July.

Mínsú Nóngjiā (民俗农家; ☎ 461 8358; Pūzhèhēi village; per bed Y15) From the final stop of the bus from Qiüběi, walk over the bridge into Pūzhèhēi village. Look for some characters painted on a cinder-block wall. Here's your cheapest option in the village. Given the price, expect little but it's fine if you can convince them to let you stay (they seemed a bit hesitant).

Pinxiànggē Jiǔdiàn (品乡阁酒店; ☎ 461 8064; s & d Y80, without bathroom Y60) This place is one of a handful of modest but comfortable restaurant-hotel options (this one started as a simple shop). From the final stop of the bus from Qiüběi, backtrack towards the park's entrance. A few minutes later on the right side you'll come to this nice little spot with rooms that are very new and clean and a really welcoming owner. There's a spacious but quiet open-air

QIÜBĒI BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Kǎiyuǎn	36	5½	2 daily	7.30am, noon
Kūnmíng	63-78	6	every 90 min	8am-9.30pm
Luóping	32	5-6	7 daily	7.30am, 10am-3pm hourly
Lúxí	38	4	2 daily	8.30am, 10.30am
Wénshān	26	4	hourly	6.20am-5.40pm

YOU WANT SOME LOTUS WITH YOUR LOTUS?

Remember this word: *hé* (荷) as in *héhuā* (荷花; lotus). You're gonna hear it often while here (if you're here May through early August, when Pūzhēhēi is a blooming garden of lotus flowers). How 'bout some chicken wrapped in lotus leaf? That'd be *hébāo* (荷包). Remember to have some lotus leaf rice – *héyèfàn* (荷叶饭). Or for a twist on that how 'bout some sticky-rice stuffed lotus root, the famed *nuòmǐ'óu* (糯米藕)? For breakfast you can't beat a lotus leaf omelette: *héyèjiāndàn* (荷叶煎蛋).

Right – you're probably sick of lotus by now. No problem, as the other culinary specialty here you needn't even work for. *Shuǐshàng shāokǎodēng* (水上烧烤等) literally means 'barbecue atop the water (while you wait!)' and indeed, Yi canoes will paddle up and offer you some roast beast (or veggies, even lotus root!).

restaurant that's good for hanging out, and the views from the 3rd-floor balconies are superb.

Yínhú Jiǔdiàn (银湖酒店; ☎ 461 0068; s & d from Y180; 22) Approximately a kilometre from the main entrance (the bus stops here or you can walk here by staying to the right after you leave the main gate) are a few weary 'mid-range' places. This is the best of the lot but they're all pretty much the same. You know: cracked mirrors, dormant lights, rusted tubs. The usual. Still, in off season you can pretty much name your price.

Getting There & Away

Large green buses (Y2, 30 minutes) run to Pūzhēhēi from Qiūbēi whenever full, sometimes half-hourly, sometimes hourly. From the Qiūbēi bus station, exit and bear right, then a quick left. One block ahead the buses wait for passengers. You can also pick them up along Dongzheng and Xizheng Jie.

The bus drops you by the ticket office, then it continues on another kilometre or so past the wharf to a tourist zone with a couple of hotels, restaurants and shops. It then backtracks a bit before splitting off and heading to Pūzhēhēi village proper. To get to other places from Pūzhēhēi, reverse your trip on the large green buses to Qiūbēi, then take a bus from there.

WÉNSHĀN 文山

☎ 0876 / pop 18,753

Wénshān is the capital of the eponymous region in far eastern Yunnan. One of the poorest regions in the province, it features a heady mixture of Miao and Zhuang people, the latter concentrated near the border with Vietnam. You'll also find quite a few pockets of Yi and Bai people. (The government is hoping that a

new airport in Wénshān will be able to jump-start development.)

Nothing in the city itself really warrants a visit, but you may have to pass through if you're heading for Guǎngxī. This is no bad thing, however, as you could do some grand village explorations in the remotest areas in the east.

Sleeping

Plenty of places to stay around the bus station have singles or doubles for Y40 to Y80.

Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn (交通宾馆; ☎ 219 5518; Huancheng Lu; 环城路; s & d Y80; 22) Also near the bus station, this place has perfectly fine standard rooms. Nothing fancy and it's convenient. To get here, head straight north from the central bus station along Puyang Lu.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

In late 2006 a new airport opened 23km west of town. Schedules are shaking out but currently flights stop in Wénshān on their way to/from Kūnmíng (Y420) and Nánning (Y580) on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday.

BUS

Wénshān actually has three bus stations. Worry not, for they're all along the same road, Kaihua Lu (开化路), which traverses the city from west to east, passing right through downtown. Furthest west is the express bus station. To the east 1km or so is the new central station (新城客运中心; Xīnchéng Kèyùn Zhōngxīn), which has most of what you need. Express buses to Kūnmíng (Y110, six hours) leave at least twice a day from the central station and more often from the express bus station. Regular buses to the capital (Y86, seven to eight hours) leave regularly from

8.40am to 9pm. At least three buses leave daily for Qiūbēi (Y26, five hours) but only one per day runs to Luóping. A dozen buses also run to Hèkǒu.

Further southeast (two bridges) is the southern station with departures to smaller, local places.

**AROUND WÉNSHĀN
Tuóniáng Jiāng (Tuoniang River)****驮娘江**

This tributary of the Pearl River lies in the far eastern tip of Wénshān, and is as far east as you can go in Yunnan (in fact, you're only around 90km from Bǎisè in Guǎngxī; p211). This river valley is famous for Bō'ài (剥隘), a smashing historic village and once a major node on water trade routes dating back to the Song and Ming dynasties. There are fabulous slate streets, tiny wooden houses and an ancient port where imperial representatives called. Sadly, this place is to be submerged in the near future by dam projects in Guǎngxī.

Forty-two kilometres upstream from the village is a fantastically lovely stretch of the river, popular for boat trips. Oddly craggy cliffs swoop up here to blot out the sun and birds squawk everywhere. And do sample the legendary *Bō'ài kǎoyā* (剥隘烤鸭; Bō'ài roast duck). Whether or not this stretch is affected by the same projects that will devastate Bō'ài is uncertain.

Bāměi 坝美

The fascinating little Zhuang village of Bāměi (admission Y35), built around groves of banyan trees, could well argue that Yunnan's Shangri-la in the northwest is misnamed. Here in one of the most idyllic locations one could imagine sits a village untouched by time (though not always by Chinese tourists). Surrounded by craggy cliffs, it is actually only entered by boat through a kilometre-long cave! In fact, the name in the Zhuang language means 'Cave in the Forest'; history has it that it was founded six centuries ago by a group of Zhuang to escape the lawlessness of one of China's upheavals.

Once in, the picturesque riverine scenery is simply marvellous, with villagers plodding about leading water buffalo and water wheels ubiquitous. And no – zero – electricity. You could also stay with a local family but this is no given.

Bāměi is actually 43km north of Guǎngnán (广南), an uninspiring but friendly town an all-day bus ride from Wénshān. From Guǎngnán you'll have to wait around for enough passengers at the bus station to fill a minivan or hire one yourself. You could also take a bus bound for Bádá (八达), and ask the driver to tell you when to hop off, after which you have a 1km walk to the village. There are very modest but clean enough hotels in Guangan (s/d from Y50).

And yes, you really do have to enter via a Zhuang-poled boat!

Bābào 八宝

Around 160km northeast of Wénshān, Bābào is a Zhuang village in one of the more aesthetically pleasing areas of the province. The name means 'Eight Treasures' (as in the soothing tea of the same name) and couldn't be more apt. It is more of a tourist region than a village today but if you can escape the tourist crowds you'll find waterfalls along the Babao River, caves and freak geology (including a fascinating wind-hole literally blown through a rock outcropping), rock paintings and more.

The village is midway between Guǎngnán and Fùning, best reached from the latter. Try haggling for a ride there. The problem is that it's more oriented toward groups, so it's tough to do solo.

YUANYANG RICE TERRACES**元阳梯田**

☎ 0873 / pop 22,631

Picture hill-top villages, the only thing visible above rolling fog and cloudbanks; an artist's palette of colours at sunrise or sunset; spirit-recharging treks through centuries-old rice-covered hills, with a few water buffalo chewing their cud contentedly nearby. Yup, it's kinda hard not to get indulgent when describing these rice terraces (梯田; *títián*), hewn from the rolling topography by the Hani over centuries. They cover roughly 12,500 hectares and are another of Yunnan's – nay, China's – most absolutely spectacular sights. Seriously – hiking in the morning mists, you'll swear these pools shimmering with golds and reds are dancing about. An unforgettable experience.

Yuányang is actually split into two: Nánshā, the new town, and Xīnjiē, the old town, located and hour's bus ride up a nearby hill. Either can be labelled Yuányang, depending

what map you use. Xinjië is the one you want, so make sure you are getting off at the right one.

Information

Agricultural Bank of China (中国农业银行; Zhōngguó Nóngyè Yínháng) Gives cash advances on credit cards and changes money but will not cash travellers cheques.

Internet café (山城网吧; Shānchéng Wǎngbā; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr) Down the stairs on your left facing the lookout.

Post office (邮局; Yóujú) Go down the stone steps at the south end of Titian Sq (Titian Guǎngchǎng). Turn when you see the road fork behind you.

Sights & Activities

Dozens of villages, each with its own terrace field, spiral out from Xinjië. The terraces around each village have their own special characteristics which vary from season to season. A rule of thumb: follow the ever-present photographers.

Duōyǐshù, about 25km from Xinjie, has the most spectacular sunrises and is the one you should not miss. For sunsets, **Bádá** and **Lǎohúzuì** can be mesmerising.

Maps are available at all accommodation in town. Most are bilingual Chinese-English, though some include Japanese, German and French labels as well.

There's a fleet of minibuses by Xinjië's Titian Sq and they leave when full and whiz around the villages but you are much better off arranging a car and driver through your accommodation. It's also easy just to hook up with other travellers and split the cost of chartering a minibus for the day (Y400 to Y450).

Sleeping & Eating

Yuányáng Chénjiā Fángshè (元阳陈家房舍; ☎ 562 2342; dm/s/tr Y10/40/60) This open and breezy guesthouse has spotless rooms with spectacular views of the rice terraces. It's all kept humming by four generations of the same family.

Government Guesthouse (元阳县山城大酒店; Yuányángxiàn Shānchéng Dàjiùdiàn; s/d Y150/180; ☎) Just off Titian Sq, rooms here are nothing special but the lobby has the best tourist information desk.

Yúntī Dǎjiùdiàn (云梯大酒店; ☎ 562 4858; s/d Y258/328; ☎) These are the swankest digs in town, with clean, modern rooms and a staff used to foreigners.

You'll find plenty of boisterous food stalls in town. **Lǎo Sīchuān Cāntīng Guǎn** (老四川餐厅; dishes from Y5; ☎ 10am-around 11pm) is probably the most popular and it's standing room only some nights. For a more tranquil atmosphere try **Liùjūn Fàndiàn** (六军饭店; dishes from Y4; ☎ 10am-9:30pm). The food is good and it's the cheapest in town.

Getting There & Away

There are three buses daily from Kūnmíng to Yuányáng (Y90, 6½ hours, 10.40am, 7.30pm and 8pm). Buses from Yuányáng (Xinjië) back to Kūnmíng leave 10.12am, 5pm and 9pm.

From here destinations include Hékǒu (Y37, four hours), Gèjiù (Y20, two hours), Jiànshuǐ (Y30, four hours) and others.

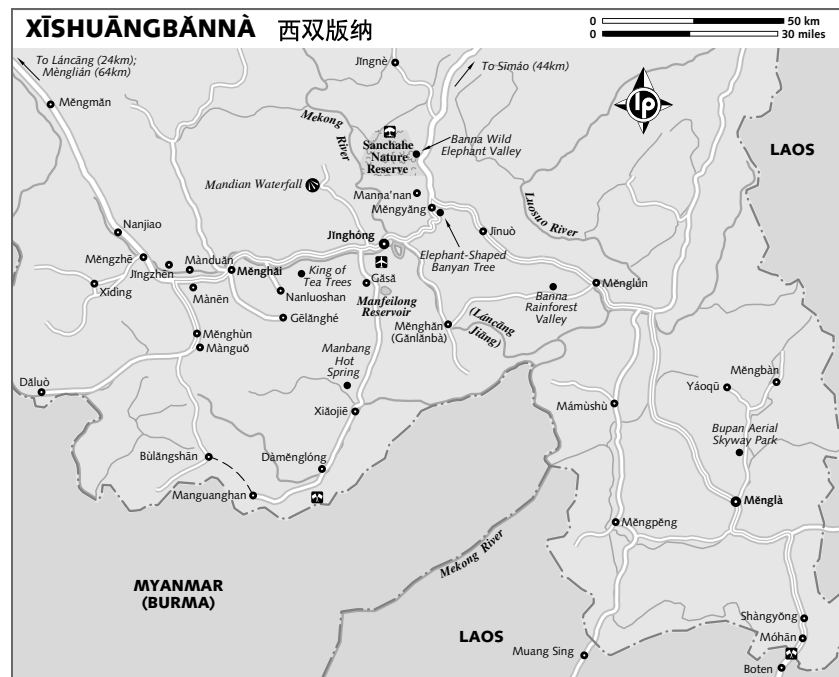
Or you can take the long way to Xishuāngbǎnnà. To get there, take the 7.30am bus to Lǚchūn (Y25, four hours), where you'll have wait to get the Jiāngchéng bus at 4pm (Y31, five hours). By the time you arrive, there'll be no more buses but you can stay at the hotel attached to the bus station, which has cheap rooms (dm/d Y10/60). Buses to Jǐnghóng (Y50, 8½ hours) start running at 6am.

This can be a gruelling route over bumpy dirt roads, but it will take you through magnificent scenery. Buses along this route are frequently stopped for routine police checks.

XISHUANGBÄNNÄ REGION 西双版纳

Xishuāngbǎnnà (the Chinese approximation of the original Thai name of Sip Sawng Panna, literally '12 Rice-Growing Districts') is located just north of Myanmar and Laos. It's better known as Bǎnnà and has become China's own mini-Thailand, attracting tourists looking for sunshine and water-splashing festivals, hikers readying epic jungle treks, and burned out citizenry (and expats) of China fleeing the congestion (and cold weather) of China's cities.

But despite Bǎnnà's popularity, it rarely seems overwhelmed by tourists – even the capital, Jǐnghóng, is basically an overgrown somnolent town that doesn't seem to get too worked up about things. It is quite easy to lose weeks here...



Environment

Xishuāngbǎnnà is home to many unique species of plant and animal life. Unfortunately, recent scientific studies have demonstrated the devastating effects of previous government policies on land use; the tropical rainforest areas of Bǎnnà are now as acutely endangered as similar rainforest areas elsewhere on the planet.

The jungle areas that remain contain dwindling numbers of wild tigers, leopards, elephants and golden-haired monkeys. To be fair, the number of elephants has doubled to 250, up 100% from the early 1980s; the government now offers compensation to villagers whose crops have been destroyed by elephants, or who assist in wildlife conservation. In 1998 the government banned the hunting or processing of animals, but poaching is notoriously hard to control.

People

About one-third of the 800,000-strong population found in this region are Dai; another third or so are Han Chinese and the rest is made up of a conglomerate of minorities that

include the Hani, Lisu and Yao, as well as lesser-known hill tribes such as the Aini (a subgroup of the Hani), Jinuo, Bulang, Lahu and Wa.

Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, as it is known officially, is subdivided into the three counties of Jǐnghóng, Měnghǎi and Měnglǎ.

Climate

The region has two seasons: wet and dry. The wet season is between June and August, when it rains ferociously almost every day. From September to February there is less rainfall, but thick fog descends during the late evening and doesn't lift until 10am or even later.

November to March sees temperatures average about 19°C. The hottest months of the year are from April to September, when you can expect an average of 25°C.

Festivals & Events

During festival times, booking same-day airline tickets to Jǐnghóng can be extremely difficult – even with 17 flights per day. You can try getting a flight into Simáo, 162km to the

THE DAI PEOPLE 傣族

The Dai are Hinayana Buddhists (as opposed to China's majority Mahayana Buddhists) who first appeared 2000 years ago in the Yangzi Valley and who were subsequently driven southwards by the Mongol invasion of the 13th century. The Dai state of Xishuangbännä was annexed by the Mongols and then by the Chinese, and a Chinese governor was installed in the regional capital of Jinglan (present-day Jinghóng). Countless Buddhist temples were built in the early days of the Dai state and now lie in the jungles in ruins. During the Cultural Revolution, Xishuangbännä's temples were desecrated and destroyed. Some were saved by serving as granaries, but many are now being rebuilt from scratch. Temples are also recovering their role as village schools where young children are accepted for religious training as monks.

The Dai live in spacious wooden houses raised on stilts, to keep themselves off the damp earth, with the pigs and chickens below. The most common Dai foods are sticky rice (*khaio nio* in Dai) and fish. The common dress for Dai women is a straw hat or towel-wrap headdress, a tight, short blouse in a bright colour, and a printed sarong with a belt of silver links. Some Dai men tattoo their bodies with animal designs, and betel-nut chewing is popular. Many Dai youngsters get their teeth capped with gold, otherwise they are considered ugly.

Linguistically, the Dai are part of the very large Thai family that includes the Siamese, Lao, Shan, Thai Dam and Ahom peoples found scattered throughout the river valleys of Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, northern Vietnam and Assam. The Xishuangbännä Dai are broken into four subgroups – the Shui (Water) Dai, Han (Land) Dai, Huayao (Floral Belt) Dai and Kemu Dai – each distinguished by variations in costume, lifestyle and location. All speak the Dai language, which is quite similar to Lao and northern Thai dialects. In fact, Thai is often as useful as Chinese once you get off the beaten track. The written language of the Dai employs a script that looks like a cross between Lao and Burmese.

In temple courtyards, look for a cement structure that looks like a letterbox; this is an altar to local spirits, a combination of Buddhism and indigenous spirit worship. Some 32 separate spirits exist for humans.

Zhang khap is the name for a solo narrative opera, for which the Dai have a long tradition. Singers are trained from childhood to perform long songs accompanied by native flute and sometimes a long drum known as the elephant drum. Performances are given at monk initiations, when new houses are built, weddings, and on the birthdays of important people, and they often last all night. Even if you do understand Dai, the lyrics are complex – if not fully improvised. At the end, the audience shouts '*Shuay! Shuay!*' which is close to 'Hip, hip, hooray!'. Even courtship is done via this singing. Some Dai phrases include *douzao li* (hello), *yindii* (thank you) and *goihán* (goodbye).

north, or taking the bus. Hotels in Jinghóng town are booked solid and prices are usually tripled.

Most people end up in a nearby Dai village and commuting. Festivities take place all over Xishuangbännä, so you might be lucky further away from Jinghóng.

Tanpa Festival During this festival in February, young boys are sent to the local temple for initiation as novice monks.

Tan Jing Festival Participants honour Buddhist texts housed in local temples in this festival (held between February and March).

Water-Splashing Festival Held in mid-April; washes away the dirt, sorrow and demons of the old year and brings in the happiness of the new. Jinghóng usually celebrates it from the 13th to the 15th. Dates in the

surrounding villages vary. In Jinghóng, the first day of the festival is devoted to a giant market. The second day features dragon-boat racing, swimming races and rocket launching. The third day features the water-splashing freak out. Foreigners get special attention so prepare to get drenched all day. Remember, the wetter you get, the more luck you'll receive.

Tan Ta Festival Held during the last 10-day period of October or November, with temple ceremonies, rocket launches from special towers, and hot-air balloons. The rockets, which often contain lucky amulets, blast off with a curious droning sound, like mini-space shuttles, before exploding high above; those who find the amulets are assured of good luck.

Closed-Door Festival The farming season (from July to October) is the time for this festival, when marriages or festivals are banned. Traditionally this is also the time of

year that men aged 20 or older are ordained as monks for a period of time.

Open-Door Festival The season ends with this festival, when everyone lets their hair down again to celebrate the harvest.

JINGHÓNG 景洪

☎ 0691 / pop 93,341

Jinghóng – the 'City of Dawn' in the local Dai language – is the capital of Xishuangbännä prefecture, but don't take that too seriously. It's still an overgrown, drowsy Mekong River jungle town as much as it is a city. Sure, taller buildings are going up and knucklehead neophyte tour groups are clambering around here in all directions (great people-watching fun, actually) but it's nonetheless a perfect representation of the laid-back place that Bännä is.

Prepare yourself for searing late-day heat that can put the entire city into a kind of serious slow motion. If you've come from Southeast Asia, no biggie, but if you've acclimatised to higher and nipier elevations in Yúnnán, you'll probably find yourself needing lots of midday siestas.

Information

The travellers' books, staff, and especially other travellers at Mei Mei, Forest and Mekong Cafés (see p329) are by far the best sources of travel tips and trek notes. The best place to make long-distance calls is from the private phone bars along Manting Lu.

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; ☎ 213 6228; Xuanwei Dadao); Changes travellers cheques and foreign currency, and has an ATM machine. There's also a branch office on Galan Zhonglu.

China Post & Telecom (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng & Zhōngguó Diànxìn; cnr Mengle Dadao & Xuanwei Dadao; ☎ 8am-8.30pm)

China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójí Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 663 8459; Jinghong International Travel Bldg, Mengzhe LuLuandian Jie) Can arrange all manner of one-day tours from Y200 to Y300. However, you're better off going to the Mekong, Mei Mei or Forest Cafés, which will help with trekking information and put you in touch with English-speaking guides.

Internet cafés (wǎngbà; Manting Lu; per hr Y2) There are about a half-dozen along this street.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjū; ☎ 212 2676; Jingde Lu; ☎ 8-11.30am & 3-5.30pm) Has a fairly speedy visa extension service.

Xishuangbanna Minorities Hospital (Xishuangbännä Minzú Yiyuàn; ☎ 213 0123; Galan Lu) The best bet for having an English speaker available.

ETIQUETTE IN DAI TEMPLES

Around Dai temples the same rules apply as elsewhere: dress appropriately (no tank tops or shorts); take off shoes before entering; don't take photos of monks or the inside of temples without permission; leave a donation if you do take any shots and consider a token donation even if you don't – unlike in Thailand, these Buddhists receive no government assistance. It is polite to 'wai' the monks as a greeting and remember to never rub anyone's head, raise yourself higher than a Buddha figure or point your feet at anyone. (This last point applies to secular buildings too. If you stay the night in a Dai household it is good form to sleep with your feet pointing towards the door.)

Dangers & Annoyances

There have been on-and-off reports from travellers regarding drug-and-rob incidents on the Kūnmíng-Jinghóng bus trip. Be careful who your friends are on buses, accept nothing, and leave nothing unattended when you hop off for breaks.

Sights**TROPICAL FLOWER & PLANTS GARDEN**

热带花卉园

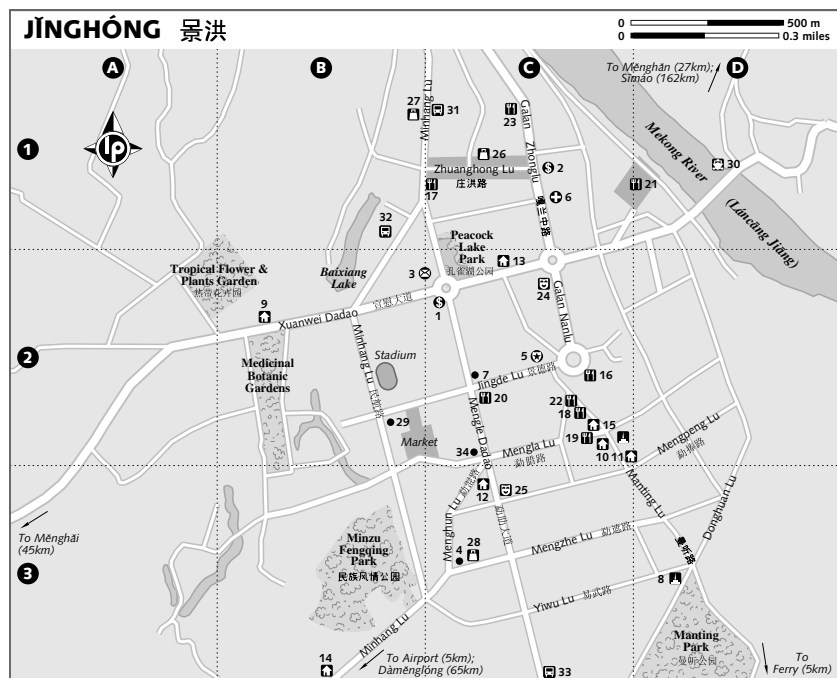
This terrific **botanical garden** (Rèdài Huāhuìyuán; ☎ 212 0493; 28 Jinghóng Xilu; admission Y40; ☎ 7am-6pm), west of the town centre, is one of Jinghóng's better attractions. Admission gets you into a series of gardens where you can view over 1000 different types of plant life. Take the path on the left-hand side as you enter the gardens to head towards the lovely tropical rainforest area.

PEACOCK LAKE PARK 孔雀湖公园

This artificial lake in the centre of town isn't much, but the small park (Kǒngquè Hú Gōngyuán) next to it is pleasant. The English Language Corner takes place here every Sunday evening, so this is your chance to exchange views or to engage with the locals practising their English.

MANTING PARK 曼听公园

In the south of Jinghóng, **Manting Park** (Mànting Gōngyuán; admission Y15) is not really interesting, even if it is the garden of a former Dai chieftain. The park contains a couple of replica stupas, and you'll probably see Dai dancing



INFORMATION

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Bank of China 中国银行	2	C1
China Post & Telecom 中国邮政&中国电信	3	B2
CITS 中国国际旅行社	4	C3
PSB 公安局	5	C2
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Blind Massage School 盲人按摩	7	C2
Mánting Fósi 曼听佛寺	8	D3

SLEEPING

Banna College Hotel 版纳学院	9	B2
Dai Building Inn 傣家花苑小楼	10	C2
Dàqingshù Bīnguǎn 大青树宾馆	11	C2

Golden Banna Hotel 金版纳酒店	12	C3
Jǐngyǒng Fàndiàn 景咏饭店	13	C2
Tai Garden Hotel 泰园酒店	14	B3
Wanli Dai Style Guesthouse 婉丽傣味餐厅	15	C2

EATING

Forest Café 森林咖啡厅	16	C2
Lucky Mandalay Restaurant 拉洽缅甸穆斯林餐厅	17	C1
Mei Mei Café 美美咖啡厅	18	C2
Mekong Café 湄公餐館	19	C2
Méngzǐ Guòqiáo MiXiàn 蒙自过桥米线	20	C2
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Mengbala Naxi Arts Theatre 蒙巴拉纳西艺术宫	24	C2
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TRANSPORT

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South Bus Station 客运南站	33	C3
Tangshi Travel Agency 唐氏航空旅舍	34	C2

girls (performing a Water-Splashing Festival dance), and a poor elephant in chains.

The temple in the rear of the park, the **Zōng Fósi** (Wat Bajie in Dai), is the leading regional temple, described by one anthropologist as the 'Ivy League' of temple schools. The temple was built in 1990 and many of its monks have studied in Thailand and speak Thai.

Just before you get to the park entrance is the **Mánting Fósi**, a temple claimed to date back 1100 years.

Activities

Jinghóng's oft-recommended **Blind Massage School** (Màngrèn Ànmó; ☎ 212 5834; cnr Mengle Dadao & Jingde Lu; ☎ 9am-midnight) offers hour-long

TREKKING IN XISHUANGBÄNNÄ

Treks around Xishuangbännä used to be among the best in China: you'd be invited into a local's home to eat, sleep, and drink *bǎijiǔ* (moonshine). Increasing numbers of visitors have changed this in places. Don't automatically expect a welcome mat and a free lunch just because you're a foreigner, but don't go changing the local economy by throwing money around either.

If you do get invited into someone's home, try to establish whether payment is expected. If it's not, leave an offering (ask at the backpacker cafés what's considered appropriate) or leave modest gifts such as candles, matches, rice etc – even though the family may insist on nothing.

Also take care before heading off, it's a jungle out there, so go prepared, and make sure somebody knows where you are and when you should return. In the rainy season you'll need to be equipped with proper hiking shoes and waterproof gear. At any time you'll need water purification tablets, bottled water or a water bottle able to hold boiling water, as well as snacks and sunscreen.

Seriously consider taking a guide. You won't hear much Mandarin Chinese on the trail, let alone any English. Expect to pay around Y250 per day for a guide.

Forest Café (Sēnlín Kāfēiwū; ☎ 898 5122; www.forest-cafe.org; Ganlan Nanlu, Jinghóng) is a great place to start. Sara, the owner, has years of experience leading treks and comes recommended. The other cafés mentioned in this book (Mei Mei Café and Mekong Café) have also been recommended and each emphasises different things.

Try the **Xishuangbanna Travel & Study Club** (Xishuangbännä Yóuxúe Jùlèbù; Map p328; Mengzhe Lu, Jinghóng) for trekking equipment.

messages for Y30. The staff here is extremely kind and travellers give it terrific reports. Head down the lane off Mengle Dadao and climb the stairs on your left up to the 2nd floor.

Sleeping

Banna College Hotel (Bännä Xuéyuàn; ☎ 213 8365; Xuanwei Dadao; 宣慰大道; dm Y15, tw/d per person Y40/50; ☎) Most travellers are winding up here now, for good reason: clean rooms, efficient service and a smattering of English. Bike rental for Y15 per day, Y150 deposit.

Dai Building Inn (Dǎijiā Huāyuán Xiǎolóu; ☎ 216 2592; 57 Manting Lu; 曼听路57号; dm Y25) Traditional Dai style must mean sweating in the summer, staff a bit uninterested, and thin walls. Still, some people love the place.

Wanli Dai Style Guesthouse (Wǎnlǐ Dǎiwèi Cǎng; ☎ 1357 811 2879; Manting Lu; 曼听路; dm Y30) Basic but OK, though the rooms can get stuffy. An approximation of a garden is here and the restaurant is decent.

Dàqingshù Bīnguǎn (☎ 216 1776; Manting Lu, Jinglan Alley 4; 曼听路景兰4巷; s & d Y40-100; ☎) Set back off of Manting Lu, and thus much quieter, is this new small hotel. Rooms range from smallish to good-sized; the only downer is that the sinks drain onto the floor via a hose. Otherwise it's great. Zilch English but friendly.

Jǐngyǒng Fàndiàn (☎ 212 3727; 12 Xuanwei Dadao; 宣慰大道12号; s & d Y180, s/d without bathroom Y60/80; ☎) A slight step up between budget and midrange is this place, your best bet for a modicum of comfort and service without busting the bank.

Golden Banna Hotel (Jīn Bännä Jiùdiàn; ☎ 212 4901; Mengle Dadao; 猛泐大道; s/d Y380/580; ☎) Though rooms are nondescript, staff are very efficient and offer great deals outside of festival times.

Tai Garden Hotel (Tàiyuán Jiùdiàn; ☎ 212 3888; fax 212 6060; 8 Minghang Lu; 民航路8号; d Y640 plus 15% tax; ☎) It has quiet grounds replete with its own island, pool, sauna, gym and tennis court. It's full of the sophisticated and the monied, which makes the elegant morning buffet all the more entertaining when it inevitably disintegrates into a rough-and-tumble free-for-all.

Eating

Manting Lu is lined with restaurants serving Dai food, the majority of which dish up Dai dance performances along with their culinary specialities. Dai women thump drums at the entrance and the restaurants are filled nearly every night with tourists generally being festive.

Dai dishes include barbecue fish, eel or beef cooked with lemongrass or served with peanut-and-tomato sauce. Vegetarians can

order roast bamboo shoot prepared in the same fashion. Other specialties of this place include fried river moss (better than it sounds and excellent with beer), spicy bamboo-shoot soup and *shāokǎo* (烧烤; skewers of meat wrapped in banana leaves and grilled over wood fires).

Mei Mei Café (曼听路; Měiměi Kāfēiting; ☎ 212 7324; Manting Lu; dishes from ¥5; ☎ 8am-11pm) The institution in town for years and years. Everyone winds up here. How's that for a recommendation?

Forest Café (嘎兰南路; Sēnlín Kāfēiwū; ☎ 898 5122; www.forest-cafe.org; Galan Nanlu; dishes from ¥5; ☎ 8.30-10pm) Almost as long as Mei Mei has been around, Sara and her brother have been up the street at the Forest, dishing out healthful foods – try the homemade bread – and the best burgers in Bännä. She also gets raves for her treks.

Méngzǐ Guòqiáo Mìxiàn (景德路; Jǐngde Lu; dishes ¥5-20; ☎ 24hr) This breezy, modest restaurant serves up round-the-clock noodles and rice dishes to be washed down with beakers of quenching lemonade (¥4). English menu available.

Lucky Mandalay Restaurant (庄洪路; Lāqià Miǎndiàn Mùsīlín Cǎnting; ☎ 214 1611; Zhuanghong Lu; dishes from ¥8) Great Muslim food, tea and ambience in the jade market. Just look for the guys whacking cards on tables outside.

Mekong Café (曼听路; Méigōng Cānguǎn; ☎ 216 2395; 111 Manting Lu; dishes from ¥8; ☎ 8am-10pm) The

food, smiling service, and travel information are wondrous, but best is the isolated balcony upstairs, your sanctuary from the polluted chaos outside.

Thai Restaurant (曼听路; Tàiguó Cǎnting; ☎ 216 1758; Manting Lu; dishes from ¥8) Pounce on it the moment you spy a free seat at this popular Thai restaurant. *Phad thai* devotees literally flock here and the crowds never really thin out. You can also wash the authentic Thai dishes down with some snake whisky if you're feeling brave.

Xingyuán Lèyuán (嘎兰中路; ☎ 663 2825; Galan Lu; mains from ¥10) Dai food without the usual crappy tourist atmosphere; this one overseen (at least originally) by one of the region's best-known traditional Dai singers.

Dining out, as in al fresco, is done nowhere better than it is in Jinghong. Everywhere you go after the heat and torpor of the day wear off, you'll see that tables are thrown onto sidewalks, fish are tossed into aquariums, woks start firing up and the beer is iced, ready for consumption.

Almost anywhere you walk in town, taking a step off a main street will bring you to a great impromptu night market. There is a huge **night food market** by the new bridge over the Mekong where dozens of stalls serve up barbecued everything, from sausages to snails. There are plenty of tables and chairs for those who want to linger at this night market.

BÄNNÄ'S TEA OF CHOICE

Yúnnán is as legendary as any Chinese province for its tea, and *pǔ'ěr chá* (普洱茶), a variety of black tea, may be the king of 'em all. Available all over the province and nationwide, it is legendarily grown in Yúnnán, in particular near Měnghāi and Símáo (though its name comes from a small town near the Laos border). This king of teas was the gold on the old tea-horse road(s) that stretched from Yúnnán into Laos, Burma (Myanmar), Tibet, India and all the way to the Silk Road.

Essentially, the tea's claim to fame is its rich taste acquired from ageing – in fact, ferments. The longer it ages, the richer the taste. (This was due in part to the discovery that in order to transport it a long distance, it would need to be steamed and compressed into nuggets or even bowls.) Naturally, some years and seasons are better than others, and each locale in southern Yúnnán claims to produce the finest.

And the higher the quality, the higher the value: a cup in a café can cost on average around ¥5, but for the highest quality you can pay nearly ¥100,000.

Brewing it is time-consuming but well worth it. You should never drink the first round of steeping and, in fact, the leaves may be reused again and again. No matter what variety, the tea is even favoured by non-tea aficionados for its subtle flavour (and the fact that the leaves are essentially impossible to oversteep).

Then, as always, the health benefits: they're infinite. Of course.

Entertainment

Mengbala Naxi Arts Theatre (Méngbālā Nàxǐ Yìshùgōng; Galan Zhonglu; 嘎兰南路; tickets ¥160; ☎ 8.30pm) This theatre has daily song and dance shows.

YES Disco (Mengle Dadao; 勐肋大道; admission ¥10; ☎ 9pm-late) Discos come and discos go, but YES keeps thumping along; you've got a good chance of being heavy-lidded at least one morning here.

Shopping

Market groupies have two terrific places to head for shopping, people-watching and atmosphere. A fabulous fish and produce market is tucked behind some modern buildings across from the long-distance bus station. The **Jade Market** (Yùshìchǎng; Zhuanghong Lu) is nearby, with lots of Burmese and other South Asians hawking their goods alongside locals.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are several flights a day to Kūnmíng (¥730) but in April (when the Water-Splashing Festival is held) you'll need to book tickets several days in advance to get either in or out.

There are two flights daily in high season to Lǐjiāng (¥840). You can also fly to Bangkok (¥1630) and Chiang Mai (¥1630) from here, usually daily.

Tickets can be purchased at the **CAAC Booking Office** (☎ 212 7040; Jingde Lu; ☎ 8am-9pm). Credit cards and travellers cheques are not accepted.

Any café on Manting Lu can buy tickets for you, or go yourself to **Tangshi Travel Agency** (Tángshì Hángkōng Lǚshè; ☎ 212 2766; Mengle Dadao), which has cheap prices.

BUS

The **Jinghóng long-distance bus station** (Chángtú Kēyùnzhan; Minhang Lu) is the most useful for long-distance destinations. If you want to explore Xishuangbännä, go to the No 2 bus station (Di'èr Kēyùnzhan).

There is a new south bus station with many provincial departures; check with your café or hotel to see if your bus starts from there (though most will likely stop at the main bus station) or if they have a better departure time. There is supposed to be a daily bus to Luang Prabang (Laos) from here, but it wasn't running at last visit.

GETTING TO THAILAND

For a couple of years, travellers were having some luck hitching rides on cargo boats heading south into Laos and Thailand, but in November 2006, authorities put the hammer down on that, giving boat operators serious fines (and revoking licenses). New fast ferries leave Jinghóng Monday, Wednesday and Saturday for the seven-hour ride (¥800) to Chiang Saen in Thailand; plans were to ultimately build up facilities to allow for six stops along the way. Get to the dock on the other side of the Mekong River at 7.30am to start customs proceedings. Also note that this could all change – other ferries have come and gone just as quickly in the past.

If you want to get to the Yuanyang Rice Terraces, first you'll have to take a bus to Jiāngchéng (江城; ¥49, 10 hours, 6.30am or 9.20am), overnight and then hop another bus to Lǜchūn (绿春; ¥31, five hours), a nice Hani town with a good market, before hopping a bus to Yuányáng (¥25, four hours). You could also take a bus from the main station to Shìpíng (15 hours) or Jiànshuǐ (18 hours) and loop back if you're going to those places anyway.

Getting Around

There's no shuttle bus or public transport to the airport, 5km south of the city. A taxi will cost around ¥20 but expect to be hit up for up to three times that during festivals.

Jinghóng is small enough that you can walk to most destinations, but a bike makes life easier and can be rented through most accommodation for ¥15 to ¥25 a day.

A taxi anywhere in town costs ¥5.

AROUND JINGHÓNG

Obviously, it's the longer trips that allow you to escape the hordes of tourists and get a feel for what Xishuangbännä is about. But even with limited time there are some interesting possibilities. Most destinations in Xishuangbännä are only two or three hours away by bus, but generally they are not much in themselves – you need to get out and about. Note that to get to many villages, you'll often first have to take the bus to a primary village and stay overnight there, since only one bus per day – if that – travels to the tinier villages.

JINGHONG BUS TIMETABLES

Buses from Jinghong long-distance bus station:

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Baoshan	230	20	daily	noon
Kunming	156-186	9	2 daily	4pm, 7.30pm
Kunming (sleeper)	145-169	9	20 daily	7.30am-7pm
Ruilu	254	26	daily	9am
Xiaguān	152	18-20	daily	12.30pm

Buses from the No 2 bus station:

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Damēnglóng	15	3-4	every 20min	6.30am-6.30pm
Gǎnlǎnbà	7.5	¾	every 20min	7.15am-10pm
Jingzhēn	11	2	every 20min	7am-6pm
Láncāng	38	5-6	every 30min	6am-4pm
Mēnghǎi	11	¾	every 20min	7.30am-1.40pm & 2.20-7pm
Mēnghùn	15	1½	every 20min	7am-6pm
Mēnglǎ	33	4-5	every 20min	6.30am-6pm
Mēnglián	44	6-7	5 daily	8.30am-noon
Mēnglún	14	2	every 20min	7am-6pm
Měnyǎng	7	¾	half-hourly	8am-6pm
Sānchàhé	10-11.50	1½	every 20min	6.15am-6.30pm
Simáo	33	5	every 15min every 30min	6.15am-4pm 4-6pm

If you're a serious collector of local market experiences, there are plenty to be found in the region. Like anything else, markets are subjective things, but most people seem to prefer the Thursday market in Xiding, then Mēnghùn, followed by Mēnghǎi.

Biking is grand. First morning? Hop on a bike and strike out in the environs of Jinghong. You can't go wrong.

Depending on where you go, you'll get lovely dirt paths interspersed with wide concrete runways, then perhaps a ferry or two across the Mekong River. Travellers in cafés will have the latest info on what roads haven't been bulldozed yet.

Another possible bike ride, for the fit, is from Jinghong to Mandian Waterfall (right). Or a much easier bike ride is south along the road to Damēnglóng; take the left fork near the airport.

About 15km from Jinghong is **Manfei-long Reservoir** (曼飞龙水库; Mǎnfēilóng Shuǐkù), a small lake with a tiny resort. Here you can rent jet skis for Y60 per minute – don't

worry, they stop timing every time you fall off.

Some rooms might be available for about Y60. There's not much else to do on the lake, but it's a nice break if you're continuing south.

Mandian Waterfall 曼典瀑布

On the road to Mēnghǎi, about 6km to 8km outside Jinghong, is a dirt road turn-off to the right near a small market. (If you miss it there should be another fork near Gādōng; take the middle dirt road.) From here it's about 25km to the waterfall (Màndiǎn Pùbù) that is near some Dai villages.

Some of the hills can be really difficult, and during rainy season there's lots of mud. From the end of the dirt road, it's about 45 minutes by foot to the falls.

It's possible to reach other falls but these are dangerous and require dodgy climbs; take a local guide. A round-trip vehicle (big enough for seven) costs around Y120. The only place to stay here is with Dai families. Figure Y30 per person as a top-end price.

Sanchahe Nature Reserve
三岔河自然保护区

This nature reserve (Sānchàhé Zìrán Bǎohùqū), 48km north of Jinghong, is one of five enormous forest reserves in southern Yunnan. This one has an area of nearly 1.5 million hectares. The part of the park that most tourists visit is **Banna Wild Elephant Valley** (Bǎnnà Yěxiàng Gǔ; admission Y25, with guide Y50), named after the 40 or so wild elephants that live in the valley; it's worth a visit if you want to see something of the local forest. You'll also find displays on tropical birds and butterflies, and peacock shows. Avoid the depressing 'wild' elephant performances for the throngs of shutterbug tourists. A 2km-cable car (one way/return Y40/60) runs over the treetops from the main entrance into the heart of the park.

If you want to stay by the park there's a generic **hotel** (d 200) at the main entrance, although it will seem pricy for what you get. Alternatively, you can stay in one of 22 Swiss Family Robinson-type **canopy treehouses** (d Y200) in the heart of the park. Expect a discount, as these are a bit unkempt, though some new highfalutin' ones are planned. A few travellers who have stayed here have reported seeing elephants bathing in the stream beneath them at dawn.

Just about any bus travelling north from Jinghong to Simáo will pass this reserve (Y12, one hour). Returning to Jinghong you may have a bit of a wait on your hands at times for traffic to pass by, depending on the time of day.

Měngyǎng 勐养

The much photographed **Elephant-Shaped Banyan Tree** (Xiàngxíng Róngshù) is why most people visit Měngyǎng. It's also a centre for

the Hani, Floral-Belt Dai and Lahu, one of the poorest minorities in the region.

Měngyǎng is 34km northeast of Jinghong on the road to Simáo.

From Měngyǎng it's another 19km south-east to **Jinuò** (基诺), which is home base for the Jinuo minority.

Buses from Jinghong's No 2 bus station to Měngyǎng (Y7, one hour) run from 8am to 6pm every 30 minutes.

Mēnghǎn 勐罕 (Gǎnlǎnbà 橄榄坝)

If you arrive mid-afternoon, Mēnghǎn (or Gǎnlǎnbà as it's sometimes referred to) will be having its daily siesta. But once it cools down, this little place really comes alive and you begin to see why it's such a popular excursion from Jinghong.

It's worth coming by bike (or hiring one in Mēnghǎn) as there's plenty of scope for exploration in the neighbourhood.

SIGHTS

The premier 'attraction' in Mēnghǎn is the **Dai Minority Park** (傣族园; Dǎizúyuán; ☎ 250 4099; Mant-ing Lu; 曼听路; adult/student Y50/25), which is quite simply part of the town that has been cordoned off and had a ticket booth stuck at the entrance. Tourists can spend the night in villagers' homes and partake in water-splashing 'festivals' twice a day. While the 'park' and Dai architecture are beautiful, spending the night here can feel a bit like you're spending the night in a zoo, albeit a minority one. Despite this, travellers who've come say it's been worth the trip and some have even stayed in touch with their host families.

If you do stay overnight in the park, your ticket is valid for the following day.

Travellers recommend heading to the south of town, crossing the Mekong by ferry (Y2

THE JINUO PEOPLE 基诺族

The Jinuo, sometimes known as the Youle, were officially 'discovered' as a minority in 1979. The women wear a white cowl, a cotton tunic with bright horizontal stripes and a tubular black skirt. Earlobe decoration is an elaborate custom – the larger the hole and the more flowers it can contain the better. Teeth are sometimes painted black with the sap of the lacquer tree, which serves the dual dental purpose of beautifying the mouth and preventing tooth decay and halitosis.

Previously, the Jinuo lived in long houses with as many as 27 families occupying rooms on either side of the central corridor. Each family had its own hearth, but the oldest man owned the largest hearth, which was always the closest to the door. Long houses are rarely used now and the Jinuo sadly seem to be quickly losing their distinctive way of life. The **Temaoko Festival** is held in Jinuo villages on the 6th to 8th of the second lunar month.

GETTING TO LAOS

On-the-spot visas for Laos can be obtained at the border, at Mòhān. Please remember that this could change tomorrow. The price will depend on your nationality (generally US\$30 to US\$35). The Chinese **checkpoint** (☎ 0691-812 2684; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) is generally not much of an ordeal. Don't forget that Laos is an hour behind.

Měnglà has one daily bus at 9am running to Luang Nam Tha in Laos (Y32); it takes 90 minutes to the border, where you wait for around an hour to deal with paperwork, before reboarding for the final two-hour leg.

If you miss that, from Měnglà there are also buses to Mòhān every 20 minutes or so from 8am to 6pm.

No matter what anyone says, there should be no 'charge' to cross. Once your passport is stamped (double-check all stamps), you can jump on a tractor or truck to take you 3km into Laos for around Y5. Whatever you do, go early, in case things wrap up early on either side. There are guesthouses on both the Chinese and Lao sides; people generally change money on the Lao side.

with a bike), and then heading left (east). The last ferry returns at 7pm.

SLEEPING & EATING

Beds in a Dai home within the park will cost around Y20 per person. Food is extra. Beds are traditional Dai mats and are usually very comfortable. Most homes will also have showers for you.

Yùnlì Bīnguǎn (运丽宾馆; ☎ 241 0204; Manting Lu; d/tr Y40/60) This is a modern hotel with spotless rooms that all come with their own private balconies.

Dai Family Restaurant (傣家餐厅; Dǎijiā Cāntīng; Manting Lu; mains Y15-18) This place has an English menu on the wall and there are no prices listed, so check before you order as food is a little pricier than elsewhere.

You'll find a handful of Dai restaurants near the Dai Family Restaurant.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Microbuses to Měnghǎn leave from Jinghóng's No 2 bus station (Y8, every 20 minutes, 7am to 6pm). Minibuses also depart from Měnghǎn's bus station for destinations throughout the region. These destinations include Jinghóng (Y8), Měnglún (Y10, one hour) and Mengla (Y29, five hours).

It's possible to cycle from Jinghóng to Měnghǎn in a brisk two hours or a leisurely three hours, and it's a pleasant ride.

GETTING AROUND

You can rent a mountain bike at the entrance to the Dai Minority Park (Y20 per day) or from one of several bicycle shops along Manting Lu in Jinghóng (Y10 per day).

Měnglún 勐伦

Měnglún is the next major port of call east of Měnghǎn. The major attraction is the **Tropical Plant Gardens** (热带植物园; Rèdài Zhīwùyuán; adult/student Y60/40; ☎ 7am-midnight). The gardens are gorgeous and get high marks from visitors. The 933 hectares of garden are well laid out, and tour groups give it a festive atmosphere, though the concrete paths and guides toting bullhorns quickly dash any hopes of communing with nature. Over 2000 species of tropical plants have been introduced since 1959 and you'll also find every conceivable species existing in Xishuangbanna. Look out for *Artiaria toxicana*, which local hunters once used to coat their poisoned arrows. The gardens are over the river, but the entrance is on the northern bank.

To get there, turn left out of the bus station and walk to the first corner. Walk one block and turn left again. You'll come to market hawkers, and a road leading downhill to the right side. Follow this until you reach a footbridge across the Mekong. The ticket booth is just in front of the bridge.

A 10-minute bus ride west of Měnglún towards Měnghǎn, at kilometre-marker 63, is the **Banna Rain Forest Valley** (版纳雨林谷; Bǎnnà Yùnlín Gǔ; adult/student Y20/16), a small but fairly pleasant state-level protected area of forest compete with an aerial walkway (though not as good as the walkway at Bupan outside Měnglà; see opposite). This is primarily a Chinese tourist spot so there's concrete paths and no-smoking signs, but if you get there between 4pm and 5pm you should have the place to yourself. Hopping on a bus back to Měnglún is easy.

There are a couple of lovely Dai villages between Měnglún and the valley. If you have time, continue on the Jinghóng–Měnglà highway, straight through town for 3km (passing a second entrance to the gardens) to a **forest reserve** (Sēnlín Gōngyuán; 森林公园). There is no word on whether it's open, but it may be ripe for exploring, following all trail etiquette of course.

There are plenty of basic hotels in town, a couple near the park, and one in the park. Every one of them will suffer from dampness and most of them are pretty run-down. It's worth taking a walk around when you arrive to see if anything new has opened up.

The **Bus Station Hotel** (车站招待所; Chēzhàn Zhāodàisuǒ; d Y30) is your best-value option. There's no air-con, but the shared bathrooms and showers are clean and there's a TV in each room.

East of the roundabout, the **Red Bean Hotel** (红豆大酒店; Hóngdòu Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 871 6966; s & d Y100; ☎) is relatively new and has great-value rooms. Expect a discount.

The **Friendship Restaurant** (友谊餐厅; Yóuyì Cāntīng; Main Hwy; dishes from Y8) has lots of dishes made from strange vegetables, ferns and herbs only found locally.

From Jinghóng's No 2 bus station there are buses to Měnglún (Y14, two hours, every 20 minutes, 7am to 6pm). The buses pass through Měnghǎn. Some travellers have cycled here from Měnghǎn.

From Měnglún, there are buses to Měnglà (Y20 to Y25, 2½ hours, 8.30am to 7.30pm) and Jinghóng every 30 minutes.

Měnglà 勐腊

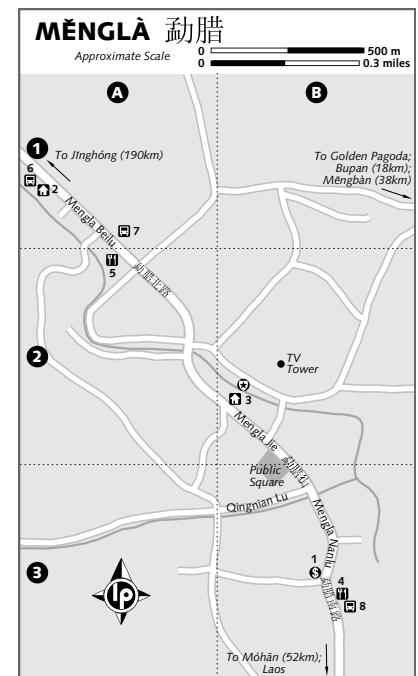
The only reason you want to find yourself here is if you're crossing into Laos at Mòhān and you can't make it before the border closes. Trust us. Because the bus journey from Jinghóng, or even Měnglún, will take the better part of the day, you'll probably be stuck here for the night.

There is a **Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; ☎ 8-11.30am & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) in the southern half of town that changes cash and travellers cheques but won't give cash advances on credit cards. To change Renminbi back into US dollars, you'll need your original exchange receipts.

If for some godforsaken reason you need to spend more time here, a day trip from Měnglà might include a stop at the **Bupan Aerial Skyway Park** (Wàngtiānshù Zǒuláng; adult/student Y20/17),

a 45-minute bus ride (Y7) to the north. It has a 500m-long rickety walkway 40m above the ground that showcases the rare Chinese parashorea tree (known locally in Chinese as 'Looking at the Sky Tree' because of its height and fast growth). A short trail leads around the forest. Entry includes Y2 life insurance (gulp!). To get here take an hourly minibus to Měngbān or Yáoqū. The last bus back is around 5.30pm.

About five minutes out of Měnglà town in the direction of the park is a golden **pagoda**



INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行 1 B3

SLEEPING

Jinqiao Dajiu Dian 金桥大酒店 2 A1
Jinxiu Grand Hotel 金秀大酒店 3 B2

EATING

Gene's Café 4 B3
Restaurants 饭店 5 A2

TRANSPORT

Long-Distance Bus Station 长途客运站 6 A1
Main Long-Distance Bus Station 长途客运总站 7 A1
Southern Bus Station 客运南站 8 B3

MĒNGLÀ BUS TIMETABLE

Buses from Měnglā's No 2 station:

Destination	Price (Y)	Frequency	Departs
Jinghóng	30-34	every 20min	6.20am-6pm
Měnglún	20-24	every 20min	6.20am-6pm
Móhān	14	every 20min	8am-6pm
Yáoqū	12	4 daily	8.30am, 10.30am, 2.30pm, 4.30pm

(金塔) on a distant hillside that makes for a good hike.

There are a couple of basic guesthouses in Měngbān, which you could use as a base to hike up to surrounding **Yao minority villages**. Don't stray too close to the Lao border though.

The **Jinqiao Dajiu dian** (金桥大酒店; ☎ 812 4946; Mengla Beilu; 勐腊北路; d/tr Y50/60; 🚗) is convenient for the north bus station just up the hill on the left, but don't expect much else. The best place to stay is the **Jinxiu Grand Hotel** (Jinxiu Dajiu dian; Mengla Jie; 勐腊街; s & d Y150-280; 🚗 🚗), a self-proclaimed three-star hotel right along the main road. Rarely full and adequate with a discount. There's also an iffy pool.

There are loads of restaurants along Mengla Jie where you can get dishes for Y5. Outside the southern bus station is **Gene's Café** (Mengla Nanlu; 勐腊南路), which a few travellers have recommended for travel advice.

Měnglā has three bus stations: two in the northern (Mengla Beilu) end of town, either of which can be used to head for Jinghóng and/or Kūnmíng (Y218, hourly, 8.30am to 11.30am, 14 hours). The southern bus station (No 2 station; Mengla Nanlu) is where you go for Laos.

DÀMĒNGLÓNG 大勐龙

Dàměnglóng (written just 'Měnglóng' on buses) is one of those sleepy places to aim for when you want a respite from the beaten path and a base from which to do some aimless rambling. You won't find much to do in the village itself outside of visiting the Sunday market, but the countryside around the village is peppered with decaying stupas and little villages.

About 70km south of Jinghóng and a few kilometres from the Myanmar border, Dàměnglóng is also a good base for hikes and bike rides through the surrounding hills. You can hire bicycles at Dàměnglóng Zhāodàisuo for Y15 per day.

The border crossing point with Myanmar (poetically named 2-4-0) has been designated as the entry point for a planned highway linking Thailand, Myanmar and China. Highways have been constructed around here with a vengeance, though the expressway into the three-nation triangle area is only gradually inching this way.

Sights**WHITE BAMBOO SHOOT PAGODA**

曼飞龙塔

This **pagoda** (Màn fēilóng Tǎ; admission Y5), built in 1204, is Dàměnglóng's premier attraction. According to legend, the temple was built on the spot of a hallowed footprint left by Sakyamuni Buddha, who is said to have visited Xishuangbānnà; if you're interested in ancient footprints you can look for it in a niche below one of the nine stupas. Unfortunately, in recent years a 'beautification' job has been done on the temple with a couple of cans of white paint.

If you're in the area late October or early November, check the precise dates of the **Tan Ta Festival**. At this time White Bamboo Shoot Pagoda is host to hundreds of locals whose celebrations include dancing, rocket launchings, paper balloons and so on.

The pagoda is easy to get to: just walk back along the main road towards Jinghóng for 2km until you reach a small village with a temple on your left. From here there's a path up the hill; it's about a 20-minute walk. There's an entry fee, but often there's no-one around anyway.

BLACK PAGODA 黑塔

Just above the centre of town is a Dai monastery with a steep path beside it leading up to the **Black Pagoda** (Hēi Tǎ; admission free); you'll notice it when entering Dàměnglóng. The pagoda itself is actually gold, not black. Take a stroll up, but bear in mind that the real rea-

son for the climb is more for the views of Dàměnglóng and surrounding countryside than the temple itself.

Sleeping & Eating

Plenty of cheap options are available for foreigners.

Dàměnglóng Zhāodàisuo (大勐龙招待所; dm Y15) This place has basic beds and fragrant bathrooms but the main reason to take note of this hotel is for its bicycle rental (Y15 per day). To get to the hotel, walk uphill from the main highway to where the local government building sits. From there, the hotel is in the grounds to the left, just past some ornamental frogs.

Lai Lai Hotel (来来宾馆; Láilái Bīnguǎn; d/tr Y20/30) Simple rooms and a lovely owner meticulous about cleanliness made this hotel the most popular accommodation choice with the Dàměnglóng-to-Búlǎngshān trekkers of yore. You'll see the English sign right next to the bus station.

There are a couple of decent restaurants to be found located down from the bus station, near the steps leading up to the Black Pagoda; the Chinese signs proclaim them to be Dai restaurants.

Getting There & Away

Buses for the bumpy ride to Dàměnglóng (Y15, three to four hours, every 20 minutes, 6.30am to 6.30pm) leave from Jinghóng's No 2 bus station. Remember that the 'Da' character won't be painted on the bus window. Buses for the return trip run regularly between 6am and 6pm.

THE BULANG PEOPLE 布朗族

The Bulang live mainly in the Bulang Xiding and Bada mountains of Xishuangbānnà. They keep to the hills farming cotton, sugar cane and *pū'ěr chá* (pu'er tea), one of Yún-nán's most famous exports.

The men wear collarless jackets, loose black trousers and turbans of black or white cloth. They traditionally tattoo their arms, legs, chests and stomachs. The Bulang women wear simple, brightly coloured clothes and vibrant headdresses (atop the black turbans) decorated with flowers. Avid betel-nut chewers, the women believe black teeth are beautiful.

AROUND DÀMĒNGLÓNG

The village of **Xiǎojiē** (小街), about 15km north of Dàměnglóng, is surrounded by Bulang, Lahu and Hani villages. Lahu women shave their heads; apparently the younger ones aren't happy about this any more and hide their hair beneath caps.

The Bulang are possibly descended from the Yi of northern Yún-nán. The women wear black turbans with silver decorations; many of the designs are of shells, fish and marine life.

There's plenty of room for exploration in this area, although remember you're not allowed over the border.

MĒNGHǎI 勐海

This modern town is another popular base for exploring the countryside. Grab a bike and head north for the most interesting pagodas and villages.

If you're passing through Měnghǎi, it's worth visiting the huge daily produce market that attracts members of the hill tribes. The best way to find it is to follow the early-morning crowds.

If you have to overnight here, just head out in any direction of the bus station to find an inordinate number of hotels; they're all essentially the same – decent.

Buses run from Jinghóng's No 2 bus station to Měnghǎi (Y11, 45 minutes, every 20 minutes, 7.30am to 1.40pm and 2.20pm to 7pm).

From Měnghǎi's bus station there are buses to Búlǎngshān (Y18, 9am and 2pm), Xiding (Y11, 10.40am and 3.30pm), Měngmǎn (Y11, 7.30am, 8.30am, 9.30am and 5pm) and Kūnmíng (Y170 to Y187, 2.30pm, 4.30pm, 5.30pm and 6.30pm), among other destinations. Buses return to Jinghóng every 20 minutes until 7pm.

AROUND MĒNGHǎI

In the village of Mǎnlěi, about 7km west of Měnghǎi, are the **twin pagodas** (双塔), built in 1746. The taller one is 9m, the shorter one 7m. A temple can be visited that sits between them.

Located a few kilometres to the southwest of Manlei (曼垒) is the **Manduan Wat** (曼短) in Mǎnduǎn Village, which dates from approximately 1132. This building is built on 50cm-diameter poles and the heads of each pole are carved into a lotus or painted like a dragon.

Měnghùn 勐混

This quiet little village, located about 26km southwest of Měngǎi, has a colourful **Sunday market**. The town begins buzzing around 7am and the action lingers on through to noon. The swirl of hill tribespeople, which includes women sporting fancy leggings, headdresses, earrings and bracelets, is enough alone to make the trip worthwhile. Měnghùn also a good place to buy local handicrafts for much cheaper prices than you would find in Kūnmíng (don't haggle too much, these women have yet to learn the idea of overcharging foreigners).

There are several guesthouses here, though none are remarkable. Y40 will get you a double with bathroom and TV but there's no air-conditioning.

Buses departing from Jǐnghóng for Měnghùn (Y15, 90 minutes, every 20 minutes, 7am to 6pm) run from Jǐnghóng's No 2 bus station.

From Měnghùn, minibuses run regularly to Měngǎi (Y6), Xìdìng (Y11, 1½ hours, 7.10am and 4pm) and throughout the day to Jǐnghóng.

Unless you have a very good bike with gears, cycling to Měngǎi and Měnghùn is not a real option. The road up to Měngǎi is so steep that you'll end up pushing the bike most of the way. Cycling from Měnghùn back to Jǐnghóng, on the other hand, is almost entirely downhill.

Around Měnghùn

Near Mànguó Village (曼国), 8km southeast of Měnghùn, is a cluster of **pagodas** (塔) atop Guangjingha Hill. Built in 1746, the grouping is one large, 17m-high pagoda ringed by eight more, beneath which lie the sacred ashes of Bazaiyapa Pasa. You could hire a tractor to get to Manguo for about Y15 return, from where you could walk up the hill. Ask in town for more information.

Xìdìng 西定

This sleepy hillside hamlet comes alive every Thursday for its weekly market, reputedly one of the best in the region. At other times you'll find it almost deserted. To get here by public transport you can either catch one of the two direct buses from Měngǎi (Y11, 10.40am and 3.30pm) or travel via Měnghùn and change for a bus to Xìdìng. If you want to see the market at its most interesting, you'll really have to get

here the night before. The small guesthouse at the bus station has beds for Y20. Buses from Xìdìng leave twice a day (Y11, 7.20am and 1pm) for Měnghùn. If you miss the bus you can always get a ride on a motorbike (Y30), a spectacular if not hair-raising experience, from the only bike shop in town.

Jǐngzhēn 景真

In the village of Jǐngzhēn, about 14km northwest of Měngǎi, is the **Octagonal Pavilion** (八角亭; Bājiǎo Tíng; admission Y10), first built in 1701. The original structure was severely damaged during the Cultural Revolution but renovated in 1978 and the ornate decoration is still impressive. The temple also operates as a monastic school. The paintings on the wall of the temple depict scenes from the *Jataka*, the life history of Buddha.

Frequent minibuses from the minibus centre in Měngǎi go via Jǐngzhēn (Y11).

MÈNGLIÁN 孟连

☎ 0879 / pop 12,973

OK, fine, so it's not actually in Xishuangbanna. Let's not cavil; Měnglián is a quick and worthwhile side trip for anyone attempting the long journey between Jǐnghóng and the Bǎoshān or Déhóng regions. You're also within sniffing distance of Myanmar, but no, you still can't cross in the vicinity.

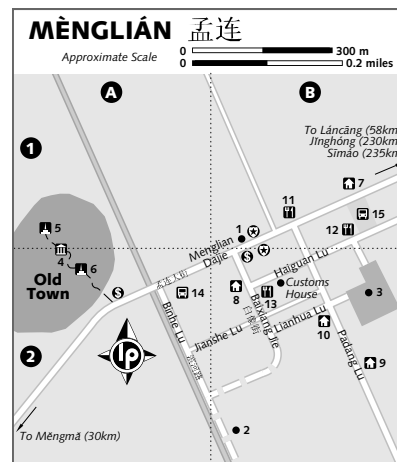
Měnglián is a big draw for Chinese artists because of its heady dose of minority culture, and the mists rolling through the river valleys of the Bin and Nanlei Rivers and throughout the nature reserve of Gold Mountain (Jīn Shān; also known as Dragon Mountain), rising above the town to the west. (See the mists snaking about the pervasive dragon trees and it isn't hard indeed to imagine dragons, eons ago.)

Of its 16 minority groups, Dai and Lahu are a considerable segment and it's also one of the few places where you experience large numbers of Wa. An old town lined with a few cobblestone walkways rises into the hills.

If you're headed for Jǐnghóng from Déhóng or Bǎoshān and if the roads are washed out somewhere (not unlikely) you may be looking at an overnight stay in Lǎncāng to the northeast, so what the hey, just bop down.

Information

No information sources, not even an internet café that we could find. The best place to get



INFORMATION

Wanderer Café 流浪者咖啡馆 (see 13)
Xinhua Bookshop 新华书店 1 B1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Jīn Tǎ 金塔 2 B2
Market 集贸市场 3 B2
Menglián Dai People's House Museum 孟连宣抚司署 4 A2
Shàngchéng Lóng Miǎnsì 上城龙佛寺 5 A1
Zhōngchéng Fósi 中城佛寺 6 A2

SLEEPING

Kāngfú Bīnguǎn 康福宾馆 7 B1
Kǒngquè Bīnguǎn 孔雀宾馆 8 B2
Rúyì Dàjiǔdiàn 如意大酒店 9 B2
Tōngquán Bīnguǎn 通全宾馆 10 B2

EATING

Dai Barbecue Vendors 傣味烧烤 11 B1
Jiāchángwèi Fàndiàn 家常味饭店 12 B1
Wanderer Café 流浪者咖啡馆 13 B2

TRANSPORT

Local Bus Station 县客运站 14 A2
Main Bus Station 客运站 15 B1

help is at the **Wanderer Café** (Liúliàngzhě Kǎfēiguǎn; ☎ 872 5233; Haiguan Lu), where the irrepressibly cheery Han Qing and staff can likely figure out what to do.

Sights

Měnglián has an old town up in the hills and a new, soulless part of town built on a grid pattern, where you'll arrive and sleep. In this lower section of town, in the far southwest, is the **Jīn Tǎ** (Golden Pagoda; admission Y3). You'll find a Buddha statue, other statues, and Dai and Burmese script on the walls.

From here, head back to town and to a small **market** where the roadway is lined with Hani, Dai and Wa farmers.

Now walk west along Menglián Dajie and cross the bridge. Virtually any alley leading up the hill from this point will take you past earthy, traditional mud or wood homes. It's a lovely surprise after the tedium of the new town.

As you head up through the village you'll see the **Zhōngchéng Fósi** (admission Y4), a Dai temple with some pretty gold-leaf designs.

The real attraction in the old town though is the **Menglián Dai People's House Museum** (Měnglián Xuānfú Sīshù; ☎ 872 3591; admission Y5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm), the largest and best-preserved of Yunnan's 18 traditional minority 'clan houses' and used as a residence and meeting hall by the group's elders and high officials. Though Simáo now holds sway over the county, Měnglián was once the centre of Dai culture, predating Simáo and its rulers, who once lavished gifts on the Dai leader in Měnglián.

This structure was originally built in 1289 during the Yuan dynasty and held 28 generations of Dai rulers. It has since been turned into a museum and the upper floor now features historical artefacts ranging from gowns to court clothing and Dai manuscripts. A side room and shrine was once used as quarters for visiting dignitaries.

Further uphill (take a right just before the museum) is the three-storey **Shàngchéng Lóngmiǎn Sì**. This place is the most active temple in town, with two golden pagodas to the side.

Back in the centre of town, the large **central market** is worth a look, especially during the weekly market, held every five days.

Sleeping

For the cheapest digs, exit the bus station onto Haiguan Lu and cross the street; you've got about 20 places to stay in either direction. Take your pick; there are quite a few clean, decent ones.

At midrange places, always but always expect a steep discount (we got around 75% without breaking a sweat) outside holidays and 'busy' season, whenever that is.

Kǒngquè Bīnguǎn (Peacock Hotel; ☎ 872 8895; Haiguan Lu; 海关路; r per person Y30, without bathroom Y10, d Y50-100) Once a solid budget stand-by, this place has faded but at least it's dirt-cheap

THE LAHU

The Lahu people occupy a narrow belt of land between the Wa and Dai people's area, along the Mekong River. Though they've adopted agrarian practices through the Han, the Lahu are still called 'Tiger Hunters' for their one-time prowess at tracking and lack of fear. The Lahu language is of the Sino-Tibetan family; *la* means 'tiger' and *hu* means 'to roast tiger meat with flavour'. Lahu houses all contain shotguns and crossbows; hunting dogs are still revered, and are even buried by families when they die. Hunters still put tufts of hair or feathers on their weapons for every animal they kill. Not limited to animals, the Lahu in the early 18th century also made their presence known to humans, threatening Luang Prabang in Laos, and border regions of Thailand and Burma (Myanmar). They weren't pacified by China until the end of the 19th century.

The Lahu's distinctive dress is similar to that in certain areas of northern China. The women wear a skirt with a high slit, silver ball buttons and no belt. The men wear a necklace coat buttoned on the right and loose pants. Men and women traditionally shave their heads, leaving a tuft of hair called their 'soul'. Women usually wrap their heads in a metre of black cloth.

Customarily, a man lives with his wife's family after marriage and there's no preference for sons. But what the Lahu have always been famous for is smoking. If you're a guest, don't offend by neglecting to offer cigarettes to grandma too.

and staffed with interested workers who are accustomed to dealing with foreign guests.

Kāngfú Bīnguǎn (☎ 872 1243; Menglian Dajie; 孟连大街; s/d ¥60/80) Found by exiting the *other* exit from the bus station, this place has clean, smart rooms with squat toilet. Same deal here – nothing flash but perfectly adequate.

Tóngquán Bīnguǎn (☎ 872 6669; Padang Lu; 帕当路; s & d ¥180-288, tr ¥240; 🚻) Completely renovated only a few years ago, this place is holding up well. Staff were cheery if amazed to see foreigners. Do not even think of paying rack rate here – you can get great deals.

Rúyì Dàjiùdiàn (☎ 822 3888; 18 Padang Lu; 帕当路18号; s & d ¥240; 🚻) Tops in town is this smart complex, with new rooms and super service.

Eating

Wanderer Café (Liúliàngzhè Kāfēiguǎn; ☎ 872 5233; Haiguan Lu; 海关路; food from ¥5) What a treat to find this place, which had just opened a week or so before our visit. Owner Nan Qing, a superfriendly Wa woman, will likely find you as she pedals around; if not, do seek this sanctuary out. Sip your fresh-brewed coffee (from ¥20) overlooking a lotus pond and listen to awesome music.

Jiāchángwèi Fāndiàn (Haiguan Lu; 海关路; dishes from ¥5) This friendly eatery next to the bus station serves good food and will try to accommodate you, though there's no English menu.

Mènglián also has some fine street food. Dai barbecue vendors congregate every afternoon a block west of the bus station but it's all

over by around 6.30pm. You'll see local dried sausages all over town, and the odd Burmese vendor selling *palatar* (Burmese crepe served hot and doused in sweetened condensed milk for ¥5). You'll see a couple of small Dai restaurants in the old town, near the Shàngchéng Lóng Miānsi.

Getting There & Away

Buses from the No 2 bus station in Jìngzhōng leave for Mènglián (Y44, six to seven hours) at 8.30am, 10am, 11am, 11.30am and noon. Return buses leave at 8am, 9.30am, 10.30am, 11.30am and 12.30pm.

One bus daily leaves for Xiànguān (Y165, 12 to 14 hours) at 8.30am.

The Mènglián bus station also has tons of buses back up to Lāncāng (Y12, one hour, 6.30am to 6pm), from where long-distance transport is easier. Buses for local destinations, including to Fùai and the border area at Měngmǎ (勐马) and Měng'ā (勐阿), leave from a second bus station near the bridge leading to the old town. The border crossing is not open to foreigners.

AROUND MÈNGLIÁN

About 5km from Mènglián, boats can be rented (around ¥10) for riverside tours on the Nanlei River. It's also possible to go swimming and to explore caves nearby.

West of Mènglián in the Dai village of Měngmǎ there is another fine pagoda, the **Xiàngyá Tǎ**, and a waterfall about 10km south of the town.

If nothing else, travellers can hop on a Měngā-bound bus (Y5, one hour) just to sniff around (but not cross!) the markets around the border area.

Minority Villages

Of the 16 minority groups, you'll mostly encounter Dai, Lahu and Wa. Měngmǎ, near the border, has sizable numbers of Lahu, while Wa are mostly encountered in Fùai to the west or Lǎlěi to the south. Both Fùai and Lǎlěi have markets every five days. Buses depart from Mènglián for Fù'ái (Y7, one hour) at 8am, 11am and 4.30pm. When a bus arrives, one leaves. There should be a single afternoon bus to Lǎlěi at 4pm, which would involve staying the night.

LĀNCĀNG 澜沧

☎ 0879 / pop 7886

Lāncāng is a cheerful if not aesthetically pleasing town, a crossroads between Mènglián, Simáo and Lǐncāng, leading to Dèhóng and Bāoshān regions. If you head south to Mènglián you'll often have to switch buses here.

If you arrive on a Sunday, make sure it's early, as the town market is fairly populated and energetic.

Orientation

Lāncāng is dissected into a Y-shape by the highway from Jìngzhōng leading to Lǐncāng, and by the highway south to Myanmar via Mènglián. In the middle sits a large statue – use that for your bearings.

Sleeping & Eating

Shèxīn Bīnguǎn (射鑫宾馆; ☎ 722 5568; Menglang Jie; 勐郎街; s/d ¥20/30) Exiting the bus station main entrance, head right, turn right at the first intersection and you'll get to this decent place, where the staff will be amazed to see you. After a bit of bustling about, they'll figure out how to give you a decent, cheap room.

Shùnxiyuàn Bīnguǎn (顺西苑宾馆; ☎ 722 3567; Menglang Jie; 勐郎街; s & d ¥60, with bathroom ¥100-280; 🚻) Cross the street to better digs here, with smart rooms and an attentive staff.

Getting There & Away

To confuse things, Lāncāng has three bus stations. From the statue at the crossroads, the main bus station is 100m southeast. Departures to everywhere, in all sorts of buses, leave from here.

To Mènglián there are buses every 40 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm (Y10, one hour). To the Wa settlement of Xīméng (西盟; Y20, four hours) there are buses three or four times a day from all bus stations.

To Jìngzhōng, buses leave hourly or so from 6.30am to 5.30pm (Y34, five to six hours).

Buses depart for Lǐncāng (Y51, eight to nine hours) and there is a sleeper bus to Bāoshān (Y148, 20 hours) around 3pm.

Note that the twisting road from Lǐncāng to Lǐncāng still can be, as it always has been, a bit brutal, especially during the rainy season. To make it worse, hyperactive border agents search buses a lot.

SĪMÁO 思茅

☎ 0879 / pop 7500

An uninteresting little town, Simáo was Xishuāngbǎnnà's air link with the outside world. Now Jìngzhōng has an airport and only the occasional traveller flies from Kūnmíng to Simáo (Y390) to do the final leg to Jìngzhōng by bus if they can't get a flight to Jìngzhōng.

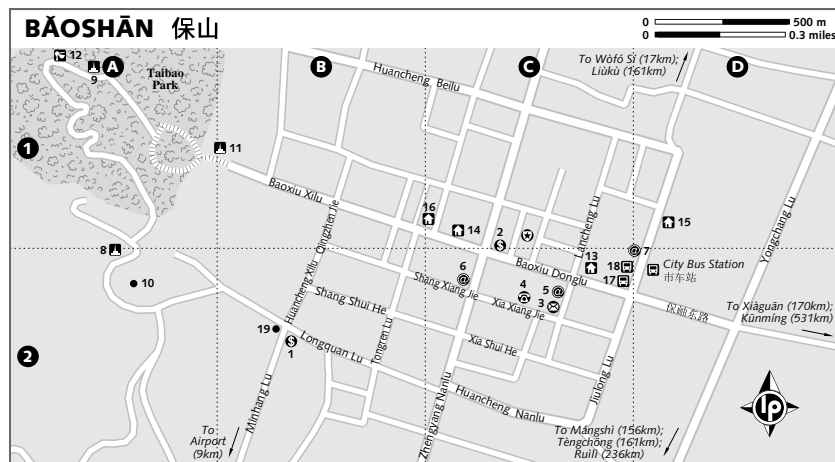
South of Simáo is the **Caiyang River Nature Reserve** but apart from that, the scenery between Simáo and Jìngzhōng is not exactly a Sumatran jungle, and if you're travelling further afield from Jìngzhōng you'll see plenty of Xishuāngbǎnnà scenery anyway.

If you do get stuck here, however, east of town is the **Manzhongtian Hot Spring**, set among hundreds of hectares of grassland. Most Chinese tourists come for **Cuiyun Resort** and its oddball karst formations and grottoes, 54km southwest of town.

BĀOSHĀN REGION
保山

Hiking dormant volcanic peaks, dipping in hot springs, peering about traditional villages. That pretty much sums up this prefecture that was heretofore ignored – at least until the decadent star of Ruili (in Dèhóng Prefecture) began to wane (and transport became doable).

The eponymous capital is nice enough, but when you say Bāoshān you really mean Téngchōng, with its residual – less and less but enough to hold interest – old quarters and especially its environs, peppered with minority groups whose villages lie in and around the ancient fire mountains. Located on the other



INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1	B2
Bank of China 中国银行	2	C1
China Post 中国邮政	3	C2
China Telecom 中国电信	4	C2
Internet Café 网吧	5	C2
Internet Café 网吧	6	C2
Internet Café 网吧	7	D2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Wénbǐ Tǎ 文笔塔	8	A2
Wuhouci Ancestral Temple 武侯祠	9	A1
Yiluo Pond 易罗池	10	A2
Yúfó Sì 玉佛寺	11	B1
Yuhuang Pavilion 玉皇阁	(see 11)	
Zoo 动物园	12	A1

SLEEPING

Fútài Bīnguǎn 福泰宾馆	13	C2
Huálì Bīnguǎn 华利宾馆	14	C1
Huāchéng Bīnguǎn 花城宾馆	15	D1
Lándū Bīnguǎn 兰都宾馆	16	C1

TRANSPORT

Long-Distance Bus Station 长途客运站	17	C2
Microbuses to Běimào 到北庙的中巴车	18	C2
Yunnan Airlines/CAAC 云南航空公司	19	B2

side of Gāolígòng Shān range, Tēngchōng is also prime earthquake territory, having experienced 71 earthquakes measuring over five on the Richter scale since 1500.

As early as the 4th and 5th centuries BC (two centuries before the northern routes through central Asia were established), the Bāoshān area was an important stop on the southern Silk Road (the Sichuan-India route). The area did not come under Chinese control until the Han dynasty, when, in AD 69, it was named the Yongchang Administra-

tive District. In 1277 a huge battle was waged in the region between the 12,000 troops of Kublai Khan and 60,000 Burmese soldiers and their 2000 elephants. The Mongols won and went on to take Pagan (in Burma).

BĀOSHĀN 保山

☎ 0875 / pop 22,174

Bāoshān used to have some funky old architecture and alleys for the visitor to explore. No more. Today it's a bustling up-tempo city with few sights. However, you still may find yourself here, as it is plunked strategically at the centre point of the Dēhóng, Nù Jiāng, and Dàlì regions.

Marco Polo visited the town in the 13th century when it was known as Yongchang and marvelled at the locals' gold teeth and tattoos. It has innumerable speciality products that range from excellent coffee to leather boots and pepper and silk. Tea connoisseurs might like to try the Reclining Buddha Baoshan Tea, a brand of national repute.

Information

Shops at the long-distance bus station sell maps of Bāoshān (city and prefecture) that show regional sights in Chinese, with precious few explanations in English.

The **Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Baoxiu Donglu) is west of the bus station (no weekend service), with another branch opposite the Yunnan Airlines office, and the **China Post and China Telecom offices** (Xia Xiang Jie) are not far away. You can get decent internet access at several internet cafés

(corner Shang Xiang Jie and Zhengyang Nanlu; corner Xia Xiang Jie and Lancheng Lu; Jiulong Lu, north of bus station) for ¥3 per hour.

Sights

Bāoshān streets are lively and, in a waning few spots, dotted with traditional homes, though the city walls have long since gone. The major sight within easy walking distance of the centre of town is **Tàibāoshān** and its surrounding **park** (admission ¥3).

Just before you head up the steps leading up the hillside you'll see the Ming dynasty **Yuhuang Pavilion** (Yùhuáng Gé) and the attached **Yúfó Sì** (Jade Buddha Temple) on your right. At the top of the steps is the small park and the **Wuhouci Ancestral Temple**, which has a nice garden and teahouse. Wuhou was the title given to Prime Minister Zhuge Liang in the Three Kingdoms period in the kingdom of Shu.

There are paths in the park heading north, west and south. The northern path doubles back to the south and eventually takes you past a very mediocre zoo (best keep walking).

Continuing to the south you will reach **Yiluo Pond** (Yilúo Chí), also known as the Dragon Spring Pond (Lóngquán Chí), with a view of the 13-tiered pagoda known as the **Wénbǐ Tǎ**.

Sleeping

You'll have no problem whatsoever finding budget places to stay in Bāoshān. Along Baoxiu Donglu are a few Chinese-style hotels, all of which really seem ready to roll out the red carpet for a foreign guest.

Huálì Bīnguǎn (☎ 216 1696; Baoxiu Donglu; 保岫东路; s & d ¥100-360, without bathroom from ¥30; ☺) A bit nicer than most cheaper options, this place is set back off the busy main street. Staff are amazed (appalled?) that foreigners would ever wish to stay in a common room, but with some nudging they'll let you. Expect a discount on a room with a bathroom.

Fútài Bīnguǎn (☎ 219 0128; Baoxiu Donglu; 保岫东路; d/tr ¥80/90; ☺) The staff here will likely blow a gasket in excitement to see you wander in. Nice rooms and frenetically cheery staff. Expect to pay ¥60.

Huāchéng Bīnguǎn (☎ 220 3999; Jiulong Lu; 九龙路; s/d ¥180/220; ☺) Hands down this is the best value yuán for yuán in town. Once a pioneering, city budget-hotel (shed a tear nostalgically), it's been tastefully revamped into an up (sort of) scale place, with nice appointments and design in the rooms. It was offering huge discounts when we visited, making it a steal.

Lándū Bīnguǎn (☎ 222 2888; www.landuhotel.com.cn in Chinese; Baoxiu Xilu; 保岫西路; r ¥240-400; ☺) If you need any sense of sybaritic comfort in the city, this is it. Great rooms and attentive service. The restaurant is well-regarded locally.

Eating

Alleys off Baoxiu Lu, Shang Xiang Jie and Xia Xiang Jie are good for cheap restaurants. Near the intersection of Baoxiu Xilu and Minhang Lu is Qingzhen Jie (Muslim St), where there are several Muslim (and possibly Burmese, but all the good ones were gone at last check) restaurants.

To the west and around the corner from the Lándū Bīnguǎn is a small street with several coffee shops, one pub, and trying-to-be-chic restaurants.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Travellers are able to fly daily between Bāoshān and Kūnmíng, though we've never heard of anyone actually doing it. The **Yunnan Airlines/CAAC office** (Yúnnán Hángkōng Gōngsī; ☎ 216 1747) has its office inconveniently located at the intersection of Longquan Lu and Minhang Lu.

Look for a large yellow-tiled building. The **ticket office** (☎ 8.30am-6.30pm) is on the 1st floor,

BĀOSHĀN BUS TIMETABLE

Destination	Price (¥)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Kūnmíng	140-174	7-9	hourly	8am-10pm
Liùkù	29	3-4	every 40 min	6.50am-2.50pm
Rúlì	47-54	6	hourly	6.30am-2.30pm
Tēngchōng	26-40	3-4	every 40 min	8am-6.40pm
Xiànguān	35-44	2½-3	every 45 min	7am-7pm

facing Longquan Lu. The airport is about 9km south of town.

BUS

The sprawling Bāoshān long-distance bus station has buses pretty much always to pretty much everywhere in Yúnnán. Buses to Ruili pass through Mángshì and Wǎngdìng. There are also a couple of departures just to Mángshì. For the Nujiang Valley expect the speed to increase as lots of road upgrading is on-going.

There is also a daily sleeper at 6pm to Jìngzhōng (Y180, 20 hours), though it's a rough ride and most travellers opt to take the direct Dàlì–Jìngzhōng bus or return to Kūnmíng. If you want to break the trip to Jìngzhōng there are three morning buses (7am, 9am and 10.50am) to Línkāng (Y52) where you can overnight and continue on to Mènglián or Jìngzhōng.

The outside of the bus will always look better on the pricier buses, but the inside won't, and they won't run any faster.

Getting Around

Bāoshān can be comfortably explored on foot. A bicycle would ideal to get to some of the sights around Bāoshān but there is no evidence of bicycle-hire stands.

Taxis cost Y5 for any ride around the town centre.

AROUND BĀOSHĀN

Just 17km north of town, the **Wófó Sì** (卧佛寺; Reclining Buddha Temple) is one of the most important historical sights near Bāoshān. The temple dates back to the Tang dynasty, and has a history of 1200 years. The reclining Buddha, in a cave to the rear of the temple area, was severely damaged during the Cultural Revolution.

To get to the temple take a microbus (Y2) from stands of drivers lurking near – usually north of – the main bus station to the interesting village of **Běimào** (北庙) and walk or hire a microbus for the rest. A motorcycle with sidecar can take two people there and back from Bāoshān for Y40. Taxis ask around Y80.

TÉNGCHŌNG 腾冲

☎ 0875 / pop 13,472

Say Tèngchōng and Chinese think 'fire mountain' – as in the Chinese word that means volcano. With 20 volcanoes in the vicinity

and lots of hot springs (p347) there won't be a problem if you're looking for a hot time. (Sorry.)

The town of Tèngchōng itself is also worth a quick look-see. For the most part it's a rather drab, grey provincial town, but bizarrely, in the midst of it all, some lanes are still packed with the traditional wooden architecture that used to be commonplace in many towns and cities in Yúnnán. Construction is encroaching on them quickly, however, so you'll need some patience while seeking them out.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Fengshan Lu & Yingjiang Xilu) Will change cash and travellers cheques. There's also an ATM here.

China Post & Telecom (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng & Zhōngguó Diànxìn; Fengshan Lu).

Internet café (wǎngbā; Feicui Lu; per hr Y2).

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú; ☎ 513 1146; Yingjiang Xilu; ☎ 8.30–11.30am & 2.30–5.30pm Mon–Fri) Can help with visa extensions.

Sights & Activities

Much of the city's grand old architecture has been bulldozed but poke around long enough and you will see some fine eye candy, including some funky old temples that had for decades lain dormant but are now being renovated. The best places for a random wander are the backstreets running off Yingjiang Xilu.

There are a couple of small markets with plenty of colour and activity in the mornings. Walking along Fengshan Lu from Feicui Lu, the first side street on the left has a small **produce market**.

Further down on the right is a large, covered **jade market** where you can sometimes see the carving process. Walk east along Yinjiang Xilu and you will come across a larger **produce market** (Chǎnpǐn Shìchǎng; 产品市场) on your right.

A new **museum** was in the works but there's no word on when it was to open.

On the western edge of town is the **Laifeng Shan National Forest Park** (Láifēng Shān Guójīā Sēnlín Gōngyuán; admission Y20; ☎ 8am–7pm). You can walk through lush pine forests to **Laifeng Temple** (Láifēng Sì) or make the sweaty hike up to the summit where a pagoda offers fine views. There are lots of further hiking possibilities.

In the southwestern suburbs of town, **Xianle Temple** (Xiǎnlè Sì; admission Y5) is beside the small



INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国邮政	.....	1	C1
China Post 中国邮局	.....	2	B2
China Telecom 中国电信	.....	(see 2)	
Internet Café 网吧	.....	(see 11)	
PSB 公安局	.....	3	B1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Dieshui Waterfall 叠水瀑布	.....	4	A1
Jade Market 珠宝玉器交易中心	.....	5	B2
Laifeng Temple 来凤寺	.....	6	A2
Produce Market 产品市场	.....	7	B2
Produce Market 产品市场	8	C2
Xianle Temple 仙乐寺	9	A1

SLEEPING

Xinghuá Dàjiùdiàn 兴华大酒店	10	A1
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EATING

Food Court 餐厅	11	B2
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TRANSPORT

Bicycle Shop 自行车出租	12	C2
Local Bus Station 客运站	13	C1
Minibuses to Hésùn 到和顺的中巴车	14	B2
Minibuses to Sea of Heat 到热海的中巴车	.....	15	C2

Dieshui Waterfall (admission Y20), which makes a good place for a picnic. The area makes a nice destination for a bike ride and you could easily combine it with a trip to Hésùn (p346), a picturesque village 4km outside Tèngchōng.

Sleeping & Eating

Tèngchōng's accommodation options are fairly spread out. Rooms near the local bus station can get pretty decrepit. Alternatively, try one of the new hotels along Rehai Lu north of the long-

distance bus station. It's a less central location, but it's packed with new (clean!) hotels; some have doubles for as little as Y40 per night.

Jinhào Bīngquān (cnr Mashi Lu & Rehai Lu; s & d Y60, tr Y70; ☎) Possibly the biggest and brightest rooms on the entire street. If you're mid-slog through western Yúnnán, the pristine condition of bathrooms here will be cause for unbridled celebration. Head one block north from the long-distance bus station; the hotel is on the right side of the street. Discounted rooms usually go for Y30 to Y40.

Xinghuá Dàjiùdiàn (☎ 513 2683; s/d Y220/380; ☎) It's got cruddy halls with a 'going-out-of-business' vibe, but the rooms themselves are terrific: dark wood, handsome furniture, obscenely big bathrooms. Discounted doubles go for as little as Y120. It's northeast of Laifeng Shan National Forest Park.

Food court (cnr Feicui Lu & Laifeng Dadao) Your best option for lunch and dinner. Here you'll find half a dozen restaurants serving up delicious food from morning to night. There's a huge choice of delicious dishes here including *shāokǎo*, grilled fish and chilli crabs.

Getting There & Away

There are two bus stations in Tèngchōng: the shiny new long-distance bus station in the south of town and the old local bus station on Dongfang Lu. In general, for destinations north of Tèngchōng, head to the long-distance bus station, and for all locations south of town head to the local bus station.

THE HANI (AKHA) PEOPLE 哈尼族

The Hani (also known in adjacent countries as the Akha) are of Tibetan origin, but according to folklore they are descended from frogs' eyes. They are closely related to the Yi as a part of the Tibeto-Burman group; the language is Sino-Tibetan but uses Han characters for the written form.

They are famed mostly for their river-valley rice terraces, especially in the Red River valley, between the Ailao and Wuliang Shan, where they cultivate rice, corn and the occasional poppy. There is a great variety in dress amongst the Hani, particularly between the Xishuāngbānnà and the Hónghé Hani around Yuányáng. Hani women (especially the Aini, a subgroup of the Hani) wear headdresses of beads, feathers, coins and silver rings, some of which are made with French (Vietnamese), Burmese and Indian coins from the turn of the century.

The Hani have two animated New Year celebrations. The seven-day **Misezha** (New Year festival) takes place in the 10th month of the lunar calendar; this is followed by the **Kuzhazha** god-worshipping celebration in the sixth lunar month, lasting three to six days. As part of festivals, the Hani use an ox-hide swing to symbolically ward off bad fortune and augur a favourable year ahead.

The Hani are famed for their hospitality, though whether this endures increasing tourist contact remains to be seen.

The local bus station has daily buses to Ruili (Y40, six hours, 7.40am, 8.30am, 10.40am and 11.40am) and Mángshì (Y22, 4½ hours, 7.30am, 10.20am and 1pm), and frequent departures to local destinations.

The long-distance bus station has sleeper buses to Kūnmíng (Y180, 12 hours, eight daily from 3.30pm to 8.10pm). An express bus also leaves for Kūnmíng at 8.30am (Y202, 11 hours). Buses to Bāoshān (Y28 to Y35, five hours, 7.30am to 5.30pm) leave every 30 minutes. Xiàguān buses leave twice a day (Y87, 10.30am; Y93, 7.40pm).

Buses to local destinations north of Téngchōng (eg Mǎzhàn, Gùdōng, Ruidián, Diántān or Zizhi), either leave from, or pass through, Huoshan Lu in the northeast of town.

Getting Around

Téngchōng is small enough to walk around, but a bicycle is helpful for getting to some of the closer sights outside town – the surrounding scenery alone justifies a ride. You can hire a bike from a shop on Guanghua Lu (Y1 per hour).

Bus 2 runs from the town centre to the long-distance bus station.

AROUND TÉNGCHŌNG

There's a lot to see around Téngchōng but getting out to the sights is a bit tricky. Catching buses part of the way and hiking up to the sights is one possibility, while some of the closer attractions can be reached by bicycle.

Your other option is a hired van, which may be affordable if there are several of you; head down to the minibus stand just off the southern

end of Huoshan Lu or to the minibus stand for the Sea of Heat in the southwest of town.

Some highlights of the region are the traditional villages that are scattered between Téngchōng and Yúnfēng Shān (Cloudy Peak Mountain). The relatively plentiful public transport along this route means that you can jump on and off minibuses to go exploring as the whim takes you. Several travellers have recommended taking bus 2 to the end of the line south of town; along the route you can see some fine old villages and old architecture.

Héshùn 和顺

Southwest of town is the village of Héshùn, which is well worth a visit. It has been set aside as a retirement village for overseas Chinese, but it's of more interest as a quiet, traditional Chinese village with cobbled streets. There are some great old buildings in the village, providing lots of photo opportunities; a small **museum** (博物馆; *bówùguǎn*); and a famous old **library** (图书馆; *túshūguǎn*). There's no admission fee to the village itself but for any 'sights' in the village an all-inclusive fee of Y30 is charged.

Minibuses leave from the corner of Feicui Lu and Laifeng Xiang (Y1.50) in Téngchōng or you can hop on bus 3 that passes nearby. It's an easy bicycle ride out to the village but the ride back is an uphill slog.

Yúnfēng Shān 云峰山

A Taoist mountain located 47km north of Téngchōng, **Yúnfēng Shān** (Cloudy Peak Mountain; admission Y60), is dotted with 17th-century temples

and monastic retreats. Most people take the cable car (one way/return Y30/50), from where it's a 20-minute walk to **Dàxióng Bǎodiàn** (大雄宝殿), a temple at the summit. **Lǔzǔ Diàn** (鲁祖殿), the temple second from the top, serves up great vegetarian food at lunchtime. It's a quick walk down but it can be hard on the knees.

To get to the mountain, go to Huoshan Lu where you can flag down a bus to Ruidián or Diántān and get off at the turn-off to Yúnfēng (Y8). Alternatively, take a bus to Gùdōng (Y6) and then a microbus from here to the turn-off (Y2). From the turn-off you have to either hitch, or you can choose to take the lovely walk past the village of Héping to the pretty villages just before the mountain. Hiring a vehicle from Téngchōng to take you on a return trip will cost about Y300.

Volcanoes

Téngchōng County is renowned for its volcanoes, and although they have been behaving themselves for many centuries, the seismic and geothermal activity in the area indicates that they won't always continue to do so. The closest one to town is **Mǎ'ān Shān** (马鞍山; Saddle Mountain), around 5km to the northwest. It's just south of the main road to Yíngjiāng.

Around 22km to the north of town, near the village of Mǎzhàn, is the most accessible cluster of **volcanoes** (admission Y20). The main central volcano is known as **Dàkōng Shān** (大空山; Big Empty Hill), which pretty much sums it up, and to the left of it is the black crater of **Hēikōng Shān** (黑空山; Black Empty Hill). You can haul yourself up the steps for views of the surrounding lava fields (long dormant).

Minibuses run frequently to Mǎzhàn (Y5) from along Huoshan Lu, or take a Gùdōng-bound minibuses. From Mǎzhàn town it's a 10-minute walk or take a motor tricycle (Y5) to the volcano area.

Sea of Heat 热海

This is a cluster of hot springs, geysers and streams about 12km southwest of Téngchōng. In addition to the usual indoor baths, the **Sea of Heat** (Rèhǎi; adult/student Y30/20, with pool access Y100; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) features a couple of outdoor hot springs and a nice warm-water swimming pool. If the steep entrance fee puts you off swimming, then you can pay Y30 for a quick dip in the **Měimǔ Chí** (Beautiful Lady Pool) instead. Some of the springs here reach temperatures of 102°C.

The site is a popular local resort and there are several hotels.

THE BURMA ROAD

When Japanese troops occupied northern and eastern China in 1937, the Kuomintang government retreated inland to Chóngqing. As they looked for supply lines through which to receive Allied reinforcements, they turned back to the ancient overland trade routes with Burma and India, namely the Southwest Silk Road and the old Ambassador's road, once travelled by Marco Polo.

The Kūnmíng–Xiàguān section was built from 1934 to 1935, and in 1937, 200,000 labourers ('coolies' in the parlance of the day) were drafted in to build the section from Xiàguān to Wǎnding and then on to Mandalay in 1940 via the railhead of Lashio in Burma's Shan state. By February 1939, Allied supplies were being transported by boat to Rangoon, by train to Lashio in northern Burma and then trucked across the jungles and mountain ranges of Burma to Xiàguān and finally Kūnmíng, which rapidly became a major US air base.

In 1942 the Japanese overran Burma and cut the Burma Road and the allies were forced to build another road, from Ledo in northeast India to Bhamo. At one point there were even plans to link Lijiang to Assam and US Army engineers went as far as enlisting Joseph Rock's help in mapping the area. The road from Ledo became known as the Stillwell Road, after General Joseph Stillwell, who led the Allied forces in China, Burma and India from his base in Kūnmíng. The road was finally finished in 1944 and disused in 1945.

A short-term stopgap was an air supply line, which ran over the Hump from British India, and over the Himalayan Hump into the airfields of Kūnmíng and Lijiang. Over 1000 airmen died crossing the Hump, lost in territory so remote and wild that many bodies have still not been recovered. The US Army is currently investigating two sites in far eastern Tibet as the suspected site of a C-46 plane that crashed in 1946 en route from India.

The importance of the Burma Road diminished after WWII but is enjoying somewhat of a revival, though jade, teak, opium and heroin has replaced the military hardware.

The basic rooms at **Rèhǎi Zhāodàisù** (热海招待所; ☎ 515 0306; d & tr Y80) are a bit damp but come with free access to the hotel's bathing pool (not such a bonus once you've seen it). This place is to the left of the park entrance.

Rehai Grand Hotel (热海大酒店; Rèhǎi Dàjiǔdiàn; ☎ 515 0366; d Y280) has two branches, one within the park and the other just outside the main entrance.

Microbuses leave for Sea of Heat (Y5) when full from the Dongfang Lu turn-off in the south of town.

DÉHÓNG PREFECTURE 德宏州

Déhong Prefecture (Déhong Zhōu and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture), like Xishuangbanna, borders Myanmar and is heavily populated by distinctive minority groups. It's in the far west of Yunnan and is definitely more off-the-beaten track than Xishuangbanna.

Most Chinese tourists in Déhong are here for the trade from Myanmar that comes through the towns of Ruili and Wǎndīng – Burmese jade is a popular commodity and countless other items are spirited over the border. The border with Myanmar is punctuated by many crossings, some of them almost imperceptible, so be careful if you go wandering too close.

The most obvious minority groups in Déhong are the Burmese (normally dressed in their traditional saronglike *longyi*), Dai and Jingpo (known in Myanmar as the Kachin, a minority long engaged in armed struggle against the Myanmar government). For information on etiquette for visiting temples in the region see the boxed text, p327.

Around Déhong are signs in Chinese, Burmese, Dai and English. This is a border region getting rich on trade – in the markets you can see Indian jewellery, tinned fruits from Thailand, Burmese papier-mâché furniture, young bloods with wads of foreign currency, and Chinese plain-clothes police.

MÁNGSHÌ (LÙXÌ) 芒市 (潞西)

☎ 0692 / pop 15,057

Mángshì is Déhong's air link with the outside world. It's a large, sprawling town and there's little to see here. Most travellers simply pass through on their way to Ruili. If you fly in from Kunming there are minibuses running direct from the airport to Ruili and your best bet is to jump into one of these and head south.

If you're planning to fly out of Mángshì then you might have to stay overnight here, in which case there are enough things to keep you occupied for an afternoon or so.

Information

The **Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Dongfeng Lu) changes cash and travellers cheques and gives cash advances on credit cards. There is an ATM machine around the corner from the southern bus station on Weimin Lu.

Sights

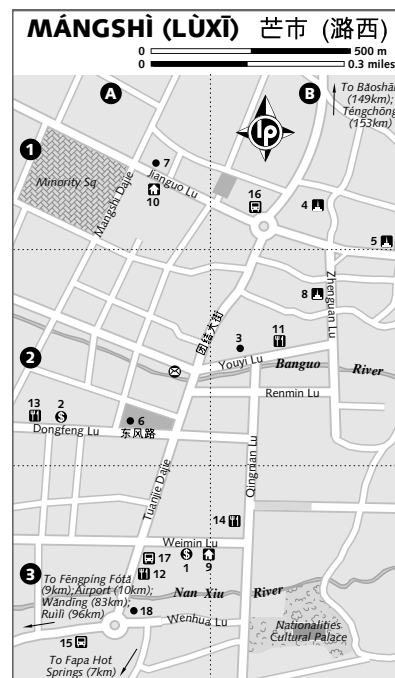
Down town, several temples stand out. **Puti Temple** (Pútí Sì; Zhenguan Lu; admission Y2) dates from 1674 but isn't too impressive nowadays.

Continue on to the next road crossing; the more interesting **Five Clouds Temple** (Wǔyún Sì) is found straight ahead down a mud track. Next to the temple there is a water tank and a tree wrapped in thread to form a spirit trap. It's getting more and more spruced up but is still worth a visit, as much for the mischief

MÁNGSHÌ BUS TIMETABLE

Bus services from Mángshì include the following:

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Bāoshān	35	4	11 daily	7.20am–3.30pm
Jīnghóng	239	24	daily	11.30am
Kūnmíng	160–180	10	3 daily	10.30am, 6.40pm, 9pm
Lǐjiāng	133	14	daily	5pm
Téngchōng	22	3½	8 daily	7.40am–4.20pm
Xiànguān	80–90	7	2 daily	11am, 8pm
Yíngjiāng	25	3	every 40min	7.30am–4.50pm



gang of oldsters that set up in front of it, as for the temple itself. Back at the crossroads a left turn will take you a few hundred metres to the **Fóguāng Sì** (建国路; Foguang Temple) and its cluster of stupas.

Halfway along Youyi Lu, tucked down a side street leading to a primary school, is the 200-year-old **Shùbāo Tǎ** (Embracing Tree Pagoda; admission when anyone is around Y2), so named because over the years it has fused with the surrounding tree. It's only worth a look from a distance, otherwise you'll be hit with an 'admission' ticket.

The town's most interesting market is in the north of town, opposite the Jiànguó Fàndiàn, though there is another market just west of the main square.

Not far from the south bus station is the **Nationalities Cultural Palace** (Mínzú Wénhuà Gōng; admission Y3), which is more like a large park full of elderly Chinese practising their taichi. There are a few small exhibits on nationalities and a couple of reconstructed Dai buildings.

About 7km south of town are the **Fapa Hot Springs** (Fàpà Wēnquán). There are good re-

INFORMATION

ATM 自动取款机	1	A3
Bank of China 中国银行	2	A2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Embracing Tree Pagoda 树包塔	3	B2
Five Clouds Temple 五云寺	4	B1
Foguang Temple 佛光寺	5	B1
Market 集贸市场	6	A2
Market 集贸市场	7	A1
Puti Temple 菩提寺	8	B2

SLEEPING

Chángjiāng Bīnguǎn 长江宾馆	9	A3
Xīngjiàn Jiùdiàn 兴建酒店	10	A1

EATING

Fei Ma Movie & TV Bar 飞马影像工作室	11	B2
Noodle Restaurant 炒面店	12	A3
Restaurants 餐厅	13	A2
Restaurants 餐厅	14	B3

TRANSPORT

Buses to Ruili 到瑞丽的公共汽车	15	A3
Buses to Wǎndīng 到畹町的公共汽车	(see 15)	
Long-Distance Bus Station 长途客运站	16	B1
Southern Bus Station 客运南站	17	A3
Yunnan Airlines 云南航空公司	18	A3

ports of this site from travellers who have cycled out to them.

If you arrive by plane, en route to town you will pass the attractive **Féngpíng Fótǎ**, a pagoda 9km southwest of town.

Sleeping & Eating

Chángjiāng Bīnguǎn (☎ 228 6055; 2 Weimin Lu; 为民路2号; s/d 80/100, without bathroom Y50/60; ☺) The impressively well-kept rooms belie the impression one gets from the locale and exteriors. Then again, feel free to snoop around a few – there are some mustier ones to be found.

Xīngjiàn Jiùdiàn (☎ 228 6788; Jianguo Lu; 建国路; s & d Y120) Smart hardwood floors and clean bathrooms – that's a good start to this new, homey hotel, well located down the street from the bus station.

The best places to head for food in Mángshì are the point-and-choose places on Dongfeng Lu located just after the market or along Qingnian Lu. Otherwise try the extremely popular **noodle restaurant** (Tuanjie Dajie) near the southern bus station, where you can get a big plate of fried noodles for Y5.

Fei Ma Movie & TV Bar (Fēi Mǎ Yǐngxiàng Gōngzuò Shì; Youyi Lu; 友谊路; ☎ 10am-late) serves coffee and makes valiant stabs at Western cuisine like pizza, serving it all up among the jungle-like décor.

Make sure you try a freshly squeezed lime juice (large/small Y3/2) from one of the numerous stands dotting the town.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 10km from the city. There are daily flights between Mángshì and Kùnmíng (Y790). There are no buses from Mángshì airport to the town centre so you'll have no choice but to negotiate with the taxi sharks at the airport (Y20 to Y25).

Minibuses to Ruili (Y30, two hours) usually wait at the airport for incoming flights. Buses leave the Mángshì **Yunnan Airlines** (Yúnnán Hángkōng Gōngsī; Wenhua Lu; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm) office for the airport around an hour before flight departures.

BUS

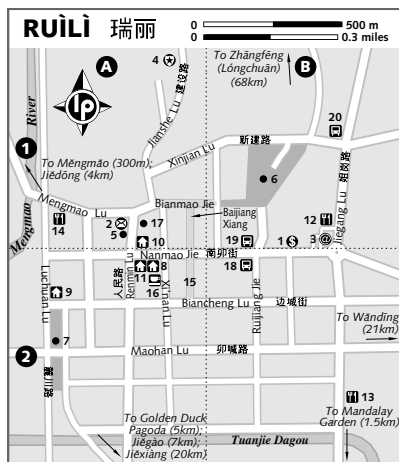
There are several bus stations in Mángshì. Both the long-distance bus station in the north of town and the southern bus station offer similar destinations at similar prices and schedules. If you don't find your bus at one, trudge along to the other. A bus stand a block southwest of the southern bus stand has the most frequent departures to Wándīng (Y20) and Ruili (Y20, 7am to 8pm). Minibuses leave when full so be prepared to wait.

RUILI 瑞丽

☎ 0692 / pop 13,299

Pity poor Ruili. Ruili was considered one of the 'it' places in Yúnnán, and young people with money would head here in droves, lured by the implicit promise that 'what-happens-in-Ruili-stays-in-Ruili'. A rite of passage for anyone living in/passing through Yúnnán was to check out the 'action' in town. Wannabe gangsters mingled with real gangsters, or at least everyone thought they were gangsters. Who the hell knew, so fuelled by dope, drink, and lust was everyone.

Trade with Myanmar fuelled the boom. The border only opened for business in the 1990s but no sooner had it opened than Ruili became a hotbed of trade, handling everything from raw goods to gems and arms. In return for the latter, China received huge quantities of heroin, which saw drug-taking and trafficking become part of everyday life. The local government, with help from Běijīng, retaliated and drug dealers were hauled before sentencing panels and then



INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1 B1
China Post & Telecom 中国邮政&中国电信	2 A1
Dielai Photograph Centre 蝶来摄影中心	(see 8)
Internet Café 网吧	3 B1
PSB 公安局	4 A1
Ruili Overseas Travel Company	(see 8)
Xinhua Bookshop 新华书店	5 A1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Jade Market 珠宝街	6 B1
Market 市场	7 A2

SLEEPING

Limin Binguān 利民宾馆	8 A2
New Kaitong International Hotel 新凯通国际大酒店	9 A2
Ruby Hotel 巴石酒店	10 A1
Ruili Binguān 瑞丽宾馆	11 A2

EATING

Burmese & Cantonese Restaurants 缅甸餐厅 广东餐厅	12 B1
Huafeng Market 华丰市场	13 B2
Kùnmíng Guòqiáo Míxiàn 昆明过桥米线	14 A1
Night Food Market 夜市	15 A2

DRINKING

Bobo's Cold Drinks Shop 步步冷饮店	16 A2
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TRANSPORT

China Eastern Airlines 东方航空公司	17 A1
Long-Distance Bus Station 长途客运站	18 B2
Minibus Stand 中巴车站	19 B1
North Bus Station 客运北站	20 B1

executed. Then trade began expanding, the money flowed to the next hot trade zone, and suddenly all those hot nights didn't seem too hot any more.

These days Ruili is, quite honestly, almost sterile. The dance halls and gambling dens are

gone and shiny shopping malls and modern hotels stand in their place.

About the raciest thing the average traveller will encounter these days is the odd trader a little overenthusiastically adjusting his sarong. (Well, those pretty lasses haven't all gone, of course.)

But despite the clean-up, Ruili has a great mix of Han Chinese, minorities and Burmese traders hawking jade, lively local markets and a laid-back Southeast Asian feel. The minority villages nearby are also reason to come; the stupas are in much better condition than those in Xishuāngbǎnnà, and it's worth getting a bicycle and heading out to explore.

Another draw for travellers is Myanmar, which lies only a few kilometres away from Ruili. Border-crossing restrictions are beginning to relax and although individual tourists are still not allowed to cross, organising permits to take you through the sensitive border area is becoming easier (see p353). New highways laid to facilitate border trade stretch all the way from the border to Mandalay, making what had been a horrible five-day journey much more sane. Foreign travellers may one day be able to re-create the 'Southern Silk Route', of which Ruili and Mandalay were a part.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Nanmao Jie) Provides all the usual services and will let you cash travellers cheques for US dollars in case you're headed to Myanmar.

China Post & Telecom (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng & Zhōngguó Diànxìn; cnr Mengmao Lu & Renmin Lu) Despite (or perhaps because?) of its border location, sending any kind of package abroad from this branch is a full-on nightmare if not completely impossible. For anything more complicated than buying stamps or making international calls, wait until you move on from Ruili.

Dielai Photograph Centre (Diélái Shèyǐng Zhōngxīn; Nanmao Jie) Burns CDs for Y10 per CD. Keep an eye out for the big yellow Kodak sign.

Internet café (wǎngbā; Nanmao Jie, cnr Jiegang Lu; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr)

Mandalay Garden (曼德丽花园; Mǎndèlǐ Huāyuán; ☎ 415 3924; www.mandalaygarden.com; 4 Mangsha Lu; 芒沙路4号) The place to head first if you need information on local travels, tours, bike rentals, and especially those pesky Myanmar overland visas.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjū; Jianshe Lu; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm) Just up the road from Ruili Binguān, 500m north of the corner of Nanmao Jie and Renmin Lu.

Ruili Overseas Travel Company (Ruili Hǎiwài Lǚyóu Gōngsī; ☎ 414 1880; 27 Nanmao Jie; ☎ 8-11.30am, 2.30-5.30pm & 7.30-10pm) If it happens to be staffed, you should be able to get information on the local area.

Xinhua Bookshop (Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; Renmin Lu) Sells the *Tourism and Traffic Map of Ruili*, which includes some English.

Dangers & Annoyances

Despite Ruili's new look, old problems die hard and prostitution remains an enormous industry in Ruili. You don't have to look very hard to see the evidence: brothels disguised as hairdressers fill the town.

All vehicles, including buses, leaving Ruili are searched. Authorities are usually more interested in locals, and foreigners are often completely ignored and not even asked for ID. However, some travellers have reported epic grillings bordering on the farcical.

Sights

A visit to Ruili is about atmosphere, people-watching, markets and aimless wandering rather than formal sights. It's small enough that you can cover most of it in an hour or so. The huge **market** in the west of town is most colourful by day, especially in the morning, when the stalls are lined with Burmese smokes, tofu wrapped in banana leaves, snack stalls and charcoal sellers. There's also whirl of people from nearby minority villages, Burma and far flung places like Pakistan.

At the other end of town, Ruili's **jade market** is a hoot and one of the best locations for people-watching. Most of Ruili's sights are outside town (see p353), and you'll need a bicycle to get out and see them.

Sleeping

There are some good deals to be found in Ruili's hotels, and all the accommodation is within easy walking distance of the main bus station.

Mandalay Garden (曼德丽花园; Mǎndèlǐ Huāyuán; ☎ 415 3924; www.mandalaygarden.com; 4 Mangsha Lu; 芒沙路4号; dm Y15; ☎) Might as well call it Moe's Place, that's its de facto name for good reason: Moe, the Burmese owner, is one of those utterly laid-back hosts who brings travellers back to his place just to hang out. It's just the place to chill and soak in the atmosphere of town (and the tons of travel information from other travellers and the staff). There's also a restaurant on site; it's a bit expensive but

PAYING THE PRICE

A major problem for the past two decades has been of the poppy-derived variety, Ruili being an entry point for Burmese opium headed to Hong Kong. This resulted in a serious IV drug-use problem in the Déhóng region in the 1980s and early 1990s, and a spike in HIV and its pernicious sibling AIDS. According to Unesco reports, China's first AIDS cases (146) were reported in Yúnnán in 1989 (obviously the government was a mite slow in acknowledging the mere existence of HIV), and by 1999 the province reportedly had 44% of all AIDS cases in China.

The province, with Běijīng's help, poured millions of yuán into antidrug efforts along the border with Myanmar. And it had an effect: in the first month it was instituted over 1.8 tonnes of drugs were seized, and new cases of HIV infection have dropped by 30% since 2004.

This is not, of course, to say that the problem has been solved. Those yawn-inducing bus searches are strictly aimed at those attempting to smuggle drugs and if you're dumb enough to possess or – even more insanely stupid – transport, be well aware that the officials do not mess around if they catch you.

excellent, serving Burmese, minority, Indian, Japanese and Western food. It can even arrange cooking lessons or hook you up to teach local schoolkids.

Limín Bīnguǎn (☎ 4142249; Nanmao Jie; 南卯街; dm Y20, s & d Y40-80; ♿) There is little to distinguish the singles and doubles, so you might as well go for the cheaper ones. Dorm rooms can get hot and stuffy and the shared bathrooms can be noisy. And certainly expect little from the staff. You can rent bicycles here but some of them are better than others so have a look at a few.

Ruby Hotel (☎ 419 9088; Nanmao Jie; 南卯街; s/d Y80/180) After taking in the bright green exterior and the halls bedecked with pebble-encrusted wall panels, the very plain rooms, while clean, are a minor letdown. No matter, there's more than enough atmosphere at the terrace bar with its thatched huts and floor cushions.

Ruili Bīnguǎn (☎ 410 0555; Nanmao Jie; 南卯街; s & d Y200) Across the street from the Ruby Hotel, this place has no fireworks but is comfortably average. Outside of holidays, rooms rarely go for more than Y100, though deft bargainers have gotten rooms for less.

New Kaitong International Hotel (Xīn Kāitōng Guójī Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 415 777; fax 415 6190; 2 Biancheng Lu; 边城路2号; d Y360, discounted d Y180; ♿) This is the original luxury hotel in Ruili and it offers good discounts which make it a worthwhile option. The outdoor swimming pool is perhaps the best feature and is open to nonresidents for Y10.

Eating & Drinking

For good Burmese food, there are several restaurants in a small alley off Jiegang Lu. The one at the top of the northwestern corner is

particularly good and sees a lot of Burmese patrons. This is also the spot to go for Thai Mekong whisky, served Thai-style with soda water and ice.

There are also lots of Cantonese restaurants here. At night a small but lively market sets up on Baijiang Xiang between Bianmao Jie and Biancheng Lu.

Huafeng Market (Huáfēng Shìchǎng; Jiegang Lu; 姐岗路; dishes from Y4) Ruili's version of a traveller's culinary institution is this busy-busy market, where you'll find a huge, thriving outdoor food court with an incredible selection of food, including Thai, Burmese, Chinese and even some Western dishes on offer.

Kūnmíng Guòqiáo Mǐxiàn (昆明过桥米线; Mengmao Lu) You may have had your fill of across-the-bridge noodles (*guòqiáo mǐxiàn*) while in Kūnmíng, but this place is charming with its dark wood furniture and blue-and-white checked tablecloths. There's a little garden with outdoor seating in back.

Bo Bo's Cold Drinks Shop (Bùbù Lěngyǐndiàn; Baijiang Xiang; drinks from Y3) If Huafeng Market is the institution for eats, then Bo Bo's is the place to go to quaff a beer (or non-alcoholic drink) and chat idly with the *longyi*-clad Burmese guys. Serves excellent fresh fruit juices and small meals in a bright eating area buzzing with low-key commotion.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Ruili has daily flight connections to Kūnmíng via Mángshì, which is a two-hour drive away. See p350 for details. You can buy tickets at

China Eastern Airlines (Dōngfāng Hángkōng Gōngsī; ☎ 411 1111; Renmin Lu; ✈ 8.30am-6pm). Shuttle buses leave daily from the office, three hours before scheduled flights (Y60). You can also use the ticket office to book and reconfirm return flights – do so early as this is an increasingly popular flight.

BUS

There are two bus stations in Ruili, the long-distance bus station in the centre of town and the north bus station at the top of Jiegang Lu. Head to the north bus station if you're trying to get to Mángshì (Y20-25, 1½ hours, last bus 6pm, leaves when full); for everything else, you're better off going to the long-distance station.

For local destinations, minibuses and vans leave from the minibus stand near the jade market, or you can just flag one down in the street. Destinations include Wǎndìng (Y5), the border checkpoint at Jiégào (Y5), and the village of Nóngdǎo (Y8). Buses to Zhāngfēng (Y10, one hour) leave from Xinjian Lu.

TO MYANMAR

To cross from China into Myanmar, travellers must have the correct visa, travel permits and be part of an official 'group'. The group, which might consist entirely of yourself and no-one else, will be escorted from Jiégào in China to Hsipaw in Myanmar, an eight-hour drive from the border. Once you reach Hsipaw you can wave good bye to your guide and are free to travel on your own further south to Mandalay, Rangoon and so on.

Mandalay Garden (曼德丽花园; Mǎndé lì Huāyuán; ☎ 415 3924; www.mandalaygarden.com; 4 Mangsha Lu; 芒沙路4号) Your best source of up-to-the-minute information.

Ko Wai Lin Travel (Map p222; ☎ 0871-313 7555; myanmarwailin@yahoo.com; Room 221, Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Lu, Kūnmíng) can arrange permit and

group travel. Remember it's not possible to organise a visa for Myanmar in Ruili and you will have to do this in Kūnmíng at the Myanmar consulate (see p470).

Getting Around

Ruili is easily seen on foot, but all the most interesting day trips require a bicycle. Ask at your accommodation for the best place to rent one. A flat rate for a taxi ride inside the city should be Y5, and up for negotiation from there. There are also cheaper motor and cycle rickshaws.

AROUND RUILI

Most of the sights around Ruili can be explored easily by bicycle. It's worth making frequent detours down the narrow paths leading off the main roads to visit minority villages. The people are friendly, and there are lots of photo opportunities. The *Tourism and Traffic Map of Ruili* shows the major roads and villages.

The shortest ride is to turn left at the corner north of the post office and continue out of the town proper into the little village of Měngmǎo. There are half a dozen Shan temples scattered about; the fun is in finding them.

Golden Duck Pagoda 弄安金鸭塔

In the outskirts of town to the southwest, on the main road, this pagoda (Nòng'ān Jīnyā Tǎ) is an attractive stupa set in a temple courtyard. It was established to mark the arrival of a pair of golden ducks that brought good fortune to what was previously an uninhabited marshy area.

Temples

Just past Golden Duck Pagoda is a crossroad and a small wooden temple. The road to the right (west) leads to the villages of Jiěxiàng and Nóngdǎo; on the way are a number of

RUILI BUS TIMETABLE

Buses from Ruili long-distance bus station:

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hours)	Frequency	Departs
Bāoshān	45	6	every 30-40min	6am-2.30pm
Jīnghóng	195	25	daily	8.30am
Kūnmíng	190	16	hourly	8am-8pm
Téngchōng	25	6	every 40-50min	5.40-10.40am
Xiànguān	116	12	hourly	4-8pm

small temples, villages and stupas. None are spectacular but the village life is interesting and there are often markets near the temples.

The first major Dai temple is **Hansha Zhuang Temple** (喊沙庄寺; Hānshā Zhuāng Sì), a fine wooden structure with a few resident monks. It's set a little off the road and a green tourism sign marks the turn-off. The surrounding Dai village is interesting.

Another 20 minutes or so further down the road, look out for a white stupa on the hillside to the right. This is **Léizhuāngxiāng** (雷奘相), Ruili's oldest stupa, dating back to the middle of the Tang dynasty. There's a nunnery in the grounds of the stupa as well as fantastic views of the Ruili area. Once the stupa comes into view, take the next path to the right that cuts through the fields. You will see blue signs written in Chinese and Dai pointing the way through a couple of Dai villages. When you get to market crossroads at the centre of the main village, take the right path. You'll need to push your bicycle for the last ascent to the stupa. In all, it should take you about 50 minutes to cycle here from Golden Duck Pagoda.

About 2km past the town of Jiěxiàng is **Dēnghǎnnòng Zhuang Temple** (等喊弄庄寺; Dēnghǎnnòng Zhuāng Sì), a wooden Dai temple with pleasant surroundings.

It's possible to cycle all the way to Nóngdǎo, around 29km southwest of Ruili. There's a solitary hotel in town that has cheap doubles or you can return to Ruili on one of the frequent minibuses.

Jiégào Border Checkpoint

姐告边检点

There's not much at this checkpoint (Jiégào Bianjiǎn Diǎn) but border fanatics will marvel at how everything seems so relaxed on both sides of the – quite literally – bamboo curtain. On a thumb of land jutting into Myanmar, Jiégào is the main checkpoint for a steady stream of cross-border traffic. As with Ruili this place has seen its popular casinos and other dens of iniquity replaced by lemonade stands and cheap electronic shops. To get here, continue straight ahead from Golden Duck Pagoda, cross the Myanmar bridge over Ruili Jiāng and you will come to Jiégào, about 7km from Ruili (p353).

Microbuses shuttle between the border and Ruili's long-distance bus station when full for Y5 or you can charter one for around Y25 to Y30. Buses continue until late at night.

Wanding Border Checkpoint

畹町边检站

East of Ruili lies Wǎndīng (Wǎndīng Biānjiǎn Zhàn), a second checkpoint for crossing into Myanmar. It's not as busy here, nor is it as interesting as Jiégào, but if you're a serious borderholic then it's worth making the 30-minute drive here just so you can take a photo and say you've been.

Staff at the foreign affairs office of the PSB, just across from the Chinese border checkpoint, seem quite easy-going, and although they will not help you sneak into Myanmar, they are otherwise accommodating. Besides, so underwhelming is the border trade zone here that they look bored enough to have a chuckle at your request.

It's worth climbing up to the north of town to take a look and spend some time at the **Wanding Forest Reserve** (畹町森林公园; Wǎndīng Sēnlín Gōngyuán; admission Y2). There are some pleasant walks. Avoid the zoo, home to three psychotic monkeys, a couple of peacocks and an unidentifiable ball of fur that was either fast asleep or dead.

Local places to stay might be able to provide information on **river trips** that include a barbecue lunch in a minority village. Prices vary depending on the number of participants, but you should be able to do it for around Y50 per person.

Alternatively, it is possible to catch a lift on a boat with locals. Take a minibus in the direction of Mángshì and get off at the bridge that connects with the main Ruili–Mángshì road. Travellers have caught boats back to the second bridge closer to Ruili and then hitched back to Ruili or Wǎndīng. Some very strenuous haggling is required for boat trips.

Minibuses for Wǎndīng (Y10) leave Ruili when full, and vice versa.

Golden Pagoda 姐勒金塔

A few kilometres to the east of Ruili on the road to Wǎndīng is the Golden Pagoda (Jiělè Jintǎ), a fine structure that dates back 200 years.

Bàngmáhè 棒麻贺

Another possible cycling route takes you west of Ruili, past the old town of Měngmǎo, now a suburb of Ruili. After 4km, just past the village of Jiědōng, a turn-off north leads to Bàngmáhè village, a Jingpo settlement with a small waterfall nearby.

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