

Guǎngxī 广西



The mysterious karst peaks of Guilín and Yángshuò may lure most travellers to this province, but more and more, it's Guǎngxī's mosaic of nationalities that makes people linger.

While the limestone scenery, dotted with rice terraces, covered bridges and drum towers makes for a bewitching combination of sights and is one of the most photographed parts of China, those who head off to Guizhōu or Guǎngdōng before dipping their toes further into the province are missing out on a great deal.

The less touristed south has China's best mainland beaches, the rock paintings on Left River (Zuǒ Jiāng), a border crossing with Vietnam and the binational Detian Waterfall. It's also where you'll hear Zhuang or Vietnamese spoken in the streets and see these languages sharing street signs with Chinese characters.

Nearly 75% of Guǎngxī is non-Han. Today the Zhuang are China's largest minority, with well over 15 million people concentrated in Guǎngxī. The Zhuang are virtually indistinguishable from the Han Chinese, and the province is often referred to as the Guǎngxī Zhuang Autonomous Region. The province is also home to smaller numbers of Dong, Maonan, Mulao, Jing (Vietnamese Gin) and Yi peoples.

Guǎngxī roughly translates as 'vast, boundless west', and for centuries its remoteness and challenging topography kept it poverty-stricken (a residual problem out of the main cities). Its area of 236,000 sq km ranks it ninth in size nationally; and with nearly 46 million inhabitants, it's the 11th most populated province in the country.

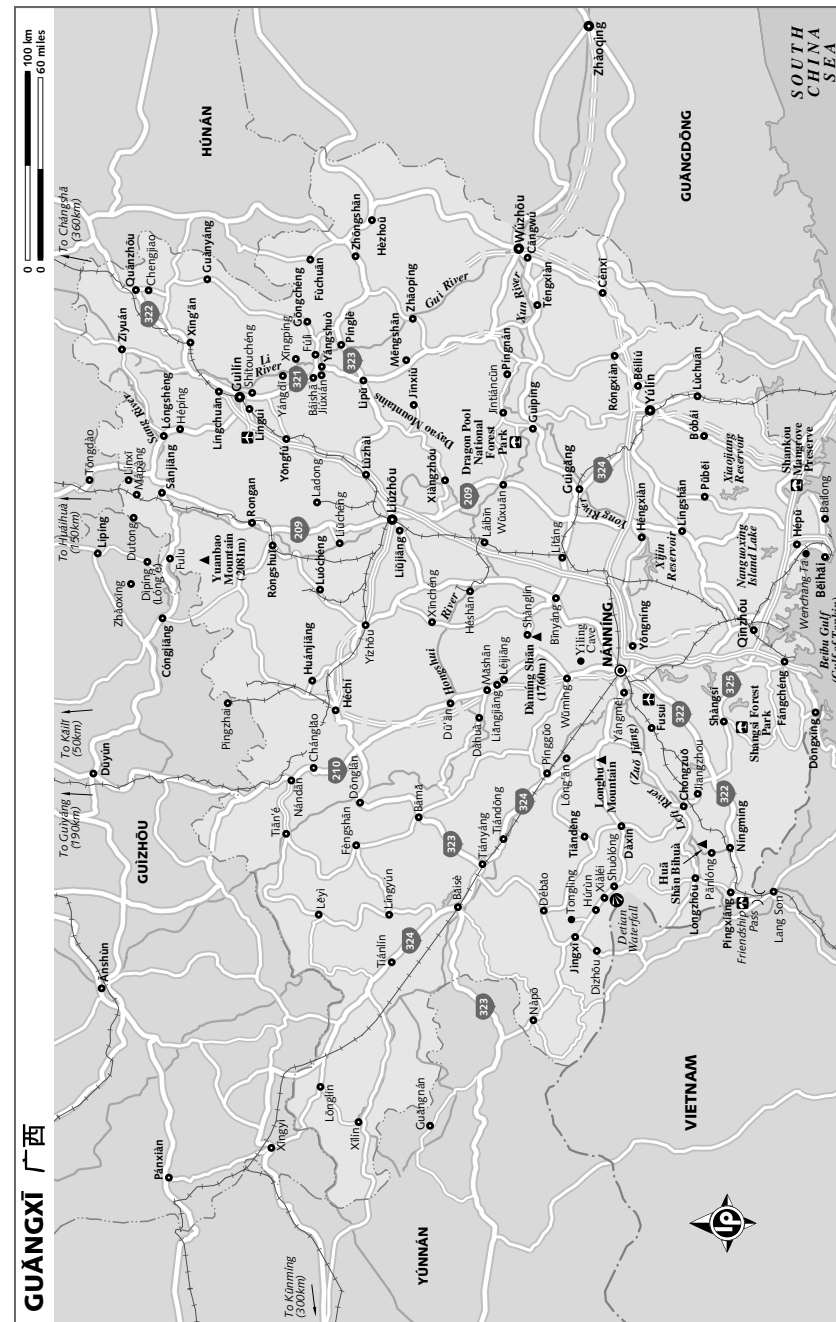
HIGHLIGHTS

- Take in China's legendary karst scenery as you cruise along the **Li River** (Lǐ Jiāng; p656) from Guilín
- Pedal through the rice paddies and limestone peaks of **Yángshuò** (p656) in search of ancient villages
- Trek the **Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces** (p663) near Lóngshèng and sleep in a Zhuang village
- Enter Guizhōu province via the 'back door' of **Sǎnjiāng** (p665) – a lush, isolated region of lovely villages, river ferries and wooden bridges



POPULATION: 45.9 MILLION

www.gxi.gov.cn



GUǎNGXĪ

GUǎNGXĪ

History

In 214 BC a Qin dynasty army finally conquered (on its third attempt) what is now Guǎngdōng and eastern Guǎngxī, overpowering the Zhuang people, who found sympathy in the northern regions with the Yao (Mien) and Miao (H'mong) people.

Unlike the Zhuang, who were ultimately immersed in Chinese customs and eventually assimilated, the Yao and Miao remained in the hill regions and were often cruelly oppressed by the Han. There was continuous conflict between the Chinese and the hill tribes, leading to uprisings in the 1830s and again during the Taiping Rebellion, which began in Guǎngxī. Compounding these conflicts was the rough land and its great distance from central power.

The Qin built China's first canal (Ling Canal), but made little headway with it. The province was a backwater until the 20th century when anti-Kuomintang forces began to

modernise it in the 1920s. WWII devastated much of the progress. Herculean transport infrastructure laid down in the 1960s to supply Vietnam in its war against the US – and more recently, tourists flocking to Guǐlín – have energised the province economically.

Climate

Latitudinally, Guǎngxī approximates balmy Florida in the USA, but don't just pack a bathing suit. Tropical heat and humidity are the norm (average temperatures range from 13°C in January to 28°C in August), but a north/south distinction exists. Northern Guǎngxī rises gradually into the Yúnnán plateau and, though still subtropical, highlands here are much more temperate, even in summer; frost and snow are not unheard of in winter.

Much of the annual 1500mm to 2000mm of rain falls from June to August; less heavy (but more constant) early rains in March bring

THE DRAGON TO THE NORTH

Uneasy neighbours, China and Vietnam have been at odds for more than 2100 years. Han dynasty armies conquered the first Vietnamese patriot, Tíe Dà, in the 2nd century BC. After dozens of attempts, Vietnam eventually threw off the yoke of imperialism in the 10th century AD.

After WWII, Western forces sent a 200,000-strong force of Chinese Nationalists to northern Vietnam to demobilise Japanese troops. The two nations have regularly been at war ever since, apart from when China supported Vietnam during the (American) Vietnam War.

In 1979, open war broke out. The Chinese incursion was impelled (according to the Chinese) after the Vietnamese signed a treaty with the Soviet Union – another border country with a Chinese love-hate relationship. Vietnam had also invaded Cambodia to topple the Khmer Rouge. Finally, and most importantly, Vietnam had seized the assets of and deported (or forced out) up to 250,000 *huàqiáo* (overseas Chinese), most of them to Yúnnán and Guǎngxī.

The Chinese also claim Vietnamese forces crossed the border first. The Vietnamese of course deny this (most Western sources back the Vietnamese version). Over 16 days, scores of people were killed and five provincial border towns in Vietnam were heavily damaged. Bizarrely, both sides claimed to have won this battle.

Major battles erupted again in 1984 in several areas of Yúnnán and along much of Guǎngxī's border. This time the Vietnamese used up to 10 expanded divisions to attack; while they didn't seize any land, they did inflict a humiliating lesson on China.

In 1997 Vietnam took its protests over China's selling of oil exploration rights in its waters to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which sided with Vietnam. Daily newspapers ran front-page banner headlines screaming about major Chinese border transgressions. This dispute continues to this day.

To everyone's surprise, China conceded on border issues, agreeing to clear landmines from 10 sq km. Cynics argue China did this as much to facilitate further trade – which had quadrupled from 1992 to 1997 along the border – as to encourage friendly relations. Soon after, Běijíng greeted a high-level contingent of Vietnamese, and historic sites in Dōngxíng (Guǎngxī) dating Sino-Viet ties to the 19th century were restored and opened to the public. Perhaps most symbolic: in mid-1999, direct postal links, which had previously gone through Singapore, were finally restored through Guǎngxī.

dismal, cold damp. Note that coastal regions can get hit by typhoons starting in summer. May, September and October are generally the best times to visit.

Language

Language geeks will have a blast in Guǎngxī; you'll hear Cantonese along the Guǎngdōng border; see bilingual Chinese-Vietnamese signs to the southern coast and western regions, and run into the Zhuang romanisation system (quite different from standard pinyin but still understandable) prominently displayed on Nanning's street signs. Numerous minority languages like Yi, Miao and even some Hakka round out the mix.

Getting There & Around

The Nankun rail line into Yúnnán boasts some of China's most modern trains and tracks; Guǐlín's airport is one of the nation's busiest and most efficient. Guǎngxī also offers hydrophiles the chance to hop ferries to Hǎinán.

An intraprovincial transport option is found in northern Guǎngxī, where many minority villages are reached only by long-poled river ferries.

Nǎnníng 南宁

☎ 0771 / pop 1.3 million

Nanning is a hard city to really love. It's got discouraging urban sprawl, no major sites and even worse, doesn't inspire the kind of enthusiasm among locals that sometimes win over visitors.

However, Nanning has one of the friendliest populations of any city in the south and there's plenty to keep you busy whether you're just passing through or awaiting for a Vietnam visa.

Běijíng's thriving border trade and increasingly friendly ties with Hanoi makes Nanning an ideal base to leave or enter Vietnam, and there are several places in town that can help with travel arrangements.

Orientation

In the north is the train station. Nanning's main artery, Chaoyang Lu, runs roughly north-south towards Yong River (Yōng Jiāng), which bisects the city. Halfway down Chaoyang Lu is Chaoyang Garden.

MAPS

The *Nanning Street Map* (Y4) is sold at bookstores and kiosks around town.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Foreign Languages Bookstore (Wǎiwén Shūdiàn); Minzhu Lu) Packed with novels, dictionaries and phrase books in everything from English to Vietnamese.

Xinhua Bookshop (Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; Xinhua Lu) Has four levels jam-packed with books.

INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

Internet café (wǎngbā; per hr Y1.50) On Xinhua Lu, across the street from Xinhua Bookstore.

MONEY

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Minzhu Lu) This friendly and good-humoured branch gives credit-card advances and changes travellers cheques and cash. If asked to write down 'reasons for cashing cheques/exchanging money' resist the impulse to write 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' or similar. Staff speak very good English here. An answer like 'shopping' or 'buying bus tickets' will suffice.

POST

Post office (yóujú; Minzhu Lu) The McDonald's of Nanning post offices, this branch has you in and out in minutes and gives you service with a smile. Umpteen times more efficient and less bureaucratic than the city's bigger branches.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

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

TRAVEL AGENCIES

China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójì Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 280 4960; 40 Ximin Lu; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Only an OK place for independent travellers to get information. Also issues one-month Vietnamese visas (1-/2-/3-day processing Y650/550/450).

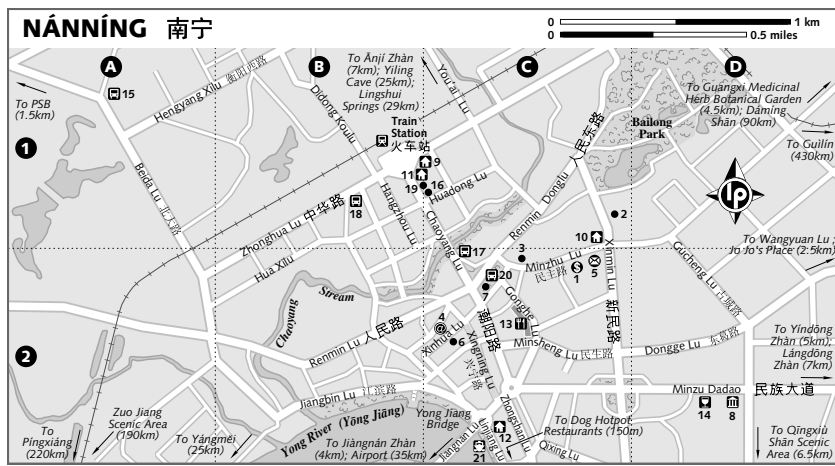
Guangxi Overseas Travel Service (Guǎngxī Hǎiwài Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 261 2553) One building over from CITS. A one-month Vietnamese Visa (Y400) takes three days to process. Open Monday to Friday, though staff sometimes hang around on weekends too.

Sights & Activities

GUANGXI PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

广西省博物馆

This **museum** (Guǎngxī Shěng Bówùguǎn; cnr Gucheng Lu & Minzu Dadao; admission Y8; ☎ 8.30-11.50am & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) offers a browse through 50,000 years of Guǎngxī history, the highlight being the world's largest bronze drum collection. In the tree-filled rear garden sit several



INFORMATION		DRINKING	
Bank of China 中国银行	1 C2	Guangxi Provincial Museum 广西省博物馆	8 D2
CITS 中国国际旅行社	2 C1	Feeling 57 Bar 飞来57酒吧	14 D2
Foreign Languages Bookstore 外文书店	3 C2	TRANSPORT	
Guangxi Overseas Travel Service 广西海外旅游社	(see 2)	Beida Kèyùn Zhōngxīn 北大客运中心	15 A1
Internet Café 网吧	4 C2	Bus Ticket Window	16 C1
Post Office 邮局	5 C2	Buses to Yángmēi 到杨美的汽车	17 C2
Xinhua Bookshop 新华书店	6 C2	Buses to Yángmēi 到杨美的汽车	18 B1
		CAAC 中国民航	19 B1
		Chaoyang Garden Bus Stop 朝阳花园	20 C2
		Ferry Dock 南宁客运码头	21 C2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING	
Chaoyang Garden 朝阳花园	7 C2	Food Stalls & Cafés	13 C2
		Pantry 福林诺食品	(see 8)
		SLEEPING	
		Cháoyáng Fàndiàn 朝阳饭店	9 C1
		Xiángyún Dàjiǔdiàn 翔云大酒店	10 C1
		Yínhé Dàjiǔdiàn 银河大酒店	11 B1
		Yǒngjiāng Bīnguǎn 邕江宾馆	12 C2

full-size examples of Dong and Miao houses and a nail-less bridge.

The museum garden is a magnet for wedding photographers and also houses the giant drum restaurant. Catch bus 6 from the train station.

QINGXIU SHAN SCENIC AREA

青秀山风景区

A favourite summer retreat since the Sui and Tang dynasties, this scenic area (Qingxiu Shān Fēngjǐngqū) offers verdant woods, springs, lakes and landscaped gardens. There are modest but scenic peaks of up to 180m that can easily be scaled for a more elevated perspective.

Local bus 10 heads to the park from the train station, but you still have a fair walk to the entrance. Tour buses to the park also depart from Chaoyang Garden.

GUANGXI MEDICINAL HERB

BOTANICAL GARDEN 广西药用植物园

This fascinating garden (Guǎngxī Yàoyòng Zhīwùyuán; ☎ 561 7166; admission Y10; ☽ dawn to dusk) is the largest of its kind in China, with more than 2400 species of medicinal plants. The botanical gardens will be especially impressive if you are lucky enough to tag along with one of the centre's few English speakers. Stuck in an industrial wasteland northeast of the city, it takes about 30 minutes to get there on bus 101 or 102 from Chaoyang Garden. A taxi from town costs about Y25.

Tours

If you are in town during the summer months, take a wander along the pier off Linjiang Lu, south of the Yong Jiang bridge. Two-hour river tours often leave from here during high season.

Sleeping

Cháoyáng Fàndiàn (☎ 211 6388; www.cy-hotel.com; 86 Chaoyang Lu; 朝阳路86号; dm from Y18, s/d Y50-150, tr Y165-205, q Y155; ☹) Though it's kind of like staying in a giant state hospital, this place is nevertheless a rollicking good budget choice. It has a 24-hour store, several rooms with computers/internet, and the constant flood of humanity trundling in from the nearby train station is expertly handled with good humour by staff. One caution: hot water in dorms runs between 5pm and 1am only.

Xiángyún Dàjiǔdiàn (☎ 210 1999; xyjd@public.nn.gx.cn; 59 Xinmin Lu; 新民路59号; s/d/t Y320-460/380-430/520) This hotel is dark, severe and very 1970s but it still comes very much recommended. The discounts are substantial, internet in the business centre is only Y5 and the staff go out of their way for guests. Mouldy bathmats and dirty drain strings are the only let downs. Air-conditioning May to September only.

Yínhé Dàjiǔdiàn (Milky Way Hotel; ☎ 211 6688; www.yhhotel.com; 84 Chaoyang Lu; 朝阳路84号; s/d Y330-380/380; ☹) Also near the train station, the accommodation here is generically decorated but has newish wood furniture. Many rooms also have computers with internet. Unlike the Cháoyáng Fàndiàn, staff here don't cope well with the tour throngs and it can get quite chaotic.

Yǒngjiāng Bīnguǎn (☎ 280 0888; fax 280 0535; 1 Linjiang Lu; 临江路1号; s & d from Y800; ☹) Deluxe rooms overlooking the Yong River are worth the splurge for the attention to detail; wash cloths are artistically folded, desks are outfitted with every conceivable office supply. Regular standard rooms are completely unremarkable and, even with discounts, aren't worth the price. Head to the Xiángyún Dàjiǔdiàn, where better quality standard rooms can be had for much less.

Eating

Nánning is famous for its *gǒuròu huǒguō* (dog hotpot; 狗肉火锅). Zhongshan Lu, south of Qixing Lu, is where the locals go for this popular winter dish. There are tons of restaurants here. Just follow the crowds and take your pick.

The centrally located Gonghe Lu is another great place to look for sustenance. The southern end near Minsheng Lu is sprinkled with Chinese cafés and slick little Chinese fast-food joints. The road further north is packed with

very friendly dumpling food stalls and point and choose places. **Wangyuan Lu** (望园路) is the place to head to if you want western fare or coffee.

Feeling 57 Bar (Fēilái 57 Jiǔba; 57 Minzu Lu; ☎ 8pm to late) For drinking and occasional live music, this bar near the Minority Museum is another popular watering-hole for expats. Many of them rave about the music and reasonably priced drinks.

Jo Jo's Place (Wangyuan Lu; ☎ 10am-late) This place, just south of Pinghu Lu, is popular with expats. There's a pool table, an extensive menu and a motley mix of foreigners that can include anyone from English teachers to Brazilian and Russian circus performers.

Pantry (Fúlin Zhǐpí Shípín; 34 Minzu Dadao) A great option for self-catering. It stocks hard to find cheeses and cold cuts. It's next to the Minority Museum on the left-hand side.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Domestic airlines fly everywhere, and there are multiple departures daily to almost all major cities, including Guǎngzhōu (Y730), Shànghǎi (Y1660), Shēnzhèn (Y890), Kūnmíng (Y630), Běijīng (Y2050), Guìyáng (Y650) and Hǎikǒu (Y610).

Irregularly scheduled international flights leave throughout the week for Hong Kong and Hanoi (Hénnèi).

Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 243 1459; 82 Chaoyang Lu; ☎ 24hrs) is generally efficient, though travel agencies often have lower prices. From 8pm to 8am doors are barred shut and tickets are sold from the window round the side of the building.

BUS

Bus stations are sprinkled throughout Nánning. You can buy tickets for most destinations from a window at the corner of Chaoyang Lu and Huadong Lu. This is a good idea as the city's stations can get chaotic.

The Lángdōng Zhàn bus station is east of town along the expressway. Frequent express buses depart to: Běihǎi (Y55, 2½hrs), Guǎngzhōu (Y180, 10 hours), Guílín (Y80 to Y110, four to 4½ hours), Guìpíng (Y50 to Y63, three hours), Lǐzhōu (Y60, three hours) and Wúzhōu (Y90 to Y110, six hours). Bus 6 runs to the train station.

Northwest of the train station is the Beidà Kèyùn Zhōngxīn bus station; anything to the

north departs from here, including buses to Dàxīn (Y30, 2½ hours) or Jìngxī (Y50, seven hours) and Bǎisè (Y50, three to four hours). Bus 52 links this station to the Yíndōng Zhàn via the train station.

For south-bound destinations, use the mad-house Jiāngnán Zhàn bus station, located south of Yong River. If the crowds toss you around too much, go to the information booth and look pathetic. Staff are usually too frazzled to be friendly but they do speak some English and will help foreigners buy tickets and walk them through the terminal to find their buses.

There's a daily Hanoi-bound bus (Y110, 8am, 10 hours). It will take you to Friendship Pass, after which you cross into Vietnam on foot and then board a Vietnamese bus the rest of the way to Hanoi. Bus 41 departs from Chaoyang Garden and runs along Chaoyang Lu to this station. Buses leave Ānjí Zhàn station every 15 minutes for Wǔmíng, useful for travellers heading to Yiling Cave.

TRAIN

To get to Píngxiáng and the Vietnam border, consider the convenient morning train (Y40 to Y55, 7.58am, 3½ hours).

Major direct rail links with Nánning include Běijīng (T6, 9.50am, 29 hours), Chéngdū (K142, 5.51pm, 37 hours), Guǎngzhōu (K366, 11.55pm, 14 hours), Kūnmíng (K393, 6.10pm, 14 hours), Shànghǎi (K182, 9.26am, 30 hours), Xī'ān (K316, 10.47am, 36 hours) and Guǐlín (N802, 8.25am, five hours).

The T6 for Běijīng also passes through Liǔzhōu (three hours), Guǐlín (five hours), Wūhàn (17 hours), Zhèngzhōu (22 hours) and Shìjiāzhuāng (26 hours). The K142 to Chéngdū passes through Guiyáng (19 hours) and Chóngqīng (29 hours).

The T905/M2 from Nánning to Dong Dang (Tóngdēng) in Vietnam departs at 9.15pm, but think twice before hopping on. It takes forever with lengthy delays in Píngxiáng and at customs.

Getting next-day tickets at the train station doesn't seem to be too problematic. Foreigners can use any window, though window 15 is supposed to be 'the one'; window 16 is the place to go to change tickets.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The most efficient way to reach the airport is by CAAC buses (Y15, 40 minutes), which

depart regularly from the CAAC office on Chaoyang Lu (p643).

A taxi from downtown will cost Y80 to 100.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

There are abundant taxis and motorcycle taxis plying the streets. Taxi rides usually start at Y7; motorcycle taxis are around Y5.

Buses generally run from 6am to around 11pm and fares start at Y1.

AROUND NÁNNING

Yángměi 扬美

This beautifully preserved 17th-century town on the Yong River (26km west of Nánning, admission Y10) has become a popular day trip from Nánning. Guides will offer their services upon arrival; some speak a little English.

The best way to get around the town is to hire an ox cart for the half-day (Y10).

Buses leave from a bus stop just north of Chaoyang Garden or from a stop two blocks west of the train station, but only in high season. A taxi to the village costs Y50 to Y60.

Yiling Cave 伊岭岩

Twenty-five kilometres north of Nánning, **Yiling Cave** (Yiling Yán; admission Y45; ☎ 8am-5pm daily) is a bit of a tourist trap, but fun all the same with its stalagmites and galactic lights. The surrounding countryside is also worth exploring.

Minibuses run from Chaoyang Garden on most weekends (especially during summer). Or, take bus 41 to the Ānjí Zhàn bus station where you can buy a ticket to Yiling Cave on a bus for Wǔmíng (武鸣; every 15 minutes, 6.15am to 10pm).

North of Yiling Cave is **Lingshui Springs** (灵水泉; Língshuǐ Quán), essentially a large outdoor mineral swimming pool. To reach the springs, continue on the bus past Yiling to Wǔmíng, and catch a motorcycle taxi (Y3) the remaining few kilometres.

Dà míng Shān 大明山

Some 90km northeast of Nánning is **Dà míng Shān** (admission Y20), an impressive mountain with an average elevation of over 1200m, and a maximum height of 1760m. With more than 1700 species of plants, the mountain is a provincially protected zone. The majority of the scenic spots are accessible within a day's hike, however, most visitors organise a

guide to show them around because paths are poorly marked.

Most people spend the night in the small forestry village of **Dà míng Shān** at the base of the mountain. Try to make your sleeping arrangements beforehand. Accommodation here isn't necessarily staffed 24-hours outside of high season unless they are expecting someone. Try the **room reservation hotline** (☎ 9851122).

Hands way up for **Daming Shan Longteng Guesthouse** (大明山龙腾宾馆; Dà míng Shān Lóngténg Bīnguǎn; ☎ 1397 815 3459; s/d/tr from Y150) if only because it is consistently staffed outside of high season. Rooms are average but service is helpful. Staff can help you arrange guides and transport to the mountain.

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

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

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

ZUO JIANG SCENIC AREA

左江风景区

A boat trip down Left River (Zuǒ Jiāng) to the **Zuo Jiang Scenic Area** (Zuǒjiāng Fēngjǐngqū) around 190km southwest of Nánning will take you through karst rock formations and offer glimpses of rock paintings.

The largest of 80 groups of paintings is in the area of **Huā Shān Bìhuà** (花山壁画; Flower Mountain; admission Y20), about three hours further south from the scenic area by boat. Here, a fresco 170m high and 90m across depicts some 2000 figures of hunters, farmers and animals. It is now believed that the Luoyue, ancestors of the Zhuang minority, painted these cliffs around 2000 years ago.

Halfway to the site is the cheerful village of **Pānlóng** (攀龙) and behind it, the rough, explorable **Longrui Nature Reserve** (陇瑞自然保护区; Lǒngruì Zìrán Bǎohùqū; admission Y10). The reserve is the only known home of the rare

báitóu yèhóu (white leaf monkey). Hiking possibilities here are endless.

The low-key tourist resort of **Hua Shan Ethnic Culture Village** (花山民族山寨度假村; Huāshān Mínzú Shānzhài Dūjiàcūn; ☎ 862 8195; d 160-288, tr 160) is behind Pānlóng, and has decent rooms in Dong-style cabins. Guides can be arranged.

Catch a morning Píngxiáng train (or bus) from Nánning as far as Níngmíng. Tour operators in Níngmíng are unmissable. They offer boat trips that vary from Y150 to Y200 depending on how many people they get. Expect to negotiate extra if you want to stop overnight in Pānlóng. A new road runs along the river from Níngmíng to Pānlóng; a ride in a taxi (Y30) takes about 20 minutes.

PÍNGXIÁNG 凭祥

☎ 0771 / pop 100,000

The staging post for onward travel to Vietnam, Píngxiáng is a trading town rife with markets and a sheen of sleaze but not much else. Some travellers, as they enter China, have had their Lonely Planet *China* guides confiscated by officials. We recommend you copy any essential details before crossing and put a cover on your guide.

Hotels around the bus and train stations have everything from battered doubles for Y50 to adequate midrange doubles for Y198, but there is no real need to stay. By early morning bus or train from Nánning, you'll reach Píngxiáng by noon at the latest. Minibuses and private vehicles run to Friendship Pass (Yǒuyì Guǎn) from near the bus and train stations and costs Y5 to Y20, depending on the number of passengers. From Friendship Pass it's another 600m to the Vietnamese border post. Onward transport to Hanoi by train or bus is via the Vietnamese town of Lang Son (Liǎngshān), 18km from the Friendship Pass. Note that Vietnam is one hour behind China; at the time of writing the border post was open till 7pm Vietnam time.

DETIAN WATERFALL 德天瀑布

Located at the 53rd boundary marker between China and Vietnam, most of the earth-shaking **Detian Waterfall** (Détiān Pùbù; admission Y30) is on the Chinese side. The cascade drops only 40m, but makes up for it by its more than modest breadth. It has a nice 'translational vibe' thanks to the tourists and the Vietnamese-Chinese hawkers camped out from dawn to dusk. July is the best time to visit, although

water levels will be fairly high from May to late September. While wandering around, be particularly careful that you don't accidentally cross the border into Vietnam – it's no laughing matter for border officials.

Sleeping & Eating

There are a couple of **guesthouses** and a **restaurant** (☎ 377 3570) with a fantastic view. If you want to stay here, be sure to book with its Nánning office for a discounted rate (☎ 362 7088). If you just turn up at the door, twins/quads cost Y450/680. If you get stuck in half-way-point Shuòlóng, there are a few grubby **guesthouses** at the main intersection.

Getting There & Away

From Nánning one infrequent direct bus to the falls leaves at or around 8.30am (Y98, 4 hours), but generally only during high season. Otherwise, from Nánning or Píngxiáng, you will need to first head to Dàxīn (Y40, 3 hours). From Dàxīn, hop on a bus heading to Xiàléi and get off in Shuòlóng (Y8, 1½ hours). In Shuòlóng, catch a rattletrap minibus or motorbike taxi through some lovely scenery for the final 14km (Y5). Leaving the falls, get back to Shuòlóng before late afternoon, as there isn't much movement on the main road in any direction after that. From Shuòlóng semiregular services run towards Dàxīn and Nánning.

If you're heading for Jíngxī, either wait for a proper bus or leap-frog villages. First take a minibus (Y4) to Xiàléi, and then get another minibus (Y5) to Hūrùn (pronounced Fúyuàn in these parts), from where you can get a 'proper' bus for the hour-long ride to Jíngxī. All up, the trip should take around two to three hours, and you may enjoy a fun ride with farmers and their pigs!

Jíngxī is a friendly town and home to the Jiuzhou Pagoda and some cheap places to stay. From Jíngxī, take one of many buses to Bǎisè, the largest city in northwest Guǎngxī. The interesting **Baise Uprising Museum** (粤东会馆; Yuèdōng Huìguǎn) traces every movement of Deng Xiaoping and the Seventh Red Army during the 1920s and 1930s. From Bǎisè it's easy to head into Guǐzhōu or Yúnnán via Xíngyì.

BĚIHǎI 北海

☎ 0779 / pop 560,000

No time for the beaches of Hǎinán? Head directly here, your next-best alternative. This friendly, tree-lined port community, 229km

south of Nánning, is the launching point for a ferry to Hǎinán but also has its own famed Silver Beach. More than 2000 years old, the city was once a major node on the ancient marine Silk Road – the harbour area retains lovely old buildings. Pearl production later cemented its reputation. Thousands of Chinese-Vietnamese refugees landed here after the 1979 Sino-Viet conflict – look for evidence of the Vietnamese community around the harbour.

Orientation & Information

The northern coast is home to the bus terminal, shops and most lodging options. The southern strip has the new International Ferry Terminal, hotels and that famous stretch of white sand.

Walking east from the main bus station along Beibuwan Lu, you'll pass by any number of **internet cafés** (网吧; wǎngbā; per hr Y2). The **Bank of China** (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Beihai Dado; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) lies between Guizhou Lu and Sichuan Lu; an ATM is here.

Activities

Silver Beach (Yíntān), a sleepy, 1.6km stretch of sparkling white sand, is the reason people come to Běihǎi. It has few crowds, a pleasant boardwalk and palms rustling in the breeze. It's not as exciting as Hǎinán but it's numbingly pleasant for sure.

The beach is about 10km southeast from downtown Běihǎi. To get here, walk west from the bus station, bear right at Woping Lu, which branches off behind the Běihǎi Yíngbīngguǎn, and catch bus 3 at the corner of Jiefang Lu (Y2, 20 minutes). A taxi costs Y20 to Y25.

There are showers and lockers available just off the boardwalk (Y10 each).

Sleeping

Tons of accommodation choices are available close to the beach. Budget offerings in this area are pretty bleak and often charge ludicrously high prices.

Táoyuán Dàjiùdiàn (桃园大酒店; ☎ 202 0919; s/d Y180/200; ☺) Squat toilets sit diagonally in the middle of bathrooms. Chinese wood carvings, imitation Greek sculptures and faux Van Gogh paintings pack the halls. This is budget kitsch at its best. Follow the signs down a lane across from the main bus station. Expect rooms to cost Y70/80 during off-peak season.

Liánggǎng Dàjiùdiàn (良港大酒店; ☎ 208 6666; 10 Beibuwan Donglu; 北部湾东路10号; d from Y328; ☺) The walls and halls look like they've taken a battering but the rooms are bright and clean, fixed up with blonde wood floors and yellow bedspreads. Outside the summer months you'll rarely pay more than Y190 for a standard room. Located about 500m east of the main bus station.

Beach Hotel (海滩大酒店; Hǎitān Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 388 8888; bhht@bh.gx.cninfo.net; Silver Beach Blvd; 银滩大道; s/d from Y580; ☺) The beach's best option. Sea-view rooms are comfy, decorated in white and royal blue and have charming little balconies. Sea-view rooms start at Y580 and go up Y50 each floor. You should be able to nab good discounts here outside the summer months.

Shangri-la Hotel (香格里拉饭店; ☎ 206 2288; www.shangri-la.com; 33 Chating Lu; 茶亭路33号; d Y840-1050; ☺) Běihǎi's most luxurious spot, this hotel is out of the way but has top-notch service and frequent discount rates including perks such as complimentary meals and 6pm checkout. The food here is spectacular and the harbour-view doubles are an absolute treat.

Eating

The place for fun, great photos ops as well as Běihǎi's most interesting food is **Wàishā Dǎo** (外沙岛), an islandesque spit of land filled with boisterous restaurants. You can gorge yourself on seafood for anywhere from Y10 to more than Y100 per person here.

Another place to check out sea critters is the nearby **seafood market** (shuǐchǎn shìchǎng; 水产市场). Take bus 2 or 8 here from the main bus station.

Getting There & Away

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

AIR

Flights leave throughout the week between Běihǎi and Běijīng (Y1930), Guǎngzhōu (Y760) and Hǎikǒu (Y380).

BOAT

The **International Ferry Terminal** (Guójì Kèyùn Mátou) serves Hǎikǒu on Hǎinán and the nearby island of Wéizhōu. Boats for the 11-

hour journey to Hǎikǒu leave once daily (6pm). Tickets cost from Y90 for a seat to Y230 for a cabin, and can be bought at the terminal or just north of Beibuwan Zhonglu on Sichuan Lu; buy your ticket and await your shuttle bus.

BUS

Express buses connect Běihǎi with Dōngxīng (Y45, three hours), Guǎngzhōu (Y180, 9½ hours), Guílín (Y160, seven hours), Liǔzhōu (Y115, five hours) and Nánning (Y55 to Y73, 2½ hours). There's another bus terminal on Guangdong Lu, about 15 minutes by foot northeast of the main bus station, but it won't be of use to most travellers unless you can't find what you're looking for at the main station.

TRAIN

Train 820 departs Běihǎi at 8.46am for Nánning (three hours), from where you can connect to points beyond.

Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Comfortable buses meet planes at the airport, 21km north of town (Y10, 30 minutes). A taxi should cost about Y50.

BUS

Most of Běihǎi's buses congregate on Jiefang Lu, north of Zhongshan Park. Here you can catch bus 3 to Silver Beach and bus 2 west to the ferry docks and seafood market. Local buses cost Y2.

GUǐPÍNG 桂平

☎ 0775 / pop 151,341

This grey mess of a town is wildly friendly to the point of being surreal. (Where else in China do baton-swinging cops pepper visitors with 'Hello! How do you do? Welcome to Guǐpíng!' before running off in giggles to their patrol cars?!) Perhaps there's something in the famous Xī Shān tea.

As for the town's more formal sights, Guǐpíng is known for its gorgeous **Xi Shan Park** (西山公园; Xī Shān Gōngyuán; admission Y33; ☎ dawn to dusk), with a modest mountain climb of 880m. To get there, walk 15 to 20 minutes west of the public square along Renmin Xilu. The mountain's Xī Shān tea is famous all over China and there are shops selling it everywhere.

Only 20km northwest of town is **Dragon Pool National Forest and Park** (龙潭国家森林公园; Lóngtán Gúojiā Sēnlín Gōngyuán; admission Y50), which gives you the opportunity to delve into the rustic wilderness of Guǎngxī's only remaining old-growth forest.

Direct transport to Dragon Pool Park doesn't exist. From Guǐpíng, get the bus to Jintiáncūn (Y2) and ask the driver to drop you off at the Dragon Pool Park access road (Longtan Lukou). Motorcycle taxis waiting at the intersection will take you to the park for about Y30. A two-day trip with the **Forestry Department** (☎ 338 0413) in Guǐpíng, including guide, food, transport and accommodation, is about Y200.

Just 25km north of Guǐpíng, **Jintiáncūn** (金田村) is the birthplace of Hong Xiuquan, the schoolteacher who declared himself a brother of Jesus Christ and eventually led an army of more than a million followers against the Qing dynasty in what came to be known as the Taiping Rebellion – one of the bloodiest civil wars in human history. A museum, **Qiyi Jinianguan** (起义纪念馆; admission Y20) now stands at the site of Hong's home. For more information on Hong, see p45.

To reach Jintiáncūn from Guǐpíng, take a minibus from the main square at the corner of Guǐgui Lu and Renmin Lu (Y4 to Y5, 40 minutes). Backtrack 500m from the bus drop-off in Jintiáncūn to the motorcycle taxis, from where the museum is a further 4km. The last bus back to Guǐpíng departs Jintiáncūn around 6pm.

Sleeping

Chángtài Bīnguǎn (长泰宾馆; ☎ 336 9988; fax 336 9000; Renmin Zhonglu; 人民中路; s/d Y198/298, family ste Y568; 🍴) Though some rooms have lovely views of the Yujiang River, the rest, with their sad-looking bathrooms, don't really warrant the going room rate. Make sure you negotiate a substantial discount. This hotel is very proud of its top-floor revolving restaurant, and all the employees will be reminding you about it every chance they get.

Guǐpíng Fàndiàn (桂平饭店; ☎ 336 9292; fax 299 6338; 7 Renmin Zhonglu; 人民中路7号; s & d Y220; 🍴) This hotel is tidy, friendly and has green astroturf carpeting. Showerheads perch over squat toilets despite bathrooms being squash-court-sized. Likely the best budget accommodation in town, and certainly the oddest. Discounts can bring the room rate down to Y100.

Getting There & Away

From Guǐpíng, express buses leave for Nánning every three hours (Y70, four hours). There are four express buses to Wúzhōu (Y30, three hours) and one daily to Guǎngzhōu at 1pm (Y110, six hours). If you want to get to Guǐlín or Lüzhōu, head to Guǐgǎng (Y18) and change buses there.

WÚZHŌU 梧州

☎ 0774 / pop 330,000

Travellers will only hit Wúzhōu on the way to somewhere else, but it is still quite charming in its own right and it's worth an afternoon or day getting to know it.

In 1897, the British arrived at this busy trading town and set up steamer services to Guǎngzhōu, Hong Kong and later Nánning. European architecture left over from this period still looms over crowded back lanes making for some interesting walks around town.

Recently, big money has gone into developing the riverfronts, resulting in boardwalks, plaques and public art depicting everything from historical to space-age events.

Orientation

Situated at the confluence of Gui River (Gui Jiāng) and Xun River (Xún Jiāng), the city is effectively divided in two, with the modern and developed Hédi west of the river and the more interesting Dōnghé on the east bank.

Good maps of the city with bus routes (though not in English) are available at the shops inside both bus stations.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng) South of the park, on the corner of Zhongshan Lu.

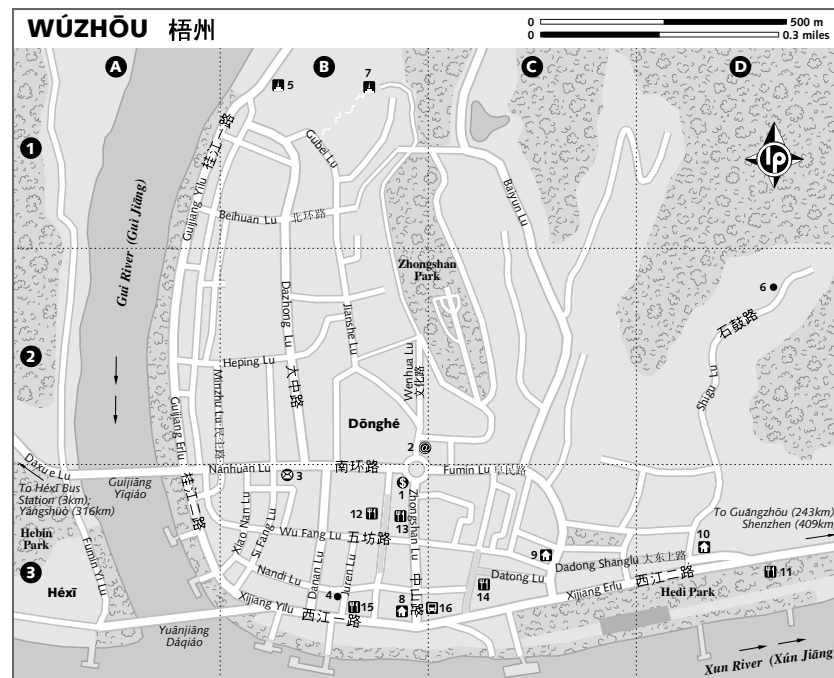
Internet café (wǎngbā; Wenhua Lu; per hr Y1.80; 🕒 24hrs) Located south of Zhongshan Park. The entrance is downstairs between the red Chinese lanterns.

Post & telephone office (Yóudiàn Dàlóu; Nanhuan Lu) East of Guǐjiāng Yǐqiáo.

Sights

SNAKE REPOSITORY 蛇园

Wúzhōu's **snake repository** (shé yuán) transports more than one million snakes to the kitchens of Hong Kong, Macau and other snake-devouring locales. At the time of research, the aging repository and the on-site snake restaurant were closed to the public for renovations, the schedule of which was still being hammered out. Before heading up,



check with your hotel to see if it has reopened. To get there walk along Shigu Lu for about 2km from the Wúzhōu Dàjiùdiàn hotel.

WESTERN BAMBOO TEMPLE 西竹园

Bordering Zhongshan Park, **Western Bamboo Temple** (Xīzhú Yuán) overlooks the town and is home to around 40 Buddhist nuns. The temple's **vegetarian restaurant**, usually open for lunch on weekends, is highly recommended. The restaurant doesn't keep regular hours, but it seems the earlier you get there, the better. Entrance to the temple is free, but you should leave a donation of a few yuán after your visit.

To reach the temple from the city centre, continue straight up Wenhua Lu to the top end of Zhongshan Park. A pinyin sign will point you the rest of the way.

LÓNGMŪTÀI MIÀO 龙母太庙

Recently renovated, the multicoloured **Lóngmūtài Miào** (Dragon Mother Temple; admission Y5; 🕒 7.30am-5.30pm daily) was originally constructed during the Northern Song dynasty to honour the dragon mother of a mythical female

INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1	B3
Internet Café 网吧	2	B2
Post & Telephone Office 邮电局	3	B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bird Market	4	B3
Lóngmūtài Miào 龙母太庙	5	B1
Snake Repository 蛇园	6	D2
Western Bamboo Temple 西竹园	7	B1

SLEEPING

Jinshan Jiudian 金山酒店	8	B3
Lóngmén Jiudian 龙门酒店	9	C3
Wúzhōu Dàjiùdiàn 梧州大酒店	10	D3

EATING

Bars and Restaurants	11	D3
Fruit Market 水果市场	12	B3
Jichē Jīnlóng 机车金龙	13	B3
Market 市场	14	C3
Street Restaurant 餐厅	15	B3

TRANSPORT

Hedong Bus Station 河东汽车站	16	C3
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chieftain. A good time to visit is during the temple's main festival, held on the seventh and eighth days of the fifth lunar month and the 15th day of the eighth lunar month.

There's also a tiny **bird market** on Juren Lu between Xijiang Yilu and Nandi Lu (just follow the chirping). In nice weather, hundreds of bamboo cages filled with twittering songbirds spill out onto the sidewalks and the sound alone is just beautiful.

Sleeping

Jinshān Jiūdiàn (☎ 281 2080; Zhongshan Lu; 中山路; s/d from Y38/98, tr/q from Y88/138; 🍷) This budget stand-by opposite the Hedong bus station has a whole range of budget room combinations for you to choose from. Not spotless, but if you want convenience and a central location for cheap, this is it.

Wúzhōu Dàjiūdiàn (☎ 204 8888; www.wzhotel.com.cn; 3 Xijiang Erlu; 西江二路3号; d Y230-430; 🍷) A very friendly option located near the Snake Repository. Go for the cheaper rooms here. The only differences between them and the deluxe rooms are that the cheapies have worse carpets and no teapot.

Lóngmén Jiūdiàn (☎ 202 0066; fax 203 88880; 64 Dadongshang Lu; 大东上路64号; s/d Y280/318; 🍷) Low-midrange prices for way-above-average rooms could give the more expensive digs in town a run for their money. Old bedspreads and some mouldy bathroom fixtures are the only reminders you're in budget-land.

Eating & Drinking

Development has seen the north banks of the Xun River packed with restaurants and bars of all types. It hasn't quite taken off yet, and feels more Disneyland than Wúzhōu but there is plenty of delicious seafood on offer and it's worth a stroll to see what interesting places may have opened up. Head to the eastern end of Hedi Park.

For local flavours with a more laid-back atmosphere, try the small, popular **street restaurant** on the corner of Juren Lu and Xijiang Yilu.

For self-caterers, there are plenty of **fresh produce markets** along the backstreets.

This huge building may look unoccupied, but head to the 6th floor and you'll find a delightfully kitschy restaurant-like food court, **Jichē Jīnlóng** (cnr Guo Zhongshan Lu & Wufang Lu; 🍷 11am-10pm), that serves up Chinese-Western dishes. The décor matches the menu. Wait staff dressed in minority costumes greet you when you come up the escalator and whisk you past Harley-Davidson memorabilia on the way to your table.

Getting There & Away

Wúzhōu has two new bus stations so slick they look like miniairports: Hédōng and the main bus station in Hēxī. In general, buses heading for smaller and closer destinations depart from Hédōng and those heading further afield depart from Hēxī. A free shuttle bus (for ticketed passengers) runs between the two stations every 40 minutes. Buses 2 and 12 also connect the stations (Y1.50, 20 minutes) or, if you're in a hurry, a taxi costs around Y20.

From Wúzhōu to Yángshuò expect a bumpy seven-hour ride (Y110), and it's another 1½ hours to Guilín (Y110). Buses leave the Hēxī station six times daily between 8.20am and 11pm.

For Guǎngzhōu, four expresses (Y105, 5½ hours) daily and more numerous slower buses cover the route (Y60 to Y70, six hours). There are also regular express bus connections throughout the day for Liǔzhōu (Y110, seven hours) and Shēnzhèn (Y160, seven hours), and every half-hour for Nánning (Y90 to Y110, six hours).

GUILÍN 桂林

☎ 0773 / pop 670,000

When it comes to Guilín and its stunning karst topography, there's good news and there's bad news.

The good news is the beauty of this scenic city, celebrated for generations by poets and painters, more than lives up to its reputation. If you can handle the hectic traffic, most of Guilín's peaks and parks are a short bicycle ride away and Li River (Lí Jiāng) cruises take in some of the province's most breathtaking scenery.

The bad news is that rapid economic growth and a booming tourist trade have made it a challenge to enjoy Guilín's charms.

Tourist sights levy heavy entry fees and many travellers tell of being grossly overcharged at restaurants. Touts (some persistent) appear at every turn, with many taxi drivers now aggressively in on the game (opposite). Humid days create an opaque haze, obscuring even the closer peaks.

Orientation

Most of Guilín lies on the west bank of Li River. The main artery is Zhongshan Lu, which runs roughly parallel to the river, on its western side. At the southern end (Zhong-

shan Nanlu) is Guilín's train station. Zhongshan Zhonglu is a rapidly gentrifying stretch of tourist-class hotels, shops and expensive restaurants.

Closer to the centre of town, northeast of the lakes of Róng Hú and Shān Hú, is Guilín's new Central Square (Zhōngxīn Guǎngchǎng) and the main shopping and eating district. Further along Zhongshan Beilu is the city's main commercial area.

Heading east on Jiefang Donglu and crossing over Liberation Bridge, will bring you to the large Qixing Park, one of the town's chief attractions.

MAPS

Several good maps are for sale around the city but these are in Chinese only. The *Tour & Communication Map of Guilin* (Y5) is decent and has some English.

Information

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng) Branches near the train station and on Yinding and Zhongshan Lu change money and travellers cheques, give credit-card advances and have ATMs.

CD Burning (Wángchéng Bǎihuó; Jiefang Donglu) Many of the computer kiosks on the 4th floor of this department store burn CDs for Y20 per disk.

CITS (Zhōngguó Guójiā Lǚxíngshì; ☎ 286 1623; www.guilintravel.com; 41 Binjiang Lu) Reasonably helpful staff offer tours, including day-long city tours (Y400) and a full-day Li River tour (Y450).

Daofeng Bookshop (Dǎofēng Shūdiàn; 18 Binjiang Lu; 9am-10.30pm) Books, movies and music are displayed alongside a small café in a store flooded with natural light. There are a few English titles and a good selection of maps in the travel section.

Internet cafés (wǎngbā; per hr Y2) There are dozens in the alleys near the Jinfeng Bīnguān.

Post office (yóujú) On the north corner of the large square in front of the train station. Several smaller offices are north along Zhongshan Lu.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú; ☎ 582 9930; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) On the east side of Li River, south of Longyin Lu. Offers visa extensions.

Tourist booths dot the city but getting the staff off MSN messenger can be next to impossible at some. The city's website www.guilin.com.cn is outstanding for information.

Dangers & Annoyances

Taxi drivers can be among the most aggressive touts in the city. Travellers often arrive in Guilín only to have the cabbie tell them there's a huge conference in town and the

hotel they're booked in or the sight they want to visit is full/bad/dangerous/too expensive. These drivers will get a big commission for taking you elsewhere and they can be relentless.

Don't accept any short detours 'just to look' or get drawn into conversations about your accommodation or visiting plans. Pretending you can't understand a word they're saying, getting out your map and looking like you mean business is usually the best strategy.

Several travellers wanting Li River cruises have reported feeling ripped off by guides using fake CITS business cards and trying to pass themselves (and their friends' creaky boats) off as the real thing. Ask at your accommodation or an official CITS office to make sure you're getting what you want.

Sights

SOLITARY BEAUTY PEAK 独秀峰

This 152m **pinnacle** (Dúxiù Fēng; admission Y15) is just north of the centre of town. The climb to the top is steep, but worth the effort for the splendid vistas.

At the foot of the peak is the 14th-century **Wáng Chéng**, a palace built by the nephew of a Ming emperor. The restored walls and gates of the palace surround the peak. You can reach the peak by bus 1 or 2 from Guilín's train station.

FÚBŌ SHĀN 伏波山

Close to Solitary Beauty Peak, **Fúbō Shān** (Wave-Subduing Hill; admission Y15) offers equally good views.

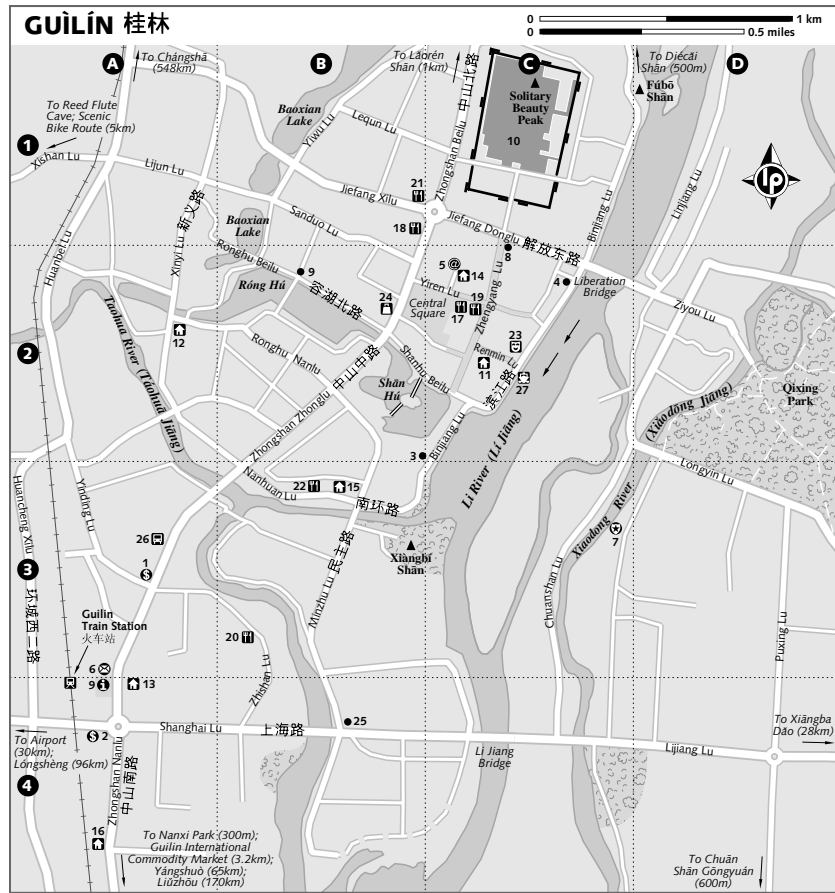
On the hill's southern slope is **Returned Pearl Cave** (Huánzhū Dòng). A 1000-year-old Buddha image is etched into the cave wall, along with more than 200 other images of the Buddha, most dating from the Song and Tang dynasties. Somewhere, too, is a portrait and autograph by Mi Fu, a famous calligrapher of the Song dynasty.

Thousand Buddha Cave (Qiānfó Yán) is nearby. The name's an exaggeration – a couple of dozen statues at most date from the Tang and Song dynasties.

Bus 2 from the train station runs past the hill.

OTHER HILLS

North of Solitary Beauty Peak is **Diécǎi Shān** (Folded Brocade Hill; admission Y20). Climb the stone pathway that takes you through the



cooling relief of Wind Cave, with walls decked with inscriptions and Buddhist sculptures. The hill climb can be skirted by taking bus 1 or 2.

From Fúbō Shān there's a good view of **Lǎorén Shān** (Old Man Hill), a curiously shaped hill, from the centre of town 2km to the northwest. The best way to get there is by bicycle, as buses don't go past it. At the southern end of town, one of Guilín's best-known sights is **Xiàngbí Shān** (Elephant Trunk Hill; admission Y25), which actually does resemble an elephant dipping its snout into Li River. The best way to see it is by bamboo raft (usually Y3 per person, 40 minutes) as the park itself is underwhelming. You can find the punters by Liberation Bridge.

QĪXĪNG GŌNGYUÁN 七星公园

If you only have the time (or the desire) to visit one thing in Guilín, this is the best choice. One of China's most picturesque city parks, with winding trails and lovely picnicking, **Seven Star Park** (Qixing Gongyuan; park/cave admission Y35/30; park 7am-10pm, cave 8am-5.30pm) is on the eastern side of Li River and covers 137 hectares (the seven peaks resemble the Big Dipper constellation). The park was one of the original tourist spots in southwest China, and first opened to sightseers during the Sui dynasty (AD 581-618). The park's two highlights are **Seven Star Cave** (Qixing Yán), a capacious chamber filled with bizarre stalactites and stalagmites coloured by floodlights, and **Dark Dragon Cave** (Lóngyīn Dòng),

INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1	A3
Bank of China 中国银行	2	A4
CITS 中国国际旅行社	3	B2
Daofeng Bookshop 刀锋书店	4	C2
Internet Cafés 网吧	5	C2
Post Office 邮局	6	A3
PSB 公安局	7	C3
Wángchéng Bǎihuó 王城百货	8	C2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

South City Gate 南门	9	B2
Wángchéng 王城	10	C1

SLEEPING

Backstreet Youth Hostel	11	C2
后街青年旅社	11	C2
Bravo Hotel 桂林宾馆	12	A2

Guilin Flowers Youth Hostel	13	A4
花满楼	13	A4
Jinfeng Bīnguǎn	14	C2
金丰宾馆	14	C2
Meidǒu Fàndiàn	15	B3
美都饭店	15	B3
Overseas Chinese Hotel	16	A4
华侨大厦	16	A4

EATING

Guilin Rén 桂林人	17	C2
Nikodō Plaza 微笑堂	18	B1
Rosemary Café	19	C2
Shèngfā Fàndiàn	20	B3
胜发饭店	20	B3
Shǐjī Mǐfěn 石记米粉	21	B1
Yíyuán Fàndiàn	22	B3
怡园饭店	22	B3

DRINKING

Club 100% Bǎidù Club	(see 4)
百度100%	(see 4)

ENTERTAINMENT

Lǐjiāng Theatre	23	C2
漓江剧场	23	C2

SHOPPING

Night Market 夜市	24	B2
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TRANSPORT

CAAC 中国民航	25	B4
Dragonair 桂林宾馆	(see 12)	
Main Bus Station	26	A3
汽车总站	26	A3
Tourist Wharf	27	C2
漓江游览船码头	27	C2

with inscribed stelae dating back more than 1500 years.

To reach the park, walk across Liberation Bridge or catch bus 10 or 11 (Y1 to Y2) from the train station. From the park, bus 13 (Y1 to Y2) runs across Liberation Bridge, past Fúbō Shān and across to Reed Flute Cave.

REED FLUTE CAVE 芦笛岩

Some of the most extraordinary scenery Guilín has to offer – rock-concert lights blazing at stalactites – is underground at **Reed Flute Cave** (Lúdí Yán; admission Y60), 5km northwest of the city centre. At one time the entrance to the cave was distinguished by clumps of reeds used by the locals to make musical instruments, hence the name.

Inside, the Crystal Palace of the Dragon King alone can hold about 1000 people, although many more crammed in during WWII when the cave was used as an air-raid shelter. Despite the high entrance price, the cave is worth visiting.

Take bus 3 (Y1.50) from the train station or Zhongshan Zhonglu to the last stop. Otherwise, it's a pleasant bicycle ride. Follow Lijun Lu, which runs into Xishan Lu and then Taohua Jiang Lu. The latter parallels the small Taohua River (Táohuā Jiāng), and winds through fields and karst peaks. At Ludi Lu turn left and continue for another 1.2km back to Zhongshan Beilu.

RÓNG HÚ & SHĀN HÚ 榕湖, 杉湖

There are two lakes near the city centre, **Róng Hú** on the western side of Zhongshan Zhonglu and **Shān Hú** on the eastern side. Róng Hú is named after an 800-year-old banyan tree on its shore. The tree stands by the restored **South**

City Gate (Nán Mén) originally built during the Tang dynasty. It's gorgeous here at night and everything from the bridges to the trees is tastefully lit.

Tours

There's no shortage of tour operators offering half- or full-day tours of Guilín's major sights usually outside the bus and train stations, and along Binjiang Lu. Be rigorous in asking questions about what you are getting.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Guilin Flowers Youth Hostel (Huāmèn Lòu; ☎ 383 9625; Block 2, 6 Shangzhi Lane, Zhongshan Nanlu; 中山南路, 尚智巷6号2栋; dm Y40, s/d without bathroom Y50/Y90; 🚻 📺) Some travellers find the steep prices a turn-off, but this is a lovely hostel with a bright, cosy common area and staff that go out of their way for guests. Facing the Plaza Hotel, go left and follow the hot pink 'Flowers' signs into the lanes. Locals often point confused-looking foreigners the rest of the way without even being asked.

Backstreet Youth Hostel (Hòujiē Qīngnián Lúshè; ☎ 281 9936; 3 Renmin Lu; 人民路3号; dm Y40; 🚻 📺) This is another terrific, newly opened hostel in a fantastic central location. In general, rooms are bigger and fresher than what you'll find at Guilin Flowers Youth Hostel, though staff at Flowers are generally more helpful. There's also a good selection of hotel-quality singles and doubles.

Overseas Chinese Hotel (Huáqiáo Dàshà; ☎ 383 2055; fax 382 0290; 13 Zhongshan Nanlu; 中山南路13号; dm Y60, standard d Y280-350; 🚻) This hotel is a little inconveniently located, but its clean, unmemorable rooms are an old backpackers' stand-by and

you should keep the address on hand in case Flowers Youth Hostel is full and you need accommodation near the buses and trains.

MIDRANGE

Meidǒu Fāndiàn (☎ 283 8268; fax 288 6698; 17 Nanhuan Lu; 南环路17号; s/d/spouse room Y158/198/218; 🚻) Wooden floors and wall lights make the halls cosy and welcoming, though not much thought has gone into the rooms' wilted linens. But the riverside location and discounts of up to 66% make any room here a steal.

Jinfēng Bīnguǎn (☎ 288 2793; lane off Yiren Lu; 依仁路近的; s/d Y388/488; 🚻) Down a bustling alley off Central Square; dark, dire halls hide enormous midrange rooms. You couldn't ask for a better location, and there's food stalls, cafés and restaurants right at your doorstep. Expect up to 60% discounts off the rack rates.

TOP END

Bravo Hotel (Guilín Bīnguǎn; ☎ 282 3950; www.gibravo.com; 14 Ronghu Nanlu; 榕湖南路14号; r from Y918; 🚻 🚰 📺 📶) Arguably one of Guilín's best, this hotel has marble in the bathrooms and good food available in the hotel's Chinese, Japanese and Western restaurants. Check river-view rooms out before handing over your money, a few of them do face the Li River, but trees growing on the river's banks obstruct the view.

Eating

Guilín is noted for its snake soup, wild cat or bamboo rat, washed down with snake-bile wine. You could be devouring some of these animals into extinction, and we don't recommend that you do. The pangolin (a sort of armadillo) is a protected species but still crops up on restaurant menus. Other protected species include the muntjac (Asian deer), horned pheasant, miniturtle, short-tailed monkey and gem-faced civet.

Mostly you'll find an infinite variety of *guilín mifěn* (Guilín rice noodles; 桂林米粉), generally eaten for breakfast and snacks. Strictly guarded recipes vary greatly from chef to chef; you'll find some not unlike Phad Thai, and others smacking of a horse-meat stew!

A Qing dynasty speciality, white fermented bean curd, is often used to make a dipping sauce for roast pork or chicken. Sanhua wine, actually more like mellow rice firewater, is a favourite local drink, as is local oil tea (though it's quite salty, with flecks of rice in it).

You'll find a good variety of eateries including buffet-style cafeterias, standard restaurants, trendy cafés and small hole-in-the-wall restaurants just north of Central Square along Yiren Lu.

Shíjǐ Mífēn (Jiefang Xilu; dishes from Y4) It sure doesn't look like much on the outside but locals flock here to scarf down the city's most famous dish for cheap. Staff are a bit brusque but they treat regulars the same way. You'll see two hole-in-the-wall stalls to the west of the China Telecom building. This restaurant is the one on the right.

Guilín Rén (Yiren Lu; from Y5) Come here on a warm night and you'll hear the buzz from around the corner. A popular institution that's done up like a big, sleek fast-food operation, locals come here for all the usual Guilín specialties as well as beef dishes like *gāilǐ niúròu* (咖喱牛肉; curried beef).

Yiyuán Fāndiàn (Nanhuan Lu; dishes from Y18; 🕒 11.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-9.30pm) This outstanding Sichuanese restaurant is a longtime favourite with great food and great atmosphere (plants, dark wooden tables, friendly servers). There's an English menu. Try the stir-fried eel with dried chilli and Sichuan spices (Y22).

Shèngfā Fāndiàn (Zishan Lu) A very popular place with locals who come here to eat *píjiǔyú* (啤酒鱼; beer fish; Y18), which is wok-fried on your table and usually knocked down with the local Liqun Beer. Noodles are added at the end to mop up the sauce.

Rosemary Café (Yiren Lu; pizza Y25; 🕒 10am-midnight) The best western food in the city. The menu has all the usual suspects but there are some interesting flourishes such as the barbecued peanut pizza. On the cocktail front, Rosemary has nailed the hot chocolate and brandy combo like no other Western restaurant in Yangshuò.

There are a number of **supermarkets** around town, the most convenient of which is located in the Nikodo Plaza basement.

Drinking & Entertainment

Club 100% Bǎidú (Binjiang Lu; 🕒 8pm-late) Very hip, very loud. This is the most popular club in town and is a great place to meet locals.

Lijiang Theatre (Lijiang Jǔchǎng; Binjiang Lu; admission Y120/160/180; 🕒 8pm) A show full of acrobats music, dance and lights. Not as popular as the big Yangshuò show, but travellers are enthusiastic about it nonetheless.

Shopping

For jewellery, clothing, souvenirs as well as pretty much anything else you can think of, check out Guilín's **night market**. It sets up every night at around 7pm on Zhongshan Zhonglu between Ronghu Beilu and Sanduo Lu.

Getting There & Away

AIR

CAAC (☎ 384 7252; 🕒 7.30am-8.30pm) is at the corner of Shanghai Lu and Minzhu Lu. You'll find **Dragonair** (☎ 282 5588, ext 8895) in the Bravo Hotel.

Guilín is supremely well connected to the rest of China (and beyond) by air. Destinations include Běijīng (Y1920), Chéngdū (Y1100), Chóngqīng (Y860), Hǎikǒu (Y840), Guǎngzhōu (Y790), Guiyáng (Y710), Hong Kong (Y1895), Kūnmíng (Y970), Shànghǎi (Y1430) and Xī'ān (Y1220). Seats *may* be available for next-day purchase; shop around travel agents for discounted tickets.

International destinations include regular flights to Seoul (Hànchéng) and Fukoka, Japan (Fúgǎng). Less frequent flights also go to Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur; more and more international flights are being added.

BUS

For short local runs such as Yangshuò (Y10, one hour) and Xing'an (Y8 to Y12, two hours), buses depart from in front of the train station as well as from the main bus station.

Guilín's **bus station** (Zhongshan Nanlu) is north of the train station. Hourly buses run to Lóngshèng (Y22, 1½ hours). There are several buses to Sǎnjiāng (Y39, five hours) between 6am and 7.30pm. Expresses to Quǎnzhōu leave every hour (Y10, one hour). Frequent buses also leave for Nǎnníng (Y80 to Y110, four to 4½ hours) every 15 minutes.

To Guǎngzhōu and Shēnzhèn, express and sleeper buses are available, however, the expresses are usually more reliable and smoother. Express buses head for Guǎngzhōu six times daily (Y100, nine hours) and to Shēnzhèn at 8pm and 9.30pm (Y220, 10 hours). Buses for Wúzhōu leave five times daily (Y110, eight hours).

TAXI

Guilín is not as convenient as Nǎnníng for train connections (not much starts here)

and tickets are harder to come by. Outside national holidays, you might be lucky, but be prepared to wait an extra day or two for hard-sleeper tickets.

Direct train services include train T6 to Běijīng (3.06pm, hard sleeper Y449, 22 hours), K36/7 to Guǎngzhōu (6pm, Y229, 11 hours), K198 to Shànghǎi (2.08pm, Y400, 25 hours) and train K316 to Xī'ān (5.25pm, Y356, 25 hours). For Chóngqīng and Chéngdū, change trains at Guiyáng (or start in Nǎnníng).

To Kūnmíng, train 2055 departs at 8.52am and takes 22 hours (Y237); this is the only train that starts here, and the others can be tough to land tickets for. Consider a worthwhile trip to Nǎnníng to hop on the direct Nánkūn line (15 hours).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Guilín's international airport is 30km west of the city. Buses run from **CAAC** (cnr Shanghai Lu & Minzhu Lu) to the airport for Y20, leaving half-hourly from 6.30am to 8.30pm. A taxi to the airport costs about Y90 (40 minutes).

BICYCLE

One of the best ways to get around Guilín is by bicycle. There are plenty of bicycle-hire shops. You'll find some near the bus and train stations, and one next to the Overseas Chinese Hotel on Zhongshan Nanlu. Most charge Y10 to Y20 per day and require Y200 or your passport as security. Try to avoid handing over your passport.

BUS

Bus 58 is a tourist freebie (anything that begins with '5' should be free) that runs to many local sights, including Xiàngbǐ Shān, Qíxíng Gōngyuán and Reed Flute Cave.

Otherwise, most of the city buses that stop in front of Guilín's bus and train stations will get you to the major sights, but a bicycle is definitely better, especially in the searing summer heat. Bus 2 runs from the train station through town, passing Xiàngbǐ Shān, Liberation Bridge, Fúbō Shān and Diécǎi Shān. Bus 15 runs a circuit from the train station to the city's main tourist highlights. Local buses cost between Y1 and Y1.50.

TAXI

Flag falls start at Y7. Motorcycle taxis charge only Y5 per trip.

AROUND GUILÍN

Ling Canal 灵渠

Built from 219 to 214 BC to transport supplies to the armies of the first Qin emperor, **Ling Canal** (Ling Qú) is considered to be one of the three great feats of Chinese engineering (the others being the Great Wall and the Du River irrigation system in Sichuan). The 34km canal links Xiang River (Xiāng Hé), which flows into the Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng), and Li River, which flows into the Zhu River (Zhū Jiāng), thus connecting two of China's major waterways.

Two branches of the canal flow through the market town of **Xing'an** (兴安), one at the northern end and one at the southern end.

The canal is in Xing'an County, about 70km north of Guilín. From Guilín, there are buses for Xing'an every half-hour until 6.30pm (Y8 to Y12, two hours) and hourly express buses to Quánzhōu (Y10, one hour).

Li River 漓江

Li River (Lí Jiāng) runs between Guilín and Yángshuò; a phenomenally popular trip is the **boat ride** from Guilín to Yángshuò. The price – which comes in at around Y500, includes lunch and the bus trip back to Guilín from Yángshuò – does hurt. Joining a Chinese tour group lets you pay a nominal Y325 for the same service, though it's conducted *sans* English.

Boats (Y450) depart from Guilín's tourist wharf opposite the Golden Elephant hotel (see Map p652) each morning at around 8am, although you have to take a shuttle bus to Zhújiāng or Mópánshān wharf downriver when the water level is low. The ticket office is nearby, or you can book through many hotels. The trip lasts all day.

YÁNGSHUÒ 阳朔

☎ 0773 / pop 300,000

Pedalling across the rice fields through Yángshuò's soaring limestone peaks is often the top experience of travellers in China. If you're like most, you'll come to Yángshuò for a couple of days after the Li River cruise but end up staying far longer.

Yángshuò is more of an international backpacking colony than a Chinese village but it's an ideal base from which to explore the countryside. It certainly beats Guilín for the unrivalled opportunity to soak up local flavours on the cheap. The activities and day trips from here could easily fill up a week or more.

Orientation

You'll probably only need to know two streets in Yángshuò. The first, Pantao Lu, forms the southwest perimeter of Yángshuò and is the main artery to and from Guilín. The second, Xi Jie, is known as 'Foreigner Street'. It runs northeast to the Li River, and is lined with cafés, hotels and tourist shops. The further you go from Xi Jie or Pantao Lu at its intersection with Xi Jie, the closer you get to Chinese group-tour reality. Xi Jie itself has been turned into a pedestrian mall (relatively) free from pesky wheels.

MAPS

Good English-language street maps of Yángshuò are available throughout town for Y3 to Y5. Maps of the surrounding villages and countryside are generally pretty poor and in some cases seem downright random. But no matter. Half the adventure is trying to find your own way through the rice paddies!

Information

CD BURNING

Kodak Express Shop (Xi Jie) Y15 per CD.

INTERNET ACCESS 网吧

One of the best internet cafés (*wǎngbā*) in town is on Chengzhong Lu near the corner of Xi Jie, Y5 per hour. It's open round the clock and even has a nonsmoking room.

MEDICAL SERVICES

There are a number of traditional medical clinics on the northern side of Pantao Lu offering therapeutic massage, acupuncture and traditional medicine. It is even possible to enrol in brief courses at some of these centres.

People's Hospital (Rénmín Yīyuàn) North of the main tourist centre, not far from the PSB.

MONEY

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Binjiang Lu; ☎ 9am-5pm) Will change cash and travellers cheques, give credit card advances and receive wire transfers, although the latter can take up to 15 days. Other banks on Xi Jie also cash travellers cheques.

POST & TELEPHONE

Post office (yóujú; Pantao Lu; ☎ 8am-5pm) Has English-speaking staff and long-distance phone services.

PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU

PSB (Gōngānjú; Chengbei Lu; ☎ 24hr) This PSB is well versed in dealing with travellers and has several fluent



INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1 A2
Internet Café 网吧	2 C2
Kodak Express Shop	3 D1
People's Hospital 人民医院	4 B1
PSB 公安局	5 C1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Cloud 9 Restaurant 聚福楼饭店	6 C2
Karst Pizzeria	7 D1
Lizard Lounge	8 D1

SLEEPING

Bamboo House Inn & Café	
竹林饭店	9 C2
Hotel Explorer 文化饭店	10 D1

Monkey Jane's Guesthouse

背包客栈	11 D2
Morning Sun Hotel 阳光酒店	12 C2
New Century Hotel	
新世纪酒店	13 A2
Paradise Yangshuo Resort Hotel	
阳朔白来度假饭店	14 C2
Yangshuo International Youth	
Hostel 阳朔国际青年旅馆	15 C2

EATING

Café Under the Moon	
月亮下咖啡馆	16 C2
Dynasty of Dumplings	17 D1
Farmers' Trading Market	
农贸市场	18 A2

Global Movie Café	19 D1
Le Vötre Café	
乐得法式餐厅	20 C2
Meiyou Café	
没有饭店	21 C2
Ming Yuan Café	
明园咖啡馆	22 C2
Night Market	23 B2
Night Market	24 C2

SHOPPING

Tourist Market 旅客市场	25 D1
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TRANSPORT

Main Bus Station 汽车总站	26 B2
Wharf 码头	27 D1

English speakers. That said, always be calm if complaining about a local business; losing your cool will get you nowhere. If you need a visa extension you'll have to head further afield as this office doesn't issue them.

TOURIST INFORMATION

This town is rife with travel agents. *Choose carefully.* Surfacing constantly are reports of aggressive agents not providing the service they sell. Flimsy bicycles for rent are the most chronic headache. Train tickets will never be easy unless you hike to Guilín and do it yourself. Ask other travellers if anything dodgy has happened recently.

Dangers & Annoyances

While Yángshuò is relatively safe, it's important to keep your wits about you. Yuéliang Shān (Moon Hill) has been particularly popular with muggers in recent years and some victims have been wounded with knives.

The local PSB says all this is a thing of the past ('perfectly safe, even by yourself!') but it would still be wise not to stray off alone. Yángshuò is also the scene of many rip-offs, from hotel 'deposits' to dodgy tours.

Sights & Activities

People come to Yángshuò for the activities in the countryside but there's lots to keep you busy in town too. Established parks with trails dot the town.

In the southeastern corner of town is Yángshuò's main peak, **Green Lotus Peak** (Bilián Fēng; admission Y30). It's also called Bronze Mirror Peak (Tóngjìng Fēng) because it has a flat northern face that is supposed to look like an ancient bronze mirror. The peak is next to Li River, in the **Mountain Water Garden** (Shān Shuǐ Yuán).

Yangshuo Park is in the western part of town, and here you'll find **Xiláng Shān** (Man Hill; admission

Y9), which is supposed to resemble a young man bowing to a shy young girl represented by **Xiǎogū Shān** (Lady Hill). There's a further jungle of hills nearby: **Shìzǐ Qí Lǐyú Shān** (Lion Riding Carp Hill), **Lóngtóu Shān** (Dragon Head Hill) and the like.

Should you desire to hoof it up other hills solo, get advice from locals before you set off – there's no search and rescue service for foreigners stranded on a karst cliff face. A better bet is guided **rock climbing**; there are 75 or so routes up the cliff faces. For advice, gear and tours, neophyte climbers should head directly to Xianqian Jie and the shops and climbing-oriented cafés like **Karst Pizzeria** (www.karstclimber.com; 42 Xianqian Jie) and **Lizard Lounge** (Xianqian Jie). Lizard Lounge was closed for renovations at the time of research but should have reopened by the time you read this.

Cloud 9 Restaurant (cloud9restaurant03@yahoo.com; Chengzhong Lu) offers three-hour morning or afternoon cooking classes for Y80 a person. Each class starts off with a trip to the farmers' market for fresh ingredients.

A popular evening activity is to take part in one of the **cormorant fishing tours**. While it's entertaining, it's mainly a tourist attraction (the real thing lasts all night). However, in both cases, the river supports an ever-diminishing supply of fish. Tours begin around 7pm and last 40 minutes to one hour. Hotels and restaurants usually charge Y25 per person.

Sleeping

In peak periods, dirt-cheap beds along Xi Jie (or any bed for that matter) may be tough to find. However, new accommodation is opening all the time, so there's a good chance you'll be able to rustle up something in one of the back lanes or on less-touristed streets if you're in a pinch. Ask about weekly rates if you are planning to stay awhile. Credit cards are widely accepted, even at the cheapies.

BUDGET

On arrival you will no doubt be met by touts wielding business cards and photo albums of their abodes. Finding a clean dorm bed for Y10 or Y15 or a single/double with private bathroom for Y50 to Y100 is relatively easy outside summer weekends and holidays.

The most popular places to stay are on Xi Jie though with the late-night partying going on outside, rooms here can get noisy.

Monkey Jane's Guesthouse (Běibào Kézhān; ☎ 882 1603; monkeyjaneguesthouse@yahoo.com; 28 Lianfeng-zhongxiang; 莲峰中巷28号; dm Y20, s/d from Y40) The chipped paint and cheerless dorms don't seem to matter to the party animals who swear by this new guesthouse. After a night on the rooftop taking in the river view while slamming back the brew's with Monkey Jane herself, it's likely you won't notice either. If you don't already know Yángshuò it will be hard to find this place, ring and ask the owner to meet you.

Bamboo House Inn & Café (Zhúlín Fāndiàn; ☎ 882 3222; bamboohouse23@hotmail.com; 23 Guihua Lu; 桂花路23号; dm Y20, s/d 50/60, with air-con Y60/70, with balcony Y80; ☎ ☑) Down a small lane off Xi Jie, this place is quiet and has pleasant staff. Dorms have mattresses on the floor and the bathrooms are somewhat primitive but this place has laundry (Y12), bike rental (Y10) and free internet.

Yangshuo International Youth Hostel (Xījī Guójī Qīngnián Lǚguǎn; ☎ 882 0933; hostel-ys@163.com; 102 Xi Jie; 西街102号; dm/tw/ste from Y25/80/200; ☎ ☑) Very friendly and right in the thick of things, this YHA hostel gets great reviews from travellers for service, though earplugs are deemed essential given its location. The nine-bed dorms with desks and chairs are huge, as are the family suites. Check your room first, as some are quite musty. Bathrooms are clean, but be prepared for some monster rust caked on some of the drains and pipes.

Yangshuo Culture House (☎ 882 7750; www.yangshuo-study-travel.com; 110 Beisan Xiang, Chengxi Rd; 城西路北三巷110号; s & d Y60-80; ☎ ☑) Run by Wei Xiao Geng and his family. A stay here could very well be one of the highlights of your trip. Rooms are bright and clean and three meals a day are included if you want them. Mr Wei can tell you absolutely anything about the region, and also offers taichi, calligraphy and Chinese lessons. It's located down a lane about 1.7km west of the bus station. You'll never find it on your own so call for a pick up. Reservations are recommended.

MIDRANGE

Most budget places also offer slightly cushier rooms for more money. A huge number of midrange places are located in town, most of them Chinese hotels found along Pantao Lu, west of Diecui Lu. All are decent, if unremarkable. The two mentioned here are very similar to each other but stand out from the rest of the crowd.

Morning Sun Hotel (Yángguāng Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 881 3899; www.morningsunhotel.com; 4 Chengzhong Lu; 城中路4号; s/d/tr Y180/240/350, d with balcony Y280; ☎) Dark, hardwood flooring, well-chosen designs for amenities, and a relaxing atrium show that some thought went into the design of this place. Huge bathtubs in each room are what sets it apart from the Hotel Explorer.

Hotel Explorer (Wénhuà Fāndiàn; ☎ 882 8116; jimmyqin@hotmail.com; 40 Xianqian Lu; 县前路40号; s/d/tr with bathroom 368/418/548; ☎) Done up in ancient courtyard style with wood trims, sliding doors and indoor gardens, rooms here are spotless and have large modern bathrooms. Tucked down a side street, it's quiet despite being just seconds from Xi Jie. Outside holiday periods, expect discounts of about Y120.

TOP END

Paradise Yangshuo Resort Hotel (Yángshuò Bǎilái Dūjiǎ Fāndiàn; ☎ 8222109; www.paradiseyangshuo.com; 116 Xi Jie; 西街116号; standard/deluxe d Y664/913; ☎ ☑) Standard rooms are immaculate, with wood floors and pristine furniture, but lack pizzazz. The deluxe rooms are another story with balconies, floor to ceiling windows, and if you nab a corner room, lots of light. The lobby is filled with pictures of US presidents to help the American tour groups feel at home. It's surrounded by lush green gardens.

New Century Hotel (Xīnshìjī Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 882 9819; fax 882 9809; beside Yangshuo Park; 阳朔公园旁; s/d Y680; ☎) Finally, some upscale rooms decorated with a little imagination. Rooms are done up in shades of plum, black and white and feature accents such as framed pictures and wooden elephant sculptures. Western buffet breakfast is available for Y35.

Eating & Drinking

Xi Jie is famous for its cafés offering Chinese-Western fusion cuisine as well as perennial travellers' favourites such as banana pancakes and pizza. Most places have mastered a couple of Western dishes but in general, the street's reputation for authentic fare far surpasses the often mediocre results. Many cafés also double as tourist information centres, show movies or host live music. However, Xi Jie is now so full of tour groups and pestering touts that the possibility of a quiet evening of dining al fresco is pretty much gone.

If you need a breather from Xi Jie, wander the labyrinth of back alleys and you'll discover

many small markets and restaurants catering to locals and Chinese travellers.

Global Movie Café (cnr Xi Jie & Xianqian Jie; mains Y10-30; ☎ 9am-late) Films are shown every night at 7pm and 9pm on the 2nd floor. It's free as long as you buy a drink or snack. This is a great place to ask about Mandarin lessons or other interesting things that might be going on round town.

Dynasty of Dumplings (Xianqian Lu; 16 dumplings Y15; ☎ varies) Dumplings here range from veggie options to exotic lamb and melon combos. It also serves remarkable selection of local specialties like *píjiú yú* (beer fish; 啤酒鱼) or *tiánwǒ jī* (hot snails in chicken soup; 田螺鸡).

Meiyou Café (86 Xi Jie; mains Y10-40; ☎ 7.30am-1am) This café promises 'méi yǒu bad service, méi yǒu warm beer' (*méi yǒu* means 'don't have'), and has delivered on this pledge seemingly forever.

Café Under the Moon (Yuèliàngxiàng Kāféiguǎn; Xi Jie; mains Y15-30; ☎ 7am-1am) With blue and yellow linen, green plants and a cosy 2nd-floor balcony, this place has plenty of ambience. Service and food are only average but this place is usually packed nonetheless. The menu is good for entertainment value alone. Celery-apple-juice-chocolate-ice-cream milkshake, anyone?

Ming Yuan (Ming Yuán Kāféiguǎn; 50 Xi Jie; cappuccino Y20-37, sandwiches Y17; ☎ 9am-11pm) This tiny café serves the prettiest and most perfect coffee in town; rosettas top the cappuccinos, milk hearts deck out the lattes. With only a handful of tables, this is a quiet, calming place to while away the afternoon. Completely nonsmoking premises.

Le Vötre Café (Lèdèfāshì Cǎntīng; ☎ 882 8040; 79 Xi Jie; mains Y20-48; ☎ 9.30am-11pm) It doesn't always hit the mark with its French-inspired cuisine, but this place is worth a visit for the ginger tea and the huge, theatre-like dining room crammed with Buddha statues, Chinese wood carvings, Ming-style furniture and Mao portraits.

Farmers' Trading Market (Nóngmào Shìchǎng; Pantao Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm) Through an archway, this place is dark and atmospheric and is full of fishes, eels, chickens and rabbits. *Píjiúyú* (啤酒鱼; Y30 per kilogram) is Yángshuò's most famous dish and this may be the best and cheapest places to try it. Local Li River fish are cooked with chillies, spring onion, tomato, ginger and beer. A good winter alternative is *qīngshuǐyú huǒguō* (Li River catfish hotpot;

清水鱼火锅). For the more adventurous, there is also *lāoshūgān* (fried dried rat with chillies and garlic; 老鼠干; Y20) or *sōngshūgān* (fried squirrel; 松鼠干; Y20). Besides the food, this market is worth a visit for the people watching and photo opportunities alone.

A massive **night market** starts up after 6pm across from the bus station. The market has tents, tables and chairs, so you can settle in for a sampling of local delicacies like *tiánluóniàng* (stuffed field snails; 田螺酿) whatever the weather. Another smaller **night market** sets up on Chengzhong Lu.

Entertainment

The hot ticket in town is **Impressions Liu Sanjie** (Yínxíang Liǔ Sānjiē; Y188-320; 8-9pm daily). Directed by movie maker Zhang Yimou, 600 performers, including local fishermen, take to the Li River (yes, that's right, they perform *on* the Li River). Twelve surrounding karst peaks are illuminated as part of the show Zhang describes as a 'folk musical'. Travellers give it rave reviews. Book through your accommodation and you can usually get tickets for Y150 to Y180. Middle seats are the best.

The show is tweaked every six months or so to keep it fresh.

Shopping

Yángshuò is a good place to do souvenir shopping. Good buys include silk jackets, scroll paintings and batiks (from Guìzhōu). Name chops (carved seals used for ink stamping) are available from between Y10 to Y60, but you are expected to bargain (hard) for everything. Don't forget that Yángshuò is not simply Xi Jie; for comparison shopping, take a wander around the backstreets, especially north around the **tourist market** (Lǚkè Shìchǎng; Binjiang Lu).

If you are in the market for a chop, bear in mind that it is not the size of the stone that is important in determining a price, but the quality of the stone itself.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The closest airport is in Guilín; the numerous CITS outlets and many cafés dispense air tickets relatively cheaply. See p655 for details on available flights. Cafés and hotels can organise taxi rides from Yángshuò directly to the airport (Y150, one hour).

BUS

Most travellers arrive in Yángshuò via Guilín, from where there are good connections to both domestic and international destinations.

Buses leave Guilín for Yángshuò, every 20 minutes from 7am to 8pm from the main bus station and in front of the train station; express buses take one hour (Y13) regular buses take 1½ hours (Y10).

Moving on from Yángshuò other options include express buses to Guǎngzhōu (Y100, eight hours), Wúzhōu (Y110, seven hours) and Shēnzhèn (Y220, nine hours).

Cheaper ancient sleepers still ply many of these routes from the bus station; however, they're smoky, haphazard and excruciatingly slow.

TRAIN

The nearest train station is in Guilín. Almost any café or travel outfit around Yángshuò will organise train tickets. Some offer hard sleepers for high-demand routes such as Guilín to Kūnmíng for Y170 to Y270 (depending on the time of year) plus Y50 commission. To get any of these tickets you'll have to book at least two to three days in advance or further ahead during holidays.

Getting Around

Yángshuò itself is small enough to walk around, but hiring a bicycle is perhaps the local must-do. Average prices are Y10 per day. You'll see bikes for rent everywhere. Many places also charge a deposit. Thoroughly check gears, brakes, tyres, handle bars and cranks. The farmers' paths around Yángshuò put all bikes to the test and could leave you stranded miles away from your deposit. There have also been some ugly situations when travellers have been accused of returning bikes 'broken'; if this happens, don't expect the PSB to take your side.

Think twice if you're asked to fork over a Y400 deposit that's waived only if you agree to a 'private' bike tour costing anywhere from Y20 to Y60. Some travellers who've agreed say they've felt hijacked by the guides who were paid to take them to particular sights whether the travellers wanted to see them or not.

AROUND YÁNGSHUÒ

Exploring Yángshuò's countryside often makes travellers top 10 lists. The list below

is just to get you started. Whatever direction you head off in, you'll likely stumble across your own gems.

In Yángshuò, there are several locals offering guided tours of Yuèliàng Shān, the caves and other famous spots, as well as their home villages. Some now cook lunch or dinner as well. These minitours have garnered rave reviews from some travellers and they may be worth a try, although you may need to get at least three people and prices will vary wildly.

Yuèliàng Shān 月亮山

A limestone pinnacle with a moon-shaped hole, **Yuèliàng Shān** (Moon Hill; admission Y9) goes from full to crescent moon depending on your vantage point. The views from the top (some 1251 steps up, so reports one focused Frenchman) are incredible. You can spy Moon Hill Village and the 1500-year-old **Big Banyan Tree**. To reach Yuèliàng Shān by bicycle, take the main road south out of town towards the river and turn right on the road about 200m before the bridge. Cycle for about 8km – Yuèliàng Shān is on your right.



Black Buddha Cave & Water Cave

黑佛洞, 水岩

These **caves** (Hēifó Dòng & Shuǐ Yán; Y128) have been opened up not far from Yuèliàng Shān. Both are worth a visit for their rock formations, mud baths and caverns. Water Cave is especially popular. It's easy to reach the caves by bike; if you head for Yuèliàng Shān, you will undoubtedly be intercepted by tours.

Keep in mind that official entrance fees and tours to these caves are just a guideline so bargain all you want. Talk to any traveller coming out of these caves and you might discover they've paid admission prices anywhere from Y50 to Y150!

Yulong River 遇龙河

The scenery along the Yulong River (Yúlóng Hé) rivals that of Li River, and it's an area that usually leaves the biggest impression on most visitors to Yángshuò – despite ongoing development.

It is possible to do a full-day tour of the river and neighbouring sights, including **Double Flow Crossing** (Shuāng Liú Dù), **Xiangui Bridge** (Xiāngui Qiáo), nearby **Xīniú Hú** (Rhinoceros Lake) and **Dragon Bridge** (Yúlóng Qiáo). This last bridge, built in 1412, is impressive; it's among Guǎngxī's biggest bridges at 59m long, 5m wide and 9m high.

From Yángshuò, head towards Yuèliàng Shān. Before crossing the bridge over Yulong River, turn right down the dirt trail. It's possible to continue along this path all the way to Dragon Bridge and the village of Báishā. Don't be tempted by the Báishā road as it is busy, noisy and dusty. A round trip to Dragon Bridge takes a full day, but it's worth it. Pack a lunch and plenty of water.

If you do this jaunt, make sure to stop in at **Jiùxián** (旧县) near the Xiangui Bridge, about 10km from Yángshuò. About 20 families live here. There is a Tang dynasty wall and the village is packed with Ming and Qing dynasty stone buildings that have interesting rooftop carvings and offbeat doors. There's a restaurant here that keeps irregular hours, and in the summer you can also rent bamboo rafts.

Shìtóuchéng 石头城

If you want to get off the beaten track, this fascinating village is a brilliant day trip. Perched amongst karst peaks roughly 10km northeast-ish of Pútáo village (葡萄), the

ancient gates and walls of Shítóuchéng's old town are mostly still intact, crowning a limestone peak. Depending on who you ask, the walls have housed notables from a renegade prince looking for a retreat from rivals, to Qing gangsters who made the walls a base from which to extort protection money from villages below.

Don't bother trying to find the ruins yourself. Ask one of the villagers to be your guide. (*Nǐ kěyǐ dài wǒ yóu gǔ chéng ma?*; 你可以带我游古城吗?; Can you show me around the old town?). At the time of research, Y30 to Y40 was considered a fair price for both you and them.

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

If there's been any rain at all, you'll be (literally) up to your knees in mud and cow shit by the time you're done. Consider yourself warned.

Adventurous, independent travellers looking to get away from the crowds will get the most out of a trip here. The gates are small and not particularly impressive in and of themselves. The reward is the chance to stomp through the fields and see rural Chinese life up close. If you speak Mandarin or can bring someone to translate, getting to know your guide is worth the trip.

To get here, go to the Yángshuò bus station or stand on Chengxi Lu and flag down anything heading in the direction of Guilín. Ask to get off at Pútáo (Y5). You should see a long dirt road heading east once you've stepped off the bus. A motorcycle (Y20) or tractor (Y30) will take you the rest of the way to Shítóuchéng. It's about a 30-minute ride along some very bumpy, windy, uphill dirt roads.

It's also possible to walk, but the way to Shítóuchéng is not marked and people and houses become scarce the further you go. If you reach a fork in the road, don't move until a farmer wanders by and you can ask for directions.

There are no stores or restaurants on your way here, so bring water and snacks.

Your guide or a villager should be able to arrange your motorcycle ride back to Pútáo; from there, you can flag down a south-bound bus back to Yángshuò.

River Excursions

Many villages along the Li River are worth checking out. **Yángdī** (杨堤) and **Xíngpíng** (兴坪) are two of the most picturesque.

Many cafés and travel agents organise boat trips to these villages, about three to four hours upstream from Yángshuò. The mountain scenery around Yángdī is breathtaking and around Xíngpíng you'll also spot many caves. Official prices for all boat trips run from Y100 to Y150 a ride, but the final price will depend on the number of people going on the tour and your bargaining skills. Local boats charge less than Y5 for the same trip, but are deemed dangerous and the owners are not allowed to take foreigners.

A good alternative is to ride your bike to Xíngpíng and then put your bike on the boat coming back. Any number of places in Yángshuò or Xíngpíng can organise boat tickets (Y30 to Y50 per person).

There's also a fantastic 24km hike between Yángdī and Xíngpíng going back and forth over the river. The entrance fee is Y16 and a moderately fit person can complete it in four to five hours. Though there are restaurants along the way, it's a good idea to take some water and snacks of your own. Outside of the high season many of the restaurants have irregular opening hours.

You can start the hike at either end, though most people start at Yángdī and end at Xíngpíng if only because there are more frequent buses leaving from the latter for Yángshuò.

Buses leave Yángshuò for Yángdī from 7am to 6pm (Y8, 80 minutes) from the main bus station roughly every 30 minutes. Buses for Xíngpíng (Y5.5, 45 minutes) supposedly leave every 20 to 30 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm daily but more often than not leave on the 'when full' principle, the last bus back is 6pm. In both cases buy your ticket on board.

Boat trips (Y30, 20 minutes) also depart from Xíngpíng to **Yúcūn** (渔村), a picturesque ancient village with wonderfully preserved architecture. The problem is that boats only depart with enough people – never a given in sleepy Xíngpíng.

Xíngpíng has some interesting lanes and streets to explore. Keep your eyes peeled for the restaurant with giant caged rats outside.

There are lots of guesthouses by the river if you need to stay the night, but it only takes the arrival of one or two tour buses to fill them

up quickly. If this happens try the **Xíngpíng Inn** (Xíngpíng Kèzhān; ☎ 870 3089; s/d from Y50). It has small tidy rooms with squat toilets. It's not near the river but several of the rooms have balconies with limestone-peak views.

Right on the river, **Bamboo Café** is a good spot for a lei and refreshing drink. Just up from the Li River is the wonderful **One World Café**.

Another popular riverboat trip is to the village of **Fúli** (福利). It's not quite as picturesque as it's made out to be but the trip there and the surrounding scenery are lovely. The village is known for its fans and you'll see them everywhere: on walls, in workshops, outside people's houses. A couple of boats a day putter to Fúli from Yángshuò for around Y50, although most people tend to cycle here – it's a pleasant ride and takes around an hour. Head for Dutou village (渡头村) and take the boat across the river to Fúli (Y3).

Several places also offer rafting trips, kayak hire and bamboo rafts, popular options in the warm summer months.

Markets

The villages in the vicinity of Yángshuò are best visited on market days, which operate *roughly* on a three-day, monthly cycle. Thus, markets take place every third day starting on the first of the month for Yángdī and Báishā, every third day starting on the second of the month for Fúli and Pútáo, and every third day starting on the third of the month for Yángshuò and Xíngpíng. However, after the third market the next one is in four days, not three, but this doesn't happen in all towns (there are no markets on the 10th, 20th, 30th and 31st of the month). Confused? Definitely ask at your lodging or at cafés.

LÓNGSHÈNG 龙胜

☎ 0773 / pop 167,000

Close to the Guizhōu border, this town and the surrounding area is home to a colourful mixture of Dong, Zhuang, Yao and Miao cultures. The Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces and a *wēnquán* (hot spring) are also nearby.

Buses (Y5) to the hot spring pass through rolling hills sculptured with rice terraces and studded with Yao and Zhuang villages. It's possible to desert the bus around 6km from the hot spring and take off into the hills for some exploring. Other tourist sights around

Lóngshèng include forest reserves and unusual stone formations.

When you return from the day's outing, Lóngshèng offers cheap to midrange accommodation, and even cheaper food at its lively night market.

Information

Internet café (wǎngbā; per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-midnight daily) Walk behind Xinhua Bookstore. Go up the stairs on the right to 2nd floor.

Post & telephone office (Yóudiànjú; Gulong Lu)

Sleeping & Eating

Riverside Hotel (凯凯旅舍; Kǎikǎi Lǚshè; ☎ 758 8986; 5 Guilong Lu; 桂龙路5号; s without bathroom Y20, d with bathroom Y50) Down the road to Guilín, this basic hotel is run by a sociable English teacher. The restaurant below takes valiant stabs at Western dishes and has an English menu.

Lóngshèng Dǎjiùdiàn (龙胜大酒店; ☎ 751 7718; Zhongxin Jie; 中心街; s/d Y200; ☑) A recent spruce-up has left rooms with new furniture and new carpets. Bathrooms didn't get the same attention and still look terribly battered.

Just past the bridge on Xinglong Xilu, **street stalls** start operating around 8pm, offering point-and-choose meals.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave the Lóngshèng bus station every 10 to 15 minutes for Guilín (Y22, 1½ hours) and express buses depart every two hours (Y15, three hours). Buses depart Lóngshèng for Sǎnjiāng hourly (Y10, two to three hours).

AROUND LONGSHENG

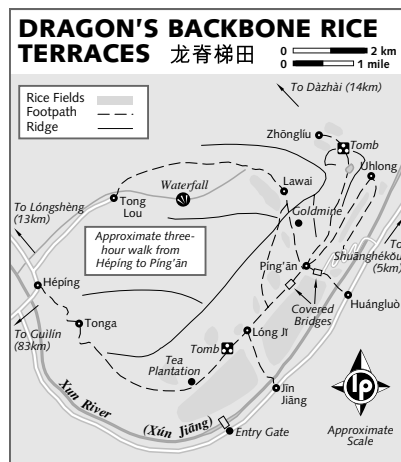
Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces

龙脊梯田

The **Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces** (Lóngjǐ Tītián; admission Y50) is a feat of farm engineering that reaches all the way up a string of 800m peaks. A half-hour climb to the top delivers an amazing vista.

The 600-year-old Zhuang village of **Píng'ān** (平安) is on the main ridge of the backbone and has become a small travellers' centre and base camp for exploring the terraces.

Walking possibilities include the one-hour circuit walk from the village to the clearly marked Viewpoint 1 and Viewpoint 2; pricier accommodation (Y70 for a room with simple private bathroom) is at each spot and has sublime views. More extensive day walks are also possible along the Dragon's Backbone



and down to Héping, or over the ridge and down into the valley behind. Some travellers insist that the three-hour trek to the Yao village of Dàzhài (大寨) is the only place to get away from the beaten path. Note that not all of these walks have established trails, so local guidance or advice is a good idea; it is not difficult to get lost.

Summer rains give the fields a sparkle, and they are stunningly golden in October; some travellers have remarked at the beauty of the terraces covered in snow. Winter and early spring bring heavy fog and mist that often shroud the terraces.

Most accommodation is found in Píng'ān. Other villages in the area also offer basic lodging in traditional wooden homes. A dorm bed costs between Y20 to Y30 in Píng'ān or at least Y20 elsewhere; most also have rooms with private, though spartan, bathrooms. **Countryside Café & Inn** (乡村旅馆; Xiāngcūn Lǚguǎn; liyue_lu@hotmail.com; ☎ 758 3020; d Y80) in Píng'ān is easy to access and has clean rooms and good food and service.

Buses to the terraces leave six times daily from 7.40am to 5pm (Y6.5) from Lóngshèng's bus station. Some buses will drop you off at the base of the terraces and continue on to Shuānghékǒu, so ask where you'll be deposited. The trip is only about 20km, however some buses stop midway at the town of Héping to try to pull in more passengers, dragging the trip out to 1½ hours. Returning to Lóngshèng, buses usually depart from the car park near the beautiful covered bridge at

the entrance to Píng'ān at 7.20am, 8.50am, 11am, 1pm, 3pm and 4.50pm.

The entrance fee is collected on the main road along the valley bottom.

SĀNJIĀNG 三江

☎ 0772 / pop 330,000

The reason for visiting the capital of the Sānjiāng Dong Minority Autonomous County (Sānjiāng Dǒngzú Zìzhìxiàn) is to get out and explore the surroundings. It is also a worthy route into Guizhōu. Approximately 20km to the north of town, Chengyang Wind & Rain Bridge and the wondrous patchwork of surrounding Dong villages are as peaceful and attractive as Sānjiāng is not.

Sights

CHENGYANG WIND & RAIN BRIDGE 程阳桥 Built in 1912, this 78m-long elegant **covered bridge** (Chéngyáng Qiáo; admission Y30) is considered by the Dong to be the finest of the 108 such structures in Sānjiāng County. It took villagers 12 years to build (theoretically achieved without the use of nails). Chéngyáng is a wonderful base to head off into the surrounding Dong villages in the countryside.

From the Sānjiāng bus station, you can catch hourly buses to Línxī (Y3), which go right past the bridge. Otherwise, catch one of the frequent minivan taxis (Y3) that congregate outside the bus station.

Sleeping

Chéngyáng is strewn with basic but comfy family-run hostels for about Y20 per bed.

Chengyang Bridge National Hostel (程阳桥招待所; Chéngyáng Qiáo Zhāodàisù; ☎ 861 2444, 858 2568; fax 861 1716; dm/d with shared bathroom Y20/60) Just off to the left of the Chengyang bridge, on the far side of the river, this is easily the best abode in the area. The hotel is an all-wood, Dong-style building and the owners are friendly, informative and welcoming.

Chengyang Bridge Hotel (程阳桥宾馆; Chéngyáng Qiáo Bīnguǎn; d Y140; ☎) Expect to find OK accommodation down the street from the bus station. Despite the name, it is located in Sānjiāng.

Getting There & Away

Sānjiāng's bus station has several buses to Guilín between 7.10am and 2.30pm (Y39, 5½ hours) and two daily to Wúzhōu at 3.10pm and 4.35pm (Y90, 9 to 10 hours). Buses to

Lóngshèng (Y10) leave every 40 to 50 minutes between 6.30am and 5.30pm.

SĀNJIĀNG TO KǎILĪ

If you have time on your hands, it's worth entering Guizhōu province through the back door. From Sānjiāng's bus station parking lot, minibuses leave when full for Dìpíng (Lóng'è; Y14 to Y20), which is just across the Guizhōu border. Though the journey is approximately three hours, delays may leave you stranded in Dìpíng for the night. There are frequent

buses departing from Dìpíng for Lípíng (Y22, five hours).

The journey to Lípíng passes through some beautiful mountains, as well as the fabulous Dong village of Zhàoxíng (p684), the highlight of the trip and definitely worth a visit.

There are also frequent buses from Sānjiāng to Cóngjiāng in Guizhōu. The road is new and improved but the route isn't as pretty. However, if you're in a hurry to reach Kǎilǐ, there are numerous onward connections from Cóngjiāng.

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