

Chóngqìng 重庆



It's the biggest city you've never heard of. The Capital of Fog. Chóngqìng may not be at the top of your itinerary, but if you're in China's Southwest, odds are you'll end up here. Stay a while. Chóngqìng saves its best for those who take their time.

For 50 years there was little to distinguish Chóngqìng from any of a dozen cities in China – except maybe the pollution. Steel mills spewed soot into the air and sludge into the water. It was said that the rain was black before it hit the ground.

Chóngqìng had been largely ignored since the 1940s, when it served as the wartime capital and was bombed to oblivion. In 1997 Běijīng finally took notice and carved out the Chóngqìng municipality, and poured \$200 billion into transforming it.

As a result, Chóngqìng is being paved and polished at breakneck speed. Slick skyscrapers pop up in place of ramshackle, stilt houses, and beauty parlours and motorcycle-repair shops grow out of abandoned bomb shelters. It's the dynamics of old and new, the struggle between the past and the future, that comprise this city's beauty and character.

Chóngqìng's charm is in the easily missed little details. It is Saturday morning on the waterfront and a woman is casting a net into the muddy waters. 'It's true,' she says, 'many days the city is covered in fog. But you know, fog is beautiful. In Chóngqìng, we have a saying: "There is beauty here every three steps."'

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sample Chóngqìng's red-hot signature dish, the spicy **hotpot** (p449)
- Look for the life lessons hidden within **Dàzú's** (p453) exquisite cave carvings
- Bounce over the green waters on floating bridges in **Wànshèng** (p454), but don't scare the wildlife
- Soar high on a zipline cable and then climb down into the earth in **Wùlóng** (p455)
- Scale the ancient walls that have protected the village of **Làitān** (p456) for a millennium



■ AREA CODE: ☎ 023

■ SYMBOL: 渝 (Yú)

■ POPULATION (CITY/MUNICIPALITY):
4,307,000/31,904,000

HISTORY

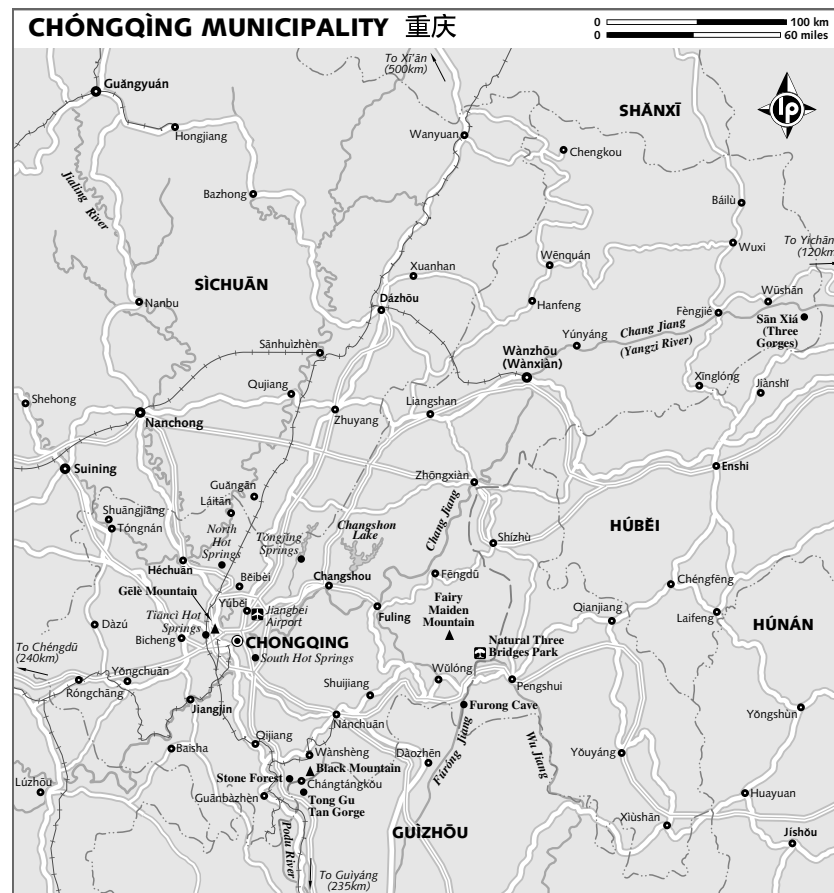
Modern-day Chóngqìng stands on the site of one of humanity's earliest civilisations. Stone tools and fossils unearthed in the Yangzi River valley show that our upright ancestors roamed here two million years ago, a million years earlier than previously thought.

The first written history comes from the Ba (巴) empire, which inscribed its laws on tortoise shells and built its capital in present-day Chóngqìng. The Ba thrived from the 21st century BC until about 316 BC, when it was conquered by the Qin state. Despite the distance in time, the Ba influence remains strong – the 'hand-waving dance' of the Tujia, the largest minority group in the municipality, is derived from Ba war dances. The character-

istic stilt houses of the region were also first built in the Ba era.

Fast forward to 1938, when the Kuomintang hid its wartime capital in Chóngqìng's mountains. Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong, Chiang Kai-shek and Soong Chingling, communists and Kuomintang alike, came here. In their wake, refugees from all over the country followed, swelling the population to two million. Most of Chóngqìng's current tourist sights are linked to this era.

For a time, this overburdened, war-torn city could not live up to its name. Back in 1189, the local prince, upon becoming Emperor Zhao Dun of the Song dynasty on his birthday, had given Chóngqìng its name in celebration of his 'repeated good fortune'.



Finally, recent decades have marked widespread reconstruction and development. New buildings and roads appear daily – a modern library in Shapingba District, a Science and Technology Exhibition Hall in Jiangbei and a massive Grand Theater perched on the north bank of the Jialing are among the major projects. From the ashes rises China's phoenix, a glass and steel megalopolis.

CLIMATE

Chongqing weather has just three settings: sweltering, rainy and foggy. Temperatures hover within a moderate range of 6°C to 20°C most of the year, but from July through September they can top 40°C, earning the city its place as one of the country's 'three furnaces', along with Wuhàn and Nánjīng.

LANGUAGE

Mandarin Chinese with a distinctive lilt is spoken here. The characteristic accent turns tones upwards, making declarations sound like soft questions. One key colloquialism: 'Méi de' (没得) takes the place of 'méi yǒu' (没有), meaning 'no' or 'none'. Except in Chongqing city and a handful of popular tourist spots such as Dázú, the best English you'll hear will be Chinese eager to practise 'Hello, how are you?' or vendors vying for your attention. Once they have it, though, it's all hand signals.

THE BANGBANG ARMY

Ever since the first resident could not carry his groceries up the stairs of this mountain city, these porters for hire have been an essential element of Chongqing.

The Bàngbàng (棒棒) are named for the characteristic bamboo pole or 'bàng' (棒) they carry on their shoulders. They hustle for work around the docks, bus stations and department stores, offering to climb where no cart or mule could go, carrying loads few could bear and only earning an average Y100 a week.

Their numbers exploded in the 1990s when the government resettlement of the millions living along the Yangzi River began. Today, an estimated 100,000 are members of the city's Bàngbàng Army. Unregulated and poor, they are vulnerable to abuse and misunderstanding. Their lives were glamorised in a popular soap called 'Mountain City Bang Bang Men'. A popular college drinking game involves spotting them.

At 52, Cun Yu Zhun has more grey hair than others in the army, but he says, 'I can still carry as much as the youngsters' – up to 90kg (the equivalent of four crates of oranges plus a few small appliances). A retired middle-school teacher, he is among a growing number of educated Bàngbàng. On his best day, he says, he earned Y30 delivering a TV to the front desk of a high-rise condominium and hauling bricks at a construction site. But as new roads make deliveries increasingly easy, most days, he waits with others on the Cháotiānmén steps for work that does not come.

ORIENTATION

Chongqing is a three-dimensional city, sprawling under and over hilltops and nestled deep into mountainsides. Its streets are so unruly that residents long ago dropped any reference to the sun and made everything relative. Your destination is to be found 'left', 'right', 'straight ahead', 'up', 'down' or 'soon'.

At the city's heart is Yúzhōng District, the densely populated peninsula that juts out between the Jialing River to the north and the Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) to the south. The rivers converge at Yúzhōng's eastern tip found at Chaotianmen Dock. Just inland from the dock is the Liberation Monument; the surrounding area of this monument, because of its flatness, became the first touristy part of the city.

Just north across the Jialing River from the main peninsula is the rapidly developing Jiāngběi, and further afield, Yúběi District, both of which have new roads cropping up faster than they can be named.

To the east and south of the peninsula across the Yangzi is the verdant Nán'àn District, the city's oxygen pool and Chiang Kaishek's wartime hide-out.

Finally, west of Yúzhōng is Shapingba District, which has so many universities it seems everyone walking about is under 25, and historical sites such as Gele Mountain and Ciqikou Ancient Town.

Maps

City maps with points of interest and transit lines are updated every few months and come in both English and Chinese. A good one is *Commerce, Traffic and Tour Map of Chongqing*. Pick it up at any newsstand (报刊亭; *bào kān tíng*) for Y5 or stop by Chongqing Book City/Xinhua Bookstore, which offers a comprehensive selection on the 1st floor. Cháotiānmén vendors hawk cheap tourist maps most useful for taping to your dorm wall.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Chongqing Book City/Xinhua Bookstore (Chongqing Shūchéng/Xīnhuá Shūdiàn; 121 Zourong Lu; ☎ 9am-9.30pm) Six stories of printed matter and DVDs that will actually pass customs. A modest foreign-language collection (including English-Chinese novels straight off your high-school reading list) is on the 4th floor. Check out the treasure-trove of Chinese art prints on the 5th.

Internet Access

Internet connections are no longer a rarity. Service at an internet bar (网吧; *wǎng bā*) generally costs a few yuan per hour plus a nominal deposit of Y10 or comes free with a cuppa at many coffee shops.

Frisco Coffee Co (☎ 6775 5992; 1B Paradise Walk, 2nd fl, 23 Yanghe Lu; ☎ 10am-10pm) Good coffee, tasty cheesecake and, free with purchase, wi-fi or access to two terminals in this sunny café in Guānyīn Qiáo.

Readers' Club Internet Café (Dúzhě Jùlèbù; ☎ 6371 6364; 3rd fl, 181 Minsheng Lu; per hr Y2, deposit Y10; ☎ 24hr) Surf for hours completely guilt-free on one of a legion of brand-new PCs, or just enjoy the cushy banquettes and bar service.

SPR Coffee (166 Minzu Rd; ☎ 9.30am-12am) Chinese hipsters in tight jeans come here for the salads, hot dogs and free wi-fi.

Media

Chongqing Currents is a free, fledgling English-language publication that answers expats' burning questions about table manners and where to get a decent beer. Alternatively, *Go West* is a free, Chéngdū-based magazine that also sometimes covers Chongqing's bar, restaurant and entertainment scenes. Unfortunately, only a few copies of either bimonthly publication are rationed to major hotels such as the Harbour Plaza, Hilton or JW Marriott. If you don't find them there, you're out of luck.

Medical Services

Chongqing First Aid Centre (Jījiù Yīliáo Zhōngxīn; ☎ 6369 2253; 1 Jiankang Lu; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) Provides comprehensive care and 24-hour emergency services (dial clinic) for foreign visitors.

Fuqiao Foot Massage Centre (Jiǎfú Fúqiáo; ☎ 38-8399 8666; 3rd fl, 12 Yang He Lu; ☎ 24hr) In traditional Chinese medicine, the feet are the gateway to the rest of the body. Try a 60-minute Chinese foot massage for Y50.

Global Doctor Chongqing Clinic (☎ 8903 8837; 7th fl, Suite 701, Hilton Hotel, 139 Zhongshan San Lu; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, closed holidays) Provides basic care and 24-hour emergency services (dial clinic) for foreign visitors.

Heping Pharmacy (Héping Yàofāng; ☎ 6370 2900; 28 Minquan Lu; ☎ 8am-9.30pm) Has many branches but this is one of the biggest. On-site health advice too.

Money

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; 104 Minzu Lu; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri summer, 1.30-5pm winter) Changes money and advances cash on credit cards. Bring your passport and crisp bills. After a rash of counterfeiting, tellers are extremely wary of foreign currency and, unlike you, they have all day. Thank goodness for the always-courteous 24-hour ATM bank access from Harbour Plaza. Also, many large hotels have exchange desks and ATMs.

Post

Post Office (Yóujú; 104 Minquan Lu; ☎ 8.30am-9pm) Look for the round, green post box out front. The service counter is tucked in back behind the mobile-phone sales counters. Don't expect lines. It's fight or flight if you want to buy stamps, international and domestic calling cards, or Western Union services.

Public Security Bureau

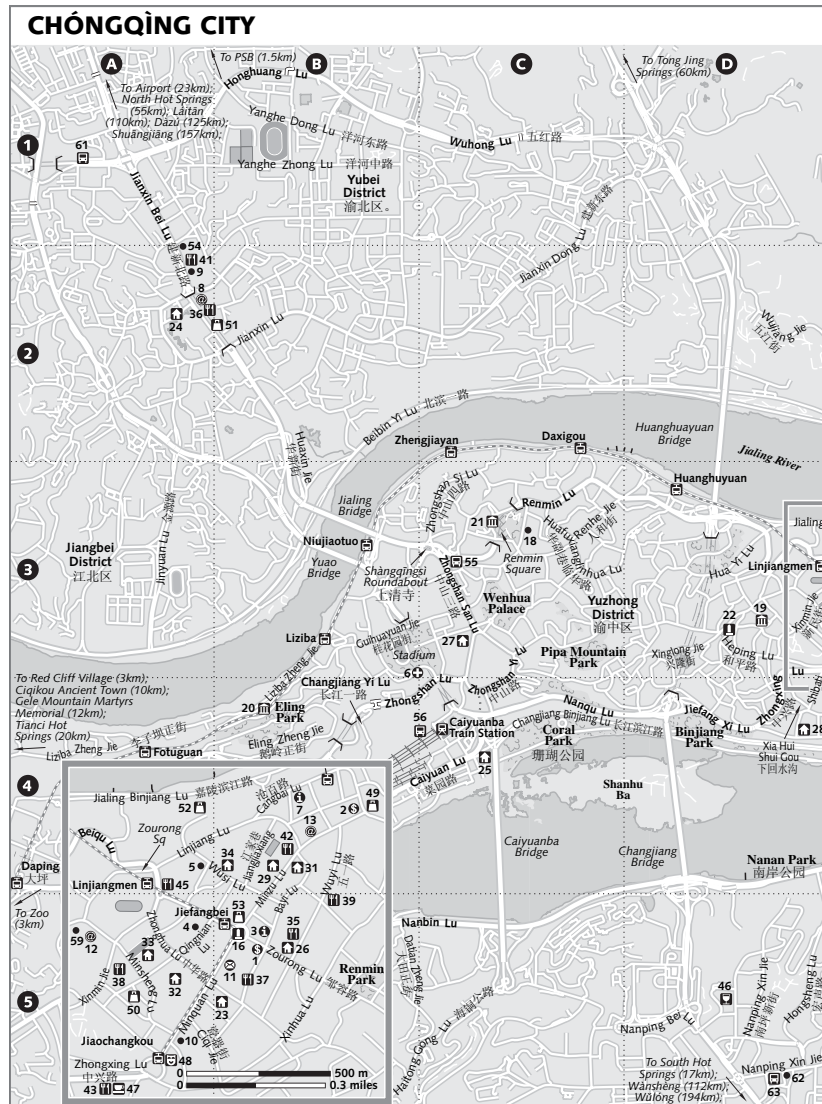
PSB (公安局; Gōngānjú; ☎ 6369 2043; www.cqga.gov.cn; 555 Huang Long Jie & Wu Huang Lu; ☎ 1.30-5pm) The Entry-and-Exit Bureau issues visa extensions. If you're after anything more unusual, take care of it in Chéngdū. Take bus 461 from Liberation Monument to the last stop and walk west a couple of blocks.

Tourist Information

Chongqing Municipal Tourism Bureau (Chongqing Shì Lǚyóu Jú; ☎ 8903 3055; 50 Jiuchikan & Cangbai Lu; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm) Direct general questions and gripes to this public information office.

Travel Agencies

Your hotel concierge can ferret out better deals on tours and tickets than you can on your own but they will only offer a few choices. Check with a travel agency to find out all that's available.



China International Travel Service (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójí Lúxíngshè; ☎ 6373 0111; www.citscq.com; 25th fl, New York, New York Bldg, 108 Bayi Lu; ☎ 9am-6pm) Handles domestic and international travel for Chinese citizens, so city tours (Y60) and day trips to Dazu and Wulong (Y220 and up) are cheapest here. Expect booking and tours to be entirely in Chinese.
Chongqing China Travel Service (Chóngqìng Zhōngguó Lúxíngshè; ☎ 6372 8888; www.ctscq.com;

19F, Tower A, Dushi Plaza, 39 Wusi Lu; ☎ 9am-6pm) Your best bet for booking tours outside the city proper. It says it has English, French, German, Korean, Thai and Japanese speakers on staff.
Harbour Plaza Business/Travel Centre (Hǎiyú Lǚyóu Zhōngxīn; ☎ 6370 0888; 3rd fl, Harbour Plaza, Wuyi Lu; ☎ 8am-11pm) Run by the posh Harbour Plaza hotel (p448), so staff is used to meeting high-maintenance trav-



anywhere ambling tourists frequent, especially bus and train stations and crowded areas such as Cháotiānmén and Liberation Monument.

Scams

Touts will try to make friends with you at the bus or train station. They may suggest a great (cheap!) hotel, by which they are paid to lure you. Avoid the hassle and tell them you've already reserved a room elsewhere, thank you. Sometimes they do have decent recommendations, but most of the time the hotel is already booked up. And if it isn't, it'll be obvious why.

SIGHTS

Chóngqìng's sights are scattered all over town and fall under two major themes: war and revolution; and other events. Many in the first category are west of the peninsula, but the rest are centrally located.

Liberation Monument 解放碑

If you have just a couple of days to spend in the city, **Liberation Monument (Jiěfàngbēi; Zourong Lu & Minquan Lu; 邹容路和民权路)** is the best place to start. First built to commemorate Sun Yat-sen's death, the wooden tower's dedication was twice revised to mark the victory over the Japanese in 1947 and the first anniversary of the People's Republic of China in 1950. It's also the site of a spectacle every morning at 6am, when hundreds congregate at its base for taichi practice. Keep an eye out for blue Chinese and English markers pointing the way to major sites and shopping around this area.

Luòhàn Sì 罗汉寺

Just a 10-minute walk from Liberation Monument, this 1000-year-old Buddhist **Arhat temple (nr Xinhua Lu & Datong Lu; 新华路和打铜路交叉口; admission Y5; ☎ 8am-5.30pm)** stands in stark contrast to the concrete jungle outside its gates.

Luòhàn is the Chinese expression of the Sanskrit *arhat*, which is a Buddhist term for those enlightened disciples who have overcome the bondages of greed, hate and ignorance. The temple's striking feature is a long corridor of Song dynasty rock carvings. Among these carvings are a large bronze Buddha and an Indian-style *jataka* mural of Prince Siddhartha cutting his hair to renounce the world. There are also over 500 terracotta *arhats*, which could not withstand fires, bombs

ellers' needs and many are fluent in English. They can track down English guides for a premium price (city tour Y680).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Chóngqìng is a relatively safe city, but pick-pockets, especially children from the western provinces sometimes supervised by nearby adults, are becoming a nuisance. Take care

INFORMATION	Three Gorges Museum 三峡博物馆.....21 C3	DRINKING ☑☑	Dee Dee's Bar.....46 D5
ATM 自动柜员机.....1 B5	Tongyuanmen 通远门.....22 D3	Lao Jie Shi Ba Ti Teahouse 老街十八梯茶楼.....47 A5	Pirates Pub 卡布雷登海盜吧.....(see 52)
Bank of China 中国银行.....2 B4	SLEEPING ☑	Ruyi Jiubā 如意酒吧.....(see 27)	
China International Travel Service (CITS) 中国国际旅行社.....3 B5	Bayi Hotel 八一宾馆.....23 B5	ENTERTAINMENT ☑	Dèyì Shìjié 得意世界.....48 A5
Chongqing Book City/Xinhua Bookstore 重庆书城/新华书店.....4 A5	Chongqing Golden Resources Hotel 金源大饭店.....24 A2	Soho Bar 苏荷酒吧.....(see 48)	True Love 真爱.....(see 48)
Chongqing China Travel Service 重庆中国旅行社.....5 A4	Fuyuan Hotel 富苑宾馆.....25 C4	SHOPPING ☑	Carrefour 家乐福.....49 B4
Chongqing First Aid Centre 急救医疗中心.....6 B3	Harbour Plaza 重庆海逸酒店.....26 B5	Flower & Bird Market 花鸟市场.....50 A5	Guānyīn Qiáo 观音桥.....51 B2
Hilton Hotel 希尔顿酒店.....27 C3	Hong Ya Dong Hotel 洪崖洞大酒店.....(see 52)	Hóng Yá Dòng 洪崖洞.....52 A4	Maison Mode 美美时代百货.....53 B5
Chongqing Municipal Tourism Bureau 重庆市旅游局.....7 B4	Huixianlou Hotel 会仙楼宾馆.....29 B4	TRANSPORT	Air China 中国国际航空.....54 A2
Frisco Coffee Co 啡可咖啡.....8 A2	Inn No 9 9号客栈.....30 E3	Airport Shuttle 重庆机场客车.....55 C3	Caiyuanba Bus Station 菜园坝长途汽车站.....56 C4
Fuqiao Foot Massage Centre 家富桥.....9 A2	InterContinental Chongqing 洲际酒店.....31 B4	Chaotianmen Dock 朝天门码头 朝天门码头售票处.....57 E2	Chaotianmen Bus Station 朝天门长途汽车站.....58 F2
Global Doctor Chongqing Clinic..(see 27)	JW Marriott Chongqing 万豪酒店.....32 A5	China Eastern 中国东方航空.....59 A5	Chongqing Changjiang 重庆长江轮船两江游船公司.....60 E2
Harbour Plaza Business/Travel Centre 海逸旅游中心.....(see 26)	Milky Way Hotel 银河大宾馆.....33 A5	Chongqing North Bus Station 重庆北站长途汽车站.....61 A1	Chongqing Zu Lin Company 重庆租赁公司.....62 D5
Heping Pharmacy 和平药房.....10 A5	Square Hotel 赛格酒店.....34 B4	Dragonair 港龙航空.....(see 35)	Nanping Bus Station 南坪长途汽车站.....63 D5
Post Office 邮局.....11 B5	EATING ☑		
Readers' Club Internet Café 读者俱乐部网吧.....12 A5	AE&E Restaurant.....35 B5		
SPR Coffee.....13 B4	AE&E Restaurant 阿利与艾德咖啡西餐厅.....36 A2		
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Good Eats Street 好吃街.....37 B5		
Chongqing Planning Exhibition Gallery 重庆市规划展览馆.....14 F2	Hotpot Restaurants 火锅.....38 A5		
Huguang Huguang 湖广会馆.....15 E3	Hotpot Restaurants 火锅.....39 B5		
Liberation Monument 解放碑.....16 B5	Hotpot Restaurants 火锅.....40 E4		
Luohàn Sì 罗汉寺.....17 E3	Little Swan Hot Pot 小天鹅火锅餐厅.....41 A2		
Museum of Famous Historical Figures 历史名人馆.....(see 14)	Lǎo Sìchuān Dǎjiǔlóu 老四川大酒楼.....42 B4		
People's Hall 人民礼堂.....18 C3	Muslim Restaurant of Tian Shan 新疆天山餐厅.....43 A5		
Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea 大韩民国临时政府.....19 D3	Propitious Winds 南方花园渝高广场.....44 E4		
Stilwell Museum 史迪威将军故居.....20 B4	Qiqi Shàn'yú Hot Pot 齐齐鲜鱼火锅.....45 A4		

and pollution, and so have been reincarnated a couple times, most recently in 1986.

Once home to 70 monks, there are only around a couple of dozen ascetics in residence these days. We visited during heavy renovations, which when completed will include a vegetarian eatery.

Three Gorges Museum 三峡博物馆

This **natural history and art museum** (Sānxiá Bówùguǎn; ☎ 6367 9066; www.3gmuseum.cn; 236 Renmin Lu; 人民路236号; adult/child Y40/20; ☎ 9am-5pm) covers the cultural history of the civilisations that grew up along the Yangzi's banks. The well-executed exhibits, some of which came from the former Chongqing Museum, warrant at least an afternoon. Check out the splendid Three Gorges Hall for a play-by-play of the first people who settled here all the way through to the construction of the world's largest dam (minus references to the social

upheaval). While English captions are sparse, you can rent an English audio tour for Y10.

On the way out, look across the square at the **People's Hall** (Rénmín Tǎng; admission Y5). When built in 1954, it was the tallest building in town and symbolised Chongqing's rebirth from backwater war casualty to modern metropolis.

Take light rail or bus 103 from Liberation Monument.

Hú Guǎng Huì Guǎn 湖广会馆

This **guild** (☎ 6393 0287; www.cqhuguang.com; 1 Changbin Lu, Bajiaoyuan, 长滨路芭蕉园1号; admission Y30; ☎ 9am-6pm) was the seat of immigrant life 300 years ago in the Qin dynasty. Eager to increase the population in Sichuan, the government encouraged widespread immigration beginning in AD 316. By the time of the guild, the population was 800,000 and rapidly growing as settlers arrived mostly from the Hú (Húnán and Húběi) and Guǎng (Guǎngdōng

and Guǎngxī) provinces, as well as 10 others. People came to the guild for legal processing and to worship and celebrate with other new arrivals.

English guides are available for Y60, though you could easily spend a day wandering on your own through the beautifully restored guild houses and their collections of furniture, art and jewellery.

Also worth checking out are the daily performances on the three opera stages, highlighting some examples of the traditions immigrants brought to Chongqing – from the tea art of Xizàng to the quick-change *biàn liǎn* mask changing of Sichuan. Free preview performances are put on at 2.30pm. Full performances with tea service are at 8pm (Y98 and up).

The guild is a 15-minute walk from Liberation Monument.

Cháotiānmén Dock 朝天门码头

Cháotiānmén has been one of China's busiest river ports since the Ming dynasty. From the square overlooking the dock, you can watch the jade green Jialing River meet the less photogenic, brown Yangzi. Climb down the steps to the markers along the bank marking the river's rise (eventually 175m) as a result of the Three Gorges Dam down river.

Chongqing Planning Exhibition Gallery 重庆市规划展览馆

This newly renovated **museum** (Chóngqingshì Guìhuà Zhǎnlǎnguǎn; Chaotianmen Sq; 朝天门广场; admission Y20; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) sets recent local history to flashing lights. As told by models, la-

sers and interactive consoles, the story of the Three Gorges Dam is a rosy one. Downstairs, a separate room is devoted to each of the 43 townships and counties comprising the municipality. Next door, the companion **Museum of Famous Historical Figures** (Lishi Mínggrén Guǎn; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Tue-Sun) introduces visitors to everyone who was anyone in this town, for example, prodigal son Deng Xiaoping, who grew up just north of Chongqing. Both museums' exhibits have many expert English captions.

Ciqikou Ancient Town 磁器口古镇

Perched on a hill overlooking the Jialing River 14km west of the city centre, Ciqikou Ancient Town (Ciqikou Gǔzhèn) dates back almost 1700 years. At its height in the Ming dynasty, it shipped its namesake ceramics, *ciqi*, from the town pier.

Every building has been preserved or restored for tourists, but behind the shops and restaurants, the residents air their laundry and stir rice porridge over charcoal flames. And at 8pm each night, the town crier walks the streets banging a gong to announce all is well. Behind the lacquer is a living, working village – just one adorned with descriptive placards.

A network of alleyways and walking streets comprises the town. Check the map at the two main gates for all the attractions. A few sights not to be missed include **Baolun Si** (宝轮寺; Heng Jie & Ciqikou Zheng Jie; 横街和磁器口正街; admission Y5; ☎ 7am-6pm), one the last remaining of Ciqikou's five temples (another now serves as a primary school). The magnificent main

DIÀOJIǎO LÓU 吊脚楼

A striking trait of the Chongqing skyline is the traditional stilt houses precariously clinging to the city's steep inclines. *Diàojiǎo* refers to these structures' support pilings, while *lóu* refers to their many levels.

Diàojiǎo lóu are in many ways the predecessor to the modern skyscraper, sprawling vertically rather than horizontally to save space. Their design also serves to keep family units in close quarters despite uneven terrain. They are built on a bamboo or fir frame that is fitted into bore holes drilled into the mountainside. Their thin walls are stuffed with straw and coated with mud to allow for cooling ventilation. This is in contrast to the four-cornered *shìhéyuàn* (四合院) structures typical in northern China, whose design maximises light while shutting in warmth.

The Miao minority continues to live in *diàojiǎo lóu* today, building their houses to jut out over steep riverbanks. The burial ritual of the high-mountain tribes in southern Chongqing involves arranging coffins on wooden stilts in the form of these houses fit for the afterlife. In the city, modernisation has turned *diàojiǎo lóu* into a symbol of poverty and as a result they are quickly disappearing. A few examples remain in use today on the cliff overlooking the Yangzi River bridge and around the Eighteen Stairs.

HOT SPRINGS 温泉

Weary souls have for dynasties found rejuvenation soaking in Chongqing's hot springs. The Chinese are just re-embracing the luxury travel concept, so amenities at these retreats are often sparse, but at least the waters are always soothing.

North Hot Springs (北温泉; Běi Wēnquán; ☎ 6822 0111; admission Y20; 🕒 7am-10pm), nestled at the base of Jinyun Mountain, was once an extremely exclusive, ancient medical retreat and still houses a 5th-century Buddhist temple and gardens. Take bus 502, 503 or 504 to Běibèi (北碚) and then catch bus 520 (Y11).

South Hot Springs (南温泉; Nán Wēnquán; ☎ 6284 6106; admission Y20; 🕒 9am-10pm) is a no-frills assemblage of 40°C sulphur springs. Come here to avoid the crowds. Take bus 302 from Liberation Monument for the 25-minute ride.

Tiānci Hot Springs (天赐温泉; ☎ 6570 0075; Jiulongpo District; admission Y46; 🕒 24hr) offers the hottest mineral-rich soaks (57°C) in lovely landscaped private pools. About 20 minutes by bus from the North bus station (Y24) or by taxi (Y60).

Tǒngjǐng Springs (统景温泉; ☎ 6728 8999; 66 Jin Qian Lu; admission Y60; 🕒 24hr) is the most manicured and modern of the retreats. You can stay for up to a month in an apartment. Single and double rooms go for Y388 and Y468. Take bus 612 from Cháotiānmén between 8am and 11pm for the hour-long trip.

building dates back 1000 years to the Northern Song dynasty.

Across from the temple and down the stairway is the small **Trackers' Cultural Museum** (纤夫文化; Qiānfū Wénhuà; admission Y2; 🕒 8am-6.30pm), dedicated to the Yangzi's boat trackers. Working in gangs of up to 30, these muscle men employed moves like 'phoenixes nodding their heads', where each dug into the ground with one hand and steadied the rope with the other to haul boats upriver.

The curator, Cheng Wei Bing, was himself a tracker for 30 years and many items including the braided bamboo rope and rainhat are his own gear. There are few English captions here, but there are neat wooden-boat models.

For a quiet walk away from the bustle, head up the path towards **Ma An Mountain** (马鞍山; Mǎ'ān Shān) and get lost among the meandering backstreets.

From Liberation Monument take bus 402, 418, 462 or 702 to Shāpíngbà and then transfer to bus 202 or 843 to Ciqikou. The ride takes about an hour. A taxi takes half the time and costs about Y35.

Red Cliff Village 红岩村

During the Kuomintang–communist alliance against the Japanese in WWII, this **village** (Hóngyán Cūn; admission Y18; 🕒 8.30am-5.15pm) west of the peninsula served as the offices and living quarters of the communist representatives to the Kuomintang.

During the war, almost every one of the Party's major leaders lived here, including Ye Jianying, Zhou Enlai and his wife, Deng Yingchao, and Dong Biwu. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, Mao Zedong also came to Chongqing – at the instigation of US ambassador Patrick Hurley – to join in the peace negotiations with the Kuomintang. The talks lasted 42 days and resulted in a formal agreement that Mao later described as 'empty words on paper'.

One of China's better revolutionary-history **museums**, which includes a large collection of wartime photos and furnishings, now stands at this site. Most captions are in Chinese only. Just a short walk from the museum stands the old headquarters of the South Bureau of the Communist Party's Central Committee and the office of the Eighth Route Army, which fought on the frontlines under a strict code of ethics that are still referred to by Chinese parents and school-teachers today.

To get to Red Cliff village, take bus 104 from Linjiang Lu just northwest of Liberation Monument. The ride takes under an hour. A taxi from downtown takes less time and will cost around Y24.

Gele Mountain Martyrs' Memorial
歌乐山烈士陵园

In 1943 the USA and Chiang Kaishek were to sign a secret agreement that set up the Sino-American Cooperation Organisation (SACO),

under which the USA helped to train and dispatch secret agents for the Kuomintang. The chief of SACO was Dai Li, the ruthless head of the Kuomintang military secret service, and US Navy Commodore Milton Miles served as deputy chief.

Though the Kuomintang had recognised the Communist Red Army as allies in the struggle against the Japanese invaders, it never recognised the Communist Party as a legal political entity. The Kuomintang held adherents of repressive laws and imprisoned high-ranking and student communists alike in the SACO prisons during the era known as the Bloody Betrayal. On the night before the Kuomintang's withdrawal from the mainland on 29 November, 1949, more than 300 prisoners were marched out and executed. All the **sites** (gèlèshān lièshì língyuán; admission to all sites Y40; 🕒 8.30am-7pm) on Gele Mountain relate to these events.

The largest of the 20 prisons on the mountain is **Zhāzǐ Dòng** (渣滓洞; admission Y10). It was here that the highest-ranking prisoners were held under the most punishing conditions. Prisoners were also kept in **Bái Gōngguǎn** (白公馆; admission Y10), a residence turned makeshift internment camp about 20 minutes from Zhāzǐ Dòng (just follow the signs). On display are gory pictures and films about the massacre of communist prisoners. On the way down the hill, check out the **Doghouse** (中美合作狼犬室; Zhōngměi Hézuò Lángquǎn Shì; admission Y5), where the US trained spy dogs. Near the bottom of the hill is the **Martyrs' Memorial** (烈士墓; Lièshì Mù; admission Y10; 🕒 8.30am-5pm), on whose peaceful grounds stands a forest of memorial stelae (碑林; bēilín). Included in the Martyrs' Memorial admission is the Hong Yan Spirit Exhibition Hall, a museum filled with more macabre and gory scenes.

Take bus 215 from Linjiang Lu just northwest of Liberation Monument. The ride is about an hour. A taxi is quicker and will cost you Y30. Make sure that the driver knows where you want to get off, as the entrance is not obvious.

Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea 大韩民国临时政府

This small enclave of offices and residences served as the entire **Korean capital** (Dà Hán Mínguó Línshí Zhèngfǔ; ☎ 6382 0753; 38 Lián Huā Chí; 莲花池 38号; admission Y20; 🕒 9am-5pm) during WWII. In response to brutal colonial rule by the Japa-

nese, the Korean heads of state fled to China in 1909 and formed an alliance. They set up camp in Shànghǎi and eventually moved to Chongqing in 1940. The provisional government's plea to President Roosevelt, written in imperfect but plaintive English, hangs in a gallery accompanied by haunting footage of the air raids.

This is within 10 minutes' walking distance of Liberation Monument.

Bomb Shelter 演武厅出入口

You could easily miss the entrance to this **shelter** (Yǎnwǔtīng Chūrùkǒu; admission free; 🕒 9am-noon & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun) save for graphic carvings on its exterior of men, women and children engulfed in flames. Japanese bombers usually flew in by night, following the silver reflection of the moonlight on the Yangzi to pinpoint the city.

A small display of photographs documents the effects of 104 separate air strikes between 1938 and 1943, particularly 5 June 1941 when bombs fell for five hours and killed 2500 people. It is estimated that thousands more suffocated in shelters throughout the city behind caved-in entrances.

The shelter is a very short walk from Liberation Monument.

Stilwell Museum 史迪威将军旧居

Only opened in 2003, this **museum** (Shídīwēi Jiāngjūn Jiùjū; admission Y5; 🕒 9am-5pm) by Eling Park is something of a novelty in China as it focuses on the American involvement in WWII. It is located in the former VIP guesthouse of the Kuomintang and residence of General Joseph Stilwell, commander of the US forces in the China-Burma-India Theatre and chief-of-staff to Chiang Kaishek in 1942. Stilwell realised early on that a successful resistance required the cooperation of the Kuomintang and communist forces, and it was at his urging that Chiang relented for a time.

Repeated efforts to bring the two sides together in a truly unified front against the Japanese largely failed, Stilwell said later, because of Chiang's obsession with wiping out the communists. Vinegar Joe's caustic personality grated with Chiang and others, so despite major victories including retaking the Burma front and procuring fighter jets for the Chinese air force to fly a key route over the Himalayas, called the Hump, Roosevelt relieved him of command in 1944.

Take the light rail to the Liziba stop or bus 104 from Linjiang Lu just northwest of Liberation Monument. The museum is a five-minute walk up a very steep hill.

Parks

At 345m, **Pipa Mountain Park** (枇杷山公园; Pipa Shan Gōngyuán; 74 Pipa Shan Zheng Jie; 枇杷山正街 74号; admission Y5, temple Y3; ☎ 6am-11pm summer, 6.30am-10pm winter) marks the highest point on the peninsula. It's a good place to spend a leisurely afternoon sipping tea, playing chess, and sunning your prized songbirds.

At the neck of the peninsula, **Eling Park** (鹅岭公园; Eling Gōngyuán; Eling Zheng Jie; 鹅岭正街) is not worth a special trip but does offer good views of the skyline if you can't make it east across the Yangzi.

Renmin Park (Rénmín Gōngyuán; Xinhua Lu & Zourong Lu; 新华路和邹容路; ☎ 6am-dusk), not to be confused with Renmin Sq, has more wildlife for sale than it has roaming free. Puppies, fish, birds and every other form of pet await adoption, although some are just being babysat for the day.

Head across the Yangzi to get to the least-developed corner of the city and the Nanshan Scenic Area. It contains a number of parks including **Nanshan Park** (Nánshān Gōngyuán), which has spectacular rose and orchid gardens as well as cherry blossoms in bloom from mid-March to early May. On a cool, clear night, the most incredible views of the skyline are from behind the glass of the **Yikeshu Viewing Platform** (admission Y20; ☎ 9am-11pm). Or brave the 20-minute climb up to the **Golden Eagle Garden** (Dàjīnyīng Yuán; admission Y12; ☎ 8.30am-11pm), the highest point within the city proper. From the Yangzi River Cable Car, catch bus 320 (Y1.50, running from 8.40am to 5.30pm) on Wuyi Lu just east of Liberation Monument.

WALKING TOUR

This short route takes you through 1800 years of history and the heart of the old city.

Start at the western end of **Tōngyuǎnmén** (1; 通远门; cnr Zhongshan Yi Lu & Heping Lu). Only the footstone remains of the original structure, one of nine major and eight minor gates (*mén*) that have protected the city since the 2nd century BC. It is for these gates that neighbourhoods around the city are still named.

Head up to the top of the gate and walk its length, following the signs to **Drum Tower**

Lane (2; 鼓楼巷; Gǔlóu Xiàng). The bronze inscriptions along the way tell the story of Tōngyuǎnmén's construction, the Mongols breach in 1278 AD and a peasant revolt that pushed through in 1644.

Past the aerobiscisers and the tea house (you might check out the old tools on display in the courtyard), the **bronze sculpture** (3) of a fist on your right commemorates a 1927 military coup in Chongqing, in which Yang Shangkun's eldest brother was killed at age 27. Follow Drum Tower Lane as it makes a sharp left turn downhill all the way back to Tōngyuǎnmén.

Climb back over the gate and then swing under its arch to head downhill on the right side of Heping Lu (和平路). After about 10 minutes, take the small pedestrian lane just after the exercise park and police stand. When you see the roundabout, cross the street and head to the **viewing balcony** (4) to your left.

From this roost, glimpse a view of the old city, with its clay rooftops and lively community built along the winding steps of the Eighteen Stairs (十八梯; Shíbāti). An example of **stilt housing** (5) stands on its last legs just to the left (p443).

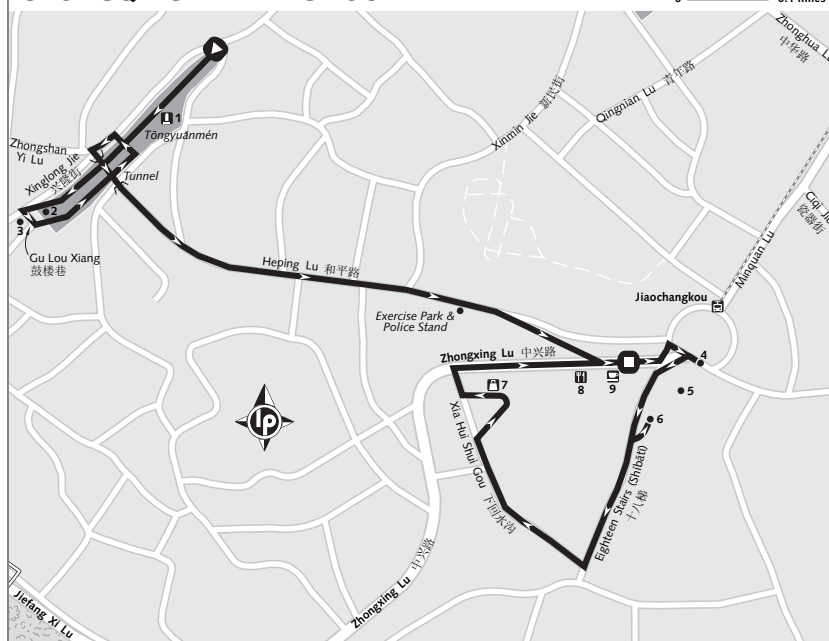
Head to the right of the platform and down the old stairs, worn smooth by countless climbers carrying goods up from the river to the rest of the city. For more on those climbers, see p438. Behind a metal gate to the left of the stairs is a tunnel several kilometres long. On hot afternoons, the neighbourhood takes advantage of the cool air that pours from the **bomb shelter's** (6) mouth over card tables and tea.

As you continue winding your way through the neighbourhood, hang a right on to Xia Hui Shui Gou (下回水沟; Xiàhuishuǐ Gōu), which makes a sharp turn up the hill back to Zhongxing Lu (中兴路; Zhōngxīng Lù), and then turn right. A few steps on the right is a large **flea market** (7; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), where you'll need a good eye, or at least patience, to spot the finds among the Mao buttons and knock offs. Take a few steps further up the road and rest your feet with onion pancakes at the **Muslim Restaurant of Tian Shan** (8; p449) or at the neighbourhood institution **Lǎojiē Shíbāti Tea House** (9; p451).

TOURS

Hotels and travel agencies book pricey day tours around the city for Y680 or to Dàzú for

CHONGQING WALKING TOUR



WALK FACTS

- **Start** Tōngyuǎnmén
- **Finish** Lǎojiē Shíbāti Tea House
- **Distance** 2.3km
- **Duration** two hours

Y1550 (see p439). If you enjoy organised fun, an affordable option is a river cruise, which departs nightly from Chaotianmen Dock, March through January. Most cruises sail around the peninsula and pass under both the Jialing and Yangzi bridges, giving you a good look at Chongqing by night when the grey is dressed up with a flash of neon.

You can buy tickets for the river cruise at most hotels or the travel agencies around Chaotianmen including **Chongqing Changjiang Sightseeing** (☎ 6373 5818; fax 6373 0013; 2 Shanxi Lu; with/without dinner Y108/Y80). Cruises board at 6.30pm, serve dinner at 7pm, and cruise from 8pm to 10pm. Just don't expect too much out of the food.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Spring Festival (southeast Chongqing) Begins on the eve of lunar new year and ends with the lantern festival on the 15th day of the first month of the lunar calendar (mid-January to mid-February). The Tujia put on performances of their hand waving and lantern dances throughout the counties of Shizhū, Péngshuǐ, Qiánjiāng, Yǒuyáng and Xiūshān.

Three Gorges International Tourist Festival (☎ 5823 9314) Happens annually in late May at different sites along the Yangzi. Events include dragon boat races and special sightseeing tours throughout the region.

Autumn Harvest (southeast Chongqing, Wànshèng) For the Miao this is a week of bullfights, drumming and song, taking place late October. The celebration is also an opportunity for young people to couple up. Each village builds a giant swing on which couples stand and swing together. If a girl steps on her partner's feet, it's love.

SLEEPING

Chongqing may not be a Pearl of the Orient, the Paris of the East, or a modern, Olympic host city. But at least the price of a night's accommodation reflects this – it's up to a third less than what you'd pay in Hong Kong, Shanghai or Beijing.

Unfortunately, there's little in the way of true budget accommodation, but dependable standard midrange options can be had for not much more than a budget room. If you can afford the splurge, top-end living is ultimately the best bargain. Always ask for a discount, which knocks anywhere from 20% to 40% off the published rate.

As for perks, most hotels regardless of range offer complimentary breakfast spreads.

Budget

Huixiánlóu Hotel (Huixiánlóu Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6384 5101; fax 6384 4234; 186 Minzu Lu; 民族路186号; dm/s/d ¥50/240/320) The regular rooms are, by our nose, rank. But while the dorm rooms (four or six beds with a shared bathroom and a hose for showers) are unspectacular, they are clean. Dorm beds are for foreign travellers only (read: if you look Chinese, don't talk like one here).

Inn No 9 (Jiǔhào Kèzhàn; ☎ 6377 0909; 29 Xinyi Jie; 信义街29号; s/d 140/209; ☎ ☎ ☎) Just steps from Cháotiānmén, this brand-new high-rise still smells of paint and plaster. Some rooms are closets and durability trumps design everywhere, so at least ask for an even-numbered room, which have pretty views of the river.

Fùyuàn Hotel (Fùyuàn Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6362 7333; 12 Caiyuan Lu; 菜园路12号; s/d ¥160/198; ☎) With newly spruced-up rooms, this is the best budget option in town. Right by the Càiyuánbà bus and train stations, it's a great location for late arrivals/early departures but out of the way for everything else. A huge internet café sits just off its lobby (¥2 per hour plus ¥10 deposit).

Bāyì Hotel (Bāyì Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6380 5400; fax 6383 4038; 250 Bayi Lu; 八一路250号; s/d/tw ¥218/248/248; ☎ ☎) If you can overlook the spotty red carpeting and grotty bathrooms, rooms here are perfectly fine. The central location, handful of English-speaking staff and internet bar downstairs (¥2 per hour) make up for everything else.

Midrange

Square Hotel (Sàigé'ér Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 6373 3333; fax 6373 2525; 28 Wusi Lu; 五四路28号; s/d/st ¥250/258/438; ☎ ☎) Planted in the heart of downtown, the location and comfortable rooms make this a popular place for locals to send their friends. If you're here for an extended stay, deluxe doubles are equipped with kitchenettes. Check in is on the 11th floor.

Hóngyádòng Hotel (Hóng Yá Dòng Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 6399 2888; fax 6399 2999; 56 Cangbai Lu; 沧白路56号; s/d/st ¥398/538/1288; ☎ ☎) This brand-new hotel's

traditional Chinese architecture and setting sends you back in time armed with modern conveniences like broadband internet. Request a balcony room with a view of the river, which is noisier because of the bustling street below, but brighter than the alternative – a close-up of the mountain's face.

Homehome Inn (Fēnghuáng Jiǔjiǔdiàn; ☎ 6355 7444; fax 6355 7399; 6 Fenghuangtai, Nanjimen; 南纪门凤凰台6号; s/d/tr ¥436/516/636; ☎ ☎) At the higher end of midrange but with good reason. Rooms are spotless, have broadband internet, and are decorated in a slick, Eastern minimalist theme. Plus the staff is as big as an army and keen to respond.

Milky Way Hotel (Yínhé Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6380 8585; www.cqyinhe.com; 49 Datong Lu; 大同路49号; s/d ¥598/698; ☎ ☎) Rooms here are bright and comparable to some of the city's five-star affairs. Some even have in-room computers. The major downside: no nonsmoking rooms.

Top End

Harbour Plaza (Chóngqing Hǎiyì Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 6370 0888; www.harbour-plaza.com/hpcq; Wuyi Lu; 五一一路; s/d/st ¥498/768/1298; ☎ ☎ ☎) A great bargain considering the plush beds and opulent décor. English-speaking staff is the norm. Being next to a huge mall is a plus; everything from shopping to Dance Dance Revolution to ice skating and bowling is at your doorstep.

Chongqing Golden Resources Hotel (Jīnyuán Dà Fāndiàn; ☎ 6795 8888; fax 6795 9999; www.grhotel.cn; 2 Jianxin Bei Lu; 建新北路2号; s/d/st ¥640/723/1536; ☎ ☎ ☎) The first of a growing legion of ritzy hotels in Jiāngběi District. Rooms overlook Guānyin Qiào's parks and the building connects to a kooky underground mall modelled after Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas.

InterContinental Chongqing (Zhōujī Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 8906 6888; www.ichotelgroup.com; 101 Minzu Lu; 民族路101号; r/st ¥800/1200; ☎ ☎ ☎) The city's showy nonpareil not surprisingly has luxurious amenities and impeccable service. The concierge has every single bus route committed to memory for heaven's sake. There's a chichi spa, sapphire-blue indoor pool, and five-room themed suites.

Also recommended:

JW Marriott Chongqing (Wán Hào Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 8906 6888; 6399 9999; 77 Qingnian Lu; 青年路77号; www.marriott.com; s/d/st ¥530/660/1200; ☎ ☎ ☎) **Hilton** (Xī'ěrdùn Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 8903 9999; www.hilton.com; 139 Zhongshan San Lu; 中山三路139号; r/st ¥1500/2080; ☎ ☎ ☎)

STREET FOOD PRIMER: THE MOST COMMON TREATS ON THE STREETS

- *Héchuān táo piàn* (合川桃片): rice-flour wafers flavoured with osmanthus and walnuts; Chinese aristocracy used to mail order this stuff in the 18th century.
- *Jiāoyán huāshēng* (椒盐花生): the ultimate touring food – peanuts fried with salt and black pepper.
- *Liáng cí bā* (凉糍粑): round or half moon-shaped rice cakes stuffed with yellow bean and either honey or salt, toasted over a charcoal fire.
- *Máoxièwàng* (毛血旺): a butcher's wife's invention that made its debut on the Ciqikou pier. Try this at home! Stew beef stomach, duck blood, pig lung, duck intestine, eel, cured meats, pig heart, bean sprouts, peas, ginger and hot peppers. Serve over noodles.
- *Máhuā* (麻花): fried wheat-flour twists that come in sweet and savoury breeds.
- *Mùchūsū* (木捶苏): caramelised sugar made airy by being repeatedly pounded by heavy wooden mallets; the pounding catches air pockets between a thousand folded layers.
- *Shānchéng xiǎo tāngyuán* (山城小汤圆): the mountain city's favourite treat. Silky soft rice balls floating in a clear soup, with a tasty centre of sesame, red bean, or ground peanut and sometimes served with *láo zāo* (醪糟), fermented rice from the wine-making process.

EATING

Street Food

The drag for cheap eats is **Good Eats Street** (Hǎochī Jiē), the stretch of Bayi Lu between Zourong and Zhonghua Lu. From stalls, carts and underground food courts, loudmouthed vendors dish up spicy noodles, clay-pot stews and beasties on sticks. Lines run deep on weekends. For more on what to eat, see above.

Hotpot

Chóngqing's most famous dish is *huōguō* (火锅; see p450). Hotpot is usually cheap, but since it's priced by ingredient the tab adds up quickly. Look for it wherever there are street vendors or small restaurants. Wuyi Lu has a concentrated assortment and is locally known as Huoguo Jie (Hotpot St), or take a walk along Minsheng Lu. Across the Yangzi on Nan'an Binjiang Lu, hotpot tends toward the upscale (glass tables and air conditioning).

Qíqí Shānyú Hot Pot (☎ 6379 9369; 2nd fl, 39 Linjiang Lu; 临江路39号; ☎ 10.30am-'whenever') This joint is loud, crowded and serves hotpot so corrosive you tear up just stepping into the dining room. Not surprisingly, it's a local favourite. Paper-thin slices of lamb, freshwater eels (its namesake), and all manner of greens are ¥6 to ¥11 per heaping plate.

Little Swan Hot Pot (Xiǎo Tiān'é Huōguō Cānting; ☎ 6785 5328; 78 Jianxin Bei Lu; 建新北路78号; per person ¥100; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-9pm) Recommended for those who don't subscribe to the sweat-ing-buckets-perched-on-a-plastic-stool hotpot

experience. There's air-con, tablecloths, and five kinds of broth. Ask to 'zìzhù huōguō' (自助火锅), which allows you to choose from 30 different meats, vegetables and noodles wheeled to your table. Take bus 112 from Linjiang Lu just northwest of Liberation Monument.

Restaurants

A good place for a sit-down meal is along Nan'an Binjiang Lu. The strip is teeming with outdoor patios, hotpot eateries, loud riverboat dining halls and classy restaurants where waiters serve meals in white gloves and surgical masks. It's worth going for the great view of downtown along the boardwalk in Nan'an Park alone. Take the Yangzi River Cable Car and then grab a taxi (¥8) or bus 338 west to Haitang Xiaoyue Lu. Walking takes about 20 minutes.

AE&E Restaurant (Āi yǔ àidè Kāfēi Xīcānting; meals ¥55; Far Eastern Bldg ☎ 8911 8066; 2nd fl, Far Eastern Bldg, Guānyin Qiào; 观音桥远东百货二楼; Metropolitan Plaza ☎ 6371 0088; 1st fl, Tàipíng Yáng department store, Metropolitan Plaza; 大都会广场太平洋百货一楼; ☎ 10am-10pm) The place for ice cream and occasionally misguided Western food.

Muslim Restaurant of Tian Shan (Xīnjiāng Tiānshān Cānting; ☎ 6383 3803; 3-7 Zhongxing Lu; 中兴路3-7号; average dish ¥10; ☎ 9am-9pm) Serves the dishes of the Silk Road, meaning lots of lamb – braised lamb, stewed lamb and lamb wrapped in buns – eaten with a side of black vinegar and garlic. Try the *lǎng* (¥5), crispy onion pancakes baked to perfection on the side of circular ovens.

VERY HOT, VERY SPICY & A LITTLE TINGLY

The definition of a good dish in this region is one that balances the sensations of *má* and *là*.

Má is the numbing sensation provided by the Sichuan peppercorn, a tiny black flower with the kick of black pepper and ginger combined with what can only be described as your dentist's anaesthesia. Taken in large doses, it is said, this stuff can kill. But no dish is complete without the searing bite of chilli pepper (of which there are countless varieties), which supply the *là*.

Hotpot (火锅; *huǒguō*; literally 'fire pot') embodies these elements and is therefore Chongqing's famed and favourite dish. It's eaten year-round, even on the hottest days, because it is believed the sweat it induces encourages circulation and is a cure for aches and colds.

Best guesses put the birth of hotpot at a meat market on the banks of the Jialing River at the end of the 19th century. Poor boatmen floating by fished the scraps and organs thrown into the river and slow boiled them with plenty of spices to cover up any rancid taste. Enterprising peddlers saw the niche in the market and began selling the soup on the streets. On a long pole, they carried a roving restaurant – a pot of broth, a selection of cheap meats, and utensils and stools.

Today, hotpot is no longer itinerant nor a dish of leftovers. Everything from exotic mushrooms to freshwater crab can go in the pot. To local residents, however, the key remains not what you cook but what you cook it in. Restaurants have their signature broths, and vendors sell congealed lumps of perfectly proportioned Sichuan peppercorn, chilli peppers and sesame oil to take home.

There are different forms of hotpot throughout China, but no-one eats hotpot quite like the people here. The chilli combinations are much hotter than even those used in neighbouring Chengdu. If all this sounds too much for your taste buds, ask for the '*yuányang*' version, which is divided like a Yin-and-Yang symbol into a spicy side and a mild side (fish or chicken broth). Fish out the peppercorns, and do as the locals do by adding lots of vinegar to your bowl to stop your throat from clenching up from all the hot chillies. Or just tell waiters, '*pà là*' (you're scared of spice). Just don't be surprised if they laugh.

Propitious Winds (Nánfāng Huāyuán Yú Gāo Guǎngchǎng; ☎ 6862 3123; 2nd fl, Hua Yuan Yu Gao Complex; 花园渝高广场二楼; per dish Y16-38; ☎ 10.30am-11pm) Its outdoor deck draws a lively crowd and its extensive menu of *jiāng hǔ*, signature local dishes, keeps them coming back. Try the clay-pots and springwater chicken (泉水鸡).

Lǎo Sichuān Dàjiǔlòu (☎ 6382 6644; 186 Minzu Lu; 民族路186号; average dish Y38; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 4-9.30pm) Locals bring visitors here to ease them into the region's spicy cuisine. The reason? 'It's not so spicy', one patron divulged gesturing to his pansy-mouthed Běijīng friend. The food is otherwise pretty authentic, though if you order from the English menu, more likely to be tourist-oriented.

DRINKING

When it comes to Chongqing nightlife, a couple of ground rules apply: hotspots all turn over fast and frequently, so you should ask around for the latest obsession; and, in these parts a good time starts with green tea-whiskey cocktails and invariably ends at a KTV (karaoke) bar. So you can consider yourself warned.

Déyì Shìjiè (Minquan Lu & Xinhua Lu; 民权路 and 新华路) Start the night at this massive KTV bar and club complex with a constantly changing line-up of tenants including some of the following venues.

Soho Bar (Sūhē Jiǔbā; ☎ 6379 7776; A1-6 Deyi Shijie; 得意世界 A1-6号; ☎ 7pm-3.30am) The young and fashionable sway to covers belted out by professional karaoke singers perched on podiums throughout the bar. Pimped-out private KTV rooms are available but must be booked in advance.

True Love (Zhēn'ài; ☎ 6379 7377; www.chongqingjiuba.com; A1, Deyi Shijie; 得意世界 A1; ☎ 8pm-2am) This eccentric hangout is a lonely-hearts club set to upbeat background music. Theme nights include find-a-date (have your mini-bio ready to read on stage along with your cell-phone number) and Arabian night when belly dancers shimmy around the uncomfortable date you just found.

Pirates Pub (Kǎbùléidēng Hǎidàobā; ☎ 6399 2888; 1st fl, Hóngyádòng, 56 Cangbai Lu; 红崖洞, 沧白路56号; ☎ 8pm-6am) Serves up the ingenious combination of pirates and disco. Local bands start playing most nights at 9pm but the mutiny

doesn't happen until 11pm. Look for three ship's sails.

Dee Dee's Bar (86 Nánping Xīnjiē; 南坪新街86号; ☎ 2pm-midnight) Tucked down steps next to the Holiday Inn (Yangzi), this bar remains the hub of the city's expat community thanks in part to its Thursday dart tournaments. Aside from the decent beer and grub, this is the place to gather local knowledge about things like where to get a good milkshake (the word is AE&E Restaurant).

Rúyì Jiǔbā (☎ 6385 8029; 31 Tiyù Cūn; 体育村31号; ☎ 8pm-7am) While the gay scene in China remains underground, businessmen and labourers alike come here to down pints together and catch lively drag acts. Head down the dark stairs directly across from the lobby of the Hilton on Zhongshan Lu.

Lǎojiē Shìbāti Teahouse (Lǎojiē Shìbāti Cháloù; ☎ 6383 1694; 1 Zhong Xing Lu; 中兴路1号; ☎ 9am-midnight) A teahouse has stood for 600 years here at the top of the Eighteen Stairs. Come for a fresh pot of tea (Y30 to Y50) served with small plates of dried fruit and cakes, and an arresting view of the old city. There's beer available too.

SHOPPING

True local handicrafts like Sichuan silk embroidery, bicolour stone carvings, and lively flower and brocade Tujia weavings are hard to find in the city proper. Pick up that sort of thing on an excursion.

Hóngyádòng (Linjiang Lu & Cangbai Lu; 临江路和沧白路; ☎ 9am-7pm) Built into the cliffs overlooking the Jialing, this massive complex is a Disney version of the tumbledown houses that once stood in its place. If you have just a day to try local food and pick up souvenirs, it's a fun place to wander around. The handicraft stalls are on the 3rd floor, and food is on the 4th. If you have time in the evening, catch the dynamic dance performance depicting the history of the city in the Báyú Theatre (tickets Y80 to Y120; 8pm Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday), or head to the ground floor to dance the night away yourself.

Guānyīn Qiāo (Jianxin Bei Lu & Jianxin Dong Lu; 建新北路 and 建新东路; ☎ most stores 8am-10pm, to 10.30pm Sat & Sun) Ages ago on this spot, Guanyin, goddess of mercy, saved residents from a flood with a lotus bridge. Today, the only magic around here is how your money disappears. Pick up Italian boots in the Las Vegas Underground Sleepless Town and then skip over to

the Hong Kong Center for American designer jeans. For brand names, check out Mào Yè Department Store.

Maison Mode (Méměi Shìdài Bāihuò; ☎ 6376 7325; 100 Zourong Lu; 邹容路100号; ☎ 8am-10pm) From its perch smack in the middle of Liberation Monument, the poshest department store in town hawks the world's most upscale labels (but for the usual price).

Carrefour (Jiǎlèfú Chāojiéshìchǎng; ☎ 9658 8999; Cangbai Lu & Mianhua Lu; 沧百路和棉花路; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Gleaming mega-markets are cropping up all over town including a Wal-Mart out in the west 'burbs, but none beat this store's central location and wide assortment of envelopes, cheese and foot baths.

Flower and Bird Market (花鸟市场; Huāniǎo Shìchǎng; across from Marriott; ☎ dawn-dusk) Fragrant herbs and jasmine flowers perfume this open-air market. Vendors hitch in from the countryside with buckets of rare orchids on Sundays. Sadly, birds are no longer sold here. For buyable birds, see p446.

GETTING THERE & AWAY
Air

Chongqing's Jiangbei International Airport (重庆江北飞机场; Chóngqing Jiāngběi Fēijīchǎng) is 25km north of the city centre. You can book domestic flights through **Air China** (Zhōngguó Guójī Hángkōng; ☎ 6787 8538; 30 Jianxin Bei Lu; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) and **China Eastern** (Zhōngguó Dōngfāng Hángkōng; ☎ 7118 1821; www.ce-air.com; 235 Minsheng Lu; ☎ 8.30am-5pm). **Dragonair** (Gānglóng Hángkōng; ☎ 6372 9900; Room 2906, Metropolitan Plaza, 68 Zourong Lu; ☎ 9am-5pm) flies to Hong Kong and destinations beyond the mainland. You can also book flights at most hotels and the numerous travel agencies around Liberation Monument (see p439).

There are daily flights to destinations across China, including Chengdu (Y460; 50 minutes), Kunming (Y820; one hour), Guiyang (Y490; 45 minutes), Guangzhou (Y1290; 1½ hours), Wuhàn (Y810; 80 minutes), Shànghǎi (Y1490; two hours), Běijīng (Y1560; two hours 10 minutes), Shēnzhèn (Y1280; two hours) and Hong Kong (Y2639; two hours and 15 minutes). Prices increase during holidays.

Boat

Countless cruises make the run daily from Chongqing down the Yangzi River to the Three Gorges and Yichang. The cruises have been popular with tourists for dynasties and

CHÓNGQÌNG BUSES

Buses make the following trips from Chóngqing's bus stations (check related sections for specific stations).

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration	Frequency	Departs
Bèibèi	3.50	41min	2 daily	9.59am, 12.59pm
Chéngdū	117	6.5hr	every 30min	6.30am-9.30pm
Dàzú	45	2.5hr	every 30min	6.30am-9.30pm
Èméi	106	2hr	2 daily	9.30am, 11.30am
Héchuān	45	2hr	hourly	9.30am-1.00pm
Jiāngkǒu	65	4.5hr	4 daily	6.30am, 8am, 9.20am, 11.30am
Lèshān	80	2½hr	hourly	7am-6pm
Nánchuān	35	2.5hr	hourly	7.30am-6pm
Tóngnán	50	2hr	2 daily	7.40am, noon

have also inspired masterworks of Chinese literature and art. Major historical sites have disappeared and a few have been transplanted since the Three Gorges Dam opened in 2006. But the mountains remain the stuff of paintings, despite losing 145m and counting to rising waters.

For details on Yangzi River trips see p461. Cruise tickets can be purchased through your hotel or from the agencies around Cháotiānmén, although shop carefully as amenities vary greatly while prices may not.

Bus

The main long-distance bus terminal is **Càiyuánbà bus station** (☎ 6280 5226) located right next to the train station. There are 10 other major bus depots in the city proper, but those of most interest to travellers are **Cháotiānmén** (☎ 6373 6778), **Nánping** (☎ 6280 5226) and **North** (☎ 6785 3898) bus stations.

Buses run to Chéngdū (Y112) between 6.30am and 9.30pm, but as this is the busiest route, you can also catch shuttle buses (the plush air-con type) in the mornings in front of Cháotiānmén Dock. Major hotels including the Marriott and Hilton offer vans and buses depending on numbers for Y120.

Train

Càiyuánbà train station (☎ 6386 2607; 1 Caiyuanba Zheng Jie), Chóngqing's main rail station, is located west of the city centre. You can also check timetables and buy train tickets at the more conveniently located **Cháotiānmén Book-ing Hall** (☎ 6310 0659; Dock 3; 3号码头; ☎ 7am-10pm) just off Chaoqian Lu.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Until the light rail is finished, a taxi is the easiest mode of transportation. Depending on traffic, it will cost Y60 to Y100 (plus tolls). No city buses go directly to the airport, but the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng) operates a Y15 airport shuttle from 6.30am to 5pm arriving and departing from the Shàngqīngsì (上清寺) roundabout. The ride is free if you fly Sichuan Airlines between Chéngdū and Chóngqing.

Bus

Local buses in Chóngqing can be painfully slow and, since the hills mean there are no bicycles, more crowded than those in other Chinese cities. Destinations are posted and also called out by attendants from the side window. As this is undoubtedly confusing, here are key routes to note: 401 runs from Cháotiānmén and Shàngqīngsì via Zhongshan Yi Lu; 402 heads further west from Liberation Monument to Shāpīngbà; 405 runs between Liberation Monument and Guānyīn Qiáo; 102 connects Càiyuánbà bus and train stations with Cháotiānmén; 384 runs from Wuyi Lu just east of Liberation Monument to Nánshān.

Most importantly, watch out! A city-wide ban on car horns to cut down noise pollution has unfortunately turned buses into silent, wheeled predators.

Cable Car

A ride on either of the city's two cable cars – the Yangzi River Cable Car (Y2/4 one-way/

CHÓNGQÌNG TRAINS

Trains travel daily to the following destinations. Express trains are marked with an 'E.'

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration	Frequency	Departs
Běijīng	347/401E	25hrE/33/44hr	3 daily	12.26pmE, 8.18pm, 11.59pm
Chéngdū	113/120E	4.5hrE/9hr	5 daily	8amE, 1pmE, 3.07pmE, 8.55pm, 9.05pm
Guǎngzhōu	208/339E	31hrE/38hr	6 daily	5.35pm, 7.36pm, 9.11pm, 10.36pmE, 12.32am, 1.02am
Guìyáng	73/101E	10hrE/12hr	2 daily	7.45am, 8.03pmE
Kūnmíng	213	21hr	2 daily	12.47pm, 2.42pm
Lhasa	754	47hr	daily	7.20pm
Shàngghǎi	458	42hr	daily	8.07pm
Wūlóng	98/100E	2hr 30minE/ 4hr 35min	2 daily	8.40am, 10.45pmE
Xī'ān	109	13.5hr	daily	9.59am

return, departs 6.30am to 9.45pm) and the Jialing River Cable Car (Y1.5/3, departs 10am to 6pm) – spanning both the Jialing and Yangzi rivers is more fun than functional.

You get a bird's-eye view of the polluting industrial blocks and murky waters from the cable car. The ride north lands you in the middle of major construction projects, so expect a 20-minute walk to civilisation (or catch bus 607). The ride south drops you off about a 20-minute stroll from the Nanan Binjiang Lu eateries.

Car

Companies base rates on time, mileage and car model. Always pricier than public transit, but for a group of two or more the flexibility of having a driver on hand with local knowledge can make this a worthwhile option.

For example, hiring **Chongqing Zulin Company** (重庆租赁公司; Chóngqing Zūlín Gōngsī; ☎ 6280 6598; 1 Nanping Dong Lu) for a two-day trip to Wūlóng runs about Y1500 for a cushy sedan, including tolls but not food, lodging and tip for the driver. Also check with your hotel for car services.

Light Rail

The city has a smooth, new **light rail** (轻轨; qīng guǐ; ☎ 6.30am-10.32pm) costing Y1 to Y5 depending on how far you go. The only downside is that for now that's not very far. Wave your ticket over the sensor upon entry and stick it in the slot upon exit.

Taxi

The flag falls at Y5 and doesn't move for 3km. The base fare increases to Y6 between 10pm and 6am. Catching a cab is tricky only right before 5pm when drivers change shifts.

Most drivers do not read maps, so if you don't speak Chinese, have your destination written down in Chinese. Cabbies are surprisingly honest, so no need to get suspicious if one makes extra turns. The city is fraught with one-way streets.

AROUND CHÓNGQÌNG

DÀZÚ COUNTY 大足县

The grotto art of Dàzú County, 125km northwest of Chóngqing, is a designated Unesco World Heritage Site on par with China's most prominent Buddhist cave sites at Dūnhuáng, Luòyáng and Dátóng.

The exquisite carvings here uniquely reflect the melding in the 9th century of China's three main religions – Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism – by mixing their beliefs in both sacred and profane scenes. Over 50,000 individual carvings and statues are hidden in 40 sites across the county.

The main groupings are on five mountains, with the most historically important at North Hill and Treasured Summit Hill. The earliest figures in the area were carved in the 7th century during the Tang dynasty with additions continuing through the Song dynasty, 600

years later. Combined tickets for both sites are available for ¥120.

Sights & Activities

TREASURED SUMMIT HILL 宝顶山

A Tantric Buddhist monk named Zhao Zhifeng directed that the carvings at **Treasured Summit Hill** (Bǎodǐng Shān; admission ¥80; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) be cut from a horseshoe-shaped ridge. The results of his 70-year effort, which began in 1179 AD, are some of the most striking examples in the county.

The centrepieces are a 31m-long, 5m-high reclining Sakyamuni Buddha entering nirvana and, next to it, a mesmerising gold Avalokiteshvara (God of Mercy), with 1007 arms reaching out to the suffering multitudes. Many of the other surrounding figures were made in the likenesses of Buddhist preachers and sages – celebrity figures of the time. Others are depictions of the everyman: cowboys enjoy a rest after diligently tending their buffalo; parents care for their children through birth and death; drunkards forget what their wives and children look like and tumble into hell. It's a wonder what those monks were trying to teach us.

Treasured Summit's thoughtful design incorporates the area's natural features directly into the forms. For example, a natural spring that would have gradually washed away a depiction of the nine dragons bathing the baby Buddha was ingeniously channelled through the mouth of a dragon.

Take a minibus (¥5, 45 minutes) about 15km northeast of Dàzú town to Bǎodǐng Shān from 9am to 6pm, departing when full. A motorcycle taxi will take you there for around ¥20. As you pass by on the bus, look out for sculptures hidden in the hillsides.

NORTH HILL 北山

Built on the site of a military outpost, **North Hill** (Běi Shān; admission ¥60; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) contains some of the earliest carvings in the region and was commissioned by the local prefect. The dark niches hold nearly 300 small statues, unfortunately many in poor condition. According to locals, it was unmanaged tourists rather than the usual Cultural Revolution zealots who beheaded them.

Look for the Bodhisattva of Universal Benevolence, whose round features and unassuming posture are said to represent the ideals of Eastern beauty. A steep hike up to the white pagoda (also covered in carv-

ings) earns you a splendid view of the entire county.

North Hill is about a 30-minute hike up from Dàzú town – head straight for the pagoda, which is visible from the bus station.

Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of hotels in the area but none of them stand out. Sniff for mustiness before checking in.

Dàzú Hotel (Dàzú Bīnguǎn; ☎ 4372 1888; fax 4372 2967; 79 Lónggǎnglóng Zhōnglù; 龙岗龙中路79号; s/d ¥200/332) As the regular host of metallurgist conferences, rooms are what you'd expect: perfectly nice, boring and dressed in durable fabrics. The location is central and the staff is used to dealing with tourists. To get here, turn left from the bus station, then at the roundabout take the first road to the right, Binhe Jie (滨河街), which runs along the river. It's a 30-minute walk from the hotel to Běi Shān or a ¥10 cab ride.

Finding a bite to eat in Dàzú is no problem. **Buxing Jie** (步行街; the second road branching right at the roundabout) is a charming street lined with restaurants and dumping carts.

Getting There & Around

BUS

Buses make the 2½ hour trip from Chóngqing to Dàzú (¥45) every half hour from 6.30am to 9.30pm. Buses back to Chóngqing follow roughly the same schedule with the last leaving at 6pm.

To get to the sites, take a 10-minute taxi ride (¥12) from Dàzú's long-distance station, also called the **old station** (220 Shuangta Lu; 双塔路220号), over the bridge to the local bus station to catch a minibus.

TRAIN

Skip the train and save hours and money.

WÀNSHÈNG DISTRICT 万盛区

With native old-growth forests and rare wildlife like the endangered golden monkey, Wànshèng is the closest thing to hinterland in Chóngqing. Another reason to spend a couple of days here is the fascinating mix of ethnic minorities that have made their home in the foothills along the border with Guizhōu.

Black Mountain (黑山; Hēi Shān; ☎ 4827 9999; admission ¥60, incl Stone Forest ¥99; ☎ 8am-6pm) is actually a gorgeous range of mountains crisscrossed by floating bridges and jade-green

streams that plummet into waterfalls. To get the most out of your time, enter from the north gate and pay for the electromobile ride (¥20), which saves you a 30-minute walk down an uninspiring paved road. At the end of your three-hour hike, catch the **cable car** (admission ¥20; ☎ 8am-6pm) up to the south exit of the park.

Not 15 minutes away, the **Stone Forest** (石林; Shí Lín; admission ¥60; ☎ 7am-4pm) covers 6 sq km of jagged stone outcrops that formed 460 million years ago in very odd shapes. There are interesting fossils to look at too. Residents of the **Miao farming communities** dotted along the base of the mountains put on traditional dance performances here in the summer at 10am and 2.30pm Friday through Sunday.

Head to **Tonggutan Gorge** (铜鼓滩漂流; Tónggūtān Piāoliú; adult/student ¥100/80; ☎ 8am-4pm) for an 11km rafting trip down the Podu River, which flows just across the border in Guizhōu. This is not white-water rafting, but at peak water levels the steepest drop is about two stories. The nearby town, which developed as a result of the salt trade, also has some interesting architectural sites.

Sleeping

Huixin Jiǔlǒu (汇鑫酒楼; Zǐ Rù Sq, South Bldg; 子如广场南楼; s/d ¥168/198; ☎) The newest hotel in the area also has luxury-level rooms for twice the price as the basic. The friendly staff aims to please and has extensive knowledge of the surrounding area.

Wansheng Hotel (Wànshèng Bīnguǎn; ☎ 4827 0487; 42 Wandong Bei Lu; 万东北路42号; s/d ¥188/198; ☎) Rooms haven't been redecorated since calico was in style, but at least they're clean. More importantly, food and everything you may need in town is within walking distance.

Getting There & Around

From Nánping bus station, buses make the 2½-hour trip to Nánchuān (南川; ¥35) every hour between 7.30am and 6pm. There are no trains. Don't miss the last bus back to Chóngqing, which leaves Nánchuān at 5.30pm.

To get to the sites, exit from Nánchuān's main bus station, turn right, and walk 10 minutes to the local bus station to ride a minibus for another hour to Wànshèng. Buses from Wànshèng heading to Black Mountain and Stone Forest (¥5) depart when full

between 7.30am and 5pm. To reach Tonggutan Gorge, you have to take a minibus from Wànshèng to Guānbāzhèn (关坝镇; ¥11) departing every 40 minutes between 7am and 6pm and then catch another to Chángtángkǒu (长塘口; ¥11), the rafting start point. A taxi directly from Wànshèng is about ¥150.

CAR

If all this is too much for you, the Hu family offers great **tours** (☎ 4835 7152, 130 183 32838; 2-day tour ¥600) if you can speak some Chinese (they speak absolutely no English and don't have plans to learn so far). They can arrange a home stay or book hotel rooms, buy tickets, share local lore and shuttle you around in their yellow 4WD. Plus, they know invaluable tricks, for example, how to wave down a bus at the expressway toll plaza if you miss the last official bus to Chóngqing.

WǔLÓNG COUNTY 武隆县

About 194km southeast of Chóngqing, this county is a vast landscape of sharp peaks, deep gorges and unique geological formations. Geologists named the distinctive and ubiquitous limestone caverns and stone bridges created by subterranean water flows karst (天坑; tiānkēng) formations.

Tiānkēng is the reason this is some of the best terrain in the region for outdoor activities like hiking and climbing, and why the entire county is designated a national geological park.

The three major sites are widely dispersed and take at least two very full days to cover. If your time is limited, start at the Natural Three Bridges, spend the night on Fairy Maiden Mountain, and take on Furong Cave the next day.

About 19km south of town, **Natural Three Bridges** (天生三桥; Tiānshēng Sān Qiáo; admission ¥40; ☎ 9am-4pm) is an incredible feat of earthly engineering. The scenery is so striking it served as backdrop for a number of major motion pictures, including most recently Zhang Yimou's *Curse of the Golden Flower*. A spring-fed underground river carved out underground passages, which collapsed two million years ago to create the Heavenly Dragon, Green Dragon (the tallest natural bridge in the world at 281m) and Black Dragon bridges. The 30-minute continuous descent into the valley from either of the two entrances is steep. The

faint-hearted can catch a bus to an elevator near the Heavenly Dragon bridge.

Fairy Maiden Mountain (仙女山; Xiānnǚ Shān; admission ¥50) is named for the column of stone in the shape of a lone lass standing at the top of the mountain. At 2300m, this alpine prairie is a good place to spend a quiet night. There's plenty to do during the day as well, including horseback riding, skiing, and petting the sheep that wander about.

Furong Cave (芙蓉洞; Fúróng Dòng; adult/child ¥70/50; ☎ 9am-4pm) is so massive, it's a wonder that it was only discovered in 1993. The two-hour tour involves a lot of ascending and descending on paved stairs through the main limestone cavern, which is almost 3km in length. The first possible exit is two-thirds of the way through, so be prepared to commit. Naff comparisons of stalagmites to dragons, gods and body parts aside, the tour is spectacular. There are formations not to be seen anywhere else, including a watery pool of pink calcite flowers that look like coral. Afterwards, enjoy the surface by flying 100m above it and the Wu River on a **zipline cable** (速滑; Sùihuá; ¥50; ☎ 9am-5pm). Or float downriver on a raft (¥70 for three hours) or go for a swim just west of the cave at the **Furong River jetty** (芙蓉江码头; Fúróng Jiāng mǎtóu; ☎ 774 2278; ☎ 8.30am-8pm April-Oct, 8.30am-6.30pm Nov-March).

Sleeping & Eating

Just east of Renmin Sq in Wǔlóng's city centre is a night market with countless noodle stalls and other street food.

Fairy Maiden Mountain Holiday Hotel (Xiān Nǚ Shān Zhèn, Dà Cǎo Yuán; 仙女山镇, 大草原; ☎ 7773 7657; www.cq-xinhua-hotel.com/zh/xls; s/d ¥350/488; 🏠 🚗 🚙) is a sparkling five-star hotel, happy to reward you after a long day of hiking with sublimely soft pillows. Staff can also hook you up with skiing (¥60 per hour, December to February). Book ahead, because if it's full, they may try to cab you over to sister hotel Fairy Maiden Xinhua Manor, which is not quite as swanky but nearly the same price.

Nóngjiālè (农家乐) is a breed of inn that abounds along Wuxian Lu (武仙路), the road up to Fairy Maiden Mountain. A very reasonable fee gets you a huge homemade meal, access to house rice wines and the opportunity to commune with fellow travellers over raucous mah jong late into the night. Bathrooms are always shared and shower

facilities are very basic. Sometimes, the kids' room is converted for your stay. **Róngyí** (蓉怡; per person incl dinner ¥27) serves delectable food, sometimes involving a special breed of chicken raised in the mountains.

Getting There & Around

BUS

Buses from Càiyuánbà make the 4½-hour drive to Jiāngkǒu (江口; Y65) four times a day at 6.30am, 8am, 9.20am and 11.30am. Buses also depart from Cháotiānmén twice a day at 8.30am and 6.30pm. When you arrive, you have to walk about 10 minutes to the local bus station to catch a minibus to the sites. All local buses depart when full.

Destination	Price (¥)	Duration	Departs
Fairy Maiden Mountain	15	1hr	9am-4pm
Fúróng Cave	6	30min	9am-4.30pm
Natural Three Bridges	13	1hr	9am-6pm

TAXI

A taxi to the sites will run anywhere from ¥60 to ¥100. You can also haggle for a motortaxi (about ¥20), though this is not recommended as these rides are technically illegal. This is usually not a problem except, say you fell off said bike, and the driver ditched you rather than risk talking to the authorities when the ambulance arrived.

TRAIN

Two trains daily make the trip between Càiyuánbà and Wǔlóng (Y98) at 8.40am (takes about 4½ hours) and the express (2½ hours) at 10.45pm. The last train departs for Càiyuánbà at 9pm. The local bus station is a very short walk downhill from the train station.

LÁITĀN 涪滩

This breathtaking village is actually an ancient military fort that has been encircled by protective walls for over 1100 years. The walls successfully withstood Mongol invaders, but they could not keep out developers who plan to pave over the spring-fed paddies and ancient flagstones to make the area more accessible to tourists. Locals keen on opportunity are not questioning progress, but try catching it before the plastic Buddha vendors show up, at least for comparison's sake.

From the main gate, you can see the town sites first or walk along the wall. Either route will eventually lead you past all the sites.

The central attraction is an imposing 14.6m Song dynasty **Buddha** (二佛寺; Èrfó Sì; admission ¥10; ☎ 7am-6pm) carved into the mountainside and flanked by 1014 statues of his disciples. This Buddha is said to be second in size (hence the name, 'èr' for second) to the giant buddha in Lèshān. Almost all of the original poetry and many of the figures' heads were snapped off during the Cultural Revolution, but the Buddha's right hand fell off in the Qing dynasty of natural causes.

Just around the bend is the Tang dynasty **temple** (二佛禅院; Èrfó chányuàn; admission ¥5; ☎ 7am-5.30pm). The relief carvings of round-headed figures on the front gate are the oldest in the area and have lasted so long unscathed, locals say, because of their artistry.

A word of caution: this is a superstitious community. Never touch upturned ceramic bowls (or any curiously placed object, for that matter) as these are prayer relics left after a cleansing ritual. If you want to partake in some of your own unexplainable phenomena, the fortune tellers outside the temple are of noted repute. Liú Bānxiān (刘半仙), whose name literally means 'Half Genie', charges ¥40 and usually sits on the right-hand side of the road leading out of the temple. He doesn't speak English so give him your birthday and time you were born and record what he says, so that someone can translate your fate later.

When you're ready for some realism, grab a bite in town at a number of friendly restaurants that serve up Láitān's famous rice wine (米酒; mǐjiǔ), or head down the worn steps near the monks' tombs to the river. A local family serves up the day's catch on the fishing boat moored offshore for about ¥120 for a meal for four. You can pick your fish from a tank submerged on the side of the boat. The salt-and-pepper river prawns (椒盐虾; jiāoyán xiā) are truly divine.

To reach Láitān, buses leave Càiyuánbà for the hour drive to Héchuān (合川; Y12) hourly between 6am and 9pm. For the 30-minute ride to Lóngshì Zhèn (龙市镇; Y10), transfer to a minibus, which departs when full between 5.30am and 9pm. Then catch another minibus (Y2) for the short ride to Láitān's main gate, departing when full usually between 6am and 9pm but confirm with the driver to be sure.

SHUANGJIANG 双江

About 160km northwest of Chóngqing city, this tiny village is packed with architectural sights and is a living homage to their hometown hero, Yang Shangkun. Just keep in mind, unless you're really into buildings, the sites start to blur together and there's not much else in the town, so plan this as a half-day trip.

Buses make the two-hour trip from Càiyuánbà station to Tóngnán (潼南; Y50) twice daily at 7.40am and noon. From Tóngnán, catch minibus 16 (Y2) the last 10km to Shuāngjiāng. Minibuses usually return to Tóngnán until 5pm but check with the driver on your way there to avoid surprises.

On the way in from the Tóngnán bus stop to Shuāngjiāng stands the massive tomb of Yang Shangkun, who died in 1998 after serving as the second president of the PRC. A small-town guy who was nothing if not scrappy, Yang worked his way up the communist ranks only to be imprisoned for 12 years in 1966 after allegedly planting a bug in Mao's office.

His loyalty to the party earned him the presidency in 1988, a position he held during the student uprising in Tiananmen Sq the following year. Most of the sites in Shuāngjiāng were at some point all owned by Yang's family.

From the bus stop, head to the right downhill for the main attractions, which are hidden within the meandering, ancient streets of a section called Jīnlóng Cūn (金龙村). The main drag will take you past several major examples of Qing dynasty houses.

The first is **Tiánbà Dàyuàn** (田坝大院; 48 Zheng Jie; admission ¥15; ☎ 8am-6pm), the ancestral home of the Yang family, last inhabited by Shangkun's eldest brother. It is a prototypical **sihéyuàn** (四合院), a four-sided house with a courtyard, common in northern China. There's not much by way of exhibits here, but you're free to wander so climb upstairs to the ladies' bedroom and marvel at how anyone with bound lotus feet climbed up and down ladders.

Just down the road is **Yáng'āngōng Jiùjū** (杨闇公旧居; admission ¥15; ☎ 8am-6pm), the home of Shangkun's great uncle.

On your way back to the bus, take a rest at **Dingzikou Tea House** (丁字口茶楼; He Jie), one of several tea houses that have been brewing pots since the Qing era.

Cruising the Yangzi

THE THREE GORGES

China's mightiest – and the world's third-longest – river, the 6300km Yangzi (长江; Cháng Jiāng), starts life as trickles of snow melt in the Tànggǔlǎ Shān of southwestern Qinghǎi before spilling from Tibet, swelling through seven Chinese provinces, sucking in water from hundreds of tributaries and powerfully rolling into the East China Sea north of Shànghǎi.

Few riverine panoramas inspire such awe as the Three Gorges (三峡; Sānxiá). The vast chasms of rock, sculpted over aeons by the flowing mass of water, are the Yangzi River's most fabled piece of geology. Apocryphally the handiwork of the Great Yu, a legendary architect of the river, the gorges – Qútáng, Wū and Xiling – commence just east of Fēngjié in Chóngqìng and level out west of Yíchāng in Húběi province, a journey of around 200km.

The imposing chasms span from 300m at their widest to less than 100m at their narrowest pinch. Their attraction is easily hyped, however, and some travellers register disappointment. The construction of the formidable Three Gorges Dam (p461) has furthermore cloaked the gorges in as much uncertainty as their famous mists: will the gorges be humbled, vanishing forever beneath a huge lake, or will they shrug off the rising waters?

The truth lies somewhere in between. Experienced boat hands avow to a stunting of their magnificence, but first-timers – the majority of those on cruises – remain suitably awestruck. The waters have yet to rise to their full stature, but you can gauge the extent of the deluge from the riverside 175m markers, awaiting the water's highest reach. It's also worth noting that the gorges were clipped by 10m or so when the earlier Gezhou Dam in Yíchāng (Húběi province) went up, and seasonal variations in water level can be as much as 50m.

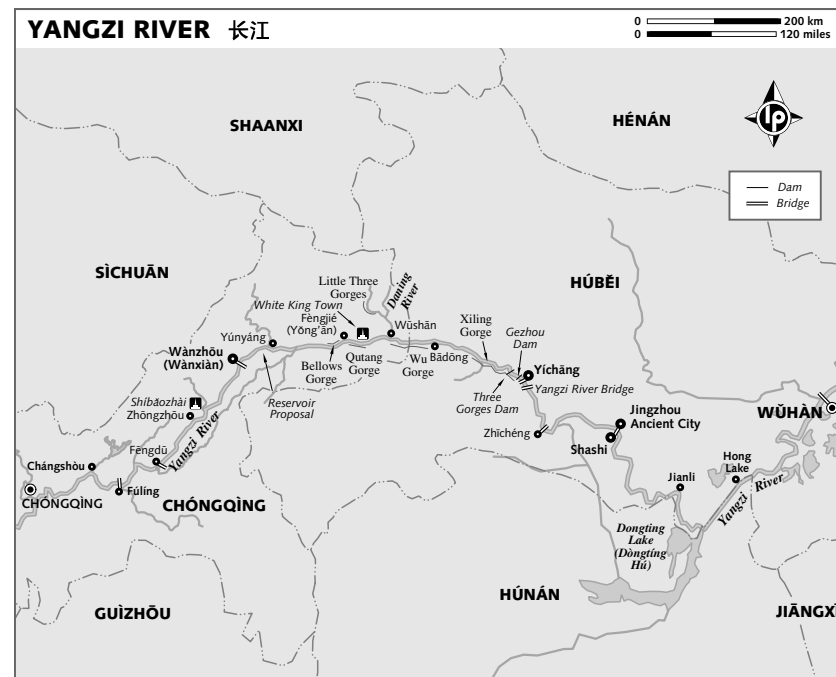
If a consensus emerges from travellers' reports, it is that the temples can be busy with jostling crowds (and overpriced) while the towns and settlements along the Yangzi River are quite modern-looking and uniform. It is the spectacular natural scenery that undoubtedly steals the show, although some find it possible to gorge oneself (excuse the pun) on the canyons. After the shock and awe of their first appearance, the cliffs can become repetitive, especially the overlong Xiling Gorge (Xiling Xiá). But if you don't expect to swoon at every bend in the river, the sheer pleasure of journeying downriver is a stimulating and relaxing adventure, not least because of the change of pace and perspective.

The principle route for those cruising the Yangzi River is between Chóngqìng and Yíchāng. The growth of speedier expressways sees fewer passenger boats nosing all the way down from Chóngqìng to Nánjīng or Shànghǎi, and most cruises focus on the Three Gorges themselves. High-season boats (April to May and October to November) can be a scrum; off-season, however, the trip is serene and a great opportunity to observe life on the river from a sedentary perspective – even better if you bring some binoculars with you.

BOATS & TICKETS

When choosing your boat you have three options. The most luxurious passage is on internationally owned tour cruise ships, where maximum comfort and visibility are accompanied by a leisurely agenda. Boats stop at all the major sights for long visits, giving passengers time to tour the

The Three Gorges Dam is designed to withstand an earthquake of seven on the Richter Scale.



attractions. These boats are ideal for travellers with time, money and negligible Chinese skills. The average number of days for such a cruise is three nights and three to four days.

The fastest route is by hydrofoil, although at the time of writing, direct Chóngqìng–Yíchāng hydrofoils (Y370, 11 hours) had stopped running. Hydrofoils depart from Wánzhōu (Y380, including bus from Chóngqìng to Wánzhōu; Y270 just from Wánzhōu; seven hours) downriver, running to the hydrofoil terminal west of Yíchāng (a further hour by bus from town). Buses linking Chóngqìng and Wánzhōu take three hours.

Hydrofoils are not geared towards tourists so there's no outside seating, but visibility is OK, albeit through Perspex windows. Nonetheless, most passengers use them solely for transportation so while everyone is watching films on TV, you can stand at the door, stupefied by the views. For those who find a day of gorge-viewing adequate, hydrofoils are ideal, although tourist sights are skipped. Food and refreshments are served, but it's a good idea to take along your own snacks and drinks. Hydrofoils make regular but very brief stops at towns (but not sights) along the river to take passengers on board and for disembarkation; check when the boat is leaving if disembarking temporarily.

The third alternative is to board one of the Chinese cruise ships or slow passenger boats that typically depart Chóngqìng in the evening. Chinese cruise ships generally take three days and three nights to reach Yíchāng, while passenger ships take around two and a half days. Some Chinese cruise ships stop at all the sights, others stop at a mere handful, while other vessels stop at none; standards are less professional than the luxury tour ships, but adequate. Tickets for cruise ships not stopping at tourist sights are as

Plans for the Three Gorges Dam date from 1919 when Sun Yatsen (Sun Zhongshan) saw its huge potential for power generation.

follows. First class (Y1042), two-bed cabin with shower; 2nd class (upper/lower bunk Y483/530), four beds; 3rd class (upper/lower bunk Y317/347), six beds. Ships that stop at six tourist sights have accommodation as follows. First class (Y1525), two-bed cabin with shower room; 2nd class (upper/lower bunk Y992/1060), four beds; six-bed 3rd class prices start at Y620. It is also possible to book packages that take you first by bus to Wànzhōu from Chóngqing, where you board a vessel for the rest of the trip.

Passenger ships can be disappointing as you may end up sailing through the gorges in the dead of night, so check when you buy your ticket. Stops are frequent, but boats tie up for short periods and pass by tourist sights. Cramped and functional accommodation on passenger ships is as follows (all without sights). First Class (Y956), 2nd class (Y495), 3rd class (Y317). Shared toilets and showers can be gross. Meals on board are average, so take along your own food and drinks. When the boat stops make sure you find out when it's leaving again; it won't wait for latecomers.

In theory, it's possible to buy your ticket on the day of travel, but it's probably worth booking one or two days in advance. Fares tend to be similar whether you buy them from an agency or direct from the ticket hall, but it's worth shopping around as there are often some good discounts available. If buying a ticket through an agent, ensure you know exactly what the price includes.

In Chóngqing, buy tickets from the Chaotianmen Dock Ticket Office (朝天门码头售票处; Cháotiānmén Mǎtóu Shòupiàochù) or the helpful **Chongqing Port International Travel Service** (重庆港国际旅行社; Chóngqing Gǎng Guójī Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 6618 3683, 6310 0553, 6310 0711; www.cqpts.com.cn; 18 Xinyi Jie), where staff speak English. If you want a refund on your ticket, there is a cancellation fee of around 20%.

THE ROUTE

Most boats travel from Chóngqing to Yíchāng or Wūhàn. The Chóngqing to Yíchāng route is by far the most travelled section of the Yangzi, threading through the Three Gorges and passing the namesake dam. The route can be travelled in either direction, but most passengers journey downstream from Chóngqing to Yíchāng, a journey that can take anything from 11 hours (hydrofoil) to two nights and two days (passenger ships) or three nights and three days (cruise ships) to even longer tourist cruises. Some vessels soldier on beyond Yíchāng to Wūhàn and on to Jiūjiāng, Nánjīng and Shànghǎi, but boat numbers have dwindled in the face of alternative transport and the riverside scenery becomes distinctly ho-hum beyond Yíchāng.

Vessels stop at many of the towns between Chóngqing and Yíchāng that can also be reached by road, so taking the bus can speed up your journey. If you buy your ticket from an agency, ensure you're not charged up front for the sights along the way as you may not want to visit them all and some of the entrance fees are steep. The only ticket really worth buying in advance is for the popular Little Three Gorges tour, which is often full (see the Wànzhōu to Yíchāng section, p462).

CHÓNGQÌNG TO WÀNZHÒU 重庆 - 万州

The initial stretch is slow-going and unremarkable, although the dismal view of factories gradually gives way to attractive terraced countryside and the occasional small town.

Passing Fúling, the next significant town and the first disembarkation point is **Fēngdū** (丰都), 170km from Chóngqing. Nicknamed the City of

The Yangzi River will deposit over 500 million tons of silt every year into the reservoir behind the dam.

THE DAMNED YANGZI

The Three Gorges Dam is China's biggest engineering project since the construction of the Great Wall. Completed ahead of schedule in May 2006, it will eventually back the Yangzi River up for 550km, flood an area the size of Singapore and wash away the homes of up to two million people. It will rank as the world's largest dam – an epic show of communist might, evidence of man's dominance over capricious nature and the 21st-century symbol of a new superpower.

Located at Sandouping, 38km upstream from the existing Gezhou Dam, the Three Gorges Dam is a cornerstone of government efforts to channel economic growth from the dynamic coastal provinces into the more backward western regions, somehow transforming hinterland into heartland. Measuring 185m high and 2km wide, the dam will have a hydroelectric production capacity equivalent to 18 nuclear power plants.

The dam will improve navigation on the Yangzi River, which already transports 70% of the entire county's shipping, and will be instrumental in flood control, a problem that has claimed more than one million lives in the past 100 years alone.

However, the massive scale of the Three Gorges Dam project has caused disquiet among environmentalists, economists and human-rights activists, arousing some of the most outspoken criticism of government policy since the Tiananmen Sq protests of 1989.

Construction of the dam was incredibly expensive, the initial estimates of US\$20 to US\$30 billion rising to an eventual US\$75 billion. The social implications of the dam are enormous: an estimated 1.5 million people living in inundated areas will have been relocated and, more importantly, given a new livelihood. Environmentalists are perhaps the most vocal in their concerns, as it's thought that as the river slows, so will its ability to oxygenate. The untreated waste that pours into the river from over 40 towns and 400 factories, as well as the toxic materials and pollutants from industrial sites, could well create another world record for the dam: a 480km-long septic tank – the largest toilet in the world.

In addition, the dam will disrupt the environments of such endangered species as the Yangzi River dolphin and Chinese sturgeon. The rising waters will also cover countless cultural artefacts at more than 8000 important archaeological sites. Despite an ambitious plan of relocation and preservation, only one-tenth of all historic sites and relics will be saved.

In 1999, 100 cracks were discovered running the full height of the up-stream face of the dam. Yet despite this, in June 2003 the reservoir was filled to a depth of 127m. Chinese engineers say such problems are common in large dams and that the cracks have been repaired.

Fears about the project were further heightened when information was released about two dams that collapsed in Hénán province in 1975. After 20 years as a state secret, it is now apparent that as many as 230,000 people died when the Banqiao and Shimantan dams collapsed. If a similar accident was to happen on the Yangzi River, the entire population of nearby Yíchāng (480,000 souls) would be dead within an hour.

Planners insist that the Three Gorges Dam has been constructed according to safety regulations that would make such disasters impossible. Still, the collapse of the walls holding back the world's largest storage reservoir in one of the world's most densely populated pieces of real estate is a scenario that must keep even the most gung-ho supporters of the Three Gorges Dam project awake at night.

Ghosts (Guǐchéng; 鬼城), the town faces inundation once all the sluice gates are shut on the Three Gorges Dam. This is the stepping-off point for crowds to belt up – or take the cable car up – **Míng Shān** (名山; admission ¥60) and its theme-park crop of ghost-focused temples.

Drifting through the county of Zhōngzhōu, the boat takes another three hours to arrive at **Shībǎozhài** (Stone Treasure Stockade; admission ¥40; ☎ 8am-4pm) on the northern bank of the river. A 12-storey, 56m-high wooden pagoda built on a huge rock bluff, the structure originally dates to the reign of Qing-dynasty emperor Kangxi (1662–1722). Your boat may stop for rapid expeditions up to the tower and for crowded climbs into its interior.

Most morning boats moor for the night at **Wànzhōu** (also called Wànxiàn), a grimy town that rises in steep gradients above the river. Travellers aiming to get from A to B as fast as possible while taking in the gorges can skip the Chóngqing to Wànzhōu section by hopping on a three-hour bus and then taking either a hydrofoil, passenger ship or cruise ship from the Wànzhōu jetty.

WÀNZHŌU TO YÍCHĀNG 万州 – 宜昌

Boats departing Wànzhōu soon pass the **Zhang Fei Temple** (Zhāngfēi Miào; admission ¥20), where short disembarkations may be made. Yúnyáng, a modern town strung out along the north bank of the river, is typical of many utilitarian settlements. Look out for abandoned fields, houses and factories, deserted in advance of the rising waters. Boats drift on past ragged islets, some carpeted with small patchworks of fields, and alongside riverbanks gorgeously striated with terraced slopes, rising like green ribbons up the inclines.

The ancient town of **Fengjié** (奉节), capital of the state of Kui during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States, overlooks **Qutang Gorge** (瞿塘峡; Qútáng Xiá), first of the three gorges. The town – where most ships and hydrofoils berth – is also the entrance point to **White King Town** (白帝城; Báidìchéng), where the King of Shu, Liu Bei, entrusted his son and kingdom to Zhu Geliang, as chronicled in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Qutang Gorge – also known as Kui Gorge (夔峡; Kuí Xiá) – rises dramatically into view, towering into huge vertiginous slabs of rock, its cliffs jutting out in jagged and triangular chunks. The shortest of the three gorges, at 8km in length, Qutang Gorge is over almost as abruptly as it starts, but it is reckoned by many to be the most awe-inspiring. Also the narrowest of the three gorges, it constricts to a mere 100m or so at its narrowest point, where the waters flow at their fastest. The gorge offers a dizzying perspective onto huge strata and vast sheets of rock; the final rise of the water level will undoubtedly rob the gorge of some of its power, but for now the cliffs remain imposing. On the northern bank is **Bellows Gorge** (夔峡; Fēngxiāng Xiá), where nine coffins were discovered, possibly placed here by an ancient tribe.

After Qutang Gorge the terrain folds into a 20km stretch of low-lying land before boats pull in at the riverside town of **Wūshān** (巫山), situated high above the river. Many boats stop at Wūshān for five to six hours so passengers can transfer to smaller tour boats for trips (¥150 to ¥200) along the **Little Three Gorges** (小三峡; Xiǎo Sānxiá) on the Daning River (大宁河; Dàníng Hé). The landscape is gorgeous, and some travellers insist that the narrow gorges are more impressive than their larger namesakes.

Back on the Yangzi River, boats pull away from Wūshān to enter the penultimate **Wu Gorge** (巫峡; Wū Xiá), under a curiously bright red bridge that blots the landscape. Observe how some of the cultivated fields on the slopes overhanging the river reach almost illogical angles, and look out for the markers that signpost the water's highest reach.

Wu Gorge – the Gorge of Witches – is simply stunning, cloaked in green and carpeted in a profusion of shrubs, its cliffs frequently disappearing into ethereal layers of mist. About 40km in length, its cliffs rise to just over 900m, topped by sharp, jagged peaks on the northern bank. A total of 12 peaks cluster on either side, including **Goddess Peak** (Shénnǚ Fēng) and **Peak of the Immortals** (Jíxiān Fēng).

Boats continue floating eastwards out of Wu Gorge and into Húběi province, past the mouth of **Shennong Stream** (神农溪; Shénnóng Xi) and

The Yangzi River has caused hundreds of catastrophic floods, including the disastrous inundation of 1931, in which an estimated 145,000 died.

the town of Bādōng on the southern bank, along a 45km section before reaching the last of the Three Gorges.

At 80km, **Xiling Gorge** (Xíling Xiá) is the longest and perhaps least impressive of the gorges. Note the slow-moving cargo vessels on the river, including long freight ships loaded with mounds of coal ploughing downriver to Shànghǎi, their captains alerted to the shallows by beacons that glow from the bank at night. This gorge was traditionally the most hazardous, where hidden shoals and reefs routinely holed vessels, but it has long been tamed, even though river traffic slows when the fog reduces visibility.

The monumental **Three Gorges Dam** (Sānxiá Dàbà; admission ¥240) looms up and boats stop so passengers can shuttle across to the dam's observation deck for a bird's-eye view of this mammoth project. Hydrofoils from Chóngqing and Yíchāng pull in here for passengers to disembark. Boats continue and pass through the locks of the Gezhou Dam (Gézhōu Bào) before completing the journey 30km downstream to Yíchāng.

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