

# Yúnnán Province (China) 云南



You've won the travel lottery if your Mekong travels take you to Yúnnán, arguably the one province in China to choose if you have time for but one. Strong words, but hyperbole is, remarkably, possibly an understatement here.

China's lengthy segment of the mighty Mekong garners little press compared with the attention given to the river's rolls through its Southeast Asian neighbours. Yet don't overlook it – from the Mekong's source in Tibet to its exit from China in Yúnnán's Xīshuāngbǎnnà Region, China has half the length of the river! With herculean transport infrastructure continuing to be built near the province's borders with Laos (towards Thailand), Vietnam and Myanmar (Burma), within the next half-decade Yúnnán will truly 'belong' to the Southeast Asian neighbourhood.

Along the Mekong's roll southward, majestic, and often sacred, peaks thrust from the Tibetan Plateau to the north; here you'll find some of China's most precious time-locked towns as well as superb trekking. Lush jungle lies a two-day bus ride south in the Xīshuāngbǎnnà Region, where you can search out elephants in extraordinarily dense rainforest, hike (or pedal or paddle) from village to village and eat a hell of a lot of pineapple rice. To the east, away from the Mekong River itself on the route to Vietnam, spreads some of Asia's most drop-jaw-gorgeous rice terraces.

Best of all: Yúnnán province has China's most diverse population. Village-hop in this breathtaking province and be greeted by a new minority group each day, many in time-capsule towns that you'll never forget.

Smacks of PR pulp, no? Well, just be prepared that if you start here, you may never get to another province. It has happened.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel your jaw hit your chest at the **Yuanyang Rice Terraces** (p462)
- Trek the jungle and do your anthropologist thing in **Xīshuāngbǎnnà Region** (p463)
- Lose your cares among the canals and cobbled lanes of **Lijiāng's old town** (p456)
- Stroll the flagstone streets and shop maniacally in **Dàilǐ's old town** (p452)
- Strengthen your legs (and spirit) trekking **Tiger Leaping Gorge** (p459)



## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 394,000 sq km
- **Capital** Kūnmíng
- **Country Code** ☎ 86
- **Population** 42.1 million
- **Money** US\$1 = ¥7.70 (yuán)
- **Seasons** high May-Sep & all national holidays; rainy May-Sep (especially Jun-Aug)
- **Phrases** *nǐ hǎo* 你好 (hello), *zàijiàn* 再见 (goodbye), *xièxiè* 谢谢 (thank you)

## HISTORY

With its remote location, harsh terrain and diverse ethnic make-up, Yúnnán, China's sixth-largest province, has always proved to be a province eminently troublesome to govern. Thus, for much of its history – including today – the province felt a greater pull toward its Southeast Asian neighbours than any dynasties to the north. Understandable, given that many of Yúnnán's ethnic groups have for centuries been tied directly to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam (and Burma).

Yúnnán's first kingdom, the kingdom of Dian, near present-day Kūnmíng, was established during the Warring States Period (453–221 BC). In the 2nd century BC, Chinese forces conquered the Red River Delta in modern Vietnam, beginning a millennium of Chinese cultural if not political domination. Chief among the Chinese exports were Confucianism, Taoism and Mahanaya Buddhism. While Vietnam gained much from the Chinese, they would struggle to throw off the yoke of its dragon neighbour until finally succeeding after the fall of the Tang dynasty in the 10th century. (China would reclaim Vietnam in the early 15th century, carting away much Vietnamese heritage and doing irreparable harm; only later in the century would they finally overthrow Chinese hegemony for good.)

The Indianised Cambodian kingdom of Funan had cultural and quasi-diplomatic ties with Yúnnán's chieftain leaders from the 1st through 6th centuries AD. Later, Qin Shi Huang (China's 'first' emperor) and subsequent Han emperors held tentative imperial power over the southwest and forged southern Silk Road trade routes to Burma, but by

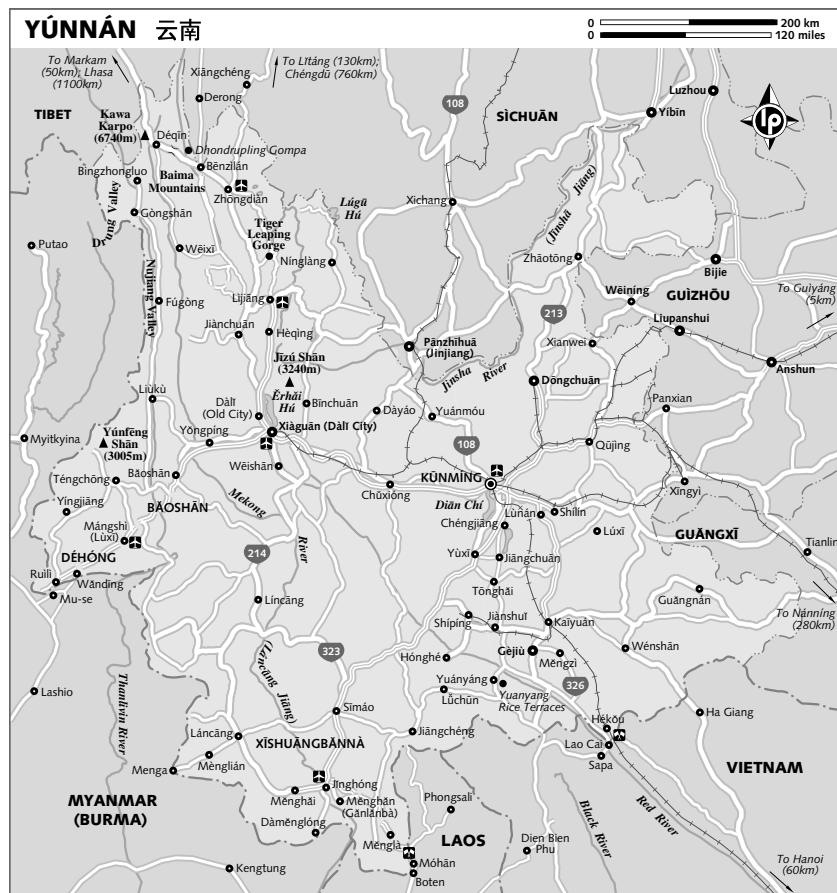
the 7th century the Bai people (among other groups) had established their own powerful kingdom, Nanzhao, south of Dàilǐ. Initially allied with the Chinese against the Tibetans, this kingdom extended its power until, in the middle of the 8th century, it was able to challenge and defeat the Tang armies. It took control of a large slice of the southwest and established itself as a fully independent entity, dominating the trade routes from China to India and Indochina. During the reign of Nanzhao, the Tai (today, Dai) peoples began their migration southward, moving into Laos and Thailand.

The Nanzhao kingdom fell in the 10th century and was replaced by the kingdom of Dàilǐ, an independent state that lasted until it was overrun by the Mongols in the mid-13th century. After 15 centuries of resistance to northern rule, this part of the southwest was finally integrated into the empire as the province of Yúnnán.

Even so, it remained an isolated frontier region, with scattered Chinese garrisons and settlements in the valleys and basins, a mixed aboriginal population in the highlands, and various Dai (Thai) and other minorities along the Mekong River (Láncāng Jiāng). During the Ming dynasty, much infrastructure work began; the famed tea-horse trading routes from Yúnnán to India and Tibet were extended south through Yúnnán's Xīshuāngbǎnnà Region into Laos.

Right up to the 20th century, Yúnnán looked to its southern neighbours Indochina and Burma, as it did to the Chinese emperor. Wracked by ethnic disturbances, including the bloody 1855 Muslim uprising and even bloodier Chinese army put-down, the province was exploited by local warlords, Europeans, and the emperor. During the Republican period, Yúnnán, like the rest of China's southwest, continued its history of breaking ties with the northern government. During China's countless political purges, fallen officials often found themselves here, adding to the province's character.

During WWII, Yúnnán's fortunes strangely improved, at least infrastructure-wise, thanks to herculean works projects by the US and allied Kuomintang government. (Imperial government treatment of locals was another matter.) The Communist takeover was generally smooth – the Yunnanese figured they couldn't be any worse than leaders of the last



two millennia and appreciated the back-to-the-land ethos espoused by Mao – but suffered a few hiccups when the daunting task of modernising the province halted any real Chinese Communist Party (CCP) actions, not to mention a horribly ill-fated 1979 war (and equally black-eye skirmishes in 1984) with Vietnam, during which Yúnnán was used as a base of operations and suffered cross-border attacks.

Presently, it seems the same as it ever was, historically. While Yúnnán's modernisation has been marvellous when compared with other provinces in China's southwest, it genuinely seems even more interested in going its own way – southward, towards its neighbours, as much as north, towards Běijīng. Not technically part of the Mekong River Commission,

Yúnnán nonetheless is acting as if it is – pouring epic monies into dams (a baker's dozen on the Mekong alone), highways, airports and commercial ventures with its neighbours. (Indeed, Yúnnán's Mekong-based trade with Thailand has more than doubled in some years.) Ultimately, it seems poised to become part of a powerful new Southeast Asian trading group, whether the capital likes it or not.

## PEOPLE & THE POPULATION

Home to more than half of all China's 56 ethnic minorities, Yúnnán is nearly 50% non-Han; most populous are the Naxi (near Lijiang), the Bai (Dàli), Tibetans (throughout northwestern Yúnnán) and the Dai (Xishuāngbǎnnà). Yúnnán sees very little surface ethnic hostility

## KŪNMÍNG IN WWII

Kūnmíng was the eastern terminus of the famous Burma Road, a 1000km haul from Lashio to Kūnmíng. Today, Renmin Xilu marks the tail end of the Burma Road.

In 1942 the Japanese captured Lashio, cutting the supply line. Kūnmíng continued to handle most of the incoming aid from 1942 to 1945, when US planes flew the dangerous mission of crossing the 'Hump', the towering 5000m mountain ranges between India and Kūnmíng's vicinity.

(though utopia it ain't). Problems here are typical of China as a whole: urban growth (migration to the cities), an unbalanced gender ratio (around 117 boys to 100 girls) and a fast-ageing populace (by 2020 nearly 16% of the population will be over 60).

## RELIGION

Three major schools of thought – Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism – commingle with animism. Yúnnán also has one of the highest concentrations – some 600,000 – of China's Hui, a Muslim group distinct from China's dozen or so other Muslim groups; they're found largely in Kūnmíng and in the province's northwest.

## ARTS

Kūnmíng's Yunnan Provincial Museum (p446) details the local contributions to China's culture. Yúnnán's ethnic groups have made equally important contributions to China's artistic legacy. Architecturally, comparing the temple styles alone could take up an entire trip. If there is one not-to-be-missed cultural experience in the province, it is the Naxi Orchestra in Lijiang (see p458), which performs Taoist temple music (known as *dòngjīng*) that has been lost elsewhere in China.

## ENVIRONMENT

Yúnnán's landscape is as diverse as its people: from a low point of 76.4m above sea level in Hékǒu, near Vietnam, to 6740m in the northwest Tibetan Plateau.

Geomorphologically, it's got everything one could want. From the stunning peaks of the northwest, you pass through splendid river valleys as the land moves into subtropics near its southwestern border with Myanmar,

and it finally becomes full-blown rainforest in Xishuāngbǎnnà, near Laos and Vietnam. Eastern Yúnnán is the province's fertile belt – a cornucopia of agricultural lands featuring some of China's most splendid rice terraces.

Yúnnán's primary environmental issue is deforestation – once 60% covered by forest, it's down to 25%. Logging was banned in the 1980s in northwest Yúnnán, with devastating effects on local economies. Newer environmental rallying cries are massive dam projects on the Nu (near Myanmar and Tibet) and Jinsha (along Tiger Leaping Gorge) Rivers.

# CENTRAL YÚNNÁN

## KŪNMÍNG 昆明

☎ 0871 / pop 1.01 million

'Yúnnán' means 'South of the Clouds', and Kūnmíng, with the apt moniker 'Spring City', couldn't be a better meteorological metaphor for a place situated far from inclement weather. At an elevation of 1890m, Kūnmíng has a milder climate than most other Chinese cities. Come in from the tropics and take a big gulp of the (relatively) fresh and cool air!

It's not unlike one big park, with tree- and flower-lined boulevards every which way. With a populace that refuses to be anything but laid-back, there is no sense of hurry-up here and the quotient of cell-phone-yapping wannabes is relatively low.

Sure, traffic and smog are worsening by the minute and most of the city's quaint architecture has gone, but in the end you'll likely find yourself quite relaxed here.

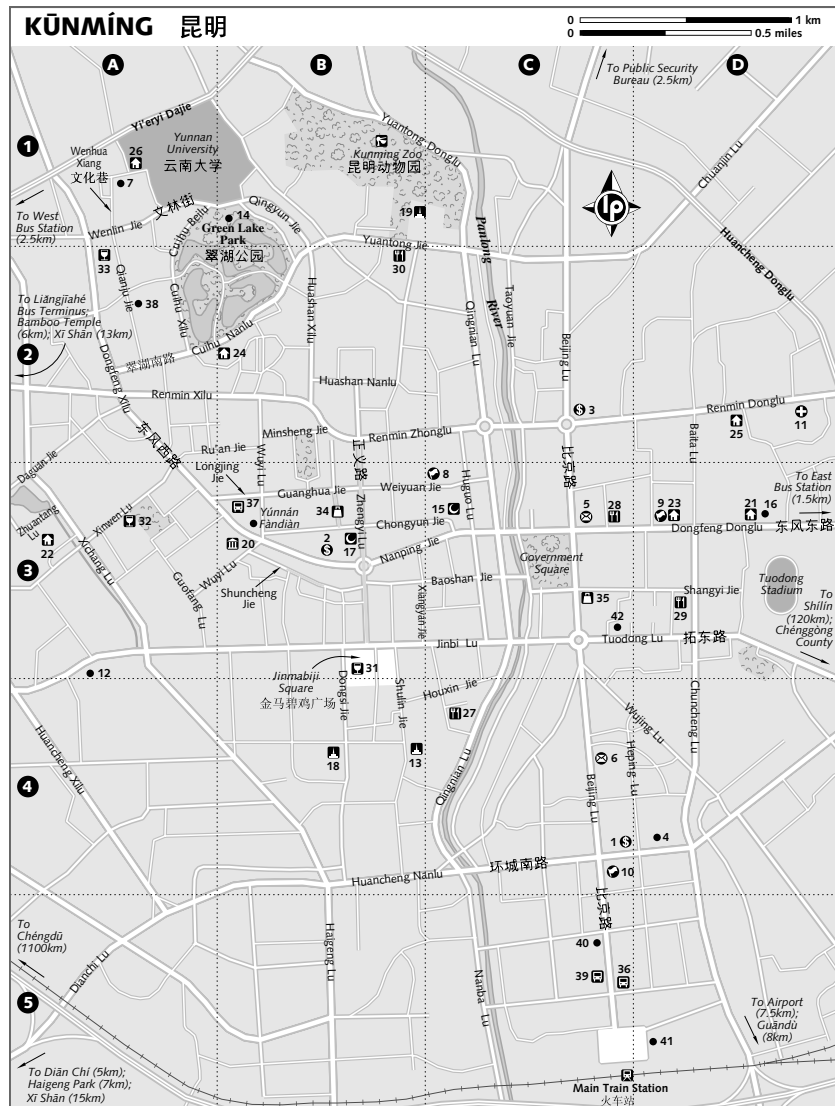
## Orientation

The centre of the city is the traffic circle at the intersection of Zhengyi Lu and Dongfeng Xilu. To the southwest, down to Jinbi Lu, are a few interesting old alleys.

Situated to the north of the intersection is lovely Green Lake Park (Cuihú Gōngyuán),

## GETTING INTO TOWN

Buses 52 and 67 run between the centre of town and the airport (situated 7.5km southeast of town). A taxi averages ¥20, depending on where you're going.



Yuantong Temple and the Kunming Zoo. East of the intersection is Kūnmíng's major north-south road, Beijing Lu. At the southern end is the main train station and the long-distance bus station. At about the halfway point, Beijing Lu is intersected by Dongfeng Donglu, where the luxurious Kunming Hotel can be found.

## MAPS

Get maps near the bus and train stations and in bookshops; those with English lack detail.

## Information BOOKSHOP

**Mandarin Books & CDs** (☎ 220 6575; West Gate, Yunnan University; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has a variety of

## INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行.....	1 C4
Bank of China 中国银行.....	2 B3
Bank of China 中国银行.....	3 C2
China International Travel	
Service 中国国际旅行社.....	4 D4
China Telecom 中国电信.....	(see 5)
International Post Office	
国际邮局.....	5 C3
International Post Office	
国际邮局.....	6 C4
Lao Consulate 老挝领事馆.....	(see 21)
Mandarin Books & CDs	
五华书苑.....	7 A1
Myanmar Consulate	
缅甸领事馆.....	8 C3
Thai Consulate	
泰国总领事馆.....	9 D3
Vietnamese Consulate	
越南领事馆.....	10 C4
Yanan Hospital 延安医院.....	11 D2

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Chuang Kù (The Loft)	
创库艺术主题社区.....	12 A3
East Pagoda 东寺塔.....	13 B4
Green Lake Park 翠湖公园.....	14 B1
Mosque 清真寺.....	15 C3

Mr Chen's Tours	
陈先生旅游.....	16 D3
Nancheng Mosque	
南城清真寺.....	17 B3
West Pagoda 西寺塔.....	18 B4
Yuantong Temple 圆通寺.....	19 B1
Yunnan Provincial Museum	
云南省博物馆.....	20 B3

## SLEEPING

Camellia Hotel 茶花宾馆.....	21 D3
Kunming Cloudland	
Youth Hostel	
昆明大脚氏青年旅社.....	22 A3
Kunming Hotel 昆明饭店.....	23 D3
Kunming Youth Hostel	
昆明国际青年旅社.....	24 B2
Mingdu Dajudián	
明都大酒店.....	25 D2
Yunda Binguǎn	
云大宾馆.....	26 A1

## EATING

1910 La Gare du Sud	
火车南站.....	27 C4
Brothers Jiang 江氏兄弟.....	28 C3
White Pagoda Dai Restaurant	
白塔傣味厅.....	29 D3

Yuquanzhai Vegetarian Restaurant	
玉泉斋.....	30 B2

## DRINKING

Jinmabiji Square 金马碧鸡广场.....	31 B3
Kundu Night Market 昆都夜市.....	32 A3
Speakeasy 说吧.....	33 A2

## SHOPPING

Flower & Bird Market 花鸟市场.....	34 B3
Tian Fu Famous Teas 天福茗茶.....	35 C3

## TRANSPORT

Bus Station 客运站.....	36 C5
Buses to Bamboo Temple	
到筲竹寺的班车.....	(see 37)
Buses to Xi Shan	
到西山的班车.....	37 B3
CAAC 中国民航.....	(see 42)
Dragonair 港龙航空.....	(see 10)
Fat Tyres Bike Shop.....	38 A2
Lao Aviation 老挝航空公司.....	(see 21)
Long-Distance Bus Station	
长途汽车总站.....	39 C5
Thai Airways 泰国国际航空.....	40 C5
Train Ticket Office	
火车站售票处.....	41 D5
Yunnan Airlines 南航空公司.....	42 C3

media in English, German, French, Dutch, Italian and Spanish.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel (p447) has free access (and is wireless equipped). Rates at Kūnmíng's zillion internet cafes are Y2 to Y3 per hour.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

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

## MONEY

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; 448 Renmin Donglu; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm) Changes travellers cheques and foreign currency and offers cash advances on credit cards. There is an ATM here. There are branches at Dongfeng Xilu and Huancheng Nanlu.

## POST & TELEPHONE

**China Telecom** (Zhōngguó Diànxìn; cnr Beijing Lu & Dongfeng Donglu) You can make international calls here. **International Post Office** (Guóji Yóujú; 231 Beijing Lu) The main office has poste restante and parcel service (per letter Y3, ID required) and is the Express Mail Service (EMS) and Western Union agent. There's a branch on Dongfeng Donglu.

## PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU (PSB)

**PSB** (Gōngānjú; ☎ 571 7030; Jinxing Huayuan, Jinxing Lu; ☎ 9-11.30am & 1-5pm daily) The Foreign Affairs

Branch will issue visa extensions in three to five days. The bureau is north of the city centre. The main entrance is off Erhuan Beilu. Bus 3, 25 or 57 will get you within a couple of blocks.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

Lodging options can assist with travel queries and make ticket reservations (ranging from free to Y20 per ticket). The Camellia Hotel (p447) has four (at last count) agencies, including Mr Chen's Tours (p447).

**China International Travel Service** (CITS; Zhōngguó Guóji Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 356 6730; 285 Huancheng Nanlu; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) Organises tours but doesn't like to dispense information. French and English spoken.

**Tourist Complaint & Consultative Telephone** (☎ 316 4961) Where you can complain about or report dodgy tourist operations.

## Dangers & Annoyances

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

## Sights & Activities

### TANG DYNASTY PAGODAS

To the south of Jinbi Lu are two Tang pagodas ageing gracefully as the neighbourhood gentrifies around them. **West Pagoda** (Xīsi Tǎ; Dongsi Jie;

## THE HUI

Of the province's approximately 600,000 Hui (one of China's Muslim groups), Kūnmíng holds the lion's share, though their once-thriving neighbourhoods of shops and restaurants have slowly been dispersed as the wrecking balls moved in.

In the 13th century Mongol forces swooped into the province to outflank the Song dynasty troops and were followed by Muslim traders, builders and craftsmen, whose descendants made extraordinary contributions to Chinese civilisation. Yünnán-boy-done-good Cheng Ho (Zheng He) was a famed eunuch admiral who opened up the Chinese sea channels to the Middle East and may have visited the Americas.

admission Y2; (🕒) 9am-6pm) is the more interesting. Attached is a compound that is a popular spot for older people to get together, drink tea and play cards and mah jong (and perhaps get a shave and a haircut).

**East Pagoda** (Dōngsī Tǎ; Shulin Jie) was, according to Chinese sources, destroyed by an earthquake; Western sources say it was destroyed by the Muslim revolt.

## YUANTONG TEMPLE 圆通寺

This **temple** (Yuántōng Sì; Yuantong Jie; admission Y4; (🕒) 8am-5pm), at the base of Luofeng Hill, is the largest Buddhist complex in Kūnmíng and attracts a fair number of pilgrims. An excellent example of Tang dynasty design, it is about 1200 years old; the highlight is a statue of Sakyamuni, a gift from the king of Thailand.

The fabulous Yuquanzhai Vegetarian Restaurant (opposite) is opposite the main temple entrance.

## OLD KŪNMÍNG

One place to go to still see little old men puttering about in their funky blue Mao suits is **Guāndù** (官渡), about 8km south of downtown.

Now, living museum this ain't. 'Old' flagstone alleys are being repaved in 'new' brick and 'old' wooden façades are giving way to new ones (like in the rest of China), and pavilions are draped in dropcloths for a garish paint job.

Yet it's a real kick. When you get off Bus 31 (from the train station all the way to the last stop), follow the donkey carts. They'll take you to a very laid-back and pretty much tourist-free section of town. A handful of temples (admission Y5), pagodas and other historic structures are great to search out.

## YUNNAN PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

云南省博物馆

This **museum** (Yünnán Shěng Bówùguǎn; Wuyi Lu; admission Y10; (🕒) 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) was just putting the finishing touches on a much-needed face-lift; the previous incarnation was as much tomb as museum.

The Bronze Drums Hall has a collection dating from the Western Han periods. Of 1600 such drums known to exist in the world, China has 1400, 400 of which were found in Yünnán itself. The Ancient Buddhist Art Hall has examples of the art at Shībǎoshān, near Dàlǐ, and the murals of Bǎishā outside Lǐjiāng. The Minority Nationality Hall gives an overview of Yünnán's ethnic diversity.

## GREEN LAKE PARK 翠湖公园

This **park** (Cuihú Gōngyuán; Cuihu Nanlu; (🕒) 6am-10pm) is a great place to while away a morning or afternoon, especially on Sunday, when half of the city is here. Try to pay a visit for the **Lantern Festival** in late September to early October.

## MOSQUES 清真寺

The oldest mosque, or at least located on the site where a mosque has sat the longest, is the 400-year-old **Nancheng Mosque** (Nánchéng Qīngzhēn Gúsi; 51 Zhengyi Lu). It can be identified by its tell-tale greenish onion domes, though the lower floors essentially look like the white-tiled offices that they are!

Another **mosque** is nearby, wedged between Huguo Lu and Chongyun Jie; yet another sits at the corner of Jinbi Lu and Dongsī Jie. Both are more historical landmarks than places of active worship.

## CHUANG KŪ (THE LOFT) 创库艺术主题社区

In a disused factory district now housing several art galleries, **TC/G Nordica** (诺地卡;

Nuòdìkǎ; (📞) 411 4692; www.tcgordica.com/en; 101 Xiba Lu; (🕒) 5-11.30pm Mon, 11.30am-11pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun), the epicentre of sorts, is best described as a gallery-exhibition hall-cultural centre-Scandinavian restaurant. Most weekends you'll find live entertainment.

## Tours

Several tour outfits cover Kūnmíng and its surrounding sights faster than public minibuses would, but be forewarned that many are pricey and include lots of shopping – er, sorry, toilet – stops. Hostels are the best places to find tours.

**Mr Chen's Tours** (📞 318 8114; Room 3116, No 3 Bldg, Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Lu) can organise trips to almost anywhere you want to go.

## Sleeping

**our pick Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel** (Kūnmíng Dǎjiāoshí Qīngnián Lúshè; (📞) 410 3777; www.cloudland2004.com; 23 Zhuantang Lu; 篆塘路23号; 4-/6-bed dm Y30/20; (📺) This charming new place has comfy beds, wondrous staff, free internet access and loads of extras. To get here from the train or long-distance bus station take bus 64. Get off at the Yunnan Daily News stop (云南日报社站).

**Kunming Youth Hostel** (Kūnmíng Guójī Qīngnián Lúshè; (📞) 517 5395; youthhostel.km@sohu.com; 94 Cuihu Nanlu; 翠湖南路94号; dm Y25, d from Y80) Tucked along a lane beside the Zhengxie Hotel, right by Green Lake Park, dorms here are institutional but staff are friendly and the hostel has been slated for a makeover.

**Camellia Hotel** (Cháhuā Bīnguǎn; (📞) 316 3000; www.kmcamelliahotel.com; 96 Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路96号; dm Y30, d Y188-288; (📺) This landmark budget option has grubby rooms on offer (though toilets and showers are good) and a staff trying not to be weary of budget travellers. But with travel services, bicycle hire, foreign exchange, cheap laundry and a breakfast buffet, it's still a good lodging option.

**Yúndà Bīnguǎn** (Yunnan University Hotel; (📞) 503 3624; fax 514 8513; d from Y160; (📺) The university area – laden with foreign student-centric restaurants, coffee shops, bookshops and the like – makes for a nice base, and the standard doubles here are a good choice. Staff practically fall over themselves to help.

**Míngdū Dǎjiūdiàn** (📞 624 0666; fax 624 0898; 206 Baifu Lu; 白塔路206号; s & d Y388, ste 688; (📺) A rarity in China – a hotel that seems to have actually taken a shot at a design scheme. Decent amenities and service for the price.

## ACROSS-THE-BRIDGE NOODLES

Yünnán's best-known dish is across-the-bridge noodles (过桥米线; guòqiáo miàoxiàn). You are provided with a bowl of very hot soup (stewed with chicken, duck and spare ribs) on which a thin layer of oil is floating, along with a side dish of raw pork slivers (in classier places this might be chicken or fish), vegetables and egg, and a bowl of rice noodles. Diners place all of the ingredients quickly into the soup bowl, where they are cooked by the steamy broth.

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

**our pick Kunming Hotel** (Kūnmíng Fàndiàn; (📞) 316 2063; www.kunminghotel.com.cn; 52 Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路52号; s & d Y780, ste Y1419; (📺) This place has always received – and still gets – tons of raves. Its laundry list of amenities includes a bar, disco, karaoke hall, outstanding restaurants, tennis court and even a bowling alley on-site.

## Eating

**Brothers Jiang** (Jiāngshì Xiōngdì; Dongfeng Donglu; noodles Y10-60) Yünnán's speciality – across-the-bridge noodles (see the boxed text, above) – are the hit here at this filled-to-the-sidewalks fave, with branches all over town. The noodles come with eating instructions!

**White Pagoda Dai Restaurant** (Báitǎ Dài Wéitíng; (📞) 317 2932; 127 Shangyi Jie; dishes from Y10; (🕒) 9am-9pm) Dai cuisine makes its way north here, with a slew of fish dishes and the old standby, pineapple sticky rice.

**our pick Yuquanzhai Vegetarian Restaurant** (Yùquánzhāi Cāntīng; Yuantong Jie; dishes from Y10) No meat in the fabulous dishes, but you'll swear there is. The menu – with English – is encyclopaedic, so ask for help!

**our pick 1910 La Gare du Sud** (Huòchē Nánzhàn; (📞) 316 9486; dishes from Y20) Ensnared cosily down an alley south of Jinbi Lu, here you'll find Yünnán specialities in a classy neocolonial-style setting. Travellers rave about the place.

## Drinking

Wenhua Xiang near Yunnan University has quieter options. If you need strobe lights and dancing, Jinmabiji Sq literally thumps

**ONE-STOP SHOPPING**

The **Flower & Bird Market** (Huāniǎo Shìchǎng; Tongdao Jie) has long been one of the more enjoyable and relaxing strolls in the city. It's also known as Lǎo Jiē (Old Street). Flowers and birds most certainly aren't the main draw here anymore; it's more endless curios, knick-knacks and doo-dads, some occasionally fine rugs and handmade clothing, and a hell of a lot of weird stuff. (Kurt Cobain or KISS T-shirt? Hmm.)

For real antiques it's better to look among the privately run shops on Beijing Lu and Dongfeng Donglu.

the night away with a dozen places. And for hard-core techno (and outrageous prices), the Kundu Night Market has dozens of discos frequented by the seen-on-the-scene.

**Speakeasy** (Shuōbā; Dongfeng Xilu; ☎ 8pm-late) A hipster mainstay, it's got a nice mix of expat and local and isn't trying too hard to be cool.

**Shopping**

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

Some functional items make good souvenirs: large bamboo water pipes for smoking angel-haired Yünnán tobacco and local herbal medicines such as Yünnán Báiyào (Yunnan White Medicine), which is a blend of more than 100 herbs and is highly prized by Chinese throughout the world.

Yunnanese tea is also an excellent buy and comes in several varieties, from bowl-shaped bricks of smoked green tea called *tuóchá*,

which has been around since at least Marco Polo's time, to leafy black tea that rivals some of India's best.

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

**Getting There & Away****AIR**

There are international flights to most major Asian cities including Hanoi, Chiang Mai/Bangkok, Rangoon, Vientiane and Siem Reap. For more information on flights and airlines serving Kūnmíng, see p478.

**BUS**

The long-distance bus station on Beijing Lu is the best place to organise bus tickets to almost anywhere in Yünnán. Exceptions to this are more local destinations such as Diān Chí or even southeastern Yünnán.

**TRAIN**

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

Trains no longer serve Hékǒu on the border with Vietnam.

Rail options from Kūnmíng (all prices are for hard sleepers) include trains to Běijīng (Y578), Shànghǎi (Y519), Guǎngzhōu (Y353), Xiān (Y258) and Chéngdū (Y222). Several trains run daily to Dàlǐ (Y95).

**Getting Around****BICYCLE**

Many backpacker hotels and hostels rent bikes for around ¥15 per day.

**Fat Tyres Bike Shop** (☎ 530 1755; 61 Qianju Jie; per day ¥20) has a large stock of bicycles including some very good mountain bikes. It also organises Sunday morning bike rides.

**KŪNMÍNG BUS TIMETABLES**

Destination	Price (¥)	Duration (hr)	Frequency	Departs
Dàlǐ	74-126	5-8	frequent	7.30am-7.30pm
Dàlǐ (sleeper)	95	9	2 daily	9pm, 9.30pm
Lǐjiāng	171	9	hourly	7.30-11.30am
Lǐjiāng (sleeper)	139	10-12	2 daily	8pm, 8.30pm
Jǐnghóng	185-223	9-10	4 daily	9.30am, 6pm, 7.45pm, 8.30pm
Jǐnghóng (sleeper)	165	10-11	half-hourly	4-8pm
Yuányáng	73-82	6-7	4 daily	10.40am, noon, 7.30pm, 8pm

**CROSSING INTO VIETNAM: HÉKǒU TO LAO CAI**

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

The border checkpoint on the Chinese side (☎ 0873-342 1655) is technically open from 8am to 11pm but don't bank on anything after 6pm. For information on the Vietnam side, see p376.

**BUS**

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

**AROUND KŪNMÍNG**

There are some fabulous sights within a 15km radius of Kūnmíng, but local transport isn't comprehensive. If you don't have that much time, the Bamboo Temple and Xi Shān are probably the most interesting.

**Bamboo Temple 箒竹寺**

This temple (Qiángzhú Sì; admission Y10; ☎ 8am-6pm) dates back to the Tang dynasty and is worth a visit for its tremendous 500 life-sized and precisely sculpted *luòhàn* (arhats or noble ones), individually masterpieces but together a *tour de force*. Espying the wall of surfing Buddhas is worth the price of admission.

The temple is about 12km northwest of Kūnmíng. Minibuses (Y10, 30 minutes) leave when full from opposite the Yünnán Fàndiàn from 7am. Minibuses return regularly to Kūnmíng.

**Diān Chí 滇池**

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

Plying the waters are *fānchuán* (pirate-sized junks with bamboo-battened canvas sails). It's mainly for scenic touring and hiking, and there are some fabulous aerial views from the ridges at Dragon Gate in Xi Shān. Buses leave for here from the same minibus stop in Kūnmíng as those going to Bamboo Temple and Xi Shān.

**Xi Shān 西山**

Spread out across a long wedge of parkland on the western side of Diān Chí, Xi Shān (Western Hills) offers hills for walking, exploring and discovering all the temples and other cultural relics. The path up to the summit passes a series of famous temples – it's a steep approach from the north side. The hike from Gāoyāo bus station, at the foot of the hills, to Dragon Gate takes 2½ hours, though most people take a connecting bus from Gāoyāo to the top section. Alternatively, it is also possible to cycle to the hills from the city centre in about an hour.

At the foot of the climb, about 15km from Kūnmíng, is **Huating Temple** (Huáting Sì; admission Y4), a country temple of the Nanzhao kingdom.

**Sānqīng Gé**, near the top of the mountain, was a country villa of a Yuan dynasty prince, and was later turned into a temple dedicated to the three main Taoist deities.

Further up, near the top of the mountain, is **Dragon Gate** (Lóng Mén; admission Y30). This is a group of grottoes, sculptures, corridors and pavilions that were hacked from the cliff between 1781 and 1835 by a Taoist monk and coworkers, who must have been hanging up there by their fingertips.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Minibuses (one way/return Y10/20, one hour, 7.30am to 2pm) leave when full from opposite the Yünnán Fàndiàn.

It's more reliable to use local buses: take bus 5 to the terminus at Liàngjiāhé, and then change to bus 6, which will take you to Gāoyāo bus station.

**Chénggòng County 呈贡县**

This county (Chénggòng Xiàn) is an orchard region on the eastern side of Diān Chí. Once one of Yünnán's poorest areas, it now sells literally millions of sprays of flowers each day and is a primary reason Yünnán has so many nicknames proclaiming its botanical heavenliness.

Many Western varieties of camellia, azalea, orchid and magnolia derive from southwestern Chinese varieties. Azaleas are native to China – of the 800 varieties in the world, 650 are found in Yünnán.

Flowers bloom year-round but during the **Spring Festival** (January/February and into March) a profusion of blooms can be found in the environs.

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

## SHÍLÍN 石林

☎ 0871

A conglomeration of utterly bizarre karst geology, **Shílín** (Stone Forest; ☎ 771 0316; admission ¥140) is a massive collection of grey limestone pillars about 120km southeast of Kūnmíng. Split and eroded by wind and rainwater, the tallest pillar reaches 30m high. Legend has it that the immortals smashed a mountain into a labyrinth for lovers seeking privacy.

It's packed to the gills – oft-bemoaned by travellers – and pricey as hell, but there are idyllic, secluded walks within 2km of the centre and by sunset or moonlight the place becomes otherworldly.

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

The **Stone Forest International Youth Hostel** (Shílín Guójī Qingnián Lǚguǎn; ☎ 771 0768; 4-bed dm ¥50, small s & d ¥120, big s & d ¥140), directly opposite where the buses drop you off, offers the cleanest, best-value accommodation you'll find.

## Getting There & Away

Buses to Shílín (¥30 to ¥40, two hours, every 30 minutes from 8am to noon) leave from the **bus station** (Beijing Lu, Kūnmíng) opposite the long-distance bus station. Make sure you don't get dragged onto one of the tourist buses. In the afternoon there are minibuses waiting at Shílín's car park, leaving when full (¥20).

## XIÀGUĀN 下关

☎ 0872

An important FYI: Xiàguān, the capital of Dàlì prefecture, is also referred to as Dàlì on buses, maps and tickets. So when you hop off your bus, you're probably not in the 'real' (that is, old) Dàlì (Dàlì Gǔchéng); this is around 15km north.

There is no reason to stay in Xiàguān and you only need to come here for visa extensions or transport.

To go straight to old Dàlì, turn left out of the long-distance bus station and left again at the first intersection. Just up from the corner is the station for local bus 4, which runs to the real Dàlì (¥1.50, 30 minutes) until around 8pm.

The regional **Public Security Bureau** (PSB; Gōngānjú; 21 Tianbao Jie; ☎ 8-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), south of town, handles *all* visa extensions for Xiàguān and Dàlì (for directions from Dàlì, see opposite).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

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

### BUS

Xiàguān has several bus stations, which throws some travellers. Luckily, the two main ones are both on the same side of the street, approximately two blocks apart. You might get dropped off at either one.

Journeys from Xiàguān's long-distance bus station include Kūnmíng (¥90 to ¥126, seven hours, every 40 minutes from 7.50am to 7pm), Lijiāng (¥41 to ¥58, three hours, five daily at 8.30am, 10am, 2pm, 4pm and 7pm) and Jīnghóng (¥170, 17 hours, three daily at noon, 2pm and 7.30pm).

Minibuses to Lijiāng also run regularly from Xiàguān.

Tickets for nearly all destinations can be booked in Dàlì.

### TRAIN

Overnight sleeper trains leave Kūnmíng's main train station between 10pm and 11.30pm, arriving in Xiàguān between 6am and 8.05am. Hard sleepers are ¥95. Returning to Kūnmíng, trains leave Xiàguān at 2.34pm, 9pm, 9.40pm, 10.02pm and 10.20pm.

## AROUND XIÀGUĀN

### Jízú Shān 鸡足山

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

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

Accommodation is available at the base of the mountain, about halfway up and on the summit. Prices average ¥20 to ¥30 per bed.

To get here from Xiàguān's north bus station, take a bus to Binchuān (¥11, two hours), from where you'll have to change for a bus or minibuses to Shāzhǐ at the foot of the mountain (¥10, one hour).

## Weishān

Some 55km or so south of Xiàguān, Weishān is a funky, small and cheery town with traditional architecture and strollworthy flagstone streets. It's most famous for **Weibǎo Shān** (admission ¥50), about 7km south of town, purportedly the birthplace of the Nanzhao kingdom. During the Ming and Qing dynasties it was the zenith of China's Taoism and you'll find some superb Taoist murals here.

Xiàguān's south bus station has buses (¥12, two hours) to Weishan from 6am to 6pm. Travelling to the mountain you have to wait for minivans to fill up, which isn't very often outside of summer. Hiring the whole van is only ¥40 (for ¥50 the guy'll wait for you).

## DÀLÌ 大理

☎ 0872 / pop 136,800

Ah, Dàlì. Just say the name and watch long-time China travellers grin, thinking of the first of Yünnán's (nay, China's) backpacker sanctuaries decades ago. Yet today Dàlì finds itself getting slagged by quite a few travellers. 'Touristy' has become a cliché in backpacker discussions and online forums.

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

Then again, so what? It's still in a stunning location, sandwiched between mountains and Ērhǎi Hú (Erhai Lake), and it has a fabulous climate. Just keep wandering the ancient alleys to find your own nook, hike the trails above the town, get on a boat on Ērhǎi Hú or, better, get your hands on a bike and get the hell out of town.

## History

For much of the five centuries in which Yünnán governed its own affairs, Dàlì was the centre of operations. The main inhabitants of the region are the Bai. The Bai people have long-established roots in the Ērhǎi Hú region, and are thought to have settled the area some 3000 years ago. In the early 8th century they grouped together and succeeded in defeating the Tang imperial army before establishing the Nanzhao kingdom.

The kingdom exerted considerable influence throughout southwest China and even, to a lesser degree, Southeast Asia, since it controlled upper Burma for much of the 9th century. This later established Dàlì as an end node on the famed Burma Road.

## Orientation

Dàlì is a miniature city that has some preserved cobbled streets and traditional stone architecture within its old walls. It takes about half an hour to walk from the South Gate (Nán Mén) across town to the North Gate (Běi Mén).

Huguo Lu is the main strip for cafés – locals call it Yangren Jie (Foreigner's St) – and this is where to turn to for your café latte fix.

## Information

All the hotels offer travel advice and can arrange tours and book tickets for onward travel.

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Huguo Lu & Fuxing Lu) Changes cash and travellers cheques. An ATM here accepts all major credit cards.

**China Post** (Yóujú; cnr Fuxing Lu & Huguo Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm) The best place to make international calls as it has direct dial and doesn't levy a service charge.

**China Telecom** (cnr Fuxing Lu & Huguo Lu; per hr ¥2; ☎ 8am-10pm) For internet access. Most hotels and guesthouses also offer free internet access for guests.

**Jim's Tibetan Guesthouse & Peace Café** (☎ 267 1822; 63 Boai Lu; 博爱路63号; www.china-travel.nl/) Offers a long list of trips that have been very highly rated by travellers.

**Mandarin Books & CDs** (Wúhuá Shūyuán; Fuxing Lu) Has maps, along with a decent selection of guidebooks and novels in Chinese, English and Dutch.

**Public Security Bureau** (PSB; Gōngānjú; 21 Tianbao Jie, Xiàguān; ☎ 8am-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) The PSB branch in Dàlì will *not* issue visa extensions. You need to go to the Xiàguān branch (opposite). To get there, take bus 4 until just after it crosses the river in Xiàguān. The PSB office is a short walk south from here.



## Dangers & Annoyances

The hike up to Zhonghe Temple (Zhōnghé Sì) and along the mountain ridges is super, but there have been several reports of robbery of solo walkers. Try to find a partner to go with you.

Be careful on the overnight sleeper buses coming in from Kūnmíng as someone often finds a bag pinched or razored.

## Sights

Well, you're going to spend at least a chunk of your time wandering about/getting lost in the **old town**. Nothing much exists to 'see' other than remanufactured architecture – a bit of the original remains – and a helluva lot of dirt-cheap shopping.

The **Three Pagodas** (三塔寺; Sān Tǎ Sì; admission incl Chongsheng Temple Y121; ☎ 8am–7pm) are among the oldest standing structures in southwestern China and are definitely *the* symbol of Dàlì. It's a hell of an admission price (especially given that you can't enter the pagodas), but it's fun enough just to watch Chinese tourists tearing about here to take their snaps.

## Festivals & Events

Merrymaking during the **Third Moon Fair** (Sānyuè Jié) begins on the 15th day of the third lunar month (usually April) and ends on the 21st day. The origins of the fair lie in its commemoration of a fabled visit by Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, to the Nanzhao kingdom.

The **Torch Festival** (Huǒbǎ Jié) is held on the 24th day of the sixth lunar month (normally July). Flaming torches are paraded at night through homes and fields.

## Sleeping

Despite heaps of accommodation, during peak summer months brace yourself for a long slog about town in search of a bed.

**No 3 Guesthouse** (Disān Zhāodàisuǒ; ☎ 266 4941; Huguo Lu; 护国路; 6-bed dm Y20; ☎) A fab staff buzzes about, new wooden furniture fills the rooms with a pleasant pinelike smell, each bunk has a bamboo curtain for privacy and facilities are immaculate.

**our pick** **MCA Guesthouse** (☎ 267 3666; mcahouse@hotmail.com; Wenxian Lu; 文献路; dm Y20, s/d Y100/120; ☎) Dorms sport lovely touches such as wall art, hardwood floors and furniture that's actu-

INFORMATION	SLEEPING	DRINKING
Bank of China 中国银行.....1 B2	Jim's Peace Hotel 吉姆和平酒店.....7 B3	Marley's Café 马丽咖啡馆.....12 B2
China Post 中国邮局.....(see 1)	Jim's Tibetan Guesthouse & Peace Café 吉姆和平餐厅和饭店.....8 B2	Yunnan Café & Bar 云南咖啡馆&酒吧.....13 B2
China Telecom 中国电信.....(see 1)	Lühéyuàn Qīngnián Lúshè 六合院青年旅社.....9 C2	<b>DRINKING</b>
Mandarin Books & CDs 五华书苑.....2 B2	MCA Guesthouse.....10 B3	Birdbar 鸟吧.....14 B2
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>	No 3 Guesthouse.....11 B2	<b>TRANSPORT</b>
East Gate 东门.....3 D2	第三招待所.....11 B2	Bus Station 往沙坪的公共汽车.....15 A2
North Gate 北门.....4 B1	往沙坪的火车站的八路车站.....16 A2	Buses to Train Station 往大关火车站的八路车站.....16 A2
South Gate 南门.....5 B3	<b>EATING</b>	Local Bus Station 汽车站.....17 A2
West Gate 西门.....6 A2	Jim's Peace Café 吉姆和平餐厅.....(see 8)	

ally pleasant to look at; the standard rooms have commanding lake views.

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

**our pick** **Jim's Peace Hotel** (Jímǔ Héping Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 267 7824; www.china-travel.nl; 13 Yuxiu Lu; 玉秀路中段13号; d Y200; ☎) Newly opened by a Dàlì longtimer, rooms manage to be both sleek and cosy. There's a garden, a rooftop terrace, and restaurant and bar below.

## Eating

**Èr kuài** (饵块) are flattened and toasted rice 'cakes' with an assortment of toppings (or plain); these are found province-wide. Fish are a mainstay here. Try **shāguō yú** (沙锅鱼), a clay-pot fish casserole/stew made from salted Èrhǎi Hú carp – magnolia petals might be added!

**Yunnan Café & Bar** (Yúnnán Kāféiguǎn & Jiǔbā; Huguo Lu; dishes from Y5) This cosy town stalwart with eminently friendly staff has always been raved about for its pizza, but you pretty much can't go wrong.

**Marley's Café** (Mǎlì Kāféiguǎn; ☎ 267 6651; 105 Boai Lu; dishes Y5–25) Marley's has always been a cornerstone of the town. Well-done food, great service and helpful advice, all in a just-subdued-enough environment. Check out the Bai banquet on Sunday night (reserve early).

## Drinking

**Birdbar** (Niǎobā; ☎ 266 1843; 22 Renmin Lu) This place is worth trying. It's a low-key off-the-main-drag watering hole with a pool table.

## Shopping

Huguo Lu has become a smaller version of Bangkok's Khao San Rd. Dàlì is famous for its

marble and for blue-and-white batik printed on cotton and silk. A lot of the batik is still made in Dàlì and hidden behind many of the shopfronts are vast wares of blue dye. Most of the 'silver' jewellery sold in Dàlì is really brass.

Most shopkeepers can also make clothes to your specifications.

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

## Getting There & Away

**AIR**  
Xiàguān's airport (p450) is served often by flights from Kūnmíng, possibly by other cities in the near future.

## BUS

The golden rule: find out in advance whether your bus is for Dàlì or Xiàguān. Coming from Lijiāng, Xiàguān-bound buses stop at the eastern end of Dàlì to let passengers off.

For information on getting to Dàlì from Kūnmíng, see p448.

From the bus stop near the west gate in Dàlì there are express buses to Kūnmíng (Y106, five hours, 9.30am, 10.30am, 4.30pm and 9pm). A slow bus for Kūnmíng also leaves daily at 8am (Y65). Buses to Lijiāng (Y30 to Y50, three hours, every 30 minutes from 7.30am to 7.20pm) also leave from here.

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

**TRAIN**

The overnight sleeper train from Künmíng is comfy but the times aren't grand – you arrive pretty early in the morning. For more details, see p450.

**Getting Around**

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

Bikes are the best way to get around (Y10 to Y15 per day). Most of the guesthouses and several other places on Boai Lu rent bikes.

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

Bus 8 runs from Dali to Xiàguān's train station.

**AROUND DALI Markets**

Usually markets follow the lunar calendar, but now there's a regular scheme so that tourists have a market to go to nearly every day of the week. See right for information on the Monday Shāpíng market. Markets also take place in Shuāngláng (Tuesday), Shābā (Wednesday), Yòusuǒ (Friday, the largest in Yunnan) and Jiāngwēi (Saturday). There's a daily morning market in Xìzhōu and a daily afternoon market in Zhōuchéng.

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

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

**Ērhǎi Hú 洱海湖**

At 1973m above sea level and covering 250 sq km, Ērhǎi Hú is the seventh-biggest freshwater lake in China. Bike-worthy trails, old villages, temples, islands – you can't *not* find something to like.

The best way to explore is either renting a bike or zipping about on one of the many ferries that crisscross the lake. A great bike trip is from Dali to Shāpíng and it can be done in a day. The lakeside road may seem the most picturesque, but it's congested; stick to side roads.

From Cáicūn, a pleasant little lakeside village east of Dali (Y2 on minibus 2), there's regular ferries to Wāsè (Y3 to Y5) on the other

side of the lake. Plenty of locals take their bikes over.

Ferries crisscross the lake at various points, so there could be some scope for extended touring; timetables are flexible and departures are somewhat unreliable.

Roads now encircle the lake so it is possible to do a loop (or partial loop) of the lake by mountain bike.

**Zhonghe Temple 中和寺**

This temple (Zhōnghé Sì; admission Y2) is a long, steep hike up the mountainside behind Dali; the delightful slog and the vistas of Ērhǎi Hú will be treasured memories, even if the temple isn't. To reach the top take the **chairlift** (one way/return Y30/50) up **Zhōnghé Shān** (Zhonghe Mountain). Or hike.

Branching out from either side of the temple is a trail that winds along the face of the mountains, taking you in and out of steep, lush valleys and past streams and waterfalls. From Zhōnghé it's an amazing 11km up-and-down hike south to **Gantong Temple** (Gǎntōng Sì) or **Qingbi Stream**, from where you can continue to the road and pick up a Dali-bound bus. There's also a new cable car between the two temples (one way/return Y52/82).

Alternatively, you can spend some more time here and stay the night at **Higherland Inn** (☎ 0872-266 1599; www.higherland.com; dm/s/d Y25/30/50) located just above Zhonghe. The hostel has fabulous views and is a true getaway. You can reserve rooms at the booking office on Renmin Lu in Dali.

**Xìzhōu 喜洲**

The old town of Xìzhōu is worth a look for its well-preserved Bai architecture. You can catch a local bus from the south gate in Dali (Y3) to make the 18km trip, but a bicycle trip with an overnight stop (there's accommodation in town) is also a good idea. From here, the equally interesting town of Zhōuchéng is 7km north.

**Shaping Market 沙坪赶集**

Every Monday at Shāpíng, about 30km north of Dali, there is a colourful Bai market (Shāpíng Gǎnji). The hustle starts at 10am and ends around 2.30pm. Expect to be quoted ridiculously high prices on anything you set your eyes on, so get into a bargaining frame of mind.

Head out on the road to Lijiang and flag down anything heading north. By bike it will take about two hours at a good clip.

**NORTHWEST YUNNAN****LJIANG 丽江**

new town ☎ 08891, old town ☎ 0888 / pop 60,000

Lijiang's maze of cobbled streets, rickety old wooden buildings and gushing canals makes it one of the most visited sites in northern Yunnan. Those same tour buses disgorging the hordes in Dali also inevitably call here – and they all manage to get snarled up in epic waves of human jams in the town's tiny alleys.

But don't let the crowds or any bitchy travellers discourage a trip. Get up early enough and it will be just you, Lijiang and a few bun sellers. Then skedaddle before the onslaught begins around 9am.

In 1996 an earthquake measuring over seven on the Richter scale rocked the Lijiang area, killing more than 300 people and injuring 16,000. The Chinese government took note of how the traditional Naxi buildings held up and sank millions of yuan into rebuilding most of Lijiang County with traditional Naxi architecture, replacing cement with cobblestone and wood. The UN placed all of Lijiang County on its World Heritage Site list in 1999.

**Orientation**

Lijiang is separated into old and new towns that are starkly different. The approximate line of division is Shìzǐ Shān (Lion Hill), the green hump in the middle of town topped by Looking at the Past Pavilion. Everything west of the hill is the new town, and everything east

is the old town. You *will* get lost in the old town; just follow a stream, all of which lead back toward the centre.

**Information**

Lijiang's cafés and backpacker inns are your best source of information on the area. There's a slew of Travel Reception Centres all over the old town but they mostly arrange tours.

Many of the cafés in the old town have International Direct Dial (IDD) lines. Prague Café (p457) has internet access for Y5 per hour.

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Dong Dajie) This branch has an ATM.

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

**China Post** (Yóujú; Minzhu Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm) Offers EMS. Another branch is located in the old town, just north of the Old Market Square.

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

**Eco-tours** (☎ 131-7078 0719; www.ecotourchina.com) Run by Zhao Fan at Café Buena Vista (see p459).

**Mandarin Books & CDs** (Lijiang Wúhuā Shūyuán; Xin Dajie) Has a fantastic choice of English books and maps on Lijiang and the region. Also German, French and other foreign-language titles.

**Public Security Bureau** (PSB; Gōngānjú; ☎ 518 8437; Fuhui Lu; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Reportedly very speedy with visa extensions. So be nice.

**Dangers & Annoyances**

Pickpockets love the old town's crowds. There's been a handful of reports of solo

**THE NAXI 纳西**

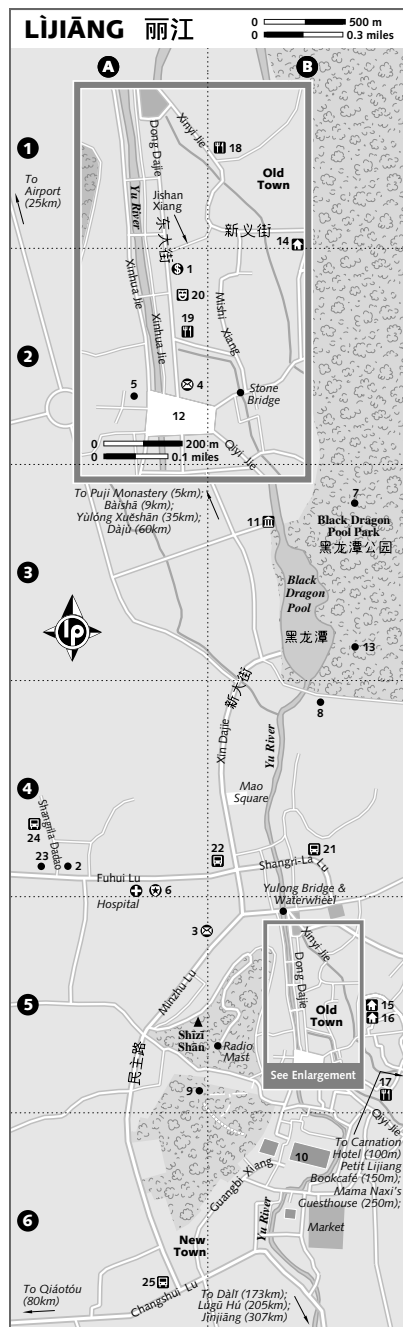
Lijiang has been the base of the 286,000-strong Naxi (also spelt Nakhi and Nah) minority for about the last 1400 years. The Naxi descend from ethnically Tibetan Qiang tribes and lived until recently in matrilineal families. Since local rulers were always male it wasn't truly matriarchal, but women still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

The Naxi matriarchs maintained their hold over the men with flexible arrangements for love affairs. The *azhu* (friend) system allowed a couple to become lovers without setting up joint residence. Linguistically, nouns enlarge their meaning when the word for 'female' is added; conversely, the addition of the word for 'male' will decrease the meaning. For example, 'stone' plus 'female' conveys the idea of a boulder; 'stone' plus 'male' conveys the idea of a pebble.

The Naxi created a written language over 1000 years ago using an extraordinary system of pictographs – the only hieroglyphic language still in use. The most famous Naxi text is the Dongba classic *Creation*, and ancient copies of it and other texts can still be found in Lijiang. The Dongba were Naxi shamans who were caretakers of the written language and mediators between the Naxi and the spirit world.

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



**INFORMATION**

Bank of China 中国银行	1	A2
China International Travel Service 中国国际旅行社	2	A4
China Post 中国邮政	3	A5
China Post 中国邮政	4	A2
China Telecom 中国电信	(see 3)	
Mandarin Books & CDs 五华书苑	5	A2
Public Security Bureau 公安局	6	A4

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Black Dragon Pool Park 黑龙潭公园	7	B3
Dongba Research Institute 东巴研究所	8	B4
Looking at the Past Pavilion 望古楼	9	A5
Mu Family Mansion 木氏土司府	10	B6
Museum of Naxi Dongba Culture 东巴博物馆	11	B3
Old Market Square 四方街	12	A2
Xiang Shan 象山	13	B3

**SLEEPING**

International Youth Hostel Lijiāng 丽江老谢车马店	14	B1
Moon Inn 新月阁客栈	15	B5
Zen Garden Hotel 瑞和园酒店	16	B5

**EATING**

Blue Papaya 蓝木瓜	17	B5
Lamu's House of Tibet 西藏屋西餐馆	18	B1
Prague Café 布拉格咖啡馆	19	A2

**ENTERTAINMENT**

Naxi Orchestra	20	A2
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**TRANSPORT**

Bus Station 客运站	21	B4
Buses to Báishā 到白沙的班车	(see 22)	
Buses to Yúlóng Xuěshān 到玉龙雪山的班车	22	B4
CAAC 中国民航	23	A4
Express Bus Station 高快客运站	24	A4
Long-Distance Bus Station 长途汽车站	25	A6

women travellers being mugged when walking alone at night in isolated areas of historic Lijiāng. Also try to avoid going solo to Xiāng Shān in Black Dragon Pool Park (Hēilóngtán Gōngyuán).

**Sights**

Crisscrossed by canals, bridges and a maze of narrow streets, the **old town** is the reason why people come to Lijiāng. The town's web of arterylike canals once supplied the city's drinking water.

The focus is the **Old Market Square** (Sifāng Jiē). Once the haunt of Naxi traders, they've long since made way for tacky souvenir stalls.

Now acting as sentinel of sorts for the town, the **Looking at the Past Pavilion** (Wàngǔ Lóu; admission Y15) was raised for tourists at a cost of over one million yuán. It's famed for a unique design using dozens of four-storey pillars – unfortu-

nately these were culled from northern Yúnnán old-growth forests. Still, from here you get superb eyefuls of the old town's misty mornings.

**MU FAMILY MANSION** 木氏土司府

The former home of a Naxi chieftain, the **Mu Family Mansion** (Mùshìtú Sífǔ; admission Y35; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) was heavily renovated (more like built from scratch) after the 1996 earthquake. Poor captioning notwithstanding, many travellers find the beautiful grounds reason enough to visit.

**BLACK DRAGON POOL PARK** 黑龙潭公园

On the northern edge of town is the **Black Dragon Pool Park** (Hēilóngtán Gōngyuán; Xīn Dàjiē; admission Y30, free after 6pm; ☎ 7am-7pm). Note the admission price is expected to rise to Y60 soon. Apart from strolling around the pool – its view of Yúlóng Xuěshān (Jade Dragon Snow Mountain) is the most obligatory photo shoot in southwestern China – you can visit the **Dongba Research Institute** (Dōngbā Wénhuà Yánjiūshì).

Trails lead straight up **Xiāng Shān** to a dilapidated gazebo and then across a spiny ridge past a communications centre and back down the other side, making a nice morning hike. Avoid going to this area solo.

The **Museum of Naxi Dongba Culture** (Nàxì Dōngbā Wénhuà Bówùguǎn; admission Y5; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) is at the park's northern entrance.

**Festivals & Events**

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

July brings the **Torch Festival** (Huǒbǎ Jié), also celebrated by the Bai in the Dàli region and the Yi all over the southwest. The origin of this festival can be traced back to the intrigues of the Nanzhao kingdom, when the wife of a man burned to death by their king eluded the romantic entreaties of the monarch by leaping into a fire.

**Sleeping**

There is no shortage of charming Naxi-style lodging here. Note that prices can spike in July and August and especially during holidays.

**Mama Naxi's Guesthouse** (Gúchéng Xiānggēyún Kèzhàn; ☎ 510 0700; 78 Wenhua La, Wuyi Jie; 五一街 & 文化巷78号; dm Y15, s & d from Y50; ☑) This place's enormous popularity derives mainly from

Mama's dynamic personality; you'll be glad to have her looking out for you. It's packed, a bit chaotic (though well run and clean) but eminently fun. Midnight curfew.

**International Youth Hostel Lijiāng** (Lijiāng Lǎoxiē Chēmǎdiàn; ☎ 511 6118; 25 Jishan Alley, Xinyi Jie; 新义街, 积善巷25号; dm Y20, s Y40-120, d Y100-140, tr Y150-180) Well-kept rooms of every conceivable variation and nice touches set it apart from the generic hostels in town. Hot water from 6pm to 2am only.

**our pick Carnation Hotel** (Kāngnǎixīn Kèzhàn; ☎ 511 1237, 511 7306; ewan\_215@yahoo.com.cn; 134 Wenzhi Alley; 文治巷134号; s & d Y50-120, Jul & Aug Y150; ☑) This relaxing place has solicitous owners – chatty, with some English – and comfy rooms set around a large courtyard. Budget prices, midrange service. The hotel is located just east of town.

**Moon Inn** (Xīnyuégé Kèzhàn; ☎ 518 0520; moon inn@163.com; 34 Xingren Xiaduan, Wuyi Jie; 五一街, 兴仁下段34号; s & d Y200; ☑) A casual but mod place, its bright and breezy rooms have wood furniture and fetching colours. The courtyard is lovely and there's a relaxing common room as well.

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

**Eating**

There are always several 'Naxi' items on the menu, including the famous **bābā** (粑粑), thick flatbreads of wheat, served plain or stuffed with meats, vegetables or sweets. Great pretrekking or biking sustenance.

**Prague Café** (18 Mishi Xiang; meals from Y15; ☎ from 7.30am) An old favourite, the Naxi breakfast (Y22), will have you set for Tiger Leaping Gorge. Great atmosphere with a loyal crowd, this café also has a book exchange, magazines and internet (Y5 per hour).

**our pick Petit Lijiāng Bookcafé** (☎ 511 1255; 50 Chongren Xiang, Qiyi Jie; dishes from Y15) Owners Mei and Olivier (a Chinese-Belgian couple) are inveterate travellers and great sources of travel info. Sublime food, and the bookshop has English- and French-language titles focusing on Yünnán and elsewhere in China.

**Lamu's House of Tibet** (Xizàngwū Xicānting; ☎ 518 9000; 56 Xinyi Jie; dishes from Y10) Away from the main

drag, this place serves excellent food from a hugely varied menu. Try the *momo* (Tibetan dumplings), which come with a variety of fillings, but make sure you save room for the desserts – they're massive.

**Blue Papaya** (Lán Mùguā; ☎ 661 2114; 70 Xinyi Jie; dishes from Y30) Serves pasta and fish dishes that are terrific not just against Chinese standards but by any benchmark. Service is outstanding and the menu has creative flourishes such as pineapple or sweet potato ice cream. This is a perfect place to relax and linger over a first-rate meal.

## Entertainment

The **Naxi Orchestra** (Nǎxī Gǔyuè Huì; ☎ 512 7971; Naxi Music Academy; tickets Y100-140; 🎫 performances 8pm) is perhaps the town's most legendary attraction. The 20 to 24 Naxi members play a type of Taoist temple music (known as *dòngjīng*) that has been lost elsewhere in China. The pieces they perform are supposedly faithful renditions of music from the Han, Song and Tang dynasties, and are played on original instruments.

Famed local historian Xuan Ke often speaks – too much, some say – explaining each musical piece and describing the instruments. BTW, don't grouse about the somnolent musicians – they're ancient and it's half the fun!

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

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

From Lijiang there are oodles of daily flights to Künmíng (Y660) and in season to other Chinese cities.

### BUS

Lijiang has three bus stations: one just north of the old town; the main long-distance bus

station in the south; and an express bus station to Künmíng and Xiàguān on Shangrila Dadao in the north of town.

From the express bus station there are daily departures to Künmíng (Y171 to Y193, 8am, 9am, 10am, 11am and 12.30pm). Two sleeper buses also leave daily for Künmíng at 8.30pm. One terminates at Künmíng's west station, the other at its south station. Buses also leave for the 160km trip to Xiàguān (Y41 to Y58, 8am, 11.10am, noon, 2.10pm, 3.50pm and 6.10pm).

Buses from the northern bus station include Künmíng (Y119, eight hours, daily at 8pm) and Xiàguān (Y35 to Y37, two hours, 20 a day from 7.30am to 6pm).

## Getting Around

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

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

Bike hire is available at the International Youth Hostel Lijiang (see p457; Y15 per day).

## AROUND LIJIANG

It is possible to see most of Lijiang's environs on your own, but a few agencies do offer half- or full-day tours, starting from Y150 to Y200 *without* entrance fees.

## Monasteries

The monasteries around Lijiang are Tibetan in origin and belong to the Karmapa (Red Hat) sect. There's not much monastic activity nowadays though seeing the scenery from a bike saddle is lovely. **Puji Monastery** (普濟寺; Pǔjì Sì) is around 5km northwest of Lijiang (on a trail that passes the two ponds to the north of town).

West of Báishā lies the remains of the **Fuguo Monastery** (富國寺; Fùguó Sì), once the largest of Lijiang's monasteries. To get there head west from the main intersection in Báishā until you reach a small village. Turn right at the fork in the road and continue for around 500m before taking the next left that you come to. It's 30 minutes uphill from here.

**Jade Peak Monastery** (玉峰寺; Yùfēng Sì) is on a hillside about 5km past Báishā. The last 3km of the track require a steep climb. At the foot of Yùlóng Xuēshān, the monastery's main attraction is the Camellia Tree of 10,000 Blossoms (Wànduǒ Shānchá). A monk on the grounds risked his life to keep the tree secretly watered during the Cultural Revolution.

## BÁISHĀ 白沙

Báishā is a small village on the plain north of Lijiang, near several old temples, and is one of the best day trips out of Lijiang, especially if you have a bike. Before Kublai Khan made it part of his Yuan empire (1271–1368), Báishā was the capital of the Naxi kingdom and still offers a close-up glimpse of Naxi culture for those willing to spend some time nosing around.

The star attraction of Báishā, Dr Ho (or He), looks like the stereotype of a Taoist physician. Travel writer Bruce Chatwin propelled the good doctor into the limelight when he mythologised Dr Ho as the 'Taoist physician in the Jade Dragon Mountains of Lijiang' and Dr Ho, previously an unknown doctor in an unknown town, has achieved worldwide renown.

Almost directly opposite Dr Ho's clinic is **Café Buena Vista** (Mànà Wéisītà Jùlèbù; ☎ 131-7078 0719; info@ecotour.com), a lovely little café and gallery run by artist Zhao Fan and his girlfriend. It's

## FRESCOES

Lijiang is famed for its temple frescoes, most of which were painted during the 15th and 16th centuries by Tibetan, Naxi, Bai and Han artists but, of course, were damaged heavily during the Cultural Revolution.

In Báishā the best frescoes can be found in **Dabaoji Palace** (Dàbǎoji Gōng; admission Y15; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm). Nearby, **Liuli Temple** (Liúli Diàn) and **Dading Ge** also have some and frescoes can be found on the interior walls of **Dajue Palace** (Dàjué Gōng), in the neighbouring village of Lóngquán.

a fantastic place to get travel information and organise tours.

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

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

## YÙLÓNG XUÈSHĀN 玉龙雪山

Also known as Mt Satseto, **Yùlóng Xuēshān** (adult/student Y80/60, protection fee Y40) soars to some 5500m. Its peak was first climbed in 1963 by a research team from Běijīng and now, at some 35km from Lijiang, it is mobbed (not an exaggeration at times) by hordes of the Gore-Tex-clad for its superlative scenery.

**Dry Sea Meadow** (甘海子; Gānhǎizi) is the first stop you come to if travelling by bus from Lijiang. A chairlift (Y160) ascends to a large meadow at 3050m which, according to geologists, was actually a lake 2000 years ago. It can often get freezing at this elevation even when warm below: warm coats can be rented for Y30, deposit Y300, and oxygen tanks are Y40.

**Cloud Fir Meadow** (云杉坪; Yúnsānpíng) is the second stop and a chairlift (Y40) takes you up to 4506m where walkways lead to awe-some glacier views. Horses can be hired here for Y80.

Get here early to get a head start on the tour groups, or you'll have an hour wait to get either up or down the mountain.

Around 60km from Lijiang, or a 30-minute drive from Dry Sea Meadow, is **Yak Meadow** (牦牛坪; Mǎoniúping), where yet another chairlift (Y60) pulls visitors up to an altitude of 3500m; there are ample hiking opportunities near Xuēhuā Hǎi (Snowflake Lake). Crowds and long waits are almost unheard of here.

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

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

## TIGER LEAPING GORGE 虎跳峡

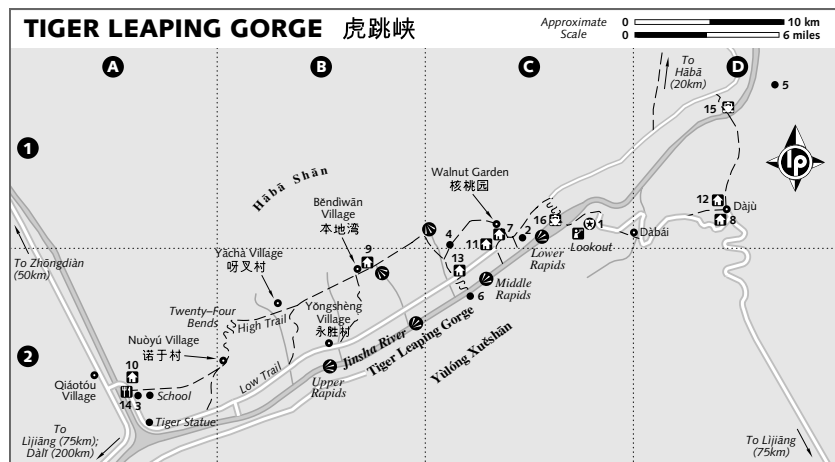
☎ 0887

Yunnan's original trek, Tiger Leaping Gorge (Hǔtiào Xiá) is now considered a traveller's

## LIJIANG BUS TIMETABLES

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

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hr)	Frequency	Departs
Künmíng	151	12	hourly	8.30-11.30am & 1pm
Künmíng (sleeper)	119	8	11 daily	6.30-9pm
Xiàguān	35-50	3½	27 daily	7.10am-6.30pm
Qiáotóu	20	2	daily	1pm



## INFORMATION

Public Security Bureau 公安局	1	C1
Ticket Office 售票处	2	C1
Ticket Office 售票处	3	A2

## SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES

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

## SLEEPING

Chateau de Woody 山白脸旅馆	7	C1
Daju Longhu Inn 大具龙虎客栈	8	D1
Halfway Lodge 中途客栈	9	B2
Jane's Guesthouse	10	A2
Sean's Spring Guesthouse 山泉客栈	11	C1
Snowflake Hotel 雪花饭店	12	D1
Tina's Guest House 中峡旅店	13	C2

## EATING

Gorged Tiger Café	14	A2
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## TRANSPORT

Ferry 渡船	15	D1
New Ferry 渡船	16	C1

rite of passage. One of the deepest gorges in the world, it measures 16km long and is a giddy 3900m from the waters of Jinshā Jiāng (Jinsha River) to the snowcapped mountain-tops of Hābā Shān (Haba Mountain) to the west and Yúlóng Xuēshān to the east. And it's preternaturally lovely pretty much everywhere. Admission to the gorge is Y50 (you can pay at either ticket office).

## Dangers &amp; Annoyances

The gorge trek is not to be taken lightly. Even for those in good physical shape, it's a workout. The path constricts and crumbles; it

certainly can wreck the knees. When it's raining (especially in July and August), landslides and swollen waterfalls can block the paths, in particular on the low road. Half a dozen people – including a few foreign travellers – have died in the gorge. A few solo travellers have also been assaulted on the trail.

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

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

## Gorge Trek

There are two trails – the higher (the older route, known as the Twenty-Four Bends path), and the lower, the new road, replete with belching tour buses. Only the high trail is worth hiking. Arrows help you avoid getting lost.

The following route commences at Qiàotóu Village.

To get to the high road, after crossing through the gate, cross a small stream and go 150m. Take a left fork, go through the schoolyard's football pitch, and join the tractor road. Continue until the track ends and then follow the yellow arrows to the right. It's six hours to Bēndiwān Village or a strenuous eight hours to Walnut Garden. Guesthouses dot the trail.

One option is **Halfway Lodge** (Zhōngtú Kèzhàn; Bēndiwān; dm Y15), which was once a simple home to a guy collecting medicinal herbs and his

family. It's now a busy-busy – but cosy and well-run – operation.

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

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

**Sean's Spring Guesthouse** (Shānquán Kèzhàn; ☎ 880 6300; www.tigerleapinggorge.com; dm Y15) is one of the original guesthouses on the trail and still the spot for lively evenings and socialising. Sean's has electric blankets and mountain-bike hire (Y10 per hour), and can organise camping, guides and horse trips.

**Chateau de Woody** (Shānbáiliǎn Lǚguǎn; dm Y15) is the other original and is just fine too.

The next day's walk is slightly shorter at about four to six hours. There are two ferries and so two route options to get to Dàjù. After 45 minutes you'll see a red marker leading down to the new (winter) ferry (*xin*

*dūkòu*; one way Y10); the descent includes one hairy section over planks with a sheer drop below.

Many trekkers call it a day when they reach the bottom and flag down anything heading back Qiàotóu. The road to Dàjù and the village itself are pretty uninteresting so you won't be missing anything if you decide to skip it.

If you do decide to head on to Dàjù, it's a hard climb to the car park where you should register with the Lijiāng Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú). The PSB officer offers a car to take you into Dàjù for Y10, avoiding the dull 1½-hour's walk along the road.

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

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

## Sleeping &amp; Eating

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

## JOSEPH ROCK

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

Born in Austria, he taught himself eight languages – including Sanskrit – and began learning Chinese at 13 years of age. He later convinced the US Department of Agriculture, and later Harvard University, to sponsor his trips to collect flora for medicinal research. After becoming the world's foremost authority on Hawaiian flora, he devoted much of his life to studying Naxi culture, which he feared was being extinguished by the dominant Han culture. He became *National Geographic* magazine's 'man in China' and it was his exploits in northwestern Yúnnán and Sìchuān for the magazine that made him famous.

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

Rock lived in Yùhú village (called Nguluko when he was there) outside Lijiāng. Many of his possessions are now local family heirlooms and his residence is now a museum.

The *Ancient Naxi Kingdom of Southwest China* (1947) is Joseph Rock's definitive work, along with his Naxi dictionary. For an insight into the man and his work, take a look at *In China's Border Provinces: The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer* (1974) by JB Sutton, or Rock's many archived articles for *National Geographic*.

### THE END OF THE GORGE?

If only the gorge's annoying new road and its ubiquitous shuttle buses were all. Tiger Leaping Gorge could disappear in a matter of years if plans to build eight dams along 564km of the upper reaches of the Yangzi River go ahead. Once completed, the dams will flood more than 13,000 hectares of prime farmland, force over 100,000 people (some claim up to a million) to relocate, and wash away local culture, history, unique architecture, and indigenous plant and animal life.

Local opposition has been uniform and ferocious (there have been one or two reports of assaults against officials) but even with every environmental group in China and abroad lobbying against it, it's hard to believe that those in charge will take much notice. Chinese media report that preparatory work, including blasting, has already begun and proper construction on the dams is expected to begin by 2008.

### QIÁOTÓU VILLAGE

**Jane's Guesthouse** (☎ 880 6570; janetibetgh@hotmail.com; dm Y15, s & d Y30; ☑) Jane is one of the gorge's true characters and has all the straight dope on the trek.

**Gorged Tiger Café** (☎ 880 6300; mains Y50-20) Run by Australian woman Margo, the food gets mixed reviews, but Margo herself gets raves.

### DĀJÙ

**Snowflake Hotel** (Xuēhuā Fāndiàn; r with shared bathroom from Y20) Rooms are spartan and a bit dark but the hotel's friendliness will snag most sweaty TLG trekkers.

**Daju Longhu Inn** (Dájù Lónghú Kézhán; ☎ 888 532 6040; standard/deluxe d with shared bathroom Y20/50) You may need to stick a smoke into your nostrils in the communal showers and toilets and the budget rooms are nondescript, but the deluxe ones are quite impressively done up.

### Getting There & Away

Transport is ever easier. Most people take a Shangri-la-bound bus (Y20, hourly from 7.30am to 5pm) early in the morning, hop off in Qiáotóu, and hike quickly to stay overnight in Walnut Garden.

Returning to Lijiāng from Qiáotóu, buses start running through from Shangri-la around 9am. The last one rolls through around 7.40pm (Y20). The last bus to Shangri-la passes through at around 7pm.

Buses (Y24, four hours) run in the morning – whenever they feel like it – from just north of the old town in Lijiāng. From Dājù to Lijiāng buses leave at 7.30am and 1.30pm.

If you want to cheat, alight in Qiáotóu and then catch a shuttle bus to the main viewpoint 10km away; bargain to around Y15. You could even take a taxi (Y50) the 23km from Qiáotóu to Walnut Garden and hitchhike back.

## SOUTHEAST YÚNNÁN

### YUANYANG RICE TERRACES

☎ 0873

These rice terraces, hewn from the rolling topography by the Hani over centuries, cover roughly 12,500 hectares and are another of Yúnnán's – nay, China's – most spectacular sights. At sunrise or sunset these pools are an artist's palette of colours; hiking in the morning mists, you'll honestly swear they're dancing about. An unforgettable experience.

Yuányáng is actually split into two: Nánshā, the new town, and Xīnjiē, the old town, located an hour's bus ride up a nearby hill. Either can be labelled Yuányáng, depending on which map you use. Xīnjiē is the one you want, so make sure you're getting off at the right one.

### Sights & Activities

Dozens of villages, each with its own terrace field, spiral out from Xīnjiē. The terraces around each village have their own special characteristics which vary from season to season. A rule of thumb: follow the everpresent photographers.

**Duōyishū**, about 25km from Xīnjiē, has the most spectacular sunrises and is the one you should not miss. For sunsets, **Bádá** and **Lǎohúzuǐ** can be mesmerising.

Maps are available at all accommodation options in town. Most are bilingual Chinese-English, though some include Japanese, German and French labels as well.

There is a fleet of minibuses by Xīnjiē's Titian Sq that leave when full to whiz around the villages, but you are much better off arranging a car and driver through your accommodation. It's also easy just to hook up with

other travellers and split the cost of chartering a minibus for the day (Y400 to Y450).

### Sleeping

**Yuányang Chénjiā Fāngshé** (☎ 562 2342; dm/s/tr Y10/40/60) This open and breezy guesthouse – overseen by four smiling generations of the same family – has spotless rooms with splendid views.

**Government Guesthouse** (Yuányang Xiànshāchéng Dǎjiūdián; s/d Y150/180) Just off Titian Sq, rooms here are nothing special but the lobby has the best tourist information desk.

**Yúntí Dǎjiūdián** (☎ 562 4858; s/d Y328/258) These are the town's swankest digs, offering clean, modern rooms and a staff used to foreigners.

### Getting There & Away

There are three buses daily from Kūnmíng to Yuányáng (Y90, 6½ hours, 10.40am, 7.30pm and 8pm). Buses from Xīnjiē back to Kūnmíng leave at 10.12am, 5pm and 9pm.

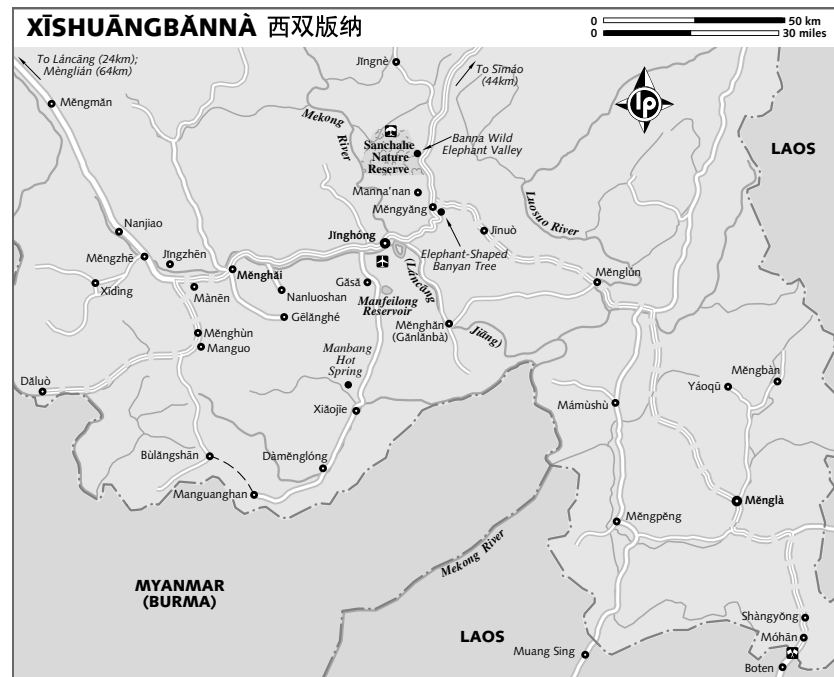
From here destinations include Hékǒu (Y37, four hours) or you can take the long way to Xishuāngbǎnnà. To get there, take the 7.30am bus to Lǚchūn (Y25, four hours),

where you'll have to wait to get the Jiāngchéng bus at 4pm (Y31, five hours). By the time you arrive, there'll be no more buses but you can stay at the hotel attached to the bus station which has cheap rooms (dorms Y10, doubles Y60). Buses to Jīnghóng (Y50, 8½ hours) start running at 6am.

This can be a gruelling route over bumpy dirt roads, but it will take you through magnificent scenery. Buses along this route are frequently stopped for routine police checks.

## XISHUANGBĀNNÀ REGION 西双版纳

Just north of Myanmar and Laos, Xishuāngbǎnnà, a Chinese approximation of the original Thai name of Sip Sawng Panna (Twelve Thousand Rice Fields), is better known simply as Bǎnnà and has become China's own mini-Thailand, attracting tourists looking for sunshine and water-splashing festivals, hikers readying for epic jungle treks and pissed-off



expats fleeing the congestion (and cold weather) of China's cities.

## People

About one-third of the 800,000-strong population of this region are Dai; another third or so are Han Chinese and the rest is made up of a conglomeration of minorities that include the Hani, Lisu and Yao, as well as lesser-known hill tribes such as the Aini (a subgroup of the Hani), Jinuo, Bulang, Lahu and Wa.

## Climate

Two seasons: wet and dry. The wet season is between June and August, when it rains ferociously almost every day. From September to February there is less rainfall, but you often experience thick fog.

November to March sees temperatures average about 19°C. The hottest months of the year are from April to September, when you can expect an average of 25°C.

## Environment

Xishuangbännä is home to an extraordinary number of plant and animal species. Unfortunately, the tropical rainforest areas of Bännä are now as acutely endangered as similar rainforest areas elsewhere on the planet.

The jungle areas that remain contain dwindling numbers of wild tigers, leopards, elephants and golden-haired monkeys. To be fair, the number of elephants is now 250, up 100% from the early 1980s; the government now offers compensation to villagers whose crops have been destroyed by elephants, or who assist in wildlife conservation. In 1998 the

government banned the hunting or processing of animals, but poaching is notoriously hard to control.

## Festivals & Events

The **Water-Splashing Festival** is held in mid-April and washes away the dirt, sorrow and demons of the old year and brings in the happiness of the new. Jinghóng usually celebrates it from the 13th to the 15th. Dates in the surrounding villages vary. The third day features the water-splashing freak-out. Foreigners get special attention so remember, the wetter you get, the more luck you'll receive!

During the **Tanpa Festival** in February, young boys are sent to the local temple for initiation as novice monks. The **Tan Ta Festival** is held during the last 10-day period of October or November, with temple ceremonies, rocket launches from special towers and hot-air balloons.

## JINGHÓNG 景洪

☎ 0691 / pop 94,150

Jinghóng is the capital of Xishuangbännä prefecture but with its palm-lined streets and relaxed ambience it can feel like a giant, overpopulated village. Prepare for searing late-day heat that can put the city into a deep sleep or serious slow motion. Then again, that's kind of the whole point of coming here, isn't it?

## Information

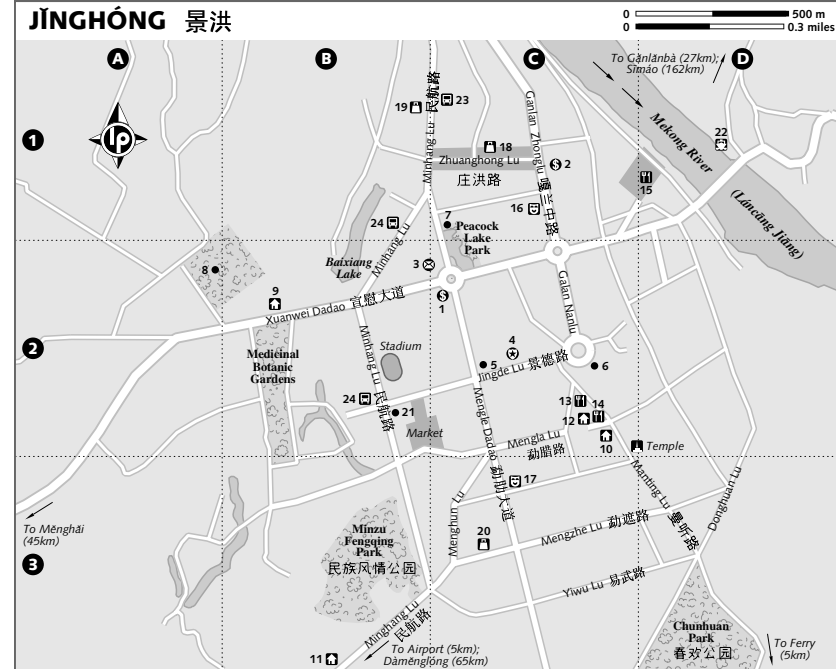
The local cafés are the best source of travel tips and trek notes. There are a handful of internet cafés along Manting Lu (Y2 per hour). The phone bars along Manting Lu are the best place to make international or long-distance calls.

### THE DAI PEOPLE 傣族

The Dai are Hinayana Buddhists (as opposed to China's majority Mahayana Buddhists), who first appeared 2000 years ago in the Yangzi Valley and who were subsequently driven southwards by the Mongol invasion of the 13th century. The Dai state of Xishuangbännä was annexed by the Mongols and then by the Chinese.

Linguistically, the Dai are part of the very large Thai family that includes the Siamese, Lao, Shan, Thai Dam and Ahom peoples found scattered throughout the river valleys of Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, northern Vietnam and Assam (India). The Xishuangbännä Dai are broken into four subgroups – the Shui (Water) Dai, Han (Land) Dai, Huayao (Floral Belt) Dai and Kemu Dai – each distinguished by variations in costume, lifestyle and location. All speak the Dai language, which is quite similar to Lao and northern Thai dialects. In fact, Thai is often as useful as Chinese once you get off the beaten track. The written language of the Dai employs a script that looks like a cross between Lao and Burmese.

Some Dai phrases include *douzao li* (hello), *yindii* (thank you) and *goihán* (goodbye).



### INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行.....1 C2  
Bank of China 中国银行.....2 C1  
Bank of China 中国银行.....(see 3)  
China Post 中国邮政.....3 B2  
Public Security Bureau 公安局.....4 C2

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Blind Massage School  
太极盲人按摩.....5 C2  
Forest Café  
森林咖啡屋.....6 C2  
Peacock Lake Park  
孔雀湖公园.....7 C1  
Tropical Flower & Plants Garden  
热带花卉园.....8 A2

### SLEEPING

Banna College Hotel 版纳学院.....9 B2  
Dai Building Inn 傣家花苑小楼.....10 C2  
Tai Garden Hotel 傣园酒店.....11 B3  
Wanli Dai Style Guesthouse  
婉丽傣味餐厅.....12 C2

### EATING

Mei Mei Café 美美咖啡厅.....13 C2  
Mekong Café 湄公餐馆.....14 C2  
Night Market 夜市.....15 D1

### ENTERTAINMENT

Méngbálá Nàxī Arts Theatre  
蒙巴拉娜西艺术宫.....16 C1  
YES Disco 迪斯科.....17 C3

### SHOPPING

Jade Market  
玉石市场.....18 C1  
Market 市场.....19 B1  
Xishuangbanna Travel & Study Club  
西双版纳游学俱乐部.....20 C3

### TRANSPORT

CAAC Booking Office  
中国民航.....21 B2  
Dock 码头.....22 D1  
Long-Distance Bus Station  
长途汽车站.....23 C1  
No 2 Bus Station  
第二客运站.....24 B1

**Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Xuanwei Dadao) Changes travellers cheques and foreign currency, and has an ATM. There's another branch on Ganlan Zhonglu.

**China Post** (Yóudiàn; cnr Mengle Dadao & Xuanwei Dadao; ☎ 8am-8.30pm)

**Public Security Bureau** (PSB; Gōngānjū; Jingde Lu; ☎ 8-11.30am & 3-5.30pm) Has a fairly speedy visa-extension service.

## Dangers & Annoyances

The Künmíng-Jinghóng bus trip has had a couple of reported drug-and-rob instances. Be

careful who your friends are on buses, accept nothing, and leave nothing unattended.

## Sights

### TROPICAL FLOWER & PLANTS GARDEN

#### 热带花卉园

This terrific botanical garden (Rèdài Huāhuìyuán; ☎ 212 0493; 28 Jinghóng Xilu; admission ¥40; ☎ 7am-6pm), west of the town centre, is one of Jinghóng's better attractions with more than 1000 different types of plant life in a lovely tropical rainforest setting.

**PEACOCK LAKE PARK** 孔雀湖公园

This artificial lake in the centre of town isn't much, but the small park (Kǒngquè Hú Gōngyuán) next to it is pleasant.

**Activities**

Jinghóng's **Blind Massage School** (Mánggrén Ànmó; ☎ 212 5834; nr Mengle Dadao & Jingde Lu; ☎ 9am-midnight) offers hour-long massages for Y30. Staff are extremely kind and travellers give terrific reports.

**Sleeping**

**Banna College Hotel** (Bǎnnà Xuéyuàn; ☎ 213 8365; Xuanwei Dadao; 宣慰大道; dm Y15, tw/d per person Y40/50; 🏠) Overall your best value is here – decent rooms and helpful (usually) staff, some of whom speak a smattering of English. Bike rental for Y15 per day, Y150 deposit.

**Dai Building Inn** (Dǎijīā Huàyuán Xiǎolóu; ☎ 216 2592; 57 Manting Lu; 曼听路57号; dm Y25) Traditional Dai style must mean sweating in the summer, staff a bit uninterested and thin walls. Still, some people love the place. Facilities are good.

**Wanli Dai Style Guesthouse** (Wǎnlì Dàiwèi Cāntīng; ☎ 1357 811 2879; Manting Lu; 曼听路; dm Y30) Basic but OK, although the rooms can get stuffy. An approximation of a garden is here and the restaurant is decent.

**Tai Garden Hotel** (Tǎiyuán Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 212 3888; fax 212 6060; 8 Minghang Lu; 民航路8号; d Y640 plus 15% tax; 🏠) The best of the town's innumerable posh options, it has quiet grounds replete with

its own island, pool, sauna, gym and tennis court. Staff are crackjack, as well.

**Eating**

Manting Lu is lined with restaurants serving Dai food, many of which dish up Dai dance performances along with their culinary specialities. There is a huge night market by the new bridge over the Mekong where dozens of stalls serve up barbecued everything, from sausages to snails.

Dai dishes include barbecue fish, eel or beef cooked with lemongrass or served with peanut-and-tomato sauce. Vegetarians can order roast bamboo shoot prepared in the same fashion. Other specialities include fried river moss (better than it sounds and excellent with beer), spicy bamboo-shoot soup and *shāokǎo* (烧烤; skewers of meat wrapped in banana leaves and grilled over wood fires).

**Mei Mei Café** (Měiměi Kāfēitīng; ☎ 212 7324; Manting Lu roundabout; dishes from Y5) It's got cold beer, genius Dai chicken and some of the best travel information in Jinghóng. Everyone winds up here.

**ourpick Mekong Café** (Méigōng Cānguǎn; ☎ 216 2395; 111 Manting Lu) The food, travel information and smiling service are wondrous but best is the upstairs balcony, which gets you away from the polluted chaos outside.

**Entertainment**

**Měngbálá Nàxī Arts Theatre** (Měngbálá Nàxī Yìshùgōng; Ganlan Zhonglu; tickets Y160; ☎ 8.30pm) This theatre has daily song and dance shows.

**YES Disco** (Mengle Dadao; admission free; ☎ 9pm-late) Discos come and go but YES keeps thumping along; just ask the heavy-lidded café patrons any morning.

**Shopping**

A fabulous fish and produce market is tucked behind some modern buildings across from the long-distance bus station. The Jade Market is nearby on Zhuanghong Lu, with lots of Burmese and other south Asians hawking their goods alongside locals.

**Getting There & Away****AIR**

There are several flights a day to Kùnmíng (Y730) but during the Water-Splashing Festival you'll need to book tickets several days in advance to get either in or out.

**TREKKING IN XISHUANGBÄNNÄ**

Used to be you'd be invited into a local's home to eat, sleep and drink *báijiǔ* (literally 'white alcohol, a type of face-numbing rice wine). Increasing numbers of visitors have changed this. Don't automatically expect a welcome mat and a free lunch just because you're a foreigner, but don't go changing the local economy by throwing money around either.

If you do get invited into someone's home, establish whether payment is expected. If it's not, leave an offering or modest gifts such as candles, matches, rice etc – even though the family may insist on nothing.

It's a jungle out there, so go prepared, and make sure somebody knows where you are and when you should return. In the rainy season you'll need to be equipped with proper hiking shoes and waterproof gear. At any time you'll need water purification, bottled water or a water bottle able to hold boiling water, as well as snacks and sunscreen.

Seriously consider taking a guide. You won't hear much Mandarin Chinese on the trail, let alone English. And it's an eminently more rewarding experience. Expect to pay about Y250 per day.

**Forest Café** (☎ 898 5122; www.forest-café.org/; Manting Lu) in Jinghóng is a great place to start. Sara, the owner, has years of experience leading treks and comes recommended. The other cafés mentioned in this book also have been recommended and each emphasises different things.

Try the **Xishuangbanna Travel & Study Club** (Xishuangbännà Lúxué Júlèbù; Mengzhe Lu) for trekking equipment.

For information on responsible trekking, see the boxed text, p484.

In high season there are also two flights daily to Lǐjiāng (Y840). You can also fly – usually daily – to Bangkok (Y1630), often via Chiang Mai (Y830), from here.

Tickets to anywhere can be bought at the **CAAC Booking Office** (☎ 212 7040; Jingde Lu; ☎ 8am-9pm) or at any café.

**BUS**

The Jinghóng long-distance bus station (Minhang Lu) is the most useful for long-distance destinations. If you want to explore Xishuangbännà, go to the No 2 bus station.

There is supposed to be a daily bus from Jinghóng to Luang Prabang in Laos, but it wasn't running when we were there.

**Getting Around**

There's no shuttle bus or public transport to the airport, 5km south of the city. A taxi will cost around Y20 but expect to be hit up for up to three times that during festivals.

Jinghóng is small enough that you can walk to most destinations, but a bike makes life easier and can be rented through most accommodation for Y15 to Y25 a day.

A taxi anywhere in town costs Y5.

**AROUND JINGHÓNG**

First morning? Hop on a bike and strike out around Jinghóng. You can't go wrong. Depending on where you go, you'll get lovely

dirt paths interspersed with wide concrete runways, then perhaps a few ferries across the Mekong River. Travellers in cafés will have the latest scoop on which village roads haven't been bulldozed yet.

**Sanhahe Nature Reserve****三岔河自然保护区**

This **nature reserve** (Sānchǎhè Zìrán Bǎohùqū), 48km north of Jinghóng, is one of five enormous forest reserves in southern Yúnnán. This

**DOWNSTREAM TO THAILAND**

For a couple of years, travellers were having some luck hitching rides on cargo boats heading south into Laos and Thailand, but in November 2006, authorities put the hammer down on that, giving boat operators serious fines (and revoking licences). New fast ferries leave Jinghóng on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday for the seven-hour ride (Y800) to Chiang Saen in Thailand; plans were to ultimately build up facilities to allow for six stops along the way. Get to the dock at 7.30am to start customs proceedings. Also note that this could all change – other ferries have come and gone just as quickly in the past. See the boxed text, p148, for information on travelling in the opposite direction.

**ETIQUETTE IN DAI TEMPLES**

Around Dai temples the same rules apply as elsewhere: dress appropriately (no tank tops or shorts); take off shoes before entering; don't take photos of monks or the inside of temples without permission; leave a donation if you do take any shots and consider a token donation even if you don't – unlike in Thailand, these Buddhists receive no government assistance. It is polite to 'wai' the monks as a greeting and remember to never rub anyone's head, raise yourself higher than a Buddha figure or point your feet at anyone. (This last point applies to secular buildings too. If you stay the night in a Dai household it is good form to sleep with your feet pointing towards the door.)

**JĪNGHÓNG BUS TIMETABLES**

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

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hr)	Frequency	Departs
Kūnmíng	156.50	9	2 daily	4pm, 7.30pm
Kūnmíng (sleeper)	145-169	9	20 daily	7.30am-7pm
Xiāguān	152	18	daily	12.30pm

The following bus services depart from the No 2 bus station:

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration	Frequency	Departs
Dàměnglóng	15	3-4hr	every 20min	6.30am-6.30pm
Jìngzhèn	11	2hr	every 20min	7am-6pm
Měnghǎn	7.5	40min	every 20min	7.15am-10pm
Měnghǎi	11	45min	every 20min	7.30am-1.40pm & 2.20-7pm
Měnghùn	15	90min	every 20min	7am-6pm
Měnglà	33	4-5hr	every 20min	6.30am-6pm
Měnglún	14	2hr	every 20min	7am-6pm
Měngyǎng	7	40min	half-hourly	8am-6pm
Sānchàhé	10-11.50	1½hr	every 20min	6.15am-6.30pm

one has an area of nearly 1.5 million hectares. The part of the park that most tourists visit is **Banna Wild Elephant Valley** (Bǎnnà Yéxiànggǔ; admission Y25, with guide Y50), named after the 40 or so wild elephants that live in the valley; it's worth a visit if you want to see something of the local forest. Avoid the depressing 'wild' elephant performances. A 2km-cable car (one way/return Y40/60) runs over the treetops from the main entrance into the heart of the park.

If you want to stay by the park there's a generic **hotel** (d 200) or stay in a Swiss Family Robinson-type **canopy treehouse** (d Y200); definitely negotiate. A few travellers who have slumbered in the trees have reported seeing elephants bathing in the stream beneath them at dawn.

Just about any bus travelling north from Jìnhóng to Simáo will pass this reserve (Y12, one hour). Returning to Jìnhóng there is a bus that leaves the north entrance daily at 2.30pm (Y10).

**Měngyǎng 勐养**

The **Elephant-Shaped Banyan Tree** (Xiàngxíng Róngshù) is why most people visit Měngyǎng, a centre for the Hani, Floral-Belt Dai and Lahu.

Měngyǎng is 34km northeast of Jìnhóng; it's another 19km southeast to **Jinuò**, the centre of the Jinuo minority.

**Měnghǎn 勐罕 (Gǎnlǎnbà 橄榄坝)**

Watching this town come alive in the evening after its long afternoon siesta is reason enough to visit. After sundown the streets of Měnghǎn (or Gǎnlǎnbà as it's also known) fill with the smells of cooking, the sounds of gossip and wandering locals trying to escape the indoor heat. It's worth coming by bike (or hiring one in Měnghǎn) as there's plenty of scope for exploration in the neighbourhood.

**SIGHTS**

The premier 'attraction' is the **Dai Minority Park** (傣族园; Dǎizúyuán; ☎ 0691-250 4099; Manting Lu; adult/student Y50/25), which is simply part of the town that's been cordoned off and had a ticket booth stuck at the entrance. Tourists can spend the night in villagers' homes and partake in water-splashing 'festivals' twice a day. Despite this zoolike aspect, travellers who've come say it's been well worth it. If you stay overnight in the park, your ticket is valid for the next day.

Travellers recommend heading to the south of town, crossing the Mekong by ferry (Y2 with a bike), and then heading left (east). The last ferry returns at 7pm.

Beds in a Dai home within the park will cost around Y20 per person. Food is extra. Beds are traditional Dai mats and are usually

very comfortable. Most homes will also have showers for you.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Microbuses to Měnghǎn leave from Jìnhóng's No 2 bus station (Y8, every 20 minutes, 7am to 6pm). Minibuses depart from Měnghǎn's bus station for destinations throughout the region including Měnglún (Y10, one hour) and Měnglà (Y29, five hours).

It's possible to cycle from Jìnhóng to Měnghǎn in a brisk two hours or a leisurely three hours, and it's a pleasant ride.

**GETTING AROUND**

You can rent a mountain bike at the entrance to the Dai Minority Park (Y20 per day).

**Měnglún 勐伦**

East of Měnghǎn, the major attraction in Měnglún is the **Tropical Plant Gardens** (热带植物园; Rèdài Zhīwùyuán; adult/student Y60/40; ☎ 7am-midnight). The gardens are gorgeous and get high marks from visitors; there's also a midrange hotel.

To get here, turn left out of the bus station and walk to the first corner. Walk one block and turn left again. You'll come to market hawkers, and a road leading downhill to the right side. Follow this until you reach a footbridge across the Mekong. The ticket booth is just in front of the bridge.

The **Bus Station Hotel** (车站招待所; Chēzhàn Zhàodàisù; d with shared bathroom Y30) is your best-value option in a city of not-too-good options. There's no air-con, but the shared bathrooms are clean and there's a TV in each room.

The **Friendship Restaurant** (友谊餐厅; Yǒuyī Cāntīng; Main Hwy) has lots of dishes made from strange vegetables, ferns and herbs only found locally.

From Jìnhóng's No 2 bus station there are buses to Měnglún (Y14, two hours, every 20 minutes from 7am to 6pm). The buses pass through Měnghǎn. Some travellers have cycled here from Měnghǎn.

From Měnglún, there are buses to Měnglà (Y20 to Y25, 2½ hours, 8.30am to 7.30pm) and Jìnhóng every 30 minutes.

**Měnglà 勐腊**

Měnglà is a *grim* town, but if you're crossing into Laos at Mòhàn, you'll probably be stuck here for the night.

There is a **Bank of China** (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; ☎ 8-11.30am & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) in the south-

ern half of town that changes cash and travellers cheques but won't give cash advances on credit cards. To change Renminbi back into US dollars, you need your original exchange receipts.

The **Jinqiao Dajudian** (金桥大酒店; ☎ 0691-812 4946; d/tr Y50/60; ☎) is a convenient sleeping option for the north bus station just up the hill on the left, but don't expect much else. Don't expect much from any of the other options here either.

Měnglà has two bus stations: the northern long-distance bus station which has buses to Kūnmíng (Y218, hourly from 8.30am to 11.30am) and No 2 bus station in the southern part of town. From Měnglà's No 2 station, destinations include Jìnhóng (Y30 to Y34, every 20 minutes from 6.20am to 6pm), Měnglún (Y20 to Y24, every 20 minutes from 6.20am to 6pm) and Mòhàn (Y14, every 20 minutes from 8am to 6pm).

**DÀMĒNGLÓNG 大勐龙**

Dàměnglóng (written just 'Měnglóng' on buses), about 70km south of Jìnhóng and a few kilometres from the Myanmar border, is one of those sleepy places to aim for when you want a respite from the beaten path and a base from which to do some aimless rambling looking for decaying stupas and little villages. You can hire bicycles at Dàměnglóng Zhàodàisù (大勐龙招待所) for Y15 per day.

The border-crossing point with Myanmar has been designated as the entry point for a planned highway linking Thailand, Myanmar and China.

**Sights**

**WHITE BAMBOO SHOOT PAGODA** 曼飞龙塔 This **pagoda** (Mànfeilóng Tǎ; admission Y5), built in 1204, was, as the legend says, built on the spot of a hallowed footprint left by Sakyamuni Buddha, who is said to have visited Xishuangbǎnnà; look for it in a niche below one of the nine stupas.

To get there walk back along the main road towards Jìnhóng for 2km until you reach a small village with a temple on your left. From here there's a path up the hill; it's about a 20-minute walk. There's an entry fee, but often there's no-one around.

**BLACK PAGODA 黑塔**

Just above the centre of town is a Dai monastery with a steep path beside it leading up

**THE BULANG PEOPLE** 布朗族

The Bulang live mainly in the Bulang Xiding and Bada mountains of Xishuangbǎnnà. They keep to the hills farming cotton, sugarcane and Pu'er tea, one of Yúnnán's most famous exports.

The men wear collarless jackets, loose black trousers and turbans of black or white cloth. They traditionally tattoo their arms, legs, chests and stomachs. The Bulang women wear simple, bright clothes and vibrant headdresses decorated with flowers. Avid betel-nut chewers, the women believe black teeth are beautiful.

to the **Black Pagoda** (Hèi Tǎ; admission free) – you'll notice it when entering Dàměnglóng. The pagoda itself is actually gold, not black. Take a stroll up, but bear in mind that the real reason for the climb is more for the views of Dàměnglóng and surrounding countryside than the temple itself.

**Sleeping**

**Lai Lai Hotel** (Láilái Bīnguǎn; d/tr Y20/30) Simple rooms and a lovely owner meticulous about cleanliness – remember, though, this is China! – has made this hotel the most popular accommodation. You'll see the English sign right next to the bus station.

**Getting There & Away**

Buses for the bumpy ride to Dàměnglóng (Y15, three to four hours, every 20 minutes, 6.30am to 6.30pm) leave from Jǐnghóng's No 2 bus station. Remember that the 'Da' character

won't be painted on the bus window. Buses for the return trip run regularly between 6am and 6pm.

**AROUND DÀMĚNGLÓNG**  
**Xiǎojiē** 小街

The village of Xiǎojiē, about 15km north of Dàměnglóng, is surrounded by Bulang, Lahu and Hani villages. Lahu women shave their heads; apparently the younger ones aren't happy about this any more and hide their heads beneath caps. The Bulang are possibly descended from the Yi of northern Yúnnán. The women wear black turbans with silver decorations; many of the designs are of shells, fish and marine life.

**MĚNGHǎI** 勐海

Most come here to head out for markets in the surrounding area. It's also worth visiting the huge daily produce market that attracts members of the hill tribes.

Buses run from Jǐnghóng's No 2 bus station to Měnghǎi (Y11, 45 minutes, every 20 minutes from 7.30am to 1.40pm and 2.20pm to 7pm). Buses return to Jǐnghóng every 20 minutes until 7pm.

**AROUND MĚNGHǎI**  
**Měnghùn** 勐混

Located about 26km southwest of Měnghǎi, the village of Měnghùn has a colourful **Sunday market**. The town begins buzzing around 7am and the action lingers on through to noon.

There are several guesthouses here, though none is remarkable. Y40 will get you a spartan double with bathroom and TV (but no air-con).

**CROSSING INTO LAOS: MÓHĀN TO BOTEN**

On-the-spot 30-day visas for Laos can be obtained at the border. The price will depend on your nationality (but generally cost US\$30 to US\$35). The **Chinese checkpoint** (☎ 0691-812 2684; ☎ 8am-5pm) is generally not much of an ordeal; see p312 for details on crossing from the Lao side. Don't forget that Laos is an hour behind.

Měnglà has one daily bus at 9am running to Luang Nam Tha in Laos (Y32); it takes 90 minutes to the border, where you wait for around an hour to deal with paperwork, before reboarding for the final two-hour leg.

If you miss that, from Měnglà there are also buses to Móhān every 20 minutes or so from 8am to 6pm.

No matter what anyone says, there should be no 'charge' to cross. Once your passport is stamped (double-check all stamps), you can jump on a tractor or truck to take you 3km into Laos for around Y5. Whatever you do, go early, in case things wrap up early on either side. There are guesthouses on both sides; people generally change money on the Lao side.

Buses departing from Jǐnghóng for Měnghùn (Y15, 90 minutes, every 20 minutes from 7am to 6pm) run from Jǐnghóng's No 2 bus station.

From Měnghùn, minibuses run regularly to Měnghǎi (Y6), Xiding (Y11, 1½ hours, 7.10am and 4pm) and throughout the day to Jǐnghóng.

Unless you have a very good bike with gears, cycling to Měnghǎi and Měnghùn is not a real option.

**Xiding** 西定

This sleepy hillside hamlet comes alive every Thursday for its weekly market. You can either catch one of the two direct buses from Měnghǎi (Y11, 10.40am and 3.30pm) or travel via Měnghùn and change for a bus to Xiding. To see the market at its most interesting, you'll really have to get here the night before. The small guesthouse at the bus station has beds for Y20. Buses from Xiding leave twice a day (Y11, 7.20am and 1pm) for Měnghùn. If you miss the bus you can always get a ride on a motorbike (Y30), a spectacular if not hair-raising experience, from the only bike shop in town.

**YÚNNÁN PROVINCE**  
**DIRECTORY****ACCOMMODATION**

Yúnnán is one of the cheapest Chinese provinces, with decent youth hostels (青年旅社; *qīngnián lǚshè*; www.hostelchina.cn), guesthouses (招待所, *zhāodàisù*; or 旅馆,

*lǚguǎn*) and budget hotels galore in all locations included in this chapter. Figure an *average* of Y20 (US\$2.90) for a bed in a dorm and from Y30 to Y60 per bed in a twin or double in a budget hotel. Midrange prices are Y200 to Y600 and top end ranges from Y600 to US\$300.

Budget hotels are generally decrepit, but safe and not dirty. For midrange and top-end hotels, you should subtract a star from whatever they claim. The former are generally vanilla – in the sense of bland – the latter not all that common (or worth it) in the province.

**Discounts & Reservations**

Always negotiate prices at hotels. Discounts (*dàzhékòu*) are, outside of holiday periods (the first week of May and October, Chinese New Year and Spring Festival), virtually always available (30% off on average). Travel agencies can often get good deals, as can websites such as www.china-hotelguide.com, www.sinohotel.com, or, once in China, www.english.ctrip.com.

Hostels and cheap guesthouses don't much like to haggle over dorm beds.

**ACTIVITIES**

By far the most common activity in the province is trekking and the Tiger Leaping Gorge trek (see p460) is one of China's best. The Xishuangbǎnnà region is legendary for its jungle trekking from ethnic village to ethnic village (see the boxed text, p467).

Outfits in China itself, such as **Wildchina** (www.wildchina.com), offer a host of dramatic treks in remote parts of China.

**PRACTICALITIES**

- There are four types of plugs: three-pronged angled pins (as in Australia), three-pronged round pins (as in Hong Kong), two flat pins (US style but without the ground wire) or two narrow round pins (European style). Electricity is 220V, 50 cycles AC.
- The standard English-language newspaper is the *China Daily* (www.chinadaily.com.cn). The *People's Daily* has an English-language edition at www.english.peopledaily.com.cn. Imported English-language media? Try Kūnmíng's top-end hotels.
- Listen to the BBC World Service (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/tuning/) or Voice of America (www.voia.gov), although these websites are at times jammed. China Radio International (CRI) is China's overseas radio service and broadcasts in about 40 foreign languages. The national TV outfit, Chinese Central TV (CCTV), has an English-language channel – CCTV9.
- The ancient Chinese weights and measures system features the *liǎng* (tael, 37.5g) and the *jīn* (catty, 0.6kg), which are both commonly used. There are 10 *liǎng* to the *jīn*.



### THE HOTEL RITUALS

At check-in you'll need your passport and the registration form will need your visa information; for most people it's type 'L'. Most hotels require a deposit (*yājīn*), for which you receive a receipt – do NOT lose it – to be returned at checkout, and here you should budget an extra 10 minutes while the clerk rouses from behind the desk and rings the vacant attendant's desk upstairs to see if you've pilfered the stringy towels. It's *maddening*.

Credit cards can still be hard to use, even at three- and even some four-star hotels.

Oh, and expect regular phone calls from prostitutes, who ask whether *ànmó* (massage) or *xiǎojiě* (a young lady) is required; unplug your phone, as they can be persistent.

### BOOKS

For more on Yúnnán, Lonely Planet's *China's Southwest* covers the province in more detail. Pick up Lonely Planet's *China* guide if you're planning to travel further afield in the country.

### BUSINESS HOURS

China has a five-day working week. Banks, offices and government departments are usually open weekdays from 9am to 5pm, with a loooong lunch break; banks may be open on Saturday, but the exchange counters might not be. Note that all of these are shut tight for national holidays.

Department stores and shops are generally open daily from 9am or 10am to 10pm. Standard restaurant hours are 10.30am to around 11pm – they may also shut down for a few hours around 2pm. The Chinese are accustomed to eating lunch around midday and having dinner about 6pm.

### CLIMATE

Yúnnán – 76.4m above sea level in Hékǒu to 6740m in the Tibetan Plateau with an average of 2000m – has dozens of microclimates. In summer (June through August) you can still freeze your tail off near Tibet, and in the midst of winter (mid-November to late February) you can get by with a light coat in Kūnmíng, the capital, its mean temperature never fluctuating more than 10°C throughout the year.

The Xishuāngbǎnnà border with Laos lies on the 21° latitude – meaning steamy subtropics; here the summer months soar to 33°C.

### COURSES

It seems everyone and his or her grandmother is studying Mandarin in Kūnmíng these days, especially at Yunnan University. In Dàlǐ and Lǐjiāng you can also study Mandarin or even local languages (along with private tutorials

in painting, calligraphy and martial arts); your guesthouse or local cafés can help you find a teacher or course.

### CUSTOMS

The duty-free allowance is 400 cigarettes, two bottles of wine or spirits and 50g of gold or silver. Fresh fruit and cold cuts are prohibited. You can legally only bring in or out Y6000 in Chinese currency; there are no restrictions on foreign currency (though you should declare any cash exceeding US\$5000 or its equivalent currency).

It's rather uncommon for any foreigners to have their bags searched; the officials likely won't even glance at your forms. The exception is Hékǒu, the Yúnnán border town leading to Vietnam. Officials here have a reputation for being particularly testy.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Traffic notwithstanding, China is an amazingly safe country, and Yúnnán overall has an incredibly low crime rate for travellers. But violent crime against foreigners, long almost unheard of in China, does happen, though it's almost always of the snag-your-bag variety.

Just keep your wits about you and don't help out the thieves by practising unsafe habits, and you'll be fine. The number-one rule is to avoid being in remote locations alone.

Train and bus stations are haunts for pickpockets. Overnight trains and sleeper buses are also places where travellers have had bags razored while they slept. A new tactic is to race by you as you pedal on your bike and grab anything you have in your basket.

Hotels are generally safe; some even have attendants on each floor. But you still shouldn't leave your laptop just lying around. Don't assume hostels are perfectly safe either; most will provide at least a locker for each bed.

Carry just as much cash as you need and keep the rest in travellers cheques.

### Lǎowài!

Get ready to hear the word *lǎowài* a lot. (Usually followed by a bellowed 'Hullo!' and a Grand Canyon–esque grin.) It means 'foreigner' and don't be offended – virtually every time you hear it, it's due to happy surprise and precious, endless Chinese curiosity.

### Loss Reports

Report any thefts to the nearest Foreign Affairs branch of the Public Security Bureau (PSB). Be prepared for a headache – this can at times be the ultimate in through-the-looking-glass bureaucracy.

### Pollution & Noise

China has an enormous pollution – air and water most of all – problem, for which you'd best prepare yourself, especially if you have allergies, skin conditions or chest, eye, nose and throat problems.

You'll likely be most annoyed by the noise. Constant. Never. Ending. Racket. Bless the authorities for attempting to ban car horns and sidewalk speakers, but seriously – in a country of a billion people (and cars), what can one expect? To avoid becoming as deaf as everyone else seems to be, take industrial-strength earplugs!

### Queues

A smart-aleck might ask, 'What queues?' And they'd be partially right. There is a semblance of lining up in China today. That's about all that can be said at times.

### Scams

Con artists have worked out a few scams in which they ostensibly invite a foreigner to 'try' some tea or local delicacies, then hit them up for an ungodly bill.

Most annoying of all for travellers is simply poor – or nonexistent – service from a travel agent or guide service. Ask around before plunking down money on tickets or tours.

### Spitting

Well, it isn't as bad as it once was in the cities, but out in the sticks? Hawk and let fly. Even on the bus next to you!

### EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

#### People's Republic of China Embassies & Consulates

For a full list of diplomatic representation abroad, go to the Ministry of Foreign affairs website at [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/) and click on Missions Overseas.

**Australia** Canberra embassy (☎ 02-6273 4783, 6273 7443; <http://au.china-embassy.org/>; 15 Coronation Dr, Yarralumla, ACT 2600); Melbourne consulate (☎ 03-9822 0604; [www.chineseconsulatemel.org/](http://www.chineseconsulatemel.org/)); Perth consulate

### YÚNNÁN IN WORDS

- *The Search for Modern China* (2001) This is one of the best by Jonathan Spence, but all of his books are worth reading. Also try *God's Chinese Son*.
- *South of the Clouds: Tales from Yunnan* (1994) This fascinating anthology of Yúnnán tales, edited by Guo Xu and Lucien Miller, provides a wonderful thumbnail sketch of the cultural ethos(es) of the province and its people.
- *Mr China's Son, A Villager's Life* (2002) You cannot possibly not be moved by this account of a simple man's ordeal during all of China's 20th-century upheavals. He Liyi was unlucky enough to have studied English, a crime for which he later found himself sent to the countryside and otherwise persecuted for much of his life. In the end, he wound up sharing his wondrous outlook on life with foreign travellers in his café (now closed) in Dàlǐ.
- *Soul Mountain* (2001) Nobel Prize winner for literature Gao Xingjian weaves a search for his own 'soul mountain' as he wanders about the countryside of southwest China. Brilliant.
- *Ancient Naxhi Kingdom of Southwest China* (1947) This is Joseph Rock's definitive work. For more on Rock, see the boxed text, p461.
- *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (2001) Erik Mueggler's compelling account of a Tibetan-Burmese minority community on the fringes – literally and figuratively – of the Han empire in the 20th century.

(☎ 08-9222 0302); Sydney consulate (☎ 02-8595 8000; <http://sydney.chineseconsulate.org/eng>)

**Cambodia** (☎ 023-427428; 156 Mao Tse Toung Blvd, Phnom Penh)

**Canada** Ottawa embassy (☎ 613-789 3434; [www.chinaembassycanada.org](http://www.chinaembassycanada.org); 515 St Patrick St, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5H3); Calgary consulate (☎ 403-264 3322); Toronto consulate (☎ 416-964 7260); Vancouver consulate (☎ 604-736 3910)

**Denmark** (☎ 039-460 889; [www.chinaembassy.dk](http://www.chinaembassy.dk); Oerogarrds Alle 25, 2900 Hellerup, Copenhagen)

**France** (☎ 01 47 36 02 58; [www.amb-chine.fr](http://www.amb-chine.fr); 9 Ave V Cresson, 92130 Issy les Moulineaux, Paris)

**Indonesia** (☎ 021-576 1037; [www.chinaembassy-indonesia.or.id](http://www.chinaembassy-indonesia.or.id); JL Mega Kuningan No 2, Jakarta)

**Japan** (☎ 03-3403 3389, 3403 3065; [www.china-embassy.or.jp](http://www.china-embassy.or.jp); 3-4-33 Moto-Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo) Consulates in Fukuoka, Osaka and Sapporo.

**Laos** (☎ 021-315100; Th Wat Nak, Ban Wat Nak, Vientiane)

**Malaysia** (☎ 03-242 8495; 229 Jln Ampang, Kuala Lumpur) Consulate in Kuching.

**Netherlands** (☎ 070-355 1515; Adriaan Goekooplaan 7, The Hague)

**New Zealand** (☎ 04-472 1382; [www.chinaembassy.org.nz](http://www.chinaembassy.org.nz); 2-6 Glenmore St, Wellington) Consulate in Auckland.

**Singapore** (☎ 65-734 3361; 70 Dalvey Rd)

**Thailand** (☎ 02-245 7032/49; 57 Th Ratadaphisek, Bangkok)

**UK** London embassy (☎ 020-7299 4049, 24hr visa information 0891 880 808, visa section 020-7631 1430; [www.chinese-embassy.org.uk](http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk); 31 Portland Pl); Edinburgh consulate (☎ 0131-337 3220); Manchester consulate (☎ 0161-224 7478)

**USA** Washington embassy (☎ 202-338 6688; [www.china-embassy.org](http://www.china-embassy.org); Room 110, 2201 Wisconsin Ave NW, Washington DC); Chicago consulate (☎ 312-803 0098); Houston consulate (☎ 713-524 4311); Los Angeles consulate (☎ 213-380 2508); New York consulate (☎ 212-330 7410); San Francisco consulate (☎ 415-563 9232)

**Vietnam** Hanoi (☎ 04-845 3736; [eosscc@hn.vnn.vn](http://eosscc@hn.vnn.vn); 46 P Hoang Dieu); HCMC consulate (☎ 08-829 2457; [chinacon sul\\_hcm\\_vn@mfa.gov.cn](mailto:chinacon sul_hcm_vn@mfa.gov.cn); 39 D Nguyen Thi Minh Kai)

## Embassies & Consulates in Yúnnán

**Laos** (Map p444; ☎ 0871-317 6624; Room N120, ground fl, Camellia Hotel, 96 Dongfeng Donglu; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

**Myanmar** (Map p444; ☎ 0871-360 3477; fax 360 2468; [www.mcg-kunming.com](http://www.mcg-kunming.com); B503, Longyuan Haozhai, 166 Weiyuan Jie; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

**Thailand** (Map p444; ☎ 0871-314 9296; fax 316 6891; Ground fl, South Wing, Kunming Hotel, 52 Dongfeng Donglu; ☎ 9-11.30am Mon-Fri)

**Vietnam** (Map p444; ☎ 0871-352 2669; 2nd fl, Kaihua Plaza, 157 Beijing Lu; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

### Chinese New Year/Spring Festival (Chūn Jié)

This starts on the first day of the first month in the lunar calendar. This is China's biggest holiday and demand for transport/rooms (and prices) skyrocket. Falls on 7 February 2008 and 26 January 2009.

**Lantern Festival (Yuánxiāo Jié)** Not a public holiday, but very colourful. Falls on the 15th day of the first moon and will be celebrated on 22 February 2008 and 9 February 2009.

**Tomb Sweeping Day (Qīng Míng Jié)** People visit and clean the graves of their departed relatives, placing flowers on tombs and burning ghost money. Generally falls close to Easter, on 5 April in most years or 4 April in leap years.

**Water-Splashing Festival (Pōshuǐ Jié)** Held in the Xishuāngbǎnnà Region of Yúnnán, this is held in mid-April (usually 13 to 15 April). Wash away the dirt, sorrow and demons of the old year – and get each other utterly soaked.

**Torch Festival (Huǒbǎ Jié)** Celebrated by the Naxi in Lijiāng and the Bai in Dǎli, it's generally held in July, on the 24th day of the sixth moon and commemorates a woman who immolated herself rather than be taken by a king who had killed her husband.

**Mid-Autumn Festival (Zhōngqiū Jié)** This is also known as the Moon Festival, when you gaze at the moon and eat *yuè bǐng* (moon cakes); it's also the de facto day for lovers. Takes place on the 15th day of the eighth moon, and will be celebrated on 25 September 2007, 14 September 2008, and 3 October 2009.

## FOOD & DRINK

Yúnnán has a fabulous array of provincial specialties, including *qìguōjī* (汽锅鸡; herb-infused chicken cooked in an earthenware steam pot), *xuānwēi huǒtuǐ* (宣威火腿; Yúnnán ham), *guòqiáo miàxiàn* (过桥米线; across-bridge noodles; see the boxed text, p447), *rùbǐng* (月饼; goats' cheese) and various Muslim beef and mutton dishes. *Qìguōjī* is served in dark-brown casserole pots and is imbued with medicinal properties – *chóngcǎo* (虫草; caterpillar fungus, or pseudoginseng) is one such property.

Do treat yourself to *mógū* (蘑菇; mushrooms) here. Yúnnán is blessed with infinite varieties, many rare and pricey in other provinces but delightfully common and dirt-cheap here, especially *cháshùgū* (茶树菇; tea tree mushrooms), which grow only in proximity to tea trees and which are infused deliriously with their essence.

A meal for one at any budget eatery should cost under Y30, midrange between Y30 and Y100 and top-end choices (not many in Yúnnán) up to Y800 or more.

For more on dining in the Mekong region, see p86.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

The Chinese Psychiatric Association no longer classifies homosexuality as a mental disorder. The large cities are more tolerant than rural areas, yet even in moderately hip Kūnmíng it is not recommended that gays and lesbians be too open about their sexual orientation in public, though you will see Chinese same-sex friends holding hands or putting their arms around each other in public. The situation is slowly changing as more prominent Chinese are 'outed', but the police periodically crack down on gay meeting places.

Check [www.utopia-asia.com/tipschin.htm](http://www.utopia-asia.com/tipschin.htm) for tips for gay and lesbian travellers.

## HOLIDAYS

China has nine national holidays:

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**Chinese New Year** (Spring Festival) usually February

**International Women's Day** 8 March

**International Labour Day** 1 May

**Youth Day** 4 May

**International Children's Day** 1 June

**Birthday of the Chinese Communist Party** 1 July

**Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Liberation Army** 1 August

**National Day** 1 October

Many of these are nominal holidays and do not result in leave. The 1 May, 1 October and Chinese New Year holidays are week-long fests – this means transport is tough to get, hotels (if you can get a room) cost stratospherically more and you'll get nothing bureaucratic done.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Be prepared for glacial connection speeds (if you're accessing foreign sites) or, occasionally, some sites (CNN, BBC) being blocked by censors. Higher-end hotels have in-room broadband access but it can be a pain (unreliable) and staff don't always know how to set it up; even a few hostels do too now. Broadband wi-fi access is creeping into Yúnnán's cafés and guesthouses, especially in Kūnmíng, Dǎli and Lijiāng; for more information on travel-

## GETTING ONLINE

Memorise the characters for internet café: 网吧 (*wǎngbā*). All cities in this chapter have loads of them, with rates usually ranging from Y1.50 to Y3 per hour. You are rarely required to show ID though it's possible in some areas of China; a deposit of Y10 or so is more common. Note that on weekends – especially Sundays – every kid in China is packed into these place and getting a spot can be tough – go early!

ling with your portable computer, check [www.teleadapt.com](http://www.teleadapt.com).

## LEGAL MATTERS

Anyone under the age of 18 is considered a minor, and the minimum age at which you can drive is also 18. There is no minimum age for consumption of alcohol or use of cigarettes.

The Chinese legal system does not presume innocence and no fair trial is guaranteed. If arrested, most foreign citizens have the right to contact their embassy. Do not expect preferential treatment from police anywhere just because you are a foreigner.

Do not mess with drugs in China. Penalties are harsh. Foreign nationals have been executed for drug trafficking (China conducts more judicial executions than the rest of the world combined).

## MAPS

Maps are available at all train and bus stations and bookshops; these are usually fairly good but only in Chinese. If you find one in English, it'll be limited in its detail. These generally cost Y3 to Y6.

## MONEY

Chinese currency is the Renminbi (RMB), or 'People's Money'. The basic unit is the *yuán* (Y), which is divided into 10 *jiǎo*, and again divided into 10 *fēn*. Colloquially, the *yuán* is referred to as *kuài* and *jiǎo* as *máo*. You'll most likely encounter bills in denominations of one, five, 10, 20, 50 and 100 *yuán*; coins come in denominations of one *yuán*, five *jiǎo*, one *jiǎo* and the useless five *fēn*.

Everyone will tell you to be very wary of counterfeit bills; the problem is, it's pretty tough for a novice to tell the difference.

Virtually everyone in China will check to see if a Y50 or Y100 bill is real before accepting it, though few of them really can tell either.

### ATMs & Credit Cards

ATMs exist but not many accept foreign cards and you may have to do some slogging to find an ATM that accepts yours (check [www.international.visa.com/ps](http://www.international.visa.com/ps) or [www.mastercard.com/cardholderservices/atm](http://www.mastercard.com/cardholderservices/atm)). Bank of China and Industrial & Commercial Bank of China branches are the best places to start. You can generally get cash advances at the Bank of China, but the service comes with a 4% commission.

Otherwise, credit cards are of very, very limited use in China, especially Yünnán.

### Exchanging Money

Always carry enough cash; this must be stressed. You can get Renminbi in most South-east Asian countries and especially Hong Kong but not generally in countries outside the region. Not all banks in China can/will change cash and/or especially travellers cheques; this is a major pain at times. Good news: in all of this chapter's locations exchanging is fairly easy.

Country	Unit	Yuán
Australia	A\$1	6.40
Cambodia	1000r	1.90
Canada	C\$1	6.90
euro zone	€1	10.40
Japan	¥100	6.40
Laos	1000 kip	1.90
New Zealand	NZ\$1	5.70
Thailand	100B	23.40
UK	£1	15.20
USA	US\$1	7.70
Vietnam	10,000d	4.80

### Tipping

Tipping isn't expected, so restrain yourself. Any tips will be included in midrange or top-end restaurants or hotels.

### Travellers Cheques

Bring travellers cheques with you. They're safer and you get a better rate than for cash (around 2% higher). Outside of the areas detailed in this chapter they're of little use. Note that many banks won't cash travellers cheques on weekends.

### POST

International and domestic post is amazingly efficient. International letters and cards arrive in a week to 10 days for most destinations.

Then again, it ain't cheap. Postcards to international destinations cost Y4.50; airmail letters up to 20g cost Y5 to Y7.

Larger China Post branches operate an Express Mail Service (EMS) that's reliable and safe; rates vary by country but it's about Y160 to Y200 for parcels up to 500g. If you mail parcels home, take them *unpacked* with you to the post office to be inspected and an appropriate box or envelope will be found for you.

There are fairly reliable *poste restante* (*cúnjú hòulíng*) services in Künmíng, Dàli and Lijiāng; expect to pay Y1 to Y2.50 per item.

### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

China will undoubtedly lead the world in tourism numbers in the future. This can be a good thing or a bad thing. We wish to emphasise the good.

Most of all, keep your cool, whether questioning a cost – get prices beforehand to avoid this – or bargaining for a souvenir. You, after all, are an ambassador (one that is seen as phenomenally wealthy, no matter what you think).

Environmentally, take the bus or train instead of flying. China has mountains of empty plastic bottles everywhere, so carry a water bottle and top it up; many places have communal water bottles to refill from, or you can purify.

Yünnán has some of China's most serious drug-use problems. Don't contribute to it. Not only is it just perpetuating a problem, it's a crime and the authorities do NOT care about your nationality when they close the prison door.

For information on responsible trekking, see p484 and p138.

### SHOPPING

Dàli and Lijiāng are absolute shoppers' paradises. You can do your birthday/Christmas shopping for five years in these cities, snapping up everything from hand-painted souvenir T-shirts to lovely batik and ethnic clothing. Let the haggling begin.

### Bargaining

You can bargain in small shops and markets (but not department stores). Always be polite (duh). Aim for Chinese price – tough to do, but if you can, you should feel pleased.

### TELEPHONE

The easiest way to call domestically or internationally is to find a private 'phone bar' (话吧; *huàbā*), usually just an open-air place with phones along the walls. Most of these use internet phone systems and can be dirt cheap, even for international calls. Luckily, in Jìng'hóng, Dàli and Lijiāng, these are ubiquitous; in Künmíng, your guesthouse or hotel will know the nearest one.

Otherwise, you can buy a phonenumber, of which there are IC (Integrated Circuit) and IP (Internet Phone) cards. The latter (IP卡; IP kǎ) are much cheaper, with rates of around Y1.80 per minute to the USA or Canada and Y3.20 to other international destinations. Local long-distance calls are around Y0.30 per minute.

Note however that infinite varieties of IC and IP cards exist and not all can be used everywhere. Definitely ask at your guesthouse or a fave café for help.

Mobile phones are ubiquitous but tricky to buy if you don't speak Mandarin; you can buy SIM cards here but it's also a hassle figuring out how to install it in your phone.

### TOILETS

Public toilets (look for 'WC') are everywhere but can be downright putrid. You just pay the attendant whatever the cost is, usually around Y0.20. Always – and this is key – carry your own toilet paper, though in public toilets for Y0.50 you can get a tiny packet of tissues. Put the toilet paper in the wastebasket next to the toilet (which, incidentally, will probably be of the squat variety).

Always remember:

Men 男  
Women 女

### TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Chinese National Tourism Association** ([www.cnta.gov.cn](http://www.cnta.gov.cn)) has branch offices around the world; also check [www.travelchinaguide.com](http://www.travelchinaguide.com), one of the few very useful sites.

Once in Yünnán, you're pretty much out of luck. By far the best sources of information are the hostels, guesthouses and foreign-centric cafés. Most cities and towns have a branch of the **China International Travel Service** (CITS; 中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójí Lǚxíngshè). There is usually a member of staff who can speak English who may be able to answer questions and offer some travel advice, but the main purpose of CITS is to get you onto a tour.

### VISAS

For most travellers, the type of visa issued is an L, from the Chinese word for travel (*lǚyóu*). This letter is stamped right on the visa. The L visa can be either a multiple- or single-entry visa. Visas are readily available from Chinese embassies and consulates in most Western and many other countries. A standard 30-day, single-entry visa from most Chinese embassies abroad can be issued in three to five working days. Prices have risen steadily over recent years, and express visas cost twice the usual fee.

You can obtain applications online from [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng). A visa mailed to you will take up to three weeks. You can also make arrangements at certain travel agencies. Visa applications require at least one photo (normally 51mm by 51mm). Try to list standard tourist destinations such as Künmíng and Dàli (not Tibet or western Xinjiāng); the list you give is not binding.

A 30-day visa is activated on the date you enter China, and must be used within three months of date of issue. Sixty-day and 90-day travel visas are no longer issued outside China. You need to extend your visa in China if you want to stay longer. A Chinese visa covers virtually all of China, although some restricted areas still exist that will require an additional permit from the PSB, at a cost. In addition to a visa, permits are also required for travel to Tibet.

At the time of writing, Chinese embassies in the USA were no longer accepting mailed visa applications, so this may mean you will have to mail your passport to a visa service agency. Many people use the **China Visa Service Center** (☎ 1-800 799 6560; [www.mychinavisa.com](http://www.mychinavisa.com)), which offers impeccable service. Expect it to take 10 to 14 days.

Political events can suddenly make visas more difficult to procure. When you check into a hotel, there is a question on the registration form asking what type of visa you hold, as follows:

Type	Description	Chinese name
L	travel	<i>lǚxíng</i>
F	business or student	<i>fāngwèn</i>
D	resident	<i>dīngjū</i>
G	transit	<i>guòjīng</i>
X	long-term student	<i>lǚxué</i>
Z	working	<i>rènzhí</i>
J	journalist	<i>jìzhě</i>
C	flight attendant	<i>chéngwù</i>

## Visa Extensions

The Foreign Affairs Branch of the local PSB (公安局; Gōngānjú) – the police force – handles visa extensions. A first-time extension of another 30 days is easy to obtain on a single-entry tourist visa, but further extensions are harder to get and may only give you a further week. Offices outside of Kūnmíng may be more lenient and more willing to offer further extensions, but don't bank on it. Extensions to single-entry visas vary in price. American travellers pay Y185, Canadians Y165, UK citizens Y160 and Australians Y100; prices can go up or down. Expect to wait up to five days. If you have used up all your options, popping into Hong Kong for a new one is common. The penalty for overstaying your visa in China is up to Y500 per day.

## Visas for Countries in the Region

### LAOS

It is now possible to get a visa for Laos at the border (p470), or visit the Lao consulate (p474) in Kūnmíng for a 15-day tourist visa. For those from Western European countries, Australia and New Zealand, visas cost Y270 and for American, Japanese and German nationals the cost is Y320. You must bring one passport photo with your application. Visas take three working days to process or you can pay a surcharge for next-day service.

### THAILAND

Travellers from most countries won't need a Thai visa unless they plan to stay in the country more than 30 days. The Thai consulate (p474) in Kūnmíng can issue a 60-day tourist visa for Y200. Visas take two days to process.

### VIETNAM

Kūnmíng has a Vietnam consulate (p474) where you can pick up a 30-day tourist visa (Y400). Visas take three working days to process or you can pay an extra Y200 for the express service. You must bring along a passport photo with your application.

## VOLUNTEERING

There are endless opportunities for volunteer work in Yúnnán; just have a look at guest-house notice boards to get a start. Websites to consult include [www.volunteerchina.org](http://www.volunteerchina.org) and [www.volunteerinchina.org](http://www.volunteerinchina.org).

## WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Principles of decorum and respect for women are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. Despite the Confucianist sense of superiority accorded to men, Chinese women often call the shots and wield considerable clout (especially within marriage). Nonetheless, in its institutions, China is a patriarchal and highly conservative country. In general, foreign women are unlikely to suffer serious sexual harassment.

Solo travellers are at risk of crime. Try to stick to hotels in the centre, rather than the fringes of town. Taking a whistle or alarm with you would offer a measure of defence in any unpleasant encounter. As with anywhere else, you will be taking a risk if you travel alone. If you have to travel alone, consider arming yourself with some self-defence techniques.

Tampons (卫生棉条; wèishēng miántiáo) can be found almost everywhere, especially in big supermarkets. It's best to take plentiful supplies of the pill (避孕药; biyùnyào) unless you are travelling to the big cities where brands like Marvelon are available from local pharmacies, as are morning-after pills (紧急避孕药; jǐnjí biyùnyào). Condoms (避孕套; bǐ'yùntào) are widely available.

## WORK

Teaching English can be particularly lucrative, and there are opportunities for acting, modelling work, editing, proofreading, freelance writing and IT work. Large numbers of Westerners work in China through international development charities such as VSO ([www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk)). Those with Chinese-language skills will find it much easier to source work. Useful places to start looking for positions include [Chinajob.com](http://Chinajob.com) ([www.chinajob.com](http://www.chinajob.com)).

# TRANSPORT IN YUNNAN PROVINCE

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Kūnmíng is served by all Chinese airlines and has daily flights to most cities in the country. International destinations via innumerable airlines include – but are not limited to – Hanoi (Y1480 to Y2230, daily), Chiang Mai/Bangkok (Y1580), Rangoon (Y1710), Vientiane (Y900) and Siem Reap (Y1700). Most of these have daily flights. Jǐnghóng,

Xīshuāngbǎnnà's air link, has direct flights to Bangkok (Y1400) via Chiang Mai in Thailand throughout the year.

**Yunnan Airlines/CAAC** (Map p444; ☎ 0871-3164270, 313 8562; Tuodong Lu; ✈ 24hr) in Kūnmíng issues tickets for any Chinese airline but the office only offers discounts on Yunnan Airlines flights.

Foreign airline offices in Kūnmíng: **Dragonair** (Map p444; ☎ 0871-356 1208, 356 1209; 2/F Kaihua Guangchang, 157 Beijing Lu)

**Lao Aviation** (Map p444; Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Donglu)

**Thai Airways** (Map p444; ☎ 0871-351 1515; 68 Beijing Lu) Next to the King World Hotel.

## Boat

In November 2006 a new high-speed passenger boat began running from Jǐnghóng to Chiang Saen in Thailand; see p467.

## Border Crossings

Yúnnán province has border crossings with Laos and Vietnam. See the table, p101. The crossing from Hékǒu to Lao Cai in Vietnam is convenient for travellers going between Kūnmíng and Hanoi. There are two other border crossings between Vietnam and China, located outside of Yúnnán (see p374).

## Train

Yúnnán's capital, Kūnmíng, is linked comprehensively to the rest of China. Book early for trains to popular destinations, especially Guǎngxī province, which borders Vietnam.

Yúnnán once had a funky old narrow-gauge rail system linking Kūnmíng with Hékǒu on the border with Vietnam. The provincial government has announced plans to completely redevelop the rail system, along with other Association of Southeast Asia (Asean) nations.

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

Within Yúnnán province daily flights to/from Kūnmíng connect with Jǐnghóng (Y780), Lǐjiāng (Y660) and Xiàguān/Dǎli (Y520).

During the high season it's possible to fly from these centres to other Chinese cities as well.

## Bicycle

It's a grand Chinese tradition to hire a bicycle (自行车; zìxíngchē) and tool around. Renting them is quite easy and the bikes nowadays are not too bad, though always check the conditions first and never use your passport as a deposit. Traffic is sheer madness. Only park in designated bicycle parking areas (it costs a pittance); thieves will steal the bike if you don't.

## Bus

Roadwise, Yúnnán has a comprehensive and smooth bus network to all major destinations. Expect a few curlicue ribbons but no tailbone smashing. Expressways link Kūnmíng with Dǎli (and soon Lǐjiāng), south to Jǐnghóng and southeast towards (but not to, yet) Hékǒu.

These expressway networks link Kūnmíng with neighbouring provinces and, by the time this book is printed, further on to Laos (and ultimately Thailand).

## Car & Motorcycle

Forget about it. Only rarely is it possible for a tourist to drive a car in China, and then only in large eastern cities. This is mostly because the authorities think you'd be mad – rightly so – to want to attempt driving here. That said, recently a few shops in Jǐnghóng in the Xīshuāngbǎnnà Region have been hiring out motorbikes to tourists who were looking to spend a pleasant day buzzing about the jungles.

## Train

Rail travel within Yúnnán is not so easy. A rail line exists to gotta-go-there Dǎli (a further extension from Dǎli to Lǐjiāng was reportedly half-completed at the time of writing).

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