

Yúnnán Province (China) 云南



RICHARD FANSON

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'The mountains are high and the emperor is far away.' So goes a Chinese proverb, which well describes this diverse province so far removed from the comparative monoculture prevailing in many other parts of China. A liminal zone in the truest sense, Yúnnán is a land of fusion where hybrids of faith and culture coexist, offering the traveller a plethora of experiences, the likes of which you'll not find elsewhere in either Southeast Asia or the Middle Kingdom.

For the spiritual traveller, Yúnnán is a place where you can drink yak-butter tea with monks on the grounds of a sacred Tibetan monastery and view Buddhist frescos in temples reminiscent of those found hundreds of kilometres south in Thailand. To the naturalist, the province offers a stunning variety of ecological zones, from the high peaks and rarefied Himalayan air of the northwest to the rolling green hills of Xīshuāngbǎnnà and the near-sea-level jungles in the southeast. And for those more interested in staying on the beaten path, Yúnnán is where you'll find some of the most oft-visited spots in southern China – touristy, no doubt, but still infused with charm and even a little magic.

For readers of this book, which is, after all, devoted to following the tribes and nations connected by the mighty Mekong, a trip to Yúnnán is an indispensable way to truly get to know the river's character. Though born in the frigid highlands of Tibet, it's through these lands that the Mekong (Lǎncāng Jiāng in Chinese) passes from childhood into adolescence, winding and warming slowly under the Yúnnán sun as it passes through gorges and canyons before exiting to the south into the sweltering jungles of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

As diverse and defiant of labels as the people who call her home, Yúnnán is where the Middle Kingdom meets – and merges – with Southeast Asia.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 394,000 sq km
- **Capital** Kūnmíng
- **Country Code** ☎ 86
- **Population** 44.8 million
- **Money** US\$1 = ¥6.83 (yuan)
- **Seasons** high May-September & all national holidays; rainy May-September (especially June-August)
- **Phrases** *nǐ hǎo* 你好 (hello), *zàijiàn* 再见 (goodbye), *xièxie* 谢谢 (thank you)



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Shāxī** (p471) Live in a traditional Bai valley village and hike the surrounding mountains.
- **Xishuāngbǎnnà** (p458) Experience tribal life and trek through dense jungle.
- **Lǐjiāng's old town** (p475) Feel like a character out of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in these cobbled lanes.
- **Shangri-la** (p480) Stroll among yaks and beneath Tibetan prayer flags in Shangri-la's rarefied mountain air.
- **Tiger Leaping Gorge** (p478) Hike the high and low trails of China's still-spectacular gorge.

ITINERARIES

- **10 days (Tribal Trek)** China's most ethnically diverse province offers myriad opportunities to experience the hospitality of many of the tribal groups that make up around a third of Yúnnán's population. Begin in Kūnmíng with a few hours at the Yúnnán Provincial Museum (p454) to get a grasp on the ethnic diversity of the province. Next head down to Xishuāngbǎnnà (p458), where you can trek in dense jungle and visit the villages of Dai, Yi, Lahu and Bulang. You could easily spend the full 10 days in Xishuāngbǎnnà, otherwise head back north and visit the valley of Shāxī (p471), where you'll experience the hospitality of the Bai people beneath the unparalleled beauty of the Stone Treasure Mountains. From Shāxī head north again to Lǐjiāng (p473), using the heavily touristy town as a base from which to explore the area's surrounding Naxi settlements.
- **20 days (South for the Winter)** Preparing yourself for the high, cool and dry conditions, begin your trek in early December at the furthest point north in this chapter, Shangri-la (p480), where you'll experience the beauty and mystery of the ancient town and surrounding area. Hike amongst fluttering prayer flags in the surrounding hills, visit the Ganden Sumtseling Monastery (p483; far less crowded with tourists at this time of year), drink yak-butter tea with monks and soak away the cold at the amazing Stone Bridge Hot Springs (p483). After three or four days, head south for a one- to two-day hike through Tiger Leaping Gorge (p478)

before moving on to Lǐjiāng (p473) for a day or three of chilling in the old town and cycling in the countryside. From here, head south to Dàlì (p467) for a few days of slacking among backpackers before moving on to Kūnmíng (p452), where you'll want to experience the creature comforts and culture of the provincial capital and ditch your winter coat and long johns (mailing them back home is a definite option). From Kūnmíng, it's an overnight bus to Xishuāngbǎnnà (p458) for a week to 10 days of tribal living and jungle trekking in the warmth and dry of southern Yúnnán in early January.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Varied topography and altitude make this Tropic of Cancer-straddling province a veritable wealth of weather. Yúnnán's southern lowlands, especially Xishuāngbǎnnà, are tropical nearly year-round, offering a rainy season from May to October and a dry season from November to May. Winters (December to February) are mild and dry, and summers hot and humid; daily summer rains are usually intense and drenching rather than all-day affairs.

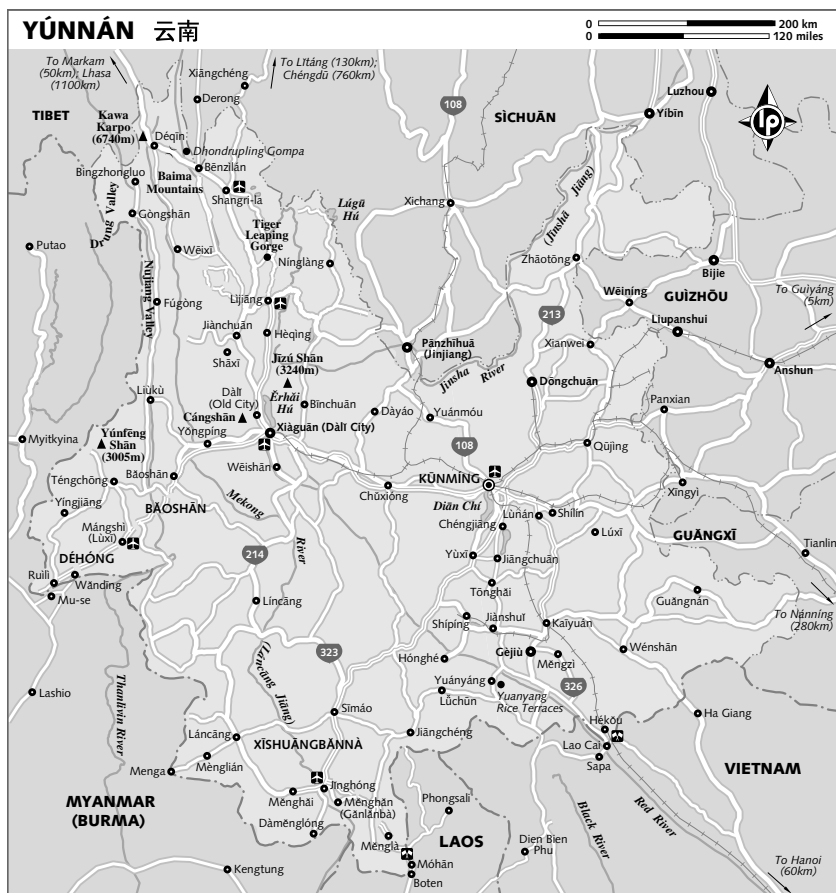
As you head north to northwest through the province, the altitude increases with latitude, meaning increasingly colder and longer winters. Shangri-la in early December is just entering winter hibernation, so you'll see cheaper hotel rooms and far less crowded streets; by the time January rolls around some restaurants are shuttered. If you plan on travelling anywhere north of Dàlì from mid-November to April, you'll want to bring a good jacket (though you might not wear it every day).

HISTORY

The mountains' elevation and remoteness from the ruling monarchy have been major

YÚNNÁN INDEX

- Steamed bun Y0.50
- 500ml bottle of water at a shop Y5
- Dali beer Y10
- Souvenir T-shirt Y40
- Hotel room with air-con Y80-200



factors in making China's sixth-largest province somewhat troublesome to govern for much of its history within the Middle Kingdom. Closer geographically to Hanoi and Yangon (Rangoon) than Beijing or Guangzhou, Yunnan has been pulled politically and economically more by its Southeast Asian neighbours than by dynasties to the north or trading cabals of the east. Its ethnic make-up plays a major role as well, with many of the province's southern tribal groups having strong kinship with tribes found in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar (Burma) and regarding the Han Chinese officials as carpet-baggers at best.

Yunnan's first kingdom, the kingdom of Dian, near present-day Kunming, 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 Han cultural (if not always political) domination of the region. Chief among the Chinese exports were Confucianism, Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism. While Vietnam gained much from the Chinese, it would struggle for centuries to throw off the yoke of its larger neighbour, finally succeeding after the fall of the Tang dynasty in the 10th century.

The Indianised Cambodian kingdom of Funan had cultural and quasi-diplomatic ties with Yunnan'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 Dàli. 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 Dàli, 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. 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 Xishuāngbǎnnà Region into Laos, bringing horses south and tea north.

Right up to the 20th century, Yúnnán looked as much to its southern neighbours Indochina and Burma as it did to the Chinese emperor, and during China's countless political purges, fallen officials often found themselves here, adding to the province's 'outpost' character.

Yúnnán played a critical role in the war effort during WWII, both as a staging ground for anti-Japanese resistance and a link in the supply route bringing material from India to China. It's for this reason that, to this day, Westerners – particularly Americans – are looked upon more favourably in Yúnnán than most anywhere else in China. The province became strategically important again during China's 1979 war with Vietnam, during which Yúnnán was used as a base of operations and suffered cross-border attacks.

In the early 21st century, Yúnnán has again found itself in a position of great strategic importance, this time for economic rather than military reasons. The province has become the anchor point for China's first cross-national highway, the much-heralded Kūnmíng–Bangkok Expressway (Kūnmàn Gāosù Gōnglù). Beginning in Kūnmíng, about a third of the roughly 1900km highway is in China, with the other two thirds passing through Laos before crossing into Thailand, where it runs from Chiang Khong to Bangkok.

The current global economic downturn makes it hard to gauge what effect the new highway might have on the province in the long run. The expectation, however, is that it heralds a potentially bright future, transforming the one-time Chinese outpost into a hub for trade between the Middle Kingdom and Southeast Asia.

PEOPLE & THE POPULATION

Home to more than half of all China's 56 ethnic minorities, Yúnnán is close to 50% non-Han. To the north you may find yourself breaking bread with Naxi, Bai and Tibetans, while down south you're more likely to be eating pineapple rice with the Dai, Zhuang or Miao. Problems in the province 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 a large concentration 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

Tribal Yúnnán has made vast contributions to China's artistic legacy. Architecturally, comparing the temple styles alone could take up your entire trip. The province is also a popular spot for artists both Chinese and foreign to come and set up studios and art communes.

ENVIRONMENT

As diverse as its people, Yúnnán's landscape rises from close to sea level in Hékǒu, near Vietnam, to 6740m in the northwest Tibetan Plateau.

Geomorphologically, it's got everything you 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 finally becomes full-blown rainforest in Xishuāngbǎnnà.

Yúnnán's primary environmental issue is deforestation, and – especially in Xishuāngbǎnnà – soil depletion due to the mono-cropping of rubber trees. However, there's also good news: plans to build a Three Gorges-style dam in Tiger Leaping Gorge seem to have been put on the back burner, at least for the moment, thanks in no small part to public opposition to the potential destruction of one of China's most beautiful places.

KŪNMÍNG 昆明

☎ 0871 / pop 6.2 million (prefecture), 3.2 million (city)

China's 'spring city' has undergone tremendous changes since the turn of the millennium. A major population boom has turned this one-time notoriously mellow city into a more typical Chinese metropolis, meaning crowds, traffic and smog.

Still, at an elevation of 1890m, Kūnmíng has a milder climate than most other Chinese cities, and it's easy enough to get around in and – most importantly – out of. While the population continues to grow, the people are still generally laid-back, making the city a good place to explore for a few days before heading out into the wilds of Yúnnán.

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), Yuantong Temple and the Kūnmíng 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, marked by a four-way overpass that often becomes an ad hoc fruit market. It's at this intersection that you'll find both the Sakura (p455) and Kunming Hotels; one block to the east is the Camellia Hotel (p455).

Decent city maps abound, and even some small newsstands offer maps with both English and Chinese. The folks at the Hump Hostel (p454) have gone out of their way to create

INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行 1 C2

Bank of China 中国银行 2 C4

Bank of China 中国银行 3 B3

China Telecom 中国电信 (see 4)

International Post Office

国际邮局 4 C3

International Post Office

国际邮局 5 C4

Lao Consulate 老挝领事馆 (see 17)

Mandarin Books & CDs

五华书苑 6 A1

Myanmar Consulate 缅甸领事馆 7 C3

Thai Consulate 泰国总领事馆 8 D3

Vietnamese Consulate

越南领事馆 9 C4

Yanan Hospital 延安医院 10 D2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

East Pagoda 东寺塔 11 B4

Green Lake Park 翠湖公园 12 B1

Mr Chen's Tours 陈先生旅游 13 D3

West Pagoda 西寺塔 14 B4

Yuantong Temple 圆通寺 15 B1

Yunnan Provincial Museum

云南省博物馆 16 B3

SLEEPING

Camellia Hotel 茶花宾馆 17 D3

Hump Hostel 驼峰客栈 18 B3

Kinnone Hotel 京王酒店 19 B3

Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel

昆明大脚氏青年旅社 20 A3

Sakura Hotel 樱花大酒店 21 D3

EATING

Diānwèi Fànzhǔāng 滇味饭庄 22 D3

French Cafe 蓝白红 23 A1

Jia Xiang Cuisine 家香小吃 24 A2

Kunming Korean Restaurant

昆明韩菜 25 A1

DRINKING

Jinmabiji Square 金马碧鸡广场 26 B3

Kundu Night Market 昆都夜市 27 A3

Speakeasy 说吧 28 A2

SHOPPING

Bird & Flower Market

花鸟市场 29 B3

Gúwán Chéng 古玩城 30 C3

TRANSPORT

Buses to Bamboo Temple

到筲竹寺的班车 (see 31)

Buses to Diān Chǐ (see 31)

Buses to Xi Shān

到西山的班车 31 B3

Dragonair 港龙航空 (see 9)

Lao Aviation (see 17)

Long-Distance Bus Station

客运站 32 C5

Long-Distance Bus Station

长途汽车总站 33 C5

Thai Airways 泰国国际航空 34 C5

Yunnan Airlines 云南航空公司 35 C3

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.

Mandarin Books & CDs (☎ 220 6575; West Gate, Yúnnán University; ☎ 9am-10pm) This Kūnmíng media stalwart is a veritable bookstore of Babel, with books, music and maps in a variety of scripts and tongues. If it's DVDs you're after, look for the big store specialising in Western movies and TV series around the corner on Wenhua Xiang.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú; ☎ 571 7030; Jinxing Huayúan, Jinxing Lu; ☎ 9-11.30am & 1-5pm) 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.

Yanan Hospital (Yán'ān Yīyuàn; ☎ 317 7499, ext 311; 1st fl, Block 6, Renmin Donglu) Has English speaking doctors, making it popular with wounded Westerners.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Cities in China are generally safe, and Kūnmíng is among the safest. Most crime is of the pick-pocketing variety (mobile phones are a tempting target), but there's a bit of snatch-and-grab as well. The area around the train and long-distance bus stations can feel a bit seedy.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Tang Dynasty Pagodas

South of Jinbi Lu are two Tang pagodas ageing gracefully as the neighbourhood gentrifies around them. **West Pagoda** (Xisi Tǎ; Dongsì Jie; 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.

East Pagoda (Dōngsìtǎ; 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 Y10; ☎ 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.

Yunnan Provincial Museum 云南省博物馆

This recently renovated museum (Yúnnán Shěng Bówùguǎn; Wuyi Lu; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun)

is a fine place to get some ideas for what you'd like to experience as you venture out through greater Yúnnán.

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 Yúnnán itself. The Ancient Buddhist Art Hall has examples of the art at Shìbāoshān, near Dàlì, and the murals of Báishā outside Lǐjiāng. The Minority Nationality Hall gives an overview of Yúnnán'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.

TOURS

Several tour outfits cover Kūnmíng and its surrounding sights faster than public minibuses do. Hostels are the best places to find tours. Lodging options can assist with travel queries and make ticket reservations (ranging from free to Y20 per ticket).

The Camellia Hotel (opposite) has four (at last count) agencies, including the venerable **Mr Chen's Tours** (☎ 318 8114; Room 3116, No 3 Bldg, Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Donglu).

For cycling tours, see p457.

SLEEPING

Hump Hostel (Tuófēng Kèzhàn; ☎ 364 0059; www.thehump hostel.com; Jinmabiji Sq, Shulin Jie entrance; 金马林街; dm Y25, s from Y80; ☎ ☎) Rooms here come with earplugs but no towels, which should give you a good idea about what sort of happening place this sprawling and revered hostel, both a social hub and a nexus of travel information, happens to be. Rooms are basic – the ones furthest from the front desk are a bit chilly in winter – but the rooftop bar and restaurant can't be beat.

Kunming Cloudland Youth Hostel (Kūnmíng Dǎjiāoshì Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 410 3777; www.cloudland2004.com; 23 Zhuantang Lu; 篆塘路23号; 4-/6-bed dm Y40/35, s/d Y120/130; ☎ ☎) This charming (though a bit hard to find) hostel has comfy beds, a cool downstairs bar and restaurant, and a pretty swinging social scene. To get here from the train or long-distance bus station, take bus 64. Get off at the Yunnan Daily News (云南日报社站) stop.

Kinnone Hotel (Jingwáng Jiùdiàn; ☎ 607 7555; 88 Dongfeng Xilu; 东风西路88号; d from ¥150; ☹️ 📺) Close to Jinmabiji Sq, the Bird & Flower Market and other cool spots, this boutique hotel offers clean, well-furnished rooms at reasonable prices. The staff speak no English, and they have an odd system whereby you pay for your own utilities; still, your stay should be boutique quality for just above hostel price.

Camellia Hotel (Cháhuā Bīnguǎn; ☎ 316 3000; www.lmcamelliahotel.com; 96 Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路96号; d ¥188-288; ☹️ 📺) A long-time favourite with Westerners, and not just because the Chinese name is easy to say. Though the grand dame is showing her age, the Camellia still offers a central location, free information, clean and comfy rooms, and the best free breakfast buffet in town. Good discounts can be had by booking online.

our pick **Sakura Hotel** (Yinghuā Dàjiùdiàn; ☎ 316 5888; www.sakurahotel.com.cn; 29 Dongfeng Donglu; 东风东路29号; s/d ¥600/700, ste ¥1300; ☹️ 📺) Though it sits in the shadow (figuratively, not literally) of the illustrious though somewhat staid Kunming Hotel across the street, the Sakura offers the same high-class atmosphere and many of the same amenities (minus the bowling alley) for about two-thirds of the price. And come on, if you're spending in this budget category, don't you deserve a glass elevator?

EATING & DRINKING

Like all Chinese cities, Kūnmíng offers a multitude of excellent general culinary choices alongside a few of its own local specialities. Probably the best known local dish is across-the-bridge noodles, though Dai barbecue places abound.

Kūnmíng's famous Muslim food street, Shuncheng Jie, became the dubious recipient of the gift of gentrification around 2005; many of the old restaurants from this now-generic street have reopened on Nanqing Jie. Running behind Wenhua University, Wenlin Jie and Wenhua Xiang are the main hang-outs for local and international students, boasting scores of good and cheap restaurants serving everything from French pastries to pizza.

As for drinking, the spring city is a college town at heart, offering a plethora of places to get plastered. The famous Wenhua Xiang offers some quiet, cafe-type options

for those who prefer a more literary scene, but if you need strobe lights and dancing, Jinmabiji Sq offers a dozen or so pubs and clubs (hence the free earplugs at the Hump Hostel). And for hard-core techno (and outrageous prices), the Kundu Night Market has dozens of discos frequented by the seen-on-the-scene.

Kunming Korean Restaurant (Kūnmíng Hāncài; Wenhua Xiang; dishes from ¥15; ☹️ lunch & dinner) One of the best of many Korean options in the student neighbourhood. The food is excellent and all dishes are served with ample appetisers, so that ¥15 order of *bibimbap* (a beloved Korean beef, rice, egg and vegetable dish served in a sizzling stone bowl) will keep you full for hours.

our pick **Jia Xiang Cuisine** (Jiāxiāng Xiǎochī; cnr Renmin Xilu & Dongfeng Xilu; dishes from ¥20; ☹️ 11am-1am) Kūnmíng food court to the gods, this below-street-level spot incorporates a dozen or so stalls cooking up Yúnnán delicacies under one roof. Meals are paid for via a swipe card obtained at the front entrance for ¥50 and up; any money not used is refunded at the end of your meal.

Diānwèi Fànzhǎng (☎ 316 7913; Dongfeng Donglu 53; dishes from ¥20; ☹️ lunch & dinner) The English sign above this restaurant reads 'cooking school', and all dishes are prepared by local culinary students under the careful tutelage of master chefs. Vegetarian options are available, and ordering is done via colourful placards. Cooking lessons are also available, though an interpreter would be necessary.

French Cafe (Lánbáihóng; 70 Wenlin Jie; dishes from ¥25; ☹️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) There are many coffee shops in the city, but none serves

ACROSS-THE-BRIDGE NOODLES

Yúnnán's best-known dish is across-the-bridge noodles (过桥米线; *guòqiáo mǐxiàn*). 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.

KŪNMÍNG BUS TIMETABLES

Destination	Price (Y)	Duration (hr)	Frequency	Departs
Dàlì	74-126	5-8	frequent	7.30am-7.30pm
Dàlì (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
Jīnghóng	185-223	9-10	4 daily	9.30am, 6pm, 7.45pm, 8.30pm
Jīnghóng (sleeper)	165	10-11	half-hourly	4-8pm

pastries of the calibre you'll find at this favourite Kūnmíng expat haunt. Books – including a fine variety of second-hand Lonely Planet guides – sell for reasonable prices.

Speakeasy (Shuōbà; Dongfeng Xilu; ☎ 8pm-late)

Just around the corner from the university, Speakeasy is the city's long-time hipster hideaway-slash-meat-market for students, expats and locals alike.

SHOPPING

Beneath the modern, glittering and cavernous malls of Kūnmíng's Jinbi Lu, men in straw hats still sell bamboo water pipes from the baskets of bicycles. Even as construction gentrifies the mazelike alleyways of the Bird & Flower Market (Huāniǎo Shìchǎng; 花鸟市场), business continues in the surrounding alleys, with small shops selling Yúnnán specialities such as marble and batik from Dàlì, jade from Ruìlì, minority embroidery, musical instruments, and, of course, plenty of angel-haired Yúnnán tobacco (what did you think you're supposed to smoke in those bamboo water pipes?).

One signature Yúnnánese item you'll want to consume in great quantity (and perhaps take home) is Pu'er tea. Though named for the Pu'er region of the province, much of the best of this tea is actually grown a bit further south in Xīshuāngbǎnnà. Any good tea shop should invite you in for a tea-tasting session designed to both introduce and entice.

Probably the most relaxed place in Kūnmíng to sit and drink Pu'er is in the shops and stalls in the southwestern corner of Jinmabi Sq Pedestrian Shopping Mall (金碧鸡坊; Map p453), where you can also find myriad other treasures, knick-knacks and consumables for sale. Those interested in antiques should check out Gǔwán Cheng (古玩城; Map p453) just a few blocks to the north on the corner of Huguó Lu and Nanping Jie.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Kūnmíng is a major Southeast Asia air hub, and the city's newly expanded international airport is buzzing day and night with flights connecting Kūnmíng with other major cities including Hanoi, Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Yangon, Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Siem Reap and many others. Kūnmíng is also well connected with other Chinese cities, and though there were no direct flights to Taiwan as of this writing, there may be before too long. For more information on flights and airlines serving Kūnmíng, see p488.

Bus

The two most useful long-distance bus stations are on opposite sides of Beijing Lu, just up from the train station. Some buses to more local destinations, such as Diān Chí or even southeastern Yúnnán, leave from the west bus station. Schedules and prices are subject to change, and new companies offering sleeker, more comfortable buses start up nearly every year. As any hostel can book a ticket for you for next to nothing (sometimes even nothing), getting your ticket through one of them is your best bet.

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.

Although trains still aren't serving Hékǒu on the border with Vietnam, there is talk of this line running again in the future.

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 Dàlì (Y95). A great website with up-to-date schedules is at www.chinahighlights.com/china-trains/kunming-train-schedule.htm.

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

Many backpacker hotels and hostels rent bikes for around Y15 per day, though most require a deposit of between Y200 and Y400.

China on Two Wheels (☎ 135-2931 0207; chinaontwowheels@gmail.com) runs trips ranging in distance and duration, visiting sights around Kūnmíng and beyond. Prices for tours are very reasonable, and include usage of high-quality mountain bikes, entrance fees, accessories and a bilingual guide. Email for details.

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.

AROUND KŪNMÍNG

There's plenty to see and do within a 20km radius of Kūnmíng. The lobby of the Hump Hostel is the best place to plan your day trips, as management has gone to great lengths to post maps, descriptions and directions (including bus routes) to nearly all points of interest (major and minor).

BAMBOO TEMPLE 箬竹寺

This **temple** (Qióngzhú Sì; admission Y10; ☎ 8am-6pm) dates back to the Tang dynasty and is worth a visit for its 500 tremendous, life-sized and precisely sculpted *luóhàn* (arhats or noble ones), individually masterpieces but together a tour de force. The temple is about 6km northwest of Kūnmíng. Minibuses (Y10, 30 minutes) leave when full from opposite the Yúnnán Fàndiàn from 7am, and return regularly to Kūnmíng. Bus 90 from Jine Xilu also goes there.

DIĀN CHÍ 滇池

The shoreline of Diān Chí, 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 minibuses stop in Kūnmíng as those going to Bamboo Temple and Xi Shān.

XĪ 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. Check out the bulletin board at Hump Hostel for details on getting there by public transport.

SHÍLÍN 石林

Further, but still doable as a day trip, **Shílín** (Stone Forest; ☎ 771 0316; admission Y140), a conglomeration of utterly bizarre karst geology, is about 120km southeast of Kūnmíng. Split and eroded by wind and rainwater, the tallest of the many pillars 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 if you decide to stay over. The **Stone Forest International Youth Hostel** (Shílín Guójiā Qīngnián Lǚguǎn; ☎ 771 0768; 4-bed dm Y50, r Y120-140), directly opposite where the buses drop you off, offers the cleanest, best-value accommodation you'll find.

Buses to Shílín (Y30 to Y40, two hours, every 30 minutes from 8am to noon) leave from the **bus station** (Beijing Lu) opposite the long-distance bus station in Kūnmíng. In the afternoon there are minibuses waiting at Shílín's car park, leaving when full (Y20). If you take a tourist bus, expect to be taken shopping.

SOUTHEAST YÚNNÁN

YUÁNYÁNG RICE TERRACES

☎ 0873

Considered by many to be among China's most spectacular examples of natural-meets-human-made topography, the Yuányáng rice terraces are levelled rice farms hewn over the

centuries by Hani farmers. Located 300km south of Kūnmíng and covering roughly 12,500 hectares, the terraces are yet another reason why Yúnnán is our favourite province in China.

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 stop.

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 ever-present photographers.

Duōyishū, about 25km from Xīnjiē, has the most spectacular sunrises and is the one you should not miss. For sunsets, **Bádá** and **Lǎohūzǐ** 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 are 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 to hook up with other travellers and split the cost of chartering a minibus for the day (figure on Y500 as a good starting price).

Sleeping

Yuányáng Chénjiā Fángshè (☎ 562 2343; s/d Y45/65) This open and breezy guesthouse – overseen by four smiling generations of the same family – offers nice rooms with good views, and is located just across from where the bus from Kūnmíng stops.

Yúnti Dǎjiùdián (☎ 562 4858; s/d Y190/240) This is the town's fanciest digs, offering clean, modern rooms and staff used to foreigners. Single rooms are nice, but if you really want to splurge, go for the suite at Y720.

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 Xīshuāngbǎnnà. To get to Xīshuāngbǎnnà, 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 in Jiāngchéng, 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, and though the road is long and in some places bumpy, it takes you through magnificent scenery.

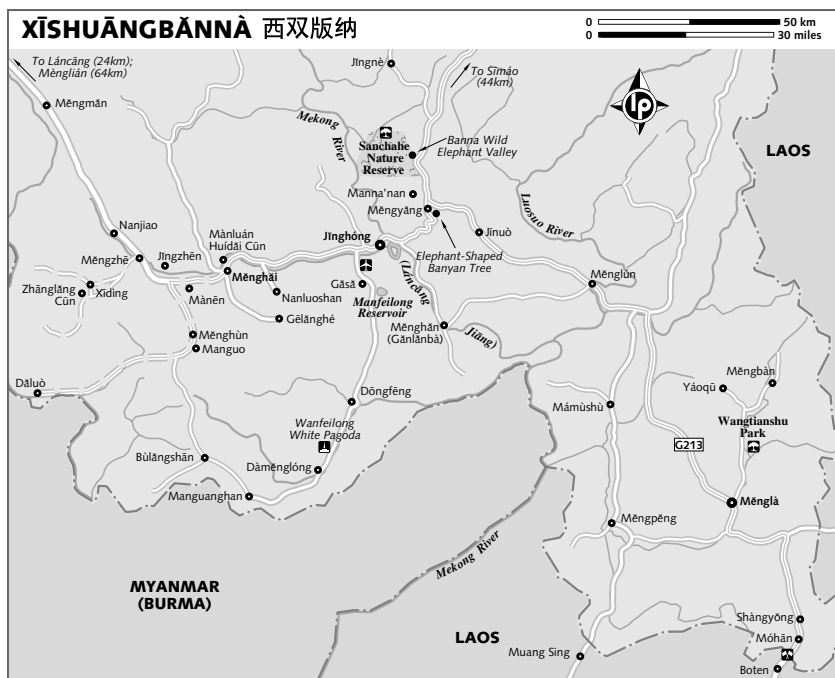
XĪSHUĀNGBĀNNÀ 西 双版纳

☎ 0691 / pop 994,000

There's something about Yúnnán's southernmost region that makes it feel more a part of Southeast Asia than the Middle Kingdom. Perhaps it's the landscape, lush and rolling hills occasionally terraced into tea farms (some in the process of being destroyed by rubber farms), but mostly covered by thick, nigh impenetrable jungle. Maybe it's the food, a special hybrid cuisine influenced more by the culinary traditions of tribal groups of southwestern China, Laos and Myanmar than by the better-known styles of coastal and northern China. Or it might be the people, as laid-back as any you'll find in Yúnnán (which says a lot in China's most relaxed province), as happy to chat for hours over endless pots of Pu'er tea as city dwellers back east might be to haggle over the same tea's profitability.

Xīshuāngbǎnnà is home to a wide variety of ethnicities, including groups not found elsewhere, such as the Jinuo. About a third of the prefecture's people identify themselves as being from the Dai tribal group (which is itself split into several sub-groups), while another third are split between a dozen or more smaller tribal groups, such as the Miao, Yi and Aini, a sub-group of the Hani. In all, it's likely that only around a third of the people in the prefecture are purely of Han stock.

For travellers looking to experience the hills, jungles and people of Southeast Asia, Xīshuāngbǎnnà offers this in a microcosm, while for those heading north from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar or Thailand, it's a great segue into the Middle Kingdom. And for



trekkers, Xishuangbanna offers jungle wandering and cultural opportunities galore.

Climate

Leave your winter clothes in storage; you'll be wearing a T-shirt when you get off the plane in Jinghong even if you were wearing a jacket getting on in Kunming. But it's still Southeast Asia, and that means wet summers. Expect ferocious storms to hit daily between June and August. From September to February there is less rainfall, but you often experience thick fog.

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

Environment

Xishuangbanna's tropical climate has made it an ocean of biodiversity, harbouring an abundance of tropical plants and animals (including some of the last few Asian elephants remaining in China). In the past several decades, the region's biodiversity and environment have been severely degraded by a proliferation

of rubber tree plantations, which have systematically replaced stretches of once diverse rainforest with mono-cropped rubber trees. As you travel through the province, you'll see what look like partially melted terraced hills; these are rubber tree plantations that have stripped all nutrients from the soil, causing the surrounding hills to collapse. Many people in the region see tourism as one of the ways that the area's unique environment can be preserved and protected.

Orientation

Xishuangbanna is divided into two counties and one county-level municipal area. Menghai County (Menghai Xian) is to the west, surrounded on the west and south by Myanmar, and Mengla Xian to the east, borders Laos. Jinghong Municipality and the surrounding areas lie in-between the two counties, and consist of Jinghong City, Gasa, Dàmènglóng, Měngyǎng, Jinuoshan and a number of other small and medium-sized towns.

The Mekong River runs through the centre of the prefecture and through Jinghong City itself.

Festivals & Events

Probably the most well known of Xishuāngbǎnnà's festivals is the **Water-Splashing Festival**, the traditional New Year's ceremony of the Dai people. Held to wash away the dirt, sorrow and demons of the old year and bring in the happiness of the new, the festival is usually celebrated in Jīnghóng from 13 to 15 April. Dates in the surrounding Dai villages vary. The third day features the water-splashing freak-out. Foreigners get special attention, so remember to pack your electronics and passport in waterproof bags.

Dangers & Annoyances

While all areas along the border are technically open, foreign travellers are currently not permitted to cross from Xishuāngbǎnnà into Myanmar; areas close to the Sino-Burmese border are considered sensitive, so be careful not to cross over accidentally while trekking in southern and western Měngǎi.

The Kūnmíng–Jīnghóng bus trip has had a couple of reported drug-and-rob instances, so mind yourself when coming in.

JINGHONG 景洪

☎ 0691 / pop 143,000

The capital of Xishuāngbǎnnà prefecture has grown over the past decade, and though it still has palm-lined streets and a relaxed

ambience relative to most other Chinese cities, the days when it could be confused with a giant village are history. The city is now undergoing major renovations along the main avenues – big hotels are going up and old buildings are coming down. The once fragrant air is increasingly filled with cement dust and exhaust fumes, making Jīnghóng feel, more and more, like any other small Chinese city. Still, Jīnghóng is a cool place to hang out, and, thanks to its central location, an excellent base from which to explore the surrounding area.

Orientation

Most of Jīnghóng is on the south side of the Mekong River. Xuanwei Dadao is the longest east–west street, and crosses the river at the new bridge. Mengle Dadao is the main north–south street. The two streets meet at a traffic circle, and most of the stuff worth seeing in the city is in the southwest corner.

Information

Jīnghóng's cafes offer a wealth of travel information. In addition to being owned by people who know both the area and the needs of travellers, Mekong Café and Mei Mei keep a stack of guest books around that are bursting with the low-down from other travellers, including info on trails and treks,

BANNAVIEW: NOT YOUR AVERAGE TOUR OPERATOR

Once upon a time two women from very different backgrounds, Wendy from Xishuāngbǎnnà and Echo from Hong Kong, met in Jīnghóng and discovered they shared a passion for ethno-biology, tribal culture and travel. Before long, they realised that these shared interests, combined with their complementary skill sets, provided a solid basis from which to start a business designed to promote local culture to the outside world. In doing so, they could preserve this culture for future generations.

And thus **Bannaview** (☎ 664 5083, 136-1881 4895; echo414@yahoo.cn) was born. Part tour guide service, part mobile research facility, Bannaview arranges customised trips and tours around Xishuāngbǎnnà, channelling as much of its proceeds as possible to the people and villages visited along the way.

Travels with Wendy and Echo are anything but routine. The two have broken bread in half of the villages in Xishuāngbǎnnà, so while you may seem strange to the folks they're introducing you to (many of whom have never met a Westerner), you won't be a stranger. Wendy's in-depth knowledge of tribal culture and language (not to mention off-road driving skills that'd make any Dakar racer envious) makes the most remote village in Xishuāngbǎnnà accessible. Echo's years of acting as interpreter for both casual travellers and travelling academics have given her a wealth of knowledge on a variety of subjects far wider than your average tour guide.

In addition to acting as liaison between visitors from both East and West and the myriad tribal groups that make up Xishuāngbǎnnà's unique cultural tapestry, Wendy and Echo also dispense travel advice freely. These two are definitely 'folks in the know to know' in 'Banna.

**INFORMATION**

- Bank of China 中国银行 1 C2
 Bank of China 中国银行 2 C1
 China Post 中国邮局 3 B2
 Public Security Bureau 公安局 4 C2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Peacock Lake Park
孔雀湖公园 5 C1
 Tropical Flower & Plants Garden
热带花卉园 6 A2

SLEEPING

- Banna College Hotel 版纳学院 7 B2
 Dai Building Inn 傣家花苑小楼 8 C2
 Jinglan Inn 景兰客栈 9 C2
 King Land Hotel 景兰大酒店 10 C2
 Tai Garden Hotel 傣园酒店 11 B3

EATING

- Mànjīnglǎn Shāokǎochǎng
曼景兰烧烤场 12 D2
 Mei Mei Café 美美咖啡厅 13 C2

- Mekong Café 湄公餐馆 14 C2
 Wangtianshu Deli 望天树美食 15 C3
SHOPPING
 Zhizhèng Cháhuáng 致正茶行 16 C2

TRANSPORT

- Dock 码头 17 D1
 Long-Distance Bus Station
长途汽车站 18 C1
 No 2 Bus Station 第二客运站 19 B2

which villages are worth visiting and which tourist attractions are overblown.

Most hotels and many cafes offer wireless internet, and there is a handful of internet cafes along Manting Lu (Y5 per hour). The phone bars along Manting Lu are the best places to make international or long-distance calls.

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

China Post (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; cnr Mingle Dadao & Xuanwei Dadao; ☎ 8am-8.30pm)

Public Security Bureau (Gōngānjú; ☎ 216 7059; Jingde Lu; ☎ 8-11.30am & 3-5.30pm) Reportedly has a fairly speedy visa-extension service.

Sights & Activities

Although most travellers use Jinghong as an exploration base, there are enough interesting things in and around town to keep you hanging about for at least a couple of days.

The terrific **Tropical Flower & Plants Garden** (Rèdài Huāhuìyuán; ☎ 212 0493; 28 Jinghong Xilu; admission Y50; ☎ 7am-6pm) is just west of the town centre, hosting more than 1000 different types of plant life in a lovely tropical rainforest setting.

In the centre of town, **Peacock Lake Park** (Kǒngquè Hú Gōngyuán; 孔雀湖公园) is a popular spot for locals and visitors alike; dances

and ad hoc performances can be found most evenings around the park's artificial lake.

About 6km out of Jìng'hóng lies the town of Gasa, home of the **Gasa Hot Springs** (Mǎnsūcūn Wēnquán; 曼洒村温泉; admission Y20). Though it looks like a country club swimming pool, albeit one filled with natural hot-spring water, it's actually quite a nice place to hang out on a cool evening. It has no real address, but any local can tell you how to find it. A taxi from town shouldn't cost more than Y25.

Sleeping

Though there aren't many places offering dorm beds in Jìng'hóng, there are plenty of clean and inexpensive hotels, especially on Manting Lu.

Banna College Hotel (Zhíyuàn Bīnguǎn; ☎ 213 8365; Xuanwei Dadao; 宣慰大道; dm Y20, tw/d per person Y60/80; 🏠 📶) Clean and comfortable enough, which is a good thing for a town with a dearth of dorm bed space. If you're looking to rent a room, better options abound.

Dai Building Inn (Dǎijiā Huāyuán Xiǎolóu; ☎ 216 2592; 57 Manting Lu; 曼听路57号; r Y50; 🏠 📶) Interesting enough in that the inn is a traditional Dai-style village guesthouse, around which a city seems to have sprung up. Cottage walls are a bit thin, and the staff a bit disinterested.

Jinglan Inn (Jínglán Kèzhàn; ☎ 216 4233; C4-103 Jinglan International Building; 景兰国际C4-103栋; r Y50; 🏠 📶) This unassuming guesthouse in the alley just behind King Land Hotel offers clean private rooms with kitchenettes.

King Land Hotel (Jínglán Dàijiūdiàn; ☎ 212 9999; 6 Jingde Lu; 景德路6号; r from Y480; 🏠 📶) This newly opened mid-priced option has clean and comfortable rooms overlooking the city and a set of elephant statues guarding the entrance, which locals seem to love being photographed with.

Tai Garden Hotel (Dǎiyuán Jiūdiàn; ☎ 212 3888; fax 212 6060; 8 Minhang Lu; 民航路8号; d Y640 plus 15% tax; 🏠 📶) One of Jìng'hóng's posher options, Tai Garden has quiet grounds replete with their own island, pool, sauna, gym and tennis court.

Eating & Drinking

Manting Lu is lined with restaurants serving Dai food, many of which dish up Dai dance performances along with their culinary specialities. Over on Mengpeng Lu is a great night market called Mǎnjínglán Shāokǎochǎng (曼景

兰烧烤场), where dozens of stalls serve up barbecued everything, from sausages to snails.

Traditional Dai dishes include barbecued fish, eel or beef cooked with lemongrass or served with peanut-and-tomato sauce, spicy bamboo-shoot soup, *shāokǎo* (烧烤; skewers of meat grilled over a wood fire) and *bāo shāo* (包烧; grilled meat wrapped in banana leaves). If you want to get really different, get yourself a plate of *yóuzhā zhúchóng* (油炸蛀虫) – deep-fried bamboo grubs.

our pick **Mei Mei Café** (Měiměi Kāfēi; ☎ 212 7324; Manting Lu; dishes from Y15; 📶) A home away from home for Jìng'hóng's backpacker set, and for good reason. In addition to great grub (Western and Chinese) in a swell location, Mei Mei is also an information hub. Take an hour pre-trek to peruse its info-packed guestbook. (By the time this book hits the shelves, there'll be a second Mei Mei's around the corner from the first on Menglong Lu.)

Mekong Café (Méigōng Kāfēi; ☎ 216 2395; www.mekongcafe.cn; Menglong Lu; dishes from Y25; 📶) Another excellent spot for food, travel information and great service. There's also a fine book library, and a cool upstairs balcony/chill-out space. Like Mei Mei's, Mekong also has an excellent guest book.

Wangtianshu Deli (Wàngtiānshù Měishí; ☎ 212 1546; Mengzhe Donglu; 📶) Though hardly 'typical' Xishuangbännà cuisine, this newly opened place serves great Western and Asian meals, as well as freshly baked bread and probably the only cheesecake in a 200km-plus radius. Wangtianshu Deli is also very much involved with the Biodiversity Research Centre, which promotes biodiversity, environmental tourism and sustainable agriculture. Visit the centre on the web at www.biodiversitycentre.com, and pick up a copy of the excellent quarterly guide to the area, *Seeds of Heaven*, at the deli.

Shopping

Jìng'hóng's location makes it a trading town for tribal craftspeople from Xishuangbännà, as well as merchants from Laos, Myanmar and other points in South and Southeast Asia. When the sun goes down, Mengla Lu becomes something of an open-air craft market. Behind King Land Hotel, you'll find a dozen or so tea shops selling Pu'er tea. **Zhìzhèng Cháháng** (致正茶行; ☎ 13759257737; 景兰大酒店; 外圈jd108) is co-owned by an Englishman with unparalleled knowledge and passion for Pu'er tea, who's always glad

to share tea, ceremonies and knowledge with visitors.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are a dozen flights a day to Kūnmíng (Y730), but during the Water-Splashing Festival (p460) you'll need to book tickets several days in advance to get either in or out. It is possible to get tickets from Kūnmíng to Jìng'hóng for as little as Y350, but expect to pay twice that to return to Kūnmíng. There are also direct daily flights to Chéngdū (Y890), and in the high season there are two flights daily to Lìjiāng (Y840). Most other Chinese cities are accessible via Kūnmíng.

You can also fly, usually daily, to Bangkok (Y1630), often via Chiang Mai (Y830).

BOAT

Jìng'hóng is the terminus for the high-speed boat to Chiang Saen, Thailand. Offering beautiful views of Myanmar (no visa needed, as the boat doesn't dock), the boat stops on the north side of the Mekong River in Jìng'hóng, 250m north of the main bridge. See p489 for more details.

BUS

Jìng'hóng has three bus stations. Buses to most destinations within Xishuāngbännà take off from the short-distance station (known as 'Banna bus station') on Mínháng Lu. Most sleeper and express buses leave from the long-distance bus station in the north (at the northern end of Mènglè Dadao). The new southern station on Mènglè Dadao and Mènghài Lu currently handles express buses to Kūnmíng. This is subject to change, so check at Mei Mei Café before heading out.

Sixteen buses run daily from Jìng'hóng to Kūnmíng, ranging from normal sleepers (Y167) to luxury sleepers (Y197). There's one direct sleeper bus to Lìjiāng (Y239) leaving at 2.30pm, two sleeper buses to Dàlì (Y191) at 5.30pm and 7.30pm, and one direct sleeper bus to Ruìlì (Y191) at 9am. A long-distance sleeper bus runs to Nánning in Guǎngxī province (Y340), from where buses to Hanoi are plentiful.

Getting Around

There's no shuttle bus or public transport to the airport, 5km south of the city. A taxi will

VILLAGE OF FEASTS

For a feast fit for a gaggle of kings, head to **Manla BBQ Village** (Mǎnlà Shāokǎo Cūn; 曼腊烧烤村), 3km west of Jìng'hóng on the old Mènghài road. This village has half a dozen restaurants serving amazing traditional Dai dishes such as sticky rice (meant to be eaten with the hands), bamboo shoots, sautéed greens, grilled eggplant and an astounding assortment of barbecued delicacies. A decadent spread for 10 costs less than Y400, including beer, soft drinks and – oddly enough – a mid-meal shoeshine for your humble narrator.

cost around Y25, but expect to be hit up for more during festivals.

Jìng'hóng is small enough that you can walk to most destinations, but a bike makes life easier and can be rented through most accommodation options for Y15 to Y25 a day. There's an excellent bike-rental place that rents higher-quality mountain bikes for Y30 and above, depending on the quality.

A taxi anywhere in town costs Y5.

AROUND JĪNG'HÓNG 景洪

Roughly a third of Xishuāngbännà, this municipality is the area between Mènghài and Mènglè Counties, and encompasses both the administrative capital and some of the prefecture's most visited spots.

Sanchahe Nature Reserve 三岔河自然保护区

With an area of nearly 1.5 million hectares, this nature reserve (Sānchàhé Zírán Bǎohùqū), 48km north of Jìng'hóng, is one of five enormous forest reserves in southern Yúnnán. The part of the park that you'll want to visit is **Banna Wild Elephant Valley** (Bǎnnà Yéxiànggǔ; admission Y65), named after the 40 or so wild elephants that live there.

You have the option of staying inside the park at one of the dozen **canopy tree houses** (d Y280) maintained by the park, but by all accounts the dwellings are more like arboreal flophouses. In any event, the elephants come out to the river at dawn, so sleeping close by is very likely the only chance you'll have of seeing them in the wild.

Just about any bus travelling north from Jìng'hóng to Símáo will pass the reserve

THE ROAD TO DÀMĒNLÓNG 大勐龙

If getting there is half the fun, then the real reason for heading to Dàměnlóng is the journey itself. Smooth as a baby's behind (well, almost), the newly paved road connecting Jīnghóng with Myanmar just south of Dàměnlóng is a boon for travellers. Though you can't cross the border into Myanmar (yet), you can see it from the terraced hillsides surrounding Dàměnlóng, and the journey there offers some lovely sightseeing and exploration opportunities.

About 35km out of Jīnghóng, you'll pass through the town of **Dōngfēng** (东风), which has all the hallmarks of a newly built town waiting for a (Burma Road-induced) trade boom. There's a brand new museum of local history and culture (not open as of this writing), and a rather cool traditional day market with crafts, food and traditional Chinese medicine.

About 5km past Dōngfēng, keep an eye out for the white-and-blue staircase heading up the hill topped by a pair of stone serpentine creatures. This, according to a hand-carved sign, is **Manna White Pagoda** (曼纳白塔). Not to be confused with the nearby Mǎnfēilóng White Pagoda, and not actually white, this golden stupa is well maintained and mostly devoid of tourists.

Further south along the road, about 2km before you hit Dàměnlóng, you'll pass a small Dai village on the west side of the road. Following the road up the hill will take you to one of the area's most famous holy spots, the **White Bamboo Shoot Pagoda** (Mǎnfēilóng Bǎitǎ; 曼飞龙白塔; admission ¥5), often referred to simply as the White Pagoda. It was built in 1204, and legend has it that the Sakyamuni Buddha once visited here, leaving his footprint; the print's indentation is said to be below one of the nine stupas.

From the White Pagoda, you can head back to the main road and walk or catch the next bus to Dàměnlóng. If you have a decent bicycle, or are just feeling adventurous, check out the paths that wind through the hills behind the pagoda complex; one of the monks can tell you which paths to take on what is definitely a beautiful – though much longer than the road – trek to Dàměnlóng.

Dàměnlóng's other main attraction is **Black Pagoda** (Hēitǎ; 黑塔; admission free), a Dai monastery just above the centre of town. The pagoda is actually gold, not black, and the temple isn't as impressive as the White Pagoda. However, the views from the top (a panorama of the surrounding countryside with Myanmar directly to the south) make the trek worth it.

If you decide to spend the night in town, you'll find plenty of restaurants serving Dai, Chinese and Burmese cuisine (but don't expect much English to be spoken). There are a couple of cheap hotels in town; in a pinch, the **Lai Lai Hotel** (Lǎilái Bīnguǎn; 来来宾馆; d ¥40) offers simple and clean double rooms.

The new road has made getting from Jīnghóng to Dàměnlóng easy, and buses (¥15, two hours, every 20 minutes from 6.30am to 6.30pm) leave from Jīnghóng's northern bus station all day. Buses for the return trip run regularly between 6am and 6pm. Another option is to rent a bicycle and spend the evening in Dàměnlóng before riding back the next day, exploring the villages along the road and celebrating the 140km round-trip ride with a soak at Gasa Hot Springs (p462).

(¥12, one hour). Returning to Jīnghóng, there is a bus that leaves the north entrance daily at 2.30pm (¥10).

Gǎnlǎnbà 橄榄坝

A popular side trip from Jīnghóng, Gǎnlǎnbà (also called Měngǎn) is to **Dai Minority Park** (Dàizúyuán; 傣族园; ☎ 0691-250 4099; Manting Lu; adult/student ¥100/50), a cordoned off section of town where the hands of time have been frozen mid-way through the traditional Water-Splashing Festival. Though in the real world the festival occurs only once a year (for about a week), in the park it's a daily occurrence. If paying

money to have people throw water on you is your thing, enjoy. (We think it's like going to 'Hanukkah-land', a theme park where dreidels are spun and menorahs lit year-round.)

Minibuses to Gǎnlǎnbà (¥8, every 20 minutes from 7am to 6pm) leave from Banna bus station and take about 40 minutes. Most people rent bikes; the ride from Jīnghóng is quite nice and takes about two hours.

MĒNGHǎI COUNTY 勐海县

☎ 0691 / pop 293,000

Outside of stunning scenery, the main thing that brings travellers to this hilly and beauti-

ful stretch of country west of Jìnghóng and bordering Myanmar is the chance to visit the small indigenous groups who call the area home. In addition to various traditional **Dai villages**, Měngǎi County is also home to smaller tribes, such as the Bulang, Aini and Lahu.

Though the scars of the rubber trade can be seen in the melted, deforested hillsides along the main roads, tourism is quickly becoming an important source of income to the people of Měngǎi County. Even more important is the tea trade. Much of the tea sold around the world as 'Pu'er' comes from here (where the climate is slightly more favourable), rather than from the area actually known as Pu'er, 100km or so northeast. The tea trade is currently experiencing a major business trough, like most other trade globally, making tourism an even more vital income source for locals in this area. **Tea tasting tours** are also becoming popular, though at this stage they're still mostly an ad hoc affair. Bannaview, p460, can help arrange trips to tea farms and factories.

The county's main town is, naturally, called Měngǎi, and while it has a huge daily produce market that attracts hill-tribe members, more interesting are the two **weekly markets** held in surrounding villages, making Měngǎi town more of a base of operations than anything. There are a number of sleeping options in Měngǎi, ranging from the rather nice **Nanmen Dajiudian** (☎ 519 0222; rY130) in the centre of town, to the very flophouse-ish **Bridge Hotel** (☎ 660 9666; rY20), just up from the bus station.

Just a few kilometres north of Měngǎi is a rather unique village, marked on most maps as **Mànluán Huídāi Cūn** (曼峦回傣村). Come around sundown, when the sound of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer from the village's mosque mingles with the musical chanting of Buddhist monks in the Dai temple up the road; it's an aural juxtaposition you're unlikely to hear anywhere else in Xishuangbännä.

Měnghùn 勐混

Located about 26km southwest of Měngǎi, the town centre of Měnghùn has a colourful **Sunday market**; the town starts buzzing around 7am and the action lingers on through to noon. A lovely and ancient **temple complex**, surrounded by old-growth trees and bamboo, sits high on a hill overlooking Měnghùn. From here you can see across the valley to a second

Dai temple about 4km away, which is said to have been visited by the Buddha.

Even if you don't come for the market, Měnghùn is home to a number of craftspeople worth visiting, including a 30-something Dai silversmith named **Yùjiào** (玉叫; ☎ 159-2466 9385; 景勐混村1号). Right across from the town's central elementary school, Yùjiào crafts made-to-order gold and silver jewellery while you wait, charging far less than she should. She's been threatening to quit jewellery-making to help her sister sell tofu, so if you appreciate the work of this tremendously talented woman, thank her by saying 'no tofu' when you pick up your jewellery. She'll understand.

Buses departing Jìnghóng for Měnghùn (Y15, 90 minutes, every 20 minutes from 7am to 6pm) run from Jìnghóng's Banna bus station. From Měnghùn, minibuses run regularly to Měngǎi (Y6), Xiding (Y11, 1½ hours, 7.10am and 4pm) and throughout the day to Jìnghóng.

Xiding 西定

This hillside hamlet offers beautiful views of the rice and sugar-cane fields below, shrouded by white clouds. Sleepy six days a week, the town comes alive every Thursday when its **weekly market** attracts buyers and sellers from all over the area. According to locals, Thursday was picked in commemoration of Xiding's liberation from Kuomintang troops during the civil war, one Thursday long ago.

You can either catch one of the two direct buses from Měngǎi (Y11, 10.40am and 3.30pm), or travel via Měnghùn and change for a bus to 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, and there's a slightly better guesthouse behind the post office with rooms for Y50. Buses from Xiding leave twice a day for Měnghùn (Y11, 7.20am and 1pm). If you miss the bus you can always get a ride on a motorbike (Y30) from the only bike shop in town, a spectacular if not hair-raising experience.

MÈNGLÀ COUNTY 勐腊县

☎ 0691 / pop 195,000

East of Jìnghóng, Měnglà County is more rugged than the rest of Xishuangbännä. It's through this terrain that the new highway connecting China with Thailand, via

WELL OFF THE BEATEN PATH

As you make your way up the hill to Xiding, you'll pass an ancient-looking white stone stupa overlooking the valley below. The stupa itself isn't actually that old, but it's worth a look anyway. The main reason to take note of the structure is because following the trail into the valley beneath it will take you to a positively enchanting hillside village called **Zhānglǎng Cūn** (章朗村). Whereas nearby Xiding – itself a rural and aboriginal village clearly off the beaten path – still resembles China, visitors to Zhānglǎng Cūn may suspect they've wandered a bit too far off the trail and into Myanmar.

The people of Zhānglǎng Cūn are of the **Bulang tribe**, their skin a shade of milk-coffee brown and teeth stained red from betel nut. Many Bulang women still practise the ancient tradition of earlobe stretching, using increasingly weighty jewellery to stretch their lobes until they hang close to their shoulders. Some, especially the older women, also practise teeth blackening, thought to be a sign of great beauty.

The village is built into the hillside with small stilt houses of wood and bamboo, surrounded by huge clutches of bamboo, flowering plants and tea trees. There are some trees in the village that, according to villagers, are many centuries old; in particular, several kilometres into the jungle is one tea tree that locals claim is over 1700 years old. Tea made from the leaves of this ancient tree is so bitter it's nearly undrinkable, but, claim the villagers, it possesses incredible curative powers to anyone who can stomach it.

Though hardly on the tourist trail, the Bulang people of Zhānglǎng Cūn are hoping to bring small groups of travellers to visit their forest home. A recently built museum in the centre of the village (which opens only when visitors show up) shows multilingual displays documenting the culture and history of the Bulang people. Though there are no formal hotels or guesthouses in the village, accommodation and meals can be arranged in advance through Wendy and Echo at Bannaview (p460).

neighbouring Laos, carves its way through a dozen or more mountain tunnels. The area is home to beautiful scenery and great trekking opportunities, and is still far enough off the tourist trail to be relatively cheap.

Měnglún 勐仑

The major attraction here is the **Měnglún Tropical Plant Gardens** (Měnglún Rèdài Zhīwùyuán; 勐仑热带植物园; adult/student Y80/50; ☎ 8am–6pm). Home to a purported 6000 species of tropical plants, the gardens are gorgeous and get high marks from visitors.

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. Follow this until you reach a footbridge across the Mekong. The ticket booth is just in front of the bridge. There is also a number of cheap hotels by the bus station.

From Jīnghóng's Banna bus station, buses go to Měnglún (Y14, two hours) every 20 minutes (7am to 6pm), passing through Gǎnlǎnbà. Cycling from Jīnghóng is possible, but unless

you like riding through long tunnels, take the old road rather than the new highway.

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

Měnglà 勐腊

About 100km south of Měnglún, Měnglà is the last major town before the border with Laos. It's a pretty little town, sitting on the banks of the Mekong, but there isn't much reason to spend time here unless you're using it as a base from which to explore the area. If you're crossing into Laos at Móhān, you might spend the night here, though you'll probably find Móhān a bit cheaper. There's a **Bank of China** (Zhōngguó Yínháng; ☎ 8–11.30am & 3–6pm Mon–Fri) in the southern part of town if you need cash.

If you do spend the night, **Jinqiao Dajudian** (金桥大酒店; ☎ 812 4946; 73 Bèilù; s/d/tr Y40/60/80; 🍴) is convenient, being just north of the bus station. Rooms are reasonably clean, and toilets are squat-style. A nicer option right on the river is the **Green Diamond Hotel** (Lǜbǎoshí Fàndiàn; 绿宝石饭店; ☎ 670 7567; rY100; 🍴 📺), which has a good restaurant and a free breakfast buffet for guests.

Ultimately though, Měnglà is a transit town, and the bus station on its main thoroughfare is a stopping point for travellers heading into Laos. There are daily buses going to Luang Prabang (Y98, 370km, 7.30am), Nan Ta (Y36, 127km, 9am) and Meng Sai (Y36, 163km, 8am). There's a bus every other day to Vientiane (Y188, 745km, 8am), and one daily bus to Poo Chao (Y82, 320km, 10am) in Thailand. There are also six buses daily to Kūnmíng (Y232, 631km, 9am, 10.30am, 12.30pm, 3pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm) and seven daily to Pu'er (Y66, 214km, 7.30am, 8.20am, 9.10am, 10.20am, noon, 1.30pm and 3.50pm), as well as regular bus services to points around Xishuāngbǎnnà, including Jìng'hóng (Y38, 136km) and Měngbàn (Y12, 39km).

Wangtianshu Park 望天树

Meaning 'Facing Heaven Tree', this **jungle park** (admission Y60; ☎ 8am-7pm) is a protected jungle preserve with well-maintained trails winding through old-growth trees, many of which are labelled in English, Chinese and Latin. The special attraction from which the park gets its name is a three-storey, 500m-long **sky platform** (admission Y100), a series of interconnected rope and cable catwalks that traverse the park. The area surrounding the park is as beautiful as the park itself.

If you want to spend the night in the area, the **Alianya Resort** (☎ 887 6098; www.alianya.com; r from Y360; ☎ ☎) is 2km down the road.

Móhān 磨憨

The China-Laos border runs through this quiet little jungle town, so you may wind up spending the night. It's a pleasant place, with a number of inexpensive hotels and restaurants. Móhān hosts a **market** opposite the town square on the eighth day of every calendar month, with merchants from both sides of the border coming to sell handicrafts, wild game and vegetables. It's a popular local event, beginning in the early morning and lasting until around noon.

There are plenty of hotels on the main drag offering rooms from Y40 up. The newest is **Móhān Dàjiùdiàn** (磨憨大酒店; ☎ 139-8815 2967; r Y50-60), which has clean rooms with balconies and TVs. If you are hungry for Thai, **YYS Thai Restaurant** (☎ 881 1538; dishes from Y25) is just across the street and serves excellent food. Its spicy seafood soup is suspiciously napalm-like.

The border crossing into Laos is at the southern end of Móhān's main street, and operates from 8am to noon and 1pm to 5.30pm, seven days a week.

NORTHWEST YÜNNÁN

DÀLǐ 大理

☎ 0872 / pop 590,000 (incl Xiànguān)

Sandwiched between mountains and Ěrhǎi Hú (Erhai Lake), the walled town of Dàlǐ boasts classical architecture, cobblestone streets, restaurants, bars and, of course, endless travellers. And herein lies the rub: this long-time travel hot spot, the first backpacker sanctuary in China by many reckonings, has the dubious distinction of being a veritable cliché, the 'Margaritaville' of Mekong travel, if you will.

This begs the question 'is a visit to Dàlǐ worth the time?', the answer to which is purely personal. Some folks love the town, and wind up staying here for weeks, wandering in the ancient alleyways, hiking in the mountains, studying calligraphy or martial arts, or just hanging out eating banana pancakes. Others stop in for a day or two, and, finding the place fairly played out, move on to less popular parts of the province.

Orientation

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

A fair chunk of the shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants is located on Huguo Lu west of Fuxing Lu. The less touristy parts of town are in the northeast quarter.

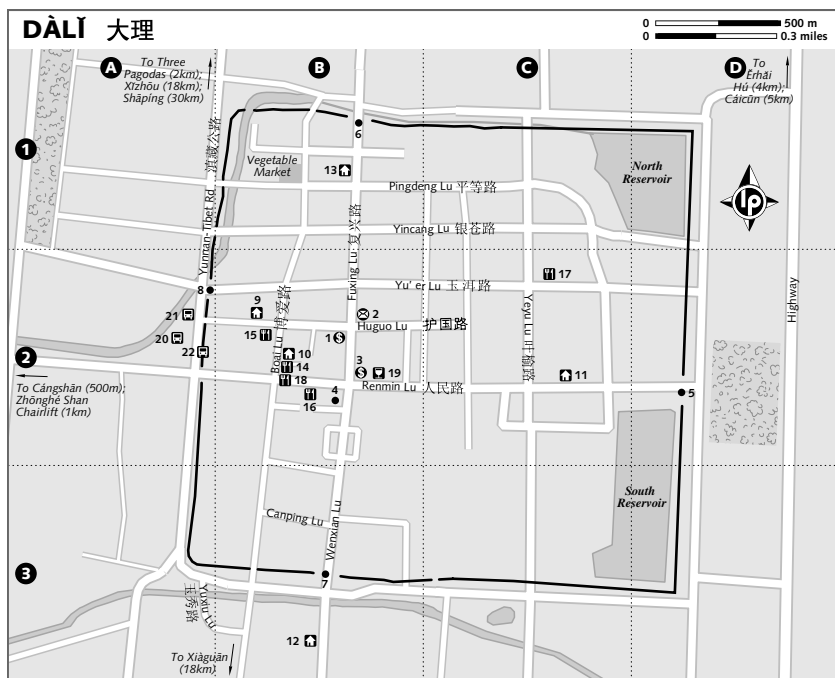
Information

All hotels and guesthouses are happy to offer travel advice and arrange tours and book tickets for guests; most also offer free internet access for guests. Wireless internet is common all around town.

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Huguo Lu & Fuxing Lu)

China Post (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; cnr Fuxing Lu & Huguo Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm)

China Telecom (cnr Fuxing Lu & Huguo Lu; internet per hr Y2; ☎ 8am-10pm)

**INFORMATION**

Bank of China 中国银行 1 B2
 China Post 中国邮政 2 B2
 China Telecom 中国电信 (see 2)
 ICBC 中国工商银行 3 B2
 Mandarin Books & CDs 五华书苑 ... 4 B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Cycling Dali (see 10)
 East Gate 东门 5 D2
 North Gate 北门 6 B1
 South Gate 南门 7 B3

West Gate 西门 8 A2
SLEEPING 
 Dali Zhonghe Ju Inn 大理中和居 ... 9 B2
 Lee's Guesthouse & Hotel 10 B2
 Liùhéyuàn Qīngnián Lúshè
 六合院青年旅社 11 C2
 MCA Hotel 12 B3
 The Hostel of the Color of Wind
 风的颜色国际青年旅舍 13 B1

EATING 

Mariusz 14 B2

Marley's Café 马丽咖啡馆 15 B2
 Seeds Vegetarian Cafe 16 B2
 Suānlüo Bóyú 酸萝卜鱼 17 C2
 Sweet Tooth 18 B2

DRINKING 

Pranja Bar 19 B2

TRANSPORT

Bus Station 汽车站 20 A2
 Buses to Train Station
 往火车站的公共汽车 21 A2
 Local Bus Station 汽车站 22 A2

ICBC (cnr Renmin Lu & Fuxing Lu) 24hr ATM; banking hours are standard

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

Sights

The **old town** of Dali is a sight in itself, though at times you may feel like you are more sight than sightseer – thanks to the high number of touts who'll approach you offering to sell you things, including ganja and trinkets, combined

with the usual Chinese tendency to stare at foreigners.

There's a fair bit of interesting architecture, some of it original and other bits re-manufactured, and plenty of shops to bop around in.

The **Three Pagodas** (Sāntǎ Sì; 三塔寺; admission incl Chongsheng Temple Y121; ☎ 8am-7pm) are among the oldest standing structures in south-western China and the definitive symbols of Dali. Keep in mind that the high admission price does not allow entrance into the pagodas themselves.

DÀLÌ INSIDE OUT

English-fluent Lee of **Cycling Dàlì** (☎ 267 1385; www.cyclingdali.com; cnr Boai Lu & Renmin Lu) is a cycling enthusiast, dog lover and all-round outdoors type. He rents bicycles (from clunkers to top-of-the-line mountain bikes), provides information, books tickets, runs two hotels and is generally the man to know. Once you're hooked up with Lee, Dàlì will be your oyster.

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. During winter, the whole town is open and discounts abound.

Lee's Guesthouse & Hotel (Lìshì Qīngnián Lùshè; ☎ 267 1385; www.cyclingdali.com; 55 Boai Lu; 博爱路 55号; dm Y15-25, r Y60-290; 🍳 📺 📺) Lee (of Cycling Dàlì, above) runs both a hostel-type guesthouse with hot showers and clean shared rooms and, a few blocks away, a lovely new hotel with bright, airy singles and doubles surrounding a leafy courtyard.

Lìuheyuán Qīngnián Lùshè (☎ 267 0660; 415 Renmin Lu; 人民路 415号; dm Y40, s & d Y80-100; 🍳 📺 📺) Very artistically designed are the rooms in this lovely place in the eastern half of the old town; each room has its own individual charms, with wall paintings done by the owner, a local artist of some renown. The dormitory area features comfy floor mats underneath small tents. There's not much else like it in Dàlì.

MCA Hotel (MCA Jiùdiàn; ☎ 267 3666; mcahouse@hotmail.com; Wenxian Lu; 文献路; r Y60-150; 🍳 📺 📺) Just a quick hop south of the South Gate, MCA caters to the backpacker and the midrange set with dorm rooms, singles and doubles. It also has a courtyard and swimming pool.

our pick **The Hostel of the Color of Wind** (Fēngde Yánsè Guōjī Qīngnián Lùshè; ☎ 267 2102; 565 Fuxing Lu; 复兴路 565号; 3-bed r Y80, s & d Y120; 🍳 📺 📺) This unusually named hostel and guesthouse is located in a courtyard-house in the less touristy chunk of the old city just by the North Gate. It offers unique and comfortable tatami-style rooms with low beds and thick quilts, along with lots of cool spaces for sitting and drinking tea. There's also a pretty courtyard filled with musical instruments, a rock garden and other lovely touches.

our pick **Dali Zhonghe Ju Inn** (Dàlì Zhōnghéjū Kèzhàn; ☎ 268 0999; http://zhonghejuinn.blog.163.com; 31 Yangren Lu; 洋人街 31号; d Y260-289; 🍳 📺 📺) Beautifully furnished rooms surround a serene Bai-style courtyard at this newly opened place on the west side of town, combining the aesthetic appeal of a traditional Ming dynasty-style inn with the comfort of a contemporary boutique hotel.

Eating & Drinking

There's no shortage of bars, cafes and other assorted watering holes in Dàlì's old town.

Marley's Café (Mǎlì Kǎféiguǎn; ☎ 267 6651; 105 Boai Lu; dishes Y5-25; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Still a cornerstone of the town. The name of this place is derived not from the famed Rastafarian, but from the owner's name, 'Ma-li', an ethnic Hui who's been serving up well-done pork-free fare and helpful advice in a just-subdued-enough environment for over a decade.

Seeds Vegetarian Cafe (72 Renmin Lu; dishes Y15-25; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The name says it all: good vegetarian food, home-baked whole-grain bread, good coffee. The cafe also sells real Lonely Planet guides, in case you want an extra copy of this one.

Mariusz (☎ 137-0866 8510; 56 Boai Lu; dishes from Y25; 🍳 lunch & dinner) Middle Eastern food, kebabs, pizza and sandwiches all prepared by a Polish expat chef. Chill out to cool tunes, German beer or Polish vodka.

Suān Luóbó Yú (☎ 135-0872 8315; 335 Yu'er Lu; 玉洱路 335号; dishes from Y28; 🍳 lunch & dinner) There are no English menus at this local favourite, just amazingly good spicy-sour fish hotpot; at Y28, the smallest one is just right for two, too much for one.

Sweet Tooth (52 Boai Lu; dessert from Y20) Serving exquisite desserts and great coffee, this charming bakery is run by hearing-impaired students from a local school for the deaf. In addition to enjoying pastries, it's also fun to learn bits of the local sign language, which

differs from both American and International Sign Language.

Pranja Bar (Niǎobā; ☎ 267 6650; 26 Renmin Lu)

This cool bar with a loft space and courtyard opened in the summer of 2008, and features coffee, tea and alcoholic libations of all sorts.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Xiàguān's airport is connected to Kūnmíng by several daily flights, as well as Jīnghóng and Shangri-la. A taxi from the airport to the old town of Dàlì should cost around ¥70.

The airport itself is about 15km northeast of Xiàguān.

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 p456.

From the bus stop near the West Gate in Dàlì, there are express buses to Kūnmíng (¥106, five hours, 9.30am, 10.30am, 4.30pm and 9pm). A slow bus for Kūnmíng also leaves daily at 8am (¥65). Buses to Lijiāng (¥30 to ¥50, three hours, every 30 minutes from 7.30am to 7.20pm) also leave from here.

A bus also leaves from here for Shāpíng every Monday morning (¥5, one hour, 9.30am) for the market. At all other times, local buses run regularly to Shāpíng, Xizhōu and other local destinations from opposite the bus station in Dàlì.

TRAIN

The overnight sleeper train to Kūnmíng is comfy, but be prepared to arrive in Kūnmíng

before sun-up. See p456 for details on getting to Dàlì/Xiàguān from Kūnmíng.

Getting Around

From Dàlì, a taxi to Xiàguān airport takes 45 minutes and costs around ¥80; to Xiàguān's train station it costs ¥30.

Bikes are the best way to get around (¥10 to ¥20 per day). Most of the guesthouses and several other places on Boai Lu rent bikes, but if you're planning on doing any serious riding, you'll want to splurge on a better bike from Lee at Cycling Dàlì (p469).

Bus 4 runs between Dàlì and central Xiàguān (¥1.50, 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 Dàlì to Xiàguān's train station.

AROUND DÀLÌ

Markets

Noisy and colourful, a traditional market in Yúnnán brings together craftspeople and merchants from all over the area; as such, they're great places to get a good overview of the various tribal groups that make up this part of the province, to try local dishes, and to buy locally made items. Traditional markets tend to start early and go on throughout the day, and Dàlì is an excellent base from which to check out at least a couple of these. The markets traditionally follow the lunar calendar, but since the advent of tourism in China, regular schemes have been set up so that travellers have the chance to experience one nearly every day of the week.

XIÀGUĀN 下关

Many a traveller headed to Dàlì has wound up in Xiàguān by mistake. Xiàguān is the capital of Dàlì prefecture, and sometimes called 'Dàlì City' on buses, maps and tickets. But unless you're looking for the train station, the regional **Public Security Bureau** (PSB; Gōngānjú; 21 Tianbao Jie; ☎ 8-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), which handles *all* visa extensions for the prefecture, or the nearest Walmart, Xiàguān probably isn't the place you're looking for. The old city, or Dàlì Gǔchéng, is around 15km north.

Some of the long-distance buses take you to Xiàguān, and if you train or fly here you'll definitely pass through. To get to Dàlì Gǔchéng, 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 will take you to the gates of the old city (¥1.50, 30 minutes) until around 8pm. After that, you should be able to get a taxi for under ¥60.

Among the markets within striking distance of town are Monday's market in **Shāpíng** (about 30km away), Tuesday's in **Shuāngláng** (about 15km) and the Friday market in **Yòusuǒ** (about 63km), said to be the largest in Yúnnán. There's a daily afternoon market in **Zhōuchéng** (25km away) and a morning market in **Xìzhōu** (18km). Both of the latter towns are particularly worth visiting, and doable in a single well-spent day.

Many of the cafes and hotels in Dàlì offer market trips, including a driver and sometimes an interpreter for a few hundred yuan. More adventurous trekkers can go on their own, either by public bus or bicycle; Lee at Cycling Dàlì (p469) can help you sort it all out.

Ērhǎi Hú 洱海湖

The seventh-largest freshwater lake in China, Ērhǎi Hú is surrounded by old villages and temples, and with mountains on both sides the scenery is spectacular. The lake itself, alas, is fairly polluted from decades of farming fertiliser, so swim at your own risk.

The best way to explore the area is either by renting a bike or zipping about on one of the many ferries that criss-cross the lake. A great bike trip is from Dàlì to Shāpíng and it can be done in a day. Though picturesque, the main lakeside road is a bit congested, so if you're interested in having a relaxed ride, the side roads are your best bet. Roads now encircle the lake so it is possible to do a loop (or partial loop) of the lake by mountain bike.

The closest lakeside village to Dàlì is **Cáicūn** (Y2 on minibus 2), east of the old town by a few kilometres. The village is worth a stroll, and you can head over to **Wàsè** by ferry; the price of the ferry is a ridiculous Y150 per person, though sometimes you can talk your way down to as low as Y100. A cheaper way to get to the market town is via taxi from Xiàguān.

Cāngshān 苍山

With 18 peaks, an excellent variety of flora and fauna, and astounding views of Dàlì, Ērhǎi Hú and beyond, this mountain is a must for anyone visiting Dàlì. Numerous hiking trails wind their way up and around the mountain, passing shrines, waterfalls and a few beautiful temples. Offering quirky Buddhas and prognosticating monks, **Zhōnghé Temple** (Zhōnghé Sì) sits at the end of an arduous one-hour hike from Dàlì's West Gate, and is more than half the way between town and some of the higher

GETTING OUT OF THE TOURIST FLOW WITH SMART FISH

The brainchild of Chinese artist Fenghua Guo and French transplant Jean Yves Tollu, **Smart Fish Studio** (Zifēiyú Gōngzuòshì; ☎ 135-0872 3270; www.smart-fish.cn) is an artistic collective designed to promote traditional Han and local minority culture. Its headquarters are in a traditional Dàlì building close to the centre of Dàlì's old town, and house a small library, cultural centre and yoga studio. Smart Fish organises Chinese, calligraphy and music appreciation lessons, and tea tasting workshops. It also promotes local artists and craftspeople and introduces them to travellers. Call for more information, and check its website for up-to-date happenings.

peaks. If you're too lazy to hike, the **chairlift** (one-way/return Y30/50) will let you off quite close to the temple.

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 Dàlì-bound bus. The **cable car** (one way/return Y52/82) between the two temples saves time.

Of course, you can always spend the night at **Higherland Inn** (☎ 0872-266 1599; www.higherland.com; dm/s/d Y30/70/70). At 2000m above sea level, the inn offers stunning views and a quiet refuge from the tourist bustle of Dàlì down below. Rooms are clean and simple, a funky vibe pervades the common areas, and electric blankets are provided on cold nights.

SHĀXĪ 沙溪

☎ 0872 / pop 25,000

Off the beaten path and largely undiscovered by casual tourists, Shāxī refers to a beautiful valley that's spread out between the Huácóngshān (华丛山) and Shíbāoshān (石宝山) mountain ranges. The valley is home to a series of small villages. It is from these villages, centred on the market town of Sīdēng (寺登街), that your exploration of this truly remarkable area can begin. The valley is home to approximately 25,000 people, most

SHĀXĪ: NEW KID ON THE TOURIST MAP

At the forefront of bringing the culture, history, landscape and people of Shāxī to the world at large, tour guide and innkeeper Wu Yunxin took a few moments to chat with us about Shāxī's place on China's tourist map.

How did you get into bringing travellers to Shāxī? In 2001 I went to Dàlǐ for Labour Day and met a Japanese traveller who, after finding out that I lived in Shāxī, asked me about the stone carvings in the temple at Shìbǎoshān. So I brought him back with me. It was a huge thing for the locals – they all came out to see a 'real Japanese person'. That's how rare visitors to Shāxī were just eight years ago!

With visitors so rare, what made you open a guesthouse? Our Japanese guest stayed about a week; this planted the idea in my mind about opening a guesthouse. At first, I opened my home, more or less informally, to travellers for the next two years. It wasn't profitable, but I learned a lot from the people who came to visit Shāxī.

What kind of traveller is drawn to Shāxī? Trekkers, definitely, looking to visit the mountains surrounding our valley. Also, cultural travellers wanting to experience the traditional life of an indigenous agricultural society in a beautiful setting.

How has the area changed since you first arrived? Tourism has changed people's daily lives in some ways. Shāxī people can afford televisions, which they didn't have before. As more travellers have come, more guesthouses and restaurants catering to guests have opened. There's also been a restoration project on some of our historical buildings, a joint project with scholars from Switzerland.

What do you see as some of the potential benefits of a regular influx of tourism? There are a lot of potential benefits for local people if tourism grows in sustainable ways, because we will

of them farmers belonging to the Bai minority of southwest China, though a small number of Han Chinese and members of other tribal groups also call the area home.

Sights & Activities

It would be easy to mistake **Sidēng Village** for a film set for a Ming dynasty period piece (which may account for the presence of that film crew scouting the place around the time of our visit). The centre of the village is **Xingjiao Temple** (Xingjiào Sì; 兴教寺; admission Y20), a restored structure with a history spanning back nearly 600 years. The temple contains two original buildings dating to Emperor Yongle, and there's a surviving fresco painted by famed Bai artist Zhang Bao.

Across from the Xingjiao Temple is the beautifully restored **Sidēng Theatre** (Sidēng Gūxítái; 寺登古戏台). Take the time to climb steep wooden steps up to the very top pavilion of the theatre, where you'll find the carved wooden statue of Kui Xing, a deity whose areas of influence include culture and examinations. Before the statue sits a pile of small banknotes, placed there by parents eager to curry favour with the god in the hope that he'll look favourably upon their child's current exam-taking process. Admission to the theatre is included in the temple's ticket price.

A hike into the gorgeous 'Stone Treasure Mountains', or **Shìbǎoshān**, offers more than picture-perfect views of the valley below; it also provides the chance to visit amazing temple complexes featuring ancient devotional art. Over 1300 years old, the Shìbǎoshān **rock carvings** feature images of the Bodhisattva Guanyin and other Buddhist art carved into the rock face, evidence of the spread of Mahayana Buddhism into Yúnnán from Tibet. Expect to pay Y20 for admission into Shìbǎoshān's temples. A day spent hiking through the mountains will bring you past many of these holy spots. Though you probably won't run into more than a few other tourists, you'll definitely meet up with monks, and possibly even monkeys.

Those looking for longer **treks** can get information about trips and trails of between two and three days from Wu Yunxin at Dragonfly Bed & Breakfast (opposite). One of the best treks in the area follows an ancient salt-trade route deep into the mountains, passing through moss-draped forests, tiny villages, mountain hot springs and unparalleled views. Accommodation and meals can be arranged at **Mǎpíngguān** (马坪关), a Bai village roughly six hours from Shāxī.

Sleeping & Eating

Lǎomǎdiàn (老马店; ☎ 472 2666; Sidēng Village; dm Y60, s & d Y450) This restored Bai home has

have a better environmental protecting system, increasing incomes, better health and security systems, better education opportunities and so on.

What might be some of the pitfalls? It's a fine line between some place being traveller friendly and over-touristy. The local government has to make a long-term plan for balancing things, avoiding pitfalls such as over-construction, over-charging travellers and over-commercialising in general. These are the most dangerous pitfalls for growing tourist areas, because when more and more people come, local governments can easily get too confident about the future and make mistakes.

Many feel that nearby Dàli and Lijiāng have become way too touristy. Do you think Shāxi runs the same risk? The risk is definitely there, both because it's such a great place and because it's close to both Dàli and Lijiāng. As Shāxi becomes more well known, we need to keep things from getting too out of control. But we also have a good opportunity to learn from examples in Dàli and Lijiāng, to learn from their successes and mistakes in order to maintain a balance between enough and too much.

A Lonely Planet guide to China has fallen through a wormhole from the future. What do you hope our 2020 write-up on Shāxi says? 'This remote and beautiful valley between Dàli and Lijiāng offers amazing scenery, traditional food and kind local people. Highlights of your visit should include a trip to the Shībāoshān rock carvings, the best place to learn about the Nanzhao kingdom of the 7th to 9th centuries. Shāxi also offers some beautiful and pristinely kept mountain trails. Though tourist friendly, Shāxi is definitely not over-touristy, making it one of the best places to visit and stay in Yúnnán.'

Duàn Village resident Wu Yunxin is the owner of Dragonfly Bed & Breakfast (below)

comfortable rooms ranging from rather posh singles and doubles with restored antique furniture (and heated beds) to three-bed dorm rooms. Set meals, a curious combination of dishes from both local and Taiwanese traditions (the owners are from Taiwan), are offered from Y60.

Pingchāng Rénjiā (平常人家; ☎ 133-9872 3490; Sidēng Village; s/stē Y80/200) Though the name means 'Ordinary Family Home', little is common about this restored 100-year-old-plus Bai home-cum-boutique hotel, which features a dazzling array of restored antique furnishings, a glowing stone-and-neon floor in the downstairs bar, and more charm than you can shake a buggy whip at.

our pick **Dragonfly Bed & Breakfast** (Qingting Wū; 蜻蜓屋; ☎ 135-7785 1712; shaxi-travel@hotmail.com; Duàn Village; 段家登; r Y150; 📶 📺) Dragonfly occupies a stunningly beautiful traditional walled courtyard complex in a small village 3km from Sidēng. Gorgeously furnished, the complex is comprised of the Wu family's two-storey home, a one-storey building containing five comfortable guest rooms (each with bathroom, shower and individual backyard) and a magnificent Bai-style theatre and temple dating back to the early Qing dynasty.

Guests of the Wu family enjoy full use of the facilities, including a common

area with TV and DVD and the sunny courtyard looking out over the valley. Traditional Bai meals are cooked by Ms Wu, one of the best chefs in the valley, and English-fluent innkeeper Wu Yunxin provides a variety of services, including in-town guiding, trek leading and introductions to local villagers of note. He also offers longer treks into the mountains, introductions to smaller villages with home-stays of their own, and traditional musical performances in his home.

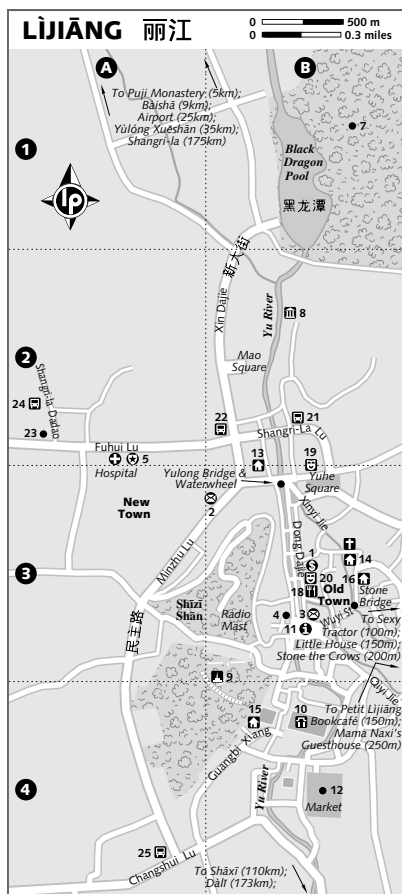
Getting There & Away

Shāxi is 30km from the nearest city, Jiànchuān (劍川). At first glance the small city, roughly equidistant from Lijiāng and Dàli, seems to have little to hold travellers, though if you take the time to wander away from the main road you'll find some impressive – and gloriously unrestored – old architecture. Most buses plying the Dàli-Lijiāng route pass through Jiànchuān. From Jiànchuān, a taxi to Shāxi costs about Y60.

Lijiāng 丽江

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

Lijiāng's maze of cobbled streets, rickety old wooden buildings and gushing canals make it one of the most visited sites in northern



Yünnán, but don't let the crowds and jaded expats discourage you. Get up early enough and it will be just you, Lijiang and a few bun sellers.

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 new town is set

INFORMATION

Bank of China 中国银行	1	B3
China Post 中国邮政	2	B3
China Post 中国邮政	3	B3
China Telecom 中国电信	(see 2)	
Mandarin Books & CDs 五华书苑	4	B3
Public Security Bureau 公安局	5	A2
Sifang Jié 四方街	6	B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Black Dragon Pool Park	7	B1
Dongba Research Institute 东巴研究所	8	B2
Looking at the Past Pavilion 望古楼	9	B3
Mu Family Mansion 木氏土司府	10	B4
Sifang Jié 四方街	11	B3
Zhōngyì Shìchǎng 忠义市场	12	B4

SLEEPING

Grand Lijiang Hotel 丽江格兰大酒店	13	B2
International Youth Hostel Lijiang 丽江老谢车马店	14	B3
Memory Inn 忆栈	15	B4
Zen Garden Hotel 瑞和园酒店	16	B3

EATING

Highland Gale 高原蜂憩园	17	B2
Prague Café 布拉格咖啡馆	18	B3

ENTERTAINMENT

Highland Gale 高原蜂憩园	19	B2
Naxi Orchestra	20	B3

TRANSPORT

Bus Station 客运站	21	B2
Buses to Baisha 到白沙的班车	22	B2
CAAC 中国民航	23	A2
Express Bus Station 高铁客运站	24	A2
Long-Distance Bus Station 长途汽车站	25	A4

up in a grid, much like many other Chinese towns. To avoid getting lost in the new town, stay to the west of Shizi Shan (Lion Hill), the green hump in the middle of town topped by Looking at the Past Pavilion. To the east of this is the old town, a map of which resembles a charcoal drawing of a web created by a spider on LSD. Carry your hotel's name card on you and use it to strike up conversations with strangers. As you wander, you'll experience the wonder that is ancient Lijiang, and eventually find your way back to your hotel.

If you're dead set on actually orienting yourself in the old town, detailed and sometimes semi-accurate folding maps are available. Do not attempt to use the maps set up on every corner, which, with their seemingly random orientation (some are north up, others east up, still others south or west up...), are clearly designed to entrap an invading army.

Instead, envision the old town as looking like a gigantic fried egg, on top of which you are a tiny, tiny ant. The 'yolk' is a central square called Sifāng Jiē (四方街), which is kind of in the middle, but closer to the western end. All roads lead there eventually, and listings in this section will often make reference to the square (as in 'south of Sifāng Jiē').

Though all of Lijiāng's alleys are well-beaten, the southern part of the old town (around Zhōngyì Shìchǎng, the old market square) tends to feel a bit more like a regular Chinese town (as opposed to the Disney version).

Information

Lijiāng's many cafes and backpacker inns are your best source for information on the area.

There's a wealth of travel reception centres all over the old town offering a dearth of English competence.

Many of the cafes in the old town have International Direct Dial (IDD) lines. Nearly every cafe offers free wireless internet, and many have computers for ¥5 per hour. There are dozens of internet places in the new town.

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Dong Dajie)

China Post (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Minzhu Lu; ☎ 8am-8pm) Offers Express Mail Service. Another branch is located in the old town, just north of Sifāng Jiē.

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

EcoTour China (☎ 131-0872 1216; www.ecotourchina.com; 51 Yangren Jie) The Lijiāng branch of this very cool travel company arranges tours, volunteer opportunities and Tibet travel permits. Its website is very detailed.

Mandarin Books & CDs (Lijiāng Wúhuā Shūyuán; Xin Dajie) Has a fantastic choice of English books and maps on Lijiāng 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) In the new town; reportedly very speedy with visa extensions. So be nice.

Dangers & Annoyances

The crowded old town is a pickpocket's dream, so mind your valuables. There has been a small handful of reports of solo travellers being mugged or otherwise harassed when walking alone at night in isolated areas of the old town.

Sights

Criss-crossed by canals, bridges and a maze of narrow streets, the **old town** (古城) is the reason why people come to Lijiāng. The town's web of artery-like canals once supplied the city's drinking water.

Zhōngyì Shìchǎng is the old town's actual old market, a snacker's paradise and well worth visiting; you'll find it in the far south of town.

Now acting as a sentinel of sorts for the town, the **Looking at the Past Pavilion** (Wàngǔ Lóu; admission ¥25) was raised for tourists at a cost of over one million yuan. It's famed for a unique design using dozens of four-storey pillars – unfortunately these were culled from northern Yúnnán old-growth forests. Still, from here you get superb eyeviews of the old town's misty mornings.

The former home of a Naxi chieftain, the **Mu Family Mansion** (Mùshìtǔ Tǔsīfǔ; 木氏土司府; admission ¥45; ☎ 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.

On the northern edge of town is the **Black Dragon Pool Park** (Hēilóngtán Gōngyuán; 黑龙潭公园; Xin Dajie; admission ¥60; ☎ 7am-7pm). Aside from strolling around the pool and getting a nice view of Yùlóng Xuěshān (Jade Dragon Snow Mountain), you can visit the **Dongba Research Institute** (Dōngbā Wénhuà Yánjiūshì). Trails lead straight up **Xiàng 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.

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 Dàlì 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 (Māma Nàxī Bīnguǎn; ☎ 510 0700; 78 Wenhua La, Wuyi Jie; 五一街王家庄巷78号; dm Y15-20, 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. Her success has turned the one-time guesthouse into triplets, each overseen by Mama herself.

International Youth Hostel Lijiang (Lìjiāng Lǎoxié Chēmàdiàn; ☎ 511 6118; 25 Jishan Alley, Xinyi Jie; 新义街, 积善巷 25号; dm Y25, s & d Y45-125; 🍴 📺) Well-kept rooms in a variety of configurations make this hostel a time-honoured favourite.

our pick **Memory Inn** (Yìzhàn; ☎ 518 6099; www.memoryinn.cn; Guangbi Alley, 25 Guangyi Street; 光义街光碧巷25号; s/d incl breakfast Y100/160; 🍴 📺) This lovely place on the relaxed southwest-ern edge of the old town has two buildings, upper and lower, both surrounding beautifully serene courtyards. Rooms are comfortable, well furnished and definitely good value for the price. The outstanding views offered by the upper building are well worth the climb.

Grand Lijiang Hotel (Lìjiāng Gélán Dàjiūdiàn; ☎ 512 5878; s/d Y360/450; 🍴 📺) Though lacking the old-fashioned charm of hotels in the old town, the Grand Lijiang has the advantage of being right on the town's edge, just across from the water wheel, and thus, easy to find.

Zen Garden Hotel (Rùihé Yuán Jiūdiàn; ☎ 518 9799; www.zengardenhotel.com; 36 Xingren La, Wuyi Jie; 五一街兴仁下段36号; d Y500, wedding r Y1200, ste Y2400; 🍴 📺) This beautiful hotel (run by a Naxi teacher and decorated with help from her artist brother) has undergone mitosis, splitting into two equally gorgeous, museumlike branches offering sumptuously decorated rooms fit for an emperor. The newer one, on Lion Hill, offers glittery night views of old Lijiang below. Hotel staff will cheerfully meet you to bring you to either.

Eating & Drinking

Lijiang has a plethora of restaurants and bars, offering everything from genuine Naxi items such as *bābā* (粑粑, thick flatbreads of wheat, served plain or stuffed with meats, vegetables or sweets) and dried yak meat, to excellent Chinese dishes from all corners of the Middle Kingdom, to good old backpacker fare including pizza and banana pancakes. In short, sustenance is not a problem in Lijiang. Following are just a few suggestions you might wish to check out.

Prague Café (18 Mishi Xiang; meals from Y15; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) An old favourite, the Naxi breakfast, will have you set for Tiger Leaping Gorge. With a great atmosphere and a loyal crowd, this cafe also has a book exchange, magazines and internet access (Y5 per hour).

Petit Lijiang Bookcafé (☎ 511 1255; 50 Chongren Xiang, Qiyi Jie; dishes from Y15; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) 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.

Stone the Crows (☎ 158-9438 4361; 130 Wuyi Jie; pizzas from Y30; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Run by an Irishman named John, Stone the Crows is the pub for those in the know looking for pizza and beer with the best night views Lijiang has to offer.

Sexy Tractor (Xìnggǎn Tuōlājī; ☎ 510 5663; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) In addition to having a fine selection of imported beers, ales and ciders, the good folks at Sexy Tractor also run Sunshine Snail, a nonprofit project designed to increase rural children's access to education and promote environmental awareness in the countryside. A cool bar with a strange name and free internet run by very cool people. What more could you ask for?

Little House (Xiǎo Fángzi; ☎ 136-2888 5856; 130 Wuyi Jie; meals from Y30; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place has good coffee and snacks served in a whimsical environment complete with DVDs, guitars, free internet and even a Playstation. Eva, Little House's owner, speaks good English.

Entertainment

The **Naxi Orchestra** (Nàxī 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.

Less well known – though no less worthwhile – are the nightly Tibetan performances offered at Highland Gale (opposite).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Lijiāng's airport is 25km east of town. Tickets can be booked at the **Civil Aviation Administration of China** (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 516 1289; cnr Fuhui Lu & Shangri-la Dadao; ✈ 8.30am-9pm). Most hotels in the old town also offer an air-ticket booking service.

From Lijiāng there are oodles of daily flights to Kūnmíng (Y660) and, in season, to other Chinese cities.

BUS

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

From the express bus station there are daily departures to Kūnmíng (Y171 to Y193, 8am, 9am, 10am, 11am and 12.30pm). Two sleeper buses also leave daily for Kūnmíng at 8.30pm. One terminates at Kūnmíng's west station, the other at its south station. Buses also leave 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 Kūnmíng (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 office 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 Mama Naxi's Guesthouse (opposite) and the International Youth Hostel Lijiāng (opposite) from Y15 to Y30 per day, depending on quality.

AROUND LIJIANG

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

Monasteries

The monasteries around Lijiāng are Tibetan in origin and belong to the Karmapa (Red Hat) sect. **Puji Monastery** (Pǔjì Sì; 普济寺) is around 5km northwest of Lijiāng (on a trail that passes the two ponds to the north of town).

West of Báishā lies the remains of the **Fuguo Monastery** (Fùguó Sì; 富国寺), once the largest of Lijiāng'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 (Yùfēng Sì; 玉峰寺; admission Y80) is on a hillside about 5km past Báishā. The last 3km of the track requires a steep climb, followed by a steep entrance fee. At the foot of Yúlóng Xuěshān, 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.

HIGHLAND GALE

Every once in a while you come across a place that spans several categories of classification. **Highland Gale** (Gāoyuán Fēngqiyuán; 高原蜂憩园; ☎ 135-0888 6309; <http://highlandgale.com>; 2nd fl, 35A Yuhe Guangchang; 丽江古城玉河广场A区35号二楼) is one such place. Located near the northeastern entrance to the old town (just across from the Water Wheel), Highland Gale is a Tibetan cultural centre and a resource centre for all things Tibetan (and Lisu, and some other rarer ethnic groups such as Pumi, Qiang and Nu). It's also a performance centre and Tibetan dance hall, offering nightly performances beginning at around 8pm and lasting until midnight, featuring the best of traditional dance and some of the best of Tibetan and Lisu songs in greater Lijiāng.

In addition to these functions, it is an exceptionally good restaurant, employing two of the old town's finest chefs and serving up Tibetan, Naxi and Chinese dishes including yak hotpot, yak-cheese rolls, corn biscuits, sandwiches with homemade bread, and excellent vegetarian fare.

Highland Gale is owned and managed by American-born Molly Riley. Molly also acts as the go-to person for travellers interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the people and places that make up greater Lijiāng's cultural patchwork, beyond the usual tourist spots.

Báishā 白沙

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

While in Báishā, why not visit Dr Ho? Everyone else has, from travel writer Bruce Chatwin to Monty Python alumni John Cleese and Michael Palin, propelling this ‘Taoist physician in the Jade Dragon Mountains of Lijiāng’ (as Chatwin described the doctor) into a strange and self-perpetuating worldwide renown. Dr Ho will offer you special herbal tea and regale you with tales of himself. Visual aids may be employed. After you’ve heard all there is to hear, and been shown stacks of newspaper clippings sealed in plastic, the doctor will perform a diagnosis on you and make sound health recommendations, then he’ll prepare some herbal compounds for you to take away. The clinic is run by donation, so give what you see fit.

Almost directly opposite Dr Ho’s clinic is **Xiāngcǔnlǚ Café** (☎ 136-8876 4409; freebirdsky@163

.com), a cool restaurant and chill-out spot owned by Tibetan guide Nongbu, who also organises tours around the area. Stop in for coffee, food and travel advice.

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

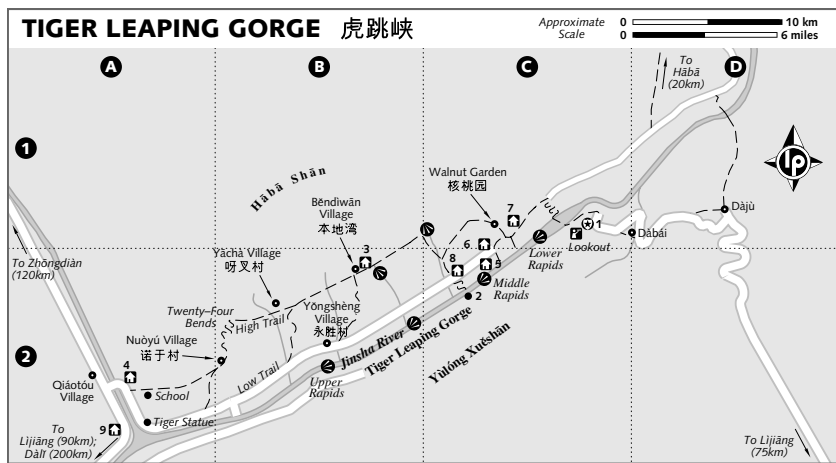
TIGER LEAPING GORGE 虎跳峡

☎ 0887

Yúnnán’s original trek, Tiger Leaping Gorge (Hùtiào Xiá) is still considered a traveller’s rite of passage, and with good reason. 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 mountaintops of Hábā Shān (Haba Mountain) to the west and Yùlóng Xuěshān to the east. It’s preternaturally lovely pretty much everywhere. Admission to the gorge is Y50.

Dangers & Annoyances

File a trek through Tiger Leaping Gorge under the category ‘things that probably won’t kill you but could’. Despite its popularity, the trek is not to be taken lightly, even by

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Tina's Guest House 中峡旅店..... 8 C2

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彝香大酒店..... 9 A2

those in good physical shape. 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 paths, in particular on the low road. At least half a dozen people – including a few foreign travellers – have died in the gorge, and there have been a couple of reports of solo travellers being harassed along the trail.

Check with cafes 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 sunscreen and lip balm.

Gorge Trek

There are two trails: the higher trail (known as the **Twenty-Four Bends Path**) and the lower. While the higher one is easily the more beautiful of the two (much of the lower one has you sharing a newly paved road with cars and tour buses) the lower one offers a number of opportunities for hiking down to the river itself.

To get to the high road from **Qiáotóu Village**, cross through the toll gate and walk about 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 the guesthouses of **Bēndiwān Village** or a strenuous eight hours to make it up and down again to the lower trail at **Walnut Garden**.

Should you wish to stay up high, there is a number of guesthouses along the trail from which you can enjoy some of the most spectacular views on the planet. Every now and again you'll run across a hiker or two who've wound up so entranced that they've stayed for days. On-trail guesthouses are usually pretty social places offering food, beer and nightly campfires. There are several smaller and well-marked trails that lead from upper to lower trail before the main one going into Walnut Garden.

The main town along the road (about 1½ hours from Bēndiwān Village) is Walnut Garden, where you'll find a wider selection of guesthouses and hotels, as well as a few restaurants. Spread out along the road, the centre of Walnut Garden is a high arch bridge crossing over a particularly stunning area where a smaller gorge meets the main one.

Most travellers concentrate the majority of their gorge time on the higher trail, but below Walnut Garden there are some excellent trails leading down to the middle rapids and **Tiger Leaping Stone** (from where the gorge gets its name; as the story goes, a tiger once used the stone as a jumping-off point for a cross-Yangtze leap). No matter which trail you take, you'll be asked at the top for Y10 to use the trail (and asked again on the way back, if you happen to ascend on a different path). As you descend into the gorge, through bamboo forests and over rocky, boulder-strewn paths, keep in mind that the trails, the rebar ladders spiked into the cliff faces and the platforms and resting areas were all provided by people living in Walnut Garden. So when locals hit you up here and there for Y10 for using the trails, be gracious.

From Walnut Garden, it's about a four- to six-hour hike – and two ferries – to the gorge exit at **Dàjù**. Most trekkers head back to Qiáotóu (where they've left most of their gear, as Qiáotóu's hotels and guesthouses offer storage service to hikers) to spend the night or head on to Lijiāng or Shangri-la.

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 will offer a car to take you into Dàjù for Y20, avoiding the dull 1½-hour walk along the road.

Sleeping & Eating

Most visitors spend at least one night at Qiáotóu, the village at the gorge's western entrance. Not a particularly interesting town, Qiáotóu has several restaurants and hotels along the main drag. All of Qiáotóu's hotels offer luggage storage for guests doing the trek. All of the guesthouses in the gorge and on the trail have restaurants and there are a number of places to buy snacks and bottled water along the way.

QIÁOTÓU VILLAGE

Jane's Guesthouse (☎ 880 6570; janetibetgh@hotmail.com; dm Y20, s & d Y50; 🍽️ 📺) In business for six years, Jane is one of the gorge's true characters, with all the low-down on the trek. The guesthouse's restaurant is a good place to meet returning trekkers and get fortified before your own hike.

Yixiang Grand Hotel (Yíxiāng Dàjiūdiàn; ☎ 880 6168; d Y120-200; 🍽️) The first hotel on the main drag you see coming in from the south, Yixiang is fairly upscale for the area, offering bathrooms with tubs for a post-hike soak. Bargaining is possible during the low season.

UPPER TRAIL

Halfway Lodge (Zhōngtú Kèzhàn; Bēndiwān; dm Y25) This is a fine place to make camp on the trail. Once a simple home to a guy, collecting medicinal herbs, and his family, it's now a busy – but cosy and well-run – operation.

Sean's Spring Guesthouse (Shānquán Kèzhàn; ☎ 880 6300; www.tigerleapinggorge.com; dm Y25) A TLG favourite, Sean's is the in spot for on-the-trail socialising. It has electric blankets, serves food, and its website offers helpful tips on the trek, as well as the option to pre-pay rooms (thus assuring that you'll have a bed even in the peak season).

WALNUT GARDEN

Tina's Guest House (Zhōngxiá Lǚdiàn; ☎ 820 2258; dm Y25, s & d from Y120) Just south of the bridge is where you'll find this newly renovated hotel and hostel. Tina's has lovely rooms and an excellent restaurant overlooking the gorge and river below.

Sandy's Guest House (Tiāndì Kēcān; ☎ 820 2238; s Y20-80) The cheapest rooms here are plain and simple, featuring Chinese toilets; more expensive ones have great views and hot showers. The owner also operates a very simple guesthouse down at the bottom of the gorge itself.

Tibet Guest House (Xizàng Kēcān; ☎ 820 2614, 131-1690 2773; s/d/tr Y40/50/60) North of the arch, this pretty little inn features simple, clean rooms with furniture made of fragrant wood, and windows facing out over the gorge. Ms Lu, the owner, is also the town taxi driver, and will be glad to deliver you to Qiáotóu post-hike, or pick you up there with advance notice.

Getting There & Away

From Lijiāng, most people take a Shangri-la-bound bus (Y20, 2½ hours, 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 (Y20), buses start running through from Shangri-

la around 9am. The last one rolls through around 7.40pm. The last bus to Shangri-la passes 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 to Dàjù. From Dàjù to Lijiāng, buses leave at 7.30am and 1.30pm.

From Shangri-la, hop on a Lijiāng-bound bus and get off at Qiáotóu (Y25).

If you aren't into doing the main hike, you can catch a shuttle bus from Qiáotóu to the main viewpoint 10km away or call up Ms Lu at the Tibet Guest House (left) and ask for a lift from town to Walnut Garden.

SHANGRI-LA/XIANGGELILA

香格里拉

☎ 0887 / pop 130,000 (Shangri-la County)

Shangri-la: idyllic, mythical land high in the mountains of Yúnnán, or clever invention dreamed up by the tourism industry? Shall we say some from column A and some from column B?

Sometime in the 1990s, some folks in the Chinese tourist ministry – realising that the town formerly (and still, on many maps and buses) called Zhōngdiàn (中甸) resembled the idyllic place described in James Hilton's book – decided to rename the surrounding area Shangri-la. It was a brilliant marketing strategy, lending the place instant tourist cred. The name change occurred in 2001 (though many Chinese still call the city Zhōngdiàn, and local Tibetans often use the Tibetan name, Gyalthang).

Prior to this, the town was a sleepy frontier, known only to a few travellers. Nowadays, Shangri-la seems to be girding its collective loins to become the next Lijiāng, though whether this will happen in the next two years or five isn't certain.

Like Lijiāng, the old town is filled with guesthouses, hostels and cafes where pizza and yak-butter tea are listed side by side on the menu.

But cynicism aside, Shangri-la, located in an idyllic valley, with winding stone streets and wooden buildings with beautiful, intricately carved eaves and tiled roofs, does live up to its name.

Though crowded in summer, from autumn onwards things slowly wind down, and if you come in the winter you'll have the place almost to yourself.

Orientation

Shangri-la is divided into old and new towns, with the former being located at the southern end of the latter. A winding, car-free ramble of cobblestone streets, temples and traditional Tibetan buildings, the old town is where most visitors to Shangri-la end up spending most of their time. Some of the alleys in the old town are named, while others are not; to further complicate matters in this town of shifting nomenclature, many of the street names (in both old and new towns) are currently in the process of being changed from Chinese to Tibetan. However, the town is small, so knowing the name of any particular place is enough to get you around.

The main north-south artery of the new town is still, as of this writing, called by the very Chinese-sounding Changzheng Lu – ‘Long March Road’.

Information

Shangri-la's cafes and backpacker inns are your best source of information on the area. There are a number of internet cafes in the new town, and a few of the cafes in the old town offer internet access for Y5 per hour. Several of the hotels and cafes also have free wireless internet.

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; Changzheng Lu)

Across from Paradise Hotel, this branch has an ATM and can change foreign currency.

Kevin's Trekker Inn (Lóngmén Kèzhàn; ☎ 822 8178; www.kevintrekkerinn.com; 138 Dawa Lu) English-speaking Kevin is a wealth of information on all things Shangri-la.

Post Office (Yóujú; 18 Changzheng Lu)

Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjú; 72

Changzheng Lu; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Can do visa extensions.

Tibet Cafe (Xizàng Kāfēiwū; www.shangbala.org) Just west of the old town; provides information to visitors and arranges Tibetan visas as well as tours both around Shangri-la and into Tibet.

Dangers & Annoyances

At around 3280m above sea level, Shangri-la is definitely high enough to require some altitude adjustment for folks coming in from the lowlands. Wear sunblock, drink plenty of water and save the long hiking or biking trips for the second or third day – especially if you've flown in from closer to sea level.

As for annoyances, the hills surrounding Shangri-la are teeming with yaks; *don't annoy them*.

Sights

Shangri-la's charming **old town** feels as mystical as its name suggests. You'll want to spend at least the better part of an afternoon wandering the winding alleyways beneath the Tibetan prayer flags slung between rooftop and stupa-tip.

The centre of the old town is **Guishan Park** (Guīshān Gōngyuán; 龟山公园), a small hill on top of which you'll find the world's largest prayer wheel, the auspiciously named **Auspicious Stone Pillar** (Jíxiáng Shènglìchuāng; 吉祥胜利幢). At 23.8m tall and weighing over 100 tonnes, the magnificent golden structure does indeed turn, though it usually takes eight worshippers to make this happen. Next to the pillar is the beautiful old **temple** where worshippers come to prostrate themselves before the Buddha before visiting the wheel.

Wandering to the west of Long March Road brings you up grassy hills filled with white and gold stupas, temples and shrines surrounded by an ocean of prayer flags and a seemingly endless supply of grazing yaks. To the west of the old town is a hill, on top of which you'll find a small temple with an astounding view of town and the surrounding mountains.

Festivals & Events

Beginning on the fifth day of the lunar calendar's fifth month, the **Horse Racing Festival** brings people from the area out to Wufeng Mountain (in Shangri-la County) for three days of riding and racing. Highlights include traditional riding skills, horsemanship and speed competitions, usually accompanied by various singing and dancing activities.

Falling on the 29th day of the 11th lunar month, the **Gedong Festival** is the most important traditional Buddhist festival held at the Songzanlin Temple (p483). Otherwise known as the ‘God Dancing Festival’, the hallmark of this celebration is a huge procession of dancers wearing masks representing animals and deities. Spectators are welcome to take part.

Sleeping

Though Shangri-la hasn't yet become Lijiang (keep your collective fingers crossed that it avoids doing this entirely), there is an expanding number of hotels and guesthouses in and around the old town. In summer your choices might be limited; once the mercury starts dropping, however, there's no shortage of empty rooms. Bear in mind that a few

of the smaller guesthouses close down for the winter.

Another thing to keep in mind is that, in keeping with the traditional nature of the old town, many of the businesses serve a variety of functions: most of the hotels serve food, and many of the bars and coffee shops also rent rooms. In the high season, the latter options might be the best bet for travellers arriving without reservations.

Dragon Cloud Hostel (Lóngxíng Kèzhàn; ☎ 828 9250, 688 7573; www.dragoncloud.cn; 94 Beimen Jie, 门街94号; dm/s/deluxe/f Y25/80/120/160; 📶 📺) Located in a 60-year-old traditional Tibetan-style building, this popular hostel-hotel has well-kept rooms with comfortable beds and electric blankets, 24-hour hot water and a great common area offering movies, billiards and wireless internet. Definitely one of the best midpriced hotels in town.

our pick Kevin's Trekker Inn (Lóngmén Kèzhàn; ☎ 822 8178, 013-9887 66016; www.kevintrekkerinn.com; 138 Dawa Lu; 达娃路138号; dm Y30, s Y80; 📶 📺) A lovely courtyard inn just outside the old town, Kevin's has clean singles and dorm rooms, two very friendly hounds and all the local information you'll ever need. He rents great bicycles and his hotpot dinners are legendary.

Tibet Cafe & Inn (Xìzàng Kāféiwū; ☎ 823 0019; www.shangbala.org; Chang Zheng Lu; dm Y30, d from Y120; 📶 📺) Currently undergoing a slow metamorphosis from the well-known Tibet Cafe to what the owner, Zhanxin Douji, hopes to be the equally well-known Shangbala Ranch, this place is a fixture in Shangri-la. Douji offers all sorts of activities, from trips and homestays in nearby Napa (a beautiful Tibetan village on a crystal-clear lake), to Tibetan visas and horse riding.

Compass Lodge (☎ 822 3638; www.the-compass.cn; 3 Chi Long Xiang, old town; townhouses Y350-450; 📶 📺) Close to the centre of the old town, the well-run Compass Lodge offers four beautifully appointed two-storey townhouses, each fully furnished and large enough for a family of four. Room rates include breakfast for two at the Compass Cafe, connected to the lodge by a courtyard.

Paradise Hotel (Tiānjiè Shénchuān Dǎjiùdiàn; ☎ 518 9799; zzy_jesse@126.com; 165 Changzheng Lu; 长征大道165号; r Y1080-1280; 📺 📶) Definitely a contender for poshest hotel in town, the five-year-old Paradise offers Tibetan-style rooms with thick rugs and amenities fit for the

Dalai Lama; Western-style rooms are also available. Wireless internet is free, as is the sumptuous breakfast buffet and use of the swimming pool. It's located just a hop, skip and jump away from the old town. Paradise's manager Jessie speaks English and will be glad to offer any travel assistance. Discounts are available in the off-season.

Eating & Drinking

You'll find no shortage of decent restaurants in either the old or new town. Dongwang Lu (东旺路) has a daily open-air market where you can score fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as street food. Tibetan food is the main staple in Shangri-la, followed, of course, by Chinese cuisine from all around the Middle Kingdom.

The totem animal of the area is the yak, and there's plenty of yak-derived dishes awaiting consumption: yak hotpot, yak dumplings, dried yak meat, and *sūyóuchá* (yak-butter tea), which helps keep the warm in and drive away altitude sickness. Be warned: it's an acquired taste.

There are a number of cool bars and cafes inside the old town in which to relax, meet people and get information. Many of these double as traditional-style inns, renting rooms and dorms.

All listings following, apart from Líxiāngyuán, are in the old town.

Fragrant Valley Coffee (Xiānggǔ Kāféi; ☎ 823 3240; coffee & snacks from Y12; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A neat little coffee shop in the old town just south of Guishan Park. The owner, Yi Fung, is a local artist and photographer who makes his own books, decorating the first few blank pages with his drawings. Good coffee, breakfasts and snacks.

Tashi Deley (37 Beimen Jie; dishes from Y15; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Just up from the Dragon Cloud Hostel, this Tibetan restaurant serves amazing dumplings, excellent soups and a wide variety of both Tibetan and Western dishes. Service is a bit slow as everything is made to order, but the food is worth the wait, and there are plenty of options for vegetarians.

Compass Cafe (☎ 822 3638; www.the-compass.cn; 3 Chi Long Xiang; dishes from Y25; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) 'Eclectic' eateries in China are often best avoided in favour of those that specialise, but in the case of this charming old-town eatery, don't let the variety scare you.

Compass does Chinese, Tibetan and Western food equally well. Leave some room for a French pastry served with a mug of Indian chai afterwards.

Our pick **Líxiāngyuán** (☎ 688 3737; Chicika Jie; hotpot for 4 Y150; 🍴 lunch & dinner) At first glance this place might turn off the casual tourist, what with the halved-and-quartered salted pig and yak carcasses decorating the walls. But unless you're a vegetarian (in which case flight is your best option), you're in for a serious feast, as LXY may make the best Tibetan hotpot this side of the border. Wujin Dingzhen, the restaurant's gregarious owner, will ply visitors with his homemade rice wine at no extra charge. (A note on the address: Chicika Jie is actually part of Changzheng Lu.)

Shangri-la Tavern (☎ 888 1147; www.travelblog.org/bloggers/tavern47; 47 Cuo Lang Jie; meals from Y25) A traditional inn of yore, this place in the old town is an all-in-one restaurant, bar and hostel with private rooms for Y120 and dorm beds for Y25. Good grub, beer and a place to sleep afterwards.

Sajiao Poetry College (Sājiao Shiyuàn; ☎ 139-8877 8451; www.sajiao.net; 58 Jinglong Jie) Run by a very cool local poet and writer called Tian Yong, this hip bar features an extensive library (mostly Chinese, some in English), drinks, art and music. There's also an on-site hotel.

Raven Bar (Wúyā Jiǔbā; ☎ 828 9239; 19 Beimen Jie) A cool bar and café close to the main square offering good drinks and music.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Shangri-la's airport is 5km south of town, and has regular flights from Kūnmíng and Lhasa, as well as periodic flights to a few other Chinese cities. Any hotel or guesthouse should offer air-ticket booking services for a nominal (Y10 to Y15) service charge.

BUS

Shangri-la's main bus station is at the north end of town about 2km from the old town. It's from here that both long- and short-distance buses depart and arrive.

There are daily departures to Kūnmíng (Y176 to Y205, 9am, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm, 4.30pm, 5.30pm, 6.30pm and 7.30pm), with the 9am one being the fastest (and most expensive). Twelve buses a day head to Lijiāng (Y38, three hours), beginning at 7.10am and continuing

until 5.40pm. There are also three morning buses to Dēqīn (Y40) beginning at 7.20am, and a couple of direct buses to Dàlì (Y60 to Y76, seven hours) that take an alternative, rather picturesque route south, not stopping in Lijiāng.

Getting Around

Taxis will vie for your business at the airport, and shouldn't charge you more than Y20 for the 10-minute journey into town. Bargaining is possible.

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

Bikes are available for hire at Kevin's Trekker Inn (opposite), starting at Y30 per day. Kevin's bikes are good enough to do long day trips incorporating light off-road riding.

AROUND SHANGRI-LA

Songzanlin Temple 松赞林寺

Probably the most beautiful Tibetan palace outside of Tibet proper, this amazing **temple complex** (Sōngzǎnlín Sì; admission Y30; 🕒 7.30am-6.30pm) is 3km north of town and easily accessible by bicycle, taxi or public bus 3.

Otherwise known as the Ganden Sumtseling, the original structure was built in the 15th century by the fifth Dalai Lama, and is modelled on the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Defaced and badly damaged during the Cultural Revolution, the newly restored complex is now a major draw for tourists, both domestic and international.

The main temple is accessible by a long climb up a steep flight of stairs. At the main gates of the complex, locals – most of whom live in the town beneath the monastery – stand watch with their large Tibetan mastiffs, posing for photographs and selling various trinkets, holy and secular. Once you've reached the top, you can explore the main temple complex and smaller temples, and enjoy (or not) the curious interplay between solemn Tibetan clergy and worshippers and giddy Han tourists. Firecrackers and other pyrotechnic displays are not uncommon, and the view from the top is astounding.

Stone Bridge Hot Springs 天生桥温泉

Located inside a protected national park about 17km out of Shangri-la, this natural **geothermal pool** (Tiānshēngqiáo Wēnquán; admission Y50) is set on the banks of a river at the

bottom of a deep gorge. The superheated waters come from an underground spring, and are first piped through a series of grottoes (creating natural steam caves, inside which visitors are invited to bask). Slightly cooled, the waters then trickle through cracks in the mountainside before collecting in a perpetually warm Olympic-sized pool.

The main pool is open 24/7 and admission includes use of a locker (towels and swimsuits are available for sale). If you're staying at the **hotel** (d Y280) just across the river from the springs, you can soak to your heart's content – free of charge – for the duration of your stay. The hotel also has a fine restaurant. Admission to the park itself is Y15.

YÚNNÁN PROVINCE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Yúnnán is among the cheaper Chinese provinces, with decent youth hostels (*qīngnián lǚshè*; 青年旅社; www.hostelchina.cn), guest-houses (*zhāodàisuǒ*; 招待所; or *lǚguǎn*; 旅馆) and budget hotels galore in all locations included in this chapter. Figure on an average of Y25 (US\$3.65) for a bed in a dorm and from Y50 to Y80 per bed in a twin or double in a budget hotel. Midrange prices are Y200 to Y600, and top end ranges from Y600 up.

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 long 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.

COURSES

Kūnmíng's Yunnan University is a popular spot for Chinese studies. In Dàlì and Lǐjiāng you can also study Mandarin or even local languages (along with painting, calligraphy and martial arts); your guesthouse or local cafes can help you find a teacher or course.

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 pick-pockets. 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.

Spitting

Get used to it.

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 and click on Missions Overseas. For more on getting visas, see p487.

Foreign Embassies & Consulates in Yúnnán

Laos (Map p453; ☎ 0871-317 6624; Room N120, ground fl, Camellia Hotel, 96 Dongfeng Donglu; ✉ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Myanmar (Map p453; ☎ 0871-360 3477; fax 360 2468; www.mcg-kunming.com; B503, Longyuan Haozhai, 166 Weiyuan Jie; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Thailand (Map p453; ☎ 0871-314 9296; fax 316 6891; ground fl, South Wing, Kunming Hotel, 52 Dongfeng Donglu; ☎ 9-11.30am Mon-Fri)

Vietnam (Map p453; ☎ 0871-352 2669; 2nd fl, Kaihua Plaza, 157 Beijing Lu; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Refer to p488 (Visas for Countries in the Region) for details about journeying onward from Yúnnán.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Over the last decade, China has merged into a more-or-less 'don't ask, don't tell' society, and outside of major cities most people tend not to flaunt their sexuality. That said, holding hands among same-sex friends isn't seen as unusual, and two people putting their arms around each other in public does not necessarily bring sexual orientation to mind among the Chinese.

Check www.utopia-asia.com/tipschin.htm for gay and lesbian traveller tips.

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

One of the paradoxes you may discover about internet access is this: though China is the most wired country in the world, internet access here is slow and often sketchy. The reason for this is that many sites are filtered, and some are blocked entirely. Don't be surprised if you find yourself unable to access your favourite news sites, or even your own blog. Most hotels have broadband as well as wi-fi

access, and you'll find wi-fi floating around in most guesthouses and cafes in Yúnnán – even in small towns.

LEGAL MATTERS

Though the minimum driving age in China is 18, foreigners aren't permitted to operate motor vehicles without Chinese-issued licences, making motorcycle rental difficult and technically illegal. There is no minimum age for consumption of alcohol or use of cigarettes, so drink up and smoke 'em if you got 'em.

On the subject of smoking: 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). 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.

MAPS

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

MONEY

The Chinese currency is the Renminbi (RMB), or 'People's Money'. The basic unit is the *yuán* (Y; used throughout this chapter), which is divided into 10 *jiǎo*, usually referred to as *mào*. You'll most likely encounter bills in denominations of one, five, 10, 20, 50 and 100. Coins have mostly been phased out.

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.

Exchanging Money

Banking has loosened up in China, and there are international-card-accepting Bank of China branches (as well as some ICBC branches) in all places mentioned in this book.

THE MIGHTY YUAN (CASH CONCERNS IN CHINA)

Though a trip through the Middle Kingdom won't take as large a bite from your bank account as a trip to Korea or Japan, twilight is definitely falling fast on the days of rock-bottom China travel. The rise of the Renminbi (higher as of this writing than the Hong Kong dollar, much to the chagrin of residents of the once-mighty financial centre), combined with China's burgeoning middle class have given rise to noticeable inflation, especially in the tourist sector.

Though some items, such as train, bus (and even most aeroplane) tickets still cost roughly the same or only a bit more, other things, including food and, in some cases, hotel prices, have gone up more noticeably. Where you'll find the most egregious inflationary examples is at the ticket booths of popular tourist attractions – temples, parks, mountains and places to which tourists flock in general. For this reason, some Western backpackers are giving once-popular attractions a wide berth, opting instead for the less-beaten (and cheaper) trail.

There is a silver lining in all this: accessing your cash in China has never been easier. Many medium-sized towns have at least one branch of the Bank of China (all of which have ATMs connected to a wide variety of common international networks), and in the cities you shouldn't have to walk too far before bumping into a Bank of China or ICBC (International Commercial Bank of China, whose ATMs have, since the Olympics, accepted international cards).

Be aware that to change Renminbi back into US dollars while in China, you'll still need your original exchange receipts.

Currency exchange can be done at these banks, as well as at the front desks of most high-end hotels. Exchange rates, as of the middle of the ox year (2009), are as follows:

Country	Unit	Yuan
Australia	A\$1	4.98
Cambodia	1000r	1.70
Canada	C\$1	5.60
euro zone	€1	9.10
Japan	¥100	6.86
Laos	1000 kip	0.82
New Zealand	NZ\$1	4.02
Thailand	100B	19.38
UK	£1	10.18
USA	US\$1	6.84
Vietnam	10,000d	3.96

Tipping

Tipping isn't expected, though midrange or top-end restaurants or hotels often tack on a service charge.

Travellers Cheques

Though always safer than cash, outside of the areas detailed in this chapter travellers cheques are of little use; make sure you change yours before leaving major cities (Künmíng, Jíngzhōng etc).

POST

International and domestic post is amazingly efficient. International letters and cards arrive

in a week to 10 days for most destinations. However, it ain't cheap.

Postcards to international destinations cost Y4.50, while 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 want to mail a parcel home, take its contents *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, Dàlì and Lìjiāng; expect to pay Y1 to Y2.50 per item.

TELEPHONE

The easiest way to call domestically or internationally is to find a private 'phone bar' (*huàbā*; 话吧), 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 Jíngzhōng, Dàlì and Lìjiāng these are ubiquitous; in Künmíng, your guesthouse or hotel will know the nearest one.

Otherwise, you can buy a phonocard, of which there are IC (Integrated Circuit) and IP (Internet Phone) varieties. The latter (IP *kǎ*; IP 卡) 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.

Mobile phones are ubiquitous, and you may be able to buy a SIM card for your own phone (depending on where it's from) that'll work well for in-country use. Recent regulations have made obtaining SIM cards that make outgoing international calls more difficult, though incoming international calls are not affected.

TOILETS

Public toilets (look for 'WC') are everywhere but can be downright putrid. You just pay the attendant whatever the cost is, usually around Y0.50. 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

TOURS

EcoTour China (www.ecotourchina.com) Specialises in ecotours for small groups to remote areas around Yúnnán.

Go Kunming (<http://gokunming.com/en>) News, photos and events in and around Kùnmíng.

Spice Roads (<http://spiceroads.com>) A well-respected bicycle tour operator, Spice Roads has been leading bike trips around Yúnnán and Southeast Asia for over 15 years.

Travel China Guide (www.travelchinaguide.com) One of the largest online tour operators in China; its site offers a wealth of information.

Wu Yunxin (<http://teahorse.net>) The website of Wu Yunxin (owner of Dragonfly Bed & Breakfast, p473), who leads treks into the mountains surrounding Shāxī. The site details some of the organised treks led by Mr Wu and provides additional information about Shāxī.

Yunnan Roads (www.yunnan-roads.com) The site is great, and the company offers a wide variety of travel packages throughout the province.

VISAS

Chinese travel 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, especially for American and British nationals, and express visas cost twice the usual fee. Visa prices rise and fall depend-

ing on a variety of factors, including current relations between your country and China, and internal factors, such as tension, within China itself. The ease (or lack thereof) with which visas are issued is also variable.

You can obtain applications online from 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, which is a good way to go as the agencies will be able to advise you on any complicating developments (such as 'China now requires Americans to provide a stool sample with their visa application since the unfortunate ambassadorial punch-up at the UN') and how to get around them. Many people use the US-based **China Visa Service Center** (☎ 1-800 799 6560; www.mychinavisa.com), which offers impeccable service. Expect it to take 10 to 14 days. There are many agencies in Hong Kong (easily found) that do a bustling business helping travellers to obtain visas to China. Rates vary by nationality.

Visa applications require at least one photo (normally 51mm by 51mm) and at least a vague declaration of your itinerary. Try to list standard tourist destinations such as Kùnmíng and Dàlì (not Tibet or western Xīnjiāng); 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 the 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 (see below). A Chinese visa covers virtually all of China, although some restricted areas still exist (specifically Tibet), which will require an additional permit from the Public Security Bureau (PSB), at a cost. There are many competent guesthouse owners and travel agents in Kùnmíng, Dàlì, Lìjiāng and Shāngri-la who will be happy to help you with this.

As permits to these restricted areas can take from two to five business days to come through, some northward-heading, forward-thinking travellers do the paperwork in Dàlì and arrange to have their Tibet permit waiting for them further up the road in Lìjiāng or Shāngri-la.

Visa Extensions

The Foreign Affairs Branch of the local PSB (Gōngānjú; 公安局) – 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 Künmíng 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, and currently Americans and UK citizens pay nearly four times as much as their Canadian or Australian counterparts. Expect to wait up to five days. If you have used up all your options, popping into Hong Kong for a new visa is common. The penalty for overstaying your visa in China is up to Y500 per day.

Visas for Countries in the Region

LAOS

You can get a visa for Laos at the border crossing at Mòhān; however, you may only be able to get a 15-day visa directly from the border. If you want to be assured of a 30-day visa, you're better off visiting the Lao consulate inside the Camellia Hotel (p455) in Künmíng. For those from most Western European countries, Australia and New Zealand, visas cost Y280, and for American, Japanese and German nationals the cost is Y330. You must bring one passport photo with your application. Visas from the consulate take three working days to process or you can pay a surcharge for next- or even same-day service. At the border, you'll usually get your visa within an hour.

THAILAND

Travellers from most countries won't need a Thai visa unless they plan to stay in the country for more than 30 days. The Thai consulate (p485) in Künmíng can issue a 60-day tourist visa for Y220. Visas take two days to process.

VIETNAM

Künmíng has a Vietnamese consulate – also inside the Camellia Hotel (p455) – where you can pick up a 30-day tourist visa (Y350). 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 Yünnán; have a look at guesthouse

noticeboards for a start. Websites to consult include www.volunteechina.org and www.nature.org/china. Echo at Bannaview (p460) can also help those with time and altruism to spare.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

In general, foreign women are unlikely to suffer serious sexual harassment, though Chinese men have been known to behave in a creepy manner towards foreign women, who are considered more sexually liberated than their Chinese counterparts. Solo women travellers should take basic precautions and seek travel partners when trekking in more rural areas.

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

WORK

The days when anyone with foreign features could rock up in China and be offered a job off the boat modelling, editing, proofreading or teaching English (whether they speak it or not) are coming to an end, thanks to a combination of a shrinking economy and a surplus of Chinese-literate Westerners. Furthermore, though Chinese companies once played fast and loose with the rules, nowadays things have tightened up to the point where Westerners are often expected to have 'degrees' and 'qualifications' before being considered for potential employment. However, there are still opportunities to be found, especially for those with Chinese-language or other marketable skills.

TRANSPORT IN YÜNNÁN PROVINCE

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Künmíng 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), Chiang Mai/

BORDER CROSSINGS

Getting to Cambodia

As Cambodia does not border China, most passengers going to Cambodia leave from Kúnming Airport (p456). The airport is open 24 hours a day, and services most destinations throughout China and Southeast Asia as well.

Getting to Laos

The border crossing from Yúnnán to Laos is in Xīshuāngbǎnnà in the town of Móhān. The border crossing is open seven days a week, from 8am to noon and 1pm to 5.30pm. If you're taking a bus from elsewhere in Yúnnán, you'll be required to get off the bus for passport and immigration formalities. See p318 for details on crossing from Laos into China.

Getting to Thailand

While China does not border Thailand, a new high-speed passenger boat goes from Jīnghóng in Xīshuāngbǎnnà to Chiang Saen in Thailand. See below for more details.

Getting to Vietnam

The only crossing from Yúnnán to Vietnam passes through the town of Hékǒu. The border crossing is open seven days a week from 8am to noon and 1pm to 5.30pm. If you're taking a bus from elsewhere in Yúnnán, you'll be required to get off the bus for passport and immigration formalities. At the time of writing, there was no rail service between China and Vietnam. See p384 for details on coming from Vietnam.

Bangkok (Y1580), Yangon (Y1710), Vientiane (Y900) and Siem Reap (Y1700). Most of these have daily flights. Jīnghóng, Xīshuāngbǎnnà's air link, has direct flights to Bangkok (Y1400) via Chiang Mai throughout the year. Friendly hostel personnel are your best bets for deals on flights out of Kūnmíng, followed closely by travel agents. If you need to go to the airlines directly, Kūnmíng has branch offices for the following airlines:

Dragonair (Map p453; ☎ 0871-356 1208, 356 1209; 2/F Kāihuá Guǎngchǎng, 157 Beijing Lu)

Lao Aviation (Map p453; Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Donglu)

Thai Airways (Map p453; ☎ 0871-351 1515; 68 Beijing Lu) Next to the King World Hotel.

Yunnan Airlines/CAAC (Map p453; ☎ 0871-316 4270, 313 8562; Tuodong Lu)

Boat

The high-speed passenger boat takes nine hours to get between Jīnghóng in Xīshuāngbǎnnà and Chiang Saen in Thailand. Passing through Myanmar (but not docking there – hence no visa worries), the boat is both a great way to travel and an excellent way to get more acquainted with a section of the Mekong you might otherwise never see. The boat leaves the dock at Jīnghóng (just north of the bridge; see

Map p461) at 8am on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Boats return from Chiang Saen at 6am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. One-way tickets are Y800, return Y1500.

Border Crossings

Yúnnán province has border crossings with Laos and Vietnam; see p104. The crossing from Hékǒu to Lao Cai in Vietnam is convenient for travellers going between Kūnmíng and Hanoi. There are two border crossings between Vietnam and China, located outside of Yúnnán (see p376). Though Xīshuāngbǎnnà borders Myanmar, as of this writing there are no legal crossing points for Western travellers.

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. At the time of research, there were no trains connecting China to Vietnam or Laos (the latter has no trains, period).

GETTING AROUND

Air

Within Yúnnán province, daily flights to/from Kūnmíng connect with Jīnghóng (Y780),

Lijiāng (Y660), Xiàguān/Dàlǐ (Y520) and Shangri-la (Y780). Ticket prices fluctuate; it is possible to get better deals if you shop around. During the high season it's possible to fly from these centres to other Chinese cities as well.

Bicycle

Renting a bicycle (zìxíngchē; 自行车) in China is a must, and while there are still many old-style single-speeds around, you can usually rent decent mountain bikes for a few yuan more. Always check the conditions first and never use your passport as a deposit. Only park in designated bicycle parking areas and lock your bike or, better still, don't leave it unwatched, as theft is rampant.

Bus

Roadwise, Yúnnán has a comprehensive and smooth bus network to all major destinations. Expressways link Kūnmíng with Dàlǐ and Lijiāng, south to Jǐnghóng and the Laos border at Móhān, and southeast towards (but not yet to) Hékǒu.

These expressway networks also link Kūnmíng with neighbouring provinces, as well as Laos, Thailand and even Myanmar (though foreign travellers can't get there from Yúnnán yet).

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 – and rightfully 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 are looking to spend the day buzzing about the jungles.

Train

Rail travel within Yúnnán is currently limited to getting you between Kūnmíng and Dàlǐ, though there should soon be a rail line linking Kūnmíng to Lijiāng as well. Go to www.chinahighlights.com/china-trains/kunming-train-schedule.htm for up-to-date rail info.

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