



Hǎinán

POPULATION: 8.2 MILLION

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Best Places to Eat

- » Áo zhūāng Hǎixiān Chéng (p577)
- » Holiday Inn of Jadeite Mountain City Restaurant (p574)
- » Folk Jar Restaurant (p570)
- » Pattaya Thai Cuisine (p580)

Best Places to Stay

- » Bó'áo Inn (p576)
- » Sunny Sanya Family Inn (p580)
- » Resort InTime (p580)
- » Sānyà Backpackers (p580)

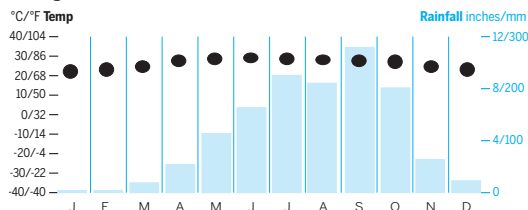
Why Go?

China's largest tropical island boasts all the balmy weather, coconut palms and gold-sand beaches you could ask for. Down at Sānyà it's see-and-be-seen on the boardwalks or escape altogether at some of Asia's top luxury resorts. Thatched huts and banana pancakes haven't popped up anywhere yet, but there's a whiff of funkiness coming from the East Coast beachside towns, and the budding surf scene is helping to spread the gospel of chill-out.

Money's pouring into Hǎinán (海南) these days to ramp up the luxury quotient, and you can cruise on the new high-speed rail, but cycling is still the better way to get around. When you've had enough of a lathering on the coast, the cool central highlands are an ideal place to be on two wheels. The good roads, knockout mountain views, and concentration of Li and Miao, the island's first settlers, give the region an appealing distinction from the lowlands.

When to Go

Sānyà



April–October
Best months for a hotel bargain.

November–March Best time for cycling.

November–January Prime surfing season.

History

Until the economic boom of the last 30 years, Hainán had been a backwater of the Chinese empire since the first Han settlements appeared on the coast almost 2000 years ago. Largely ignored by a series of dynasties, Hainán was known as the 'tail of the dragon', 'the gate of hell', and a place best used as a repository for occasional high-profile exiles such as the poet Su Dongpo and the official Hai Rui.

More recently, China's first communist cell was formed here in the 1920s, and the island was heavily bombarded and finally occupied by the Japanese during WWII. Li and Han Chinese guerrillas waged an effective campaign to harass the Japanese forces but the retaliation was brutal – the Japanese executed a third of the island's male population. Even today among the younger generation, resentment over Japanese atrocities lingers.



Hainán Highlights

- 1 Soak up the sun, sand and cocktails at **Sanya** (p578), China's top beach resort
- 2 Cycle the **Central Highlands** (p573), home of the Li and Miao
- 3 Explore the traditional villages and empty beaches around **Bó'áo** (p575)
- 4 Surf China's best waves at **Sanya Bay** (p579) and **Shiméi Bay** (p577)
- 5 Hike through a tropical rainforest at **Yanoda** (p581)
- 6 Climb **Wuzhishan** (p574) and **Seven Fairy Mountains** (p574), the most famous peaks on Hainán