



Macau

853 / POP 549,500

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Best Places to Eat

- » Antonio (p526)
- » Robuchon Au Dôme (p526)
- » Tim's Kitchen (p526)
- » Alfonso III (p526)
- » Lung Wah Tea House (p527)

Best Sights

- » Ruins of the Church of St Paul (p513)
- » Guia Fort (p518)
- » Mandarin's House (p513)
- » St Lazarus District (p513)

Why Go?

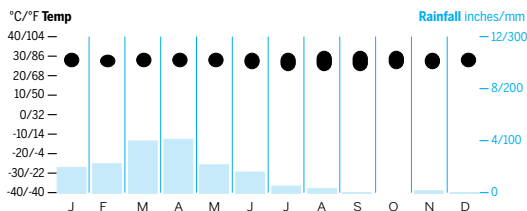
The Chinese people have stood up and they're off to Macau. Chairman Mao (who coined the first half of that sentence) must be spinning in his glass coffin. Mainlanders can't get enough of this once Portuguese-administered backwater-turned-gambling-megaresort.

Such has been its explosive growth since 2002 that it is commonplace to refer to Macau as the Vegas of the East. It might be more appropriate to put that the other way round, since Macau has eclipsed its American rival in gambling income. And there are many other things that Macau does better. Beyond the gaming halls, it offers cobblestoned streets punctuated with Chinese temples and baroque churches, pockets of (natural) greenery, a historic centre of Unesco World Heritage status and balmy beaches.

Macau's history has also created a one-of-a-kind cuisine that celebrates the marriage of European, Latin American, African and Asian flavours.

When to Go

Macau



Mar–May Celebrate the arts, a sea goddess and a dragon as mist hangs over the harbour.

Jun–Sep Days in the shade of temples and dragon boats; nights aglow with fireworks.

Oct–Feb Music and Grand Prix in a high-octane run-up to Christmas and New Year.

History

Portuguese galleons first visited southern China to trade in the early 16th century, and in 1557, as a reward for clearing out pirates endemic to the area, they obtained a leasehold for Macau and were allowed to

establish a tiny enclave here. The first Portuguese Governor of Macau was appointed in 1680, and as trade with China grew, so did Macau, which became the principal centre for Portuguese trade with China, Japan and Southeast Asia. However, after the Opium Wars between the Chinese and the British, and the subsequent establishment of Hong Kong, Macau went into a long decline.

China's Cultural Revolution spilled over into the territory as riots broke out in 1966. The Portuguese government tried to hand Macau back to China, but the latter, fearing the economic shock that would have on Hong Kong, refused the offer.

In 1999, under the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration, Macau was returned to China and designated a Special Administrative Region (SAR). Like Hong Kong, the pact ensures Macau a 'high degree of autonomy' in all matters (except defence and foreign affairs) for 50 years. The handover, however, did not change Macau as much as the termination of gambling monopoly in 2001 (see p528). Casinos mushroomed, transforming the skyline of the city, and tourists from mainland China surged.

Language

Cantonese and Portuguese are the official languages of Macau, though few people speak Portuguese. English is harder to find here than in Hong Kong, but in most midrange and top-end hotels, casinos, restaurants and tourist zones you should be able to get by. Mandarin is reasonably well understood, though note that most written Chinese is in traditional characters, not the simplified forms used on the mainland.

Sights

For a small place (just 29 sq km), Macau is packed with important cultural and historical sights, including eight squares and 22 historic buildings, which have collectively been named the Historic Centre of Macau World Heritage site by Unesco. Most of the sights are on the peninsula. At many of these sites, seniors aged over 60 years and children 11 years or under are admitted free. The **Macau Museums Pass** (MOP\$25) allows entry to a half-dozen museums over a five-day period.

CENTRAL MACAU PENINSULA

Running from Avenida da Praia Grande to the Inner Harbour, Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro – or San Ma Lo (新馬路; New Thoroughfare) in Cantonese – is the peninsula's



Macau Highlights

- 1 Get context for your impressions at the **Macau Museum** (p513)
- 2 Explore the ethereal ruins of the very symbol of Macau at the **Church of St Paul** (p513)
- 3 Take a stroll in the old quarter around **Rua dos Ervanários** and **Rua de Nossa Senhora do Amparo** (p529)
- 4 Sample Macau's unique cuisine at **Alfonso III** (p526)
- 5 Lose yourself in mazelike spaces at **Lou Lim Ioc Garden** (p519) and the **Mandarin's House** (p513)
- 6 Take the cable car to handsome **Guia Fort** (p518) and its gorgeous chapel
- 7 Mingle with artists on the cobbled paths of the charming **St Lazarus district** (p513)