



Hǎinán

POP 9 MILLION

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Ā Bo Pó (p598)
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- ➔ Sanya Market #1 (p607)
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Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Hàikǒu Banana Youth Hostel (p597)
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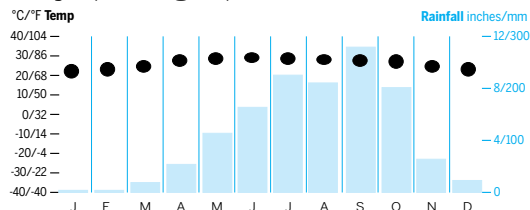
Why Go?

China's largest tropical island boasts all the balmy weather, coconut palms and gold-sand beaches you could ask for. Down at Sanya 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 hint of hipness coming from the east coast beachside towns, and the budding surf scene is helping to spread the gospel of chill out.

Money is pouring into Hainan (海南) these days to ramp up the luxury quotient. You can cruise on the 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

Sanya (Dàdōnghǎi)



Apr–Oct Low season is hot, hot, hot, but ideal for hotel bargains.

Nov–Mar Cool dry months are perfect for cycling under the blue South China sky.

Nov–Jan Winter winds blow in the island's best 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 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 then 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 resentment over Japanese atrocities lingers among the younger generation.



Hainan Highlights

- 1 Sanya (p605)** Soaking up the sun, sand and cocktails at China's top beach resort.
- 2 Central Highlands (p601)** Cycling through the island's mountainous spine, home of the Li and Miao.
- 3 Hòuhǎi Beach (p605)** Surfing and chilling out at a beachside guesthouse.
- 4 Seven Fairy Mountain (p601)** Hiking and hot-spring soaking in the rainforest.
- 5 Xínglóng (p609)** Getting a whiff of Hainán's unexpected coffee scene.
- 6 Bānqiáo Road Seafood Market (p598)** Bargaining for fresh local seafood in Haikou.
- 7 Bó'áo (p602)** Taking in traditional villages and empty beaches.