



Chóngqìng

POPULATION: 5 MILLION

Includes »

- Dàzú Buddhist Caves... 763
- Zhōngshān 764
- Láitān..... 764
- Sōngjī..... 765

Best Places to Eat

- » Shùnfēng 123 (p759)
- » Yèfù Huōguō (p759)
- » Shāokǎo street barbecues (p759)
- » Onboard an evening river cruise (p754)
- » Gǔzhèn Jiūdàwǎn in Sōngjī Village (p765)

Best Places to Stay

- » Tīna's Hostel (p757)
- » Sunrise Míngqīng Hostel (p757)
- » Any village guesthouse in Zhōngshān (p764)
- » Sunrise Backpack Hostel (p757)
- » Huílóng Kèzhàn in Láitān Village (p764)

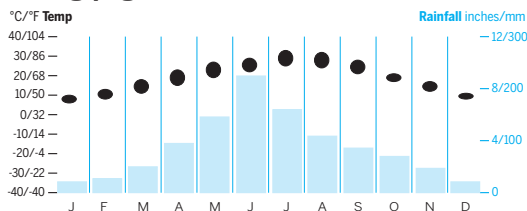
Why Go?

Some visitors are attracted by the cliffside location overlooking the iconic Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng); others by the eye-wateringly spicy food that the locals are so proud of. Others still love the gritty atmosphere down by the docks with their 'bangbang' army of porters and old steel ships, while some tourists come here simply to climb aboard boats heading for the awe-inspiring Three Gorges on what is arguably China's most spectacular river cruise. Whatever the reason for coming, most visitors tend to agree there's a unique feel to Chóngqìng (重庆), an allure not found in other major Chinese cities.

True, the weather's awful. This is the City of Fog; it rains much of the time, is as polluted as almost anywhere in China and is a furnace come midsummer. But like its signature dish, the chilli-filled fire broth known as hotpot, Chóngqìng emits a certain spice that many people just can't resist.

When to Go

Chóngqìng



April & May

Winter chill has lifted; full force of summer sweat-box yet to arrive; but still rainy.

July & August

Only if you love it hot; temperatures top 40°C and the city resembles a steam bath.

September & October

Like spring: more manageable temperatures, but worth carrying an umbrella.



Chongqing Highlights

- 1 Relax aboard a **Yangzi River Cruise** (p766) as it makes its way downstream to the awesome Three Gorges
- 2 Gasp in awe at the exquisite artwork inside the **Dazú Buddhist Caves** (p763)
- 3 Tuck in to the world's spiciest **hotpot** (p759) at Yefu Huoguo
- 4 Pull up a stool and sample the delights of *shaokao*, Chongqing's delicious **streetside barbecues** (p759)
- 5 See traditional wooden stilt housing in the ancient riverside village of **Zhongshen** (p764)
- 6 Squeeze your way through Chongqing's fascinating network of **hillside alleyways**
- 7 Wander the cobblestones, or just chill in a teahouse in the Ming-dynasty village of **Songji** (p765)

History

Stone tools unearthed along the Yangzi River valleys showed that humans lived in this region two million years ago. In recent times, however, it wasn't until the 1930s, following the Japanese invasion, that Chóngqing began to make its mark. From 1938 to 1945, the city (previously known as Chungking) became the Kuomintang's wartime capital. It was here that representatives of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), including Zhou Enlai, acted as 'liaisons' between the Kuomintang and the communists headquartered at Yán'ān, in Shaanxi province.

Refugees from all over China flooded in during WWII, swelling the population to over two million. In a city overstrained, with its bomb-shattered houses, these wartime residents must have found their new home's name somewhat ironic: Chóngqing means 'double happiness' or 'repeated good luck'.

In 1997 Chóngqing separated from Sichuān province and became a municipality under the direct control of the central government. Billions of yuán have gone into its development, launching a major construction surge that shows no sign of slowing. In 2010 the Chinese government announced Chóngqing's Liǎngjiāng district would follow the likes of Pǔdōng in Shànghǎi, Bīnhǎi in Tiānjīn and Shēnzhèn in Guǎngdōng province by becoming China's latest special economic zone (SEZ), with preferential tax, investment, trade and land policies.

Chóngqing is sometimes mistakenly referred to as the biggest city in the world. It isn't. Figures for the whole municipality's population top 32 million, but these are made up of a number of towns and cities. The city of Chóngqing itself has a mere five million, for now.

Language

In addition to standard Mandarin Chinese, Chóngqing residents also speak Sichuanese. It's a Mandarin dialect, but pronunciation is different enough that it's often difficult for those who speak standard Chinese to understand. One word visitors should know: instead of the oft-heard *méiyǒu* ('no'; literally, 'don't have'), the Sichuanese say *méide*.

👁 Sights & Activities

Arhat Temple

BUDDHIST TEMPLE
(罗汉寺; Luóhàn Sì; Map p756; Luohan Si Jie; 罗汉寺街; admission Y10; ☉8am-5pm) Built around 1000 years ago, this still-active temple is now sandwiched between skyscrapers. A

PRICE INDICATORS

The following price indicators are used in this chapter:

Sleeping

\$	less than Y200
\$\$	Y200 to Y500
\$\$\$	more than Y500

Eating

\$	less than Y40
\$\$	Y40 to Y80
\$\$\$	more than Y80

notable feature is the corridor flanked by intricate rock carvings found just after you enter the complex, but the main attraction here is Arhat Hall (罗汉堂; Luóhàn Táng), off to your right just after the corridor, which contains 500 terracotta arhats (a Buddhist term for those who have achieved enlightenment and who pass to nirvana at death). Between the stone-carvings corridor and the temple proper there is a reasonably priced **vegetarian restaurant** (dishes Y12-35; ☉10am-5pm) with a photo menu.

Húguāng Guild Hall

MUSEUM
(湖广会馆; Húguāng Huìguǎn; Map p756; ☎6393 0287; Dongshuimen Zhengjie; 东水门正街; admission Y30; ☉9am-6pm, tickets not sold after 5pm) You could spend several hours poking around the beautifully restored buildings in this gorgeous museum complex, which once served as a community headquarters for immigrants from the Hú (Húnán and Húběi) and Guāng (Guǎngdōng and Guǎngxī) provinces who arrived in Chóngqing several hundred years ago. There are rooms filled with artwork and furniture, a **temple**, a **teahouse** and several stages for Chinese **opera performances**. Free-to-watch rehearsals of Yuèjù (operatic style originating from Zhèjiāng province) and Jīngjù (Běijīng Opera) are held every Thursday and Saturday, usually between 3pm and 6pm.

River Cruises

RIVER CRUISES
Chóngqing looks best from the water, especially at night when the city flashes with neon. Two-hour river cruises (游船; Map p756) leave nightly from Cháotiānmén Dock at around 7pm. Buy tickets as you board the boats rather than from agencies

or hotels. Most boats offer very similar trips and serve food on board for an extra cost. If you're stuck for choice, **Jinbi Huīhuáng** (金碧辉煌; per person ¥68; dinner from ¥30; ☎7pm), noticeable by its neon-gold crown, has been recommended by readers.

Chóngqing Science & Technology Museum

MUSEUM

(重庆科技馆; Chóngqing Kējìguǎn; ☎6186 3051; 7 Xi Dajie, Jiangbei District; 江北成西大街7号; admission ¥40; ☎9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) Located opposite the eye-catching Chóngqing Grand Theatre and housed in its own impressive state-of-the-art building, this new museum overlooking the Jiāling River has plenty of interactive games and gadgets to keep the kids occupied for an hour or two. They'll also enjoy the IMAX theatre (¥30) and even the cable car ride just to get here. Pleasant **gardens** behind the museum contain two 100-year-old churches and make a nice picnic spot.

Cíqǐkǒu Ancient Town

OLD TOWN

(磁器口古镇; Cíqǐkǒu Gǔzhèn) The opportunity to glimpse slices of old Chóngqing makes it worth riding out to this part of town, on the Jiāling River west of the centre. Most of the buildings, many dating to the late Ming dynasty, have been restored for tourists, and the main drag can feel like a carnival, but away from the central street, a living, working village remains. You can easily lose yourself in its narrow lanes, peeking into homes and tiny storefronts. And there's plenty to eat here, both in the alleys and overlooking the river.

It's also worth poking your head inside **Bǎolún Sì** (宝轮寺; admission ¥5; ☎7am-6pm),

one of Cíqǐkǒu's only remaining temples. Its main building is more than 1000 years old.

Take bus 503 (40 minutes) from Cháotiānmén. It stops at the Càiyuánbà bus station, from where you can also catch bus 808. Bus 215 (one hour) meanders here from the Liberation Monument. A taxi costs about ¥30.

FREE Three Gorges Museum

MUSEUM

(三峡博物馆; Sānxiá Bówùguǎn; Map p759; 236 Renmin Lu; ☎9am-5pm Tue-Sun, last entry 4pm) This sleek museum showcases the history of settlement in the Chóngqing region. A 1st-floor exhibition about the Three Gorges includes a model of the dam, and upstairs you can learn more about southwest China's minority cultures through their clothing and artwork. Some exhibits have better English captions than others, but the artefacts are well presented throughout.

Although admission is free, you need a ticket from the booth outside on the square.

From the Dàxigōu light rail station, the museum is about a 15-minute walk west along Renmin Lu.

Cable Car Trips

CABLE CAR

A ride on either the **Yangzi River Cable Car** (Chángjiǎng suǒdào; Map p756; tickets ¥5; ☎7am-10pm) or the **Jiāling River Cable Car** (Jiālingjiǎng suǒdào; Map p756; tickets ¥5; ☎10am-9pm) gives you a bird's-eye view of the murky waters. Both are within walking distance of the Liberation Monument. The Yangzi ride drops you off near the modern, riverside bar-and-restaurant strip on Nan'an Binjiang Lu. The Jiāling ride takes you to the eye-catching Chóngqing Grand Theatre and the Science Museum.

CHONGQING'S STILT HOUSING

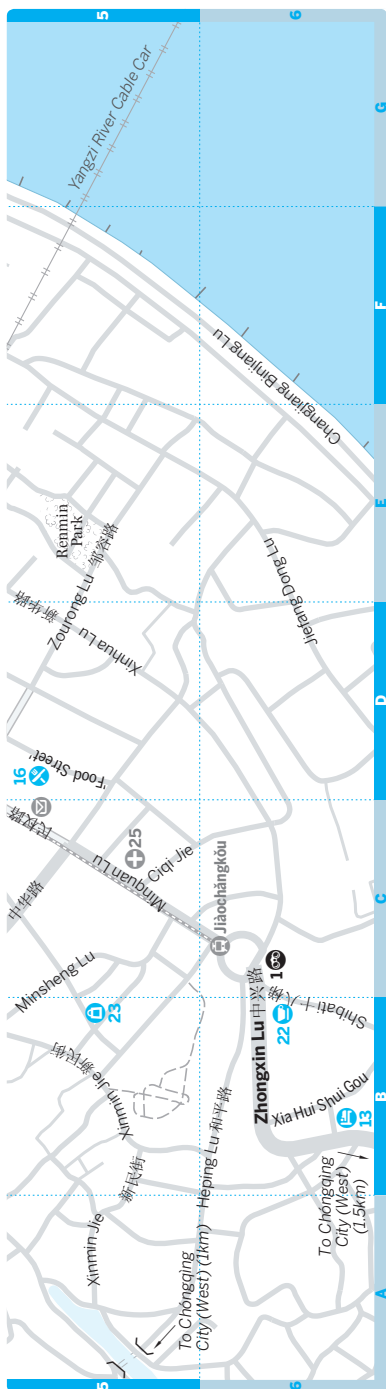
Once a striking feature of the Chóngqing skyline, stilt houses (吊脚楼; *diàojiǎo lóu*) were, in many ways, the predecessor to the modern skyscraper; sprawling vertically rather than horizontally to save space. Their design also served to keep family units in close quarters despite the uneven terrain of hilly Chóngqing. They were built on a bamboo or fir frame that was fitted into bore holes drilled into the mountainside, and their thin walls were stuffed with straw and coated with mud to allow for cooling ventilation in a city that swelters in summer.

Modernisation has turned stilt housing into a symbol of poverty and as a result they have all but disappeared in the city centre. A wonderful exception is the tall, rickety-looking wooden building to your left as you stand at the top of the Eighteen Steps Lane viewing platform. And many stilt houses still survive in the villages around Chóngqing municipality, with some fine examples in the alleyways of Sōngji and particularly by the river in Zhōngshān.

Chongqing City (East)

0 0.1 miles 250 m





FREE Pípa Mountain Park

PARK

(枇杷山公园; Pípa Shān Gōngyuán; Map p759; ☉6am-10pm) For views of the city skyline, climb 345m Pípa Mountain Park, the highest point on the Chóngqing peninsula. During the day, residents bring their songbirds to the park for air and group warbling.

Sleeping

TOP CHOICE Tina's Hostel

YOUTH HOSTEL \$

(老街客栈; Lǎo Jiē Kèzhàn; Map p756; ☎8621 9188; www.cqhostel.com; Ganzibao Alley, off Zhongxing Lu; 中兴路柑子堡; dm Y25-45, r from Y100; 📶📺📺) Perched above the street-market alleys surrounding Eighteen Steps Lane (十八梯; Shíbātī), where Chóngqing's few remaining stilt houses can still be found, Tina's is perfect for exploring the grittier side of the city. Its rooftop terrace, with free pool table, makes a wonderful vantage point before you dive in to the old town. Some rooms suffer slightly from damp but all are neat and bathrooms are clean if a little cramped. Staff members are welcoming and speak good English. There's free pick-up from the train station, or take the sky train to Jiàochǎngkǒu and walk down the hill on Zhongxing Lu until you see a sign for Tina's on your left.

Sunrise Míngqīng Hostel

COURTYARD \$\$

(尚悦明清客栈; Shàngyuè Míngqīng Kèzhàn; Map p756; ☎6393 1579; www.srising.com; 23 Xiahong Xuexiang (down steps from 26 Jiefang Donglu); 下洪学巷23号 (解放东路26中对面); dm Y59, d Y199-399, ste Y999, discounts to 30%; 📶📺📺) Despite the name, and the fact that it has a couple of dorms, this gorgeous 300-year-old courtyard place isn't really a hostel. Rooms are beautifully decorated with dark-wood furniture and have cute little modern bathrooms. The courtyard has its own fishpond and the Qing-dynasty building has the same beautiful yellow walls and stone gateways as next-door Húguāng Guild Hall. It's great fun getting here too, down a tiny alley from Jiefang Dong Lu. There's no restaurant or bar.

Sunrise Backpack Hostel

YOUTH HOSTEL \$

(尚悦背包客栈; Shàngyuè Bēibāo Kèzhàn; Map p756; ☎6391 1980; www.srising.com; 2 Bajiaoyuan; 芭蕉园2号; dm Y35-50, s Y89, tw from Y130; 📶📺📺) There's bags of old-world charm in this recently renovated stilt-style building, and rooms are excellent value. Ones overlooking the river (and the main road below) have huge windows and are big and bright, but the traffic noise is constant.

Chóngqìng City (East)

📍 Sights

- 1 18 Steps Lane Viewing Platform..... C6
- 2 Arhat Temple E3
- 3 Cháotiānmén Sq..... G1
- 4 Húguāng Guild Hall F4
- 5 Jiǎng River Cable Car D3
- 6 Liberation Monument D4
- 7 Línjiāng Pái Decorative Arch..... C4
- 8 Yángzi River Cable Car E4

🛏 Sleeping

- 9 Harbour Plaza D4
- 10 Hóngyádòng Dàjiūdiàn D3
- 11 Sunrise Backpack Hostel..... F4
- 12 Sunrise Míngqìng Hostel..... F4
- 13 Tina's Hostel B6
- 14 Xīnhuá Hotel C4

🍴 Eating

- 15 Barbecue Stalls..... F4
- 16 Hǎochī Jiē Xiǎopáidàng..... D5
- 17 Shānchéng Lǎohuǒguō..... F4
- 18 Shùnfēng 123..... D4

Wàngwàngxiān Yácháng Huǒguō (see 17)

- 19 Yèfù Huǒguō..... B4

☕ Drinking

- 20 Cici Park C3
- 21 Ile Cafe G1
- 22 Lǎojiē Shìbāti Chálóu B6

🛍 Shopping

- 23 Flower & Bird Market B5
- 24 Kodak Express..... D4

Information

- 25 24hr Pharmacy..... C5
- 26 China International Travel Service C4
Harbour Plaza Travel Centre..... (see 9)
- 27 Huìhuī Wǎngba C4
- 28 Yìjīng Wǎngba F4

Transport

- 29 Cháotiānmén Bus Stop G1
- 30 River Cruises G1
- 31 Three Gorges Ferry Port & Ticket Hall..... F2

Ones overlooking the charming alleyway out the front are quieter, but darker. The alleys round here are perfect for wandering, but be prepared for lots of steps! It's right by Húguāng Guild Hall, or slightly further down from Sunrise Míngqìng Hostel.

Xīnhuá Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(新华酒店; Xīnhuá Jiūdiàn; Map p756; ☎6355 7777; 9 Qingnian Lu; 青年路9号; tw from Y460, discounted to Y328; 🍷🍷) Elegant, low-lit interior with spacious, well-equipped rooms (TV, fridge, safe) and good-sized bathrooms with separate shower and tub. A stone's throw from Liberation Monument so about as central as it gets.

Hóngyádòng Dàjiūdiàn

HOTEL \$\$\$

(洪崖洞大酒店; Map p756; ☎6399 2888; 56 Cangbai Lu; 沧白路56号; d from Y518, ste from Y998, 40% discount is typical; 🍷🍷) This huge complex hugging the cliffsides overlooking Jiǎng River comes with restaurants, bars, shopping streets, a theatre and this pretty decent hotel. The whole complex is new, and the rooms are clean and modern, but it's been built in the style of Chóngqìng's once ubiquitous stilt buildings so some find it a little twee.

Harbour Plaza

HOTEL \$\$\$

(重庆海逸酒店; Chóngqìng Hǎiyì Jiūdiàn; Map p756; ☎6370 0888; www.harbour-plaza.com/hpcq; Wuyi Lu; 五一路; r from Y1300; 🍷🍷🍷) Rooms are spacious, elegant and come with widescreen TV, fridge, safe and internet connection (Y80 per day). Otherwise, decent bathrooms come with a very small tub which doubles as a shower. Discounts border on the ridiculous sometimes. When we were here, standard twins were down to Y498 from Y1600.

Perfect Time Youth Hostel

YOUTH HOSTEL \$

(纯真年代青年旅舍; Chúnzhēn Niándài Qīngnián Lúshè; ☎6547 7008; www.hostelchongqing.com; 2 Zhong Jie, Cìqǐkǒu; 磁器口正街2号; dm Y30, tw Y140, with shared bathroom Y80; 🍷🍷) If you fancy the charms of Cìqǐkǒu rather than the city centre, this friendly hostel has helpful staff and a lovely cafe terrace overlooking the river. At the end of the main tourist strip.

Fùyuàn Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$\$

(富苑宾馆; Map p759; ☎6903 3111; 12 Caiyuan Lu; 菜袁路12号; r from Y260, discounted to Y148; 🍷🍷) Around the corner from Càiyuánbà train and bus stations, this old-timer is handy for late-night arrivals or early departures.

Eating

Chóngqing is all about **hotpot** (火锅; *huǒguō*): a fiery cauldron of head-burning chillies (辣椒; *làjiāo*) and mouth-numbing Sichuan peppers (花椒; *huājiāo*) into which is dipped deliciously fresh ingredients, from vegetables and tofu to all types of fish and meat. It's a dish best sampled with a group of friends. Indeed, hotpot restaurants tend to be among the liveliest you'll find. But don't underestimate a hotpot's bite. This part of China is renowned for spicy food, and it doesn't come spicier than hotpot.

Another great thing to sample in Chóngqing are the **street barbecues** (烧烤; *shāokǎo*), the perfect point-and-eat street food. Just choose your skewers, hand them over and wait for them to come back spiced and grilled. The junction where Datong Jie meets Shanxi Lu is a good spot, but you'll find *shāokǎo* all over the city.

For cheap noodle joints, try the Flower and Bird Market (p761).



Shùnfēng 123

SICHUANESE \$\$

(顺风123; Shùnfēng Yāo Èr Sān; Map p756; Dàbùhuì Shopping Centre, West Bldg, 3rd fl, Jiéfāngbēi; 大部会西楼商厦三楼; dishes ¥10-50; ☺10am-midnight) Mouth-wateringly good, high-quality Sichuanese food, with some pan-Asian dishes too, at the Jiéfāngbēi branch of one of Chóngqing's best-value high-end restaurants. Everything here is tasty, but we loved the *jiāowáng chánzǔ tū* (椒王馋嘴兔; rabbit and peppers; ¥38) and the *shānhú xiā* (珊瑚虾; coral shrimp; ¥36). For dessert, don't miss the *mìzhì chāshāo sū* (秘制叉烧酥; secret-recipe meat-filled pastries; ¥3 each). Enter through a lift accessed from Bayi Lu (八一一路).

Yèfù Huǒguō

HOTPOT \$

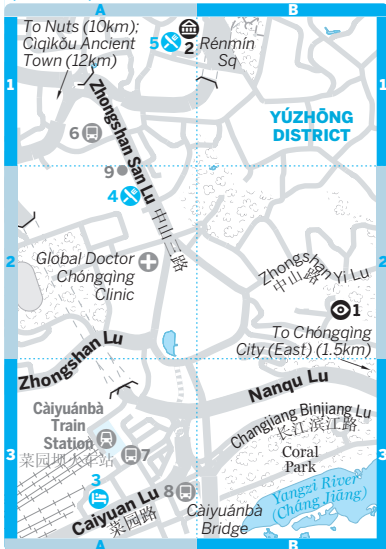
(夜富火锅; Map p756; Bei Qu Lu, 15 Linjiangmen; 临江路15号北区路; dishes ¥3-15; ☺9am-4am) Seats are of the plastic stool variety, and if you're fussy about hygiene you might want

HOW SPICY CAN YOU GO?

- » *jiā má jiā là* (加麻加辣; extra, extra spicy)
- » *zuì là* (最辣; top-level spice)
- » *zhōng là* (中辣; mid-level spice)
- » *wēi là* (微辣; mildly spicy)
- » *bù là* (不辣; not spicy – note that in Chóngqing this will still be spicy)

Chóngqing City (West)

759



Chóngqing City (West)

Sights

- 1 Pipá Mountain Park.....B2
- 2 Three Gorges Museum.....A1

Sleeping

- 3 Fùyuan Bīngǎn.....A3

Eating

- 4 Dǒngtíngxiān Huǒguō.....A2
- 5 Made in Kitchen.....A1

Transport

- 6 Airport Shuttle Bus.....A1
- 7 Càyuánbà Bus Station.....A3
- 8 Càyuánbà Old Station.....A3
- 9 Chóngqing Civil Aviation Ticket Centre.....A2

to consider somewhere else, but if you truly love hotpot, welcome to Heaven. Here you'll find quite possibly the spiciest hotpot on the planet, and Yèfù's fire broth will leave you practically hallucinating if you're not careful. Unless you're hardcore, insist on 'wēi là' (微辣; mildly spicy), although even that will be *very* spicy. The delicious xiànzhá sūròu (现炸酥肉; deep-fried pork) is already cooked. Everything else needs to be dunked. From Línjiāngmén station (临江

HOTPOT MENU

The best hotpot restaurants are entirely local affairs so you have about as much chance of finding an English menu as you have of being able to eat the thing without your nose running. As with many dishes in Chóngqing, the first thing to establish when ordering hotpot is how hot you want it (see p759). Then you'll be given a menu checklist of raw ingredients that you will later cook in your pot. Here are some of our favourites for you to look out for on the menu:

- » *yáng ròu juǎn* (羊肉卷; wafer-thin lamb slices)
- » *féi niúròu* (肥牛肉; beef slices)
- » *xiān máodǔ* (鲜毛肚; strips of cow stomach)
- » *xiān yācháng* (鲜鸭肠; strips of duck intestine)
- » *lǎo dòufu* (老豆腐; tofu slabs)
- » *ōu piàn* (藕片; slices of lotus root)
- » *xiān huánghuā* (鲜黄花; chrysanthemum stalks)
- » *tǔ dòu* (土豆; potato slices)
- » *bǎi cài* (白菜; cabbage leaves)
- » *mù'ěr* (木耳; mushroom)

门), walk along Beiqu Lu, following the road right, left, and it's on your left up a small flight of stairs (blue sign). If possible, line your stomach with lead before you come.

Hǎochī Jiē Xiǎopáidàng

SICHUANESSE \$

(好吃街小排档; Map p756; Food Street; 好吃街; dishes Y18-38; ☉11am-9.30pm) A trip to Food Street, a bustling restaurant strip near Liberation Monument (解放碑; Jiěfàng Bēi), should be done at least once, and this place is one of the liveliest here. It specialises in *gānguō* (干锅; literally 'dry pot'; Y32 to Y38), a clay pot of herbs and spices plus a main ingredient of your choice – anything from fragrant chicken (飘香鸡; *piāoxiāngjī*) and spare ribs (排骨; *páigǔ*) to pig intestine (肥肠; *fēicháng*). The Sichuan-pepper chicken (花椒鸡; *huājiāojī*) is a great dish for those who are starting to become addicted to Chóngqing's favourite mouth-numbing peppercorn, while plain fried green vegetable dishes such as *xiǎobái cài* (小白菜; cabbage) or *kōngxīn cài* (空心菜; water spinach) make good mouth-cooling accompaniments.

Shānchéng Lǎohuǒguō

HOTPOT \$

(山城老火锅; Map p756; 24 Daomenkou, Jiefang Donglu; 解放东路到门24号; dipping ingredients Y2-15, sauce Y3; ☉4.30-11pm) Tables with wooden benches and an often raucous atmosphere full of locals make this a great down-to-earth place in which to sample Chóngqing's signature dish.

Made in Kitchen

CHINESE-WESTERN \$\$\$

(厨房制造; Chúfáng Zhìzào; Map p759; ☎6363 6228; Three Gorges Museum, 236 Renmin Lu; 人民路236号三峡博物馆; dishes Y20-100; ☉11am-10pm) Fine dining with excellent service and a fabulous menu, including a good choice of imported wines. Located underneath the Three Gorges Museum; the entrance is down to the left as you face the museum entrance.

Dòngtíngxiān Huǒguō

HOTPOT \$

(洞庭鲜火锅; Map p759; 149 Zhongshan Sanlu; 中山三路149号; dipping ingredients Y2-20, dipping sauce Y5; ☉10.30am-midnight) The explosive qualities of Chóngqing hotpot are well documented, so, just to be safe, why not sample yours in a wartime bomb shelter? This is the most popular of three small restaurants housed in converted bunkers that were cut into the rocks on one side of Zhongshan Sanlu. Like all the best hotpot places it's a no-nonsense affair, with stools for seats, but the hotpot's good so who cares?

Wàngwàngxiān Yācháng Huǒguō

HOTPOT \$

(旺旺鲜鸭肠火锅; Map p756; 26 Daomenkou, Jiefang Donglu; 解放东路到门口26号; dipping ingredients Y2-12, sauce Y3; ☉9.30am-midnight) Has a similar atmosphere and menu as Shānchéng Lǎohuǒguō, although it specialises in duck intestine (鸭肠; *yācháng*).

**Drinking**

As well as the places listed, there's a string of upmarket riverside bars (酒吧; *jiǔbā*), cafes and restaurants on Nán'àn Bīnjiāng

Lù (南岸滨江路). Take the cable car over the Yangzi, then walk down to the river and turn left. From there, walk 15 minutes along the river or hop on any bus for one stop. The cable car stops running at 10pm.



Cici Park

BAR

(西西公园; Map p756; Xixi Gongyuan; 2 Linjiang Lu; 临江路2号; beer from Y15; ☎7pm-4am) The most laidback bar in Chóngqing, Cici's has chilled-out music and loungey, bohemian furnishings with outdoor seating on the square too. Beers are affordable, mixers start at Y25 and there's local plum wine (梅子酒; *méizi jiǔ*; Y10) that comes in a cute bottle with a thimble cup. It's on a big open square on the roof of a small shopping complex beside the renovated city gate Linjiang Pái (临江牌).



Lǎojiē Shíbāti Tī Chálóu

TEAHOUSE

(老街十八梯茶楼; Map p756; 1 Zhongxin Lu; 中心路1号; tea from Y30, beer from Y10; ☎10am-8pm) There's been a teahouse on this spot for more than 600 years and walking in here is like stepping into an antiques shop, with its wooden interior, period photos and fabulous furniture. The views are cool too as you look over one of the oldest parts of town, a maze of winding market lanes that can be accessed by walking down the teahouse's namesake alley, Eighteen Steps Lane (十八梯; Shíbāti).

Nuts

CLUB

(坚果; Jiānguǒ Jùlèbù; www.douban.com/host/nutsclub, in Chinese; Shaozhong Lu, Shapingba District; 沙坪坝区沙中路; beer from Y5; ☎8pm-2am) This pint-sized club is the best place to see local bands playing live. It's right by Chóngqing University so gets a decent crowd in. Live music tends to be weekends only, from 8pm to 10pm, and usually carries a Y30 cover charge. After that it's DJs.

Ile Cafe

CAFE

(屿咖啡酒廊; Map p756; Yūkāféi Jiǔláng; Cháotiānmén Sq; 朝天门广场; beer & coffee from Y28; ☎10.30am-2am) If it was anywhere else in Chóngqing this otherwise ordinary bar-café would be overpriced, but you pay for the location: a patio perch, overlooking the Yangzi River docks. It's down one level from the main square.



Shopping

Chóngqing's modern shopping district is centred on Liberation Monument. For souvenirs, try the unashamedly touristy third

STREETSIDE BARBECUE: TOP FIVE

- » *dòufu pí* (豆腐皮; tofu skin)
- » *xiǎo mántou* (小馒头; mini steamed rolls)
- » *niángāo* (年糕; sticky rice cake)
- » *qiézi* (茄子; eggplant/aubergine)
- » *jiūcài* (韭菜; leek)

floor of **Hóngyádòng** (56 Cangbai Lu; 沧白路56号), below the hotel of the same name.

Flower & Bird Market

MARKET

(花鸟市场; Huāniǎo Shìchǎng; Map p756; ☎dawn-dusk) The birds have long since flown, but the fragrant flowers and herbs that fill the alleys here lend a burst of colour to Chóngqing's greyer days. Noodle joints also dot the lanes.

Lǎo Chóngqing Huàfāng

ARTWORK

(老重庆画坊; 13 Huangjueping Yixiang, Ciqikou; 磁器口黄桷坪一巷13号; ☎8.30am-7pm) Funky impressions of old Chóngqing that make great souvenirs of the city. You can pay thousands for some of the original paintings here, but small prints start at Y10. It's on the main strip in Ciqikou Ancient Town.

Kodak Express

PHOTOGRAPHY

(柯达; Kēdá; Bayi Lu; 八一一路; CD burning Y15) Opposite Metropolitan Plaza, just north of Zourong Lu.

i Information

Internet Access

There are internet cafes all over the city. Look for the characters 网吧 (*wǎngbā*).

Huīhuī Wǎngbā (辉辉网吧; Map p756; 1st fl, 20-40 Zhonghua Xiang; 中华巷20-40号2层; per hr Y2.50; ☎24hr)

Yijing Wǎngbā (忆镜网吧; Map p756; Shanxi Lu; 陕西西路; per hr Y2.50; ☎24hr)

Internet Resources

Chóngqing Expat Club (www.cqexpat.com)

The best of a sorry bunch of English-language websites about Chóngqing.

Medical Services

24-hour pharmacy (药店; Yàodiàn; Map p756; 63 Minquan Lu; 民权路63号; ☎24hr) Western medicine, ground floor; Chinese medicine, 1st floor.

Global Doctor Chóngqing Clinic (环球医生重庆诊所; Huánqiú Yīshēng Chóngqing Zhǎnshù; Map p759; ☎8903 8837; Suite 701, 7th fl, Office

Tower, Hilton Hotel, 139 Zhongshan Sanlu; 中山三路139号希尔顿酒店商务楼7层701室; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri) A 24-hour emergency service is available by dialling the general clinic number.

Money

Most of the ATMs around town now accept foreign cards.

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Map p756; 104 Minzu Lu; 民族路104号; ☎9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Changes money and travellers cheques, and gives advances on credit cards. Foreign-friendly ATM.

Post & Telephone

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Minquan Lu; 民权路; ☎9am-7pm) You can top up your Chinese phone and buy SIM cards at the China Mobile store (open 9am to 9pm) on the 1st floor.

Public Security Bureau

PSB (公安局; Gōng'ānjú; ☎6396 1994; 555 Huanglong Lu; 黄龙路555号; ☎9am-noon & 1-5pm) Extends visas. Accessed from Zīwēi Zhìlù (紫薇支路). Take Bus 461 from Cháotiānmén to last stop.

Travel Agencies

Tina's Hostel and Perfect Time Youth Hostel can arrange tours of all types and have better English-language speakers than the following.

China International Travel Service (CITS; 中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójí Lúxíngshè; Map p756; ☎6387 6537; 8th fl, 151 Zourong Lu; 邹容路151号; ☎9am-6pm) Friendly English-speaking staff can arrange train tickets (Y30 commission), flights and Three Gorges cruises.

Harbour Plaza Travel Centre (海逸旅游中心; Hǎiyì Lǚyóu Zhōngxīn; Map p756; ☎6370 0888; 3rd fl, Harbour Plaza, Wuyi Lu; ☎7.50am-11pm) Staff speak OK English and can book air tickets and Three Gorges tours.

i Getting There & Away

Air

Chóngqing's Jiāngběi Airport (重庆江北飞机场) is 25km north of the city centre. As always, it's easiest to book online. Try www.elong.com or www.ctrip.com. Alternatively, buy tickets at the **Chóngqing Civil Aviation Ticket Centre** (重庆机场机票销售中心; Chóngqing Jīchǎng Jīpiào Xiāoshòu Zhōngxīn; Map p759; ☎6385 1105; 161 Zhongshan San Lu; 中山三路161号; ☎8.30am-8pm). Because of the new high-speed rail link, there are no longer flights between Chóngqing and Chéngdū. Direct flights:

Běijīng Y1660, 2½ hours

Kúnmíng Y780, 70 minutes

Shànghǎi Y1590, 2½ hours

Xī'ān Y770, 90 minutes

Wūhàn Y890, 90 minutes

Boat

Chóngqing is the starting point for hugely popular cruises down the Yangzi River through the magnificent Three Gorges. For all the details, see p766.

Bus

Chóngqing has several long-distance bus stations, but most buses use **Càiyuánbà Bus Station** (菜园坝老站; Càiyuánbà) beside the main (old) train station. Destinations:

Chéngdū Y110 to Y120, four hours, every hour (8am to 8pm)

Dàzú Y51, 2½ hours, every 30 minutes (6.30am to 9pm)

Héchuān Y31, 80 minutes, every 30 minutes (6.30am to 8.30pm)

Jiāngjīn Y23, 70 minutes, every 30 minutes (6.40am to 8pm) Leaves from Càiyuánbà Old Station.

Yǒngchūān Y33, 90 minutes, every 20 minutes (6.30am to 9.20pm)

Train

New, faster trains, including the bullet train to and from Chéngdū, use Chóngqing's new **North Station** (北站; Běizhàn), but many others still use the older train station at **Càiyuánbà** (菜园坝). Plenty of local buses link both train stations, including 419, 611 and 168. Train destinations:

Běijīng sleeper Y416, 24 and 29 hours, two daily (11am and 11.42pm)

***Chéngdū** seat Y98, two hours, 11 daily (8am to 7.30pm)

***Gullín** sleeper Y169, 20 hours, one daily (9.01pm)

Kúnmíng sleeper Y254, 19 to 20 hours, two daily (9.21am and 2.11pm)

Lhasa sleeper Y619, 45 hours, every other day (7.55pm)

***Shànghǎi** sleeper Y423, 28 hours, one daily (8am)

***Xī'ān** sleeper Y112 to Y185, 12 hours, three daily (10.08am, 11.12am and 5.57pm)

*From North Station; the others leave from Càiyuánbà.

i Getting Around

Airport

The **airport shuttle bus** (机场大巴; *jīchǎng dàbā*) meets all arriving planes (Y15, 45 minutes) and takes you to a small road off Zhōngshān Sānlù (中山三路), via a couple of stops in the north of the city. Bus 461 goes from Zhōngshān Sānlù to Cháotiānmén (朝天门). To get to the sky train, turn left onto Zhongshan Sanlu and go straight

THE TOUGHEST PORTERS IN CHINA

Ever since the first Chóngqing-ers couldn't bear the thought of carrying their buckets of water from the river up to their cliffside homes, there's been a need for a special kind of porter. A porter who can lift more than his bodyweight and lug that load up and down hills all day long. A porter who can't use a trolley like in other cities, or a bike or a rickshaw, but instead works on foot using only the cheapest of tools: a bamboo pole, or 'bangbang', and a length of rope.

Known as the Bangbang Army, these porters have been bearing the city's weights on their shoulders for hundreds of years, but their numbers really exploded in the 1990s when the government began resettling millions who lived along the Yangzi River. Many came from the countryside with little education and no relevant skills, and soon became part of the 100,000-strong workforce. Unregulated and poor, 'bangbang' porters earn around ¥30 per day to work in one of China's hottest, hilliest cities, lugging heavy loads up and down steep hills. When you consider some of the wealth that's been pumped into the city in recent years (just look across the river at the Grand Theatre), it's perhaps surprising that this age-old trade still thrives. But for now, at least, the Bangbang Army continues to be an integral feature of the alleyway-riddled areas that link this fast modernising city to its old docks.

over the large roundabout. Niújiǎotuó (牛角沱) station will be on your left. Buses to the airport run from 6am to 8pm. A taxi is around ¥50.

Bus

Local bus fares are ¥1 or ¥2. Useful routes:

Bus 120 Cháotiānmén–Càiyuánbà Train Station

Bus 461 Cháotiānmén–Zhongshan Sanlu (for airport bus)

Bus 462 Zhongshan Sanlu (airport bus)–Liberation Monument

Bus 419 North Train Station–Càiyuánbà Train Station

Bus 105 North Train Station–Línjiāngmén (near Liberation Monument)

Bus 141 North Train Station–Cháotiānmén

Subway

Chóngqing's first subway line (Line 2) is actually an overground **Light Rail** (轻轨; qīngguǐ; ¥2-4; ☀6.30am-10.30pm) for most of its length, but burrows underground at its eastern end where Línjiāngmén and Jiàochǎngkǒu stations are both walking distance from Liberation Monument.

Lines 1 and 3 were due to open in 2011 and will be mostly underground. Line 1 will link Cháotiānmén with the western district of Shàpíngbà. Line 3 will link the two train stations. Extensions for both these lines are planned for 2013, linking Line 1 with Cìqǐkǒu Ancient Town and Line 3 with the airport.

Taxi

Fares start at ¥5. A taxi from Jiěfàngbèi to Nuts Club should cost around ¥35.

AROUND CHONGQING

Dàzú Buddhist Caves

大足石窟

The fabulous rock carvings of Dàzú (Dàzú Shífkū) are a Unesco World Heritage Site and one of China's four great Buddhist cave sculpture sites, along with those at Dūnhuáng, Luòyáng and Dàtóng. The Dàzú sculptures are the most recent of the four, but some believe the artwork here to be the best of all.

Scattered over roughly 40 sites are thousands of cliff carvings and statues (with Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian influences), dating from the Tang dynasty (9th century) to the Song dynasty (13th century). The main groupings are at Treasured Summit Hill and North Hill.

👁 Sights

Treasured Summit Hill

ROCK CARVINGS

(宝顶山; Bǎodǐng Shān; admission ¥120, combination ticket with North Hill ¥170; ☀8.30am-6pm) Of the extensive sculptures at this site, the centrepiece is a 31m-long, 5m-high reclining Buddha depicted entering nirvana, with the torso sunk into the cliff face. Next to the Buddha, with a temple built around her for protection, is a mesmerising gold Avalokiteshvara (or Guānyīn, the Goddess of Mercy; see the boxed text, p935). Her 1007 individual arms fan out around her, entwined and reaching for the skies. Each hand has

an eye, the symbol of wisdom. It is believed these sculptures were completed over roughly 70 years, between 1174 and 1252.

Treasured Summit Hill differs from other cave sites in that it incorporates some of the area's natural features – a sculpture next to the reclining Buddha, for example, makes use of an underground spring.

The site is about 15km northeast of Dàzú town and is accessed on a bus from Dàzú's new bus station (新站; *xīnzhàn*; Y4, 25 minutes, until midday). Buses from Chóngqing drop you at Dàzú's old bus station (老站; *lǎozhàn*). To get from old to new, turn right out of the old station, then immediately left at the crossroads and keep walking for five to 10 minutes. Then turn left over the canal and take the first left. It's Y5 in a cycle rickshaw. Once at the site, it's a 10-minute walk from where the bus drops you off, past numerous **restaurants**, **guesthouses** and **souvenir stalls**, to the entrance to the sculptures. Buses returning from Treasured Summit Hill run until 6pm, but may drop you at Dōngguānzhàn bus stop, from where you can take local Bus 1 to Dàzú's old station, or a Y5 cycle rickshaw to the new station.

North Hill

ROCK CARVINGS

(北山; Běi Shān; admission Y90; ☉8.30am–6pm) This site, originally a military camp, contains some of the region's earliest carvings. The dark niches hold several hundred statues, although the collection is smaller than at Treasured Summit Hill and some are in poor condition.

North Hill is about a 30-minute hike – up many steps – from Dàzú town; aim straight for the pagoda visible from the old bus station.

Sleeping & Eating

You can easily visit Dàzú as a day trip from Chóngqing. If you decide to stay overnight, try the standard midrange **Dàzú Bīnguǎn** (大足宾馆; ☎43721888; Longgang Longzhonglu; 龙岗龙中路; d Y300), which gives small discounts. It's 200m past the Dàzú's new bus station, on your left and set back from the road (龙中路; Lóngzhōng Lù).

If you turn left out of the hotel and left again onto Bínhé Jiā (滨河街) you'll reach a roundabout, near which there are plenty of restaurants and street stalls serving noodles, dumplings and other light bites. Turning left at the roundabout, you'll cross a river where there are some teahouses. You can also continue this way to the old bus station.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Dàzú old station:

Chóngqing Y51, 2½ hours, every 30 minutes (6.30am to 6pm)

Yǒngchuān (for Sōngji) Y21, 90 minutes, every 45 minutes (7.10am to 5.40pm)

Buses from Dàzú new station:

Chéngdū Y84, four hours, four daily (7.15am, 8.55am, 9.50am and 2pm)

Héchuān (for Láitān) Y20, 2½ hours, four daily (8am, 10.20am, 2pm and 5.10pm)

Zhōngshān

中山

Chóngqing's once ubiquitous stilt-style homes are an endangered species these days, but trek out to this gorgeous riverside village and you'll find plenty of them to gawp at. The old town (古镇; Gǔzhèn) is essentially one long street lined with wooden homes on stilts above the riverbank. Be sure to walk down to the river and look up at the houses to see their support structures.

Many residents of these old houses have turned their living rooms into storefronts. While some hawk souvenir trinkets, others sell locally made products such as chilli sauce or jugs of rice wine. Popular snacks include squares of grilled, spice-rubbed tofu, and sweet doughy rice cakes filled with ground nuts.

Above the river are several restaurants and teahouses, where you can have lunch or simply snooze in a lounge chair, as well as a couple of basic guesthouses (beds from Y30) which, although low on luxury, are great places to stay thanks to the cracking riverside location. It's possible, though, to visit Zhōngshān in a day trip from Chóngqing.

To get here from Chóngqing, change buses at Jiāngjīn (江津), from where buses leave for Zhōngshān (Y10 to Y13, two hours, roughly every 30 minutes from 8.40am to 4.30pm). The last bus back to Jiāngjīn is 4.20pm. The last bus from Jiāngjīn back to Chóngqing is 7pm.

Láitān

涪滩

The main attraction in this ancient walled village overlooking the Qú River is a towering **Buddha** (二佛寺; Èrfó Sì; admission Y20) carved into a hillside and surrounded by more than 1000 mini-statues. The Buddha dates to the 12th or 13th century. At roughly

14m tall, it pales in comparison to the giant Buddha at Lèshān, but it's still quite impressive – and far less visited.

A short walk from the Buddha is the village **temple** (admission ¥5), which is still in use.

Allow time to wander around the village, which is more than 1000 years old, checking out the small shops and eateries. Láitān *mǐjiǔ* (米酒; rice wine) is a local speciality.

Although it is possible to visit Láitān in a day trip from Chóngqing, some people might like to stay the night within the village walls at the neat and tidy **Huǐlóng Kèzhàn** (回笼客栈; ☎023-4256 1999; r ¥120, discounted to ¥100). There's nothing special about the guesthouse itself (although it's clean and well looked after), but staying here gives you the chance to experience the nontouristy side of this ancient village, once all the day trippers have left.

From Chóngqing, change buses at Héchuān, from where there are three direct buses to Láitān (¥10, 50 minutes, 10.16am, 1.40pm and 4.10pm) as well as regular buses to Lóngshì (¥9.50, 45 minutes). From Lóngshì, minibuses (¥2, five minutes) leave for Láitān from outside the bus station.

The last bus back to Chóngqing from Héchuān is 6pm.

Sōngji

松溉

Cobblestone alleyways housing temples, teahouses, old gateways and some wonderful courtyard homes are perfect for aimless strolls in this still lived-in Ming-dynasty village on the banks of the Yangzi River.

If you're looking for a focus, seek out the **Chén Family Compound** (陈家大院; Chén Jiā Dàyuàn; admission ¥2), the historic home of the village's most prominent family. This sprawling structure once contained more than 100 rooms. What remains of the compound is much smaller, but its walls are extensively decorated with family photos and memorabilia. Actor Joan Chén (Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* and Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution*) is the family member best known outside China.

On a bluff above the river, about a 20-minute walk from the old town, is the **Dōngyù Temple** (东狱庙; Dōngyù Miào), home to a 9.5m-tall Buddha and some gruesome dioramas depicting various hells (impaling, scalding, having your tongue ripped out).

Sōngshān Bīnguǎn (松山宾馆; ☎023-4954 6078; r from ¥80; ☎) has smart clean doubles, some with river views. Nearby **Gǔzhèn Jiǔdàwǎn** (古镇九大碗; dishes ¥15-30; ☎9am-8pm) is a nicely renovated old courtyard that has been turned into a restaurant-cum-teahouse. There's a selection of Chinese teas here plus a well-priced menu of mostly Sichuanese dishes. To guide yourself around the lanes, take a photo of the large wooden bilingual map at the entrance to the old town (古镇; *gǔzhèn*), just down towards the river from where the bus drops you.

To get to Sōngji, catch a bus to Yǒngchuān, from where minibuses to Sōngji (¥9, 70 minutes) leave every 20 minutes. The last bus back to Yǒngchuān leaves Sōngji at about 5.30pm. The last bus from Yǒngchuān to Chóngqing leaves at 6.50pm.

Cruising the Yangzi

Includes »

Chóngqing to Wànzhōu.....	768
Wànzhōu to Yíchāng	768
Luxury Cruises.....	770
Tourist Boats.....	770
Passenger Ships.....	770
Hydrofoil.....	771

Travel in China is often a terrestrial and sedentary experience, with agonising bus rides, colossal freeways, traffic jams, dusty mountain roads, marathon train journeys and daily victories hard won over stupefying distances. Half of the ‘China Experience’ can be the unavoidable grind of getting from A to B (sometimes via C and D, if there are no direct buses). Much of the other half is recuperating from the first half. So the Yangzi Cruise – on China’s longest and most scenically impressive river – enjoys special significance as a trip where the destination is irrelevant compared to the greater drama of the journey. It’s an occasion to put the travel schedule on ice, hang up one’s hat and admire an astonishing panorama sliding past.

When to Go

December–March The low season; rates are cheaper and the journey is more serene

April & May The best weather, but the highest prices and rowdiest crowds

October & November Cooler climes but the crowds are back

The Three Gorges

Few river panoramas have inspired as much awe as the Three Gorges (三峡; Sānxiá). Well-travelled Tang-dynasty poets and men of letters have gone weak-kneed before them. Voluble emperors and hard-boiled communist party VIPs have been rendered speechless. Flotillas of sightseers have megapixelled their way from Chóngqing to Yíchāng. For as long as many Yangzi boat hands can remember, the Three Gorges have been a member of the prestigious China Tour triumvirate, rubbing shoulders with the Terracotta Warriors and the Great Wall.

Yet the gorges these days get mixed press. Some travellers have their socks well and truly blown away; others arrive in Yíchāng scratching their heads and wondering what all the fuss was about. The route’s natural scenery is certainly way

FAST FACTS

- » The Three Gorges Dam is the world's largest man-made generator of electric power from a renewable source.
- » The Three Gorges Dam is designed to withstand an earthquake of 7 on the Richter scale.
- » Plans for the Three Gorges Dam date from 1919, when Sun Yatsen (Sun Zhongshan) saw its huge potential for power generation.
- » The Yangzi River will deposit over 500 million tons of silt every year into the reservoir behind the dam.
- » The Yangzi River has caused hundreds of catastrophic floods, including the disastrous inundation of 1931, in which an estimated 145,000 people died.

more dramatic than its historical sights, often crammed with historical allusions obscure to all but Chinese minds; temples and so forth along the way can be crowded, while uniform riverine towns and settlements are modern-looking rather than twee and charming. To some, the gorges' dramatic appearance can become rather repetitive, especially overlong Xiling Gorge (Xiling Xiá). The reservoir built up behind the Three Gorges Dam – a body of water almost the length of England – has certainly taken its toll as much more is now inundated.

But if you don't expect to swoon at every bend in the river, journeying downriver is a stimulating and relaxing adventure, not least because of the change of pace and perspective.

Apart from bringing some binoculars with you, here are four handy tips to maximise your enjoyment of the Three Gorges:

- » Try to ensure the Three Gorges aren't one of just three things on your China tour
- » Disregard the roar of a marketing machine selling the Three Gorges like there was no tomorrow
- » Treat the journey as an occasion to unwind from the effort of getting around China
- » Take along a good read

If you don't have the time for the *Three Gorges* Director's Cut, hop on the hydrofoil and

jet down for the shorter and edited (but perhaps equally enjoyable) highlights version.

The River

The journey puts you adrift on China's mightiest – and the world's third-longest – river, the gushing 6300km Yangzi (长江; Cháng Jiāng). Starting life as trickles of snow melt in the Tànggǔlā Shān of south-western Qīnghāi, the river then spills from Tibet, swells through seven Chinese provinces, sucks in water from hundreds of tributaries and powerfully rolls into the Pacific Ocean north of Shànghǎi. En route, it surges past some of China's greatest cities: super-sized Chóngqīng, Wūhàn and Nánjīng.

The Effects of the Dam

The dwarfing chasms of rock, sculpted over aeons by the irresistible volume of water, are the Yangzi River's most fabled length. Yet the construction of the controversial and record-breaking Three Gorges Dam cloaked the gorges in as much uncertainty as their famous mists: have the gorges been humbled or can they somehow shrug off the rising waters? In brief, the gorges have been undoubtedly affected by the rising waters. The peaks are not as towering as they once were, nor are the flooded chasms through which boats travel as narrow and pinched. The effect is more evident to seasoned boat hands or repeat visitors who are more inclined to repeat the 'you should have seen them in the old days' mantra, accompanied by a knowing look. But for first-timers the gorges still put together a dramatic show when the highlights arrive (but prepare for some lengthy intervals between performances).

THE ROUTE

Apocryphally the handiwork of the Great Yu (see p249), a legendary architect of the river, the gorges – Qútáng, Wū and Xiling – commence just east of Fèngjié in Chóngqīng and level out west of Yíchāng in Húběi province, a distance of around 200km. The principal route for those cruising the Yangzi River is therefore between the megalopolis of Chóngqīng and humdrum Yíchāng downstream.

The route can be travelled in either direction, but most passengers journey



downstream from the 'City of Fog' Chóngqìng to Yíchāng. Some vessels soldier on beyond Yíchāng as far as Shànghǎi, but the riverside scenery becomes distinctly ho-hum beyond Yíchāng.

Vessels stop at many of the towns between Chóngqìng and Yíchāng that can also be reached by road, so taking the bus can speed up your journey. If you buy your ticket from an agency, ensure you're not charged upfront for the sights along the way, as you may not want to visit them all and some of the entrance fees are as steep as the surrounding inclines. The only ticket really worth buying in advance is for the popular Little Three Gorges tour, which is often full (see p769).

Chóngqìng to Wànzhōu

重庆 - 万州

The initial stretch is slow-going and unremarkable, although the dismal view of factories gradually gives way to attractive terraced countryside and the occasional small town.

Passing the drowned town of Fúlíng (涪陵), the first port of call is at Fèngdū (丰都), 170km from Chóngqìng. Long nicknamed the **City of Ghosts** (鬼城; Guǐchéng), the town is just that: inundated in 2009, its resi-

dents were moved across the river. This is the stepping-off point for crowds to clamber up – or take the cable car (Y20) up – **Ming Shān** (名山; admission Y60), with its theme-park crop of ghost-focused temples.

Drifting through the county of Zhōngzhōu, the boat takes around three hours to arrive at **Shībǎozhài** (石宝寨; Stone Treasure Stockade; admission Y80; ☀8am-4pm) on the northern bank of the river. A 12-storey, 56m-high wooden pagoda built on a huge, river-water-encircled rock bluff, the structure originally dates to the reign of Qing-dynasty emperor Kangxi (1662-1722). Your boat may stop for rapid expeditions up to the tower and for climbs into its interior.

Most morning boats moor for the night at partially inundated **Wànzhōu** (万州; also called Wànxiàn). Travellers aiming to get from A to B as fast as possible while taking in the gorges can skip the Chóngqìng to Wànzhōu section by hopping on a three-hour bus and then taking either the hydrofoil or a passenger ship from the Wànzhōu jetty.

Wànzhōu to Yíchāng

万州 - 宜昌

Boats departing from Wànzhōu soon pass the relocated **Zhāng Fēi Temple** (张飞庙;

Zhāngfēi Miào; admission Y20), where short disembarkations may be made. Yúnyáng (云阳), a modern town strung out along the northern bank of the river, is typical of many utilitarian settlements. Boats drift on past ragged islets, some carpeted with small patchworks of fields, and alongside riverbanks striated with terraced slopes, rising like green ribbons up the inclines.

The ancient town of **Fèngjié** (奉节), capital of the state of Kui during the periods known as the 'Spring and Autumn' (722–481 BC) and 'Warring States' (475–221 BC), overlooks Qútáng Gorge, the first of the three gorges. The town – where most ships and hydrofoils berth – is also the entrance point to half-submerged **White King Town** (白帝城; Báidìchéng; admission Y50), where the King of Shu, Liu Bei, entrusted his son and kingdom to Zhu Geliang, as chronicled in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Qútáng Gorge (瞿塘峡; Qútáng Xiá) – also known as Kui Gorge (夔峡; Kuí Xiá) – rises dramatically into view, towering into huge vertiginous slabs of rock, its cliffs jutting out in jagged and triangular chunks. The shortest and narrowest of the three gorges, 8km-long Qútáng Gorge is over almost as abruptly as it starts, but is considered by many to be the most awe-inspiring. The gorge offers a dizzying perspective onto huge strata and vast sheets of rock despite having some of its power robbed by the rising waters. On the northern bank is **Bellows Gorge** (夔箱峡; Fèngxiāng Xiá), where nine coffins were discovered, possibly placed here by an ancient tribe.

After Qútáng Gorge the terrain folds into a 20km stretch of low-lying land before boats pull in at the riverside town of **Wūshān** (巫山), situated high above the river. Many boats stop at Wūshān for five to six hours so passengers can transfer to smaller tour boats for trips along the **Little Three Gorges** (小三峡; Xiǎo Sānxiá; tickets Y150-200) on the Dàníng River (大宁河; Dàníng Hé). The landscape is gorgeous, and some travellers insist that the narrow gorges are more impressive than their larger namesakes.

Back on the Yangzi River, boats pull away from Wūshān to enter the penultimate Wū Gorge, under a bright-red bridge. Some of the cultivated fields on the slopes overhanging the river reach almost illogical angles.

Wū Gorge (巫峡; Wū Xiá) – the Gorge of Witches – is stunning, cloaked in green and carpeted in shrubs, its cliffs frequently

disappearing into ethereal layers of mist. About 40km in length, its towering cliffs are topped by sharp, jagged peaks on the northern bank. A total of 12 peaks cluster on either side, including **Goddess Peak** (神女峰; Shénnǚ Fēng) and **Peak of the Immortals** (集仙峰; Jíxiān Fēng). If you're fortunate, you'll catch the sunrise over Goddess Peak.

Boats continue floating eastward out of Wū Gorge and into Húběi province, past the mouth of **Shénnóng Stream** (神农溪; Shénnóng Xī) and the town of Bādōng (巴东) on the southern bank, along a 45km section before reaching the last of the three gorges.

At 80km, **Xīlíng Gorge** (西陵峡; Xīlíng Xiá) is the longest and perhaps least impressive gorge; sections of the gorge in the west have been submerged. Note the slow-moving cargo vessels, including long freight ships loaded with mounds of coal, ploughing downriver to Shànghǎi. The gorge was traditionally the most hazardous, where hidden shoals and reefs routinely holed vessels, but it has long been tamed, even though river traffic slows when the fog reduces visibility.

The monumental **Three Gorges Dam** (三峡大坝; Sānxiá Dàbà; admission Y105) looms up and boats stop so passengers can shuttle across to the dam's observation deck for a bird's-eye view of this mammoth project. Hydrofoils from Chóngqìng and Yíchāng pull in here for passengers to disembark. Boats continue and pass through the locks of the Gèzhōu Dam (葛洲坝; Gèzhōu Bà) before completing the journey 30km downstream to Yíchāng.

BOATS & TICKETS

The growth of speedier expressways sees fewer passenger boats nosing all the way down from Chóngqìng to Nánjīng or Shànghǎi, so most cruises focus on the Three Gorges. In Chóngqìng, most hotels, hostels and travel agents can sell you a trip, some on the luxury cruise ships aimed primarily at Western tourists. You can also buy tickets for the ordinary ferries at the **ferry port ticket hall** (重庆港售票大厅; Chóngqìnggǎng Shòupiào Dàtīng; ☎6am-10pm), accessed from under the bridge on Chaoqian Lu (朝千路) in Chóngqìng. An option is **Chongqing Port International Travel Service** (重庆港国际旅行社; Chóngqìng Gǎng Guójí Lǚxíngshè; ☎023-6618 3683; www.cqpits.com.cn; 18 Xinyi Jie), where staff speak English. Travel agents and hotels in Yíchāng

BEST TOP-END CRUISES

» **Viking River Cruises** (www.vikingrivercruises.com) Very luxurious cruise, offering five-day cruises from Chóngqing to Wǔhàn, as part of a larger 12-day tour of China; complete tour £1995.

» **Orient Royal Cruises** (www.orientroyalcruise.com; ☎027 8576 9988; Wǔhàn) Good spoken English from guides, comfy cabins, decent restaurant and bar, excursions. Four-day Chóngqing–Yíchāng journey or five-day Yíchāng–Chóngqing voyage. Prices from Y6230 per person.

» **Victoria Cruises** (www.victoriacruises.com) Comfortable four- to five-day Chóngqing–Yíchāng and Yíchāng–Chóngqing route; excellent English-speaking guides. From \$470 (winter price) plus \$65 for shore excursions.

also sell cruise tickets for the upstream journey; for the passenger ferry and hydrofoil, buy tickets at **Yíchāng Ferry Terminal** (宜昌港客运站; Yíchāng Gǎng Kèyùn-zhàn; ☎696 6166; Yanjing Dadao). In Yíchāng, **China International Travel Service** (CITS; 中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójí Lǚxíngshè; ☎625 3088; Yunji Lu; ☀8.30am–5.30pm) can arrange tickets.

Luxury Cruises

The most luxurious passage is on international-standard cruise ships, where maximum comfort and visibility accompany a leisurely agenda. Trips include shore visits to all the major sights (Three Gorges Dam, Little Three Gorges et al), allowing time to tour the attractions (often secondary to the scenery). Cabins have air-con, TV (perhaps satellite), fridge/minibar and perhaps more. These vessels are ideal for travellers with time, money and negligible Chinese skills. The average duration for such a cruise is three nights and three to four days.

Tourist Boats

Typically departing from Chóngqing at around 9pm, Chinese tourist cruise ships usually take around 2½ days to reach

Yíchāng. Some Chinese cruise ships stop at all the sights; others stop at just a few (or none at all). They are less professional than the luxury tour cruises and are more aimed at domestic travellers (Chinese food, little spoken English). It is possible to book packages that take you first by bus to Wǎnzhōu from Chóngqing, where you board a vessel for the rest of the trip.

The following details are for cruise ships that do not stop at the tourist sights:

1st class Y1042, two-bed cabin with shower

2nd class upper/lower bunk Y483/530, four-bed cabins

3rd class upper/lower bunk Y317/347, six-bed cabins

The following details are for vessels that stop at six tourist sights:

1st class Y1525, two-bed cabin with shower

2nd class upper/lower bunk Y992/1060, four-bed cabins

3rd class from Y620, six-bed cabins

Passenger Ships

A further alternative is to board a straightforward passenger ship from Chóngqing to Yíchāng. They are cheap, but can be disappointing; you will sail through the first two gorges in the dead of night and only catch the last gorge. Stops are frequent but hasty and they pass tourist sights by. Journeys take 36 hours (38 hours from Yíchāng to Chóngqing). Shared toilets and showers can be grotty. Meals on board are average, so take along your own food and drinks. Functional accommodation costs the following:

1st class (一等; *yīděng*) Y800, twin cabin

2nd class (二等; *èrdēng*) Y490 to Y510

3rd class (三等; *sāndēng*) Y400 to Y424

4th class (四等; *sìdēng*) Y302 to Y332, 8-bed dorm

In theory, you can buy tickets on the day of travel, but booking one or two days in advance is recommended. Fares tend to be similar whether you buy them from an agency or direct from the ticket hall, but it's worth shopping around to check. If buying a ticket through an agent, ensure you know exactly what the price includes.

Hydrofoil

Hydrofoils are the fastest route through the gorges, although the direct Chóngqing–Yíchāng hydrofoil service runs no more. Hydrofoils depart hourly from Wànzhōu (Y410, including a bus from Chóngqing to Wànzhōu, or Y300 for the hydrofoil ticket only) downriver, running to the hydrofoil terminal west of Yíchāng. The journey takes 10 hours: three hours for the bus trip from Chóngqing to Wànzhōu, six hours for the hydrofoil journey from Wànzhōu to Yíchāng and an hour by bus from the Yíchāng hydrofoil terminal into town. Note that Wànzhōu is also called Wànxiàn (万县). You can also pick up the hydrofoil to/from Yíchāng to/

from Fēngjié (Y220, hourly) and Wūshān (Y190, hourly).

Hydrofoils are passenger vessels and are not geared towards tourists, so there's no outside seating. Visibility is OK (albeit through perspex windows), but if you stand by the door you can get a good view. For those who find a day of gorge-viewing sufficient, hydrofoils are ideal, but tourist sights are skipped. Food and refreshments are served, but it's a good idea to take along your own snacks and drinks as the food is humdrum. Hydrofoils make regular but very brief stops at towns along the river for embarkation and disembarkation; check when the boat is leaving if disembarking.

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