

GUANGZHOU (广州)



By Cory Preston

Guangzhou, often known in the west as the city of Canton, is a beautiful city with lots of historic sites and delicious food. Historically Guangzhou was a major port on the maritime Silk Road and has been a strong trading area ever since, well known for holding the Canton Fair which is the oldest and largest trade fair in China.



ATTRACTIONS

Guangzhou is a fascinating city with numerous attractions that will interest different types of visitor. A few of these are covered below and have been split by area to help you plan your trip.

Yuexiu (越秀区) and Liwan (荔湾区) are the two main districts you want to know about - they are helpfully connected by two huge roads, Zhongshan road (中山路) and Jiefang road (解放路). If you stick to these two main roads you won't go far wrong and will catch most of the sights.

Zhongshan road is split into different parts, one way to start your day is to get the subway to Zhongshanba station (中山八站) (meaning Zhongshan eight signifying its exit onto Zhongshan 8th Road) and check out the Liwan district. This district is one of the oldest in Guangzhou, originally home to rich merchants and boasting many old buildings in the Cantonese style. It is home to the standard Xiguan (西关) Cantonese dialect and a great way to get a taste of the old Guangzhou. If you stick around this area you'll catch the following sites:

Liwan Lake Park 荔湾湖公园 - A short walk from Zhongshanba station Liwan Lake Park is usually full of older Chinese playing mahjong or cards, it's a peaceful park with lots of flowers.



Liwan Old Town (including Lizhiwan Road) - From Liwan Lake Park you can follow the Lizhiwan Road (荔枝湾路) along the canal to take in some of Guangzhou's old buildings built in the Cantonese style.



Shamian Island 沙面岛 - This area now filled with hotels was once ceded to France and the UK by the Qing government as a concession area. It is filled with colonial style buildings including former consulates of the UK, US and Soviet Union as well as the beautiful Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral. You can easily walk here from Lizhiwan Road and grab a snack from the many food stalls at the entrance to the island (there used to be a great stinky tofu 臭豆腐 vendor there for those with adventurous tastebuds).



Shangxiajiu Shopping Street 上下九步行街 - This street is well known with locals and tourists alike boasting interesting teahouse style architecture. Where Wenchang street (文昌路) intersects Shangxiajiu street you will find a Hualin jade market (华林玉市场) which is worth strolling down.

Chen Clan Ancestral Hall 陈家祠 - Once you've had your fill of food and shopping, the Chen Clan Ancestral Hall is a 30 minute walk away. The hall is a complex of 19 beautiful buildings decorated with wood, stone and brick carvings, pottery, plaster and iron engraving. These buildings finished just before the turn of the 19th century are well worth a visit.



You might wish to start your second day by exploring Jiefang Road starting at People's Park at the bottom of Jiefang North Road from Gongyuanqian station (公园前站). If you follow this road all the way up you will see the following sites:

People's Park 人民公园 - This is a nice park where you'll probably catch some dancing aunties (阿姨), get here early enough and you might see some elderly folk doing tai qi (太极拳).

Temple of the Six Banyan Trees 六榕寺 - This Buddhist temple was originally built in 537 but has since been restored and rebuilt due to fire and damage. The grounds boast a beautiful pagoda worth taking in.

Guangxiao Temple 光孝寺 -- This is one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Guangzhou originally built in the 2nd century, though it has since been destroyed and some of the halls have been totally rebuilt. On a weekday this temple is pretty quiet and tranquil and worth a stroll around.



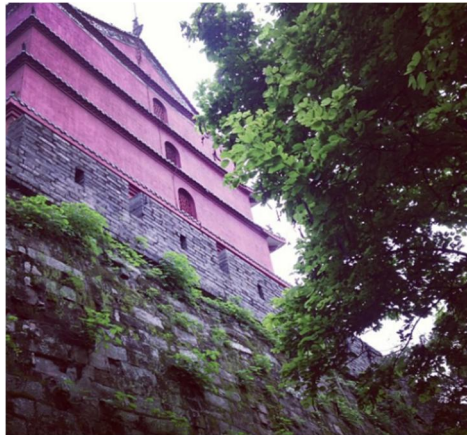
Sun Yat Sen Memorial Hall 中山纪念堂 - Interesting building with pretty grounds although the exhibitions are totally Chinese with no English (or other language) translation so if you can't read Chinese you may struggle. It's worth getting acquainted with Sun Yat Sen's history though as he was the founding father of the Republic of China.



Mausoleum of the Nanyue King 西汉南越王墓博物馆 - This is an interesting museum including the main attraction which is the Nanyue King's burial armour made entirely of jade.

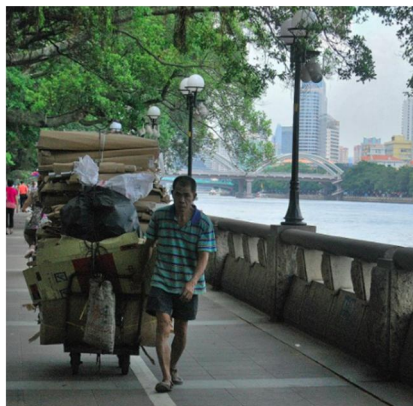


Yuexiu Park 越秀公园 - This huge park is very close to the Mausoleum of the Nanyue King. It's worth seeking out the Zhenhai tower (镇海楼) which has good views over Guangzhou.



Other classic sites include:

Pearl River 珠江 - If you have time take a stroll along the Pearl River, you'll almost think you're in Europe but for all the Chinese guys collecting cardboard, fortune telling and fishing along the river's edge. Really nice for a peaceful walk to take in Guangzhou and its inhabitants.



Guangzhou Tower 广州塔 - If you're feeling super touristy get yourself on a river boat cruise to catch the Guangzhou TV Tower lit up at night. It's quite pretty though you'll have to endure a bit of a tussle to buy the tickets from the busy ticket office.



Baiyun Mountain - This mountain park lies a little out of the city but is worth it, lush mountain scenery with small rivers and waterfalls. You can get here by taking the subway to Meihuayuan Station (梅花园站) in under an hour.



Left field choices include:

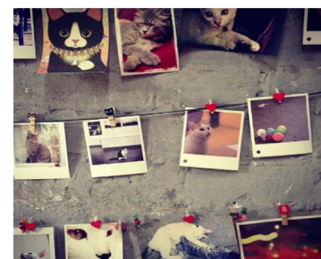
Baohan Straight Street 'Africa Town' 宝汉直街 - Baohan Street is interesting for a number of reasons. Traditionally home to a large number of China's ethnic Muslims, both Uighurs and Hui, it now also hosts a large contingent of residents from various African countries come to China for business. A lot of the people living here have questionable residential status in China and the Chinese government seems to have had mixed feelings about this area. That said, it's bustling and boasts a lot of halal restaurants with delicious food if you're looking for a break from Canto food and a change in atmosphere. The closest station is Xiaobeilu (小北路站).

Redtory Art and Design Factory 红专厂 - If you've ever lived in or been to Beijing this is the 798 of Guangzhou. Redtory is a bunch of old factories showing all kinds of exhibitions from installation, to painting and photography. There are also small bars and restaurants. You can get there from the city by taking the subway to Yuancun Station (员村站).



Xiaozhou Village 小洲村 - Xiaozhou Village is a cute little area with ramshackle buildings, alleyways and canals, cat cafes and small art galleries. This area is popular with local Chinese and can be reached from the city by taking the subway to Lijiao (沥滘站) and then getting the number 35 bus.

If you feel like going slightly further afield, Panyu district (番禺区) has a few beautiful parks and is home to some of the richest people in Guangzhou. These parks are popular with local residents and Chinese tourists:



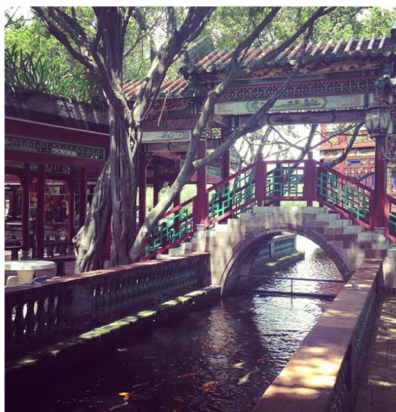
Lianhua Mountain 莲花山 - This is a beautiful park with a huge golden Guanyin statue, can be reached by subway followed by a dedicated bus line.



Dafushan Forest Park 大夫山森林公园 - This is a cool park, popular with locals. You can rent bikes and ride around the mountains and lakes. You can get here by using a subway/bus combination - it may take a while, better if you can drive or be driven.



Baomo Garden 宝墨园 - This is a beautiful ancient garden with halls, flowers and ponds. Unfortunately it was destroyed and rebuilt in the 1950s but still worth a look and popular with local residents. To get here using public transport from the city will take a few hours.



For a trip out of Guangzhou the Kaiping Dialou (开平碉楼) are perfect. These villages are home to fortified multi-storey watchtowers built out of concrete that have been well preserved and are absolutely beautiful. The site is a UNESCO world heritage site so be prepared for a lot of Chinese tourists. It's fair to say that not many Westerners make it out here due to the transport constraints but it's well worth it!

Getting to the dialou will require a car as the journey takes between 2-2.5 hours and there are a couple of villages that you would need to drive between. If you can't get hold of a car or your Chinese isn't good enough to hire one, there are buses from Guangzhou bus station to Kaiping where you would then need to get another bus to Zili Village (自力村). At this point you should be able to buy a ticket for the tourist bus that shuttles tourists between the different villages.



FOOD

In Guangzhou, the most obvious food of choice is dim sum, dim sum restaurants can vary from old school joints that are heaving and chaotic or luxury hotels with waitresses to brew and pour your expensive tea.

A few suggestions include:

Beiyuan Restaurant 北园酒家 - This is a well known dim sum restaurant with a traditional garden vibe, offers great dim sum but might require a bit of a wait for a table. This restaurant can be found at 202 Xiaobei Road (小北路).

Woo's Hong Kong Cuisine 吴係茶餐厅 - This place serves up different types of Cantonese cuisine including dim sum. It's hugely popular with locals and can be found at 75 Tianhe East Road (天河东路).

If you get sick of dim sum seek out a Chaozhou style (潮州菜) restaurant for a different type of Guangdong cuisine. Chaozhou is a city east of Guangzhou with its own food, customs and dialect. It's worth trying the Chaozhou congee (潮州粥).

Chaozhongchao Restaurant 潮中朝食府 - This place is close to the Guangzhou tower at 19 Siyou New Road (寺右新马路) and offers both traditional and modern style Chaozhou cuisine.

Huaweida Beef Restaurant 华威达牛肉店 - This restaurant is a well known Chaozhou restaurant and can be found at 499 Huangpu West Avenue (黄埔西大街). It's said to have a truly authentic Chaozhou flavour and is very affordable.

Cantonese cuisine is well known for its desserts so well worth seeking out a dessert cafe, for starters you could try:

Pak Fa Dessert Shop 百花甜品店 - You can find this place at 120 Wenming Road (文明路). It serves up many different kinds of traditional sweet soups and jellies.

ACCOMMODATION

For the budget traveller China is incredible, most of its youth hostels are clean new and affordable. In Guangzhou check out:

Guangzhou Riverside International Youth Hostel 江畔国际青年旅舍

Part of the Youth Hostels Association (YHA) of China this hostel is clean and offers both dorm and private rooms ranging from £7 for a dorm bed in a 6 bed room to £20 for a private twin room. This hostel is located across the river from both Liwan to the north and Shamian Island to the east.

Lazy Gaga Hostel 春田家家青年旅舍

This hostel is a couple of pounds more expensive than the YHA option but is more of a sociable party hostel located in the centre of town. Located off of the Zhongshan 6th Road - perfect for all your sightseeing needs.

If you're looking for a more luxurious vibe at affordable prices, Holiday Inn is usually a very safe (and far more luxurious than its Western counterparts) bet in China. Guangzhou's Shifu branch (十甫假日酒店) is a 20 minute walk from Shamian Island, has a rooftop pool and can be booked for around £60 per night for a king bed with bathtub.

ENTERTAINMENT

Over the last few years, craft beer joints have been gaining popularity in China, check out the Hideaway Taproom 精酿生啤体验馆 if you like the sound of that.

If you're looking for live music, try these bars for alternative Chinese music and occasional foreign acts:

C Union - This bar is on 115 Shuiyin Road (水荫路) and is known for hosting live music from Chinese bands of the reggae and rock persuasion.

Tekkwun Bar

This bar also hosts live bands and is located near the Guangzhou Sculpture Park on 201 Huanshi Middle Road (环市中路).

GETTING AROUND GUANGZHOU

Getting around the city is pretty straight-forward, the subway is easy to use and goes to most places. Many attractions are within walking distance from one another too.

If you can read a little Chinese (or at least match up the characters) getting the bus is pretty simple too, though if you do get lost a taxi is also very affordable. As always, have the name of your hotel written in Chinese (including the address) and you shouldn't have a problem getting a taxi in a do or die situation.

The Travel China Guide (<https://www.travelchinaguide.com/>) is also an incredible resource for directions to any attraction, including in Chinese.

TRAVEL TO/FROM GUANGZHOU

Guangzhou's international airport is easily accessible from major Chinese cities and from Europe. An alternative route from Europe is to fly to Hong Kong and take the train to Guangzhou from there which takes around 2 hours.

Overland routes include the high speed train which goes to and from major Chinese cities such as Beijing and other provincial capitals such as Changsha, Wuhan, Zhengzhou and Shijiazhuang. A trip to Beijing takes between 8-10 hours on the train.

It's even possible to go overland from Guangzhou to Lhasa - though it takes 55 hours and you still need to arrange appropriate permits etc.