

KUNMING (昆明)



Kunming is the capital city of Yunnan province located in south-west China, which is renowned for its incredible landscapes and natural beauty. Kunming is known as 'the Spring City' of China due to having one of the mildest climates in China and bright flowers that bloom almost all year round. Yunnan is a very popular province to travel amongst foreign expats and Chinese locals with Kunming being a city to tick off the long list of Yunnan highlights. Kunming is a quaint and easily-explorable city with a selection of beautiful and exciting things to see in the city centre as well as incredible scenic sights to venture to outside of the city.

Attractions

Green Lake Park: This is a city park centrally located amidst the city's hustle and bustle but it stood out to me so much more than any other city park I have been to in China. I visited the park on a Saturday and was mesmerised by how much was going on; from boats on the lake, beautifully designed pavilions, public square dancing and music performances, bustling cafés and teahouses, to works of art to peruse as you walk around. At Green Lake Park, you can truly see why Kunming is known as 'the Spring City', by taking a long walk or cycling around the vibrant flowers, plants and trees. The park is easy to get to from multiple other central attractions and is located opposite Yunnan University. The lake park is free to visit.



Stone Forest: A few hours on a bus from Kunming East Coach station will bring you to this amazing natural wonder of vivid stone masterpieces. This is an attraction that is very high up on Yunnan Province's list of



scenic sights. The Stone Forest is a 270 million-year-old huge scenic area made up of all different sized and shaped stone karsts. A day should be dedicated to visiting the Stone Forest. This factors in the bus journey there and back and the many hours you can spend strolling through the different sections within the forest. Whilst there you will also come across lakes, waterfalls, ponds and caves. The Stone Forest has an entrance fee of 200RMB.

Dian Lake & West Hill: A bus journey from the city centre or a cheap taxi ride takes you to the famous, large Dian Lake, at the bottom of West Hill. This bustling lake is full of visitors and cyclists as well as food stalls and fair rides. From the lake you can take the cable car up West Hill, where you will buy a ticket to see the sights amongst West mountain. You will then get on a chair lift further up the mountain and see the incredible views of the massive Dian lake, and then you can hike and explore the mountain.



Yuantong Temple: This is the most famous Buddhist temple in Kunming. With an entrance of only 6RMB this is a pleasant sight to spend a morning or an afternoon visiting. Yuantong temple offers beautiful buildings with a relaxing atmosphere and surrounding the temple you will find ponds full of fish and turtles. It is built around a small lake with bridges and pagodas.



Food

Kunming offers various local dishes and snacks for you to try known as 'Dian dishes'. You can find many of these dishes across many restaurants as well as local street stalls.

Cross Bridge Rice Noodles: These noodles are a popular local dish in Yunnan province. This dish is made up of three main parts: a bowl of hot chicken broth, slices of meat or seafood and the rice noodles.



Where to try: You can try this at Qiao Xiang Yuan, a large chain of restaurants which specialise in serving local Yunnan dishes. You can find these restaurants all over the city.

Steaming Pot Chicken: Exactly as it sounds, this is a delicious chicken soup served in a steam pot which you can find across restaurants in Kunming. It is a very flavourful dish which is made with various strong spices but most commonly it is cooked with ginger.



Braised Mushroom in Soy Sauce: Kunming is well known amongst the whole of China for its fresh wild mushrooms grown on the mountains there. A popular one is the Jizong mushroom which is enjoyed for its chicken-like taste. First the Jizong mushrooms are fried with chili and salt and then braised with garlic, ginger and shallot.



Where to try: You can try both of these famous local dishes at Fuzhao Lou, a popular Kunming restaurant for tasty local dishes.

Accommodation

Kunming Upland International Hostel: Only a 2-minute walk from Green Lake Park and close to multiple temples and bars, this hostel is situated nicely for walking or cycling to places around the centre of Kunming. The hostel has a nice relaxed atmosphere with helpful staff. Upon arrival at reception, you'll see a list of things to do on the walls with recommendations for if you want half day trips, full day trips or have just 1 or 2 hours to kill. The hostel also has a strong social vibe with a large bar and very cheap food and drinks. This hostel is about a 10-minute walk from the well-known Yunnan university and the student's bar street where you'll find plenty of places to go in the evenings.



Kunming Cloudland International Hostel: The sister hostel of Upland, Cloudland hostel has the same kind of chilled atmosphere and the same style bar and food/drink menus! So, the main difference between these two hostels is the location. Cloudland Hostel is closer to downtown Kunming, where you find the shops and the bird and flower market. It's also just a 5-minute walk from the bar street.



You can check out and book both of these hostels at www.hostelworld.com.

Entertainment

Kunming is a very easy-going city with laidback people and things to do day and night. Walking around the city at night you'll find the city is very much alive with many bars, cafes and restaurants that are full of people until late. In the evening, you will find places all around the city centre for you to eat, drink and shop.

Kundu Night Market: Everyone in Kunming knows about the bustling night market. You can go here to experience the city of Kunming by night and buy gifts or souvenirs. The night market has plenty of ethnic specialties and jewelry for sale. Kundu also has a selection of nightclubs in this area. Don't forget to bargain!



Dymanic Yunnan Show: Go to Kunming Hall any night of the week and you can watch this original ethnic singing and dancing show. The show is directed by and stars Yang Liping, a famous dancer known as China's 'dancing queen'. The show includes over 90 performers and over 70% of them are from different ethnic groups in Yunnan. Shows are on 8-9.45pm every day.



Wenlin Street: Go to the street that Yunnan University students spend their time on. Here you'll find an array of foreign cafes, restaurants and bars with a variety of cuisines. You can have a fun evening on this street and you are also able to feel the student vibe of a Chinese city which is a cool experience. This street is walkable from Kunming Upland International Hostel.

Kundu Bar Area: This is another place where you can find lots of bars, but with less of a foreign twang. This street is full of typical Chinese bars which means karaoke, karaoke and more karaoke! Rock'n'roll bars are enjoyed by the locals in Kunming and you can try these bars in this area.



The Hump Bar: Located above a hotel, this is a nice relaxed rooftop bar that is perfect for a fun evening. Here you can take in an amazing view of Kunming's city centre and meet like-minded travellers. The informal bar has a pool table, table football and on some nights the venue hosts performances and open-mic nights.

Kunming Teahouses: On the East side of the city, the Xinyin Residential District is known for its Chinese teahouses. These teahouses attract many locals and tourists to taste the best teas Yunnan province has to offer, so if you are a tea lover this is definitely a cultural experience worth checking out.

Getting Around Kunming

Buses are commonly used for getting around Kunming with it being a very cost-effective way to get around and buses going to all of the attractions and places you would want to visit. One-way bus fares in Kunming cost only 1RMB! There are several bus routes across Kunming, and you can purchase the city map at any newsagents to find the full list. The buses operate from around 6am to late evening, around 9-11pm.



Personally, I found taxis an ideal form of transport. The city is overflowing with taxis and with many sights in Kunming city centre being so close together, taxis would save me a lot of time spent on bus journeys and the taxi rides were very cheap too. Taxis could often be a very time-saving option. For example, the 2-hour bus to the Stone Forest goes from Kunming East Coach station and from the Kunming Upland International hostel, I could have chosen a 1.5-hour bus journey to Kunming East coach station or a 30-minute taxi for 40RMB.



Push bikes are another form of transport you could use for visiting attractions in the city centre such as going to Green Lake Park, Yuantong Temple, Yunnan University or the Bird and Flower Market. There are many bike rental places and your hostel will be able to inform you of where to go. Cycling is a popular form of transport as Kunming city is not so big.

The city currently has a subway plan they are building. According to the plan it will operate 9 lines upon completion.

Travel

There are four main train stations in the city of Kunming, and from them it is possible to travel to most places within China.

Kunming has North, East, South and West bus stations to take you to varying destinations. From the West Bus station, you can also travel to various other tourist attracting cities in Yunnan, such as Dali (4 hours) and Lijiang (8 hours). From the South bus station, you can travel to the very popular attraction within the whole of China; the Yuanyang rice terraces (7 hours). From the East bus station, you can get to the Stone Forest attraction (2 hours) and the Vietnam border (8 hours).

Kunming Changshui International airport is the primary airport serving Kunming, located around 15 miles northeast of downtown Kunming. The airports connects you to all major cities across China as well as major cities in other South East Asian countries. The list of international destinations includes Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

By Emma Lomax, State School Teacher in Foshan, 2016-2017