



24 HOURS text and photos by Mark Andrews

24 hours in Beihai

gorge on seafood at this sleepy beach town

a more undiscovered, sleepier alternative to Hainan, only a few foreign tourists make it to Beihai.

It's somewhat of a shame, as it boasts huge beaches, great seafood and 2,000 years of history. And sitting at the very top of the Beibu Gulf (Gulf of Tonkin) in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, it has year-round sunshine and warm temperatures.

8am: Breakfast is a quiet affair. Tourists stay within the walls of their hotels to feast on the local food on offer at vastly uninteresting breakfast buffets. It may not be the best, but it's always included in the price.

9am: Explore the old colonial influenced streets around Zhongshan Road and Zhu Hai Road near Waisha Island. This time in the morning constitutes being early in this part of China, so you'll be in time to see the fishermen readying their boats for the day. Old buildings line the streets with the catch of the day being sorted and gutted by the roadside and fish dry overhead in the morning rays. Make no mistake, this is a town fueled by seafood.

10.30am: Head for Silver Beach. While in actuality this huge span of sand stretches 24km in length, you will most likely find yourself at the hawk-patrolled 1.6km stretch about 10km from the main part of town. Sun yourself on the sands, which were a lot cleaner than you may expect, but don't forget the sun-cream or else you will be cooked like the seafood that keeps getting paraded up and down. If sunbathing is

not your thing, then you can take a boat trip or rent a dune buggy.

12.30pm: Take a leisurely lunch. Most restaurants serve seafood. Rephrase that. Every restaurant serves seafood, and you'll be hard pushed to find anything else. With no menus, it's a matter of looking in the tanks to see what looks back at you. Wherever you go you can be assured that it is fresh.

2pm: Go to local beauty spot Nan Wan. The secluded beach with fishermen crouching on stilted platforms tending their nets is a favorite for those good old wedding pictures. Beihai is famous for its pearls and the pearl farm here will give you a glimpse of how they are raised plus a chance for you to buy some at prices much cheaper than in the major cities.

3.30pm: Visit the Hai Men statue - a large part of Beihai's history. The statue dates back to 1876, and the opening of the port. If time allows you, explore some of the old buildings near the statue that herald back to the era in the years after the port was opened.

4pm: Just in case you haven't overdosed on fish quite just yet, then visit the aquarium. It contains a wide array of species indicative of the Beibu Gulf's marine life, plus some rather bizarre extras: crocodiles, a huge collection of turtles and strange skeletons of half fish/half humans with debatable authenticity. The feeding displays are actually

pretty good; especially the seals.

6pm: Head for the seafood restaurants on Waisha Island. With most you can have your own private hut at the back as the sea gently laps up near your feet and the moon catches the white of the waves. Yet another favorite among wedding parties.

8pm (check time locally): Go to Seaside Park near Silver Beach. Catch the musical water fountain show in the 20m spherical chao (tide) sculpture. Follow this with a quiet stroll by the sea to finish off the day. And the day really does finish here, you may struggle to find any life after 9pm as the tourists head back to their hotel rooms. ■

Getting there

There are two flights a day from Guangzhou priced around RMB690. Buses to Guangzhou take 9.5 hours and 3 hours to Nanning.

Sleep

Pearl Bay Seaview Hotel. Waisha Island (0779 6811111) is a newly built 4 star hotel with good rooms and a swimming pool.

Eat

Hai Yang Cheng. Waisha Seafood Island (0779 2087299) Dan Jia Peng. Waisha Seafood Island. With huts for outside dining. Jiuji Restaurant, Guizhou Road for seafood in the town center.