



24 HOURS text and photos by Mark Andrews

24 hours in Nanning

the quest for food in the green city

the sign as you exit the airport reads: "Guangxi is open to you. Nanning the green city is embracing you." And water buffalo graze on lush green vegetation as you move towards the center of this provincial capital in south-west China. But Nanning has never been high on tourists' "to see" lists in China. Yet thousands pass through each year, often stranded as they wait for visas en route to Vietnam. But is it worth a trip all on itself? Here are a few hints for a 24-hour stay.

8am: Start the day in the traditional local way in one of the many restaurants serving zao cha (dim sum) behind the clouds of steam. There is a good line of restaurants in and around the Majestic Hotel.

9.30am: Head for the Guangxi Medicinal Herb Botanical Garden (RMB8 entrance) in the eastern suburbs. This is a working center looking into the use of herbs in traditional medicine. It does however offer a landscaped garden which is best explored before the day gets too hot. Nearby is a school teaching traditional medicine, with a huge colorful mural detailing how historically doctors examined patients.

12.30pm: Get a taxi back into town and have lunch at the Banxianju restaurant. Try the house special eggplant stuffed with pork and spring onions, or the crispy BBQ pork – it's so sweet you'll need a busy

afternoon to burn it off.

2pm: Enjoy the sights and sounds of the flower and bird market on Yuanhu lu, an intriguing local spot overflowing with life. Pets of all varieties are for sale along with flowers, jade, second hand books and the usual random paraphernalia that ends up filling your rucksack.

3pm: The Museum of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (RMB8 entrance). Yes the museum! Downstairs is a bronze drum collection, unique symbols of the Zhuang minority; while upstairs focuses on the area's many other minorities which make up 75 percent of the population. The costumes and handicrafts will leave you wanting to head for the hills to find the traditional villages – recreated here at the back, with a ganlan house of the Zhuang, and a Dong drum tower and wind and rain bridge.

6pm: Head for dinner at Wan Zai Wei on Qi Xing Lu, a popular, slightly up-market Nanning institution. One dish worth a shot is the Xian Niang Tofu stuffed with pork and stewed in a broth. Dining in Nanning happens early and quickly, with the bars being the focus of the evening.

8pm: Head to one of the bars on Tao Yuan Lu for live music, bands and performances. Sohu Bar (Su He) is the current hot spot, attracting sizeable crowds

even during the midweek.

11pm: If you're feeling tired but a bit peckish then attack the street stalls that line Zhongshan Lu and indulge as the locals do in Ye Xiao: the fourth meal of the day. End off your evening with the Nanning speciality: Old Friend Noodles (Laoyou Mian). ■

Getting there

Buses from Guangzhou take 10 hours, with trains taking around 14 hours. There are seven flights a day (full fare RMB730) taking 1 hour 15 minutes.

Sleep:

Majestic Hotel (Mingyuan Xindu Jiu Dian), 38 Xinmin Road. (0771 211 8668) The best known and best located in town.

Yong Jiang Hotel, 41 Jiangbin Dong Lu. (0771 218 0888) A less expensive option.

Eat and Drink:

Transcentury Hotel (Kuashiji Da Jiu Dian), 111 National Road Development Mansion (Minzu Dadao 111 Hao Guangxi Fazhan Dasha) (0771 5611238)

Wan Zai Wei, 137 Qi Xing Road. (0771 2832999)

Ban Xian Ju Zhen Wei Canting, 55 National Road (Minzu Dadao 55 Hao) (0771 5877399)

Sohu Bar (Su He), 63 Tao Yuan Lu
City Bar, 57 Tao Yuan Lu