

SE Travel  
 HD **Mao and more**  
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 WC 1,280 words  
 PD 10 May 2014  
 SN The Australian  
 SC AUSTLN  
 ED Travel  
 PG 10  
 LA English  
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## THE PERFECT 10 GUANGZHOU

Delectable dumplings, vertiginous views and cultural cruising in **China's** south

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**ROYAL TOMB** THE 2000-year-old tomb of the second king of Nanyue, Zhao Mo, was discovered only in 1983 when developers were levelling an inner-city **site** to build an **apartment** block. What they found is as astonishing as the tomb of Tutankhamun: several rooms crammed with more than 1000 relics, including clay food pots, the sad, dusty remains of the king's concubines, weapons, chariots, gold seals, musical instruments, incredibly beautiful and intricate jade drinking vessels and, most impressively, the king's 2300-piece gold and jade burial garb. The finds are housed in the intriguing Museum of the Western Han Dynasty and the Mausoleum of the Nanyue King. More: [gznywmuseum.org](http://gznywmuseum.org).

**FAMILY JEWELS** DATING from 1894, the impressive Chen's Lineage Hall compound was spared during the Cultural Revolution when it was converted into a printing factory, my guide says, turning out copies of Mao's Little Red Book. Featuring 19 impressively carved buildings linked by courtyards, the conclave centres around the richly decorated ancestral hall, considered one of the best examples of Lingnan (southern **Chinese**) style architecture in Guangdong Province. The Chen family used the house when they returned to the provincial capital for "official discussion, imperial examination or litigation", a tourist pamphlet states, mysteriously. These days, it houses an excellent Folk Arts Museum demonstrating a range of mind-bogglingly intricate arts, including bone (formerly ivory) carving and evocative ink landscapes, made without brushes, just the artist's fingertip and fingernail. Onsite shops sell quality mementos. More: [gzchenjiaci.com](http://gzchenjiaci.com).

**BIRD'S-EYE VIEW** SOARING towers boasting vertiginous viewing decks are increasingly the norm in Asia, but the 660m Canton Tower, one of the world's tallest buildings, has cleverly inserted a fun **park** near the edifice's apex. For those with a head for heights, there's a bubble train, a sort of horizontal version of the London Eye, circling the tower (a sign warns that psychotics and alcoholics may not ride). However, a stiff drink is probably in order before taking the plunge on the sky drop — at 450m above terra firma, no one can hear you scream. Scaredy-cats could simply settle for a quiet beer or cuppa in the Cloud Star Bar on level 111 (open until 11pm), a perfect spot to drink in the long view, weather and smog permitting, of this go-ahead town.

More: [cantontower.com](http://cantontower.com).

**COLONIAL NOSTALGIA** WITH its broad, shady streets lined with grand neoclassical buildings, Shamian **Island** in the southwest of the city makes a quiet, cool retreat from the hurly burly of downtown. Acquired as a concession by Britain and France in 1859 following the Opium Wars, it quickly became the city's diplomatic quarter and there's still a whiff of those colonial days about these refined boulevards where the famous White Swan **Hotel** is undergoing refurbishment (reopening September 1) and even Starbucks is housed in a handsome villa replete with tiled veranda, plantation chairs and whirring ceiling fans. On weekends, the riverside **park** offers a slice of nostalgia, as women dance or lustily sing songs in praise of Mao and old men skilfully kick shuttlecocks from foot to foot.

DAINTY DIM SUM PANXI is one of the city's oldest and largest restaurants. Overlooking the pretty Liwan Lake, and interwoven with courtyard gardens and meandering koi carp-stuffed ponds, the various ornate banquet halls and traditional private dining pavilions seat upward of 3000. The food is very good and if you have children in tow (or even if you don't) drop by for dim sum. Only the most hard-hearted food critic could fail to be charmed by the animal-shaped dumplings. There are rabbits holding carrots, and carrots stuffed with meat; porcupines plump with pumpkin and pumpkins packed with coconut. The mushroom-filled pigs are particularly tasty. After dim sum, take a stroll through one of the most picturesque parts of the city, by the lake, dotted with little paddle boats, past couples lingering over steaming pots of green tea or women exercising with flags while twanging **Chinese** music twines about the trees. 151 Longjin West Lu, Liwan.

AFTER-DARK CRUISING GUANGZHOU is shaped by its broad "mother" river, the Pearl, making a post-prandial, after-dark cruise a must for first-time visitors. Boats leave from several locations, including the historic Tianzi Wharf near Haizhu Square, and this busy precinct is a good place to grab dinner, upstairs at Dongjiang restaurant on Yanjiang Middle Road (try the roast goose or local crab) or downstairs in the frantically busy seafood market, where some may feel uneasy at the sight of crowded tanks of eels and water snakes or freshly butchered crocodile. Red wine is available; the staff will have to send out for white, French but warm. The cruise is a rather Alice in Wonderland affair, the entire city lit up like Christmas: riverside trees glimmer like radioactive broccoli, flashing lights chase up and down the new high-rise buildings, while the show-stopping Canton Tower, wrapped in a striking basket-weave metal skin, shimmies from blue to pink to rainbow and back again.

**PARK** AND RECREATION THIS lovely 86ha city **park** featuring winding, shaded paths, monuments and museums is a great place to escape the crowds, although not on weekends, when families congregate here en masse, schoolchildren travel in packs and all sorts of groups, including People's Liberation Army veterans, gather near the sculpture of the Five Rams, the city's emblem. Near the middle of the **park**, the hilltop Guangzhou Museum is housed in the five-storey Zhenhai Tower, dating back to 1380. Look out for the vendors selling tempting snacks, including roasted chestnuts and fresh coconut water. More: [cnto.org.au](http://cnto.org.au).

GO VISA-FREE WITH the introduction last year of a 72-hour visa waiver, Guangzhou now makes a colourful (and less expensive) stopover alternative to nearby **Hong Kong** for those on their way to Europe and elsewhere. The whole process is reasonably hassle-free and the visa allows visitors to travel to any part of Guangdong Province, including the economic hub of Shenzhen.

THE CANTON ROUTE **CHINA** Southern Airlines operates 31 weekly flights from Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane to its Guangzhou hub in southern **China** and onward to almost 200 destinations in 35 countries on the airline's Canton Route. Return flights from Australia to Guangzhou are from \$896 economy and \$3886 business class. Return **sale** fares from Australia to London and Paris from \$1707 and \$1531, respectively (business class from \$5645). More: [csair.com.au](http://csair.com.au).

Christine McCabe was a guest of **China** Southern Airlines.

BEST BEDS RETREAT TO THE RIVERSIDESITUATED on the river next to the city's sprawling convention and exhibition centre (home to the famous Canton Fair), the Shangri-La is more urban resort than city **hotel**. Neat, meandering gardens (where birdsong, not car horns, is the soundtrack du jour), a lagoon pool (left), putting green, health club and signature CHI spa are the perfect antidote to a veritable mini UN of food served in the **hotel**'s eight bars and restaurants. Don't miss the Summer Palace (for Cantonese) or Nadaman for the city's best Japanese fare. A total of 639 large guestrooms, 65 suites and 26 apartments afford all the usual smooth-as-silk and very practical five-star embellishments one expects from Shangri-La: gratis WiFi, iron and ironing **board** and a sensible women's survival pack placed discreetly in each bathroom. Floor-to-ceiling windows provide mesmerising river and city views. More: [shangri-la.com](http://shangri-la.com).

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**PUB** News Ltd.

**AN** Document AUSTLN0020140508ea5a0003c