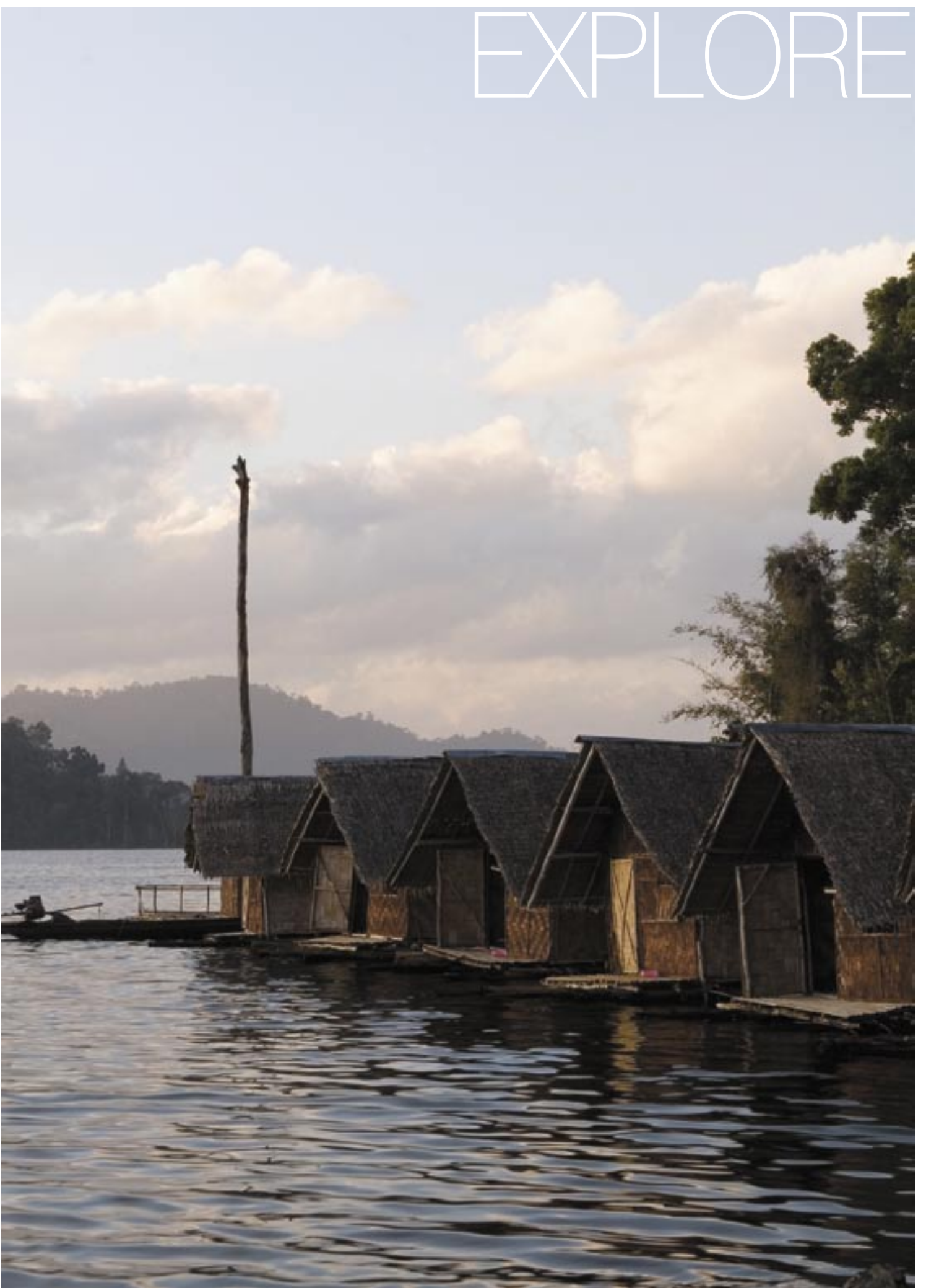


EXPLORE



Floating bungalows in Khao Sok, Thailand. See Feature, p33; photo by Daniel Schwartz

Travel

Beijing's long-overshadowed and oft-neglected sibling **Tianjin** is taking off thanks to Airbus (among others). The Toulouse-based aviation giant has just opened its first final assembly line outside Europe in the port city.

Greeted by boisterous lion dancers, I attended the opening ceremony wondering if the world is ready for **made-in-China commercial jets**. The factory is certainly impressive, covering an area of 600,000sqm and accommodating not only an assembly line but also a spray-painting workshop, a power station and a hangar.

The manufacturing process is equally fascinating. Six jigs loaded with parts for an **Airbus A320** – including a pair of wings and the forward and rear fuselage section – were transported on a container ship from Hamburg to Tianjin. Now the workers are putting all the pieces of this huge puzzle together, aiming to roll the first plane off the line mid-2009 for an on-time delivery to Sichuan Airlines. By 2011, Airbus expects the annual capacity in Tianjin to reach 44. The plant will churn out **247 A320-series jets per year** by 2016, and will also start selling them outside China.

For those of you concerned about safety, Airbus has emphasized that European engineers will be permanently on site, and that planes made in Tianjin will go through the same **rigorous testing** and certification processes. While many multinational companies take advantage of China's cheap labor, Airbus has made the move more for its long-term goals than short-term gains.

Despite beating nemesis Boeing in the worldwide market several years in a row, Airbus is still the **underdog in China**. Boeing entered China 13 years ahead of Airbus and still controls nearly two-thirds of the market. Although it has been gaining on Boeing since 2004, Airbus wants half of the market in five years.

One thing the two archrivals see eye to eye on is China's huge appetite for **new commercial jets** in the coming years. By some estimates, China will spend some **300 billion US dollars** by 2025 to triple the size of its fleet to nearly 4,000 aircraft. The bottom line: China remains one of the few bright spots in the gloomy global airline sector, which has been hit hard by volatile oil prices and slumping major economies.

By building a plant in Tianjin to assemble the popular A320, the workhorse of many airlines and the second best-selling jetliner family of all time (after Boeing's venerable B737), Airbus has agreed to transfer some of its **technology** to China. Some analysts call it a decision that will bring guaranteed orders from Beijing, but others question the wisdom of helping a future competitor.

China has made no secret of its ambition in the aviation industry, introducing its first indigenous regional jet last year and launching its large commercial jet program in May. One of Airbus' main partners in Tianjin, China Aviation Industry Corporation I (AVIC I), happens to be in charge of developing the country's own big planes. When China unveils its own **jumbo jet** in the future, more than a few eyes will be scrutinizing the design for resemblance to Airbus models.

Steven Jiang



AIRLINES

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Khao Sok Adventures

KAYAKING THROUGH THE TREE TOPS IN
SOUTHERN THAILAND'S HIDDEN GEM

text and photos by Daniel Schwartz



I certainly couldn't deny it. The sunset *had* been spectacular. Nature had delivered a pull-out-all-the-stops, never-to-be forgotten, multi-hued extravaganza. Yet now, after the last glow of light had disappeared below the horizon, I was beginning to wonder if we hadn't enjoyed a little bit too much of the sunset. We were kayaking on the waters of southern Thailand's massive Chiaw Lan Lake, deep in the mountains of the Khao Sok National Park. Surrounded as we were by jagged peaks and looming rainforests, it was certainly not a place to be lost at night.

Waves rippling across the water pushed our kayaks deeper into a dark forested inlet. With the jungle closing in on three sides, I suddenly felt very small. We remained motionless, and before long the sounds of the rainforest began to emerge. Wild pigs crashed through the underbrush only a few feet away, while ghostly birdcalls echoed through the humid air. The forest came to life, and I began to hear more and more animals. I then realized that we were literally encircled by wildlife. It felt like the opposite of a zoo – five lonely humans surrounded by crowds of animals. I was awed, and more than a little spooked. Certainly this would be the highlight of our trip – if we ever made it back.

Just then, the reassuring voice of my guide called out and woke me from my reverie. "Time to head back to camp," he said. I followed the sound of his voice, and soon we were back in the open water, where I could make out his star-lit silhouette. As I paddled up beside him, he broke the silence again. "That was nothing," he said in a subdued voice. "Just wait till you see what I show you tomorrow."

He was right, of course. The next morning, as we were serenaded by the haunting sound of gibbon calls, it seemed that *this* must surely be the highlight. We soon learned that the only thing we could take for granted about our four-day kayaking trip was to expect the unexpected. Whether it was flocks of hornbills swooshing through the trees, the thrill of finding hidden waterfalls, or the



grandeur of the otherworldly karst mountain scenery, we were continually surprised by Khao Sok's bounty and diversity.

Khao Sok National Park, together with adjoining wildlife refuges, covers a huge swath of dense jungle in the center of Thailand's Andaman Peninsula. Though only a four-hour drive from the tourist center of Phuket, its rugged mountains and turbulent history have protected the area from the deforestation and development that has marked most of the region. Today, Khao Sok's stunning mountain scenery and pristine natural environment makes the park a paradise for wildlife watchers and adventurers.

At the heart of this protected area is Chiaw Lan Lake. Though it can seem timeless, the lake is barely over 20 years old. Prior to 1986, this was a rugged area of lowland forests set in steep, inaccessible valleys. Though the creation of the lake was controversial

at the time, it now hailed as an astounding success. The waterway is now famous for its abundant birdlife and beautiful scenery. The tourism it attracts also provides a reliable source of income for local villagers, thus discouraging logging and poaching, and ensuring that the park will remain intact for future generations to enjoy.

Though hiking is possible in the park, the best way to experience Khao Sok is on the water. Traveling by kayak provides views that are rarely possible in the rainforest.

Thanks to the steep slopes of Chiaw Lan Lake, we literally floated through the treetops in our kayaks

Kayaking amidst Khao Sok's jagged peaks



(Wildlife watching from far below on the forest floor can be a frustrating exercise, as animals which reside in the canopy are heard but never seen; more than once, I have finished rainforest treks having sighted nothing more exotic than mosquitoes.) Here, however, thanks to the steep slopes of Chiaw Lan Lake, we literally floated through the treetops in our kayaks. Wildlife "highways" lay exposed to view on the lakeshore. Monkeys were clearly visible as they crashed through the treetops. Hornbills, famous for an oddly shaped beak, are normally difficult to spot – we saw these birds by the hundreds. As an added benefit, the lake breezes mercifully kept away any unwanted insect visitors.



Bungalows atop floating rafts

Chiaw Lan Lake is perhaps most famous for the towering cliffs and bizarrely shaped outcroppings found in its central section. Because of their similarity to the karst mountains found elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the lake is often described as an inland version of Vietnam's Halong Bay, or nearby Phuket's Phanga Bay. In fact, such glib comparisons do not do Khao Sok justice. After a night watching the sunset over this magical scenery, both Halong and Phanga seemed like pale imitations of Chiaw Lan Lake. Certainly, the absence of the mega-tour boats that mar those areas made the experience more peaceful. For those not content to simply gaze up at the cliffs, both rock climbing and caving can be arranged.

As we paddled home through the dark on that first evening, we headed back to yet another unexpected delight. At Khao Sok we not only spent the day on the water, we also slept on it. Our simple bungalows floated on rafts anchored to the cliff sides. Linked by lattice-like walkways, they looked like they belonged in a fairy tale. That night, starlight drifted through the window as the gentle rocking of the waves lulled me to sleep. It's counterintuitive, but looking back, I realize that falling asleep was perhaps the biggest highlight of all.

Travel Tips

Arranging your trip:

Paddle Asia (www.paddleasia.com) is the best tour operator for visiting Khao Sok National Park, with reliable, honest service and knowledgeable guides. They also offer the only regular kayak trips on the lake; the kayaking is easy and is suitable for all skill levels. Trips can be customized, but prices start at USD 435 for a three-day tour. If you opt for other tour operators, be sure that your guide is experienced if you are planning to explore the caves, which are prone to flooding.

Getting there:

Paddle Asia can arrange to pick you up from Phuket. There are several daily flights from Beijing to Bangkok, starting at around RMB 2,500 round-trip; from there, you must take a flight to Phuket. Bangkok Airways (www.bangkokair.com) is a good local carrier.

Where to stay and when to go:

Most tours include lodging on floating bungalows. Khao Sok is best visited in the winter dry season (Nov-Feb).

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24 hours in... Sanya

WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO DO FOR TRAVELERS ON A TIME BUDGET

text and photos by Christian Kober

Often referred to as the “Hawaii of China,” Hainan is a popular destination for tourists who seek the sun during the cold winter months. November marks the end of the rainy season, and thus the start of the high season, but it’s still considerably quieter than at Chinese New Year.

06:30 I’m woken by the sun coming up over the blue sea and low mountains, a nice start to the day. After flying in last night, I checked into the four-star **Pearl River Garden Hotel**. Located in Dadonghai, one of three beach areas in Sanya, the hotel is close enough to the city to be convenient, but far enough away to feel remote.

06:45 Decide to skip the early morning jog on the beach in favor of reserving a **sun lounger** before the Russians put their towels down for the day!

07:00 Start the day with a **fruit cocktail breakfast** of dragon fruit, starfruit, papaya, guava, lychee and pineapple juice.

08:00 Sanya is *the* place to go **diving** in China. (Novices can take a Discover Scuba Diving course.) I’ve dived before, so I go to Yalong Bay, where a professional dive team takes me on a two-tank dive. Unfortunately, the best of the coral is being sold outside my hotel to tourists, and the best chance of seeing any shark’s fin is in a soup down at the local market. Nevertheless it’s a good chance to keep my diving log book active.

10:00 Half of Hainan’s 1,580km coastline is made up of beaches. Seven of those sandy kilometers stretch around Yalong Bay, and they host a string of five-star luxury hotels as well. I take a quick look at one of the infinity pools but instead head into **Yalong Bay Resort Golf**

Club for a quick round on a course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

12:00 It’s time for **lunch**, and my hotel’s outdoor buffet offers an array of exotic foods. Popular treats in Hainan include sea cucumber, shark’s fin, abalone, sea snakes and jellyfish. Tropical fruits like lychee, pineapple, jackfruit, mango and bananas are also much fresher here than in other parts of China.

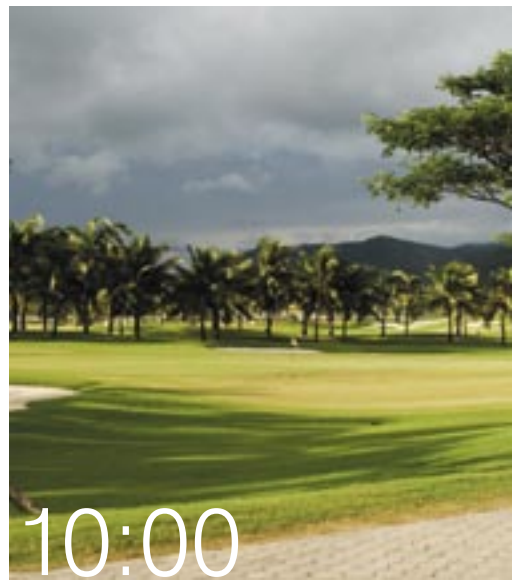
13:00 An easy afternoon trip takes me east of Sanya to **Nanwan Monkey Island**. This reserve dedicated to primates features a rhesus monkey population of around 2,000. These monkeys are crazy. Be warned, a kilo of bananas will last less than five seconds. Don’t even think of

*Sanya is the place to go
diving in China*

shortchanging them. They’ll root around in your belongings to retrieve every last morsel of food – you have been warned!

15:00 On the way back to Sanya is **Nantian Hot Spring Resort**. In case your tropical holiday isn’t relaxing enough, this resort offers another opportunity to unwind. Because it has the highest proportion of octogenarians, nonagenarians and centenarians in China, Hainan is often referred to as “Longevity Island.” These hot springs must certainly help ...

15:15 Of the resort’s 67 pools, the **“Fish Kissing Pool”** has to be the most unique and entertaining. Rather than actually snogging each other, the 50,000 fish nibble away at your dead skin. Soaking in the pool for around ten minutes softens the skin enough for the fish to nibble on. This ticklish exfoliation process is pleasant, as long as you don’t think too long and hard about what is actually taking place.



10:00



15:15

17:30 Once back at the hotel, I stroll the 20 meters down to the beach and sit down to sip a refreshing, freshly cut **coconut**, and watch the waves breaking on the crescent-shaped beach.

18:00 After the coconut refreshment, I walk along a short promenade as I wait for sunset. The **promenade** itself is lined with juice bars, snack food vendors and live music venues; they tend to be more low-key and relaxing than openly trying to attract customers.

18:30 I then head over to **Luhuitou Park**, at the top of a 280m-high hill overlooking the city. The hill is said to be shaped like a deer looking back over its shoulder, hence the Chinese name. In the park there is a lookout, which is guarded by a huge “Looking Back Deer” sculpture. I

climb up for a look, only to find the entire city is lit up, so I decided to venture back into town and explore.

19:30 Hainan’s **dining scene** comes alive at night ... literally! Tasty prawns, lively crabs, mussels and oysters are just some of the seafood available at the markets and food stalls all over the city. As the live fish and crustaceans are kept in tanks in most restaurants, you can be assured it’s all at its freshest when it arrives at your table. After selecting the lucky specimen, your catch is then served up *dabianlu*-style (similar to hot pot).

21:00 After dinner, I decide to stay out and soak up the Hainan’s nightlife. I’m told **Lidu of Maintint Hotel** is one of the most popular nightclubs and was also the venue of a Miss World Pageant.

Travel Tips

Getting there:

Flights leave daily from Beijing to Sanya, and prices vary depending on the time of year. Check with a travel agent for the best flight deals. Alternatively, you can travel to Hainan by train (Beijing-Sanya T202, Sanya-Beijing T201).

Activities in Sanya:

Scuba diving – professional dives RMB 760/person

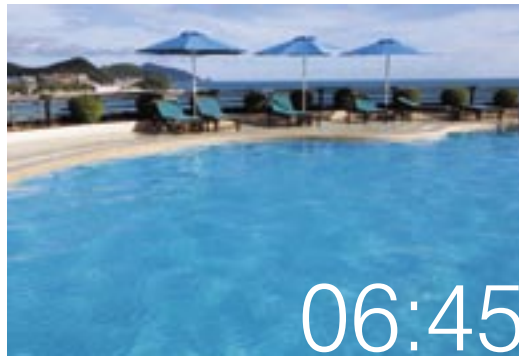
Coral diving – RMB 360/person

Snorkeling – RMB 260/person

Golf – www.yalongbaygolfclub.com (898 8856 5888, welcom@yalongbaygolfclub.com)

Nanwan Monkey Island – RMB 68

Nantian Hot Spring – RMB 168 (reservations at holiday@globalsanya.com)



06:45



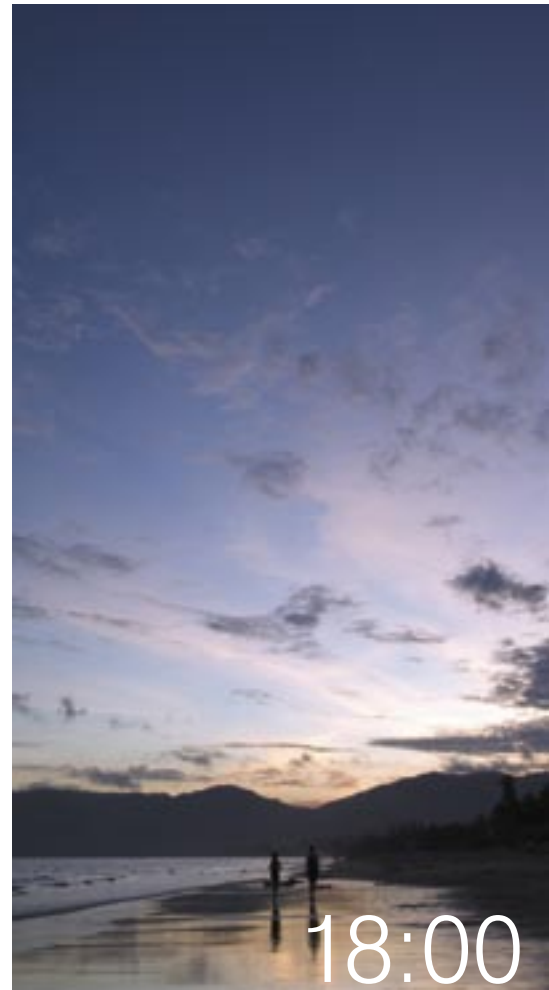
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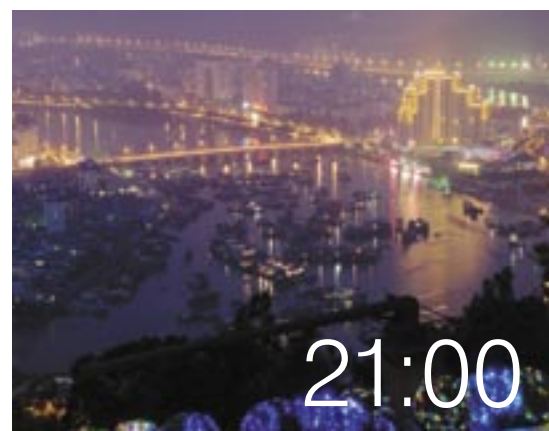
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18:00



18:30



21:00



LANTERN MARKET STREET

Lao Beijing lives on in Dengshikou

by Ed Lanfranco

I owe readers an apology. To celebrate the fourth anniversary of my Forgotten City column last issue, I wanted to uncork Dengshikou like a special bottle of wine. However, I didn't decant it right, failing to convey the full-bodied flavor of this special spot where you can savor Beijing's history in all its splendid iterations: Mongol, Ming, Manchu, the Republican era, Mao and now.

Special attention needs to be paid to the remnants of Wangfujing's past glories – from Chang'an Boulevard to the Wusi Dajie/Dongsi Xidajie intersection – before everything disappears in the next round of redevelopment. Indeed, a walk through the area offers great trips through time, and places to visit and revisit.

Despite the massive remake of Beijing, parts of Dengshikou's traditional way of life have managed to adapt in order to survive – and thrive. The Dengshikou of today offers a brilliant opportunity for preservationists and commercial real estate interests to work together in a thoughtful manner to preserve history for the future while meeting the needs of the bottom line today.

Dengshikou translates as “Lantern Market Street.” Starting with the Ming emperor Yongle (r. 1403-1424) and continuing to the last Qing child despot Puyi (r. 1908-1911), this roadway was lined with shops and stalls devoted to the manufacture and sale of lanterns in myriad materials, themes and sizes. The street was thronged for ten nights during the first lunar month as shop owners put on a light show trying to outshine the competition with their wares.

In old Beijing, every household hung the best lamp they could afford outside their door on the fifteenth night, the full moon celebrating Yuanxiao Jie, the Lantern Festival. Princeton historian Susan Naquin noted that this time of year created a unique nighttime use of public space; the populace would promenade en masse to see city streets lit up rather than follow the usual year-round pattern of staying home after dark. The shops and festival rites disappeared in the early stages of the Republican period (1912-1949).

Dengshikou Beitiao leads to other alleyways, making it the better of the two options for exploring the heart of the little district. About ten to 15 meters on the left side is the former compound of the American Board Mission, first established in the late 1800s. The school, Protestant church and residential buildings were all rebuilt after the Boxer Uprising in 1900. Sun Yat-sen, the founding father and first president of modern China, stayed here as a guest in 1912 during his negotiations with Yuan Shikai to relinquish the presidency in exchange for a stable transition away from the monarchical form of government.

On weekends and major holidays it's usually possible (albeit with a bit of charm and Chinese language skills) to penetrate the wrought iron gate and tetchy guard at today's No. 25 Middle School, so long as you don't wander around too far or too long.

There are two examples of the Mongol imprimatur at Dengshikou. Accessible from Wangfujing on the area's western border, Da Boge and Xiao Boge (“Big Pigeon” and “Little Pigeon”) Hutong are place names dating back to the Yuan era, when Beijing was called Dadu, and the area was a major marketplace catering to devotees of in-flight entertainment, rather than gourmands seeking feather-picked viands.

Important parts of Dadu's cosmopolitan composition were court advisors, artisans and traders from Muslim lands. Records regarding the origins of the Dongsi Mosque within northeastern corner of Dengshikou are sketchy prior to the Ming period, but some accounts

say it was originally built in 1356, eight years before the end of Mongol rule. Now home to the Chinese Islamic Association, the mosque's library includes a Quran from the Yuan dynasty.

The northwestern corner of Dengshikou has its own mysteries of history in the form of the Huaqiao Dasha, once translated as the Overseas Chinese

Mansion but now called the Prime Hotel. This place has the distinction of being the only one of Beijing's ten big projects for the tenth anniversary of the PRC in 1959 to be razed (1988) and then resurrected (1992). The calligraphy atop the building is from Mao Zedong's brush.

The first alley south of Huaqiao Dasha, Duofu (“Much Good Fortune”) Hutong offers one of those great adventures in tracking down treasures of the forgotten city. Rather than follow the dogleg leftward direction of the alley, turn right and discreetly walk into the ruins of the Fahua Si.

The Temple of Buddha's Glory was created in 1451 as a plush palace belonging to the chief eunuch of the Ming Jingtai emperor and became a house of worship 20 years later. This was the site of preliminary negotiations involving Britain's Lord Elgin, France's Baron von Gros and Prince Gong, the half brother of the Qing emperor Xianfeng for one of the notorious unequal treaties in 1860.

Despite several families occupying its precincts in the 1930s, Fahua Si was described as “still in good repair,” with religious ceremonies regularly taking place. Nowadays two of the *shibe* (stone steles) survive, and one still stands.

Despite the massive remake of Beijing, parts of Dengshikou's traditional way of life have managed to thrive

Directories continued from p32

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Global Easy Tour Mon-Fri and Sun 9am-6pm, Sat 10am-4pm. A0611, Free Tower, 58, Dongsanhuan Nanlu, Chaoyang District. ((5867 2900/1/2/3, 135 0115 6019, travel@globaleasytour.com) 和平国际, 朝阳区东三环南路58号富顿中心A0611

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Mercury International Travel Mercury Travel is a full-service, English-speaking travel resource - offering international and domestic trips, for both business and leisure. (8454 9420, enquiry@mercurytravel.com.cn) www.mercurytravel.com.cn

My Bus Tours Guides speak either English or Japanese. 2105, Bldg 5, Jianwai Soho, 39 Dongsanhuan Zhonglu, Chaoyang District. (5900 0642, travel@mybusbeijing.com.cn) 朝阳区东三环中路39号建外SOHO 5号楼2层106室

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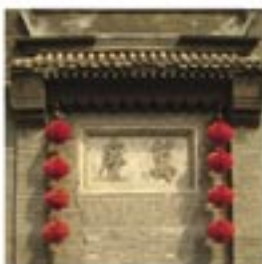
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