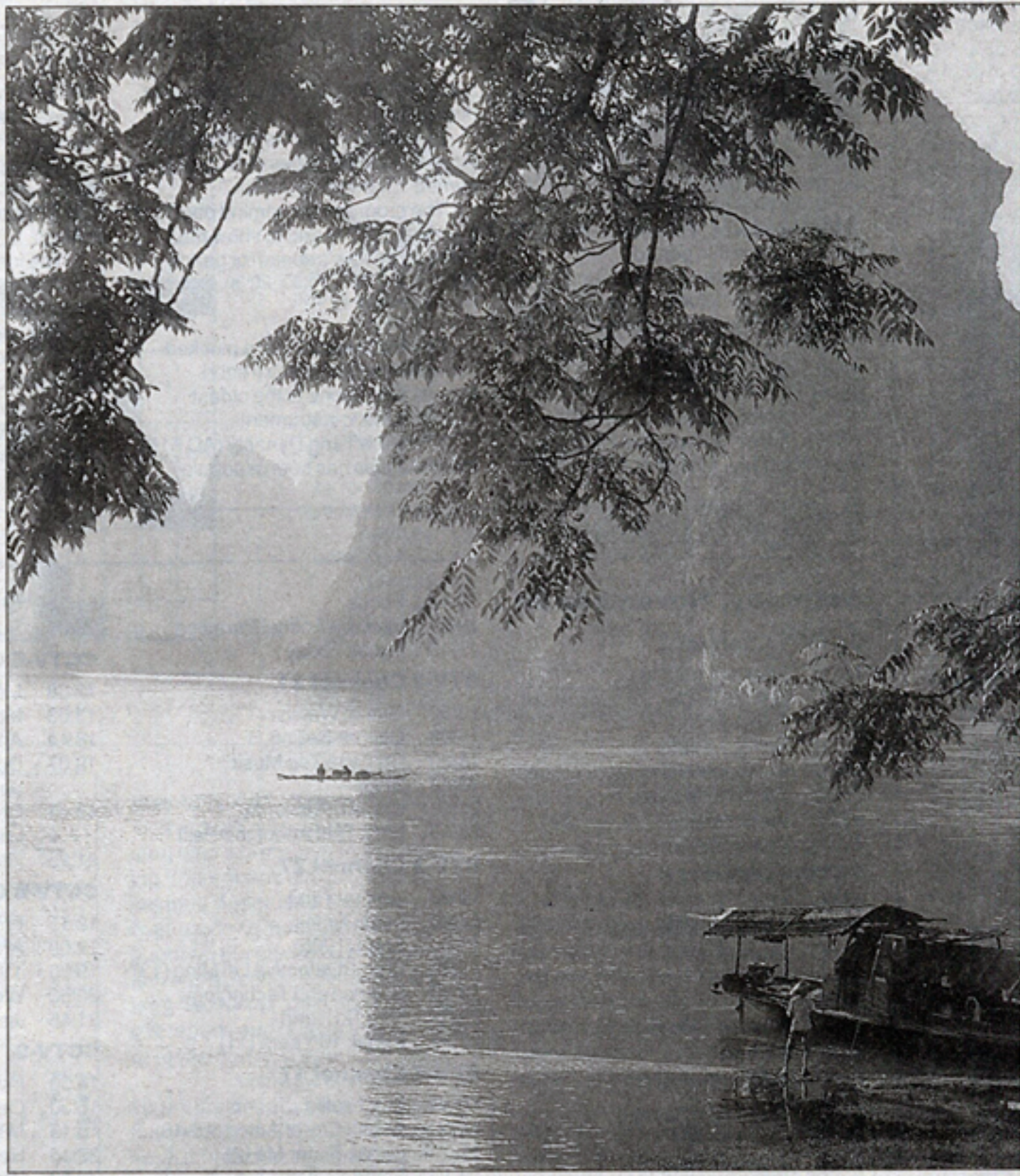


Scenic river: Cruising down the picturesque Lijiang River is one of the highlights of touring Guilin, South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.



File photo



Beady eyed: A fish hawk is a good companion of the fishermen on Lijiang River.

YU NAN/China Daily



LI ZHENGMING/China Daily

Cycling around picturesque Yangshuo

A hasty trip ends with lasting memories of a charming town

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

At dusk, drizzle quietly knocked at the window, making the outside scenery along the expressway to Guilin Airport vague, even more attractive.

Anxiously lying on the backrest of the airport shuttle bus, I checked my watch from time to time, hoping I would not miss my flight that left within an hour.

I was still indulging myself in Yangshuo, where I spent several hours shuttling around the tiny place on a bicycle, almost forgetting the evening flight.

The town near Guilin in South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region attracts swarms of tourists all year round with its picturesque Lijiang River, green limestone pinnacles and tranquil villages.

New plans

My original destination in Guangxi was not Yangshuo. I came to Guilin to cover the four-day Bo'ao Asian Forum-Tourism Conference.

I enjoyed the river cruise along dreamy Lijiang River with the bright sunshine and limpid water contrasting against the hilly backdrop on my first day there.

The journey down the river to Yangshuo took about four hours. There was no time left for me to visit the town because I had to rush back to Guilin, 65 kilometres away, to catch the opening ceremony of the conference.

So Yangshuo, with only a quick glance at its wharf, was left in my mind.

That was why I jumped on to one of the mini buses to Yangshuo with another two reporters during our final day in Guilin.

The buses were parked in the square in front of the railway station of Guilin and took off every 20 minutes. The one-way ticket cost

only 7.5 yuan (US\$0.90), an incredible price. It was misty, a classical day in the area, according to the local ticket seller. The moist air made a change from Beijing's dry air and was extremely comfortable on the skin.

The breath-taking green hills along the road loomed out of the fog and the bus finished the roughly 60 minute journey before we knew it.

We finally arrived at the legendary town, which was established in the Sui Dynasty (AD 581-618) and praised as a bright pearl of tourism in China for its fantastic scenery and local people.

It was still early, but after catching a whiff of a cooked dish the stomach started to rumble.

Following the fragrance, I found the famous Xijie (Western Street), which is near the bus station and centre of town.

Western-style restaurants and bars stand one after another along both sides of the street, all with lofty and distinctive decorations and colourful shop signs and billboards written in English.

"Am I in China?" joked Shen Li, one of my fellow travellers.

"We definitely are," I replied with a smile, pointing to the various small shops and vendor stands scattered around, inside which any international tourist interested in Chinese traditional culture could find whatever they want.

The charming stuff included traditional Chinese paintings and calligraphy, ornaments engraved with patterns of dragon and phoenix, Peking Opera masks, local batik carpets, fashionable *tangzhuang* (a traditional Chinese jacket) and scarves made of Chinese silk.

But surely it was not the right time to shop, as our stomachs kept reminding us.

Worth the wait

My companion was worried about being over-charged so we chose a small restaurant

at a cross bypath. We skipped the various Western dishes at the front of the restaurant and ordered three local dishes.

"Fish cooked with beer," "stone-sizzling beef" and "fried rice-flour noodles, the most famous local speciality."

I had tried rice noodles in Guilin, but the same rice noodles offered at the restaurant in Yangshuo were a special and unforgettable taste.

The soup was served with sour and spicy pickles and crisp deep-fried soybeans and hit the spot.

The *pijiuyu* (fish with beer) was a little spicy and hot, but it had a special taste of red peppers, soy sauce, green chives and beef tender.

The "stone-sizzling beef" was made by pouring and stirring small pieces of beef with heated cobbles.

Two minutes later and a mouth-watering beef turned white.

The hardest part was getting the meat from wooden chopsticks and washed, attentively.

The bill was a reasonable 60 yuan (US\$7.50). It was already nearly three hours since we had left Guilin to pick up our suitcases so we were worried about how to balance several interesting destinations with our remaining time, another attendant walked to our table and asked if we wanted bikes.

She said it was cheaper and more convenient than renting a car and faster than strolling on foot. Renting a bike costs 8 to 10 yuan (US\$0.97-1.20) for a day.

Both I and Xue Bing, a reporter from People's Daily, thought it would be a good way to travel, but Shen said she did not know how she would go — she last rode a bike 10 years ago.

"No problem, I could carry you around. We have a special bike for two people. And I can also be your tour guide," said the young attendant, Hu Quan, who helps her aunt rent bikes to tourists.

Hu led us out of town into the tranquil countryside. Our first destination was "the Big Banyan" and some villages.

Trip by bike

On a bike, I discovered myself in an even more serene and beautiful surrounding. Grottesque green limestone pinnacles were thrusting towards the sky, flocks of ducks were swimming in the stream and groves of bamboo were waving to us in the gentle breeze.

I felt like I had ridden into a traditional Chinese painting. "Look at your left side," Hu shouted excitedly, pointing to a village about 100 metres ahead. "I grew up there."

The houses in her village are built with black bricks. Most of them have lofty tiled roofs and walls, widely-opened wooden gates, elegant gables and upturned eaves.

Hu said she finished middle school last year and wanted to be a professional tour guide in Yangshuo someday. She was learning English by herself now.

"I wish to speak more fluent English, not just 'hello' and 'good-bye,'" Hu said.

Hitting Beijing's slopes

By CHEN LIANG
China Daily staff

Even though it has not snowed in downtown Beijing yet, many ski enthusiasts in the city still dressed up in their ski suits last weekend and celebrated the beginning of a new season by speeding down the slopes of Nanshan Ski Village.

Opened on Saturday, the resort in Miyun County in northern Beijing is the first of eight scattered around the suburb that are opening for the season.

At the weekend, an Austrian snowmaker created two well-paved runs for novice and intermediate skiers at the resort. The country's only halfpipe trail was also opened to snowboarders.

"More slopes, including our 600-metre-long advanced slope, will be opened to skiers in the next week," Lu Jian, director of the board and chief executive officer of the resort,

declared at the recent opening ceremony.

According to Lu, a total of 15 million yuan (US\$1.8 million) was invested this summer to upgrade the resort and prepare for its second skiing season.

As a result, the Nanshan Ski Village has become the largest ski resort in North China, with the most advanced equipment and most complete variety of slopes.

"Besides our eight runs for novice, intermediate and advanced skiers and the halfpipe slope, we have the country's only advanced Mogul trail, a snow football ground for six players and a 1,318-metre-long toboggan run," Lu said.

Eight snowmobiles and 100 sledges imported from Canada will provide visitors more choices, he said.

The Nanshan Skiing Club has also been opened to skiers since Saturday.

Club members, 300 at most, can use individual lock-

ers in the clubhouse and ski out and in from the building to the slopes.

"It is the first of its kind found in the country," Lu said.

He said three European-style villas and a camping ground will be opened to skiers soon.

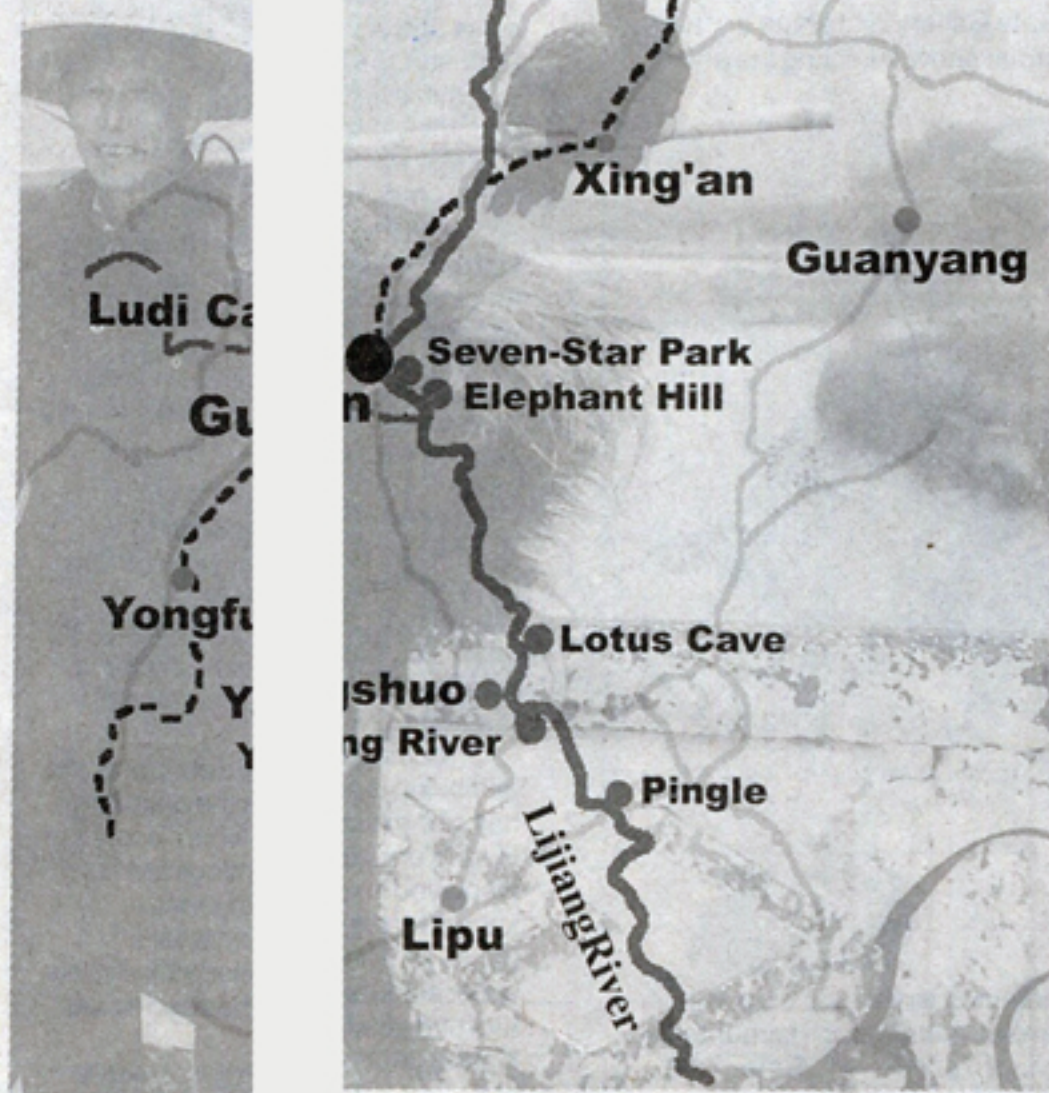
Meanwhile, the Sino-Austrian Snowboard Educational Institution has established the Nanshan International Snowboarding School at the resort.

An Austrian snowboarding instructor is helping the resort train 15 instructors.

"If they go through the training and tests, they will get the instructing licence from the Austrian Snowboard Association," said Lu, a snowboarding enthusiast.

"We really expect to develop our resort into a training base for Chinese snowboarders."

In its first skiing season, the Nanshan Ski Village received 56,000 skiers.



Above: A brief introduction of the scenic spots around Guilin. Right: Yu Nan, author of article, enjoys her ride along the river.

Tips for Guilin trip

A bright pearl in China's tourism industry, Guilin has become an ever popular destination for many years. The area's accommodation, transport, restaurants, shopping and entertainment are all remarkable.

Suggested tour routes for backpackers:

- Day 1: Free bus tour in Guilin: Elephant Hill Park — Seven-star Park — Fubo Hill and Diecai Hill — Zhengyang Walking Street — Central Square.
- Day 2: Boat tour along Lijiang River and strolling in Yangshuo: Lijiang river cruise (about 4 hours) — settle in Yangshuo — stroll along Xijie Street and enjoy its evening entertainment.
- Day 3: Bike tour in Yangshuo: Moon Hill — Big Banyan Park — villages.
- Day 4: Bike tour in Yangshuo: Yulong River — old town of Yangshuo — Baisha town — Shiwai Taoyuan.

A week's stay in Yangshuo is recommended.



Courtesy of Yu Nan