Lay of the land

Guangzhou is a sprawling city, which occasionally absorbs neighbouring areas. Nansha, for example, only recently became included in Guangzhou’s city limits and there is confusion among some residents as to whether Foshan to the west is part of the city.

For the sake of simplicity, our orientation begins in the Baiyun district to the north of the city centre. This is where the aptly named Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport is found and so for many will be the first point of entry to Guangzhou. Although the airport is roughly 40km from the city’s primary district, Baiyun extends all of that way, encompassing a number of suburban residential districts, schools and a couple of forest parks.

Baiyun tapers as it heads south towards the city. Nestled at its eastern flank is Tianhe district. Tianhe is Guangzhou’s central business district. However to be more exact the CBD is Zhujiang New Town, an area at the southernmost point of Tianhe. Twenty years ago the district was simply fields and farmland on the outskirts of the city, but now it boasts wide streets and skyscrapers, a football stadium, Guangzhou East Railway Station, shopping malls, the American consulate and a collection of local government offices too. It is one of the most desirable places to live in Guangzhou and consequently is also one of the most expensive.

To the west of Tianhe is Yuexiu. Perhaps Guangzhou’s smallest district it is the old heart of Guangzhou. On Beijing Road, a popular shopping destination in Yuexiu, the remnants of the high street that ran through there during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) have been preserved under glass, after they were unearthed during road development. The area has a long history as Guangzhou’s central hub.

West once again is Liwan, which is home to some of the earliest Western settlements in China, on Shamian Island. The island is also the site of the People’s Republic of China’s first five-star hotel: the White Swan.
Guangzhou Circle is a landmark building. It is the headquarters of the Hongda Xingye Group.
Thus far these districts could all be said to be north of the Pearl River. Haizhu district is in the middle of the river. (Given that Guangzhou is part of the Pearl River Delta, some of its districts are in fact islands. However due to the size of the islands this might not be immediately perceptible.) Haizhu is one of the largest of Guangzhou’s estuary islands, stretching beneath Yuexiu and Tianhe. There you’ll find the city’s most recognisable landmark – The Canton Tower – the most prestigious university – Sun Yat-Sen University – and the gargantuan exhibition centre where the Canton Fair is held.

Beneath Haizhu is Panyu district. At its most northern point lies the island of Xiaoguwei, which has been converted into the Higher Education Mega Centre. The most prominent universities in Guangzhou all have a campus on this island and besides that there is not much else. The rest of Panyu is a collection of townships, villages, farmland and industry.

Then finally, at the southern-most point of Guangzhou, there is Nansha. Nansha was developed as part of the Guangdong Free Trade Zone, and is home to the Guangzhou Nansha Economic and Technological Development Zone, or the Nansha New Zone.

There are four other districts in Guangzhou – Huadu, Conghua, Zengcheng and Huangpu. Huadu hosts part of

Conghua and Zengcheng only became part of the city of Guangzhou in 2014.
Baiyun International Airport, and Conghua and Zengcheng only became districts of Guangzhou in 2014. Huangpu district is largely industrial, maintaining its historical significance as a port. Huangpu took its name from the island formerly known as Whampoa, of Whampoa Military Academy fame – the Soviet-funded training facility that brought to prominence the paramount leader of the Republic of China, Chiang Kai-shek.

Transport

International flights
Baiyun International Airport is the centre of operations for China Southern Airlines, China’s largest passenger airline in terms of planes. In 2015 it was the third busiest airport in China in passenger numbers. Most of the air traffic to and from Baiyun is domestic, and most of the international routes are to cities in Asia. Long-haul options are available too from the likes of London, Paris and Los Angeles.

The airport is connected directly to the city centre via the underground system. The journey takes approximately 40 minutes and costs roughly Rmb8 ($1.22). It might be best avoiding this method at rush hour however, as you’re not likely to make many friends trying to shift luggage along the narrow confines of the underground trains. A taxi from the airport to downtown Tianhe district will cost about Rmb100 ($15) on the meter.

Train from Hong Kong
From Hong Kong you can ride the MTR Intercity Through Train from Hung Hom station straight to Guangzhou East Railway Station. The journey takes a little over two hours and costs HK$210 ($27). If returning from Guangzhou to Hong Kong by the same train, it’s best to buy your tickets at the East Railway Station, where purchases can be made in both Hong Kong dollars and renminbi. A lot of misinformation online suggests that ticket sales at

Guangzhou Baiyun Airport
Guangzhou cease six hours before the train is due to depart, but the deadline is closer to 20 minutes before departure, for purchases made in both Guangzhou and Hong Kong. You can buy train tickets several days in advance and the route can be popular so it is best to get them early. A word to the wise: eat before checking in for your train. Although the train has a dining carriage, the holding pens at either terminus have no such fare, which is problematic if faced with a lengthy delay.

A faster train service linking Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou is currently under construction and is due for completion in 2018. This high-speed service, known as the Express Rail Link, at its fastest will travel from Kowloon to Guangzhou in 48 minutes but that duration only applies to direct trains; the Express trains that stop at Shenzhen along the way may take over an hour to reach Guangzhou. And when you arrive in Guangzhou the terminus is Guangzhou South Railway Station, which is currently a fairly barren area. The underground connection from Guangzhou South to Zhujiang New Town (the CBD) takes around 40 minutes (for more, see page 88).

**Underground**

The Guangzhou Metro is probably the best way to travel around the city, if you can handle the crowds and resign yourself to the fact that you will likely have to stand. The
In the pipeline

Guangzhou's underground system is to be massively extended – see page opposite for its eventual size

**Line 1:**
- **Guangzhou East Railway Station** – The connection station for the bulk of Guangzhou's intercity trains. Trains connecting to Shenzhen and Hong Kong leave and arrive here, it is also a short distance from IKEA.
- **Tianhe Sports Centre** – Home to Guangzhou Taobao Evergrande FC
- **Huangsha** – The best station for access to Shamian Island, the former living quarters of foreign traders during the Qing Dynasty and the current site of the White Swan hotel.

**Line 2:**
- **Guangzhou South Railway Station** – The terminus of the Hong Kong-Express Rail Link, currently under development. The track already extends to Shenzhen.

**Line 3:**
- **(Also) Guangzhou East Railway Station**
- **Zhujiang New Town** – The city's new CBD and one way to access the Opera House and Guangdong Museum.
- **Canton Tower** – For access to the Canton Tower.
- **Airport South** – The southern terminal of Guangzhou's Baiyun International Airport (located to the north of the city).
Line 4:
Higher Education Mega Centre, North and South – This area offers little save for those attending university at one of the campuses accumulated on the islet.
Jinzhou – A good station for accessing Tian Hou Temple: a striking reconstruction of the Ming Dynasty temple built in honour of Mazu, Queen of the Sea.

Line 5:
(Also) Zhujiang New Town
Liede – For Xingsheng Road, lined with restaurants and bars.

Line 6:
Beijing Road – A pedestrianised shopping street and site of Guangzhou’s city centre during the Tang Dynasty.

Line 8:
Sun Yat-Sen University – The most prestigious university in Guangzhou, providing good grounds for a stroll.

APM (Automated People Mover):
Canton Tower
Guangzhou Opera House
Tianhe Sports Centre South
VISITOR INFORMATION

The current length of track on Guangzhou’s underground subway system is 260km.

Network has a decent number of connection points, plotting all the major locations of the city, and it’s easy to navigate with station announcements made in Mandarin, Cantonese and English.

(One oddity that might confuse a first timer is that when travelling on Line 6 you are required to change trains at Zhujiang New Town and Tiyu Xilu regardless of whether you want to change lines. Perhaps this system will be smoothed out).

Perhaps the most startling thing about the Metro is its reach. You can head underground from the pristine streets in the city centre and emerge again in a dusty industrial port or close to a country village. The Metro also connects with the neighbouring city Foshan, where a lot of Guangzhou’s manufacturers have moved. This connection is convenient if you need to conduct factory visits, for example.

There are currently nine lines on the Metro system, including the APM (Automated People Mover) – an unmanned, two-carriage train that runs a fairly short north-south stretch. There are four additional lines under construction, due for completion by 2018, but the government’s ambitions are far larger having submitted a proposal to up the total number to 24 (see page 29). However the proposals await approval, so the metro network might not grow to be as extensive as projected.

Taxis, motorbikes and apps

Taxis are a more relaxing travel option if you have time on your hands, and the best option if you’re going somewhere not yet graced by a metro stop. Guangzhou is a heavily congested city, which is in part due to poor

A tram near the Canton Tower

SINOPOLIS: GUANGZHOU
planning and partially down to the unfortunate geography of the area. As Guangzhou is built upon a delta, many areas need to be connected by bridges, which creates choke points.

Even within many of the recently developed areas, the streets are divided into large blocks and the opposing traffic lanes are separated by barriers, providing little option for U-turns or short-cuts.

All told, sometimes taxis need to take what seems like a fairly indirect route to your destination, choosing ring roads around the city – but this is often a necessity.

Didi Chuxing and Uber are also commonly used in the city, but since using the services usually requires some form of consultation with the driver (if they can't find exactly where you are) these options might best be left to those with Mandarin or Cantonese language skills.

As you travel further away from the city centre, to Panyu or Huangpu for example, motorbike taxis suddenly become prolific. These ferrymen are entirely unofficial and unregulated.

Mostly they are opportunistic workers who linger outside of metro stations or beep at pedestrians as they ride down the street, on the off chance someone might want a lift.

Prices are naturally based entirely on negotiation, but are often very cheap. It's a quick way to travel and in the

**Transportation Cards**

Like many cities in China and the world, Guangzhou operates a pre-loaded transport card system that can be used on the metro and on the city buses. It is called a *Yangchengka*, as *yangcheng* is one of the monikers for Guangzhou (the name translates as City of Rams and relates to a story that tells how after Guangzhou had suffered famine for many years, five immortals riding on rams came to the city. Each ram carried a stalk of rice in its mouth and gifted the rice to the villagers, permanently ending the famine.) Transport cards can be acquired and loaded at most metro stations.
more remote areas where taxis rarely venture it might be your only option, but of course they are much more dangerous than other modes of transport. Motorbikes are actually banned in the city's central districts due to the danger and disruption they cause.

**Buses and transport cards**

For an outsider, buses are perhaps only convenient for travelling the distance between wherever you are and the closest metro stop.

Although some buses do make announcements of their stops in English, there is no English information on bus timetables.

**Recommended hotels**

**Shangri-La** – The best choice for attendees of the Canton Fair: within walking distance of the Fair compound, and graced with a secluded pool-garden for winding down after touring the trader's booths.

**Mandarin Oriental** – Boasting one of Guangzhou's finest Cantonese restaurants, it is in an elegant setting at the heart of the city's thriving Tianhe district, located within the upmarket Taikoo Hui shopping mall.
Internet

Internet services are restricted in China which can make navigating your way around the city difficult if you’re dependent on things like Google or Google Maps. If you’re unable to get a VPN, Baidu is China’s alternative to Google, though Baidu Maps is not great. Apple Maps actually excels in most parts of China. Gmail (usually), Facebook and Twitter are all unavailable in China so if you rely on these platforms for communication, it’s best to either arrange an alternative or get a VPN. If neither of those options are available, some international hotels appear to bundle a VPN service with their wi-fi.

White Swan – Standing on the island that was once the only place of residence for foreigners in China, the old go-to hotel for executive travellers has had some of its prestige restored by recent renovation.

Four Seasons – A chic design that caps the 103-storey IFC building in Zhujiang New Town, offering views across the river and onto the Canton Tower.

Food

As the former English-name of the city has lent itself to one of the world’s most famous cuisines, you might expect Guangzhou to represent the pinnacle of Cantonese cooking. In fact, many residents in Guangzhou will say that the best Cantonese food comes from Hong Kong and has since been brought back to Guangzhou. But that doesn’t mean there are not great places to eat. Guangzhou still offers a feast of local delicacies and a host of restaurants to enjoy.

Dim Sum （点心）

Dim sum is most commonly represented by steamed dumplings, although the name refers more to a manner of preparing and eating the food rather than any one
Har Gow: a popular dim sum dish made with shrimps

particular dish. The banner of dim sum covers any variety of bite-sized treats which can be combined to deliver a light meal of extraordinary flavours and textures. Think of it as Chinese tapas, if you like. Drinking tea with dim sum is known as yum cha – a cultural pastime centred on snacking and chatting around brunch time.

Har Gow (虾饺, Shrimp dumplings)
Har gow is perhaps the most iconic Cantonese dumpling. These dumplings are traditionally dipped in soy sauce or rice vinegar. Though seemingly a plain dish, it is often used to determine the skill of a dim sum chef. The skin must be thin and translucent, yet sturdy enough not to break when picked up with chopsticks. The dumpling must not stick to the bamboo basket it arrives in, nor to other har gow. The shrimp must be fully cooked, yet not overcooked. Due to its fresh flavour, it has gained popularity with Chinese and international diners.

Chee Cheong Fun (猪肠粉, Rice noodle roll)
During the Qing Dynasty, the Qianlong Emperor was travelling through what is now Guangzhou. Due to its popularity among the locals, the emperor was drawn to a local dish called long kan ci and decided to take a detour just to taste it. The emperor was so impressed by the dish that even after he returned to the capital he could not forget it and he decided to rename it chee cheong fun (pig intestine noodles) for its peculiar resemblance to the animal’s entrails.

In fact, this dish is made from rice noodles and is commonly served at breakfast or as a light meal. A wide strip of congealed shahe fen (rice flour and tapioca) is filled with meat or vegetables and served with seasoned soy sauce, which is poured over the dish upon serving. There are many variations depending on the filling: for example, one version is filled with youtiao (fried dough stick), a popular breakfast food.
Kao Ru Zhu (烤乳猪, Roast suckling pig)
This dish may be common across the world but the Cantonese have perfected its preparation. The best pork is roasted over a low fire for hours during the day and continuously lathered with oil to ensure the skin transforms into a crisp, golden-brown crackling. And unlike European roasted hogs, a Cantonese pig’s ribs are removed and its body is splayed before cooking, allowing the meat to be sliced rather than carved. While on the theme of pork, Guangzhou is also famed for its stewed trotters, which are slow-boiled in a sticky soup of sugar, vinegar and ginger.

Long Hu Dou (龙虎斗)
This dish translates as something like “Dragon and Tiger Fight”, but its ingredients are of a more common order. In lieu of the existence of dragons, snake is substituted in this dish, and in imperial times a variety of wild cats might have been served in place of actual tiger meat. Today often the ‘wild cat’ is more likely to be an unfortunate stray and the methods of capturing these animals and preparing the meat have been rebuked by many as inhumane. Consider its inclusion here less as a recommendation and more as a warning lest you accidentally find yourself gnawing on someone’s former pet.

Where to eat
Guangzhou Restaurant (广州酒家)
Guangzhou Restaurant is in fact a restaurant chain with its headquarters located at the intersection of Wenchang Road and Shangxiajiu Pedestrian Street, which is
famous for its Cantonese cuisine and mooncakes during the traditional Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. As its name suggests, it is one of the most famous restaurants in Guangzhou and is well known across China, having earned titles such as a ‘national top 10 restaurant’. Built in 1935, the restaurant has since been registered on Guangzhou’s heritage trail, and as such it must be preserved. Its traditional architecture and decoration conjure an ambience deliberately reminiscent of ancient times.

2 Wen Chang South Road, Liwan District (广州市文昌南路2号)

Tao Tao Ju (陶陶居)
When you ask about restaurants in Guangzhou, everyone speaks of Tou Tou Koi (to give it its Cantonese name). Tao Tao Ju was one of the first luxury restaurants to open in the city. Its origins can be traced back to the Qing Dynasty – its location is at Di Shi Fu, which was then a scenic spot. The founder, disgruntled by the lack of eateries in the area, built a small teahouse. Over its 100 years of history, it transformed into a grand restaurant hosting noted figures of Chinese literature; a plaque on display at the restaurant contains the original handwritten carving of a famous scholar. Serving dim sum and desserts, the restaurant attracts many locals and tourists every day starting from breakfast at 7 until 11 at night.

20 Dishifu Road, Liwan District (荔湾区第十甫路20号)

South Garden Restaurant (南园酒家)
Highly reputed among locals, South Garden Restaurant serves iconic dishes in the Cantonese and Chaozhou (another city in Guangdong) style, using the freshest and finest ingredients. With its pleasant scenery, it is the perfect location for yum cha. Highly popular, you may find a long queue when you arrive, but it is guaranteed to be worth the wait.

142 Qianjin Road, Haizhu District (广州市珠海区前进路142号)

Panxi Restaurant (泮溪酒家)
Located on the bank of Liwan Lake, Panxi Restaurant is a large-scale garden-style eatery on the site of Chang Hua Garden, an imperial garden of the Southern Han Dynasty. In its vast grounds, occupying 12,000 square metres, you will find beautiful eaves and pavilions, decorated with traditional elements of Chinese architecture complete with a large park divided into four sections. Due to the poetic setting, some elderly diners are known to sing an operatic aria or two when the mood is right. Within the
restaurant’s huge menu, about 40 dishes and pastries have won prizes in national cooking contests. Some of the most famous include its har gow, taro nests, water chestnut cake and crisp three-flavoured rolls.

No.151, Longjin Road West, Liwan District (广州市荔湾区龙津西路151号)

Attractions

Canton Tower
The Canton Tower (unofficially called Guangzhou Tower) is Guangzhou’s primary tourist attraction. Its construction was finished in 2009 and it went operational in 2010 just in time to welcome the Asian Games to the city. At the time it was the tallest tower in the world (today its ranking depends on how you define a tower, but it is certainly not the tallest).

The tower houses two restaurants, four observation levels and an information gallery (albeit with no information in English). A monorail runs around the perimeter of the first exterior observation deck, bringing visitors that little bit closer to the edge. Canton Tower also has what it claims to be the world’s highest amusement ride, which raises you, seated, into the air before letting you plunge back down. The drop isn’t actually that far, but given that you can only see the ground some 600 metres below, it’s enough to get the adrenaline going.

The tower is quite a lively place at night too, when crowds of tourists come out to try and take pictures of themselves against the backdrop of its light display. But if a good photo is what you want, you’d be better off going
across the river to the plaza near the Opera House, where you can see the tower in full.

*Accessible from Canton Tower station on line 3 of the metro*

**Shamian Island**
Shamian Island was for a period of time between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the entry point into China. It was the only place that foreigners were allowed to live, but they could only spend part of the year there to trade their wares.

During the trading season the merchants stayed on Shamian, housed in large buildings known as factories. Besides being dormitories, they were also storehouses and offices of trade.

Today the factories that remain on Shamian serve a similar function to their original use, having mostly been adapted into modern residential compounds and government offices. Some commercial enterprises have moved into the old colonial-style buildings too, such as Starbucks. The island is now a good place to go for a stroll down historic avenues, and it is also home to the White Swan hotel, which was the first five-star hotel available to foreign guests in the People’s Republic of China.

*Accessible from Huangsha station on line 1 of the metro*

**Guangzhou Opera House**
Designed by (the recently deceased) British-Iraqi architect Dame Zaha Hadid, the Guangzhou Opera House was the winning entry in a competition in 2002. Work on the opera house began in 2005 and was completed in 2010 – in time for the Asian Games. The work received international acclaim, with architectural critics proclaiming it was “a magnificent example of how a single building can redeem a moribund urban environment” and the structure was praised for being “at once highly theatrical and insistently subtle”.

The contours of the separate buildings of the opera house – reflected in the pool of water they stand above – have led some to compare their appearance to that of two pebbles washed smooth in a river. However, whilst many visitors come simply to see the iconic building, others are more interested in the performances inside. The opera house has hosted a variety of genres, from world class orchestras to the musical *Phantom of the Opera*; from Russian ballet to the family-friendly *Shrek: The Musical*, as well as more recently welcoming the Blue Man Group to perform its Las Vegas show.

*Accessible from Zhujiang New Town station on line 3 of the metro or Guangzhou Opera House station on the APM*

**Rmb138 billion**
What it cost to build the Guangzhou Opera House
Dragon Lake Golf Club

Only a 15-minute drive from Guangzhou’s Baiyun airport, in the city’s northern district of Huadu, Dragon Lake Golf Club features a 27-hole course secluded between the mountains and the water.

Carved from dramatic terrain, the course is challenging, conjuring deep bunkers from steep fairways and forested rough that tumbles into the lake. Dragon Lake was the host of the 2013 Royal Trophy – a tournament that was designed to pit the best of Europe against the best of Asia (the event was founded by the late Seve Ballesteros).

One legacy of hosting that event remains: a 5-star hotel on the resort’s grounds. The Princess Hotel stands in a quaint village on the fringes of the golf course, with a design inspired by medieval Dutch towns. A standard room in this European oasis costs Rmb1,380 ($207) per night, but larger suites are available for as much as Rmb9,888 ($1,484).

Reservations can be made through www.jiulonghugzhotel.com/en/