



Luxury hotels are lit up along Yalong Bay in Sanya, Hainan province. Known as “the edge of the Earth” in ancient times, the island today is a paradise for visitors. ZHAO HUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hainan tourist numbers soar

Island’s location, climate and geology make it an ideal resort destination, **Huang Yiming** reports.

Hainan, China’s southernmost province, has made great strides toward its grand goal of becoming an international tourist destination.

The province received more than 47.89 million tourists in 2014, up 10.6 percent year-on-year, according to the Hainan Provincial Tourism Development Commission. The number of overnight tourists exceeded 40.6 million, up 10.56 percent. Tourism generated 50.65 billion yuan (\$8.14 billion), an increase of 13.2 percent from the previous year.

The province is located far from the interior of the Chinese mainland and was regarded as “the edge of the Earth” in ancient times.

However, the island has ideal advantages as a tourism resort. It lies across the Qiongzhou Strait from Guangdong province to the north and across the Gulf of Tonkin from Vietnam to the west. It also neighbors the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in the east and Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines in the south. All those countries and regions are one to four hour’s flight time from Hainan.

The province sits at 18 degrees north latitude — a golden line that connects many of the famous coastal vacation resorts of the world, including Miami, Hawaii, Bali, Phuket and the Maldives.

Hainan is a “masterpiece of the Creator” and a “brilliant pearl for all mankind”, said Enriquez Savignac, former secretary-general of the United Nations World Tourism Organization. The province,

47.89
million

tourists visited Hainan last year

composed of Hainan Island, the Zhongsha, Xisha and Nansha Islands, and the territorial waters surrounding these islands, has the largest ocean area (2.1 million square kilometers) and smallest land area (34,000 sq km) of China’s provincial regions.

As the second-largest island in China, Hainan boasts a coastline that stretches 1,528 km with many beaches, as well as hot springs.

Volcanic eruptions throughout history have left many extinct craters on the island.

The most typical is the Ma’anling crater in Qiongsan city, which is more than 220 meters above sea level. Moreover, 61.9 percent of the province is covered by forest, according to Lu Zhiyuan, assistant governor of Hainan People’s Government and director-general of the Hainan Provincial Tourism Development Commission. That helps to rank Hainan at the top of China’s best air list, Lu said.

With its pleasant climate and seawater temperatures that range from 18 C to 30 C for most of the year, the island is ideal for water sports and sunbathing.

A series of events, including the Tour of Hainan International Regatta, the Volvo Ocean Race and the GoPro World Longboard Championship, were held in the province last year. Duty-free shopping in Hainan has become



Fenjiezhou Island attracts tourists from home and abroad. PHOTOS BY HUANG YIMING / CHINA DAILY

another attraction for tourists. Each tourist can purchase up to 8,000 yuan of duty free goods on the island.

The Haitang Bay International Shopping Center, the world’s largest duty-free shop that covers an area of 72,000 sq m, opened its doors in Sanya in September last year. The range of imported items available at duty-free shops in Hainan was increased on March 20, Xinhua News Agency reported. An additional 17 types of product, including baby formula, coffee and air purifiers have been added to the duty-free program, taking the total to 38, according to the report. Apart from its natural beauty,

Hainan also has a time-honored history featuring a unique ethnic culture.

As the earliest residents in Hainan, people from the Li ethnic group preserve their culture through oral traditions and art because they have no written language of their own. The Li people’s culture covers such areas as architecture, art performances and handicrafts.

The ethnic group’s weaving technology dates back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476) and is believed to be one of the earliest weaving techniques in China.

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What they say

“Hainan, with its key attraction of Sanya, is indeed the tropical paradise it promotes itself as. Whether one comes



to the island to seek a place to relax and rejuvenate or one lives here permanently, the year-round sunshine, fresh air, beautiful beaches, calm waters and extensive tropical forest make it a wonderful place to be. It’s ideal if you love the outdoors. Hainan is also rich in medical herbs — another reason why the island is becoming more and more popular for medical tourism. There’s plenty to enjoy. Living on Hainan island simply feels good.”

Stephan Stoss, general manager of Hilton Sanya Yalong Bay Resort & Spa



“Before arriving on Hainan, I knew Hainan is not only the southernmost province and the biggest

special economic zone in China, but also a well-known tourism destination. When I landed in Hainan the first time, I was fully attracted by its beautiful environment. For me, I live in Haikou with my wife, and besides happily working, we spend much of our time traveling and enjoying the great new experiences in culture that Hainan Island has to offer.”

Martin Rogers, cluster general manager of Hilton Haikou Meilan and Hilton Wenchang

“Hainan is a very interesting island with a long history and deep cultural heritage. There are



more than 30 minority groups that moved from different areas of China and many unique customs and traditions remain in the ethnic groups in Hainan. It is great that when you do manage to get some spare time you can indulge in some great local dishes, travel to some brilliant beaches and have a relaxing time with warm weather and plenty of sunshine.”

Neil Blenkarn, general manager of Hilton Wenchang

Colorful Life in Hainan

Where to go?

1. Fenjiezhou Island

Fenjiezhou Island is a national 5A scenic zone in Lingshui county. Home to a number of rare wild animals and plants, it is also called the Sleeping Beauty Island for what it looks like from afar. Sylvia Earle, a US marine biologist who was called “Her Deepness” and “Queen of the Ocean”, dived in the waters off the island in October 2012, when she was 77.

Besides a range of marine recreational programs, the island has the only sightseeing submarine in China, which is 18.6-meters long and can accommodate 46 people.



2. Yanoda Rain Forest

The Yanoda Rain Forest Cultural Tourism Zone is a national 5A tourism destination



and a model base for the cultural industry. Its recreational programs, including a 600-meter rope slide through the forest, have attracted lots of adventurous tourists.

3. Binlang Valley Cultural Tourism Zone



Hainan has built more than 10 tourist spots featuring the primitive cultures of the Li and Miao ethnic groups, including the Binglang Valley Cultural Tourism Zone in Baoting county, a national 4A tourism destination. More and more tourists are impressed by the amazing natural landscape, the ancient ethnic culture and traditional handicrafts in the zone. The scenic zone receives 1.2 million visitors annually, according to statistics.

4. Hot springs



Hainan boasts many hot springs, which are a legacy of the volcanic activity that shaped the island long ago. The spring water is rich in minerals that help improve bathers’ health conditions. The province has developed some 40 hot spring resorts, including the Mission Hills resort in Haikou, the Guantang resort in Qionghai, the Xinglong resort in Wanning, the Nantian resort in Sanya, and the Qixianling resort in Baoting.

Where to stay?

1. Luxury hotels

Five-star hotels in Hainan are concentrated in such areas as Yalong Bay in Sanya, Qingshui Bay in Lingshui and the west coast of Haikou. Sanya is clustered with well-known five-star hotels, including the InterContinental, Marriott and Hilton brands.

What to eat?



Wenchang Chicken, Dongshan Mutton, Hele Crab and Jiayi Duck are the four famous traditional dishes of Hainan. Steamed seafood delicacies with sauces made of chili, soy sauce and sesame will also stimulate the appetite of tourists.