

Nanning in Brief:

Business, Beauty and Brains

Report and photos
by Lowell Bennett

Nanning earned its world-class permanent designation as host city for the annual China-ASEAN Expo—reported on by this writer in the proceeding article. Besides its place in history, this is a metropolis carrying out highly progressive investment in infrastructure, business, education and beautification.

A center of culture and commerce for more than 1,600 years, today Nanning and the two counties under its jurisdiction comprise a total population of more than 2.5 million people and span a total geography of

more than 10 thousand square kilometers. Approximately 700 thousand people reside within about 70 square kilometers of the urban center. The Yonghe River, a branch of the Xijiang River, flows through the city and shipping is a big part of the industrial base.

The Nature of Nanning

On a first trip to Nanning, during that first ride from the airport, traversing rolling hills and green countryside, one could be forgiven for presuming the route would take them to a rural town or outpost. Indeed, even upon entering the thriving and modern ur-

ban center, it becomes clear that city directors take their greenery seriously.

Even the busiest boulevards are lined with lush trees, flowers and tropical plants. But the showstopper is the world-class expansive promenade and landscaping surrounding the downtown South Lake, “the first lake” of Nanning. Of special note is the area around the central fountain area, where myriad tropical trees from around the world have been collected and are lovingly tended by the park’s fastidious gardeners.

Also suggested for sightseers seeking quiet, fresh air and lush Eden-like greenery

is the Green Mountain Park, 10 kilometers southeast of the city center. The “mountain” is actually 18 contiguous ridges spanning 4.07 square kilometers, with the main peak reaching 289 meters above sea level. Cradled therein is 14,667 square meters of lake waters tucked among 25,000 square meters of fertile greenscape. Notable stops include the Tropical Rain Forest Garden, the Palm Garden, the Water Moon Temple, the Dragon and Elephant Tower, the Thailand Garden, the Fairy Pool, the Sky Pool and the largest sago cypress garden in the world.

Remarkably, Nanning has managed to largely safeguard its precious natural environment while expanding a dynamic business landscape.

The Numbers of Nanning

Is there a major city in this nation that is not booming? From what this writer has seen: No.

In the first six months of 2005, Nanning’s gross revenues reached 4.897 billion yuan, an increase exceeding 15 percent over the same period of 2004. And, of particular note, in January 2005 Nanning achieved a major milestone: Revenues topped 1.11 billion yuan, besting the numbers of January 2004 by 33.59 percent. Nanning thus became the first city in Guangxi to generate 1 billion yuan

in a single month.

Nanning’s managers are investing a good chunk of those additional funds in the education of its youngest citizens — the future of the city. An additional 53.28 million yuan was recently invested in resources such as equipment and building renewal for primary and secondary schools. Significantly, a large portion of the funds are going to the program (roughly translated as), “Helping 3,000 Students from Low Income Families Through Education.” And an additional 600,000 yuan has been allocated for improving the infrastructure and overall teaching conditions at schools previously designated as fiscally disadvantaged.

The Hospitable Nanning

The spiritual heart of a city is held within its people. And the people of Nanning are some of the most warm-hearted of any urban dwellers this writer has encountered in China. Indeed, citizens there are about as friendly, helpful and gracious as any I have come across in any city in the world. Remarkably, the merchants, too, are polite and seemingly tranquil—not hustling and howling at the very few westerners seen on the sidewalks of the harmoniously hyperactive commercial districts.

Near the end of my stay, passing a small electronics store not far from my hotel, I stopped in with the admittedly doubtful notion of replacing the rubber ear-fittings of some rather pricey portable headphones acquired in the US. Not surprisingly, the store did not stock the oddball item. In fact, I would have been shocked to locate the very specialized pieces on hand at any major retailer in the States. But here, in this metropolis in southern China, before I knew what was happening, one of the shopkeepers tore out of the store, leapt on a scooter and buzzed off down the street.

A short while later he returned, smiling big. I discovered he had motored to another store a few kilometers away to acquire the precise item I needed — and at a very fair price.

Perhaps the only debatable downside to the Nanning-style of hospitality is encountered in the city’s nightclubs.

One evening an Irish journalist associate and I ventured into the Bar and City Club on Tao Yan Jie Street. This place, we both agreed, was high-energy, yet somehow also about the most well-mannered and friendliest nightclub either of us had encountered in



Nanning—The Garden City. by imaginechina



Silent Applause—Tai Chi at National Plaza, Nanning.



Art and Entrepreneurship—On the friendly streets of Nanning.

Children of Nanning play along the fountains of National Plaza.



The Bar and City Club on Nanning’s Tao Yan Jie Street — About the most energetic, best-mannered and friendliest nightclub the writer has ever encountered.

China — or maybe anywhere. The downside? We were the only westerners in the place and many of the local clientele insisted on sharing with us their pitchers of the liquid house speciality. This was offered up with big smiles, and the expectation that the two-ounce offering be honorably consumed in traditionally gregarious Chinese style: One gulp and “Gan bei!”

Yet, even in my slightly hazy and somewhat headache-impaired thoughts of the following morning, as I moved slowly through my tasks and neared the end of my stay, I continued to collect ever-fonder memories of a wonderful people and a special city, Nanning. ■