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**Highlights:**

002 BASIC INFO

005 GETTING TO KNOW HANGZHOU

021 SIGHTSEEING & MAIN ATTRACTIONS

089 TRANSPORT & ACCOMMODATION

113 LEISURE & LIFESTYLE

165 DINING

205 NIGHTLIFE

221 HANGZHOU & 2010 WORLD EXPO

225 DIRECTORY

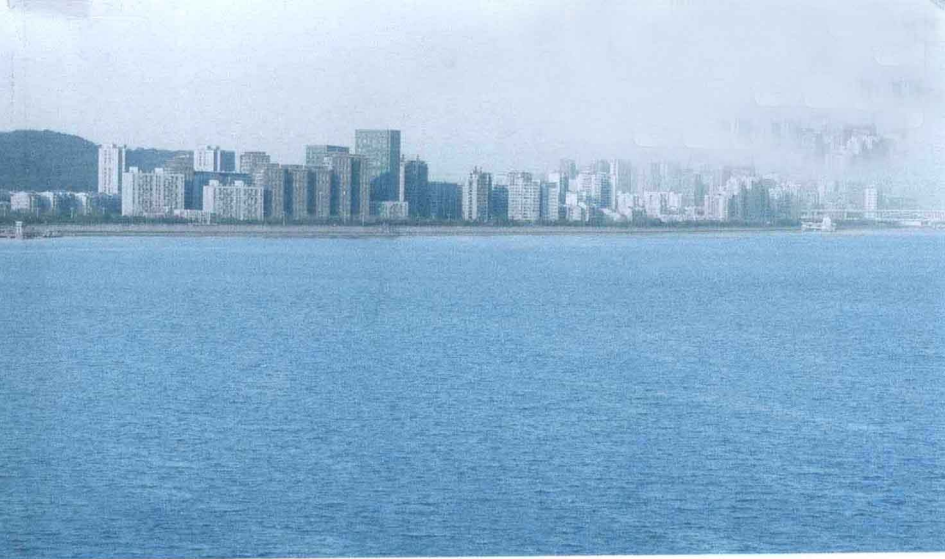
**ULTIMATE**  
City Guide

# Hangzhou

# BASICS



杭州出版社  
INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS



杭州大学图书馆  
藏书章

# Hangzhou BASICS

*by LI JING*



中国广播出版社

CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS



图书在版编目(CIP)数据

精彩杭州：英文 / 厉静著.

北京：五洲传播出版社，2010.1

ISBN 978-7-5085-1775-9

I. ①精… II. ①厉… III. ①杭州市—概况—英文 IV. ①K925.51

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2010)第009508号

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## 精彩杭州 (Hangzhou Basics)

出版发行：五洲传播出版社

北京海淀区北小马厂6号华天大厦23-26层 邮编：100038 发行电话 +86 10 5889 1281

策划编辑：荆孝敏

责任编辑：王莉

主编：厉静

策划制作：That's & INTOUCH

特约编辑：Duncan J. Poupard (英) Sarah Kirkland (美)

图片：厉静 郑昀 Samuel Lécrivain

设计：夏微 杭希

市场：吴滢姿 张笑奇

中国浙江省杭州市莲花峰路24号 邮编：310002 电话：+86 571 8763 0119/8763 0035

尺寸：128mm×198mm

字数：100,000字

印刷：浙江国广彩印有限公司

版次：2010年6月第一版

印次：2010年6月第一次印刷

书号：ISBN 978-7-5085-1775-9

定价：RMB 96.00

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## Editor's Note

Hangzhou cannot be described in mere words or pictures; it must be lived and breathed, explored and understood first hand. This is the city that captivated Marco Polo more than any other, and has given inspiration to generation after generation of artist and poet. It's a city very much made by its geography, built as it is around West Lake and the Qiantang River. Its cultural geography has been shaped by centuries of artists, architects, poets and writers, and West Lake plays an important, if hidden, role in the average Hangzhou residents' consciousness. That is to say, the lake has become a symbol of Hangzhou, of its refined nature and dignified spirit, and the 'lake' and the 'city' cannot be separated.

We believe that Hangzhou is one of China's most splendid destinations, and the great injustice is that the uninformed traveler too often overlooks it, in favor of more 'big-name' cities such as Beijing, Xi'an and Chengdu. With a bit of luck, this book is one small step on the path toward helping Hangzhou gain the audience it deserves.

Travel guides go out of date quicker than you can say 'xie xie', and this is especially true of a fast developing, up-and-coming city such as Hangzhou. Hangzhou is enjoying an economic boom, as indeed is China as a whole, and newfound prosperity brings with it high-rise apartment blocks, new leisure and shopping destinations and a much-improved infrastructure. With this in mind, this guide seeks to capture a snapshot of the city as it is now, and also hints at things that are to come (such as the extensive subway system), whilst including as many interesting facts about Hangzhou's history, language and culture as we could squeeze in. All the main tourist spots are covered, as well as more out-of-the-way places better suited to the intrepid traveler or long term resident.

We hope you come to love Hangzhou as much as we do, and that this book can give you some assistance, no matter how small, during your time here.

LI JING





## An Invitation to Readers

Tell us about your experiences in Hangzhou and wonderful places you have discovered so that we can share the information with your fellow travelers in future editions. We'd also love to get feedback on places you feel fail to live up to our recommendation. Please write to:

itzjeditor@gmail.com, hzweekly@gmail.com

or to:

**That's China · Intouch Zhejiang**

24 Lianhuafeng Road, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, P.R. China 310002

(中国 浙江省杭州市莲花峰路24号 310002)

**Note:** You can also visit the Intouch website at [www.intouchzhejiang.com](http://www.intouchzhejiang.com) or get a copy of That's China · Intouch Zhejiang magazine or the Hangzhou Weekly newspaper (both available in various places across Hangzhou) for the latest news, events and other information about Hangzhou. Please be advised that the information in this guide is subject to change at any time – and this is especially true of prices, restaurants and nightlife venues. Sometimes it's annoying that the world changes a little bit too fast. A restaurant can disappear overnight. Hot venues can soon become clichés. We therefore suggest you write or call ahead for confirmation when making travel plans.



# CONTENTS



## BASIC INFO

002

When to Come .....	002
Festivals .....	002
Money & Costs .....	004

## 1 GETTING TO KNOW HANGZHOU

005

Geography & Climate .....	005
History & Culture .....	012
People & Dialect .....	017
Sister Cities .....	018
Long-term Expats .....	018
Economy & Environment .....	019

## 2 SIGHTSEEING & MAIN ATTRACTIONS

021

The Best of Hangzhou .....	022
Hills .....	046
Historic Streets .....	053
Pagodas .....	058
Religious Sites .....	061
Parks .....	066
Zoo, Aquarium, Botanical Garden .....	072
Museums .....	074
Former Residences .....	080
Traditional Chinese Medicine .....	082
Day Trips from Hangzhou .....	084





### 3 TRANSPORT & ACCOMMODATION

089

Transport .....	089
Where to Stay .....	101

### 4 LEISURE & LIFESTYLE

113

Café & Teahouse .....	116
Shopping .....	124
Markets .....	125
Shopping Streets .....	131
Local Fashion .....	135
Department Stores .....	135
Supermarkets .....	140
Convenience Stores .....	145
Sport .....	148
Health & Beauty .....	157

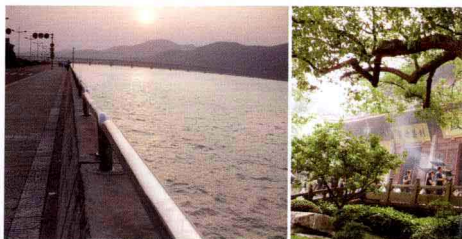
### 5 DINING

165

Wine and Dine with the Locals .....	165
Eat Internationally .....	167
Farmer's Restaurants & Hostel Restaurants .....	167
Famous Dishes/Snacks .....	168
Fine Dining .....	170
Historic Restaurants .....	171
Greasy Spoons .....	172
Dining Options (Listings by category) .....	174
Sweet Treats .....	200
Bakeries .....	202



# CONTENTS



<b>6</b>	<b>NIGHTLIFE</b>	<b>205</b>
	Bars .....	205
	Clubs .....	215
	Cinemas & Theatres .....	218
	KTV .....	220

<b>7</b>	<b>HANGZHOU &amp; THE 2010 SHANGHAI EXPO</b>	<b>221</b>
	Hangzhou Pavilion .....	221
	Zhejiang Elements .....	223
	Expo on the Doorway .....	224

<b>DIRECTORY</b>	<b>225</b>
------------------	------------

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>234</b>
The Perils of Menu Translation .....	234
Useful Phrases & Expressions .....	235
Maps .....	238



A late-autumn scene of the West Lake



# BASIC INFO

## Hangzhou

**Area:** 16,596 square kilometers

**Population (as of 2009):** About 7,960,000

**GDP per capita:**

\$ 9292 (ranking first in the province in 2009)

**Featured Tourist Attractions:**

West Lake, Lingyin Temple, Six Harmonies Pagoda



## WHEN TO COME

As summers can be very hot and humid, with temperatures reaching highs of 40 Celsius degrees, it's probably best to plan your trip in the milder months of spring and autumn (*see more on P225 in Directory*).

## FESTIVALS

Hangzhou, as befits a regional capital and international resort city, has a good number of events and festivities throughout the year. Despite the usual traditional festivities on public holidays such as National Day and Spring Festival, that one can expect in most cities across China, Hangzhou also hosts several unique festivities, both traditional and modern, so no matter what time of the year you visit, you'll always have something exciting to do.

### January/February

#### Spring Festival / Lantern Festival

For the many festivals celebrated nationally in the country, there are some customs that are unique to Hangzhou. Hangzhou natives burn joss sticks at Lingyin Temple on New Year's Eve to pray for good luck, and thousands of people gather at Jingci Temple to listen to the auspicious 108 chimes of Nanping Bell on the stroke of midnight. During the Lantern Festival that marks the end of the Spring Festival, the locals string up thousands of lanterns around the lake and city streets, and participate in various activities organized by the local authorities.

### March/April

#### West Lake Tea Expo / Hangzhou World Leisure Expo / West Lake Pilgrimage Fair

These government-sponsored events are designed to promote the local culture and encourage participation from both residents and tourists. The West Lake Tea Expo is timed to coincide with the first tea harvest of the year.

Hangzhou World Leisure Expo is a massive undertaking intended to promote the city as an important leisure destination in China, featuring a host of leisure-oriented activities, events and forums that cater to industry players and independent travelers.

A large number of temples spread around the hills near the West Lake draw hordes of pilgrims from across the province to Hangzhou every year. The birthday of Guanyin on the 19th day of the second lunar month brings to the city the first of such pilgrimages to the two Tianzhu temples. This time of the year also sees the city's farming community file along the ancient Incense Footpath, releasing pent-up piety at the temples. Every year, the white-toweled heads of pilgrims trekking through the hill paths in breathtaking scenery is quite a spectacle in itself (*see P64 for more info*).



## May/June

### Dragon Boat Festival / International Cartoon and Animation Festival

Jiangcun Village, where the Xixi Wetlands Park is located, is one of the two best places in Zhejiang where the ancient art of Chinese Dragon Boat racing can not only be witnessed, but also participated in.

Hangzhou is also the proud host of the China International Cartoon and Animation Festival, which has been held annually since 2005, and serves as an interesting event for cartoon and anime enthusiasts as well as the industry. The festival is the only state-level and international cartoon and animation industrial festival, co-sponsored by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and Zhejiang provincial government.

## August/September

### Mid-autumn Festival / Osmanthus Festival / Qiantang Tide Watching Festival

The Mid-autumn Festival encompasses the West Lake Osmanthus Festival and the annual Qiantang Tide Watching Festival, both of which occur around the middle ten days of September. However, the osmanthus blossoms may fall behind the festival itself, depending on the weather. Osmanthus is the official city flower of Hangzhou and all the culture related to it can be fully experi-

enced at the Manjuelong Village if you happen to be visiting the city at the right time.

The world-famous tide of the Qiantang River drew the curiosity of a delegation of photographers from National Geographic in July of 2009. Four professional surfers from the United States and Brazil participated in the 2009 Qiantang River Surfing Competition and were all impressed by the mighty power of the tidal bore.

## October

### West Lake Expo / West Lake Beer Festival

The West Lake Expo is one of the city's most significant annual events and has been held for seven consecutive years, serving as a major platform for promoting local culture and industrial achievements to the world while facilitating industrial forums aimed at attracting business and investment.

Another interesting local festival that is by no means traditional but has all the same become popular in recent years is the West Lake Beer Festival, which is a bit like a Chinese Oktoberfest in that everyone gets together to drink a lot of beer, listen to music and eat lamb kebabs and other snacks. The beer on offer is West Lake beer, as the event is sponsored by the Siwo West Lake beer company. Siwo is an unassuming lager, refreshing and worth the very modest price.



## WEST LAKE MODERN MUSIC FESTIVAL

Having been held twice as an annual hallmark music event, the festival lives up to its rising fame as 'the most beautiful outdoor music festival in China'.

Set to the backdrop of the gorgeous West Lake and held on a lovely lawn in the city's Xihu Tian-di, a Hangzhou version of the famous Xin Tian Di in Shanghai, the festival has drawn a host of the most beloved singers from the pop music world of the country to perform for days at the picturesque lakeshore.

The festival went truly international in 2010, with participation from Angle Heart from Australia and These New Puritans from the UK to show Hangzhou residents how to party hard. The 2010 event lasted for a total of 10 days from May 28 to June 6.



West Lake Modern Music Festival

## MONEY & COSTS

The Chinese unit of currency is known as the renminbi, or yuan. At the time of writing, one Chinese yuan is equivalent to US\$0.15. Hangzhou is, by Chinese standards, a quite expensive city in which to live, although still generally cheaper than Beijing and Shanghai. House prices in the city are some of the most expensive in China, and Hangzhou has its fair share of expensive eateries and designer boutiques, but those wishing to travel on a shoestring can still find cheaper local restaurants, budget hotels and hostels.

### HOW MUCH?

200ml bottled water - RMB 1.5

West Lake beer: In a shop - RMB 3

In a bar - RMB 15

Pack of cigarettes - RMB 15-40

Can of Coke - RMB 2.5

Cup of coffee in a café - RMB 30

Carton of milk (500mm) - RMB 4.5

3km taxi ride - RMB 11

Bus fare - RMB 1-3

Bowl of noodles - RMB 6

Cinema ticket - RMB 40

Room rates in a budget hotel start from - RMB 160



## HANGZHOU IN BLOOM

The fragrant Osmanthus blossoms can be seen at the end of September, or beginning of October, depending on the weather. Lotus blossoms on West Lake are best viewed in June/July. Plum blossoms and cherry blossoms can also be found in various places across the city in the right season.



# 1 Getting to Know Hangzhou

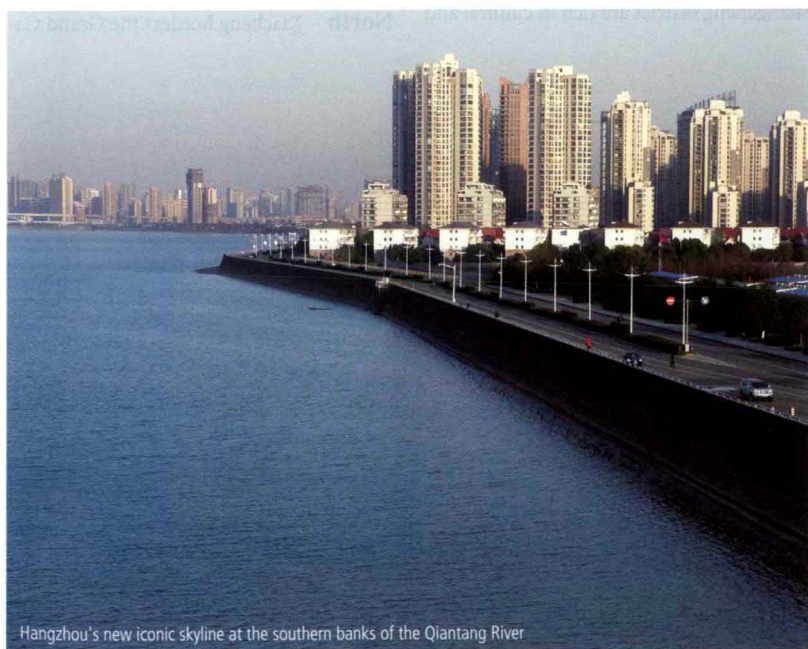
## GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

Hangzhou is located in northern Zhejiang Province, eastern China, at the southern end of the Grand Canal of China, on the plain of the mid-lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The region extends west to the border with the mountainous Anhui Province, and east to the flatland near Hangzhou Bay. The city center is built around the eastern and northern sides of the West Lake, just north of the Qiantang River.

Hangzhou's climate is classified as humid subtropical with four distinctive seasons, characterised by long, hot, humid summers and cool to cold, cloudy winters (with occasional snow). The average annual tem-

perature in Hangzhou is about 16°C, with highest average temperatures of 33°C in summer and lowest of 1.5°C during winter. It receives an average annual rainfall of around 1,400 mm (*see more in Directory*).

Hangzhou is affected by the 'Plum Rains' ('*mei yu*') of the Asian Monsoon in June. In late summer (August to September), Hangzhou, along with other cities in Zhejiang province, suffer from typhoon storms, but typhoons seldom strike the city directly. Generally they land along the southern coastal cities of the province, and affect Hangzhou with strong winds and stormy rains.



Hangzhou's new iconic skyline at the southern banks of the Qiantang River



## Administrative Divisions

Founded about 2,200 years ago during the Qin Dynasty, Hangzhou is the capital city of Zhejiang and has eight districts, three county-level cities (Lin'an 临安, Fuyang 富阳, Jiande 建德) and two cities (Tonglu 桐庐 and Chun'an 淳安) under its jurisdiction. Historically, it is one of the six ancient capitals of China. Located 180 kilometers southwest of Shanghai, the name 'Hangzhou' is more often used to refer to the urban agglomeration of the Hangzhou metropolitan area that is composed of six core urban districts – Shangcheng (上城), Xiacheng (下城), Xihu (西湖), Gongshu (拱墅), Jianggan (江干) and Binjiang (滨江). Shangcheng, Xiacheng and Xihu are the three most central downtown areas. Xiaoshan (萧山) and Yuhang (余杭) are also an integrated part of Greater Hangzhou, each boasting unique attractions and definitely worth a visit.

**Center** - The middle and southern parts of Shangcheng district are rich in cultural and

historic sites and have the luxuriant greenery of Fenghuang Mountain and Wu Hill, and the world-famous West Lake scenic area all seated in easily accessible locations. Its scenic features and abundance of city amenities make Shangcheng the most highly regarded urban district of the city for leisure activities and tourism, although some of its communities, such as Wangjiangmen (望江门) and Nanxing (南星), are relatively less developed and, naturally, less visited.

**West** - Five of the most valued newly-developed tourism areas of Hangzhou, including the Xixi Wetlands, are in the Xihu district. Confusingly, the district of Xihu, meaning 'West Lake', does not include the lake itself; it mainly refers to the city's ever-expanding western parts that feature many high-tech entrepreneurial parks and high-end apartment blocks, together with well-developed service sectors.

**North** - Xiacheng borders the Grand Ca-



nal to the north and the scenic West Lake to the south. This part of the city has a history dating back to the Han Dynasty, and reached its pinnacle in the Southern Song Dynasty. It is the most commercially prosperous section of the city, with Yan'an, Tiyyuchang, Qingchun, Zhonghe, Fengqi, West and North Huancheng roads as its main thoroughfares, and with Hangzhou Tower, Hangzhou Department Store and INTIME satisfying the shopping needs of the majority of the locals. Xiacheng is also the financial, cultural and press center of the city. Economic vitality can be felt everywhere.

**Further North** – The biggest highlight of Gongshu district is the ancient Jing-Hang Grand Canal. Much of the development of the district in recent years has evolved around the canal. This part of the city is less attractive compared with the more urbanized and modern areas, but it is growing dynamically and has noticeable cultural and industrial features.

**East** - Jianggan district is intrinsically related to the Qiantang River and the enormous cultural connotations swept up in this ancient body of water. Rarely cited in any tourist guidebook, Jianggan serves as the transportation hub of the city, with a labyrinth of inner-city express roads and two major river-spanning bridges conveniently linked with highways and railways leading to neighboring cities. The city's East Bus Station are in Jianggan. The massive Qianjiang New CBD (钱江新城) city expansion project, which is verging on completion, is designed to relocate the city's major government offices towards the sprawling and newly developed northern banks of the Qiantang River. Qianjiang New Town is the city's future key CBD with the most inflated housing costs.

**Easternmost** – Xiasha (下沙) serves as the city's higher education hub, although it has little tourism value. Recent years saw amazing growth in this far-flung district. The area is also home to a good number of world-famous multinationals.

## Southern Banks of Qianjiang River

– Binjiang is an ideal place for entrepreneurial undertakings and high-end residences, and is popular with resident foreigners. Wentao Road is a scenic avenue with a gorgeous view of the river.

### WENTAO ROAD, BINJIANG

The hills, the lake and the river, as well as the lush greenery one can see almost everywhere, are the true blessings of the city. As befits an international leisure capital, Hangzhou is justifiably an ideal place for hiking and jogging. Major running competitions held regularly in Hangzhou include the annual **West Lake International Marathon** and the **West Lake Cross-country Running Competition**. The year of 2009 saw a new sports event added to the city's athletic calendar at the newly developed riverside Binjiang district – the **6K Running Challenge Competition**, which was attended by about 4,000 people in 2009.

Wentao Road (闻涛路), literally meaning 'listening to the waves', has become the favorite destination for the city's angling community and an ideal jogging track. One side of the avenue is a forest of high-end apartment complexes.







## “The finest city in the world”

Seven centuries ago, Marco Polo pronounced Hangzhou “the finest, most splendid city in the world... where so many pleasures may be found that one fancies oneself to be in Paradise.”

Hangzhou has been one of the most renowned and prosperous cities of China for much of the last 1,000 years and is a ‘green city’ in the strictest sense of the word. The scenic wonders of Hangzhou can not only be attributed to geographical coincidence, but the results of caring conservation by generations of the city’s residents. Statistics show that some 62.8% of the city is covered in forest. Strolling and biking are the best ways to appreciate the unique greenery as well as the city’s folk charms.

The scenery of Hangzhou is encapsulated in the perfect mountain and water view around the world-famous West Lake. The lake remains to this day what a visitor in the 12th century proclaimed it: “a landscape composed by a painter.” You can finish walking its circumference in about three hours – longer if you linger at a temple, a pavilion, a park, a scenic path leading to a hidden beauty spot, or a lakeside café overlooking a body of tranquil water with undulating hills in the distance. Two causeways – one running along the north shore, the other along the west shore – shorten the journey and add gorgeous views that vary seasonally. Some would say it’s best to plan your trip in springtime when the whole city is covered in a sea of flower blossoms and trees; but it’s probably smarter to be here when the lakeside roads are not taken over by tourists from all over the world, flocking in groups and making all the walkways terribly congested, say, somewhere between September and December.

A poll conducted by the Beijing-based *Oriental Outlook* magazine placed Hangzhou atop the list of China’s top 10 cities where people are most content with their life.