

chengdoo

CITYLIFE

067

AUG 2013

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**CITY
MAP**
inside

escape from grey

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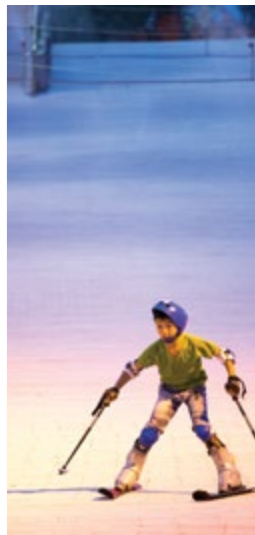
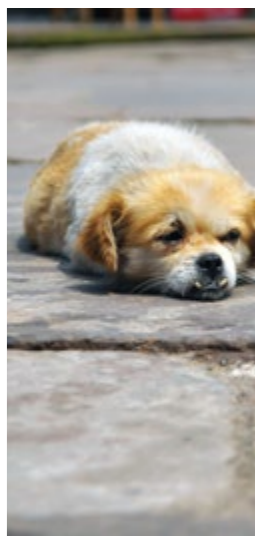
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The American Extreme Sports Park 美洲极限运动公园

Photos by Dan Sandoval



A wall bordering a seemingly empty corner of the High-Tech Park a block south of the National Defense Park announces the *world's biggest* extreme sport park. While the global superlative has become the default for any development project in Chengdu, and perhaps many cities in China, most of the hundreds of thousands of square meters is currently covered with suburban vegetation.

The very first spot after the unmarked entrance is an **artificial ski slope** that is open year-round, offering skiing on a JF-Dry ski surface, a carpet of smooth plastic knobs that is sprayed with a fine water mist to simulate a snow slope. There are different slopes to suit various skill levels, as well as a ramp for jumping that is rolled out on special occasions.

The overall impression of the ski slope site is professional. Perhaps because it caters to beginners and kids, it sees a steady influx of customers, an impression the **indoor skate park** doesn't share; the half pipes are OK, but the area seems deserted and the personnel—women in their later years—all seem to be unlikely skateboarders. Nonetheless, it's still probably a unique option in Chengdu, and during the week you would most likely have the 1,000 square meters to yourself.

Scattered on three hills, the **downhill bike park** offers various ramps—from the highest peak you can see as far as the Baijiachang Flyover (百家场立交), where the High-Speed Ring Road meets the G93 highway to Yibin on one side and the new Global Center and adjacent Jincheng Park on the other. As with the indoor skate park, this place seems to be populated only on weekends.

The least extreme section and yet biggest business of the Extreme Sports Park is the **Chengdu football park** with several well-maintained fields of different sizes.

Other parts of the park are currently in planning and development phases, including a go-kart track, an outdoor parkour court, and a climbing range.

Entrance & opening times

Chengdu Football Park 成都足球公园

Open daily from 10 a.m. to midnight
RMB210-600 for 90 minutes depending on day/
time; 10-20 percent discount for regulars
Tel. 86912686/ 1351316941

Four Seasons Dry Ski Slope 四季滑雪场

Open daily from 1 to 11 p.m.
(dinner break 6-7 p.m.)
RMB120 (100 until 6 p.m. on weekdays);
20 percent discount if you bring your own
equipment; 20-50 percent discount for
members and regulars

Bike Park 成都单车公园

10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (weekends 7 p.m.)
RMB50 (members RMB40)

Indoor Skate Park

Closes at 6ish, later on weekends
RMB39 (members RMB29)

Directions

Jincheng Dadao (锦城大道) at Xinyuan Dadao (新园大道) (approximately 30 minutes on foot west of the Metro Line 1 Incubation Park Station/孵化园).



Photos by Michal Pachniewski

Jincheng Park 锦城公园

Although the Jincheng Park (锦城公园) is currently Chengdu's largest park, it's remained relatively under the radar in local media perhaps in the shadow of the opening of the Global Center for which it, along with the American Extreme Sports Park, serves as a back yard of sorts. The park is laid out on a 2 kilometer by 1 kilometer patch of land bordered by Jincheng Road to the north and the Tianfu Yi Jie real estate project to the south. Each of its four connected parts has wide sidewalks wrapping around fish-filled lakes—a perfect place for a stroll or a jog, or even a bike ride during non-peak hours (that is, any time apart from evenings and weekends).

At the junction of Jiannan Dadao and Jincheng Dadao is a newly built large Tibetan Buddhist temple called Jinci Temple (近慈寺) whose history dates back four centuries. The attached monastery can be found in an older, rundown temple building two minutes' walk south.

Some areas of the park are still in development, but for the moment it's relaxing despite the highway cutting right through the middle and speakers blaring Chinese pop music. As there are no shops in the park or its immediate vicinity, park visitors are advised to bring their own snacks and drinks.

Directions

Take Metro Line 1 to the Incubation Park station (孵化园) or Jincheng Plaza (锦城广场)/Global Center. Walk west 10 minutes until you reach the northwestern entrance to the park, just behind the Global Center.



CITY CHENGDOO 05

At the Edge of the Roof of the World

american hostellers in kangding



Photo by Dan Sandoval

Americans Kristopher Rubesh, 37, and Stephanie Rubesh, 35, met on a trip from Lhasa to Kathmandu, and from there they started a Tibetan adventure that ultimately led to their opening the Zhilam Hostel in Kangding.

Kangding, the capital of Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, is often described as the gateway to Tibet for travelers, but it's also home to a diverse population of around 100,000 Tibetans, Han Chinese, and people of Qiang, Yi, Hui, and other minority ethnic groups. The city is rich in history, as a stop on the horse tea road, as well as natural scenery; it sits at an altitude of 2,500 meters and within 60 kilometers of the city, there are more than 20 mountains that exceed 6,000 meters, including Gongga Shan (also known by its Tibetan name, Minyak Konka), the tallest of these at 7,556 meters.

How did you get started with the hostel?
Kristopher: We started studying Tibetan at the Minorities University in Chengdu, and we asked our school to give us a month off to practice speaking Tibetan. We ended up staying in Kangding—the old boss where we used to stay would watch football games until 3 o'clock in the morning and wake up at 10 or 11. Meanwhile his couple of *fuwuyuan* would do all the work. You had to ask if you wanted new sheets between guests. So we thought, you could do a much better job, and if he does it with such a lazy schedule we could put a bit of effort into it. It would be easy and we could get a very nice hostel doing, make some money while we study Tibetan and hang out. We didn't want to work in an office in America eight hours a day, five days a week. We wanted to have some adventure in our life.

“ We didn't want to work in an office in America eight hours a day, five days a week. We wanted to have some adventure in our life. ”

It took us about a year to register. We moved in 2007 and opened in October in 2008. It was the first fully foreign-owned enterprise and still is the only one to this day, as far as I know. The government officials were very kind and pleasant, but they didn't know how to register us either, so it took a long time.
Stephanie: We gave the paperwork to the Industry and Commerce Bureau, and the people said we would hear back from them within five days. Almost one calendar year later we finally did.
Kristopher: It was in 2008, a bit of a tough time with the Olympics and the earthquake. We found to make it a really good place it takes a lot of hard work still.

What other obstacles did you have to face?
Stephanie: We've had so many unexpected hurdles, like two summers ago we had a landslide, so we had to close for a long time during the main season.
Kristopher: And if the political situation gets a bit tense they close off the whole area to foreigners, and that reduces our business quite a bit—30 percent of our guests are foreigners. So there is always that issue every now and then. Then there are typical staff issues; of course it's hard to keep a farmer, nomad on an annual schedule working for us. Lots of turnaround. But I can't imagine doing any other kind of business. I love interacting with our guests—all of the guests are wonderful people.

Why did you choose Kangding?
Kristopher: We knew for us to make a business we had to be close to a big city to catch the expats who want to have vacations. Another reason is that to transport goods to our restaurant we can't be too far out. If we moved to a little Tibetan town like Litang or Tagong, we would take all the business from the locals, and we don't want to do that. We want it to be a big enough town where we can fit in the business infrastructure without taking away from one particular group.
Stephanie: We could feel free to compete in the environment and still help out.
Kristopher: We're in a very good place. Other hostels in the area can come to learn new ideas, learn to make their own chocolate cakes. So we help them with their businesses, and it feels very cooperative rather than competitive. We love it.
Stephanie: Our main thing is to help locals develop tourism in a way they can benefit and also protect the environment.

But most travelers don't seem to fancy staying in Kangding longer than overnight.
Stephanie: Actually there is a whole section of traveling that the Chinese do, but the foreigners don't do yet, because it's not published in the guidebooks. The whole Gongga Shan mountain area is very lightly traveled, it's really amazingly beautiful. Climbing, hiking, nobody goes there.
Kristopher: More and more of our guests end up saying, we should stay in Kangding longer, there is a lot of stuff to do.

So what's the best thing to do in Kangding?
Kristopher: Eat some pizza in our hostel and watch a good movie.
Stephanie: [Laughs.] No. The city itself is not that pretty. There are some monasteries.
Kristopher: And like every Tibetan town, Kangding has town dances at night and a few nice bars.



Photos by Dan Sandoval

What are must-eats in the city?
Kristopher: You know the Are [Tibetan] restaurant? There's one with the same owner [like the one in Chengdu], there's really nice hotpot and a vegetarian restaurant, and a nice café just opened by foreigners—Himalayan Coffee and Trading Company.
Stephanie: They are the only other foreigners in town—they have a bill at our hostel, and we have a bill at their café.

What are the surroundings of the hostel?
Kristopher: We're surrounded by three mountains. Each one is a different level of [climbing] difficulty. Paoma Mountain, which is the famous love mountain in China, has cable cars going up and a park on the top and a museum at the bottom. It's quite nice for older guests, people with disabilities who can't really walk but want to have some beautiful views. And the second mountain is the one behind our hostel. You walk one-and-a-half hours through some beautiful forest, to get to some grassland with yaks, and see some snow mountains. You can go farther and come to a pristine valley on the other side, and be all by yourself, all day in beautiful nature. The third mountain is called Buddha Mountain. It's quite steep, but there is a trick to it. You can take an old mining road way up the mountain, walk through a mine to the other side of the ridge, and from the top look up to Gongga Mountain. It's beautiful, especially if you get to drive up, not walk up. It's also quite extreme, most climbers end up in the hospital.

Gongga Shan is the 41st-highest mountain, and outside the Himalayas, it's among the top five in the world. On average one or two foreign climbers die a year. It's such a draw for the climbers to come, but it's also quite dangerous. Three weeks ago, we had 30 Swiss mountaineers over to climb Mount Gongga from different sides. We help the climbers get the permit, but we don't take them up. We also rent tents and equipment. There are beautiful areas for a city family to go out—there are hill excursions 15 kilometers from here, by a

beautiful riverside. You can set up a big tent, have hot chocolate by the fire.

What kind of guests do you meet at the hostel?
Kristopher: We meet people from all over the world. We've met some of the world's leading mountaineers, archeologists, biologists collecting butterflies have been out there, you name it.

We like Chengdu families coming up. It gives our kids someone to play with, and they get away from the big city. I think our favorite guests are the ones we have personal connections to, maybe we happened to go on a family picnic and invited them to come with us. There are some really precious guests, nice people who are looking for a home experience. When traveling, often that's the most difficult thing to get. The best compliment a guest can give us is "It feels like home."

Have you had any strange guests?
Kristopher: [There was a guest] from Japan, he took the bus 12 hours from Chengdu to Kanding.
Stephanie: He arrived at 5 p.m. or something like that, and he went right to bed, we didn't see him. The next day at noon he woke up and came upstairs: What time is it? 12. Oh, I gotta catch my bus to Chengdu!
Kristopher: He didn't see anything.
Stephanie: He slept the entire time.
Kristopher: We had a guest from Colorado who bought some yaks, and he came up to learn how to raise yaks. He's a 60-year-old ranger. I get talking to him and actually he says he's also the world's leading archeologist for trying to find Noah's Ark (in Turkey, as in the Bible). He tells me all these stories about finding Noah's Ark and being under the old city of Jerusalem. He's an Indiana Jones kind of character.

To learn more about Zhilam Hostel and traveling to Kangding, see www.zhilamhostel.com

Qingcheng Shan: Sacred Mountain

Part 1: The Back Mountain

Photos by Michal Pachniewski



The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way
The names that can be named are not the unvarying names

If these famous lines have been puzzling you since your first lecture on the Tao Te Ching, chances are a visit to Qingcheng Mountain will not bring you closer to clarity. But feeling the soreness in your legs the day after your pilgrimage may fill you with regret.

Indeed, Qingcheng Shan can be experienced differently depending which path you chose, the “back mountain”—the closer and commonly recognized as easier of the two—offers a shorter hike and more Taoist sites of importance. It’s also more crowded with tourists and more expensive, but most likely your choice if you’re only out for a day trip or generally not a hiking fanatic.

To the left of the back mountain’s main gate is the ticket toll booth and to the right is the often-overlooked Jianfu Palace (建福宫), a Taoist temple built in the eighth century during the Tang dynasty that nowadays functions as a teahouse. As soon as you pass through the gates, you will begin hiking up thousands of stairs, passing the first pavilions, which feature traditional west Sichuanese architecture, and reaching the first of many junctions where hardy sherpas offer to carry you sections of the hike in an open seat (starting at RMB60, RMB580 for the whole tour).

You’ll be well advised to make a right turn and experience the mountain hike counterclockwise. That way, the cable car can take you halfway up the mountain as opposed to down, as on the clockwise hike. Along the way, you’ll pass the unspectacular Yucheng Lake (the short ferry ride isn’t worth the RMB5). At first sight hopping into one of the six-person cable cars dangling from the cable by a bent arm attached to two small rollers seems a frightful proposition, but in the worst case, there are indeed security hooks, and after all the design is based on time-tested Swiss technology. The couple-hundred-meter ride provides an overview of the lake and the first forest-covered mountains.

Next it’s another hour-long hike up past more temples and pavilions until you reach the Donghua Hall, which offers scenic views or a look at the impressive mountains of cash donations that are counted in the room next to the shrine. For RMB40 you can light a big candle, or you could have your name engraved on a lock or your fortune told in Chinese.

Hikers pass you on their way down with sweat-soaked T-shirts glued to their bodies. You’re just a few more last steps away from the very peak and the Laozi Pavilion (老君阁). Its rooftop, once accessible to hikers, is now closed off, so all there is at the peak is another look down the valleys from 1,260 meters up, but you won’t see too far as the subtropical forests constant evaporation surrounds the summit even on Chengdu’s rarer sunny days.

Once you descend from the peak you can choose to make a right turn to take the same way down, skipping all the other temples and pavilions by shortcutting with the cable car, or you can turn left and engage in a longer hike downhill, which doesn’t go straight down but gently undulates up and down. Along the way you’ll cross paths with fat squirrels and various birds as well as the abundance of grasshoppers, beetles, mantis, millipedes, butterflies, and other insects that live on the mountain.

A colony of exhausted and sweaty clockwise hikers passed heading in the opposite direction. They don’t talk, laugh, or make jokes. But going down is just as, if not more, demanding as going up. The stairs are irregularly sized and spaced and the surface unpredictable, at times flat and slippery. Take your time; this sections is dangerous, and it’s easy to fall (probably this is where the optional RMB10 insurance could pay off). But the reward is revealed when you arrive at the Tianshi Cave (天师洞)—spectacular cliffs, scenic gorges, and energetic mountain formations. The distance between the pavilions starts to stretch, and at times the beautiful towering trees give off a *Jurassic Park* vibe, and indeed, the gingko trees are a living fossil of that period.

The cave itself features a stone sculpture of former “resident” Zhang Daoling, a Jiangsu preacher who, after receiving a revelation from a deified Laozi, is said to have started the



health cult Way of the Five Pecks of Rice here. His movement gained momentum, and for a short while, he even managed to gain power in north Sichuan but was absorbed into the Wei Kingdom after a military defeat by Three Kingdoms “villain” Cao Cao. This event marked the first time Taoism was exposed to a broad society, initiating its rise to a major religion in China and neighboring countries.

After the Tianshi Cave there are more pavilions and temples, some of which offer proper cuisine and accommodation. Apart from these, there are few culinary options on the mountain—mainly instant noodles or cold noodle dishes, but if you’re patient, you could eat in one of the few hotel restaurants on the right-hand side downhill from the entrance.

In the year 2000, UNESCO named two sites in Sichuan—the Dujiangyan irrigation system and Qingcheng Mountain—world heritage sites. The latter was recognized as the birthplace of religious Taoism, which led to the foundation of a short-lived theocratic state in west Sichuan.

It’s rumored that Qingcheng Shan was originally named Tiancang Shan (天仓山) but changed its name after a struggle with Buddhist missionaries for dominance in the area, a dispute so delicate that the emperor had to intervene and ruled out the Buddhist missionaries from the mountain. To signify the “clarity” of the Taoist mountain, the name would have started with the character 清 (“clear”), but a mistaken change to the

homophonous 青 (“green”) was made in the documents.

Unfortunately little of this history is spelled out on the many signs along the way. Mostly, the signs remind you that the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction of the mountain is financially supported by Macao, although, to be fair, Shanghai and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage also chipped in. Alongside those are badly translated descriptions and fairy tales for tourists.

Tickets
Tickets to the back mountain are RMB90, and there is an option for RMB10 insurance (beware of quakes and landslides). The posterior mountain is another 17 kilometers away, but entrance is only RMB20. The hike itself should take around five hours, and you’ll likely need the following day to recover. Bring sufficient water and painkillers. If you’re looking for a lighter hike, nearby Dujiangyan is an option. As usual, avoid the weekend crowds if you have a choice.

Transport
Although high-speed trains from the North Train Station in Chengdu reach up to 200kmph, the 70-kilometer ride may take up to 50 minutes due to numerous stops on the way. Bring your passport to reserve the RMB15 tickets (extra RMB5 if you purchase outside the train station). Trains leave roughly every hour, and advanced booking of return tickets is highly recommended. Alternatively, you could



take Metro Line 2 to Chadianzi Bus Station or Xipu and transfer to a bus to Qingcheng Shan. If you’re lucky, taxis back to Chengdu can be RMB50 per person.

From the Qingchengshan Train Station buses leave regularly to the parking lot of the back mountain. Avoid the RMB5 electric tourist trams, they are more expensive and drop you off before the parking lot. Buses stop operating in the late afternoon. Taxi driver are reluctant to use the meter and will ask for RMB20 for the short 3km ride—you may be able to bargain them down on the way back from the mountain to RMB10, or you could get a ride on a motorcycle for the same price.

Cable car rides are RMB35 one way RMB60 return.



火 炎 炒 灯

Mandarin Made Easier

learning Chinese characters with radicals

By Lucy Wang

As we’ve discussed, the part of the character known as the radical (or 部首/bùshǒu in Chinese) can aid Mandarin learners in deciphering a character’s meaning or pronunciation. In paper dictionaries, they are also used to arrange the order of the characters, so being able to recognize radicals is an important part of knowing the language.

This month, I’m going to introduce the “火,” or fire, radical . This is not only a radical but a common character that means fire. In oracle bones, the form of the character is like the profile of a roaring fire. After metal language, the character became less hieroglyphic in form. Its meaning has been extended to encompass several other definitions, including arms and ammunition; very urgent; and prosperous. For example, we can say that a business is very 火: 生意很火 (shēngyì hénhuǒ).

As a radical and a character, 火 appears in the following characters, words, and idioms.

远水救不了近火
yuǎnshuǐ jiù bùliǎo jìn huǒ
This is widely used idiom literally means water from afar cannot help a nearby fire. It means that a slow remedy cannot solve an urgent matter.

真金不怕火炼
zhēnjīn bùpà huǒliàn
Pure gold does not fear the furnace; true gold fears no fire.

火上浇油
huǒshàng jiāoyóu (idiom).
To put fuel on the fire; to make things worse.

灯
dēng
a lamp or lantern

灭
miè
extinguish, put out, turn off. This is a very pictographic word: It looks like putting something on the fire to extinguish it.

灿烂
cànlàn
magnificent, splendid, bright. Fire is certainly bright, so it’s no wonder the fire radical appears (twice) in this phrase.

炒
chǎo
fry, stir-fry

炊
chuī
cook a meal, meal. In ancient times, fire was absolutely indispensable if you want to cook.

巧妇难为无米之炊
qiǎofù nánwéi wúmǐ zhīchuī
This is a wise and widely used idiom that says that even the cleverest housewife cannot cook a meal without rice.

炎热
yǎnrè
hot, burning; (so hot that the character contains not one but two huos).

火 炊

Dandoval’s Fast Food Trials

Photos and commentary by Dan Sandoval

Bonus Round: Burger King 汉堡王

Dandoval completed his pseudo-scientific mission after sampling the nasty of 20-something fast food chains in Chengdu. But the highly anticipated recent opening of Burger King at Chunxi Lu prompted Dandoval’s sudden lapse into fast-food junkiedom—and he wasn’t the only one. The tide swept locals and foreigners alike through the doors of the king’s domain, throwing a strange light on general culinary expectations in Chengdu. So, do or don’t believe the hype? As we entered the kingdom, were immediately and pleasantly surprised by the cleanliness and comfort, the English-speaking service and the zero-queue time. Someone is finally trying.



Test subject #1. Spicy Whopper 天椒星堡

Components: Mayo, ketchup, pickles , onion, ground beef, bun

Flavor	●●●○○○○○○	(Dan’s face squeezes concentrically.) The beef flavor is just wrong, the <i>huajiao</i> spoils it. The bun is better than McDonald’s sugar bread.
Texture	●●●●●○○○○	Meat is too spongy, but the tomato’s crunchy, and the whole thing is better assembled than guess-who.
Apparent nutrition	●●●●○○○○○○	Too greasy to be healthy.
Greasiness factor	●●●●●●○○○	On the drippy side (a stream of sauce runs down Dan’s arms)
Would you eat it again?	Nope.	I’m hungry, so I’m eating it, but otherwise I would eat the normal Whopper without the <i>mala</i> business.

OUR CHOICE

RMB20

Test subject #2. Double BBQ Western Bacon Cheeseburger 烧烤培根芝士双层堡

Components: Bun, bacon, western bbq sauce, cheese

Flavor	●●●●●●●○○	The sauce adds a dimension, a balance that brings out the meat flavor, unlike ketchup. The melted cheese makes a big difference, in the right place, maxing out the flavor impact. Mmm.
Texture	●●●●●●●○○	Everything in its perfect place and not soggy. That bacon is crispy and carefully laid out so you taste it with every bite.
Apparent nutrition	●●●●○○○○○○	Much less than the Whopper—it’s just meat, cheese, and barbecue sauce!
Greasiness factor	●●○○○○○○○○	Doesn’t feel greasy, and the sauce is not dripping and stays where it should.
Would you eat it again?	Yes.	I would cross town just to eat this. Really! It’s my favorite item.

DAN’S CHOICE

RMB33 (meal)

Test subject #3. Chicken Filet 原味鸡柳

Components: chicken, breading, barbecue sauce

Flavor	●●●●●○○○○	Sugar, sugar, sugar. Nothing special about it. I prefer the Dicos chicken fries.
Texture	●●●●●●○○○	Not bad. I wish the outside were more crunchy and the inside more chewy.
Apparent nutrition	●●○○○○○○○○	It’s nothing but fried breaded chicken.
Greasiness factor	●●○○○○○○○○	Not that oily.
Would you eat it again?	Yeah, I would.	But I wouldn’t order it. Better get the nuggets.

PROMOTIONAL ITEM

RMB5

Burger King Final Verdict

Our impression of cleanliness didn’t extend to the toilets, and the Avril Lavigne loop felt like a Gitmo technique to get customers out of there in 15 minutes or less, but Burger King seating is comfy and the coloring and interior design doesn’t scream “fast food” as much as “café that happens to have a grill.”

Says Dandoval: “By far the best fast-food burger. More expensive than McDonald’s, but it’s worth it as you feel you’re getting higher quality and you can modify your orders—‘your way.’ I would come here every now and then. Hopefully brings up the quality a bit among fast food spots.” [Dandoval went on a lengthy “crunchy on the outside, soft on the inside” talk about the goodness of the French fries but we edited that out. –Ed.]

We probably need to remind you that this column was all Dandoval’s idea, and he eagerly volunteered to participate in its creation before he thought better of the idea. Contrary to appearances, no Dandovals were harmed in the making of this page, at least not over the short term. See more of Dan Sandoval at www.dansandoval.com.



Dialogue in the Dark: 黑暗中对话

an eye-opening experience

Photos by Dan Sandoval

It's a rather unusual request to ask museum visitors to leave behind their bags, cameras, mobiles, watches, glasses, keys, and anything that may be lost on a tour through darkness. But as visitors to Dialogue in the Dark find out shortly after complying with the request, it's a reasonable one. After we climbed up to the second floor we were handed a cane and received a short briefing on how to hold and use it. Shortly thereafter we entered a pitch black room, fumbling around to try to find our bearings without the aid of our vision. It was a relief to figure out how to coordinate with the help of the others in our group and most importantly, our blind guide—in our case, a bilingual named Jerry, who for the following 60 to 90 minutes became our “eye” through the black on a tour of everyday life situations in Chengdu.

Without the help of vision we relied on our other senses, slowly learning to “see” with our hands by touching everything, our ears absorbing sounds while we made hesitant steps, each one a painstaking effort. Simultaneously we began to acknowledge and trust our guide's capabilities more than our own senses, our admiration growing with every step. This clever switch of roles was the idea exhibition founder Andreas Heinecke had in mind when he set up *Dialogue in the Dark*.

In the 1980s, the German journalist and documentarian accepted a tricky work task—rehabilitating a colleague who had lost his eyesight in an accident. Heinecke was able to understand his colleague's daily challenges only after he started to put himself in the position of a visually impaired person. This approach proved to be successful and eventually led Heinecke to the opening of a social enterprise that now houses franchised

“We began to acknowledge and trust our guide's capabilities more than our own senses,”

exhibitions and workshops in cities around the world as well as new events (most prominently, Dinner in the Dark), and has since branched out to other fields with Dialogue in Silence (simulating a deaf experience) and Dialogue in Time (showing the challenges of aging).

The exhibition in Chengdu follows the success of Chinese workshops and exhibitions in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Though still in its infancy, it's safe to say it will help to improve the situation of visually impaired and open new career paths for blind off the beaten massage track.

It's remarkable how the exhibition concepts of transforming a personal experience to a mutual understanding, while never pointing fingers or calling for pity. Finally it's rare for an exhibition to leave the visitor with such an extremely strong unforgettable personal impression (in Chengdu anyway) and that one could recommend it blindly to anyone. Dialogue in the Dark is one.

Opening Hours

Tuesdays to Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Fridays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Sundays, 1 p.m. to 10 p.m.
Closed Mondays

Entrance

RMB100 (Tuesday to Friday), RMB120 (Weekend)

Address

Chengdu Dialogue in the Dark Service Center
232 Jinjiang Dong Lu (diagonally opposite river from Xinanmen Bus Station)
成都锦江区黑暗中对话服务中心滨江东路232号
Tel. 62103889 (advance reservation for groups, companies, and non-Chinese speakers recommended)

www.dialogue-in-the-dark.org.cn
www.dialogue-in-the-dark.com



Litang Horse Festival

Text and photos by Dan Sandoval

Every summer people gather in the far western reaches of Sichuan to watch the Litang horse festivals. Steeped in tradition, the horse festivals are an event where nomadic Tibetan families gather for a bit of friendly competition and bonding. About 14.5 kilometers outside Litang are the grassy fields of Benge, which hosted the second of Litang's horse festivals this year.

When I spotted many white tents clustered together in the grasslands, I figured I'd arrived in the right place. Once there, I found the people very inviting—multiple families invited me to dine and stay with them, free of charge. I politely declined accommodation as I had my own tent (and I'll be damned if I had carried it through towns and on busses for three days for nothing), but I did gratefully accept dining invitations.

The event itself is somewhat unorganized, with the three days of horse events starting at seemingly random times, and no clear judges or winners for anything except the grand opening race. Activities range from racing to mounted archery, and include a good bit of trick riding in all categories. After the three days of races there are another three days of traditional song and dance, with participants dress in full traditional wardrobe. Days go from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., give or take.

Before you embark on a journey to Litang, try contacting a local hotel or hostel to find out the approximate dates of the festival (allot for spare time, though, as the schedules tends not to be set in stone). Staying out in the field is not necessary, as you can hire a taxi or car to take you the short distance back and forth from Litang, but it does add to the experience. Many families are happy to accommodate open-minded guests, and it is possible to buy some food and fruit from vendors during the festival. Though the cool air and clear blue skies make for an excellent getaway from Chengdu's humid heat, it can get fairly cold at night, so take warm clothes for the evenings.





Shangli Old Town 上里古镇

Photos by Michal Pachniewski



If you're like most China outsiders, before you arrived you had the stereotypical mélange of positive China images stuck in your head—quaint gardens, kung fu masters around every corner, quiet teahouses. This fantasy, is, of course, stamped away the moment you cross the immigration line and the longer you stay on the mainland the harder it is to conjure up those illusive visions again. That is, until you come to places like Shangli, the kind of Chinese old town that brings to life all of those imagined positive stereotypes—the kind of China you always hoped to see—in miniature format. Just like Huanglongxi it serves as a backdrop for domestic movies and TV production, but offers two distinct advantages to the visitor: it's not overrun and it doesn't look fake.

Your journey from Chengdu starts with a bus ride up a tortuous, gorgeous mountainside road from Ya'an alongside rivers and waterfalls. Once you're 1,000 meters up, the minibus spits you out in front of a stone bridge that leads you to an arrangement of traditional wooden houses. Once the pride of the five big family dynasties, who divided all trading and crafting in the town among them, and from which the town's former name, Wujiakou, derived, the houses now serve as snack shops and bars catering to tourists.

A walk around the old town first takes you to a plaza with another bridge that shows wooden Ming and Qing dynasty houses hanging over the river on one side and the Han Court on the other. At the court's main entrance, an old man is waiting to charge you RMB3, but if you have booked a room inside or just move 50 meters to your left and enter the court through another gate you may skip the fee. The court itself is laid out in a north China style. Some old residents still live here, but more and more guesthouses and hotels have taken over the rooms to let them out to travelers. Still it's a fine example of a Chinese Qing dynasty courtyard that reveals amazing still life in every corner.

Once you're done wondering around Han's, you can head over to the riverside restaurants and teahouses, which offer decent Sichuanese food, the kind you rarely find in the city anymore. There are also some more distinct local dishes with wild mushrooms, wild herbs and fish, and drinks like fruit wines and rosewood tea made of the bark of *Dalbergia dyeriana*, which you'll see laid out to dry all over town like a carpet.

You can follow the river on stone pathways, pass the old station of the Tea Horse Road, which was in ancient times the last stop of the Southern Silk Road route before traders left the Sichuan basin and entered either the Tibetan or Yunnan Plateau. These days, the horses are gone, and instead of stocking up on provisions, you can take photos with huge dogs, peacocks, all kinds of birds, snakes, and other animals. Additional walking takes you up to an old mill,

and if you cross one of the many uniquely designed bridges, you will find yourself in the countryside.

Going up the mountains can take you to heights of 1,700 meters all the way to Mengding Shan, or you could follow the rivers and check out the Red Army's stone carvings from when they passed by in 1935. Within (strenuous) walking or biking distance are also the Tang dynasty Baima Spring and the Bifengxia Panda Reserve.

Shangli is a good enough place to stroll around, especially for those with an appreciation for visual details like the intricate wood and stone carvings that cover the doors, roofs, and walls, and it's equally suited to lazy hours next to the river watching the tea drinkers and mahjong players, the roaming town kids, the silent painters and villagers from the mountains. It's quiet but still lively with a fresh breeze of air from the surrounding evergreen forests.

The old town saw a small tourism boom a decade ago, when it was poised to become a Sichuanese Lijiang, but it lost momentum along the way, and the 2008 Wenchuan and 2013 Lushan quakes impacted visitor numbers. Luckily, the wooden structures resisted the shocks, and the only buildings severely damaged in the shaking were the stone structures. The low tourism numbers in part mean that prices at Shangli have yet to inflate.

Shangli falls just outside the two-hour-bus-trip radar for Chengdu residents and thus is not a usual target for daytrippers, but the extra half-hour on the bus is well worth it—and perhaps you'll be so attached to the rural magic that you'll want to stay overnight in one of the many 60-kuai rooms. Then again, maybe you'll find yourself not wanting to leave at all, but in any case when you do leave, it'll most likely be with a promise to yourself to return.



Transport
Buses leave from Xinnanmen Bus Station (新南门汽车站) to Ya'an (雅安) regularly, approx. 2 hours, RMB48. Alternatively, buses run from the Shiyangchang Bus Station (石羊场汽车站) in the south of Chengdu, which shortens the trip slightly. From the Ya'an bus station, minibuses depart for Shangli as they fill up, the 30-kilometer trip takes approx. 30 minutes and costs RMB6.5.





Photo by Michal Pachniewski

Dear Editor:

We are writing with regard to the photo stories in the "Animals" issue of Chengdoo City Life (Issue 65, May/June 2013). We have been working with animals in China and with the people who are responsible for their care and conservation for nearly two decades, and would like provide your readers with an ethical perspective.

The photographs in issue capture the abject conditions, illness and misery under which the animals in the Xinkai Jie pet market live. Every single one of the animals in the images is unwell. They are not a cute puppy, a pretty bird, a soft chinchilla. They are a puppy suffering the profound stressors of social isolation and physical illness; a highly intelligent bird who is chained, restricted from all activity that define his species, and suffering chronic stress and disease that have depleted him; a starving and sick chinchilla.

The author of the article about the Qingshi Qiao wet market seemed somewhat disgusted by the experience of the visit there. What happens to get the animals to the market, and then to dismember them—which often happens before they are dead—should do more than disgust anyone who is not lost to severe psychopathology. Even if one doesn't care about the suffering of sentient beings, one might be aware that wet markets such as this one are a principle source of emerging infectious diseases: the pandemics that terrify the public, health officials and government leaders internationally, and which

may well be the end of our species if we continue to do this with animals.

We invite visitors to walk through the pet and wet markets with an eye to the well-being of the animals, with sensitivity to the overwhelming stressors that the animals suffer every single day, and the many signs of depression and the struggle to cope physically and psychologically with the horrors that describe their lives. These animals suffer badly. Those who survive long enough to be sold from the pet market are purchased as a toy or when it comes to wildlife species and large dogs—a consumer item to be shown off as a mark of wealth and exotic tastes. The large majority die shortly after purchase, and before they do so will have had the chance to spread disease that they acquired in these markets to people and to other animals.

We understand that your magazine attempts to keep observations about local idiosyncrasies light-hearted and with an air to cultural exploration. However, the abuse of animals and the multi-billion dollar wildlife trade are not mere cultural curiosities to be enjoyed by tourists, any more than are child abuse and human trafficking.

Animal abuse is not a cultural diversion. Animal abuse is universally unethical.

Sincerely,

Kati Loeffler, DVM, PhD
Sarah Bexell, PhD

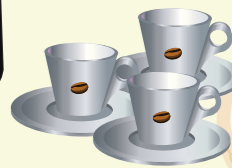
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巴适的很
Basi de Hen
your monthly guide to CD cool!

Basi de the
Rise of Cafés



First, there was Goodwood. (Blech.) Then, there was Starbuck's. (Meh.) Later, there was Kaffestugan. (Woohoo!) And now, in some neighborhoods, it feels like cafés outnumber teahouses. Cafés seem to be taking over Chengdu, and while teahouses will always hold a special place in my heart for cultural and social reasons, cafés are my weakness. So the more, the merrier, and I'm here to tell you about a few good ones you may not have noticed yet.

Korean Cafés

There are two coffee chains I've noticed so far in Chengdu of the Korean persuasion: Zoo Coffee and Maan Coffee. They each have multiple locations with more in the pipeline, apparently, and I wouldn't be surprised if there were other Korean cafés creeping in. They seem to have a few things in common: oversized drinks with flavors like pumpkin and maple, scrumptious *baobing* big enough to share with your closest eight or ten friends, Belgian-style waffles with a variety of topping options, and stuffed animals. Korean cafés are definitely for the *meinü* set with all their sweet and cutesy goodness.

Lavazza Café

First of all, the Global Center, which houses Lavazza, is coffee heaven; there were at least

ten different cafés there last time I visited. The open-plan Lavazza Café on the third floor in front of the Lotte Department store is a welcome addition to Chengdu's oeuvre of cafés, with its solid Italian coffee drinks which make up for the lack of atmosphere. The mocha I had there was the best I've ever had in Chengdu, with its rich chocolate syrup instead of insipid chocolate powder that stuck to the bottom of my cup.

Ms. Bamboo

Apparently on everyone's radar at Chengdoo for the introduction of Ryan's Sandwiches (which I haven't tried yet), Ms. Bamboo is on this list simply for being a bizarro experience. You walk in and the incongruous explosion of styles, colors, shapes, and textures of the décor make you feel like you're walking into someone's private dream world. I kind of like that vaguely unsettling feeling, which I've experienced at art installations and while watching *Spirited Away*. On the more conventionally *basi* side are the sunken, cushion-filled X-Box pit, private rooms with widescreen TVs for surfing the Internet, delectable desserts baked onsite, and a game room complete with foosball and board games. The whole place will bring out the child in you for an afternoon, at least.



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