



The Jingjiang Princes' City, built in the 14th century, is one of the best preserved historic sites in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

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# CITY AND PEOPLE ARE ONE

The resilient Guilin has withstood the ravages of war and fire to become one of China's most popular tourist destinations, write **Li Yang** and **Huo Yan**.

There are numerous ways to take in the beauty of Guilin, a world-acclaimed tourist destination famed for its karst landscape. One of the best ways is climbing up to the top of Duxiu Hill.

The 66-meter-high peak stands in the center of a stretch of plain encircled by two rivers, four lakes and ranges of bamboo-shoot-shaped hill forests in the distance.

The 2,000-year-old Guilin has prospered into a city of 700,000 people.

Looking down from the Duxiu Hill, visitors can easily discern the two "necklaces" of Guilin. One is a rectangular ring of mossy ancient city wall piled with bluestones and the other jade-green rivers and lakes conveyed by flourishing trees.

The city wall divides the old Guilin from the modern.

The rectangular ancient city, called Jingjiang Princes' City, covers an area of 150,000 square meters and was built between 1372 and 1392 by Jingjiang King Zhu Shouqian, the great-nephew of Zhu Yuanzhang, the founder of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

The Princes' City had been home for 14 princes of the royal Zhu family of the Ming Dynasty.

The Princes' City's wall is 7.92 meters high and has a thickness of 5.5 meters. There are four gates in four directions opened for different people at different times for different purposes.

Main buildings in the Princes' City, arranged on an axis, include administration buildings, royal quarters and a garden.

The subsidiary buildings on both

sides of the axis are symmetrical. From east to west are the Imperial Divine Temple and Ancestral Temple. There are four halls, four pavilions and 40 other buildings.

The Duxiu Hill stands in the north of the Princes' City, accompanied by an artificial pond in its north. It used to be the exclusive asset of the ancient city owners from 1372 till 1649, when the Manchu cavalries swept away the last Han resistant in Guilin.

According to feng shui theories, the delicate location and combination of rivers, lakes and hills near or in a city brings good geomantic potency in the form of political stability, represented by hills, and sustainable wealth, embodied by the water to the city, making the city an ideal choice for capitals.

Because of the perfect combination of the small pond, Lijiang River, Duxiu Hill and the Princes' City, as local people say proudly, Guilin has been the capital of China twice in the difficult war against the invading Manchu troops during the late Ming Dynasty and in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression from 1942 to 1944.

The main buildings of the Princes' City were burned to ruins by the Manchu troops in 1652 and rebuilt as exam sites in 1657 for imperial exams throughout the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

After the Qing Dynasty, the city served as the provincial government of Guangxi, until 1943 when it was destroyed by Japanese bombers.

Guangxi Normal University was moved to the Princes' City after it was established in the suburb of Guilin in 1932. The buildings were built on stone bases and surrounded



The Jingjiang Princes' City is designed according to feng shui theories, featuring a perfect combination of hills, ponds, rivers and buildings.

by delicate ancient stone balustrades of the Ming Dynasty.

The main structures were designed in Gothic style and the roofs took the traditional Chinese

style of cornices covered with black glazed tiles.

It feels comfortably cool walking in the quiet and spacious Princes' City, which is immersed in a green



## IF YOU GO

Jingjiang Princes' City is in the center of Guilin and Yanshan Manor is located 24 km south of Guilin. It is recommended to take a boat from Guilin to Yangshuo to see the picturesque Lijiang River and karst mountains in the morning and take a shuttle bus back to Guilin in the afternoon. You can get off the bus at the stop for the university town of Guilin to visit the Yanshan Manor.

It takes about three hours' bus ride to get to the Princes' City and two hours to Yanshan Manor. It would be wise to read about Guilin's history before the tour or find a good guide. The ticket price for the Princes' City is 70 yuan (\$11) and 45 yuan for the Yanshan Manor.

sea of osmanthus, ginkgo and loquat trees.

Students and teachers painted Chairman Mao Zedong's words on the 136 valuable ancient stone inscriptions on the Duxiu Hill in the "cultural revolution" (1966-76) and successfully protected the inscriptions from the Red Guards' sabotage.

One fourth of the Princes' City in its south was occupied by exam takers in the Qing Dynasty and is now lived in by the Guilin people.

In the mid-1990s, the normal university campus was opened to the public as a city park and most students were transferred to a suburban campus.

Deng Jinhao, 74, a retired teacher in Guilin, says: "I cannot imagine Guilin without the Princes' City. I studied and lived in it from 1959 to 1963. That is one of the most beautiful memories for me."

From the 1950s, local people started building houses at the foot of the ancient city wall. A kind of symbiotic relationship between the Princes' City and local people was formed, physically and mentally.

"I am proud my hometown has the Princes' City. I used to plant vegetables on the city wall and played games in it when I was a child. Now I take a walk in it every day," says Qin Lin, 68, a retired doctor.

Yang Huihong, 21, a college student born in Guilin, says: "The history of the Princes' City seemed sleeping silently in local people's hearts. But the temperament of royalty has been passed on by the Princes' City and the anima of the beautiful scenery has permeated in every Guilin citizen's spirit."

When asked about the Princes' City, most young locals reply in one voice: "It's just there as always." This may be an ideal relationship between a city and its people.

Yang Min and Yang Huihong contributed to the story.

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## Manor from heaven a place of great inspiration

By **LI YANG** and **HUO YAN**  
in Guilin, Guangxi

Yanshan Manor in Guilin, which once served as a shelter for scholars during World War II, remains a source of inspiration for philosophers, writers and artists.

The traditional manor, covering an area of 150,000 square meters, was built at the foot of Yanshan Mountain to its southwest by local official Tang Yue from 1869 to 1873 in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Following feng shui masters' suggestion, Tang constructed the manor along an open section of an underground stream, which flows into a deep pond in the north of the manor.

The stream is about 15 meters wide and 300 meters long. Its water is dark green and the water flow is stable throughout the year. Flourishing bamboos as well as osmanthus, maidenhair and banyan grow on the river banks, turning the manor into a sea of green, filling it with fragrance in blossom season.

A little hill on the east bank of the river provided Tang Yue with more options to plan his houses. He dug several small artificial ponds along the river and built at least five small gardens of different styles beside the



Yanshan Manor, built during the 19th century, is popular among tourists and artists alike, with its unique architecture and landscape.

ponds on both sides of the river.

It is said the delicate location of the Yanshan Mountain, which looks like a flying wild goose stretching its wings, and the stream, which is comparable to a dragon, can ensure constant prosperity for the manor's residents.

Tang was transferred to north China by the court a few years after the manor was built and died there in the late 1890s. His offspring sold the manor to the regional governor Cen Chunxuan in 1909.

The only legacy Cen left is a "drag-

on path" built with gravel along the stream, the hunched middle line of the path was marked with a row of neatly arranged gravel of similar sizes representing the backbone of a dragon. Cen believed walking on the path every day boded well for his promotion.

However, the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1911 and Cen left Guangxi with his family soon afterwards. Because of a lack of maintenance, most wooden buildings were destroyed by termites within a decade.



PHOTOS BY LI YANG / CHINA DAILY

Cen gifted the deserted manor to the new provincial government hosted by local warlord Li Zongren in 1929, who rebuilt the manor without changing the layout designed by Tang Yue, replacing the old wooden buildings with solid brick buildings and small villas.

Guangxi Normal University was established in the manor in 1932 and merged into the Guangxi University in 1936, which was moved to the manor from neighboring Wuzhou city to dodge the invading Japanese.

With its open and free academic atmosphere, the university quickly attracted a large number of scholars, artists and writers on their way to Guilin from around China, such as philosophers Hu Shi and Liang Shuming, historian Chen Yinke, architects Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin, geologist Li Siguang, writers Ba Jin and Guo Moruo as well as painters Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian and Xu Beihong.

Their short stay in Yanshan Manor, varying from one year to three

years, came at the most difficult time in China's anti-Japanese war as well as their most productive periods.

They taught students and accomplished a large number of classic works during their stay in Yanshan Manor before moving to Yunnan together. Their perseverance in teaching and research during war inspired the whole nation and left a rich artistic and academic heritage.

The university moved to Guilin after the war. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, the manor was turned into a barracks. Thanks to military protection, most historical relics were not destroyed in the "cultural revolution" (1966-76).

Guangxi agricultural school was in charge of taking care of the manor until 2003 when businessman Peng Peng, with a doctorate in history, invested in it and opened it to the public as a tourist resort and a painting school for local painters.

Peng says: "Botanists regard the manor as a treasury of rare plants. Feng shui masters praised it as a treasure land. Architects marvel at its layout and buildings. Landscape painters find their home here."

Yang Min and Yang Huihong contributed to the story.