

Nanjing Now!

By **Carla Hunt** - October 23, 2017



Clients can take in the views of a Confucius temple on a river cruise in Nanjing.

Beijing may be the capital of China today, but for many centuries (mostly during the Ming dynasty), the country was ruled from Nanjing, a historic and booming city located on the banks of the Yangtze River, 175 bullet-train-miles from Shanghai and 3.5 hours from Beijing, 14h/25minutes from Los Angeles aboard the recently introduced nonstop flights of **China Eastern Airways**, which connects 478 destinations in China with seven gateways in North America.

Those are just a fast-facts sampling of many things we learned from the city's tourism delegation visit in New York City to explain why Nanjing is an essential and accessible destination on any client tour of China. And they made an appealing case: my suitcase's packed.

Steve Xu, president of **Champion Holidays** and a native-son of Nanjing, was at my table. "Ours is a cultural destination, booming, yes, but less commercial than other 21st century cities in China, still enjoying a traditional way of life, although a university town with more than 50 universities [including a branch of Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies]. Xu pointed out a perfect China itinerary, based on the positioning of four city destinations sitting along the same high speed rail: Beijing, Nanjing, Suzhou, Shanghai.

The list of top attractions for U.S. travelers in Nanjing—recognized as one of the four great ancient capitals of China—is long; consider just a sampling:

The Qinhuai River Scenic Area is the city's cultural center embracing temples, historic buildings, gardens, tourist-friendly shops and restaurants. The major monument is the Confucius Temple, built on the banks of the Qinhuai River in 1034. Renovated and reconstructed many times, it presents a temple complex in the architectural style of the Ming and Quin dynasties; it is home to the largest Confucius figure in China and a collection of ornate panels, which chronicle his life in jade, silver and gold. Everyone's favorite activity is a Qinhuai River cruise aboard a beautifully painted boat, a slow tour of a waterway lined with modern buildings and temples, including tea, snacks, and traditional Chinese music.

The Zhonghua Gate is the best-preserved part of the city wall, built to defend the city in the 14th century. The original wall had 13 gates and supported a huge defensive complex of ramps for horseback access and dozens of chambers to house soldiers, horses, food and weapons. Needless to say, the view from atop the wall—once 22 miles long and now about 15.5 miles—is spectacular.



The Nanjing city wall stretches over 15 miles.

Nearby, the Purple Mountain scenic area is one of the best known mountains in southern China. It's a national park dotted with historical and cultural relics, including the 20-acre park surrounding the Mausoleum of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, father of the Republic of China. Also here is the Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty (a UNESCO World Heritage site), set in a forested garden area, accessed via a half-mile-long Sacred Path that is guarded by four pairs of stone warriors and 12 pairs of mythical creatures.

When it's time to dine around, salted duck served many ways is the signature dish in Nanjing; however, we don't seem likely to forget another specialty, the hairy crab, reportedly sweet and tasty, with mid-September the best time for the female of the species, while the males peak in mid-October. Both best washed down with crafted beer; while there are more than 300 craft breweries in China, the first started right here in 2008.

In cosmopolitan Nanjing, there is no shortage of skyscrapers, shopping malls and luxury hotels. Among the listings in our press materials were 10 luxury hotels, all seemingly providing incredibly low-cost luxury lodging: nine were international brands, and joining these at the luxury level is the 970-room **Jiling Hotel Nanjing** with 260 guestrooms on the executive floors, plus six restaurants, a health club complete with billiards, table tennis, yoga rooms, a gym and pool, plus the *Angsana Spa*.

An hour from the city-center at the Tangshan Hot Springs, luxury resorts include **Balinese Kayumanis Nanjing Private Villas & Spa** and the **Regalia Resort and Spa**.

And coming in 2018 are the Nanjing Green Towers, two vertical forest towers which, in hopes of combatting greenhouse gas emissions by absorbing 25 tons of CO2 annually, will be adorned with more than 1,100 trees and 2,500 cascading plants. The larger of the two towers will house office spaces, a museum, and a "green architecture" school, while the smaller tower will feature a 247-room **Hyatt Hotel** with rooftop swimming pool; and lower spaces in the two towers will accommodate a conference hall and event space along with food shops and restaurants.

For more information, visit gotonanjing.com.