

# Sanya: The next big destination for groups?



**T**ravel insider Philip Cooke lifts the lid on a lesser-known destination in China that's gearing up for the groups market in a big way.

Miles of silver white sand, coral reefs, tropical rainforests, championship golf courses, new luxury hotels and a new airport terminal have turned the Chinese city of Sanya into a burgeoning oceanside resort that is fast becoming an international destination for leisure and business groups.

## China's southern belle

Sanya is China's most southerly city. It's located about 300 miles east of Hong Kong at the lower end of an archipelago of islands in the South China Sea that are known collectively as Hainan Province, and it's separated from the continental mainland by the 20 mile wide Qiongzhou Strait.

A new international terminal has provided Sanya's Haikou Meilan International Airport (HAK) with a large number of international long haul routes and services, connecting mainly via Beijing and Hong Kong and making it already the second busiest airport in China.

This investment has been matched by the construction of a phalanx of luxury hotels that have transformed Sanya's metropolitan skyline. These impressive up-scale international brands include the Sheraton Sanya Resort, the Sanya Marriott Resort and Spa, Mandarin Oriental, the Ritz Carlton Sanya and the Hilton Sanya Resort and Spa; names which clearly indicate that this is a booming international destination.

## On the itinerary

Groups will find plenty of things to do in and around Sanya. Its stunning beaches are complemented by nearby rainforest trekking routes, high quality golf courses, water sports such as sailing, paddleboarding and snorkeling in the crystal clear South China Sea, traditional fishing and visits to hillside villages, natural hot springs, Buddhist temples, sophisticated restaurants and local food outlets.

Parties can organize tour buses to take them to the likes of Butterfly Valley, where you'll find 2,000 different kinds of butterfly, and Tianya Haiiao, a scenic coastal spot where huge natural stones are marked with Chinese characters that mean 'the edge of the whole world and the sea'.

Trips can also be arranged to visit the likes of the Buddhist Nanshan Temple, which is guarded by two Buddha statues, and Monkey Island, which 1,800 endangered Macaque monkeys call their home.

Visitors to Sanya will also be astonished to discover that this relatively small and undiscovered tropical island now boasts the largest duty free shop in the world. The gigantic Haitang Bay Shopping Centre was recently described by the Daily Mail as 'duty free shopping on steroids' and it contains nearly one million square feet of duty free shopping spread over three levels under a stunning glass atrium roof.



## Visa-free

New hotels, leisure facilities and transportation infrastructure and the introduction of a 15-day visa exemption for visitors from the UK, the USA, France, Germany and other countries, plus generous duty free allowances, have also helped make Sanya an ideal destination for footloose international conferences, trade shows, exhibitions and business tourism events and meetings.

It is estimated that Hainan Island received nearly 40 million overnight tourists in 2014 and the Sanya Tourism Association has an ambition to become a major world destination by the end of the decade. So far, it seems to be well on the way.

For more information visit  
[www.whatsonsanya.com](http://www.whatsonsanya.com) and  
[en.visithainan.gov.cn](http://en.visithainan.gov.cn)

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