

CHONGQING

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A CITY FOR TOMORROW



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WHERE
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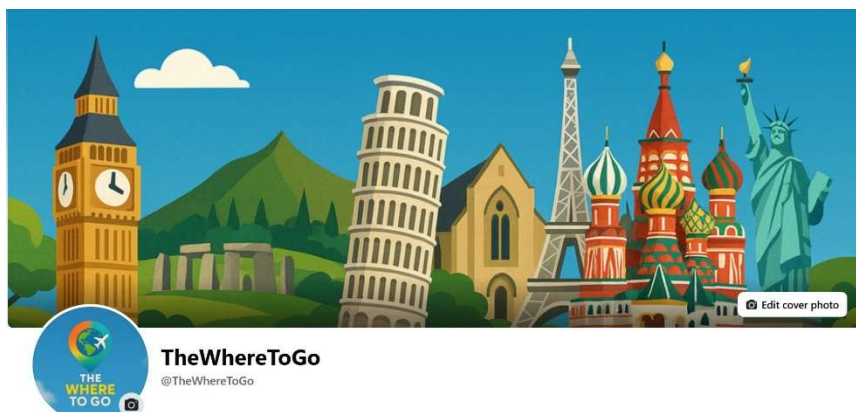
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Chongqing – A City for Tomorrow

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Introduction

Built among mountains at the meeting point of the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers, Chongqing is unlike any other city on Earth. Often described as China's 'Mountain City', it defies conventional ideas of urban planning. Roads climb impossibly steep hillsides, bridges soar across deep river valleys, trains pass through apartment buildings and entire neighbourhoods seem to exist on multiple levels at once. It is a city where gravity appears to have been challenged, creating one of the most remarkable urban landscapes in the world.

Although largely unfamiliar to many international visitors, Chongqing is one of China's largest municipalities and home to more than 30 million people. During the Second Sino-Japanese War it served as China's wartime capital, while today it has become one of the country's fastest-growing economic and technological powerhouses. Yet beneath its futuristic skyline lies a city with a history stretching back over 3,000 years, where ancient temples, merchant guild halls and traditional neighbourhoods continue to preserve its rich cultural heritage.

For travellers, Chongqing offers a thrilling combination of history, engineering and spectacular scenery. Explore lantern-lit streets at Hongya Cave, cross the Yangtze by cable car, discover atmospheric old districts, sample the city's world-famous hotpot and admire breathtaking views from riverside promenades and mountain viewpoints. Above all, experience the extraordinary skyline after dark, when millions of lights transform the city into one of the most dazzling urban spectacles anywhere in the world.

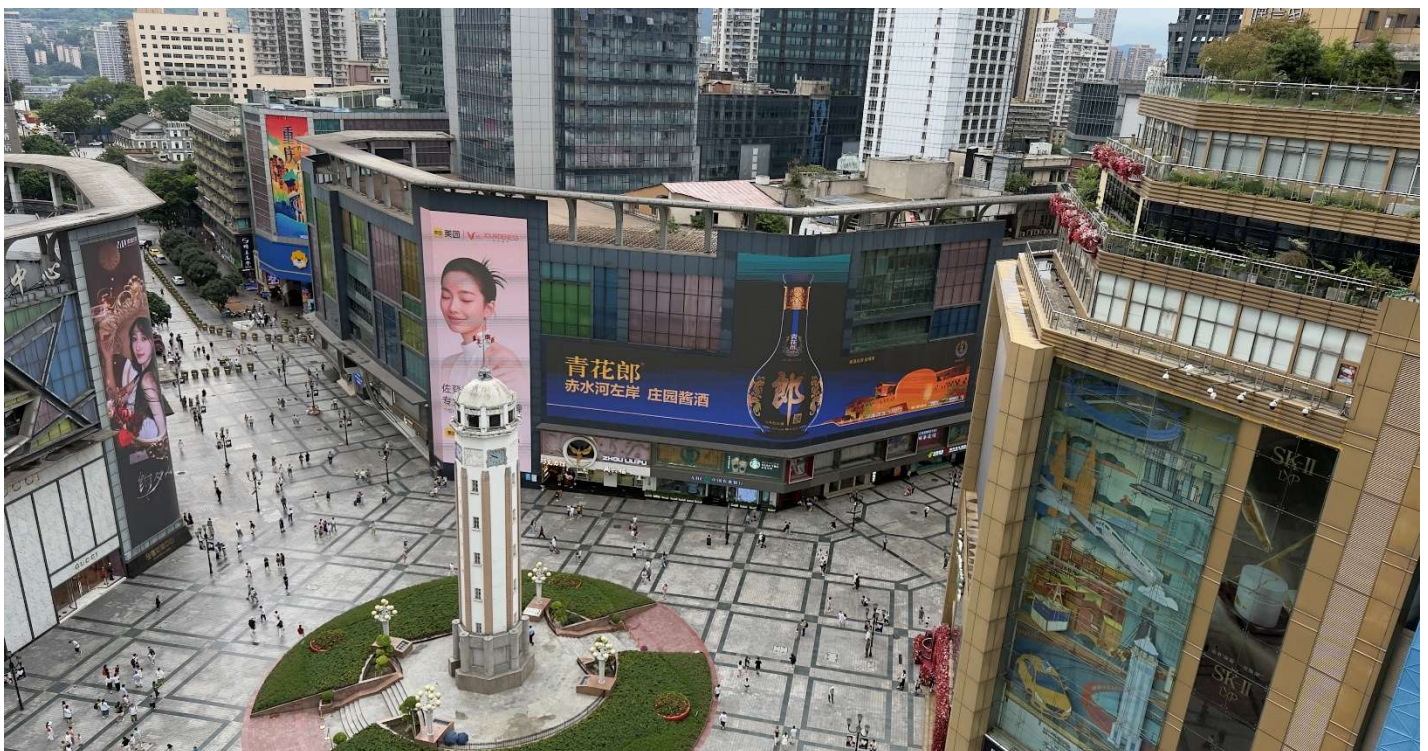
Bold, energetic and endlessly surprising, Chongqing remains one of China's best-kept secrets. For those willing to venture beyond the country's more familiar destinations, it offers an unforgettable glimpse into the future while remaining firmly rooted in its remarkable past.



People's Liberation Monument (Jiefangbei)

Standing at the heart of modern Chongqing, the People's Liberation Monument is both the symbolic centre of the city and the starting point for exploring its bustling commercial district. Originally built in 1940 as the Spirit of the Fortress Monument to commemorate China's resistance during the Second Sino-Japanese War, it was renamed after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Rising almost 92 feet (28 metres) above the surrounding streets, the monument has become one of Chongqing's most recognisable landmarks and an important gathering place for residents and visitors alike.

The monument stands in what is now Jiefangbei, literally 'Liberation Monument'. Surrounding the monument is Jiefangbei Pedestrian Street, one of western China's premier shopping and entertainment districts. Glittering skyscrapers, luxury boutiques, department stores and enormous digital advertising screens create an atmosphere that rivals Shanghai or Hong Kong, while hidden among the modern developments are traditional restaurants, teahouses and lively food streets serving Chongqing's famously spicy cuisine. The district is particularly vibrant after dark, when colourful lighting transforms the area into a dazzling display of neon and giant LED screens.



World Financial Centre – WFC Skyview



The World Financial Centre is one of Chongqing's most recognisable skyscrapers, rising 1112 feet (339 metres) above the Jiefangbei district. Its Skyview observation deck occupies the 75th to 78th floors and provides one of the best opportunities to understand just how extraordinary Chongqing's geography really is. The top floor is entirely open, so you are not even looking through glass at the scene below you.

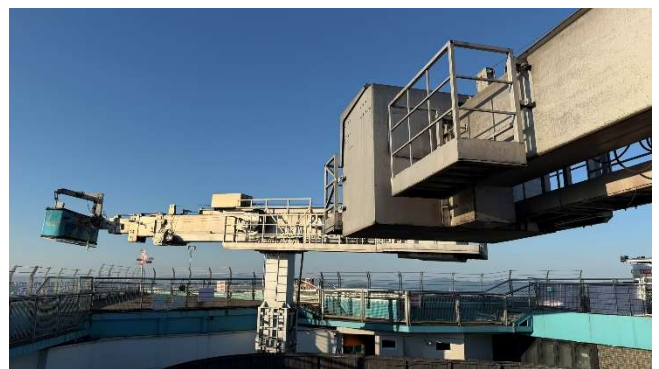
Interestingly, the building is 1112 feet (339 metres) high but the observation deck is advertised as 1936 feet (590 metres) which refers to the elevation of the observation deck above sea level.....as such, the height of the land is as significant as the height of the buildings. In fact, Chongqing now has a much taller skyscraper, but the WFC remains the highest-elevation viewpoint.

From this height, you can see the Yangtze and Jialing rivers, the densely built Yuzhong Peninsula, numerous river crossing bridges and endless ranks of high-rise buildings all competing for your attention. Not that far above you are the planes coming in to land at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport. The open-air viewing area is particularly impressive because there is little to separate the visitor from the surrounding skyline.

The Skyview opened in 2017 and has become one of Chongqing's signature viewpoints. It is especially rewarding late in the day when daylight gradually gives way to the city's famous illuminated nightscape. From above, landmarks such as Jiefangbei, Hongya Cave, Raffles City and the two rivers can be picked out below.

For me, however, the real attraction is not simply the height. It is the perspective..... Chongqing's reputation as China's 'mountain city' becomes easier to understand when you look down on the streets, buildings, hills and waterways. And standing on the roof, beside a sign proclaiming '590M', provides a useful reminder that in Chongqing there is more than one way of measuring how high up you are.





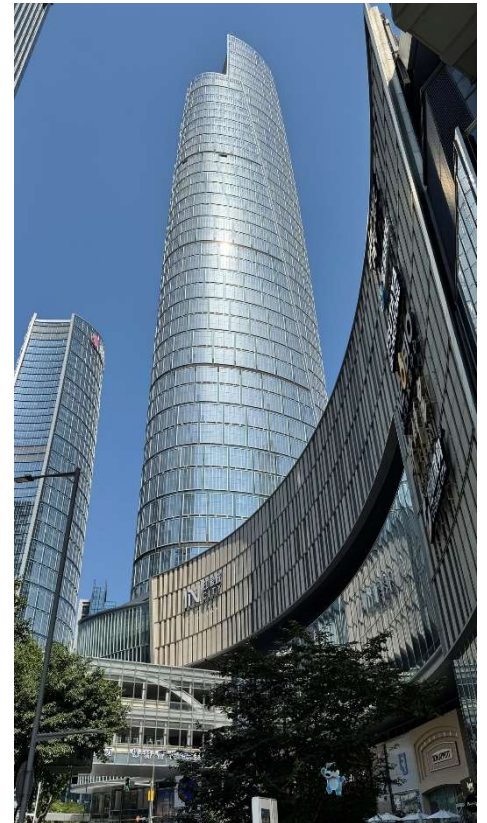
International Land-Sea Centre

The International Land-Sea Centre is Chongqing's tallest building, rising 458.2 metres and dominating the skyline around Hualongqiao. Its slender, tapering form makes it an impressive addition to a city already famous for spectacular skyscrapers. There is, however, an important qualification for visitors: at the time of my visit, the building was still in the transition between a completed tower and a functioning landmark.

The figures make for an interesting comparison with the WFC. The International Land-Sea Centre is genuinely taller as a building, at 1500 feet (458 metres). Yet the WFC observation deck, despite being on a building only 1112 feet (339 metres) high is at a higher elevation because of Chongqing's mountainous terrain. The figures are somewhat counter-intuitive since the city's tallest building does not automatically provide the highest observation point.

At ground level, the situation at the International Land-Sea Centre tells a rather different story from the impressive exterior. When I visited, the main entrance doors were locked, and the building was clearly not yet operating as a normal public destination. Inside, the contrast was striking. Some areas were surprisingly polished, while elsewhere the building was still unmistakably a construction site. Outside, hoardings were still in place, including signage carrying an investment and business enquiry telephone number.

The impression was therefore not of an abandoned skyscraper, but of a huge development somewhere between completion and occupation. The tower itself has reached its full architectural height and much of the internal fit-out is clearly advanced, but significant areas were still being prepared for their eventual use. Most importantly for visitors, the entrance was closed and there was no functioning public observation deck.



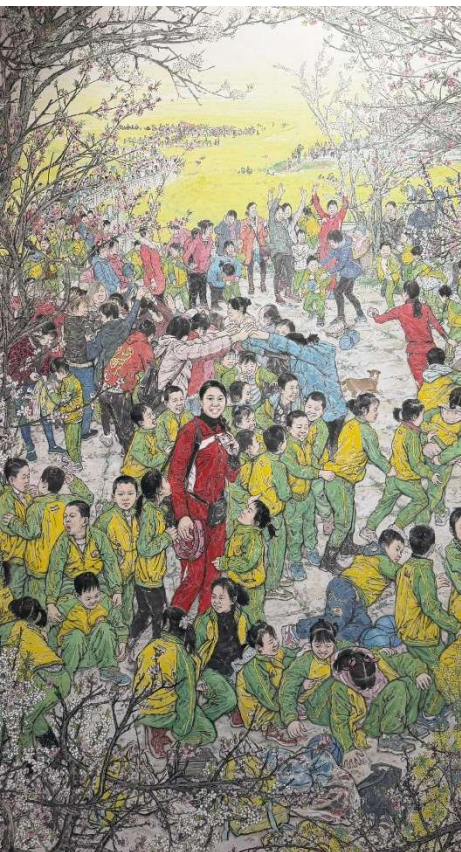


Chongqing Art Gallery

The Chongqing Art Gallery occupies a striking position close to Jiefangbei and is almost as interesting from the outside as it is from within. Opened in 2013, the building forms part of the Chongqing Guotai Arts Centre and is immediately recognisable for its unusual external framework of interwoven red and black beams.

The design has produced various interpretations. Some see the projecting beams as resembling chopsticks, while others have associated them with the ingredients and visual energy of Chongqing hotpot. Whatever the original intention, the result is unmistakably Chongqing..... bold, colourful and slightly unconventional.

Inside, the gallery concentrates particularly on Chinese painting, printmaking and sculpture, with exhibitions that provide a useful cultural counterpoint to the city's skyscrapers and commercial attractions. It is therefore worth including even for visitors whose principal interest is architecture rather than art.



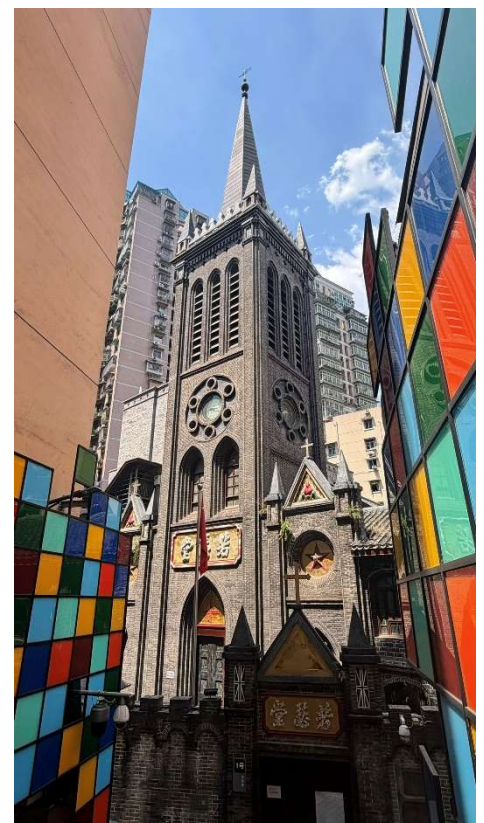


St Joseph's Cathedral

St Joseph's Cathedral is one of the most unexpected buildings in central Chongqing. The Gothic Revival church dates from the late nineteenth century when French missionaries of the Paris Foreign Missions Society established a Catholic presence in the city. Construction began in 1879 and the cathedral was completed in 1891, with its bell tower following in 1893.

The ivy-covered exterior pointed arches and square clock tower look distinctly European and provide a striking contrast with the surrounding modern Chinese city. Its survival is particularly notable given the upheavals Chongqing experienced during the twentieth century, including the Japanese bombing campaign during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the political turmoil that followed.

The cathedral remains an active Catholic church, although access can be restricted and the interior may be largely closed to casual visitors. Consequently, its value to a visitor may be more architectural and historical than religious. Regardless, even from outside, it is an intriguing reminder that Chongqing has long been connected to the wider world.



Luohan Temple (Arhat Temple)

Luohan Temple, also known as the Arhat Temple, is one of Chongqing's most remarkable survivals. Although the present complex has undergone substantial rebuilding, its origins date back to the Song dynasty, when it was established between 1064 and 1067. It was originally known as Zhiping Temple.

The temple acquired its present name during the Qing dynasty after 500 Arhat statues were installed in 1885. These figures became one of its principal features, although many were subsequently destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The temple also suffered devastating damage during Japanese bombing in 1939.

Today the temple provides a striking contrast with the commercial world immediately surrounding it. Towering office blocks and shopping centres are only a short distance away, while inside the temple the atmosphere changes abruptly to courtyards, Buddhist images and traditional architecture.





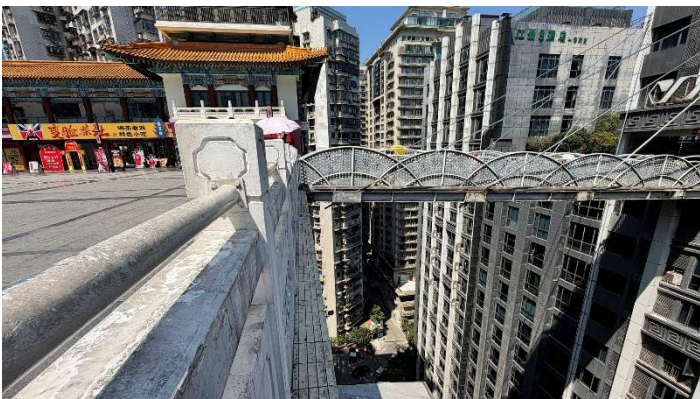
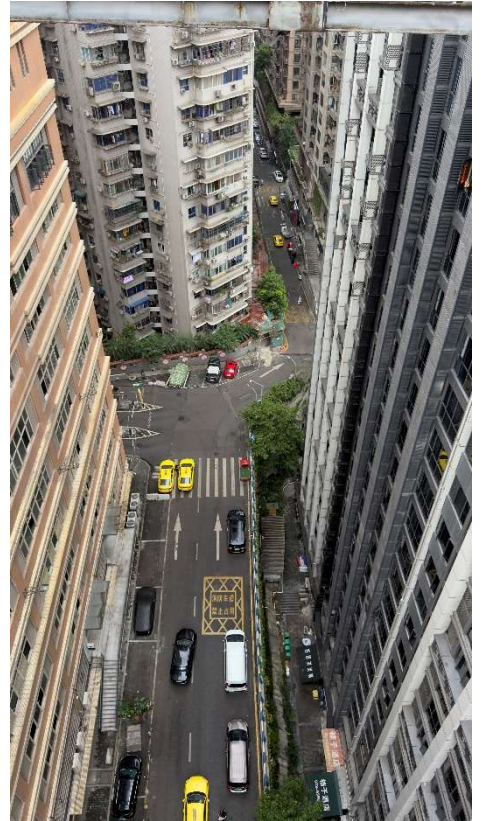
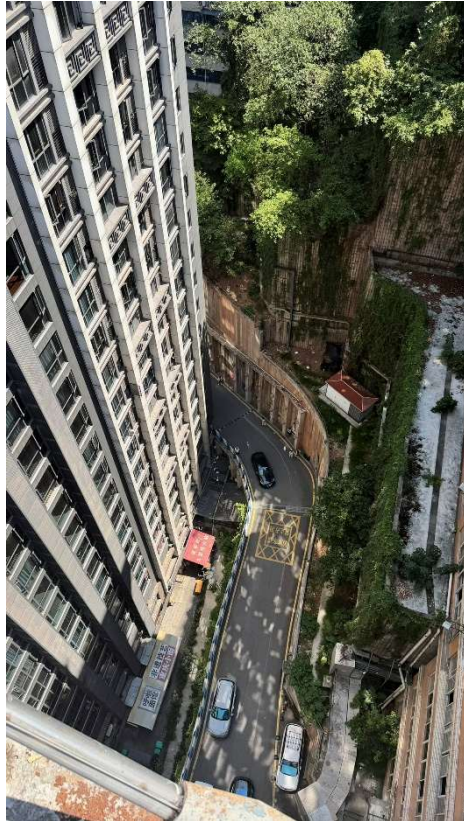
Mountain City Alley & Kuixing Building

Few places demonstrate Chongqing's extraordinary geography better than Mountain City Alley and the nearby Kuixing Building. Together they highlight the city's famous multi-level streets, dramatic elevation changes and seemingly impossible architecture, where roads, buildings and bridges exist on several levels simultaneously.

Mountain City Alley is a beautifully restored historic district of stone steps, narrow lanes and traditional houses clinging to the hillside. Walking through the neighbourhood provides a sense of what everyday life was once like before the arrival of modern high-rise development. Small cafés, local shops and viewing platforms offer welcome opportunities to pause and admire sweeping views across the Yangtze River.

Just a short walk away stands Kuixing Building, one of Chongqing's most extraordinary architectural curiosities. One minute you are standing at, what you believe to be, street level and then you look over the railings and realise that you are 22 floors above the street level below. This astonishing illusion has become one of the city's most popular photographic locations.





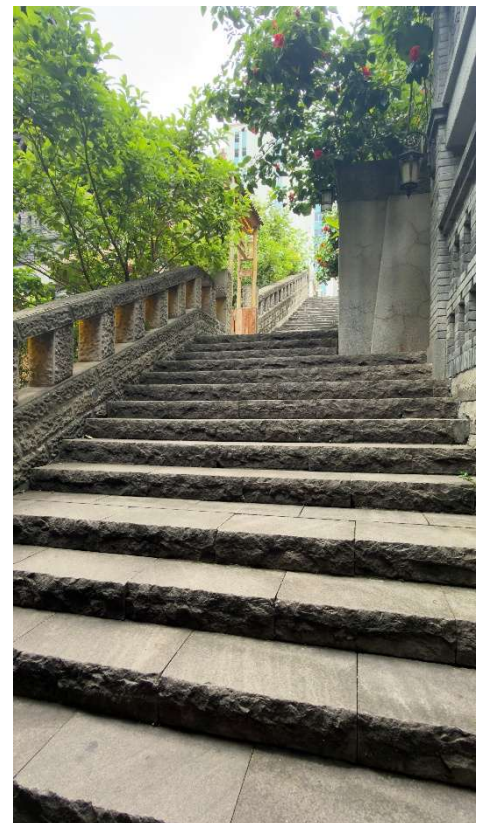
Shibati (Eighteen Steps)

Shibati, meaning 'Eighteen Steps', was traditionally one of the important routes connecting the upper and lower parts of old Chongqing. The steep staircase descended through the hillside towards the lower city and riverfront, making it an important pedestrian link in a city where vertical movement has always been part of daily life.

The name does not simply refer to a modern flight of eighteen steps constructed for tourists. It comes from the historic route itself, although the precise explanation of the original count is less straightforward than the name suggests. The staircase formed part of a larger network of steep lanes and steps dating back to the Ming and Qing periods.

The original neighbourhood eventually deteriorated and was closed for extensive redevelopment. It reopened in 2021 as a reconstructed traditional-style district. This creates an important qualification for visitors: much of what appears old is actually a modern recreation of the former neighbourhood, although the project retained elements of the original landscape, routes, stonework and vegetation.

Shibati is therefore interesting both as history and as an example of how Chongqing is preserving its disappearing urban character. Its traditional-style buildings, narrow lanes and steep steps now sit beneath the city's modern towers, creating precisely the sort of contrast that makes Chongqing so visually distinctive and wonderfully different.



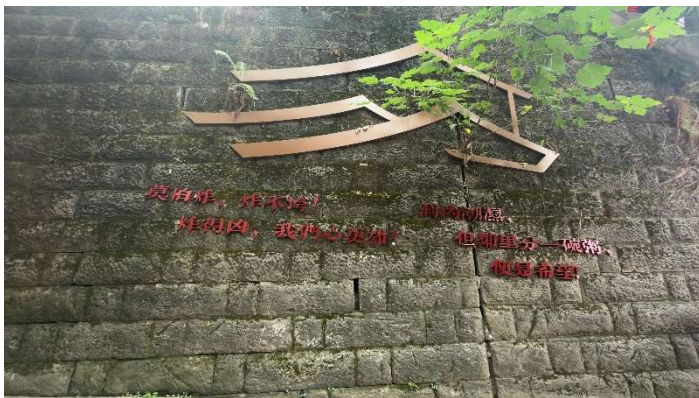


Chongqing Bomb Shelter

The bomb shelters of Chongqing are among the most poignant reminders of the city's wartime history. When Chongqing became the provisional capital of Nationalist China during the Second Sino-Japanese War, its strategic importance made it a major target for Japanese air attacks. Beginning in 1938, the city endured repeated bombing raids, and its steep hills provided an obvious opportunity for underground shelters.

Hundreds of shelters and tunnels were created in the mountainsides and beneath the city. They were not simply places where people hid during an air raid. Research has shown that shelters became part of everyday urban life, providing spaces for socialising, working, trading and even recreation. Chongqing effectively developed a second city beneath the first.

The bombing campaign was prolonged and brutal. Between 1938 and 1944 Chongqing suffered hundreds of raids, with thousands of bombs dropped on the city. The worst episode came on 5 June 1941, when overcrowding and panic in shelters contributed to a catastrophic loss of life through suffocation. Some surviving tunnels have subsequently been adapted for shops, restaurants and other uses.



Huguang Guild Hall

Huguang Guild Hall is one of Chongqing's most valuable links with the city's history before the modern skyscraper era. The complex was first established in 1759 during the Qing dynasty, although much of what can be seen today derives from later reconstruction. It contains courtyards, halls, theatres and associated buildings, including the Yuwang Temple and guild halls representing different communities.

Its significance goes beyond architecture. During the eighteenth century, Sichuan had suffered devastating wars, famine and epidemics, and its population had fallen dramatically. The Qing government encouraged people from neighbouring provinces to migrate into Sichuan to rebuild the region. Large numbers came from Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong, Jiangxi and elsewhere.

Guild halls such as Huguang therefore became meeting places for these migrant communities. They provided somewhere for people from the same region to worship, conduct business, maintain social networks and preserve aspects of their cultural identity in their new surroundings. The result is a complex that tells a story about migration as much as architecture.



Yangtze River Cableway

The Yangtze River Cableway is one of Chongqing's most famous forms of transport and one of the best ways to appreciate the city's geography. Opened in 1987, the cableway crosses the Yangtze between the Yuzhong Peninsula and Nan'an District, carrying passengers high above the river. The journey is remarkably short, but the views are spectacular and well worth all that stair ascending and subsequent descending.

As the cabin moves away from the crowded Yuzhong Peninsula, the river opens beneath it, and the layers of Chongqing's hills, bridges and skyscrapers become visible. What makes the cableway especially interesting is that it was not originally constructed as a tourist attraction. It formed part of Chongqing's public transport system, providing a practical connection across a major geographical obstacle.

The cableway is now almost a symbol of Chongqing itself. Where another city might build a bridge or tunnel, Chongqing has historically been forced to exploit every possible dimension of its terrain. The cable car provides a wonderfully simple demonstration of that ingenuity.... instead of going around the mountain or underneath the river, it simply goes over it.



Longmenhao Old Street

Perched directly opposite the glittering skyline of Yuzhong Peninsula, Longmenhao Old Street occupies an attractive position on the southern bank of the Yangtze, opposite the Yuzhong Peninsula. Its steep setting between the river and Nanshan provides a vastly different atmosphere from the dense commercial districts across the river.

The narrow stone lanes wind uphill between beautifully preserved traditional houses, restored merchant residences and elegant colonial-era villas. Many of these buildings now house independent cafés, galleries, bookshops and boutique restaurants, creating a relaxed atmosphere that contrasts with the energy of the city centre across the river.

The area has a long history, but its importance grew considerably after Chongqing was opened to foreign trade in the late nineteenth century. Longmenhao became one of the city's earliest international trading areas, and foreign diplomatic and commercial interests established themselves around the riverside district. The result was an unusual mixture of Chinese and Western influences.

Today the restored old street combines historic buildings, restaurants, cafés, shops and viewpoints with carefully maintained public spaces. It is nevertheless more than a collection of attractive façades. The hillside setting makes it possible to look across the Yangtze towards the modern skyline of Yuzhong, creating a remarkable visual dialogue between old and new Chongqing.





Raffles City Chongqing

Raffles City Chongqing is one of the most ambitious modern developments in the city. Designed by Moshe Safdie, the complex occupies the strategic site at Chaotianmen, where the Yangtze and Jialing rivers meet. It consists of eight towers, with the tallest reaching approximately 1150 feet (350 metres). The complex contains offices, residences, a hotel and a huge shopping mall.

Its most extraordinary feature is The Crystal, a 300-metre-long enclosed horizontal structure suspended high above four of the towers. It has been described as a 'horizontal skyscraper' and contains viewing areas, restaurants, leisure facilities and an exploration deck. The development's soaring towers and elevated structure were inspired in part by the sailing vessels that historically travelled Chongqing's rivers.

Raffles City sits directly beside Chaotianmen and the meeting of the two rivers, so it has become one of the defining elements of the modern Chongqing skyline. Seen from the river or from the opposite bank, the towers resemble sails rising above the water. Seen from within the city, they demonstrate how dramatically the old river port has been transformed into a twenty-first-century commercial centre.



Chaotianmen Square

At the very tip of the Yuzhong Peninsula lies Chaotianmen Square, the historic heart of Chongqing and the point where the mighty Yangtze and Jialing Rivers converge. This strategic location served as the city's principal river port and gateway to southwest China. Its name, meaning 'Gate Facing Heaven', dates back to the Ming Dynasty.

For centuries, the area was associated with Chongqing's river trade. Boats arriving along the two rivers effectively entered the city here, making Chaotianmen a natural gateway between the inland waterways and the wider Yangtze system. Today the area has been transformed into an expansive public square surrounded by impressive modern architecture, yet it remains closely connected to Chongqing's maritime heritage.

Raffles City dominates the skyline, while the rivers provide a constantly changing foreground of ferries, cargo vessels, pleasure boats and smaller craft. Standing at Chaotianmen makes it possible to see the two rivers and observe the river's distinct colours, the brown coloured Yangtze and the green coloured Jialing as they merge into one.





Bridges (Qiansimen and Dongshuimen)

The Qiansimen and Dongshuimen bridges are an excellent illustration of Chongqing's determination to make its difficult geography work for a modern city. The two structures form a paired transport system across the two rivers, linked through the Yuzhong Peninsula.

Qiansimen crosses the Jialing River, connecting Yuzhong with Jiangbei, while Dongshuimen crosses the Yangtze towards Nan'an. Both carry road traffic and rail traffic, making them unusually important pieces of infrastructure as well as impressive architectural features.

Their positions also provide a useful lesson in Chongqing geography. The Jialing River approaches from the north and joins the much larger Yangtze at Chaotianmen. From a viewpoint above the city, the meeting of the two rivers can be seen clearly, with the Yuzhong Peninsula occupying the land between them. Together they demonstrate why Chongqing has become famous for bridges. Rivers, ravines and steep terrain have not prevented urban growth; they have simply forced the city to become exceptionally inventive in connecting its different levels and districts.

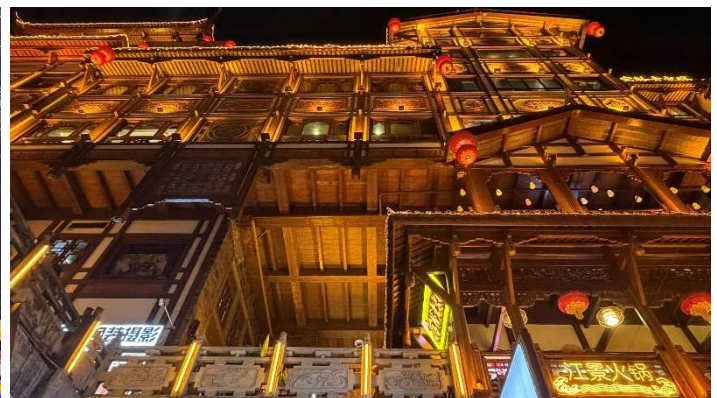


Hongya Cave

Hongya Cave, or Hongyadong, is one of Chongqing's most photographed attractions and perhaps its most recognisable night-time image. The enormous complex clings to the hillside beside the Jialing River and consists of a series of traditional-style buildings stacked vertically above one another.

The word 'Cave' can be misleading as Hongya Cave is not a natural cave in the conventional sense. The name comes from the historic Hongya Cave area and its association with a cave-like opening in the cliffside. The area is a modern multi-level development incorporating restaurants, shops, hotels and viewing areas.

The building's dramatic vertical arrangement is particularly suited to Chongqing. Streets appear at different levels, and what looks like the top of the complex from one direction can become a lower floor when viewed from another. At night, thousands of lights transform the structure into a glowing wall above the river.



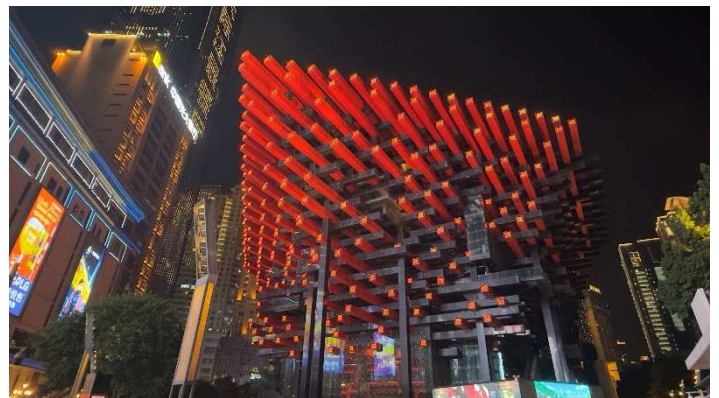
Chongqing at Night

Chongqing becomes a different city after dark. During daylight, the overwhelming impression is one of hills, concrete, traffic and an extraordinary concentration of high-rise buildings. At night, the same landscape becomes almost theatrical as towers, bridges, roads and rivers are illuminated.

The city's geography is partly responsible for the effect. Buildings occupy hillsides rather than a flat plain, while the Yangtze and Jialing rivers provide dark corridors through the illuminated urban landscape. Roads climb, descend and disappear beneath buildings, and elevated railways and bridges add yet more layers.

The best-known night views include Hongya Cave, Raffles City, Chaotianmen and the riverside districts, but the spectacle is not confined to one viewpoint. From high above at WFC Skyview, the city becomes a vast illuminated landscape. From the river, the skyscrapers rise dramatically from the hills.

At night, the overlapping layers become even more apparent because the roads and buildings are outlined by light. The result is not simply a beautiful skyline but an urban landscape that is constantly changing according to where the observer stands.



Great Hall of the People

The Great Hall of the People is one of Chongqing's most important twentieth-century buildings and one of the city's most striking examples of monumental architecture. Construction began in 1951 and the building was completed in 1954, during the early years of the People's Republic of China. The hall was conceived as a major venue for political meetings and public gatherings, but it has also become an important cultural and performance venue.

Its design deliberately draws on traditional Chinese architecture. The enormous central dome and sweeping tiled roof are surrounded by symmetrical wings, creating an appearance that has been compared to the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. Yet beneath the traditional appearance lies a large modern structure capable of accommodating thousands of people. The surrounding People's Square was created later, particularly following Chongqing's establishment as a municipality directly under the central government in 1997.



Three Gorges Museum

The Three Gorges Museum stands opposite the Great Hall of the People and forms part of one of Chongqing's most important cultural complexes. The museum opened in 2005 and was created to record and preserve cultural material affected by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam.

Its collections go far beyond the Three Gorges themselves. Exhibitions cover the history of Chongqing, the ancient cultures of the region, the development of the Yangtze River and the experiences of the people who lived in areas affected by the reservoir project.

This makes the museum particularly valuable for understanding Chongqing as something more than a modern megacity. Archaeological material, paintings, historical objects and photographs help place the city within the much longer story of the Yangtze basin.

The building also works well as part of the surrounding urban landscape. From the museum and People's Square there are clear views towards the Great Hall of the People, allowing visitors to experience two vastly different expressions of Chongqing's twentieth-century history almost side by side.

For a visitor with limited time, the museum provides useful context for many of the places encountered elsewhere in the city. The rivers, migration, wartime history, traditional culture and spectacular modern development all make more sense after seeing something of the historical story behind them.



Chongqing Metro

Chongqing's metro system is an attraction in its own right because conventional ideas about urban railways do not always apply here. The city's mountainous terrain, deep valleys and tightly packed development have required engineers to build a network that frequently climbs, dives, tunnels and crosses the landscape in unusual ways.

The system now consists of numerous numbered lines and has become one of the most important ways of moving around the enormous metropolitan area. For visitors, Line 1 is particularly useful for reaching places such as Ciqikou, while Line 2 is famous for its monorail operation and provides access to central attractions including Jiefangbei and Liziba.



Line 2 is especially interesting because Chongqing uses straddle-type monorail trains rather than conventional metro trains. The line threads through the city's built-up terrain, sometimes running on elevated structures and sometimes disappearing into tunnels. It is this mixture of railway and mountain-city engineering that makes travelling on it an experience rather than simply a means of getting from A to B.

Liziba Monorail Station

Liziba is perhaps the most famous railway station in Chongqing because the Line 2 monorail appears to pass directly through a residential building. It is one of those sights that initially looks like an elaborate piece of computer-generated imagery but is, in fact, a genuine example of urban engineering. The arrangement has become one of Chongqing's most recognisable images and has attracted visitors from around the world.



The station and the residential structure were designed together, allowing the railway to occupy part of the building rather than simply demolishing it or constructing a separate route through the neighbourhood. The train therefore enters an opening in the building, stops at the station and then continues along the elevated track. A viewing area below allows photographs to be taken as the train disappears into the building.

What makes Liziba particularly interesting is that the railway is not an isolated curiosity. It demonstrates the fundamental problem faced by Chongqing's planners..... enormous numbers of people live and work in a city where available flat land is limited. Transport infrastructure has therefore had to be integrated into the existing urban fabric.



Chongqing 1949 Grand Theatre



Chongqing 1949 is a large-scale theatrical production based on the dramatic and bloody events surrounding the final days of the Chinese Civil War and the liberation of Chongqing in 1949. It is staged in a purpose-built theatre at Ciqikou and uses an unusually elaborate combination of live actors, huge sets, projections, lighting, sound and a rotating stage.

The story focuses particularly on the final period of Nationalist control and the fate of Communist prisoners held at places such as Zhazidong and Bai Mansion. These were not simply prisons. Political prisoners were interrogated, tortured and held in appalling conditions, and as Communist forces closed in on Chongqing, the Nationalist authorities began systematically executing many of those still in custody.

The killings reached their horrifying climax between 27 and 29 November 1949, immediately before the city fell. More than 300 prisoners and political activists were killed in the wider series of executions, with only a small number managing to escape. At Zhazidong, prisoners were shot inside the prison while at Bai Mansion, others were taken away in groups to be executed.

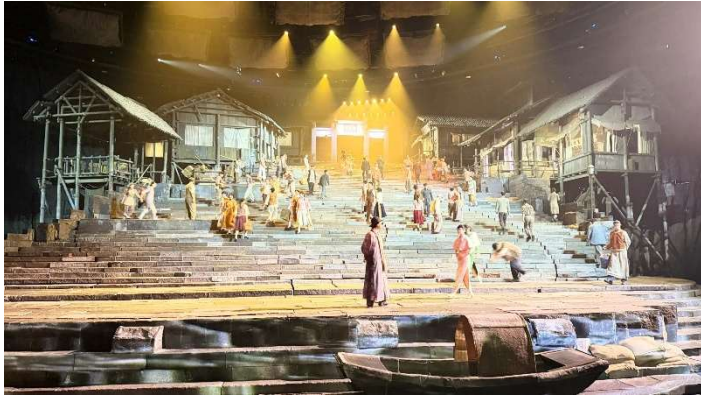
This is the historical backdrop to Chongqing 1949, and it gives the performance considerably more weight than a conventional revolutionary spectacle. The production does not dwell on the violence in a graphic or gratuitous way, but presents the prisoners' suffering, courage and final resistance as the central emotional thread. The stories of individual prisoners are woven into the much larger story of a city on the brink of political upheaval.

What makes the performance distinctive is its sheer scale. Rather than presenting history through a conventional seated drama, the entire theatre becomes part of the production. The rotating stage allows scenes to appear and disappear around the audience, while enormous sets, projections and lighting create rapid transitions between prison cells, streets and battle scenes.



The show lasts roughly 75 minutes without an interval and is designed as an immersive spectacle rather than a restrained historical lecture. It is visually impressive, technologically sophisticated and includes some genuinely beautiful singing. You can even borrow an earpiece providing an English translation as the performance unfolds, which makes following the story considerably easier for non-Chinese speakers.

If you are coming to Chongqing, I cannot recommend this production enough. Even without understanding every word, the combination of music, acting, staging and sheer scale makes it surprisingly moving. More importantly, it offers an insight into one of the darkest episodes in Chongqing's modern history and into the way that history is presented to a contemporary Chinese audience.





Ciqikou Ancient Town

Ciqikou is one of the most popular places in Chongqing for experiencing an approximation of the city's traditional commercial streets. Situated beside the Jialing River, the settlement has a history stretching back well over a thousand years and became particularly important during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Its original prosperity was intricately connected with river transport and trade.

Goods moved along the Jialing River and through the town, while local workshops and traders served the surrounding population. Ciqikou also became famous for porcelain production, giving rise to the name by which it is now known.... Porcelain Port or Porcelain Village. Ciqikou is therefore best understood as a mixture of genuine historical setting and modern restoration rather than a perfectly preserved ancient town.

The present streets contain traditional-style wooden buildings, small shops, food stalls, teahouses and craft businesses. It is busy and increasingly commercialised, particularly at peak times, but it still provides a useful impression of the narrow, pedestrian-oriented settlements that once dominated this part of China. One of the attractions is simply wandering rather than following a particular itinerary.

More than simply a tourist destination, Ciqikou preserves the architectural style, customs and traditions of old Chongqing. It provides a fascinating contrast to the city's modern skyline and offers visitors an opportunity to experience the rich cultural heritage that continues to underpin one of China's most dynamic and rapidly evolving cities.



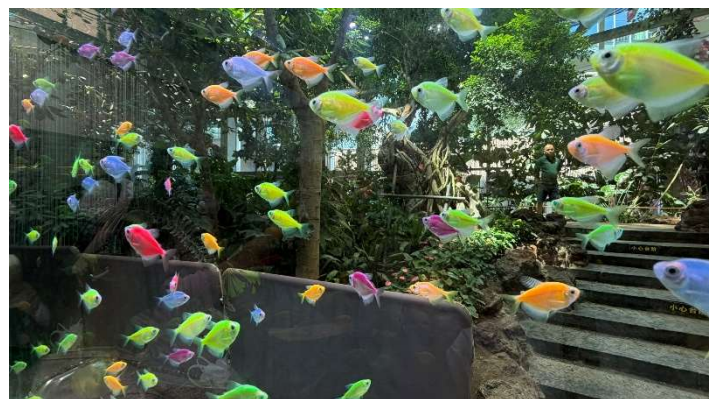


Ring Shopping Plaza

The Ring Shopping Plaza is a hugely different proposition from Chongqing's traditional attractions. Located in Liangjiang New Area, it is a large contemporary shopping and leisure complex whose most unusual feature is an enormous indoor botanical garden. The concept is to combine retail development with nature rather than simply filling a vast enclosed building with shops.

The botanical garden contains around 300 varieties of tropical and subtropical plants and includes a spectacular 20-metre-high waterfall. The temperature and humidity are controlled to maintain the environment, creating an extraordinary contrast with the commercial spaces around it.

The Ring illustrates a newer phase of Chongqing's architectural development in which commercial projects increasingly compete through design and experience rather than simply through size. Opened in 2021, The Ring was subsequently expanded and developed as part of the city's rapidly growing northern districts. The complex confirms Chongqing's fondness for doing things on a spectacular scale.



Meiquan 22nd Century

Meiquan 22nd Century is perhaps the most controversial building in this list because it became famous not simply for its architecture, but for its striking resemblance to Zaha Hadid's Wangjing SOHO complex in Beijing. The Chongqing development consists of a series of curving, futuristic forms that look remarkably similar to Zaha Hadid's project.

The resemblance was noticed while both developments were still being constructed and prompted a very public dispute. Zaha Hadid Architects and SOHO China alleged that the Chongqing project had copied the Beijing design, while the Meiquan developers rejected the accusation and claimed that their inspiration came from the rounded stones found along the Yangtze.

Zaha Hadid Architects reportedly took legal measures, and SOHO China sent a lawyer's letter, but the matter did not result in a definitive public court judgment requiring the Chongqing building to be demolished or radically altered. Architectural copyright is particularly complicated because copyright protects original expression rather than a general architectural idea or style.

Chinese law and the practical remedies available at the time also made the case far from straightforward. The controversy remains part of the building's identity. It is an extraordinary example of Chongqing's futuristic architecture, but also an unusually clear case study in the difficult boundary between inspiration, imitation and architectural plagiarism.

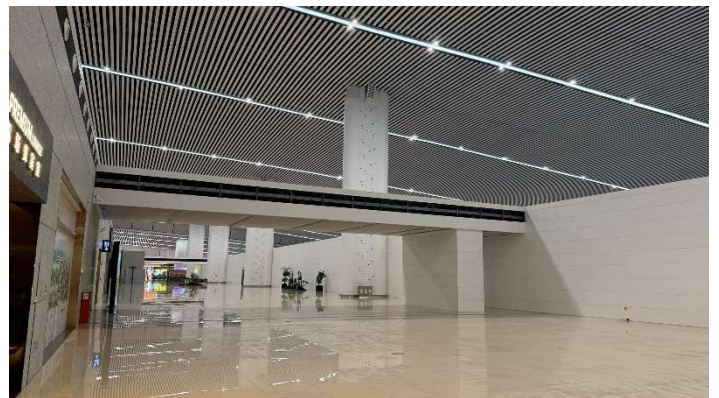
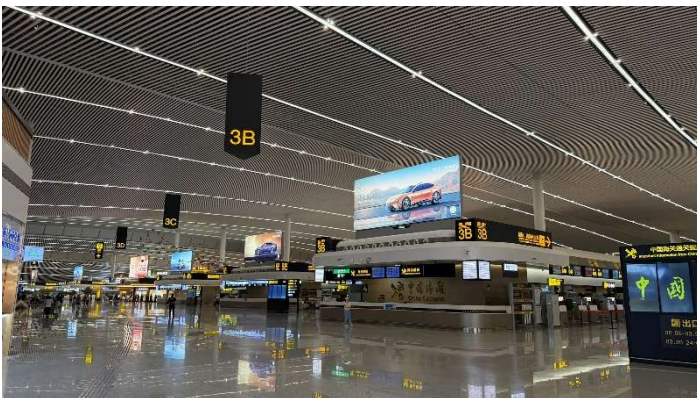
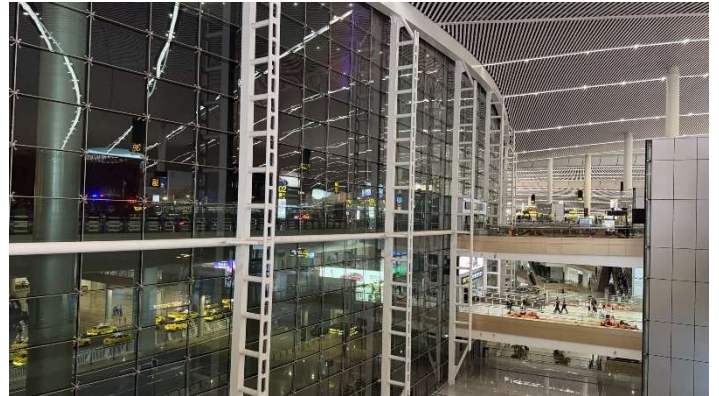


Terminal 3B by Zaha Hadid

Terminal 3B at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport is the newest major addition to the city's rapidly expanding transport infrastructure and, importantly, it is now open. The terminal began passenger operations in 2026 and represents the final major phase of the airport's expansion.

Designed by Zaha Hadid Architects, Terminal 3B has an ambitious X-shaped plan incorporating 71 aircraft gates. It is a satellite terminal rather than a conventional extension directly attached to the existing terminal buildings. The arrangement is designed to allow aircraft to park around the terminal while keeping passenger movement and aircraft turnaround as efficient as possible.

The scale is extraordinary. T3B adds capacity for approximately 35 million passengers annually, taking the airport's overall planned capacity to around 80 million passengers. It has also been described as one of the world's largest satellite terminal by passenger traffic.



A Final Thought

Chongqing is the kind of city that makes you question your sense of direction. I arrived expecting a typical Chinese metropolis, but nothing prepared me for the sheer verticality of the place. Built across steep hillsides where the Yangtze and Jialing rivers meet, it seems to defy the rules of conventional urban planning. You can enter a building at what appears to be ground level, take a lift several floors up and emerge onto another street entirely

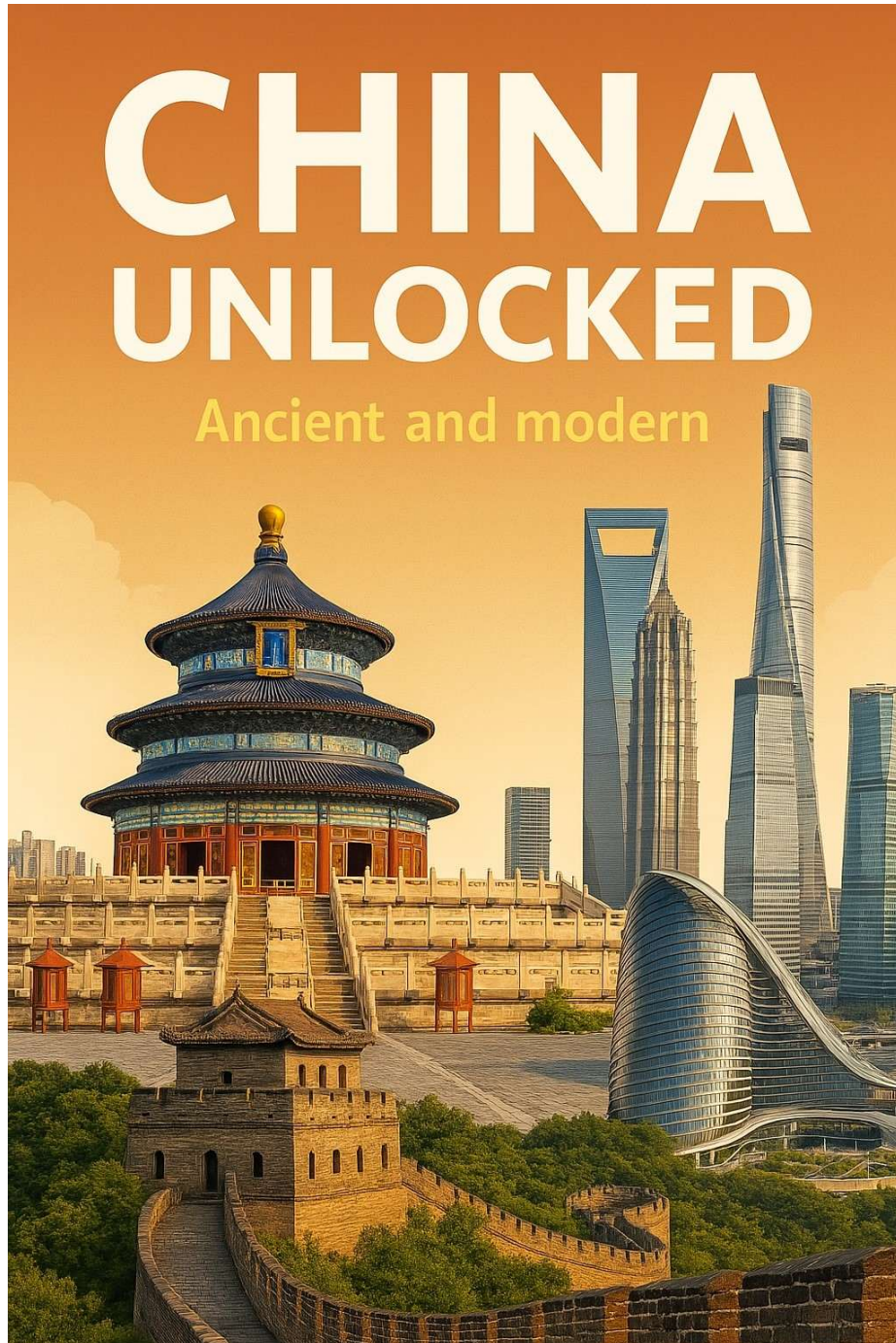
Yet Chongqing is much more than a collection of extraordinary buildings, spectacular bridges and illuminated skylines. Its past is never far away. The bomb shelters carved into its hillsides, the historic temples and the traditional streets all tell stories of a city that has endured enormous upheaval while continuing to reinvent itself. The contrast between these reminders of the past and the futuristic developments rising around them is part of what makes Chongqing so fascinating.

What impressed me most was the city's determination to make its difficult geography work to its advantage. Railways pass through buildings, cable cars cross the Yangtze, roads climb mountainsides and skyscrapers compete for space in a landscape where flat ground is a luxury. Here, engineering is not simply a means of overcoming obstacles it has become an essential part of the city's identity. At times, I found myself disoriented, but in a way that felt exciting rather than frustrating.

And then there is Chongqing after dark. From the heights of the WFC, the illuminated riverside or the crowded walkways around Hongya Cave, the city becomes an unforgettable spectacle of colour, movement and light. For the traveller prepared to look beyond China's more familiar destinations, Chongqing offers something genuinely different a place that challenges expectations, rewards curiosity and, most definitely, a city for tomorrow.



You will find out more about China in the travel guide called 'China Unlocked' which is available at www.thewheretogo.com



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