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Qingdao, a Black Forest Hamlet Magically Adrift on the Yellow Sea

By Jonathan Napack

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(Page 2 of 2)

Shandong cuisine, or lu cai, is considered one of China's greatest (along with those of the Yangzi delta, Hunan, Sichuan and Canton). The province grows China's best temperate fruits and vegetables — apples, pears, peaches, Western spinach and white asparagus. Two classics are xiangsu ji, fragrant-crisp chicken, and tangcu yu, sweet-and-sour fish. Both are excellent at Chunhelou (146 Zhongshan Road, in the old town), Qingdao's most famous, and still quite reasonable, restaurant.

BUT Qingdao is less famous for lu cai than for seafood, which is excellent and good value. It's best to head for Yunxiao Road, a street entirely given over to seafood restaurants — just pick the busiest and/or cleanest, and choose your dinner from the tanks placed out front. The suggested cooking method will usually be qing zheng, or "clear steam." Your shellfish or fish will be served plain but sweet with freshness, with vinegar as a dipping sauce.

Other than the beer festival, post-collegiate nightlife is limited to the Heaven Walker Bar at 7-6 Yunxiao Rd. There is also the friendly Alice Bar at 9 Changzhou Road (set back from the street, so look for the sign), which caters to Qingdao's small, mostly English-teaching expatriate community. The young at heart can head for Parker ("Puerka") a seriously underground Berlin-esque techno club, shrouded in graffiti, where suspiciously alert twentysomethings rock well past dawn (the taxi drivers all know it).

Qingdao's best hotels are the Equatorial and the Shangri-La, both best reached through their reservation centers. The Chinese-owned Dongfang Hotel at 4 Daxue Road has fine rooms for 500 yuan and up.

More information can be found at the Beer Festival's Web site:

<http://beerfest.qd.sd.cn>.


Jonathan Napack is a journalist who travels frequently in Asia.

[Previous Page](#) | 1 | 2

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