Hainan Information

Overview

Hainan is an island located to the south of the mainland and is the country’s smallest province in terms of area and population. Its name means “south of the sea”. The largest city of the island is the capital, Haikou, which is also a major port. Its population is 8,180,000, which is China’s 28th and smallest provincial population. Hainan province covers 13,100 sq mi (33,940 sq km) and is the largest island off the China coast within the control of the central government.

Hainan Geography

Hainan Province rises from its coastal circumference of about 982 mi (1,580 km) to a mountainous and thickly forested center. The Hainan Strait expands about 30 miles, separating it from the Liuzhuo Peninsula of Guangdong. The Gulf of Tonkin and Vietnam lie to the west of the island. Officially, Hainan province also constitutes some 200 islands of the South China Sea. The monsoon climate of the region gives way to a scattering of rivers throughout the island, some of which lose their presence during the annual dry season.

Hainan Demographics

Hainan province is predominantly rural, but there has been an increase in modernization in the past couple of decades. It is comprised primarily of four Chinese ethnic groups: Han constitute the majority with 83% of the population followed by Li with 16%, Miao make up 0.8% and Zhuang follow with 0.7%.

Hainan History

Hainan province first came under the influence of the mainland government in the 110 BC when the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) established a garrison there. Although mainland migration was slow, the Li people from Guangxi displaced much of the island’s Malayo-Polynesian population around the turn of the millennium. Han first made their way into Hainan during the Song Dynasty (960 AD – 1279 AD) when the island was incorporated under the umbrella of Guangxi province. It became an independent province during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1206 AD – 1368 AD) but was annexed as a part of Guangdong during the subsequent Ming Dynasty (1368 AD – 1644 AD). After large migration during the 16th and 17th Centuries from Guangdong and Fujian, in the 18th Century the Li staged a revolt against central governance. Descendants of the Miao mercenaries that were sent to quell the rebellion retain an acute presence in the western highlands today. Hainan Province gained independence for a short time in 1912 under a new name but was reintegrated politically with Guangdong in 1921. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese communists allied with the Li on Hainan. Together they fought the Japanese occupation during World War II only for the Kuomintang’s Nationalist Party to gain control over the island at the end of the war in 1945. Hainan finally gained independent provincial status in 1988 when it became a Special Economic Zone. Hainan was a popular place for Chinese exiles over the centuries, the famous exiled poet Su Dongpo (1036 AD – 1101 AD) among them.

Hainan Industry

Until the 20th Century, the most important part of Hainan’s economy was agriculture. Hainan province became a Special Economic Zone of China in the 1988. The hot and moist climate is favorable for crop cultivation.
Hainan is rich in many natural resources including tropical hardwoods and minerals. Fishing and pearl harvesting off the coast provides a significant supplement to the land industry of the province. Hainan’s climate and many beaches have bolstered investment in the tourism and resort industry. The Miss World competition of 2004 held its finals on the island. However, Hainan remains one of China’s smallest economies and least significant industrial players due to a variety of reasons including infrastructure and sparse energy capacity.