

# Shanghai

**A concrete playground in the confines of China's vast cultural landscape, Shanghai is a city establishing itself once again at the forefront of international trade and business**

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**W**hen thinking of China, Shanghai is rarely the first city that comes to mind. The grandeur of Beijing, the bustle of Hong Kong, or the scenic beauty of Xian and Guilin, would usually be at the top of every traveller's list when planning an adventure to uncover the beauties of the largest country in the East. And these would definitely be the prime destinations for those in search of China's past. The future however lies with Shanghai. It's a relatively new city whose population has exploded almost tenfold since the 1930s as people from all over the world have flooded in, bringing with them a unique slice of their own countries that help to give Shanghai such a diverse flavour.

The regeneration of a city once plagued by an often-bloody array of interests in the opium trade has seen the ports hum once again to the tune of big business. The profligacy of increasingly eccentric, but nonetheless awe-inspiring, high-rise towers makes Shanghai an architectural art gallery, where wandering the streets dwarfed by such overwhelming structures is an experience in itself. Indeed the city even goes as far as to give the impression that you are experiencing the future before it has happened. From the neon glow that means it is never plunged into darkness to the seemingly unchecked nature of construction, things move at such a pace in Shanghai that it is hard enough to keep up, let alone stay ahead. ▶

## SIGHTSEEING

Like Hong Kong, Shanghai is split into two main sectors – Pudong and Puxi – straddling either side of the Huangpu River. **Pudong** is host to the slightly surreal **Oriental Pearl Tower** (right) (telephone: +86-21-5879 8888), and the current tallest building in China, the 88-storey **Jinmao Tower** (far right). Both are extraordinary feats of architecture and stand distinctive in Shanghai's notorious skyline, most spectacularly visible to those across the river on the Bund. The Jinmao building incorporates many businesses as well as perhaps the most luxurious hotel – although there are many – in the **Grand Hyatt**. No visit to Shanghai is complete without venturing up to the restaurant on the 88th floor to sit at the highest point in China to survey (just about) the commotion below. Of course, being Shanghai, having the accolade of the highest hotel in the world would never be enough. The work in progress that stands directly next to the Jinmao Tower is what will be the 101-storey **Shanghai World Financial Centre**, set to be unveiled in 2008.

The evolution of Pudong since the early 1990s is in stark contrast to what lies across the water in **Puxi**. The **Bund** is the historic centre of Shanghai, housing the main ports of the city and some of the oldest and most charismatic buildings. Former government buildings and banks have been transformed into sophisticated wine bars and exquisite restaurants as the Bund has established itself as Shanghai's social centre.

Further inland on the Puxi side lies **People's Square** (below left), or **Renmin Dadao**. Once inhabited by a giant racetrack built by the British in 1862, it held regular races until the Japanese occupation in 1941. It was then turned into a prison camp by the occupying forces until after the war, when it was decimated following the communist take-over of 1949 and the subsequent 'Cultural Revolution'. The site has since become a park that's home to some fabulous bars, with world-famous art galleries on its fringes. The greenery and artificial lake to be found once inside the grounds offer momentary relief from some of Shanghai's imposing architecture.

Walk south-east back towards the Bund and the **Old Town** comes somewhat unexpectedly into view. This, some might feel, is what the real China is all about; a taste of authenticity in a city cloaked in a façade of modernity. There is still a great deal of poverty, but as

long as such vastly differing worlds are allowed to coexist peacefully, the Old Town will remain an antiquated yet essential window into the lives of many Chinese people. One of Shanghai's most popular tourist attractions can be found in the middle of the Old Town, though it's a park rather than any modern building, structure or monument. The **Yu Gardens** (open 08.30 to 17.00 daily) is an oasis of serenity (despite the large number of visitors it attracts), amidst the turmoil

of the city outside its walls. Be sure to visit the bazaar right next to the gardens which houses many small stores all located in narrow, twisting lanes and a marvellous teahouse, which sits on a large ornamental lake.



## EATING AND DRINKING

Because of the sustained arrival of visitors into Shanghai there is a huge range of eateries from which to choose. Everybody is catered for in the city, with cuisine ranging from top-end Chinese delicacies such as the 'hairy crab', right down to the delicious street food.

The Bund enjoys a proliferation of high-class restaurants – **M On The Bund** (telephone: +86-21-6350 9988); **Jean Georges**, the Manhattan-based French chef who has recently turned his attentions to China (telephone: +86-21-6321 7733) and **New Heights** (telephone: +86-21-6321 0909) all complement the classic Bund architecture and offer fantastic food and a sumptuous ambiance in which to enjoy the stunning views.

People's Square and Xintiandi also have fine selections of restaurants, especially for those with Western appetites. Most notably there is **Kathleen's 5** (telephone: +86-21-6327 2221) which is set in a marvellous clock tower right next to the park. The roof it inhabits is actually that of the **Shanghai Art Museum** (telephone: +86-21-6327 2829) – possibly the best in the city. With this being owner Kathleen Lau's fifth bar/restaurant venture in Shanghai, the culinary reputation of many of the classic Western dishes on offer has already been cemented and it has swiftly become a firm favourite amongst the Shanghai elite.

For those with a greater sense of adventure there are countless numbers of Shanghainese/Chinese eateries that serve the usual menu basics such as noodles, dumplings and rice alongside some of the more interesting dishes including chicken feet and intestine. The traditional Chinese belief of 'what's good for what' means that most parts of an animal are counted as delicacies to aid various human organs – including the stomach, eyes and feet!

Be sure to try a few different dishes though and if in doubt (when faced with an all-Chinese menu, for example) just point at a few dishes from a neighbouring table that take your fancy and let the feasting begin!

Shanghai is very much a city of contrasts; the apparent gloss of wealth that greets many tourists belies the overwhelming number of people who still live in poverty. But it is undoubtedly a city on the rise; a recent influx of internationally renowned artists – at the Duolun MoMA – testifies to its cultural evolution. The Shanghai International Film Festival has just appointed French director Luc Besson as one of its judges, while earlier this year, the city hosted rock 'n' roll legends the Rolling Stones for their first concert in mainland China.



## Nightlife

With a selection of world-class DJs recently taking to the decks in Shanghai (including renowned Dutch DJs Tiesto and Paul Van Dyk, plus British master Paul Oakenfold), the city has become not just a bustling business epicentre during the day, but also a vibrant urban jungle at night.

With a standard closing time of 02.00 for most bars and some clubs stretching to even later, be prepared to survive on little sleep! There are some excellent venues though – including a few bars inhabiting wonderful old colonial buildings – and Shanghai's nightlife has perhaps come to eclipse the clamour of the day, if only as an antidote.

## Shopping

Whilst Shanghai may not be outrageously cheap anymore, there are still some great bargains to be sought out. The top end boutiques that have recently flooded into China tend to gravitate towards the **Shanghai Centre** in the Jing'an district. **Gucci**, **Zegna** and the high street fashion store **Zara**, are all to be found here displaying the latest catwalk items while offering some of their own unique interpretations on Chinese fashion and style. **Plaza 66** (telephone: +86-21-6279 0910) also houses most of the big names; so if it's high fashion on big budgets you're after, look no further.

One of the most convenient ways of shopping is in the big city malls. Shanghai boasts no fewer than 40 of them, and at the very least they offer respite from the intense summer heat, albeit amidst a rather soulless shopping experience. Look hard enough and you are bound to find some bargains, and remember that very little in Shanghai actually has a set price. Anything from clothes, furniture and even meals in restaurants can often be haggled for – so be prepared to negotiate! Some of the best malls around include **Raffles City** (telephone: +86-21-6340 3600) off People's Square, **The Grand Gateway** (telephone: +86-21-6407 0115) in Xujiahui and the **Westgate Mall** (telephone: +86-21-6218 7878) off the mercifully pedestrianised shopper's paradise of the West Nanjing Road.

For the more discerning visitor there are a clutch of markets worth visiting where you can indulge in the purchase of fake goods (**Xiangyang Market**, open 09.00 to 20.30 daily), get yourself fitted with suits and coats of all designs and colours (**Dongjiadu Lu Fabric Market** in the Old Town, 08.00 to 17.00 daily) and acquire strange, and sometimes wonderful, antiques (**Dongtai Lu Antique Market** by high-end open-air shopping plaza **Xintiandi**, 08.00 to 18.00 daily). ▶

# Hotels

Shanghai has a selection of some of the best premium hotels in the world gracing its streets. Many of the finest and most interesting buildings house some of the best hotels. The Jinmao Tower incorporates the **Grand Hyatt** (telephone: +86-21-5049 1234), The Tomorrow Square development houses the **JW Marriott** (right) (telephone: +86-21-5359 4969), and the **Westin Hotel** (telephone: +86-21-6335 2888) is located in part of the Bund Centre complex. Even if you're not staying in any of these luxurious hotels it is worth going up to the very top (since the hotels tend to inhabit the upper floors of the towers) to savour some of the most magnificent views over the city skyline.

The most famous hotel in Shanghai is the **Peace Hotel** (telephone: +86-21-6321 6888), which is located on the Bund. It has fallen into some



## Ten Chinese words you need to know

ni hao (lit: nee how): **hello**  
 zai jian (lit: zai jian): **goodbye**  
 xie xie (lit: sheer sheer): **thanks**  
 wo bu mingbai (lit: wo bu mingbai): **I don't understand**  
 bu yao (lit: boo yow): **don't want** (to incessant street hawkers)  
 meiyou (lit: mayo): **don't have**  
 duo shao qian? (lit: door shar chian?): **how much is it?**  
 tai gui le (lit: tie gway le): **too expensive**  
 mai dan (lit: my dan): **the bill/cheque**  
 wo jiao... (lit: wo jiaow): **my name is...**



disrepair of late since its heyday as the social hub of Shanghai among the expat communities of the 1930s, but still plays host to one of the best jazz bars, located in the basement of the hotel.

Backpackers on budgets tend to leave Shanghai relatively frustrated due to the limited number of cheaper options available – the **Captain's Hostel** (telephone: +86-21-6323 5053) near the Bund being an exception – yet Shanghai has never been a city content to satisfy the urges of those with little to spend. Expensive hotels catering essentially to business travellers are plentiful, and the **Portman Ritz-Carlton** (to be found in the Shanghai Centre along with many other western style amenities, telephone: +86-21-6279 8888), the **Shangri-La** (Pudong side, telephone: +86-21-6882 6888) and the **Okura Garden Hotel** (off the HuaiHai Road, one of Shanghai's longest and busiest roads, telephone: +86-21-6415 1111) are three of the best. ■

*Royal Jordanian flies from Amman to Shanghai three times every week on a codeshare arrangement with Thai Airways*