

Welcome to Shànghǎi

Shànghǎi: few world cities evoke so much history, glamour, mystique and exotic promise by name alone.

Architecture

Shànghǎi pulls a rabbit or two from its top hat. It's home to the world's second-tallest tower and a host of other neck-craning colossi, but it's not all sky-scraping razzamatazz. Beyond the crisply cool veneer of the modern city typified by Pūdōng, there's a treasure chest of architectural styles. The city's period of greatest cosmopolitan excess – the 1920s and 1930s – left the city with pristine examples of art deco buildings, most of which survived the 20th-century vicissitudes that assailed Shànghǎi. And there's more: from Jesuit cathedrals, Jewish synagogues and Buddhist temples to home-grown *lǒngtáng* laneway and *shíkùmén* housing, Shànghǎi's architectural heritage is like nowhere else.

Cuisine

Thirty years ago, Shànghǎi's dour restaurant scene was all tin trays and scowling waiting staff, with international food confined to the dining rooms of 'exclusive' hotels. Chinese cooking was pedestrian stuff. Today, you simply don't know where to start – the mouth-watering restaurant scene is varied, exciting and up-to-the-minute. Food is the hub of Chinese social life. It's over a meal that people catch up with friends, celebrate and clinch business deals, and spend hard-earned cash.

Shopping

Bearing in mind that Chinese shoppers constitute up to 47% of the global luxury-goods market, shopping is rarely done in half-measures in Shànghǎi. Retail therapy is one way of spending new money and the Shanghainese aren't called 小资 (*xiǎozī* – 'little capitalists') by the rest of China for nothing, especially at the luxury end of things. But it's not all Prada, Gucci and Burberry. There are pop-up boutiques, bustling markets, funky vintage shops and young designer outlets. Beyond clothing you're also spoiled for choice, whether you're in the market for antiques, ceramics, art, Tibetan jewellery... whatever is on your shopping list.

Entertainment & the Arts

Běijīng often hogs the limelight as China's cultural nexus, but for what is essentially a town of wheelers and dealers, Shànghǎi is surprisingly creative. Many art galleries are exciting, offering a window onto contemporary Chinese concerns, while nightlife options have exploded. Acrobatics shows are always a favourite and you might grab the chance to catch some Chinese opera. Shànghǎi's music and club scene is vibrant: from unpretentious jazz and indie venues to all-night hip-hop and electro dance parties, the city swings with the best of them.



Why I Love Shànghǎi

By Damian Harper, Author

I first visited Shànghǎi in 1993, when the Oriental Pearl TV Tower was going up, the Peace Hotel Jazz Band was already *old* and Xintiāndi wasn't even on the back of an envelope. I sat on the Bund by the Huángpǔ River, opposite the flatland of Pǔdōng, and felt a buzz in the air: this city was going places. Why do I love Shànghǎi? It's the food, the people, the European streets and art deco buildings, the narrow alleys and the sense of purpose. And don't get me started on the language!

For more about our authors, see p320.