

# Understand Shànghǎi

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# Shànghǎi Today

Rapidly becoming a world metropolis, Shànghǎi typifies modern China while being unlike anywhere else in the nation. Awash with cash, ambition and economic vitality, Shànghǎi is, for the movers and shakers of business (and indeed any job-seeking migrant), the place to be. For all its modernity and cosmopolitanism, however, Shànghǎi is part and parcel of the People's Republic of China, and its challenges are multiplying as fast as cocktails are mixed and served on the Bund.

## Best on Film

**Shanghai Triad** (Zhang Yimou; 1995) Stylish take on Shànghǎi's 1930s gangster scene, starring Gong Li.  
**Empire of the Sun** (Steven Spielberg; 1987) Dramatisation of JG Ballard's account of his internment in WWI Shànghǎi as a child.  
**Suzhou River** (Ye Lou; 2000) A disturbing and obsessive narrative of love in modern Shànghǎi.

## Best in Print

**Five Star Billionaire** (Tash Aw) Compelling tale of four Malaysians trying to make the Shànghǎi big-time.  
**China Cuckoo: How I Lost a Fortune & Found a Life in China** (Mark Kitto) Undone by Shànghǎi, Kitto flees to the mountains in this fascinating and charming read.  
**Life & Death in Shanghai** (Nien Cheng) Classic account of the Cultural Revolution, with a Shànghǎi angle.  
**Shanghai: The Rise & Fall of a Decadent City 1842–1949** (Stella Dong) Rip-roaring profile of the city's good-old, bad-old days.

## Money

The Shanghaiese may natter about traffic gridlock and chat about the latest celebrity faux pas or political scandal, but what they really talk about is cash. Labelled *xiǎozī* – 'little capitalists' – by the rest of the land, the Shànghǎi Chinese know how to make *qián* (money) and, equally importantly, how to flaunt it. Ever since Shànghǎi first prospered under foreign control, wealth creation has been indivisible from the Shànghǎi psyche. Whether it's the stock market, apartment price tags or the latest Dior evening bag, money's the talk of the town.

## Property

Shànghǎi property prices are talked about at bus stops in the same way British people discuss weather. High prices have ramifications for everyone renting (or owning) floor space, from the lowliest McJobber to the wealthiest property tycoon. Amid dark mutterings of a property bubble, the government has repeatedly tried to tame the runaway market with tax and ownership measures to stifle speculation, with limited success, but property prices in relation to income remain higher than in London, New York or Tokyo.

## Air Pollution

Shànghǎi's smog woes have long been eclipsed by Běijīng's more caustic readings. In 2013 and 2014, however, Shànghǎi hit back with some of its own record-breaking levels of atmospheric pollutants. In some areas of town, readings were 28 times World Health Organization safe limits. In response, a 2014 announcement declared that 160,000 cars that did not meet emission standards would be swept off Shànghǎi's roads. The city also pledged to eliminate 2500 polluting coal-fired boilers by 2015 in a further bid to clean the worsening air. Local media reports in 2014 even