

Understand Shànghǎi

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Is Shànghǎi the city of the future, a property bubble waiting to pop or a bit of both?

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Discover the Shànghǎi of yesteryear, from backwater to 'Paris of the East'; socialist citadel to financial megalopolis.

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The city that cooked up the *qípáo* (cheongsam) can teach us all a thing or two about aesthetics.

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There's more to Shànghǎi than just skyscrapers: welcome to one of the art deco capitals of the world.

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Shànghǎi's spirituality goes far deeper than the city's reverence of Burberry and Chanel.

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, 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 and Found a Life in China (Mark Kitto) Undone by Shànghǎi, Kitto flees to the mountains in this fascinating and charming read.

Life and Death in Shanghai (Nien Cheng) Classic account of the Cultural Revolution, with a Shànghǎi angle.

Shanghai: The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City 1842–1949 (Stella Dong) Rip-roaring profile of the city's good-old, bad-old days.

Money

The Shanghainese may chatter about traffic gridlock and 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, whether poor or wealthy. 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.

Pollution

In recent years, Shànghǎi has reached record-breaking levels of atmospheric pollutants. In some areas of town, readings climbed to levels that were 28 times World Health Organization safe limits. In response, in 2016 the city pledged to introduce measures to tackle the pollution problem. Plans include building more parks and forest areas, introducing bans on air-polluting vehicles and factories, and monitoring dust emissions from construction sites. It's not just the air that's affected; a 2016 report by the Shanghai Environmental Protection Bureau stated that 50% of Shànghǎi's rivers and lakes were also polluted.