

Chapter One

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THE BEST OF HONG KONG, BEIJING, SHANGHAI & TAIPEI

There is an old Chinese curse that goes something like this: May you live in interesting times.

Perhaps all times are interesting, none more so than those related to the New China . . . of 2008 and the Olympic Games and the World's Fair in Shanghai in 2010. China Onstage.

So I'd like to twist the ancient curse into a prayer for you and yours: May you shop in somewhat dirty street markets but contract no disease. May you never pay more than 100 of anything (yuan, Hong Kong dollars, euros—whatever). May you gaze at the New China and understand that you see the future—and it is powerful.

Hey, I know there's a real China out there, that miners are dying in horrific accidents, and that many couples still are permitted only one child. But as a visitor to glam parts of Shanghai and Beijing, you will be hard-pressed to find it.

With the Olympics considered a turning point for the government, everything has become cleaner and more generic, brighter, and even garish. Hong Kong still shimmers as an oasis, although prices are higher on most items (except designer goods, which cost 20% less than in mainland China). This is the new China, and it has been built by the world's finest architects. You can't help but be impressed.

If you're antsy about the rate of exchange on the dollar against the euro, Asia is your new best friend. The rush is on, so get going now. This chapter will help guide you to the best, the brightest, and the most brilliant according to budget.

Please remember that coming up with a single best of anything is pretty difficult. "Best" is a subjective thing. Each choice here is based on a combination of location, value, and convenience.

Believe it or not, there is little crossover in merchandise in the cities this book covers; once you have left a destination, you may not have the luxury of another crack at a particular item, often resulting in the "Why didn't I buy more?" syndrome.

THE 10 BEST STORES

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Along with my alphabetical list comes the usual disclaimer—these choices are based on my personal visits. China is changing fast. As soon as we go to press, a bigger or better resource might pop up.

ASHNEIL

Far East Mansions, 5-6 Middle Rd., Shop 114 (up the stairs), Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong (MTR: TST).

Calling this a store may lead you to believe it is bigger than a postage stamp, which it is not. More than two shoppers make it feel crowded. But that's only because it's piled high and deep with handbags of all sorts. These babies are no fakes either. They're excellent-quality items that look like styles you know and love—but, with no phony parts, they're totally legal. Prices begin at around \$150 and go up (sometimes way up), but you often can't tell the bags from the \$1,000 versions. You can have your purchases delivered to the U.S. (saving on the Customs allowance), order something made in a custom color, or buy small leather goods such as belts and wallets. Credit cards accepted.

BLANC DE CHINE

Pedder Building, 12 Pedder St., Room 201, Central, Hong Kong (MTR: Central).

Armani meets Shanghai Tang (see below). Expect to pay \$500 or more for a jacket, but the quality and appearance will melt you. Mens, womens, and home styles.

CITY SUPER

Times Square Mall (MTR: Causeway Bay); Ocean Terminal, Harbour City, Kowloon (MTR: TST); IFC2 mall (MTR: Central); all Hong Kong.

As the name implies, this is a supermarket. The branches are not all equal—the one at Times Square is the best—but all are good enough to qualify for this list. You can buy Asian products (which make great gifts) as well as bath and beauty items and housewares.

HU & HU ANTIQUES

1685 Wuzhong Lu, Shanghai (no nearby Metro).

If you aren't interested in furniture, then you can skip this establishment. If you love to look at pretty things and adore high style with ultra-panache, this is the most chic furniture store in all of China. The woman who runs it is American-Chinese and speaks English like few others in Shanghai. In addition to two warehouses filled with furniture, you'll also find smaller tabletop and gift items. I bought an ancestor scroll once. Have your taxi wait . . . even if it's for a few days.

LOTUS CENTRE/TESCO

Super Brand Mall, Pudong, Shanghai (Metro: Lu Jia Zhui).

Lotus Centre is a chain, and I recommend any branch you can get to—this one is just easy for tourists. It is Target with a fancy supermarket: two floors of clothes, food, lifestyle goods, and everything you want. Did I mention great prices?

MAYLIN

Peninsula Hotel Shopping Arcade, Salisbury Rd., Kowloon (MTR: TST), Hong Kong.

The Birkin bags are all gone but the store has expanded and is now heavy into woven leathers that look surprisingly like, hmmm, what was that Italian brand? Prices hover around \$250 for a nice sac. They take credit cards but are not big on charm.

SHANGHAI TANG

Pedder Building, 12 Pedder St., Central, Hong Kong (MTR: Central).

This is undoubtedly one of the must-see, must-dos of Hong Kong, even if you don't buy anything. In fact, there is a good chance you *won't* buy anything. Still, the store is gorgeous to look at and inspirational in its creativity.

Shanghai Tang stocks souvenirs and fashions, Mao-mania, and original artwork by contemporary artists—all imported from China. Get a load of the gift wrap! Wander, drool, buy, have a cigar, sit down for tea, or shop 'til you're late for your next appointment.

SHIATZY CHEN

7 The Bund, Shanghai.

Religious encounter of the fourth dimension. Okay, so that's a little glib, but I am sincere. The first few times I walked into this store it was truly a religious experience; the earth moved. The Taiwanese designer makes men's and women's clothes as well as accessories; they have stores all over Asia. The look is "Armani meets Blanc de Chine" kicked up many notches into couture. In short, gorgeous clothing, usually beginning at \$1,000.

Airports & You

Many businesspeople are in such a great hurry getting from meeting to meeting that they wait to shop at the airport duty-free shops as they're leaving town. Depending on your point of departure, this may or may not be such a hot idea.

The **Hong Kong** airport may be a virtual shopping mall, but note that prices are not the same as in town. Even duty-free prices are high. I suggest hitting the gift shop at your hotel in Hong Kong if you're willing to pay top dollar anyway. Gift shops will have slightly more budget-friendly prices and less pressure of the "Oh my, I'd better grab it" variety.

The **Beijing** airport's duty-free shop is excellent for last-minute shopping. I can't tell you that the prices are the lowest in town, but the selection is wide enough for all of you last-minute shoppers to at least accomplish all of your shopping goals.

Shanghai's Pudong Airport gift shops are even more sophisticated in the TT (tourist-trap) department. I've stocked up on chocolate-covered litchis and the most extraordinary embroidered satin bedroom slippers. Shanghai's Hong Giao Airport is neither new nor spiffy but has some basics for giftables.

Taipei's airport is the biggest surprise—the old-fashioned CSK airport is gone and this new beauty has tons of shopping and eats. Yep, even a Starbucks. Note that this airport may have better shopping than in town and is a far better hub to Asia than Narita (Tokyo), so worship for awhile if you can.

SUZHOU COBBLER

3 Fuchow Rd., Shanghai.

Don't sneeze or you will miss this tiny shop that specializes in a sophisticated twist on an old Chinese art: the embroidered slipper. About \$50 a pair, but they look like a million.

SPACE 798

Dashanzi Art District (no nearby Metro).

Yes, I know it's off the beaten path; but this trendsetting reclaimed factory is well worth it, with all sorts of shopper's delights in store for you: photography, art, and a little bit of clothing. Look, touch, and splurge. You can even grab a drink or a light meal to reward yourself for making it out there. (See p. 295, in chapter 9 for tips on how to get there and make the most of your excursion.)

GREAT INEXPENSIVE GIFTS

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- **Tea mugs.** Chinese tea mugs (complete with lid) cost about \$3 each in any Chinese department store. You'll have to wrap them yourself (pack with care), but they make marvelous gifts and are especially unique for giftees who don't have the privilege of having a Chinatown in or nearby their hometowns.
 - **Chinese tea.** From high-end brands and makers (such as Fook Ming Tong, in Hong Kong) to any old brand in a great-looking package sold on the street or at a Chinese department store, tea makes a very traditional gift, and it doesn't break. Prices vary with brand and venue. If tea strikes you as old hat, look for the flower teas that are the size of a ping-pong ball and open into a beautiful blossom inside the cup as you make the tea. Excellent party trick. Buy flowering tea (of the jasmine variety, for example) in a gift bag for about \$10 to \$12.
 - **"Jade."** I buy "jade" doughnuts by the dozen at the Jade Market in Hong Kong and then string each one individually as a gift. They cost about \$1 each and are not real jade. If you're willing to pay \$10 to \$15 per gift, you can purchase animal figurines.
 - **Chops.** You can be sure that no one else has one of these. A chop, or Chinese signature stamp, costs about \$25 and can usually be carved while you wait.

- **Chopsticks.** OK, so more people in your social circle are likely to have a few sets of these. But I found some really chic ones—pearl inlay and all that—in Hanoi (not in China, incidentally). They are indeed a bargain at about \$2 per pair.
- **Perfume bottles.** Many people like perfume bottles painted on the inside, but I prefer the fake antiques that look like smoked glass from the 1920s for \$10 to \$20. I have a collection of tiny cinnabar bottles for which I paid about \$15 each. They are fake antiques, true, but good-looking nonetheless.

THE BEST SHOPPING EXPERIENCES

- Trolling for bargains on Fa Yuen Street, Hong Kong
- Having a garment made to measure in Hong Kong
- Any flea market in China
- Shenzhen
- Museum-store shopping in Taipei (and I don't mean the National Palace Museum)

BEST NEW SHOPPING CONCEPTS

The big-name luxury hotels are fighting it out and opening in Hong Kong shopping malls that specialize in the combination of luxury sleep, happy eats, and shopping ops right out the front door—or at the end of the concierge's magic wand. Two of the biggest names in town will knock your socks off with shopping deals, packages, and perks: the **Mandarin Landmark** in the Landmark and the **Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong** in the IFC Tower.

In **Beijing**, shopping for Olympic souvenirs isn't new, but the officialness of doing business is. The crackdown on fake Olympic merchandise—as well as designer fakes and DVDs—is impressive.

In fact, the crackdown on fakes all over Asia is staggering. If you are caught crossing from the PRC into HKG with pirated DVDs, you will be fined \$HK1,000 (about US\$130) *per* disc. Since no one buys just one DVD, you are looking at confiscation plus a nasty fine.

OTHER CONCEPTS

INSIDER CONCIERGE

InterContinental Hotel, Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong (MTR: TST).

Insider Concierge is an InterContinental trademark for a program in which the chain's super-duper concierges locate whatever you need. Actually, any good hotel concierge can provide this service, but InterConti backs this up with a fabulous team. The concierge can even arrange for potential purchases to be brought to your hotel room for you to look at, or for fittings to be done in your room.

XINTIANDI

Huai Hai Rd. E., Shanghai (Metro: Huang Pi Nan Rd.).

Maybe it's not fair to call this an urban-renewal effort—it's an entire city of stone houses that have been renovated into bars, restaurants, and shops with walkways in between and the most chic customers in all of China. You don't come here so much for the shopping as for the whole package, usually at night, when the stores stay open late and you drink and stroll and then have dinner.

BEST WINDOW-SHOPPING CONCEPT

THREE ON THE BUND

No. 3 *The Bund*, 3 *Zhong Shan Dong Yi Rd.*, at *Guangdong Rd.* (Metro: *Renmin Guangchang*), *Shanghai*.

I didn't come to Shanghai to buy \$400 Armani jeans, but this experience is still a thrill. Check out several floors of retail, eat at one of the restaurants, and plop down in the Evian spa. The whole shebang is so beautiful that you don't want to miss out.

THE BEST SOURCES FOR ANTIQUES

Antiques in China are tricky—you simply don't know what's real and what isn't. Hong Kong's Hollywood Road is an excellent stroll for antiques shopping, getting an overview of what is available, and learning about the prices. Don't buy anything serious from a dealer who is not known in the trade.

Macau is an excellent source for antiques—that is, if they weren't just made right there!

Both Shanghai and Beijing abound with shopping ops for small decorative items and antiques, real and fake. Prices can be half those in Hong Kong. But then, reliability can be, too.

THE BEST MARKETS

JADE MARKET

Kansu and Battery sts., *Yau Ma Tei*, *Kowloon*, *Hong Kong* (MTR: *Jordan Rd.*).

Two tents' worth of dealers with beads, jade, more jade, and a few antiques. Do-it-yourselfers will go wild. Check out Jenny Gems. To reach the market from the Metro, walk or take a taxi.

PANJIAYUAN ANTIQUE AND CURIO MARKET/DIRT MARKET

Huaweiqixi Nan Dajie, Beijing (no nearby Metro).

If you are a flea-market person, you owe it to yourself to arrange your trip so that you have a few hours here. Also known as the Dirt Market (it once had a dirt yard), the market includes some aisles of dealers under tin rooftops, and masses of real people with their goods laid out on the ground. Beware of fakes. The best time to shop is before 10am, when it gets very crowded. Open Saturday and Sunday only.

PEARL MARKET (HONG QIAO MARKET)

Near the Temple of Heaven, Beijing (no nearby Metro).

This indoor mall sounds a lot more romantic than it looks, but if you can adjust your expectations, you'll be on your way to heaven. . . and the Temple of Heaven is conveniently across the street.

The first floor has watches and small electronics (including Mao lighters), along with leather goods and fakes. Also on this floor is luggage, which comes in handy when you run out of packing space and are desperate for cheap new bags. At the far end of this floor is a series of stalls selling Chinese arts and crafts and souvenir items. Next up is a floor of pearls and pearl wannabes, beads, gemstones, clasps, and more beads. The rear of this floor holds a small mall of antiques shops.

SHANGHAI SOUTH BUND SOFT SPINNING MATERIAL MARKET

399 Lujiabang Lu (no nearby Metro).

This enclosed market is filled with stalls staggering under the weight of bolts of fabric. It also holds some tailor shops, and a few of the fabric shops sell ready-made garments or gift items. Fabric I saw for 86€ per meter (\$135) at the fabric market in Paris was \$15 here.

THE BEST TAILORS

Prices in China for custom-made clothing may be less than in Hong Kong, but don't be tempted. If you want top-of-the-line quality that competes with the best of Savile Row, you want a Hong Kong tailor (whose family probably came from Shanghai anyway).

Hong Kong has no best tailor—it has two. They stand head and shoulders above the others for one simple reason: They have their own workrooms and do not send their piecework to China. Only W. W. Chan & Sons has expanded to mainland China—it has a shop in Shanghai. Prices in Shanghai are approximately 20% less than in Hong Kong; the quality is the same.

A-MAN HING CHEONG CO. LTD.

Mandarin Oriental Hotel, 5 Connaught Rd., Hong Kong (MTR: Central).

W. W. CHAN & SONS LTD.

Burlington House, 92-94 Nathan Rd., Second floor, Kowloon, Hong Kong (MTR: TST); 129A-2 Mao Ming Rd., Shanghai (Metro: Shi Men Rd.).

BEST SHIRT MAKERS

All good tailors also make shirts, but two incredibly famous names in shirt making specialize in men's shirts, shorts, and pajamas only.

ASCOT CHANG CO. LTD.

The Peninsula Hotel, Salisbury Rd., Kowloon (MTR: TST); InterContinental Hotel, 18 Salisbury Rd., Kowloon (MTR: TST); Prince's Building, Chater Rd. (MTR: Central); all Hong Kong.

DAVID'S SHIRTS

Victoria Hotel, Unit 201, Shun Tak Centre (MTR: Sheung Wan); Mandarin Oriental Hotel, 5 Connaught Rd. (MTR: Central); 33 Kimberley Rd., Kowloon (MTR: TST); all Hong Kong.

My Best Finds

by Suzy Gershman

- **Shinco DVD Player:** I thought Shinco was a no-name Chinese brand, but the Sony store near me in Paris also sells it. So do Fortress and Broadway, two reliable electronics chains in Hong Kong. My latest score is a portable DVD player the size of a CD player for \$135. It's dual voltage (110–220), so I can use it anywhere in the world.
- **Bubble Tea:** Once you've tried this dessert-like drink (see p. 48), you'll never be the same. Buy the supplies in Taipei or online. I serve it often and give my guests a unique experience.
- **Face Cream:** I can't tell you that wrinkle creams and moisturizers really work, but I'm not taking any chances. I like the big-name brands, the ones that cost about \$100 a jar (sorry, I can't afford the ones that cost \$1,000). I used to buy them at duty-free stores. Now I buy from the stands at the Pearl Market in Beijing.
- **Eyeglasses:** I have bought eyeglasses and had the prescription filled at the Eye Mart in Beijing and been pleased with the adventure and the quality. But my best trick is to go to **New Fei Optical** in Kowloon (Hong Kong), where I can get designer frames plus my prescription for about \$100 per pair.
- **Chinese Shirts:** From Kenki, a small chain of arts-and-crafts clothing stores in Hong Kong, I bought reversible velvet-silk Chinese big shirts for \$40.
- **Custom-Made Jewelry:** I brought a set of aquamarines that I bought in Brazil to Hong Kong and had a pair of David Yurman-like earrings made in sterling. It took 1 week and cost \$250, not counting the price of the stones.

- **Designer Fashion:** Not just any designer mind you, but Taiwanese legend **Shiatzy Chen**. I fell into a sale with prices marked down 20%, and I got a men's tailored black silk Chinese-style jacket that would make the door gods weep (for a total of \$455).

My Best Finds

by Sarah Lahey

- **Silk Clothing:** In Saigon, Suzy and I found several shops on **Le Loi Street** selling good-quality silk clothing in sizes large enough to fit us. I bought a dressy cinnamon silk velvet jacket with ruched collar and placket for about \$50. Suzy bought one in moss green and we almost fought over a little black number. Ultimately, a truce was called when the black sleeves proved to be too short for our long arms.
- **Chinese Jacket:** From the Shanghai/Pudong branch of **Lotus Centre**, I bought a men's navy embossed corduroy blazer with a tab collar, lined in silk, for about \$25. I had to replace the cheap buttons, but it now looks like a \$500 jacket. Similar styles were available for (small) women.
- **Armani Sweater:** I found a Giorgio Armani Collezione pale sage double-breasted cotton tunic at the **Joyce Warehouse** in Aberdeen, Hong Kong, for \$40.
- **Embroidered silk tote:** Lots of vendors at the **South Bund Soft Spinning Material Market** sell accessories along with yard goods; here, I bought several stunning tote/carry-on bags for \$10 each. Large enough to hold my computer, travel pillow, and other necessities, the bags are made of jewel-toned heavy-duty embroidered silk.
- **Eyeglasses:** I brought my prescription (and my husband Tom's, too) from home and had several pairs of eyeglasses made. The best selection of frames and best prices (under \$75/pair) were at **New Fei Supply** in Hong Kong, but I also had a pair (\$90) made for my husband Tom at **Ming Jin Yuan**, at the Beijing Eye Mart.

My Best Finds

by Aaron Jame

- **CDs:** In Shanghai you can find cheap and legal CDs in local stores—just weed through racks of Backstreet Boys and eventually you may find something decent.
- **Video Games:** I found Game Boy and other game system cartridges and cassettes in the Shanghai street market. Video-game cassettes are cheap and contain several games in one. Of course, they may not be legal, and they may repeat the same game over and over.
- **Mao Bags:** Street vendors, especially in Shanghai, sell these. An over-the-shoulder Mao bag is a must for any young revolutionary.
- **Custom-Tailored Shirts:** In Shanghai I visited the showroom of W. W. Chan & Sons Ltd. (my father's tailor from Hong Kong) and was fitted for my first custom shirts. The quality of the shirts is unmatched. I work in the music business in L.A., so I like to wear a good shirt, with a simple, almost invisible monogram on the cuff, with a pair of jeans. If I'm really going to dress up, I can throw on a blazer.

My Best Finds

by Jenny McCormick

- **Hair Sticks:** Plastic chopstick-style fashion statements that you poke into your hair—everything from faux tortoise shell to Burberry plaid. Talk 'em down to \$1 each. Best selection: ground floor of the Pearl Market, Beijing.
- **Fake Jade “Doughnuts”:** The Pearl Market and elsewhere, about \$1. These babies are great for stringing individually onto a cord or chain of your choosing to make a striking pendant.
- **Bamboo Handbag:** About \$10 at the Dong Tai Market in Shanghai.
- **Mao Watch:** About \$2. Available at most street markets but sold by the dozens at Hong Qiao and in the booths along Wangfujing, both in Beijing. Extra points awarded for their excellent kitsch value.