

The Best of Shànghǎi

Recently featured in many business and travel magazines and newspapers, Shànghǎi has seemingly once again become the latest “It” city of the world. Much like in the first half of the 20th century, visitors from around the world are flocking here, drawn by curiosity, a sense of possibility, the lure of potential professional and financial success, or perhaps simply a desire to be in the coolest, brashiest, and most exciting city in the new century. While Shànghǎi lacks the classical Chinese monuments of Běijīng, its colonial legacy gives it a character all its own. This museum of East meets West on Chinese soil is also China’s capital of commerce, industry, and finance, and the one city that best shows where China is headed at the dawn of the 21st century.

Following is a list of Shànghǎi’s highlights, both the obvious and the more offbeat choices that make the most of all that is unique about the city. But don’t just take our word for it: Come experience this dynamic, must-see city for yourself.

1 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE SHÀNGHǎI EXPERIENCES

- **Strolling the Bund:** The most widely known street in Asia, with its gorgeous colonial buildings that were the banks, hotels, trading firms, and private clubs of foreign taipans (bosses of old Shànghǎi’s trading firms) and adventurers past, deserves to be walked over and over again. See up close the exquisite architectural details of the **Peace Hotel**, the **Customs House**, the **former Hong Kong and Shànghǎi Bank**, and scores of other buildings, some lavishly restored, others closed and awaiting development. Then head across the street to the **Bund Promenade**, where you mingle with the masses while admiring the splendor and grandeur of old Shànghǎi. After you’ve seen it by day, come back again at night for a different perspective. See “Walking Tour 1” on p. 196.
- **Admiring the Collections in the Shànghǎi Museum:** China’s finest, most modern, and most memorable museum of historic relics has disappointed almost no visitor since it opened in the heart of People’s Square. Make it a top priority, and allow a few hours more than you planned on. See p. 164.
- **Surveying Shànghǎi from Up High:** After crossing the Huángpǔ River from old Shànghǎi to the new Shànghǎi, enjoy the ultimate panorama from either the sphere atop the **Oriental Pearl TV Tower**; the 88th-floor observatory of the **Jīn Mào Tower**; or the 100th-floor all-glass observation deck of the new **Shànghǎi World Financial Center**. All three rank as some of Asia’s tallest structures. On a clear day, you can see forever. See p. 188, 187, and 190.
- **Cruising the Huángpǔ River:** A 27km (17-mile) pleasure cruise from the Bund to the mouth of the mighty Yángzǐ River, past endless wharves, factories, and tankers at anchor, gives substance to Shànghǎi’s claim as China’s largest port and the fact that nearly half of China’s trade with the outside world travels these same waters. A shorter

1-hour cruise, and an abbreviated 30-minute cruise from the Pūdōng side, do not convey the full importance of the river, but they will suffice if you're pressed for time. See p. 167.

- **Shopping 'til You Drop:** To paraphrase a local saying, if you haven't shopped, you haven't been to Shànghǎi. Savvy locals know if you want greater choice and better deals, **Huáihǎi Lù**, with its slew of international boutiques and large department stores, is the place to shop. Branching off and parallel to Huáihǎi Lù, Mǎomíng Lù, Xìnglè Lù, and Chánglè Lù are also home to a number of delightful small shops. Even if you're the kind of person who only shops once a year, a visit to **Nánjīng Lù**, the "Number One Shopping Street in China" is practically required, if only for a chance to marvel (or shudder) at the sheer numbers of people, people, people everywhere! A pedestrian mall makes strolling and browsing that much easier and that much more crowded. Finally, **Tàikàng Lù**, with its ever-growing block of small shops, artists' studios, and outdoor cafes, makes for a delightful afternoon of shopping. See "Walking Tour 2: Nánjīng Lù" on p. 204, and see chapter 9 for shopping listings.
- **Bargaining for Fakes:** Shànghǎi has any number of antiques markets where you can hone your bargaining skills. Two of the top choices are the more touristy **Dōngtái Lù Antique Market** and the slightly more ragtag but colorful **Fúyòu Market** in the old Chinese city (at the western end of Shànghǎi's restored old street, Shànghǎi Lǎo Jiē). Half the fun is in rifling through all the personal collections of memorabilia and antiques that the vendors seem to have scavenged; the other half is in dramatically protesting the high prices quoted, walking away, then being called back by a vendor newly willing to deal. The same process and joys of bargaining apply when trying to purchase knock-off designer goods, but *caveat emptor*. See p. 220 for warnings about knock-off purchases, and see p. 221 for antique markets.
- **Rediscovering Shànghǎi's Jewish Past:** In the mid-19th century, Sephardic Jews from the Middle East helped make Shànghǎi a great city. In the mid-20th century, thousands of Jewish refugees flooded the International Settlement north of the Bund. Today, this history can be encountered at the former **Ohel Moshe Synagogue**, today renamed the **Shànghǎi Jewish Refugee Museum**, with an exhibit documenting life in this little-known but important Jewish ghetto. See p. 173.
- **Soaking in Shànghǎi's Night Views:** The night views of the Bund and Pūdōng are simply not to be missed. Viewing options include dining at one of the Bund restaurants, such as **M on the Bund** or **Laris**, and then crossing the river to **Jade on 36** in Pūdōng for a nightcap (you can also reverse the order). Better yet, savor the best of both worlds by finishing off the evening at **Vue** bar at Hyatt on the Bund where you can behold the nightlights on both shores of the Huángpǔ River, while soaking in an outdoor Jacuzzi! See chapter 6 for dining options and chapter 10 for bars.
- **Watching the Acrobats:** This has "TOURIST" stamped all over it, but it's nevertheless a totally worthwhile pleasure, especially since Shànghǎi's dazzling troupes are rightly considered China's very finest at this ancient craft. See chapter 10.
- **Sampling Shànghǎi's Jazz Scene:** The famous **Peace Hotel Jazz Band's** nightly performances of New Orleans-style jazz, with some members who have been playing here since before the Revolution in 1949, have lost much of their





nostalgic draw since temporarily relocating to the Huátíng Hotel while the Peace undergoes renovation, but take heart, jazz lovers. Modern and more improvisational jazz can be heard at a number of true-blue joints: the **Cotton Club**, **Club JZ**, and the **House of Blues and Jazz**. See p. 239 for jazz bars.

- **Drifting in a Gondola through a Water Village:** There are any number

of picturesque “water villages” near Shànghǎi where you can be paddled in a gondola along streams and canals as you pass traditional arched bridges, quaint stone houses, and classical Chinese gardens. Two villages stand out: Tónglǐ and Nánxún. Also, both have additional sights worth seeing and considerably smaller crowds than at tourist traps like Zhōu Zhuāng, but see them soon. See p. 263 and 260.

2 THE BEST SPLURGE HOTELS

- **Park Hyatt Shànghǎi** (Shìjì Dàdào 100, World Financial Center, Pǔdōng; ☎ 021/6888-1234): Although this top-of-the-Hyatt-line hotel hadn’t opened at press time for our review, we are preemptively including it here, for we think its high-flying status as the world’s tallest hotel combined with the stellar worldwide reputation of the brand will make this a highly attractive hotel worth seeking out. See p. 105.
- **Four Seasons Hotel Shànghǎi** (Wēihǎi Lù 500, Jīng Ān; ☎ 021/6256-8888): The best all-around hotel in Pǔxī, the Four Seasons is worth splurging on just for its patented bed alone. Oh, and the service is impeccable, the staff discreet, and your surroundings as classy as classy can get. If it’s good enough for Tom Cruise (who stayed here when he was filming *Mission Impossible III*), it just might be good enough for the rest of us. See p. 98.
- **Mansion Hotel** (Xīnlè Lù 82, Xúhuì; ☎ 021/5403-9888): If you want to be transported back in time to Shànghǎi in the 1930s, then the exclusive boutique **Mansion Hotel**, right in the heart of the French Concession, is where you want to lodge. At this refurbished old mansion, you’ll get to experience all of today’s luxurious amenities in a nostalgic colonial setting. See p. 96.
- **Pǔdōng Shangri-La** (Fùchéng Lù 33, Pǔdōng; ☎ 021/6882-8888): It’s difficult to pick between the newer Grand Tower, with its large, luxe rooms furnished with LCD TVs, fax machines, DVD players, and all the usual luxury accoutrements, or the recently refurbished River Wing rooms with their unbeatable views of the Bund. In the end, it doesn’t matter because you can’t go wrong at the Shangri-La. There’s a ridiculous number of fine-dining restaurants to choose from, two health clubs, two pools (one of them a glass-enclosed outdoor pool), the Himalayan-themed Chi spa, and still the best overall views of the Bund from Pǔdōng. See p. 105.
- **St. Regis Shànghǎi** (Dōngfāng Lù 889, Pǔdōng; ☎ 021/5050-4567): Its location in Pǔdōng isn’t ideal, but otherwise, this is as good as it gets with Shànghǎi hotels. What’s better than being pampered by your St. Regis butler, who can do everything from pressing your pants and making dinner reservations to acting as your personal tour guide about town? Rooms are large and luxurious, there’s open access to the executive lounge, free wireless Internet, excellent dining options, and a top-notch spa. See p. 105.

3 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED HOTELS

- **Old House Inn** (Huáshān Lù 351, No. 16, Jing Ān, ☎ 021/6248-6118): For those who want to wake up in old Shànghǎi and who don't need a lot of hotel facilities, this small, unpretentious inn in the French Concession will deliver the goods. You'll walk on hardwood floors, sit on traditional Chinese chairs, and sleep in four-poster beds—it's not fancy but it's charming, quaint, and reasonably priced. See p. 101.
- **Captain Hostel** (Fúzhōu Lù 37, Huángpǔ; ☎ 021/6323-5053): Lodged

in a 1920s Art Deco building just steps from the Bund, this popular maritime-themed hostel offers clean dorms and simple double “cabins” for around ¥300 (\$43/£22) after discount, a whopping good bargain for its location. After a hard day's sightseeing, you can sip a cold beer on the rooftop bar (which has fabulous views of Pǔdōng) and be grateful you weren't shanghaied like a sailor of yore. See p. 90.

4 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE DINING EXPERIENCES

- **Tackling Hairy Crab:** The name says it all. The signature dish of Shànghǎi is absolutely scrumptious, but it's seasonal (autumn) and best enjoyed at a big local restaurant. See chapter 6.
- **Rooftop Dining on the Bund:** Whether it's savoring world-class cuisine on the open-air balcony of **M on the Bund**, or enjoying a romantic dinner for two catered by world-renowned chefs in the cupola atop **Three on the Bund**, dining high above Asia's most famous street is a heady experience not to be missed. See p. 115.
- **Eating Xiǎo Lóng Bāo:** Unless you're a vegetarian, not trying Shànghǎi's favorite (pork) dumpling while you're here is tantamount in some circles to not having been to Shànghǎi at all. The “little steamed breads” spill broth in your mouth when you bite into them. You can find them everywhere, but **Crystal Jade Restaurant** (p. 117) serves up the best in the city. For tips on how to eat it without scalding your tongue, see

“Shànghǎi's Favorite Dumpling” on p. 135.

- **Savoring “Avant-Garde” Cuisine:** There are many highly creative chefs the world over, but treating yourself to French chef Paul Pairet's delightfully playful and deliciously inventive “avant garde” cuisine at the Shangri-La hotel's **Jade on 36** restaurant is truly one of the most unforgettable dining experiences you're likely to have. The wonders this master can do with foie gras, truffles, chocolates, and lemons will have you vowing a return visit...for your next meal. See p. 134.
- **Dining in a Colonial Mansion:** These days it's easy to find a restored old mansion for dinner, but two standouts that combine just the right colonial ambience with delicious food are **Fu 1088**, serving excellent Shanghainese cuisine in private dining rooms in a restored mansion; and **Lan Na Thai**, sitting amidst the sprawling grounds of the Ruijin Hotel. See p. 132 and 118.

5 THE BEST THINGS TO DO FOR FREE

- **People-Watch:** One of our favorite activities. It's free, it's fascinating, and you may learn more about today's China in an hour of people-watching than you would in a day spent on a tour bus. You can do this practically anywhere, at a park or a major intersection, but the best spots may be in People's Square, along Nánjīng Lù Pedestrian Mall, on Huáihǎi Lù, on the Bund Promenade, or at Xīntiāndì, where you are almost certain to see some wild and woolly mix of beleaguered tourists, Chinese and foreign, newly minted business folk, trendy young fashionistas, uniformed school children, strolling seniors, and, of course, whistle-blowing traffic cops.
- **Morning Exercises on the Bund:** There's no better way to greet the day than to join the thousands of Shànghǎi residents in their morning tai chi exercises (and occasionally Western ballroom dancing) on the Bund and in Shànghǎi's parks. The Bund is preferable: The first golden rays hitting the colonial facades are truly something to behold. See chapter 7 for details on the Bund and on Shànghǎi parks.
- **Wander the Old Chinese City:** The narrow winding alleys of the old Chinese city may strike some as mysterious and forbidding, but they are neither of these, and are worth exploring even beyond the walking tours in chapter 8. Here is a chance to come upon a wet market, or run into the increasingly rare sight of a night soil worker on his morning rounds (many houses in this part of town still lack indoor plumbing). See it before the bulldozer shows up. See "Walking Tour 3" on p. 209.
- **Stroll the French Concession:** This is the most interesting of the colonial districts left in Shànghǎi, filled with the gorgeous villas, mansions, and apartment houses of the 1920s and 1930s when the French made their mark here. Plenty of Art Deco gems abound, hidden behind years of grime and buried beneath webs of laundry poles, awaiting discovery, so keep your head up. See "Walking Tour 4: French Concession" on p. 213.