

Shanghai

Reaching for the Sky



*Words & Photos by
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With a population topping 20 million, a history and character born in colonial roots and a future embodied in its spectacular skyline, Shanghai is a living museum of East meeting West and one of world's great modern capitals.

Of all the cities in China, Shanghai fore-shadows the powerhouse that China is becoming not only as a center for commerce but also of tourism. From the world's tallest building, to the world's fastest commuter train, this is the new China on a grand scale and a true reflection of China's optimism for the future and its impatience to get there.

For the tourist, Shanghai is a delightful blend of cultures and excitement unlike any other city in this fabled country. Here East truly does meet West. Traditional treasures like the magnificent Yu Gardens, the Old Town which teems with the traditional pulse of China, and structures like the Jade Buddha Temple, Huxinting Teahouse, and Longhua Pagoda stand shoulder-to-shoulder futuristic skyscrapers and modern commerce.

To experience classical Shanghai, start at one of the most beautiful gardens in China, the Yu Gardens (Yu Yuan) or the "garden of contentment" in English.

Located in Old Town, the gardens are a lush

labyrinth of pools, ponds, pavilions and lavish landscapes. Covering some five acres of land, a stroll through the maze of Ming Dynasty pavilions, arched bridges and Koi ponds, is like a walk into the past.

It is actually not just one garden, but a series of gardens-within-gardens each partially concealed by walls, but connected by arched bridges or curved pathways. At first, it may seem large and confusing, but just follow your nose and you should be able to see most of the garden without getting lost.

One of the most interesting landmarks is the zig-zag bridge, which crosses a large pond near the entrance of the gardens. It was made in this zig-zag shape because evil spirits apparently must travel in straight lines and the undulating path of the bridge is designed to keep the evil out of the garden. Another landmark is the dragon wall which surrounds the garden while acting as a screen for many of the interior gardens.

China's Best Museum

Just across from People's Square and People's Park (once the site of colonial Shanghai's horse racing track) is another excellent place to find 'old' China: the Shanghai Museum. Called the 'best museum in China' its



One of the museum's many treasures



Yu Yuan ("Garden of Contentment")

11 galleries and three special exhibition halls are arranged on four floors that encircle a cylindrical atrium that is bathed in light from above.

Unlike most Chinese museums, this one is arranged by theme instead of by the age of the exhibits or dynasty. On the first floor is the Bronze Gallery and the Sculpture Gallery. The second floor houses the Ceramics Gallery. The Painting Gallery, the Calligraphy Gallery and the Seal Gallery occupy the third floor. On the fourth floor are the Jade Gallery, the Coin Gallery, the Furniture Gallery and the Minority Nationalities Art Gallery. Plan to spend much of the day exploring this exciting museum.

For a blending of the old and the new, take some time to visit the Bund (Wai Tan). This wide pedestrian walkway runs for about a mile (1.7 kilometers) from Suzhou Creek in the north to Jinling Lu in the south. The Bund is Shanghai's waterfront promenade that runs along the west shore of the Huangpu River and forms a kind of cultural and historical boundary.

On the same side of the river is the wide avenue (Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu) which runs parallel to the European buildings built during the colonial period of the 1920s and 1930s. On the other side of the river, casting a long shadow, are the modern towers of the Pudong New Area that includes the most modern structures in the world and Shanghai's Financial District. It's centerpiece is the 101-story Shanghai World Financial Center, a 1,614-foot (492-meter) wedge-shaped tower with a rectangular hole at the very top that dominates the skyline.

The wide, picturesque Bund is always crowded with visitors, but don't let this bother you. It is the perfect place to take the pulse of China's most vital city.

At night you should also take a cruise along the Huangpu River. The 17-mile (27-kilometers) 3 ½ hour tour will take you from the Bund to the mouth of the Yangzi River past factories and port facilities as well as junks and Chinese barges that ply the narrow waterway. To the west are the lights of the European skyline; to the east is Pudong's modern skyline. From here you can truly see China's past, present and future in a single view.

Shopper's Paradise

Shopping has always been one of the main attractions of Shanghai. From open markets and shopping centers to small shops and modern boutiques featuring exclusive European brands, Shanghai offers something for everyone. The main shopping district is Nanjing Road, where you can find just about anything from the simple and inexpensive to the grand and costly.

On the east end are the locals shop at Huaihai Road, while the west end of Nanjing Road is home to the most upscale. You might also want to visit Xiangyang Road Market for

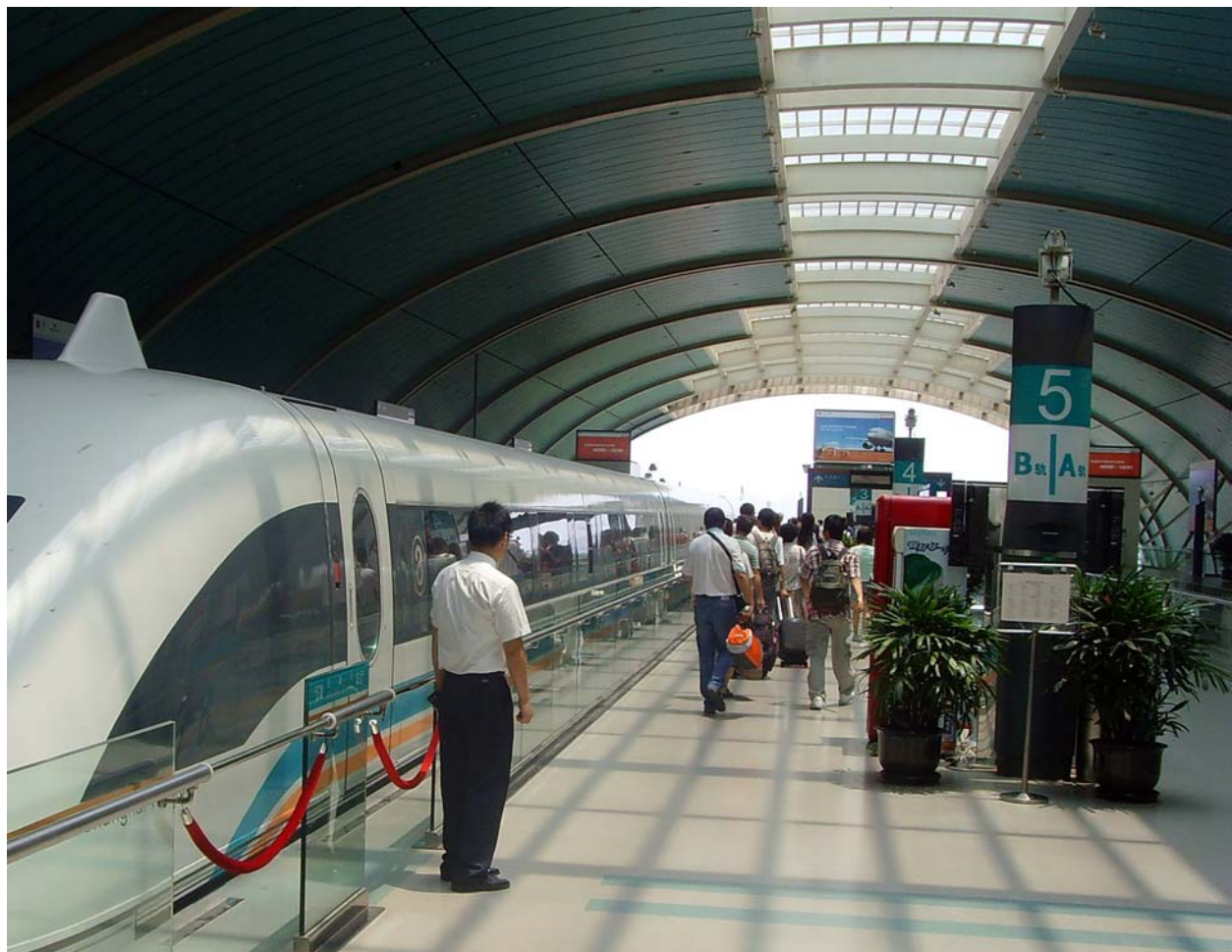
Shanghai's version of Silk Street.

Look for low prices on both silk goods and antiques. Shanghai has some of the best deals in antiques in all of China. The best place to start is "Old Street" which runs from east to west along the southern border of Old Town.

Be sure to take a bit of time also to visit one of the many Ming and Qing Dynasty teahouses that line the pedestrian walkway. Jewelry can also be a good deal especially jade, gold and freshwater pearls.

At night, Shanghai offers a dazzling array of things to do and see. Everything from traditional acrobatic performances, opera and theater to jazz clubs, discos and other western-style entertainment can be found after dark. Don't miss a chance to see an acrobatic show.

For two thousand years, Chinese acrobats have been perfecting their skills which today are married with modern staging and music. Seeing a performance by a professional troupe is an evening you will long remember and yet another reminder that Shanghai is both China's past and its future.



Shanghai's Maglev commuter train travels at an astonishing 431-kilometers per hour (268-miles per hour)