

Shanghai Biennale: a guide to China's largest city

With the Shanghai Biennale generating fresh energy in this thriving city, the Telegraph's China correspondent Malcolm Moore finds there's plenty to discover.



A city of 23 million people, Shanghai is in a constant state of flux Photo: Oliver Yao / Alamy



By Malcolm Moore 10:38AM GMT 18 Dec 2012

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Why go to Shanghai?

Shanghai's art scene has been turbocharged by the wealth of Chinese collectors. For its ninth staging, the Shanghai Biennale (until March 31, 2013) has moved from the old Shanghai Race Club to the city's version of Tate Modern, the restored Nanshi power station on the banks of the Huangpu river. The theme is a pressing one for China: how to progress from building infrastructure to creating a modern society. To see how art has regenerated a district, visit Tianzifang , part of the old French Concession that was unzoned and quickly filled up with artists' studios. Its tiny streets are packed with boutiques and cafes, and though many artists have moved, galleries remain: the Beaugeste has contemporary photography. Communist party artwork is on show at Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Center, a collection of posters exhorting the masses to greater feats and better behaviour; descriptions are in Chinese and English. Early mornings in Fuxing Park (105 Fuxing Zhong Lu) are a good start to a day; you will find tai chi practitioners and men taking caged birds for a dawn stroll. End the day with a cocktail in the Vue Bar at the Hyatt on the Bund; it has the best view of the city, looking east over the skyscrapers of Pudong and west over the Bund, with the



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Where to eat in Shanghai

Culinary genius is on display at Jia Jia Tang Bao (00 86 21 6327 6878), at 90 Huanghe Lu , near Beijing Lu . Queues form to watch women create Xiaolongbao , delicate soup dumplings. Each one holds pork, sometimes crab, and a spoonful of broth – take care not to break them in the eating. Shunxing (00 86 21 6213 8988), at 1088 Yan'an Xi Lu , near Panyu Lu , is a Chengdu tea house transplanted to the coast, and the best place to sample Sichuan's searing cuisine and enjoy an acrobatics act. Off the beaten track is the enormous Xibei Oat Noodle Village (00 86 21 5875 2999), at Hongxin Plaza, West Wing 5F, 762 Tianshan Lu, near Gubei Lu . The Chinese voted its home-made yoghurt the best dish in Shanghai, and joints of lamb and home-pressed tofu are also on the menu. Among the best Western restaurants is **Mr & Mrs Bund** at 18 Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu . Book ahead: its playful menu (try Picnic Chicken) means it is almost perpetually full.

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Where to stay in Shanghai

The 174-room **Park Hyatt** is not only the world's highest hotel, occupying the 79th to 93rd floors of the World Financial Center, but one of the most refined and quiet places to stay. Ask for a view over the river towards the city centre. For Art Deco elegance, and the glamour of the old French Concession, opt for the 30-room **Mansion Hotel** which has a great position in the middle of town. **The Puli** is a sleek, "urban resort", with more than 200 spacious rooms, a knockout restaurant and an inviting spa.

What to read

Shanghai, unlike Beijing, is a walking city. Buy a copy of *Six Shanghai Walks* , written by five expatriate women, and get to know the surviving history of the city while strolling through its plane tree-lined streets. For those who want to know more about China's turbulent modern history, one of the greatest books about the Cultural Revolution is set in Shanghai. *Life and Death in Shanghai* by Nien Cheng is an autobiographical tale of the horrors of the 1960s, which still resonate in Chinese life today.

British heritage

The Bund was built by the British at the end of the 19th century as Shanghai became the busiest port in Asia. The solid granite buildings once housed banks and trading houses, the British and Russian consulates, and the Shanghai Club (now the Waldorf). Today the finance district is on the other side of the river, in Pudong, but the Bund has been regenerated into a wonderful urban park and its buildings include some of Shanghai's finest, and most expensive, hotels and restaurants. The name Bund comes from the Hindi word for embankment, and the Chinese simply call it Waitan, which also means "outer bank".

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Shanghai is bitterly cold in winter and unpleasantly hot in summer; the best months to visit are April and May or September to November. There are daily flights with British Airways from London, and several times a week with Virgin Atlantic.

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