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Travel essentials



Essentials: portable speakers

When travelling with friends, you might want to share your favourite tracks – in your room as background music or to get you in the mood before a night out, or simply for chilling in the park – and this is where lightweight, portable speakers come in handy.

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Geared for good times

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A man practices tai chi at the Bund, which has been reopened after a massive renovation for the Shanghai World Expo 2010. **Nir Elias / Reuters**

Why Shanghai

China's pulsing commercial capital is a heady place to visit at any time. But as host of the World Expo 2010 from May to October, Shanghai has hit full throttle.

In the months leading up to the May 1 curtain raiser, the city underwent one of the largest scale metropolitan makeovers ever witnessed and is now home to the biggest metro system in the world, two revamped international airports, a high-speed intercity rail hub, a redeveloped Bund waterfront and a multitude of new skyscrapers and gentrified entertainment districts.

It's a return to the global spotlight for a city that was associated with glamour and good times in the early part of the last century, too. During its 1930s heyday, the "Paris of the Orient" was divided into self-governing foreign concessions, filled with dancing halls, opium dens and one of the world's largest collections of art deco architecture. These global influences mixed with traditional Chinese customs created an exotic blend that captured the imagination of visitors to the Far East.

A comfortable be

There are rich pickings for visitors, with a rush of hotel openings ahead of the Expo. One of the newest is Ritz-Carlton Shanghai, Pudong (www.ritzcarlton.com) atop the new Shanghai IFC tower in the Lujiazui financial district. Shanghai's second Ritz-Carlton boasts a mod-deco design and a 58th-floor al fresco rooftop bar with sweeping views of the Huangpu River and heritage Bund mansions. Double rooms cost from US\$293 (Dh1,076) plus taxes.

Across the Huangpu River on the Bund, Shanghai's riverfront boulevard, is The Peninsula Shanghai (www.peninsula.com) which opened last year. It features 235 fully-wired rooms, a Peninsula Spa by ESPA and several fine dining options, including the palatial Cantonese Yi Long Court helmed by the Michelin-starred chef Tang Chi Keung. Double rooms start from \$468 (Dh1,719) plus taxes.

Tucked away in a 1930s art deco apartment building in the former French Concession, the 39-room boutique guesthouse @Gallery Suites (www.artgalleryhotels.com) features stylish period decor, free-standing bathtubs and hi-tech amenities. The Annexe building next door is home to an art gallery and teahouse. Double rooms cost from \$175 (Dh643) plus taxes.

Find your fee

Built in the mid-19th century as a racecourse, People's Square is the geographical centre point of Shanghai, ringed with landmark buildings including the Shanghai Museum, Grand Theatre, Shanghai Exhibition Centre, MoCA, and the Shanghai Art Museum in the old Shanghai Jockey Club. From here, follow the throngs of domestic tourists along the pedestrianised shopping strip of Nanjing East Road. At the eastern end of the road is the Bund. Take in the stunning string of neoclassical, Romanesque, Chinese and art deco gems along this historic waterfront, then turn around and be equally mesmerised by the futuristic skyline of Pudong on the opposite riverbank.

Meet the local

Rise early and hit the streets for a typical Shanghainese breakfast. Streetside vendors – often using wheelbarrow-mounted kitchens – prepare a delicious array

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of made-to-order snacks. Be sure to try *jian bing*, a large burrito with fried egg, coriander, chives, preserved vegetables, and a salty cruller (*you tiao*); pan-fried dumplings; and steamed buns (*baozi*) filled with meat, vegetables or sweet red bean paste. Breakfast is usually packed away by 10am.

Another cherished local tradition is *hewu cha* (or yum cha), when families and friends congregate over steaming baskets of snacks and pots of longjing tea. Crystal Jade (www.crystaljade.com) and Lynn (see below) are popular venues for Cantonese and Shanghainese dim sum, served from late morning until early afternoon.

Book a tabl

From Michelin-starred chefs to makeshift holes in the wall, you can eat well in Shanghai on any budget. **Mr & Mrs Bund (www.mmbund.com) is one of the trendiest tables.** The Bund-side dining room and river views are a treat, but **the main draw is the acclaimed French chef Paul Pairet's classic French comfort fare and trademark quirky creations.** Dinner for two will set you back around \$65 (Dh239) without drinks.

In a heritage villa in the French Concession, Lost Heaven (www.lostheaven.com.cn) serves up folk cuisines of the ethnic hilltribes along the Ancient Tea Horse Trail through China's Yunnan province and into Burma and Laos. The richly spiced curries are complemented by a seductive setting, upbeat vibe and reasonable bill – around \$29 (Dh106) for two without drinks.

For local fare, Lynn offers traditional and updated Shanghai classics, like *hong shao rou* (red-cooked pork) and *shizi tou* (giant meatballs) in a comfortable downtown locale. Book ahead for the popular \$13 (Dh48) unlimited weekend dim sum.

Shopper ' paradise

The residential alleys and former factory buildings around Taikang Road have been transformed into an artsy enclave, perfect for a morning of souvenir shopping and people watching from sidewalk cafes. Check out local designer boutiques such as La Vie for fashions, Shokay for yak-wool knits, whimsical homeware at Platane, men's jewellery at JIP, and Nest, an eco-design collective of locally based brands. For contemporary Chinese art, head to the burgeoning art district of Moganshan Road. ShanghART, m97, Vanguard and Island 6 are the top gallery picks.

What to avoi

If someone approaches you offering a "genuine" Rolex watch or LV bag "at a good price", walk on. These are most certainly not genuine, and it is not advisable to follow hawkers into the back blocks to their secret stashes of bootleg gear. They can be pesky, but a firm "no thank you" while walking on usually does the trick.

Do 't miss

Shanghai is at its best after dark, when the neon lights sparkle and cocktail lounges and jazz clubs start swinging. Glamour Bar (www.m-theglamourbar.com) on the Bund lives up to its name with a sophisticated vibe, classic cocktails and live entertainment, from literary discussions to top DJs. For seductive sipping, Constellation II (5465 5993) in the French Concession is a throwback to the Thirties, with leather armchairs and cocktails courtesy of the Japanese-trained owner. Shanghai and jazz are synonymous, and JZ Club (www.jzclub.cn) hosts a fusion of the top local and foreign talents and late-night jam sessions – the perfect end to those legendary Shanghai nights.

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