

INTRODUCING SHANGHAI



Stroll along the Huangpu River and marvel at the panorama of Pùdōng (p89)

The most dynamic city in the world's fastest-changing nation, Shanghai is an exhilarating, ever-morphing metropolis that isn't just living China's dream, but is setting the pace for the rest of the world.

Once a playground for foreign adventurers and socialites, the one-time whore of the Orient is now where home-grown tycoons build soaring monuments to capitalism and the locals party all night. But despite a past as evocative as it is notorious, Shanghai has dispensed with the rear-view mirror, pushed the pedal to the floor and is roaring towards its imagined future so fast that keeping up is almost impossible. New developments spring up weekly, while the rapidly growing middle classes work seven days a week in the hope of graduating to the big-time.

Shanghai is much more Hong Kong than Běijīng; there are no dusty imperial palaces here. Instead, European-style cityscapes and tempting, tree-lined neighbourhoods rub shoulders with the sci-fi skyline of Pùdōng. Shanghai was where China first met the West and it's still a frontier town, obsessed with the latest fads, fashions and technology.

But tucked between the shopping malls and the eye-popping modern architecture is the old Shanghai, where temples nestle down alleys, along with street markets and classical Chinese gardens. Shanghai is a city of stunning contrasts, where visitors can go from sipping a cocktail in a designer bar overlooking the Bund, to eating dumplings at a street stall, or gazing at a 10th-century Buddhist monastery, in the space of a few hours. Summer is hot and humid, winter can get cold, but Shanghai never stops.

SHANGHAI LIFE

Yes, it will all be there, just as intensely and tenaciously alive as ever – all there a thousand years hence, five thousand, ten. You have only to stroll through Shanghai to be certain of it. London and Paris offer no such certainty.

Aldous Huxley, from his diary, 1926

It's easy to imagine there's something deliciously alchemical about Shanghai's rise. The highest salaries in China, the top-of-the-range cars that clog the roads, the way people have so effortlessly made the transition from living under dour Maoist ideology to embracing Western-style consumerism, it all seems too easy. But the real roots of Shanghai's success tap into something altogether more mundane: economic liberalisation, hard work, an inbred competitiveness and an ideal geographical location.

Getting a piece of the action is on the mind of all Shanghai's 17 million inhabitants. Money, and the pursuit of it, is an obsession. Shanghai relishes being home to the tallest buildings in China, just as it's proud of the MagLev train that hovers across Pùdōng at breakneck speeds and the fact that Formula 1 has made Shanghai one of its pit stops.

The newly rich and rising middle classes take overseas holidays, join golf clubs, send their children to overseas universities, wear expensive Western labels and carry the latest mobile phones. Their kids enjoy lifestyles unimaginable even 10 years ago. The old conservative attitudes to sex have broken down, the divorce rate is skyrocketing and those who marry do so at a later age.

But for all the new social liberalism and economic progress, Shanghai lacks a certain substance. The city has grown too fast and too furiously, with ingenuity and creativity somehow swept from the blueprints. This is foremost a city of action, not of ideas. The foreigners, jazz, architecture, style and buzz of 1920s Shanghai have all returned – along with drugs and prostitution – but the creativeness, freedom of expression and élan of that era have yet to follow.

Nor is politics a topic of conversation. As long as the economy continues its staggering growth, everyone, at least in public, is happy with the status quo. But for those unable to afford the property prices, or who lost their jobs when state-owned industries were privatised and rely on meagre state pensions, life is less comfortable.

The gap between the rich and poor is growing all the time and is clearly visible on the city's streets. Millions of migrant workers toil on the thousands of construction sites for low pay and with few rights. Beggars, tatty soothsayers, itinerant shoe-shiners and trinket-sellers seek loose change from passers-by on the city's overhead walkways.

Nevertheless with thousands of overseas Chinese choosing to return to Shanghai every year, there's no doubting that this is China's golden land of opportunity. For the people who live here, that's enough for the moment and their pride in their city and its progress is palpable. Once again, Shanghai has captured the world's imagination.



It's almost like Europe in the French Concession (p78)

GETTING STARTED

From economy exploration to the cool apex of luxury travel, Shànghǎi has all budgets covered. Apart from getting a visa (p251), you will need to decide when you want to visit Shànghǎi. Getting around Shànghǎi is not hard going, but it's not a piece of cake either so allow yourself a flexible itinerary and enough time to move around. For essentials, you should be able to find everything you may need in Shànghǎi, but packing some good reading material is recommended as there are thin pickings in that department. Take a look at the Itinerary Builder (p56) for suggestions on how to best arrange your time in and around Shànghǎi. English is barely spoken in Shànghǎi, and is rarely understood outside of tourist hotels and restaurants, so communication can be thorny in the extreme.

WHEN TO GO

The best seasons to visit Shànghǎi are spring (March to mid-May), as the city warms up from a clammy, cold winter, and autumn (late September to mid-November), as the heat of summer pleasantly subsides. Although Shànghǎi has grown warmer in winter over recent years (adult Shànghǎi residents certainly recall the winter snows that used to carpet the city, but snow is rarer these days), winter (mid-November to February) is generally miserable with most heating coming from air-con (central heating is rare). Summer (June to September) is fiercely hot, and the humidity combines with the crowds to rapidly sap energy, although this is the peak tourist season. All hell breaks loose in late January/early February when the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) hits town and swamps the transport infrastructure with domestic travellers. The first weeks of May and October are national holiday periods (p242) for the Chinese and best avoided, unless you enjoy being crowded out of the top sights. Peruse the following Festivals section to cherry-pick events that float your boat. See the Climate section (p48) for information on the weather in Shànghǎi.

FESTIVALS

Apart from the festivals listed below and the holidays outlined in the Directory chapter, other events include the Shanghai International Tea Culture Festival at the end of April and the Shanghai International Fashion Culture Festival, in March or April. If you fancy something stronger, the Shanghai Beer Festival staggers into town around the end of July. Of less interest to foreign visitors are the Nanhui Peach Blossom Festival in mid-April, the Osmanthus Festival (near Guilin Park) in September or

October, and the Tangerine Festival in early November. Children will particularly enjoy the Anting Kite Festival, held in nearby Āntíng (安亭; Jiading district) in mid-April. The Shanghai Tourism Festival kicks off in mid-September with a parade down Central Huaihai Rd or East Nanjing Rd, and offers a wide variety of cultural programmes. The **Tennis Masters Cup** (www.masters-cup.com) is held every November in the magnificent **Qi Zhong Stadium** (5500 Yuanjiang Rd) in Minhang district. Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal appeared in the 2007 line-up.

Special prayers are held at Buddhist and Taoist temples on days when the moon is either full or just a sliver. According to the Chinese lunar calendar, the lunar month begins with the new moon, while the full moon occurs fifteen and sixteen days later; some Chinese Buddhists observe a vegetarian diet on the occasions of the new moon and full moon.

January & February

WESTERN NEW YEAR

元旦 Yuándàn

1 Jan

Longhua Temple (p127) has excellent New Year celebrations, with dragon and lion dances. At New Year the abbot strikes the bell 108 times while the monks beat on gongs and offer prayers for the forthcoming year. The Western New Year is celebrated wildly in bars citywide on New Year's Eve.

SPRING FESTIVAL

春节 Chūn Jié

7 Feb 2008; 26 Jan 2009; 14 Feb 2010

Also called the Chinese New Year, the Spring Festival is the equivalent of Christ-

mas in the Chinese calendar. Families get together to feast on *jiāozi* (dumplings), exchange gifts, vegetate in front of the TV, visit friends and take a long holiday. Locals also pay crucial New Year visits (*bàinián*) to their bosses, seniors and elders. The festival traditionally commences on the first day of the first moon of the traditional lunar calendar, but a high-octane month-long build up – featuring a crescendo of red and gold decorations festooning shopping malls and the inescapable onset of seasonal Cantopop ditties – gets everyone hyped up much earlier. An explosion of fireworks at midnight welcomes the New Year and wards off bad spirits, while special services are held at Longhua Temple (p127) and Jing'an Temple (p97). Top Chinese restaurants are booked out well in advance for *niányèfàn* (New Year's Eve dinner). Families paste red couplets on their doors and hand out *hóngbāo*, red envelopes stuffed with money. Another explosion of firecrackers on the fifth day of the New Year heralds the arrival of the God of Wealth.

This can be a bad time if you are on the road – planes are booked out by overseas Chinese, ticket prices soar, trains are packed with migrant workers returning home, and hotels are booked solid. If you are in China at this time, book your room in advance, don't expect to get much business done and sit tight until the chaos is over!

LANTERN FESTIVAL

元宵节 Yuánxiāo Jié

21 Feb 2008; 9 Feb 2009; 28 Feb 2010

Not a public holiday, but this is a colourful time to visit Shànghǎi, especially the Yuyuan Gardens (p72). Families get together, make *yuánxiāo* or *tāngyuán* (sweet dumplings of glutinous rice with sweet fillings) and sometimes hang out paper lanterns. The festival falls on the 15th day of the first lunar month.

VALENTINE'S DAY

情人节 Qíng rén Jié

14th February

The traditional Chinese festival for lovers – held on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month (七夕; *qīxī*) – has been usurped by the Western celebration. Valentine's Day is taken seriously by Shànghǎi suitors as an occasion for a massive blow-out: it's the chance to get their true love that Cartier wristwatch or diamond ring she

has been hankering for, although a bunch of 11 roses (symbolising loyalty) could do the trick. If you plan to eat out, insist on an early reservation as popular restaurants will be stuffed with dewy-eyed lovers.

March & April

SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL LITERARY FESTIVAL

上海国际文学艺术节

Shànghǎi Guójiā Wénxué Yìshù Jié

To counter Shànghǎi's drift towards philistinism, this highly popular festival for bibliophiles and literati alike is staged in the Glamour Bar (p174) in March or April, with a range of international and local authors (Guo Xiaolu was present in 2007) in attendance. Tickets including one drink cost ¥50.

BIRTHDAY OF GUANYIN

观世音生日 Guānshìyīn Shēng rì

Guanyin is the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, much revered in China for her boundless compassion. The goddess (more strictly a Bodhisattva or a Buddha-to-be) goes under a variety of aliases: Guanshiyin, literally meaning 'Observing the Cries of the World', is her formal name, but she is also called Guanzizai, Guanyin Dashi and Guanyin Pusa or, in Sanskrit, Avalokiteshvara. Generally, but not exclusively worshipped by women (especially those eager to bear children), Guanyin has her birthday on the 19th day of the second moon (26 March in 2008 and 15 March in 2009), an excellent time to visit Buddhist temples or the nearby island of Pūtuóshān.

TOMB SWEEPING DAY

清明节 Qīng Míng Jié

5 Apr (4 Apr in leap years)

Qingming occurs close to Easter every year, when over six million Shanghainese visit the graves of their dearly departed relatives, clean the grave sites and worship their ancestors. Flowers (particularly magnolias, the city's flower) are often placed on tombs and 'ghost money' is burnt (for use in the afterworld).

LONGHUA TEMPLE FAIR

龙华寺庙会 Lónghuá Sì Miào huì

The two-week fair coincides with the blossoming of the local peach trees and kicks off on the third day of the third lunar month.

May & June

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

端午节 Duānwǔ Jié

8 Jun 2008; 28 May 2009; 16 Jun 2010

Commemorates the death of Qu Yuan, a 3rd-century-BC poet-statesman who drowned himself to protest against the corrupt government. It is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month with boat races along the Huangpu River, Suzhou Creek and Dianshan Lake.

SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

上海国际电影节 Shànghǎi Guóji Dìyǐng Jié

☎ 6253 7115; www.siff.com

With screenings at various cinemas (p171) around town, the movie-going festival brings a range of international and locally produced films to town in June. For international flicks, check for an English version (英文版; *yingwén bǎn*).

September & October

FORMULA 1

☎ 6982 6999; www.icsh.sh.cn;

2000 Yining Rd, Jiāding

The slick Shanghai International Circuit hosts several high-profile motor-racing competitions, including the hotly contested F1 in September (Y160-3980), China Circuit Championship and Moto GP (Y30-1880).

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

中秋节 Zhōngqiū Jié

14 Sep 2008; 3 Oct 2009; 22 Sep 2010

Also known as the Moon Festival, this is the time to give and receive tasty moon cakes stuffed with bean paste, egg yolk, coconut, walnuts and the like. Gazing at the moon, eating duck and lighting fireworks are popular activities; it's also a traditional holiday for lovers. The festival takes place on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month.

HALLOWEEN

万圣节 Wànshèng Jié

31 Oct

One of a handful of imported Western festivals, spooky Halloween is increasingly popular with young Chinese. Pumpkins, seasonal outfits and masks pile up at large supermarkets and stores, while parties are held at expat-oriented bars and restaurants.

SHANGHAI BIENNALE

上海双年展 Shànghǎi Shuāngniǎnzǎn

Sep-Nov 2008

☎ 6327 2829; www.shanghaiennale.org

Held once every two years, this popular international arts festival takes place at the Shanghai Art Museum (p70).

November & December

CHINA INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

中国上海国际艺术节

Zhōngguó Shànghǎi Guóji Yìshù Jié

www.artsbird.com

A month-long programme of cultural events in November and December, with events including the Shanghai Art Fair, a varied programme of international music, dance, opera and acrobatics, and exhibitions of the Shanghai Biennale (see [above](#)).

SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

上海国际马拉松赛

Shànghǎi Guóji Mǎlāsōng Sài

www.shmarathon.com

This annual late-November event attracts around 12,000 runners. It starts at the Bund, and events include a half-marathon and a 4.5km 'health race'.

CHRISTMAS DAY

圣诞节 Shèngdàn Jié

Not an official Chinese festival perhaps, but the birthday of baby Jesus is a major milestone on the commercial calendar, and Shànghǎi's big shopping zones sparkle

ADVANCE PLANNING

Check out some of Shànghǎi's top websites ([opposite](#)) and find out the latest from local media, including expat magazines. Check to see if your trip coincides with popular festivals or clashes with the big Chinese holiday periods (p16). Make sure your passport and visa are in order (p251). Check that your vaccinations are up-to-date and make a start at learning some Mandarin.

Give some thought to possible itineraries (p56) and how to best manage your time, especially if you are planning some excursions (p206). Scout around for good hotel deals (p191) and make a room reservation. On the day before you leave, reconfirm your flight (and cancel the milk).

with decorations and glisten with (fake) snow. The white stuff does occasionally fall and Santa Claus (*shèngdàn lǎorén*; 圣诞老人) can be seen around town. Christmas is celebrated more by expats and young Chinese, rather than by more elderly locals. Christmas services can be attended at churches in town. 'Merry Christmas' in Chinese is *shèngdàn kuàilè!* (圣诞快乐!).

COSTS & MONEY

Shànghǎi is one of China's most expensive cities and you can quickly wind up paying much the same as in the West, if not more.

Accommodation will be your greatest expense, with prices ranging from around Y50 for a dorm bed to over Y2000 a night in the best five-star hotels (although discounting in midrange and top-end hotels is standard so always ask for the discounted rate).

Local Chinese restaurants offer fantastic value if you can decipher a Chinese menu. The city's set-lunch specials or department-store food courts also offer excellent value, where one person can dine for around Y25. Meals at more expensive restaurants will cost anywhere from Y50 to Y400; aim for set meals rather than dining à la carte. Check the bill carefully; there's no need to leave a tip if service is included.

Cafés and bars are expensive so expect to pay up to Y40 for a coffee or Y30 for the smallest of beers.

Travelling by metro and bus can keep transport costs down, while taxis are plentiful and inexpensive for short hops.

Be alert to scams (p249), or your holiday costs could start soaring.

INTERNET RESOURCES

City Weekend (www.cityweekend.com.cn/shanghai/)

Comprehensive listings website.

CTrip (www.english.ctrip.com) Discounted hotels and ticketing.

Expat Shanghai (www.expats.com) OK intro to Shànghǎi.

Learn Chinese with the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk/languages/chinese/) A very useful introduction to learning Mandarin Chinese, with video.

HOW MUCH?

Short hop metro ticket Y3

Meal in a local Chinese restaurant Y20

Meal in a top-end international restaurant Y200 and above, plus drinks

0.5L bottle of mineral water from corner shop Y2

Bottle of local beer from corner shop Y3

Bottle of local beer in bar Y30

Local map from hawkler Y5

Cricket in a cage from a wayside peddler Y5

Large lamb kebab Y2

Litre of petrol Y4.9

Shanghai Expat (www.shanghaiexpat.com) All the facts at your fingertips from employment to language study and events, plus a resourceful forum (weekly Sunday brunch held to rub shoulders with expats).

Shanghai Guide (www.shanghaiguide.com) Good collection of links, though info is patchy.

Shanghaiist (www.shanghaiist.com) News, gossip, blogs, forum.

Smart Shanghai (www.smartshanghai.com) Events, listings, forum.

Tales of Old China (www.talesofoldchina.com) Lots of reading on Old Shànghǎi, with the text of hard-to-find books online.

SUSTAINABLE SHÀNGHǎI

Environmental degradation in Shànghǎi is a natural consequence of rapid industrialisation and the ongoing construction boom; ecological awareness remains embryonic. There is little visitors can do to mitigate this, but a few measures exist where visitors can make a contribution. Avoid eating the Chinese sturgeon, the Yangtze crocodile or other endangered animals that may be dished up to impress. Shark's fin soup should also be avoided, if it's genuine. Try to invest in a pair of your own chopsticks (to protect the forests of bamboo that are felled to make disposable chopsticks) and consider hiring a bicycle to get about town.

THE AUTHORS

Damian Harper



Captivated by Taoist martial arts, Damian first reached China via a degree in Chinese at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Since graduation he has worked for several years in Shànghǎi, shacked up in a

Běijīng *sihéyuàn* (courtyard house), reached the Tàì Shān summit three times, grappled with the Cantonese dialect in Hong Kong, and experienced the best and worst of China's hotels while cultivating a formidable tolerance for long-distance bus journeys. Married with two children, Damian has contributed to over a dozen books for Lonely Planet, including *Shanghai, China, Beijing* and *Hong Kong*, and divides his time fitfully between Honor Oak Park in London and China.

David Eimer



When David made his first trip to China in 1988, he had no idea he would end up living and working there. After taking a law degree at University College London, he abandoned the idea of

becoming a barrister for a career as a freelance journalist. That took him from London to LA for five years, where he wrote for a variety of newspapers and magazines including the *London Sunday Times*, the *Mail on Sunday* and the *Guardian*.

Back in London, David began to be intrigued by the world's increasing focus on China. Returning there in 2002 for the first time in 14 years, he found a country that had changed almost beyond all recognition. He moved to Běijīng in early 2005 and now contributes to the *Sunday Telegraph* and *South China Morning Post*, among other publications.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Greg Elms

Greg Elms has been a contributor to Lonely Planet for over 15 years. Armed with a Bachelor of Arts in Photography, Greg was a photographer's assistant for two years before embarking on a travel odyssey. He eventually settled down to a freelance career in Melbourne, and now works regularly for magazines, graphic designers, advertising agencies and, of course, book publishers such as Lonely Planet.

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