

EXCURSIONS

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Ever since its development as a concession city, Shànghǎi has been an amalgam of different peoples and ideas, and a driving force behind China's steps towards modernisation. Shànghǎi certainly has its own unique tale to tell, but within range of town are other enthralling destinations offering a completely different take on China.

The easiest and most interesting places to get to for a day, a weekend or longer are scattered across the Yangzi River Delta. Traditionally known as Jiāngnán (江南; the land south of the river), this has always been one of China's most prosperous areas. The big centres of trade in dynastic history were Hángzhōu and Sūzhōu – the former being the southern terminus of the astonishing 7th-century engineering feat known as the Grand Canal (which at 1800km is still the longest canal in the world), linking the Yangzi and Yellow River basins.

Other options include the lovely canal towns – tiny whitewashed water villages that have remained pretty much unchanged over the centuries, many of which can be easily reached from Shànghǎi.

HÁNGZHŌU 杭州

Arriving by train, one's first instinct is to put Hángzhōu in the ever-handly 'Uniform Chinese City' category. The underwhelming suburban approach – past grim worker's flats and numbing ceramic-tile architecture – hardly prepares you however for Hángzhōu's gorgeous West Lake and its fabulous, green environs.

The Chinese tourist brochure hyperbole surrounding West Lake is – perhaps for the very first time – almost justified in its shrill accolades. The very definition of classical beauty in China, West Lake continues to mesmerise while methodical prettification over the past decade has worked its cunning magic. Hazy hills rise above the willow-lined banks, forming crinkled silhouettes punctuated by solitary pagodas, while tiny boats float lazily by. The landscapes are quintessentially Chinese, and there's more than enough walking, cycling and (take a deep breath) green spaces to keep everyone leisurely occupied. You'll need about three days to fully savour what's on view but the inclination is to take root – like one of the lilting West Lake willows – and stay put.

A caveat: Hángzhōu is the country's most famous tourist attraction. Drones descend from all over China to digitally capture West

Lake – especially on holidays (boxed text, p242) and weekends – resulting in a blight of overpriced, fully booked hotels and chattering tour groups. But don't despair, the West Lake area is (just about) large enough to absorb the tourist swell and still leave pockets of tranquillity and unspoiled beauty.

Hángzhōu has been in existence since at least the start of the Qin dynasty (221 BC). When Marco Polo passed through Hángzhōu in the 13th century he described it as one of the finest and most splendid cities in the world. Calling the city Kinsai, the Italian traveller noted in amazement that Hángzhōu had a circumference of 100 miles while its waters were vaulted by 12,000 bridges.

Other eminent ancient travellers also visited the city – such as Odoric of Pordenone, who referred to it as Camsay – and returned with tales of its majesty. Although Hángzhōu prospered greatly after it was linked with the Grand Canal in 610 (the canal ferried the region's grain and silk tribute up to Běijīng), it really came into its own after the Song dynasty (based at Kāifēng) was overthrown by the invading Jurchen in 1126. The Song court fled south and finally settled in Hángzhōu, establishing it as the capital of the Southern Song dynasty. Hángzhōu's population of Chinese Jews probably fled here at the same time from Kāifēng, the historic seat of the Israelites in China.

China had experienced an economic revolution in the preceding years, yielding huge and prosperous cities, an advanced economy and flourishing interregional trade. With the Jurchen invasion, the centre of this revolution was pushed south from the Yellow River valley



USEFUL WEBSITES

Hángzhōu www.hangzhou.com.cn/english,
www.gotohz.com

Sūzhōu www.visitzs.com/webpage_en/

to the lower Yangzi valley and to the coast between the Yangzi River and Guǎngzhōu.

While the north of China remained firmly in the hands of the invaders, Hángzhōu, in the south, became the central hub of the Chinese state. The court, civil officials, artists and merchants all congregated in Hángzhōu, where the population rose from half a million to around 1.75 million by 1275. The city's burgeoning population and its proximity to the ocean promoted the growth of river and sea trade, ship building and other naval industries, although it was downgraded from capital when the Mongols conquered China. Hángzhōu's wooden buildings made fire a perennial hazard; among major conflagrations, the great fire of 1237 reduced some 30,000 residences to piles of smoking carbon.

With 10 city gates by Ming times, Hángzhōu took a hammering during the Taiping Rebellion. In 1861 the Taiping laid siege to the city and captured it, but two years later the imperial armies reclaimed it. These campaigns left almost the entire city in ashes, led to the deaths of more than half a million of its residents through disease, starvation and warfare, and finally ended Hángzhōu's significance as a commercial and trading centre.

Few monuments survived the devastation, and most of those that did became victims of the Red Guards, 100 years later during the destructive Cultural Revolution. Much of what may be seen in Hángzhōu today is of fairly recent construction.

Hángzhōu grants free admission to all of its museums and gardens. All other sights

offer half-price tickets for children from 1m to 1.3m, and free entry for the wee ones shorter than 1m.

West Lake 西湖

There are 36 lakes in China called West Lake (Xī Hú), but this is *the* West Lake that all others are christened after. Resembling a super-sized Kunming Lake from Běijīng's Summer Palace and originally a lagoon adjoining the Qiantang River, the lake didn't come into existence until the 8th century, when the governor of Hángzhōu had the marshy expanse dredged. As time passed, the lake's splendour was gradually cultivated: gardens were planted, pagodas were built, and causeways and islands were constructed from dredged silt. The poet Su Dongpo famously personified West Lake as a young woman whose beauty was enhanced by her elegant dress.

Su himself had a hand in the lake's development, constructing the **Su Causeway** (苏堤; Sūdī) during his tenure as local governor in the 11th century. It wasn't an original idea – the poet-governor Bai Juji had already constructed the **Bai Causeway** (白堤; Báidī) some 200 years earlier. Lined by willow, plum and peach trees, today the traffic-free causeways with their half-moon bridges make for excellent outings, particularly on a bike.

Since none of the sights around the lake are a must see, the best way to tour is to take off in one direction and stop at places when the fancy strikes you. Dawn and dusk are particularly good times to visit, especially when the lake is covered in mist.

Connected to West Lake's northern shores by the Bai Causeway is **Gushan Island** (孤山; Gū Shān), the lake's largest island. It's the site of the **Zhejiang Provincial Museum** (Zhèjiāng Shěng Bówùguǎn; 25 Gushan Lu; 孤山路25号; admission free, audio guide Y10; ☎ 9am–4pm Tue–Sun, noon–4pm Mon), which introduces visitors to the region's prehistory and history; **Zhongshan Park** (Zhōngshān Gōngyuán) and the intriguing **Seal Engravers' Society** (Xiling Yīnshè), dedicated to the ancient art of carving the name seals (called chops) that serve as personal signatures; and the **Louwailou Restaurant** (楼外楼餐馆; Lóuwàilóu Cǎiguǎn), Hángzhōu's famous, tourist-frequented restaurant.

In the northwest is the lovely **Quyuan Garden** (Qūyuán Fēnghé), a collection of gardens spread out over numerous islets and renowned for its fragrant spring lotus blossoms.

Across from the entrance to the 3km-long Su Causeway is the **Mausoleum of General Yue Fei** (Yuè

Miào; Beishan Lu; admission Y25; ☎ 7am–6pm), bounded by a redbrick wall and dedicated to General Yue Fei (1103–41). Commander of the Song armies, Yue Fei was executed after being deceived by Qin Hui, a treacherous court official. More than 20 years later, Song emperor Gao Zong exonerated Yue Fei and had his corpse reburied at the present site.

At the other end of the Su Causeway is **Red Carp Pond** (Huágāng Guānyū), another collection of gardens on the southern shore that is home to a few thousand red carp. East along the shore is the eye-catching and recently re-built **Leifeng Pagoda** (Léifēng Tǎ, Thunder Peak Pagoda; admission Y40; ☎ 7.30am–9pm 15 Mar–15 Nov, 8am–5.30pm 16 Nov–14 Mar). Topped with a golden spire, it's climbable for fine views of the lake. The original pagoda, built in 977, collapsed in 1924. Set against the hillside across the road is the peaceful **Jingci Zen Monastery** (Jīngcǐ Sì; Nanshan Lu; 南山路; admission Y10; ☎ 6am–5.30pm); check out the vast effigy of Sakyamuni in the main hall and the magnificent 1000-arm statue of Guanyin (Buddhist goddess) in the Guanyin Hall (观音殿; Guānyīn Diàn).

On the eastern shore is the impressive **Chinese Academy of Art** building, with several galleries and bars nearby, as well as **Xihū Tiāndì**, West Lake's own lovingly cultivated Xintiāndì (p.78).

WALKS

West Lake is littered with fine walks – just follow the views. For a splendid trek into the hills above the lake, however, take Xixialing Lu (栖霞岭路; also called Qixialing Lu) immediately west of the Mausoleum of General Yue Fei (left). Stone map inscriptions can help you find the way if you get lost, but they are only in Chinese, so refer to the characters given here. The road initially runs past the west wall of the temple and then enters the shade of towering trees, with stone steps leading you up. At **Ziyun Cave** (Ziyún Dòng) the road forks; take the right-hand fork in the direction of the Baopu Taoist Temple, 1km distant, and the Baochu Pagoda. At the top of the steps turn left and passing the **Sunrise Terrace** (Chūyáng Tái), again bear left. Down the steps, look out for the roofs and yellow walls of the **Baopu Taoist Temple** (Bāopǔ Dàoyuán; admission Y5; ☎ 6am–5pm) below you to your right; head right along a path to reach it. With its newspaper-reading nuns, the temple's first hall contains a statue of Guanyin in front of a *yinyang* diagram; an effigy of Gehong (葛洪) – who once smelted cinnabar here – resides in the next hall, behind a fabulously carved altar decorated with figures. Return the way

TRANSPORT: HÁNGZHŌU

Distance from Shànghǎi 170km

Direction Southwest

Bus Deluxe buses leave frequently for Hángzhōu's east bus station (Y55, 2½ hours) from Shànghǎi's Hengfeng Rd bus station (Map pp98–9), the Shanghai South bus station and the main long-distance bus station north of Shanghai Train Station (Map pp98–9). Buses (Y85, two hours) to Hángzhōu also run every 30 minutes between 10am and 9pm from the Hongqiao airport long-distance bus station. Regular buses (Y100, three hours) also run to Hángzhōu from the long-distance bus station at Pudong International Airport.

Train Seven express trains (Y40, one hour 18 minutes) run daily to Hángzhōu from Shànghǎi's sleek and modern Shanghai South Train Station (Shànghǎi Nánzhàn; Map pp58–9). Trains leave at 7.50am, 9.30am, 11.45am, 1.07pm, 4.40pm, 7.03pm and 8.01pm. The last train back to Shanghai South Train Station is at 8.41pm. At weekends and holidays, be sure to buy your tickets (including return) as early as possible as they sell out quickly; counter three at Hángzhōu train station ticket office (售票处) is bilingual(-ish).

Getting Around

Airport Bus Services (Y15, one hour) run every 15 minutes from 5.30am to 8pm from the CAAC office in town to Hángzhōu airport, or take a taxi (Y100).

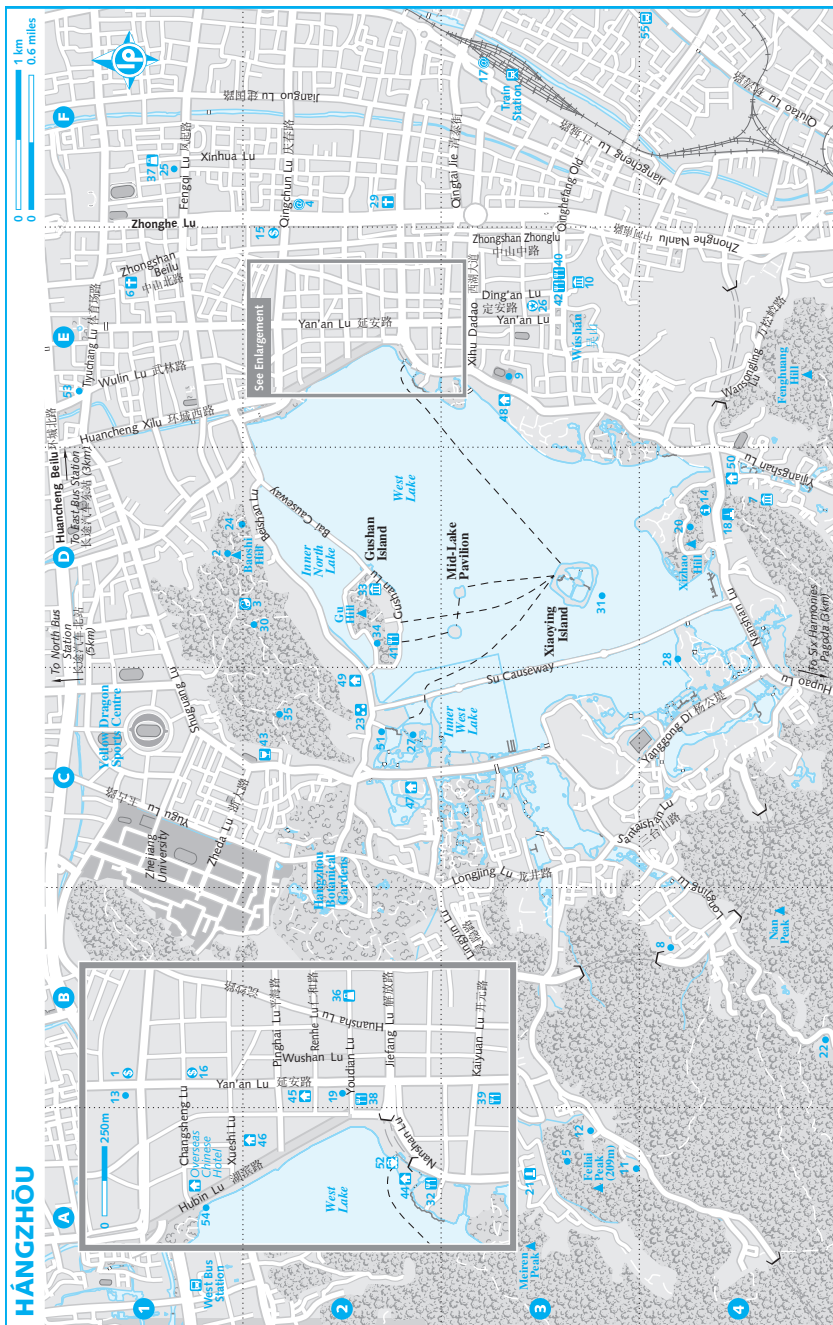
Bicycle Cycling is the best way to get around and you'll be tripping over bike rental outfits around West Lake; prices can be steep (in the region of Y5 to Y10 per hour), so also ask at youth hostels. Ming Town Youth Hostel (p.215) rents one-gear mountain bikes (Y15 for four hours, with a Y500 deposit).

Boat At the time of writing the night-time boat along the Grand Canal to Sūzhōu was no longer running. A water bus (Y5, Y3 after 4pm) runs boats every hour between 7am and 6pm between the wharfs at Gēnshān Mén (艮山门), Wúlin Mén (武林门), Xìnyì Fāng (信义坊) and Gōngchén Qiáo (拱宸桥).

Bus Routes prefixed by the letter 'K' are air-con. City Bus K7 connects the train station with the eastern side of the lake (Hubin Lu; 湖滨路) and Lingyin Temple. Bus 15 connects the north and west bus stations to the northwest area of West Lake. Bus 27 is useful for transport between the eastern (Pinghai Lu; 平海路) and western sides of the lake. Bus Y3 runs all the way from Yan'an Lu (延安路) and Qingchun Lu (庆春路) around Beishan Lu, down to Longjing village and through the hills south of the lake. Buses to Wūzhèn (Y25, 90 minutes) leave every half hour from the **east bus station** (Dōng Zhàn; 东站; ☎ 8604 3134) from 6.25am to 6.25pm. Bus 518 (Y2) links the train station and the east bus station.

Electric carts These run around the lake, including the Su Causeway, for around Y10 per trip, or Y40 all around the lake.

Taxi Taxis start at Y10 for the first 3km.



HANGZHŌU

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Baopu Taoist Temple 抱朴道院	3	D2	
Beibei Internet Café 贝贝网吧	4	F2	
Buddhist Carvings	5	A3	
Catholic Church 天主堂	6	E1	
China Silk Museum			
中国丝绸博物馆	7	D4	
China Tea Museum			
中国茶叶博物馆	8	B4	
Chinese Academy of Art			
中国美术学院	9	E3	
Chinese Medicine Museum			
中药博物馆	10	E3	
Fajing Temple 法净寺	11	A3	
Fajing Temple 法镜寺	12	A3	
Hangzhou City Construction Exhibition Hall			
杭州城市建设陈列馆	13	B1	
Hangzhou Tourist Information Center			
杭州旅游咨询服务中心	14	D4	
HSBC ATM 汇丰银行取款机	15	E2	
Industrial & Commercial			
Bank of China 工商银行	16	B1	
Internet Cafés 网吧	17	F3	
Jingci Zen Monastery 净慈寺	18	D4	
Kodak Express 柯达	19	B2	
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西泠印社	(see 41)		
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Mingtong Garden Youth Hostel 明堂杭州国际青年旅舍	47	C2	
Mingtong Youth Hostel 明堂杭州国际青年旅舍	48	E3	
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you came to continue east along the previous path to the **Baochu Pagoda** (Bǎochù Tǎ) and after hitting a confluence of three paths, take the middle track. Squeeze between a gap between some huge boulders and you will see the Baochu Pagoda rising up ahead. Restored many times, the seven-storey brick pagoda was last rebuilt in 1933, although its spire tumbled off in the 1990s. Continue on down and you will pass through a **páilóu** (牌楼) – or decorative arch – erected during the Republic (with some of its characters scratched off) to a series of cliffside **Ming dynasty effigies**, all of which were vandalised in the tumultuous 1960s, apart from two effigies on the right which were left untouched. Bear right and head down to Beishan Lu (北山路), emerging from Baochutaqianshan Lu (保俶塔前山路).

BOAT TRIPS

While not particularly romantic, the **cruise boats** (游船; Yóuchuán; 1½hr; adult/child incl entry to Three Pools Y45/22.5; ☎ 7am-4.45pm) are practical, shuttling every 20 minutes from four points (Hubin Park, Red Carp Pond, Zhongsan Park and the Mausoleum of General Yue Fei) to the **Mid-Lake Pavilion** (湖心亭; Húxīn Tíng) and **Xiaoying Island** (小瀛洲; Xiǎoyīng Zhōu), which has a fine central pavilion and ‘nine-turn’ causeway. From the

island you can look over to the **Three Pools Mirroring the Moon** (Sántǎn Yīnyuè), a string of three small towers in the water, each of which has five holes that release shafts of candlelight on the night of the moon cake festival in mid-autumn.

If you want to contemplate the moon at a slower pace, hire one of the six-person boats rowed by a boatman (小船; xiǎo chuán; Y80 per person or Y160 per boat). Look for them across from the Overseas Chinese Hotel or along the causeways. For a more invigorating workout, try the paddle boats (Y15 per 30 minutes, Y200 deposit) on the Bai Causeway.

Lingyin Temple 灵隐寺

Lingyin Temple (Língyīn Sì; Língyīn Lù; 灵隐路; grounds Y35, grounds & temple Y65; ☎ 7am-5pm; bus K7 from Beishan Lu, or bus Y1 or Y2 from Nanshan Lu) is Hángzhōu’s principle Buddhist temple. It was built in 326, and due to war and other calamities it has been destroyed and restored no fewer than 16 times.

The walk up to the temple skirts the flanks of **Feilai Peak** (飞来峰; Fēilái Fēng; Peak Flying from Afar; admission Y35), magically transported here from India, according to myth. The real highlights here, though, are the **Buddhist carvings** lining the riverbanks and hillsides – all 470 of them, dating from the 10th to 14th centuries. To get

BIKE TOURS

There are numerous possibilities for cycling around Hángzhōu. This circuit loops through the forested hills south of West Lake and takes a half-day minimum; however you could easily stretch it into a longer trip by stopping at the sights along the way. It's by no means the Tour de China, however it does cross over one pass and covers approximately 10km, so be prepared. Bring plenty of water and a *Hangzhou Travel Guide* trail map (available at the train station and most hotels).

Begin by heading south from the lake on Longjing Lu (龙井路). It's a gradual ascent into the hills, past the China Tea Museum (below) and fields of tea plantations. From here the grade becomes significantly steeper. When you approach Lóngjǐng village (龙井村), the road will fork; put in the extra effort, go left and keep on heading up the mountain on Manjiaolong Lu (满觉陇路) – an easier route is to go right up to Lóngjǐng village and over a lower pass down Jiuxi Lu (九溪路).

Skip the tacky tea park, which is just below the pass. Once you've cleared the pass, you'll coast through a small tea village (翁家山; Wēngjiāshān). Enjoy the downhill into the forest, but don't go too fast, or you'll miss the turnout for Yángméiling (杨梅岭), a tiny road on your right. This leads down through another village and out onto the forest floor, following a small stream past Lǐ'ān Temple (理安寺; Lǐ'ān Sì).

Not far after this is Nine Creeks Park (九溪烟树; Jiǔxī Yānshù; admission Y2), with a lovely little pool fed by a waterfall (if you came from Lóngjǐng village, this is where you'll end up). From here you'll be wending your way through scenic countryside, until you reach Jiǔxī village (九溪村) at the highway. There are two restaurants and a convenience store in Jiǔxī.

Turn left on the highway, and follow Qiantang River until you reach Six Harmonies Pagoda (below). Fork left, go under the bridge, and head north on Hupao Lu (虎跑路), from where it's a reasonably easy ride all the way back to the lake.

a close-up view of the best carvings, including the famous 'laughing' Maitreya Buddha, follow the paths along the far (east) side of the stream. Nearby are two similarly named temples, Fajing Temple (法镜寺; Fǎjǐng Sì) and Fajing Temple (法净寺; Fǎjìng Sì).

The main temple buildings are restorations of Qing dynasty structures. The Great Hall envelops a magnificent 20m-high statue of Siddhartha Gautama (the historical Buddha), sculpted from 24 blocks of camphor wood in 1956. Behind the giant statue is a startling montage of 150 small figures, which charts the journey of 53 children on the road to buddhahood.

Behind the Lingyin Temple is North Peak (北高峰; Běi Gāofēng), which can be scaled via a cable car (suǒdào; up/return Y30/Y40) or on foot. From the summit are sweeping views across the lake and city.

South of West Lake

The hills south of West Lake are Hángzhōu's most undeveloped area and are a prime spot for walkers, cyclists and green tea connoisseurs. Not far into the hills, you'll begin to see fields of tea bushes planted in undulating rows, the setting for the China Tea Museum (Zhōngguó Cháyè Bówùguǎn; Longjing Lu; 龙井路; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm; bus Y3 or 27 from Beishan Lu) – 3.7 hectares of land dedicated to the art, cultivation and tasting

of tea. Further up are several tea-producing villages, all of which harvest China's most famous variety of green tea, *lóngjǐng chá* (龙井茶; dragon well). Longjing Tea Village (龙井问茶; Lóngjǐng Wènchá) itself is up near the first pass. Everyone will want to sell you some tea, but if you do buy some, do it for the novelty, because prices aren't cheap. Bus 27 runs to the village from Beishan Lu.

Three kilometres southwest of the lake stands an enormous rail-and-road bridge, which spans Qiantang River. Close by is the 60m-high octagonal Six Harmonies Pagoda (六和塔; Liùhé Tǎ; 16 Zhijiang Lu; 之江路16号; grounds Y20, grounds & pagoda Y30; ☎ 6am-5.30pm; bus 504 or K4 from Nanshan Lu), first built in 960 and named after the six codes of Buddhism. The pagoda also served as a lighthouse, and was supposed to have magical power to halt the 20ft-high tidal bore which thunders up Qiantang River in mid-September every year. Behind the pagoda stretches a charming walk, through terraces dotted with sculptures, bells, shrines and inscriptions. Serious hikers can also do a number of long walks from here – the *Hangzhou Travel Guide* pamphlet (available at the train station and most hotels) has a sketchy trail map inside; take food and water.

Just south of the lake, the China Silk Museum (Zhōngguó Síchóu Bówùguǎn; ☎ 8706 2079; 73-1 Yuhuan-

shan Lu; 玉皇山路73-1号; audio guide deposit Y100; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm; bus 12 or Y3) has good displays of silk samples, and explains the history and processes of silk production.

Qinghefang Old Street

清河坊历史文化街

Qinghefang Old Street (Qinghéfāng Lìshǐ Wénhuà Jiē) is a fun and fascinating take on old Hángzhōu. Join the swarms enjoying the souvenir stalls, tea houses and makeshift puppet theatres, chomp on a chewy Southern Song Dingsheng Cake (南宋定胜糕; Nán-sòng Dìngshèng Gāo; Y1.5) or a Chinese burrito (鬼菜煎饼; Guǐcài Jiānbǐng; Y3), pick up a hand-carved stone teapot (Y29) or a box of Dragon Whiskers Sweets (龙须糖; Lóngxū táng; Y10 a box), try your hand at a Song-era coconut shy (Y10 for ten throws) or pose for a photo next to the statue of the podgy laughing Buddha, covered in effigies of cavorting children. There are several pungent traditional Chinese medicine shops on the side streets. One, Húqīngyú Táng (胡庆余堂; since 1874), is home to the Chinese

Medicine Museum (Zhōngyào Bówùguǎn; 95 Dajing Xiang 大井巷95号; admission Y10; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm).

Other Sights

Hidden away behind sheet metal gates, the blue-and-white Catholic Church (Tiānzhǔ Táng; 415 Zhongshan Beilu; 中山北路415号) is a magnificent building, with a compassionate effigy of Mary above the door. Knock on the door for admission and the gatekeeper will probably let you in. Built by the Chinese, the brick Protestant Si-Cheng Church (Sìchéng Táng; 132 Jiefang Lu; 解放路132号) is a more Chinese-style church, with a loyal and amiable congregation; if it looks shut, try the entrance along Jueyuansi Alley (觉苑寺巷) down the east side of the church. Located within the former Zhejiang Superior Court building (also called the Red Building, or Hóng Lóu; 红楼), Hangzhou City Construction Exhibition Hall (Hángzhōu Chéngshì Jiànshè Chénlìguǎn; 258 Qingchun Lu; 庆春路258号; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) has exhibits that are sadly all in Chinese but the photos of the city of yore are interesting. The highlight is the redbrick building itself, dating from 1930.

CITY SIGHTSEEING BUSES

Convenient, comfortable and punctual green buses from the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Centre (Map p126; Shànghǎi Lǚyóu Jìsàn Zhōngxīn; ☎ 6426 5555; Gate 5, 666 Tianyaqiao Lu; 天钥桥路666号) at the east end of Shanghai Stadium shuttle tourists to the small canal towns listed in this chapter. Similar, less comprehensive terminals can be found at Hongkou Stadium (Map p104; ☎ 5696 3248; 444 East Jiangwan Rd; 东江湾路444号), Yangpu Stadium (Map pp58–9; ☎ 6580 3210; 640 Longchang Rd; 隆昌路640号), at the Shanghai South Long-Distance Bus Station (Map pp58–9; ☎ 5436 3617; 666 Shilong Rd 石龙路666号) and the Shanghai Long-Distance Bus Station (Map pp98–9; ☎ 5697 2850; 1666 Zhongxing Rd 中兴路1666号).

Day Tripping

The following are round-trip tickets that include entry fees (套票; tàopiào). Otherwise, Lúzhí, Mùdú, Tónglǐ and Nánxún can be easily reached by bus from Sūzhōu.

Lúzhí (2hr; Y100) Buses leave Saturdays and Sundays at 9am, returning at 4pm.

Mōgānshān (3hr; Y268) Overnight trips leave Saturday at 6.30am, July and August only. Ticket includes three-star accommodation, but not the entry fee (Y75) or meals.

Mùdú (2hr; Y120) Buses leave every other Saturday at 8.15am.

Nánxún (3hr; Y110) Buses depart daily at 8.40am, returning at 4pm.

Tónglǐ (1¼hr; Y120) Daily buses leave at 8.30am, returning at 4pm.

Wūzhèn (2hr; Y148) Buses leave daily at 8.45am and 9.30am, and return at 5pm.

Xítáng (2hr; Y120) Buses leave daily at 8.30am and 9am, returning at 4pm. The trip includes two stopovers to visit old houses in Píngghú and Jiāshān, in addition to lunch.

Zhōuzhuāng (1½hr; Y140) Regular buses from 7am to noon. The last bus returns at 5.30pm.

Zhūjiǎjiǎo (1hr; Y80) Buses depart every 30 minutes between 7.30am and 3pm. Last bus returns at 5.30pm.

INFORMATION

Loads of 2nd-floor internet cafés (网吧) can be found around the train station.

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; 320 Yan'an Lu; 延安路320号; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Beibei Internet Café (Bèibèi Wǎngbā; 2nd fl, 151 Qingchun Lu; 庆春路151号; per hr ¥4; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎ 8666 8666; 390 Tiyuchang Lu; 体育场路390号; ☎ 7.30am-8pm)

Hangzhou Tourist Information Center (Hángzhōu Lǚyóu Zhōngxīn Fúwù Zhōngxīn) At the train station, near Leifeng Pagoda and other locations.

HSBC (Huìfēng Yínháng; cnr Qingchun Lu & Zhonghe Lu; 庆春路、中河路交叉口) A 24-hour ATM.

Industrial & Commercial Bank of China (Gōngshāng Yínháng; 300 Yan'an Lu; 延安路300号) A 24-hour ATM taking foreign cards.

PSB (Gōng'ānjū; ☎ 8728 0600; 35 Huaguang Lu; 华光路35号; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Can extend visas.

SHOPPING

Qinghefang Old Street (清河坊历史文化街) offers bundles of souvenir and gift possibilities from Chinese tiger pillows to Taichi swords; see p213. Relocated to Huixing Lu (惠兴路) between Youdian Lu (邮电路) and Renhe Lu (仁和路), the bustling evening street market **Wushan Lu Night Market** (Wúshān Lù Yèshì) is excellent for souvenir shopping.

Xinhua Lu Silk Market (Sìchóu Shìchǎng; ☎ 8am-5pm) A string of silk shops strung out along the north of Xinhua Lu (新华路); check out the **Ming Dynasty Residence** (明宅; Míng Zhái) at 227 Xinhua Lu, now a silk emporium.

HÁNGZHŌU CUISINE

Part of the so-called 'Eastern School', Hángzhōu cuisine is sometimes described as southern food cooked in a northern style and has noticeably less oil than Shanghainese cuisine. There's a predominance of fish, shrimp and green vegetables, in fresh and subtle sauces. Longjing shrimp (龙井虾仁; *lóngjǐng xiārén*) are soaked with Hángzhōu's famous *lóngjǐng* tea. *Xīhú chúncai tāng* (西湖纯菜汤; West Lake soup) is made with water shield, a green plant that grows in the West Lake. *Xīhú tángcú yú* (西湖糖醋鱼; sweet-and-sour West Lake fish) is another popular dish.

Look out for *Dōngpō ròu* (东坡肉; pork slices), named after the Song dynasty poet Su Dongpo. Flavoured with Shàoxīng wine, and cooked and served in a pot, the pork is often quite fatty.

Another local delicacy, apparently a firm favourite with Emperor Qianlong, is *shāgōuyú tóu dòufu* (沙锅鱼头豆腐; earth-ware pot fish-head tofu).

Jiāohuājī (叫花鸡; beggar's chicken) was supposedly created by a pauper who stole a chicken but had no pot to cook it in. So he plucked it, covered it with clay and put it on the fire. These days, the bird is stuffed with mushrooms, pickled Chinese cabbage, herbs and onions, wrapped in lotus leaves, sealed in clay and baked all day in hot ashes, ending up deliciously crispy.

EATING & DRINKING

The top restaurant strip in town is Gaoyin Jie, parallel to Qinghefang Old Street. For a rundown on Hángzhōu cuisine see the boxed text, below. For drinking, Shuguang Lu (曙光路) is the place; a brash clutch of lesser bars also operates opposite the Chinese Academy of Art on Nanshan Lu (南山路). For a comprehensive list of Hángzhōu bars and restaurants, grab a copy of *More – Hangzhou Entertainment Guide* (www.morehangzhou.com) available from bars and concierge desks at good hotels.

Ajisen (Wèiqiān Lāmìàn; 10 Hubin Lu; 湖滨路10号; dishes ¥20-30; ☎ 10am-11pm) The reading is high on the chilli-ometer for Ajisen's scrummy noodles, so those with ulcerous constitutions should avoid the (gorgeous) *wèiqiān málà lāmìàn* (味千麻辣拉面) but everyone else, dive in. Ajisen's photo menu makes ordering a breeze; there's free tea and busy, efficient staff. Pay up front.

Gongdelin Vegetarian Restaurant (111 Gaoyin Jie; 高银街111号; mains ¥35-50; ☎ 9.30am-2.30pm & 5-9pm) Buddhist-inspired veggie cuisine with a mock-meat focus at this famous Shànghǎi eatery sibling. Fool your tastebuds with the lamb kebabs (羊肉串; ¥24) or the sizzling beef platter (铁板牛肉; *tiěbǎn niúròu*; ¥24).

Xiǎo Shàoxīng Jiūjiā (131 Gaoyin Jie; 高银街131号; mains ¥50) A local favourite on Gaoyin Jie, serving Shàoxīng and Hángzhōu specialities. The claypot chicken simmered with pork, lotus leaves and rice wine (*shēnxiān jī*; ¥48) is so good you'll wind up gnawing on the neck when there's nothing left in the pot.

Xīhú Tiāndì (147 Nanshan Lu; 南山路147号) A leafy version of Xintiandi on West Lake with smart cafés and restaurants.

Carrefour (Jiālèfú; 135 Yan'an Lu; 延安路135号; ☎ 9am-9pm) The place for picnic supplies.

Reggae Bar (Hèigēn Jiūbā; 95 Shuguang Lu; 曙光路95号; beer ¥20; ☎ 4pm-3am) Frequently packed-out watering hole popular with expats and overseen by friendly and loquacious bar staff; good-value Carlsberg and more than just reggae.

SLEEPING

If you don't stay in a hotel within walking distance of the lake, you'll be kicking yourself afterwards. Most hotels offer considerable discounts throughout the year, particularly the Shangri-La and the Grand Hyatt (up to 40%). Keep an eye out for 住宿 and 客房 signs (meaning 'rooms'), which identify cheap guesthouses. If calling ahead to book, note that the area code for Hángzhōu is 0571.

Grand Hyatt Regency (Hángzhōu Kāiyuè Jiūdiàn; ☎ 8779 1234; www.hangzhou.regency.hyatt.com; 28 Hubin Lu; 湖滨路28号; s/d ¥1600/1600, garden view s/d ¥1850/1850, lake view s/d ¥2050/2050) Five-star accommodation with a pool and spa makes the Hyatt the eastern shore's luxury pick.

Shangri-La (Hángzhōu Xiānggélǐlǎ Fāndiàn; ☎ 8797 7951; www.shangri-la.com; 78 Beishan Lu; 北山路78号; d ¥1650, with lake-view ¥2500) Hángzhōu's most refined and romantic hotel, amid spacious forested grounds on the northern lakeshore. View rooms first, as quality varies.

Dahua Hotel (Dàhuá Fāndiàn; ☎ 8718 1888; 171 Nanshan Lu; 南山路171号; d ¥780, with view ¥980) Overpriced, but with a choice location on the lake and recent renovations.

Dongpo Hotel (Dōngpō Bīnguǎn; ☎ 8706 9769; 52 Renhe Lu; 仁和路52号; s ¥280, d ¥300-420) This is a clean, no-frills, midrange choice; chase discounts.

West Lake Youth Hostel (Hángzhōu Guòkè Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 8702 7027; www.westlakehostel.com; 62-3 Nanshan Lu; 南山路62-3号; dm ¥45-50, d ¥180-200, discounts for members) South of the action with pleasant rooms and comfy lounge area hung with lanterns; bike hire (¥40 per day) and internet (¥4 per hour). Book ahead.

Mingtown Youth Hostel (Míngtáng Hángzhōu Guóji Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 8791 8948; 101-11 Nanshan Lu; dm ¥40-50, d ¥120-280) Enjoy a central, lake-side location. If it's full, they can direct you to one of their two alternate hostels, such as the **Mingtown Garden Youth Hostel** (☎ 8797 5883; 4 Zhaogongdi; 赵公堤4号) in town. You will need to reserve ahead.

SÜZHŌU 苏州

Surrounded by factories and hi-tech parks and displaying a flair for the white-tile, uniform architecture that robs most Chinese towns of any individuality, Sūzhōu is marketed as a *tiāntáng* (天堂) – literally 'paradise' – by an advertising machine running at full throttle. Unless you have a serious hankering for Chinese gardens, the stupendous over-hype can stun expectations. While sporadic examples of canal-side charm and its famed gardens reward exploration, Sūzhōu's high tourist profile guarantees a constant barrage of visitors. But coming to Sūzhōu can at least put you within reach of a band of lovely canal towns (p220): Mùdú, Tóngli, Lùzhí and Nánxún.

Dating back some 2500 years, Sūzhōu is one of the oldest towns in the Yangzi Basin. With the completion of the Grand Canal in the Sui dynasty, Sūzhōu found itself strategically located on a major trading route, and the city's fortunes and size grew rapidly.

Sūzhōu flourished as a centre of shipping and grain storage, bustling with merchants and artisans. By the 12th century the town had attained its present dimensions. The city walls, a rectangle enclosed by moats, were pierced by six gates (north, south, two in the east and two in the west). Crisscrossing the city were six canals running north to south and 14 canals running east to west. Although the walls have largely disappeared and a fair proportion of the canals have been plugged, central Sūzhōu retains some of its 'Renaissance' character.

Marco Polo arrived in 1276 to describe the town as having '1600 stone bridges under which a galley may pass'. By the 14th century, Sūzhōu had established itself as China's leading silk-producing city. Aristocrats, pleasure-seekers, famous scholars, actors and painters were drawn to the place, constructing villas and garden retreats for themselves as they came.

At the height of Sūzhōu's development in the 16th century, the gardens, large and small, numbered over 100. The town's winning tourist formula was created from its medieval mix of woodblock guilds and embroidery societies, whitewashed housing, cobbled streets, tree-lined avenues and canals.

In 1860 Taiping troops took the town without a blow, and in 1896 Sūzhōu was opened to foreign trade, with Japanese and other international concessions. For one reason or



SÜZHŌU

SIGHTS & INFORMATION (p217)

Bank of China 中国银行	1	C2
Blue Wave Pavilion 沧浪亭	2	C4
Canal Tour Boats 游船	3	C2
China Telecom 中国电信	4	C3
Confucius Temple 文庙	5	C4
Garden for Lingerin In 留园	6	A2
Garden of Harmony 怡园	7	C3
Garden of the Master of the Nets 网师园	8	D3
Humble Administrator's Garden 拙政园	9	C1
Kunqu Opera Museum 昆曲博物馆	10	D2
Lianhe Ticket Centre 联合售票处	11	C2
Lions' Grove 狮子林	12	C2
North Temple 北寺塔	13	C2
Pan Gate 盘门	14	C4
Pingtan Museum 评弹博物馆	(see 10)	

Post Office 中国邮政	15	C2
PSB 公安局	16	C3
Qixing Internet Café 七星网吧	17	C2
Ruiguang Pagoda 瑞光塔	18	C4
Suzhou Museum 苏州博物馆	19	C1
Suzhou Silk Museum 苏州丝绸博物馆	20	C2
Temple of Mystery 玄妙观	21	C2
West Garden Temple 西园寺	22	A2

EATING 吃 (p219)		
Ajisen 味千拉面	23	C3
Déyuèlǒu 得月楼	24	C2
Yakexi 亚克西酒楼	25	C3
Yang Yang Dumpling House 洋洋水饺馆	26	D3

SHOPPING 买 (p219)		
Dongwu Silk Shop 东吴丝绸商店	27	C2

Shi Lu Night Market 石路夜市场	28	B2
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SLEEPING 住 (p219)

Home Inn 如家	29	C2
Nanlin Hotel 南林饭店	30	C3
Sheraton Suzhou 吴宫喜来登大酒店	31	C4
Suzhou Youth Hostel 苏州国际青年旅舍	32	D3

TRANSPORT 交通 (p217)

Local Buses 当地汽车	33	B1
North Bus Station 汽车北站	34	C1
Shuichéng Keyùn Bāshì Boat Tours 水城客运巴士	35	C4
Suzhou Tourism Distribution Centre (Buses to Tongli) 苏州旅游集散中心	(see 34)	
Train Ticket Office 火车票售票处	36	B1
Yanguan Bicycle Rental 租自行车店	37	C1

another, the city escaped relatively unscathed from the ravages of the Cultural Revolution.

Note that tickets gardens and museums usually stop selling tickets around 30 minutes before closing. Peak prices listed are applicable from March to early May and from September to October.

Gardens 园林

Süzhōu's gardens (see boxed text, p218) were generally small, private compounds attached to family residences. In principal they were designed to help achieve the intellectual ideal of balancing Confucian social duties (in the city) with Taoism's worldly retreat (in nature). Realistically speaking of course, the worldly retreats were probably inhabited just as much by servants and house-bound concubines as by kids who needed a place to blow off some steam after a morning spent memorizing the classics.

It's hard to avoid megaphone-touting tour groups – the best time to visit is either first thing in the morning or around lunchtime. If you need a break, the gardens all have tea-houses inside.

Originally laid out in the 12th century, the smallest garden of all, the **Garden of the Master of the Nets** (Wǎngshì Yuán; off-peak/peak Y20/30; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm) is also widely considered the best, with a striking use of space. Architecturally heavy – with residence halls, viewing pavilions and walkways – the garden relies on select landscape arrangements set against whitewashed walls, which are like the blank space of a Chi-

nese ink painting. An evening music show is staged (7.30pm, Y80), but performances are amateur at best.

In contrast to the Master of the Nets, the luxuriant five-hectare **Humble Administrator's Garden** (Zhūzhèng Yuán; 178 Dongbei Jie; 东北街178号; off-peak/peak Y50/70; audio guide free, deposit Y200; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm), dating to 1509, is large enough to be a park. There's also a bonsai (*pénjǐng*; potted landscape) garden and a small museum that explains Chinese gardening concepts.

Around the corner is the one-hectare **Lions' Grove** (Shìzì Lín; 23 Yuanlin Lu; 园林路23号; off-peak/peak Y20/30; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm), constructed in 1350 by the monk Tian Ru and famed for its rockeries.

A bit on the wild side, with winding creeks and corridors of bamboo, **Blue Wave Pavilion** (Cānglàng Tíng; off-peak/peak Y15/20; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm) is one of the oldest gardens in Süzhōu. The one-hectare garden creates an illusion of space by borrowing scenes from the outside, incorporating the adjacent canal and distant hills.

The three-hectare **Garden for Lingerin In** (Liú Yuán; off-peak/peak Y30/40; ☎ 7.30am-5pm), in the northwest of the city, dates from the Ming dynasty. Ornamental doorways and windows open onto wisteria-draped rockeries, ivy-covered tiled roofs and overgrown fairyland landscapes.

The small Qing dynasty and less visited **Garden of Harmony** (Yí Yuán; admission Y15; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm) has assimilated many of the features of older gardens and delicately blended them into a style of its own. The entrance is on Renmin Lu.

TRANSPORT: SÜZHŌU

Distance from Shànghǎi 100km

Direction West

Train Double-decker express trains run hourly from Shanghai train station to Süzhōu, from 5.38am to 8.20pm (39 minutes, Y15). There are plenty of trains back, but note: when returning make sure you don't accidentally get off at Shanghai West, the station before Shànghǎi proper.

Bus Services to Süzhōu (1½ to two hours, Y30) leave every half-hour (7.10am to 8pm) from Shànghǎi's Hengfeng Road Bus Station, and regularly from the Shanghai South Train Station. Most buses arrive and depart from Süzhōu's north bus station (☎ 6577 6577), east of the train station. City bus 1 runs the length of Renmin Lu. Regular buses (1½ hours, Y50) run to Süzhōu from Hongqiao airport's long-distance bus station between 10am and 9pm. Buses (Y82, three hours, 13 per day) also run to Süzhōu from the long-distance bus station at Pudong International Airport.

Boat At the time of writing, boats to Hángzhōu were no longer running. Travellers have recommended the evening boat trips (one hour 20 minutes, Y35) that tour the outer canal, departing at 6.30pm. Buy tickets from the Shuichéng Keyùn Bāshì office (☎ 6520 8484) across from the wharf near Renmin Bridge.

Bicycle The Yangyang bike rental (洋洋车行; Yángyáng Chēháng) outfit north of the Suzhou Silk Museum at 2067 Renmin Lu rents bikes for Y7 to Y10 per day.

GARDENS FOR LINGERING IN

Classical Chinese gardens can be hard to come to grips with: there are no lawns, few flowering plants, and misshapen, huge rocks are everywhere. Yet a stroll through one of Sūzhōu's gardens is a walk through many different facets of Chinese civilisation, and this is what makes them so unique. Architecture, philosophy, art and literature all converge, and a background in some basics of Chinese culture helps to fully appreciate garden design.

Mountains and rivers (山水; *shānshuǐ*; literally 'mountain-water') constitute a large part of China's geography, and are fundamental to Chinese life, philosophy, religion and art. The central part of any garden landscape is therefore a pond surrounded by rock formations.

This also reflects the influence of Taoist thought. Contrary to geometrically designed formal European gardens, where man saw himself as master, Chinese gardens seek to create a microcosm of the natural world through an asymmetrical layout of streams, hills, plants and pavilions (they symbolise man's place in the universe – never in the centre, just a part of the whole).

Symbolism works on every level. Plants are chosen as much for their symbolic meaning as their beauty (the pine for longevity, the peony for nobility), the willow rocks call to mind not only mountains, but also the changing, indefinable nature of the Tao (the underlying principle of the universe in Taoist thought), and the names of gardens and halls are often literary allusions to ideals expressed in classical poetry. Painting too goes hand in hand with gardening, its aesthetics reproduced in gardens through the use of carefully placed windows and doors that frame a particular view.

Finally, it's worth remembering that gardens in China have always been lived in. Generally part of a residence, they weren't so much contemplative (as in Japan) as they were a backdrop for everyday life: family gatherings, late-night drinking parties, discussions of philosophy, art and politics – it's the people who spent their leisure hours there that ultimately gave the gardens their unique spirit.

Silk Museum & Other Sights

The highly recommended **Suzhou Silk Museum** (Sūzhōu Síchóu Bówùguǎn; ☎ 6753 6538; 2001 Renmin Lu; 人民路2001号; admission Y15; ☎ 9am-5pm) houses fascinating exhibitions providing a thorough history of Sūzhōu's silk industry over the past 4000 years.

About 500m west of the Garden for Linger-ing In, **West Garden Temple** (Xiyuán Sì; Xiyuan Lu; 西园路; admission Y25; ☎ 7.30am-5.30am) stands on the site of an old garden that was later donated to the Buddhist community. Greeting you upon entering the simply magnificent **Arhat Hall** (罗汉堂; Luòhàn Táng) within the temple is a stunning four-faced and thousand-armed statue of Guanyin, leading to mesmerising and slightly unnerving rows of glittering *luòhàn* (Buddhist monks who have achieved enlightenment), each one unique. The Ming dynasty hall was burned down by soldiers (surely Taiping rebels) in 1860, and rebuilt.

At the heart of what was once Suzhou Bazaar, the Taoist **Temple of Mystery** (Xuánmiào Guǎn; Guanqian Jie; 观前街; admission Y10; ☎ 7.30am-5pm) was originally laid out between AD 275 and 279, with many later additions. The enormous Sanqing Hall, supported by 60 pillars and capped by a double roof with upturned eaves, dates from 1181.

The **North Temple** (Běisī Tǎ; 1918 Renmin Lu; 人民路1918号; admission Y25; ☎ 7.45am-6pm) has the tallest pagoda south of the Yangzi River. At nine

storeys high it dominates the northern end of Renmin Lu; climb it for fine aerial views of town.

The **Suzhou Museum** (Sūzhōu Bówùguǎn; 204 Dongbei Jie; 东北街204号; admission Y20; ☎ 9am-5pm, last tickets 4pm) was once the residence of a Taiping leader, Li Xiucheng. The museum offers some interesting old maps, including those of the Grand Canal and Sūzhōu, and a Taiping cannon. There are few English captions. A brand new museum – designed by IM Pei – is an eye-catching element of the museum.

In the city's cobbled streets in the east is the small and pretty **Kunqu Opera Museum** (Kūnqū Bówùguǎn; 14 Zhongzhangjia Xiang; 中张家巷14号; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm), housing an old stage, musical instruments, costumes and photos. Just before the opera museum is the **Pingtán Museum** (Píngtán Bówùguǎn; 3 Zhongzhangjia Xiang; 中张家巷3号; admission Y4), which stages two-hour performances every day at 1.30pm, for Y4.

By the outer moat in the southwest, a stretch of the city wall known as **Pan Gate** (Pán Mén; 1 Dong Dajie; 东大街1号; admission Y25, incl Ruiguang Pagoda Y31, boat rides Y12; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) contains Sūzhōu's only remaining original city gate (dating from 1351). The nearby **Ruiguang Pagoda** (Ruìguāng Tǎ) dates from the 3rd century and can be climbed. North of here on Renmin Lu is the old **Confucius Temple** (Wén Miào; Renmin Lu; 人民路; admission free; ☎ 8.30-11am & 12.30-4.30pm), which these days holds an antique market.

Out of Town

In the far northwest of town, **Tiger Hill** (虎丘山; Hùqū Shān; ☎ 6723 2305; Huqiu Lu; 虎丘路; off-peak/peak Y40/60; ☎ 7.30am-5pm; bus 46 from cnr Renmin Lu & Guanqian Jie) is topped by the leaning **Yunyan Pagoda** (云岩塔; Yúnyán Tǎ), built in the 10th century.

Located in the west, **Cold Mountain Temple** (寒山寺; Hán Shān Sì; 24 Hanshansi Long; admission Y20, incl Maple Bridge Y45; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm; bus 3 from cnr Renmin Lu & Guanqian Jie) is named after Han Shan, the eccentric 7th-century poet and recluse. Alas, today the temple holds little of interest, except for a stele by Tang poet Zhang Ji, immortalising nearby Maple Bridge.

The **Grand Canal** (大运河; Dà Yùnhé) passes to the west and south of Sūzhōu, within a 10km range of the town. Suburban buses 13, 14, 15 and 16 will get you there. In the north-west, bus 11 follows the canal for a fair distance, taking you on a tour of the enchanting surrounding countryside.

Straddling the Grand Canal southeast of Sūzhōu, and boasting 53 arches, **Precious Belt Bridge** (宝带桥; Bǎodài Qiáo) is thought to be a Tang-dynasty construction. You can get to the bridge by taxi or a 40-minute bike ride. Head south on Renmin Lu, past the south moat, then left at the TV towers. If you're heading to Tóngli (p220), you'll see the bridge on the way.

INFORMATION

ATMs on the lobby level at the Sheraton Suzhou (*right*) take international cards.

Bank of China (Zhōngguó Yínháng; 1450 Renmin Lu; 人民路1450号; ☎ 8.15am-5.15pm) A 24-hour ATM.

Lianhe Ticket Centre (1606 Renmin Lu; 人民路1606号; ☎ 8am-5pm) Sells train, plane, bus and boat tickets for a commission.

Post office (Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; cnr Renmin Lu & Jingde Lu; 人民路, 景德路交叉口; ☎ 8am-8pm)

PSB (Gōng'ānjú; ☎ 6522 5661; 1149 Renmin Lu; 人民路1149号) You'll find this 200m down Dashituo Xiang alley.

Qixing Internet Café (Qìxīng Wǎngbā; 302 Xibei Jie; 西北街302号; per hr Y2; ☎ 24hr)

SHOPPING

Wherever you look you will be bombarded with Sūzhōu-style embroidery, calligraphy, paintings, sandalwood fans, writing brushes, silk underclothes and freshwater pearls from Tàihú.

The large **Dongwu Silk Store** (1546 Renmin Lu; 人民路1546号; ☎ 8.30am-9.30pm), attached to a silk factory, sells clothes, brocade and bedding, while the **Shi Lu Night Market** (☎ 6.30-9.30pm) sells food, clothes and all kinds of stuff.

EATING & DRINKING

For bars, the eastern end of Shiquan Jie (十全街) is increasingly deluged with neon-lit, brass bars aimed specifically at Western travellers.

Yang Yang Dumpling House (Yángyáng Shuǐjiǎoguǎn; 420 Shiquan Jie; 十全街420号; dishes Y10-20) You just can't beat a dozen fresh dumplings (水饺; *shuǐjiǎo*) for Y5. They also serve veggie dishes.

Ajisen (Wéiqián Lǎmiàn; Renmin Lu; 人民路; dishes Y20-30) The noodle-bar franchise extends its tasty tentacles to Sūzhōu. Dishes high on chilli will blow your eyebrows off. Handy photo menu, free tea and fast customer turnover.

Déyuélóu (☎ 6523 8940; 43 Tajian Long; 太监弄; dishes Y20-40) For Sūzhōu specialities (squirrel-shaped mandarin fish, pork with pine nuts and Gusu marinated duck), try this traditional building near the Temple of Mystery. English menu.

Yakexi (Yàkèxī Jiǔlòu; 768 Shiquan Jie; 十全街768号; dishes Y30; ☎ 10am-2am) The lamb kebabs (羊肉串; *yáng ròu chuàn*) here don't quite cut the mustard, but the atmosphere – Uighur kitsch – is entertaining. Sink a bottle of SinKiang beer (新疆啤酒, Y10) alongside a plate of tiger salad (老虎菜; *lǎohú cài*) and a *náng* bread (囊), and dream of Kashgar. No English menu.

SLEEPING

Like Hángzhōu, standard midrange hotels are way overpriced; always inquire about discounts. The area code for Sūzhōu is ☎ 0512.

Sheraton Suzhou (Wúgōng Xílǎidēng Dàjiǔdiàn; ☎ 6510 3388; www.sheraton-suzhou.com; 259 Xinshi Lu; 新市路259号; r Y1660) This grandiose Ming-style palace is the top spot in town. Five-star amenities include a private garden.

Nanlin Hotel (Nánlín Fàndiàn; ☎ 6801 7888; fax 6801 5818; 20 Gunxiufang, Shiquan Jie; 十全街滨绣坊20号; d Y1080) Tasteful Chinese-style rooms and beautiful gardens. Enter off Shiquan Jie.

Home Inn (Rújiā; ☎ 6523 8770; 1400 Renmin Lu; 人民路1400号; s/d Y188/228) You'll find clean, functional lower midrange rooms in this town-centre chain hotel.

Suzhou Youth Hostel (Sūzhōu Guójiā Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 6510 9418; www.yhasuzhou.com; 178 Xiangwang Lu; 相王路178号; dm Y45, d Y110-208) Usual youth hostel amenities in a good location just south of Shiquan Jie. Internet Y5 per hour.

CANAL TOWNS

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the Yangzi Delta, bounded by the Yangzi River to the north, Lake Tai to the west and Hangzhou Bay to the east and south, is inundated with water. Many of the villages in this region are picturesque canal towns, with original Ming and Qing architecture, cobbled lanes, humpbacked bridges and, of course, interlocking canals. Some of these towns date back to the Tang dynasty and, as nearly all had access to the Grand Canal, they were traditionally fairly prosperous places. Analogies with Venice stuff the local tourist literature; suffice to say that this is rubbish, but the towns are picturesque and a welcome counterpoint to Shànghǎi's brash urban frenzy.

Here's the bad news though: the canal towns are tiny and are often overrun with visitors. The only way to reach these places from Shànghǎi is via the sightseeing buses (boxed text, p213). Alternatively, Tónglǐ, Mùdú, Lùzhí and Nánxún can be combined with a trip to Sūzhōu. Try to either visit on a weekday or spend the night, when most residents are doing nothing more than living their lives.

ZHŪJIǎJIǎO 朱家角

Zhūjiǎjiǎo (admission Y60, includes entry to all the main sights) is both easy to reach from Shànghǎi and truly delightful – as long as your visit does not coincide with the arrival of phalanxes of tour buses. Select an off-season rainy weekday, pack an umbrella and pray the sky clears before others get wind of sunshine over town.

Chinese guidebooks vaguely identify human activity in these parts 5000 years ago and a settlement here during the Three Kingdoms period 1700 years ago. It was during the Ming dynasty, however, that a commercial centre built on its network of waterways had truly developed. What survives today is a charming tableau of Ming and Qing dynasty alleys, bridges and old town (古镇; *gǔzhèn*) architecture.

Paper maps of Zhūjiǎjiǎo may be hard to find, but ample stone maps of town are affixed to streets walls in the old town. Anyway, the riverside settlement is small enough to wander completely in three hours, by which time you will have developed a precise mental map.

TRANSPORT: ZHŪJIǎJIǎO

Distance from Shànghǎi 30km

Direction West

Buses from Shànghǎi Buses (one hour, Y80) depart daily from the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Centre (Map p126) every half hour between 7.30am and 3pm. Tickets include admission to the town and its sights; last bus back to Shànghǎi is at 5.30pm.

Buses from Tónglǐ Nine daily buses (Y15, ninety minutes) run between Tónglǐ bus station and Zhūjiǎjiǎo.

On the west side of the recently built City God Temple bridge stands the **City God Temple** (城隍庙; Chénghuáng Miào; admission Y5; ☎ 7.30am–4pm), moved here in 1769 from its original location in Xuějiābāng. Further north along Caohe Street (漕河街), running riverside alongside the canal, is the **Yuanjin Buddhist Temple** (Yuánjīn Chányuàn; admission Y5; ☎ 8am–4pm) – also called the Niangniang Temple (娘娘庙; Niāngniāng Miào) – near the distinctive **Tai'an Bridge** (泰安桥; Tà'ān Qiáo). Pop into the temple to climb the Qinghua Pavilion (清华阁; Qīnghuá Gé) at the rear; it's a towering hall visible from many parts of town, containing a multi-armed statue of Guanyin on the ground floor, a pagoda studded with multiple effigies of the goddess above and a recently cast bell on the top floor which you can strike for good luck (Y5).

Earmark a detour to the magnificent **Zhūjiǎjiǎo Catholic Church of Ascension** (朱家角耶稣升天堂; Zhūjiǎjiǎo Yēsū Shēngtiāntáng; 27 Caohe Jie, No 317 Alley; 漕河街27号317弄), a gorgeous church with its belfry rising in a detached tower by the rear gate. Built in 1863, the brick church stands alongside a lovingly cultivated courtyard decorated with a statue of Joseph holding a baby Jesus.

Of Zhūjiǎjiǎo's quaint band of ancient bridges, the standout must be **Fangsheng Bridge** (放生桥; Fàngshēng Qiáo), first built in 1571 and linking Bei Dajie (北大街) and Dongjing Jie (东井街). With its long and graceful 72m span, it is certainly the most photogenic. The five-arched bridge was originally assembled with proceeds from a monk's 15 years of alms-gathering.

You can jump on boats for comprehensive waterborne tours of town at various points including Fangsheng Bridge. Tickets are Y45 per person, or Y60 per boat for the short

tour or Y120 for the long tour. Boat tours include the Fangsheng Bridge, the **Handalong Sauce & Pickle Shop** (涵大隆酱园), **Zhongguanyin Bridge** (中观音桥), the **Daqing Post Office** (大清邮局), the City God Temple and the Yuanjin Buddhist Temple.

You'll be tripping over souvenir shops and their vocal vendors, and you can buy anything from a small pair of children's tiger shoes to 'antique' Chinese eyeglasses.

The tight old streets of the old town are stuffed with restaurants overlooking the water, but expect tourist prices.

There is little need to overnight in Zhūjiǎjiǎo as it is so close to Shànghǎi, but a selection of hotels can be found in and around the old town, with single rooms starting at around Y100.

TÓNGLǐ 同里

Its sights neatly parcelled together in a more picturesque and easily navigable setting than Sūzhōu, the charming canal town of Tónglǐ is a marvellous day out. Avoid the weekend crowds and if going in summer, note that tour groups often shun the scaldingly hot weekdays of July and August.

With its whitewashed houses, laundry hanging out to dry and unhurried canal scenes, the **Old Town** (古镇; ☎ 0512-6333 1140; admission Y80; ☎ 7.30am–5.30pm) is best explored in a lazy meandering loop; bilingual signs guide the way and maps are available at the point of entry ticket office, but getting lost is half the fun.

There are three old residences that you'll pass at some point during your wander (un-

less you're really lost), the best of which is the **Gènglè Táng** (耕乐堂), a vast Ming dynasty country estate with 41 rooms and courtyards in the west of town.

In the north of Tónglǐ is the **Pearl Pagoda** (珍珠塔; Zhēnzhū Tǎ), originally the home of a Ming dynasty official, containing a large residential compound, an ancestral hall, a garden and even an opera stage.

In the east of the Old Town you'll find **Tuisi Garden** (退思园; Tuisi Yuán), a gorgeous 19th-century garden that delightfully translates as the 'Withdraw and Reflect Garden'. The Tower of Fanning Delight served as the living quarters while the garden itself is a lovely portrait of pond water churning with outsized goldfish (fish food Y2 a pack), rockeries and pavilions, caressed by traditional Chinese music. It's a lovely place to find a perch and drift into a reverie, unless you are outflanked by one of the marauding tour groups.

It's definitely not for infant Tónglǐ-visitors, but the nearby **Chinese Sex Museum** (中华性文化博物馆; Zhōnghuá Xìngwénhuà Bówùguǎn; admission Y20) is Tónglǐ's most famous sight. If you thought Confucius was a prude, have a look around and think again.

Slow-moving six-person boats ply the waters of Tónglǐ's canal system (Y70, 25 minutes).

Restaurants are everywhere (resist being pushed towards the priciest dishes) and guesthouses (客栈; *kèzhàn*) are similarly in abundance if you want to extend your stay. Rooms are cheaper than in Sūzhōu and air-con double rooms start from around Y80. Try the **Zhèngfú Cǎotáng** (正福草堂; ☎ 0512-6333

TRANSPORT: TÓNGLǐ

Distance from Shànghǎi 80km

Direction West

Buses from Shànghǎi Buses (1¼hr; Y120) depart daily from the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Centre (Map p126) at 8.30am, and depart Tónglǐ at 4pm. Tickets include admission to the town and all sights, except for the Chinese Sex Museum and Pearl Pagoda. You will be dropped off 2km from town at Tongli Lake, from where there's a shuttle (Y4) to the gate. The boat trip on Tongli Lake is free, though of no particular interest. One daily public bus (Y26, 6.20pm) leaves Tongli Bus Station for Shànghǎi.

Buses from Sūzhōu Tourist buses (Y80, one way, 50 minutes) run to Tónglǐ every hour from 7.25am to 5.25pm from Sūzhōu's North Bus Station (☎ 0512-6577 6577); buy tickets from the Suzhou Tourism Distribution Center (苏州旅游集散中心; Sūzhōu Lǚyóu Jísàn Zhōngxīn), east of the main ticket hall. The Y80 bus ticket includes entry to Tónglǐ and all its sights bar the Chinese Sex Museum. Return buses (Y8, 50 minutes) to Sūzhōu run every 20 minutes from the Tónglǐ bus station (同里车站; Tónglǐ Chēzhàn). A pedicab from the bus station to the Old Town is Y5, or you can walk it in 10 minutes.

6358; www.zfct.net; 138 Mingqing Jie; 明清街138号; d Y180-480), a restored traditional residence with a courtyard where you can sit and sip tea while the owner plays the *qin* for guests at night; book ahead.

LÜZHÍ 角直

Easily reached by public bus from Sūzhōu, this minute canal town (admission Y45; ☎ 8am-5pm) is similarly very picturesque, albeit frequently overrun with visitors thronging its narrow streets. Meandering around the old town is the best approach, threading past charming arched bridges, canal scenes and ancient residences. The **Baosheng Temple** (保圣寺; Bǎoshèng Sì) originally dates back to the early 6th century and contains Tang dynasty Buddhist figures.

TRANSPORT: LÜZHÍ

Distance from Sūzhōu 25km

Direction Southeast

Buses from Sūzhōu Jump on bus 518 (Y4, one hour, first/last bus from Sūzhōu 6am/8pm, last bus back from Lüzhi 7.30pm) from the train station or from the bus stop on Pingqi Lu (平齐路).

Buses from Shànghǎi Daily buses (Y15) run regularly to Lüzhi from the bus station on North Zhongshan Rd (806 North Zhongshan Rd; 中山北路806号). From the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Centre (Map p126) a bus (Y100, two hours) runs on Saturday and Sunday to Lüzhi at 9am, returning at 4pm.

MÙDÚ 木渎

A short trip west of Sūzhōu, Mùdú is in some ways a less touristy Jiāngsū canal town and provides a welcome alternative to Sūzhōu's frenzied tourist blitz. The ancient town (2500 years old, says the tourist blurb) is largely famed for its Ming and Qing dynasty architecture, and its labyrinth of alleys is perfect for immersing yourself in its traditional charms.

Among the sights in the old town (admission Y60; ☎ 8am-4.30pm) are the **Bangyan Mansion** (榜眼府第; Bǎngyǎn Fǔdì), the Qing dynasty **Hongyin Mountain Villa** (虹饮山房; Hóngyīn Shānfáng), where the Emperor Qianlong regularly came to watch opera on its famous stage, and the

TRANSPORT: MÙDÚ

Distance from Sūzhōu 12km

Direction Southwest

Buses from Sūzhōu Tourist bus 4 (Y2, 30 minutes) runs from the train station to Mùdú; ask to get off at the Mùdú Yánjiā Huāyuán stop (木渎严家花园站), across from a small road leading to the main entrance.

Buses from Shànghǎi Buses (Y120, two hours) run from the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Centre (Map p126), departing every other Saturday at 8.15am, returning from Mùdú at 4pm.

Yan Family Garden (严家花园; Yánjiā Huāyuán), which originally dates back to the Ming. Boat rides (Y10 per person) convey tourists along Mùdú's canals.

NÁN XÚN 南浔

Roughly 125km from Hángzhōu, the pretty canal town of Nánxún (admission Y60, includes entry to sights) became prosperous on the back of the silk trade during the Southern Song dynasty. A typical ancient waterside Jiāngnán town with arched bridges, historic residences and pinched alleys, Nánxún is becoming increasingly popular as a destination, but plentiful charm and pockets of tranquility make it a desirable spot for a trip back in time.

You can see everything in a few hours. Once again, meandering around the streets is the best way to appreciate the stone bridges and historic homes and residences that typify the old town.

The pretty **Little Lotus Villa** (小莲庄; Xiǎolián Zhuāng) is one of Nánxún's gardens, and once belonged to a well-to-do Qing official. Note the fabulous highly decorative carved stone gates.

Other sights include the **100 Room Pavilion** (百间楼; Bǎijiān Lóu), a Ming dynasty structure, and the **Jiaye Library** (嘉业堂藏书楼; Jiāyètáng Cángshūlóu), which dates from 1920 and is set within a scenic courtyard with a lotus pond. With its blend of European and Chinese architectural motifs, the **Zhang Family Compound** (张氏铭宅; Zhāngshì míng Jiùzhái) is an elaborate old residence once owned by a prosperous silk merchant. Among historic bridges, look out for **Guanghui Bridge** (广惠桥; Guānghuī Qiáo),

TRANSPORT: NÁN XÚN

Distance from Shànghǎi 140km

Direction West

Buses from Shànghǎi Buses (2½ hours, Y30) for Nánxún leave every 20 minutes or so from the long-distance bus station on Hongjiang Rd (虹江路) between 6am and 7.30pm. Buses (three hours, Y110) also depart from the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Centre (Map p126) at 8.40am, returning at 4pm.

Buses from Tónglǐ Buses leave Tónglǐ regularly for Wújiāng bus station (吴江; Y1, 15 minutes) from where you can hop on a bus to Nánxún (Y8).

Buses from Hángzhōu Buses leave hourly from Hángzhōu's north or east bus station for Húzhōu (湖州; Y25, 1½ hours) from where you can jump aboard a bus to Nánxún (Y8).

Buses from Sūzhōu Buses (Y15, one hour) leave regularly for Nánxún from Sūzhōu's south bus station between 7am and 5.50pm.

Tongjin Bridge (通津桥; Tōngjīn Qiáo) and **Hongji Bridge** (洪济桥; Hóngjī Qiáo).

XITÁNG 西塘

Turbo-boasted to international fame after a cameo appearance in *Mission: Impossible III* (which dished up its canal-side backdrops as part of modern-day Shànghǎi), the parcel-sized Zhèjiāng settlement of Xitáng (www.xitang.com.cn) is another canal town that has become a victim of its own popularity. Nonetheless, if you choose a weekday

TRANSPORT: XITÁNG

Distance from Shànghǎi 90km

Direction Southwest

Buses from Shànghǎi Daily buses (two hours, Y120) leave the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Station (Map p126) for Xitáng at 8.30am and 9am, returning at 4pm.

Trains from Shànghǎi Take a train from Shanghai North Train Station to Jiāshàn (嘉善) and then hop on one of the regular buses from Jiāshàn bus station to Xitáng.

Trains from Hángzhōu Take a train from Hángzhōu train station to Jiāshàn and then take a bus from Jiāshàn bus station to Xitáng.

sortie, you may be able to chart a pleasant course through its cobbled streets that doesn't involve constant wrestling with crowds blotting out the view. Simply wander through the lanes and alleys of the old town, admiring the traditional architecture and bridges.

MÒGĀNSHĀN 莫干山

Forested with feathery bamboo, pine and juniper, the mist-shrouded mountains of Mògānshān (admission Y65) in north Zhèjiāng have long been a popular retreat – on summer days it can be a whole seven degrees cooler than in Shànghǎi. The resort was first developed around the turn of the 20th century by taipans and missionaries, and later became fashionable for Shànghǎi gangsters (such as 'Big-Eared' Du Yueheng; see boxed text, p28) and reprehensible politicians (such as Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong) before becoming a military garrison in the 1960s. If you aren't staying overnight, you will need to leave the area by 6pm.

Today Mògānshān has reverted to the people and is refreshingly rural. The villagers have taken over the stately granite villas that are scattered across the hillside and they spend most of their time tending their gardens, raising chickens and harvesting wild herbs. Sit on the terrace with a bamboo beer and read,

TRANSPORT: MÒGĀNSHĀN

Distance from Shànghǎi 190km

Direction West

Buses from Hángzhōu The easiest way to get to Mògānshān is from Hángzhōu. Buses leave the north bus station (汽车北站; qìchē běizhàn) for Wúkāng (武康) every half an hour from 6.20am to 7pm (Y13, 40 minutes). From Wúkāng minibuses run to the top of Mògānshān.

Buses from Shànghǎi Buses from the Shanghai Sightseeing Bus Station (Map p126) run to Mògānshān in the summer months of July and August only. There are three public buses that do the Shànghǎi–Wúkāng trip (Y42, four hours); they leave from a small bus station (Map p62) near Baoshan Rd metro station, at 80 Gongxing Rd (公兴路 80号). Buses depart Shànghǎi at 6.30am, 11.50am and 12.50pm; buses return from Wúkāng at 6.30am, 7.40am and 1pm. Keep an eye on your bags.

or if that's not enough for you, hike on over to the other side of the mountain to watch the sun set.

SLEEPING

Call ahead on summer weekends when you may need to reserve a room – there are at least 10 hotels here, so someone will have space. All have restaurants, which are essentially the only eating options in Mògānshān.

Léidísēn Mògānshān Biéshù (雷迪森莫干山别墅; ☎ 0572-803 3601; d Y1100-1300) This is gangster Du

Yuesheng's old villa, and is now owned by the Radisson group. It might be lower down on the mountain, but it has the best views of all.

Jiànquán Shānzhūāng (剑泉山庄; ☎ 0572-803 3607; 91 Moganshan; d Y480-680) This hotel is beneath the main village, and has an outdoor terrace looking down the bamboo slopes.

Yīnshān Fàndiàn (荫山饭店; ☎ 0572-803 3315; Yinshan Jie; d with/without private bathroom Y100/50) This hotel offers simple rooms right on the main street; the hot water is iffy.