

SHANGHAI *Splendor*

HOW CHINA'S LARGEST CITY IS CHANGING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT BY AMBER GIBSON



Facing page: The Ritz-Carlton Shanghai—view from Flair Rooftop & Bar
This page, right: A stretch of the gloriously frenzied Nanjing Road commercial district at dusk



Shanghai, China's financial hub and largest city, is changing so rapidly that it seems impossible to ever fully know the city, even as a regular visitor. There are dozens of five-star luxury hotels (competition for visitor dollars is fierce), newcomers including The Middle House, Bvlgari, Bellagio, Capella Shanghai Jian Ye Li, and the fantastical InterContinental Shanghai Wonderland—an underground resort hotel built in an abandoned quarry in the Songjiang district, about 90 minutes west of city center.

Rising to prominence during the Qing dynasty, Shanghai became a vital trading center, and remains the world's busiest container port. After the Opium Wars, western merchants flooded the city and claimed sovereign "Concessions" (areas of control), the most famous the former French Concession. Many Russians fled here after the 1917 revolution and during World War II, and Shanghai also became a haven for more than 20,000 Jewish refugees. From the 20th century on, it has also been a hub for Chinese cinema and popular music, and is known as the "Paris of the East."

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Like New York, there are four distinct seasons, but winters are generally milder. United, Delta, Air China, and China Eastern all fly direct from either JFK or Newark to Pudong International Airport. The city is split by the Huangpu River, and so divided into Pudong and Puxi districts (the east and west sides of the waterway). Puxi is the historical, cultural, and residential center, while Pudong has more skyscrapers (including many new hotels) and encompasses the Lujiazui financial district.

As is the case for much of mainland China, air quality is pretty atrocious most of the time, and keep in mind that the government has a strict internet censorship policy; you'll need to get a virtual private network (VPN) app or browser extension if you plan to access Google domains, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Netflix, or media outlets like Bloomberg and *The Wall Street Journal*. There are dozens of VPNs out there, but the government switches them off and on at will, so it's best to have several on rotation. Given the uncertainty, a best bet for communication is WeChat, an app that millions use in China for everything from messaging to in-store payments.

Don't bother shopping for the usual luxury brand suspects; a high tax on luxury goods means everything is far more expen-

sive than back home. Instead, ladies should consider getting a traditional and lovely body-hugging *qipao* dress, made to order. A good hotel concierge will be able to recommend top makers, but it's great to arrange an appointment before arrival, as it can take one to two weeks to have a piece completed, depending on its level of embellishment.

ATTRACTIONS

XIN TIAN DI

Old meets new in these effortlessly hip and narrow pedestrian streets, where more than 100 years of history is compressed and layered to create a modern eating and entertainment district. Mid-19th-century Shikumen architecture with vaulted stone doors houses modern galleries, cafés, boutiques, and bars. There's made-to-order truffle

ice cream, luxury fashion brands like Shanghai Tang, and even a Shake Shack. Chef Paul Pairet's brand-new all-day café, Polux, just opened here, and in true French bistro fashion has become one of the best places in the city for people-watching. **Huaihai Zhong Lu, Huangpu District, Shanghai Town**

SHANGHAI FILM MUSEUM

Here, the history of local cinema unfolds over four stories and in thousands of artifacts, multimedia exhibitions, and working production studios. The city was long considered the "Hollywood of China," and you'll learn about its groundbreaking films, movie stars, and production process through wax figure film sets, movie props, and historic posters. Even if you aren't a film buff, it's a unique lens through which to glimpse recent Chinese history. Informational panels are in both English and Chinese, and video clips include English subtitles. Don't miss the interactive studios, where you can recreate sound effects with daily household items. **595 North Caoxi Road, Xuhui District, shfilmuseum.com**

WHERE TO STAY

THE RITZ-CARLTON SHANGHAI, PUDONG

This glamorous skyscraper boasts the best views of the iconic Oriental Pearl TV Tower in the city, and is also attached to the IFC Mall. Treat your-

self to a suite with views of the Pearl Tower and North Bund along with club lounge privileges like limousine drop-offs, complimentary pressing, and culinary presentations from early morning to late night. Chinese restaurant Jin Xuan is delightful, serving delicacies like sweet and sour lobster with housemade tofu and creamy crab yolk bird's nest soup. The spa is open until midnight, so book a late-night massage before rolling into bed. **8 Century Avenue, LuJiaZui, Pudong District, ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/china/shanghai-pudong**

THE MIDDLE HOUSE

This 111-room boutique hotel is at once serene and sultry, with a glazed ceramic bamboo forest in the lobby leading to dark interiors and curved hallways. Studio 90 rooms have the best views, with three walls of floor-to-ceiling windows, blackout shades, and a tasseled bedside rope hanging from the ceiling that serves as the master light switch. The underground fitness center and spa is a relaxing oasis from the city above; treatments feature Cha Ling products—an exclusive brand by LVMH made with wild pu-erh tea from Yunnan province. **No. 366 Shi Men Yi Road, Jing'an District, themiddlehousehotel.com**

MANDARIN ORIENTAL PUDONG

Elegantly au courant, this accommodation features thousands of modern art pieces throughout, most by contemporary Chinese artists. Club level rooms



Top: Mandarin Oriental Shanghai Presidential Suite bedroom
Bottom: French Concession; Next Page: Ultraviolet by Paul Pairet

come with a host of benefits, including complimentary laundry valet service. The hotel's speciality Chinese restaurant, Yong Yi Ting, earned a Michelin star for regional specialties like king prawn in sea urchin sauce and Shanghaiese braised eel. Bamboo and butterflies abound at the Forbes five-star spa, with treatments like the signature oriental essence massage designed to relax and revive tired travelers. You may find yourself dozing off afterwards while sipping bamboo tea in the tepidarium. 111 Pudong South Road, Pudong District, mandarinoriental.com/shanghai/pudong/luxury-hotel

DAY TRIPS AND TOURS

FRENCH CONCESSION

Shanghai's former French Concession is still home to many expats living in colonial mansions along tree-lined avenues. The French controlled this area from 1849 until 1943, and by the

1920s it was the most elite residential neighborhood in the city. Here you'll find trendy boutiques, cocktail bars, art galleries, and outdoor cafés that feel suitably European. Visit the former residences of Sun Yat-sen and Zhou Enlai to better understand China's 20th-century history. The neighborhood is great to explore by foot or bike, and your hotel can arrange a private guide to hit the highlights and provide colorful commentary, unearthing hidden courtyards and Art Deco designs.



CHINESE COOKING WORKSHOP

For more than 15 years, this gem has been teaching travelers and expats how to make authentic Chinese food, including regional specialties from Shanghai, Beijing, Szechuan, and Guangdong. There are classes year 'round, seven days a week, and beginners are welcome. Your day might begin with a trip to a wet market or farmer's market to shop for ingredients, then you'll learn how to braise fish stomach, cook chicken with chestnuts, or fold xiao long bao soup dumplings. Public classes can be booked online and private sessions are available as well. 370 Wulumuqi Road (South) near Zhaojiabang Road, chinesecookingworkshop.com

DINE AND DRINK

ULTRAVIOLET BY PAUL PAIRET

This 10-seat table is the hottest ticket in town, transforming food into a multi-



sensory theatrical production. It has earned three Michelin stars (Shanghai's only restaurant to do so) and a spot on the World's 50 Best list. Chef Paul Pairet draws from childhood memories and China's best ingredients (including truffles from Yunnan province) to conceptualize each course, and brings them to life with myriad sounds, smells, and visual effects, producing what in Pairet's imagination is the environment for maximum enjoyment. For example, you might be transported deep within a forest to enjoy decadent burnt truffle toast soaked in sauce meunière (the only dish that appears across all menus). uvbypp.cc

YI LONG COURT

This is perhaps the best example of Cantonese fine dining in the city—its stylish dining room decidedly Chinese, but with an Art Deco touch. Sample slowly braised delicacies like fish maw, bird's nest, and sea cucumber, all considered in traditional Chinese medicine to confer health benefits. Even seemingly simple and familiar steamed dim sum and fried rice with plump king prawns are elevated to new heights. In a culinary tradition where timing, temperature, and execution are everything Yi Long Court stands out among the rest. Opt for tea over wine, and servers will happily pair rare teas from the extensive list. 32 Zhongshan East 1st Rd, WaiTan, Huangpu District, peninsula.com/en/shanghai

BAO LI XUAN

This new fine dining restaurant at the Bvlgari Hotel Shanghai is located across from the hotel's main lobby in the historic Chamber of Commerce Shanghai building. Bao Li Xuan is actually a Chinese translation of Bvlgari, and the custom ceramics, silverware, and sumptuous leather banquettes and chairs are just what you'd expect from the Italian jeweler. As Chinese restaurants go, the wine list is particularly impressive, including an ample by-the-glass selection and several natural varieties. Chef Bill Fu recommends the wok-fried prawns in XO chili sauce and braised eggplant with straw mushrooms. No 33, North Henan Road, bulgarihotels.com/en_US/shanghai/restaurants/chinese-fine-dining-restaurant ■

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