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PORT GUIDE SHANGHAI

Packed with markets, museums, historic neighbourhoods and traditional vendors selling sizzling soup dumplings, this great metropolis is China in your hand, writes longtime Shanghai resident **Mark Andrews**

The Bund - Mark Andrews



One of Shanghai's nicknames is 'the Paris of the East', and just like the French capital it is carved in two by a waterway. The Huangpu River divides China's great port city into east and west, new and old. In Pudong on the east bank, an LED symphony of illuminated skyscrapers represents the future – not just of this city but of China as a whole, which continues to follow the trail blazed by Shanghai during the rapid development of the 1990s.

Immediately west of the Huangpu lies the architectural splendour of the city's colonial past, when Shanghai was carved up by foreign powers during China's 'Century of Humiliation' from the 1840s onwards. Grand edifices such as the old HSBC headquarters and Customs House line the waterfront, while the remnants of historic buildings and traditional *shikumen* dwellings – terraced homes that blend Eastern and Western styles – radiate out on the streets around them.

It's all there for you to explore – but whether you head east or west, one thing is for certain: Shanghai likes to entertain.

3 UNMISSABLE THINGS TO DO

THE BUND

If you've seen just one picture of Shanghai, the Bund will be it. Although promenades now stretch along both banks of the river, the Bund on the west side presents the classic view. From this famous waterfront you can gaze across to the city's tallest buildings and see old colonial-era architecture behind you. Make sure you walk up to the 117-year-old Garden Bridge, which spans the spot where Suzhou Creek joins the Huangpu River.

YU GARDEN

This is where everyone goes to buy souvenirs, but look beyond the tourist circus and you'll be rewarded with a quintessential Shanghai experience. The teahouse in the centre of a zigzag bridge appears to be the focal point, but if you continue into the actual gardens you'll discover an enchanting world of

FROM FAR LEFT The famous view from the Bund; the teahouse in Yu Garden; a political poster from the Maoist era

classical architecture set in a rocky landscape. Before you leave, try the soup-spurting dumplings at the Nanxiang Steamed Bun restaurant. They may not quite be the best *xiaolongbao* in town but you'll certainly enjoy them in the most atmospheric location.

PROPAGANDA POSTER ART CENTRE

An almost surreal foil to the bright lights of modern Shanghai, Propaganda Poster Art Centre is part museum, part shop. Its stock ranges from advertising posters of the city's 1930s heyday to more recent propaganda exhorting the people to unite behind the Chinese Communist Party and fight the nation's enemies. In Chairman Mao's China of the 1960s and 70s, these flyers were a key way for the government to communicate with the populace, so they hold historic as well as artistic interest. ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Shanghai Astronomy Museum; China's Marmite, stinky tofu; Chenshan Botanical Garden



3 ACTIVITIES FOR REPEAT VISITORS

OFF-BEAT

Chenshan Botanical Garden in the western Songjiang District is Shanghai's answer to the UK's Eden Project. The landscaped gardens include a quarry pit repurposed as a lake with a walkway down to the water. Covering 207 hectares, the grounds feature 15,000 plant species from 71 countries and regions. Don't miss the carnivorous plants displayed in one of the large greenhouses, or the exhibits of desert plants and tropical flowers in other hothouses.

INDOOR

Shanghai Astronomy Museum is the world's largest planetarium. Designed without any straight lines or right angles, the building uses sunlight to guide visitors through a journey of space and time. Explore the solar system in the Home area, which has a 23m telescope for a view of the sun as you've never seen it before. In the Universe area you get to gaze deeper into space, while the Odyssey section looks at interstellar exploration.

“Prepare for a barrage to the senses, especially from fermented ‘stinky’ tofu”

EXPERIENCE

Venture into one of Shanghai's wet markets to experience how most locals still shop for their groceries. Prepare for a barrage to the senses, especially from fermented 'stinky' tofu, which has an aroma variously likened to drains and rubbish bins. Wuzhong Market has become a tourist hotspot in recent years, with vendors selling everything from seasonal fruit and veg to dried goods, cooked food, raw meat and live seafood. Stalls are usually at their busiest and most atmospheric in the morning.



Museum - ABCStock/Shutterstock, tofu - kizcorner/Shutterstock, waterfall - Mark Andrews

4 ACTIVITIES FOR CURIOUS CRUISERS

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Converted from old factories and *shikumen* houses, Tianzifang is a maze of arty cafés, small restaurants and boutiques that spill out into the street. Amid lanes strung with lanterns, vines and colourful umbrellas, there is always something new to discover, and there are even a few people who still call the area home. Be warned, though – don't expect the best prices or the best quality food in town.

COUPLES

Transformed from the airport and wharves of an old industrial zone, the West Bund is now a large riverside promenade where you can join locals in a relaxing stroll. Home to galleries such as the Long Museum, Yuz Museum and Tank – the latter housed in an old airport fuel dump – this cultural hotspot with a sizzling culinary scene is now one of Shanghai's hippest areas.

KIDS

Despite some adaptations for the domestic market, Shanghai Disneyland will be reassuringly familiar to younger travellers. Among its eight themed areas, Enchanted Storybook Castle is the tallest in any Disney theme park, while thrill-seekers shouldn't miss the original Tron ride, which whizzes its screaming customers around a rollercoaster on bikes. The water-based Pirates of the Caribbean ride, complete with massive screens and animatronics, is also well worth the inevitable queue.

MULTI-GEN FAMILIES

Water is the lifeblood of Shanghai, and the city and its surrounding provinces harbour ancient water towns. Dating back 1,700 years, Zhujiajiao lies within Shanghai and hosts 36 bridges that criss-cross a series of waterways. Around 1,000 buildings from the Ming and Qing dynasties line the banks, and some of the most historic sites, such as Kezhi Garden, are open to the public. Hop in a gondola-style boat to see the town from a different angle. ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Shanghai Disneyland; new meets old in hip Tianzifang; ancient bridges span the waterways of Zhujiajiao



Shanghai Disneyland - QingGong12/Shutterstock, woman - NavinTar/Shutterstock, gondola - anek.sowannaphoom/Shutterstock

3 PLACES TO EAT

BUDGET

Pan-fried so they're half soft and half crispy, *shengjianbao* soup dumplings are a staple food for hungry workers. Da Hu Chun has been serving them since 1932, yet this Shanghai institution on Middle Sichuan Road is still unknown to most visitors. Venture inside and the locals will give you a knowing smile – and probably share your table. Order pork or prawn dumplings with beef curry soup and you can expect to pay around £3.

MID-RANGE

With so many restaurants to choose from, Jianguo 328 in the Former French Concession might be a controversial choice but it blends good food, welcoming service and pleasant decor to make the grade. If you're visiting as part of a large group, make a reservation a few days in advance for its signature dish, eight treasure duck, or walk in and try regular menu items such as braised pork. You won't be disappointed.

“Venture inside this Shanghai institution and the locals will give you a knowing smile”

PREMIUM

The contemporary French restaurant Mr & Mrs Bund in one of the old Bund buildings might be upmarket, but it's the views rather than the prices that will make your eyes water. Many dishes have an Asian influence, such as jumbo prawn steamed in a jar with the tart flavours of lemon, orange and pomelo and then dipped in soy sauce. On a budget? Then try the weekday set lunch, from £31 per person, which includes many classic dishes. The emphasis in the evenings is on steak and seafood, with prices accordingly higher. Whatever time you go, ask for a table overlooking the river.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Braised pork in soy sauce; dumplings at Da Hu Chun; a citrus prawn dish



Braised pork - Moment Capsule/Shutterstock; dumplings - Mark Andrews; prawns - hphoto/Shutterstock

LOCAL INSIGHT



“Shanghai is safe, clean and full of energy. It has food from all over the world, and hidden historical sites, museums, gardens and ice cream stands waiting to be found.”

ALBERT WANG
partner, East & Concord law firm



“Together with its deep-rooted history and distinctive culture, Shanghai is a shopper's paradise. Nanjing Road offers everything from luxury brands to affordable local products. The city's diversity and dynamism make it a great destination for international travellers.”

SELINA YIN
business development manager



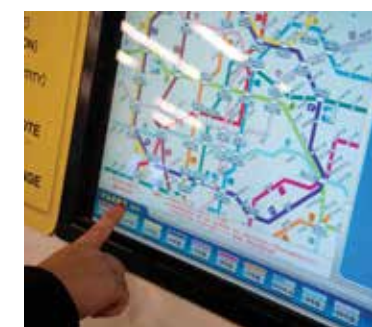
“I enjoy taking visitors through the alleyways of the French Concession, which are filled with surprises. Here, you'll find local gelato shops, craft beer breweries and soup dumpling eateries.”

GENIE YIP
tour guide

Bike - Toni Schmidt/Shutterstock; metro map - noina/Shutterstock



ABOVE Borrow a bike or use the metro (below) to experience daily life in Shanghai



Get on board

Viking Cruises' 14-night Coastal Jewels of China itinerary aboard *Viking Yi Dun*, from Beijing (Tianjin) to Shenzhen via Dalian, Qingdao, Shanghai, Zhoushan, Dongtou, Pingtan and Xiamen, departs on 19 September 2025, from £6,495 including flights. viking.com

Oceania Cruises' 14-night Graceful Pagodas itinerary aboard *Regatta*, from Seoul to Shanghai via Busan, Kanazawa, Sakaiminato, Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Jeju and Beijing (Tianjin), departs on 21 February 2026, from £2,611. oceaniacruises.com

HOW TO TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

Shanghai has the world's largest metro network, with lines reaching most corners of the city. Travel is cheap, with the majority of journeys costing less than 50p.

You can also take advantage of the city's ebike schemes. Hellobike is the easiest to access; just download the Alipay app, use it to scan a bike's QR code and off you ride. Most roads have cycle lanes but watch out for other ebikes.

What did you experience on your trip to Shanghai? Tell us on social media, tagging #WorldofCruising