

STEPPING INTO SHANGHAI



TEXT AND
PHOTOS BY

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Legend

1. The central altar at *cheng huang miao*
2. Soup-filled pork dumplings are one of Shanghai's top delicacies
3. With its double sphere and sharp apex design, the Oriental Pearl Tower stands out among the rest of the buildings along the banks of the Huangpu River
4. *Cheng huang miao* district at night
5. Nanjing Road is the main shopping belt of Shanghai

What comes to your mind when you hear the name "Shanghai"? For me, it's a retro scene of Chinese ladies and gentlemen waltzing on the dance floor to jazz music playing in the background. Often lauded as the "Paris of the Orient" and the financial and cultural centre of China, Shanghai prides itself as being one of the largest and most prosperous cities in the world. What's more, it is the epitome of the east meeting the west, with colonial buildings lining its bunds and yet retaining its unique oriental identity.

As my family members and I exited the Shanghai Pudong International Airport, we were greeted by highways lined with lush greenery. The road network was simply fascinating; there were multi-layered highways intertwining at each juncture (if you find it hard to picture this, just imagine your Lego train set with multi-layered tracks). The Pudong New Area flourishes with modern skyscrapers and traditional Chinese architecture – a testimony of China's rapid economic developments in the last few decades.

EXPERIENCING LOCAL CULTURE

One of Shanghai's renowned cultural landmarks is the City God Temple of Shanghai, also known as the *cheng huang miao*, where believers pray for

good fortune and peace. Due to its popularity, the temple has expanded into a sprawling commercial district, boasting hundreds of shops that sell anything from local delicacies and trinkets to the latest fashion apparels. Entering the temple was like transiting into a world of serenity and calmness, and the fragrance of incense exuded an air of sacredness.

After exploring the temple, lunchtime beckoned and we were off to savour the local signature delicacies! Shanghainese cuisine is one of the best cuisines in China, with mouth-watering dishes such as *la mian* (a type of Chinese noodle), the delightful *xiao long tang bao* (soup-filled pork dumpling), dim sum and a variety of seafood like crabs and lobsters.

EXHILARATING SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

For those who love to shop, it is a must to visit Nanjing Road. With both international brands ranging from fast food restaurants to boutiques, and traditional century-old jewellery shops, Nanjing Road is undeniably the favourite haunt of local youths and families. Traditional craftsmen can be seen hammering gold and silver into little trinkets, as the clinking sound

of the hammer echoes through the alley. The entire shopping belt seems endless, and with colourful lightings and booming music, one is bound to feel the pulsating heartbeat of the city.

Next up, we were given a mind-boggling visual treat by a famous acrobatic group. One stunt featured multiple acrobats hopping in and out of a giant wheel with ease despite its speed and height. Then, there was a beautiful couple who performed graceful gymnastic stunts with silk ribbons from at least two storeys above the ground (oblivious to the audience's apprehension). The most heart-stopping moments during the show, however, were when eight motorcyclists zigzagged each other deftly in a confined space of a giant steel globe. If there was a moment of hesitation from any performer, the consequences would be unthinkable. I really applaud the team for their death-defying stunts and skills!

It is said that if you haven't taken the night cruise on the Huangpu River, you have not been to Shanghai. As we cruised along the river, the water shimmered gently in the night, with sophisticated skyscrapers dotting the east bank and charismatic colonial buildings on the west bank. Every building has distinctive architecture and lighting design – it's an enchanting sight. One of the skyscrapers that stood out was the Oriental Pearl Tower,



brightly lit with its ever-changing LED lights. Its double sphere design, coupled with a sharp apex, makes it hard to miss in the enthralling city skyline. We also caught a glimpse of Singapore's DBS Bank building and could hardly contain our excitement! The cool and refreshing night air further added to the magical feeling.

The next day, we visited the observatory of the Shanghai World Financial Centre, one of the tallest skyscrapers in the world, which stands at a height of 498 metres. Before we ascended, our tour guides told us that individuals suffering from acrophobia should not proceed. As we ascended the skyscraper in a super-fast lift, silence filled the enclosed space. The only thing we could hear was the beeping panel, which indicated the rapidly changing floor numbers. When we stepped out of the lift at the 100th floor, I was momentarily blinded by the sheer

brightness of sunlight. I gingerly walked across the glass floor and the view from such a dizzying height was honestly a sight to behold. Giant trucks and cars resembling toy cars zoomed in and out of the city and one truly gets to have a panoramic view of the city. What an experience!

All too soon, we had to bid goodbye to this beautiful and charming city. Going back to the airport was fast and easy; we hopped onto the Shanghai Maglev Train, the first commercial high speed magnetic levitation line in the world which travels at a neck-breaking speed of 430 km/h. It was well furnished, comfy and quiet, and we reached Shanghai Pudong International Airport in the wink of an eye. I will always remember the vibrancy and vitality of Shanghai. With its breathtaking sights and colourful lights, it is indeed a city that never sleeps. ◆