



Historic Shanghai: preserved for timeless glory



SHANGHAI, which feels like the new centre of the universe, is a city with all-round wow factor.

Long shaped by ancient Chinese dynasties and colonial powers, and bounded by the Huangpu River, Puxi is Shanghai's historic west bank, the keeper of the city's enthralling past.

Thankfully, some generous chunks of timeless Shanghai have been safeguarded. Yu Garden was built 450 years ago during the Ming Dynasty by the local governor as a retirement retreat for his parents. During the First Opium War, the British requisitioned the garden as a military camp. Once walled, moated and criss-crossed by canals, Yu Garden is a time-honoured vestige of the Old City

Marquee attractions include

nan xiang steamed buns and the Huxinting Teahouse, which was built in 1784 and has served tea to a number of world leaders, overlooking the lotus pond.

Thomas Cook, founder of the eponymous travel firm, first brought tourists here in 1872.

Adjacent to Yu, Shanghai Old Street is a frenetic tourist trap, with many cheap and cheerful souvenirs. But take a diversionary stroll through the pencil-thin alleys, or lilongs, where urban life defies the march of time.

The lilongs are lined with stucco tenant blocks; washing is strung across the lanes; old ladies perch on low stools and old men shuffle along, hunched over. Rickety bicycle carts, piled absurdly high with produce, weave past you.

Check out snack street, Sipailou Lu, which comprises a multitude of street stalls touting local cakes, buns, sticky tofu, skewered delicacies — and chicken feet.

Another experiential must is the lovely, leafy French Concession district. Developed by the French in 1849, initially to house Shanghai's wealthy traders, a cafe-based salon culture exudes the district. Gothic churches, grand pink-brick mansions and pretty sidelanes all contribute to the

calm gentility that can be found within the plane-tree shaded district. Discover it on foot, or hire a bike. (No helmets required in this city of seven million cyclists.)

Another must-see is Nanjing Rd, one of the world's longest shopping streets, of which 1km is pedestrianised. This glitter canyon of retail is packed with prestigious department stores,

designer brands and luxury goods. Just the place for a Gucci-snaffling spree.

Nanjing Rd is home to the truly superlative Portman Ritz-Carlton hotel. With 610 rooms, the hotel places you in the heart of the Puxi action, and offers the full spectrum of premium visitor services and facilities. Home to one of Shanghai's largest health clubs, it offers tai chi classes and

a swimming pool complex.

My gorgeous room, with a bathroom covered in marble, was spacious enough to house a family reunion. The Palladio restaurant and Ritz bar are stand-outs, and the Club Lounge provides complimentary food and drinks as you soak up the view from the 45th floor.

Kiwi Confucius

Air New Zealand's commitment to China as a destination is underscored by its decision to base one of its marketing supremos in Shanghai.

Neil Patton is the "Kiwi Confucius" who shares the city's best sights and secrets, as well as other Chinese destinations. Follow his blog on Theflyingocialnetwork.com or on Twitter.

As a taster, I asked Neil for his top tips on sampling Puxi eateries and drinking spots. For local flavour, Neil recommends Lost Heaven, by the Bund —

nothing but beautiful, fresh and spicy food from Yunnan province. Neil's favourite Shanghai restaurant is Goga, where Californian chef Brad Turley masterly combines Asian flavours into Western-style dishes. Don't miss the amazing Vietnamese lobster rolls, Japanese-style chicken salad or the tuna tataki.

And in a city with a jazz legacy, JZ Club is the hotspot for the city's best musicians. A dark, smoky bar with low red lamps, get your fix of old-world Shanghai at Fuxing Lu.



Top tips

The Portman-Ritz Carlton has an enticing range of holiday offers, including a stay three nights for the price of two package. www.ritzcarlton.com/shanghai

Air New Zealand operates daily direct services to Shanghai from Auckland. Return airfares start from \$1727 an adult including taxes. For more information, visit www.airnewzealand.co.nz

