

# Living in: Shanghai

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For residents looking for more space, areas of Pudong across the river are popular. (Eugene Hoshiko/Associated Press)

For some Westerners, China's largest city (by most estimates) conjures a romantic vision of steamer trunks and junk ships making their way across the Yangtze River. But the days of opium dens and trading houses on the Bund have been replaced with a modern, supersized metropolis whose skyline reaches higher every day. Living here means living on the edge of China's future and moving at the speed of light.

• **[Related article: Mini guide to Shanghai, China](#)**

## What is it known for?

Shanghai, China's financial and cultural powerhouse, is located where the Yangtze meets the sea. In the 19th Century it was the Middle Kingdom's (one of China's many names) open face to the West and the trading and commercial port for acquisitive nations like Great Britain, the US, France and Germany, that were hungry to establish a foothold in the Orient. That frontier and commercial spirit is still what

attracts people from around the world to live and work in this vibrant, ever-expanding megalopolis.

For fashion and fads, boutique hotels and big ideas, Shanghai is the place to be. It is the most foreigner-friendly city in mainland China, where the elite from both sides meet and mingle.

## Where do you want to live?

The city is vast and dense, and the areas that are most popular are ones with a human scale or with open, green space, which is a premium in the city. Many expats rent, especially those who have a housing budget from their company, but often the second generation of Chinese who emigrated to other countries return to buy property here.

The French Concession near the downtown area is popular for its retail, stores and café life. The Xin Tian Di district has older, well-preserved housing stock of "lane houses", the two-story brick structures that are very popular to live in. Another popular neighbourhood downtown is Jing An, for its restaurants, bars and nightlife, as well as its access to public transport.

For those looking for more space, areas of Pudong across the river are popular, especially near Century Park. Families looking for houses, not apartments, might want to consider Hongqiao or Songjiang west, and south of the city centre for their Western-style developments with green space. "These areas are popular for families with children who want to be close to schools like the American school," said Catherine Lee, managing director F&T Group, a real estate company "There are gated communities with villas and townhouses."

"It really depends on what kind of experience you want," Lee explained. "Shanghai is very foreigner friendly and you can live only with expats or you can live with the local Chinese."

## Side trips

The historic city of Hangzhou is a popular weekend getaway only 45 minutes from Shanghai on the high-speed train. The area near the city's famous West Lake was made a Unesco World Heritage site in June. Another popular spot for weekend trips, especially in the summer, is Moganshan in the mountains, with its bamboo groves and once-grand villas of the foreigners who went there to escape the Shanghai summers a century ago. "It's very relaxing, with plenty of lodges to stay in," said Taylor Mork, who moved to the country six months ago. Closer to Shanghai is Suzhou, famous for its canals and classical Chinese gardens, only 30 minutes away by train.

"Travel in China can be annoying with congestion, roads under construction, train stations can be a total mess," said Mork. "But when I have the opportunity, I like to leave the region and go to a more unique place like Yunnan in the south."

For city breaks, flights from Shanghai to Tokyo are under three hours and to Seoul are under two, while other Asian destinations such as Thailand's Phuket and Bali are around five or six hours.

## Practical information

Be aware that many listings you see online are fake. Real estate agents commonly make this bait-and-switch to show you other properties. Neighbourhoods vary as much as the quality of housing, so take your time hunting down listings.

A one- to two-bedroom apartment in a basic building in a desirable location runs anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 rmb a month. The average cost to buy in a good neighbourhood is 50,000 rmb per square metre, while a house is 70,000 per square metre, according to Brent Beisher, the founder of Build, a property management and development company in Shanghai.

## Web link

<http://www.bbc.com/travel/feature/20111004-living-in-shanghai>