

# CONTRAST &



38  
香港路二四八弄

RISTORANTE  
ITALIANO  
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Crostini  
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# CONTRADICTION

in Shanghai

**Mick Shippen** takes a stroll through modern day Shanghai and finds traces of a once opulent past as it quickly reshapes its destiny and leads China into the future.

Photos **Mick Shippen**

Looking up at a muscular bronze statue of Mao Zedong erected opposite the Bank of China, communist flag fluttering on its rooftop, it is immediately apparent that Shanghai is a city of contrast and contradiction. Mao's steely gaze looks across The Bund, an expansive waterfront promenade on the western bank of the Huangpu River lined with grandiose buildings.

## The First Opium War

Following the first opium war, which ended in 1842, the British opened a concession in Shanghai by way of a forced treaty with the Qing Dynasty. Each concession within the city was governed by an occupying country, including Britain, Russia, France, Japan and America. Fuelled by international trade in silk, tea and porcelain, Shanghai boomed and was transformed into one of Asia's most wealthy commercial centres. The buildings on The Bund,





as splendidly imposing as any in Victorian-era London and including many exquisite examples of 1920s Art Deco, housed administrative centres, major banks and global trading houses until, that is, the rise of communist ideology in the 1950s brought business to a grinding halt.

### Economic Powerhouse

When the door to China gradually eased open to the wider-world in the 1990s so did the doors of The Bund's architectural gems. The banks reopened, along with luxurious hotels that now dazzle visitors with the opulence of a bygone era. Yet, for many locals, the promenade is renowned simply as a viewing platform for what lies on the other side of the river; Pudong, China's glittering financial hub and a monument to the country's seemingly unstoppable drive and ambition.

It's hard to believe that little more than a decade ago, Pudong was agricultural land. Now it is a modern day reflection of The Bund that generates an astounding GDP of US\$54 billion. In the evening, Pudong is a shining multicoloured spectacle that hundreds of Chinese visitors come to gaze upon. Here, the night sky is pierced by the space-age Oriental Pearl Tower, the Bank of China

Tower, China's tallest structure, the gleaming 492m Shanghai World Financial Tower, and many other shrines to capitalism.

At street level, Shanghai's economy bustles on Nanjing Road. Once known to the British as Park Lane, much of the six kilometre stretch has been pedestrianised and is home to restaurants, hotels, department stores and international brands shops, including a three storey Marks & Spencer and a huge Apple store.

### A New Take on History

Many of Shanghai's old concessions, dating from the 1900s, included stately villas and apartments, gated residential communities and neighbourhoods linked by a warren of narrow alleyways. Unfortunately, unbridled development has taken its toll on much of Shanghai's history, but the few clusters that remain are a delight to explore.

One such area is Tianzifang, an atmospheric district that was saved from the wrecking ball thanks to unprecedented local protests. In the past, the blocks of residences with their distinctive stone gateways were simple homes. Today, they are the preserve of art and photo galleries, chic boutiques, cafes and restaurants.

Here too, the iconic imagery of communist propaganda has also been saved, albeit as colourful reproductions of posters and enamel mugs sold to tourists eager for a touch of colourful nostalgia from China's greyest period, or playful modern interpretations that include images of 'Obamao'.

Throughout the day, Chinese and foreign visitors descend on Tianzifang to shop and eat; by night they frequent trendy bars and cafes. Another historic district transformed into a thriving centre of shops and bars is Xintiandi.

### Culinary Melting Pot

When talking with locals it is not uncommon to hear them assert that Shanghai is unlike anywhere else in China, so much so that it should be considered a separate entity. This is no more apparent than with Shanghai's dining and entertainment scene which quickly became incredibly diverse and cosmopolitan.

In recent years, flocks of chefs from around the world have descended on the city to take advantage of expats hungry for home comforts and China's affluent middleclass with its taste for fine wines and western cuisine. There is, of course, no



shortage of excellent Shanghai or Hu cuisine which incorporates influences from neighbouring provinces and includes dishes such as soy sauce braised pork, Shanghai-style noodles stir-fried with beef, the famous hairy crab and a vast array of other intriguing seafood dishes. Dumpling lovers should watch out for shops selling *xiao long bao*, an irresistible steamed dumpling with meat and soup inside or local fried dumplings known as *sheng jian bao* available from one of the city's most popular eateries, Xiao Yang's on Wujiang Lu, near Taixing Lu and at several other locations around the city.

### Lost Heaven

However, Shanghai is also an excellent place to discover the flavours of Yunnan, one of China's most delicious cuisines. The award-winning Lost

Heaven has two incredibly popular restaurants in the city serving dishes from China's mountainous south-western province. Located on the borders with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, the region is home for many tribal groups including the Tai, and is a culinary melting pot of flavours and techniques. Lost Heaven can be found in the French Concession at 38 Gaoyou Road and just off The Bund at 17 Yan'an Dong Road.

In 1937 Mao Zedong wrote, "The interdependence of the contradictory aspects present in all things, and the struggle between these aspects, determine the life of things and push their development forward. There is nothing that does not contain contradiction; without contradiction nothing would exist."

He could well have been writing about present day Shanghai. [AJ](#)

### WHERE TO STAY

#### Grand Central Hotel Shanghai

For visitors wishing to explore The Bund and the vibrant shopping district of Nanjing Road, the Grand Central Hotel Shanghai is in the perfect location. The hotel is also just three minute's walk from the convenience of the extensive Shanghai Metro underground system.

The elegant 353-room five-star hotel features a dramatic lobby with an all day dining venue, a French and Cantonese restaurant, and comfortable rooms and suites with excellent amenities with high-speed Internet access. Step outside the hotel, and Nanjing Road's shopping, dining and entertainment awaits.

*Grand Central Hotel Shanghai*  
505 Jiujiang Road, Huangpu District  
Shanghai  
[www.grandcentralhotelshanghai.com](http://www.grandcentralhotelshanghai.com)

#### Pullman Shanghai Skyway

The new 52-storey Pullman Shanghai Skyway towers above the historic Tianzifang district which is just a few minutes' walk away, making it the ideal choice for visitors who wish to explore the French concession.

The distinctly modern 545-room hotel is also just a two-minute walk from Shanghai Metro line 9, providing quick and easy access to all that the city has to offer. Guests at the Accor brand hotel can enjoy a choice of six restaurants and bars, a fitness center, indoor swimming pool and spa. There's also a Club Floor lounge with stunning city views.

*Pullman Shanghai Skyway*  
15 Dapu Road, Luwan District  
Shanghai  
[www.pullmanshanghaiskyway.com](http://www.pullmanshanghaiskyway.com)

