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24 hours in Shanghai

July 23, 2011

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Street cred ... a tai-chi session on the Bund. Photo: Getty Images

Julia Medew strolls along the Bund and tries piping-hot dumplings in the superpower's trendiest city.

Forget our visions of communist China. If you want to see the young, bold, playful side of this superpower, Shanghai puts on a spectacular show. While this city of 20 million has a rich colonial story to tell, a visit to the megalopolis is more about the here and now.

For many Chinese, Shanghai is a symbol of progress and change. Funky bars and glitzy restaurants have sprung up next to hawker-style food stands. Designer brands are being sold on the same streets as cheap, locally made suits. With its fascinating architecture, chic eateries and bustling markets, this cosmopolitan city is firing on all cylinders.

7am

The heart of Shanghai is best seen at dawn when there are no honking cars or tourists jostling for photographic space. Shanghai's famous promenade on the Huangpu River, the Bund, is at its most serene in the morning as locals practise tai chi and fly kites. The Bund is home to many art-deco and neoclassical buildings left behind by European imperial forces. Look out for the Peace Hotel and Bank of China building, two treasured art deco relics. Across the river lies Pudong, a busy collection of skyscrapers. Pudong is home to the iconic Oriental Pearl Tower and the Shanghai World Financial Centre, China's tallest building. To experience views from the 100th floor of the latter, you can take a ferry from the Bund Museum to Dong Chang Road ferry terminal. A short bus trip will take you to the building.

Shanghai World Financial Centre, 100 Century Avenue, Pudong New Area. Open 8am-11pm daily. Entry 120 yuan to 150 yuan (\$17-\$22).

8am

Line up at breakfast for steamed dumplings at Nanxiang Kitchen in Shanghai's old town. Served in bamboo baskets, xiaolongbao are traditionally filled with pork but can come with seafood and vegetarian fillings. They are served with a dipping sauce of black vinegar and freshly sliced ginger. Remember to let them cool before you take a bite - the fillings are piping hot. While here, beat the crowds and take a stroll through Yu Yuan Garden, a beautiful example of classic Chinese gardening and architecture.

Nanxiang Kitchen, Yuyuan Bazaar, 378 Fuyou Road. Open from 7am every day. Yu Yuan Garden, 218 Anren Street. Open daily 8.30am-5.30pm. Entry 30 yuan.

10am

Take a guided tour through the leafy streets of the French Concession to discover why Shanghai was once called "Paris of the East". It has, however, a wacky range of British and Russian architecture with Chinese elements of feng shui thrown in. This neighbourhood became home to about 6000 French people between 1849 and 1943, as well as taking in thousands of British and American merchants, Russian and German refugees and Chinese artists and intellectuals. Life in the area is said to have reached debauched heights in the 1920s and '30s. The French Concession was also home to the first meeting of the Chinese Communist Party, which took place in 1921 with a young Mao Zedong in attendance. Despite rampant redevelopment, the area retains a lot of its charm and has trendy bars such as Cotton's, which is inside a beautiful villa on Anting Road. Expect to see plenty of young people in designer brands with toy dogs and beware of the hair salons. Some are fronts for brothels.

Spencer M. Dodington's Luxury Concierge China service runs guiding services including half-day, full-day or tailor-made itineraries that include the French Concession. Half-day tours start from 2500 yuan. See luxuryconciergechina.com.

1pm

Join some local hipsters for Shanghainese cuisine at Art Salon. Run by two artist brothers, this quirky little restaurant in the French Concession is fitted out with retro furniture and serves a selection of local recipes in quaint antique dishes. Try to get a table in the front window so you can observe locals going about their business in the tree-lined street outside. The spicy crumbed beef with cumin is a winner, as is the tiny shrimp mixed with egg, tofu and chives. Trust the owners to serve you the specials of the day. Feel free to shop while you're at it, too. Customers can buy almost anything they fancy in the place, from the art hanging on the walls to the dishes from which they eat.

Art Salon, 164 Nanchang Road. Open 11.30am-4pm and 5.30pm- 9.30pm daily. Most dishes about 100 yuan. Phone +86 21 5306 5462.

2pm

Escape the skyscrapers and smog by taking a train to Hangzhou, a refreshingly green town that Marco Polo described as heavenly. Its famous West Lake is an enchanting break from the pace of Shanghai. Amid rolling hills, the misty lake has several causeways for walking or cycling. You can rent a boat to explore islands or drink tea at pretty tea houses on the banks. Hangzhou is a top destination for Chinese travellers who flock to enjoy peace and quiet at temples and the Six Harmonies Pagoda. The site is surrounded by hundreds of replicas of the world's most well-known pagodas, complete with mini-sized trees. Hangzhou is also home to silk, tea and Chinese medicine museums. Eleven express trains leave Shanghai South station for Hangzhou every day from 7.20am. The journey takes about

80 minutes and costs 54 yuan.

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Mr and Mrs Bund, 6/F, Bund 18, 18 Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu (near Nanjing Dong Lu). Open daily for lunch starting 11.30am and dinner starting at 6.30pm. Phone +86 21 6323 9898. Set menus from 200 yuan. See mmbund.com.

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Savour romantic views of Pudong over a nightcap at Glamour Bar, Australian Michelle Garnaut's sassy hot spot on the Bund. One level below Garnaut's restaurant, M on the Bund, this modern establishment is popular with socialites who flock to sip colourful cocktails at all hours of the night. The bar hosts film screenings, literary festivals, chamber music performances and book launches. Another great bar to soak up memorable views is New Heights, a brasserie in the historic Three on the Bund building. Patrons can snack on crispy roast duck spring rolls on a spectacular terrace. ADJ plays every Friday and Saturday night. On the same floor of this elegant 1916 building, you will find the entrance to The Cupola, one of Shanghai's most elite dining rooms. Guests have to climb up a winding rooftop staircase to enter the tiny space in the apex of the building. It accommodates a maximum of eight people, who can order from any of the four restaurants in the building. Beyonce, Tom Cruise and Halle Berry are all said to have eaten here.

New Heights 7/F, corner of the Bund and Guangdong Road. Open 11.30am-1am daily. Phone +86 21 6321 0909, see threeonthebund.com. The Glamour Bar, 6/F, No.5 the Bund (corner of Guangdong Lu). Phone +86 21 6702 2727. Open every day from 5pm until late.

Midnight

Time to retire for the night. The Peninsula Hotel has become the most luxurious place to stay in Shanghai since it opened in 2009. On the Bund, the hotel has been designed to capture the glamorous art-deco period. The hotel has a fleet of Rolls-Royces for guest use.

The Peninsula, No.32 the Bund, 32 Zhongshan Dong Yi Road, Shanghai. Rooms start from 2600 yuan a night. Phone +86 21 2327 2888, see peninsula.com/shanghai.

Julia Medew travelled courtesy of V&A Travel.

V&A Travel has 10-day tours of China taking in Shanghai, Hangzhou and Beijing, starting from \$12,750, excluding international flights. Next tour departs on September 2. Phone 1300 376 835, see vandatravel.com.au.

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July 25, 2011

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Photo: Getty Images

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