



Dan Washburn in his neighborhood, Hua Ye Xiao Qu. Dan will answer questions about Shanghai on Tuesday, July 11, at BudgetTravelOnline.com

My Shanghai Is Better Than Yours

Four years ago, **Dan Washburn** dropped everything, moving from suburban Georgia to China's most dynamic city. As the editor of Shanghaiist.com, he's since learned far more about Shanghai than we ever could hope to, so we've invited him to tell us the best places to eat, shop, and play. **Photographs by Ryan Pyle**

I ARRIVED IN SHANGHAI BY ACCIDENT, REALLY. I had a decent gig at a small newspaper outside Atlanta—they paid me to try a new activity each week (bull riding, skydiving, nude water volleyball...) and write about my experiences. Not bad. Of course, I also had to cover high school tennis, but there are always trade-offs in life. Nearly four years into my Georgia stay, with another high school sports season on the horizon, I suddenly decided I needed to make a change. I didn't know what, and I didn't know where. I just knew I wanted something...different.

An e-mail here, a contact there, and faster than you can say "career suicide," I had signed a one-year contract to teach English at a place called Shanghai University. Different, indeed.

Four years later, my teaching days far behind me, I'm still in Shanghai. And I have no plans to leave.

Western journalists have taken to calling Shanghai "the most exciting city on Earth," and while I generally think anyone who writes such hyperbolic swill should be fired on the spot, it's true

that Shanghai is certainly never boring. The city is constantly changing, always reinventing itself. The relentless pace of the place is addictive. I have fallen in love with Shanghai (and no, that's not hyperbole).

I had a personal website before I moved to Shanghai, so I kept it going once I got here. Hard to believe now, but back in 2002, there was a dearth online of English-language information about the city. My blog, ShanghaiDiaries.com, quickly attracted a dedicated readership. Last summer, I launched Shanghaiist.com, a blog that has since become one of the most popular English-language websites about Shanghai.

It's kind of funny: Four years ago I was the guy asking all the questions, and now I'm the one other people look to for answers. I receive e-mail after e-mail from people the world over wanting to know about Shanghai, Shanghai, Shanghai. I respond to most of them, too. Think of the following 3,000 words as a giant mass e-mail about the city that I happily call home.



Chun 124 Jinxian Lu, near Maoming Lu, 011-86/21-6256-0301, \$15 (prices listed are for two)

Jesse 41 Tianping Lu, near Huaihai Zhong Lu, 011-86/21-6282-9260, \$30

Bao Luo 271 Fumin Lu, near Changle Lu, 011-86/21-5403-7239, \$18

Ye Olde Station 201 Caoxi Bei Lu, 011-86/21-6427-2233, \$40

Nanxiang Mantou Dian Inside Yu Yuan, 5 Yu Yuan Lu, 011-86/21-6355-4206, \$2-\$30

Din Tai Fung Xingye Lu, near Madang Lu, South Block Xintiandi, Lane 123, House 6-7, 2nd Fl., 011-86/21-6385-8378, \$35

Yang's Fry-Dumpling Wujiang Lu, south of Shimen Yi Lu metro station, \$2

Da Qing Hua 466 Changde Lu, by Xinzha Lu, 011-86/21-6289-9999, \$16

Shu Di La Zi Yu Guan 187 Anfu Lu, near Wulumuqi Zhong Lu, 011-86/21-5403-7684, \$12

Guyi 89 Fumin Lu, 011-86/21-6249-5628, \$20

Dolar Shop 1728 Nanjing Xi Lu, Bailemen Hotel, floors 20-21, 011-86/21-6249-7188, \$20

Afanti Tianshan Hotel, 775 Quyang Lu, 011-86/21-6555-9604, \$12

Vegetarian Lifestyle 258 Fengxian Lu, near Jiangning Lu, 011-86/21-6215-7566, \$15

Crystal Jade Xingye Lu, near Madang Lu, South Block Xintiandi, Lane 123, House 6-7, 2nd Fl., 011-86/21-6385-8752, \$25

Charmant 1414 Huaihai Zhong Lu, near Fuxing Xi Lu, 011-86/21-6431-8107, \$15

Xing Xing Shaanxi Bei Lu, Lane 193, No. 60, near Nanjing Xi Lu, 011-86/21-6272-5821, \$3



Eat

You probably aren't visiting Shanghai for its hamburgers—which are getting a lot better, by the way—so I'm focusing on Chinese restaurants. Whittling my list down was no easy task; Shanghai is a great city for anyone who loves to eat.

Shanghaiese cuisine gets a bad rap: too oily, some say, or too sweet. But when prepared correctly, it can be delicious. (You'll hear that word a lot: It's one of the first English words students here learn.)

On a small, dark street in Luwan District, **Chun 1** ("Spring" in Chinese) serves the best home-style Shanghaiese food in town. Reservations are essential, as Chun has just four tables. Simply ask the owner what she recommends. If you don't speak Chinese, have your hotel concierge write "please feed us well" on a piece of paper. You'll be taken care of.

There are a dozen more tables and an English menu at **Jesse 2** in Xuhui District, but you still need reservations. The braised pork is, well, delicious.

If you're out late, hope for a seat at Jing'an District's **Bao Luo 3**, a cavernous joint that stays open until 6 A.M. and often has lines out the door. I like the sautéed tofu and crabmeat.

Ye Olde Station Restaurant 4, in the heart of Xujiahui, is a little more upscale. Despite its name and the old train cars that double as dining rooms, it was never an old station. It was a French monastery, founded in 1921. (The equally regal St. Ignatius Cathedral is across the street.) Savor the tender Mandarin fish—a steamed river fish that the server will debone—then explore the grand building, which is the epitome of Old Shanghai.

You must try *xiaolongbao*, often called "soup dumplings." While the steamed delicacies—thin pastry skins filled with meat and scaldingly hot soup (be careful!)—can be found on many a corner, ordering them in English will get you nowhere. The easy solution is tourist-friendly **Nanxiang Man-**

tou Dian 5, in the kitsch capital of Old City, Yu Yuan. Nanxiang is famous, and recognizable by the long take-out line (pay more to get a seat upstairs). Gourmands grumble about a decline in quality at Nanxiang, preferring the Taiwanese chain **Din Tai Fung** in Luwan's Xintiandi development, despite a sterile atmosphere and higher prices.

The *xiaolongbao*'s fried cousin is *shengjian mantou*, which is worth the wait at **Yang's Fry-Dumpling 6**. While we're on the subject of dumplings, I could live on *jiaozi*, minced meat and/or veggies in ravioliesque skins. They're boiled, steamed, or fried and served with an addictive soy-vinegar sauce. **Da Qing Hua 7/8** is a chain—I go to the one in Jing'an—but it has a wonderful selection of *jiaozi* and other hearty specialties from the northeast. Don't miss the bizarre "penis shrine" in the men's room.

Spice things up even more at **Shu Di La Zi Yu Guan 9**, a multistory Sichuan joint in northern Xuhui that specializes in *la zi yu*, a vat of tongue-numbing, flaky fish drowned in an oily broth and red chili peppers. (The huge bullfrogs you see in tanks just inside the entrance? They cook

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WHEN YOU REACH a number in the text, locate it on the grid. A photo of the place will be in the corresponding spot on the opposite page.

up quite nicely.) Slightly more sophisticated, **Guyi 10**, a Hunan restaurant in Jing'an, can make you breathe fire. I've enjoyed everything I've had there, especially the pork ribs with cumin.

Personally, I had always identified with that line from *Lost in Translation*: "What kind of restaurant makes you cook your own food?" Oddly named **Dolar Shop**, however, recently converted me to hot pot. You sit before an individual pot bubbling with broth. Toss in meats and vegetables, wait a couple minutes, and enjoy. Nice view, too.

Speaking of fun, **Afanti 11** serves Xinjiang food, which is more Middle East than Far East, in a raucous atmosphere well worth the 25-minute cab ride to Hongkou District. Stuff yourself with roast mutton and Xinjiang Black Beer, and enjoy the belly dancers. I've been to Xinjiang, in the west, and Afanti rings true, down to the clientele.

After Afanti, a time-out from meat will be in order. My fiancée, a vegetarian, thinks **Vegetarian Lifestyle 12** is the best place in town. Drinks include a variety of juices and teas, but no alcohol, and it's one of the only nonsmoking establishments in China.

Dim sum is a breakfast and lunch tradition here, so get to Xintiandi's **Crystal Jade 13** early. I'm a big fan of the Sichuan *dan dan* noodles—so what if they're not technically dim sum—in peanut broth.

In Xuhui, Taiwanese restaurant **Charmant 14** (I don't understand the name, either) has an equally expansive menu, with creative desserts. Just don't try to drink the "smoothies"; you need a spoon.

The restaurant I go to most often is **Xing Xing 15**, in the old Jing'an lane area I call home. Everything is fresh, and I love the *huntun* soup (akin to wonton soup, but a whole lot better). Poke around the Hua Ye Xiao Qu neighborhood: If you see a tall white guy walking a cute dog, say hello.



Assuming you won't want Chinese food for every meal, let me suggest a hip new place, serving Western fare, that may not have found its way into your guidebook. **A Future Perfect**, in the beautifully renovated first floor of an old Shanghai lane house, is a cozy—verging on cramped—café, restaurant, and bar that serves up equal parts style and substance. Five of us ate there recently—appetizers, entrées, desserts, and drinks—and the bill was \$120 (No. 16, Lane 351 Huashan Lu, near Changshu Lu, 011-86/21-6248-8020). A Future Perfect also boasts one of the nicest outdoor dining areas in Shanghai. The restaurant shares the 1930s brick house with the **Old House Inn**, one of the city's only boutique hotels. The 12 charmingly decorated rooms range in price from \$65 to \$130 (011-86/21-6248-6118, oldhouse.cn).

Shop

In Shanghai, someone's always trying to sell you something. It can be maddening, particularly when the same guy tries to sell you the same Rolex at the same corner every single day.

But when you really want to shop, this bazaar-like quality is a blessing—even if the best options rarely approach you on the street.

Small, unassuming **Tree 1**, in Xuhui, for example, is the perfect place to order a custom-made leather shoulder bag (around \$85) or a pair of cowboy boots (around \$115) for a fraction of what you'd pay in the States. Designer Yan Feng will help you with a sketch, or you can choose one of the many items on the store walls.

The owner designs many of the wares at **Christine Tsui's Fashion Club 2**, where handbags (from \$30) and other accessories blend modern and ancient aesthetics. The shop is in northern Xuhui on Xinle Lu, a lovely lane lined with boutiques, some set away from the street and buffered by gardens. On the west end of Xinle is **Sideways 3 4**, the only head shop I'm aware of in the city. Always an entertaining visit.

A couple streets north is **Brocade Country 5**, filled with hand-stitched tapestries (from \$24) that Liu Xiao Lan hauls back from Miao villages in central China.

Walk through a nearby parking lot to get to **Spin 6**, a sleek ceramics shop. The owner of Shintori, a Japanese restaurant, was spending too much on replacing broken china, so he hired designers and started making his own. Simple cups are less than \$5, a nice alternative to the tea sets most tourists buy.

Many of those tea sets will be purchased at Yu

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10	15	9
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Yuan, the historic garden/megamall in Old City. Before buying anything there, check out **Cang Bao Lou Market 7**, the five-story building at the end of Old Street. It's the wholesale market that sup-

plies a lot of Yu Yuan's shops. Bargain hard.

That advice will serve you well at most markets. Try to pay no more than 30 percent of the initial price, and assume that nothing's authentic. If it's a name brand, it's fake; if it's "old," it was made two weeks ago and rubbed in dirt. At the **Dongtai Lu Antique Market 8**, near Old City, sift through the junk to find fun gifts. Across the street is the **Xizang Lu Flower and Bird Market 9**, which is what it sounds like (except the bird-flu scare has chased away most of the birds). In the fall, you might catch some cricket-fighting.

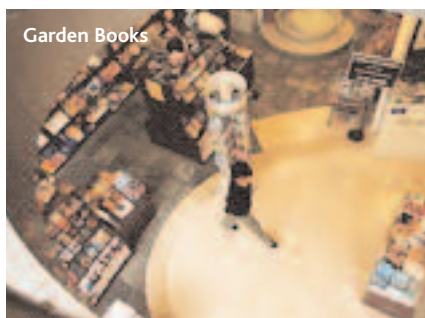
Two of Shanghai's most popular markets are in flux. The Dongjiadu Lu Fabric Market has just moved 500 meters and will now be called the **South Bund Fabric Market 10**. The new air-conditioning is a plus, but the market has lost some of its character. It's still the spot for affordable made-to-measure clothes; just don't expect perfection. I once got a tuxedo there for \$50. The famous Xiangyang Mar-

ket (a.k.a. the "fake market") is slated to close June 30 to make way for an office, retail, and hotel complex.

For old stuff that's actually old, head to **Guo Chun Xiang's Curiosity Shop 11 12** on Duolun Lu, a pleasant walking street in Hongkou. Guo has a spectacular U-shaped showroom packed with relics from the first half of the 20th century. **Art Deco 13**, in the fabulous Moganshan Lu art district, also offers a glimpse into the city's roaring pre-Communism years. Husband and wife team Ding Yi and Wang Yiwu have assembled a grand collection of furniture from the 1920s, '30s, and '40s.

For a little fun, try **Nantai Costume Company 14**, five minutes west of the Bund. Nantai outfits many of the local opera troupes and has the ambience of a factory store. Shelves are stacked with everything from tasseled platform slippers to stringy beards. Say hello to Chun Ge, the store's pet mynah bird—he'll say *ni hao* back. The kid in you will enjoy **POP Shanghai 15**, a quirky housewares store in the Bridge 8 complex in Luwan. I can't get enough of the retro tin wind-up robots (from \$5).

Finally, there's the **Shanghai Xin Mai Peng Electronics Market**. Known to some as the Gray Market, it's dark and a little dirty. There are lots of electronics, but I've seen everything from swords to baseball bats. A couple of shops sell iPods: Best not to ask where they came from or, as a friend discovered, expect them to work very well.



A little pink book called *inSHop* (\$4) provides brief introductions to 50 cool boutiques and studios, as well as interviews with 20 up-and-coming designers. The text is in English and Chinese, perfect for showing taxi drivers during communication breakdowns. Everything is organized by neighborhood, with maps. Zheng Ye, one of the book's editors, says they plan to release a new edition each year. In a city changing as rapidly as Shanghai, that's a necessity; sections of the 2005 edition are already out of date, thanks to good ol' Mr. Wrecking Ball. *inSHop* is available at two of my favorite bookstores, **Garden Books** (325 Changle Lu, near Shaanxi Nan Lu, 011-86/21-5404-8729) and **Shanghai Foreign Language Bookstore** (390 Fuzhou Lu, near Fujian Zhong Lu, 011-86/21-6322-3200).

Tree
126 Wulumuqi
Nan Lu, near Yongjia Lu,
011-86/21-6467-1758



**Christine Tsui's
Fashion Club**
24 Xinle Lu, near
Shaanxi Lu, 011-86/
21-5403-3156

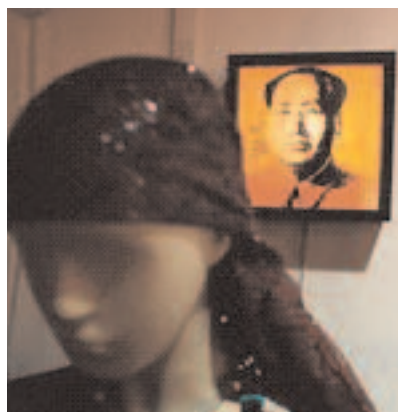


Sideways
144 Xinle Lu, near
Fumin Lu, 011-86/
21-5404-5350



Brocade Country
616 Julu Lu, 011-
86/21-6279-2677

Spin
758 Julu Lu,
Building 3, 1st Fl.,
011-86/21-6279-2545



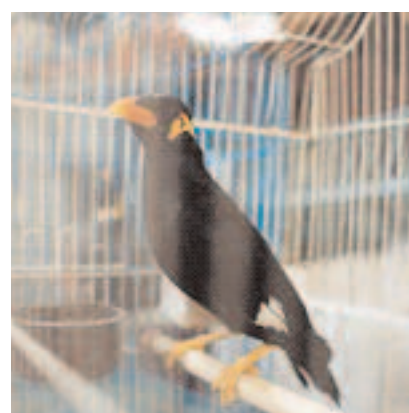
**Cang Bao Lou
Market**
457 Fangbang Zhong
Lu, near Henan Nan Lu

**Dongtai Lu
Antique Market**
Dongtai Lu and
Liuhekou Lu,
near Xizang Lu

**Xizang Lu Flower
and Bird Market**
Xizang Lu, near
Liuhekou Lu

**South Bund
Fabric Market**
399 Lujiabang Lu

**Guo Chun Xiang's
Curiosity Shop**
179-181 Duolun Lu,
near Sichuan Bei Lu,
011-86/21-5696-3948



Art Deco
50 Moganshan Lu,
Building 7, 1st Fl.,
011-86/21-6277-8927

**Nantai
Costume
Company**
181 Henan Zhong Lu,
near Fuzhou Lu,
011-86/21-6323-8344

POP Shanghai
Bridge 8 Complex,
8 Jianguo Zhong Lu,
Block 5, Room 5018,
011-86/21-5466-5108



**Shanghai
Xin Mai Peng
Electronics
Market**
638 Qiujiang Lu,
91 Baoshan Lu, and
723 Qiujiang Lu



Fuxing Park
105 Yandang Lu, 011-86/21-5386-1069

Party World
109 Yandang Lu, inside Fuxing Park, 011-86/21-5306-3888

Shanghai Concert Hall
523 Yan'an Dong Lu, near Xizang Lu, 011-86/21-6386-2836

JZ Club
46 Fuxing Xi Lu, near Yongfu Lu, 011-86/21-6431-0269, jzclub.cn

Number Five
B1, 20 Guangdong Lu, near the Bund, 011-86/21-6329-4558

Hongkou Stadium
Hongkou Stadium stop, on Line Three of the metro (three stops east of Shanghai Railway Station)

Shanghai Urban Planning Center
100 Renmin Dadao, People's Square, 011-86/21-6318-4477

Shanghai Post Museum
250 Bei Suzhou Lu, near Sichuan Bei Lu, 011-86/21-6362-9898

50 Moganshan Lu
50 Moganshan Lu, near Aomen Lu

210 Taikang Lu
210 Taikang Lu, near Sinan Lu

Boonna Café
88 Xinle Lu, near Fumin Lu, 011-86/21-5404-6676, boonnacafe.com

Cotton's
132 Anting Lu, near Jianguo Xi Lu, 011-86/21-6433-7995

Longhua Temple
2853 Longhua Lu, 011-86/21-6456-6085

Cycle China
011-86/21-139-1707-1775, cyclechina.com, tours \$19-\$62

Double Rainbow
47 Yongjia Lu, near Shaanxi Nan Lu, 011-86/21-6473-4000

Dragonfly
206 Xinle Lu, near Fumin Lu (one of many locations), 011-86/21-5403-9982



Play

One of my favorite things to do is wander. If you see an interesting alleyway (the older and smaller, the better), explore it; Shanghai is one of the safest big cities in the world. But go sooner rather than later. Old Shanghai, sadly, is disappearing at an alarming rate.

I rarely wake up as early as most Shanghainese do; but on those odd occasions, usually thanks to jet lag, I people-watch at **Fuxing Park 1**, an old French park in Luwan. Tai chi, fishing, ballroom dancing—it's got it all. It also has a granite statue of Marx and Engels, and late at night it becomes a hot spot for those heading to the two dance clubs located inside the park.

Nearby is a branch of the popular karaoke club **Party World 2**, also known as Cash Box. The Chinese love to sing, and karaoke is something that every visitor should experience (not to be confused with KTV, another type of singing establishment that has become synonymous with hookers). Party World is all private rooms that are booked in advance.

If you prefer to have other people perform, go to the 76-year-old **Shanghai Concert Hall**, south of People's Square. Three years ago, the gorgeous hall was lifted—all 5,650 tons of it—and moved 77 yards, where it's now the centerpiece of a park.

The jazz scene has enjoyed a renaissance of late, and the genre is easily the most reli-

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able source of quality live music in the city. Some say **JZ Club 3**, in Xuhui, is Shanghai's best live music venue, period. I like the sexy laid-back feel of **Number Five 4**, in the base-

ment of one of the neoclassical beauties on the Bund, Shanghai's majestic waterfront.

For sports fans, the best game in town is soccer, even if the Chinese pro league is rife with scandal and corruption. Shanghai Shenhua matches, in **Hongkou Stadium**, can be electric. The season runs March to November, and tickets from the window or a scalper shouldn't cost more than \$6.

I'm not much of a museum person. I have, however, made a few trips to the **Shanghai Urban Planning Center 5**, inside People's Square. A scale model of what city planners envision Shanghai will look like in 2010, when the World Expo comes to town, takes up an entire level of the museum.

I recently discovered the **Shanghai Post Museum 6**, which opened in January inside the impressive 1931 Shanghai District Post Office building, overlooking Suzhou Creek. The roof garden offers exceptional views of Shanghai's skyline.

Further inland along Suzhou Creek sits **50 Moganshan Lu 7**, a maze of converted

warehouses and factories in Putuo District that now house the soul of Shanghai's contemporary art scene. It's easy to spend an afternoon at the dozens of galleries and artist studios. A similarly hip, though more commercial, vibe can be found at **210 Taikang Lu 8**, an old neighborhood where many artists and designers have set up shop in renovated brick lane homes.

Chinese hipsters take their laptops to Xinle Lu's **Boonna Café 9**. For colder beverages of the alcoholic variety, I suggest **Cotton's 10 11**, a bar and restaurant in a stately 1930s home that is said to have been the residence of Shanghai's first mayor. In warm weather, drink in the large tree-shaded garden.

The city's most prominent places of worship are tied to Western religions, but if you have your heart set on visiting a Buddhist temple, Xuhui's **Longhua Temple 12 13**, Shanghai's largest and most active Buddhist center, will satisfy your needs. A seven-story wooden pagoda built more than 1,000 years ago is the signature structure. The Longhua Martyrs' Memorial, nearby, is an interesting slice of military history; it includes the original prisoners' barracks and tunnels.

Now for another activity that should probably include a little prayer: riding a bike. Some folks believe you can't truly *do* the city until you've pedaled among the masses. I'm not one of those people. But if you are, **Cycle China** organizes group and individual tours.

That, logically, brings me to my final tip. You can find great Chinese massages in Shanghai for around \$5 per 45 minutes. **Double Rainbow 14**, where many of the professionally trained therapists happen to be blind, is reliable. Chinese massages can be intense, however, and afterward I often feel like...well, like I need a massage. So lately I've been splurging (about \$25) for gentler hour-long oil massages. **Dragonfly Therapeutic Retreat 15** offers a tranquil setting for this heavenly experience.

Stay away from the "massage parlors" with the pink lights and girls in knee-high boots. They're brothels. Capitalism is alive and well in Communist China. ■

You'll thank us later!
 These names and addresses are all available in Chinese characters—download the info at BudgetTravelOnline.com



My first few years were pretty lean as far as live music goes. I like indie rock, while Shanghai preferred Filipino bar bands and "world-ranked" DJs. But a year ago, almost overnight, rock music arrived. Lately, two of the more reliable underground rock options have been **Live Bar** and **Shuffle Bar**. Live Bar, 20 minutes from downtown, is raw and divey. You can get a tall bottle of Tsingtao for less than \$2, and you'll be sitting on plastic furniture (721 Kunming Lu, by Tongbei Lu, 011-86/21-2833-6764). Shuffle Bar has a slightly more refined warehouse feel. Prices are a little higher, but at least your feet don't stick to the floor (137 Xingfu Lu, by Fahuazhen Lu, 011-86/21-6283-2769, shufflebar.com). For current concert listings, visit ShanghaiStreets.net or, of course, Shanghaiist.com.



Shuffle Bar