

Virtuoso

Travel+Life

THE GUIDE TO INSPIRED PURSUITS

THE DREAM JOURNEYS ISSUE

HIGH-FLYING SHANGHAI

Urban adventures in China's city of the future

Once in a Lifetime
10 UNCOMMON EPICS
TO MAKE YOUR OWN

Spirited reveries
on the Big Island,
the sensuous
architectural
legacy of Brazil,
and sweetest
New Orleans



HIGH-FLYING SHANGHAI

Meeting up with his daughter in Shanghai, veteran newsman KEVIN MCKIERNAN attempts to balance his *qi* with designer shopping, merlot-tipping in Pudong, and foot reflexology to the beat of *The Princess Diaries 2*.

Garden view: Yù Yuán tea-
house. Opposite: Morning
tai chi devotees on the Bund.





Year of the Rooster: Festival lanterns light up a Shanghai street.

The red lanterns in the streets of Shanghai and the fireworks outside the airport were for Chinese New Year. It also was my birthday, and I was in town to celebrate. I looked across the space-age terminal, scanning faces. Then I spotted her: the tall and graceful young woman in the red wool coat and Gucci sunglasses, the Westerner towering above the crowd and gliding toward me like a gazelle. She was laughing and waving a bouquet of flowers. It had been months since I'd seen her.

"This is my *baba*," she bubbled in fluent Mandarin to the waiting taxi driver. "I'm going to show him Shanghai!"

"*Ni hao*," the driver said with a smile, shaking my hand wearing the white gloves that distinguish the Shanghai cabbies. "Greetings."

Baba means "daddy" in Chinese, but it's a sweet word in any language. Especially when your kids are grown up and sophisticated and they use it to introduce you to strangers. Here was Caitrin, my 24-year-old daughter, linguist and marathon runner, the same girl I used to think of as a backpacker with mud on her boots. But the tailored red coat, an example of the stylish fusion designs sweeping Asia and Europe, was another side of her. She had a taste, it turned out, for cutting-edge cities. In this case, that meant Shanghai, Asia's new crossroads for art, music, clothing, and cuisine.

Caitrin had already spent close to two years in China and Taiwan, part of it as an undergrad at Stanford. Now she had a Fulbright fellowship from the State Department that took her to remote Chinese villages – places without hot showers and the vegetarian foods she craved – to take oral histories of elderly women. In other words, the rural countryside, a China I'd seen a bit of in 1997. After wrapping up a news assignment on Britain's historic hand-over of Hong Kong, a friend and I went overland hiking in search of China's minority people and ended up spending a week in a hamlet that hadn't seen a foreigner since the 1940s (when a troop of Japanese soldiers passed by). Now I had surfaced here in the "bright lights, big city" of China, curious to see how Shanghai's colonial past and still Communist-led present could merge with Caitrin's

vision of the city as a "shopping dream" and centerpiece in China's plans for the future.

Of course, I also knew that my daughter saw Shanghai as a perfect refuge for relaxation and entertainment. Here, she promised, the *baba* might be educated on the pleasures of urban life, even pampering. It was my birthday, after all, and I had eight days. When someone says a city will pamper, well, I can be a very good student.

Caitrin leaned across the breakfast table. The name of this country in Chinese is *Zhongguo*, she said, and it means "Middle Kingdom." That's because the Chinese



The author's daughter
on the subway.

historically thought of themselves as the center of the world. It's not hard to understand, considering they're a civilization of 2,000 to 3,000 years, one of the first – they believe *the* first on the planet. More on that later. We were in the hotel restaurant. I was reading the *Shanghai Daily*, an English-language paper. Caitrin was eating her fresh mangos. I could see the tall buildings out the window – Shanghai is the largest construction site in the world – and

we shared the local joke about the city's constant need to switch postcards to keep up with the ever-changing skyline.

Yao Ming, the 7' 6" NBA basketball star who plays for the Houston Rockets, was in the paper again. Yao is Shanghai-born and, of course, he's a local hero. Whenever you peer into cafés or noodle shops here, you see Shanghainese glued to a TV, listening to the Chinese announcer give the play-by-play and arguing about just how far their native son will go in the NBA. ("Yao's not Michael Jordan," one cabbie confided, "but we are proud that a person so tall from Shanghai is doing this well in America.")

I was on my second cappuccino, and already it looked like a good day. We'd managed to get tickets at the Portman Ritz-Carlton for the nightly (and dizzying) performance of the Shanghai Acrobats. That left the day to a visit to the Picasso exhibit in People's Square (where a

human-rights record or tensions with neighboring Taiwan. Instead, the story was about "red tourism," the latest craze of government-sanctioned visits for foreigners to former revolutionary bases and landmarks.

"Look, Caitrin," I said, "Communism can be found – it's now a theme park." And a profitable one at that. According to the paper, red tourism brought in \$2.4 billion in revenue in 2004. Indeed, any visitor nostalgic for the discredited system can go on a five-star tour to a "red ranch," a luxury resort with its own privatized section of the Great Wall. Whew, I thought, capitalism just got co-opted. So whatever happened to the Long March?

Shanghai ("above the sea") has always been in the vanguard. Even before the climactic end of the Opium War in 1842, when China was forced to open its doors to



flashing billboard counter announced just "1900 Days" left until World Expo in 2010) with time left to cruise the upscale French Concession on bicycles. Naturally Caitrin also wanted to squeeze in some shopping, insisting I see the latest in fusion fashion.

"I'll go," I offered, "if you help *me* find Communism!" That could be difficult, she said, citing the example of Mao, the man whose face still appears on Chinese currency. The People's Republic has remained under one-party rule, but it had long since distanced itself from the iconic leader who thought up disastrous policies like the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward. "We'll give it a try," she said, "but these days it's hard for outsiders to find many traces...."

The *Shanghai Daily* had two further articles of interest. One was about Yao Ming's parents, who had just opened a restaurant in Houston with his backing. The Texas eatery specialized in Shanghai crab, the paper noted, and the place had customized doorways that were tall enough for Yao Ming's teammates. The other story was political, but it had nothing to do with familiar topics like China's



Electric nights: The shopping scene at Nánjīng Lù and (left) club-goers in a talent show.

European and American trade, Shanghai was a major contact point with the West. Today, the Shanghainese people tend to be a little blasé about foreigners. You really can't blame them. After all, they've probably seen more visitors than the rest of China put together.

In the 1920s and 1930s, when the French, the Japanese, the British, and the Americans all had sectors – or "con-

cessions" in the city (and all had marines stationed to protect their various national interests), Shanghai had the reputation as a "sin city."

Back then it was a place of fast money, opium dens, brothels, gambling, and Al Capone-style gangsters who controlled everything from the drug trade to the police. Shanghai was called the "Paris of the East" and the "whore of the Orient." At the same time, it had long been a place of artists, intellectuals, and revolutionaries. The party town

Zedong and a dozen other radicals gathered around a wooden table in a small house and laid out their blueprint for the People's Republic of China.

Shanghai has always been a city of firsts. In 1934, the city was reported to be three times as crowded as London, with more cars on the streets than in all of China. One of its hotels boasted the fastest elevator in China in the 1930s. Another claimed the first use of the light bulb and the first long-distance telephone line. In another one, a

Red tourism reportedly brought in \$2.4 billion in revenue in 2004.

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occupied by Western powers had little to do with the life of the Shanghainese themselves, the vast numbers who walked in the shadows of the notorious city. As such, Shanghai became a crossroads of ideas in China and a launching point for new, sometimes controversial, directions. The birth of Communism took place in Shanghai's French Concession in 1921, when a young and fiery Mao

lovely piece of faded grandeur on the Huangpu River (with high ceilings, in-room movies, and broadband internet), Caitrin and I discovered that notables like Albert Einstein and Charlie Chaplin had preceded us as guests.

Then there's Shanghai's Pudong, China's hope for the future, a futuristic Wall Street district that many believe will outstrip Hong Kong as the financial capital of Asia, if



Shanghai neighbors: Armani and Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

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not the world. Last year, China's economy grew by 9.5 percent and investment spending represented more than 40 percent of the GNP (it was less than half that in the United States). No wonder U.S. companies like General Motors have plants here.

Back to Yao Ming. Alison had just text-messed Caitrin on her cell phone. Alison is Caitrin's pal from undergraduate Chinese classes, one of the young East-West ex-pats who believe we've already entered the China Century. She's a disc jockey in Beijing, an hour's flight to the north. She has a daily radio show called *Easy Café*, which is broadcast nationally; the program, a mix of soft rock and chat, is mostly in English, but it has a big Chinese following.

"Bad news," the message said, tongue-in-cheek. "Yao Ming is getting married."

I was in the lobby, waiting for Caitrin to come down from the gym. She arrived, in the outfit-of-the-day, just in time to catch me sampling another fresh kumquat from a potted tree near the reception desk. "PLEASE," she said, half-heartedly. "Don't do that when I'm around."

The friendly clerk winked at me, and Caitrin and I were off to our second spa of the week. The concierges seem to know the good places. But all the places are good, if you ask me, because Shanghai takes massage very seriously. According to Caitrin, who was enjoying a reversal of the father-daughter teaching role (she had me well in tow by now), that's the norm everywhere in the country. "At home, we look at massage as an indulgence or a way to restore health," she said. "Here, they see it as preventative, a necessary way to balance your *qi*, which means you should do it often."

Chinese medicine also makes acupuncture widely available in Shanghai (including U.S.-licensed salons, if desired), but we never got around to trying it. It was hard enough to select from the spa menus (with entries like the two-hour "Emperor's Delight," the "Post-Work-Out Spot Massage," and the "Hang-Over Relief Massage").

Caitrin's favorite was the "Pearl of the Orient" facial. Mine was foot reflexology, in a cozy room where a DVD of *The Princess Diaries 2* played softly and the attendant observed that I needed to learn to sleep "more deeply." By the time the treatment was over, I was as relaxed as a puddle of Play-Doh.

(Continued on page 100)

Shanghai Hit Parade *Starring attractions for urbane adventures.*

CAITRIN'S TOP TEN

- 1 Spend a lazy afternoon browsing **Tai Kang Lù**, an alley of art galleries and lifestyle boutiques. Look for women's fusion apparel at **La Vie** (021/6445-3585) and 1920s photos at **Old China Hand Press** (021/6415-0675).
- 2 Eat at the bustling and popular **Bao Luo** on **Fu Min Lù** – also chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's favorite Shanghai restaurant (just ignore the Budweiser girls in their thigh-high plastic boots); 021/5403-7239.
- 3 Savor high tea on the veranda at **M on the Bund**, overlooking the Huangpu; 021/6350-9988.
- 4 Smell tens of thousands of blossoms at the **Shanghai Flower Market**, between Shaanxi and Maoming Nan roads.
- 5 Ballroom dance at 6 PM in **Lù Xun Park**, north of Suzhou Creek in the Hongkou district. Return at 6 AM for tai chi with many residents.
- 6 Day-trip to **Hangzhou**; sip tea amid tea plants at hillside tea shops.
- 7 Visit **Suzhou Creek**, the new SoHo of Shanghai, with its 1920s warehouses turned art galleries.
- 8 Bicycle the tree-lined streets of the **French Concession**.

- 9 Sing karaoke at one of Shanghai's hopping KTVs (arguably wilder than anything in Japan). **Cashbox** in Fuxing Park has a big following; 021/5306-3888.
- 10 Learn a few choice phrases in Chinese, and use them.

KEVIN'S TOP TEN

- 1 **Shanghai Grand Theatre**. It has the world's largest stage and presents musicals like *Cats*, Western operas like *Aida* and *La Traviata*, foreign ballet companies, Itzhak Perlman, and top symphonies; 021/6372-8701 or 021/6372-8702.
- 2 **Jewish Quarter**. Visit **Ohel Moishe Synagogue**, built in 1927, and the **Jewish Club**, which dates to 1932. Shanghai took in 30,000 refugees fleeing the Nazis in the 1940s.
- 3 **Xiang Yang Fashion Market**. Stock up on cashmere, North Face gear, silk table runners, Rolexes, and more choice finds (some brands real, some not).
- 4 **Shanghai Museum**. I just missed the *Terracotta Warriors* exhibit, but I talked with CBS' Morley Safer and *60 Minutes* creator Don Hewitt in the museum gift shop (they were supposed to be scouting locations for the 2008 Olympics); 021/6372-3500.
- 5 **Yù Yuán** ("peace and comfort"). Take a walk in this 400-year-old classical Chinese garden in Shanghai's Old Town.
- 6 **Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Center**. Unlike the antique market, this shop's wares are all original artifacts: 3,000 posters from 1949 to 1979. Owner Yang Pei Ming is fluent in English, loves visitors, and knows the city's history; 021/6211-1845.
- 7 **Cloud Nine**. Go for dessert at the Grand Hyatt on the 87th floor of **Jin Mào Tower** – at 1,379 feet, the world's tallest hotel. Try the date-red-bean-and-sesame roll served with wasabi green-tea ice cream; 021/5049-1234, ext. 8098.
- 8 **Huangpu River cruises**. Watch the barges, yachts, and big ships going to sea.
- 9 **Shanghai tailors**. Will the new fusion designs bring back the '20s look? Ask your hotel concierge for recommendations.
- 10 **Shintori**. Eat and drink at this Taiwanese-owned Japanese restaurant, with minimalist decor and waiters in ninja suits; 021/5404-5252.

Cultural hub: Evening gala at the Shanghai Museum.



City on the Verge

Discovering Shanghai's new blush and age-old allure.

DOING IT

Full Spectrum in Five

From communist-propaganda posters to massages at the Evian Spa, **Imperial Tours'** five-day sojourn exposes Shanghai's many faces. The commercial and residential buildings lining the Bund and in the French Concession district are a visible reminder of the affluence—and decadence—that characterized the city a century ago, and the Shanghai Museum and the Ming Dynasty Yù Yuán gardens reach back even further. The sky-high Grand Hyatt Shanghai is the base for this private adventure, which also includes dinner at Jacques and Laurent Pourcel's **Sens & Bund**, afternoon tea at M on the Bund, the acrobatic show at the Grand Theatre, and a walk through the fragrant Shanghai Flower Market. Departures: Any day through 2005; from \$2,750, including accommodations, land transportation, guided activities, and most meals.

SHANGHAI STAYS

Steamy Evenings and Dim Sum

Travel Bound's five-day stay at the 511-room Shanghai JC Mandarin invites participants to conclude days of museum hopping with a relaxing **steam bath**, followed by a fine meal at the hotel's Cantonese restaurant, the Mandarin Pavilion, and perhaps a Cuban in the cigar lounge. A guide acquaints first-timers to Shanghai with a city outing via private car. Departures: Any day, June 1 through August 31, 2005; from \$1,117, including round-trip economy airfare from Los Angeles and accommodations.

The Good Son

Pan Yunduan spent two decades and his life savings creating the Yù Yuán garden as a tribute to his aging mother and father. Travelers on **Brendan Worldwide Vacations'** three-day stay in Shanghai can ponder such parental devotion during a visit to this 400-year-old **Old Town** oasis. Also on the itinerary: jaunts to the Shanghai Museum and the Children's Palace. Departures: Any day through 2005; from \$293, including accommodations at the Hua Ting Hotel & Towers and some meals.

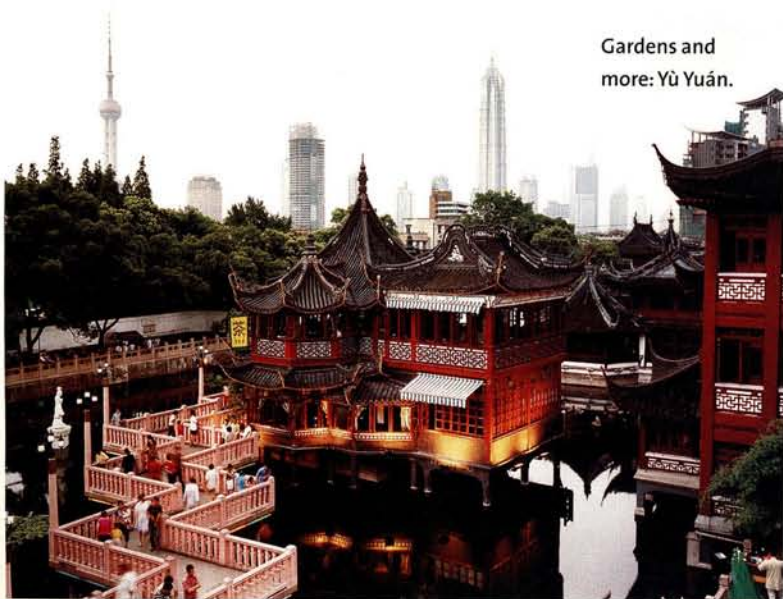
Tall Order

The cloud-piercing **Grand Hyatt Shanghai** occupies the 53rd through 87th floors of the landmark Jin Mào Tower. The Pudong hotel's 555 rooms and suites blend art deco design and traditional Chinese embellishments with bells and whistles such as heated mirrors in the showers. Another perk of the high life: bird's-eye views of the Bund, Huangpu River, and the city. Dining options range from wood-fired pizza at On Fifty Six to elegant Cantonese cuisine at Canton and Shanghai fare at **Club Jin Mào**. Cloud Nine on the 87th floor caps the building and offers yet more vistas. Rates: Through 2005; from approximate US\$245, including daily continental breakfast.

Shanghai
Acrobats roll
out the show.



Gardens and
more: Yù Yuán.



SHANGHAI AND BEYOND

Trishaws and Trapezes

Itinerant types can traverse China by trishaw, cable car, dragon boat, funicular tram, willow-leaf sampan, and riverboat with **Tauck World Discovery**. The 17-day journey takes in Chinese cities, the Yangtze River, and Hong Kong. Following a three-night cruise on the Yangtze, participants fly to Shanghai, where activities include a visit to the Children's Palace, a cultural center housed in the former mansion of one of Shanghai's wealthiest families, and a performance by the gravity-defying **Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe**. Departures: Multiple dates through October 29, 2005; from \$4,990, including accommodations and most meals.

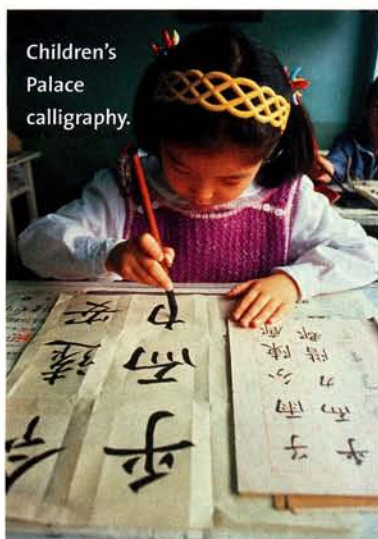
PHOTOS: (YU YUAN) ZUOPEI/LIAI/AURORA, (ACROBAT) SEVIN ACKERMAN, (CALLIGRAPHY STUDIO) D. E. COOPESTONE, (JADE BUDDHA TEMPLE) YANN LAYMATHIE IMAGE BANK

From Han to Haute

Sixteen days in China with **Intrav** get off to a memorable start at the Peninsula Palace, Beijing, and end on a high note with a three-night stay at Shanghai's Portman Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Located on **Nánjīng Lù**, the 578-room Portman Ritz-Carlton gives shoppers access to a wealth of alluring shops. A Yangtze River cruise aboard the 192-passenger *East Queen* plies the waters of the Three Gorges region and stops in White King Town, where calligraphy and stone etchings that date to the Han Dynasty are on display in the open-air museum. Departures: Multiple dates, through October 30, 2005; from \$3,995.

Big Three

Two days in Shanghai during **Viking River Cruises'** 14-day exploration of China take in a silk-rug factory, the Shanghai Museum, an acrobatic performance, and the Children's Palace. Four days cruising the Yangtze yield encounters with the 12-story **Shibaozhai Temple** and the Three Gorges. Four days each in Beijing and Hong Kong complete the circuit through the country's metropolises. Departures: Multiple dates through December 22, 2005;



Children's Palace calligraphy.

Monk domain: Jade Buddha Temple.



from \$3,179, including a \$50 per person shipboard credit. Round-trip economy airfare from Los Angeles, Seattle, or San Francisco from \$399.

Great White Zen

Travcoa's private expedition in China is an in-depth foray into the country's past. In Shanghai, lore seekers stroll the Bund, feast their eyes on the jewel-encrusted, white jade Buddha

from Burma at the Jade Buddha Temple, and peruse the **Shanghai Museum's** 123,000-piece collection of ancient Chinese art. In Beijing, travelers come face-to-face with the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Ming Tombs, and Tiananmen Square. During the 12-day trip, a family, couple, or small group can salute X'ian's army of Terracotta Warriors, seek creative inspiration in Suzhou's classical gardens, and sip delicate Dragon Well tea in Hangzhou. Departures: Any day through 2005; from \$3,595, including accommodations, guided activities, and most meals.

Shanghai à la Française

Absolute Asia combines big-city sights and small town landscapes on an 11-day peregrination through China. In addition to Yü Yuán and the **French Concession** in Shanghai, travelers explore Beijing, X'ian, Guilin's Reed Flute Cave, and the small towns of Wuzhen and Zhujiajiao, cherished for their gardens, bridges, canals, and traditional homes. Departures: Any day through January 10, 2006; from \$3,475, including accommodations, regional airfare, sightseeing, and some meals.

—ANITA CARMIN

WATER FEATURE

Flying Trains and Floating Greens

Cruisers on the *Seven Seas Mariner* soak in marble bathtubs and savor Le Cordon Bleu cuisine on **Radisson Seven Seas Cruises'** 14-day sailing between Tokyo and Hong Kong. A highlight: the three-day call in Shanghai, where the 700-passenger ship serves as a base for city outings. There, shoppers can bid on furniture at an antique auction, whiz through the city aboard the **Maglev train** (it floats above ground on an electromagnetic cushion), or get to know the French Concession and Pudong districts. The ship also calls at Nagasaki, Dalian, and Tianjin (port for Beijing), and spends four days at sea, allowing for practice of golf swings and time at the Carita of Paris spa. Departure: September 26, 2005; from \$8,695 (shore excursions extra). Virtuoso Voyager Club adds a gala dinner in Shanghai.

—A. C.