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# Visiting Shenzhen

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## Introduction

Situated just north of Hong Kong, the vibrant city of Shenzhen stands as a testament to China's rapid urbanization and economic progress. Once a small fishing village, Shenzhen transformed into a sprawling metropolis after being designated as China's first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in 1980. This status has made Shenzhen a leading example of China's reform and opening-up policy, catapulting it into the ranks of the country's wealthiest and most innovative cities.

Shenzhen's significance extends beyond its economic prowess. It has emerged as a global tech hub, home to numerous innovative companies, including giants like Huawei and Tencent. This transformation is evident in its urban landscape, where modern skyscrapers are interspersed with expansive green spaces. The city is continuously evolving, making it a compelling destination for tourists seeking to experience cutting-edge technology alongside cultural and natural attractions.

The unique blend of old and new in Shenzhen offers visitors a diverse range of experiences. From exploring the artisanal crafts at Dafen Oil Painting Village to marveling at the futuristic architecture of the Ping An Finance Centre, Shenzhen caters to a wide array of interests. For nature enthusiasts, the city's parks and hiking trails provide a tranquil escape, while its theme parks offer thrilling adventures for families.

Visitors to Shenzhen can expect a dynamic culinary scene that reflects its cultural diversity. While Cantonese cuisine predominates, the city is also home to flavors from across China as well as international cuisines. For dedicated foodies, Shenzhen's vibrant street food markets and upscale dining establishments offer a gastronomic journey that should not be missed.

As you plan your journey to Shenzhen, this guide aims to provide you with detailed information on how to make the most of your visit. Whether you're navigating the efficient metro system or deciding where to stay, "Visiting Shenzhen: A Guide for Tourists" offers practical tips and insights to ensure a seamless travel experience. By understanding what makes Shenzhen unique, travelers can fully appreciate the city's modern marvels and cultural richness.

## CHAPTER ONE: Getting There

Reaching Shenzhen is often the first logistical puzzle for prospective visitors, but fortunately, the city is exceptionally well-connected, reflecting its status as a major economic hub and neighbour to Hong Kong. Whether you're arriving from halfway across the globe or just hopping over from a nearby region, multiple pathways lead to this dynamic metropolis. Air travel is frequently the primary choice for international visitors, but high-speed rail, ferries, and convenient land border crossings from Hong Kong offer compelling alternatives depending on your starting point and preferences. Understanding the nuances of each option will smooth your entry into the Pearl River Delta's shining star.

The most direct aerial route lands you at Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport (SZX). Situated northwest of the city center, Bao'an is a vast, modern facility designed to handle significant passenger traffic. It primarily serves domestic routes within China but also offers a growing number of international flights, particularly from other Asian cities. If you're flying directly into Shenzhen, you'll likely arrive at Terminal 3, a striking structure known for its honeycomb-like architectural design. Navigating the terminal is generally straightforward, with clear signage in both Chinese and English guiding you from your gate through immigration and customs, and finally to the baggage claim area.

Upon collecting your luggage at SZX, you'll find several options for onward travel into the city proper. The Shenzhen Metro is arguably the most efficient choice. Line 11 connects directly to the airport terminal building, offering a swift journey towards key districts like Futian and Nanshan. This line uses faster trains with fewer stops compared to other metro lines, making it ideal for reaching the city center promptly. Clear directions within the arrival hall point towards the Metro station entrance, typically located on a lower level. Ticket machines are available with English interfaces, accepting various payment methods, although navigating this can sometimes be smoother with local payment apps or a pre-purchased Shenzhen Tong card, which we'll delve into later.

Alternatively, taxis are readily available outside the arrivals hall at designated taxi ranks. Official taxis are regulated and metered, providing a reliable, albeit more expensive, option compared to the Metro, especially during peak traffic hours. Be sure to join the official queue and avoid touts offering unsolicited rides. Having your destination address written down in Chinese characters is highly recommended, as many drivers may not speak English. Ride-hailing services, predominantly DiDi Chuxing, are also extremely popular and can be summoned via their app, often offering competitive pricing and various vehicle options. Designated pick-up areas for

ride-hailing are usually clearly marked within the airport's transport hub.

Airport buses provide another budget-friendly option for reaching various parts of Shenzhen from Bao'an International. Several routes operate from the airport's ground transportation center, serving different districts and major hotels. While signage for buses exists, figuring out the correct route and stop might be slightly more challenging if you don't read Chinese, as English information can be less comprehensive compared to the Metro. However, they offer a good way to see parts of the city en route, though travel times will be longer than the Metro or a taxi, particularly factoring in potential traffic congestion.

For many international travellers, especially those arriving on long-haul flights, flying into Hong Kong International Airport (HKG) is a very common and often more convenient strategy. HKG is one of the world's major aviation hubs, boasting connections from virtually every corner of the globe. Its proximity to Shenzhen makes it an excellent gateway. From HKG, you have several well-established methods for completing the final leg of your journey across the border into Shenzhen, each with its own advantages in terms of speed, cost, and convenience.

One of the most seamless ways to travel from HKG directly to Shenzhen is via the cross-boundary coach services. These buses depart frequently from Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 at HKG, heading towards various drop-off points in Shenzhen, including major hotels and key border crossings like Shenzhen Bay Port or Huanggang Port. Tickets can often be purchased upon arrival at dedicated counters within the airport terminals. The journey typically involves staying on the same bus while passengers disembark briefly to clear immigration formalities at the border control point, making it a relatively hassle-free option, particularly if you have luggage. Different companies operate these routes, offering slightly varied destinations and schedules.

Another popular option from HKG is the Airport Express train followed by the MTR connection to Shenzhen. Passengers can take the efficient Airport Express train from HKG to Kowloon Station or Tsing Yi Station in Hong Kong. From there, you would transfer to the regular Hong Kong MTR network, specifically taking the Tung Chung Line towards Hong Kong Station and then changing to the East Rail Line heading north. The East Rail Line terminates at either Lo Wu or Lok Ma Chau stations, both corresponding to major land border crossings into Shenzhen (Luohu and Futian Checkpoints, respectively). This method involves navigating the MTR system and handling your own luggage during transfers, but it integrates well with Hong Kong's public transport.

A unique and remarkably efficient transfer option directly from HKG's restricted area is the SkyPier ferry service. This allows passengers arriving at HKG, *without* entering Hong Kong proper (meaning you don't need to clear Hong Kong immigration), to transfer directly to a high-speed ferry bound for Shenzhen. Check if your airline

participates and allows baggage to be checked through. Upon landing at HKG, follow signs for "Ferry Transfer" or "Mainland Connection" before immigration. Purchase your ferry ticket at the SkyPier desk, and your checked luggage will typically be transferred directly to the ferry. Ferries usually depart for Shenzhen's Shekou Cruise Homeport or the Fuyong Ferry Terminal near Shenzhen Bao'an Airport. This is often the fastest method if your final destination in Shenzhen is near Shekou or the airport, bypassing Hong Kong traffic and immigration entirely.

For those already in other parts of China, arriving in Shenzhen by high-speed rail (HSR) is an increasingly popular and remarkably efficient choice. China's extensive HSR network connects Shenzhen seamlessly with major cities like Guangzhou, Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, and many others. Trains are modern, comfortable, punctual, and offer a scenic glimpse of the Chinese landscape whizzing by. Journeys that once took days can now be completed in a matter of hours, making train travel a very viable alternative to flying for domestic routes.

Shenzhen boasts several major railway stations, but the two most important for high-speed services are Shenzhen North Railway Station (Shenzhen Bei) and Futian Railway Station. Shenzhen North is a massive hub, handling the majority of long-distance HSR trains connecting Shenzhen with the rest of China. It's located further north of the main city center but is extremely well-connected by multiple Metro lines (Lines 4, 5, and 6), making onward travel relatively simple. The station itself is vast, featuring numerous platforms, waiting areas, shops, and restaurants. Signs are generally bilingual, aiding navigation.

Futian Railway Station holds the distinction of being one of the world's largest underground railway stations. Located directly beneath the central business district (CBD), it's incredibly convenient if your accommodation or business is in the Futian area. While it serves fewer long-distance HSR lines compared to Shenzhen North, it's a key stop for many high-speed trains, particularly those connecting to Guangzhou and Hong Kong (via the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link). Futian station is also a major interchange for Shenzhen Metro Lines 2, 3, and 11, offering excellent connectivity within the city. Its subterranean nature means navigating requires attention to signage, but its central location is a significant advantage.

Arriving at either Shenzhen North or Futian station via HSR is typically a smooth experience. Platforms are clearly marked, and disembarking passengers follow signs towards the station exits and connections to the Metro, taxis, or buses. Ticket gates require scanning your ticket or ID document upon exit. As with airports, official taxi ranks are available outside the stations, and ride-hailing services are prevalent. For those travelling from Hong Kong, the high-speed rail offers a swift connection via the Express Rail Link (XRL). Trains depart from Hong Kong West Kowloon Station and arrive directly at Futian Station or Shenzhen North Station in under 20 minutes, including immigration clearance performed conveniently at West Kowloon Station

before boarding. This co-location of immigration facilities makes the XRL journey exceptionally fast compared to traditional border crossings.

Beyond the high-speed options, conventional train services also operate into Shenzhen, primarily arriving at Shenzhen Railway Station, located adjacent to the Luohu border crossing and Luohu Commercial City. This station serves slower, traditional train routes from various parts of China and is also the terminus for the Hong Kong MTR's East Rail Line at the Lo Wu crossing. While not as fast as HSR, these services can sometimes be a more economical option from certain locations. The station is well-integrated with the Shenzhen Metro (Line 1) and local bus services. Its proximity to the border makes it a bustling hub of activity.

Ferry services provide another scenic and practical way to enter Shenzhen, especially from Hong Kong, Macau, or neighbouring coastal cities like Zhuhai. Shenzhen has two main passenger ferry terminals catering to these routes: Shekou Cruise Homeport in the Nanshan district and Fuyong Ferry Terminal near the Bao'an International Airport. Shekou Cruise Homeport is the primary terminal for most international and domestic ferry routes. It's a modern facility offering comfortable waiting areas and services. Ferries connect Shekou with several points in Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong Macau Ferry Terminal (Sheung Wan), the China Ferry Terminal (Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon), and HKIA SkyPier. Journeys are relatively quick, typically taking around an hour, offering pleasant views of the harbour and coastline.

The terminal at Shekou is well-connected to the city via Shenzhen Metro Line 2 (Shekou Port Station), making onward travel straightforward. Taxis and buses are also readily available. Ferries from Macau (both the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal and Taipa Ferry Terminal) and Zhuhai (Jiuzhou Port) also dock at Shekou Cruise Homeport. These routes offer a convenient way to combine a visit to Shenzhen with trips to the neighbouring Special Administrative Regions or coastal cities. Ticket booking can often be done online in advance or purchased at the respective ferry terminals. Remember to factor in time for immigration procedures upon arrival at Shekou.

The Fuyong Ferry Terminal, located closer to Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport, primarily serves routes connecting to Hong Kong International Airport's SkyPier and Macau. Its main advantage is its proximity to the airport, offering a convenient sea-air intermodal transfer. A free shuttle bus service often connects the Fuyong Ferry Terminal with the airport terminals. While less central than Shekou, it's a viable option if your flight departs from or arrives at SZX, or if your destination is in the Bao'an area. Always check the latest schedules and terminal information before travelling, as services can occasionally change.

Finally, for those already in Hong Kong, crossing the land border is perhaps the most common method of entering Shenzhen. Several border control points connect the two territories, each catering to different modes of transport and operating hours. The

choice of crossing often depends on your location in Hong Kong and your final destination in Shenzhen. Each crossing involves passing through Hong Kong immigration and then, after physically crossing the border bridge or channel, clearing mainland Chinese immigration.

The Luohu Control Point (connecting to Hong Kong's Lo Wu station) is one of the oldest and busiest crossings. It's accessible via Hong Kong's MTR East Rail Line. Once you exit the Lo Wu MTR station, you proceed directly through immigration into Shenzhen's Luohu district. Shenzhen Railway Station and the popular Luohu Commercial City shopping mall are immediately adjacent. The Shenzhen Metro Line 1 starts here, providing easy access to the rest of the city. This crossing is pedestrian-only, integrated with the MTR system, making it very convenient for rail travellers.

The Futian Control Point (connecting to Hong Kong's Lok Ma Chau Spur Line station) is another MTR-linked crossing, also served by the East Rail Line. Passengers alight at Lok Ma Chau station, pass through immigration, and emerge directly into the Futian Checkpoint area in Shenzhen. This modern crossing connects seamlessly with Shenzhen Metro Line 4 and Line 10 at the Futian Checkpoint station. It tends to be slightly less crowded than Luohu, though still very busy, and offers good access to Shenzhen's central Futian district. Like Luohu, this is primarily a pedestrian and rail crossing.

For those travelling by bus or private vehicle, the Huanggang Control Point is a major option. It is connected to Hong Kong via dedicated 24-hour cross-boundary coaches (often called "Go Go Buses" or similar names) departing from various points in Hong Kong (like Mong Kok, Jordan, Wan Chai). Huanggang is unique as it operates 24 hours a day, making it the go-to crossing for late-night or very early-morning travel between the two cities. After clearing immigration on both sides (passengers usually alight from the bus for checks), you arrive in Shenzhen's Futian district, with taxis and onward connections available.

Shenzhen Bay Port is another significant crossing, located further west, connecting Hong Kong's New Territories directly to Shenzhen's Nanshan district. This crossing is notable for its co-location of immigration facilities for certain transport modes, streamlining the process. It handles cross-boundary coaches, private cars, and dedicated Hong Kong city buses. Its location makes it particularly convenient for accessing areas like Shekou, Houhai, and the high-tech zones in Nanshan. On the Shenzhen side, taxis and local buses provide onward connections, though direct Metro access isn't immediately adjacent, often requiring a short connecting bus or taxi ride.

A newer option is the Liantang Control Point / Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point, located in the eastern part of Shenzhen and Hong Kong respectively. This modern facility is designed primarily for vehicular traffic but also accommodates pedestrians and cross-boundary buses. Less congested than the older crossings, it provides a

faster route for those travelling between eastern Hong Kong and eastern Shenzhen districts like Luohu or Longgang. Public transport connections on both sides are continually improving, making it an increasingly viable alternative.

Regardless of the land crossing chosen, be prepared for the process of clearing immigration on both sides. This involves presenting your passport and relevant visa or entry permit (details covered in the next chapter). Peak hours, especially weekends and holidays, can see significant queues, so always factor potential delays into your travel time. Signage is generally available in English, but the process typically involves walking between the Hong Kong and Shenzhen immigration halls. Ensure you have any necessary travel documents readily accessible to expedite the process.

Choosing your arrival method depends largely on your origin, budget, and tolerance for transfers. Flying directly into SZX offers simplicity if flights are available and convenient. Using HKG as a gateway provides vast international connectivity, followed by a relatively straightforward transfer via coach, MTR, ferry, or XRL train. High-speed rail is ideal for domestic travel within China, delivering you directly into well-connected city stations. Ferries offer a scenic alternative from nearby coastal points, while land crossings from Hong Kong provide frequent and flexible options, especially via the integrated MTR network. Whichever route you take, Shenzhen awaits, ready to reveal its modern energy and surprising diversity.

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