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Visiting Shanghai

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Introduction

Shanghai, a city where the future meets the past, is a mesmerizing blend of ultra-modern skyscrapers and ancient traditions. As China's largest metropolis and one of the global financial hubs, Shanghai captivates with its vibrant blend of history, culture, and innovation. From the awe-inspiring skyline of Pudong to the quaint allure of its water towns, Shanghai offers a unique travel experience like no other.

This guide aims to be a comprehensive companion for those planning to explore this dynamic city. While many travel guides focus on the generic aspects of visiting any destination, this book delves into the heart of Shanghai, offering insights and details pertinent to making the most of your visit to this extraordinary city. Whether you're drawn by its culinary delights, cultural treasures, or high-end shopping, this guide is curated to enhance your journey through Shanghai's diverse landscapes.

For tourists, understanding the intricacies of a city as vast and multifaceted as Shanghai is crucial. Traveling here means immersing oneself in a city of contrasts: ancient temples stand shoulder to shoulder with cutting-edge architecture, while serene gardens provide respite from bustling urban life. This guide will equip you with the knowledge and tips needed to navigate Shanghai's crowded streets, historic neighborhoods, and culinary wonders.

The layout of this book follows a logical progression: from arriving in Shanghai and exploring its public transportation system, to discovering its accommodation options and must-see attractions. It also covers essential information on dining, shopping, nightlife, and practical tips to ensure a smooth and enjoyable visit. Not forgetting the nuances of local etiquette and cultural norms that can enrich your interactions with the locals.

Shanghai is not just a city; it's an experience waiting to unfold. This guide is your key to unlocking the treasures of a city that has dazzled and captivated millions over the centuries. Prepare to embark on an unforgettable journey through the pulsating heart of Shanghai, where every street and corner tells a story of its illustrious past and vibrant future. Enjoy the adventure!

CHAPTER ONE: Getting to Shanghai

Your adventure in Shanghai begins the moment you decide how to get there, and for most international visitors, that journey culminates at one of the city's two major airports. Shanghai serves as a primary gateway to China, welcoming millions of travelers each year through Pudong International Airport (PVG) and Hongqiao International Airport (SHA). While both are efficiently connected to the sprawling metropolis, they cater to slightly different flight profiles and offer distinct transport options for reaching your final destination within the city. Understanding the layout and logistics of arrival is your first step towards a smooth Shanghai experience.

Pudong International Airport, typically bearing the airport code PVG, is the city's main international hub. Located about 30 kilometers (around 19 miles) east of the traditional city center, Pudong feels distinctly modern and handles the vast majority of long-haul international flights arriving in Shanghai. If you're flying in from Europe, North America, Australia, or many other parts of Asia, chances are you'll land here. The airport is vast, boasting two main terminals (T1 and T2) connected by walkways and shuttle buses, with further satellite concourses. Prepare for potentially long walks after disembarking.

Navigating Pudong Airport upon arrival is generally straightforward, though its sheer scale can be initially daunting. Signage is available in both Mandarin Chinese and English. Follow the signs for immigration, where you'll queue based on your passport and visa status. Ensure you have your passport, visa (if required), and completed arrival card ready. Processing times can vary significantly depending on the time of day and number of arriving flights, so factor in some potential waiting time. Patience is a virtue here, as it often is in large international hubs.

After clearing immigration, you'll proceed to baggage reclaim. Check the overhead screens for your flight number to find the correct baggage carousel. Luggage carts are readily available. Once you have your bags, you'll pass through customs. China has regulations regarding what can be brought into the country, including limits on cash, alcohol, and tobacco, as well as restrictions on items like fresh produce or certain publications. Most tourists with standard luggage will pass through the 'nothing to declare' green channel without issue, but be prepared for potential spot checks.

Once you emerge into the arrivals hall, you'll be greeted by a flurry of activity. This is where you transition from international traveler to Shanghai explorer. Here you can find information desks, currency exchange counters, ATMs, and kiosks for local SIM cards or portable Wi-Fi devices. It's generally advisable to exchange a small amount of currency or withdraw some Renminbi (RMB) from an ATM here for immediate needs

like transportation, although mobile payments are dominant in Shanghai (covered later). Avoid the unofficial money changers who might approach you; stick to the official bank counters or ATMs.

Now, the crucial part: getting from Pudong Airport to your accommodation. You have several options, each with its own advantages in terms of speed, cost, and convenience. Perhaps the most unique and talked-about option is the Shanghai Maglev Train. This magnetic levitation train is a feat of engineering, whisking passengers from the airport to Longyang Road Metro Station on the outskirts of Pudong district at breathtaking speeds, reaching up to 431 kilometers per hour (268 mph) during certain times of the day.

The Maglev journey itself takes only about eight minutes to cover the 30-kilometer distance to Longyang Road. It is an experience in itself, offering a glimpse into Shanghai's penchant for futuristic technology. However, it's important to note that Longyang Road is not the city center. From there, you will need to transfer to the Shanghai Metro network (Lines 2, 7, or 16) or take a taxi to reach your final destination. This makes the Maglev most convenient for those staying in the Pudong area or those comfortable with navigating the Metro immediately upon arrival.

To find the Maglev station at PVG, simply follow the clear signs in the airport terminals (T1 and T2 are connected to the station). Tickets can be purchased at the counter; a one-way trip costs around 50 RMB, with a discount if you show your same-day flight ticket. A round-trip ticket offers further savings if you plan to use it for your return journey. Check the operating hours, as the train does not run 24/7, typically operating from early morning until mid-evening. The frequency is generally every 15-20 minutes.

A more universally practical, albeit slower, option for reaching most parts of Shanghai from PVG is the Metro. Line 2 (the green line) extends directly into the airport, serving both Terminals 1 and 2. This line traverses the city from east to west, passing through major hubs like Lujiazui (Pudong's financial district), Century Park, People's Square (the very heart of the city), Jing'an Temple, and eventually connecting to Hongqiao Airport and Hongqiao Railway Station at the western end.

Taking the Metro Line 2 from Pudong Airport is significantly cheaper than the Maglev or a taxi, costing under 10 RMB to reach the city center. However, the journey is considerably longer - expect it to take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to reach central locations like People's Square, depending on the specific station. The trains can get very crowded, especially during peak hours, and navigating with large amounts of luggage can be cumbersome. If you prioritize budget over speed and comfort, or if your accommodation is directly on Line 2, this is an excellent choice.

Metro stations are located beneath or adjacent to the terminals; again, follow the signs. You can purchase single-journey tickets from automated machines (which

usually have an English language option and accept small bills or coins) or from a service counter. If you plan on using the Metro frequently during your stay, consider purchasing a Public Transportation Card later (covered in Chapter 2), although you'll need a single ticket for this initial journey. Be prepared for security checks before entering the Metro platform – your bags will need to go through an X-ray scanner.

Taxis offer a door-to-door service, which can be particularly welcome after a long flight, especially if you have heavy luggage or are traveling in a small group. It is absolutely crucial to use the official taxi queue outside the arrivals hall. Follow the signs for 'Taxi Stand' and ignore any drivers who approach you inside the terminal – these are often unlicensed and will charge exorbitant fares. The queue might look long, but it usually moves efficiently, managed by airport staff.

When it's your turn, an attendant may help direct you to a taxi. Make sure the driver starts the meter ('dǎ biǎo' - 打表). Tipping is not customary in China. The fare will depend on traffic and your destination, but a ride from PVG to the city center (e.g., People's Square or The Bund) typically costs between 150 and 250 RMB and takes roughly 45 to 75 minutes, heavily dependent on traffic conditions. Tolls for expressways are usually added to the final fare.

A vital tip for taking a taxi: have your destination address written down clearly in Chinese characters. While some drivers might know major landmarks or hotels by their English names, many do not. Showing the address in Chinese eliminates confusion and ensures you get where you need to go. Your hotel confirmation email often includes this, or you can prepare it beforehand. Keep the card or printout handy. Also, try to have smaller denomination RMB bills available, as drivers may struggle to make change for large notes, especially early in their shift.

Airport buses are another, more budget-friendly alternative to taxis. Several airport bus lines operate from PVG, connecting the airport to various points across Shanghai, including major transport hubs and districts. These buses are generally comfortable, air-conditioned coaches with space for luggage underneath. They are significantly cheaper than taxis, with fares typically ranging from 20 to 35 RMB depending on the route.

Finding the airport bus stops requires following the signs outside the arrivals area. Each route has a designated waiting area and schedule. The downside is that you need to figure out which bus line goes closest to your accommodation and where the specific stops are. Journey times can be longer than taxis due to multiple stops and potential traffic delays. While a viable option, they are often less convenient for first-time visitors compared to the Metro or a taxi, unless a specific bus route happens to stop very near your hotel.

While PVG handles the bulk of international traffic, Shanghai's other airport, Hongqiao

International Airport (SHA), plays a crucial role, particularly for domestic travel within China and some regional flights to destinations like Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, and Taipei. Located much closer to the city center – only about 13 kilometers (8 miles) west of downtown Shanghai – Hongqiao is older but has been significantly modernized, especially with the opening of Terminal 2.

Hongqiao Airport consists of two terminals. Terminal 1 (T1) primarily handles international and regional flights along with budget carriers like Spring Airlines. Terminal 2 (T2) is much larger and newer, handling the vast majority of domestic flights from major Chinese airlines (like China Eastern, Air China, China Southern). Importantly, T2 is seamlessly integrated with the massive Hongqiao Railway Station, one of China's busiest high-speed rail hubs, making it incredibly convenient if you're connecting directly to or from a train journey elsewhere in China.

If you arrive at Hongqiao, especially T2, you'll find the process of getting into the city generally quicker and easier than from Pudong, simply due to its proximity. Immigration and customs procedures are similar if you arrive on an international flight into T1. The arrivals halls offer similar amenities like currency exchange, ATMs, and information desks. The connection between T1 and T2 is possible via a free shuttle bus or by taking Metro Line 10 one stop.

Transportation from Hongqiao Airport benefits greatly from its location and integration with the city's transport network. The Metro is arguably the most convenient option for most travelers arriving here. Two major Metro lines serve Hongqiao Airport. Line 10 connects both Terminal 1 and Terminal 2, heading east through popular areas like the French Concession (Xintiandi, Laoximen, Yuyuan Garden stops), Nanjing Road East, and onward towards northern districts.

Metro Line 2 also serves Hongqiao Terminal 2 (and the adjacent Railway Station), providing a direct link across the city center via Jing'an Temple and People's Square, all the way to Pudong Airport at its eastern terminus. This makes transferring between the two airports possible entirely via the Metro system, though it's a long journey. A Metro trip from Hongqiao (either terminal) to People's Square takes approximately 30-40 minutes and costs only a few RMB. As with PVG, expect crowds and factor in luggage handling.

Taxis are readily available at official taxi ranks outside both T1 and T2 at Hongqiao. Due to the closer proximity, fares to central Shanghai are significantly lower than from PVG. A typical ride to People's Square or The Bund might cost between 60 and 100 RMB and take around 30 to 45 minutes, again, highly dependent on traffic. The same advice applies: use the official queue, ensure the meter is running, and have your destination address in Chinese characters.

Airport buses also operate from Hongqiao, connecting to various parts of the city, but

given the speed and convenience of the Metro from SHA, buses are less commonly used by tourists arriving here unless heading to a specific location not well-served by the Metro lines. If considering a bus, check the routes and stops carefully at the designated bus station area outside the terminals.

Regardless of which airport you arrive at, be prepared for the initial sensory immersion into Shanghai. It's a bustling environment, but generally well-organized. Take a moment in the arrivals hall to orient yourself, perhaps grab a bottle of water, and decide on your onward transport method. Don't feel rushed; navigating a new city's airport is the first small adventure of your trip. Official airport staff are usually helpful if you have questions, though English proficiency can vary.

Now, let's address the crucial topic of visas. For the vast majority of foreign visitors, entering China, including Shanghai, requires obtaining a visa *before* you travel. The most common type for tourists is the L visa. The application process typically involves submitting forms, photos, your passport, proof of travel arrangements (like flight bookings and hotel reservations), and potentially other documents to the Chinese embassy or consulate, or an authorized visa application service center, in your home country.

Visa regulations and application procedures can change, and requirements vary based on your nationality. It is absolutely essential to check the *official website* of the Chinese embassy or consulate in your country well in advance of your planned trip. Do not rely solely on travel blogs or outdated information. Allow ample time for the application process, which can take several weeks. Ensure your passport has sufficient validity (usually at least six months beyond your intended stay) and blank pages for the visa.

There is one notable exception that may apply to some travelers passing through Shanghai: the 144-hour Transit Without Visa (TWOV) policy. This policy allows citizens of certain specified countries (including the US, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, most EU countries, and others) to stay in Shanghai, Jiangsu province, and Zhejiang province for up to 144 hours (6 days) without a visa, provided they meet strict criteria.

The key conditions for the 144-hour TWOV include: possessing a valid passport from an eligible country, holding a confirmed onward ticket to a *third* country or region (Hong Kong and Macau are considered separate regions for this purpose) with a confirmed departure date and seat within 144 hours of arrival, and entering and exiting through designated ports within the eligible region (both PVG and SHA airports are included, as are Shanghai's cruise terminals and railway station, and airports in Nanjing and Hangzhou).

Using the 144-hour TWOV requires careful planning. You cannot use it if your itinerary is simply Country A -> Shanghai -> Country A. It must be Country A -> Shanghai ->

Country B (or Region B). Upon arrival at PVG or SHA, you must specifically apply for this transit permit at the dedicated immigration counter, presenting your passport and onward ticket. You will receive a temporary entry permit stamp. It's vital to understand that you must depart the designated region (Shanghai/Jiangsu/Zhejiang) to the third country/region within the 144-hour limit.

While the 144-hour TWOV can be convenient for short stopovers or specific multi-destination trips, relying on it requires certainty about your eligibility and compliance with all rules. The interpretation by immigration officers is final. If you have any doubts, or if your trip doesn't perfectly fit the criteria, obtaining a standard tourist visa in advance is the safest option to avoid potential entry denial or complications. Again, always verify the latest official rules and eligible nationalities before planning your trip around this policy.

Once you have your visa sorted (or have confirmed your eligibility for TWOV) and have navigated the arrival process at either Pudong or Hongqiao, you've successfully completed the first leg of your Shanghai journey. Choosing the right transport from the airport sets the stage for your exploration. Whether you opt for the futuristic speed of the Maglev, the budget-friendly reach of the Metro, or the direct convenience of a taxi, you are now on your way to discovering the vibrant heart of this incredible city. The next step is mastering how to navigate Shanghai once you're settled in.

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