

Adventures in Shantou (formerly Swatow), Guangdong Province, China.

Shantou is a city of 6 million people. It was significant in 19th-century Chinese history as one of the few treaty ports established for Western trade and contact. It was badly damaged by the Japanese in WW2. It was one of the original special economic zones of China established in the 1980s, but did not blossom in the manner that cities such as Shenzhen, Xiamen and Zhuhai did. Until the high-speed rail arrived in the last couple of years, Shantou was isolated. Even with a highway, it's now a 5 hour drive to Guangzhou, the Provincial capital. The train station is 31km (19 miles) away from Shantou.

I went with a friend who can speak Mandarin but not Teochew, the local dialect unintelligible to Mandarin speakers. Locals speak both. We did see some Hong Kong and mainland Chinese tourists, but virtually no Western tourists. Local buses, museums, shops, etc had almost no English signage. Shantou doesn't have a subway train system; one is under construction. There are McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, even Haagen Dazs.

High speed train from Hong Kong to Shantou (formerly Swatow). Around 3 hours. Max speed 208 km/hr. (Other Chinese high speed rail lines go up to 350 km/hr.)



Along the train trip, the train passes fish and shrimp farms (left) and duck farms (right). Also vegetable and rice farms.

There are three or four stops between HK and Shantou. The only big one is Shenzhen.



On arriving, the train station has a fake Starbucks (left). And I stayed in a fake 5-star Hyatt Hotel (right). English name is Haiyi Hotel, but in Chinese Haiyi means Hyatt. So Chinese travelers can be fooled.

Train station is 50 minute bus ride (19 miles) to Shantou. Bus ticket says “Golden Gulf Hotel”, which is across the street from the Haiyi. But halfway to town, bus driver announces the “bus will not go to Golden Gulf Hotel”. He will leave us at Garden Hotel (3km away) and we should take a taxi. Trouble is there were no taxis at Garden Hotel. It was dark. Fortunately, a “gypsy cab” found us looking perplexed in the street, and we got to the Haiyi for US\$4.

Oh yes, the first two nights the hotel phoned the room to see if we wanted the services of a nice young lady.

In Shantou we took local buses everywhere. Fare is 2RMB (US 30 cents). I had my Guangzhou Metro (subway) card with me, and unexpectedly it worked on the Shantou buses. The buses were efficient and surprisingly clean, even if a bit old.



First visit was to Shantou Museum. Large 5-story museum. However, the only exhibits were on 3rd floor. Two other floors devoted to Communist Party propaganda. The rest empty.

Museum claims to have 12,000 items in its collection, though it did not seem to be anywhere near as much.



In 2007 a sunken late Ming Dynasty (1600s) ship was found in Shantou Harbor. It was loaded with export porcelains, many of which survived underwater for 400 years. Hundreds of recovered items are on exhibit at this museum (poster is photo at right).



Recovered Ming bowls from sunken ship.



Left: high tech museum gift shop. Items are displayed behind glass. Choose and pay using the screen. Purchase will be delivered to your home next day. No staff involved.



Right: Shantou has a large historic district (buildings from 1850s to 1930s) that is very run down and in the early stages of restoration. Needs 10 years or more.



Shops in the historic district:

Left: Traditional Shantou pastries.



Right: Traditional Shantou dumplings.



Historic district:

Left: Sun Yat Sen Pavilion.



Right: 1912 post office built by Britain. Now a postal museum (very basic).



Historic district: Newly restored 1920s Shantou Opera Theatre.



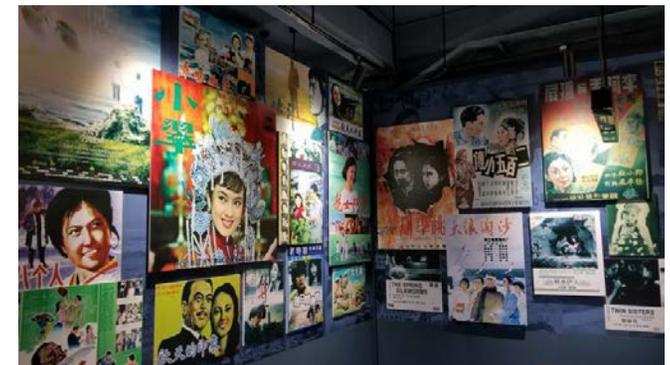
Left: St Joseph Roman Catholic Cathedral. Gated and closed.



Right: Shantou Movie Museum. Shantou (Swatow) has a long history of movie production.



Shantou Movie Museum. Newly opened.



Guanyin Temple:

Left: Outside wall.

Right: Temple exterior.



Guanyin Temple:

Left: Main altar.

Right: Guanyin shown as a fertility goddess.



Guanyin Temple

Left: Sculpture.

Right: Something I have never seen in a Buddhist temple – a female guardian at the door.



Taoist Temple



Left: Two temples – Old Mother Mazu Temple and Emperor Guan Temple (1796-1820).

Right: Interior of Old Mother Mazu Temple (1796-1820). Aka Queen of Heaven Temple. Mazu is the goddess of sailors.



Customs House Museum, 1919.



Left: Didi Car (Chinese Uber). Book and pay by phone. We took the car 25km (16 miles) to visit the Chen Cihong Residence. About US\$15.

The residence covers an area of approximately 25,400 square meters. It has 506 rooms and halls divided into four parts. Late 19th and early 20th c.

The main part is Chen's home, which has 202 rooms and is the best preserved. Other parts are homes of Chen family members.

Chen Cihong's home. Late 19th and early 20th c. Mix of Western and Chinese styles.

Chen Cihong (1843-1921) was an overseas Chinese businessman and shipping company exec. His family was very rich. He was respected by the local people because he was an enthusiastic participator in public welfare by building schools, bridges and roads in his hometown.



Chen Cihong's home. Chinese name Qianmeixiang. Late 19th and early 20th c.



Chen Cihong's home. Late 19th and early 20th c.



Chen Cihong's residence. Late 19th and early 20th c.

Some of the outbuildings have not been restored and are lived in by local people.



After finishing at Chen Cihong's residence, we asked these two girls (ages 13 and 14) how to find the #103 bus back to Shantou. They said they would lead us (about 1 km). They became our tour guides through this farm area, and our friends. We walked through their village and farms. They spoke no English or Cantonese. Mainly Teochew dialect of Mandarin.

Right: Village grocery shop.



Left: The mother of one of the girls (pictured) owns this bakery.

Right: A guava tree on a farm. Each guava has been wrapped in plastic to protect it from insects.



Left: Banana tree. The purple cone thing is a banana flower. It is edible.

Right: Goslings at a goose farm. Farmer invited us in. He also had full grown geese.



Left: A small farm with ducks.



Right: Geese on a farm.



Left: Walking to the bus.



Right: Paul and new friends.



In the end, we did not take the #103 bus. A man with a car showed up and we negotiated 100RMB (US\$15) to drive us 25km back to Shantou. At first, he got lost and took us to the wrong place, but eventually we got to the hotel.

Left: To prevent license plate fraud, all trucks, vans, and buses in China must have their license plate number painted directly on the vehicle.



Right: **Trumpchi** brand car. A Chinese brand since 2010. They will have to change the name to be able to sell in the US, which they want to do.



Left: Sign pasted on many buildings in Shantou exhorting people to behave civilly, don't spit, don't yell, don't push, don't litter, don't damage public property, etc.



Right: Funny sign.



Left: sign in my hotel room. Apparently Chinese guests will cook food or soup in the tea kettle.



Dining: We had breakfast each of the four days at the hotel. We also had all four dinners there – three at the Chinese restaurant (right) and one at their buffet restaurant. 5-star hotel was US\$65 a night including huge buffet breakfast.



Hotel Breakfast Noodle Bar.

Choose your ingredients. From top left – mushrooms, congealed blood, rice noodles, wontons, fish balls, spinach noodles, wheat noodles, macaroni, beef balls, egg noodles.



Choose your greens.



Left: Finished product. Fish ball noodle soup. Typical Chinese breakfast.



Right: Turnip cake. Except it is made from daikon radish, not turnip. But traditionally called turnip cake. It is a Hong Kong dim sum item.



Breakfast:

Sign said "Pig miscellaneous porridge".

Turned out to be "Pig intestines porridge". I took some, but the smell put me off from eating it.



Soups (both outstanding):

Left: Sweet potato leaf soup.



Right: Seafood and bean sprout soup.



At our 5-star hotel, dinner for two – four courses including soup, meat, veggies, rice, plus starter and tea – was around RMB200 = US\$30, including tax and service.

Left: Pumpkin and taro. Taro is starchy like potato.

Right: Shantou prawn balls (local specialty).



Left: Spinach and mixed vegetables with glass noodles.

Right: Dried seafood and cabbage fried rice.



Lunches:

Left: Goose with rice.

Right: Steamed rice in lotus leaf.



Left: Local specialty dessert called Duck Mother Floating. Glutinous rice with Chinese dates.

Right: Black fungus and chilis appetizer at dinner.



To return to HK, we took another Didi car to the train station, a 50-minute drive. But the guy dropped us at the wrong station – one under construction. We needed to go to the temporary station 3km away. No sign of any people or cars around the construction site.

Lo and behold a tuk-tuk shows up and, for RMB20 (US\$3) he took us to the temporary station.

My friend I went with is giving the driver the benefit of the doubt and has concluded it was a mistake. I say it was a scam.

