

# AROUND JIANGSU



## ZHOZHUANG

Billing itself as the oldest and the most iconic canal town in the country, Zhouzhuang, built in 1086, provides a sample of what life was like in eastern China before all the concrete, highways, vehicles and skyscrapers took over the Yangtze River Delta region.

Situated in Kunshan, which is 30 kilometers southeast of Suzhou, Zhouzhuang is easy to reach from major cities including Nanjing and Shanghai.

The town, noted for its culture, well-preserved ancient houses, elegant scenery and strong local traditions, was built mostly during the Ming and Qing

dynasties, a romantic reminder of China's past. The canals lacing the millennium-old town, the Ming Dynasty architecture and the batik-clothed gondoliers take you back to the days of yore.

Visitors can pass through shops selling woven bamboo and local pearls on the way to the town's two major religious sites, the Buddhist Quanfu Temple and the Taoist Chengxu Temple, or take a boat ride through the town at about 100 yuan per ride. The traditional Chinese folk tunes sung by the women gondoliers are free.

June is a popular time to visit, with

the annual Dragon Boat Festival taking place on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar. It is a time when locals come out and race dragon boats along the canals that run through the entire town.

However, it is recommended you don't come on weekends or national holidays. Just imagine this 2.7-square-kilometer town swamped by 25,000 tourists.

The view of the town at sunset is as serene as it is divine. However, you can also choose to come back to Shanghai, Suzhou or Nanjing on a one-day getaway.

## TONGLI ANCIENT TOWN

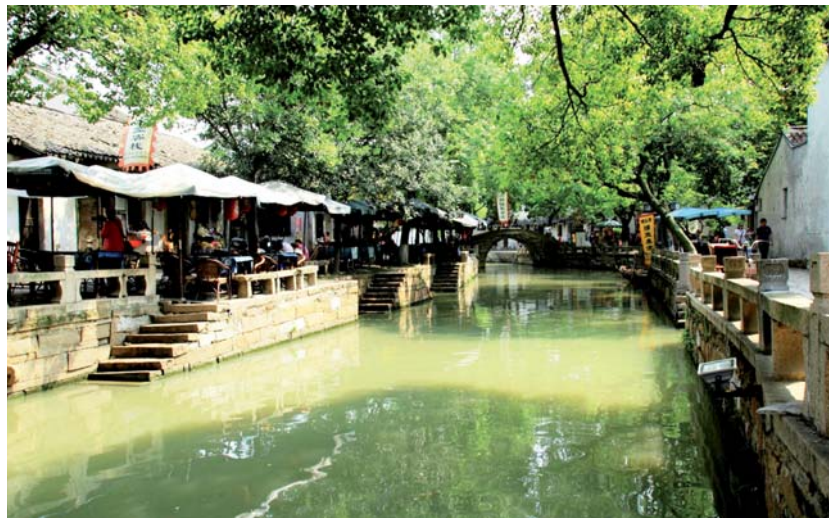
Located a short drive from Suzhou and a one-hour trip from Shanghai, the age-old and well-preserved township boasts a history of more than 1,000 years.

The town is characterized by ancient architecture from the Ming and Qing dynasties that still stand by the canals, including private gardens, temples and houses, as well as stone bridges, 49 of them, in a variety of styles that link the 15 small waterways which crisscross the town.

The three major bridges are Taiping Bridge, Jili Bridge and Changqing Bridge, which are significant landmarks in Tongli and are popular sites for weddings and parties.

The Tuisi Garden, constructed between 1885-87 by an imperial scholar, is an area where you can enjoy pavilions, terraces, halls, rockeries and ponds.

Booths that sell snacks are also prevalent. There is such a variety of local cuisine that you could spend days attempt-



ing to sample them all.

If you have a chance, don't forget to see osprey catching fish; a unique show in the ancient town. The ospreys are trained to perform on command.

If you want to avoid crowds, you may wish to visit Liuhe ancient town and Shaxi ancient town, both of which are located in Taicang of Jiangsu province, to the south of the Yangtze River and to

the north of Shanghai.

About 35 percent of Liuhe ancient town is waterways. Its unique environment has made it a river and sea seafood haven.

The two ancient towns have not been swamped by tourists yet, so you can comfortably take in the sights on both sides of the river and admire the well-preserved ancient architecture.

## LINGERING GARDEN

Located in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, the Linging Garden was originally a private garden owned by wealthy citizens and regarded as one of the four most famous in China. Recorded on the World Heritage list by UNESCO in 1997, it is well known for the beauty of its magnificent halls, phenomenal bonsais and intricate gardens.

Like other famous gardens in Suzhou, the Linging Garden is endowed with a stunning natural landscape within its limited space. Visitors can enjoy the ancestral temples, private gardens, buildings, trees and flowers that blend in harmoniously with their surroundings.

The renowned classical Chinese garden is divided into four parts, the central, eastern, western and northern parts.

With more than 400 years of history, the World Heritage site, which features amazing views for keen photographers, has changed hands several times, with all the owners trying their best to enhance it.

It was built in 1593 during the Ming Dynasty by a retired official and was bought by a calligraphy enthusiast during the Qing Dynasty. After suffering severe damage in the 1930s, the garden was sponsored and repaired by the government.

It is suggested to come early, about 7 am when it opens, if you want to enjoy the beautiful scenery without the company of thousands of tourists.



## HUMBLE ADMINISTRATOR'S GARDEN

Covering about 52,000 square meters, the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou is the city's largest and most renowned. It is considered one of China's four most famous gardens, together with the Summer Palace in Beijing, the Mountain Resort of Chengde in Hebei province and the Linging Garden in Suzhou.

Originally built in 1509 during the Ming Dynasty, it was initially a private garden of a former government servant.

The World Cultural Heritage site is a perfect example of Chinese design, with beautiful stone walkways surrounding the garden and a variety of flowers and architecture.

Designated as one of the Cultural Relics of National Importance under the protection of the State, as well as a special tourist attraction, the garden is definitely a must-see site.

