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Feb 21, 2017
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Taking the Kids publishes two e-newsletters per month, filled with information and advice for families traveling with children as well as tips on destinations and special travel offers from sponsors.

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SUZHOU, CHINA: GARDENS AND CANALS EQUAL A FAMILY-FRIENDLY ASIAN ADVENTURE

February 19, 2017



Shantang Street

By Allison Tibaldi, Taking the Kids correspondent

As I exited the airport in Shanghai, my preconceived notions about China seemed initially accurate. It was my first time visiting this country and I imagined I would be stepping into a land that had come too far too fast. I anticipated encountering a host of problems stemming from too-rapid development. Indeed, the air was smoggy, traffic was bumper-to-bumper and a general air of chaos was palpable.

But first looks can be deceiving. I boarded a high-speed train to Suzhou and in thirty minutes, I was transported to the kinder, gentler China of my travel dreams. If you're looking for an experience that harks back to the China of yesteryear, **Suzhou** merits consideration. With its gardens, scenic network of canals, tallest Ferris wheel in Asia and kid-approved food, families should have a grand adventure.



Master of Nets Garden

Garden cheat sheet

Suzhou is known as the garden capital of Asia. Cities and towns around the globe have photo-worthy gardens, but Suzhou's gardens are so unique, nine are designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites. While Suzhou is a thriving metropolis, it enjoys a somewhat tranquil pace. For traveling families, space to run and breath can be a lifesaver while on the road. While traditional Suzhou-style gardens are not wild or rambling, they are a welcome respite from urban strife.

Classical Chinese gardens are precisely manicured and combine four elements: rocks, water, plants and pavilions. With a so many world-class gardens, your toughest decision may be choosing which ones to visit.

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The Master of the Nets Garden is my top choice. It perfectly demonstrates Chinese garden designers' sublime skill at synthesizing art, nature and architecture. This garden is more compact than most but its frugal use of space gives the illusion of grandeur. For a New Yorker like myself, it all looked strangely familiar. Why? Ming Hall at the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** on Manhattan's Upper East Side is modeled after the Master of the Nets Garden, so it's no wonder I gravitated towards this serene place. You can take the girl out of New York but you can't take New York out of the girl.



View from Jinji Lake

The Venice of Asia

Located along a series of scenic canals, Suzhou is called the Venice of Asia. It enjoys a reputation as China's most beautiful city, thanks to its patchwork of waterways crossing the city. The best way to experience this city is on the water. Boat rides and kids go together like milk and cookies, and gondola-style vessels are at your fingertips, beckoning you to hop on board. Young visitors should be quite pleased to discover Suzhou from this vantage point.



Noodle soup

Slurp some noodles

Suzhou is surrounded with lakes and rivers. The aquatic bounty translates directly onto your plate with artfully presented seafood. Deep-fried Squirrel Fish and Hairy Crab are specialties. Children do not live by fish alone and perhaps most appealing to young palates are the Fengzhen noodles. Long and thin, they are served soup-style with broth and meat. We slurped a giant bowl of these treats at Tongdexing, a casual eatery on Pingjiang Road. If your family enjoys indulging in street food, Pingjiang Road and Shantang Street are venerable shopping streets and the perfect places to nibble on adventurous snacks, from zesty to sweet. Don't miss this convivial mish-mash of grassroots entrepreneurial energy.

Tweets by @takingthekids

Eileen Ogintz @takingthekids
 Still the beacon of Looney Liberty: happy 26 Mel Yemma
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Eileen Ogintz @takingthekids
 Travel Diary: A family visit to Suzhou, China. Gardens, canals and food!

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Frank Harris: I was single, stationed at Tachikawa 1958. Worked on airborne nav aids equipment, 30151 AFSC. Can't remember too many of the details but had...

Tina Anderson: I would love my for my daughter to be able to see snow for Christmas break!

Bob Pergler: Moved to Grant Heights in 56 after living on the economy in 55, attended Wash Heights school for 7th grade, went to Camp Drake for the 8th grade,...

Tom Majors: My Mom once asked me where I felt my "home" was. I told her it was Grant Heights. I tear up a little when I see the old pics and read all...



Ferris Wheel

Ride the tallest Ferris wheel in Asia

Suzhou Industrial Park, often called SIP, is home to several modern marvels, but none more kid-friendly than the largest Ferris wheel in Asia. The 60 cabins take 300 passengers up to the top for a stellar view of Jinji Lake and Suzhou's skyline. Visit on a Friday or Saturday evening at 8 pm and you'll be treated to a dramatic waterscape show, the largest and most spectacular in Eastern Asia.

For additional trip planning information, visit <http://www.traveltosuzhou.com>

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