



Bernhard Hennen, Germany

Hennen advises anyone visiting Shanghai and hoping to understand it to “come with an open mind,” as his stay here transformed his perspective in many ways, although the German writer isn’t even new to the city.

“Staying for two months and getting out a lot and exploring the city deep in the night is very different,” he said. “You have to really be here, and you need to come with an open mind.”

He used air pollution in China as an example, a topic regularly covered in the international media.

“We are very used to thinking of

Shanghai in terms of dirty pollution, but the air here is less polluted now from petrol, with all the electric vehicles filling the streets.”

He finds the people who work in Shanghai’s tiny stores to be particularly interesting. He calls them “very busy in a taichi style.”

“They are very busy because you see them work very long hours early in the morning and late into the night, but at the same time, they also look very relaxed when there is nothing to do,” he added.

“You see people on the streets who appear to be very busy, and then you see people gathering to drink and



chat in front of their houses. That entire manner of life — I call it busy in a taichi way. It appears fluent and casual, but you know how difficult it is to get to that level.”

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I find something touching my heart in the philosophy of life here.

Abeer Almadawy, Egypt

Almadawy, an Egyptian novelist and journalist, is in Shanghai for the second time, getting to know the city from a completely different angle.

Her first three-week visit in 2019 was mostly for business purposes, as she met with executives from a variety of enterprises in the city.

“In 2019, I saw the city from the tops of skyscrapers. This time, I’m more on the ground, connecting with people and learning about different aspects of life here,” she said.

“You can read about Shanghai on the Internet or in books, but it’s nothing like going down to the streets and talking to the people here despite language barriers, living their lives, eating what they eat, touching the flowers in the park, smelling the air, and walking around. It is essential for a writer to be there in the scenario.

With a strong interest in Chinese philosophy, she enjoys getting up early in the morning — at 5:30am — to watch the city wake up, “slowly and gradually at first, and suddenly it is a new day by 6:30am.”

“Then you start seeing people rushing, either on foot or on bikes. It appears that people work a lot when they also know how to have fun, particularly the young people here.”

She started writing love stories about young couples in Shanghai after finding inspiration from them on the city’s streets, including one that featured a foreign couple there.



Clara Chow, Singapore

Chow, a fan of Chinese TV dramas, put on the eponymous theme song of the 1980 hit drama “The Bund” (starring Chow Yun-fat) on her first walk down the Bund along the Huangpu River.

“You don’t have to do this in order to appreciate Shanghai,” she explained. “But for me, it’s a plus. The skyline of the Bund is so famous, but you really need to be there to experience it fully and to see the skyline in person.

She added, “I will probably do it again before we leave.”

The bilingual writer in English and Chinese also hopes to visit Hengdian World Studios, a film studio about four and a half hours’ drive from Shanghai, where many of her favorite Chinese fantasy dramas were filmed.

“For me, there is always a fantasy China that exists only in pop culture, myths and legends, and China in reality,” she said. “I hoped to reconcile the imaginary with the real and modern during my visit here.”

Instead, it got “split into more parts, because living here for a while goes beyond the superficial understanding and presents how real Shanghai people live, their dreams, hopes and struggles.”

One aspect of Shanghai’s dual identity is its surprising familiarity with Singapore in the commercial sense. Chow describes it as a “hyper, ultra, super, big version of Singapore,” which made her feel at home right away.

“It is strange that it doesn’t feel strange,” she said.



Santiago Loza, Argentina

Loza, who has served as a jury member at various film festivals, including Cannes, has two ideas for Shanghai: a futuristic movie and a road film on a bicycle.

“China is at the antipodes of Argentina. It’s like the opposite side, another world,” he said. “So for me, it was always a sort of utopia or a dream to reach Shanghai.”

He tried to create a daily routine with small things like going to the same cafe in the morning, but six weeks later, he still felt like he was “living in a dream.”

“It will probably take me a while to really process the experience here, but first, I need to enjoy it, live it, walk it, and inhabit it,” he said.

Loza describes the city as “a quarry of images” and finds everything in the city inspirational, even when he is lost.

“It’s okay if I get lost,” he said. “Because every time you get lost in Shanghai, you discover a new adventure.”

The playwright and filmmaker has had many adventures in Shanghai, which he finds to be highly bike-friendly.

“So I would think of a movie about going on a bicycle trip through Shanghai. Along the way, you encounter many characters, like people who deliver packages, who are going to work, and who also commute by bike, and through the encounters with them, one can have a tour of the city.”