



“

I find the city of Shanghai very sexy, not only in terms of beauty but also elegance.

Sofronis Sofroniou, Cyprus

Prior to his visit, Sofroniou compiled a list of Chinese works ranging from the 10th century BC “Book of Songs” to 1980s Chinese novels such as “Red Sorghum Clan” by Nobel laureate Mo Yan and asked for recommendations.

“I feel obliged to learn about the place I’m visiting, both to be prepared and keep an open mind,” he said.

“This is my selection of Chinese literature.”

He has been exploring the city by walking roughly 15 kilometers every day. Sometimes, he would simply choose a random direction and begin walking.

“It constantly gives me new impressions of the city. I am never disappointed,” he said. “Even when I was lost, people who are incredibly warm and nice helped me. Exploring the city on foot is important because it connects the dots of everything I have seen and heard about it.”

The writer sought to absorb as much as he could so that his on-the-ground experience, along with the knowledge from the book, would help him better organize a Shanghai scenario that had evolved in his head.

“I’m already planning to come back next spring to write that story in Shanghai,” he said.

“It’s an erotic story set in Shanghai because I find the city erotic in some ways.” People have a generally high quality of life and are receptive to discovering their emotional identities. It is attractive not just in terms of beauty but also of elegance; many people here express it in a really fashionable and seductive manner.”

“

You have to see them to really understand.



Kristel Thornell, Australia

Thornell stumbled into an excitingly odd building one night while strolling by Suzhou Creek, wondering if it was real or her imagination.

“There is usually so much activity there, but that night, it was so weirdly peaceful and quiet in that part, and I suddenly saw this architecture; the whole experience was so dream-like,” she recalled, showing Shanghai Daily the picture she took.

It turned out to be the Tian An 1000 Trees mall, dubbed the city’s

“Hanging Gardens of Babylon,” and one of Shanghai’s newest additions to the city’s excitingly strange-looking structures.

“I knew I was going to like it here, but the actual density of it, from the first evening when you arrive from the airport and cross the city in a taxi, far exceeds any expectations,” she said.

“It feels like a series of worlds all connected.”

She has since been observing how people live here through all kinds of details, from the rain

cape on their bikes to the way they hang their clothes to dry, and notably, how people use public space here.

“It is private and public at the same time,” she said. “Along the river, the creek, and in small parks, people use the space to stretch, exercise and dance. It is a healthy way to live while they also have the confidence to do that in public.”

The author’s second novel, “On the Blue Train,” was translated and published in China.



“

Shanghai is a city of contrasts, of dualities.

Melinda Szymanik, New Zealand

Szymanik, an award-winning author of stories for young people, has been snapping pictures and taking notes for the last six weeks so that she can undertake additional research for her novel, which is partially set in Shanghai, even after she leaves the city.

“I had had a new project idea in my mind for a while, about a teenage girl who has the voices of her ancestors inside her head, and combining this with the thought of coming to Shanghai resulted in a very strong story idea,” she explained.

“As part of it is set in Shanghai, it has been heavily inspired by my time here so far. Both modern experiences and investigating the

history of the 1930s and 1940s.”

Walking around the city, she has grown to appreciate the contrasts that can be seen everywhere, such as the view of old *shikumen* (stone-gate) buildings alongside modern freeways or the combination of old and new along the banks of Suzhou Creek, which comes alive in the evening with all of the colorful and unique light shows.

“Shanghai is a city of contrast, of dualities,” she said. “It is all held in a kind of tension that’s fascinating, but it also appears to be a very delicate balance. I love the excitement and dazzle of the new and the weight of history and style in the old.”