

# DAVE GORDON: A YEAR IN SHANGHAI



The day before I flew to Shanghai, Hurricane Katrina went through Kingston and took out our backyard umbrella. I didn't hear about the devastation in New Orleans until I was in Shanghai. I thought it was just your average August hurricane.

There were a lot of great things about life in Shanghai:

- no tipping
- no sales tax
- cheap taxis
- available, affordable Cuban cigars
- a knock-off market where you could buy all the brands: Louis Vuitton, Rolex, Gucci, Ralph Lauren, Cartier, Tag Heuer, Mont Blanc, etc. – all fake, of course, but who can tell?
- a fabulous fabric market
- bootleg DVDs of the latest movies, available on the street for under two bucks

There was also a lot of misery on display: the half naked beggar whose arms had been cut off, the man with no legs who propelled himself down the subway car looking for coins, the exploited construction workers camping at their job site.

Some random memories:

-a child with his toy – a whirring cicada tied to the end of a string

-workers on the way home strapping a large gas canister to a bicycle

-the old guy selling hot yams at the subway stop who gave us a deal

-the 87th floor of the 88 floor Jin Mao Tower (number eight is lucky) – we could barely see the Huang Pu River far below through the smog.

-the fireworks that erupted at all hours, and the grand 24 hour non-stop fireworks at Chinese New Year

-the two old women who followed me up to my fifth floor apartment to return the wallet I had dropped getting out of a cab

I have a feeling that we were in Shanghai at a special time. The art on Moganshan Lu, mostly painting, felt like the '60s and '70s: Chinese Pop. I wonder if in the future Canadian teachers won't be in demand because everyone in Shanghai will speak English and Mandarin or Shanghai-ese. A sign on the gym wall of a middle school I visited read (in English) "The Future Belongs to Us."

The knock-off market was closed by the authorities at the end of June 2006, but you could buy a fake Rolex watch on Nanjing Lu.

Dave Gordon

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## A Year in Shanghai Photos