



Left: West Lake Scenic Area in G20-Blue. Right: West Lake Scenic Area in PM250-Grey.

With a smog carpet covering all of East China and sometimes continuously westwards as far as Wuhan, one might think that there is little escape possible within the borders of mainland China. One of the hard lessons learnt in Shanghai survival is that recharging your batteries does not necessarily require blue skies, but a monthly grounding experience in nature. Living for weeks on a row in Shanghai's concrete desert, weekend strolls in crowded parks, watering your pot plants and being annoyed by vehicles congesting the compound gardens, it is well recommended to trade your pale grey field of vision for lush green, even if the sky remains all the same. When I travel to Hangzhou in late February 2017, almost all the local residents show stoic indifference to the air pollution.

我：你们这里的雾霾怎么那么厉害？ Me: How come your air pollution is so insane?

司机：没办法。 Cab driver: That's just how it is.

Even though Hangzhou's glamor has faded next to Shanghai's cosmic 20th century rise, it is a truly imperial city with lots of history and cultural sights dating back hundreds of years. If you can't make it to Beijing or Xian to get a feel for China's self-claimed 5000 years cultural heritage, then take the 45' bullet train ride to Hangzhou and spend a weekend or even a week there, cycling around the sights of West Lake | 西湖 or hiking in the tea plantations around the Dragon Well | 龙井. [Longjing Tea](#) is one of several traditional Chinese tea leaves, which have a similar status and pedigree like wine grapes in Europe; Hangzhou in that sense is the Bordeaux of tea. A visit to the Dragon Well Village and the [Tea Museum](#) just outside of Hangzhou serves therefore also as a good starting point to learn the basics about Chinese tea culture.

How to Get There

Take either a cab or travel environmentally friendly with subway line 2 or 10 to Hongqiao Railway Station | 虹桥火车站. Calculate about 60' for the subway ride from Jingan Temple. Take a bullet train from the train station to Hangzhou (CNY 73; 45'), ideally to Hangzhou

Modu Escape 01 Hangzhou | 魔都逃跑 01 杭州

Station | 杭州站, because its more conveniently located to get to our destination: the [West Lake Scenic Area | 杭州风景名胜区](#).

Note that most bullet trains leaving both Shanghai South Train Station and Shanghai Hongqiao Train Station stop at Hangzhou East Train Station | 杭州东站, which is not as close to the West Lake Scenic Area as Hangzhou Station | 杭州站。The cab ride from Hangzhou East to West Lake Scenic Area will set you back about CNY 60 and you will probably suffer 30-60' in horrible traffic conditions. From Hangzhou Station you will pay approx. CNY 30 and less of road congestion.

Although all train ticket can be purchase at the station, it is not advisable to foreigners without Chinese language proficiency to do so. Buy your (return) tickets the day before you plan to go to Hangzhou at an official ticket booths | 火车票代售点, like the one on [Dongzhuang Road 168](#), where you pay an additional CNY 5 handling fee.

Note that you have to bring the passports for all passengers for buying tickets and boarding the train, and calculate an additional hour for finding your way from the subway station through security check to your train platform if you travel the first time out of Shanghai.



Where to Stay

It is recommended to stay in one of the family operated hotels on Manjuelong Road | 满觉陇路, set back from West Lake's hustle and bustle and leading directly to the heart of Hangzhou's tea cultivation, the Dragon Well. The entire West Lake Scenic Area has developed during the last several years into one of the prime mainland tourist destinations and private accommodation has mushroomed. It's nevertheless not easy to find a comfortable and reasonably priced hotel. Try [ctrip's English website](#) for an overview or follow my recommendation to [Mailang Theme Hotel | 麦浪主题民宿](#), where decent doubles go for CNY 400-600. Next door to Mailang you will find [Dengba Hostel | 登巴国际连锁客栈](#) (call 182 5824 3650 for reservations), the local outlet of a well known budget traveler chain, which

provides basic doubles for around CNY 200. [HERE | 艺术酒店](#) (call 159 5887 7733 for reservations) is further up Manjuelong Rd and hovers somewhere in between Mailang and Dengba in comfort and convenience. Doubles go there for CNY 280 to 470 on weekends. Expect discounts on weekdays. More recommendations are to be found for Chinese readers on this [travel website](#).

Speaking to the receptionist at Dengba Hostel showed me how WIFI, which has by some already put at the very basic level of Maslow's pyramid of needs, can influence which course conversations take.

我：你们有哪些房间出租？

前台姑娘：你上去哪儿吧。在那里可以看到。

我：可不可以用你们的无线网络呢？

前台姑娘：可以啊。你真好看。

我：什么？

前台姑娘：你真漂亮用拼音写的。这是我们的密码。[大家笑着。]

我：那还好。其他我去过的旅店的密码是：你有狐臭。[大家大声笑着。]



Me: Which rooms do you have to rent out?

Receptionist: We have all information on qunar.com.

Me: Can I use your wifi?

Receptionist: Sure. You are good looking.

Me: What?

Receptionist: You are good looking in pinyin is our password. [Both laughing.]

Me: Well, better than the other hotel. Their password was: Your armpits reek. [Both laughing loudly.]

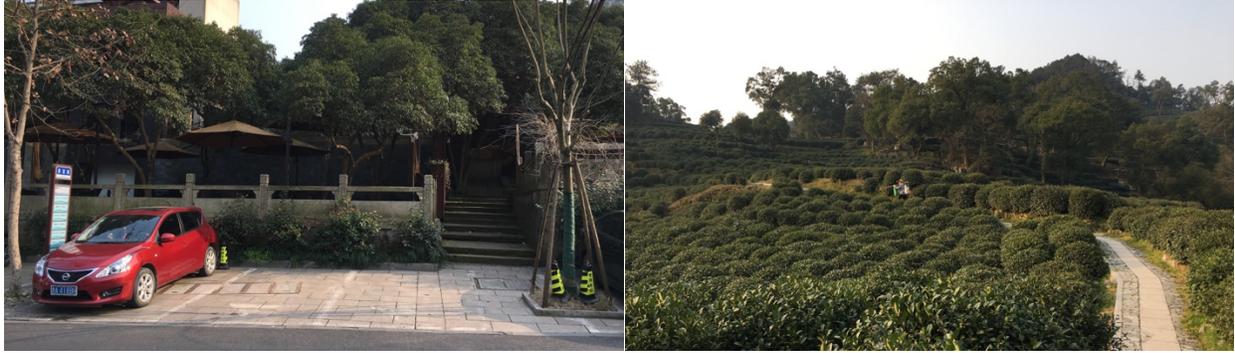
What to Do

If you are up for hiking, head out into the tea plantations which are covered by a web of cobble stone paths. There are no trail maps available and GPS mapping doesn't include most of the small paths, but once you have found the entry point to a trail you can't really go wrong. Go uphill until you reach some plateau or even summit and then go downhill on the other side of the trail. You might end up quite far from your starting point, but there are always buses which take you back to your hotel for CNY 2 only; thus keep in mind to bring some change with you.

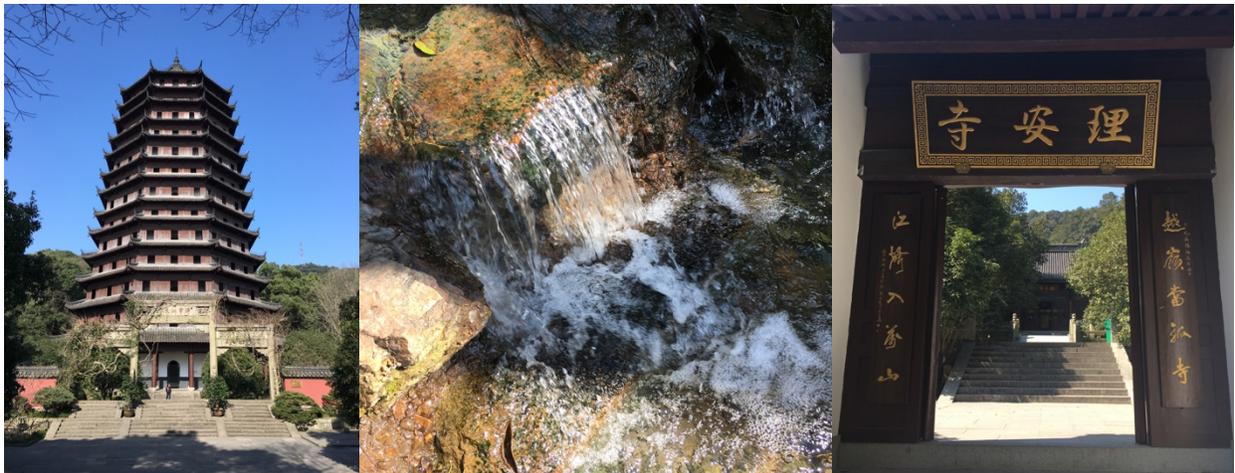


Walking Manjuelong Road uphill, a cobble stone path starts on the right side of the paved road right next to the Shuile Cave line 87 bus station. This walk leads you all the way up to the High Southern Summit | 南高峰 – a slight exaggeration because most of the hills in the area don't exceed 200 masl. Expect to sweat, anyway. You can turn back once you have reached the summit or continue on a cobble stone ridge path to Santai Rd | 三台路, where many sights like the Tomb of Chen Kuilong | 陈奎陇墓 wait for you. Plan 3 hours for this hike including return bus ride. Add considerably more time if you combine this hike with an exploration of the gardens East of Santai Rd | 三台路.

Right next to line 87 bus station Manjuelong | 满觉陇 two trailheads lead up to Tiger Paw Summit | 虎跑风 (30'). A smaller one right of the dilapidated tea house you see on the below left picture; a bigger one on the left of the same building. It took me about an hour to finish the circuit from Manjuelong to Guiren Pavilion | 贵人阁, from where you have a great view of the entire Dragon Well area and Qiantang River, and back to Manjuelong Rd.



This splendid hike can be continued all the way to mighty [Qiantang River | 钱塘江](#) and [Liuhe Pagoda | 六和塔](#), from where you can take bus no. 4 back to Hangzhou Zoo | 杭州动物园. Plan 2 hours if you want to visit the Six Harmonies Pagoda (CNY 30). The current pagoda was rebuilt with a concrete core and is not really worth the climb, in particular if you have made the hike before, but take a stroll in the pagoda gardens, where you will find a miniature collection of pagodas from all over China.



If you want to spend all day out take bus no. 4 not North back to town, but South on Zhijiang Rd | 之江路 and get off at Jiuxi Rd | 九溪路. Alternatively walk this unattractive 1km stretch next to busy Zhijiang Rd; the hike into the [Nine-Creek Valley](#) will make up for it. Follow Jiuxi Rd | 九溪路 until you reach either lovely Yangmeiling Village | 杨梅岭村 or famous [Dragon Well Village | 龙井村](#). Try to stay left of the main road and take one of the small trails which lead through the tea plantations. Note that you will have to cross several creeks on your way to Dragon Well Village, which is great fun for children and families, probably less fun for elderly visitors. The route to Yangmeiling Village follows a paved road, but is less travelled and more rewarding when you stay on the small trails. The main road will be busy with Chinese tourists and in particular on weekends with quite a few cars. You might want to have a late lunch in one of the two villages, before you continue your walk to Manjuelong Road

and hop on bus no 87 to ride a few stops back to Manjuelong Station, from where we started out.



Or get a widely available rented bicycle and ride it down along Tiger Paw Rd | 虎跑路 until you reach the intersection with Santai Rd | 三台路, where you turn left. Park your bike somewhere and take a stroll to explore the scenic gardens of West Lake. This part is the less traveled section, but expect to be in company of massive crowds on weekends and in particular during May 1st and October 1st holidays. You will be able to watch newly weds having their pictures taken, women performing a tea ceremony or employees from one of the many restaurants simply taking a nap. February, March and sometimes April, after the Chinese Spring Festival, are the months to see cherry, plum and magnolia trees in full bloom.



My personal favorite amongst Hangzhou's main sights is the [Temple of Inspired Seclusion | 灵隐寺](#), which was founded in 326 AD and since then built up a decent selection of cave stone carvings which are comparable to the Buddhist grottoes of Dunhuang | 敦煌。灵 indicates soul and 隐 stands for hidden or concealed, therefore one could also translate 灵隐寺 as Temple of Hidden Soul, which makes more sense to me in a Buddhist setting. Plan half a day

for this sight, in particular if you venture into the surrounding hills. Admission to the temple area is CNY 45, but you will have to pay another CNY 30 for getting into the actual Temple of Inspired Seclusion. Don't do it. You will only feel like herded cattle on weekends. Visit Yongfu Temple | 永福寺 instead, which is included in the general admission, and then hike up Northern High Summit | 北高峰, from where you can enjoy a stunning vista of Hangzhou (PM levels permitting) and the CNY 20 cable car ride back to the entrance. I recommend to take bus line 180 from Shiwu Cave | 石屋洞 at the intersection of Manjuelong Rd and Wulaofeng Tunnel | 五老峰隧道接线 to Limahuitou Station | 立马回头站, because all other public transport takes much longer to get there and back.



Yet another place worth a visit are the gargantuan Western marshlands | 西溪湿地, which are said to have been for more than a thousand years a playground for the local aristocracy. Take bus no. 180 to Fuyuan Xincun | 府怨新村 and walk next Yanshan River | 沿山河 for 20' until you reach the entrance to the park (CNY 80). The prominent sort of extraterrestrial Wetland Museum | 湿地博物馆 waits for a FOC visit, and electric boats to explore the marsh (CNY 60). Be sure to prepare this trip well and arrive because of the vast size of the area in the morning. Take bus no. 180 back from Fuyuan Xincun | 府怨新村 to Shiwu Cave | 石屋洞 or grab a cab.

湿地与人类文明起源

WETLANDS AND THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION

一条大河，一方文明。尼罗河造就了光辉灿烂的埃及文明；幼发拉底河和底格里斯河孕育了古巴比伦文明；印度河和恒河成就了印度文明；黄河和长江缔造了生生不息的华夏文明。
湿地是人类文明起源和延续的重要支持系统，是文明的摇篮。中国良渚文化、仰韶文化和马家浜文化均发源于湿地。

Where there is a river, there is a civilization. The Nile nurtured the Egyptian civilization, The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers bred the Babylonian civilization, the Indus River and Ganges brought about the Indian civilization, and the Yellow River and Yangtze River helped develop the Chinese civilization.

Wetlands serve as the cradle and backbone for the origination and extension of human civilization. The Liangzhu Culture, Yangshao Culture and Majiabang Culture of China all originated from wetlands.

The Wetland Museum | 湿地博物馆 is a hidden treasure in many ways. It was set up in 2009 as a natural history museum explaining the role of wetlands in the course of evolution and is therefore in the widest sense a natural history museum set in one of the most significant ecological areas of Eastern China. It serves though both as a splendid piece of scientific instruction as well as a monument of party propaganda. The imposing complex showcases the wild stock which can be encountered in marshlands and explains the role of water on our planet with particular focus to water tower of China | 中华水塔, roughly the region of Southern Qinghai and most of Tibet, which sources to a large extent Asia's three mightiest rivers: Yangtze, Yellow River and Mekong. A huge three dimensional topographical model illustrates how the change in altitude from China's most eastern border drains the water of the Himalayan highlands to the the country's dragon head Shanghai. One can not marvel at this model without recognizing the geostrategic relevance of Tibet with its vast fresh water reserves commanding over the life of almost all of China, South and Southeast Asia.

The excellent exhibition strangely closes with an elaborate section of how science and religion don't go with each other. Propaganda cartoons of several evil religious movements explain to the visitor that e.g. the belief in an omnipotent God weakens man, whereas the CCP is depicted as the political agent of scientific inquiry and society's progress. Considering that the visitor will have spent already two hours in this architectonically imposing museum explaining the evolution of mankind and the role of water in it, one cannot deny the genius narrative of using natural science to justify the CCP's rule without even mentioning it.