



## Suzhou: A City of Water

Coined the “Venice of China” by Marco Polo, Suzhou is known for its crisscrossing canals, elegant stone bridges, grand lakes and tranquil rivers. The city is famous for its double chessboard layout where streets and rivers run adjacent to one another and water and land routes run parallel to one another. An astonishing **42% of the city is covered by water**, earning Suzhou a worthy comparison to its Italian counterpart.

The **Suzhou Grand Canal**, like the Great Wall, is one of China’s most magnificent and astounding creations. Approximately 1,200 (1,776 km) miles long from tip-to-tip, the Grand Canal is the longest man-made waterway in the world. Officially known as the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, its route runs from Beijing in the north to Hangzhou in the south, connecting to various river systems along the way.

The origins of the Grand Canal can be traced as far back as 495 B.C., making it more than 2,000 years old. With fifty-eight historically significant sites along its route, the entire Grand Canal has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From ancient dynasties to the present day, the Grand Canal continues to bolster Suzhou’s economy and industry, quite literally putting Suzhou on the map.

While much of the Grand Canal is no longer in use, various sections running through Suzhou can still be toured. More than 50 miles (80 km) of scenery and wonder flank the waterway, including hundreds of old-world river dwellings, ten ancient city gates, twenty-plus stone bridges and two of Suzhou’s crown jewels, Hanshan Temple and West Garden Temple. For an added treat, consider an evening boat tour to see the sights illuminated along its historic stretch.

In **Downtown Suzhou**, a portion of the Gusu District is entirely bound by a large, rectangular canal. Known as the **Weichang River** or City Moat, nine east-west canals and 12 north-south canals exist within its boundaries. Along each passage lies a bounty of Suzhou’s rich culture and history. For a rare vantage of the ancient city and its labyrinth of canals, a **Suzhou-style gondola tour** on the Weichang River showcases sites including Panmen Gate and the Couple’s Retreat Garden.

Those exploring the area by foot can enjoy the sights and sounds of Pingjiang Street while watching traditional Chinese boats pass by on **Pingjiang River** and listening to melodic Pingtan music echoing from each teahouse. Stretching northwest from Changmen Gate to Tiger Hill, Shantang Street abounds with historic temples, ancestral halls and memorial arches — specifically Old Shantang Street, a 395-yard (361 m) slice along the **Shantang River** often referred to as “old Suzhou’s miniature.”

While Suzhou’s old town boasts an eclectic mix of aquatic channels and river systems, its sophisticated **water towns** showcase a spellbinding array of waterways. For a real local experience in the countryside, visitors can take a lazy stroll along a tree-shaded path or spend hours sipping herbal tea at a waterside

teahouse. Tongli Water Town boasts fifteen brooks and a staggering forty-seven bridges, the most celebrated bridges being Taiping (peace), Jili (luck), and Changing (celebration).

For more information on Suzhou please visit [www.TravelToSuzhou.com](http://www.TravelToSuzhou.com) or follow Suzhou Tourism on social media at [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#) at @VisitSuzhou.

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