

Editor's Note:

This weekly series focuses on individuals who have lived in China for a while and have a tale that's worth telling. Field, age, gender, nationality and race, all are unimportant in comparison with what adventures the subject has been up to, the experiences they can recount. Get in touch with a tip about a China story that deserves to be told. (features@shanghaidaily.com)



Jonathan Hasson

Nationality: Italy

Age: 30

Profession: Service industry, concierge

Description of yourself: Passionate, modest, discrete

Q&A

Favorite place in Shanghai:

Former French Concession, an oasis of peace and tranquility, in a chaotic city. Beautiful Art Deco architecture, quiet, plenty of greenery, charming narrow streets and lanes, full of charm, with nice and trendy shops/restaurants/bars scattered here and there.

Life's motto:

"Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall." — Confucius

Worst experience:

SARS, a highly stressful time to be here. Residents in panic mode, deserted streets, people wearing masks, not knowing what to expect.

Ideal weekend:

The list is endless: Tokyo (such a trendy, stylish, well organized, clean and happening metropolis) or Kayumanis' private villas in Nanjing, capital city of Jiangsu Province.

What can be done to improve Shanghai?

Reduce the noise (although there has been a big improvement since vehicles are fined for using the honk) and the pollution and improve the service in general — but the city is definitely on the right track.

Advice to new expats:

Pick up some Mandarin, learn how to become patient, and take the best of what the city has to offer, without focusing on the down sides.

Italian expat Jonathan Hasson is a VIP concierge, providing almost anything you want — from a gourmet guided tour starting with a wet market to a splendid bash yet to be held in an undisclosed skyscraper under construction, writes Jenny Hammond

VIP concierge: From wet markets to skyscraper bashes

Everyone knows Shanghai for the Bund, the leafy streets of the former French Concession and the faux traditional restoration of Xintiandi.

Want something more unusual? For one expat who has lived here around seven years, the city has far more to offer — and he offers it with a VIP touch.

From motorcycle sidecar races to organizing tours showing the city's truly unique sights, 30-year-old Italian native Jonathan Hasson has brought luxury concierge to Shanghai with his world of experience.

He organizes VIP in-depth gourmet trips, visits to traditional healers, a lavish dinner party in the middle of a park, another extravagant dinner — yet to be held — near the top of an undisclosed skyscraper under construction, and tours that you won't find in the guide-books.

Hasson lived for a decade in Africa, a decade in Europe, spent time in the other continents and is now director of Luxury Concierge China. Born in Brussels, Belgium, he grew up in the former Belgian Congo.

"A friend of mine once said, 'I am the sum of the places I have lived in, the places I have seen and the people I have met,' I can only agree. All this has enabled me to become a more open-minded person, and take in what I like from all these things," says Hasson.

"My experiences are who and what I am," says the Italian native who spent an idyllic childhood in the former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Living in the Congo was a dream at that time for a white child, he explains.

"What more can a child ask than to live in a tropical country, offering security (no longer the case), and in which one spends all his time outdoors?"

"One of the highlights of living in Kinshasa was spending our weekends on the Congo River, a picnic on a sand island or water skiing."

Leaving Africa as a teenager, he spent his university years back in Brussels to finish his studies in international affairs and economics.

First visiting Shanghai in 1997, Hasson accompanied his father on

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a business trip.

"My father had a fascination for China, and passed his passion on to me. Since I was child, I would hear my father's incredible China travel stories."

After that trip in 1997, the Italian native left the city with a very deep impression.

"I saw it booming, quite diverse, with plenty of opportunities and potential. I couldn't believe the efficiency and speed at which the city was developing. I was stunned and decided that I wanted to be a part of all this."

In 2000, Hasson decided he "needed a change of scenery" and moved to Shanghai.

Now, he spends his days catering to his clients, acting as both a concierge and travel consultant. His business partner is Spencer Dodginton.

The idea for Luxury Concierge China was conceived in 2005 while he and his business partner were waiting for a flight at Hongqiao Airport.

"We saw a gap in the market for a company dedicated to enhancing the discerning travelers' experience locally, so we decided to combine forces and soon after, our business was born."

Luxury Concierge China provides advance itineraries for residents and high-end travelers to Shanghai with a VIP touch.

"We've had some interesting requests, like organizing a race with vintage Yangtze River



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motorcycles with sidecar in the former French Concession area."

One of their latest city tours is called "Made in China — A Culinary Extravaganza," showing the city's wet markets and a dim sum cooking course in an up-market Cantonese fine dining restaurant, among other treats.

With a combined 19 years' experience of the city, "my business partner Spencer Dodginton and I are therefore relatively familiar with what the city has to offer. Over the years we have experienced the best and worst and we have served some interesting people, one of whom

was a very famous movie director."

Shanghai has lived up to his expectations and the regular opening of hotels and other venues means he spends a good part of his time testing the new establishments and determining which ones to work with.

"It's a lot of fun, as you can imagine."

Life is full of surprises, good and bad, Hasson concludes.

"In an ideal world, I can see myself living here for another five to 10 years and further developing the business to other Chinese cities. I do however dream of returning to the tropics one day, maybe this time somewhere like Bali."