

Living the Life You Desire in Shanghai

September is often a time of change for those of us in the expat world. With that change comes the opportunity to assess and evaluate your goals and direction for the next year. Many have taken a break from Shanghai's heat with visits to family, friends, and new travel destinations. Others find themselves newly in Shanghai – happily, unexpectedly, or with trepidation, trying to learn to navigate and survive the challenges of China. Whichever situation, it's likely that September has brought new things to your world – old friends missing, new friends to meet, new challenges at school, and new work or volunteer commitments.

It is remarkably easy to let the demands and opportunities of Shanghai expat living rule your time, energy and lifestyle. Alternatively, you could take a bit of time and choose to figure out the best way to live your life in Shanghai. A Chinese proverb says, "Everyone should carefully observe which way his heart draws him and then choose that way with all his strength". Shanghai represents so many choices to all of us, it can be a time to listen to your heart and find a new path.

Listening to your heart can be a bit of a challenge with the noise and confusion of China, but think how much more fulfilling your days would be if your actions are aimed toward a life of your design. If you are new to Shanghai, do take care of the daily challenges of living by asking plenty of questions and seeking lots of help. It's a confusing, chaotic, frustrating and energizing place. Once you are past the initial frustrations, give yourself permission to dream.... dream of the life you could be living.

Take some time to ponder these questions:

- If you had no limiting factors (time, resources, money, location), what would you want to do? Or asked another way, if you could do anything you wanted, what would you do?
- What have you done in your life that was deeply fulfilling and that you'd like to do more of?
- Think of a time that you were completely energized and loving what you were doing. What strengths, gifts and abilities were you using?
- What does success look like to you?

It's quite tempting, and in fact quite normal, when you think about these questions to impose on your thoughts all of the "should do's" and "can't do's" that we hear from others and from our own heads. For a few moments acknowledge those voices, "yes, they say that's it's not possible to ...", "of course I should want to ..." But then, take a turn to listen to your heart. What does it say? What makes your heart lighten, your eyes sparkle, your voice fill with energy, when you think about it? Can you put more substance to it? If that were in your life, how would you feel? What would surround you? How would you spend your days?

The more substance you can put behind that dream, the more real it can become. Think about all aspects of your life. Consider how you would be:

- working – service or product, employee or business owner, not-for-profit, volunteer
- developing yourself – mandarin classes, e-learning, associations
- taking care of yourself – exercise, diet, relaxation time
- interacting in a relationship – spouse, kids, partner, dating
- reaching out to family and friends – how often, ideal relationship

- relaxing – travel, hobbies, adventure, writing

Take some time to record your thoughts in whatever form works best for you – recounting your thoughts and direction to another person, drawing a picture, making a storyboard of your ideal life, writing a life plan or documenting in a journal.

Give this a bit of time to develop and then really test the picture you've created. Have you dreamed big enough? Do you feel energized picturing yourself in this world? Are there things in this dream that are someone else's goals, not yours? Do you deserve to live this lifestyle? Can you feel what it would be like? Modify your dream until it feels right and you can engage your heart and mind, and then celebrate – you've gone a long way to identifying where your heart draws you.

Confucius said, "Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart"; having heard your heart, move into action. Pick one element of your dream and identify 10 actions you could take in the next week to move you toward the outcome you've defined. Which of these can you commit to? If you're stuck, go back and take another look at your dream, is this piece important? Think about what's getting you stuck. Can you work on another piece of the picture for now?

The key to gaining the most from your Shanghai experience is creating a direction, a possible set of outcomes, moving into action and enjoying the process. Time will allow you to shift the direction, revise the outcomes, test new directions. By resolving to dream, to setting a direction, to moving into action, you'll generate new energy, new dreams and new goals. The cycle of resolution and movement will accelerate and you'll move further into leading the life you desire.

Don't forget to engage others in your process. Where can they help you move forward more quickly? Where can they lend support to keep you moving forward when life's challenges seem to be pulling you back? When can they celebrate with you and acknowledge your successes?

Shanghai is the boomtown of the world, the center of gravity of the world's economic growth. Don't miss the opportunity to tap this energy over the next year and use it to move you forward in leading the life you desire, the place where your heart draws you.

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