

AROUND JIANGSU

# Suzhou's palatial gardens

Known as China's "city of gardens", Suzhou has the highest number of gardens among all cities in the country. The city's art of gardening has a history of 1,500 years, dating to the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420). At one time, there

were more than 200 gardens in Suzhou. Today, 69 of them remain in well-preserved condition.

The idea of building gardens in Suzhou originated from the desire to retire from the rigors of bureaucra-

cy and to find shelter from worldly affairs. Hills and waters, flowers and trees, pavilions, terraces, towers and halls make up the basic elements in the city's gardens and most are prominent for their dark roof tiles, gray bricks and

chestnut brown wood pillars.

The Classical Gardens of Suzhou, Humble Administrator's Garden, Lion Grove Garden, Lingering Garden and Canglang Pavilion represent styles from the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties.



**HUMBLE ADMINISTRATOR'S GARDEN**

One of the four famous gardens of China, the Humble Administrator's Garden is the largest as well as the most famous in Suzhou. It contains nearly all of the features found in Suzhou's other historical gardens and, in 1997, was listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It is known for its complex layout of pools, rock gardens, islets, bamboo groves, pines, pavilions and corridors. It is representative of the historic gardens found in the southern regions of the Yangtze River and has been called the "mother of Chinese gardens".

The garden is centered around water, with green hills, pavilions and flowers and trees, and is divided into three areas: eastern, central and west, each with its own unique characteristics. A residential community is located in the southern area of the garden and directly south of the garden is the Suzhou Garden Museum, the only garden-themed museum in the country.

**THE LION GROVE GARDEN**

The name of the garden is derived from the shape of its rocks, which are said to resemble lions. Covering an area of about 10,000 square meters, it is an ideal spot for sightseeing, with its ornately decorated pavilions and towers of various styles, each with a unique history.

The True Delight Pavilion is one of the most stunning pavilions in the garden because of its regal design. In the garden is a plaque written by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), who visited the gardens on six occasions. The Standing-in-Snow Hall is named after a Buddhist legend about a kindhearted Zen Buddhist who stood in snow for an entire night to worship his master. Pavilion for Greeting the Plum Blossoms is representative of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) because of its greatest attraction, the Labyrinth Rockery, which was made mostly of limestone taken from Taihu Lake in Wuxi, Jiangsu province. The garden is also called the "Kingdom of Rockery" because its rocks were arranged to look like lions in different postures and positions, such as playing, roaring, fighting, sleeping and dancing.

There are many winding paths where you can easily get lost in beautiful scenery. The Lion Grove Garden employs a Zen Buddhist architectural design style and has been copied by many other famous gardens in China.



**THE LINGERING GARDEN**

Built in 1593 during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), ownership of the Lingering Garden has changed hands several times. Like other famous gardens in Suzhou, it has stunning natural landscapes within a confined space. Residences, ancestral temples and private gardens, as well as trees and flowers blend together harmoniously. The garden can generally be divided into four parts — central, eastern, western and northern — according to the architectural style of the buildings.

Of the four parts, the central part is the most crucial because it was built before the other three areas were added during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The central part is divided into two parts — western and eastern. The western area features pools and hills and is enchanting for its natural scenery, while historic buildings dominate the eastern portion, including the Celestial Hall of Five Peaks, the largest hall in the garden built during the Ming Dynasty.

When the leaves turn red in the fall, the western area of the central garden is a sight to behold.

**THE CANGLANG PAVILION**

The oldest of the Suzhou gardens, the Canglang Pavilion can be traced back to the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). It is sometimes called the Great Wave Pavilion or the Surging Wave Pavilion.

The Canglang Pavilion emphasizes the harmony between buildings and the natural environment. Before entering the garden, you will see a green lake surrounded by weeping willows. Inside, you will see incredible man-made rock formations that are divided into two parts. On the eastern side, the earth has been mixed with natural yellow stones and arranged to resemble a natural hill. On the western side, stones from the lake have been used to create another hill. Both rock formations are filled with trees and bamboo groves that add to the beauty of the location and create the sensation of walking in a primitive mountain forest. There are also winding corridors dotted with pavilions. The architectural style is simplistic and representative of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

