Shanghai has developed, but its historic churches and cathedrals have survived despite some major renovations. Xu Jingjun reports.

Shanghai may rank as China’s largest city, but its history scatters freely. It took only a few centuries for the pulsating urban center that we know and love to develop from a small fishing village and flourishing trading port into China’s financial hub. In terms of landmarks, Shanghai is more famous for its Bund waterfront and City God Temple landmark, the last of which commemorates the neighboring commercial area as much as the Bund temple itself, but it also has its share of historic churches and cathedrals. These put testament to the impression left on its residents over the years by Christian and Catholic missionaries. Here we list the host of the best for history buffs, believers and their tourists.

1. Sheshan Catholic Church
Perched on the top of the most famous mountain in Shanghai, Sheshan Catholic Church was established by a French missionary back in the 1870s. As the largest church in East Asia, it has a capacity of more than 4,000 people, and once stood as the most popular destination for pilgrims in Asia, attracting both Catholics and non-Catholics. In 1942, Pope Pius XII ordained the church a minor basilica, making it a Holy Land for Chinese Catholics. Despite the damage wrought on it during the “cultural revolution” (1966-76), the church has since been restored to its former glory.

Address: Top of West Sheshan Mt, Songjiang
Tel: 021-5760-1521
Opening hours: Daily 8:30 am-6 pm
Transport: Metro Line 9

2. St Ignatius Cathedral
More commonly known as Xujiahui Church due to its central location, the city’s main commercial area, St Ignatius was designed by English architect William Doyle and built by French Jesuits in 1844. Following the Gothic style typical of the Middle Ages, the cathedral consists of two 60-meter towers linking a lower central section. In 1887, the first Chinese-language Mass was celebrated here. After a five-year restoration project that began in 2000, the cathedral was fitted with new stained glass windows incorporating Chinese characters.

Address: 158 Puxi Road
Tel: 021-6418-2959
Opening hours: Saturday and Sunday 1 pm-4:30 pm
Transport: Metro Line 1

3. Shanghai International Church (Guozhi Lilib Tang)
Noted in the center of the former French Concession, Shanghai International Church was founded by American missionaries in the 1890s. It is built in a modern style with red bricks and has a foundation shaped like the letter “T.” Also called Hongkong Community Church, it is now the best-known protestant church in the city. It can accommodate up to 700 people and hosts an excellent choir. It is closed to the public on weekdays but has Chinese and foreign services on Sundays.

Address: 53 Hongkong Road
Tel: 021-6418-1076
Service schedule: Sunday 7:30 am, 10 am and 7 pm
Transport: Metro Line 1

4. St Francis Xavier Church
A replica of the Church of the Gesù (Church of the Holy Name of Jesus) in Rome, this Baroque-style church is believed to be the first foreign church built in Shanghai. It was built in the mid-19th century. As a prototype of churches designed by architects from Europe or the United States who were prone to combining Chinese elements with their own traditions, it incorporates a number of Chinese patterns. These include the lion’s lions and swords decorating its upper walls. Since the church is now undergoing renovation, there may be some changes to its Mass schedule, especially on weekdays. Calling in advance is recommended.

Address: 157 Dengloulu Road
Tel: 021-6388-7214
Service schedule: Saturday 5 pm, Sunday 9:30 am and 12:30 pm
Transport: Bus Nos 910, 926, 736

5. Moore Memorial Church (Mu’en Tang)
The church is named after Mr. Moore, a Texan who donated money for its construction, but in Chinese it goes by the name Mu’en Tang. It was built in 1929 and was completely renovated two years later by Bruno and Christian architecture. The church has been transformed the building into a landmark that can compete with today’s skyscrapers in People’s Square, where it is located. It features a sparkling, white stone exterior, while the interior boasts elegant galleries and stone arches. It is not open to the public except for during services on Sundays.

Address: 121 Xiangyang Rd
Tel: 021-6322-5069
Service schedule: Sunday 7 am, 9:30 am and 2 pm.
Transport: Metro Lines 1, 2, 8

6. Holy Trinity Church
You may have passed the “big red cathedral,” as locals affectionately dub it, and appreciated the cultural and architectural relic that has been standing in place for over 150 years. Designed in 1809, the church has a magnificent bell, showing the tendency of English architects during the Victorian era. Its nearly 50-meter-high bell tower, added afterwords, made it one of Shanghai’s highest structures at the time.

Address: 219 Jiangning Road
Transport: Metro Lines 2, 10, Bus No 65

7. Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church
Named in the late 18th century as St Ignatius of Loyola, this Baroque-style church was fitted with new stained glass windows incorporating Chinese characters between 1932 and 1934. It is described as “one of the most beautiful churches in Shanghai.”

Address: 151 Hongfeng Road, Jing’an
Tel: 021-5663-2000
Service schedule: Saturday 5 pm, Sunday 10:30 am
Transport: Bus Nos 32, 457, 60, 701

8. Jingling Church
The church gets most of its fame for having served as the wedding venue of former KFC owner Chim-sung Kang and Yeung See Kung Ling in 1927. Originally built as an inclusive educational institution for a school, the church has been taken over by several institutions and experienced some expansion. It also hosts a well-trained choir and puts on regular performances every Sunday.

Address: 135 Xizang Road
Tel: 021-6415-3011
Opening hours: Daily 9 am-5 pm
Transport: Bus Nos 910, 143, 848

Ringing the changes