

Around Town

Jurassic lark Dino Land has an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink theme, but is great fun.



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Upside down, round and round

John Ovans endures rollercoasters, dinosaurs and the terror-stricken screams of editorial assistant **Ethel Chua** as they check out five of the region's best theme parks

Dino Land

Upon entry to Dino Land, you may notice a statue of a woman with red hair blowing a horn. Immediately behind her is a placid-looking purple dinosaur on its hind legs, spindly arms outstretched as if leaning in for a hug. What this inexplicable pairing means is anyone's guess, but it sets the tone for what is to come inside: an amusement park with a no-holds-barred, everything-but-the-kitchen-sink theme, like Jurassic Park re-imagined by Terry Gilliam. At one point, as we stood beside a Santa's grotto watching a live elephant dressed as a woolly mammoth pick people up in the air with its trunk, a parade of tribal warriors furiously tore around the corner to perform a ritual dance to

the sound of thundering drums, and were quickly followed by a group of grinning teenagers dressed as soldiers in a jeep, followed by a pair of clowns with a giant unicycle. There are plenty of life-sized dinosaur models about though – some of which look very real, and others that are dressed as Roman centurions.

Although the rides don't all adhere to the dinosaur theme either, there are quite a few of them, so we think it's alright to sacrifice consistency for the sake of lots of choice. Notable are the spin-and-swing 'Crazy

Firedrake', which is medium-scary, so a good place for nervy sorts to start, and indoor rollercoaster 'Dinosaur Mountain', where you sit astride a motorbike and plummet through the darkness. Sadly we missed the only appointment that day for the serene-looking 'Fly Chaser' in which you lie on a board and pretend to be a pterodactyl.

The travel there means you'll probably have to take your lunch on-site, and there are stalls selling serviceable noodle-based fare for around 15RMB per dish. Oh, and if you're looking for any souvenirs,

then you'll be glad to know that all the rides exit through gift shops, which is a bit grubby. Overall, though, the park is modern and well-kept, and worth the trip to Changzhou for.

Best ride We weren't able to try out 'Dinoconda' either, the alarming-looking '4D rollercoaster' which is the park's main draw, but we were very impressed by the water flume ride 'Crossing Jurassic', which takes you on a spectacularly realistic rainforest/volcano safari before bombing down a great big slope.

Scariest ride 'Fire and Water Power' turns you upside down and round and round, not in the good Diana Ross way but in the way that makes you feel like your safety harness is about to spring open and hurl you down to the concrete below.

How to get there Take a train from

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Dino Land features model dinosaurs dressed as Roman centurions

Shanghai Hongqiao Station to Changzhou – high-speed *gaotie* trains take around one hour and cost from 74.50RMB one way – and take a taxi to the park (around 20RMB).

Dino Land 1

Hanjiang Lu, Xinbei district, Changzhou (0519 8512). Open 9am-5pm daily. Entry: 230RMB for adults, 115RMB for children. 常州市新北区汉江路1号

Happy Valley

One of the first things the eye is drawn to upon arrival at Happy Valley is the wooden rollercoaster on the opposite side of the lake. With an imposing, industrial aesthetic, it falls somewhere between the faded glamour of New York's Coney Island and the construction site of the Dark Lord Sauron's army of evil orcs in Lord of the Rings.

To be honest, it doesn't really scream happiness, but that's Happy Valley for you: not overwhelmingly happy, in fact probably a bit less happy than the other theme parks we visited.

The map will suggest two routes: the 'Dynamic Youth' and the 'Happy Family', so decide which one you think best describes you and yours, and set off. On the map, Happy Valley makes

declarations about its rides using all sorts of superlatives – everything is apparently the 'highest' or the 'most advanced' or the 'largest' or the 'most popular'. Here's a superlative for you: Happy Valley has some of the shortest rides we've ever experienced, and are over in about seven seconds flat – the 'Twin Tower Heroes', for instance, involves rising up, dropping once and... well, then it's over. After a long queue, you're bound to feel a bit shortchanged.

Because none of the monster coasters were open due to the season – which no one bothered to inform us of at the entrance despite us having paid full price to get in – we were forced to go against all our of life rules to go on the aforementioned wooden rollercoaster, named 'Fireball'. Of course, it's not just any wooden rollercoaster, but one billed as 'the first wooden rollercoaster in China', which to us doesn't seem like much of a sell because it makes us think of rusty bolts breaking apart. Exacerbating this mindset was the sight

of a man bent over fixing the back cart with the drill as we waited in the queue – the very cart that we ended up sitting in. It was fine, though – evidently, we lived to tell the tale.

Giving Dino Land (see previous) a run for its money in the bizarre stakes, Happy Valley featured some extraordinary scenes including four Chinese men in sunglasses and kilts playing the bagpipes, something we feel certain that we will never see again.

Best ride The 'Mine Adventure' rollercoaster, which weaves in and out of a giant artificial rock formation, was cool and creative, and on a level with anything you'd get at Universal Studios or the like.

Scariest ride The 'Diving Coaster' looked all kinds of terrifying, so while we were publicly indignant that it was closed, we were secretly quite relieved.

How to get there Take metro Line 9 to Sheshan and hop on the free shuttle bus from outside the station.

Happy Valley 18 Linying Xin Lu, Songjiang district (3355 2222). Open 9am-6pm daily. Entry is 200RMB for adults, 120RMB for children. ☺ Sheshan. 松江区林荫新路18号

Hello Kitty Park

Deep in the serene, mountainous region of Anji, in northern Zhejiang province, there dwells a shy, cat-like creature that is native to Japan. She weighs three apples, and is five apples tall. You will know her habitat as you approach it – because quite frankly there's no way you can miss a giant ferris wheel with Hello Kitty's face on it rising majestically from a misty valley.

The incongruous setting for Hello Kitty Park in its own way seems entirely appropriate for a concept which is quite bonkers anyway – like,

seriously, a little white cat that is not actually a cat and has its own pet cat? While Hello Kitty inspires all manner of fervour among adults – on our visit, there was a loved-up couple in matching pastel pink Hello Kitty jumpers tottering about – the

theme park is obviously levelled at the kids, divided into six relentlessly cheerful zones which are 'owned' by different characters, Kitty's friends. With the zany, bubblegum mise-en-scène set against the stunning backdrop of Anji's rolling hills, though, it remains a unique experience whatever your age.

All of the rides are preposterously cute, from the 'Apple Tree' swing-around in which you park your bums in little apples, to the flying 'Magic Bike', in which you can pedal yourself higher and higher, and the 'Flying Balloons', which gets you the best view of the park. Over at the Driving School, adults and kids alike can practice their skills in miniature, motorised cars before receiving a special Hello Kitty driving license (surely more desirable than the real thing), while a tour of Hello Kitty's house

reveals all of her darkest secrets (not really).

For the privilege, it'll take you a train and two buses from Shanghai, so a bit of a slog – you may wish to check into the Hello Kitty hotel next door, which looks pretty extraordinary in its own right (rooms cost from 580RMB on Sun-Thu and 880 Fri-Sat at current rates). Food-wise, there are several cafes on-site selling special overpriced Hello Kitty fare such as rice with pork ribs in curry sauce (58RMB) or roasted beef (68RMB), and for all of your Hello Kitty memorabilia needs, there is plenty of merchandise – you could splash your cash quite literally by purchasing some special Hello Kitty water for example. Certainly one for the bucket list, with plenty of kitsch photo opportunities besides.

Best ride The Flying Balloons get you a lovely view of the park and the surrounding scenery, and were given the stamp of approval by a three-year-old, who was on her third go when we went on.

Scariest ride While there are no white knuckle rides in sight, the Ferris Wheel – an iconic landmark for our times – is the park's pièce de résistance, and best saved till last. The inner pods, which move around on their own axes, are genuinely a bit scary – just ask editorial assistant Ethel Chua, who shrieked bloody murder the entire time.

How to get there Take the 40-minute high-speed *gaotie* train from Shanghai Hongqiao Railway Station to Hangzhou East Railway Station (from 73RMB one way). From there, catch a bus to Anji, which departs every two hours and costs 24RMB, and then take a taxi from outside the station, which costs around 30RMB.

Hello Kitty Park 1 Tianshi Avenue, Anji, Zhejiang province (4009 778 899; www.hellokittypark.cn). Open 9am-5pm daily. Entry is 260RMB for adults, 200RMB for kids. 浙江省湖州市安吉县天使大道1号

“All of the rides at the Hello Kitty Park in Anji are preposterously cute

Mountain madness
Suzhou Amusement Land's
Suspension Looping Coaster.



Jinjiang Amusement Park

The most central and easily accessible out of all the big amusement parks, Jinjiang Park is in a bit of an odd suburban setting, surrounded by a spaghetti junction and apartment blocks. But a bit like the Weasley family's tent in Harry Potter, which erects into a fully-functioning apartment, Jinjiang Park is deceptively large and manages to pack an awful lot in all things considered, including its own herd of

sad-looking alpacas on the right as you come in.

If you can tolerate the ghastly, saccharine music crackling through the speakers, then there's something for everybody here, from the more sedate – the Canyon Raft Ride takes you on a bumpy fake-river ride, while there's also a mouldy old log flume doing the rounds – to the more hair-raising, including Backflash, which was like Dino Land's 'Fire and Water Power' without the bashful charm. It also boasts a genuine landmark in its

socking great Ferris wheel, although more on that below.

Best ride Out-and-out adrenaline seekers will enjoy the 'Giant Inverted Boomerang', which takes you up a vertical tower backwards to plunge face first no less than three times.

Scariest ride With a diameter of 354 feet, the Ferris wheel (an additional 40RMB per go) was the most terrifying 'ride' of this whole feature, its pods like brightly coloured boxes of death.

As we ascended to the top we found ourselves crouched in the middle with our eyes shut, unable to enjoy the unbelievable view of Shanghai, which on a clear day, can include the Fengpu, Songpu and Xupu bridges, and the Oriental Pearl TV tower. Apparently.

How to get there Take Line 1 to Jinjiang Amusement Park station and step out through exit 2. You'll see the park opposite you.

Jinjiang Amusement Park 201 Hongmei Lu, near Meilong Lu, Minhang (5421 6858). Open 8.45am-5pm daily. Entry is 100RMB for six rides, 60RMB for two, including extra fee for some rides. ☎ Jinjiang Amusement Park. 闵行区虹梅路201号, 近梅陇路

Suzhou Amusement Land

If you've always wanted to get a photo in front of the Hollywood hills sign but can't afford the plane ticket, then you be thrilled to know there lies a cheapskate alternative over in Suzhou where there is an amusement park built into the side of a mountain, its name in Chinese grandly set against the hillside in big white letters.

Once inside, for an extra 20RMB, you can take the cable car up almost to the top, then do a short sojourn the rest of the way. Suddenly finding

yourself hiking up a mountain, to subsequently enjoy a fabulous view of Suzhou, is an odd but absolutely welcome contrast to the world of whirling machinery down below (although if you listen hard, you can still hear the screams). To get down, you have to take the glider, which was one of the most brilliant things we did at any of the parks. You climb inside what is basically a bodybag, are strung up on a bar, told to hold tight, and are shunted off the edge of the concrete platform. You then wing down over the forest and (artificial) lake below, where there's plenty else waiting to try.

Admittedly, Suzhou Amusement Land could do with a bit of a spruce: some of the rides

inspire fear purely on the grounds that they look like they might fall apart at any minute (particularly the 'Tornado', which was the same as Dino Land's 'Crazy Firedrake' except with added disturbing groany noises). The

'Suspension Looping Coaster' – which according to the park, holds the incredibly specific title of 'the longest looping coaster built on a mountain in our country' – is the park's big gun, but thankfully feels safe. Check the website to enjoy footage of the Time Out editorial staff on it, screaming themselves silly in the name of research.

Definitely the best value for money out of any of the parks we visited, and our pick of the lot. Plus they've got bins everywhere labelled 'vomit' which is what we call forward-planning.

Best ride The Glider didn't really count as a ride, so we'll go with the Suspension Looping Coaster, which is terrifying, but fun.

Scariest ride The Suspension Looping Coaster.

How to get there Take a train from Shanghai Railway Station to Suzhou. From there, take a taxi, which will cost you around 30RMB.

Suzhou Amusement Land 87 Jinshan Lu, near Changjiang Lu, Shixia district, Suzhou (0512 6825). Open 9am-5pm daily. Entry is 160RMB for adults, 80RMB for children, and includes extra fees for some rides. 苏州市市辖区金山路87号, 近长江路



Wellington celebrates the diversity of arts at Wellington College annual Arts Festival



"Do we truly understand the purpose of education? Do we really think that going to school is only about achieving good exam results?"

Sir Anthony Seldon, headmaster of Wellington College in the UK recently published a piece in Create – a journal of perspectives on the value of arts and culture published by the Arts Council. He expressed his frustrations with the