



## SHENZHEN: START OF CHINA'S FUTURE

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FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan Area Population	10,000,000	Chicago, Rio de Janeiro
Urban Area Population	8,000,000	Chicago, Nagoya
Urban Land Area: Square Miles	180	Wichita, Winnipeg, Nantes, Cairo
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers	465	
Population per Square Mile	44,400	Delhi, Shanghai, Suwon
Population per Square Kilometer	17,200	
*Continuously built up area		

10 August 2005

**A Modern Well-Ordered Urban Area:** Shenzhen has gotten a bad rap. The guide books describe a chaotic, even unsafe place that sounds like it comes out of the old West. There is every reason to believe it. This is China unbound. A quarter of a century ago, there was little more than a fishing village here. Then the government established it as a special economic zone and the growth has been non-stop. No-one seems to know for sure how many people live in Shenzhen. Recent government estimates put the number at 10,000,000, well above the 7,000,000 counted in the 2000 census. The difference is the large temporary population that is not counted in the census. The continuous urbanization begins in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and continues outward to the northeast to Buji, to the north and the northwest to Ba'oan, the location of the international airport and beyond.

**Getting to Shenzhen:** Shenzhen is easy to get to. A visa can be obtained in three days from the China Travel Service at 27-29 Nathan Road in Kowloon in Hong Kong. The China Travel Service sign is obvious, but the entrance is not. It is actually on Peking Road, just to the west of Nathan Road. Expedited same day processing can be obtained for an additional charge. But as easy as Shenzhen is to enter, it is comparatively unknown. There do not appear to be any reliable maps on the Internet, though they can be purchased on the streets of Shenzhen or the bookstores of Hong Kong. There are few pictures available on the Internet, which is why this article includes an unusual number of pictures.



**Urban Transport in Shenzhen:** This rental car tour is unique in not involving a rental car. Cars cannot be rented in Shenzhen without a Chinese drivers license. This is unlike the situation in some other Chinese urban areas, such as Shanghai. This means that the road travel was by taxicab. Here renting a car means renting a car and a driver.

Shenzhen is a new town as new towns should be. It is just like other Chinese cities, except it has made accommodations for contemporary living. The city is served by a grid of wide arterial streets, often with grade separated crossings. There are 8-lane freeways. And, despite China's status as an emerging middle-income economy, Shenzhen's road infrastructure meets first world

standards. The pot holes and neglected roadways of Mexico and Brazil are not to be found here. Generally, the freeways have no tolls within the special economic zone, but there are tolls on a number of the freeways in the outer counties.

Shenzhen has built a Metro, and has both bus and minibus services. The minibuses used the same vehicles as in Hong Kong (the “public light buses”).

**Urban Form:** Shenzhen is much more than the special economic zone. There are four counties within the special economic zone, and two more outside, all within the city of Shenzhen. The land area in the two outer counties is much greater than in the four special economic zone counties. There are government checkpoints between the counties in the special economic zone and those outside, but there appears to be little checking going on. Earlier visitors report that inspections were comprehensive just a few years ago. Large populations of workers live both within the zone and in communities adjacent, but outside. While reliable population figures are simply not available, it appears likely that the majority of people live outside the special economic zone, in Buji and Bao’an. The special economic zone itself is more commerce oriented and is clearly more affluent, but the outer areas represent a continuation of the urbanization.

**Residential Areas:** Some of the older residential areas are particularly dense, and many of the buildings do not have street access. In the core are many seven story residential buildings, separated by passages as narrow as eight to twelve feet. It would appear likely that fire fighting equipment simply could not access some locations. In the suburb of Buji, such buildings may be as deep as five from the street.

The newer residential buildings in the city are attractive and similar in outward appearance to the newer towers of Hong Kong. The developments themselves, however, tend to have fewer towers than in Hong Kong and achieve more modest heights, topping out at approximately 40 floors, at least 15 fewer than the newer towers in Hong Kong.

**Dense, But Not Like Hong Kong:** Shenzhen is dense, but does not portray the overcrowded feeling of old Hong Kong or the new towns of Hong Kong. This is partially because the towers are not as tall and they are not clustered as in Hong Kong. At the same time, there is considerable green space in Shenzhen. There are a number of attractive, large city parks. All of this combined with the wide streets gives Shenzhen a feeling more akin to the sprawl Beijing than the intensity of Hong Kong or even Seoul.

**Meridian View:** The “must visit” location in Shenzhen is the “Meridian View” on the top (69<sup>th</sup>) floor of the city’s tallest building. On a clear day, virtually all of the special economic zone is visible, together with parts of Buji and the Hong Kong new towns of Fanling, Sheng Shui and Yuen Long. Sheng Shui itself is only three minutes from Lo Wu, on the Shenzhen border.

**Suburbs and Exurbs:** Longgang is a notable exurb. This city gives an appearance of comparative affluence, with modern residential buildings and shopping centers. Like Shenzhen itself, Longgang has developed an impressive grid of wide arterial boulevards to move the increasing volume of traffic.

The suburbs are not nearly so dense and do not appear to be as prosperous. Many of the residential buildings are comparatively low rise, and there are few of the Hong Kong like residential towers that dot the landscape in the city itself.

**Commerce:** Shenzhen is the Chinese headquarters of Wal-Mart and at least two Wal-Mart supercenters were spotted on our tour, together with a Wal-Mart neighborhood market downtown.

Downtown itself is not to be confused with the city center. Downtown is near where the Hong Kong to Guangzhou railroad dissects the city, on the east side. The city center is directly in the center and boasts the all too familiar civic center designed by an architect trying to accomplish unprecedented outrageousness. In this case, the architect succeeded.

Downtown is where the tourists go. Shenzhen has emerged as an international shopping location, and the downtown area has a number of large enclosed shopping centers. One center we visited had seven levels and offered free parking.

**Dining:** Dining is an experience in Shenzhen. The most important thing is to dine where the locals dine. This means avoiding any restaurant that takes credit cards. There are many good, though not upscale. Some have at least an abbreviated menu in English. Failing that, one can always walk around the restaurant and point to the food that looks interesting. The restaurants deal with density by allocating seats in the same booth or at the same table to multiple parties. This may be a bit disconcerting to the Westerner, but is a part of the mainland China experience.

**East Pearl River Delta:** The arc of urbanization along the east side of the Pearl River, from Hong Kong, through Shenzhen, Dongguan to Guangzhou (former Canton) now accommodates as much as 35 million people, approximately the same population as the Tokyo-Yokohama area. If there were free travel across the border between Hong Kong and Shenzhen (as there is between the countries of the European Union), the two would combine to form a metropolitan area of approximately 17 million population, one of the largest in the world and approximately the size of Los Angeles or Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto. Even with the border restrictions, however, it is reported that some former Hong Kong residents have moved to Shenzhen and commute to jobs in Hong Kong. This trend may become more pronounced in the future, but would require substantial government policy changes.



**A Bright Future:** But Shenzhen has an infrastructure poised for the future. As China continues to progress economically, more and more people will buy cars. Shenzhen is well prepared for that, with its high capacity roadway system serving the core. There is no absence of genuine city planning here. The planners have succeeded in their principal responsibility of providing the infrastructure to meet the needs and desires of the people. For all the prosperity and excitement of Hong Kong, Shenzhen may be where what will become the modern, prosperous, emerging monolith that is China got its start.

By Wendell Cox

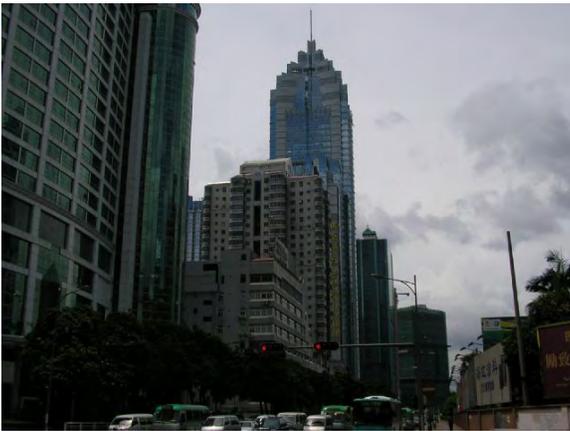
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Downtown



Downtown



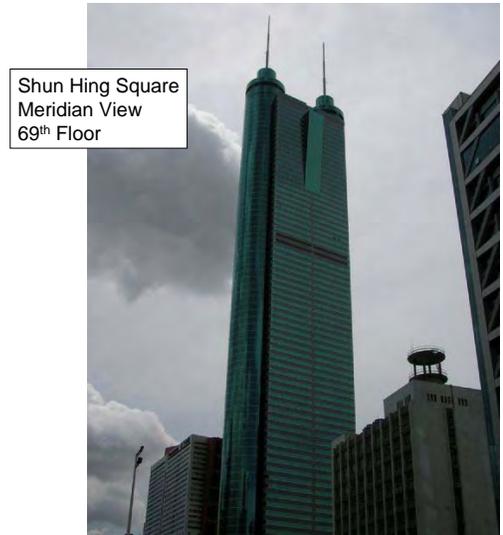
Downtown



Downtown



Old Residential - Downtown



Shun Hing Square  
Meridian View  
69<sup>th</sup> Floor



From Meridian View: SW



From Meridian View: SSW



From Meridian View: W



From Meridian View: South: Sheng Shui (Hong Kong) in Distance



From Meridian View: NE



From Meridian View: E



From Meridian View: NE



From Meridian View: N Toward Buji



From Meridian View: N



From Meridian View: W



From Meridian View: Old Residential



From Meridian View: Old Residential



From Meridian View: Old Residential



From Meridian View: NW



From Meridian View: W



From Meridian View: N: Guangzhou Rail Line



From Meridian View: N



From Meridian View: Old Residential



Meridian View: Margaret Thatcher & Deng Xia Peng



Shennan Blvd.



Example of Passage Between Old Residential Buildings



Old Residential: Downtown



New Residential: Downtown



Wal-Mart Supercenter



Shenzhen: Sekou



Sekou



Shenzhen: Northwest



Buji: Dense Residential Development (Google Earth)



North of Downtown



Expressway to Longgang



Longgang (Exurb of Shenzhen)



Longgang (Exurb of Shenzhen)



Longgang (Exurb of Shenzhen)



Airport-Heao Expressway: Northern Exurbs



Bao'an (Suburb of Shenzhen)



Bao'an (Suburb of Shenzhen)



Bao'an (Suburb of Shenzhen)



Bao'an (Suburb of Shenzhen)



Shenzhen: Binhe Avenue (Freeway)



Yuen Long (Hong Kong New Town) from West Shenzhen



New Hong Kong-Shenzhen Bridge



Towards City Center From Binhe Avenue



Binhe Avenue



Binhe Avenue



Binhe Avenue



Binhe Avenue



Binhe Avenue: Core Traffic Congestion



Shenzhen from Across the Hong Kong Border