



Suzhou's Classical Gardens, A UNESCO World Heritage Site

The pristine beauty and divine tranquility of Suzhou's beautifully manicured classical gardens — nine of which have been collectively designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and two that are considered China's most famous (Lingering Garden and Humble Administrator's Garden) — are must-see gardens for any visitor to China. Due to their impeccable preservation, these graceful sites have seemingly stood still for thousands of years.

The Classical Chinese garden design aims to create a flawless miniature landscape and emphasize the profound harmony between man and nature. Suzhou's gardens are regarded as masterpieces of this genre, and what separates them from others around the world is that each Suzhou garden must contain four main characteristics: water, buildings, flowers and trees, and rocks.

The elaborate private gardens once owned by scholars and wealthy families date back to the 6th century B.C., but it was not until the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties that Suzhou's garden art reached its zenith. Today, guests are welcome to visit and wander the paths of the city's more than 60 preserved gardens, enjoying fragrant flora, rippling ponds, and quiet pavilions along the way. While enjoying the countryside feel and communing with nature, visitors will discover why Suzhou's classical gardens give merit to the moniker, "Heaven on Earth."

Suzhou's nine UNESCO World Heritage Site Gardens are:

1. **The Humble Administrator's Garden** - Suzhou's largest garden is considered the archetype of classical garden design
2. **The Lingering Garden** - Famous for its striking architecture and vast corridors adorned in ancient inlaid calligraphy
3. **The Master-of-Nets Garden** - Suzhou's smallest garden boasts an intricate design and creates the illusion of a much larger space
4. **The Mountain Villa with Embracing Beauty** — Captivates with soaring mountains and cliffs, deep caverns, and stone houses
5. **The Canglang Pavilion**- A flawless union of architecture and nature, it is the oldest garden in Suzhou and home to a mesmerizing forest of weeping willows, viridian bamboo, and other ancient trees
6. **The Lion Forest Garden** - Full of whimsical rock formations and imposing manmade mountains
7. **The Garden of Cultivation** - With its mist-cloaked hills, deep springs, and placid pools, it is simpler than other Suzhou gardens yet its beauty is commanding
8. **The Couple's Retreat** - A romantic oasis sandwiched between three restful canals and a bevy of dramatic pavilions and verdant landscaping

9. **The Retreat & Reflection Garden** - Located in the picturesque water town of Tongli, the garden is notorious for its pavilions that seemingly float atop the pond's peaceful surface

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