



## Arts & Culture in Suzhou

With a long-lasting legacy as a city of high society and culture, Suzhou still buzzes with excitement and energy.

Suzhou's influence on Chinese culture spans 10,000 years, and the remnants of its intellectual pursuits are apparent today, not only through the traditional gardens and water townships, but also through the melodies of classical art forms such as Kun Opera and Pintan. Each of these cultural offerings mirror the exquisite character of the local history – smart, straightforward and elegant.

**Kun Opera** is the forerunner of all Chinese operas, boasting a history dating back more than 600 years. Kun Opera has a distinctive quality that is simultaneously graceful and haunting. It originated in the Kunshan area of Suzhou City in the late Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and became further established during the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644). In 2001, UNESCO recognized Kun Opera as a Human Beings' Verbal and Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Work because of its impact on international culture.

**Pintan** is an ancient art of storytelling and ballad singing in Suzhou dialect, and the word is an amalgamation of the sub genres Pinghua and Tanci. Pinghua involves a single narrator with a gavel and a fan, recounting a historical romance or heroic epic. The Tanci, in contrast, usually features a dialogue between two people. This art form originally appeared in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and was a favorite of emperors and commoners alike. Its distinctive aspects include storytelling, loud laughter and singing. The best place to see Kun Opera and Pintan is at the Suzhou Kunqu Theatre, but visitors can also explore the heritage of the operas by visiting the Kun Opera Museum.

**Suzhou's Classical Gardens**, nine of which have been collectively designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are the city's top attraction and vivid specimens of Suzhou's culture expressed via landscape. Another notable garden is Wanjing Villa which is home to more than 1,000 bonsai plants that visitors can learn about from a bonsai master on special tours. Flower arranging classes at the Lingering Garden are another popular hands-on activity.

When the emperors were relaxing in the shade of Suzhou's many gardens, it was common for them to take tea which launched the city's significant tea culture. The area is famed for its **Bi Luo Chun tea**, a green spiral tea harvested in spring that is one of the most famous in all of China.

For more information on Suzhou, visit [TravelToSuzhou.com](http://TravelToSuzhou.com) or follow @VisitSuzhou on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/VisitSuzhou), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/VisitSuzhou), or [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/VisitSuzhou).

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