



# Shenzhen's Last Hutong

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Among the things one would expect to find in downtown Shenzhen, a *hutong* is not one of them. Yet miraculously, one exists in the heart of the city's Luohu District. Before you start to envision the quaint alleyways and courtyards of Beijing, think again. Hubei Village does not deliver quite the same charm that the word *hutong* evokes.

Nevertheless, it's a fascinating look into local history and traditional Chinese architecture. Originally settled and designed by Hakka people in the Ming Dynasty, the village is now home almost exclusively to migrants from Chaozhou, who come for the cheap rent and work in nearby Dongmen. The patchwork of narrow alleys, old homes, shops, street vendors and friendly villagers makes for an intriguing afternoon of exploration. It has all the elements of a small Chinese town in the countryside, despite its location downtown in a city of millions.

Surrounded by skyscrapers and perched on prime real estate, it's a wonder the village has thus far escaped the city's drive to develop and modernize—some residents say the village is protected by the government as a heritage site, but others fear they could be ushered out any time to make way for development.

As its survival prospects are questionable, it's well worth visiting this anomaly of a village. Just east of Dongmen and just north of a golden skyscraper that looks like a spaceship, you'll find living history in a city supposedly lacking it.

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