TOUR CODE

JHYN

ADVENTURESABROAD

CHINA'S YUNNAN PROVINCE

with Jonathan Hodgson

12 days

Updated 07/09/2012

Day 1 *Arrival in Hong Kong*

Welcome to Hong Kong!

Hong Kong is a place with multiple personalities, as a result of being both Cantonese Chinese and under a long-time British influence. It is a unique destination that has absorbed people and cultural influences from places as diverse as Vietnam and Vancouver and proudly proclaims itself to be Asia's "World City."

Overnight in Hong Kong. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Hong Kong: City Touring*

Hong Kong Island is what gives the territory its name; although it is not the largest part of the territory, it is the place that many visitors regard as the main focus.

As such, we begin our day at Victoria Peak for a panoramic view of the city and its spectacular harbour. We continue to Repulse Bay and the colourful fishermen's village at Aberdeen, named after Lord Aberdeen, Secretary of State for the Colonies in the mid 19th century. Aberdeen is situated at the southwestern corner of Hong Kong Island and is one of the earliest settlements on the island. Once said to have been a hideout for pirates dealing in "Heung Kong" (perfumed water), it is now the largest fishing "village" in the former colony. We will enjoy a short sampan tour around the Aberdeen typhoon shelter before continuing to Stanley.

This afternoon your Tour Leader will take you on a stroll through Kowloon. A short trip on the Star Ferry takes us to Kowloon Peninsula; the promenade here is a great place for a stroll and provides wonderful views of Victoria Harbour.

Overnight in Hong Kong. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Hong Kong - Kunming*

Today we arrive in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan Province. The city lies 1891m (6,200 ft) above sea level and is majestically crowned on three sides by the dramatic mountain ranges of the Yunnan-Guizhou plateau. Marco Polo made reference to this place as one of the most pleasant cities in China -- 'very great and noble' -- when he journeyed through it in the 13th century.

As we drive in from Kunming's new airport, you are immediately struck by the modern highways and city infrastructure that China has put in place in a short span of two decades. Kunming is now designated a special tourism center.

Overnight in Kunming. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Kunming: The Stone Forest*

Today we drive 120 km east from Kunming to visit the impressive UNESCO designated World Heritage Site of The Stone Forest, or Shilin National Park. According to an old local saying, if you have visited Kunming and not seen the Stone Forest, you have "wasted your time." Tall rocks seem to emanate from the ground like stalagmites; many of these look like petrified trees creating the illusion of a forest made of stone.

The Stone Forest National Scenic Area covers an area of 350sq km and is divided into several scenic areas including the Major Stone Forest, the Minor Stone Forest, and the Naigu Stone Forest, all of which feature rocks of various formations. Walking through the Stone Forest, you marvel at the natural stone formations and the clever manner in which visitor walkways have been built to allow you to experience the best parts. Legend has it that the Forest was the birthplace of Ashima, a beautiful girl of the Yi ethnic minority. When she was forbidden to marry her lover, she turned into a stone in the forest that still bears her name.

Mongol and Chinese dynasties have left their mark here in the form of pagodas and the magnificent Yuantong temple in Kunming, the largest Buddhist shrine in Yunnan and a popular destination for pilgrims who come to marvel at the dragon sculptures and huge golden Maitreya (Future) Buddha statue. Time permitting, we will briefly visit the old wooden-alley district of old Jini Lu, a lively and colourful place with many shops, bars, and restaurants.

Overnight in Kunming. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Kunming - Dali*

Today we travel by road (+/- 5 hours) across the plateau toward the stunning Cangshan Mountains that rise to 4000m (13,200 ft) from the shores of tranquil Lake Erhai. Our destination is the quiet lakeside city of Dali (1992 m / 6,500 ft).

Dali's mountainous setting, it's proximity to the huge Lake Erhai, and traditional stone buildings that line the cobbledstreets combine to give this historic city an enchanting ambience. We will take time to meander down Hugo Lu and other ancient streets, dawdling in stone built cafes and generally soaking up the atmosphere.

Located in a dramatic setting at the foot of the towering Cangshan Mountains are the Three Pagodas, built from the 9th Century onwards. In 1978, more than 700 Buddhist antiques, including sculptures made of gold, silver, wood or crystal and documents were found in the structure of the main pagoda during major repair works. The designers of the pagoda are supposed to have come from Xi'an, the capital of Tang Dynasty of the time and the location of another pagoda, The Small Wild Goose Pagoda, which shares a similar style.

Overnight in Dali. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Dali: Erhai Lake & Xizhou - Lijiang*

Down at Erhai Lake, the 7th largest in China, wooden junks peacefully ply the calm waters in search of the day's catch. Local fishermen still use the traditional method of using trained cormorants to fish. We will go on a boat ride on the lake to see this fishing technique up close.

Later we visit a typical Bai minority residence in the village of Xizhou where we enjoy a refreshing tea and observe Bai architecture, art, and culture. The distinctive Bai race (Bai comprise nearly half of the Dali population) are of Tibeto-Burmese origin and have long established roots in the Erhai Lake region stretching back 3,000 years.

We continue northwards to the delightful alpine town of Lijiang (elevation 2400m / 7,900 ft). The Old Town of Lijiang, which is perfectly adapted to the hilly topography of strategic site, has retained a historic townscape of high quality and authenticity. Its architecture is noteworthy for the blending of elements from several cultures that have come together over many centuries. Lijiang also possesses an ancient water-supply system of great complexity and ingenuity that still functions effectively today. It is for these reasons that Lijiang was designated as a World Heritage Site.

Overnight in Lijiang. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Lijiang Old Town & The Black Dragon Pool*

Lijiang town grew up as a migration centre for Tibetan nomads; however, the matrilineal Naxi tribe were the most significant settlers in the area. Today the women can still be seen in their blue cotton trousers and sheepskin capes. Much of Naxi architecture remains preserved and the distinctive two storey wood framed Naxi houses with earthen sidewalls can readily be seen alongside the criss-crossed canals and red granite streets that dominate old Lijiang.

From our hotel located in the heart of the old town we will do a walking tour to explore the canal lined alleyways of Lijiang and the Mu Family mansion, once the residence and office of the Naxi rulers of Lijiang. The Mansion was built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) for the ruling family of the area who governed the Lijiang region during Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, lasting for 22 generations.

This afternoon we will visit the Black Dragon Pool and the Jade Spring Park. The place derives its name from waters that 'sparkle like jade'. The entire park is grassy and shaded by swaying willow trees. Under the Shuocui Bridge, a waterfall creates a constant roar as it cascades downstream. The park has some stunning photographic opportunities with the pond and Five Phoenix Pavilion in the foreground and the summit of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain as a backdrop.

This evening we plan to head out 16 kms north to the rural countryside to visit the Naxi village of Baisha where life has largely been unaffected by the changes that have transformed most of China. Baisha is well known for its Ming Dynasty era frescoes, 600 year paintings on a wall that combines the religious icons of three religions that thrived together -- Taoism, Mahayana Therawada Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism.

Overnight in Lijiang. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Lijiang: Tiger Leaping Gorge*

Today we drive to the first bend of the Yangtze River and Tiger Leaping Gorge. At the village of the Stone Drum we will have a look at the first great bend of the Yangtze River. Here the river makes a 180 degree turn over 20 km, first flowing south, then north, running parallel to itself. Locals say if it were not for their village standing guard at the bend, China would lose the water of the Yangtze to southeast China.

The Tiger Leaping Gorge is one of the deepest in the world. During the millennia, the Yangtze has carved a gorge into the massifs of the Haba and Jade Dragon Snow Mountains, both over 5000m (16,400 ft) high with glacier peaks towering over rice terraces on the Yangtze banks.

Return to Lijiang.

Overnight in Lijiang. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Lijiang - Zhongdian*

Today we drive to the ethnic Tibetan town of Zhongdian, located at at 3300m (10,800 ft) above sea level. Zhongdian (Gyalthang in Tibetan) is often referred to as "the Land of Limitless Bounty," and is the capital of the Diqin Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. This is an idyllic town rumoured to be the model for the utopian "Shangri-la" described in James Hilton's 'The Lost Horizon.' Indeed the government has officially renamed Zhongdian "Shangri-la" in 2001 in order to enhance its tourism trade.

Overnight in Zhongdian. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Zhongdian Area: Songzanlin Monastery*

Bordering Tibet and Sichuan Province, Zhongdian occupies a spectacular high plateau at the heart of the Hengduan Mountains. Today we visit the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Yunnan, Songzanlin Monastery, also known as Guihua Monastery or the 'Little Potala', located near Shangri-La County at the foot of Foping Mountain.

Since the 5th Dalai Lama chose the site through divination in 1679, the monastery has grown into the most important community of its kind in Yunnan. Naturally, throughout its history spanning 325 years there have been ups and downs -- the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), for instance, saw the lamasery almost completely destroyed -- but the strong faith of the people of Shangri-La has always prevailed and today Songzanlin once again houses more than 700 monks and lamas.

Built in the style of Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, the magnificent monastery complex resides on top of a hill and consists of the two Zhacang and Jikang lamaseries -- which take on the form of five-story Tibetan watchtowers -- five gates, numerous sub-lamaseries and hundreds of rooms for the monks. Walking up the 146 steps that lead to the main prayer hall is a tiring exercise at 3300 m (10,400 ft) above sea level, but it allows you to trace mentally the pilgrimage route that generations of devout Buddhists living on the plateau take on their knees and foreheads every year.

We return to Zhongdian with leisure time to enjoy this charming town.

Overnight in Zhongdian. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Zhongdian - Kunming*

Today we fly to Kunming. On arrival we travel to the Western Hills, site of a great system of temples and alleyways carved into the towering rocks by a Taoist monk. Weather permitting, we will have wonderful views over Dian Chi Lake and Kunming City and its environs.

Overnight in Kunming. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Kunming - Hong Kong - Depart*

Today particpants ending their journey in Yunnan fly to Hong Kong to connect with homeward flights.

NOTE: Those booking their own air must consult with us re the timing of the inbound flight from Kunming before confirming their air.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.