

CHINA FAMILY TOUR

Pandas, Warriors & The Great Wall

12 days

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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.

Included Meal(s): 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; the promenade here is a great place for a stroll and provides wonderful views of Victoria Harbour.

Overnight in Hong Kong.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Hong Kong - Guilin - Yangshuo

Today we fly from Hong Kong to Guilin, a city of around half a million people situated in the Guangxi Province of southern China. The name Guilin means 'the cassia tree forest,' and in autumn the sweet fragrance of the cassia flowers wafts through the town. The well known highlight of the city is its surreal landscape of limestone pinnacles that rise hundreds of feet into the air like fingers pointing skywards.

The city of Guilin was founded in the Qin Dynasty in 314 BC as a small settlement on the Lijiang River. It became increasingly important following the construction of a canal joining the river with another further north, providing a transport link with the Yangtze. The town became the provincial capital in the Ming Dynasty and remained so until 1914 when the capital was moved to Nanning. According to a popular Chinese saying, "Guilin's scenery bests all others in the world." Its shapely-rising limestone towers and crystal-clear waters are often portrayed in Chinese artworks.

We will drive to the pleasant town of Yangshuo, located about 65 km (40 miles) and set dramatically amidst the limestone mountains for which the area is famous.

Overnight in Yangshuo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Li River Cruise

Today we enjoy a spectacular cruise down the meandering Li River in Yangshuo. The scenery is breathtaking as mist-covered jagged mountains loom before you and quaint villages dot the riverbanks. We pass humped limestone peaks, fishermen astride bamboo rafts, and grazing water buffaloes. The boat passes through the Luogu Rapids where the sound of the rushing water is said to resemble gongs and drums.

Legend tells us that every sailor drowned in the Li is transformed into a demon, clutching at the boats which navigate the rapids. As the launch floats past valleys, bamboo groves, and mist-shrouded crags, one has the sensation of being carried backward in time through a traditional Chinese painting. Local river craft are still physically towed upstream in convoys; a few are still towed by men and women in harness.

Yangshuo, located about 65 km (40 miles) from Guilin is a town of about 30,000 inhabitants, a small town with a small town feel. Time permitting this afternoon we will visit the town and its lively market.

Tonight we will attend the "Yin Xiang Liu San Jie," an exciting local minority show performed on the banks of the Li River. The Ying Xiang Liu San Jie is a spectacular light and dance performance directed by Zhang Yimou, a famous Chinese filmmaker. This is a breathtaking show, using the beautiful mountains and river as the backdrop for the performance.

Overnight in Yangshuo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Yangshuo - Chengdu

Today we fly to Chengdu in South Central China.

A modern provincial capital southeast of the Sichuan basin, Chengdu enjoys a temperate climate and plentiful natural resources. In contrast to some other Chinese urban centres, and despite raging re-development, Chengdu has managed to preserve the atmosphere that one might imagine China to have in the past.

On arrival we visit the Jinsha Museum. Discovered in 2001, the Jinsha Site was the most significant archaeological discovery in the 21st century in China. Thousands of gold plates, jade articles, stone wares, bronze wares and ivories of Kingdom of Shu (221-263) were uncovered, and helped to modify previous assumptions about the origins of the Chinese civilization.

Overnight in Chengdu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Chengdu: Giant Panda Breeding Research Base & Sanxingdui Museum

We start our day with a visit to the Giant Panda Breeding Research Base, located on the mountain of Futoushan in the northern suburbs of the city. The Giant Panda Museum collects and exhibits the findings and ongoing research on the Giant Panda. It showcases the panda's evolution, ancient and present distribution, general situation, condition and research of human interaction with the animal. We will try and visit during feeding time.

We also visit the Sanxingdui Museum, a modern facility located in the northeast of the Sanxingdui Remains, composed of several large relic areas. The areas are the largest, most important and elegant ancient Shu cultural relics sites in Sichuan covering 12 square-km in total. Life went on here about 2,800 to 4,800 years ago, equivalent to the late Neolithic Age.

Overnight in Chengdu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Chengdu - Xi'an

Today we fly to Xi'an, the ancient capital of 11 dynasties and one of the largest medieval cities in the world when visited by Marco Polo. Of all cities on our itinerary, Xi'an and its history most vividly exemplify the extraordinary continuity of Chinese civilization. Only in recent years, however, has Xi'an become well-known outside of China, owing to the 1974 discovery of the astonishing burial site of emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (3rd century BC).

While in Xi'an, we will visit the museum dedicated to the tomb known as Han Yangling, located near the airport. Built in 2005 and regarded as one of the best of its kind in the world, the museum showcases not only the resting place of the occupant, Jing Di, but also how he and others lived during his time, the second century BC. The displays are exquisitely and sensitively done; the piles of hundreds of artifacts, in situ, are like a modern work of "found" art.

While in Xi'an, we will enjoy a "dumpling banquet" for which this area is famous.

Overnight in Xi'an.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Xi'an: Terra Cotta Warriors - Overnight Train

Today we view the Terra Cotta Warriors, an impressive legion of thousands of life-size terra cotta warriors that has been guarding the emperor's burial site for over 2,000 years. In 1974, a group of peasants digging a well in Lintong County, about 30 km east of Xi'an, accidentally made one of the century's greatest archeological discoveries. What they stumbled upon were thousands of life-size terra cotta warriors; an estimated 8,000 figures have thus far been identified.

We also visit the Big Wild Goose Pagoda and the Bell Tower from where you have a spectacular view of all four of Xi'an's city gates.

This evening we board our overnight sleeper train to Beijing.

Overnight Train.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Arrival in Beijing

This morning we arrive in Beijing, the capital of the People's Republic of China. While many of its elements are common to other Chinese cities, the sum of this city -- its scope and presence in history -- has no equivalent in China or anywhere else in the world.

We begin our touring with a visit to Tian'anmen Square, the place where one million students rallied for democracy in 1989. This is the largest public square in the world. Originally built in 1651, the square was quadrupled in size in 1958 to its present 40.5 hectares (100 acres) during a massive city-wide reconstruction program. Each flagstone is numbered so that parade units can line up in their assigned places.

From here we walk to the Forbidden City, a huge complex of palaces, pavilions, courtyards and gardens, which was off-limits to commoners for 500 years. This is where the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties carried out their administration and lived, now open as a Palace Museum.

Later this afternoon we visit the Temple of Heaven, completed in 1420, and expanded over the years by two Qing Dynasty Emperors. Qianian Hall, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, with the three blue-tiled cone-shaped roofs, has become a worldwide symbol of Beijing. It was hit by lightning in 1889 and then completely restored. No nails or pegs were used in the original construction nor in the restoration.

Today we include lunch and free up your evening for optional activities, such as a Kung-fu show or Peking Opera performance. Your Tour Leader can assist with these arrangements.

Overnight in Beijing.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Beijing: Hutong Tour

This morning we embark on a Hutong Tour. Hutongs are lanes or alleys formed by lines of siheyuan (a compound with houses around a courtyard) where old Beijing residents live. Roaming through Beijing's old, narrow streets by old-fashioned pedicab lets you witness daily life of ordinary Beijing citizens. After a tour focusing on ancient history and monuments, this is a fascinating opportunity to witness how everyday Chinese live and work in an environment that is rapidly disappearing in a rapidly developing country.

Today we include lunch and free up your evening for optional activities, such as a Kung-fu show or Peking Opera performance. Your Tour Leader can assist with these arrangements. This afternoon you can explore on your own or do some shopping for which Beijing is famous.

Overnight in Beijing.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 11 Beijing: The Great Wall

This morning we travel north of Beijing to the Great Wall of China. A walk along the enormous undulating towered and turreted wall is spectacular. Rising and falling in concert with the ridges of the northern hills and undulating far off into the distance, the Great Wall consistently exceeds visitors' expectations and remains one of humankind's most remarkable accomplishments.

The wall's construction began during the Warring States Period (403-221 BC), when separate sections were built in scattered strategic areas. Following China's unification under the first Qin Emperor, 300,000 men -- many of them political prisoners whose bodies are buried in the wall -- were put to work connecting the segments into one huge rampart of stone and earth.

We will have plenty of free time to explore the wall before returning to Beijing this afternoon.

Overnight in Beijing.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Departure

Departure from Beijing.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast