

CHINA: MANY EMPIRES - MANY FACES#2

Adventure

Walking Adventures International plans and guides walking adventures that combine international travel with walking. Our itineraries blend historic, cultural, and scenic highlights of the regions we're traveling through with walks in the area. Our trips are fast-paced; they are designed as overview tours to expose travelers to as much of the region's significant highlights as we can manage, and still maintain a reasonable daily schedule. Even though most walkers find it easy and natural to enjoy our style of travel, we want to ensure that we've afforded every opportunity for travelers to know what to expect, in advance! Listed below are a series of questions and answers to help you develop accurate expectations of this Adventure and make plans to maximize your enjoyment. Please feel free to call us with any additional questions you have.

Questions & Answers

Q: Do you have more detailed information than is available in the Adventure brochure?

- A: About three weeks before departure, a final packet will be mailed to each participant. This packet will include:
- * Hotel listing (including address and phone information of all hotels)
 - * Traveler List
 - * Daily schedule
 - * Adventure t-shirt & nametag
 - * Reusable luggage tags for first-time travelers

Q: Do I need a passport or visa?

- A: **China is one of an increasing number of countries that requires a passport that does not expire for at least 6 months from the date you leave the country.** A passport can usually be obtained by applying at your town's main post office. It generally takes at least six weeks to process, however, so don't delay. **In addition, China requires a visa. Included in this mailing is our "Factsheet Memo", and a flyer from the Generations Visa Service (with application form) that outlines the procedures for obtaining a Chinese visa. Please read carefully.**

IMPORTANT: Please make a copy of your passport and birth certificate and keep them in your luggage separate from where you keep your passport. In case your passport gets lost, having these copies really speeds up the replacement process.

Q: Do you have any suggestions to help with flights to China?

- A: **We have an arrangement with Debbi Custer, a travel agent who is familiar with the China Adventure. Debbi would be happy to help you make your flight arrangements. She has all of the details for this travel program and would be happy to help you find the best schedule and fare from your hometown into Shanghai and home from Beijing.**

There are four flights within China that are part of the program and are included in the Adventure price.

Other options include using your own travel agent, or AAA if you are a member. If you have access to the Internet, we've discovered several web sites that may be helpful in finding the best fares. To start your planning, www.travelocity.com is a good site on which to find flights that are available on the days of travel. For the best fares, we've found it's better to go to the web site of the specific airline serving your home and destination. Often you can leave your e-mail address, and they'll contact you when they have specials flying to cities that interest you most. There are also sites that offer tour planning services and claim to find all the sales and specials. Sites to check out include:

Airline sites:

www.continental.com
www.southwest.com
www.ual.com (United)
www.americanairlines.com
www.alaskaairlines.com
www.twa.com
www.deltaairlines.com

Planning sites:

www.travelocity.com
www.expedia.com
www.farebeater.com/domestic
www.onetravel.com
www.bestfares.com
www.priceline.com
www.qix.com

MERITS OF DEPARTING EARLY: We encourage you to consider departing for China a day early (arriving in Shanghai on October 27). Airline on-time reliability has been questionable at best over the past several months. Starting a trip a day late and without luggage is not the kind of "Adventure" we are promoting. Departing one day early 1) gives you a hedge against missed connections—more time to get to China, 2) gives any lost luggage issues an extra day to be resolved before we depart for our next hotel, and 3) gives your system an extra day to recover from jet lag before we begin our action-packed schedule! WAI can help you book the extra night in Shanghai if you give us advance notice.

A word (or two) on jet lag: Much has been theorized about the best way to fight jet lag. One small booklet we've added to our library is *Jet Smart* by Diana Fairechild. An oversimplified summary of her book would suggest that you:

- 1) eat as little as possible while in transit, avoid alcoholic beverages, and eat high carbohydrate foods if you must eat,
- 2) get up and walk around the plane when you can,
- 3) do isometric exercises (flex and relax your muscles) occasionally during the flight,
- 4) adjust your sleep schedule to the local time as soon as possible.

IMPORTANT: We particularly recommend no's. 2 and 3. Over the years, we've had several travelers who have experienced circulation problems during the Adventure due to the long flight.

Q: What type of hotels will we be in?

A: We use good quality, tourist class, 3-star or better accommodations. Most hotels will be full service facilities with restaurants on site, though we will likely eat many of our dinners at local restaurants. When making reservations, we request as many non-smoking rooms as possible. Non-smoking rooms are not always available, but due to standards of cleanliness, we have seldom had complaints in this regard from prior travelers.

NOTE: Hotels may have toiletry items in the bathrooms, some of which are complimentary and some which are not. Check to make sure there is not a price tag on a toiletry item before assuming that it is free.

Q: What will the ship on the Yangtze Cruise be like?

A: We will be using Victoria Cruises, the only American-owned company operating on the Yangtze. Our ship will be the *MS Victoria Empress* (a ship's diagram should be included in the initial mailing of this factsheet). Ships designed for river cruising are much smaller than the ocean going vessels that have made luxury cruising popular. We prefer, however, the smaller, more intimate atmosphere of river cruises. Here are a few things to keep in mind about the Yangtze River cruise:

- All cabins face outside so all passengers have river views through large picture windows.
- Cabins are all the same size and relatively spacious at 157 square feet. We even enjoy the piped-in music.
- All cabins are booked on the Main deck, but it is possible to upgrade to the Middle or Upper Decks for \$25 or \$45 per person respectively. Cabins are the same on all decks, so what you are buying is simply a view from a bit higher up.
- Dress code is informal aboard ship. There is a Captain's Dinner one night where some people do dress more formally in jackets and ties. However, this is not compulsory.
- Tipping: All tipping is included in the Adventure price EXCEPT for the Yangtze Cruise itself. Since there are so many servers involved in your cruise experience, WAI will leave the tipping to you. The tipping recommendation is approximately \$50-\$60 per person for the full cruise. Guidelines for allocation of this tip will be shared on site.

Q: What will our walks be like?

A: Walks will provide an insightful blend of rural and nature venues along with city sightseeing.

The walks in China will be led by your WAI guides with the help of local Chinese guides. When the initial version of this Adventure was planned, there were no walking clubs in China and these walks were laid out by WAI staff during planning trips. There is now a walking club in Beijing that is willing to sanction our walks. Though we cannot guarantee

a stamp, we are expecting to provide IVV stamps for all official Adventure walks. Using the American Volkssport Association's (AVA) difficulty rating system of 1 to 5, with 1 representing flat, smooth walk routes and 5 representing difficult hikes, these walks fit mostly in the 1 to 2+ range. Here is the description of ratings used by the AVA:

1. An easy walk on pavement or well-maintained trail with no significant hills. Probably suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
2. A moderately easy walk, may be on pavement or on trails. No significant difficulty with hills. May not be suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
3. A moderate walk in any setting with some difficult terrain, one or two substantial hills and/or steps. Strollers and wheelchairs questionable.
4. A more difficult walk. Most likely in a natural setting with poorly maintained paths and steeper or hilly inclines. Not likely to be wheelchair or stroller accessible. Participants with certain health problems should take caution.
5. A very difficult walk. All in rough fields or woods. Many steep hills or high altitude trails, or very rough uneven terrain, steep or unstable inclines. Not suitable for any person who is not in good health

If you are walking for IVV credit, you may use the same event and distance books for this Adventure that you use here in the States. We will have a supply of extra event and distance books along if your books get filled up en route.

In planning the program, we allow 3 to 3¼ hours to complete a standard 10 km (6.2 mile) walk, unless the walk is intended to allow for shopping and sightseeing time. Of course, none of the walks are mandatory. If you need to take a day off, or don't feel like doing the entire walk, just let your WAI guide know and he'll help you make plans to do a partial walk or find some other interesting things to do.

Carrying a water bottle on the walks is highly recommended. If you often use a walking stick at home, we would advise that you also make plans to have your walking stick with you in China.

Q: Will the walks be sanctioned volkswalks?

A: As mentioned above, we are corresponding with the one IVV club in China and do expect to provide IVV credit for our walks.

Q: What is a volkswalk?

A: Volkssport is a club activity that began in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in 1968. There are four primary activities: walking, biking, swimming, and cross country skiing. Walking is, by far, the most popular and well developed. A volkswalk is walked at a steady pace through a scenic and/or historic area over a pre-marked route (usually 10 km, which is 6.2 miles). Normally, it is hosted by a local group of volunteer club members. It is noncompetitive, and aims to involve people of all ages. Everyone who participates is declared a WINNER! Presently, there are walks in all 50 states and more than 30 countries worldwide.

Q: What type of footwear should I bring?

A: Two pairs of walking shoes or boots are recommended.

The first pair often gets wet or muddy and needs a day off. The increase in the number of light-weight hiking boots is making them a more attractive and practical option. We believe a quality pair of lightweight hiking boots is a good investment for a traveling walker and, if water-proof, can even eliminate the need for a 2nd pair of walking shoes.

Q: Is the water drinkable in the countries we're visiting? Are there any health precautions I should take?

A: Do NOT drink water from the tap in China. Water may be present in your room in a tea kettle. This water is okay to use for hot drinks provided it is boiled first. Do not drink water that has not been boiled. Water that is served for meals has been purified and is safe to drink.

One of the realities of foreign travel is that we encounter different bugs and bacteria than we do here at home. Particularly in China, travelers often experience a higher than normal susceptibility to germs. Another reality is that group travel involves sharing a lot of things — including germs. As a result, cold nasties can quickly travel through the bus looking for weak immune systems to attack. There are several supplements and behaviors that can make a significant difference in your ability to resist these bugs and preserve a healthy Adventure, including the following:

- * Use Vitamin C and Echinacea beginning a week before the trip and during the trip to boost your immune system (check with you doctor for possible allergies to Echinacea).
- * Maintain the use of a good multi-vitamin both before and during the trip.
- * Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently (carrying a waterless hand cleaner is highly recommended).
- * If/when you cough, cover your mouth as completely as possible to avoid the spread of germs in consideration of fellow travelers.
- * Avoid touching your face and rubbing your eyes.
- * Be sensitive to your health and particularly your need for rest. Guard against fatigue by monitoring your participation in trip activities and allowing yourself necessary "down time."

Q: What shots are recommended?

A: No shots are required but you will need to consult your physician for the immunizations they advise for the areas we are visiting. Many HMO's also have travel consulting services. In the past, we have been advised to have a polio booster, a hepatitis A vaccine, and typhim Vi. They also checked that our tetanus was up-to-date. Just tell your physician the areas we will be traveling through — eastern China from Shanghai and Guilin up to Beijing.

Q: How many people do you accept on an Adventure?

A: Generally, we close the trip at no more than 30 people. The trip will be lead by two WAI guides with assistance of a "national" Chinese guide, who will be with us the entire trip, and a "local" Chinese guide who will meet us at each stop.

Q: What is the average age of your groups?

A: Most of our travelers fall between 50 and 70 years of age. This seems to be the age bracket that has the time and means to travel. However, we always have travelers that fall outside that range, from the 20's up into the 80's. Walkers are characteristically great traveling companions — positive, cheerful, and appreciative of the opportunity to see the world.

Q: What is the split between men and women?

A: One of the realities of life is that there are more women on the planet than men. Another is that they tend to out-live their spouses. As a result, we do have more women on the trips than men. The percentage of women on the trip can run anywhere from 60 to 80%. We have quite a few couples, a lot of women traveling together or singly, and the occasional single male traveler. We like to see this ratio as even as possible and are always looking for a few more good men!

Q: What if I don't have a roommate?

A: It's always best to register for the trip with your own roommate, but we do offer to help match travelers up with others needing roommates. We provide contact information for potential roommates and allow travelers to contact each other and make their own decisions.

Q: What will the motorcoaches be like?

A: We will be traveling in several different coaches but will not be spending a significant amount of time on the bus. We normally employ a seat rotation system but do not plan to use this system in China due to the limited amount of time on the bus and the lack of continuity with any one bus. We do ask that you "rotate" on a voluntary basis so that everyone gets a chance to be near the front of the bus. Also, as is common in most developing countries, the standard of coaches in China does not equal the standard we have become accustomed to in Europe and North America. Rest assured that you will get the best coaches that are available in the area through which we are traveling.

Q: How much money should I take along?

A: The Chinese currency is the RMB (Renminbi), more commonly called the YUAN. The rate of exchange at the time of printing was \$1 = 7.2 RMB.

The most practical formula seems to be a combination of foreign currency (cash!) and credit cards. Though not usable everywhere, credit cards are gaining wider acceptance in China and can be used in most hotels and on board the vessels to pay for your incidentals at the end of the cruise. However, in shops and especially with souvenir vendors, cash is still "king"!

Exchange offices are available at most major hotels, airports and to a reasonable extent, via the reception desks on the ships. There is no limit to how much foreign currency you may bring into China. We therefore suggest that you take US dollars with you in a money belt, and carry your cash underneath your clothes, close to your heart.

A minimum which should cover only the three lunches that are not included, and any additional

beverages at dinner would be \$300 (to exchange in China). Many travelers take double or triple this amount.

Because we will need to depend more on cash than we usually do, we will need to place an even greater importance upon safeguards such as money belts and discreet handling of currency in public places.

ATM machines are also not as readily available as here in the States. A debit card is still a good idea to bring. Things continue to change at a rapid pace in China, and ATMs are becoming more and more common. Keypads on ATM's tend to be only in numbers, so be sure that your PIN number is given to you by your bank in numerals and not letters.

It is often difficult to exchange Chinese Yuan back into dollars before departing for the USA. When exchanging dollars for Chinese Yuan throughout the trip, however, save the receipt you receive as it may help you to convert any excess Yuan back into dollars before leaving China.

Unlike most of our Adventures, traveler's checks in U.S. dollars may be a good back-up source of currency to be exchanged at hotels and used aboard the ship to pay for incidentals.

Q: What type of clothing is appropriate?

A: Casual tourist attire will be the norm for the entire trip. Most of the time, we will be dressed in our walking clothes. Our own strategy is to take two or three pairs of nylon pants with zip-off legs along with several t-shirts and nylon or tri-blend travel shirts. We supplement this with a quality set of breathable rain-gear (e.g. Goretex) which we also wear for warmth when the temperatures are a bit cool. Additionally, we also take along a light jacket and/or silk or high performance fabric undershirts to use as additional layers. In any case, we have found that packing lightweight layers of clothing is the most practical strategy.

You may wish to bring along a set of casual non-walking clothes (slacks or nice jeans for the men and a skirt or dress for the ladies) for the odd occasion when you feel like wearing something other than walking attire or the couple of evenings when we have special dinners (e.g. Yangtze River cruise or Tang Dynasty Dinner Show).

Cruise dress code: The Yangtze experience is a cruise. There is one night where the suggested dress code includes a tie and jacket for the guys and nice slacks or a skirt for the ladies. This is a very lax situation, however, and people just wear the nicest thing they have with them; no need to take the tie and jacket thing seriously.

Weather:

Because of the wide range of latitudes we'll be traveling in, temperatures can vary significantly. Fall and spring are definitely the best weather seasons to travel in China. The warmest weather will likely be in the Guilin and Yangshuo area of southern China, and could reach up into the 80's and 90's. Be prepared for rain at some

point during our Adventure. Here are the average high and low temperatures in Fahrenheit over the past few years.

	High	Low
Shanghai	72	58
Guilin	79	60
Xi'an	58	40
Beijing	54	35

Q: Do you have a suggested reading list for this Adventure?

A: Yes, below we have compiled a list of suggested reading for this trip. Having historical background information on the areas you will visit will greatly enhance your experience. In addition to the suggestions below, we recommend that you obtain a good guidebook for each country such as those published by Lonely Planet or DK Eyewitness.

- * Wild Swans by Jung Chang
- * Mao's Last Dancer by Li Cunxin
- * Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress: A Novel by Dai Sijie
- * Life and Death in Shanghai by Nien Cheng
- * Alone on the Great Wall by William Lindsey
- * The Cambridge Illustrated History of China by Patricia Buckley Ebrey
- * Understanding China: A Guide to China's Economy, History, and Political Culture by John Bryan Starr
- * Culture Smart China by Kathy Flower

Other Important Information

MEALS:

All breakfasts and dinners and most lunches are included in the trip price. Breakfasts will be mostly American-style buffets, and dinners will be the local cuisine. You will definitely get your fill of Chinese fare, but will be surprised at the amazing variety, quality, and quantity of the food. Chopsticks are the standard eating utensils, but western-style cutlery will also be available.

The sit down meals throughout China are served in a procession-like buffet and are always on small saucer-sized plates. The meal begins when just one or two plates, representing appetizers, are put on the table.... Do not be worried about the "small" quantity; this is only the beginning! Usually, the host of the meal (if you are eating with a Chinese person) will offer the first portion to his guest or to the person on his right, then will serve himself and will pass the plate on to the person on his left. Once this formality is completed, everyone can simply dig in!

In China, eating is a serious business! There is very little time for intimate conversation or "romantic" interludes. The Chinese eat to get fed and that's it! Therefore, don't be shy - follow the leader and enjoy! What is especially interesting to the western eye is the lack of rice at the table - which is only brought at the end of the meal. The reason is that it is impolite to bring out the "cheapest" food first — therefore rice is always served last! But, if you would like rice with your meal, simply ask for it!

Another interesting quirk is the fact that soup and desert are usually brought to the table half way through the meal! Yet again, the idea is to wash down the tastes of the previous food items and clean your palate with the soup, before you continue on with other delicacies! In any case, don't be shy; ask your server to bring out whatever you need, and as for what you are eating — sometimes it's better not to know!

CALLING/MAILING HOME:

Calling home from overseas can be complicated. Internet cafes and business centers in hotels that have internet are usually a more practical way to stay in touch with loved ones back home.

LAUNDRY:

It is highly unlikely that you will find self-service laundry facilities in any of the places we visit. Most of our hotels will have laundry service available for a fee, which can be quite substantial. We have two laundry strategies: 1) pack a few feet of clothes line and do your laundry in your room, or 2) pack tightly and bring enough essentials so that you don't need to do laundry until you return home. Because of the luggage restrictions mentioned below, we recommend you travel light and do your laundry in your room.

TIME ZONE:

Although vast in size, China maintains a single time zone throughout, which is 16 hours (15 hours during daylight savings!) ahead of Los Angeles and 13 hours ahead of New York. So when it's noon in Beijing, it is 8 pm in Los Angeles and 11 pm in New York the previous day!

ELECTRICITY:

China uses 220 volts and generally either the three-pronged angle pins (like Australia) or the American style 2-prong pins. If you plan to use electrical appliances (hair dryers, battery rechargers, etc) we recommend that you bring along a travel transformer for the current and two adapters for the plugs — Australia three-pronged and European two-pronged. These can be obtained from most AAA offices or anywhere travel accessories are sold.

GRATUITIES:

Gratuities for meals and lodging are included in the cost of the Adventure. In addition, the Adventure price also includes the tip for the driver and any local guides that serve us. Due to the variety of services received from a multitude of staff aboard ship, however, tipping aboard ship in the Yangtze River is not included. In restaurants (meals not with the group), taxis, etc, you should leave a 15% tip rounded up. If you use the portage service for luggage at hotels, a tip of 5-10 RMB (70 cents-\$1.38) per suitcase will be about right. Tips for chambermaids are generally 10-15 RMB per day.

LUGGAGE:

As you will notice in the General Tour Conditions sheet originally inserted with your Adventure brochure, we request that you limit your luggage to one suitcase per

person plus carry-on type luggage. Portage will likely be provided at most hotels but will be accompanied by the expectation of the usual tip from the bellman.

Because of the distances covered on this trip, we are using air transport often, especially in China. As a result, we are subject to Chinese weight limitations on luggage. For the Chinese domestic flights, we are limited to 44 pounds of checked luggage per person, rather than the customary 70 pounds for international flights. This could be a significant factor for travelers not accustomed to traveling light. Excess baggage is charged a fee of \$1 per pound for each flight. Since we will be checking in as a group, our baggage will be weighed as a group and the limitation applied on the basis of 44 pounds times the number of travelers. Anything you can do to limit your baggage will help to ease this potentially awkward situation.

CULTURE SHOCK:

Since North American culture is linked closely with our common European heritage, China presents us with a fascinating opportunity to see into a very different culture. There are aspects of this Adventure that will amaze and delight you. Undoubtedly there will be other aspects that will confound and frustrate you. We recommend that you pick up a travel guide like *Lonely Planet* or *Fodor's*, or recommendations from our reading list, and become aware of some of the differences you can expect to encounter.

With China warmly welcoming overseas' visitors, you will see firsthand the great economic strides the country has experienced in the recent past. *However, much still remains to be developed in many outlying areas.*

The government and/or other Chinese Handling Agencies are earnestly working to improve and increase facilities and the quality of their service. In the meantime, you will enjoy your experience most fully if you take a flexible approach.

Being aware of and observing the customs of the people in whose country you are an honored guest will make your trip most rewarding. Here are a few tips to help you transition smoothly as a guest in China:

- The Chinese people are inherently shy and modest, though they often surprise Westerners with their lack of self-consciousness. Other than shaking hands, they refrain from touching each other — a convention you should respect.
- Punctuality is expected for all activities. There is no such thing as being "*fashionably late*" in China.
- Please, never refer to the Chinese as "Chinamen", or to their country as "Red China", "Mainland China" or "Communist China". The name is "*The People's Republic of China*".
- Taiwan is considered a province and should not be referred to as "The Republic of China".
- The People's Republic of China is a Socialist Country now led by a Communist party.
- Leadership is traditionally accorded the highest respect in China; under no circumstances should a slighting remark be made about any official, Chinese or otherwise.

- Social behavior in China is highly ethical, and the tourist custom of taking towels, ashtrays, and other “souvenirs” from hotels, trains or other places is NOT acceptable. It will cause major embarrassment on exit and may also present a problem for guides/interpreters and room attendants, who could be held responsible. Please, do not take “*memorabilia*” unless you buy it.

TOILETS:

The traditional Asian toilet is not what they laughingly refer to as a “throne” (western style). Rather it is a fixture (a.k.a. squatty potty) lying flush with the ground that the user must squat on their haunches to utilize. Western style toilets will be available, of course, in all the hotels and in most places we visit. At some point in the trip, however, you may find yourself faced with the uncomfortable decision of either using a squatty potty or waiting until the next opportunity to use a throne. In all fairness, we have to agree with the Asian argument that squatty potties may be more hygienic than thrones in that a squatty potty requires no part of your body to make contact with the fixture (unless you count your feet on the floor).

In addition, toilet paper is not provided in public toilets. Rather, the user is expected to BYOTP (bring your own toilet paper). Make sure you always have a supply of TP in your daypack!

CROWDS:

There's just no getting around the fact that there are lots of people in China. And though traveling as a group provides a certain degree of insulation from the masses of humanity in this country, you will certainly feel this unique characteristic of China often during our travels. You may find that the Chinese have different societal norms with regard to personal space. At times, the attention we get from the locals may convince you that we are the tourist attraction, rather the other way around. It is not uncommon for rural Chinese to stand close and watch our group, or ask to have a photo taken with us. To those from remote rural areas that are visiting the city, we are an amazing novelty. To be sure, we will spend significant time in areas of scenic beauty and you'll see the rural side of life in China, but even there, the reality that we are traveling in some of the most densely populated countries on the planet will be unmistakably clear.

AIR QUALITY:

Over the past few centuries, coal has been a major source of fuel for the Chinese. They are now paying the price in terms of quality of air and are working to clean up emissions and find alternative sources of fuel (e.g. the Three Gorges Dam). This dependence on coal gives Chinese cities a somewhat grimy, dusty feeling. If you suffer from respiratory diseases, this is certainly something to consult your physician about.

TRAVELER'S PERSPECTIVE:

As with most things in life, the benefit you receive from this experience will depend to a large degree on the frame of mind you have at the outset. If you've not traveled out-

side the U.S. before, there are a few things you should be aware of:

- Though we attempt to eliminate it as much as possible, travel always contains an element of uncertainty. Being ready to adjust will enhance your experience.
- To varying degrees, hotels, food, and local customs are different in other countries. This can be uncomfortable...and exciting!
- Though we continue to look for ways to slow the pace of our “Adventures,” we still believe in providing a full day's opportunities for our travelers. On some days, we spend a significant amount of time on the bus.
- Group travel, by its nature, involves giving up a certain degree of individual convenience. Though we strive for added flexibility for the individual, much of the time we all need to be “headed in the same direction.”

We hope we've covered most of your questions. If not, feel free to contact us and we'll be glad to fill in the gaps. We look forward to walking China with you!

