

The tour included Shanghai, Suzhou, Wuhan, a 5-night Yangtze River cruise on the *Victoria III*, Chongqing, Dazu, Chengdu, Lhasa, Xi'an, Guilin, Guangzhou (Canton) and Hong Kong.

All of the hotels were 5-star except the one in Lhasa, which was still very nice. Breakfast was complete buffet style with all of the things Americans normally want to eat. Lunch and dinner were at different interesting restaurants and included a

CHINA AND TIBET

I took the most wonderful tour of China and Tibet that I can imagine is possible, April 29-May 23, '02. The tour company was **China Plus, Inc.** (320 Decker Dr., Ste. 100, Las Colinas/Irving, TX 75062; phone 888/868-8811, e-mail chinaplus@att.net or visit www.chinaplustour.com). From the West Coast it cost \$4,768 for the 25-day tour.

I learned about this company in the pages of *ITN* and by visiting the *ITN* website. I was able to correspond with several people who had used China Plus and they were unfailingly enthusiastic.

This tour was exciting every single day. It was escorted by Ping Lee, wife of the company's owner. One thing that is unique about China Plus is that you can e-mail questions to them as often as you like and they will respond immediately. I formed an e-mail friendship with Ping long before we left for the tour and I was even more impressed when I met her. She combines efficiency with friendliness in such a charming way that you just love her.

Our small group of nine (10 is the usual minimum group size) flew Air Canada out of Vancouver and it seemed like a very short flight of only about 10 hours to Beijing.

Peking duck dinner and a Mongolian barbecue lunch.

While in Xi'an we had a wonderful meal with several courses at a dinner theater and then saw a marvelous show. There was another wonderful show in Guilin and an acrobatic show in Shanghai. In Lhasa we went to *The Crazy Yak* café for dinner and a very amusing show.

We were allowed to help plan this tour, to request places that we wanted to see be added like Dazu and the Panda Breeding Center at Chengdu. They did this graciously and with very little added cost.

Dazu is a very important site and should be included on all tours to China; I was stunned at the beauty of the carvings. And I can't stress enough how much we all enjoyed the Panda Breeding Center. We each could hold a baby panda on our lap and have pictures taken.

The cruise was so wonderful that we all agreed it would have been worth the trip just to see this area before it is gone. It's hard to believe that so much breathtaking scenery will be under water. We had a tour of the dam site and also took a smaller boat into the lesser gorges. It was all very beautiful, and we actually saw some monkeys jumping from tree to tree although the guide had said it was not sunny enough. What a thrill!

The Victoria Cruises ships are reportedly very similar. The *Victoria III* was comfortable in every way — plenty of room in our cabin without upgrading from standard, and plenty of room in the bathroom. We had a wide window with chairs and a table so we could sit and watch the scenery when we weren't hanging over the rail on the fourth deck. The food was delicious and the service always perfect. All meals were one seating.

Ours being a small group, we were able to visit in many homes in different areas of China, meeting families on different economic levels. In Tibet we also visited a rural school. We were able to ask questions through our guide and also answer locals' questions.

In some places we ran into other tour groups, one with 39 people and another with 120 people! We felt very fortunate to be a small, totally bonded group with such an outstanding tour director. All guides provided

were excellent and spoke English very well.

We were fortunate to be in Lhasa during a festival when the monks were gathered at the temple to pray and many, many people were making pilgrimages. We were able to see a very colorful part of their religious life.

The Potala Palace is one of the most astounding things I've ever seen in 25 years of travel. We also visited the Summer Palace, which gives an intimate look into the life of the Dalai Lama as he studied and went about his daily life. Tibet is incredibly beautiful and is a "must see" when visiting China.

China Plus offers tours to many other areas and our group is already planning to travel together again with Ping. I have never been on a tour that was so well handled and that delivered so much more than it had promised in every way.

— JANELLE JOHNSON, Fort Worth, TX