

is one of the nicest boats on the Yangtze. The cabins are somewhat small, but not much time is spent there. The food was excellent, and there are two American officers on board to help passengers.

The 5-day tour, upriver from Wuhan to Chongqing, was most enjoyable. It was nice to relax on the boat after a busy itinerary earlier in the trip.

There were four major stops for sightseeing, including the new Three Gorges Dam that is being constructed. Part of the dam will be completed in 2003 and the new lake will start to form; by 2009 the dam will be completed and the lake will stretch for approximately 450 miles and be 500 feet deep, we were told. Over 1.3 million people will need to be moved away from the lake. This process has already begun, with some small towns along the river being abandoned.

Another interesting stop is a visit to the Lesser Three Gorges area. This is a smaller river with high cliffs on each side and much vegetation. If the sun is out, you are able to see monkeys and other wildlife on the cliffs.

After we left the ship to visit this area, we were transported by bus to Wushan and then boarded a motorized sampan for the ride on the Daning River, part of the Lesser Three Gorges.

The end of the Yangtze River cruise was at the city of Chongqing, the wartime capital of China after the Japanese invasion in the 1930s and the headquarters of the American Flying Tigers. General Stilwell, the leader of the Flying Tigers, had his home there and it is now a museum where you can see many photos, videos and mementos of the Flying Tigers.

After debarking from *Victoria III*, visiting the Stilwell home and having a city tour of Chongqing, we flew to Guilin and spent two nights in this lovely area. This is the rice paddy area with high, pointed mountains which you see often in Chinese art. The river Li flows through the countryside, and the 3-hour boat ride through this beautiful landscape is outstanding.

The boat ride ends at the village of Yangsuo, where there are 200 handicraft sellers. This is the best place to pick up all of those purchases you will bring home.

In the center of Guilin, don't miss the nighttime cormorant fishing on the Li River. You go out in a little boat and watch the natives float on bamboo rafts with their five trained cormorants.

Two lanterns are at the bow of the raft. On command, the birds dive into the river to catch fish and then hop back up on the raft so the fisherman can take the fish from the birds' throats and throw the fish in a large basket. What an amazing experience.

After two nights in Guilin, the others in the group flew on to Hong Kong. I flew back to Shanghai for one night and then took Air China nonstop to San Francisco, a 10-hour trip. It was another excellent business-class experience.

I would rate China Plus a big 10. Chris was an excellent leader. His earlier background in tourism in China, as well as expecting only the best at each stop, made his accompaniment a joy. His personal selection of each local guide was also of the highest quality. Each guide spoke English with very little accent and had an outstanding knowledge of the history of the area.

All meals were included, which is not the case with some of the other tour companies. The meals were

served individually at our table at each hotel or restaurant; we did not have the typical hot buffet table that you see so often with tours. The types of food changed daily, depending on the area of the country we were in.

All hotels were of 5-star quality. The **Beijing Capital Hotel** was the only one rated 4-star; we all thought it was the nicest hotel of the trip and should have been rated five stars.

Cost for the 19-day tour was \$3,648 to \$3,798, mid-March to October. The shorter tour of 17 days ranges from \$3,448 to \$3,598. Single supplement was \$700 to \$800. Early-booking and other special discounts are available.

— STAN STEELE, Stockton, CA

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Chris Lee (right) next to author Stan Steele — Li River cruise, Guilin, China.