

Questions and Answers – To the Roof of the World – China including Tibet 2011 Led by Sandy Lydon and Gary Griggs

Part I – The Trip and Group Travel

Question: Who should consider going on this tour? Our group experiences are designed for travelers wishing to learn something about China, including Tibet. This tour is not appropriate for those wishing to travel lightly across the countryside, snap a few photos, buy a couple of trinkets and return being able to say that they've "done" China. There are plenty of "boilerplate" China tours that require nothing but monetary participation.

We have designed a full body and mind experience that will begin long before you board the airplane, and, hopefully, continue long after you return.

Question: What makes this itinerary so special? This itinerary was developed with one major purpose—to show you five of the multitude of modern Chinas. Beginning with what might be called standard or official China in Beijing, through Tibetan China, Yunnan-China, Portuguese-China to British-China. This is a carefully-conceived itinerary with plenty of reflective time, to give you a chance to see and experience Five Chinas. Deng Xiaoping said it was "One Country; Two Systems" when describing how Hong Kong's re-entry to Chinese sovereignty. I think it's more appropriate to say, "One Country; Many Systems."

Some China travel wholesalers kept resisting our efforts to stay longer in places. "Most American groups don't spend that long in Beijing, Lhasa or Kunming," they said. And then tried to speed up the pace of the itinerary. We fought them all until we found a travel company that understood what we wanted.

You won't find this itinerary anywhere else.

I've been to China before, so why should I go on this trip?

If you have not been to China in the past three years, then you're behind. The 2008 Olympic Games had an enormous impact on the Chinese countryside, and the China of the 1990s and even the early 2000s is gone. Mao's portrait still hangs on the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing, but the China that existed when he died in 1976 is no more. Were he to rise up out of his crystal coffin in the center of Tiananmen Square, the first thing he would see off to the south would be KFC, and beside it the Golden Arches. That may not be what he had in mind.

Are all these changes in China a good thing?

Making judgments about whether things are "good" or "bad" in present-day China is not useful. We're going to do try and set your Personal Judgment Meter to zero. And, failing at that, we'll at least try and disconnect it from your voice.

You may be surprised to learn that over a billion Chinese people don't really care what you think. They are moving forward on their own path, and it behooves us all to visit China and observe them without attempting to intrude. Instead you should open your eyes, ears, mind, and heart and absorb as much as possible without making judgments. True story: One of our Chinese contacts mentioned to our group

that they enjoyed visiting MacDonald's in Beijing and eating American hamburgers. A group member who was involved in the Santa Cruz health food industry suggested that he might try eating tofu instead of meat. The Chinese carnivore smiled and said, politely, "Yes, well, I know all about tofu. Um, you see, we invented it." Moral: cultural imperialism is just that – imperialism. The Chinese will find their own way. They always have. Save your breath and just listen.

Question: Couldn't I do this alone? Why go with a group? Traveling with a group removes most of the annoying day-to-day considerations of making connections, worrying about whether or not the hotel lost your reservations, or whether the taxi driver cheated you. Encountering and understanding Chinese culture is daunting enough without having to worry about the logistics of everyday life. We take care of the day-to-day stuff so that you can concentrate on spending every waking moment experiencing the wonders of China. What you surrender in individual freedom you more than make up for in the information that the group will receive all along the way.

And, to go to Tibet, the Chinese government requires that you be part of a group. Might as well go with someone you know.

Question: Why did you put off going to Tibet for so long? I've been tantalized about Tibet and the Himalayas for over 50 years, but during our early years of traveling in China, Tibet was closed to Americans. Then, when it was possible to visit, the cost was prohibitive. Then, with free enterprise capitalism's help, the prices of Tibetan travel came down. Finally in 2006 the Qinghai-Lhasa Railroad was completed from Xining to Lhasa and when my collaborator, Gary Griggs, visited Tibet in 2009 and told me what an incredible place it is...It was time.

The Elephant in the room: "Free Tibet" I also put off taking a group to Tibet because I knew it was going to be hard work to get a group sufficiently "neutralized" so that they would be able to approach the Tibet issue with open minds. Everybody in the United States has an opinion, and the "Free Tibet" bumper stickers are a testimony to that. When seen in all of its complexity, the Tibetan issue (sometimes known as the "Tibetan Question") cannot be distilled into a two word bumper sticker. We will explore the history of Tibet and its complicated relationship with its neighbors, and try to see this issue from many perspectives.

Question: Why do you put us in such good hotels? Wouldn't it be cheaper if we stayed in 2 and 3 star hotels? Yes, it would be cheaper, but then you'd be wondering if the door locks were strong enough, or when the hot water was going to come on. We believe that your hotel should be a comfortable refuge, a place where you can decompress and rest before venturing out again into the Chinese world.

Question: Why do you include trip cancellation insurance? Because you may not buy it on your own, and it is the only way to protect this huge investment against unforeseen circumstances. A case in point occurred in May 2010 during our trip in Ireland. We were "ashed" by the Icelandic volcano and required to stay longer in Dublin. The travel insurance company reimbursed us for out-of-pocket expenses that we incurred because of the delay, and the checks came to group members very quickly. It will begin to cover participants almost immediately after you make your deposit. Don't do group travel without it.

Part II – Group Preparation

Why is there such an emphasis on group preparation?

In China we will travel and eat together almost 24 hours a day. Since many of the meals are built in, if you choose to eat, you will be eating with the group. Our group will be seated together for breakfast, and many lunches and dinners. Seated at a round table, turning the revolving tray (we call it a lazy Susan), you will be in

Question: What other expenses can I expect to encounter? There will be a \$140 fee for obtaining your Chinese visa. There will also be a roughly \$230 fuel surcharge placed by the airlines that will be due on the final payment date. Also, there may be books and other published materials you will wish to purchase before departure. Finally, transportation to and from the airport is not included.

Question: Does everyone get sick on these trips? The most common maladies we have encountered over the years revolve around those caused by changes in diet. Diarrhea usually visits most trip members sometime during the trip, but we will help group members learn how to eat in ways to avoid such encounters. And, then we'll tell you the medicines to bring to handle it should you get it. Occasionally folks have had nagging coughs caused by the air pollution and dust, particularly in Beijing. We will discuss various medications which you might bring. The key to avoiding illness is to know when to stop, crawl into your bed and rest.

Question: What about the food on the trip? In the hotels there will be American-style breakfasts (along with more traditional Chinese cuisine), and then included lunches and dinners will be Chinese style. Group members in previous trips have rated the meals uniformly high. We are also going to widen the variety of food on this tour so that tour members get a chance to sample the regional and ethnic foods available in the larger cities. We also encourage group members to use the tools of the realm (chopsticks), and will be instructing you in the protocol for eating at round, Chinese-style tables.

The food on the train to Lhasa has its own challenges, and we will know better what to expect after I return from China.

Question: What if I have dietary restrictions or requirements? You probably shouldn't go to China with us. There's just no way we can sort out vegetarian-style dishes from others at the hotels and restaurants. Also, the use of MSG is widespread in China—they invented it—and it can't be avoided.

Question: Are there laundry services available during the trip? Yes, all the hotels have excellent (but a bit pricey) laundry services, and remember that it is not part of the tour price.

Question: What will the weather be like in October? By traveling in October we hope to avoid the extreme summer heat and China's rainy season. The weather in Beijing will be pleasant – 60s-70s perhaps as hot as the high 80s, while up on the Tibetan Plateau (Xining and Lhasa) you'll need to have something warm. The climate in coastal China is very similar to the east coast of the United States around the Carolinas. Also, you should carry a small folding umbrella at all times, preferably one that is silver colored to act as a reflector when you're walking out in the sun, and also to protect from rain.

Question: How much money should I take with me? The amount of money you might need will depend on your own personal shopping habits. Several trip members were able to get by on \$200 or so spending money. Others went intending to do holiday shopping and spent considerably more. However, it should be noted that group members sometimes catch what we call "the fever" when encountering some of the bargains available in China, so, if your self-discipline is relatively low, perhaps you should take a bit more money.

Question: Cash or Credit Cards? Credit cards are being accepted by more and more businesses in China, but it is also good to bring along some cash. We recommend that you have at least \$100 of renminbi (Chinese currency) when you enter China so that you don't hold up the group as we pass through the airport in Beijing. Though the Chinese claim that their ATM machines work just fine, it has been our experience that they don't always. We will have a better idea about ATMs by mid-summer.

How do I secure space in the Lydon-Griggs China-Tibet 2011 group?

- 1) Submit Completed application
- 2) Photocopy of main page of passport
- 3) Check for \$1,500 made out to Pacific Harbor Travel

Is any of the deposit refundable?

Yes. You can receive a refund of \$1,000 up to March 20 no reason necessary.

What about after March 20?

If you withdraw after March 20, you will receive \$500 refund, and if your reasons for withdrawal are covered by the trip insurance, you will be covered for the remainder, except for the \$250 insurance policy, for a total refund of \$1,250.

When is final payment due?

Final payment for the trip is due to Pacific Harbor Travel on or before July 15, 2011. You may use a credit card for this portion of the trip, but you will incur a fee of 5% for the privilege.

We hope these questions and answers have been helpful. If, after reading these, you still have questions, be sure to bring them along.

constant contact with your fellow group members. We need to spend time not only learning about how to get along with our Chinese friends, but also with each other.

Question: Will I be embarrassed by obnoxious cultural boors in the group? No. You DO run that risk if you join another group sight unseen. We evaluate group members both before accepting them and during the pre-trip sessions. If we feel that somebody in the group would be a distraction during the trip, we ask them to leave and refund their money. Our groups are not random collections of folks who meet for the first time in the lobby of the airport. We will have been together months ahead of time, working together to come to some common understandings about traveling together, China, and our own idiosyncrasies.

Question: What subjects will be covered in the pre-trip sessions? Chinese and Tibetan culture, geology, literature, history, protocol and language will be the main focus, but we will also discuss more practical things such as luggage, electricity, US Customs, Chinese currency and anything else to make the trip more successful. Our commitment is to make this trip the smoothest and best travel experience you have ever had. And for you to learn a lot about China and Tibet along the way.

Question: What if, for some reason, I cannot (or do not wish to) attend the pre-trip sessions? Then this China experience is not for you. If you live within 150 miles of Aptos, you must attend the four pre-trip sessions.

Question: What if I live in Southern California or another state? You will receive all the printed materials, reading assignments and books and will be expected to keep abreast of the group on your own. You will also be expected to arrive in San Francisco a day prior to departure (October 19) and attend an orientation in a hotel near the airport that evening. It is essential that all group members be as much "on the same page" as possible prior to departure.

Question: What's the number one issue in group travel? Being on time. Groups are usually tolerant of most human behavior, but they are very impatient with folks who keep the group waiting. Every minute we spend waiting is time we could be spending in the museum or wandering through the temple grounds. Therefore, beginning with the first group session on May 1, we will expect all group members to be on time. Timeliness is essential to the over-all mental and emotional health of the group. Besides, as you will learn, the Chinese put a very high value on punctuality for appointments. They believe that a person who is kept waiting loses face when an associate comes late to a meeting. We agree.

Question: How large will the group be?

Based on the early interest being expressed, we believe that the group will probably have between 30 and 35 travelers in it.

Question: Isn't a group of 35 too large? I have been leading group tours in Asia since 1974, and the group sizes have ranged from 104 in 1980 (the largest group the Chinese had seen up to that time) to a low of 35. A group of 35 is probably the optimum size as it provides a considerable amount of internal variety (helping to solve roommate issues should they arise). Also a group of 35 interested and involved travelers will encourage the locals to pull out their very best.

III. Personal Stuff

Question: What if I don't have a roommate? We will attempt to match you up with a roommate during our pre-trip sessions; however, it is always best to come to the trip with a roommate already in hand. We cannot guarantee that we will find one, and feel that the ultimate responsibility is yours. It has been our experience

over the last 35 years that most difficulties for group members (other than timeliness) have revolved around roommate compatibility issues. The best way to insure that you have a satisfying trip without all the interpersonal concerns associated with an unknown roommate is to get a compatible friend or associate to join you on the trip.

Question: What is the age range of your group members? Our recent groups have ranged in age from 30 to 82 with most group members falling in the 45-65 range.

Question: Would this trip be appropriate for someone over 80? Assuming that a person is in good health, we have no problem with senior trip members. We have had group members in their mid-80s that have out walked everyone in the group.

Question: What if I want to bring along my son/daughter/grandchild under 21? We do not accept group members under 21, and believe that the itinerary and group climate is probably not appropriate for someone under 21.

Question: What if I have some health/physical problems? Again, it will depend on the individual. In some cases we might ask that your personal physician sign off on the appropriateness of your undertaking the rigors of traveling in China and as with all other things, we will have to measure your personal requirements against those of the group.

Question: Why are you requiring all of us to get signed out by our physicians? We believe that the high altitudes on the Tibetan Plateau (the train goes over a pass that is 16,000 feet high, and Lhasa is just under 12,000 feet) are of sufficient concern that we want to be sure that everyone in the group has been cleared to go. Mountain sickness is an issue that we will address ahead of time (during the pre-trip meetings).

Question: Is China travel difficult? All international travel is tiring just by its very nature, but traveling in China, even at the level which we do, is extremely tiring. It begins with the long trans-Pacific flight and the resulting weariness and jet lag. You will do a lot of walking, stair climbing, and baggage handling (when going through customs). You will be tempted to do and see everything possible, sometimes driving your system beyond its usual limits. You will awake earlier in the morning (see jet lag) than usual, and there will always be something to do. You must be able to sustain yourself at a pace that does not hinder that of the group

Question: How might we prepare for this trip besides intellectually? We strongly urge group members to begin a program of physical exercise as soon as they sign up, either walking or running, or going to the gym to help your body get ready for the strain of China travel.

IV. Flight Arrangements

Question: Can I use frequent flyer miles to pay for the air portion of the trip? Yes. We will give you a credit of \$900 off the trip price and you can get to Beijing any way you wish. Wendy Simon our Travel Maven at Pacific Harbor Travel will be happy to help you arrange things. But, we will not come looking for you in Beijing. It will be your responsibility to meet up with us at the appointed time and place.

Question: Can I fly in Business Class on the aircraft? Yes, Wendy will be happy to explore the extra cost to fly on United to Beijing in another class. In fact we LOVE it when we have group members in Business Class because we enjoy sneaking up there and sharing the wonderful goodies.