

# Inside China

By Ron Berryman

Participant in Global Gypsies "Secrets of China Tour", October 2007

(As published in Super Living in November 2007 – [www.superliving.com.au](http://www.superliving.com.au) )

THERE is so much more to China than the highly publicised tourist attractions. Revisiting the country after a 20-year gap I certainly appreciated the changes.

On my first visit I enjoyed the countryside, the cities and the food, but had deep reservations about the commercialisation of the country.

Industrial development appeared unregulated, with factories being built haphazardly with little consideration given to the environment or local communities and little progress in the major cities.

But China today is a vibrant, exciting country inhabited by a proud, charming and industrious people.

The city traffic appears chaotic, but organises itself according to size, situation and civility. The truck jousts with bus, car, motor scooter, bicycle and pedestrian in a strangely orderly push and shove pattern that miraculously sorts itself out without undue concern or road rage.

Police intervention and traffic lights are at a minimum, while evidence of collisions and scrapes are few and far between.

The overwhelming sense one gets from touring China is the immense pride the Chinese have in their achievements – both past and present.

## Highlights of the China experience

Just over three-quarters of the way through our recent two-week holiday in China I asked the small group I was travelling with what had been the high point so far. No one had an immediate response. There had been so many highlights – and surprises.

We had arrived in Beijing and toured the Forbidden City and visited the Great Wall; travelled to Xian, seen the Terracotta Warriors, and visited the pandas in Chengdu – and were now on a four-day cruise down the Yangtze River.

The Summer Palace in Beijing is a must-see. The Sanxingdui Museum in the city of Chengdu was a revelation and the opportunity to visit the Chengdu giant panda breeding facility – and pat one of them – was captivating.

Beijing has grown into a truly great city and the 2008 Olympic Games has given it an extra shot in the arm, with a huge revitalisation program not only making it more cosmopolitan, with roadways lined by gleaming new highrise buildings, but an extraordinary amount of greening.

The tree planting program isn't just about young seedlings. Row upon row of five metre cypress, plain and poplar trees now line the freeways servicing the city as well as major arteries, while the city features lawns, shrubs, trees and hedges that would put any western city to shame. The mature trees are planted and elaborately staked to ensure they are able to take root without being disturbed by winds.

With a history dating back 4000 years, wonderful museums and historic precincts throughout the country catalogue an amazing culture.

Many of the design and construction techniques used by the Chinese thousands of years ago are still in use among today's engineers and architects.

The Forbidden City with its 8900 rooms, the Summer Palace with its fascinating covered walkway, temples, man-made lake and mountain and the marble ship, provide breathtaking examples of an ancient ingenuity and willingness to work.

The highlight for me?

The extraordinary Yangtze and its fabulous gorges.

We Australians tend to be proud of our natural assets, but these truly amazing gorges run for kilometre after kilometre with a myriad of sights and scenery.

The mountainous Yangtze surrounds provide endless treasures, from temples, pagodas, colonies of golden monkeys, cliff-face tombs, countless farms perched on mountain slopes, cities, ongoing construction of bridges and roadways, as well as a passing cavalcade of bulk ore carriers, ferries laden with trucks and commercial vehicles, fishing junks and water taxis.

A close second was Beijing's Summer Palace.

The lowlight?

Probably the pollution in the industrial cities of Yichang and Wuhan.

### **Thinking of going? Some insider tips**

My advice would be to plan a trip to China carefully. There is plenty to see, but you need to address some fairly important criteria.

- 1.** You will see more and understand what is going on if you go with someone who has a Chinese connection. A guide who understands the language can be invaluable.
- 2.** Booking a tour with a smaller, more intimate group was fun and offered more versatility than the larger tours while cutting out the hassles of travelling independently. My tour was with the Perth-based Global Gypsies and I would recommend them.
- 3.** You can travel very cheaply in China, but work out what level of comfort you require and book accommodation accordingly.
- 4.** Don't be put off by seemingly uninteresting entertainment. The Kung Fu live show in Beijing is a mind-blowing production that will appeal to all ages and there are many other forms of local entertainment that will even leave the doubters gasping.
- 5.** Slot in some free time to do some shopping. Shanghai appears to have the best range, but there are hawkers with the inevitable 'bargains' in just about every major city.

### **Where to find out more**

The Global Gypsies website is [www.globalgypsies.com.au](http://www.globalgypsies.com.au)