



Yunnan Explorer

16 day tour – Hong Kong | Kunming | Lijiang | Guilin | Hangzhou | Shanghai
9 – 24 July 2009

HIGHLIGHTS

- Viewing the longest total solar eclipse for the next 123 years
- Viewing the Qiantang tidal bore, one of the wonders of Asia
- Enjoy the views of Hong Kong from Victoria Peak
- Take in the scenery of the beautiful Yunnan province
- Take a river cruise on the Li River
- Have a meal on Shanghai's famous waterfront, The Bund

SUMMARY

Yunnan Province, meaning 'Beautiful Clouds in the South', is home to a host of treasures that are, depending on your point of view, at least as impressive as some of China's better-known and more well-trodden landmarks. It is the most southwesterly region of China bordering the countries of Vietnam, Laos, and is famed for its ethnic diversity and its natural beauty.

However, our tour starts off in Hong Kong, a world away from the picturesque landscapes of Yunnan. It is of course a modern, affluent, bustling metropolis, but also offers glimpses into a more ancient world in its peaceful temples and parks. And of course, the views from Victoria Peak are unforgettable.

After a weekend of fun in Hong Kong, you start your journey towards Yunnan, with our first stop at Kunming, the gateway to the Silk Road and site of the mysterious Stone Forest, a collection of strange, labyrinthine rock formations. We continue westwards through the ancient city of Dali, visit Old Town Lijiang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, before enjoying some of the spectacular natural scenery, including the stunning views from Yulong Snow Mountain.

Our journey continues to the mystical Shangri-La before we reach the First Bend of the Yangtze and the spectacular Tiger Leaping



Gorge. Our journey continues to Guilin, a city famous predominantly for its striking scenery, its limestone 'karsts' and its myriad caves.

Finally, we head towards Hangzhou to prepare for Eclipse Day and to meet with clients from our other itineraries. Hangzhou is in its own right a magnificent city, both for its culture and history as well as its stunning natural setting – the views from Ten West Lake Prospects are not to be missed and neither is Hangzhou's most famous attraction, West Lake Park itself.

Following the eclipse, we head back to spend some time sight-seeing, shopping and simply enjoying the spectacle that is Shanghai. The heart of China's economic boom, Shanghai is a glorious mixture of old and new; make sure you take a walk along the Bund, the city's famous waterfront. A fine ending for a trip that explores China's wonders, ancient and modern.

JOINING THE TRIP

Clients Joining the Trip in the UK

Duration: 16 days
Depart Thursday 9th July, return Friday 24th July 2009

Flight details

If you have booked a flight inclusive trip, your flight and ticketing information will be sent to you around 3 weeks before departure. Please check your ticket details for your baggage allowance. We use the services of a number of scheduled airlines – details of your flights have been posted with your invoice, however if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Arrival – on arrival at Hong Kong Airport on the morning of Friday 10th July, you will be met by an Explorers representative who will show you to our transfer vehicle to your Hong Kong Hotel.

Clients Joining the Tour in Hong Kong (Land Only)

Duration: 15 days
Start Hong Kong Friday 10th July, end Shanghai Friday 24th July 2009.

Flights - all land only clients or clients travelling from outside the UK should arrange their flights to arrive in Hong Kong on the morning of Friday 10th July. Should this timing not be possible, please contact the Explorers office to receive further advice.

Joining the Tour at Hong Kong Airport – if you arrive at the same time as or before the main group flight, you may be able to take

the group transfer to our hotel free of charge. Please contact the Explorers office if you wish to take the Group Transfer.

Joining the Group at the Hotel and Private Transfers – if you choose to make your own way or if you miss the group transfer, you must get to our Hong Kong hotel at your own expense (details of the hotel will be sent to you nearer to your departure). If you would like to join the afternoon city tour, please ensure you are at the hotel by mid-morning.

Final Joining Instructions for All clients

Around 3 weeks before departure, we will send you your final joining instructions. These will detail all routine and emergency contact details, as well as names, addresses and contact details of the main hotels in which you will be staying.

OUR ITINERARY

Day 1 of our itinerary is Friday 10th July 2009

Days 1 & 2 Hong Kong

On arrival, you will be met by your Explorers representative who will arrange your transfer to your Hong Kong hotel. The Hong Kong leg of your tour is not guided so you are free to set your own itinerary and make best use of your time seeing what you would like to see. Should you wish, your local representative will be able to arrange guided tours or excursions for you.

Hong Kong is a shock to the senses, a unique blend of eastern and western influences. It is in a remarkable setting, with so much packed into a very compact area. The best way to get your bearings in this fast-moving city, is to see it from Victoria Peak. A cable-driven tram takes you to the top where you get spectacular views of the city landscape, the harbour and Kowloon. When you're back down in the city, take a boat ride across Victoria Harbour to really savour the city from a different perspective. There is much more to Hong Kong that you will no doubt discover, as well as great shopping, restaurants and nightlife, to make sure you have a weekend to remember.

Day 3 To Kunming

You have a relaxed morning to do some last minute sight-seeing or shopping, before our journey into Yunnan begins with a flight to the provincial capital, Kunming. You will be picked up from your Hong Kong hotel to be taken to the airport at a pre-arranged time, and your Explorers representative will confirm this with you. We arrive in the late afternoon and check into our hotel before enjoying our evening meal and seeing a little of the city's nightlife.

Day 4 Around Kunming

Today we start to explore in and around Kunming, seeing some of what the city has to offer. However the highlight is located around 70 miles outside of the city, the Stone Forest. After an enjoyable drive through highland scenery, we reach these strange limestone formations which make the area famous. They truly are an extraordinary sight and well worth the drive. We will also have time to visit a traditional flower market, a great opportunity for some colourful photographs. After our evening meal, we take an overnight sleeper train northwest towards Dali.

Day 5 Dali

After a night on the train we pull into Dali in the reasonably early morning. We have breakfast at our hotel before heading out to explore the town. We start in Dali Ancient City, which dates back to the Ming Dynasty in the 14th Century. Walking around the cobbled streets, you can sense the history of this place. We move on to see the Chong Shen Monastery and Three Pagodas to the north of the town, beautifully set against a rich green backdrop of fields and mountains. Finally, we take in some of nature's work at Erhai Lake, one of the largest freshwater lakes in China, before making the 150 mile journey by bus to Lijiang city, arriving in the evening.

Day 6 Lijiang

Lijiang is an attractive city with a long history situated in an unspoilt natural landscape. Our day starts 15km outside of the city, where we take a cable car up Yulong (also known as Jade Dragon) Snow Mountain, a small mountain range whose highest peak is 5,596m. From here, weather permitting, we hope to have outstanding views of the surrounding countryside. We then return to the city and

explore the best-preserved ancient town in China and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and enjoy a peaceful stroll around its water-bound lanes. We spend the evening enjoying Lijiang.



Day 7 To Shangri-La

This morning we set off by bus for Shangri-La, just over 100 miles from Lijiang. On the way we stop at the First Bend of the Yangtze River. The unusual geology of the area forces this mighty river into a bend of almost 180 degrees. The river flows lazily at this point, lined with weeping willows and with mountains steeply rising almost from the river banks. It is a stunning vista. A little further on, we stop at Tiger Leaping Gorge, which is believed to be the deepest gorge in the world at over 700 feet. We finally reach Shangri-La where we stop for the evening.

Day 8 Exploring Shangri-La

A remote place located at an altitude of 3,000m, Shangri-La has long been a place shrouded in mystique. We spend the day exploring the area, starting with the Old Town. After a tour of the Tibetan-style town, we enjoy the beauty of the Pudatro Scenic Area and visit the Lama Temple before enjoying the local cuisine in the evening.

Day 9 To Guilin

We take a flight today to the ancient and compact city of Guilin, situated in a glorious natural setting on the Li River. On arriving in the town we have a chance to visit the Reed Flute Cave, and enjoy a fascinating walk around the water-carved rock formations.

Day 10 Guilin and the Li River Cruise

This city's most famous attraction is without a doubt its setting, and the best way to get a true appreciation of this is from the Li River. This landscape is perhaps what most people imagine when thinking about rural China – as we take a boat along the river, its simplest just to relax and take in the view, punctuated with limestone karts rising from the vegetation and dotted with its myriad caves and ravines.

Day 11 To Hangzhou.

We leave Guilin on a morning flight for Hangzhou, our base for the eclipse. We spend the afternoon enjoying the beautiful architecture, visiting the famous Temple of Souls' Retreat and taking a walk around Hangzhou's most famous attraction, West Lake Park.

Day 12 Exploring Hangzhou and The Tidal Bore

This morning we head for our viewing point just outside Hangzhou for the Qiantang tidal bore. The bore, the world's largest, can be up to 9m high, travels at up to 25mph and is an unnerving sight as it roars out of the Pacific and up the river – an impressive natural spectacle not to be missed.

During the afternoon, we have free time to explore more of Hangzhou's cultural and historical sites including Solitary Hill, the Six Harmonies Pagoda and the Ling Yin Temple. For a stunning vista, visit the Ten West Lake Prospects giving outstanding views of the mountain, lakes and city. We reconvene in the evening for an eclipse briefing from our renowned astronomer, Dr. John Mason, followed by dinner for all clients at our hotel.

Day 13 Eclipse Day

This morning is an early start to get to our eclipse observation point which will be within 1-2 hours drive of our hotel. The weather will play a key part in the day and we will need to be flexible in our choice of observation point to ensure we have the best chance of having a clear view of the eclipse. The Explorers team will be monitoring the weather overnight to make sure we are heading to the pre-planned observation point where the weather is likely to be clearest. Our provisional timetable is:

- 0500 – Breakfast
- 0530 – Depart for eclipse observation
- 0700 – Arrive at observation point
- 0820 – First Contact
- 0930 – Totality
- 1100 – Fourth Contact
- 1230 – Lunch
- PM – Free Time

These plans are strictly provisional and timings may change – you will be provided with up-to-date timings and latest weather conditions and forecasts at the eclipse briefing. Please note that weather conditions may mean that it is not possible to view the eclipse.

Day 14 To Shanghai.

After the excitement of eclipse day, we make the 2-3 hour journey by bus to Shanghai, one of the most vibrant and exciting cities on our tour. Arriving around lunchtime, we spend the afternoon exploring the beating heart of commercial China, taking in the famous sites of the Jade Buddha Temple, Yuyuan Garden and the Bund (Shanghai's famous waterfront). The evening is free to take in Shanghai's nightlife and this is a city that is viewed by some as more beautiful at night than the day – a night-time river cruise, a meal on the Bund, strolling down Nanjing Road, all will give you a last night to remember!

Day 15 End Shanghai

Our group flights depart in the morning and arrive back in the UK in the afternoon. Those on group flights will be transferred to the airport. If you are not on the group flights and would like to take the morning airport transfer, please contact the Explorers office to book your place.

Please Note – occasionally, it is not possible to follow the itinerary exactly as stated in our brochure or in our Expedition Notes. This can be for example due to weather, political or logistical reasons. Where we have to make changes to the itinerary, we make the best alternative arrangements possible under the circumstances. We would ask you to keep a flexible outlook and remember that any changes all part of the experience.

OTHER USEFUL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Weather

July is hot and humid in virtually all of the places we visit with average temperatures of around 33°C (92°F), although they can exceed 35°C (95°F). The weather can also be changeable and whilst July and August are the sunniest months of the year, they are also quite wet and rain showers should be expected.

Local Time - GMT +8 hrs

Language – Mandarin

Currency Information

The unit of currency in China is the Yuan Renminbi (CNY or RMB), colloquially known as "Kwai". At the time of publication £1 = 10 CNY. Unlimited foreign currency



may be imported and exported. You are advised to bring a small amount of spending money with you either in Chinese Yuan or in US\$. ATMs are widely available in the large cities and accessing cash in this way is likely to be the best value for money. Its safest to use Bank of China, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) and HSBC ATMs. Major credit cards (Visa, MasterCard and American Express) are widely accepted in the larger cities. You can also choose to bring Travellers' Cheques which can be cashed in many hotels and we recommend taking US\$ or GB£ cheques issued by Thomas Cook or American Express.

Allow about £200-300 (USD\$300-450) for optional activities and meals not included.

Tipping

Tipping is of course entirely at your own discretion, however, it has become customary in China. For bellboys or waiters, 1 to 5 US dollars may be appropriate as the tip. For bills in restaurants, 10% to 15% is the generally acceptable amount. For tour guides and drivers, 1 to 5 US dollars a day per person is reasonable.

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. Almost all nationalities including British, Canadian, American and Australian require a single entry visa for China, which must be obtained in advance. If you think you may be exempt you must check requirements with your local embassy or consulate.

UK residents can apply direct to the Chinese Embassy by visiting www.visaforchina.org.uk, calling on 0207 842 0960, or visiting them at Morley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct London, EC1A 2AT. The cost at the time of publication for a single entry visa is £30 and a double entry visa is £45, plus a £34.50 application service fee. The cost of the visa and service fee is not included in the tour price. We recommend that you apply for your visa at least 6 weeks before departure.

For UK residents living in the south of the UK, you can use the services of our preferred visa-processing agency, Travcour (UK). For general visa advice and for application forms, please contact them on 020 7223 5295 or www.travcour.com.

Please note: It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa. The information offered above is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of visa services, local immigration nor customs officials, and accept no responsibility for their actions.

Insurance

It is a condition of joining this trip that you must be insured against medical and personal accident risks. We offer comprehensive AXA travel insurance from £49.99 per person.

Vaccinations and Health

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for China. Yellow Fever certificates are required if arriving from an infected area. However, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, Japanese B encephalitis, polio, TB, tetanus and typhoid are recommended in some circumstances and there is a limited risk of malaria. Please consult your doctor or vaccination centre for up-to-date information.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR TRIP

Tour Leaders and Guides

The Hong Kong leg of your trip is not guided although you will be met at the airport by one of our representatives who will arrange a transfer to your hotel and can advise on excursions and sight-seeing. Your representative will also arrange for your pick-up from your Hong Kong hotel on departure for your flight to Kunming. The remainder of the trip is led by local Chinese tour leaders appropriate to the size of your group. When you arrive in Hangzhou, you will join clients from all of the other itineraries. At this point, there will be a number of tour guides and Explorers staff on hand to assist you in anything you might need and to advise you on the day's events.

Your Accommodation

We generally stay in comfortable 3 and 4 star hotels for the duration of our trip. Most will have the facilities you would expect of international hotels including air-conditioned rooms, internet access, bars and restaurants, gymnasium, laundry services and currency exchange services. Details of your start hotel in Hong Kong will be provided closer to the time of departure. For sleeper trains, see **Transport** below.

Food and Meals

Breakfasts are provided every day except for your arrival day. Some lunches are provided and this will be stated in the itinerary. Evening meals are provided every day except for the last night. Following the eclipse, we will enjoy a banquet lunch.

Vegetarians: Unfortunately, the choice for vegetarians can be very limited although the hotels and restaurants will do their best to accommodate your requirements. Please consult your leader who will help you choose suitable dishes.



Transport

Road travel on this trip is relatively limited and journeys between our main destinations should be no more than 3 hours in a private air-conditioned coach. The overnight train journey between Kunming and Dali will be a "soft sleeper". These trains are of a good standard with bedding provided and access to a bar and dining car. All international flights are economy/coach unless you have chosen to upgrade. All domestic flights are economy/coach.

Don't Forget...

Clothing – pack light, quick-drying clothes as it will be hot and humid.

Waterproofs – make sure you pack light waterproof gear as rain showers will be a feature of our trip.

Binoculars – always useful especially on eclipse day.

Insect Repellent – advisable for our Yunnan exploration.

Emergency Contact Details

The Explorers UK Office Number is 0044 (0)1276 406 877 and our email address is astro@explorers.co.uk. We can be contacted 9am-5pm GMT or 5pm-1am Chinese time from Monday to Saturday. When we send you your final documentation, we will also provide contact details for our local operator.

And Finally

The information in these Expedition Notes is given in good faith, and is designed as a guide to help you prepare for and enjoy your holiday. On the ground, circumstances beyond our control may demand that certain details relating to the holiday may change, therefore you should be aware that this holiday is subject to unexpected changes. Information in these Expedition Notes supersede the information provided in the brochure.

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