

nín hǎo (您好)

'Hello' in Mandarin – the official language of the Peoples Republic of China.

I am sure all of you marveled, as did I at the incredible show China put on during the recent 2008 Olympics. From the opening ceremonies through the rest of the games and the closing ceremonies, I would have to say it was nothing short of amazing! I recently returned from a site inspection tour of China to check out the hotels, tours, restaurants, transfers and other details in advance of our first ever CMEatSEA to China, and wanted to share some feedback with all of you.

Firstly, let me tell you - this is going to be a fantastic tour! All of our tour operator partners have commented on the extraordinary inclusions and additional features of the CMEatSEA tour vs. their typical groups and I know that many of you have traveled with us before and are expecting nothing but the best! With that in mind, I took my first ever trip to China on July 23rd. After a non-stop 13 hour flight from Vancouver to Shanghai, I disembarked in an absolutely spectacular modern airport to met by our charming and youthful looking National Guide 'Frank'. I can't pronounce his Chinese name, so thankfully he goes by Frank! Frank and I spent the next 10 days traveling this enormous country to review our planning. I am pleased to say that our tour operator partners have done an excellent job in the preliminary work and I am confident that you will all enjoy the tour. That being said, after careful review and the benefit of first hand experience, we have made a number of changes to the tour to improve its efficiency, quality and overall enjoyment. These include: changing the original scheduled hotels, altering the order of a number of sightseeing elements and chartering a plane! No small feat indeed when you don't speak the language – thank goodness for Frank!



So, now a few thoughts on my experiences in China...

Shanghai – one of the first things that hit me was the sheer size of the city at over 20 million people. Shanghai is often called the *Pearl of China* and a bustling Financial Center. And yes – there is plenty of shopping from the Night Market to High End Specialty shops - there is something for everyone. It is not all about the shopping (or is it?!), there is a lot to see and do in Shanghai. Some of the highlights that I took in and I am sure that you will enjoy include the Bund – a delightful park-like river walk that bisects the city. We will be spending our first morning here and I am sure that you will enjoy it. I don't want to give too much away, but in typical CMEatSEA style we will be seeing the Bund in a way that most groups don't. We will also be taking in the rest of the cities highlights including the Yu Gardens, French Concession and the Old City and of course we will be enjoying some famous Shanghainese cuisine.



Yangzi Explorer – your home away from home for seven days! You will experience the first ever seven day cruise upstream and downstream cruise on the Yangtze River. Departing from Yichang, this luxury River Ship will explore the three Gorges and many interesting points along the way. I saw the ship in the midst of a rainstorm and I must tell you, it is stunning! The décor and fittings are far better than my expectations. It had not carried any passengers when I was aboard, and they were in the last minute efforts of preparing for their first cruise. From everything I have seen I am sure that you will be impressed. You will be one of the last visitors to see the Three Gorges before the final flooding which will raise the river by an additional 30 metres. Thereby changing forever the vistas and breathtaking scenery you will enjoy. Here are some recently received pictures of the ship.



Lobby



Dining Room



Explorer Bar



Tang Theater



Dragon Fly Spa

A haven of relaxation and tranquility offering a choice of massage and beauty treatments rejuvenating the body back to balance. Enjoy a wide variety of massage services in one of the six uniquely designed private treatment rooms. Luxurious combinations for couples also available.



Staterooms Deluxe

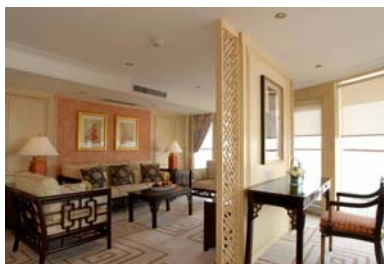


Jade Suite & Mandarin Suite

Suites



Celestial Suite & Imperial Suite



Xi'an – No matter how many times I hear the word 'wonder', it is a rare experience. Xi'an is one of those experiences. Sure to be one of your memorable highlights is a visit to the famed Terra Cotta Warriors. In true CMEatSEA style, you will not only visit Pit #1,



but other excavations to get a real sense of this unique archaeology experience. Discovered in 1975 by a local farmer, these Terra Cotta Warriors, all individual, complete with armor; horses; chariots etc are absolutely incredible. Additionally you will enjoy a visit to the Wild Goose Pagoda (China's version of the Leaning Tower of Pisa) and a chance to cycle around the Ancient City Wall. We will end this exciting day with a wonderful evening of food and entertainment at the Tang Dynasty Theatre.

Wild Goose Pagoda



Ancient City Wall



Tang Dynasty Show



Beijing – I know after your glimpse of Beijing during the Olympic Coverage, you will all be excited to see this great city. During my visit, it was a bit surreal as they had banned half the cars on the road – so it was quite easy to get around! There is no question that when you are there, there will be more traffic! However, the improvements made in preparation for the Olympics are bound to have a long lasting impact on everything from services to transportation. The city is scrupulously clean and there were flowers everywhere. It almost felt like Vancouver! I was also very impressed by the friendliness and open attitude of the people I met. Our tour of Beijing will include the best of the best with visits to the Forbidden City, Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven, a fabulous Peking Duck Dinner, and even a tour by Rickshaw! During our stay in Beijing, we will also visit China's greatest icon – 'The Great Wall'. We have organized a very special visit to the Great Wall with more access than any other group hosted by our operator, and while we are there an incredible surprise! And of course we have left time for shopping with a visit to a Jade Factory, the Night Market and much more.



The Great Wall at Badaling



Hutong Tour via Rickshaw



Trying my hand at Ball Tai-Chi!



Temple of Heaven



These are just a few of the highlights that I know will be life-long memories for all of you as part of CMEatSEA's first ever trip to China.

I hope you have enjoyed my brief review of your upcoming China program. It was certainly an eye-opener for me and I know will be an unforgettable trip for you.

All the best

Judy Branner
CME Coordinator