

# CHINESE WHISPERS

THE LATEST TRAVEL NEWS AND INSPIRATION FROM WENDY WU TOURS

## FOCUS ON: JAPAN



### CHINA'S SECRET GARDEN

Horticultural journeys through  
the Land of the Dragon

### WINTER WONDERLAND

Discover China's hidden  
gem, Nine Villages Valley

### SAVE A PANDA

with UK Panda Ambassador John Craven

### INDIAN TALES

Tips from the experts

### CRUISING THE YANGTZE

with TV presenter Judith Chalmers





▲ ANGKOR WAT



▲ TERRACOTTA WARRIORS



▲ TAJ MAHAL



**Welcome to our latest issue of Chinese Whispers, aimed to inspire you on your next travel adventure. With the winter now firmly behind us, now is the perfect time to start thinking about somewhere new to discover. We have plenty of new and exciting experiences for you to enjoy, many of which depart in 2014.**

For all panda lovers out there, we have an interview with TV legend John Craven (page 8-9), who will be leading some specialist tours this September to highlight the plight of this endangered animal. On this tour, you will have the chance to interact with the pandas and get involved with some key conservation work. What's more, we also have a chat with one of the top horticulturists from the RHS, Christopher Bailes, who will be leading a very special gardening tour of China in October 2014 (page 4-5).

Also in this issue we discover just why Japan is set to be on the top of your travel wish list (page 18-19), as well as speak to one of our Wendy Wu VIP customers who has just booked her fifth trip with us (page 16-17). She shares her tips from her most recent tour of the Himalayas. Finally, we also find out what TV travel guru Judith Chalmers got up to on her recent trip to China (page 20-21).

We look forward to welcoming you on a Wendy Wu holiday very soon.

Wendy Wu



# WHAT'S NEW?

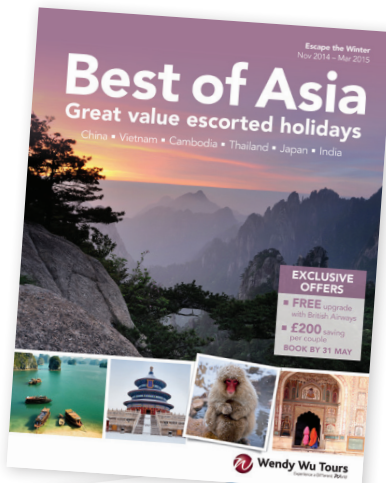
**Our experts bring you the latest news from Wendy Wu Tours**

## JUST RELEASED

### Winter Tours

We have recently launched a series of tours departing during the British winter months, visiting all of your favourite Asia destinations. Winter can be an enchanting time to visit China with the chance of a dusting of snow along the Great Wall in contrast, you'll enjoy long, warm days in other parts of Southeast Asia including Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Find out more at [winterinasia.com](http://winterinasia.com)



## NEW

### Thailand Land of Smiles

You can now explore Bangkok and Northern Thailand on our brand new private tour Thailand Land of Smiles. The tour will spend a few days in vibrant Bangkok before heading north to take in the River Kwai, the ancient temples of Ayutthaya and the hill tribes of Chiang Rai.

**12 days from £2,590pp.**

Find out more at [wendywutours.co.uk](http://wendywutours.co.uk)



## NEW for 2014

### Hakka Roundhouses of Southern China

Be one of the first western visitors to see this unique style of Chinese communal houses. They have now been given UNESCO World Cultural Heritage status.

These earthen round buildings can be experienced on our brand new Group Tour Southern Odyssey.

**17 days from £3,790pp** departing on 22nd October 2014.

Find out more at [wendywutours.co.uk](http://wendywutours.co.uk)



# WHAT'S ON?

**September 2014**

### Mooncake Festival, China and Vietnam

The mid-autumn or mooncake festival will be held on the 8th of September this year. The festival dating back to the Zhou Dynasty, celebrates the autumn full moon.

Mooncakes themselves are round and come in different flavours according to the region. They are enjoyed and shared amongst families and friends and have come to symbolise a long and happy life. Any excuse to eat cake we say!



### A CHINA EXPERIENCE

Sample a mooncake yourself whilst on our 10 day Group Tour. **Departs on the 2nd September 2014.**

PRICES FROM  
**£2,240<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 10 DAYS

**November 2014**

### Geisha Dancing, Japan

The word geisha translates as 'person of the arts' and every year Geisha districts of Kyoto hold their own annual dance festivals. It is said that Geisha inhabit a separate reality called the karyukai or the 'flower and willow world'.



### WONDERS OF JAPAN

See this tradition for yourself with our 11 day Private Tour. **Departures available throughout 2014.**

PRICES FROM  
**£2,890<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 11 DAYS

**October/November 2014**

### Diwali, India

One of India's main Hindu festivals, also known as the festival of lights, is celebrated in autumn every year. It is celebrated by the lighting of candles and lanterns and fireworks across the country. This five day festival will give you a real sense of Hindu culture.



### RAJASTHAN PANORAMA

Join our 22 day Rajasthan Panorama Group Tour. **Departs 22 October 2014.**

PRICES FROM  
**£3,290<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 22 DAYS





HUANGLONG POOLS, SICHUAN



CHRISTOPHER BAILES

# China's Secret Garden

China has long been a source of fascination for plant lovers for the past 200 years. The country is home to one eighth of the world's plant biodiversity. This is your chance to visit China in the company of some of the country's leading horticulturists with our range of exclusive gardening tours. There are tours for both the keen amateur gardener as well as those who are looking to delve deeper into China's horticultural history.

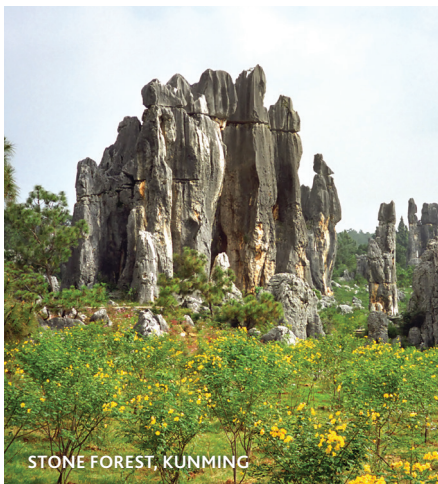
Our signature tour 'Plant Seekers' will allow you to follow in the footsteps of the original plant hunters, such as Ernest Wilson and George Forrest and your travels will include a visit to some of China's most diverse regions. What's more, this tour will be led by two leading horticulturists from the RHS – Jim Gardiner, RHS Executive Vice President and Christopher Bailes, Curator of Chelsea Physic Garden.

Here, we discover what Christopher Bailes is looking forward to discovering on his China odyssey.

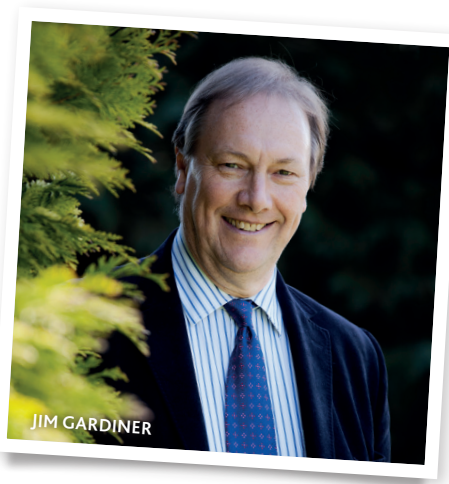
"As the fountainhead for so many of the plants we value and cherish, China was rightly described by Ernest 'Chinese' Wilson in his 1929 book as the 'Mother of Gardens'.

This floral richness can be enjoyed year-round, but reaches a peak in autumn, when the rich mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs that clothes so much of south-west China blazes with colour and fruit. The RHS Plant Seekers tour





STONE FOREST, KUNMING



JIM GARDINER

### Top Plants to look out for

- The colourful red-berried *Sorbus sargentiana*
- The metallic blue *Decaisnea fargesii*
- Tree species including spruce, fir, juniper and maple
- Many species of *Rhododendron*, *Camelia*, *Meconopsis* and *Primula*



OLD QUARTER, LIJIANG



BUDDHIST MONASTERY, EMEISHAN

### Complimentary RHS Membership

For all bookings on our RHS Tours to China, we're offering one year complimentary membership to the RHS. If you're already a member, we will renew your existing membership on a complimentary basis.

Membership of the RHS has many benefits. As well as supporting our work as the UK's leading gardening charity, you will receive:

- Free entry to our own RHS Gardens all year as well as more than 150 Partner Gardens around the country and abroad at selected periods.
- Priority booking, discounted tickets and quieter Members' Days at RHS Shows.
- The Garden Magazine – free every month, and packed with ideas on how to make the most of your membership.
- Free personalised gardening advice.



takes in many of the region's floral hotspots, and while it's difficult to pick out highlights from such a rich menu, I'm particularly looking forward to our time on Emeishan (Mt Omei). Among the many plants I'll be looking out for there are the bold and brilliantly colourful red-berried *Sorbus sargentiana*, and its white-fruited counterpart *S. setschwanensis*. The curious metallic-blue bean-like pods of *Decaisnea fargesii* should also be on view, set off against the pale strawy autumn colour of its elegant foliage.

Having studied and written on hollies I'll also be looking out for several distinctive Chinese

species, in particular the delightful small-leaved *Ilex pernyi*, and the elegant *Ilex fargesii*, each named after famous French clerical plant seekers of the past, the Abbe Paul Perny and Pere Paul Farges respectively.

Another interesting evergreen, the flowering dogwood *Cornus capitata*, should also be heavily laden with its showy red fruit. Among many herbaceous highlights in autumn *Anemone tomentosa* will be in full cry, a plant familiar to us as a stalwart of our autumn gardens, but still a thrill to come across in its native habitat."

### TAKE ME THERE

#### PLANT SEEKERS

Christopher Bailes will be co-leading the 'Plant Seekers' fully inclusive tour exploring the beautiful Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces.

**First tour departs 16 Oct 2014**

To book call **0844 288 4806** or visit **rhsgardenholidays.com**

PRICES FROM  
**£4,990pp**  
FOR 15 DAYS



# Celebrate Chinese New Year

“ We really enjoyed the experience of being in China for the New Year celebrations. The tour was very well organised plus we learned so much about Chinese life and culture from the guides, and were very impressed by their knowledge and enthusiasm. Nothing seemed too much trouble. ”

Jenny Lodge, who joined the 2014 Chinese New Year tour

There are still places available to join our 2015 Chinese New Year tour

## TAKE ME THERE

### 2015 CHINESE NEW YEAR

The tour visits Beijing, Xian and culminates in being part of the amazing celebrations in Shanghai.

**Departs 13 Feb 2015**

To book call **0844 288 4806**

PRICES FROM  
**£1,990<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 8 DAYS



# The Inside Track



When you join a Wendy Wu tour, you will be expertly led by our National Escorts and local guides. We rely on our guides to provide expert insight and guidance to help you get the most out of your trip. Here, one of our local guides in Shanghai, Jerri Nian, shares his insider knowledge on his home city.



## What is your favourite area of Shanghai that you like taking people to?

I love taking people to the Bund, where you can see both the past and the future of Shanghai. It stretches along the Huangpu River and divides the city in two. Along the western shore, you'll find colonial buildings from the 1930's when Shanghai became known as the 'Paris of the East'. In contrast, the very modern eastern side is a sea of futuristic skyscrapers. It's hard to believe that only 30 years ago, this area was still a field!

## Tell me something about Shanghai that not many people would know?

There is still a thriving Jewish community in China and in Shanghai in particular. In recent years, many international Jewish groups have helped Chinese Jews rediscover their heritage. There are synagogues, Jewish cafes and shops – all of which add to the melting pot of everyday Shanghai life.

## Describe one experience that visitors must do when they come to Shanghai?

Anyone who visits Shanghai must take a boat trip along the Huangpu River at night. When all the skyscrapers are lit up, it really is a sight to behold and will leave you with a lasting memory of Shanghai.

## Is there a particular food dish you would recommend, that is typical of Shanghai?

One word – dumplings. In China, we love our dumplings very much and especially so in Shanghai. The types of dumplings vary hugely throughout China, with each region having their own take on the dish. In Shanghai, we have our own style called *Xiao Long Bao* or soup dumplings. These tender pouches are freshly made to order. They arrive at the table in



piping hot bamboo steamers. Each plump dumpling contains a little pork meatball surrounded by a delightful meaty broth.

To prevent burning one's mouth and to savour the dumpling, the preferred method of consumption is to bite off a little piece of the doughy outside, drip the broth to a spoon or suck the broth with a "slurp", then eat the rest. Delicious!

## TAKE ME THERE

### MAGNIFICENT CHINA

Many of our China tours spend a few days in Shanghai. One of our most popular, the 21

day 'Magnificent China' also visits the charming town of Suzhou, referred to as the Venice of the East.

**Departs 14, 21, 24 Sep 2014**

To book call **0844 288 4806**

PRICES FROM  
**£3,290<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 21 DAYS  
**SAVING £400  
PER COUPLE**





# THE BIG INTERVIEW

## WITH JOHN CRAVEN

### UK PANDA AMBASSADOR

**The Giant Panda is the most iconic symbol of China and a visit to see one of the world's most endangered species is a must on any visit. Wendy Wu Tours has teamed up with legendary TV presenter and life long panda supporter John Craven to offer you the chance to visit China to visit the Giant Pandas as well as ticking off some of China's other iconic sights.**

**We recently caught up with John to ask him about his travel history and find out where he likes to go on holiday.**

#### First holiday memory?

When I was about six, mum and dad and me went to Bridlington on the Yorkshire coast for a week and they took me for a trip round the bay on a little pleasure steamer called the Yorkshire Belle. I was a bit scared at first but after an hour or so I didn't want to get off and I've loved the sea ever since.

#### Best holiday?

I've had so many wonderful trips over the years, home and abroad, that it's hard to pick a favourite but my wife and I really loved our China trip with Wendy Wu four years ago and last year

we went to Vietnam and Cambodia and sailed down the Mekong, which was truly

memorable. So was the time we took three of our young grandchildren on a surprise holiday to Jamaica – we all had a ball! My most recent holiday was spent cruising round the Caribbean in the world's largest (and, I think, most beautiful) sailing ship, the five-masted Royal Clipper.

#### Favourite destination?

It's usually the last places I've visited, so the Windward Islands and Sichuan Province in China. They could not be more different, which is the whole point of travelling. Sichuan is a captivating place with friendly people, spicy food and, of course, giant pandas.

#### What have you learnt from your travels?

Basically that there is no place like home. I have visited more than 80 countries, some

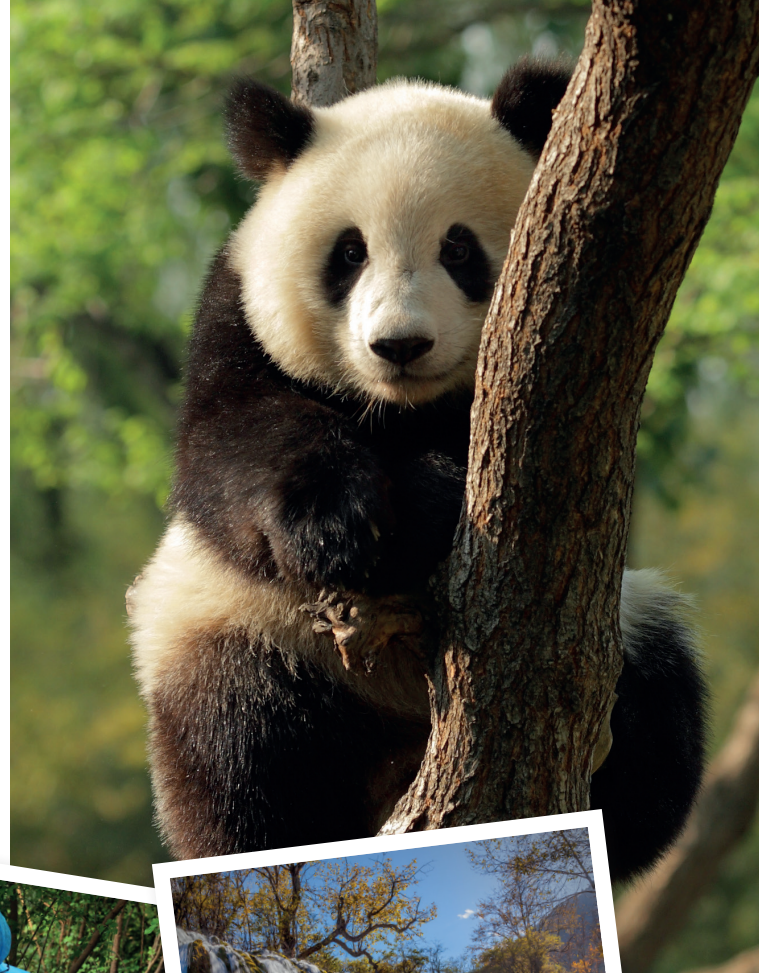
#### Panda fast fact

At birth, a baby panda is 900 times smaller than its mother.

#### Panda fast fact

Pandas are also born blind, pink and hairless. They don't open their eyes until around 6-8 weeks old.





for work and others for pleasure, but to me the British countryside is still hard to beat. But I have always loved to go travelling – after a few months at home I get itchy feet. Through my work in television I have had privileged access to places tourists can't get to - but when I'm on holiday I go with the flow. Guided tours are by far the best way to learn about a new place in a short time and I make it a rule to eat (within reason!) what the locals are eating. That way, I rarely get tummy troubles.

#### Where did your association with the Pandas begin?

That started with John Craven's Newsround on BBC One back in 1972. It was the world's first news bulletin aimed at children, though many adults also watched, and one of the key topics was conservation. We used the giant panda as

a kind of symbol and carried many stories about its fight for survival as one of the most endangered creatures. That resulted in the Chinese authorities allowing me to be the first Western journalist to film their panda rescue centre at Wolong in Sichuan Province. I went there in 1986 and made a documentary about the pioneering work that a few years later led to the first baby panda being born in captivity.

#### Panda fast fact

Although known for eating bamboo, Pandas also eat fish and small animals in the wild.

#### Where are you off to next?

To Sichuan in September, where I'll be leading four groups of Wendy Wu travellers round the panda breeding centres at Chengdu, in the Sichuan capital, and at Bifengxia, a magical place in the misty mountains which are home to some of the last remaining wild pandas. It's a new project for me and I'm really looking forward to it.

#### Panda fast fact

Unlike other bears, pandas don't hibernate, instead they move up and down mountains to stay cool.

#### TAKE ME THERE

##### MEET THE PANDAS

John will accompany two tours to China in September 2014, visiting Beijing, Xian and Chengdu. Go online to see some exclusive video footage of John with the pandas.

**Departs September 2014**

To book call **0844 288 4806** or visit **saveapanda.com**

PRICES FROM  
**£2,590<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 10 DAYS









## TAKE ME THERE

### WINTER WONDERLAND

This picture postcard scene was taken at the beautiful UNESCO World Heritage Site of Nine Villages Valley. Situated in the Sichuan Province, this is a land of snowy peaks, frozen waterfalls and emerald lakes and best enjoyed during the winter months.

Join our 'Winter Wonderland' group tour to see this remarkable region for yourself. The tour also visits Beijing and Xian.

**Departs 13 January 2015**

To book call **0844 288 4806**  
or for more details visit  
**winterinasia.com**

PRICES FROM  
**£2,690<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 10 DAYS



# 48 Hours in Dubai

Dubai is the perfect stopover point between the UK and the Far East, it's more or less exactly in the middle, with seven hours of flying either side. It's safe, modern and affordable, yet it still exudes all of the exoticism of a faraway land. The Arabic culture is rich and intriguing, there are numerous hotels for any budget, and there is plenty to do – sun bathing, shopping, golf, harbour cruises, desert adventures, water-sports - even skiing!



Here Joe Sutcliffe, Head of Product and Marketing at Wendy Wu Tours, gives us his take on what to do in this mesmerising destination.

## What would you recommend for someone to do with a couple of days in Dubai?

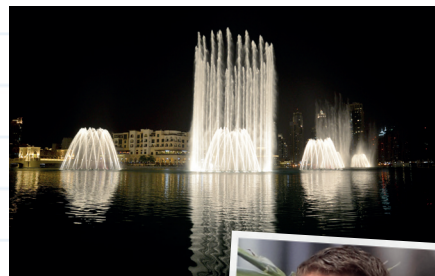
A couple of days will give you a great introduction to the city. For those staying a little longer, many choose to stay in one of the many luxury beach resorts, where you can easily while away several days relaxing in the sun. For shorter stopovers, we would suggest you save a little money and stay in one of the equally salubrious city hotels.

## A typical day

Start with a morning exploring the souks (markets) - Dubai is an ancient trading port and the sights, sounds and smells of the souks are truly fascinating. In the afternoon visit the astounding Burj Khalifa and maybe spend a few hours in the Dubai Mall (a shopping experience like no other). Late in the day, why not head deep into the desert on a 4WD safari, finishing up with a camel ride and traditional Arabic entertainment. For an evening dinner, you are spoiled for choice, with countless world-class restaurants in town. As the evening finishes, why not head to the 63rd floor of the Address Hotel for magnificent views over the city and a cocktail or two.

## What's the one experience in Dubai you must not miss?

The Burj Khalifa is not just another skyscraper, it's the tallest manmade structure in the world by nearly 200m! This fantastical, unearthly construction towers over everything around – you will never have seen anything like it. Just standing beneath this mega structure is wondrous enough, but for those fearful of heights, you can get very close to the top where there is a remarkable viewing gallery from which you can see deep into the desert or faraway across the ocean.



## Joe's Top Tip

Set in Burj Khalifa Lake, right next to its enormous namesake, the fountain light show is truly spellbinding. From 6pm every evening it runs every 30 mins until 11pm and best of all, it's completely free.



## TAKE ME THERE

### STOPOVER IN DUBAI

A stopover in Dubai can be added on to most of our China, Southeast Asia and India tours.

Including 3 nights' accommodation and airport transfers. Optional day tours can easily be booked in advance, contact us for full details.

To book call **0844 288 4806**

PRICES FROM  
**£240<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 4 DAYS





# Travel Tales

A trip to India can be an assault on the senses and is guaranteed to leave a lasting impression on every visitor. Wendy Wu Tours' Personal Travel Consultant, Liz Cathcart, tells us about her recent trip to India where she joined one of our most popular tours, Golden Triangle.

## What was the highlight of your trip?

It's hard to pick just one but witnessing the sunrise over the Taj Mahal is hard to beat. This is an experience on many people's bucket list but when you see it for yourself, it seems so unreal. This is something I'll never forget.

## How did you find the local food?

The food was great. There were always lots of different dishes to choose from. I am not a vegetarian, but the vegetarian meals were delicious! So many different flavours and nothing like a normal curry at home. One of my favourite dishes was a dessert called *Jalebi*. A bit like a doughnut then soaked in sugar syrup.

## Did you know?

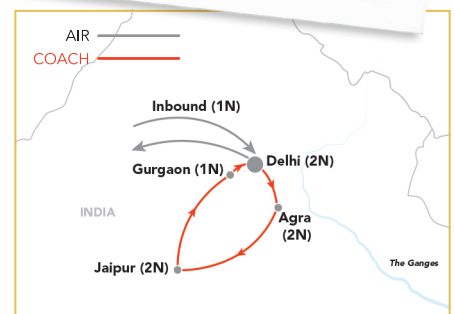
The word curry come from the Tamil word *kari*, meaning spiced sauce.

## Was there an experience that stood out for you?

When we were in Agra we decided to take a rickshaw ride and go out into the city ourselves and see the local markets. We didn't get out of the rickshaw but we just drove around the city and then our driver took us to a roof top restaurant where we watched the sunset on the Taj Mahal. Amazing! We sat up there and watched the locals celebrating with music and dancing through the small streets whilst watching the sun go down.

## What advice would you give to a first time visitor to India

I would definitely say to check the weather and temperature before you make a



decision on when you travel. Travelling between October and March is the perfect time to travel, when the temperatures are just right.

## TAKE ME THERE

### GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Spend Christmas Day at the Taj Mahal!

PRICES FROM  
**£2,190pp**  
FOR 9 DAYS

What a way to celebrate the festive day with a visit to one of the most iconic sights in the world. Visiting Delhi, Agra and Jaipur.

Departs 21 Dec 2014

To book call **0844 288 4806**









#### TAKE ME THERE

##### SAPA, VIETNAM

This local scene  
is taken in one of

the beautiful verdant valleys of Sapa,  
northern Vietnam, an overnight train  
journey from Hanoi. To experience this  
scene for yourself, you can easily add on  
a 3 day Sapa extension to many of our  
Vietnam tours.

To book call **0844 288 4806**

PRICES FROM  
**£320<sub>pp</sub>**  
FOR 3 DAYS



# Customer Corner

Tell us about your Wendy Wu holiday...

Here at Wendy Wu Tours, we can't wait to hear about your holiday experiences. We receive hundreds of complimentary letters and emails telling us about your favourite sights and sounds.

One of our Wendy Wu VIP travellers, Pauleen Pink, has just booked her fifth trip with us and recently returned from an exciting journey through the Himalayas, including the Kingdom of Bhutan. Here she describes her favourite experiences.



Pauline Pink, wendy wu VIP

"After travelling through various countries including Nepal, Tibet, India and China I came to realise I had slowly but surely fallen in love with Asia, in particular the mountain regions. For me, the sheer beauty of these countries made me hungry for more. Then I saw a documentary about Bhutan and I was hooked. Wendy Wu offered the perfect opportunity to tour Bhutan and the state of Sikkim, both of which proved to be a stunning vista of mountains, forests, tumbling streams and waterfalls interspersed with fabulously colourful and ornate temples and monasteries.

The tour began in the bustling city of Kolkata where we visited the Victoria Memorial and flower market before stopping at a tea plantation on our way to Darjeeling. The views when riding on the Little Darjeeling Himalayan Railway were simply remarkable.

Arriving over the border I found Sikkim reminded me of Nepal and



was populated by an eclectic mix of Nepalese, Tibetans and Indians. One special memory of Sikkim was meeting village children on their way to school, who would stop and with their smiling faces pose eagerly for photographs. We were then invited by the Head Teacher into the local school to see the children line up for registration, prayers and to sing their national anthem.

Wherever we travelled we found everyone to be friendly, welcoming and helpful.

Arriving in Bhutan was like entering a magical secret garden; nestled in the Himalayas, so unspoilt, so pristine.

The Bhutanese people adore their king and queen and their loyalty can be seen on display throughout the country. Life size photographs can be found outside hotels and pictures of the royal couple can be found on the walls of shops and restaurants. We were fortunate enough to catch one of the many village festivals where the locals twirled and whirled in their colourful and elaborate costumes which made for photographs with the wow factor!



Let's not forget to mention some of the fun to be had! It was my first experience of trying to stay upright while I wobbled and giggled my way across a chain link bridge and then on our last evening together our wonderful guides had arranged for us all to be dressed in the national costume which made for yet more fun photos.

Saving the best until last, having the world famous Tigers Nest monastery clinging to the high cliff edge there in front of you is most definitely the cherry on the cake.

A Wendy Wu tour brings together a mix of people all eager to widen their horizons. I have made some great friends and travelling companions this way.

This tour has all anyone could wish for. The guides who work tirelessly to ensure your total satisfaction, an itinerary packed full of sights, sounds and experiences of two of this world's most enigmatic kingdoms. Follow in my footsteps and discover for yourself."

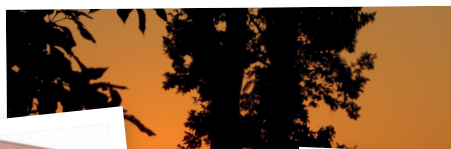
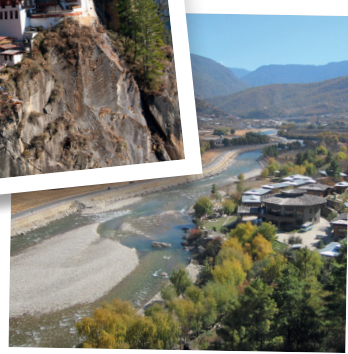
## FACT FILE: BHUTAN

**The name:** The Bhutanese name for Bhutan, *Druk Yul*, means 'Land of the Thunder Dragon'.

**Major religion:** Buddhism

**Leadership:** The Wangchuck monarchy has held power since 1907

**Did you know:** Television did not come to Bhutan until 1999



“ A Wendy Wu tour brings together a mix of people all eager to widen their horizons. I have made some great friends and travelling companions this way. ”

## TAKE ME THERE

### HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS

Visiting Kolkata, Darjeeling, Sikkim and Bhutan.

PRICES FROM  
**£4,890<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 24 DAYS

Full details of this tour can be found in our India brochure, which can be ordered online.

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or email:

**customercare@wendywutours.co.uk**



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# In focus: Japan

Mike Priest, a Wendy Wu Destination Manager and a disciple of all things Japanese, tells us what makes Japan such a fascinating place to explore plus shares his insider secrets to help you get the most out of your visit.

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## What is it that makes Japan so appealing?

You will never find anywhere else like Japan. Culturally unique, the country developed in complete isolation from the rest of the world and this is reflected in every restaurant, on every street corner and in every town.

## Is Japanese cuisine as good as I'm told?

Japanese food is the best in the world, but don't take my word for it, the Michelin Guide awarded more stars to Tokyo than any other city in the world, ahead of even Paris and London. And contrary to popular belief it's not all expensive. There is something for every budget in Japan from hearty bowls of Sukiyaki to delicate slices of Sashimi or Sushi rolls.

## My favourite dishes

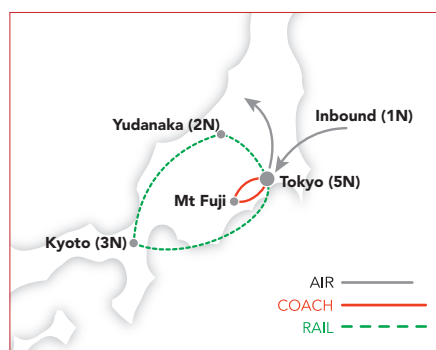
- 1 **Miso Ramen** – noodles in a typically Japanese broth
- 2 **Sashimi** – delicate thinly sliced raw fish
- 3 **Gyoza** – Japanese dumplings
- 4 **Sukiyaki** – hot pot of beef, egg, noodles and vegetables
- 5 **Okonomiyaki** – savoury pancakes

## Any inside secrets you can share?

Go for an onsen (natural hot spring bath) out in the countryside. It may seem like a strange experience but it's the ultimate in relaxation and a great window into Japanese culture.

## If there was one piece of advice you could give to the first time visitor to Japan, what would it be?

Get out and about in cities and towns to meet Japanese people. They are incredibly friendly, welcoming, and eager to meet westerners. Somewhere like Harajuku in Tokyo is perfect for people watching, and you never know when you might bump into a geisha in Kyoto.



## Top 5 Japan Sights

Japan has everything; mountains, beaches, ultra-modern cities, ancient towns, 21st century robots, thousand year old castles and much more.

1. **Mt Fuji**
2. **Sensoji Temple – Tokyo**
3. **Matsumoto Castle - Matsumoto**
4. **Kiyomizu Temple – Kyoto**
5. **Peace Dome – Hiroshima**



## TAKE ME THERE

### WONDERS OF JAPAN

Our new Private Tour through Japan is the perfect introduction to this fascinating country, visiting Tokyo, Mount Fuji, Kyoto and much more.

**Selected departures Dec 2014 – Feb 2015**

To book call **0844 288 4806**

PRICES FROM  
**£2,890<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 11 DAYS





# Our Great Whirl of China

**Judith Chalmers OBE, best known for presenting travel programme *Wish You Were Here* during the 1970's and 1980's, recently joined a Wendy Wu Tour of China with her husband Neil Durden-Smith. Here she gives her insights on her whirlwind tour.**

Takeaways, tea, the Great Wall, whispers, the Ming Dynasty – these are just some of the things which may spring to mind when you think of China – but to discover what this vast country is all about, with its 1.4 billion people in an area covering almost four million square miles, you have to go there.

We arrived in Shanghai on a Wendy Wu Tour with 25 other hardy travellers in torrential rain which became two typhoons over the next three days! It was the worst weather Shanghai had experienced for 52 years but nothing could dampen our enthusiasm or spoil our enjoyment of this amazing city, home to 23 million people (the population of Australia) with a skyline to match Sydney or New York.

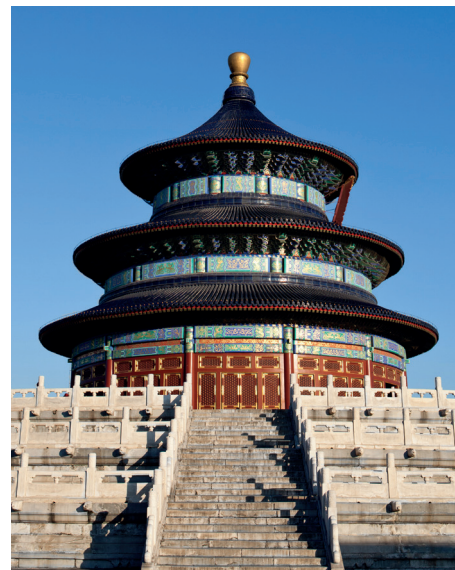
On the first morning we donned our wet weather gear and, armed with umbrellas, climbed undaunted into our comfortable coach, several of which we were to travel in during the next two weeks or so, to explore what used to be known as the 'Paris of the East'. It has become one of Asia's most influential cities, bringing together old and new cultures.

Huge skyscrapers line one side of the Huangpu river with the 1920s 'shikumen' buildings on the other. We walked through the Old Town first, the cobbled streets lined with shops selling everything from herbal medicines to silk purses. After a stroll through the moon gates and latticed pavilions of Yu

Gardens, we had lunch at a local restaurant, the first of many traditional Chinese meals we were to enjoy on the Tour, delivered in abundance to our table on Lazy Susans. On the way, Johnson (real name Chung Yan Sen), our charming and knowledgeable National Escort, asked if anyone had any special requirements. 'Could I have a knife and fork please?' one lady piped up.

On the other side of the river is the prosperous riverfront business area, The Bund. Seen as Shanghai's former Wall Street, it has an impressive collection of buildings ranging from the early trade houses of the 1850s to the glamorous art deco modernism of the 1920s. That evening we cruised along the Huangpu River and marvelled at the spectacular light show provided by the floodlit buildings. We also looked down on this stunning city – a sight not to be missed – from the top of the Jin Mao Tower, 88 storeys and 420 metres high.





The next morning, we flew to Yichang and boarded the Victoria Jenna, our cruise vessel for the next four days and nights on the Yangtze River – ‘the cradle of Chinese civilisation’. All the cabins have bathrooms, and balconies looking out over the ever-changing scenery from long stretches of open countryside to rounding a bend in the river and coming across a brand new concrete town or one under construction.

In complete contrast, we spent a morning in a sampan on the Daning River, a tributary of the Yangtze, going through several smaller gorges surrounded by sheer cliffs, many of them with caves and hanging coffins, and at one point a group of farmers sang folk songs to us from the shore!

Our next stop was Chongqing, the largest city in China with a population of 33 million (can you believe it?!) where we went to the Sunday market. The market was teeming with over 10,000 people buying jewellery, clothes,

shoes and lucky charms, watching the street vendors making fresh noodles, rice cakes and mutton kebabs while some were cooking every part of a chicken or beating peanuts and sugar to make delicious biscuits.

When we knew we were going to Chengdu, many of our friends said, ‘Isn’t that where the Giant Pandas are?’ They certainly are – at the Research Base for Giant Panda Breeding opened to the public in 1995. We were lucky enough to see all 40 giant pandas and some of the 14 cubs born that year. They weigh 41 grams at birth, grow at the rate of 100 grams a day and live for 30 years in captivity – 10 years longer than in the wild. It was a real pleasure to see the adults playing together, climbing trees, eating, or just having a nap.

Another must on the long list of things to see is the Terracotta Army. So we flew to Xian, the home of the Warriors, located on the banks of the Yellow River with a history dating back to 1,000 BC. Emperor Qin Shi Huang built the Army to defend him in the afterlife but the first Warriors were only discovered by a farmer digging a well on his land in 1974. There are now about 2,000 drawn up in 11 military formations with their horses and wooden chariots. They are a unique sight and, astonishingly, there are another 6,000 still to be excavated and assembled!

As well as being the ancient capital of China, Xian was the most heavily fortified city in the world 500 years ago and the nine mile long City Wall is still intact and is beautifully illuminated at night with its pagodas and courtyards.

The next morning we caught the flight to Beijing and braved the capital’s traffic for the first time. The city has 22 million people, seven ring roads, 11 million cars and nine million bicycles. The white-painted traffic lanes and zebra crossings are largely ignored and, as our guide said, the first thing they do before learning to drive is to toot their horns!

Like the rest of China, Beijing has a unique history, reflected in some of the places Johnson our guide – who speaks near perfect

English – took us to. Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven were all built in 1420 during the Ming Dynasty. There were thousands of visitors in the Square – the city’s focal point containing Chairman Mao’s mausoleum – on the day we were there, but it has a capacity of over one million. The Temple of Heaven is set in a beautiful park, with gates at each point of the compass, but was only used to pray for good harvests. Now elderly people buy annual tickets to use the park and passing through the outer temple walkways was like being guests at a party. One old man was playing a vertical flute, another a fiddle; everywhere men and women were playing chess, Ma Jong or poker, practising Tai Chi and sword dancing or just sitting and chatting.

No visit to China is complete without climbing the Great Wall – or, in our case, part of it! Spanning over 5,000 kilometres, it is the longest in the world and they say it can be seen from the moon. Every day thousands climb it and, because of its irregular steps, it is harder coming down than going up but the panoramic views are breath taking and well worth the effort.

The Wendy Wu Tour was expertly organised and nothing was left to chance. A trip to China is not for the faint-hearted because of the long distances involved in getting to some of the ‘must see’ places in this very different part of the world. But don’t just take our word for it – go to China and discover it all for yourself.

*This article was first published in the Mail On Sunday on 05th January 2014.*

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