

# CHINESE WHISPERS

THE LATEST TRAVEL NEWS AND INSPIRATION FROM WENDY WU TOURS



## THE INSIDE TRACK

Find out why South Korea should be high on your list

## EXCLUSIVELY YOURS

Discover China in style with experiences to die for

## WIN

THE BIG PICTURE PHOTO COMPETITION

## HEAD TO HEAD

The ultimate stopover: Bangkok vs Singapore

## FIND YOUR SHANGRI-LA

Discover a special brand of hospitality

# A MESSAGE FROM WENDY

Welcome to our anniversary issue of Chinese Whispers, packed full of new and interesting travel ideas for 2015 and beyond. Over the last 10 years, since we opened for business here in the UK, we have introduced more and more stunning destinations throughout Asia. Many of you will have travelled with us to China, but did you know we now offer tours to Burma, Japan and South Korea? Read all about how I began Wendy Wu Tours almost 20 years on page 4.



One of the best parts of my job is reading your comments and feedback following your tours with us. So we have showcased some of these on page 10, highlighting just what a great job our local guides and national escorts do. We really couldn't do it without their extensive local knowledge and expertise.

What's more, don't miss our brand new photo competition on page 16, where we want to see your pictures from your travels. Get involved and you could see your holiday snaps up in lights!

I hope you enjoy this special issue and we look forward to welcoming you on a Wendy Wu Tour very soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Wu".

Wendy Wu,  
Owner, Wendy Wu Tours

## HIGHLIGHTS



### **Celebrating 10 years: Page 4-5**

Thanks to your loyalty and support, we're celebrating our 10 year anniversary in the UK.



### **The Big Picture: Page 16-17**

Send us your holiday snaps for a chance to win in our new photo competition.



### **Plant seeking in China: Page 20-21**

Follow in the footsteps of 19th century explorers with the experts from the RHS.

## FIND US ONLINE



[facebook.com/wendywuofficial](https://facebook.com/wendywuofficial)



[@WendyWuToursUK](https://twitter.com/WendyWuToursUK)



[wendywutours.co.uk/blog](https://wendywutours.co.uk/blog)

# WHAT'S NEW?

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

## **NEW 2015/16** Brochures are now available

Our brand new China & Southeast Asia brochures have been released – and they're jam packed with lots of new and exciting tours. Our favourite, most popular tours are still available for you to book, but we're excited to launch even more inspiring destinations. Who knows where your next adventure will be?

Order your copy at [wendywutours.co.uk](http://wendywutours.co.uk)

## **NEW** Exclusive Collection

You can now explore China and Southeast Asia whilst staying in 5\* luxury and enjoying exclusive sightseeing experiences such as Champagne on the Great Wall and learning Tai Chi with a Master. Our new Exclusive Collection tours go that extra mile to ensure your tour is as authentic as possible.

Learn more about our Exclusive Collection on pages 6-7 or visit [wendywutours.co.uk/exclusive](http://wendywutours.co.uk/exclusive)

## **NEW** South Korea Explorer

Our new tour to South Korea visits the country's vibrant cities and its dramatic natural scenery, including a stay in the capital Seoul, the port city of Busan plus a trip to the beautiful Mount Seorak National Park. You'll even get the opportunity to peer over to North Korea at the Demilitarised Zone.

**12 days from £3,190pp.** Learn more about our new South Korea Explorer tour on page 29 or visit [wendywutours.co.uk](http://wendywutours.co.uk)



# WHAT'S ON?

**February 2015**

## **Chinese New Year**

In February, China reaches the year of the sheep in the Chinese Zodiac. Shanghai is full of atmosphere on the eve of the New Year with fireworks, spectacular lantern fares and impressive entertainment. An experience like no other.



### **CHINESE NEW YEAR**

Celebrate the New Year in Shanghai with Wendy herself on our exclusive 8 day group tour. **Departs 13 February 2015.**

PRICES FROM  
**£1,990pp**  
FOR 8 DAYS

## **March 2015** Holi Festival, India

The biggest festival in the Hindu calendar after Diwali, the Holi Festival celebrates the beginning of spring in India. Always celebrated after the full moon in March, the festival is famously associated with bright colours and water balloons.



### **INDIA'S GOLDEN TRIANGLE**

Experience the lively celebrations of the festival for yourself on our 9 day group tour. **Departs 28 February 2015.**

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

## **April 2015** Songkran Water Festival, Cambodia

This annual festival celebrates the New Year in Cambodia with lively celebrations including traditional music and dance. A highlight is drenching each other in water, which symbolically cleanses the body from the sins of the previous year.



### **ESSENTIAL CAMBODIA**

Experience the fun and vibrant events of the festival on our 10 day private tour.

**Departures available throughout April 2015.**

PRICES FROM  
**£1,790pp**  
FOR 10 DAYS

# CELEBRATING TEN

1994

Wendy Wu sends her first group of intrepid travellers to China.

1998

Wendy Wu Tours opens its first office in Sydney, Australia.

2001

Begins offering tours to Vietnam.

2004

Begins offering tours to India.

2004

London office opens.

2009

Launches its famous 'Solar Eclipse' tour of China.

The first ever Wendy Wu Tours group to China



2009 2010 2012 2012 2013 2015

Wins Escorted Tour Company of the Year (first industry accolade).

New York office opens.

Begins offering tours to Japan.

Launches 'ASIA Inspirations' tailor-made holidays.

Wins two prestigious awards at the British Travel Awards.

First departures of 'Exclusive Collection' deluxe tours.

# YEARS

**2014 marks the 10th anniversary of Wendy Wu Tours in the UK. During this time, we have sent thousands of customers to all parts of China, Southeast Asia and India to discover the many unique travel experiences on offer, all in the reassuring hands of our expert guides. However, Wendy Wu started her tour company several years before.**

## HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Almost 20 years ago, China wasn't on many people's bucket list. Only the lucky few had wandered around the beautiful Forbidden City in Beijing or stared open-mouthed in wonder when confronted with the Terracotta Army in Xian. Wendy Wu was one of the pioneers of group travel to China. Wendy was so passionate about her home country, she wanted to show people around and give them an insight into her own fascinating culture. Wendy took her first group of intrepid travellers to China in 1994, on the very first 'China Highlights' tour. In fact, the tour was so popular this itinerary still runs today.

Many of those customers that embarked on that first tour still travel with Wendy Wu Tours today, some of them having racked up seven or eight trips. In fact, many of

these travellers helped expand the tour programme, giving suggestions on where they would like to visit next. Wendy then travelled there herself choosing the best local experiences to include, using her own expertise and local knowledge to make sure only the best ones made the cut.

## SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

From those early days, this local expertise and personal touch has been maintained. It is those unique insights and attention to detail that can turn a good holiday into a great one. Wendy Wu receives hundreds of letters and emails each year congratulating the local guides and national escorts that accompany each and every tour, on their professionalism, patience, humour and above all, their ability to offer the personal touch.

Mr & Mrs Moore, who recently travelled to China with Wendy Wu Tours, offer their personal thoughts on their tour experience,

**"This was a wonderful eye opening tour. We saw and experienced so much. The organisation was first class. The national escort was very interesting, thoughtful, competent and pleasant.**

**Overall a first class experience. We will continue to talk about our adventure for years to come and will certainly recommend Wendy Wu."**

## TAKE ME THERE

We love to hear about your holidays with Wendy Wu Tours, share your tour experiences and photos on our Facebook page **Wendywuofficial** or email us at **customer care@wendywutours.co.uk**

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# Exclusively Yours

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Travel is all about experiences and at Wendy Wu Tours we want your experiences to be as authentic as possible. Introducing the brand new Exclusive Collection...



**Everyone is looking for something different when they explore the world. For some it's about ticking off the magnificent sights on the proverbial list, whilst for others it is a search for illumination through learning and experience. Being able to encounter and empathise with a new culture is one of the many benefits and privileges of travel and is something that the more discerning traveller knows will truly enhance any adventure.**

**But how do you do it? Well seeing as most of us don't have years to spare living amongst a new culture, we'll have to cheat a bit.**

Introducing the new Exclusive Collection. At Wendy Wu Tours we have always believed that authentic experiences are an essential part of your holiday – that you are able to see, taste, smell, hear and touch a culture as well as admiring the many spectacular sights. With the new Exclusive Collection, we have taken it a step further by introducing authentic encounters into the touring itinerary. Each of these eight tours is designed for deeper immersion with a range of experiences that span from pure indulgence to hands-on; cultural to foodie. There are four tours

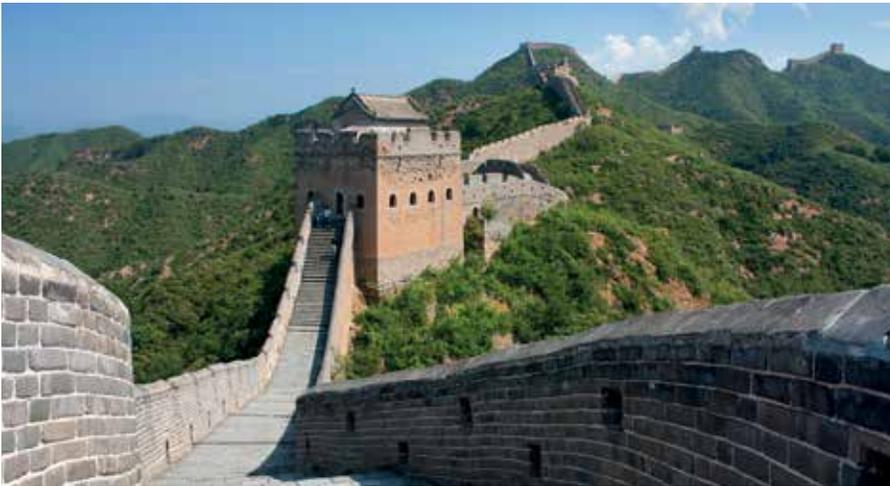
covering some of the many wonders of China, whilst the other four explore the extensive beauty and numerous treasures of Southeast Asia.



## CULTURAL CAPERS

Taking part in activities unique to your destination are an excellent way to embrace a new culture as well as developing a handy new skill. Many of these cultural activities have their roots in ancient traditions. Calligraphy, which you can try your hand at in Beijing, has evolved throughout China's history to become the symbolic art form of the oriental world, whilst water puppetry in Vietnam, which originated amongst the rice paddies of old, tells stories of old feudal practices mixed with folklore - you can chat to a puppeteer and enjoy a private performance in Hanoi.





it is. For example being accompanied by an archaeologist as you view the Terracotta Warriors allows you to learn about the rituals of death and the afterlife in Chinese philosophy. Furthermore getting off the tourist trail to explore more extensively you'll be able to meet local people and glimpse the way they live their lives on a day to day basis – cruising deep into Vietnam's Mekong Delta region gives a look at rural lifestyles that you wouldn't otherwise see.



### FINALLY, DO AS THE LOCALS DO

What could be a more authentic experience than taking a bit of time to join in with what the local people do? You can eat with the residents of Saigon at their favourite food stalls before sitting back and sinking an icy beer as you explore the city's fantastic street food scene or raise at the crack of dawn to come together with the Tai Chi enthusiasts that practice every morning in Beijing's parks. What better way to interact with people, the heart and soul of any country, than by rubbing shoulders with them as they go about their everyday lives.



combined to create the mouth-watering dishes of one of the world's most highly regarded cuisines - the traditional town of Hoi An is the perfect place to get to grips with the basics of it.

### LOCAL TASTES

Dining on the local cuisine can give an excellent insight into a society. Tasting and having a go at making local foods introduces you to traditional, local ingredients and the techniques that are likely to have been perfected over centuries. Acquaint yourself with the traditional Chinese dumpling (a symbol of wealth, family and happiness) in Xian where dumpling making has developed into an art form - join local chefs to learn how to craft these tasty morsels. In Vietnam local ingredients and local spices fresh from local fields are



### DIG DEEPER

Exploring things more deeply, whether it is a historical site or a wider region, is a sure way to gain a load of knowledge about your chosen country and its culture. By looking more closely at a destination's heritage you'll be able to form a better idea about why it is the way

### TAKE ME THERE

#### THE BEST OF CHINA

A luxurious whistle stop tour through China's most iconic sights – the Great Wall, Terracotta Warriors and adorable Giant Pandas – incorporating unique cultural experiences, champagne moments and five-star hotels.

PRICES FROM  
**£3,490pp**  
FOR 10 DAYS

**Departing 14 May, 03 Sep & 08 Oct 2015; 12 May, 01 Sep & 06 Oct 2016**

To book call **0844 288 4806** or visit **wendywutours.co.uk/exclusive** to view all of our Exclusive Collection tours.



SHANGRI-LA

HOTELS *and* RESORTS

# HOSPITALITY FROM THE HEART

**It is 30 years since Shangri-La opened their first hotel in China, in the beautiful city of Hangzhou. Their blend of world class hospitality marks them out from your standard five-star hotel and it is this personal touch that many travellers are now searching for on their journey through Asia.**



## THE SHANGRI-LA STORY

Over 40 years have passed since the first Shangri-La hotel opened in Singapore and set a new standard for hotel excellence. Now Shangri-La's luxury hotels are found across the world - everywhere from Lhasa to London. The inspiration for the brand was the legendary Shangri-La - the mythical "paradise on earth" - described in the 1933

novel *Lost Horizon*. The Shangri-La legend continues to inspire today and they believe it is more important than ever to offer a place of refuge and tranquillity, whilst at the same time reflecting the destination you are in.

## CELEBRATING A MILESTONE

On November 22, 1984 the first Shangri-La hotel opened in China in Hangzhou.

Hangzhou, praised by emperors and revered by poets, has beckoned travellers for centuries. As with so many Shangri-La hotels that would follow, Shangri-La Hotel, Hangzhou boasts a prized view and a spectacular location. The hotel sits on the north-east shore of Hangzhou's famous West Lake. Nowadays wherever you travel in China, you'll never be too far away from the



SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, BEIJING



SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, XIAN

**READER OFFER**  
**FREE Room Upgrade**  
 when you book our exclusive Shangri-La Hotel Package.



JADE ON 36 BAR, PUDONG SHANGRI-LA, EAST SHANGHAI



comforting surrounds of a Shangri-La hotel. In fact, there are now 41 Shangri-La hotels in China.

**“EMBRACING A STRANGER AS ONE’S OWN”**

This is the Shangri-La philosophy and what distinguishes their standard of hospitality. After a busy day, there is nothing better than

returning to the welcoming embrace of Shangri-La’s blend of Asian hospitality and being treated like a member of the family. Whenever you stay at a Shangri-La hotel, you are guaranteed world-class service amidst tranquil surroundings with inspirational architecture and design. This is hospitality from the heart.

**TAKE ME THERE**

**EXCLUSIVE SHANGRI-LA CHINA PACKAGE** **PRICES FROM £2,290pp FOR 8 DAYS**

Including 3 nights in Beijing, 2 nights in Xian and 2 in Shanghai. We feature Shangri-La hotels in our Exclusive Collection plus they can also be booked through our tailor-made ASIA Inspirations team.

To book call **0844 288 4806**

# LET US GUIDE YOU

We love to receive comments and feedback from our clients, it is this information that helps us to improve our tour experience and make sure our service levels never drop.

feefo<sup>co</sup> **98%**  
Service rating:

We recently started working with Feefo, an independent review platform, in order to receive instant feedback on your tour experience with us. We are delighted with the responses you have provided us with - rating our overall service at 98%. In particular, our national escorts have received some fantastic praise from you and we feel it's only right for them to be recognised for their hard work.

**“ The tour was extremely well organised and very good value for money. The success of the holiday is down to Jason our national escort who was the most pleasant and helpful person and had such a wealth of knowledge on all things China. This was an amazing tour. ”**

*Yvonne Reid, travelled on our Wonders of China tour in July 2014.*

Jason has worked as national escort for 8 years. He shares with us why he has such a passion for guiding:

**“I love meeting new people and showing them what my country has to offer. It's a great feeling knowing I've made their holiday of a lifetime.”**

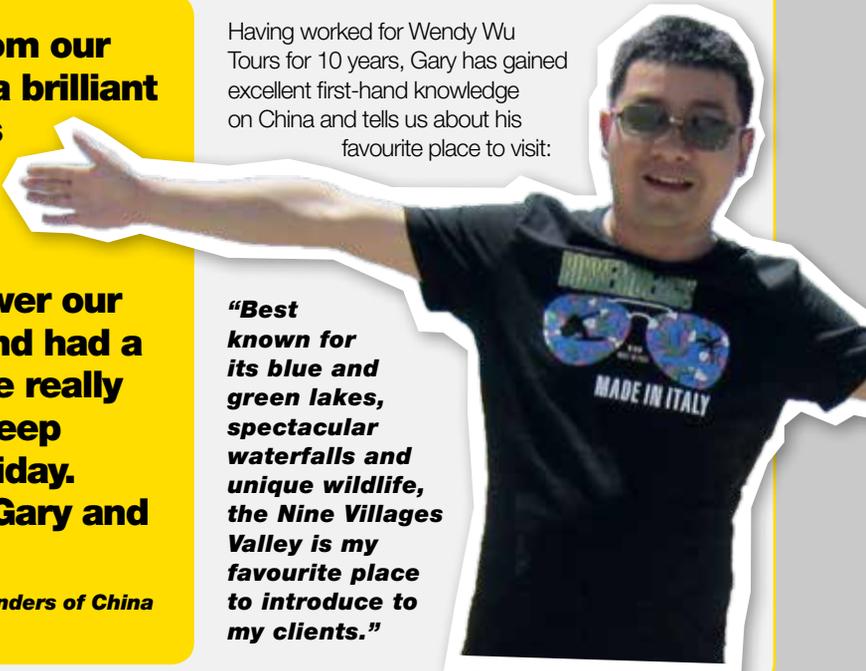


**“ We've just arrived back from our holiday in China and we had a brilliant time. We saw so many places and learnt a lot about China! Our national escort Gary was always looking after us and was always there to answer our questions – he was so kind and had a good sense of humour too. He really made the trip perfect. We'll keep great memories from this holiday. Thank you Wendy Wu Tours, Gary and our group. ”**

*Christine and Simon Martin, travelled on our Wonders of China tour in August 2014.*

Having worked for Wendy Wu Tours for 10 years, Gary has gained excellent first-hand knowledge on China and tells us about his favourite place to visit:

**“Best known for its blue and green lakes, spectacular waterfalls and unique wildlife, the Nine Villages Valley is my favourite place to introduce to my clients.”**



**“ In China, the national escort Leo was excellent and the tour ran smoothly thanks to him. He paid exceptional attention to detail and always wanted to get everything exactly right. We had an amazing holiday with a great group of people. ”**

*Donna Stephens, travelled on our A China Experience tour in September 2014.*



Leo has been a national escort for 4 years and tells us what destination in China stands out for him:

**“I particularly enjoy touring in Shanghai. The Bund is a great place to see both the past and future of Shanghai.”**

**“ Our national escort Linda was excellent and looked after all of our requirements and was a major catalyst in making the holiday such a great success. The cruise, hotels and itinerary were first class and we would not hesitate in recommending Wendy Wu Tours as a company. ”**

*John Bowen, travelled on our Grand Yangtze Deluxe tour in April 2014.*



After 4 years of working in the industry, Linda explains where she likes visiting the most:

**“Taking my clients to off the beaten track areas in China is my favourite part of guiding. These are often the most beautiful - in particular, Yangshuo is a highlight me.”**

**“ All local guides were excellent, but special praise goes to our national escort Nancy who was with us throughout, she was exceptional. This was a superb and memorable holiday all round. ”**

*John Mackie, travelled on our In Pursuit of Pandas tour in September 2014.*

Nancy has been a national escort for 4 years and tells us what destination in China stands out for her:

**“I love hearing about what a wonderful time my tour groups have had on their trip. It's what makes being a national escort worthwhile.”**



**feefo**

The Global Feedback Engine

### What is Feefo?

Feefo is working hard to be the world's most trusted supplier of ratings and reviews, generating genuine feedback that our customers can rely on. Once returning home from one of our tours or tailor made holidays, you will receive an email from Feefo asking you to rate our service and our product. Any feedback at all from you will be most welcomed.

# JOURNEY THROUGH ASIA WITH ASIA

INSPIRATIONS

OUR TEAM OF PERSONAL CONSULTANTS SHARE THEIR TOP TIPS ON THEIR FAVOURITE ASIAN SPOTS...

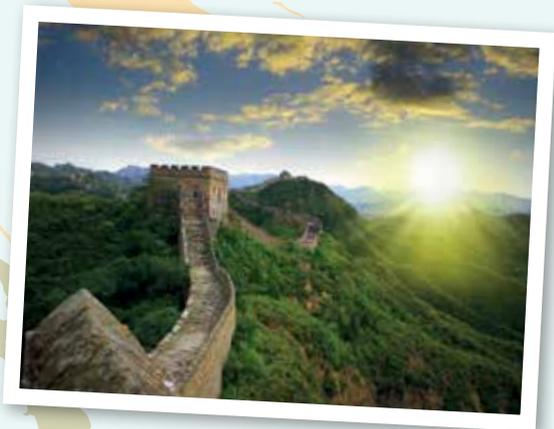
## Prefer travelling on your own itinerary or at your own pace? Then keep reading...

ASIA Inspirations is tailor-made travel by Wendy Wu Tours providing itineraries that are unique and individual, creating holidays that can fulfil your travel desires. Whatever it is you're looking for, the team can organise it for you – whether it's a couple of days flat out on the beaches of Southeast Asia for you and your partner or a six week epic trip taking in China's top sights for a group of 10. The only thing you need to concentrate on is looking forward to your trip!

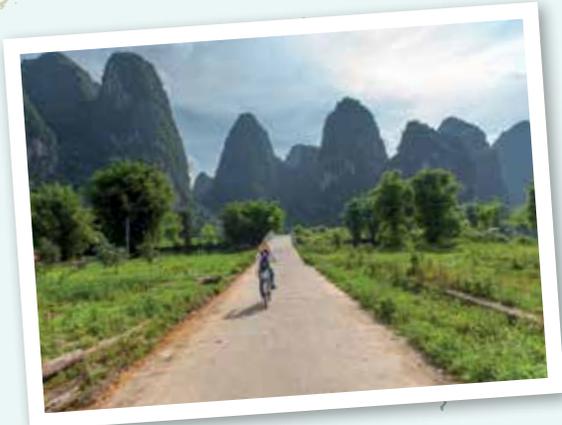


### 1 Flora

Jaipur was a really interesting place for me and whilst there I visited the Palace of the Winds, which is a really impressive 16th Century construction. It's also worth taking a trip to the Thar Desert and riding on a camel – for me that was a great experience.



**4 Katherine** When I visited Beijing I really didn't know what to expect, but I found it a fascinating city that's essential for any first-time visitor to China. There are many places in which you can visit the Great Wall, but for a really remote experience I would go to Jinshanling.



**3 Nicolene** One of my favourite places is Yangshuo, China. It's a beautiful place, surrounded by paddy fields, farms and thousands of hills. Exploring the local shops or riding a bicycle through the gorgeous countryside is a must.



**2 Mel** When you visit Halong Bay, make sure you take an overnight cruise on a Junk Boat. A highlight for me was spending the evening on board, watching the amazing sunset and enjoying a sumptuous seafood dinner.

**TAKE ME THERE**

Our ASIA Inspirations team are on hand to tailor make your next trip. All you need to do is email **info@asiainspirations.co.uk** or call **0844 856 6811** and they will do all of the hard work for you.

**Is your destination not featured?**  
No need to worry. The ASIA Inspirations team can organise trips to other Asian destinations of your choice. Please ask about anywhere that's not specifically featured.





## TAKE ME THERE

### THAILAND HIGHLIGHTS

Why not join this family of elephants in Chiang Mai, Thailand on our fully inclusive Thailand Highlights group tour.

To book call **0844 288 4806**

PRICES FROM  
**£2,490<sup>pp</sup>**  
FOR 13 DAYS

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# THE BIG PICTURE PHOTO COMPETITION

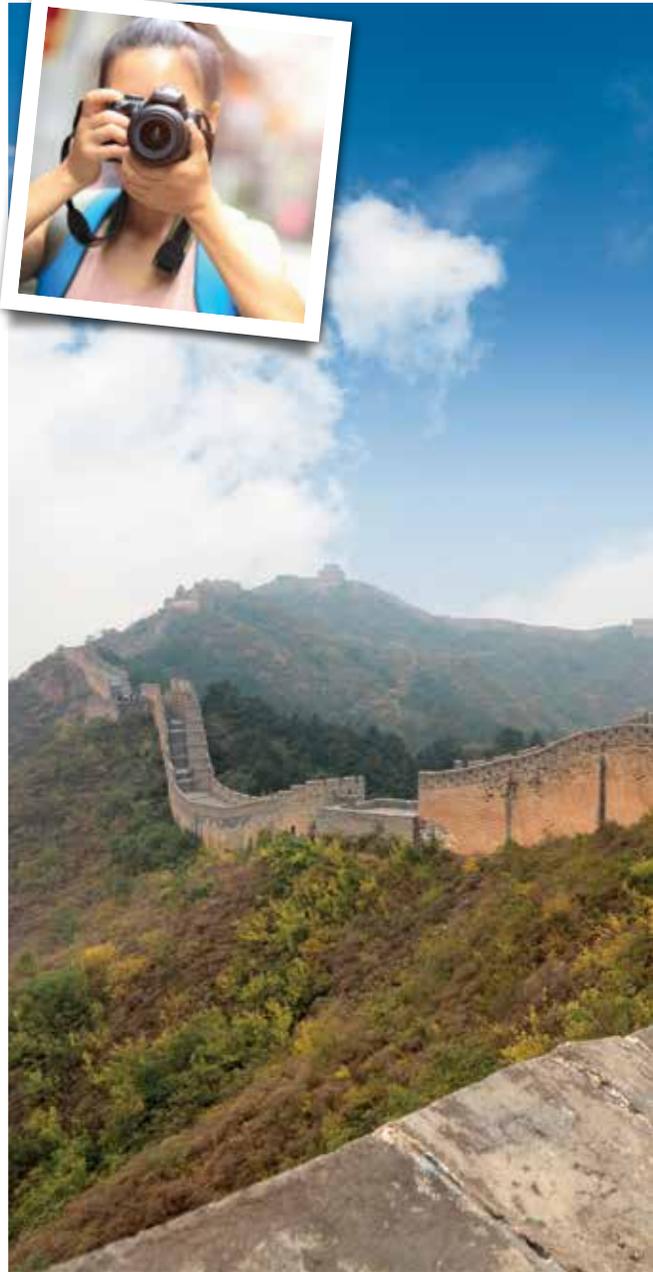
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As the saying goes 'A picture can say a thousand words' and we would love to see your favourite snaps taken from your holidays through Asia. If you've visited any of the following countries; **China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Japan, India, Korea, Taiwan, India or Thailand** then send us your best shots!

**If you haven't yet travelled to any of these destinations...**

Don't worry, this is where you can get creative. Why not take a photo that represents what one of these destinations means to you? Perhaps there is a Japanese garden you love to visit here in the UK or why not throw an Indian themed party in your home?



The Great Wall of China



Cambodia



THE BIG  
PRIZE  
WIN A £500  
CAMERA

## HOW TO ENTER THE COMPETITION

Enter your photo into one of the following categories; **Natural Beauty, Food** or **Culture**. Don't forget to tell us which category you are entering your photo for.



**Email your picture**, which must be at least 1Mb in size, along with a brief description, telephone number, the date and location of the photo and which category you are entering to [bigpicture@wendywutours.co.uk](mailto:bigpicture@wendywutours.co.uk)



**Tweet your picture** to @WendyWuToursUK and include #snapasia



**Send us your picture via Facebook** to Wendywuofficial with a brief description.

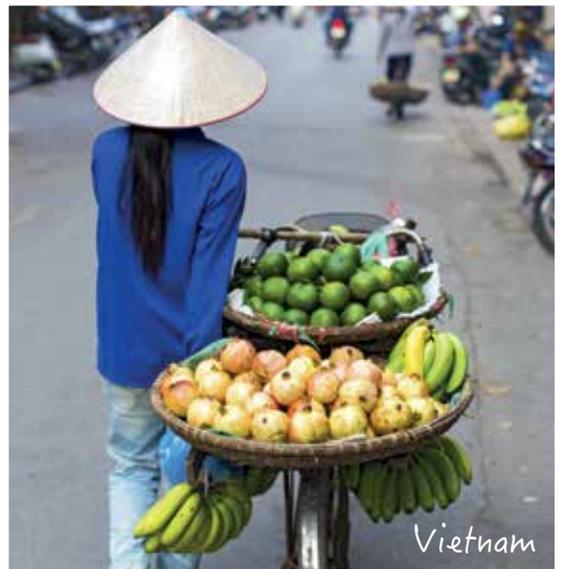
**Closing date for entries midnight 23 December 2014.**

## THE PRIZES

There will be one winner for each category and each will win a Fire HD 6 Tablet. From these three category winners, one will be chosen as our overall winner and will win a Nikon D3300 SLR. For full terms and conditions visit [wendywutours.co.uk/bigpicture](http://wendywutours.co.uk/bigpicture).

Good luck!

Hong Kong Harbour



Vietnam

# 48 HOURS... IN MACAU



Macau's unique history, combining both Portuguese and Chinese influences, gives it a rich culture that is different to its neighbours, making it the perfect extension to any trip to China. It offers visitors the chance to eat delicious food, enjoy exciting nightlife and experience a blend of cultures, all only a short ferry ride, direct from Hong Kong airport.

Here's how to spend the perfect 48 hours...

## DAY 1



### Morning

A walk through Macau's Historic Centre throws up an absorbing web of different styles and influences. In among its traditional streets there are more than 20 different heritage sites to visit, from churches, temples and shophouses to a lighthouse, library and theatre. Collectively, they make a fitting introduction to the destination's East-meets-West personality.

### Pit stop

Take time out for a Macanese lunch. This being the Far East, the chance to eat good food is a central part of the experience, and the local cuisine is an inventive merger of culinary traditions and flavours from Europe, Africa, Asia and South America.

### Afternoon

Comprising a neat row of five sensitively restored residences from the 1920s, the Taipa Houses-Museum gives an insightful overview of the Macanese life of that era that shaped latter-day Macau, showcasing authentic furniture, photographs and everyday items.

## DAY 2

### Morning

With its cobbled streets and quiet squares, Coloane Village gives a taste of a calmer, slower Macau. Order a fresh pastel de nata (egg tart) from the original Lord Stow's Bakery, then call in at the nearby Macau Giant Panda Pavilion.



### Afternoon

Visit the 1,109ft-high Macau Tower for a giddy view over the islands and the South China Sea, then ratchet up the experience by choosing one of the adrenaline activities on offer from a Skywalk around the rim to the world's highest bungee jump.



### After dark

After dinner, make the most of Macau's nightlife by venturing to one of its rooftop bars for a grandstand view of the city skyline. Or why not experience the spectacular House of Dancing Water. This water-based show is billed as the most spectacular production the world has ever seen with high diving acrobatics and somersaulting motorbikes.

## TOP MACAU EXPERIENCES



Enjoy a delicious  
Pastel de nata  
(egg custard tart)



Walk through  
Macau's  
Historic Centre



Visit the 1,109ft  
Macau Tower for  
the best views



Explore the hills,  
beaches & villages  
of southern Macau

## TAKE ME THERE

### TASTE OF MACAU

Including 2 nights' accommodation, jetfoil transfer from Hong Kong, daily breakfast and a half day city tour.

PRICES FROM  
**£290pp**  
FOR 3 DAYS

To book call **0844 288 4806**

# DID YOU KNOW?

**50,000**   
IS THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF  
CHARACTERS IN THE CHINESE LANGUAGE

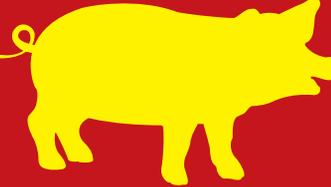
**5,500**  
**MILES**   
IS THE LENGTH OF THE  
GREAT WALL OF CHINA

**THERE IS**  
**ONE**   
TIME ZONE IN CHINA  
DESPITE IT BEING THE SECOND  
LARGEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

**35 MILLION**  
PEOPLE STILL LIVE IN  
CAVES IN CHINA 

**1,400,000,000**  
IS THE CURRENT  
POPULATION  
OF CHINA 

**45**   
**BILLION**  
CHOPSTICKS ARE USED IN  
CHINA EVERY YEAR

**1.7**   
**MILLION**  
PIGS ARE CONSUMED  
EVERY DAY IN CHINA

**1,400**   
**YEARS AGO**  
THE WORLD'S FIRST PAPER  
MONEY WAS CREATED IN CHINA

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# PLANT SEEKING IN CHINA

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**We recently caught up with Jim Gardiner, Executive Vice President of the Royal Horticultural Society, who led our signature RHS Garden Holiday to China in May 2014, 'Plant Seekers'. Our range of horticultural tours is proving very popular and attracts both the amateur gardener as well as the keen horticulturists among you. Here Jim explains what fascinates him about China's horticultural heritage.**

"A visit to China must surely be on most keen travellers' 'must do' lists, but for plant lovers such as myself, it has always been towards the very top.

China has been a source of wonder and inspiration to garden lovers for more than 200 years, and is estimated to contain a staggering one eighth of the world's plant biodiversity. As such it has made a huge contribution to our own gardens in the UK, with many of the plants that we consider every day features - such as Rhododendron, Camellia and Primula - having originated from China.

The horticultural significance of China was first realised in the early 19th century, before the days of a British Embassy. Our own society was founded as the Horticultural Society in 1804, and one of our founders, Sir Joseph Banks, was particularly keen to encourage research into plant life in China. Over the subsequent 120 years or so, names that are now recognised as the heroes of horticultural history – Ernest Wilson, George Forrest, Frank Kingdon-Ward and Robert Fortune – all travelled to the country on horticultural expeditions. George Forrest was probably the most intrepid, getting in to some quite extraordinary scrapes on his seven trips to Yunnan, from where he sent back over 30,000 herbarium specimens and discovered many new plant species.

So when the first RHS Garden Holiday to China was launched at the beginning of 2012 - the concept of a Plant Seekers tour, where we could literally follow in the footsteps of these original Plant Seekers, held great appeal.

This trip of a lifetime spans 15 days, travelling from Chengdu to Emeishan, Nine Villages Valley, Chuanzhusi, Kunming and Lijiang and is an absolute treat for any enthusiastic plantsman. The area covered – including the provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan – is the South West of the country, with a diverse geography encompassing lush tropical and temperate forests, huge rivers, high snowy peaks and magnificent lakes.

From a cultural perspective it is also fascinating – and reflects the enormity of China as a country as

well as the many facets of its culture. Bordering on to Tibet, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar and not so far from the northern reaches of India, the region is rich in Buddhist Temples, ancient monuments and traditional towns and villages.

Horticultural highlights include Emeishan (also known as Mount Omei), where the tour begins. Some 130km southwest of Chengdu, it is one of the Middle Kingdom's four famous Buddhist Mountains and home to monasteries and temples, some dating back to the advent of Buddhism itself in China in the 14th century. It is also a veritable plant mecca - home to around a tenth of all China's plant species ranging from rhododendrons, viburnums and maples to many interesting pines and firs. One of the highlights has to be *Davidia*, the Dove Tree, introduced by Ernest Wilson when collecting for Veitch and Son.

Further North from Emeishan, and another highlight, Nine Villages Valley in Jiuzhaigou is a botanical paradise, with over 2,500 recorded species. A national park since 1984 and covering some 2,000 square km, this wonderful alpine valley is dotted with 114 lakes – ranging from

light turquoise to greens and blues in colour, and 17 waterfalls. We explored the national park on foot and had a private bus to cover some of the longer distances, and were richly rewarded with plants ranging including *Paeonia veitchii*, *Cypripedium tibeticum*, several *Acer*, *Betula*, *Deutzia*, *Hydrangea* and *Philadelphus* species beneath mature *Abies* and *Picea* species.

Towards the end of the expedition, two days are also spent exploring the magnificent Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in Lijiang, in the province of Yunnan. Lijiang old town itself is fascinating – a maze of canals, cobbled alleyways and old wooden houses. The reason it is included in our trip is that it is also home to a quarter of China's plant species, a thought that is really quite

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**“ We all travel to broaden our horizons, and this trip to China is no exception. ”**

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staggering. As well as plenty of woody plants, I was delighted to see the famed *Primula forrestii* – named after George Forrest himself and the rare alpine *Stellera* – in abundance.

This is a journey filled with memorable experiences and wonderful sights – with enticing names and surrounded by myths and legends.

But for me personally, the sight of *Primula forrestii*, a landmark species, growing on rocky banks, along with *Daphne* and *Stellera* growing in gravel on a dry river bed in Gang Ho Ba in sight of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, was quite simply breathtaking especially when years before I was growing the same species in cultivation. I couldn't help thinking how much better it would have been to have seen them in the wild first. It transported me to the time of the Plant Seekers, Ernest Wilson, George Forrest, Frank Kingdon Ward and Joseph Rock, and reminded me of just what a remarkable contribution these intrepid explorers made, particularly to our own gardens in the UK."

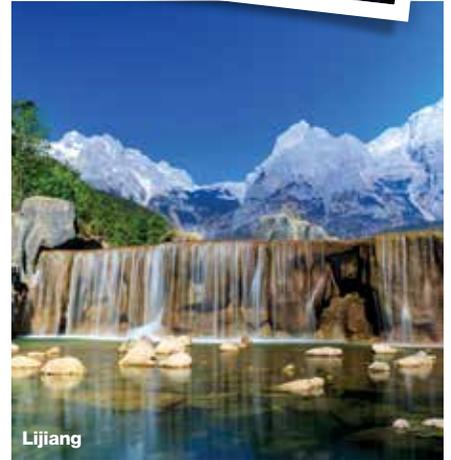
*A version of this article was initially published in the October version of The Garden Magazine.*



The Nine Villages Valley



Jim Gardiner

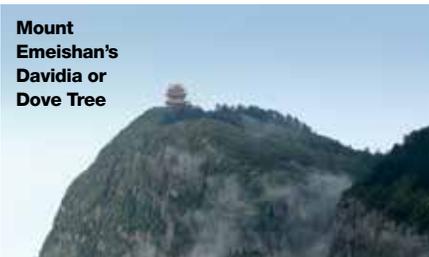


Lijiang



Stone Forest, Kunming

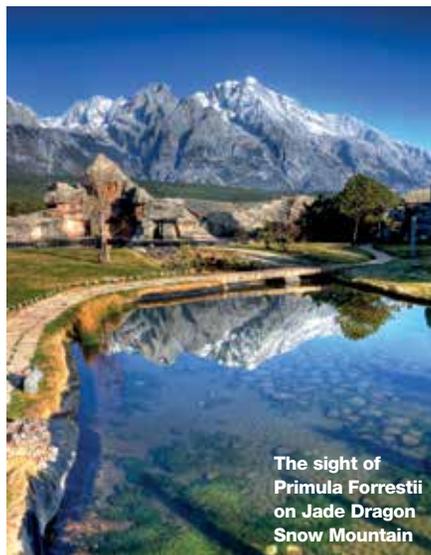
## JIM'S HORTICULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS



Mount Emeishan's Davidia or Dove Tree



The botanical paradise of Nine Villages Valley



The sight of Primula Forrestii on Jade Dragon Snow Mountain

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# WHY WE LOVE... SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Seven of the Wendy Wu Tours team recently visited Vietnam and Cambodia. Our Product Manager Rowan, Finance Executive Clare and Personal Travel Consultant Mel tell us why this region is such a fascinating place to explore and share their travel tips for this must-visit destination.





## DID YOU KNOW?



**1** TARANTULA KEBABS ARE A POPULAR DELICACY IN CAMBODIA

**2** ICED TEA IS FREE IN MOST VIETNAMESE RESTAURANTS



**3** VIETNAM IS HOME TO 30 NATIONAL PARKS

### What is it that makes Southeast Asia appealing?

**R:** The people are just fantastic. They are so happy to share their culture and country with you and make you feel so welcome. All the guides on our trip were so helpful and their stories about each place we visited were fascinating. Special mention goes to Anh, our guide in Hanoi. He really brought the city to life for me.

### Is the food as incredible as we imagine?

**R:** It absolutely is. The food is so fresh and everything is lightly seasoned. The food really reflects the hot weather and provides an antidote to the heat. It is also a living tradition in Southeast Asia – to experience the cuisine is to learn first-hand about a country.

**C:** I could rave about the food for hours. The markets are open every day and many households and restaurants shop there twice a day. There is an abundance of local produce. The range of fruit alone was staggering and the flavours are all light and delicate. The afternoon market at the Vinh Hung Riverside Resort in Hoi An was an excellent opportunity to taste many local delicacies before venturing out to restaurants.

**“ Anh, our guide in Hanoi really brought the city to life for me. ”**

**M:** For me, the food was far better than expected. It's beautifully, freshly cooked – and the spices and flavours used are like nothing you get at home. We were lucky enough to learn about their cooking and take part in a cooking class in Hoi An, which was a highlight for me.

### Have you got any travel tips for the destination?

**C:** Take your favourite item of clothing or shoes with you as there are ample opportunities to get them copied to the highest of standards. Also, take a cooking class – it will broaden your culinary horizons.

**M:** Continuing on from what Clare's just mentioned, the tailors can make an item of clothing within 24 hours! And it really is great value for money. Also, eating out is extremely reasonable and the local beer tastes great.

**R:** Learn how to cross the road – it's not anything like the UK! The guides will be able to teach you this. Don't be afraid of trying new things and in your free time, venture beyond your hotel and the main drags to discover some hidden gems.

### What was the highlight of your trip?

**R:** Halong Bay was just out-of-this-world. Cruising between the limestone karsts as the sun comes up in the morning was one of the most tranquil, peaceful and beautiful moments I have ever experienced.

**C:** Learning to cook with new ingredients in Hoi An, sipping cocktails on the top deck as the sun sets on Halong Bay and seeing Angkor Wat for the first time as the sun rises overhead. All of these places are worth visiting!

**M:** The whole trip was fantastic and opened up parts of the world to me that I'd not visited before. Vietnam is one of my top destinations to recommend and I'm sure I'll be visiting again in the near future.

**“ The whole trip was fantastic & opened up parts of the world to me that I'd not visited before. ”**

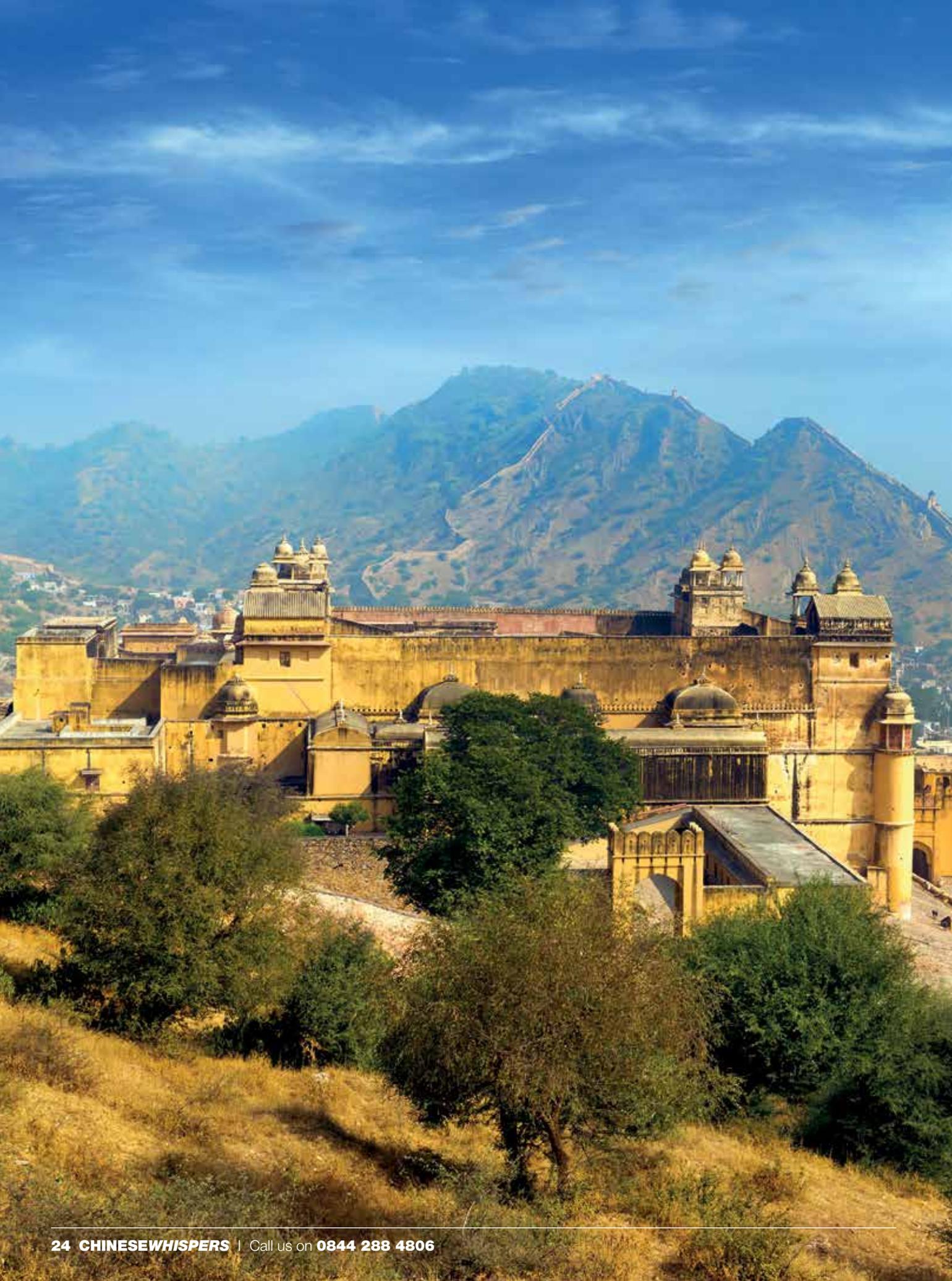
### TAKE ME THERE

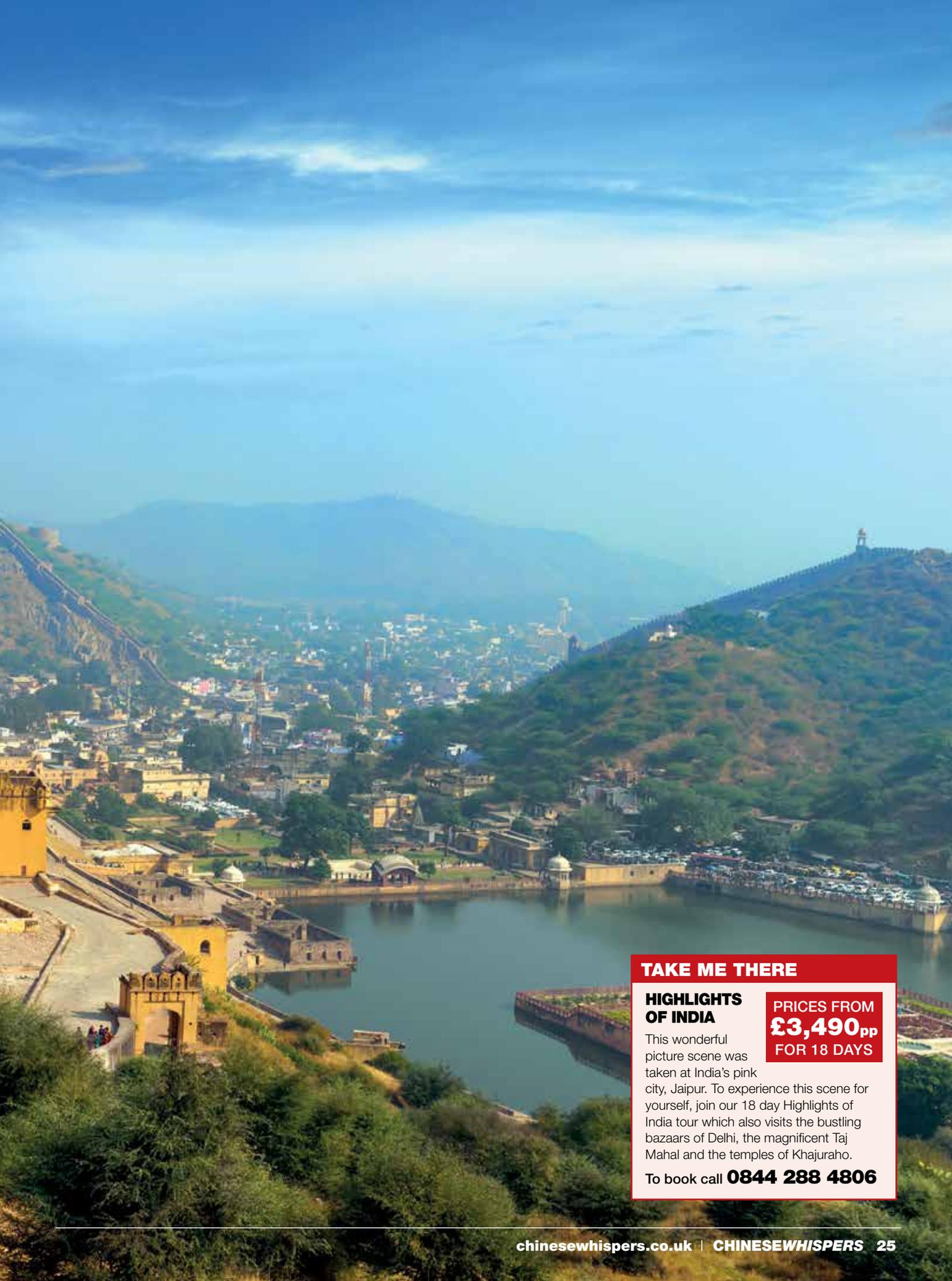
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This wonderful picture scene was taken at India's pink city, Jaipur. To experience this scene for yourself, join our 18 day Highlights of India tour which also visits the bustling bazaars of Delhi, the magnificent Taj Mahal and the temples of Khajuraho.

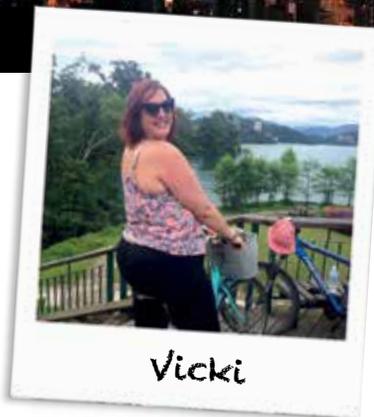
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# TRAVEL TALES



**New to the Wendy Wu Tours' portfolio, Taiwan is full of outstanding beauty, vibrant cities and sensational cuisine. Our Senior Air Product Executive, Vicki Swaby tells us about the highlights of her recent trip and shares some insider tips for this charming destination.**



## **What was the highlight of your trip?**

The highlight of my trip was the outstanding natural beauty at Taroko Gorge in Taroko National Park. Its picturesque landscape really makes you feel that you are a million miles from home. The stunning marble walls and waterfalls just take your breath away.

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

Taipei stood out for me. It was colourful, exciting and really beautiful - and what made it even better was how tourist friendly it was, with translations everywhere. The old culture of Taipei is clear to see, with many ornate temples which I loved. But there's also a very

cosmopolitan side to the city, with the tall buildings and the famous Taipei 101 building – the city's landmark skyscraper. Walking around and soaking up the local culture and the friendliness of the Taiwanese people in local markets was a great experience.

## **If there's one piece of advice you could give to the first time visitor to Taiwan, what would it be?**

Try as many local delicacies as you can. I sampled many dishes whilst in the local night markets, which were great value and they were cooked fresh as you wait. In particular, I would recommend the oyster omelette – a local dish and a popular snack which is found at almost every night market. For those who are a little more adventurous you should try, 'Stinky Tofu' which is made from fermented tofu, fried in oil and served with a pickled cabbage garnish.

## **VICKI'S TOP TAIWAN SIGHTS**



**Taroko Gorge**



**Sun Moon Lake**



**Shilin Night Market, Taipei**



**Yangmingshan National Park**

## **TAKE ME THERE**

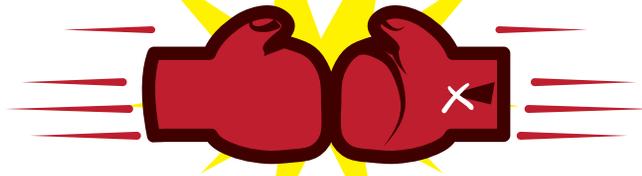
### **TAIWAN UNCOVERED**

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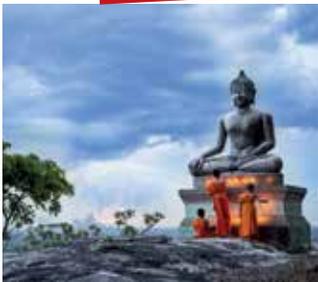
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# HEAD TO HEAD



Two of Asia's most dynamic cities go head to head in a cultural clash

## BANGKOK



### CULTURE

Thailand's capital is a potent mix of chaos and sophistication; an atmospheric, energetic metropolis full of character. The culture here is based on the philosophies of Buddhism, consumerism and having fun – you'll notice that the Thai people have a wonderful sense of playfulness.

### ATTRACTIONS

Wats, wats and wats! Over 300 of them in fact, but the most magnificent, glittering examples are Wat Phra Kaew and Wat Pho. The treasure-filled Grand Palace gives a taste of life as part of the highly regarded Thai royal family, whilst the National Museum showcases Thai art and history.



### FOOD

Most Thai food is some delectable combination of spicy, sour, sweet and salty. You'll find delicious bites on every corner, whether it's a sizzling street stall or a world-class

restaurant. Bangkok's street food scene is fantastic – most dishes are cooked fresh to order. Chow down with an icy cold Singha beer for an even more authentic taste.



### SHOPPING

Modern super malls to buzzing street markets, antiques to high-end – Bangkok can cover it all. The Chatuchak Weekend Market is a shopper's delight with an unbelievable array of goods to bargain for. For a more upscale experience head for Emporium, Siam Discovery and Siam Paragon – the names say it all.

### TAKE ME THERE

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## VS

## SINGAPORE



### CULTURE

Singapore is not the dull destination that it can often be painted to be. This is a city of cosmopolitan multiculturalism, an intriguing collision of influences enlivening its pristine streets, but is also a city of abundance, where the rich residents can reap the rewards of their hard-earned affluence.



### ATTRACTIONS

Singapore has plenty of excellent attractions, from elegant temples and colonial edifices (Raffles, anyone?) to Singapore Zoo, the Botanic Gardens and Sentosa Island. Exploring the ethnic neighbourhoods – Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India are the best known - gives an insight into Singapore's cultural mix.



### FOOD

Singapore is something of a culinary mecca. Like the culture, dishes are a collaboration of world cuisines with deliciously distinctive and affordable street food considered a national obsession. Eat in food courts where you'll find all the locals feasting on delights from the huge range of delightful smelling stalls. Chicken rice, char kway taow and wonton are among the many must tastes.

### SHOPPING

Singapore's most iconic shopping district has to be Orchard Road. A procession of glitzy malls, premier hotels and notable restaurants with world renowned names, you'll also spot many familiar brands such as Marks and Spencer. Malls though are spread throughout the city so you'll never be far from some retail therapy – clothes are particularly good value.

### TAKE ME THERE

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## IN CONCLUSION

Both Bangkok and Singapore offer exciting urban experiences with food and shopping to die for. So if you fancy a few days of edgy and exotic then Bangkok is your city, but for those looking for a clean and cosmopolitan good time, choose Singapore.

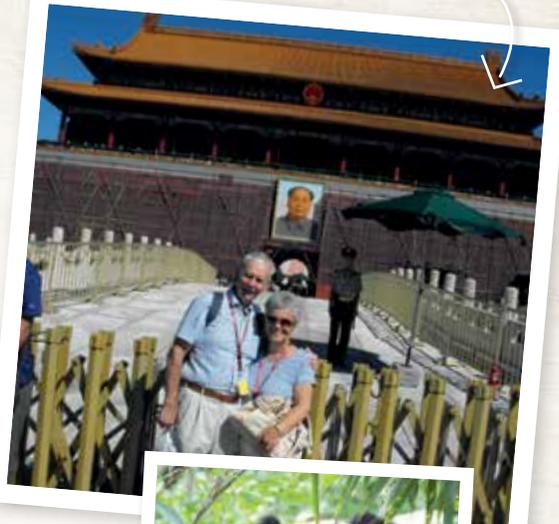
# CUSTOMER CORNER

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.

Dennis and Sandra Nutt, recently travelled with us on our 'Meet The Pandas' with John Craven tour. Here, Dennis describes his favourite experiences.

Dennis and Sandra



Since a very small child I have always had a fascination for pandas and the culture of China, so when a leaflet arrived through our door telling us about a tour where we could experience these things, it seemed like a dream had the potential to become reality.

Visiting the panda centres in Chengdu and Bifengxia proved to be more than a dream come true. We were able to hand feed the pandas and have our photograph taken with a fourteen month old panda which proved to be a very emotional experience. The staff at the centre were so friendly and made us feel as though we were the only people they had ever provided this experience for. John Craven, who accompanied us on the panda visits was a delight to meet and only added to the experience.

Whilst a main part of the tour focussed on the pandas, we were also given the chance to go on a Gorge Walk in Bifengxia, where we were able to see some of the most beautiful parts of wild China and experience meeting Chinese people in a very natural environment - it was fantastic. We spent three days in Beijing at the beginning of the tour and a highlight for me was walking on the Great Wall which revived memories from my early childhood



**PANDA FACT**  
A panda spends 14-16 hours a day eating bamboo.

school days, where we would talk about the Wonders of the World. We also enjoyed visits to Tiananmen Square and The Forbidden City and not to forget the Terracotta Warriors in Xian where we travelled to after Beijing - this was nothing like we'd ever seen before!

The group that we travelled with and our national escort Andy added to the holiday. Meal times at local restaurants were a highlight of each day, allowing us all to share our views and experiences and we've made plans to meet up again in the future.

Without a doubt, I would certainly consider repeating this experience. Every day since our return there is a time when we sit and talk about our China experience and I am sure we will continue to do so for months and years to come. Thank you Wendy Wu Tours, Andy and John Craven for providing experiences which have given us memories to treasure for a lifetime.



**PANDA FACT**  
Pandas have lived on the earth for over 2 million years.

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# THE INSIDE TRACK

South Korea is a classic combination of old Asia and new and is a brand new destination to explore with Wendy Wu Tours. As one of the most mountainous countries in Asia, it has some of the most dramatic scenery in the region. When you combine that with a unique culture, exceptional cuisine and its buzzing cities you get a fascinating place to visit.



Here, Wendy Wu Tours' Marketing Manager, Ben Briggs, shares his insider knowledge following a recent trip to the 'Land of the morning calm'.



## Q What was your first impression when you arrived in Seoul, the capital?

**A** From the outset, Seoul seemed to have a relaxed vibe and was fairly ordered for a large Asian capital city. It doesn't have the frenetic feel of many Asian cities, like Bangkok or Hong Kong for example. The city is split up into many different districts, arty ones, modern ones, cultural quarters and student areas. Seoul felt like it had found its own identity and was very comfortable with it.



## Q What did you most enjoy about Seoul?

**A** I loved the traditional tea houses, which can be found all over the city but there are areas well known for this traditional craft, such as the Palace quarter, Insadong. It is customary to take off your shoes before entering and sit on the floor beneath low, hand crafted wooden

tables. The menu of teas, both hot and iced was mind boggling but I settled on a '5 flower iced tea' which was recommended. But you could have had all manner of teas including jasmín, ginseng, plum, ginger and lemon. There are also some amazing food markets, the biggest of which is the Gwangjinag market. The variety of vegetables, meat and fish on display was astonishing. Definitely a place not to be missed in Seoul.



## Q How was the Korean food?

**A** Incredible! I was very impressed by the food in general in Korea. Most meals have lots of small dishes to share with rices, broths, meat and vegetables. It is also customary to take off your shoes in most local restaurants and sit on the floor. Not always comfortable but at least it felt like you were living like a local!

## FACT FILE: SOUTH KOREA

**Capital:**  
Seoul

**Population:**  
48.6 million

**Did you know:**  
South Korea is the only nation that is completely broadband connected.

A BBQ is also very popular, where you have your own personal hot coals in front of you on the table. They light the coals for you and then give you the raw meat and vegetables and leave you to it.

## Q Did you visit the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea?

**A** Yes I did. Of all the sights that South Korea promised, it was perhaps the DMZ that I was most looking forward to. This 4km area between the north and south borders, divided the country in two at the end of the Korean War (1950-1953). This was a strange place to visit as it is both a major tourist sight as well as being potentially a very dangerous place to be. We were led around by two American soldiers who were based there as part of the UN force.

At one stage we were standing about 200 yards from a North Korean guard staring right at us with a pair of binoculars. Very unnerving! At a certain point on the ground, in the meeting hut where north and south generals gather to talk, you can have one foot in North Korea and one foot in the south. The obligatory photo had to be taken of course.

## Q Did you get out into the countryside?

**A** Yes, we were lucky enough to visit the stunning Bulguksa Temple, an ancient Buddhist temple complex a few hours from the port city of Busan in the south east of Korea. It was a sprawling complex of beautiful buildings set high in the hills. A truly memorable end to our trip.

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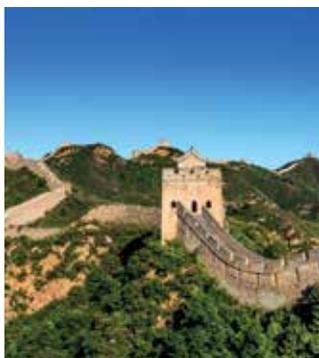
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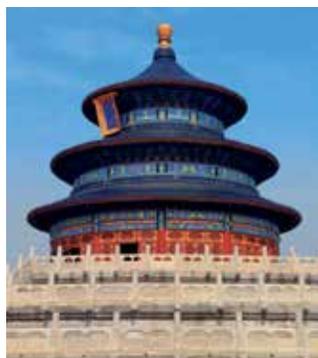


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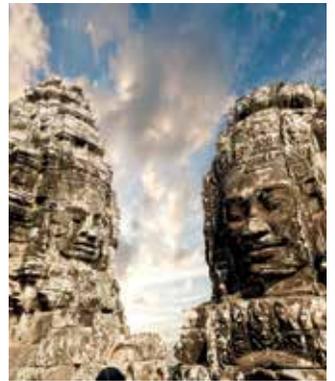


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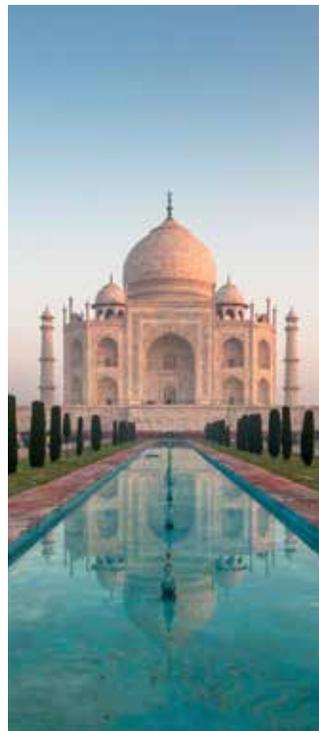


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