



## **CHINA EXPLORATION**

### **March 29, 2016 to April 12, 2016**

***A unique travel experience for those interested in exotic destinations and want to be travelers, not tourists.***

#### **Day One – Tuesday, 3/29 – USA to Beijing**

Depart from Boise for Beijing. On this day you will cross the International Dateline on your way to the People's Republic of China. Once on board, change your watch to China time: 14 hours ahead of Mountain Standard Time. (Noon in Boise is 2AM TOMORROW, China time!) All of China is on one time zone...Beijing Time Zone.

#### **Day Two – Wednesday, 3/30– Arrive Beijing**

You will be met at the Beijing Capital Airport and transferred to the hotel in the heart of Beijing. Following hotel check-in, and a time to freshen up, we can explore the Wangfujing Walking Street area.

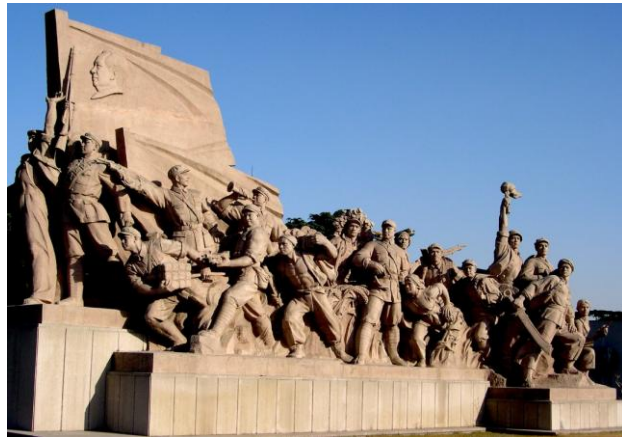
Local Beijing-style food is readily available....if you are hungry. There are lots of things to try! We can walk, gawk, and enjoy the central shopping area of Beijing. It's fun to absorb the pace of the people and the feeling of the city! You are in the friendliest city in China, and perhaps, the world!



### Day Three – Thursday, 3/31 – Beijing

Sleep in a bit, and meet for breakfast at 0800. Enjoy breakfast in the hotel restaurant. There are lots of things to choose from...both Western and Asian foods. Fruit, juices, cereal, eggs, tea, coffee and assorted breads are always available.

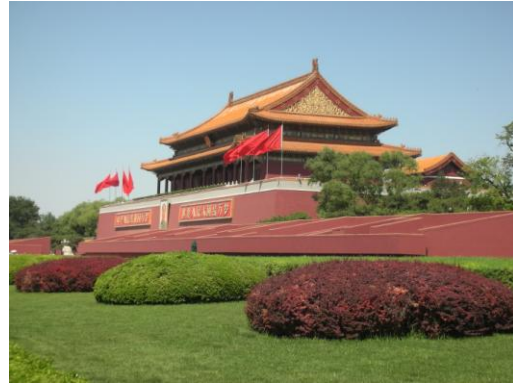
Following breakfast we will walk to Tiananmen Square, the largest public square in the world, about ¼ mile from our hotel. At over 108 acres, Tiananmen Square is the largest public square in the world. It can accommodate more than 1 million people.



We will cross the Square, viewing the elaborate Soviet-style statues dedicated to the heroes of the revolution, and the mausoleum of Chairman Mao.

- ❖ While we remember Tiananmen Square for the student democracy demonstrations and associated deaths in 1989, the Chinese People remember it as the birthplace of the PRC, the People's Republic of China.
- ❖ Looking north, we will see an enormous portrait of Chairman Mao, above Tiananmen (The Gate of Heavenly Peace), the entrance to the Forbidden City. In 1949, Mao declared the start of the PRC from the balcony above this gate.
- ❖ In 1966, from this same venue, he set the students and Red Guards on the path to Communist reform, starting the Cultural Revolution in the PRC. Ten years of absolute chaos, death and destruction followed.

We will cross Chang An (Everlasting Peace) Boulevard, and enter the Forbidden City through Tiananmen Gate.



- ❖ The Forbidden City, the central landmark in Beijing, is a double walled structure, officially known as the Former Imperial Palace, or *Gu Gong*.
- ❖ We will enter by the south gate and traverse the length (3,150 feet) viewing the relics and 9,999 buildings within this 183-acre cultural treasure.
- ❖ *Gu Gong* was home to twenty-four emperors of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, from 1407 to 1911.

We will exit through the North Gate (Gate of Divine Might), and walk to the nearest subway station, where you will get an introduction to mass transit in Beijing. Use of the subway is amazingly easy, cheap and safe. Expect it to be crowded, but not uncomfortably so.

Following lunch at a famous vegetarian restaurant, we will visit Yonghegong Lama Temple.

- ❖ This Tibetan Buddhist temple is Beijing's most visited religious site. Its five main halls and numerous galleries are hung with finely detailed thangkas (painted cloth scrolls) and decorated with carved or cast Buddha images -- all guarded by young lamas (monks).
- ❖ Originally a palace for Prince Yongzheng, it was transformed into a temple after he became the Qing's third emperor in 1723. The temple flourished under Yongzheng's successor, Emperor Qianlong, housing some 500 resident monks.
- ❖ Unlike most "feudal" sites in Beijing, the Lama Temple survived the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution mostly unscathed. Premier Zhou Enlai is credited with saving not only Yonghegong, but also Lingyin Temple in Hangzhou during this tumultuous period! (We will visit Lingyin Temple while we are in Hangzhou!) While the reason remains a mystery as to why the Premier would want to save a religious site, personal speculation is that his mother may have been a devout Buddhist.





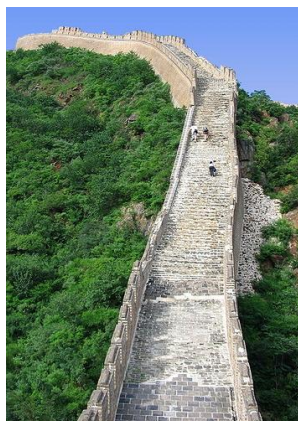
Be sure your camera battery is well charged! This is a fantastic place for candid shots.

Our evening destination is the Peking Opera. Peking Opera is quite different than western opera, in that it is one part singing, one part acting, and one part acrobatics/martial arts (kung fu). English subtitles are provided on adjacent screens. After a while, the subtitles become less important, as you start to understand the plot of the opera and characters. It is true Chinese culture. Since Peking Opera is basically a People's event, there is no need to dress formally. Business casual dress will do just fine.



## **Day Four – Friday, 4/1– Beijing– Huanghua Great Wall**

This morning, we will eat breakfast early at the hotel and then travel to Huanghua Great Wall of China, 40 miles north of Beijing.



Huanghua is off the usual tourist route and represents a fine example of the un-restored Great Wall of China. Built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Huanghua (Yellow Flower in Chinese) has a colorful history to match its name.

When summer comes, the entire village under the Huanghua Great Wall is immersed in a sea of yellow wild flowers, hence the name.

- ❖ On a cliff by the Huanghua Great Wall are two big Chinese characters 'jin tang' which means being very firm and strong. There is a legend about the origin of these characters.
- ❖ In the Ming Dynasty, the Emperor ordered a general named Cai Kai to build the Great Wall here. But it took many years to accomplish the construction. The slow pace of construction angered the Emperor greatly. At the same time, a treacherous official falsely reported that Cai Kai had spent too much money in building Huanghua and that the work was shoddy. As a result, Cai Kai was called before the Emperor and beheaded.
- ❖ Later, the Emperor asked his ministers to check the construction. They found that Huanghua Great Wall was well built, strongly fortified and extremely steep. The Emperor realized that he had treated Cai Kai unjustly and ordered craftsman to carve these two Chinese characters. Today, Huanghua Great Wall is also called the Jintang Great Wall; the lake under it is Jintang Lake.

Many portions are quite steep, with some approaching 75 degrees. Footing can be treacherous in spots. Be sure to wear sturdy hiking boots and bring a knapsack with some food and plenty of water. A broad brimmed hat (*any color but green* – we will explain fully once we are in China!), sunglasses and sunscreen are a must.

We will be well above Beijing in altitude. The weather at Huanghua is unpredictable. It can be sunny one hour and raining or snowing the next. It is generally windy and cool, but can be scorching under mid-day sun, due to reflection from the stone.

Our destination, the uppermost watch tower, affords a spectacular 360 degree view of the surrounding area. You can see the Great Wall climb high up adjacent mountain ridges and disappear into the distance. Birds soar above and fresh breezes blow freely. If you are so inclined, we can practice yoga, qigong or taiji at this ancient scenic spot.



Following our climb, we will eat at a peasant restaurant beside the Wall. The owner is quite gracious, and cooks wonderful roasted fresh fish, and assorted vegetable dishes. Her preparation of eggplant is exquisite. We can relax there, and watch the world go by.



We will return to our hotel and rest for awhile. Following dinner, we will enjoy a TCM foot soak and therapeutic foot massage to soothe those tired feet. Multiple forms of Chinese full-body massage are also available at reasonable prices.

### **Day Five – Saturday, 4/2 – Beijing**

This morning, the “Dirt Market” awaits us! Also known as Panjiayuan Market, it is a flea market on steroids! Over 4000 stalls offer abundant old merchandise including old books published during the Cultural Revolution, jade bracelets, ancient furniture, hand-made porcelain, calligraphy, paintings and Cultural Revolution propaganda posters.

The term ‘dirt’, comes from the frequent ploy of vendors to rub dirt on an object to make it look older. Be assured that NOTHING at this market is antique! (It is illegal to buy and transport antiques out of the country without a permit!) It is good fun and a great test of your bargaining skills. Everything is marked up about 400%! If you can get your treasure for less than 60% of the asking price, you are doing very well. Even at that price, things are still very reasonable.

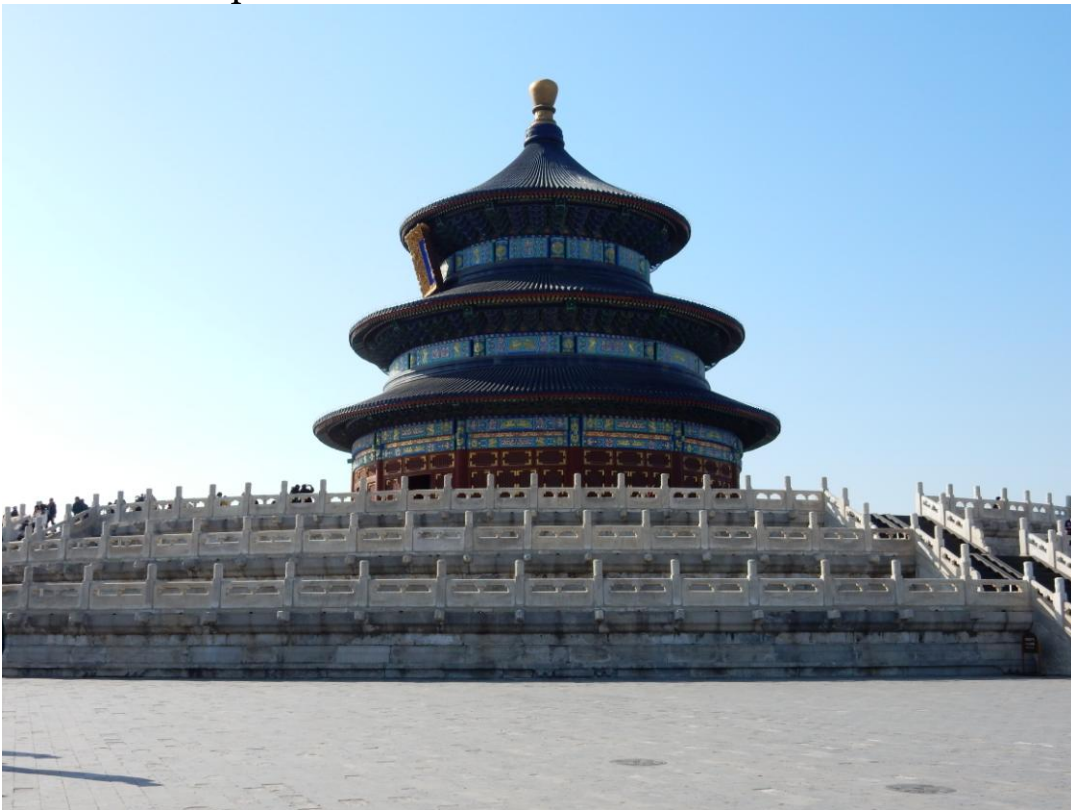
After return to our hotel for some rest and relaxation, we will sample the famous Peking Duck that Beijing is famous for.





## Day Six – Sunday, 4/3 – Beijing

This morning we will travel to the Temple of Heaven, south of Tiananmen Square.



- ❖ The Temple of Heaven was first constructed in 1420, the 18th year of the reign of Ming emperor Yongle, and was extended and renovated during the reigns of Ming emperor Jiajing and Qing emperor Qianlong.
- ❖ It was the place where the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties would worship the god of heaven and pray for good harvest. Covering an area of 273 hectares, it is the largest architectural complex in the world for rituals to pay homage to heaven.
- ❖ Following the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, the Temple fell into disrepair with many buildings collapsing.
- ❖ In 1914, Yuan Shikai, then President of the Republic of China, performed a Ming prayer ceremony at the temple, as part of an effort to have himself declared Emperor of China. This did not succeed.

- ❖ Early morning is the best time to visit the Temple of Heaven. Starting at daybreak, locals gather to practice taiji, wushu, kungfu, play badminton, dance, or just walk and talk with friends.

Later, we will travel to The Hutong for a Chinese Cooking Workshop.

- ❖ The Workshop is designed to teach you the basics and beyond: including wok and cutting techniques, tips on how to combine spices and hands-on cooking of authentic Chinese cuisine. You'll learn how to make best use of fresh seasonal produce and prepare balanced Chinese meals for you, your friends and family.

## Day Seven – Monday, 4/4 – Beijing to Hangzhou

We must check out of our hotel by 11 AM, so early morning check out is a good idea if you plan to tour around Beijing by yourself. The Concierge at the hotel will hold your luggage while you are gone.

Plan to be back at the hotel no later than 1:00 PM, since we must arrive at the Beijing Train Station more than 1 hour before departure.

This afternoon, at 4:55, we take the overnight train to Hangzhou. Our accommodations will be in a Soft Sleeper Cabin. If you desire, for an additional charge, you can upgrade to a Luxury Soft Sleeper Cabin, if available.

- ❖ Each Soft Sleeper compartment has four bunks, with quality bedding.
- ❖ Luxury Soft Sleeper compartments contain two bunks.
- ❖ Facilities such as thermos, tray for litter, rubbish bin, temperature control, reading lamp, and slippers are available in either compartment.
- ❖ On selected trains, the luxury soft sleeper compartment may contain a private toilet, equipped with wash-basin, mirror, seat-type toilet, and toilet paper(!). ***Please note: We are not able to guarantee the presence of the private toilet in all Luxury Soft Sleeper Compartments, since each train apparently has different facilities.***





## DayEight– Tuesday, 4/5 – Hangzhou

We arrive in Hangzhou at 0830, and will take a taxi to our hotel.

Hangzhou has long been known as one of the most beautiful cities in all of China. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Marco Polo marveled at its beauty. In fact, there is an old Chinese saying:

上有天堂下有苏杭, “shàng yǒu tiān táng, xià yǒu Sū Háng”:

“In heaven there is paradise, on earth, there is Suzhou and Hangzhou.”

The West Lake is undoubtedly the most renowned feature of Hangzhou, noted for the scenic beauty that blends naturally with many famous historical and cultural sites.

Our hotel is quite near West Lake, so we can walk and enjoy the beautiful view of this historic landmark.



Hangzhou has numerous bicycles for rent, located at self service kiosks. We will provide you with a rental card, so you can use bicycles for transportation while in Hangzhou.

Evening activities are open. We could visit the famous Hefeng Walking Street. There are numerous small shops to explore. Of particular interest are the TCM Pharmacy and the adjacent museum.

❖ Hangzhou is also known for the fragrant, locally grown, Long Jing (Dragon Well) tea. Tea houses are plentiful; many of which overlook West Lake. *We can stop for a few cups of this tasty green tea, relax and watch the world go by.*

❖ One of the most important parts of traveling is tasting the local delicacies. Hangzhou dishes are noted for their elaborate preparation, sophisticated cooking and refreshing taste. Many local specialties will be sure to make your trip a cultural experience. We recommend that you try Beggar's Chicken (a chicken baked in clay), West Lake Vinegar Fish (fish fresh caught from the lake coated with a sweet-sour vinegar sauce), Dongpo Pork (braised pork) and tiny Crystal Shrimp cooked with Long Jing Tea.

## Day Nine–Wednesday, 4/6–Hangzhou

This day is devoted to exploring the historic areas surrounding West Lake and getting some exercise.

Located north-west of West Lake, Lingyin Si (Temple of the Soul's Retreat) is one of the ten most significant ancient temples of Zen Buddhism in China.



- ❖ Lingyin Temple was built in 328 AD, and has a history of over 1685 years. Destroyed and rebuilt no less than 16 times, the present Temple reflects late Qing Dynasty design.
- ❖ On August 26, 1966, a portion of the Red Guards of Hangzhou in the name of sweeping away the Four Olds, (old culture, customs, habits and traditional beliefs) targeted Lingyin Temple and threatened to dismantle the temple and destroy all the Buddhist statues.
- ❖ On that day, thousands of workers, farmers and students automatically gathered and remained at the front gate and the rear gate of Lingyin Temple to protect it from The Red Guards' destruction. Fierce debates and armed conflict ensued between opposing factions.
- ❖ Urgent appeals were made to Premier Zhou Enlai to save this sacred site from the impending destruction. He eventually closed down Lingyin Temple by governmental order. While Lingyin Temple was protected successfully, it did sustain defacement of some easily accessible carvings.
- ❖ During this crisis, the monks of the temple, despite capture, humiliation and persecution, made great efforts to protect the Temple and its contents. On the one hand, these monks publicized the announcement of the State Council, and on the other hand, bought portraits of Chairman Mao and pasted them on the Buddhist statues to protect them from destruction by the Red Guards. Few foreigners realize how many died to protect this and other sacred sites in China.



Located directly in front of Lingyin Temple is Fei Lai Feng (Peak Flown from Afar). The peak is so-named because it is made of limestone, giving it a craggy appearance; very different geologically from the surrounding sandstone mountains.

- ❖ Legend holds that the peak was originally from India but flew to Hangzhou overnight as a demonstration of the omnipotence of the Buddha.
- ❖ The caves of this mountain shelter about 330 stone statues dating from the 10th to the 14th centuries. The statues appear in a variety of poses ranging from standing, to sitting, to sleeping.
- ❖ A favorite may be the Laughing Buddha, sitting on the cliff beside the stream with exposed breast and belly. If you wonder why he has such a big belly, there is a famous couplet that states: "His big belly contains all that cannot be bore in the world; He laughs at the man who deserves to be laughed at on the earth."
- ❖ This life-like statue is the largest one of all the statues on Fei Lai Feng, and the earliest Laughing Buddha carved in China.



Nearby, is the National Tea Museum and Long Jing Tea Village. China is the birthplace of tea; its use dating back more than 4,000 years. At the Museum, we can learn the history, cultivation, harvesting and processing of this national treasure.



Later in the afternoon, we can visit the Silk Market Street. This is a collection of small shops selling numerous products made of silk. Be sure to bargain hard. Typically, prices are marked up 200-300%!

### **Day Ten – Thursday, 4/7–Hangzhou**

Today we will explore more of Hangzhou and the surrounding area. The itinerary is up to you as to where you want to go. We can go either as a group, or you can refine your independent explorations of Hangzhou. Be sure to make good use of the rental bicycles found everywhere in Hangzhou.

### **Day Eleven- Friday – 4/8 – Hangzhou to Suzhou**

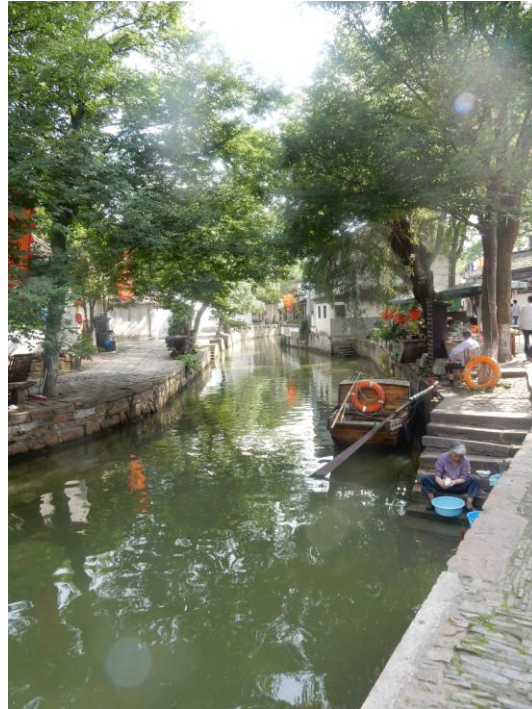
This morning we travel by train to Suzhou, where we will visit the famous Master of the Nets classical Chinese Garden.



- ❖ Sometimes the smallest package can contain the most magnificent gift. The Master of Nets Garden is a clear example of this. It is the smallest of the Suzhou residential gardens, yet it is the most impressive because of its use of space which creates the illusion of an area that is much greater than its actual size. Even more than the architectural achievement is the mood of tranquility and harmony that it embodies.
- ❖ This exquisite garden was first designed during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) as a residence for a government official. At that time, the garden was named "the Hall of Ten Thousand Books" because the owner housed numerous books in three studies within the garden.
- ❖ Later on, it went through vicissitudes in different dynasties until an official named Song Zongyuan bought and restored the garden around 1765 in the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911). It is said that in a moment of frustration with bureaucracy he declared that he would rather be a fisherman than a bureaucrat. Therefore, he changed the name of this garden to "Wangshi Yuan", meaning a fisherman's garden in English.
- ❖ As you walk about the gardens and along the walkways, you can often see beautiful flowers or plants through delicate windows which frames the scenery from a distance and draw you to a single sight, a moment of peaceful natural beauty.

- ❖ As you walk through the buildings, it is easy to imagine the life that the original residents lived in a feudal society where these gardens were solely for their pleasure and the pleasure of their guests. The various buildings are constructed so that you can always access the main garden from any room. The rooms themselves are quite impressive in design and ornamentation and well represent the style of the Song Dynasty.

Following our visit to the gardens, we will travel to Tongli Ancient Water Town. Our accommodations are in a 300+ year old house that has been transformed into a guest house. Our rooms are furnished with Ming Dynasty beds and chairs, comfortable and luxurious.



- ❖ Tongli Ancient Water Village is known as the Venice of China.
- ❖ There are numerous rivers and canals, 40 stone arch bridges and countless buildings in Tongli that date from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasty period.
- ❖ Fishermen in Tongli fish the lakes and canals using cormorants, an ancient and effective method.



## **Day Twelve- Saturday – 4/9 – Tongli Ancient Water Town**

Today, you are free to explore Tongli Ancient Water Town on your own. Travel the back alleys, take a boat ride on the canals and just relax. There is so much to see and do!!!!

## **Day Thirteen- Sunday – 4/10 – Suzhou to Shanghai**

Around noon, we will catch the high speed train to Shanghai.

This train reaches speeds of greater than 300 kph (185 mph).

Shanghai, a city of more than 23.9 million people, is the second largest city in China. (Chongqing is the largest, with more than 32 million!) With a rich history of international trading, Shanghai is truly a modern city.

Our hotel is walking distance from the Bund; an area with dozens of historical buildings, lining the Huangpu River.



- ❖ At the end of the 19th century, the Bund housed numerous banks and trading houses from the United Kingdom, France, US, Italy, Russia, Germany, Japan, Netherlands and Belgium, as well as the consulates of Russia and Britain.
- ❖ Today, it is the hub of tourism in Shanghai. The wide walkway on the Huangpu River offers spectacular views of modern Shanghai architecture and the busy river traffic.





Skyscrapers dominate the horizon, with the Oriental Pearl Tower capturing the eye of every visitor. We will ascend the Tower for a birds' eye view of Shanghai.

- ❖ At a height of 1,535 feet, the Tower is home to the local TV and radio stations. There are fifteen observation levels; the highest at 1,148 ft.
- ❖ There is a revolving restaurant at the 876 ft level.
- ❖ The Tower also contains exhibition facilities, restaurants and a shopping mall.
- ❖ There is also a 20-room hotel called the Space Hotel between the two large spheres.
- ❖ At night, the exterior lights change in color and design, creating a sight unmatched anywhere.

Our hotel is also walking distance to Nanjing Road, the neon splended walking street that rivals the Ginza in Tokyo. It is “shopping heaven” with numerous upscale shops and restaurants. It is also a great place for people watching.



### **Day Fourteen- Monday – 4/11– Shanghai**

Today we will travel to the famous Yuyuan Park. Known for its classical Chinese garden, Daoist City Temple, food and shopping, you can spend hours roaming the different streets and alleyways.

In the evening, we will take a farewell cruise on the Huangpu River, to enjoy the splendor that is Shanghai at night.



## **Day Fifteen – Tuesday – 4/12 – Shanghai to USA**

Following an early breakfast and check out, we will depart for Shanghai Pu Dong Airport (PVG). In moderate traffic, PVG is a one hour drive.

Plan to arrive at the airport at least 2 hours ahead of departure time.

Once again, you will cross the International Dateline on your journey back home. This time, you will GAIN a day. In fact, you may land in the USA the same day, before you departed Shanghai. It's Groundhog Day all over again!