Gay Travel China Cultural Tour

2021 Late May to Mid-June

A Gay Travel China Cultural Tour

Physical Challenge:

1 2 3 4 5

Discover China’s history, culture, art, food and fascinating scenery on this gay travel China tour. Walk the Great Wall. Cruise the Yangtze River and see the Three Gorges. See Beijing, Xian, and Shanghai. China is an exotic delight for the senses. Visit well-known sites & less-visited gems.
Beijing, Shanghai and China’s Mighty River

Starting in Beijing, the spiritual and historic heart of China, we tour the city, including a walk on a rarely visited portion of the Great Wall, a visit to the Forbidden City and a stroll through Tiananmen Square.

We then fly to Yichang to start our journey upriver through the Three Gorges of the Yangtze on our elegant 124-passenger ship. During our leisurely four-day cruise we will witness the beauty of the river and go ashore each day. We’ll view the now-complete dam from a high vantage point, explore a remote tributary and visit an ancient ghost city.

We disembark in Chongqing, China’s greatest inland industrial city and spend one night there. During our stay, we will be able to see the contrast between homes and shops in caves that were used to escape Japanese bombing, and numerous high-rise buildings and a sleek new monorail that follows the contours of this mountain city.

Next, we fly to the ancient capital of Xian to see the famed terracotta warrior army and an impressive display of Han Dynasty clay soldiers that has only recently been unearthed. Time permitting, we’ll even offer an optional 14 km bike ride around the top of the ancient city walls.

We finish our journey in bustling Shanghai, which the Chinese have chosen as their city of the future. An entire new downtown has been built across the river from the storied European-style bund of the 1920s, with over 100 skyscrapers having been built since 1990.

Please join us to witness today’s China: new and old. Traditional and modern. Always interesting, vibrant, and alive!
Map:

Day 1-4: Beijing: The Wall, the Square, the Duck

Upon arrival in Beijing, we will provide a complimentary transfer from the airport to our fine hotel near the heart of this international city. For those who arrive a day or two early, we will offer an optional half-day excursion. And since our hotel is just one block from Tiananmen Square, it’s a wonderful neighborhood to explore on your own as well.

Our official tour of China begins at the spiritual, emotional and patriotic heart of China, Tiananmen Square. We’ll take a morning tour of the Forbidden City, home to emperors for centuries. Our unique lunch will include the favorite foods of the last emperor at the Fangshan Restaurant in Beihai Park. In the afternoon we will head off to
the beautiful Summer Palace for a walk down the intricately painted Long Corridor. We return to Beijing for our Welcome Dinner, featuring Peking Duck.

We’ll start the next day with a visit to the Temple of Heaven, whose round tower with a bright blue roof is perhaps the most photographed single building in China. Next, we will take a rickshaw tour of an old neighborhood just north of the Forbidden City. Once home to workers at the palace, these small alleys called “hutongs” are lined by the walls of courtyards shared by several families. We will be privileged to have lunch with one of these families. This evening we close out the day with a cultural performance of kong-fu moves presented like a really energetic ballet.

One day we’ll drive north of Beijing to explore the Changling Tomb of the Ming Tombs. Then we continue on for a leisurely walk on the Great Wall! It was built to protect China from Mongolian nomads – only sometimes successfully, as Genghis Khan proved. When weather conditions permit, we visit the Mutianyu section of the Wall, often the destination for visiting presidents and royalty, but with very few other tourists, Chinese or foreign. At Mutianyu, you can take a cable car from the parking level to the Wall – or climb 1024 steps. Most people take the cable car down, but those steps are still there – or a toboggan sliding down a rounded metal chute.

Day 5-8: Cruising the Yangtze
From Beijing, we will take an early morning flight to the thriving river port city of Yichang. It is situated just below the 1980s Gezhouba Dam, which was the first to create a permanent barrier to the Yangtze River’s flow.

We will have a relaxing day seeing the highlights of Yichang, including lunch at the nearby Fangweng Restaurant. This restaurant is located in a cave in a bluff overlooking the Xiling Gorge, and has been included in a list of the 35 most scenic restaurants in the world!

We board our ship in time for dinner, then the next morning we set sail on our 400-mile journey up the magnificent Chang Jiang (Long River), as the Chinese call the Yangtze. Each day’s schedule is subject to change based on river and weather conditions. While we’re sailing, the ship’s staff offers a variety of cultural activities such as tai chi exercises, Chinese music, traditional Chinese medicine, and local arts and crafts.

We start our cruise in the most downstream and longest gorge, called Xiling. Our first optional shore excursion offers a guided walk up a verdant tree-lined ravine where a member of the local Tujia minority community demonstrate a variety of their traditions, including a mock wedding ceremony.

**Three Gorges Dam:** After lunch back on board our ship, we will be able to get a close-up view of the face of the huge dam itself, over a decade in the making. During our shore excursion, we will visit a park from which we can see the entire dam and in the distance the massive five-stage ship lock that has been carved out of a mountain to lift ships up to the new lake.

We’ll return to our ship, then when we receive clearance, we will enter the lower chamber of the lock for our estimated three-hour passage to the reservoir above the dam. The reservoir behind the dam was filled to half of its full capacity in 2003, then raised to its permanent level in 2009. We’ll spend the next few hours sailing through the western half of the Xiling Gorge.

Just before entering the Wu Gorge, our ship docks and we take a smaller ship several miles up a small tributary, the Shennong Stream. Then we switch to small “peapod boats” for an unforgettable trip up an even smaller
stream, pulled or rowed by strapping young men of the local Tujia minority group and accompanied by the singing of beautiful young women.

After returning to our ship we enter the Wu Gorge, known for unusual rock formations high on the bluffs. At the western end of the gorge, we pass the town of Wushan on the north bank. Until the old town was razed to prepare for the reservoir this gray, gritty river town saw no new building or even much maintenance for over a decade, but the site of the old city is now underwater, and the gleaming white city above has become the home for Wushan’s residents.

Later, be sure to be on deck for the Qutang Gorge, the shortest of the three gorges, but perhaps the most dramatic. The Chinese have such regard for this gorge that it is featured on their 5 yuan notes.

Our last shore excursion is scheduled at the city of Fengdu, one of the largest cities that was completely inundated by the waters of the Three Gorges reservoir. Fengdu’s most famous feature is the Ghost Temple, featuring numerous gaudy (and scary!) figures of devils and torturers on a bluff that remains above the new reservoir. The residents of Fengdu were moved across the river, so the old city of Fengdu itself is now a ghost city. Over several years, its buildings were taken apart brick by brick to avoid navigation hazards now that the old city is completely under water.

Finally, we will see the steep hills of Chongqing, marking the upper end of the Three Gorges Reservoir, and enjoy one last night on our ship.

**Day 9: Chongqing**

We disembark in Chongqing (pronounced “Chong-ching”), where we get our last views of the mighty Yangtze River. We will spend one night in a high-rise hotel overlooking this rapidly developing city. Time permitting we’ll get to know Chongqing and its environs, including visiting a museum donated to the people of Chongqing by the family of General Joseph Stilwell, a Chinese-speaking American general who served in the city in World War II. You might try another local tradition in the evening – a foot massage. Chongqing has a special place for HE Travel President Phil Sheldon, who was IBMs only employee in Sichuan Province in 1985 when he lived at a hot springs park upriver from Chongqing and worked with Chinese colleagues at a research center near the park.

**Day 10-12: Xian and the Terra Cotta Warriors**
From Chongqing, we’ll fly to Xian (pronounced “shee-an”), our home for the next three nights. Depending on arrival time, we may stop at the new museum of smaller Han Dynasty warrior figures en-route to our hotel.

We’ll have a full day tour to explore Xian’s 2200-year imperial history and observe the excavation of a 6000-year-old matriarchal civilization at the Banpo Museum. The day’s highlight will be an in-depth exploration of the three huge pits containing 6000 terracotta warriors unearthed after a farmer digging a well uncovered the first one in the 1970s.

The next day we’ll take a city tour of Xian, including the well-preserved Tang and Ming Dynasty City Walls and the picturesque Small Goose Pagoda with a fascinating array of contemporary Chinese art on display. We also visit the Chinese-style 8th-century mosque of Xian’s 100,000 strong Moslem community. Weather permitting, we’ll also leave some free time for an optional 14 km, a two-hour bike ride around the top of the wide ancient city walls. This evening we will attend the Tang Dynasty Dinner Show.

**Day 13-15: Shanghai on the Bund**

We will fly from Xian to Shanghai, where we will transfer to our centrally-located hotel which will be our home for three nights. Over the next two days, we will explore Shanghai, including the Yu Garden, the exceptional, modern Shanghai Museum, the authentic Longhua Temple (rarely visited by foreign guests), and a short boat ride to experience the magnificent harbor of this world-class port city.
There will also be time for you to explore Shanghai on your own. On one of our evenings in Shanghai, we will be
treated to a spirited acrobatic show, and we will enjoy a farewell dinner as we fondly remember our two weeks in
China.

**Day 16: Departure Day or Begin Tongli Water Village & Suzhou Extension**

Transfer to Shanghai’s new Pudong Airport to return home. Immigration formalities for North American residents
will occur at your first port of entry in North America.

**Tongli Water Village & Suzhou - Date TBD**

Our 1-day excursion west of Shanghai takes us to see the tree-lined canals and traditional shops of the well-
preserved Tongli Water Village. We also visit the larger city of Suzhou (pronounced soo-jo), known for its networks
of canals that feed into the Grand Canal. Suzhou is renowned as China’s leading center for silk production, for its
numerous classical gardens, and the exquisite new Suzhou Museum, designed by the prominent Chinese-American
architect I.M. Pei. We will provide a direct transfer from Suzhou to Shanghai’s Pudong Airport for those with late-
night flights home on the final tour day, or one more night at our Shanghai hotel, with airport transfers the
following day.
Hong Kong - Dates TBD

This 3-day extension is kicked off by a visit to Lantau Island, the largest outlying island of Hong Kong. We’ll take a 25-minute cable car ride from Tung Chung to Ngong Ping Plateau (520-metre-high) that offers stunning views.

Then we visit Lantau’s most famous monument – the Great Bronze Buddha Statue, the world’s tallest seated outdoor bronze statue of Buddha. Adjacent is the Po Lin Monastery (Precious Lotus), blessed with brightly decorated temples and floral garden.

During our stay, we’ll venture up to Victoria Peak on the tram for the most extraordinary vista of any modern city in the world, with a spectacular view of Victoria Harbor. We’ll take a sampan ride among the live-aboard boats of Aberdeen Harbour and enjoy a dim-sum lunch on the water. We’ll rest this afternoon before setting out to take in the night markets and a harbor light show.

We’ll also have a free day in Hong Kong to explore more historical locations or enjoy the shopper’s paradise (from ultra-chic luxury goods stores to street markets for every kind of product imaginable).

China and the Yangtze Main Tour

**Price includes:** All air and land transportation within China, including airport taxes for flights within China; Airport transfers on arrival and departure days; Hotel room and cabin on Yangtze River ship, each with private bath; 15 breakfasts, 11 lunches, 9 dinners; All hotel service charges, government taxes, porterage, and gratuities for included meals. Services of a knowledgeable HE Travel tour host (with a minimum number of participants); HE Travel provides complimentary Medical & Evacuation Insurance for every US Resident on our group tours who does not have other coverage.

**Not included:** Airfare to and from starting and ending points; Meals not described as being included in the itinerary; Personal items including alcoholic beverages, snacks, laundry, and telephone calls. Gratitudes to guides and host.

**Optional Tour Choices:**

- $2600 Single Supplement for standard rooms in hotels and onboard the ship.
- $1600 Single Supplement on most nights; but not all. This allows you a single room on the land portion of the tour but shared while on the ship.

**Contact us** for information about Upgraded hotel rooms and Cruise Cabins.
Extension to Suzhou & Water Village

**Price includes:** A day tour to visit Tongli and Suzhou; one night in the same Shanghai hotel as used on the main tour (no need to transfer luggage); 1 lunch and 1 breakfast; entrance fees to sites listed in itinerary; transfer to Shanghai Pudong Airport or Hongqiao Domestic Airport for flights home; All hotel service charges, government taxes, porterage, and gratuities for included meals.

**Not included:** 1 dinner; Personal items including: alcoholic beverages, snacks, laundry, and telephone calls.

$550 Suzhou & Water Village 1-day extension (per person in a shared room)

$720 Suzhou & Water Village 1-day extension (for the solo traveler)

Extension to Hong Kong

**Price Includes:** A Domestic flight from Shanghai to Hong Kong; Hotel in Hong Kong for three nights; all breakfasts, 1 lunch; a Private air-conditioned vehicle for airport transfers and local transportation; Private English-speaking tour guide; Admissions to the sightseeing spots listed in the itinerary; Government taxes and fees.

**Not Included:** Outbound flight out of Hong Kong to your next destination; 2 lunches, 3 dinners; Optional tours in Hong Kong; Tips for guide and driver; Any other services not specified in the itinerary; Personal items including alcoholic beverages, snacks, laundry, and telephone calls.

$2400 Hong Kong 3-day extension (per person in a shared room)

$2950 Hong Kong 3-day extension (for the solo traveler)

“We traveled through millennia of mythology, history, culture, geography, as well as modern-day living of an ancient and extremely populous people. The landscape alone is mind-boggling.” — Tat Haen Lie, Australia

“As always, Ebensten Tours packs a lot of great surprises —-their organization is superb, and the in-depth coverage of the culture of China added a great deal to the trip” — Frank Pennino, Los Angeles, CA

“China with Phil Sheldon and the Hanns Ebensten operation is a full and rich experience. I am amazed at all we experienced. It was the best possible way to be introduced to this amazing ancient and now 21-st century country.” — Susanne Woods, Key West, FL

**What if I am traveling alone?**

So are most of the people who travel with us. You do not need to pay extra to travel by yourself. Prices are per
person, and the single supplement applies only if you’d like a room by yourself. For selected trips, including cruises, we will charge half the single supplement if you request a roommate but we can’t match you with someone.

**Where does the tour start and end?**

This tour starts in Beijing and ends in Shanghai.

**What is the Activity Level of This Tour?**

1 2 3 4 5

Traveling in China requires some stamina for walking on uneven surfaces and occasionally up and down hills, especially in towns along the Yangtze. Be prepared for the unexpected, as travel in China is always unpredictable.

**Additional Questions**

For answers to your additional questions, please email info@hetravel.com or call 305-294-8174