

Going for gold

All eyes are on China as it plays host to the 2008 Olympics. But sport isn't the only reason you'll want to visit...

best for culture Beijing

China's capital, the majestic city of Beijing, with its palaces, temples, museums and gardens, is steeped in history.

First stop is the Great Wall, a staggering 4,163 miles long. It was built under the Qin dynasty from 214BC to protect against invasion from the North. The Badaling section is close to the Ming Tombs, where 13 of the 17 Ming emperors are buried.

Next visit the Forbidden City, former home of China's royal family. So named

because commoners couldn't enter it, the city dates from the 15th century, and has an astonishing 8,707 rooms.

And the Underground City – a huge complex constructed under Beijing which can house over 30,000 people, complete with factories, shops and restaurants – also has a small section open to foreigners.

Tiananmen Square, in the heart of Beijing City, is the largest square of its kind in the world. Famous for the 1989 democracy protests, its Chinese national flag ceremonies are well worth watching.

See The Lama Temple, Beijing's most visited religious site, home to the Lama Sect of Buddhism. It has an impressive Buddha statue, the largest ever carved from a single tree (both pictured left). And the temple

even has its own subway stop.

Or head south of Beijing to see people practising martial arts, by the Temple of Heaven, one of the holiest places in the country.

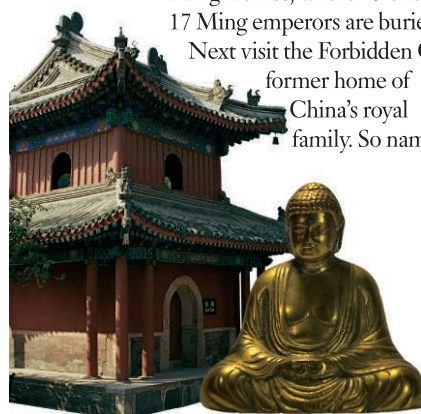
For a glimpse of Beijing's village-style community, take a tour of the winding *butongs* (alleys) surrounding the city. Or hire a bike and pedal through the streets to see local life.

Beijing's parks also attract the tourists. The Summer Palace has the largest royal garden in China – take a walk round Longevity Hill and Kunming Lake. Beihai Park, its Winter Palace, is home to the Round City and you can rent a rowboat on the lake.

An additional two million visitors are expected during the 2008 Olympics in August. Tickets from Premier Events – 0870 203 4040.



Above and right market scenes and a boy in ceremonial dress. The amazing Great Wall of China



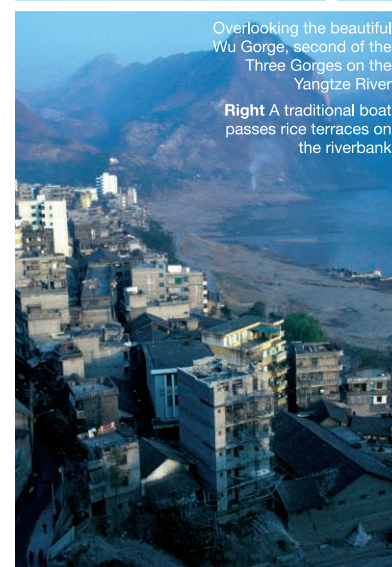
best for romance Yangtze River

Get on a slow boat in China and travel along its Golden Waterway, better known as the Yangtze River, and you will see some of the country's most breathtaking landscape unfold.

Sailing through the Three Gorges section, with its dam that rivals the Hoover, you feel the immense power of

the third longest river in the world. And the sight of the sheer cliffs of rock and the surrounding natural beauty is quite mesmerising.

And stop off in Chongqing, situated at the junction of the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers, for a city tour which includes its famous zoo and the chance to see pandas.



Overlooking the beautiful Wu Gorge, second of the Three Gorges on the Yangtze River

Right A traditional boat passes rice terraces on the riverbank



The Oriental Pearl Tower overlooking the Huangpu River



Above Tasty dim sum, literally 'little favourite close to the heart'

Left The impressive Jin Mao building towers over Shanghai

best for chic Shanghai

One of the world's fastest growing cities, Shanghai has transformed itself over the last 15 years. It's easy to be seduced by the glamour of this cosmopolitan city, where designer bars and shops meet ancient temples.

To the east side of the Huangpu River is Pudong, the face of contemporary China. Its space-age skyscrapers dominate the skyline. The Oriental Pearl Tower is the most prominent landmark and the 88-storey Jin Mao Building boasts breathtaking views.

On the other side of the river is The Bund, the old face of Shanghai with its 1920's architecture. Shanghai's attractions include the Transrapid Maglev train that zips passengers into the

city at a staggering 430 kilometres an hour. Or, for something less hectic, visit the Yu Gardens, with their pagodas, and ponds full of carp, for some peace and tranquillity.

Shanghai is excellent for shopping. Bargain hunt at its bustling markets, including Dongtai Road Antique Market, just great for Mao memorabilia and kitsch souvenirs. Or visit one of the upmarket shopping centres at The Bund.

At night, Shanghai's hip bars and restaurants really come alive. Do sample the city's delicious *dim sum* and visit Cloud 9, at the top of the Hyatt, for a cocktail. Pier 1 at 82 YiChang Road, has a bar, club and restaurant, with gorgeous river views.



best for history Xian

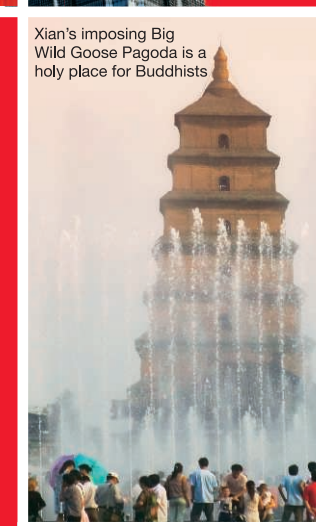
One of the greatest cities known to civilisation, Xian was where the legendary Silk Road began, stretching as far as Rome. Relics of old palaces and temples can still be seen throughout this fascinating city, in the heart of China's mainland.

Xian is home to the famous Terracotta Warriors, the 8,000 life-size, hand-carved warriors (pictured above right) which were buried alongside China's first emperor, and a popular tourist attraction. And a recently discovered set of warriors is also on display in a small museum outside the city. The Shaanxi History Museum

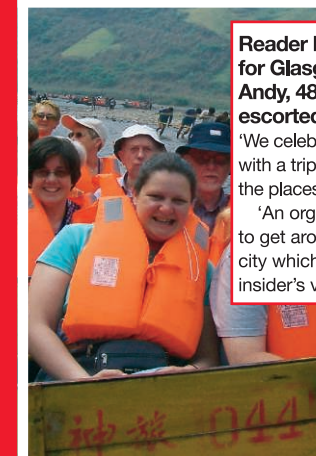
is a treasure trove of relics, exhibiting over 3,000 historical antiques. And for some great views over Xian, climb The Big Goose Pagoda, featured in the cult 1970s TV series *Monkey*.

If you're in search of natural beauty, China has thousands of hot springs. And none is more scenic than the Huaqing Hot Springs in Xian's Lishan mountain.

The Islamic influence is also evident with mosques, market places and teahouses dotted around the city centre.



Xian's imposing Big Wild Goose Pagoda is a holy place for Buddhists



Reader Lynne Colvin, 40, who works for Glasgow Council, and husband Andy, 48, travelled around China on an escorted tour with Cosmos Tourama. 'We celebrated our 15th wedding anniversary with a trip to China and were amazed at the places we visited.

'An organised tour was the perfect way to get around. We had local guides in every city which was fantastic as they gave us an insider's view. Our tour started in Beijing – on

the first night we had dinner in a revolving restaurant, with downtown views, thinking it couldn't get better. But the whole trip totally exceeded our expectations. From the opera in Beijing to seeing pandas and sampling local delicacies such as toffee potatoes in Xian, every day was so varied. But the highlight was an unforgettable boat trip along the Yangtze escorted by men singing traditional Chinese songs. Our trip to China was truly memorable.'

Getting there

Cosmos Tourama offers a wide range of escorted tours and cruises to China. Prices start from £1,139** per person and are all offered on full board basis. Options include the 15-night China and Yangtze River Cruise featuring the highlights of Beijing, the Great Wall of China and Ming Tombs, Shanghai and the Terracotta Warriors at Xian. Flights are nonstop with Air China from Heathrow or with regional connections from several UK airports. For further details visit www.cosmostourama.co.uk or telephone 0871 423 8448 for a brochure.

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