

CULTURE + WALKING

# CHINA

## Shanghai to Shangri-La



*Classic*  
JOURNEYS



“Classic Journeys provides unbeatable access to experiences around the globe.”

— *Travel + Leisure*

## A Curated Cultural Experience

Which China is in your mind? The land of terra cotta soldiers and the Forbidden City? Or a wildflower meadow where yak herders wander under the gaze of the Himalayas? Is it a Yangtze promenade on Shanghai's Bund? Or a morning on a bamboo raft floating on a rural river past dragon-teeth peaks? Is it an imperial-scale banquet? Or a dim sum lunch in a private home? Our China is all those things and much more. In true Classic Journeys fashion, we blend the essential sights with unexpected experiences—and take care of all the logistics for you. So you hike (and picnic) on the best stretch of the Great Wall. Wander country paths that farmers use to take their water buffalo to the rice paddies. And ascend to Shangri-La: the gorgeous highlands of Yunnan on the Tibetan frontier. This journey has a fine sense of balance—the travel equivalent of feng shui—that will reveal China to you like no other tour.

## DAY 1

### GREAT WALL

- Walk the most scenic (and non-touristed) section of the Great Wall between Jinshanling and Simatai
- Enjoy a picnic lunch along the Great Wall

On your international flight to Beijing, you'll have arrived late yesterday. So with a night to rest up, we can begin our excursion to the Great Wall. The Great Wall is essential to any visit, but what we can live without is crowding shoulder-to-shoulder onto the portions that are easiest to reach. Our preference is for an after-breakfast drive to Jinshanling for a day on a spectacular stretch that's much less visited. Porters from a nearby village will accompany us with water, snacks and lunch as we walk a 7-mile leg of the wall built in the mountains in 1368. As we make our way toward Simatai, our guide has plenty of opportunity to explain the history and engineering of the wall. After all, this stretch alone has 67 combat towers, plus embrasures, watchtowers, crenellations and more. When you've seen pictures of dignitaries on the Great Wall, they're standing on restored sections. One reason we love this area is that we also traverse some untouched sections that speak to the true age of the Great Wall. Because we've allocated the whole day, we take our time and stop for a picnic in the gorgeous surroundings. You're unlikely to know anyone who's seen this wonder of the world in this detail. After returning to our hotel, we'll have time to relax before dinner in one of Beijing's most spectacular restaurants.

**OVERNIGHT: BEIJING**  
**MEALS: L, D**

## DAY 2

### BEIJING

- Follow the emperors' footsteps on a guided visit to Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City
- Share a lunch and dumpling making lesson with a local family
- Relax on a pedicab ride through the historic hutongs neighborhoods

This morning we begin our first day in Beijing city with a guided walk that takes in many of the city's premier sights. We begin in Tiananmen Square, not just because it's the world's largest public square, but because this is how the emperors approached the Forbidden City. You've seen pictures, of course, but the scale is nearly impossible to imagine until you experience it yourself. A portrait of Mao Zedong looks down as we pass his mausoleum, a towering symbol of the country's recent past. But here, as in much of the country, relics of the imperial ages remain. Passing through the Gate of Heavenly Peace, constructed during the Ming Dynasty, we explore the Forbidden City, which for almost five centuries was home to the Emperor and his massive household.

Then we have one of those distinctively Chinese experiences—as our perspective shifts in just a few blocks from the expansive square down to the hutongs, ancient city lanes barely wider than the arm-span of a tall man. Aboard 3-wheeled pedicabs, it's almost as if we time-travel into the residential Beijing of centuries ago. The ancient family homes here show nothing to the public. Behind their large wooden doors lie courtyards which most visitors never see, but we have a standing invitation to visit with a family here. We'll enter to share a lunch of dim sum – the

traditional dumplings. If you're so inclined, you can even get a lesson in how to make the delicacies.

After lunch, we arrange access to the Temple of Heaven. Housed in buildings constructed in 1420 specifically for the emperors to worship heaven, it displays unique circular architecture and is three times the area of the Forbidden City. Locals young and old gather at the Temple of Heaven to practice Tai Qi, Kung Fu, traditional dancing and sword exercises, so we get a close-up view of many of the disciplines esteemed by the Chinese.

**OVERNIGHT: BEIJING**  
**MEALS: B, L**

## DAY 3

### XIAN

- Up-close visit of the Terra cotta warriors
- Enjoy a thousand-year-old music and dance performance

After breakfast, we transfer to the airport for a 2-hour flight to Xian. This 3,100-year-old city served as capital for 13 dynasties and some historians place it in the league of ancient capitals like Athens, Cairo and Rome. Today, of course, it's best known for its buried army of 8,000 terra cotta soldiers, first discovered in 1974 by peasants digging a well.

We'll pay an extended visit to the Terra Cotta Warriors Museum where our guides do an exceptional job of interpreting this amazing archeological site. It was the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty who commanded the creation of these figures. Each is 5' 10" tall, each has a unique facial expression, and they stand at attention in battle formation. Contingent on crowds, weather and inscrutable regulations, our well-connected guides always attempt to offer our guests a more privileged view of the soldiers.

After checking into our luxury hotel, we enjoy a dinner that includes a performance of thousand-year-old music and dance from the Tang Dynasty.

**OVERNIGHT: XIAN**  
**MEALS: B, L, D**

## DAY 4

### XIAN

- Relax on a scenic countryside walk to the "Painters' Village"
- Accept an invitation into a family home for lunch and a painting instruction
- Muslim Street and Great Mosque

A short drive from Xian, one of the most unusual villages you'll ever visit lies in a broad valley surrounded by mountains. To reach this classic setting, we pass through a landscape of pomegranate orchards and persimmon trees. The "Painters' Village"—is home to many farming families who remain deeply connected to traditional agriculture. The fascinating difference, though, is that many of them are also accomplished painters, known for their vivid depictions of local life. We're welcomed into one of their homes for lunch, an explanation of their artistry, and a chance to try our hands at painting.

After lunch, we'll transfer back to Xian and visit the Muslim Street and Great Mosque. For over 1,300 years, Muslims have been an integral part of daily life in Xian at the eastern

end of the Silk Road, with the city's Hui community tracing their roots back to Persian and Arabic traders. After dinner, we'll go for a stroll with our guide through the Muslim Quarter, where the way of life derives as much from the ancient cultures of Central Asia as it does from mainland China.

**OVERNIGHT: XIAN**  
**MEALS: B, L**

## DAY 5

### SHANGRI-LA

- Share a countryside path in view of the Himalayas with local ethnic people
- Accept an invitation to tea in a Tibetan family's home
- Hang a prayer flag

This morning we transfer to the Xian Airport for our flight to Zhongdian. After the temperate lowlands of Eastern China, the climate within view of the Himalayas inspires a different kind of walking. We'll be dropped off at Shika Snow ("Black Yak") Mountain in the midst of stunning scenery. Snow-capped peaks, forests, broad meadows that run down to pure lakes—it's all here. The Naxi and Tibetan peoples call this landscape home, and we won't just hear about their cultures.

After lunch, we'll visit a local Tibetan family and you won't want to pass up the chance to sip their yak butter tea. Later, we pause at the temple of the 5 Wisdom Buddhas where strings of prayer flags dance in strong breezes.

**OVERNIGHT: ZHONGDIAN**  
**MEALS: B, L**

## DAY 6

### SHANGRI-LA

- Exchange greeting with yak herders in a wildflower meadow
- Pay a quiet visit to Songzanlin Monastery to hear monks chanting

After breakfast, we immerse ourselves in the heart of Shangri-La with a walk in China's first and largest national park. It's a terrain of lakes that teem with wild yellow ducks and wildflower meadows. Yak herders on horseback share the grazing with wild musk deer.

Lunch in a local restaurant is followed by a stirring visit to the sprawling Songzanlin Monastery, built in the 1700s by the Fifth Dalai Lama. Positioned on a commanding slope, it floats above the surrounding countryside. Amid the ornate carvings and gilded accents, we hear the chanting monks and ringing bells. It's an altogether mystical experience—one of those sublime, humbling moments when sight, sound and place blend in a way that can't be replicated anywhere else on earth.

Zhongdian is a living, breathing town with something of a frontier spirit. You'll see that in the way that black pigs and yaks sometimes wander the streets. And you'll get a great look at local life in the vegetable market as well where vendors offer everything from salty/sweet yak cheese to noodle soup. If you're looking for an ideal memento of your journey, be sure not to miss the black clay cookware that's typical of the region.

**OVERNIGHT: ZHONGDIAN**  
**MEALS: B, L, D**

## DAY 7

### GUILIN

- Visit Tiger Leaping Gorge
- Fly to Guilin
- Settle into your hotel on the banks of the Li River

Early this morning you'll meet your guide and transfer by vehicle to Tacheng to visit the Tiger Leaping Gorge. The gorge is believed to be the deepest in the world. From the top of the gorge you can look down the steeply angled mountain side to the rushing Gold Sands (Jinsha) River with its frothing rapids more than 700 feet below. This afternoon, we'll transfer to Lijiang airport for our flight to Guilin in the Guanxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Guilin lies in one of China's loveliest regions. We'll check into our hotel on the banks of the Li River where, just outside our windows, local residents stroll and dance at dusk. You're welcome to join them if you like before dinner as you have the rest of the evening at leisure to settle in and relax.

**OVERNIGHT: GUILIN**  
**MEALS: B**

## DAY 8

### GUILIN / YANGSHUO

- Start the day watching local residents practice tai chi, ribbon, sword and fan dancing along the river
- Marvel at the cinematic terrain and fishermen on a Li River cruise to Yangshuo
- Stroll on a countryside walk through lush fields and bamboo forests

On a morning walk by the river, we'll witness the average daily spectacle of Guilin's citizens in their open-air practice of tai chi as well as ribbon, sword and fan dancing. It's a typical, communal scenario that's essential to Chinese life, and it's one of the many experiences your local guide will be glad to explain and interpret for you.

By mid-morning, we'll move from the banks of the Li River to its waters for a leisurely cruise through a landscape of almost indescribable beauty. It's like an ancient scroll painting come to life as you float through a terrain of karstic mountains. That's the geological term for narrow, soaring pinnacles eroded from limestone and more popularly known as "dragon's teeth." It's certainly a photographer's dream as it's easy to capture these mountains, those in the foreground in sharp detail and more distant ones fading into misty softness. Along the way, you'll see fishermen who use cormorants rather than hook and line. They send these long-necked fishing birds into the water, but a band around the neck constricts it just enough that the bird can't swallow its catch and must give it up to the fisherman.

In the late afternoon, we'll debark and make a brief drive up to Yangshuo, a small rural village. From here, we'll go out into the countryside on foot, following dirt paths through lush fields and bamboo forests. This region of Guangxi Province is well known for its mix of ethnic minorities including the Hui, Zhuang and Yao, and you'll discover their influences here and at the local restaurant where we have dinner. Here—and throughout the tour—your guide is an indispensable resource. We love to eat the authentic food of the regions we visit, and if you're adventuresome, your guide will be happy to help you select the local specialties. If your palate is more conservative, you can count on good advice to avoid culinary surprises.

If you marveled at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic Games, tonight brings a special pleasure. The same director has created a spectacular outdoor folk dancing show with a panoramic stretch of river as the stage. It's a dazzling way to cap off a memorable day.

**OVERNIGHT: YANGSHUO**

**MEALS: B, L, D**

## DAY 9

### YANGSHUO

- Begin your day with a Tai Chi lesson
- Bike among rice paddies and farmhouses on an easy guided ride
- Float down a lazy river on a bamboo raft
- Try your hand at cooking Guangxi food

Everywhere in China, we'll have seen the local people in parks exercising in the distinctive slow-motion style of Tai Chi, "supreme ultimate force." This morning, a professional master will guide us through some of the basic forms of this unique blending of exercise and meditation, a refreshing way to start the day.

Then we are off into the countryside where we pick up bikes for an easy, casual ride on the level country roads. There's no better way to soak in Yangshuo's landscape close up. Along the way, we pedal past rice paddies where we may see farmers at work with their water buffalo. All around us are farmhouses and orchards backed by mountains. We'll dismount on the banks of the Yulong River and rest our legs as we go floating on a traditional bamboo raft in the valley lined with limestone peaks. Reunited with our bikes, we take another short ride to see the fantastic views from Moon Hill Park before lunch.

*Please note: E-bikes are available on a request basis.*

This afternoon, you'll have time to relax at our resort with a cool dip in the riverside pool or maybe a spa treatment. Later we have a special treat. A local cook invites us right into the kitchen to roll up our sleeves and participate in cooking the evening meal. The cuisine in this region has nice rural simplicity that puts the emphasis on the incredible variety of ingredients that are grown in the nearby fields. In this fun-filled instruction, you'll learn about techniques of using the unique tools of the Chinese kitchen and get recipes you can recreate at home. The grand finale is the chance to sit down and share the meal we create together.

**OVERNIGHT: YANGSHUO**

**MEALS: B, L, D**

## DAY 10

### SHANGHAI

- Transfer to incredible Shanghai
- Explore the classic Yuyuan Gardens

This morning's breakfast is followed by a flight to Shanghai, the onetime fishing village that stands now as China's most dazzling modern city. But before we move into that cityscape of skyscrapers, we'll pay a peaceful visit to the 400-year-old Yuyuan Gardens. It's one of the world's great classic gardens with areas divided by sinuous dragon walls.

After lunch at the garden, we'll check into our 5-star hotel in the heart of Shanghai. The balance of the afternoon is at your leisure before we share a dinner at one of the city's finest restaurants.

**OVERNIGHT: SHANGHAI**

**MEALS: B, D**

## DAY 11

### SHANGHAI

- Visit the "Venice of China"—the historic canal village of Zhujiajiao
- Stroll down famed Nanjing Shopping Road
- Walking through old and new Shanghai on The Bund

It sometimes seems like every country has its "Venice," but the "water town" of Zhujiajiao at the edge of Shanghai is surely one of the loveliest. Thirty-seven delicate bridges cross the many canals in what is regarded as one of China's best-preserved cities. We'll wander on its willow-shaded walkways past shops that specialize in tea, silk and tofu—and come away with a real sense of history.

Antiquity aside, Shanghai is also one of the great shopping meccas. This afternoon, you'll have a chance to shop on Nanjing Shopping Road, one of the city's first and still its most lively retail districts. Afterward, we'll look after any shopping bags you've accumulated as we head off for The Bund. It's the legendary waterfront street lined with European colonial-style buildings from the pre-revolutionary days. Today, its promenade is like a walk through living history. On one side of the river, you're in the architectural relics of 19th-century powers; across the water, some of the world's tallest skyscrapers symbolize the economic growth of China. Tonight, our time together ends with an extravagant farewell dinner in one of the city's most opulent restaurants.

**OVERNIGHT: SHANGHAI**

**MEALS: B, L, D**

## DAY 12

### DEPARTURE

- Return home, or continue to Yangtze Cruise extension

If you opt for our Yangtze Cruise Extension, we'll fly you to Chongqing. Or you may choose, like many visitors to Shanghai, to continue on to Hong Kong on your own.

**MEALS: B**

## Tour Hotels



### Regent Hotel Beijing

This 5-star sanctuary elegantly blends contemporary luxury with historic charm. All rooms offer views of the Forbidden City or the ancient hutong neighborhoods. The property offers five restaurants and lounges.

**OVERNIGHT: BEIJING | NIGHTS: 2**



### Sofitel Xian

A blend of Xian's heritage and classic French hospitality, this stunning 5-star hotel is within the Xian city walls near many historical sites. Contemporary style rooms have rainforest showers and complimentary WiFi.

**OVERNIGHT: | NIGHTS: 2**



### Shangri-La Diqing

A hidden paradise in the city of Shangri-La, the hotel evokes a rich and graceful world, filled with alluring Tibetan artefacts and quiet elegance. From each room, spectacular scenery opens up with panoramic views of the stunning mountainous region.

**OVERNIGHT: SHANGRI-LA, YUNNAN PROVINCE | NIGHTS: 2**



### Shangri-la Guilin

This hotel sits on the banks of the picturesque Li River in Guilin, one of China's most beautiful cities. The large, lavish rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows with views of the city, the Li River, or the karst mountains.

**OVERNIGHT: GUILIN | NIGHTS: 1**



### **Banyan Tree Yangshuo**

Situated on the banks of the Li River, the gabled roofs of this world-class resort mimic the karst mountains that surround it. The modern suites feature classic Chinese furnishings, marble mosaics and ink-wash paintings and are wonderfully serene.

**OVERNIGHT: YANGSHUO, GUILIN | NIGHTS: 2**



### **Fairmont Peace Hotel Shanghai**

A luxurious Art-Deco masterpiece, brilliantly reinvented for the 21st century where old fashioned glamor sparkles with a new luster. Situated at the famous Bund promenade, it's the perfect place to explore Shanghai's spectacular scenery and lifestyle.

**OVERNIGHT: SHANGHAI SHI | NIGHTS: 2**

## Tour Dates & Prices

Tour Dates	Price per Person	Price per Person
	Double Occupancy	Single Occupancy
April 6-17, 2020	\$6,995	\$8,990
September 7-18, 2020	\$7,095	\$9,090
October 5-16, 2020	\$7,095	\$9,090
April 5-16, 2021	\$7,095	\$9,090
May 24-Jun 4, 2021	\$7,195	\$9,190
September 6-17, 2021	\$7,195	\$9,190
October 11-22, 2021	\$7,195	\$9,190

Want a different date? Or your own date? Visit [CLASSICJOURNEYS.COM/PRIVATE](https://CLASSICJOURNEYS.COM/PRIVATE) to learn more about private journeys.

## INTERNAL AIRFARE

This trip includes internal flights, which are priced separately from the land tour at an approximate cost of \$1495 per person.

## Trip Essentials

**TRIP LENGTH:** 12 Days, 11 Nights

**START:** 9:00 AM Lobby of Regent Beijing Hotel, Beijing, China

**END:** 10:00 AM Lobby of Fairmont Peace, Shanghai, China Optional transfer to Shanghai Airport is included.

**TERRAIN:** Walks are mostly along timeless paths in towns, villages & countryside. We're at sea level with some rolling hills during most of the week. On days 4-6 we're at 3200m elevation in Shangri-La, but walks will have the same easygoing fashion.

## What's Included

- Memorable accommodations for 11 nights
- All breakfasts, 9 lunches and 7 dinners
- Full-time experienced guide(s) who are with you throughout the trip, handle behind-the-scenes logistics
- Admissions to sites and other scheduled events as noted in the detailed daily itinerary
- Gratuities for hotels, meals and baggage
- All land transportation during the trip

## Above & Beyond Benefits

- Invisible Check-In
- Privileged Access Events

READY TO BOOK?  
CLICK TO MAKE A RESERVATION

Or give us a call

1-833-387-1210

Mon-Fri 8:00AM – 5:00PM PST

[moreinfo@classicjourneys.com](mailto:moreinfo@classicjourneys.com)



## TRAVEL WORRY-FREE!

It's easy with insurance from Travel Guard. Your policy can cover trip cancellation, travel delays, lost luggage, medical emergencies, and more. If you are traveling with kids, add them to your policy at no extra cost. [Click here](#) or call 800-826-4919 for details.

## AMBASSADOR CLUB

As a Classic Journeys guest, you are invited to join the Ambassador Club after your first Classic Journeys tour. As a member, you'll have access to a [whole suite of Ambassador benefits](#) you can use immediately and as often as you like.

## ENJOY THE UNEXPECTED

When you travel with Classic Journeys, you can expect handcrafted surprises built into every trip, but some things just can't be anticipated. Unusual weather, a once-a-year festival or an unscheduled site closing will inspire us and your local guide to improvise and modify this itinerary. Likewise, the hotels named here are used on the majority of our trips, but occasionally one of them can't accommodate us. If that happens, you can count on us to let you know before departure and make sure you're in a hotel of equal or better quality. It's our goal to make your trip exceptional!

\*\*Any discount offered cannot be combined with other offers, and only applies to published (regularly scheduled public) departure dates in our catalogs or on our website.

# THE Classic Journeys Difference



## HANDCRAFTING TRIPS OF A LIFETIME.

At the end of the day, we fundamentally believe that every guest on every departure of every trip should have a trip of a lifetime. We're fortunate to play the role of well-connected friend, linking our guests with amazing guides, artisans, winemakers, hoteliers, restaurateurs, naturalists, and too many others to list here.

That's what motivates me and our team — in our La Jolla HQ and around the world — every day. Join Us!

President & Founder



## You can expect the highest standards:



### Luxurious Lodgings:

Ours include coveted properties that appear in "World's Best" and "Gold List" rankings.



### Included Activities:

You'll never be surprised with add-on fees on your activities that include snorkeling to cooking lessons.



### Local Guides:

Your guides are locals who are always at your side like well-connected friends.



### Small Group Travel:

With an average of just 10-12 guests, it's a small footprint that guarantees you access that's off-limits to larger groups.



### Amazing Cuisine:

From Michelin-starred restaurants to lunch in a farmhouse kitchen, you'll have a seat for the region's signature dishes.



### Unmatched Value:

"Excellent value" and "unbeatable access" are two of the reasons that Travel + Leisure has consistently voted us a World's Best Tour Operator.

## You'll enjoy these handcrafted travel experiences in China...

- Hiking the most scenic stretch of the Great Wall
- Dancing with locals in the town square of Yangshuo
- Receiving an up-close visit of the Terracotta Warriors with your expert local guide
- Listening to the chanting of the monks at Songzanlin Monastery
- Following easy paths on a guided bike ride among rice paddies and farmhouses

*"A wonderful guide and perfect for us. Her knowledge of English, history, cuisine, shopping, environment, etc. was excellent. We were very comfortable relying on her for everything we could possibly need and she anticipated things before we needed them."*

—Donald B., Jupiter, FL

Let's Go!

TO RESERVE: 833.493.5038 | [CLASSICJOURNEYS.COM/RESERVATIONS](https://www.classicjourneys.com/reservations)

Extend your time...

## Yangtze River Cruise

CHINA | POST TOUR



### Extension Prices

**DOUBLE OCCUPANCY:** From \$1,857.00 per person

**SINGLE OCCUPANCY:** From \$2,752.00 per person

### Extension Essentials

**EXTENSION LENGTH:** 5 Days & 4 Nights

**EXTENSION BEGINS:** Shanghai

**EXTENSION ENDS:** Shanghai

For more information about how to extend your Classic Journeys vacation, call us at 833-387-1210 or email [moreinfo@classicjourneys.com](mailto:moreinfo@classicjourneys.com).

### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Taking a sampan boat ride to view the river's picturesque mini gorges
- Admiring Shibaozhai, a Chinese architectural gem
- Standing beside the world's largest hydropower project

You might also enjoy...



## Bhutan

### Himalayan Villages & Monasteries

Culture + Walking

#### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Exploring dramatic Himalayan monasteries
- Meeting rice-farmers and yak-herders at work in the countryside
- Witnessing the butter-lamp blessing ceremony and the skill of native masked dancers

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/bhutan/>.



## India

### Rajasthan & Taj Mahal

Culture + Walking

#### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Exploring rustic villages
- Traversing countryside trails
- Scouting bustling bazaars with a local chef

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/india/>.



## Japan

### Tokyo to Kyoto

Culture + Walking

#### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Strolling the streets of Tokyo's old town of Asakusa
- Riding the bullet train from Hakone to Kyoto
- Sipping tea at an authentic Japanese tea ceremony

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/japan-tours/>.

You might also enjoy...



## Myanmar

### Mandalay to the Temples of Bagan

**Culture + Walking**

#### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Shopping in local village markets
- Meeting the fisherman, farmers and cigar makers
- Hot-air ballooning over the temples of Bagan

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/myanmar/>.



## Nepal

### Himalayan Villages & Chitwan Safari

**Culture + Walking**

#### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Meeting Nepali farmers and villages on valley walks
- Experiencing sunrise over the Himalayas
- Spotting one-horned rhinos in Chitwan National Park

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/nepal-walking-tours/>.



## Thailand

### Phuket, Chiang Mai & Chiang Rai

**Culture + Walking**

#### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Cruising through Phang Nga Bay on a traditional junk boat
- Mingling with members of colorful hill tribes
- Communing elephants along forest and jungle paths

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/thailand/>.

You might also enjoy...



## Southeast Asia

Vietnam, Laos & Cambodia

Culture + Walking

### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Rambling past rice fields to friendly villages untouched by tourism
- Playing with an elephant in the Mekong River
- Absorbing Angkor Wat at sunrise

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/vietnam/>.

# “Enthusiasm is Contagious”

AS TRAVEL + LEISURE NAMES CLASSIC JOURNEYS THE WORLD'S BEST TOUR OPERATOR FOR 2019, FOUNDER EDWARD PIEGZA REVEALS HOW IT FEELS. ENTHUSIASTICALLY.



*EDITOR'S NOTE: Just before publication of this issue, Travel + Leisure magazine announced that its readers have voted Classic Journeys the World's Best Tour Operator for 2019. It's the second time Classic Journeys has won that recognition and the 14th consecutive year the company has been in the Top 10.*

### **Congratulations! How did you get the news?**

I received a top-secret email and phone call from the editor of *Travel + Leisure* a few weeks ago with orders not to tell ANYONE. Friends and neighbors must have wondered why my smile has been so extra big lately. Now they know.

### **And how does it feel to be the World's Best Tour Operator again?**

Awesome. Humbling. So, so satisfying. Deeply gratifying to learn that we have achieved what we set out to do which is to handcraft trips of a lifetime for every guest who travels with us. I'm known as long-winded, so I could probably come up with 10 or 15 more ways to describe it if you want me to keep going.

### **Why do you think *Travel + Leisure* gave you this recognition?**

Actually, it isn't the *T+L* editors who make the decision. That's the best part. Their readers cast the votes. So the people who do the traveling, the guests who explore the world with us and our competitors — they are the ones who raised their hands to tell *T+L* that Classic Journeys is the World's Best Tour Operator based on their own experiences. Let me say it right here: "To all of you who voted for us, you are the World's Best Guests!"

### **What do you think makes your guests the World's Best Guests?**

That's easy. They are curious. They care about connecting with people of different cultures and immersing themselves in the world. They treasure experiences more than things. Like the old ad slogan went, they go for the gusto and crave the chance to have one-of-a-kind moments. They are incredibly interesting and interested people, and all of us at Classic Journeys count it as a real privilege to share in their passion for travel. And we feel that way on the

other 364 days of the year when we're not celebrating recognition like this.

### **I guess this is what you meant when you told me that "Enthusiasm is contagious."**

Absolutely. That's not our official motto, but it could be. We love what we do. We enjoy helping guests figure out how to invest their precious time and budget. I can honestly say that all of us feel that way — the Guest Services folks who interact with you while you're planning your trip, the Tour Operations team members who plan all of the logistics, the local guides who lead each one of our trips full time. There's just a huge amount of positive energy in what we do, and I think it truly is hard to resist. We'd climb into every one of our guest's suitcases and go along with them if we could. Because we can't, we call each guest while they're on tour just to be sure they are having a trip of a lifetime.

### **Has anyone ever called Classic Journeys obsessive?**

I hope so, because we are. Everything is in the details. For instance, we've created a special tour for the total eclipse of the sun which is going to pass over parts of South America in 2020. We've already analyzed likely traffic patterns in the most remote areas and figured out how to structure our itinerary so that our guests will be in place in the path of totality while the people who don't plan ahead will be stuck in jams on remote dirt roads. We enjoy obsessing about details like that so that our guests never have to.



### **How can you top this?**

Oh, we never let ourselves think of it that way. We just continue to approach every single guest on each and every departure like the most important guest we've ever had. It seems to be working! Of course, we keep looking for new ways to win more converts. For 2019, we've launched a new series of Classic Journeys that are based from

## **"I voted for you!"**

We've heard that expression so many times lately from guests who registered their votes with *Travel + Leisure*. Given the results, we know it's true ... and you know that your votes really count!

### **STAFF AND GUIDES**

"I always feel like I'm traveling with a best friend. I prefer your local guides to the ones that other companies fly in."

### **ITINERARIES AND DESTINATIONS**

"If it's on my bucket list, you always seem to go there. Of course, with so many options you always seem to make my list longer and longer!"

### **ACTIVITIES**

"On your trips, I've cooked with Michelin chefs, sung songs with Quechua schoolchildren, and walked on glaciers with the descendants of Vikings. Fun doesn't begin to describe it."

### **ACCOMMODATIONS**

"How you manage so many 5-star properties on these trips shocks me. But please, please, please keep it up!"

### **FOOD**

"I have never eaten so well so often so happily. When you people claim that you are foodies, you aren't kidding."

### **OVERALL VALUE**

"We have never had a better vacation at any price."

river cruise boats. On a different note, seeing how many travelers can't always find as much vacation time as they really want, we have developed a series of 6-day or shorter quick trips that go as far afield as Iceland, the Galápagos and Morocco.

### **Final thoughts?**

It's always an honor to win recognition. But, for all of us at Classic Journeys, the biggest privilege is to share the dreams of our guests and make those dreams come true. That connection is the best feeling of all.