



# Beautiful Friendly China



BY DIAN THOMAS

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**China** . . . the very word echoes with mystery and intrigue. Reading about its exotic history, cuisine, architecture, and people is a pastime many enjoy. However, I learned more about China the first day I visited than I could have by reading about it for a lifetime. Before I knew it, I was walking the Great Wall and eating Peking duck. When I travel I not only see the places where history happened, but I also see the amazing people who have come *since* the events.

## The People, and How They Live

For me, even better than the beautiful architecture and decor were the warm hearts of the Chinese people. Even when they could not speak a word of English, they communicated in the language of the heart. In all my travels I have not experienced greater warmth and openness than I experienced with the Chinese people.



China, smaller in size than the U.S., has a population of one billion 300 million--five times the number of people who live in the United States. Only 160 cities in the world have a population of more than one million people, and 100 of them are in China. A city on the East Coast of China by Hong Kong called Shenzhen, a small fishing village in 1970, became a booming city of 13 million people in just 35 years!

To house all the people the only way to go is up. I was told the national bird was the crane. The skies are filled with China's version of its national bird--construction cranes building skyscrapers.

In all of my travels, I have never seen so many impressive skyscrapers. One of my favorites is called the "Dragon Building."



### Transportation

Bicycles in China are almost as plentiful as people. Beijing has 14 million people and 10 million bikes. There are even bike lanes and bike traffic lights. I saw many women in business suits and high heels and men in professional attire on their way to work on bikes. I have seen everything from small refrigerators to stacks of chickens in cages go riding down the street loaded on bikes. If you can strap it to a bike, sooner or later you will see it making its way down the bike lane.

Tourists often take rides on either bikes or in a rickshaws (pedi-cabs) through the quadrangles built around Beijing's Forbidden City. I did both, and enjoyed seeing small houses and tiny streets that have been in use for over 700 years.

### Recreation

In Beijing, our guide took us to the Temple of Heaven, surrounded by a park about the same size as Central Park in New York City. I was blown away. What I saw the people doing is so revealing of their healthy lifestyle. I wanted to bring it home and implement it in every city in America.

60 thousand people come to the park every day to exercise and socialize. They love to have Americans join with them in badminton, ring toss games, and playing like kids on playground equipment. I came across

several groups in the park singing and playing musical instruments together. These people know how to have fun and enjoy each other while they work at being healthy.



### Shopping

Chinese shopping is not to be missed by any tourist. Even though I don't like to shop in the U.S., I fell in love with shopping in China. I especially loved the bargains, such as five Russian nesting dolls or designer silk ties for \$2.00.

### Top Places to See While You are in China:

**Great Wall:** The Great Wall is the highlight of every visitor's tour. Stretched out it would be about 4,000 miles long and could reach from San Francisco to New York. A team of eight horses side by side could travel the entire distance along the top of the Wall.





**Terracotta Warriors:** If you are amazed with the Great Wall, you will find the Terracotta Warriors, located in Xi'an, just as amazing. The Warriors date back to 210 B.C. and were discovered by four farmers in 1974. On most tours you visit three different pits and see thousands of clay soldiers and their horses. Each warrior is different and is designed after a real soldier.



**Hong Kong:** Hong Kong is truly an amazing place. More than seven million people live in a very small area, so ninety percent live in skyscrapers. "The residents of Hong Kong measure their homes by the number of windows in their apartment," our guide said. "If your family has six windows, you are doing well. If you have 20 windows, you are considered a millionaire," he concluded. (Most of us in the U.S. are millionaires and do not know it!)

We went to a wonderful museum in Hong Kong and learned about its origins--rich with people who fished the sea. In days of old, salt was the key to preserving their catch. Even today visitors see markets with every kind of salted fish they can imagine.

**Tiananmen Square:** Tiananmen Square, just outside the Forbidden City, covers over 100 acres. It is the largest outdoor square in the world. On this square the Chinese violently put a stop to the student revolution in 1989.

**Forbidden City:** The Chinese Imperial Palace dates from the Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty. For more than five centuries it was the home of the Emperor. Every tour to China will take you through the Forbidden City and into the Palace Gardens.

### The Forbidden City Rolled Out Olympics Welcome Mat

In the early 1900s China started on a new path that led to the world stage. In 2008, the curtain rose on

the Summer Olympics, and Beijing became known as the Welcome City.

Beijing boasts the world's largest airport; it looks like a giant flying saucer. Equally impressive is the "Bird's Nest." Erected at a cost of 500 million, this arena used for the opening and closing ceremonies for the Summer Olympics seats 91,000 people.

Right next to the "Bird's Nest" is Beijing National Aquatics Center, which seats 17,000 people. The amazing thing about this building is that the outside is covered with images of giant bubbles.

Millions of beautiful flowers grace The Welcome City. I even saw boxes of flowers on the freeway. Trees full of flowers, flowers in hanging baskets, and many beautiful gardens can be found throughout the city.

### Shanghai to Become the Next Welcome City

Just two years after China hosted the Summer Olympics, they will be hosting the next World's Fair. Shanghai will host Expo 2010 from May 1, 2010 until October 31, 2010. They're currently projecting attendance of 70 to 100 million.

### Conclusion

For me travel is the ultimate learning experience; in contrast, reading is the slow trickle method. Yes, I learn when I read, but information flows into my head at the speed of light when I travel.

China offers an amazing travel experience. If you have ever had a yearning to get out of your rut and expand your horizons, China is the answer. The sights and sounds of China will awaken all your senses and make you feel more alive. Join the thousands of Americans who are experiencing and learning from China every year. Plan your trip right away. I made my travel dreams come true, and so can you!

