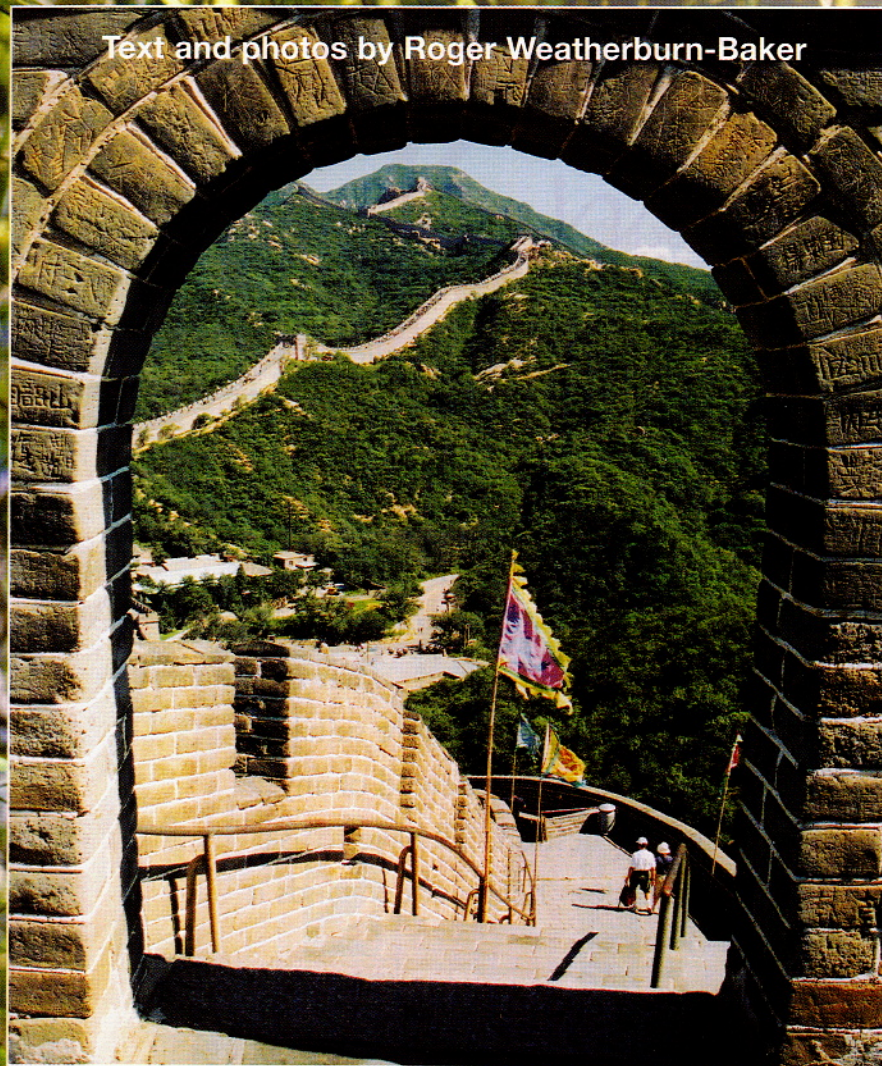


ANCIENT WONDERS

Text and photos by Roger Weatherburn-Baker

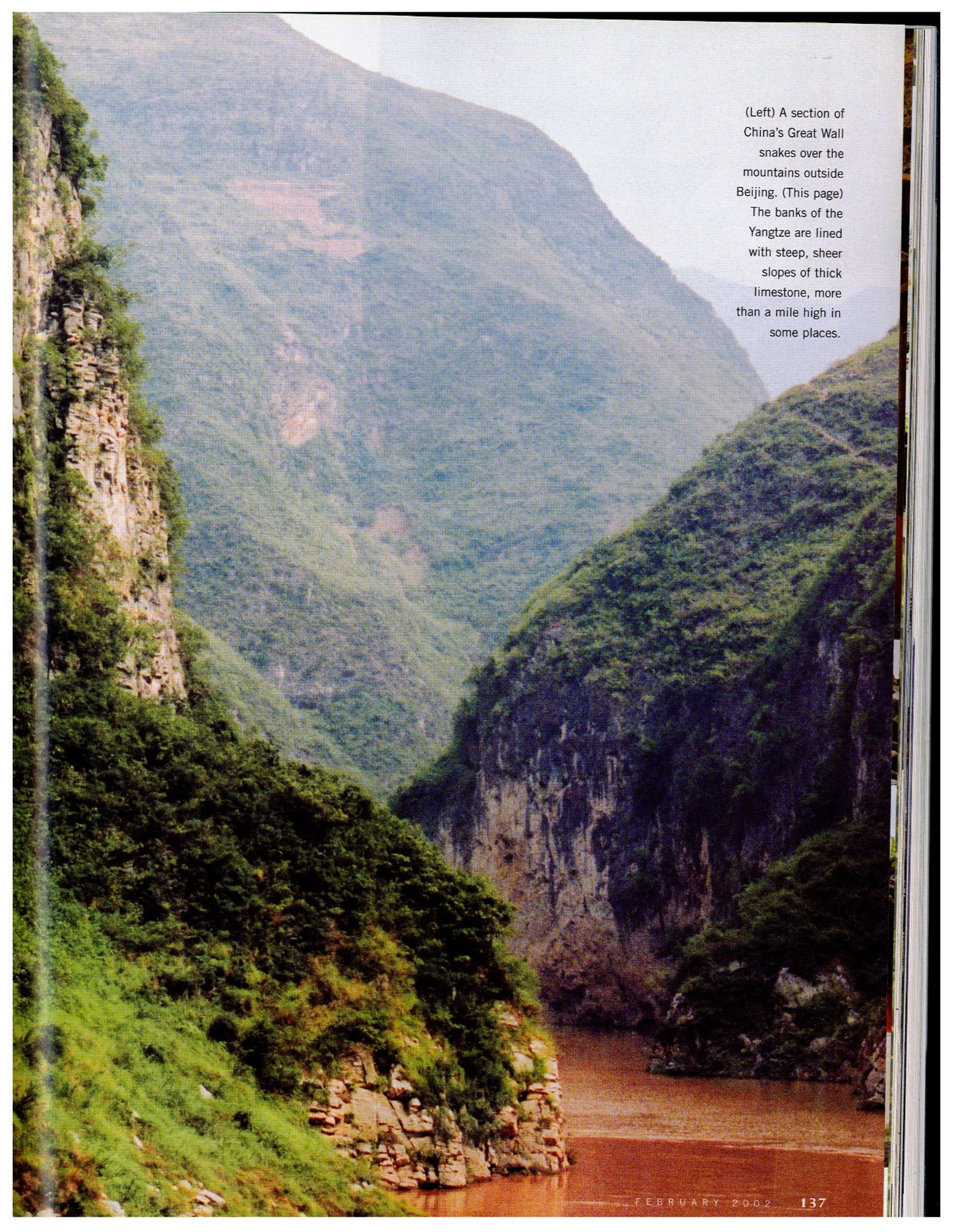


MODERN SPLENDORS

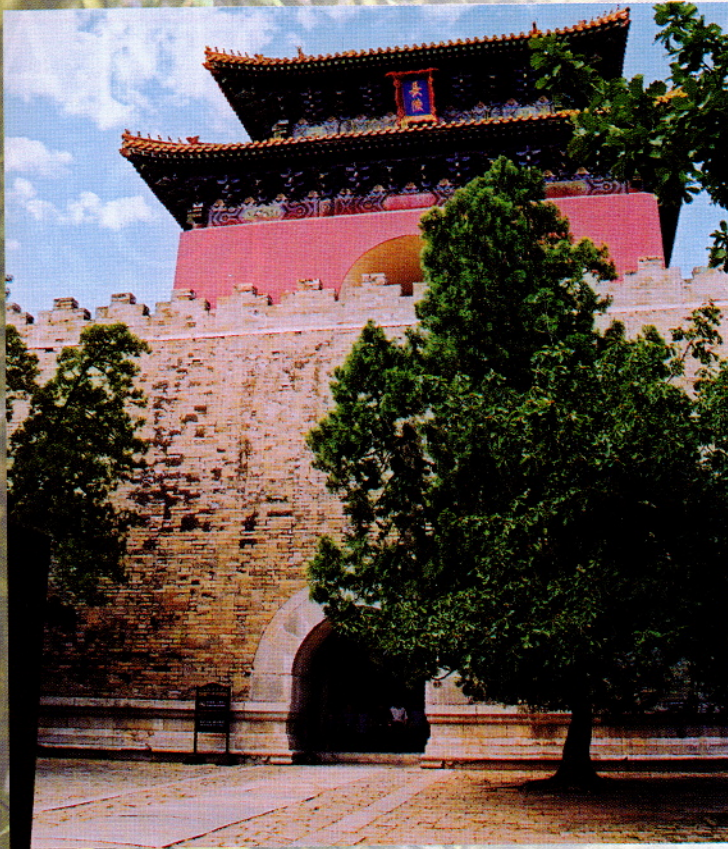
**Roger Weatherburn-Baker shares
his discoveries behind
the bamboo curtain of China.**

The author's three-week trip through China last fall included cruising the Yangtze River and a visit to the world-famous terra-cotta warrior statues of Xi'an. "Part of the Yangtze is going to be dammed and all of this wonderful heritage is going to be destroyed soon. I wanted to go before all of that is lost," Weatherburn-Baker says. In fact, he was traveling Asia's longest river on Sept. 11. "We were already remote and, as Americans, we felt more remote and vulnerable when the disaster occurred. What was surprising was the reaction of the Chinese; they were very sympathetic. Throughout the trip, people would come up to us in the streets and express their commiseration."

Although his itinerary included "a real kaleidoscopic view of the extremes" of remote villages and major cities, Weatherburn-Baker counts the imperial terra-cotta treasures as his favorite. "It's awesome. It's a huge site," he says. "Some people are crediting it as the ninth modern wonder of the world."



(Left) A section of
China's Great Wall
snakes over the
mountains outside
Beijing. (This page)
The banks of the
Yangtze are lined
with steep, sheer
slopes of thick
limestone, more
than a mile high in
some places.



(Above) Changling is the largest of 13 tombs of the Ming Dynasty emperors, which occupy a burial site 34 miles north of Beijing. (Below) The 18th-century

Huxinting Teahouse is a mid-lake pavilion in Old Shanghai. (Right) The Great Wall towers over vendors selling souvenir T-shirts, baseball caps and opera masks.

Mystery is what makes China one of the most alluring travel destinations in the world.

For centuries, tales of a vast and distant land of fabulous riches, exotic customs and an ancient culture whispered across the deserts, plains and mountains along the Silk Road all the way to the Roman Empire. Few believed what they heard. Even centuries later, when Europeans first read Marco Polo's *Travels*, most dismissed his accounts as pure fantasy.

But such stories were woven into the fabric of a mysterious allure that has persisted through the centuries. Now that its iron-clad government is stimulating sweeping change and the bamboo curtain has been drawn aside, the sights, sounds, myths and legends of China are attracting millions of visitors a year.

Few are disappointed by what they find, but many are surprised. China has a rich culture older than that of ancient Egypt and classical Rome combined. Much of it remains and it doesn't disappoint. Yet China is a country of paradoxes.

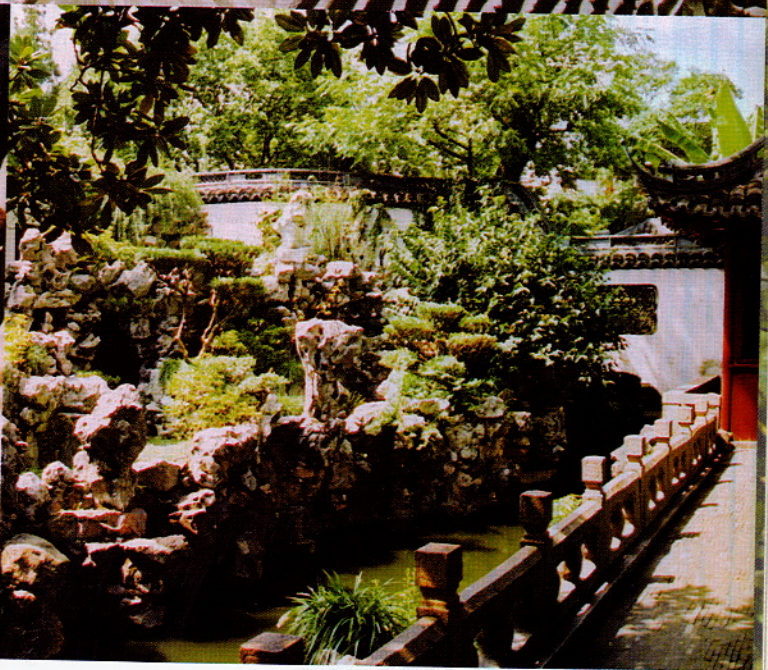
New airports, highways and cities of gleaming steel-and-glass towers housing luxury hotels, shopping malls, international banks and corporations are as



dense as a forest. With a population of 13 million — almost twice that of New York City — Beijing alone has more than 2,700 high-rises, and the number climbs every month. Shanghai's tally of towers is almost as great. Much of its spectacular Pudong business district didn't exist 10 years ago. Today, it rushes to rival Hong Kong as Asia's commercial and financial epicenter.

On the other hand, there are many rural villages, some more than 400 years old, and many whose residents are suffering from abject poverty. Although many of these slices of the past are slated to fall under the bulldozers of progress, there's no doubt the people will remain rooted in their rich cultural heritage. In China, old customs, beliefs and superstitions die hard. Even the most urbane Chinese business leaders consult feng shui specialists about the proper placement of real estate developments and contact fortune-tellers on their cell phones to discuss strategic timing.

(Clockwise from right) built in 1559, which is the only classical garden remaining in Shanghai. Some of the 8,000 terra-cotta warriors on parade in the Qin Army Vault Museum in Xi'an.





(Above) The Beijing Opera is a combination of music, poetry, song, dance, acrobatics and martial arts.



(Above) The entrance to the Precious Stone Fortress, the tallest ancient building in China, will remain an isolated island after the Yangtze River is dammed. (Below) A table of typical souvenirs offered by a street vendor in Beijing.



Perhaps the biggest paradox is this: Capitalism is in full bloom in a communist country that dictates that its citizens may have only one child, which occupations people are entitled to, what can be watched on TV and what type of Internet access is allowed. Yet American icons are not only encouraged, they're embraced. On every city corner, there seem to be KFCs, which are enormously popular with Chinese children; and when the first McDonald's opened in Xi'an, more than 50,000 meals were served the first day.

Today's travelers to China's metropolitan areas need not fear the antiquity of the country. Most of the major cities have international hotels with fitness and business centers, and luxury rooms complete with computer ports and CNN; restaurants offering Western as well as Eastern cuisine; shops with friendly English-speaking staff; and taxi drivers adept at reading major destinations preprinted in Chinese and English on pocket cards provided by the hotels.

Such aspects of modern China may surprise, but it's the ancient treasures that lure most tourists. A classic itinerary takes visitors to Beijing, founded by the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan; to Xi'an, the site of the terra-cotta warriors; to Chongqing for a cruise down the Yangtze River through the spectacular Three Gorges; to cosmopolitan

HORSING AROUND

The Naples Museum of Art is planning to celebrate all things Chinese — and its permanent collection *The Robert and Kay Gow Collection of Ancient Chinese Art and Treasures of the Chinese Scholar* on display Feb. 8-April 27 — with a celebration of the Chinese New Year.

The event on March 2 benefits the Naples Museum of Art Endowment Fund and commemorates the Chinese Year of the Horse.

Festivities will feature costumes, actors, musicians, magicians, fortune-tellers, acrobats, dancers, jugglers, calligraphy, paper-cutting, silent and live auctions, Chinese cuisine, a Lion Dance finale, "fireworks" and more.

For information, call 941-597-1900.

Shanghai on the South China Sea; and, finally, to dazzling Hong Kong, where West has long met East.

BEIJING

A 10-foot-high, 200-foot-long mural depicting the Great Wall that dominates the ultra-modern airport's Immigration Hall, greets visitors arriving by air at the nation's gateway capital. Symbolically, even today's invasion of foreign hoards must pass beyond the greatest defensive barrier the world has ever known — and the only manmade object that can be seen from space.

The Great Wall sprawls across the mountains just outside Beijing like a sleeping dragon. Begun 200 years before Christ walked the Holy Land, it snaked for almost 4,000 miles across the country's northern territories by the time it was finally completed. Here, it's possible to step back in time. While standing on the massive wall's gray terraces and listening to the brightly colored pennants snap in the breeze, it's easy to imagine Mongol warriors on the other side of the craggy, green-clad hills.

Beyond the wall awaits a sleek, commercially booming metropolis. First-time

visitors should be prepared to think big: It's the modern capital of a country larger than all of Europe and is inhabited by one in five of the world's population. Within this metropolis remain the ancient treasures. Tiananmen Square, the largest in the world and still China's spiritual and political heart, is where more than 500,000 Chinese spontaneously congregated last summer to celebrate Beijing's selection as the host city of the 2008 Olympiad.

On one side of the square — beyond a moat and behind 33-foot-high vermilion walls — is the fabulous 9,000-room fortress-palace known as the Forbidden City. For more than 600 years, 24 emperors ruled their universe from here. Despite teeming crowds, it's still possible to find a quiet corner in the massive complex, stand in a secluded courtyard and imagine the smell of lotus blossoms and the passing rustle of the silks of a Ming Dynasty official.

Of course, there's much, much more

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(Above) A pavilion in the 16th-century complex of buildings and ornamental gardens in Shanghai's old quarter.
(Below) The Bund, a waterfront

promenade in Shanghai, is a good way to see the city's multinational past, influenced for more than 100 years by the British, French and Americans.





The Three Gorges region of the Yangtze River, the world's third longest, is among the great natural wonders of the world.

and there is more of the army and several other Ming Dynasty burial sites covering almost 22 square miles left to unearth. In the years ahead, there will be much more to see.

THE THREE GORGES

Don't wait to visit the fabled Three Gorges, where visitors take a popular 900-mile, three-day cruise on the swift-moving, coffee-colored Yangtze River. Along the way, the boat sails past the dramatic, towering peaks that make this stretch of the world's third longest river a world-class draw.

Today, you can still step off the boat to visit the ancient village of Shibaozhai, a tangle of narrow alleyways that tumble down a rock outcropping crowned by the tallest ancient structure in China, the nine-story Precious Stone Fortress. And you can travel with local boatmen, wearing faded shorts and bamboo-and-grass slippers, as they sing local folk songs and paddle a narrow peapod-shaped craft over crystal-clear waters through the echoes of the steep ravines of the Shennong Stream. Just look out for the gold monkeys throwing nuts from the trees above.

Soon, most of this geographically spectacular scenery will be gone. China is building the world's largest dam, a project that will raise the waters of this area and drown almost 1,400 villages, 140 towns, 13 cities, countless temples and landmarks. The waters will start to rise in 2003 and reach their height by 2009. By then, an estimated 1.3 million people will have been displaced.

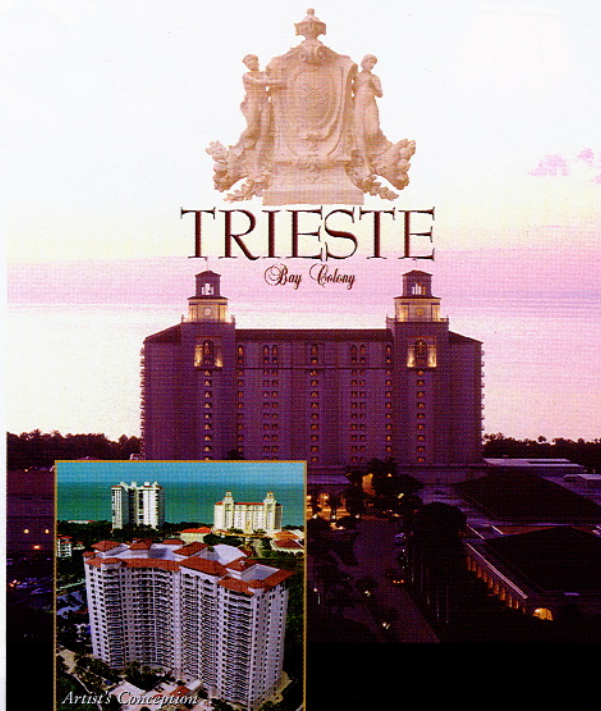
SHANGHAI

In its heyday, when it was virtually run by predominantly British and French traders, cosmopolitan Shanghai was a colorful playground of smoky jazz clubs, sepia-lit dance halls and somnolent opium dens. Today, no other city captures the urgency and excitement of China's opening and reform.

Old Shanghai is evident if you know where to look. You can still see men and women performing tai chi, and twirling ballroom dancers practicing under a bridge. You can explore the classical Yu Gardens and

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M A G A Z I N E

ANCIENT WONDERS

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to see. Imperial parks, teahouses, pagodas, temples, the labyrinth of traditional dwellings, and alleyways known as the Hutong district can be toured by rickshaw. Richly colorful song, dance and acrobatic art-form make up the Beijing Opera. Shoppers shouldn't miss the downtown Hong Qiao market, a four-story complex famed for its pearl dealers who are well known to celebrities, film stars and former presidents Carter and Clinton.

XI'AN

The ancient city of Xi'an served as China's capital for more than 1,100 years and was a terminus of the Silk Road, but most foreigners hadn't heard of it until 1974, when three farmers, digging a well outside the city walls, stumbled upon one of the greatest archeological finds of the 20th century.

Buried 16 feet beneath the ground was an army of more than 8,000 life-size terra-cotta soldiers, chariots and horses entombed more than 2,200 years ago with China's Emperor Qin (pronounced chin) Shi Huang, the first emperor to unify the country and give it his name. The discovery of a fully equipped army standing in silent rank and file guarding their emperor in his after-life swept the forgotten city onto the world stage and fueled a tourist industry that has pumped millions into the region's economy.

Today, the airy and elegant, marble-and-glass Qin Army Vault Museum is a World Heritage site. Covering an area the size of two football fields, it's the centerpiece of a high-tech complex that includes a spiffy cinema-in-the-round and museum gift shop where, every day, one of the humble farmers who originally found the site signs autographs like a rock star.

Incredibly, Emperor Qin's final resting place has not been excavated,

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stroll the surrounding old city and its markets. The Jade Buddha Temple, the universally acclaimed Shanghai Museum (the best in China), and the nearby Bird and Flower Market are important landmarks not to be missed. The riverside strand known as the Bund offers incredible views, and a ride through the French Concession quarter illustrates the city's multinational past.

It may not seem like an obvious tourist stop, but it's worth the effort to visit a "children's palace," where exceptional children identified by talent scouts are placed at a tender age in the hands of gifted educators to refine their skills. Here, you can listen to small children practicing piano or violin with the skill of virtuosos and be entertained by toddlers practicing sword fights and acrobatic skills in preparation for admission to the Beijing Opera school.

HONG KONG

Hong Kong, the Pearl of the Orient and long-time British Crown Colony, remains one of the world's foremost centers of capitalism. Even though it was returned to China in 1997, nothing much has changed. It continues to grow and prosper at warp speed and is a dazzling testament to rampant consumerism — a shopper's paradise selling everything from Mao lighters to Rolls-Royces. Sitting at the crossroads of trade between East and West, it's a glittering, modern-day bazaar where you can buy custom suits hand-cut by Chinese tailors or the latest shoes from Gucci or Ferragamo.

Much of Hong Kong's magnificent harbor that was once thronged with junks and pirates, windjammers and clipper ships, has been filled in for a sparkling new international airport (the old one is being razed to make way for a Disney theme park) and more towering pinnacles of success and prestige.

The best way to view this mercantile miracle is from above or below. Towering above the harbor is The Peak, a mountain clad with the city's most deluxe homes. Spectacular panoramic views can be seen from the road or, much more delightfully, by taking a virtually perpendicular tram ride. For ground-up views, the Star Ferry shuttles between Hong Kong and Kowloon across Victoria Harbor, where it weaves between sampans and ocean liners.

The Sons of Heaven, who once ruled this vast land with an imperial power that was absolute, adopted a personal symbol of their authority that became autonomous with their nation. They chose a fearsome mythical creature that universally inspired awe: the dragon. They chose well. The classical wonders of China's past and the unlimited potential of its future are awe-inspiring. The fire-breathing dragon, which long stood guard over the nation's treasures, is breathing a new life into the 21st century. ❧

Naples, Florida

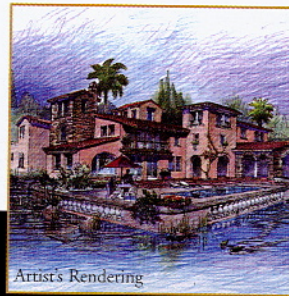
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