

Southern China

China • 15 days • Cycling

Pedaling the back roads of southern China offers an extraordinary, close-up view of rural life that would be lost by other means of travel. We cycle at our own pace, exploring the rolling countryside on daily rides of 15 - 50 miles, with options to do more or less. The highlight of the trip is cycling through a region filled with oddly shaped limestone karsts, which rise above picturesque hamlets and the winding Li River. This landscape inspired poets and painters of old. In a more remote mountainous area, we meet the gentle Yao people, whose way of life has changed little over the centuries. The trip begins in vibrant Hong Kong and ends in the bustling city of Guangzhou.

2006 Dates: November 4 - 18	Accommodations: Modern hotel in Hong Kong. On mainland China, hotels will range from simple inns and guesthouses to 3 – 5-star hotels.
Total Days: 15 (includes travel days)	
Group Size: 4-16 trip members	Activity level: Moderate Plus 1 2 [3 4] 5
Land Cost: \$2,395	Cycling 35-50 miles on most days, with optional rides up to 90 miles. Low elevation, rolling terrain, with some long steep hills. Combination of paved and dirt roads. Fully van supported.
Trip Begins: Hong Kong	
Trip Ends: Guangzhou	Bikes: 21-speed mountain bikes are provided

ITINERARY

November 4 & 5: Depart the U.S. and cross the International Dateline en route to Hong Kong. Blocked air space will be arranged so the group can travel together (specific air schedules will be finalized in November, 2005). Upon arrival in Hong Kong, we'll check into our hotel and have the remainder of the day on our own to explore, eat dinner and enjoy the city's nightlife.

November 6: An early breakfast at the hotel this morning in preparation for our departure to the ferry terminal. We take a 3-1/2 hour catamaran trip from Hong Kong Harbor and journey up the Pearl River to the town of Zhaoqing. Our local guides will meet the group here upon exiting customs and immigration. We stop for a typical Chinese lunch en-route to the peaceful Song Tao Hotel, our home for the next two nights, set in gardens overlooking a lake. After settling in, we get outfitted with bikes and begin our exploration. The cycling is easygoing and includes a visit to Seven Star Crag Park, a lovely local park with perfect terrain for our warm-up ride. Tonight we get our first taste of real Guangdong (Cantonese) food -- some of the best cuisine in China. *Cycling: 10 miles.*

Meals: All meals are included from breakfast on November 6 through breakfast on November 18. The food is tasty, nutritious, plentiful, and locally prepared. Meals are eaten in a combination of hotel restaurants, small family run restaurants and noodle shops, as well as impromptu luncheon picnics. Vegetarians are easily accommodated.

November 7: We begin with a morning bus ride to visit a Zhaoqing kindergarten, to watch a performance by the children that includes dancing and singing. They are absolutely charming! Then we begin cycling; 5 miles to Mt. Dinghu, a UNESCO nature preserve which houses a 1000-year-old virgin rain forest with over 2000 species of plants. We'll also visit a 300-year-old Buddhist Monastery, walk through the forest to a waterfall and have lunch before returning by bike to Song Tao Hotel by late afternoon. *Cycling: 15 miles; Terrain: Easy.*

November 8: The day begins with a short ride in our support vehicle to the outskirts of town and country roads ideal for cycling. We start riding into rural China, through rolling farmland and bamboo forests. Over the next couple of days, we head in a northerly direction towards the Yao minority region. The gravel road leads into more remote areas which have less vehicle traffic. This first day can be a long one, as we have the potential to cover 50 miles over mostly flat terrain. Don't be alarmed by vehicles whose drivers move out of the way, honk their horns vigorously and wave their arms -- they are saying "hello" and are happy to see foreign visitors. We encounter this often throughout the trip. *Cycling: Up to 50 miles.*

November 9: Over the next several days, we cycle through many tiny villages and spend our nights in small towns rarely visited by Westerners. These are typical hamlets that have sprung up from villages supported by river commerce, predominately farm products and local natural resource management (mostly forestry). We begin to see the first karst mountains amongst the unique old-fashioned houses and will take a boat ride to visit the inside of a karst. Scenes from

rural China include duck farms, rice paddies, country school houses, people grinding grain, children herding pigs, men planing logs, small shop owners selling candy and more. All this makes for some interesting bike riding! Today is our first challenging uphill ride that includes three big climbs. The morning ride is through a beautiful karst area; the afternoon ride is along a scenic abandoned highway. Overnight in Yangshan. *Cycling: 62 miles. Challenging Terrain.*

November 10: Today we visit the Yao people. We'll begin with a stiff uphill ride and by late morning, a hard pack dirt road leads us into the Yao minority region. The Yao believe they are descendants of a god who took the shape of a dog. The men wear a headscarf with two points that resemble a dog's ears. The Yao still maintain a lifestyle centuries old, complete with their own language and customs. Predominately farmers, the Yao grow rice, sweet potatoes and cassava. After lunch, we cycle to Lianshan. The cycling today is hilly and includes some nice downhill. *Cycling: 80 miles.*

November 11: The town of Lianshan is in a lovely valley surrounded by karst limestone mountains. In China, where one child per family is the law, schools and education are extremely important and we take some time to visit a local middle school. Our experience is that both visitors and students learn a lot about each other from these interactions. Only a few Westerners (REI members) have been here before. The visits always prove to be great fun and you might even have the chance to teach English. *(We always try and include a school visit. The actual day of the visit may change, due to riding times and school schedules).* After our visit, we continue on among the farms and villages of rural China, crossing into Guangxi province and on to Zhongshan. *Cycling: 55 miles; Terrain: undulating.*

November 12: The cycling from Zhongshan to Yangshuo is what many consider the highlight of the trip. We travel through rolling scenery dotted with farms and orange orchards as we enter the karst area surrounding Yangshuo. As we approach, there is an ever-increasing number of karst until they become a towering, tightly packed mass. Now we can appreciate why this region inspires poets and painters, even today. Two nights are spent at the lovely Yangshuo Resort Hotel, built in Chinese Pagoda style. *Cycling: 99 miles.*

November 13: Our morning begins with short bike ride and a climb, on foot, to the top of Moon Hill. Views looking down on a mist-shrouded landscape are breathtaking. Back on our bikes we weave our way along country roads, limestone karsts everywhere we look. After lunch, we cruise the Li River watching cormorant fisherman ply their trade, before returning to Yangshuo where the remainder of the afternoon is free for shopping and exploring. Yangshuo has been compared to Kathmandu, Nepal or Cusco, Peru. Here you can find shops selling classical silk paintings, "antiques", woodcarvings, and a host of other unique souvenirs. We have dinner at a streetside café tonight. *Cycling: Approximately 18 miles.*

November 14: This morning we say goodbye to charming Yangshou and head towards Guilin. Our route takes us on a marvelous winding ride along country back roads through small pine forests. Just outside of Guilin, we dismount our bikes and jump aboard the support van for a short drive into town. We stop for lunch then continue our journey, by bike, to the village of Ping An in the Long Ji (Dragon's backbone) area. This region is famous for its beautifully terraced rice fields. The rice fields were built during the Yuan Dynasty (about 800 years ago) and wind from the riverside up to the mountaintop, with the highest paddy sitting at 2900'. Overnight in a small, peaceful mountain inn. *Cycling: 75 miles. Rolling terrain with an uphill climb for the last 3 miles.*

November 15: A 3-hour morning hike along the mountain ridges en route to the village of Jin Keng will treat us to even more impressive views of these amazing rice fields. Photo opportunities abound! Our final bike ride into San Jiang will be indelibly etched in your memory as you savor the region's magical landscape. *Hiking: 4 miles, Cycling: 37 miles over rolling terrain.*

November 16: This morning we'll explore the small village of San Jiang, home to several different minority groups, primarily inhabited by the Dongzu people. Another highlight of the area

is its many interesting bridges. The historic Wind and Rain covered bridges situated in this region were regularly used as shelter during poor weather. We transfer back to Guilin this evening and check into our hotel located on the banks of the Li River.

November 17: We leave this charming region, and begin our trip back to modern China with a bus ride to the Guilin airport, to catch a flight to Guangzhou (Canton). Once in Guangzhou, we take a short city tour, which may include a visit to Chen Clan Temple, Qing Ping food market and Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Memorial Hall. Tonight we enjoy a banquet of Cantonese specialties in a downtown restaurant. We overnight in the 5-star White Swan Hotel.

November 18: Transfer to the airport independently to connect with homeward-bound flights. Re-cross the international dateline, and perhaps arrive in the US before you left China!
Breakfast included.

Note on Itinerary: Although we do our best to adhere to the schedule listed above, this itinerary is subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control.

Note on Hotels: For much of this itinerary, we encounter no other Western tourists. In some of the towns we visit, we use the best (and often only!) available hotel. Often the hotels, inns and guesthouses are amazingly good, but certain amenities which we take for granted, such as hot water, may be in short supply.

CBC Member Land Cost: \$2,395
Single Supplement: \$ 595

Single Travelers: If you are traveling alone and specifically request single accommodations, you will be asked to pay the full single supplement noted on the trip itinerary. If you wish to share accommodations, we will assign you a roommate if one is available. If a roommate cannot be found, you will be asked to pay a reduced single fee which is half of the full single supplement. Please be advised that there are a limited number of single rooms available on most departures.

Land Cost Includes: One hotel night in Hong Kong, twelve hotel nights on mainland China; all meals within mainland China; local guide leadership and vehicle support; bicycle rental; sightseeing arrangements as noted; transfers to the catamaran and boat trip; permits and transportation within mainland China; government, state and local taxes.

Not Included: Air transportation to and from the start of the trip; dinner in Hong Kong; visas; airport taxes; medical immunizations; insurance of any kind; airline excess baggage charges; gratuities to local guides or hotel staff; taxi cabs hired during free time; transfers to and from the airport and train station in Hong Kong; items of a personal nature such as liquor or laundry fees.

Extensions: Extensions north to Beijing to see the Great Wall, or Xian to view the incredible Terra-cotta Warriors highlighted in several National Geographic magazines can be easily arranged. Allow an additional 3-4 days for a visit to either area. Ask REI Adventures for a list of our basic hotel/flight packages.

Qualifications: This itinerary is rated **Moderate-plus [3- 4]** because of the distances covered, the many hills in this region, and because you will be on the go almost the entire day. Although a support vehicle will be available, participants should be experienced cyclists who enjoy spending much of the day (3-6 hours) on their bikes. The countryside is rarely flat, so a regular conditioning program beginning at least three months prior to departure is strongly recommended. Cycling, walking/running and a daily stretching regimen are all great ways to prepare for this trip. One of the most important qualifications for any trip without standard tourist facilities is a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude!

Bikes: We provide 21-speed mountain bikes and are able to fit just about any size. Female bike styles are available upon request. This trip is fully vehicle supported.

Weather: Morning riding while in the mountainous areas can be in the upper 40s to 50s, warming up to the 70s to 80s during the afternoon. The areas closest to Hong Kong are the warmest and most humid.

General Information: This trip is subject to the booking information set forth in the current REI Adventures Reservation Information. We urge you to read this information carefully and to call us if you have any questions. A full gear list and pre-departure information is sent upon sign up. **We highly recommend the purchase of travel insurance through REI Adventures. If purchased within 21 days of sign-up, the pre-existing condition exclusion is waived.** We look forward to having you join us for the trip of a lifetime! Why wait? Space is limited. Call today to reserve your adventure!

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