



Great Walks

OF THE WORLD

The Great Wall of China

**A fascinating trek along several sections of the Great Wall of China,
plus a unique visit to the Forbidden City in Beijing**

Introduction

The Great Wall of China is over 1500 miles long and has many sections that vary in age and in condition. This trek takes you through some of the most dramatic scenery and to parts of the wall which are off the beaten track. While some days are tougher than others the trek is well within the capabilities of anyone who enjoys hill walking. The trek includes the option of a variety of activities; we have the option of a short horse trek to the wall at Mutianyu. Here the wall is in an excellent condition, reconstructed in the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644). At Simatai there is the chance to harness up and brave the zip wire down from the wall to the lodge. Other days include a more challenging walk up to the Five Towers, where the mountains are so precipitous only watchtowers were needed. A day is spent exploring the waterfalls and pools at the Black Dragon Paw Park followed by a three day continuous walk from Gubeikou to Simatai where the wall snakes for as long as the eye can see along the Yang Shan Mountains in varying states of repair. The Great Wall Trek has the advantage of excellent accommodation and food. The Yunhu Hotel, where the group stays for three nights, has a swimming pool and bowling alley. Some even brave the karaoke! The food is plentiful and varied, with fresh local produce offering the perfect recovery after a day on the wall. We conclude our trip with a visit to the unforgettable Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City.

Itinerary

This itinerary is intended to be a guideline. It is given in good faith but we cannot guarantee that the Great Walk will follow this itinerary to the letter. If there are any differences between our published brochure and these trip notes, the trip notes are the most up-to-date version and supersede the brochure. Where meals are included in the trip price they are indicated by the letter (B) Breakfast, (L) Lunch (D) Dinner.

Day 1 Depart London

We depart London Heathrow Airport in the evening for our overnight flight to China's capital city of Beijing.

Day 2 Arrive Beijing

We arrive in Beijing in the mid-morning and make the transfer to our hotel. After lunch there will be an escorted sight seeing tour of Tiananmen Square.

Day 3 Great Wall at Mutianyu

After breakfast we make the road transfer to the village of Lotus Pond where our day's trek will begin. We have lunch in a traditional Chinese house and then begin the trek. The first hour and a half follows a small, pleasant track through woods and cultivated fields. If you wish, you can ride a horse on this first section of the trek leading up to the Wall. As we approach the foot of the Wall it rises steeply above us. There is a small checkpoint here and we will need to show our entry tickets before we can commence the trek. We then begin a fascinating and leisurely introduction to our Great Wall trek. All along the route, which is entirely comprised of reconstructed Wall, we will be passing a series of watch towers, and there will be plenty of time to enjoy the stunning scenery which will surround us. We walk as far as we can along this section of Wall and finish with the steep staircase which leads up to Tower 20 of this section. Beyond this the Wall is largely in ruins and it is not permitted to go any further. We retrace our steps for a short distance and then descend by way of the cable car which comes up from the roadhead. At the foot of the Wall there are a number of small shops and hawkers selling souvenirs and postcards. After running the gauntlet of these, we meet up with our support vehicle and make the 90 minute transfer to the Yunhu Hotel.

Day 4 Black Dragon Paw Park

After a short transfer from the hotel we start trekking up a shallow valley, passing through a small Chinese settlement, over a ridge to the Black Dragon Paw Park itself. The Black Dragon Paw Park is a mixture of steep climbs and descents, gorges with rivers running through and spectacular scenery. We pass a number of small picturesque pools and stop for lunch. After lunch we head uphill through heavy undergrowth until we arrive at the tallest single tower on this section of the Wall. It is possible to go inside and up to the top for panoramic views over the surrounding countryside. From there it is a gentle descent via a jeep track to reach the road. From here we travel the short distance back to the Yunhu Hotel.

Day 5 Five Towers

After breakfast we have a 20 minute road transfer to the start of our trek. Because the terrain at Five Towers was so steep, it was not necessary to construct very much Wall, but rather a series of Watch Towers to guard over the precipitous slopes. Yet today's walk is full of character and with some of the finest views on the whole trek. We begin by following a good track through some small holdings where animals graze. We pass a small reservoir and then begin to climb up towards a minor Watch Tower, the first of a series of Towers we will pass on our walk today. As we gain height, the views become expansive and we are able to look out across the waters of the Mayan reservoir and its huge dams. Although an artificial lake, it is an extremely beautiful place and the scenery is typically Chinese. Our path now enters an area of dense woodland with mixed deciduous and evergreen trees. The path can be slippery in places so stout boots and ski poles are useful. There are plenty of opportunities to stop and admire the scenery, as the path continues its long climb towards the highest Watch Tower. Here we can break for lunch, with tremendous panoramic views across both the Miyun Lake and also the city of Miyun itself. And behind us lie the dramatic mountains on the 'Mongolian' side of the Wall. Our route continues more easily now as we begin a gentle descent along the crest of the ridge, passing four more substantial watch Towers. At the last of these we can take a further break and enjoy the views which now include the route of our ascent. The path back down to our starting point is very enjoyable and concludes what is a challenging but an extremely rewarding day. We descend back down to the trailhead and can enjoy a cup of Chinese green tea in the adjacent Fiver Towers Lodge before our 20 minute transfer back to the Yunhu Hotel.

Day 6 Great Wall at Gubeikou

After breakfast we pack all our belongings into our support vehicle and leave the Yunhu Hotel for the last time. We have a 90 minute road transfer to the town of Gubeiko from where our trek continues. The watchtower at Gubeikou was once an important checkpoint on the wall, and from here the wall runs along the beautiful Yanshan Mountains. For the next three days we will be walking a continuous section of Wall starting at Gubeiko and continuing along Wall sections at Jinshanling and at Simatai. Our trek today begins with 30 minutes of trekking through a small Chinese village and then past cultivated fields before gaining the starting point of the Wall. For the first three hours of our trek today, we will be following Wall that is in good repair or has been reconstructed. It snakes its way across the hillsides, travelling from Watch Tower to Watch Tower. Some sections of the Wall date back to the Ming Dynasty. After our break for lunch we encounter a large section of Wall which is in a state of disrepair and which is overgrown with vegetation. We are therefore forced to leave the Wall itself and follow a good path which travels along the foot of the Wall, sometimes going right along its base. Eventually the path regains a good section of Wall and we are able to follow this all the way to the Jinshanling Pass where our support vehicle will be waiting for us. We then have a 40 minute drive to our accommodation at Simatai. This is courtyard style lodge situated in a pleasant position right by a lake.

Day 7 Great Wall at Jinshanling

After breakfast we will be transferred by road back to the Jinshanling Pass and continue our trek at the same place that we concluded the day before. Today we follow the Jinshanling section of Great Wall, one of the most photogenic on our trek. We will in fact be trekking directly to our hotel accommodation at Simatai and there is no vehicle transfer needed at the end of today's walk. The majority of our route today follows reconstructed Wall, although there are occasional sections where it is in some disrepair and care needs to be taken. There are also some steep sections which require a head for heights. We are able to look back at the route from yesterday, and as we progress, the following days trek comes into view. We can stop for lunch in the shade of one of the numerous Watch Towers we encounter on the route. Towards the end of the day the Great Wall snakes down towards the Simatai Pass and at its conclusion there is a small chain bridge to cross over Mandarin Duck Lake before we can ascend a short distance to the road which comes up from our hotel at Simatai. The view over the Lake to our hotel is extremely beautiful, and with the Great Wall as a backdrop, it is a marvellous place to be. From here we have an

easy downhill road walk of about 45 minutes back to the hotel, since vehicles are not permitted up this section. Alternatively, there is a more daring way of descending – the so-called Flying Fox – which involves being strapped into a harness and sliding down a steel cable running across the lake and down to the valley floor, the final section being completed by motorboat.

Day 8 Great Wall at Simatai

Today is our last on the Wall and to conclude we have a relatively short day on the Wall at Simatai. However it will also be very steep, with many sections having sheer drops. This section of Wall dates back to the Ming Dynasty and holds numerous watchtowers. We retrace our steps back up the access road to the point at which yesterday's walk finished. We then continue along the Simatai section of Wall, climbing a long and steep series of steps which gradually ease after about an hour. The Wall then levels out and provides some beautiful and very photogenic trekking. Finally we reach the furthest point which we are permitted to go, and guards prevent us from continuing. Beyond this the Wall rises up to the highest watchtower, the famous Wanjinglou, situated on the edge of a sheer precipice, and accessed by the near vertical Heavenly Ladder. At this furthest point on our trek, we can take group photos and soak in the fabulous views. We now retrace our steps for a short distance until we are able to leave the Wall and follow a path which leads down to a small chairlift station which we use to return to the valley and our lodge. (If you wish to walk back to our lodge, you are of course free to do so). After lunch we pack our belongings and make the 3-4 hour transfer to Beijing and our central hotel.

Day 9 Beijing

In the morning we will have a guided tour of the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square. The Forbidden City was once the imperial palace during the Ming and Qing dynasties and it was from here that the Emperor exercised his rule. After lunch we will go to Wangfujing Street – Beijing's principal shopping area – and you will be free to explore and shop at leisure. In the evening we will have our final celebratory meal at the famous Qianmen Quanjude Roast Duck Restaurant, the oldest such restaurant in Beijing and dating from 1864.

Day 10 Flight from Beijing to London

After breakfast we depart from our hotel and transfer to the Airport for our flight home.