



Tai Chi & Qi Gong Cultural China Trip 2018

1st-18th April 2018



Part of briefing documents
For briefing session on Sunday 9th July 2017

Dear All,

First of all I would like to welcome you on the China trip. This is a trip unique to enthusiasts of Tai Chi & Qigong and their family and friends. It is absolutely different to conventional tours offered by the normal travel agents.

In summary, this trip is a journey to places with deep spiritual and cultural heritages, and because of that, these places are not for the normal non-Tai Chi tourists. As well as exploring the real tradition and heritage of China, we will also go and see some of the most amazing landscape, temples and culture promised to make the trip a truly once in a lifetime (though many have gone back with me numerous times).

Unfortunately non-conventional tourists destinations also mean the infrastructure or services are not what to be expected in highly developed tourist cities like Beijing.

China is a country with vast landscape; it is the size of the whole of Europe. This means that although we only travel within a small part of China, journeys are still on average 5-to-20-hour-coach or –sleeper-train rides or, if we are lucky, flights. Don't despair though; we will make sure there are plenty of motorway service stops in between to use the bathroom facility or rest at service stations, while the sleeper trains will be overnight; basic but reasonably comfortable. We will try our best to make everything as comfortable for everyone as possible.

During the trip we are constantly on the move and only stay 2/3 days at each place, therefore I recommend you all to go **as light as possible**; no need for any formal dress, we are on holiday so casual is the norm.

Before setting off to the trip there are a few things we need to do and make sure we don't get repatriated for not having tourist visa at the border control in China (only joking).

I am sure by now you all have you are ready to sort out Visa and you are looking to have vaccinations. It is very important that if you have any medical conditions please ask your GP or consultant to give you a note stating the condition and medicine being used. Please find below a checklist for you need to do

- 1) Chinese tourist visa
- 2) Vaccination
- 3) Travel and medical insurance (comprehensive including flight delays etc)
- 4) Passport with at least 6 months left before expiration
- 5) Credit card (please inform your credit card company that you are going to China, otherwise they might decline all transactions), cash (in UK sterling or your own currencies, you can change Chinese Currency RMB with your own currency in China, no need to change it to US dollars) and better not to bring travellers cheques (it is safer but can only be changed in banks, which normally take some time and you will find that sometime taking cash with your credit card from cash machine works out the same but quicker)
- 6) My contact number in China 1880 111 4031, and our representative in China - Lily 13911158093, please feel free to leave it with your spouse or relative too for any emergency. Please note that it is

quite expensive to call china, so it is only for emergency only. Alternatively your family can contact Faye on +44 1952 299000 and ask for a return call from you, Faye will then pass the message on.

- 7) E-tickets – although not necessary because the airline should have your record but it is always better to take it with you just in case.
- 8) Mobile phone – it is good to take your mobile phone with you just in case you need to contact your family in emergency situations. We do find sometime the mobile phone also comes in useful when one gets separated from the group. Please inform your service provider, they need to set you up for international roaming.
- 9) Camera (voltage in china is 240V and the plug is a two flat pins plug or 3 pins triangle shape, you could get it in Dixons or Curry or any electrical store in your own country)

One of our partner organisation will meet you at Beijing airport with a placard with Tai Chi Link Travel Placard/Flag. There are people flying in from various airports, London, Manchester, Scotland, Australia etc. If you arrive a bit earlier than the group please look out for the Tai Chi Link Flag / placard. Once meet up with our representative you can relax and go for a coffee and once everyone arrives, we will set off for the hotel.

Below are few points I feel you need to be aware of and need to be organised before the trip, **please read through them and let me know if you have any queries or questions about any of the points when we meet on Sunday 9th July 2017.**

Vaccination & health

Vaccination is vital in protecting us from catching diseases we are not immune to in the west, therefore it is important to consult your GP prior to travelling. People with medical conditions should consult their GP and obtain necessary medicines needed for the journey. Just tell your GP that we will only need the standard jabs because we won't be near any animals.

Western medicines are available in many pharmacies in China, nevertheless, it is worth taking some general medicines for common sickness. eg. Diarrhoea, travel sickness etc.

Due to the change on diets, weather and temperature, it is easy for one to fall ill, it is therefore advisable to bring some over the counter tablets for general sickness such as diarrhoea, travel sickness etc.

Travel & martial arts Insurance

It is absolutely necessary to have travel insurance in place; everything costs money in China, even medical treatments, and no cash, no talk. Should there a time (which I hope won't happen) one of us need go see a doctor or to the hospital, only certain hospitals are for foreign tourists and they are expensive. One of the group members in one our previous trip had an ear infection and it cost her nearly fifty pounds for medicines. Although you still have to pay for it in cash, but you can claim it back when you get back to the UK (that if you had travel insurance).

Adequate travel insurance is therefore compulsory for our trips, please check carefully the terms and condition on the travel insurance before you purchase it, it should cover you for any injury, death, accident, loss, damage, or irregularity which may be occasioned by neglect or default of any other company, or additional expenses due to delays or changes in flights, trains, coaches or other services, or because of sickness, weather, quarantine or other causes. You will be responsible for arranging your own travel insurance.

Chinese currency & exchange rate

In most major cities department stores and tourist shops will accept credit cards. You may want to inform your credit card company you will be using your card in China. Some establishments may have a surcharge for accepting credit cards. It is wise to have alternative forms of spending money in your local currency.

The currency in China is the ¥ Renminbi (RMB) and the basic unit is the Yuan. The exchange rate is around £1 - ¥8.2RMB, It is worth changing some RMB before you go if possible, if not you can always change it when you get to China. Bring a small amount of cash (suggestion £300 / \$400 / AUD\$500 only suggestion).

Weather

The weather in China in April is between 12C – 25C, however it could be a bit lower in the morning and evening 10-15C. Due to the slight changes on the flight, our itinerary also changed to make sure we make the best of the trip. During this trip we will be travelling quite a bit, we will be making mainly coach and train journeys, and the place we are travelling to are some of the most famous places for Tai Chi and Chinese religions, but unfortunately they are also small towns too, and the conditions and standard will be lower than major cities like Beijing, please be prepared.

What to Bring

Since we are constantly on the move and there will be training in most places we visit, and we would get on and off, walking up and down the road a lot, I would therefore suggest **we travel as light as possible**, also it is a leisurely tour there is no need to take too many formal clothing for evenings. The airlines only allow 20kg on luggage to check in and one 8kg hand luggage, one lady from our previous trip suggested the following;

- 1) one or two pairs of comfortable walking shoes / trainers.
- 2) A few T-shirts (**don't forget your Dao Lu T-shirts for training!**), one or two loose comfortable pants and a small towel for use during training (most hotels provide towels and soaps, but it is always safer to bring one towel just in case)
- 3) 2/3 pairs jeans or trousers, one or two dresses for the evening
- 4) Training pants and fleece or sweater in case weather takes a deep when we train outside.
- 5) Sun cream, and other skin protection products
- 6) A jumper and a jacket for the evening.
- 7) A towel, flannels, tooth brush and tooth paste.
- 8) **Rain Coat** in case it rains, especially if we are travelling up a mountain.

The above is only for reference only. However if you follow the suggestion you will have a lot of room to take souvenirs and presents home. And remember if you are going to Wudang or any other mountain, you will have to carry the luggage up and down the mountain (we'll help each other, no panic!), but less is best... ☺

Hotels

The hotel we are staying in China do vary from one another in standard, the hotel in Beijing is a 3 star standard hotel, **but please be aware that hotels in small town and on the mountain are generally basic**. We look very hard to find hotels of reasonable standard in small towns and remote places that would suit our budget, but due to the location and nature of the town (not being a popular western tourist destination) they are a lot lower in standard compare to the hotel in bigger cities. So prepare for the ups and downs..... ☺ .Breakfast a generally Chinese style, if you can't survive without a morning cup of English tea, coffee or cereals every morning, I would suggest you *bring a small pack of tea bags, small jar of coffee or some bite size cereals pack* just in case.

There are internet in some hotels but there may be charges (though not too expensive), the reason for not having the hotels telephone number is that we are out of the hotel most of the time, it would be easier to call my mobile numbers for any emergency than try to get in touch through the hotels. So please give my china mobile numbers – I'll give it out nearer the date - to your family or friends in case of any emergencies. Some of the hotels have laundry services but they are generally quite expensive and with the weather being quite warm, I tend to wash it myself and they do get dried overnight most of the time.

In the mountain (like Wudang) and small towns, some older hotels may not have elevator (lift) facility and you might have to carry your luggage up a few flights of stairs. That is another reason why we recommend travelling with light luggage. Unfortunately the hotel does not meet and greet at the bottom of the mountain, therefore we will have to carry our suitcases up the mountain with changes between two mountain buses (a 45 minutes journey). I am planning to get a minivan to bring the luggage up, however there will be a charge of ¥50RMB for bringing the luggage up and down the Wudang Mountain. This is optional depending on how many suitcases you bring.

Some of the hotels we stay in may only have showers rather than bath and very often twin beds rather than double bed. So couples, please be aware you may need to just hop between beds. Some hotels may not provide throw away tooth brushes or paste. Please bring your own just in case.

Training options

During the trip there are full and half days or Tai Chi & Qigong training, they are all optional some are chargeable as specified on the itinerary. You can train as much as you like or just do some but not others.

You can also opt to go do your own things, relax at the hotel, look around the local area and experience the local lives or see sights instead. However you will need to pay for all costs while you are away from the group. Should you decide to go do your own things we will presume you will be away for the whole day and if you like to join the group you will need to organise transport to meet with the group wherever they are. If you would like me to organise a guide and transport, just let me know asap and I will try to organise for you. Again you will need to pay for guide, transport, entry tickets, meals, extra gratuity etc.

Road and traffic

Road system in China is similar to the US, traffic can turn right even on red lights. Therefore we must take particular care. Drivers in China are pretty careless, and mixed with bicycles and pedestrians; it creates a scene of chaos. It is therefore very important for us to take extreme care when crossing the roads. Please also remember zebra crossing is only there for show and no cars will stop for pedestrians, so don't expect the norm!!

Trains and coaches

Part of the journey in some of our trips may involve travelling and sleeping overnight on trains, we will make every effort to organise our customers to stay together on soft sleeper cabins (4 berths or sometimes 6 berths each cabin).

Please bear in mind that **due to difficulty in getting soft sleeper cabins, you may have to stay in different cabins and should there be shortage of soft sleeper cabins, we will organise our members to stay in hard sleeper** cabins (6 Berths in an open cabin) without prior notice. Condition of the cabins on trains is basic but generally clean and safe.

Our air-conditioned coaches will take you to and from your hotels to where our programmed activities take place and transfer and pick up to and from the airports or train stations.

The coach or train journey times and durations given on the itinerary are for reference only, journey time may be shortened or lengthened. Needless to say coach travel is pretty much depending on road condition and traffic situation at the time of travel, but we will make plenty of stops for rest.

Please note we are not responsible for any delay or cancellation of international or internal flight or train due to circumstances not under our control, it is therefore important to have travel insurance in place so that claims can be made against members' own insurances or the airlines concerned.

Contact with family & friends (phone & email)

We all like to keep in contact with our family and friends while we are on the move, so it is important to **bring your mobile phone with you** just in case you or they need to contact urgently. It is also good to contact me or Lily in case you get lost. Making calls in the hotel will be very expensive, however there are wifi or internet connections in some hotels and we can use email, Skype or whatsapp on the phone to keep them informed. Please make sure you contact your phone service provider to organise international roaming otherwise you may be left with an unusable phone.

We can also organise Chinese mobile sim card which should work on most phones, you can use that to contact the group member or me during the trip or call home at slightly cheaper rates. However I do suggest using wifi if available if not just wait until there is unless it is absolutely urgent.

Food

Breakfast in the hotel is mainly Chinese style (meat or plain buns, congee, Chinese tea & some veg and rice), however, there would still be plenty of choices. We will be sampling all types of Chinese food from different parts of the country, but don't worry; nothing extreme. Lunches and dinners will all be Chinese cuisine from different regions of China, and they are the real / authentic things.

Please note that in small towns or on the mountains, food choices are very limited, but we will try to organise the best dishes that is available and suitable for you. Should you find the dishes not to your taste, let me know what sort of dishes you prefer and I will see if the restaurant can do something, do remember any extra dishes will be charged extra.

Some of us might eventually feel our taste buds are a bit home sick and want to sample a bit of western taste, then McDonald's and Kentucky will be your favourite choices and they are everywhere. You might even find Pizza Hut dotted around here and there, feel free to sneak out in the evening, at your own costs of course. Just make sure you let our guide know you are not joining the group for dinner. Most important of all, remember your way back or at least the name of the hotel.

Diets

Meals on the trip will be Chinese dishes from different regions of China, Breakfast in hotels are normally Chinese breakfast. All restaurants have beer and coca cola available for purchase. Participants with special conditions or requires special diet (vegetarian, diabetes etc) need to notify us when making reservation.

Some hotels have drinking water taps, and it is important to use them for drinking water. We strongly recommend members to buy bottle water when out visiting since water from normal taps is not safe to drink.

It is quite difficult to buy tea bags or the type of coffee people in the UK drink, anyone who can't survive without a cup of coffee is advised to bring some to China. However, Chinese tea is a great alternative option and it is all over the place.

Shopping

If it is your first time visiting China, it is a must that some part of the trip will spend on buying lots of presents for family and friends. China is one of the best places to shop for good quality oriental gifts or low cost famous brands of clothing or watches. Our guide will take you to a few places in which quality of products are guaranteed, although they may not be the cheapest. Some of these shops even show you how they make some of their products or how to separate the real thing from the fakes. So even if you are not buying, it can still be a nice cultural experience.

The bottom line is, it is not obligatory to buy anything. Some of us might have been to China and visit the shops before and feel there is no need to buy anything, but please be patient since other people who haven't been to China would like to get something for friends and families, it will always make the trip more harmonious for the whole group if everyone of us is a bit more patient and considerate.

You will also see lots of market stalls at places we visit, you can haggle and get the best price for the things you want. We normally start with 40% of the asking price and work our way up. Very often you can get it for around 50-60% of the asking price. Please also note that there are lots of fake 100 RMB (Chinese currency) and 50 RMB, make sure you do not buy from the street sellers without checking if you are given the real money in change, if in doubt check with the group leader before accepting any 100rmb or 50 rmb note from street sellers.

Places we are visiting are reasonably safe and it is OK to have a stroll around the hotels, go shopping in the free evenings yourselves, but like anywhere else in the world, we still need a bit of common sense. You will be alright as long as you look after your bags and keep valuables in the hotel and cash should be put in different pockets rather than in one.

Gratuities

Gratuities to be collected at the beginning of the trip. During our stay in China , we will have coaches and sometimes local guide to chauffeur us around. It is customary to paid gratuities to the coach drivers and guides since it is their main source of income.

We will have different drivers and guides throughout the trip, although not a lot of money but it can be very irritating for everyone having me or someone coming around every day taking money off you for the tips. We will therefore collect the gratuities at the beginning of the trip and use the money to pay the drivers and guides as we travel along.

Free activities

There are some nights free of any activities, I feel it is important to have good night's rest in order for everyone to recoup from the busy days. However some of us might still feel energetic and want to do more, maybe going for a drink, have a massage in the hotel, karaoke or just have a night stroll at the town nearby.

Remember to bring the address of the hotel with you and be careful not to wonder into quiet streets or alleyways. If you need any assistant in finding places, our guide should be able to help. All expenses at free activities' time are at your own costs

Punctuality

since there are a group of us and it is important that we don't need to wait for one another, every day we will agree a time to meet up in the morning and place we visit, we will have plenty of time to wander off but please get to the agreed meeting point at the agreed time so that we don't waste time waiting for each other.

Itinerary changes

Although we try very hard to travel according to the itinerary we set, there is still possibility of changes due to unforeseen circumstances. In the event of sights or museum closure (very often due to maintenance), we will organise alternative sights to visit.

I hope I have covered everything I think relevant to you in the trip, but if you have any queries that are not answered in this briefing please do not hesitate to ask when we meet on Sunday 9th July.

I look forward to meeting everyone for an exciting and safe trip/journey together!

Master Tary Yip

Organiser