

Grand Tour of China; Part 5. Cruising on The Yangtze River

Saturday 14th

We didn't have to set our alarm today although breakfast finished at 8:30 so we were up at a reasonable time. All meals were included and were of the buffet style which suited us. We had a mixture of Chinese and western- the bread on board was fresh and still warm- well received by most of our group I think!

The first day of the cruise passed very quick-

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ly despite not really having to do too much other than relax! The morning was spent watching the world go by from our private balcony although some in our group attended a demonstration and talk about Chinese Medicine and acupuncture by the ship's doctor. We attended an interesting talk about the river by the ship's director Stephen- in which he talked more about the villages under the water. It turned out his family had had to move when he was 12 years old. I'm really struggling to get my head around the fact that complete villages are underneath where we are sailing. I can't imagine what it must have been like for the families who generations of whom had lived in the same house in the same village, suddenly having to relocate. It's just mind boggling!

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After lunch we took the included excursion to the Red Pagoda (Shibaozhai Pagoda) – an interesting and old building built into the cliff face.



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The walk to and from the Pagoda was lined with locals selling all sorts of stuff and of course we just had to buy yet more souvenirs including a Chinese dressing gown, table runner, fans etc!

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After our little adventure off the boat, we headed for a cheeky cocktail in the bar, which has panoramic views. I tried the cocktail of the day - “The Red Pagoda” whilst looking out at the real thing.

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Saturday evening arrived and the whole ship was dressed to impress as it was the Captain's Welcome Dinner. Our group looked fabulous, everyone had made such an effort. Keith even wore a blazer ☐

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We enjoyed glasses of fizz whilst the Ship's Director introduced the senior crew and captain; before a good ol cheesy boogie to Shake my Tail feather etc. Then it was time for dinner.



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After dinner there was a staff cabaret show, which despite not being to our taste so much, everyone else found entertaining. Nonetheless the evening was great fun and I was **adoring** my first taste of cruising!

Sunday

Our cruise continued today through some absolutely sensational scenery, The Three Gorges. The most dramatic gorge was first – the Qutang Gorge. At this point the mountains on each side of the river were steep and imposing- one spot is so scenic it's made it onto the 10 Yuan note.

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The ships director gave interesting commentary throughout this stretch and Keith and I sipped on cocktails. I was in heaven! It didn't matter that the weather wasn't great, it almost made it more dramatic. I really **really** loved this journey!

The following two pictures are probably my favourite- the sense of scale is truly incredible! (The cruise liner behind us was of similar size to the one we were on)

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The above picture shows a very small farm house which is the only occupied house now on this section of the river. There are no roads, no electricity and no running water but 4 families still live there.

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After lunch Keith and some of our group were given a private tour of the Bridge which Mary our tour manager had organised. I didn't go as I was reading on our balcony. Keith however loved it and came back full of admiration

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that actually the boat wasn't being driven by a computer like most ocean liners; in fact three men worked side by side for 4 hours at a time in total silence, driving the boat manually using a small wheel. He also couldn't believe that our boat, which holds 340 passengers can float in just 6ft of water!



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We passed through the Wu Gorge where we then transferred onto smaller boats to take us down one of the narrow tributaries, the Goddess Stream.

https://wanderleefy.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/d0db9-img_6704.mov

I don't even really know how to describe this-

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even the pictures don't really do it justice. It
was simply breathtaking.



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The height of the cliffs either side of the narrow stretch of water was just incredible. Let's not forget that the water level has also been raised in the last 20 years so before that the gorges would have been even higher!

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During the excursion, all the local guides stopped at a kind of make shift pontoon (don't panic- it was safe!) where they performed a local folk song and asked us to join in with a dance. It was such a surreal but special moment!

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(Keep your eyes peeled on the video above
for a familiar face joining in! ☐) pic below
just in case the video doesn't upload properly .

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Keith said it reminded him of the film *Apocalypse Now*!

By now the grey skies had vanished and we were treated to blue skies on our return to the larger ship.

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So of course Keith and I squeezed in a quick cocktail before returning to our room for a super quick shower – we both managed to shower (I even managed a hair wash!) and change in 14 minutes! That has to be a record!

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Tonight we had our disembarkation instructions for tomorrow and then it was the Captain's Farewell banquet- another great meal. We also sang Happy Birthday to 2 members of our group.

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The staff on the boat were fabulous. By far the best service we've received so far in China. And so happy and smiley! We will be sad to wave goodbye in the morning!

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Monday

Disembarkation of the ship was at 08:00 and via funicular railway.

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Disembarkation was earlier than normal as we should have been passing through the Three Gorges Dam Locks. Sadly, increased river traffic meant congestion for the locks and therefore the Chinese Government have just recently banned cruise liners from passing through in order to ease congestion. So rather than passing through the 4 locks overnight, we moored up at Mao Ping, and were transferred onto coaches along with local guides who took us to visit the site of the

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Three Gorges Dam and the Locks and the ships elevator which is actually the largest in the world. Sadly you don't get as good a view as if you're actually on the elevator or the locks but this wasn't Great Rail Journeys fault, nor Century Sun- it's been banned by the government.

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We then drove through the third gorge via coach on the road. Not quite the same as on the river but still very pretty.

Today the weather has improved so much- we've had blue skies and lovely warm weather. We were taken to lunch a little earli-

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er than scheduled due to the change in itinerary and therefore had an hours free time in Yichang. Luckily there was a lovely park and waterfront area so Mary organised for us to have an hour here relaxing- which was enjoyed immensely. Some of the group went to a local museum with our new local guide, Jennifer, but we chose to have a wander along the river and enjoyed an ice cream.

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Around 3pm we were transferred to the railway station where we boarded our next train, the bullet train to Wuhan- a journey of

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2 hours. The journey was smooth as we've come to expect and we passed lots of paddy fields. It's so relaxing travelling by train (and also a great opportunity to catch up on blog writing!)

Until next time

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