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Places in China to Experience

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Places in China to Experience

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Whether it is majestic mountains, lush rice paddies or ancient temples, the word China invokes images both striking and intriguing. With the introduction of Chinese language classes this fall at Illinois Wesleyan, students are making a deeper discovery of China, a country that is a combination of thousands of years of history, and at the same time a modern global power. We asked professors who have knowledge of China to share their favorite places.

Assistant Professor of Religion Tao Jin

Beijing

The capital of China since the 13th century, Beijing is a city of both modernity and tradition. While you can still smell the firecrackers of the 2008 Olympic Games in the air above its dazzling modern stadium, there are also opportunities to appreciate the crystallization of its long history in – among many other things – the Forbidden City, which is perhaps the largest palace compound in the world, and part of the well-known wall that stood before even the “First Emperor” of China – the “Great Wall.”

Xi’an

Located in the northwest of China, Xi’an is one of its oldest cities, a long-time ancient capital, and adjacent to the mausoleum of the emperor (“the First Emperor”) who completed the centralization form of government in China 2,000 years ago, and who has since been resting in that mausoleum, protected by his large warrior-entourage known today to the West as the “terracotta army.”

Professor Jin came from Tianjin, the third largest city of China, 11 years ago after having served as an English faculty at Tianjin Foreign Languages Institute for four years and an English news announcer at Tianjin TV Station for three years. Born in Beijing (i.e., “the capital in the north”), and raised in south, professor Jin is, he said, privileged with an opportunity to witness and live the diversity of Chinese culture.

*Visiting Faculty in Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures Department Kelly
Changjun Huo*

Hong Kong

Although a former colony of the United Kingdom before 1997, Hong Kong's residents are predominately Chinese. More than a decade has passed since Hong Kong was returned to China, and the city is still known as a place where Western culture co-exists seamlessly with the traditional philosophy and practices of Chinese culture.

Shanghai

While Hong Kong is a place where East meets West, Shanghai represents a China that is at once traditional and modern. As the largest city and the financial center in China today, Shanghai is famous for its amazing modern skylines, together with a rich collection of historical landmarks of various architectural styles. In both Hong Kong and Shanghai, you will always find something both international and uniquely Chinese.

Huo grew up in Guangzhou (Canton), China and lived in Hong Kong for several years. She studied at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in China. As a translation major and with both mandarin Chinese and Cantonese as her first languages, professor Huo worked as a translator for foreign companies in international exhibitions and trade fairs for two years while she was studying in China.

Robert S. Eckley Distinguished Professor of Economics Michael Seeborg

My favorite place to visit in China is Guilin, a city in Guangxi Province in southern China. This city of one million has a personal connection to our family since my wife, Wu Rong (Lauren), was raised there. Although many of the tourist facilities are new, there is plenty to see in this 2,000-year old city. Even a drive through the surrounding countryside is like traveling back in time. In a neighboring village, peasants still farm the rice paddies using water buffalo and hand tools. A visit to Guilin is not complete without taking a boat trip down the mysteriously beautiful Li River, which winds through lovely cloud enshrouded mountains that have unusual rounded tops rather than more common jagged peaks. The Li River flows slowly and is so clear that you can see rocks on the river bottom along with the mountain reflections on the surface. Guilin is cited by many famous Chinese poets from several dynasties as having "the landscape that is best under heaven." But they have not seen the Illinois Wesleyan Quad.

Professor Seeborg has traveled to China several times. He has given lectures on American economic policy at several universities in Wuhan, Guilin and Nanning. In 1995, he attended a social science conference in Beijing with Professor Fred Hoyt and former President Minor Myers, jr. He says although his travels were educational and fun, his real exposure to China comes through his wife, Wu Rong (Lauren), who grew up in China during the traumatic years of the Cultural Revolution.

Associate Professor of Business Administration Fred Hoyt

Qingdao

I've been to this wonderful salubrious seaside resort three times. Dr. Seeborg and I visited about 10 years ago, and by chance stayed in the home built for the German Governor General. The city was constructed initially as a German colony (1899-1914), which explains why Tsingtao Beer is China's best known brand. The residence housed, at one time, Chairman Mao, whose presence turned the home into a museum.

Yunnan

Nestled in Southwestern China, Yunnan was the place the emperor sent you if he didn't like you, but didn't hate you enough to speed you on your way to your ancestors. It was also one of the places where non-Han Chinese fled the onslaught of the middle kingdom. Hence, there're something like 26 minorities in the province. I've been to Kunming (the capital, which like most of China no longer looks like it did on my first visit in 1990), Dali, and this May, Lijiang and Xishuangbanna. Banna more resembles Thailand than China, and Lijiang, in the mountains, has the relief from the heat of the flatlands that draws many foreigners there for the summer.

The Silk Road towns

What a splendid feel for centuries of non-ocean trade that linked the Celestial Kingdom with its (usually less civilized) counterparts in Asia and Europe. As you go further west, into Kashgar and the Gobi and the Tarim Basin, you can almost feel the caravan series and oases--and don't miss the Mogao caves, with 1,000 years of Buddhist art.

Professor Hoyt studied U.S.-Chinese relations in the 1960s in graduate school. "I remember rather naively saying, 'I think I need to learn something about China,' a goal I've pursued for over 40 years!" he said. He studied the Chinese language for three years. In 1990, a spot opened in an Illinois Wesleyan-Illinois State University trip to China and he joined. In 1993, he took his first January Term trip to China, and now leads May Term trips there.

Professor of Mathematics Tian-Xiao He

Because there is so much to do and see in China, any itinerary is really shaped by the length of your trip. If you have just a week, then I would recommend splitting it between Beijing and Shanghai, where you can get a taste of both traditional and modern China. In Beijing, the must-sees include the Forbidden Palace, the Ming tombs, the Great Wall and now the Olympic venues. The best way to experience Shanghai is by strolling along the Bund. With a more extended schedule, consider trips to far off cities such as Xian (terracota warriors), Huangshan (the most famous and picturesque mountain scenery), Hangzhou (the West Lake), Suzhou (gardens), Lijiang, Hong Kong/Macau, and Lhasa. Of course, any visit must include sampling the local cuisine (e.g., Peking Duck in Beijing and soup-filled dumplings in Shanghai).

Professor He grew up in Wuhu, a city in Anhui Province and near Huangshan and Nanjing. He attended the Hefei University of Technology and the Dalian University of Technology. Over the past decade, he have traveled extensively in China, giving lectures, directing doctoral students, and organizing conferences in cities such as, Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Tianjing, Hangzhou, Dalian, Changchun, and Heifei.