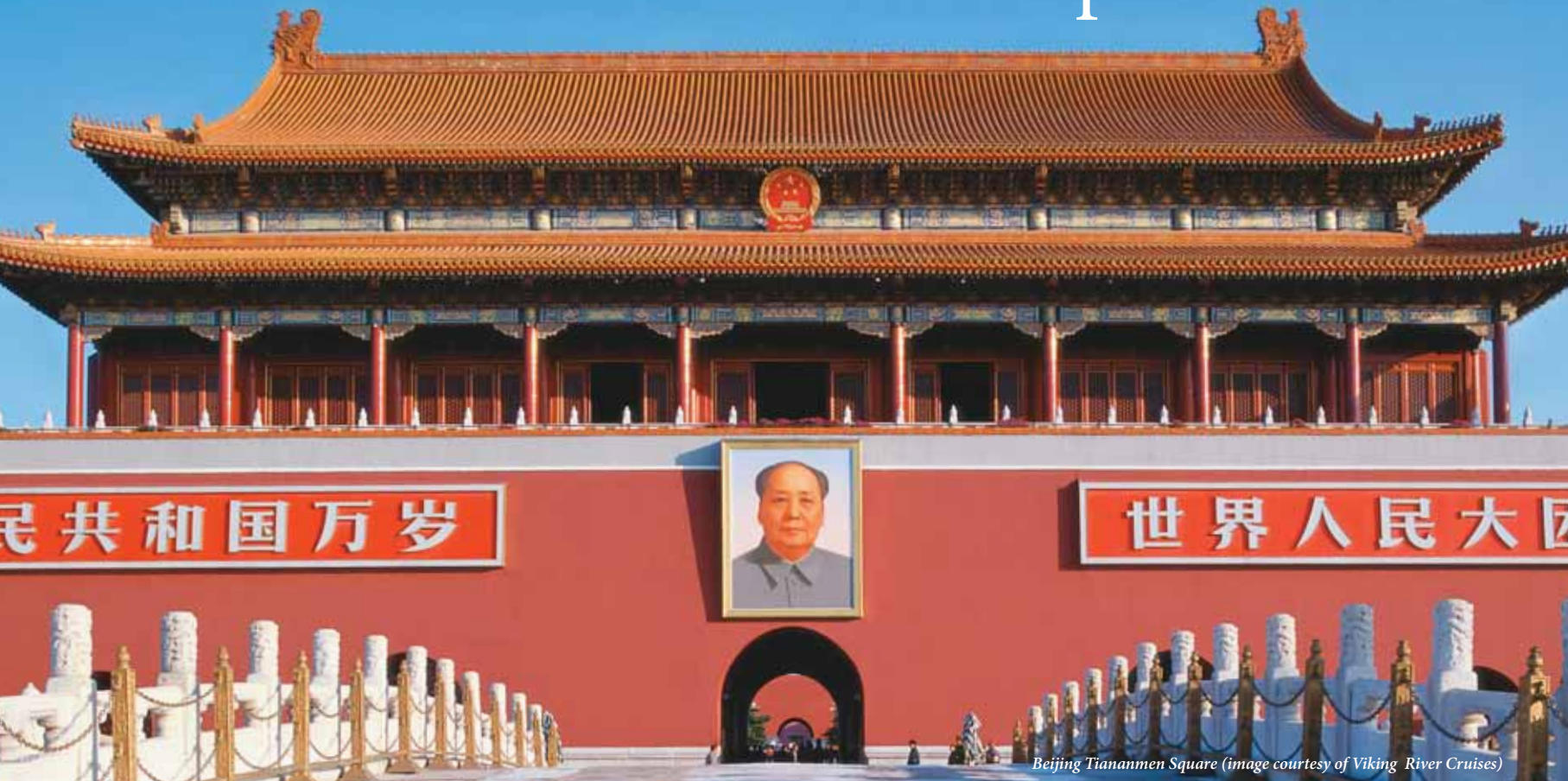


# World Expo sales results mixed, but flow-on benefits expected



Beijing Tiananmen Square (image courtesy of Viking River Cruises)

Despite wholesalers reporting mixed sales results from Shanghai's World Expo being staged until the end of October, it is good news for agents, with most seeing overall China sales bouncing back, after a tough time in 2009.

By Gary Walsh

SHANGHAI'S World Expo 2010 has been the focus of most marketing of China in Australia this year, with operators reporting mixed results and divided over whether the Expo will drive further sales. One concern has been huge crowds and long waits to visit some of the main pavilions at the Expo site, which Helen Wong, managing director of Helen Wong's Tours, the authorised ticketing agent for Australia, acknowledged.

"We have received healthy interest and inquiries from Australians who want to see and experience China without the large crowds of Expo," she said. "Then, on the other hand, it was Expo which originally generated much interest in Shanghai and China, and future bookings look bright.

"The fact that World Expo 2010 doesn't close until the end of October means bookings will continue to be strong for this year while those seeking a holiday without large crowds are inquiring about 2011," she said. "World Expo has been so successful that we were forced to put on additional six-night packages to

cope with the better-than-expected demand from Australia." She also sold out of three-day Expo tickets.

InterAsia director Dan Nebauer said business for World Expo had been "good, but not exceptional", with sales not meeting expectations. This was despite overall China business recovering exceptionally well. "China has really bounced back for us this year – by the end of February, we already had more bookings for China than for the whole of 2009," he said. He did expect, however, that Expo would have a positive flow-on to future sales.

Jimmy Liu from China Bestours was downbeat about World Expo. He said hotel prices had increased by more than what the company had been quoted, which forced it to upgrade clients to higher-level rooms. The cost of those upgrades had been met from company profits, not from income from clients.

On the other hand, Travel Indochina managing director Paul Hole said Expo had "certainly helped to boost Travel Indochina's sales to not only Shanghai but many other key tourist destinations in China. The World Expo has definitely led to an increase in positive and prime expo-

sure of China as a travel destination".

He said sales of Travel Indochina's leading Expo-related product, a package combining transfers, accommodation and an Expo ticket, had exceeded all expectations.

"Travellers to the Expo love the fact that all their needs are taken care of in the one package that offers seamless logistics and real value-for-money."

Hole said that based on the sales figures and agent and traveller feedback, he expected the positive exposure China had received as a result of the Expo would continue to drive more business to the region.

Overall, Wong said that compared with the past two years, bookings had increased dramatically, returning to the level of the excellent 2007. "What I have identified this year is an increase in interest and inquiries from second generation Australians of Asian descent," she said.

"Judging by the interest and inquiries, prospects for good sales for later this year and 2011 look bright. As for the future post-World Expo ... because of World Expo, neighbouring cities and sites such as Hangzhou and Suzhou have benefited as well as Shanghai. And Xian remains

traditionally a strong sought-after destination. So, too, the Yangtze and Victoria Cruises' journeys through the Three Gorges. Our most popular tours remain the 14-day 'China Odyssey' and the 18-day 'Mighty Yangtze'."

Wendy Wu Tours marketing manager Amanda Bruno said forward bookings were strong, regardless of the impact of World Expo, while Venture Holidays is planning additions to its China program and changes to the way it structures travel into China.

Managing director Robert Mackay said that consumer demand and massive changes to tourism infrastructure in Beijing, and particularly Shanghai, had prompted the change to promote those cities as destinations in their own right, with not only great sightseeing but shopping, restaurants and nightlife to match.

The wholesaler, whose main traffic into China is FIT travellers, stressed that the changes did not mean that Hong Kong would not continue to be a key part of travel to the region.

The changes simplified travel to China for passengers who had visited Hong Kong before and were now looking for a singularly China experience.

*sellingChina*

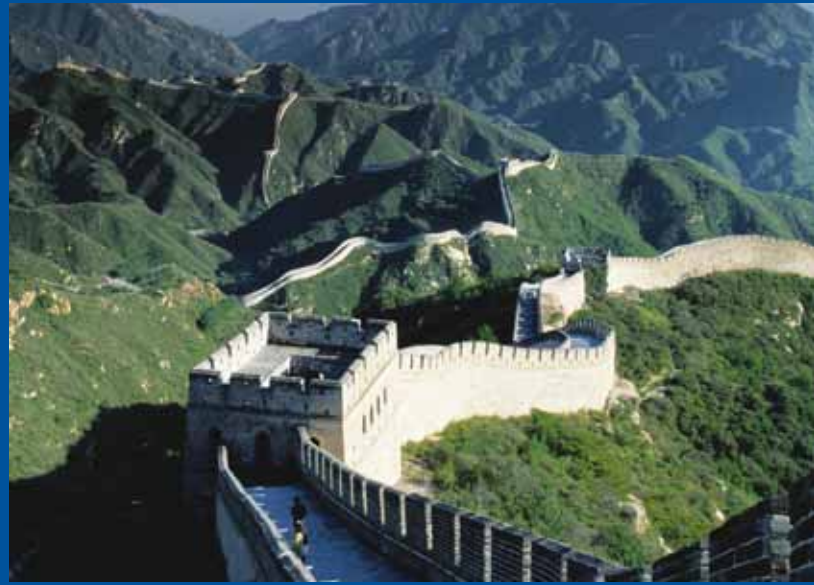
## China sales down, and Expo not driving business, says agent

CHINA is not selling as well as hoped at the moment, says Bernie Choy from Malaysia-Singapore Travel in Sydney. He puts this down to the strong Australian dollar, which is driving heavy sales of Europe generally and European cruising in particular. And World Expo has not been a big seller, Bernie says.

"There has been a lot of feedback from returning passengers with regards to the long queues to visit each pavilion and the cost of food and drinks," he says. Bernie doesn't expect World Expo to drive any repeat business for his agency.

He says he sells China mainly on the basis of its culture and history, with many of his clients Australians of Chinese descent whose ancestors migrated from China to countries such as Malaysia and Singapore and who were now interested in exploring their roots.

He says for first-timers the traditional destinations of Beijing, Shanghai, Xian and Guilin remain the most popular, but his personal favourite is the Yunnan area, which he found to be "very interesting with the different ethnic groups and its proximity to the Tibetan border".



## InterAsia's new China Now program 'receiving good feedback'

INTERASIA says prospects for China in the future are "looking very good". Director Dan Nebauer says the company's new China Now! program, with prices starting from \$1200 per person for a 10-day tour that visits Beijing, Xian, Suzhou and Shanghai, was selling well in the marketplace and receiving very good feedback.

He says this product, along with other China tours, continue to grow in 2011. "The Yangtze continues to sell very well," Nebauer says. "Chengdu and Nine Villages Valley sales are also growing nicely, as is Yunnan and the Silk Road. Guilin, the Li River and Yangshou are always very popular. And sales to Tibet and Mongolia

are also increasing." These are the real growth areas, Nebauer believes, especially for repeat visitors.

InterAsia has a range of China tours, both independent and group, from five-day Beijing and Hong Kong short stops to an 18-day "Silk Road" group tour. One of the most interesting trips is the nine-day independent "Nine

Villages Experience", which focuses on the Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong region, the Nine Villages and Yellow Dragon valleys, beginning from Chengdu.

The "Silk Road" trip begins in Beijing and also includes Xian as well as the key Silk Road destinations of Urumqi, Turpan and Kashgar. It costs \$5877 per person (twin share) including airfares.



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Yangtze River (image credit Wendy Wu)

## Wendy Wu Tours records strong forward bookings

TRAVEL to China continues to grow, with forward bookings showing strength irrespective of the impact of Shanghai's World Expo 2010, according to Wendy Wu Tours' marketing manager, Amanda Bruno.

"Many of our tours are filling steadily and the Expo has created additions to our standard group product rather than stand-alone product only. Tours that take in Shanghai are selling well but we believe that is largely due to other attractions as well as the Expo," she said. "Cruising on the Yangtze has a big following and Beijing and Xian stand out as other cities favoured by Australians."

Wendy Wu Tours features China experiences ranging from three

and four-day short stays in Beijing, Shanghai and Xian through to a 29-day "Epic Dreams" that begins in Guangzhou and travels along the Silk Road (Urumqi, Kashgar, Yecheng) and includes a 4WD excursion to Lhasa via the Xinjiang-Tibet Highway. Among the highlights is a visit to the Mount Everest Base Camp with its stunning views of the world's highest mountain. The trip is priced from \$8340 per person (twin share).

There is also a 10-day short stay package that includes a Victoria Yangtze River cruise and a 28-day "Yangtze River Panorama" that offers a cruise and visits to Beijing, Xian, Chengdu, Kunming, Lijiang, Zhongdian and Dali.

## Bestours predicts growing competition

CHINA Bestours reports that the market is picking up, and that China is now selling better than in the first part of the year. With more wholesalers and retailers now offering product, China Bestours' Jimmy Liu says there is likely to be more competition in the market next year.

Despite that, he predicts no growth in sales over this year in 2011, with the market entering a stagnant period after the massive boom in 2007 and 2008.

Liu says the Silk Road has sold strongly this year, along with the usual suspects in Beijing and Xian. And he predicts Tibet and train travel from Lhasa to Xining to grow next year, as well as travel to the Zhangjiajie Scenic Area in Hunan province.

One of China Bestours' biggest sellers is its "China Splendid Tour", which includes a Yangtze River cruise. It begins in Beijing, where clients spend three nights, before heading to Yichang for the first of four nights on the upriver cruise. The tour also visits Xian for the terracotta warriors, Suzhou and Shanghai for two nights.

There are guaranteed departures through to December 2010 and in March and April 2011. Prices range from \$3550-3990 per person (twin



share) flying Air China, \$4050-4490 with Qantas and \$4240-4680 with Singapore Airlines. The tour includes four-star hotel accommodation, a five-star cruise and all meals.

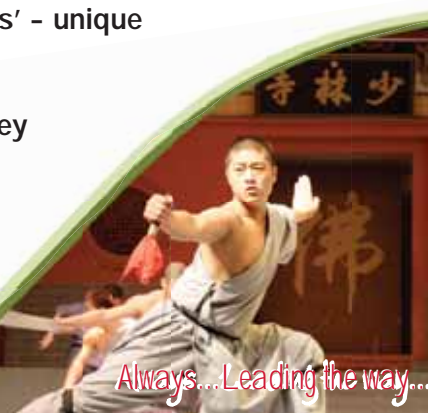
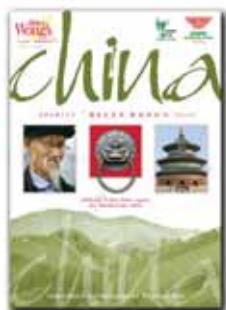
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# Macau to unveil spectacular water show

BILLED as the world's largest and most spectacular water-based show, The House of the Dancing Water is set to open with plenty of razzamatazz in Macau. A capacity audience of 2000 is expected on opening night, September 17, to witness the new permanent fixture inside the 280-degree seater theatre at the City of Dreams resort.

About 80 acrobats, dancers, stuntmen, musicians and divers, some from Australia, will showcase their skills in a spectacular that has been five years in the planning. Two years were set aside for rehearsals alone. Franco Dragone Entertainment Group spent almost \$A300 million to create and develop the performance.

Centrepiece of the giant indoor stage is the world's largest commercial pool, designed by New York architects and five times bigger than an Olympic-sized pool. There are also 258 automated fountains. About 17 million litres of water will fill the pool, which can be converted into a solid stage in one minute.

City of Dreams is Macau's newest



integrated resort which combines entertainment with a wide array of accommodation, regional and international dining and designer shopping options. The House of the Dancing Water will be a permanent fixture aimed at elevating Macau's entertainment status to a new level.

The Franco Dragone Entertainment Group has launched

productions such as A New Day starring Celine Dion and Le Reve in Las Vegas which celebrated its fifth anniversary this year.

Globally, it is estimated that 65 million have watched one of the company's many productions. More than 700 performers from 18 countries auditioned for the Macau extravaganza.

## China Travel Service packages Shanghai's World Expo

CHINA Travel Service (CTS) says Shanghai's World Expo is on track to reach its target of 70 million visitors. The Expo (on show until October 31, 2010) is catering for between 300,000 and 500,000 visitors a day.

"Most pavilions have been inundated with long wait times, especially the China pavilion so if you're travelling in the next few months please keep that in mind and line up or get your reservation in early," CTS says.

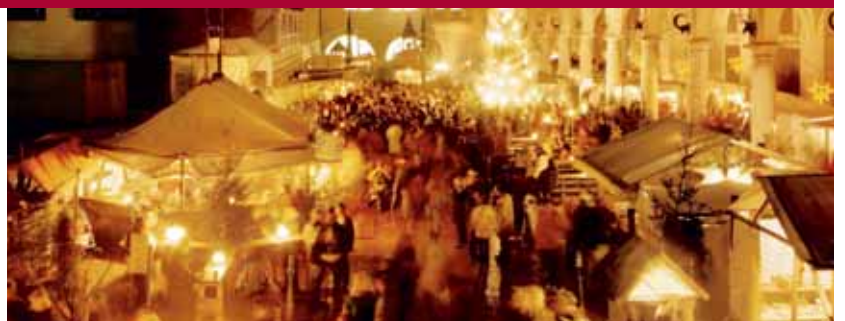
It is offering a "Hong Kong and Shanghai" package that includes four nights in both cities, with return air with Qantas or Cathay Pacific, four breakfasts in the Shanghai hotel and one standard-day World Expo admission. The deal costs from \$2060 per person (twin share).

CTS Tours also has a new 11-day "Ice and Snow Tour" with Qantas departing on January 5, 2011. This winter special covers Beijing, Harbin, Changchun, Shenyang, Dalian and Shanghai and is priced from \$2380 per person (twin share). This includes international and domestic airfares, all accommodation in four-star minimum hotels, most meals and all prepaid taxes and surcharges, transfers, tours and all sightseeing costs. A highlight is Harbin's famous ice festival.

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# Helen Wong's Yangtze river cruise bookings soar

THE growth in popularity of international river cruising has flowed on to China, with bookings for Yangtze River trips soaring by more than 20 per cent in the past year, Helen Wong's Tours says.

Last year 628,875 travellers booked cruises between Chongqing and Yichang, Wuhan or Shanghai, experiencing a close-up view of the Three Gorges as well as China's largest manmade project since the construction of the Great Wall, the Three Gorges Dam.

The 2009 figure was more than 100,000 higher than in 2008 with officials from the China Tourism Bureau predicting this year's number to increase a further 25 per cent, despite the continuing financial global concerns.

"It is a trip of a lifetime, not only for fans of cruising but for all travellers keen on seeing and experiencing China's many attributes," Helen Wong, managing director and founder of



Three Gorges Dam (image courtesy of Helen Wong's Tours)

Helen Wong's Tours, said.

"The quality of the vessels that ply the waters of Asia's longest river has improved greatly in recent years, reflected by the increased level of interest and bookings for Yangtze

river cruising. In Australia we have seen a marked growth in our bookings, which support the latest official figures from China.

"The Three Gorges, the massive Three Gorge Dam and the Danning

River's Small Gorges are only three of many sightseeing delights on the cruise," Wong said.

Downriver cruises between Chongqing and Yichang aboard luxury ships such as Victoria Cruises' *Anna*, *Prince* or *Katarina* take three nights and are priced from \$700 per person (twin share) through Helen Wong's Tours (from \$1145 a single cabin). Because of the strong flow of water the upriver cruise takes an extra day and night, yet carries a lower price, from \$680 per person twin share (from \$1100 single cabin).

Alternatively, cruise fans can opt for one of a number of Helen Wong's Tours which include the Yangtze experience, such as the nine-day "Yangtze Upstream" program priced from \$2190, including a two-night stay in Shanghai as well as Chongqing.

A 13-day "Yangtze Wonders" holiday, which also includes four nights in Beijing as well as three nights in Shanghai, is priced from \$2600.

## Worldhotels group expands China properties on offer

WORLDHOTELS has expanded significantly in the Asia-Pacific region in 2010 amid a robust rebound in the regional economy. Of 29 new hotels with more than 12,000 rooms welcomed to the group internationally since January,



Tibet Hotel Chengdu



Yue Shanghai

Asia-Pacific accounted for nearly half.

Among them is the Tibet Hotel Chengdu, styled after the famous Potala Palace in Lhasa. It became the first hotel in south west China

to join Worldhotels. The 276-room hotel in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, is just a short stroll away the famous Wenshu Monastery.

As well, the new Yue Shanghai joined the



Furama Hotel Dalian

group as a First Class Collection affiliate. In the heart of the Chinese metropolis, Yue Shanghai is situated in a green enclave beside Century Park in Pudong, only minutes from the Shanghai World Expo site. Yue Shanghai is Worldhotels' seventh affiliate in the Shanghai portfolio, joining Central Hotel Shanghai, Grand Central Shanghai, New World Mayfair, The Eton Hotel, The Seagull on the Bund, and The Everbright International Hotel.

And Furama Hotel Dalian became the first five-star luxury hotel in north east China to join the group. The Furama occupies prestigious twin towers in the heart of the city's commercial, shopping and entertainment district, with conference facilities among the largest in Dalian.



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## World's first scheduled super jumbo service to China

EMIRATES has celebrated the arrival of the first scheduled Airbus A380 service to China, with the landing of the world's largest commercial aircraft into Beijing earlier this month.

During the welcome ceremony, Richard Jewsbury, Emirates' senior vice president, commercial operations, Far East and Australasia, expressed his excitement, "Seven years ago we were the first airline to open a non-stop link between the Middle East and Mainland China.

"Today we celebrate another first with the arrival of our A380 to Beijing, this momentous touchdown of the world's largest aircraft not only reiterates Emirates' commitment to the development of the China market, but also begins a new era for China's civil aviation."

The 517-seat A380 operates as EK 306 departing Dubai daily at 04:10 hrs, touching down in the Chinese capital city at 15:10 hrs. The return flight, EK 307 takes off from Beijing Capital International Airport at 23:55 hrs, landing at Terminal 3, Dubai International Airport at 04:20 hrs the following day.

First Class passengers can relax in

one of 14 flat-bed, massage-equipped Private Suites; the cabin also has two onboard Shower Spas, ensuring a revitalised and refreshed arrival.

For First and Business Class passengers the on-board lounge is the social highlight, featuring a fully-stocked bar and a selection of hot and cold canapés.

Business Class passengers can relax in seats that convert to flat beds up to 79 inches (two metres) long, whilst those travelling in Economy Class can stretch out in seats with a pitch of up to 33 inches.

Passengers in all classes can enjoy Emirates' ICE (information, communication, entertainment) Digital Widescreen inflight entertainment system, which features more than 1200 channels of on-demand entertainment.

Currently Emirates operates double-daily services each to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, and daily services to Guangzhou; while the airline's fleet of 11 A380s are currently operating on services from Dubai to London Heathrow, Paris Charles de Gaulle, Toronto, Seoul, Bangkok, Beijing, Jeddah, Sydney and Auckland.

## Travman releases extensive winter program

TRAVMAN says 2010 has been a good year for China travel, with the market rebounding to 2008 levels, partly on the back of the success of World Expo. Travman's Robert Wang says he is confident China will continue to grow strongly next year, with the company selling an extensive winter program featuring two specials to the most popular Chinese cities.

The 10-day "China Experience" starts from \$2355 per person including all airfares and taxes. It features the golden route Beijing-Xian-Shanghai, with accommodation in four and five-star hotels and guided tours.

The nine-day "East China Explorer" provides what Travman says is a unique opportunity to explore the classic gardens, ancient canals and scenic lakes in China's east. The price starts from \$1998 per person including all airfares and taxes. Both tours are valid for travel between November 2010 and March 2011.



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China Yangtze Mountains

## Viking to introduce new China vessel

NEXT year Viking River Cruises will introduce a new vessel to its China program, the *Viking Emerald*. The 264-guest vessel will feature the "largest suites" in river cruising – the 840-square-foot Presidential Suites will have separate sitting and sleeping areas, two flat-screen televisions, panoramic windows and a private wrap-around balcony – as well as deluxe 269-square-foot staterooms with hotel-style beds and private balconies.

Viking says the new ship will feature a state-of-the-art kitchen where Asian and European cuisine will be prepared by staff trained and managed by Viking's Swiss management team.

Managing director Australia and New Zealand, Teresia Fors, says Viking's "Imperial Jewels of China" trip has been recognised in *National Geographic Traveler's 10 Best of Everything* as the fourth best cruise in the world, and it keeps receiving accolades and praise from the industry and travellers.

"I am constantly reminded of what a fabulous program we are offering in China with the flood of positive feedback I receive," she says. "Viking controls the entire hotel side of the operation and our guides on the Yangtze are by far the highest paid – and the quality is reflected in the reviews our guests give us." Viking averages more than one staff member for every two guests.

"Viking's China programs are good in length (12, 16 and 17 days) and yet comprehensive," Fors says. "They are perfect for the traveller after a China tour that covers all the highlights of Beijing, Shanghai, Xian, as the cruise offers a totally different side to their China experience. It is super simple for agents to sell as it is so inclusive and the agent can rest assured he or she has provided a good option for their clients. Their clients will be looked after from start to finish, treated like royalty and learn so much about this emerging and exciting destination. And added to that,

everything is commissionable."

Viking announced in June it would pay commission on every aspect of a client's booking – from cruise to shore excursions, port charges, taxes, fees, gratuities and more. "This unprecedented commission policy was developed with input from leaders in the travel agency community, and it is very simple," Viking's chairman Torstein Hagen says.

"If an agent sells a Viking River Cruises itinerary, they earn a commission on all of it. Our partners will be paid for everything they sell."

In addition to the industry-exclusive payment on port charges, gratuities, taxes and fees, Viking will offer many other commissionable upgrades – such as beverage packages, gift orders and more – to increase the agents' profit from the reservation. The new commission program will apply to all new 2010 and 2011 bookings, and Viking will continue to pay commissions 29 days prior to departure.



## Starwood opens 1000th hotel

STARWOOD Hotels and Resorts has opened its 1000th hotel in March, the Sheraton Qiandao Lake Resort (pictured above) located on the shores of China's famed Qiandao Lake, also, aptly known as the Lake of Thousand Islands.

Located in Chun'an County of Hangzhou, Qiandao Lake is 140 kilometres from downtown Hangzhou. The 250-room Sheraton Qiandao Lake Resort is located on the scenic lakeshore of Qiandao Lake, a popular tourist destination for mountain climbing, cycling and other outdoor activities. The waters of the lake flow directly from the Yellow Mountain Range, and the region is China's largest state forest park, spanning almost 1000 square kilometres.

Qiandao Lake is well known as home to "the Atlantis of the East", the 1800 year-old remains of an ancient Chinese city, an archeological treasure submerged beneath the water. The city walls and architecture have remained preserved and are heralded as some of the most substantial sunken artifacts in the world.

The resort offers a lobby lounge that enables guests to stay connected with instant access to information and technology, as well as a state-of-the-art gym, and the first Shine Spa by Sheraton in Greater China. The resort also features 23 well appointed suites including a 980 square metre Presidential Suite and five lounges, bars and restaurants.

In China, Starwood is slated to open more than 20 hotels this year.

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# Travel Indochina reports 'exceptional' sales

TRAVEL Indochina says China is selling "exceptionally well" with the market having recovered strongly from late in 2009.

Managing director Paul Hole says there has been a "a definite and very solid pick-up in sales across our China portfolio of small group journeys and fully independent tours since February. This growth trend has remained consistent into the 2010/11 new financial year with all future projections also looking strong."

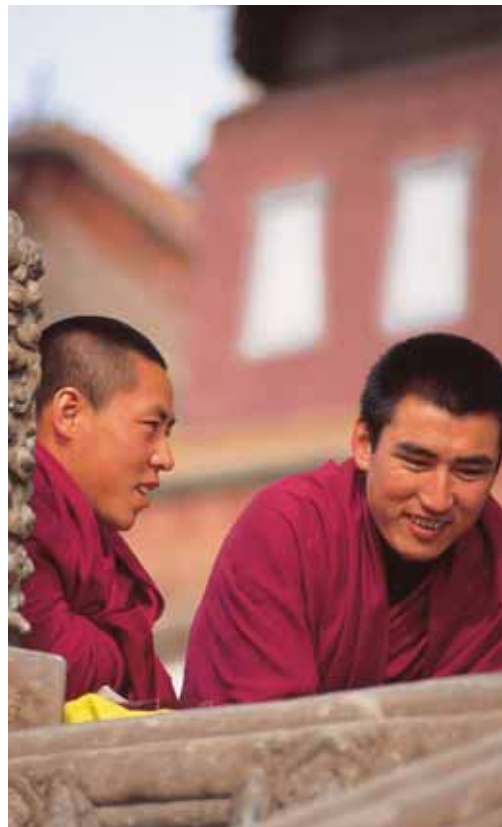
"Sales of our new 'All-Inclusive' product range, launched in December 2009, kicked off to a great start, with bookings remaining healthy."

Hole says forward sales are robust with prospects for 2011 looking very good. "Travel Indochina has some big plans for our 2011 portfolio. These new offerings come from extensive research, client feedback and our on-the-ground industry connections – we are looking forward to sharing these new products with our agents and travellers soon."

Beijing, Xian, Shanghai, Guilin/Yangshuo and the Yangtze continue to sell well for Travel Indochina, with an increase in sales of packages that feature combination tours – accommodation stays around the Great Wall with adventure hikes in the area and side trips to lesser known sections of the wall – and tours to less visited areas of the Middle Kingdom region such as Datong, Pingyao, Luoyang and Dengfeng.

Tours to Tibet are also selling strongly, and Hole says he expects a re-emergence of regions such as Tibet, Yunnan and the Silk Road as major players in the market. "Our projections show these areas to be really strong destinations in the coming year."

Travel Indochina's China program ranges from an eight-day "Yunnan Explorer" to 18-day trips to "Yangtze and Beyond" and "Yangtze and Yunnan". Both of the latter include Yangtze River cruises. There is also a 17-day "Silk Road" tour that travels from Xian's Terracotta Warriors to Urumqi and Kashgar.



At the Great Wall – Simatai and Chengde overnight tour (image courtesy of Travel Indochina)

## Mandarin Oriental, Macau – a new waterfront landmark

A NEW landmark has opened on Macau's waterfront, representing the "next era in elegant and sophisticated hotel accommodation".

The new, luxurious Mandarin Oriental, Macau is said to blend "stylish, chic modernity with subtle inspirations from the territory's European heritage", to create a premier property on the Macau Peninsula.

As part of the prestigious mixed-use complex, One Central, and with a prime location in the heart of Macau's entertainment and high-end retail centre, Mandarin Oriental, Macau is just a few minutes walk from the historic heart of town. The hotel boasts views of Taipa Island, west Nam Van Lake, Macau Tower and the hills of the South China coastline.

It features 213 rooms and suites, as well as a signature all-day dining restaurant, a bar, relaxing lobby lounge and Mandarin Oriental Cake Shop. All venues have waterfront views.

The hotel also showcases the group's spa concept as well as a fitness centre and an outdoor swimming pool.



## Accor unveils new Sofitel

ACCOR has unveiled its latest luxury property – the Sofitel Dongguan Humen Oriental – opening last month in the bustling city of Dongguan.

A 62 storey tower, Sofitel's newest hotel has been designed to blend "the best of French hospitality with Asian grace", and is the cornerstone of the Huang He Commercial Plaza considered the heart of Humen's garment and Central Business District.

The mixed-use tower rises above a podium level housing a retail and wholesale fashion mall, with the hotel's guest rooms beginning on the 29th floor.

The hotel features 409 spacious guest rooms and suites, starting at 55 square meters in size, with floor to ceiling windows, free-standing bathtubs and separate rain showers.

The hotel features the scenic Polaris Lounge as well as an atrium tea and

coffee lounge, a poolside bar, Cantonese and Japanese restaurants, and western dining with a view on the 61st floor.

A poolside fitness centre is available, along with a yoga studio, dry sauna and steam rooms. The indoor swimming pool sits in a glass house and overlooks the garden. Outdoor Jacuzzi and tennis complete the picture, all serviced by Eau, poolside bar.

"We are challenging the reputation of Dongguan as a manufacturing town by building a world class tower, with an amenity and technology level commensurate with Sofitel luxury standards," the hotel's general manager David Baldwin said.

Sofitel Dongguan Humen Oriental marks the 23rd Sofitel in Greater China, and will be followed by the Sofitel Guangzhou Sunrich.

Introductory rates start from RMB 520++ (about \$A84).



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