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# China Day Tour Report

for

Gray Line China

May 2005

## INTRODUCTION

**Client:** Hank Crawford, President, Gray Line China

**Assignment:** Evaluate various components of travel operations, reacting as a "typical Western traveler" on a visit to China. Provide a report based on Gray Line China's (GLC) target demographic: 40+ vacationers who have some travel experience and are previous users of a packaged tour, and/or are making their first trip to Asia. For this report, scrutinize the following areas:

- 1) Analysis of Beijing Day Tour Operations
- 2) Compare and contrast Beijing to tours in Shanghai
- 3) Evaluate independent tours in Xi'an and the Li River Cruise
- 4) Reaction to activities in Guilin as potential tour destination

**Travel Analysts:** Lynn and Daniel Shirey

## DAY TOUR 02: CLASSIC BEIJING

May 3, 2005

**Tour Itinerary:** Tian'anmen Square | Forbidden City | Lunch | Temple Of Heaven | Pearl Market | Summer Palace

**Tour Guide:** John

**Transportation:** Pick-up at hotel via motorcoach; 15 minutes later than scheduled time (although understandable because of the traffic situation in Beijing, suggest giving a window time for pickup instead of a fixed time).

**Comments:** Guide was knowledgeable about the sites and provided good introductory information on bus prior to arriving at destination. Obtained tickets for site quickly and efficiently, and allowed time to look around each site after providing his insight. Therefore, it was surprising how disengaged the tour guide was on the visit to the Pearl Market, not providing any build-up prior to the visit or personal involvement at the stop. Not knowing your company's tour guide's business relationship with the Pearl Market, it was evident that pre-selling this shopping opportunity was not a priority for the guide. The guide is also missing an opportunity for tips by not positioning himself outside the vehicle as customers are dropped off at their hotels. In fact, the guide left the tour a couple hotel-stops early and missed the departure of a half-dozen travelers. *See more about tipping in the Observations section below.*

**Gray Line:** GLC is not taking advantage of many branding opportunities on this tour. Guides need to carry a sign or flag with the official Gray Line logo. Guides should also have branded clothing or caps, and provide branded identifiers, such as pins or neck-worn IDs, for tour participants. It was explained to us that there are local agreements which prevent GLC from permanently branding some vehicles, but the use of magnetic signs or logo placards for the front of the bus are needed. A bus that parks at these tourist destinations displaying Gray Line branding with local contact phone number and web address is a billboard for any Western tourist in Beijing, as well as an identifier for those on the tour to locate the bus.

**Observations:** 1) One of the biggest issues we and others on the tours face was confusion about tipping. There are mixed messages, in guide books and travel media, about who to tip in China, so a printed overview with suggestions would be helpful. 2) The availability of cold water for sale on the bus would provide additional customer comfort and an opportunity for secondary sales. 3) Since you target the day tour customer, the sale of city maps and/or tour books may also be candidates for secondary sales; or have maps printed with Gray Line branding and other tour information available on the bus.

## **BEIJING DAY TOUR 03: THE GREAT WALL TOUR**

**May 4, 2005**

**Tour Itinerary:** Great Wall at Badaling | Bohua Jade Factory | Lunch | Ming Tombs

**Tour Guide:** Jason

**Transportation:** Pick-up at hotel via motorcoach; arrived on time

**Comments:** Jason was the model tour guide by whom you should benchmark all personnel. He was extremely knowledgeable and chatty about the sites and Chinese culture. He did an great job preparing customers for the sites to be visited, and excelled in pre-selling the jade factory. Instead of turning over the tour to the designated factory representative, Jason demonstrated ways to tell quality jade from imitation. He allowed ample time to climb the Great Wall, and provided a lot of interesting information at the various points of interest while touring the Ming Tombs.

**Gray Line:** While many of the previous day's branding issues apply to this tour, a Gray Line tour sign and bus placard were used.

**Observations:** 1) The main differentiation between day tour users and packaged tour customers is that people opting for day tours are free to choose what they will be doing the next day. GLC has an opportunity to promote additional tours while the audience is captive on that day's tour. 2) At the end of the tour, the ride back to the hotel provides an opportunity to solicit feedback about the tour and the guide. A short customer survey form will enable GLC to receive commentary from customers while the experience is fresh in their minds. By completing the form, customers could receive a discount coupon for future GLC day tours, providing them incentive and you additional sales. 3) Cold bottled water for sale on the bus was an extremely popular item.

## **DAY TOUR 07: CULTURAL BEIJING - HUTONG BY RICKSHAW**

**May 5, 2005**

**Tour Itinerary:** Hutong Tour | Pedicab Ride | Chinese Family Visit | Prince Gong Mansion | Formal Tea Ceremony

**Tour Guide:** Jason

**Transportation:** Pick-up at hotel via car and driver; arrived on time

**Comments:** Glad to have Jason again for this half-day tour. We were the only two on the tour, so he used a local car and driver for our use. Since Jason knew us from the previous day's tour and it was a more personalized tour, he was even more companionable and conversational. He introduced us to and accompanied us with the local guides responsible for the Hutong tour and tea ceremony. Experiencing how a typical Chinese family lives and the cultural significance of the tea ceremony made this tour more intimate than typical sightseeing excursions. GLC should take any opportunity to add these types of cultural activities as they provide a unique and memorable travel experience.

**Observations:** During our research, we discovered that it is customary to bring gifts when visiting a family home. Although this was not discussed during the tour, it might provide shopping opportunity prior to the visit to the Hutong residence. This also was another situation where tipping guidelines would have helped us to know whether (and how much) to tip the local guide and pedicab driver.