



Workhorse onTRAC
Travel ▪ Research ▪ Analysis ▪ Communications

China Day Tour Report

Part III

XI'AN SUBCONTRACTED DAY TOUR: ARCHEOLOGICAL TOUR

May 7, 2005

Transportation: Picked up at train station; tour started immediately

Tour Itinerary: Xi'an City Wall | Warrior Factory Tour | Terra Cotta Warriors | Lunch

Tour Guide: Jessie

Transportation: Van and driver

Comments: According to Jessie, she went to a university to be specifically trained as a tour guide. This may be a pool of people that GLC could tap for a source of personnel, or as a qualifier for future tour guide candidates. She was an excellent guide. Her command of the city, history, Terra Cotta Warrior site and interest in the United States made her an exceptional asset. She made good use of the driving interval between Xi'an and the Warrior site by providing a historical overview. She went out of her way to check us in to hotel and solve the confusion of lost paperwork by the hotel desk.

Observations: The general public would not be aware that this tour company was subcontracted by GLC, so some form of Gray Line identifier would be appropriate. A Gray Line logo on the pick-up sign and a logo shirt would suffice. If GLC is looking to partner with a local tour company and Jessie is representative of the quality of their guides, this might make a good match.

XI'AN CULTURAL TOUR

May 8, 2005

Tour Itinerary: Shaanxi Provincial History Museum | Drum Tower | Transfer to Airport

Tour Guide: Jessie

Transportation: Van and driver

Comments: Jessie provided a personalized tour of the museum in Xi'an. It was an excellent historical counterpoint for the Warrior site seen the previous day, and displayed the depth of Jessie's knowledge. This same level of expertise was applied at the short stop made at the Drum Tower. Jessie's blend of knowledge and personality is a standard by which GLC should continue to use in subcontracting tours. She then escorted us to the airport, allowed us a leisurely lunch, and came to get us when it was time to check-in for the flight. She stayed to see if we had any problem in obtaining our boarding passes.

SUBCONTRACTED DAY TOUR: GUILIN / YANGSHUO

May 12, 2005

Tour Itinerary: Li River Cruise from Guilin | Yangshuo area tour | Tiger River excursion

Tour Guide: Local Guide as provided by hotel tour desk

Transportation: Van and driver

Comments: Of all the tours, Gray Line-sponsored or independent, this was by far the weakest in terms of operation. This opinion has nothing to do with the region as a tour destination, as you will read about the accolades in the next section. The positives associated with this tour were that they got us to and from our destination, and the tour guide was friendly. Other than that, the morning hotel pick-up was disorganized, with a lot of sitting and waiting until the locations and passengers were sorted out. There was also a long wait to board the cruise boat, and customers were unceremoniously plunked down in the middle of a tacky gift shop to wait. Other than a brief, broken-English introduction onboard the van, the guide had very little interaction with the customers. In the gift shop and onboard the boat, very little was seen of her. She accompanied us on the Tiger River excursion, but talked mostly to those who spoke Chinese, so there must have been language-barrier issues that kept her from being effective for us. She did escort us to the Yangshou hotel, but she then interjected herself in the discussion about room costs, trying to obtain accommodations more expensive than rate agreed to on our reservations.

Observations: From the Western travelers' perspective, we would recommend a significant upgrade on this level of tour operation. Just the addition of an engaged, knowledgeable tour guide would smooth over the rough patches encountered.

GUILIN AS POTENTIAL TOUR DESTINATION

Guilin is definitely a location that Gray Line China should include in its product offering, much in the same way it does Xi'an. Travelers would see this as a side trip or weekend destination from Beijing, Shanghai or Hong Kong. There are enough quality excursions and activities to easily fill two full days. Here is a quick description of the highlights we experienced:

Li River Cruise

The sublime and unique scenery sets this region apart from anywhere in the world. We take a slow float down river and are catered to a delicious lunch that exceeded our expectations. Locals paddle up to our boat to deliver fresh fish to the cooks and to sell handcrafts to the passengers.

Tiger River Raft

The local village calls their young women "Minority Girls," and we are treated to a serenade and sing-a-long onboard a quaint raft hosted by a Minority Girl. We float serenely on the gentle river, stopping to see the local custom of fishermen using tethered birds to catch dinner for them.

Tiger River Village

The raft drops us off at a village with time enough to stretch our legs. We see the local water wheel used for irrigation, and a huge Banyan tree which was over 1,500 years old. We also have time for shopping in the outdoor market.

Yangshou Shopping and Cafes

Tiny shops and eateries line a warren of charming, narrow walking streets and provide hours of diversion. As evening falls music from the many clubs and Internet cafes fill the night and offer many destinations from which to choose. The nightlife is low key, comfortable and casual.

Guilin Cultural Center

As the river cuts through the city of Guilin, one stretch is home to a large park surrounded by large, Western-friendly hotels. This is the most attractive part of the city we experienced. There are a number of restaurant choices and a pedestrian-only street packed with people, storefronts and amusements. Elephant Trunk Hill Park centers around a single karst (the lush, green, rounded spires of rock that make the Li River region a geologic wonderland) and has many caves, monuments and stairways to explore.

These were just activities experienced on our own, the right local tour company will probably flesh-out these activities and many more in the area.

As you know, the terrain around Guilin and the Li River is the primary reason a traveler would choose this as a destination. The typography is totally unique, and only photographs can describe the riot of shapes that the mountains display to visitors. Guilin is a large city, but seems only now coming to terms with Western travelers, so care must be used to frame travelers' expectations of facilities and accommodations. Since this is not Beijing or Shanghai, the comparison to Xi'an is appropriate. In Xi'an, travelers go there primarily to

see the Warriors, so there is minimal expectation for other excursions. They don't expect to have the same selection of hotels and restaurants, so their standards of comfort and convenience may not be as high. The Li River cruise and the haunting beauty of mist-enshrouded karsts are the primary draws that travelers will consider in selecting this destination. Other quality sightseeing and cultural events will only add to the experience.

The biggest challenge GLC will face is finding a good/better/best range of accommodations and transportation options. Another challenge will be partnering with the proper local tour operation, a critical decision which will go a long way to establish the rapport needed with your guests. Someone equal to the tour guide experience in Xi'an would be the best-case scenario; the guide we had in Guilin would not be.