



KV02AT

September 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

WKGS Geography/Geology fieldtrip to China - 'The Grand Tour'
Wednesday 17th July to 3rd August 2024

Following on from the last ten very successful WKGS expeditions / fieldtrips to China, I am trying to plan one final Grand Tour of China. In the past, prices of air tickets and hotels etc were always released around 2 years in advance but since Covid this is no longer the case. To allow for a meaningful quote to be obtained **I need to know how many might like to go on the final China expedition**. Although first and foremost a Geography fieldtrip, this trip in 2024 will give students an insight into a place that holds so much that is relevant to many subject areas. The trip will show how the country is changing quickly as it both develops further into a global superpower, but also as it again becomes more inward looking.

Currently there is no upper limit on numbers, although this may change. The trip will be open to both geographers and non-geographers in Years 10 to 13 who match the stated criteria below, though students studying geography will usually be allocated places first. You are simply expressing a serious potential interest. Kindly email me at kvane@wkgs.net to simply express this interest.

Currency uncertainties, coupled with ever-escalating flight costs have meant that this trip has taken well over six months to prepare. The biggest issues have been the high cost of flights and the current weak value of Sterling as well as the massive jump in the cost of visas to China back in 2018. This trip will only run if I can bring it in at a cost that is fair. In 2019 our 17-day trip cost £2500 and so it is hoped that with some changes to the itinerary that this 21 day 'Grand Tour' will come in around at £2700 – about £130 per day plus a visa.

The length may be reduced a little if that makes the difference, with the tour finishing in Beijing, rather than Shanghai. Sadly, the Yangtze 3-day cruise element in 2019 has had to be dropped but it has been replaced by train 'Cruises'.

As a Geography/Geology fieldtrip, the itinerary has been selected to allow study of a country that retains much of its mystery to us in the west. The expedition always starts in **Hong Kong** enabling a chance to see one of the most dynamic cities in Asia while at the same time getting over the jet lag before we go into China. We will stay at the Hong Kong Baptist University Halls of Residence. Opened just over 20 years ago, they offer excellent accommodation with full air conditioning, microwave, fridge, TV, hard (yes!) beds and access to the internet and a laundry. Between four and five fully active days will be spent here with a wide range of activities as listed in the attached simple draft itinerary Highlights will include a Dim Sum banquet and a full Gala dinner (smart attire) as well as travel on the famous MTR, trams, ferries, cable car and buses. We will be swimming in the South China Sea at Repulse Bay and spend a day visiting a huge theme park – Ocean Park. This schedule will really test your stamina but will be an experience for every sense.

Following Hong Kong, we travel over the border into **mainland China** and the Special Administrative Zone of **Shenzhen** in Guangdong Province. Shenzhen is where China still makes much of the goods that we use in our everyday lives, though this is beginning to change as cheaper labour is found in other Asian countries like Vietnam. From Shenzhen airport, we fly onto **Chengdu**. Here we spend the first night in China in a 4* hotel, complete with its own swimming pool (and lifeguards). Chengdu has great shopping opportunities. While in Chengdu we will visit the world-famous Panda Sanctuary with an array of Giant and Red Pandas. In 2015, some students were able to briefly stroke the Red Pandas because they roam free.

To save money we will travel between some of China's greatest cities by train. Using overnight sleeper trains for two of the three routes will save us a lot of time as well. The first journey from Chengdu to Xian (11 hours overnight) will be in Hard Sleeper class. While travel from Xian to Beijing will be in Soft-Sleeper class (12 hours) depending on the numbers going. The final train from Beijing to Shanghai will be during the day in a new bullet train. Our luggage requirements might mean we travel first class for this journey of around 4.5 hours.



In **Xian** we will visit the famous and breath-taking tombs housing the famous Terracotta Army – created to defend the Emperor in the afterlife. We will cycle (some on tandems) around the famous city walls and visit the stunning hot springs. Other highlights will include the Grand Mosque, Big Pagoda as well as have a real Chinese massage.

Beijing, the capital, will facilitate visits to the Temple of Heaven as well as the centre of Chinese power in the Great Hall of the People facing across the huge Tiananmen Square (site of student protests and subsequent repression with tanks) to the incredible Forbidden City. We will rise early to travel to a more remote section of the Great Wall to get the full experience at Simatai, away from the tourist hordes at Badaling. Here we see rural life in China.

Shanghai (if the budget allows) is a vibrant wealthy city and here we will visit one of the best museums in the world as well as visiting the slightly less famous but excellent museum of urban development (after all – it is a geography fieldtrip!) The famous Bund (akin to Liverpool's 'Three Graces' waterfront) and the views across to the techno Pudong development will prepare us for the shopping experience that is the Nanjing Road. There are many other delights in all these cities.

Please be aware that the air quality at this time of year can be poor in the northern cities of Xian and Beijing. We will also be prepared for the earthquake risk of Chengdu and the Typhoon (hurricane) risks in Hong Kong. Crime in China is very low though (apart for the usual pickpockets).

The expedition cost will include:

- Travel from West Kirby to Manchester – return by hired coach.
- Return scheduled flights and most taxes (Please note in the present climate airport taxes / fuel surcharges are subject to increase which is not included though this has never happened) There may be four flights as we seek to get the best prices.
- An internal flight within China: Shenzhen to Chengdu.
- All express bullet trains and/or sleeper trains.
- Use of a fabulous English-speaking guide (May) throughout our stay in China plus guides in every city.
- All transfers in both Hong Kong and China using air-conditioned coaches.
- All accommodation in Hong Kong - sharing two to a room in the HKBU Halls of Residence. Meals in Hong Kong are extra (though there is a heavily discounted restaurant in our block at the hall of residence).
- Accommodation (3* or 4*) in the Chinese cities to be visited (usually full board).
- All meals in China (often as banquets)
- A dim sum buffet while in Hong Kong and hopefully a gala banquet to celebrate the final China expedition.
- All travel, meals, and accommodation while in mainland China (excluding a few meals (fast food) when out shopping or on the train.
- Cost of all tours in China.
- All buses, trains and internal air travel in China. In Hong Kong you will purchase a card similar to the London Oyster card.
- Fully comprehensive insurance cover using the School Journey Policy (considered better than that used by the travel company insurance)
- All tips for guides, drivers and train personnel.

Extra items to budget for:

- Chinese visa - £151pp – predicted £160. The Chinese increased visa costs from £65 to £151 in light of the visa rises made by the UK government for Chinese nationals coming to the UK in August 2016
- Air passenger Duty - **for any student participant aged 16 or above** on date of arrival back in the UK. (Sadly, this is a UK Government tax) However, it is hoped to include this and refund those under this age.
- Meals and drinks while in Hong Kong and the cost of local travel using a card similar to the London Oyster card. (About £80 maximum - total depending on your tastes in eating). All travel in Hong Kong will use the excellent integrated public transport system. Cost is not high.
- A couple of fast-food type lunches while in China.

At present there will be four or five staff accompanying the trip, some of whom have been to China on many previous visits. **This trip is unusual in that staff pay to participate on the trip.** This is done to keep the total cost as low as possible while enabling the programme to be as varied as possible.



How can your child get a place?

As this is a Geography fieldtrip, we would hope to take everyone who applies in a group size of a minimum of 40 persons, though we can consider more persons. We have taken close to 90 persons before. **Consideration is given to the physical health and mental health of likely participants (see below).**

1. Fitness levels. The nature of the fieldtrip and the nature of our work means that **participants must be in good health**. A combination of jet lag and general travel fatigue coupled with hot and very humid temperatures, as well as unusual food is a real test of personal fitness and stamina. A detailed **confidential** medical and consent form will need to be completed. Evidence that certain vaccinations (including Typhoid, Hep.A and MMR) have been taken will also be required nearer the time. Individual issues can be discussed beforehand as **it has been possible to take students with some medical issues (including diabetes and Coeliac)** providing they are fit. A further medical form will be completed nearer to the trip departure date.

An ability to undertake different types of transport will be required. In particular coping with long flights, long coach journeys and using very crowded public transport. If you suffer travel sickness, you should consider this point as sometimes we travel for over 22 hours.

Sadly, it is not possible to take anyone with a nut allergy, sea food allergy, severe eating disorder, or anyone who has not had the MMR vaccination. We cannot make exceptions regarding this because of the significant risk to an individual's own health and well-being. We have taken participants with other medical conditions so long as they can show their ability to cope with them and participate. We always assess the risk for every individual student based on their health and fitness as well as their mental well-being. The trip is 21 days – there is only limited social media permitted in China such as Skype. All others like Snapchat; Facebook; Instagram and WhatsApp are blocked in communist China. Home sickness can be an issue for some (a minority) partly because it is hard and very expensive for students to return home.

2. Chinese food. The trip lasts about 21 days and so the ability to **have a go at trying the food offered** will be **essential**. Vegetarians have come on every expedition, and we have tried to accommodate their dietary needs although this can be very challenging for some at times. We have taken students with coeliac dietary needs, though there are times when they become reliant on their own emergency provisions. Unfortunately, **it is impossible to cater for a vegan diet on this trip**. Prior to travel, we arrange for all participants (and their parents) attend a banquet at City Rendezvous (Chung Ku) in Liverpool to open student's taste buds to the delights of Sichuan cooking and Chinese food in general.

3. The school is sadly **not** able to offer any sponsorship or financial assistance to participants. All students are responsible for funding their participation and for having sufficient spending money as will be advised.

One main aim is that this fieldtrip/expedition will be the trip of a lifetime for your daughter/son/ward. China is a country of massive extremes in so many ways and I feel that this trip will give your child experiences that will remain with them for many years. This has always been the case for me in every trip to China I have undertaken, and I believe for the many hundreds who have been a part of these expeditions over the last 20+ years. If the budget cannot stay close to the £2700 then the trip will sadly not run. If the trip does go ahead, then you will be asked for a deposit payment to be made at a pre-trip meeting in school if you wish your child to attend.

Please remember to email your interest to kvane@wkgs.net as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

K Vane

Mr K R Vane
Head of Geography

The outline itinerary follows.

The school has a blanket School Journey Insurance policy in place to provide appropriate cancellation, curtailment, medical and personal possessions cover. This policy also carries very limited personal accident insurance cover for pupils. As the school will not be liable for any injury arising from incidents beyond our direct control, parents/carers may wish to consider purchasing their own personal accident cover to enhance the limited protection of this policy.



China 2021 THE GRAND TOUR				
Date	Meal / Transport			
Day 1 WED		Transfer to Manchester	MANCHESTER	
17.07.24	FLIGHT	Manchester to Hong Kong	HONG KONG	
Day 2 THU	COACH	Arrive Hong Kong & Transfer		
18.07.24	ACCOM	HKBU Hall of residence		
Day 3 FRI		Repulse Bay & Stanley.		
19.07.24		Nan Lian Garden HK History		
Day 4 SAT	COACH	Sai Kung HK Geopark		
20.07.24				
Day 5 SUN		Lantau Island / Tai O / HK Is		
21.07.24				
Day 6 MON		HK Ocean Park		
22.07.24				
Day 7 TUES	COACH	Transfer across border	Shenzhen	
23.07.24	FLIGHT	Shenzhen to Chengdu		
	D	COACH	Transfer - Yinhe Dynasty Hotel	CHENGDU
Day 8 WED	B	COACH	AM Panda Sanctuary Chengdu	
24.07.24	L	COACH	PM Dujiangyan Irrigation System (2 hours)	
	D		EVE Swim in hotel	
Day 9 THU	B	WALK	AM: Shop: Chunxi Road and Taikoo Li Sanlitun	
25.07.24	L	COACH	PM Tour Wide & Narrow streets	
	D			
Day 10 FRI	B	COACH	possible day trip to school (may swap with Friday tours)	XIAN
26.07.24	D	COACH	19:00 transfer to station	
		TRAIN	Chengdu West - Yizhen [Xian] K248 Hard sleeper Dep: 20:30	
Day 11 SAT			07:45 Transfer from Yizhen Station to hotel (4*) Quest Hotel?	XIAN
27.07.24	L D	COACH	Xian city wall hire bicycles. Tour Big Pagoda ; Great Mosque and Muslim community market PM: massage for whole group. Hotel	
Day 12 SUN	B	COACH	Tour Terracotta Warrior & Horses	
28.07.24	L	COACH	PM Huanqing Hot Springs	
	D	TRAIN	Xian - Beijing West Z44 soft sleeper Dep 20:27 (11h55m)	BEIJING
Day 13 MON			Arrive 08:22 Transfer to Hotel (Dong Fang Xicheng District)	
29.07.24	L D		Tour: Temple of Heaven / Tianamen Sq / Great Hall of People and Forbidden City. To hotel.	
Day 14 TUE	B	COACH	AM Silk Street market and Beijing Planning Exhibition Hall.	
30.7.24			PM Free visit to Park	
		COACH	EVE Beijing Duck Dinner then Acrobat Show - Dong Fang Hotel	
Day 18 WED	B	COACH	Beijing Great Wall Jinshanling section (or Simatai)	BEIJING
31.07.24	L		Lunch at Wall	



China 2021 THE GRAND TOUR			
Date	Meal / Transport		
	D	WALK	Dinner near Hotel – Rainbow Hotel??
Day 19 THU	B	TRAIN	Beijing S. - Shanghai Hongqiao G7 dep 10:00 - 1435.
01.08.24			Tianzifang?
		HOTEL	Eve: Free in hotel. LuXun Park area in Hongkou District???
Day 20 FRI	B	METRO	Bund, Nanking Road, Yu Gardens
02.08.24			Shanghai Museum (3 hours) Shanghai Urban Planning Museum.
	D		Eve: Banquet- final meal
Day 21 SAT	B	COACH	Transfer to Shanghai Airport
03.08.24		FLIGHT	Flight to Manchester
			MANCHESTER

SHANGHAI