

We had always wanted to visit China and when at last we had the opportunity we really wanted to include a volunteering programme with the pandas into our visit. When I first started to investigate different travel companies it was very difficult to find a company that encompassed both touring and tailoring to our own needs, as I did not feel absolutely confident travelling in a country where English is not very widespread

I must admit I hadn't heard of The China Travel Company before and came across them on the internet. When I first contacted the company I was very impressed with their response and Phil's knowledge of China and the few panda centres there. He gave me a lot of information and invested a lot of time into our initial email correspondence.

After a few months of planning and reading up on my part I produced an list of the main places that we wanted to see and things that we wanted to do and Phil and Christian did the rest!

All along the way they were there to answer any questions that I had and offered advice with a lot of the small things that planning a trip for 6 people of various ages takes.

The result of which was the most fabulous holiday that we have ever had! Everything was taken care of and we saw so many wondrous sights that if we had visited on our own, we would never have fitted in to the timescale of the couple of weeks that we had, and negotiated the travel arrangements on our own to flit across the various cities that we were in.

Even when booked, and the volunteering programme with the pandas was cancelled due to canine distemper, Phil kept his eye on things and 6 weeks before we travelled managed to find another centre that was offering a volunteering programme for the day and amended our itinerary accordingly.

I really felt that he had our interests and heart and also wanted to make sure that we had no problems on our trip, and had the best possible time while we were there.

The hotels that were chosen for us were brilliant and the locations were excellent, so that we could explore in the evenings on our own and were near to facilities. The guide book produced for us was invaluable, containing maps of the cities, and advice for the trip and offering ideas of extra places that might be of interest to us if we so wished to visit in our free time.

I was nervous before heading off, but everything pieced together with our guide meeting us at the various airports and stations, and checking us into our next hotel before clarifying our pick up time for the next morning and our next day's itinerary. Our two week trip included 3 internal flights and 2 train journeys – none of which I would have been comfortable organizing on our own – English is not commonly spoken throughout China. Our guide always explained the tickets to us and checked us in on each flight and saw us right through to the security check in on the flights and put us in the right queue for the train.

Each guide had their own merits and we feel we made friends of them during our trip, they went above and beyond to recommend eating places for the evening and taking into considerations any dislikes before organizing our lunch time restaurant meals. If we finished our sightseeing earlier than expected each guide offered to take us to extra places or to review the set itinerary if the weather was exceptionally hot and we were getting a bit weary. We just started a little earlier the next day

when it was cooler. At all times we felt safe and had a telephone number if we got into any problems in our free time.

I would have no hesitation in recommending Phil and the team at The China Travel Company if someone was considering undertaking a trip and plan to take another trip with them in the next couple of years to visit the Western side of China and probably Nepal.

Thank you Phil for making a lot of our dreams come true!

Dawn Collins

