

China

Land Of Mystery & Misconception



Zman's editor shares his impressions of China following his visit there.



China—land of mystery... land of misconception. A blind spot in Western consciousness. We are told that it is communist, and communists oppress their people, who are impoverished, unhappy and fearful. But if China is truly communist, why does it boast

more than 100 billionaires (and numerous millionaires)? Why are its busy city streets crowded with the most expensive cars? Why is there a lottery where people can win tens of millions of dollars? Why do its people seem to be happy—at least no more or less so than other peoples around the world?

Even from the perspective of Jewish history, China is a veritable blind spot. Most Jews think there is no Jewish history in China (other than the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai during WWII). The truth is that there is Jewish history in China, including a community of thousands of

observant Jews dating from at least the 12th century that lasted into the 19th century. Chinese history, past and present, has it all: despotic rulers, epic battles, dramatic revolutions; emperors and peasants, saints and sinners, wise men and fools. It is a land

with an incredibly rich history, extending back to the Bronze Age when Avraham Avinu walked the Earth. It has the Great Wall, the longest-running construction project in human history, begun in the days of the Roman Empire.

It is a place that has to be visited to be experienced. For every word written about it, there are volumes not written, not said, not explained, not possible to be conjured up by the imagination. The land is so vast, the people so different, the incredibly rich history so ever-present, that even if one could write all the facts—a sheer impossibility—an article (a book!) would in no way cover anything but a small portion of it, and it certainly would not replace being there.

One simply has to experience it for oneself.

That is why I was so grateful to see and hear many of these things in person with a group of about 85 Torah-observant Jews. In the hope of sharing some of my newly acquired vision, I have endeavored to put together a series of articles that when taken as a whole will provide a clearer picture of this fascinating land.

We start with several articles about the most surprising and fascinating aspects of modern China and then swing back to highlight some of the most poignant aspects of historical China in order to get a feel about what lies beneath the surface of the sights one sees there today. Here is a brief overview:

10 Common Misconceptions About China—Throw out everything you thought you knew about China. Find out what real “Chinese food” is (if you can stomach it), why the Chinese are the world’s greatest capitalists, how to haggle with an aggressive Chinese merchant peddling wares and how the people really work and live.

The Dark Side Of Utopia – Granted, we in the West have misconceptions about China, but the communist utopia has a very real dark side, a side that turns the original idea of communism on its head!

America Surpassed! Per statistics by the International Monetary Fund, China has surpassed the United States as the largest economy in the world, and the potential consequences are staggering.

The Terracotta Warriors – Why did China’s first emperor over 2,000 years ago build thousands of enormous, individually crafted clay figures, and then bury them? And what might it have to do with *techeiles*, the blue thread in *tzitzis*?

The Great Wall Of China – Without a doubt, the highlight of any trip to China is seeing the Great Wall, an experience that will not disappoint despite all the hype. Read about its fascinating, dramatic and incredible history.

Jewish History In Ancient China – Observant Jews with Chinese pigtailed? Yes: they kept *kashrus*, *Shabbos*, *bris milah*, *davened* toward Yerushalayim, and lived a vibrant Jewish life in a Jewish community for *seven* centuries. Who were they, where did they come from and why did they disappear?

10 Common Misconceptions About China



Almost as soon as I first stepped foot in China, I realized that my perspective of this mysterious land had been riddled with misconceptions. I needed to get educated about it.

A great deal of my re-education came—surprisingly—from a number of refreshingly

open English-speaking Chinese government-mandated tour guides. Likewise, I learned a lot from non-Chinese tour guides and residents whom I interacted with at various points. However, most of all, my completely revamped image of China emerged from my daily interaction with the sights and sounds