PLACES TO VISIT IN CHINA

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Lovin' Culture

Everybody who visits China must see the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, and of course, the Bund in Shanghai, but some of the coolest sights are the ones less seen by international visitors. I would like to share some of my favorite places in China.

For a winter trip, Harbin ice sculptures are a must-see. I have to admit, before I witnessed this magnificent scene for myself, I was a bit skeptical, but finally walking among these magnificent works of art, I was overwhelmed. Words are not enough to express what I saw. You can earn more about Harbin at https://www.icefestivalharbin.com/article-p73-harbin-ice-festival-facts.html .

Harbin, however, will not take you away from the masses of foreign visitors. Given the city's proximity to Russia, locals often mistook me as Russian when I was there. After you have your fill of ice sculptures and are ready for a place with less foreign tourists, you can try out your skiing skills in nearby Yabuli, less than four hours southeast from Harbin by car our train. Yabuli is China's largest and top ranked ski resort. For both Harbin and Yabuli, don't forget to bring your warmest coat and mittens; it's cold, mighty cold!

Sichuan ultra-spicy hotpot

You can warm up to Sichuan's spicy food in restaurants all over China, but there's nothing like indulging in the real thing in Chengdu, Sichuan's capital city. This city has its share of western restaurants and coffee shops – there's a Starbuck's on virtually every corner – but you cannot leave without sampling local snacks on the historical Jinli pedestrian street and dining in real Sichuan restaurants. The city also boasts several famous museums, a panda breeding research center, and Tianfu Square, the largest square in southwest China. The biggest risk is that you will fall in love with Sichuan and not want to leave.

Lanzhou beef noodles are another delicacy seen in restaurants all over China, but again, for the real thing, you'll have to actually visit Lanzhou, the mountain valley capital of Gansu province, situated on the Yellow River. Lanzhou isn't particularly a touristy city, which is one of the reasons I recommend it.

Real Lanzhou "bing" (flatbread), mutton sticks and beef noodles

If Lanzhou is too un-Western for your taste, then you may be better off spending your China adventure in Shanghai or Shenzhen.

Shanghai: Nanjing Pedestrian Street, Hershey's Chocolate Store, The Bund

Shanghai's Nanjing Road, a pedestrian-only street, which leads to the famous riverfront Bund, is lined with more shops, food venues, and clubs than you'll ever have time to explore. If you're a chocolate lover,

Situated just across the river from Hong Kong, Shenzhen is a newer city, so you won't see many historical sites, but you will have a chance to visit plenty of shopping malls. My favorite mall is Coco Park (pictured below).

Coco Park shopping mall, Shenzhen, China

Xi'an and Qingdao are two of my favorite cities in China. Although they are common, and sometimes crowded, tourist destinations, I still think they are worth the visit. Xi'an's main attraction is the amazing display of the Terracotta Warriors. Read more about this display and see pictures at https://www.chinahighlights.com/xian/terracotta-army/. The thing that attracts me most about Xi'an is that the city has maintained a healthy combination of being both a classic and modern city. Qingdao is best known for its beaches, beer festival, and fresh seafood. The city was once controlled by Germany, and consequently, this city still shows influences of German culture. If you don't mind being among hordes of tourists, or if you can go during the off-season, Xi'an and Qingdao should definitely be on your China bucket list.

If I try to list and picture all of my China favorites, it would fill a book. I'll just mention a few other places I have enjoyed, and I believe you would also like: Beijing's Houhai Lake, Green Lake in Kunming (Can you tell I like water?), Qinghai Lake, the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, Victoria Peak in Hong Kong, and the sharp mountain peaks of Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province. The list could go on, and there are more exciting places in China to explore, more than I will have time to see in this lifetime. You will have to come and discover for yourself.