

WEATHER:

When folks ask me what the weather is like in March in China, it is as hard to answer as the same question would be for the March weather in the US. We cover a large area of the country so there will be variety. We choose to travel in the second half of March for a good reason. China has a long, hard, cold winter and a long hot, humid summer. Their spring and fall are both short and full of a little bit of everything as the changeover occurs -- but nothing severe -- which means we should never get too hot or too cold. Along with packing a light to medium jacket and a sweater for possible layering, also carry a pair of lightweight gloves and a scarf and/or hat (to keep your head and neck warm) – just in case. Wear or pack in your carry-on bag these items and then carry them daily on the bus tours in your daily tote bag. Even though you may never need them, having them available if you encounter an unusual weather event will ensure your comfort.

Temperatures have been warming in China. Since we plan to visit the Great Wall outside of Beijing EARLY in the morning (in order to avoid the crowds of tourists and vendors), and the location is in the low mountains, it could be cold and windy at that early hour. You may want to dig out the hat, scarf, and gloves for that one experience so early in the day. We have only experienced the Wall as cold and windy on 2 tours so far.

An easy formula to help you convert between Celsius and Fahrenheit : **28° C is equal to 82° F** (of course, **0° C is equal to 32° F** – the freezing point). We will be mailing you a Weather Chart for China that is provided by our tour operator, but frankly you can rely on the general weather information already provided in this paragraph as your general guide. Air pollution: we have never been in China during any heavily polluted days which usually occur in either mid-winter or mid-summer and last for a few days at a time. The industrial and heavy populated cities do experience more pollution but it clears out completely with any breezes or wind. Chongqing and Xi'an have more industry. The Three Gorges, Guilin, & Shanghai have more moisture in the air.

CLOTHING:

Plan to travel light and be comfortable. It is NOT a fashion show. It is smart to choose dark clothing which doesn't show dirt easily. Layering and color coordinating for mix and match are two good approaches to minimize the total amount packed. We usually try to pack for eight days maximum & use the hotel dry cleaning and laundry as well as the boat laundry services at every opportunity.

Hints for the Men: Larry wears a comfortable shirt with his sports coat, dress slacks and dress shoes on the flight over (has his jacket folded in the bin above or hung if possible). He can have his jacket and slacks dry cleaned and/or pressed by the hotel the 1st morning in Beijing if needed. He packs 7 more casual shirts plus 1 dressy one, 8 pairs of BVD's, 8 pairs of socks, three pairs of dark casual slacks (Levis are also OK), one pair of walking shoes, a sweater, a light rainproof jacket (from REI – in a tiny packet), a small travel umbrella, and handkerchiefs plus his personal toilet articles (safety razor, spare blades, toothbrush and toothpaste, and deodorant).

Hints for the Gals: I usually wear my good shoes and one comfortable pantsuit outfit on the flight over and pack 2 to 3 more wrinkle-free pantsuits or coordinated ensembles, each with 2 blouses plus a few light pull-over sweaters or tank tops to mix and match. I pack one or two semi-dressy ensembles with a few minor variations possible - with emphasis on wrinkle-free & small packing space required. I add 2 short nightshirts (I don't bring a robe), 8 pairs of panties, 4 bras, 8 pairs of socks, and 4 pairs of pantyhose (in case of runs). Leave any expensive jewelry home – how else can one justify buying new pearls, jade & cloisonné???

General: You can wear some things more than once and may even wear something two or more days in a row if able (my husband insists he can get 3 days out of a dark pair of slacks). NOTE: The first person caught with a clipboard documenting the number of times anyone is seen wearing the same thing twice will be sent home immediately - ^!^ - and without any souvenirs. Jeans and tennis shoes are acceptable, as are casual slacks, etc. Comfort, simplicity and minimizing the total for packing are your quests. Remember you are restricted by the 4 flights in China to one checked bag at 44 lbs. max (including the weight of the bag, of course) per person with a maximum overall size of 62 linear inches (add length, width and depth together). You will also be able to bring one carry-on bag per person along with a number of personal items – the total of which should not exceed 43 linear inches or 11 lbs. max total for all (although they don't seem to check the weight). I can recommend two sources for travel clothes and equipment, and I am sure there are others. We use catalogues from “Magellan's” (800-962-4943), and “TravelSmith” (800-950-1600) – both have websites and Magellan's has terrific articles of information relative to travel online: www.Magellans.com, www.TravelSmith.com.

SEMI-DRESSY CLOTHING:

The gals might like to bring a nice outfit or two for the two events aboard ship and especially for the one VIP banquet in Guilin but nothing really ultra fancy. Even a nice skirt or pair of slacks and a blouse works well and can be adorned with a Chinese silk scarf which are plentiful as we tour. While the ladies should plan on a nice suit, pantsuit or dress, the men are encouraged but not required to wear a sports coat - plus a shirt and tie (turtleneck sweater or Mandarin collared shirt are OK, too) for the VIP occasion. The guys can wear their dressy outfit over on the flight like Larry does - but only if you think you can still be comfortable on the long flight. He has it pressed and/or dry cleaned as needed at the hotel upon arrival in Beijing . It's a case of wear it or pack it! We try to show respect with our attire when attending these special functions which are also attended by Chinese officials but it is not required.

OUTER CLOTHING:

Take a rain-proof lightweight coat or jacket and a sweater to layer with it (if needed), plus a small travel umbrella. You will not need a Zero-degree parka! The March weather is varied but mild. I used to "wear" a rainproof type coat with a zip-out lining on the flight over to use in case of inclement weather with and without the lining as needed, but I have never really needed it and it became a burden to lug around on the intra-China flights. I love the Magellan's hooded lightweight rain poncho that packs into its own small pouch (which converts to a zipped front pocket when worn) - it can also be added as another layer of insulation if needed for layering should we encounter a crisp day. I also take a lightweight pair of gloves and some little ear muffs and/or a scarf or hat - just in case we encounter a nippy day or a brisk early morning on the Great Wall. These items are smart to keep in a day-pack tote so that they are available to you should the need arise during a day/night out touring. It is safe to leave this tote on your tour bus as you tour each city. On the days we also have a flight, keep these items in your tote or carry-on bag since it will always be placed in the baggage hold of your assigned bus before and after the flight and therefore will always be available to you).

SHOES:

Comfortable walking shoes are a must. Here is a great shoes, etc., source for those who have foot issues : "Footsmart" (800) 707-9928 - www.footsmart.com. I've also heard very good things about "The Good Feet Store" (800) 543-3668 - www.goodfeet.com - but I have had no personal experience with them. You should always consult with your physician first and/or a good foot doctor. Besides good walking shoes for daytime, you will also need a semi-dress pair of shoes for the 3 times we dress up a little (2 evening affairs onboard ship - the Captain's welcoming cocktail party & Captain's farewell banquet - 1 VIP banquet in Guilin.

LAUNDRY & DRY CLEANING:

I do not recommend you bring anything that needs special care unless you are going to be the one to provide that. If something needs hand washing, only cold water, no dryer, or etc., it could complicate having it handled by the laundry services available due to the language barrier. Chinese laundries are famous for a good reason, though - they do an excellent job under normal circumstances. Laundry and dry cleaning fees are somewhat expensive but worth it. You can have items laundered and/or dry cleaned when staying at the same hotel more than one night - which includes all our hotels on the tour (except for the one night stay in Chengdu). The hotels can return items given in the evening by the end of the next day without an extra charge for expediting - the normal is a 24 hour turn-around, but each hotel & the ship will indicate its own limits. Normally we don't need any laundry done until the 4-night Yangtze River Cruise begins. You can find 2 white plastic laundry bags and the paperwork in your ship cabin and give the on-duty floor personnel your 1st batch that same evening or any time through the 2nd or 3rd night. You cannot send it out the last night because it won't be returned in time for our morning departure on the last/departure day. They can provide additional bags whenever you need them. Laundry service is available daily and it is a bit expensive but great, but there is no dry cleaning on the boat.

Some folks have chosen to pack old underwear and then just toss the items out as used. Unless you have the room to pack 17 sets of disposables, you will still need to plan ahead carefully. Do not plan on buying underwear in China. While you may find it in Shanghai at the end of the tour, that will be too late - and sizes in China run **VERY SMALL** compared to the same sizes as marked in the US.