



China in celluloid

Tom Weston, Audley's China specialist, takes a cinematic tour of China.



Last summer's surprise cinema hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is one of a great wealth of classic film and TV series to use China's traditional towns and stunning and varied scenery as a backdrop to the action. The martial arts romance criss-crosses the country in search of spectacular scenery, from the beautiful, traditional wooden villages of Nanping and Hongcun and the swaying bamboo forests in nearby Zhejiang province to the grand vistas of desert and steppe in Xinjiang and Qinghai in China's far west. The Imperial Palace in Chengde, one of our favourite destinations close to Beijing, also appeared in this film.

Beijing itself has provided the backdrop for some of the most famous Chinese films of recent years. Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, depicts the final years of the Qing dynasty and follows boy Emperor Pu Yi's transition from virtual prisoner in the Forbidden City to opium-addicted puppet ruler under the Japanese and finally to humble gardener in the years following the Communist revolution.

Another popular location is Shanghai, whose colonial history has left a unique mark in the form of the Bund, the riverfront area of European architecture that stands

apart from the old Chinese sections and the towering skyscrapers that now dominate the skyline. The city featured strongly in *The Empire of the Sun*, Spielberg's interpretation of J G Ballard's childhood biography based in the late Thirties, as the Japanese invasion turned the colonial world upside down.

Farewell My Concubine, by celebrated director Chen Kaige, was also set in the turbulent early years of the twentieth century, and describes the complex relationship between two friends growing up in the harsh world of the traditional Peking Opera.

Chen's less well known early work, *Yellow Earth*, is set in the vast loess plateau of north central China, whose dust and sandstorms frequently cloud the skies of Beijing and Xian. This area is also home to the Buddhist caves at Datong, which hold a fantastic array of China's oldest sculptures, and make a fascinating destination. *Red Sorghum* and *Ju Dou*, two of fellow director Zhang Yimou's most famous works, both also feature the stark and beautiful scenery of rural central China.

These films are available to buy on amazon.co.uk, or should be available to rent from any library or video shop with a good World Film section.

Travel File

We have put together a two week itinerary visiting some of the spectacular destinations featured in classic Chinese films. The approximate price for the tour is £3000 per person including flights. This itinerary could easily be combined with a Yangtse River cruise.

16-day itinerary

- Day 1: Depart the UK.
- Day 2: Arrive in Beijing. Visit Tiananmen Square. Peace Hotel.
- Day 3: Full day city tour including the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace and the Temple of Heaven. Peking Duck dinner at local restaurant. Peace Hotel.
- Day 4: Morning market visit and rickshaw tour of traditional back streets and the Lama Temple. Evening at the Peking Opera. Peace Hotel.
- Day 5: Travel north to the Great Wall at Jinshanling, continue on to Chengde and visit the Imperial Mountain Resort. Qianyang Grand Hotel.
- Day 6: Morning exploring outlying temples. Return to Beijing and catch the overnight train to Datong.
- Day 7: Visit the wonderful Yungang Caves, the Huayan Monastery and the old town of Datong. International Hotel.
- Day 8: Explore the loess plateau and visit the Hanging Monastery and the Wooden Pagoda. Return to Datong and take the overnight train to Xian.
- Day 9: Full day city tour taking in the Terracotta Warriors, the ancient City Walls and the vibrant Muslim Quarter. Grand New World Hotel.
- Day 10: Morning at leisure before flying on to Shanghai. Peace Hotel.
- Day 11: Morning walking tour and visit to the splendid Shanghai Art Museum. Evening cruise on the Huangpu River. Peace Hotel.
- Day 12: Fly to Huangshan, and visit Hongcun and Nanping, beautiful villages which provide an insight into the China of old. Continue to Huang Shan and ascend by cable car. The Xihai Hotel.
- Day 13: This morning tour the peaks before descending on foot/by cable car for spectacular views. Fly back to Shanghai and take the train on to Suzhou, where you'll be met and taken to your hotel. Gloria Plaza Hotel.
- Day 14: Full day exploring the town, taking in the gardens, the silk factory and the canals. Gloria Plaza Hotel.
- Day 15: Full day excursion to the beautiful water-towns of Tongli & Zhouzhuang with canal boat trip. Gloria Plaza Hotel.
- Day 16: Return to Shanghai and fly back to UK.

To discuss this itinerary and other options please call our China specialists on 01869 276 217.