

FREQUENT-FLIER SECRETS: MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MILES

TRAVEL + LEISURE

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In this, our first installment of T+L's Travel Made Easy series, we tackle one of the world's most mystifying—and worthy—destinations, giving insider secrets to help you plan a smooth and successful trip, with itinerary ideas, shopping strategies, transportation tips, and more.

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CHINA MADE EASY

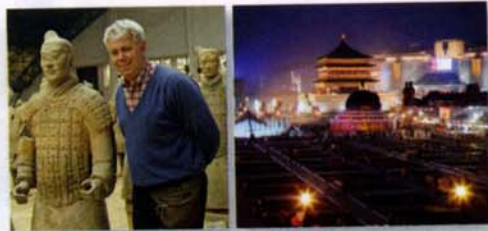
Where the Guides Go

In search of authentic, accessible experiences, T+L asked five China experts to share their favorite recent discoveries.



KRISTI ELBORNE “Last fall, I traveled to **Lijiang**, in China’s southern-most region, to see the Naxi, descendants of Tibetan nomads and one of the world’s only remaining matriarchal societies. Eighty-year-old women sat drying crab apples, their faces as wrinkled as the small fruits. They were eager to have their photos taken—most are no longer afraid that the flash will whisk away a piece of their soul.” *Toronto-based Elborne uses her Mandarin to find off-the-radar sites (Butterfield & Robinson; 866/551-9090; butterfield.com).*

KARIN HANSEN “One special landmark that not many people see in Sichuan province is the **Dazu Grottoes**. Outside, there are large and colorful carvings etched on the mountains, all portraying Chinese fables and ancient dynasties. Inside the temple, the whispers of prayer bring you into a different world.” *Over the past decade, Hansen has honed her knowledge of the country’s ethnic groups (Frosch Travel; 800/866-1623; frosch.com).*



GERALD HATHERLY “The old city of Xi’an is the link to China’s most cosmopolitan past: its Silk Road heritage. The local Hui people live around the 14th-century **Great Mosque**. It’s an architectural marvel, a mélange of traditional Buddhist design and Islamic accents. There is no great secret to arranging a tour—once you get to the Drum Tower, just open your mind, and observe.” *A&K’s China expert is based in Hong Kong and specializes in contemporary Chinese literature (Abercrombie & Kent; 800/554-7016; abercrombiekent.com).*

CATHERINE EVANS HEALD “My favorite place in Suzhou is the **Garden of the Master of the Nets**, which dates to the Song dynasty. In the main area, covered walkways open onto a pond with arched bridges and flowering shrubs. Following Taoist philosophy, the garden was designed for contemplation. I love to imagine those who came before me—each person in search of peace and tranquillity.” *Heald designs tailor-made trips to some of China’s undiscovered regions (Remote Lands; 646/415-8092; remotelands.com).*



GUY RUBIN “Huang Shan, or **Yellow Mountain**, is in the province of Anhui, west of Shanghai. I first climbed it in late October. Clouds glided across the granite tusks; it was overwhelmingly beautiful. I later asked the contemporary artist Zheng Zai Dong why he had never painted the mountain. He shook his head. ‘How could you be equal to the task?’” *Rubin creates ultra-luxe itineraries for travelers in search of the trip of a lifetime (Imperial Tours; 888/888-1970; imperialtours.net).*

For more guides and China specialists, go to travelandleisure.com/AList.

▶ **WHAT IT COSTS** Souvenir T-shirt: \$3 (20RMB) One-hour massage: \$29 (200RMB) Full-day private guided tour: \$58 (400RMB)