

# Bright future

The riverside city of Chongqing is a growing hotspot for China tours, finds **Cathy Toogood**



**A**bove me, a drone show depicting a panda on a surfboard is gliding over some glittering skyscrapers. To my right, the Raffles City complex is sparkling, its lights switching from red to orange. Behind me, the 11-storey stilt buildings of Hongya Cave are illuminated by golden lights, whose reflections meet the red glow from the Qiansimen Bridge on the surface of the Jialing River below. It's an attack on the senses – and I'm entranced.

I'm in Chongqing, a huge city in central China, with Asia specialist Wendy Wu Tours as part of its 2025 China mega-fam. Designed to showcase the underrated destination of Chongqing, the trip brought together 91 travel professionals from the UK, Australia and New Zealand, including 32 UK agents. It was a chance to showcase new product for agents to sell too, with three Wendy Wu Tours itineraries revealed – all of which include time in Chongqing.

**POTENTIAL ENERGY**  
"Chongqing is China's next must-sell city," says Gary King, head of trade sales for Wendy Wu Tours. "It's China as few have seen it before – authentic and absolutely brimming with potential. It's full of new ➤"

# DESTINATIONS

ASIA | CHINA

## AGENTS' *views*



"What surprised me was how dynamic Chongqing is. I've seen it all over TikTok, but in real life, it really did wow me. The lights, the colours, the noise – everything blows your mind."

**Bekki Pink, Peter Goord Travel**



"I loved the cable car across the Yangtze River and seeing the pandas at Chongqing Zoo. But the absolute highlights were sailing down the Yangtze, the drone show and the city lights."

**Nicola McCafferty, Downe Travel**



"The language barrier is not a problem in Chongqing. People will go out of their way to help you, regardless of what language you speak."

**Kaidan Mcewan, Gold Medal**



"The vastness of Chongqing surprised me. There are so many districts and so much countryside just outside the city. It's the most modern city I've ever visited – so vibrant and clean."

**Hayley Goodman-Bland, Gates Travel**



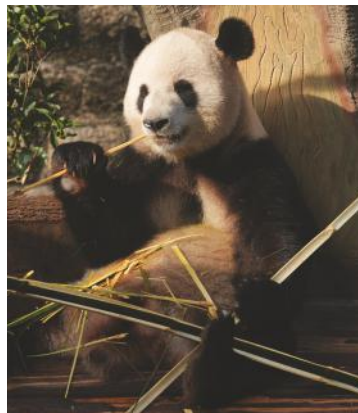
"There are misconceptions about China, but having spent a week here, I know how accommodating the locals are to adapting cultures and traditions for western tourists."

**Kelly Baldwin, Aspire Travel**



"I loved the Dazu Rock Carvings. I couldn't believe the detail and the colour – and the story that it told was fantastic. The detail the tour guide provided was fascinating."

**Jo Wessell, Ginge Tours & Travel**



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A panda in Chongqing Zoo; Wulong Karst; Chongqing and the Yangtze River by night **PREVIOUS PAGE**: Drone show above Chongqing

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Wirestock Creators, dongfang, dyl0807



## top tip

To learn more from the agents on Wendy Wu Tours' China mega-fam, follow [@travelweeklyuk](#) on Instagram and watch our exclusive reel

experiences, rich stories and that sense of discovery that travellers are craving."

The sprawling megacity and municipality of the same name has a population of 32 million. Twice the size of Switzerland in area, its setting among the mountains means buildings are designed to fit the landscape. There are escalators to reach different levels of the city, car lifts and skyscrapers with entrances every eight floors. The Liziba monorail station even has platforms situated between the sixth and eighth floors of a 19-storey building, with shops underneath and apartments above.

There are photo opportunities everywhere, from buzzing street scenes to pandas in the city's zoo, yet Chongqing remains off most British tourists' radar. It feels as if you are experiencing a slice of the real China – English is not widely spoken, locals are incredibly welcoming and helpful, and you can easily dip into older pockets of the city, such as Ciqikou Ancient Town with its lantern-lined alleys and wooden-fronted shops offering local snacks. A guided tour is the perfect

way to get under Chongqing's skin, as it combines the popular attractions with places known only to locals.

While Chongqing might feel relatively unfamiliar to international visitors, that's not the case for domestic travellers. As we head to the Yangtze River Cableway to see the city's skyline from another angle, company founder Wendy Wu tells me that Chongqing is one of the most searched-for and most-visited destinations within China.

"What domestic tourists go for tends to go international," she says. "We like to bring people to places that haven't been discovered yet – but soon, everyone will come."

## HOT PROPERTY

In contrast to its bright lights and high-rises, Chongqing is also known as China's hot-springs capital, thanks to its mineral-rich geothermal water.

Wu believes this is another reason UK tourists will love it. "Chongqing is the world capital for hot springs," she says. "It's 10 times better than Budapest." ➤

# DESTINATIONS

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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Tasting Chongqing hot pot; the fam trip group in Wanshoushan Scenic Area; writer Cathy (right) with Wendy Wu; Avalokiteshvara with a Thousand Hands sculpture; Hongya Cave

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Sumeth anu, Huang Qiangchu



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## FOODS TO TRY

🌟 **Chongqing hot pot** is served in more than 30,000 restaurants in the city. The traditional tongue-numbing soup is made from beef tallow with chilli peppers, garlic and Sichuan peppers, plus the chef's choice of ingredients.

🌟 **Mahua** is a crispy biscuit-like snack made of twisted dough, fried in peanut oil. It can be sweet or savoury.

🌟 **Chongqing xiao mian** is noodles in another lip-tingling spicy broth, sometimes topped with braised beef.

A popular place to soak is Ronghui Hot Springs. There are 55 pools to choose between, from a coffee-infused pool that promises to refresh the brain and delay ageing to a Chinese traditional medicine-inspired bath that claims to enrich the blood and improve a bather's qi (vital energy). My favourite was a milk pool with a sign saying it would nourish the whole body, particularly the lungs and skin. Surrounded by lush vegetation, including glossy Chinese fan palms, these hot springs are an idyllic spot at which to take some time out.

The Dazu Rock Carvings offer another impressive counterbalance to Chongqing's futuristic cityscapes. The Unesco World Heritage Site is home to more than 10,000 carvings dating from the ninth to 12th centuries, depicting Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian images. Our guide Jian Yu Lin explained that the carvings are so well preserved because they are less known and less frequently visited compared with similar sites in China.

Standout spots in Dazu include the Buddhist Wheel of Life, with 90 statues of people and 24 of animals, and the dazzling gold-plated, eight-metre-high sculpture of Buddhist deity Avalokiteshvara with a Thousand Hands.

## LAY OF THE LAND

A nearby Unesco site that clients might have heard of is Wulong Karst, since the film *Transformers: Age of Extinction* was shot there. Its landscape of natural bridges and steep gorges was created by water eroding the

limestone. On the day we visit, mist is shrouding the tops of the formations, adding to the primordial atmosphere.

Our guide Pan Tao says the area, sometimes referred to as 'the Switzerland of China', becomes like downtown Chongqing in summer as many people from the city own second homes here.

Even Chongqing's transport options will excite clients – especially its bullet trains that reach speeds of up to 220mph. We take the train from Chongqing towards Chengdu Airport at the end of our trip, and I watch the city slip away, soon turning into tiered fields backed by pine-covered slopes. It makes me think how different the city would have been a couple of decades earlier.

At the end of our week, Wu talks to the agent group about the dizzying pace of change.

"In the wonderful places we've visited, new things just keep on coming up," she says. "Tell your customers, if they want to come to China, come as soon as they can. The country is flying forward." **TW**

## BOOK IT

**Wendy Wu Tours** offers a 12-day Inspiring China tour, which spends three nights each in Beijing, Chongqing and Zhangjiajie, as well as one in Furong Ancient Town. Prices start at £3,640 per person in April, based on two sharing. The price includes flights from Heathrow, four-star accommodation, all meals, transfers and excursions. [wendywutours.co.uk](http://wendywutours.co.uk)