

Testimonial

Hi Janie!

We had the most wonderful trip to China. There are so many highlights, but the one I want to share is when we got to meet the pandas. The guide you set us up with was amazing and she made the whole thing possible. She had told us the night before our visit to the panda research center, that we may have the opportunity to feed and play with some baby pandas. We would need to make a contribution to the center, the pandas would need to be willing to visit, as well as the trainers having the time to facilitate this experience.

On the day we went, there was a VIP from Hong Kong coming that afternoon. I got the feeling that we were not going to have the opportunity to visit with the pandas because all the trainers were busy bathing the pandas for the afternoon visit. Our guide, Java, knows all the trainers, and the schedulers because she does volunteer work at the research center. She shovels panda poop, cuts bamboo, cleans the panda rooms, and anything else they ask her to do. That morning, a couple of Japanese tourists who had already made a donation to the center had been turned away from visiting with the



pandas. The center refunded their money and supposedly they were very angry. But the pandas were not hungry at the time of their visit, and they were out in their forest area playing. When we got there, the pandas were playing, but we patiently waited, listening to Java tell us stories about the different Pandas. One's name was New Moon and she always sticks out her tongue and licks her face. This is a problem because New Moon is a female of breeding age and the trainers are trying to get

her to mate, but none of the panda boys want to mate with her because of her tongue behavior. Java knew all the pandas by name, knew their ages, and knew little characteristics about each one. Many tourists came and left after a five minute viewing. Java entertained our 5 year old daughter with her stories and information about the pandas for over an hour. During this time, we got to watch 5 pandas in their natural habitat. They were climbing trees, gnawing on branches (teething as Java told us), and playing in the panda house.

Java asked us if we wanted to go ahead and see some pandas in the other habitats. We were willing to wait for a little more. At one point, Java said she thought it would take about 30 minutes for the pandas to come down from the trees to eat. At that point, there would be a possibility that the trainers would be willing to let a couple of tourists in to help feed the pandas. Java knew this by seeing the behavior of the pandas and the cycle of their day. They eat about the same time every day, but then they all seem to snack at different times. The snacking times are when you can play with them. So when 2 pandas started walking down towards the trainers, I saw Java dart in to talk to the scheduling people. Within minutes she had blue robes for Ava and me to put on. She was helping us put on our shoe covers and she was instructing me on how to pet the

pandas and how to protect Ava. She took my camera and told us to have a good time. At one time, she put my camera on video mode and gave it to one of the trainers. He was able to get great video of us feeding, petting, and playing with the pandas. The 2 pandas came up to Ava and me and were rolling and frolicking around us. They were actually nibbling our ankles. Ava said: “Mama, I think they are trying to eat us up!” We were so elated that all we could do was giggle. The pictures we have from this time are the most joyous pictures we have ever taken.

One of our new panda friends was a 10 month old boy and the other one was 1 year old. They rolled around like balls on the floor at our feet. One of them put both of his paws on my shoulders and looked me straight in the eyes. I felt he wanted to come home with me. We were surprised that their fur was coarse and wire-y instead of soft and fine like it looks in pictures. I was amazed at how big these “babies” were. Their little teeth were so cute, but so nibble-y too. Their teeth did not go past their gums, but we could see them and FEEL them as they nibbled on our ankles and fingers as we were trying to feed them the insides of bamboo and carrot sticks.



We had been told that we were going to get to spend 5 minutes with the pandas, but we have 17 minutes of video coverage. We were smiling for 3 full days after that experience. I am smiling now as I am writing this. It was really one of the most exhilarating experiences I have ever had.

When people ask my daughter what her favorite part of our China trip was, she says: “Getting to play with the pandas. They almost ate us up!” She did love the exploring the Great Wall and the luge we rode down after our visit, the authentic kite

shop where we got to see a very old man making kites and excitedly explaining in Chinese about how he makes them fly, playing all afternoon with the daughter of a woman who taught my husband and me to make dumplings and Kung Pow Chicken in their own home, and, I can’t forget, how much she loved the posh hotels and swimming pools, but it is the experience with the pandas that she most likes to share.

Thank you sooooo much for planning the most wonderful trip for us,

Holly

