



China Solar Eclipse Expedition Newsletter # 1

Hello to the Amateur Telescope Makers of Boston members, and invited guests, registered for the Twilight Tours solar eclipse expedition to Hangzhou, China in July 2009.

I am Joel K. Harris, the president and founder of Twilight Tours Inc., located in Westlake Village, CA (just north of Los Angeles proper).

First off, I want to thank all of you who have chosen to participate in our adventure to Southern China, some 30 months from now. You have made an important and wise decision to join our group, as it is my opinion that we shall have an outstanding expedition --- one to remember for a long time after its completion.

As the vast majority of you do not know me, I'd like to very briefly echo some of the initial history that many of you have seen in the introductory information that Mario Motta and Bernie Volz erected on the ATMob web site back in early October this year (atmob.org/events/travel.php).

I have been pursuing ("chasing") solar eclipses for over 30 years. I first "caught the fever" in 1973, when I was privileged to be a

participant and a science team member of a research group from Harvard Observatory, under the direction of the late, renowned American solar astronomer, Dr. Donald Menzel.

As part of Donald's team, under the auspices of what was formerly Educational Expeditions International (now the Earthwatch Institute), over 40 of us trekked to the Western Sahara desert, northeast of the small mining town of Akjoujt, Mauritania, in late June 1973. We established a tented camp in that highly challenging environment, and lived there for nearly three weeks, awaiting the 30 June solar eclipse that was to occur there.

While dodging some high cloud cover that developed early on the day of the eclipse event, we were fortunate to successfully observe the longest total eclipse to occur for the next 135 years. Interestingly enough, the eclipse that you have chosen to sign up to chase with Twilight Tours in July of 2009 is a member of that same Saros, or family, of eclipses to which the 30 June 1973 eclipse belongs. Traveling to the July 22, 2009 eclipse in China will make me as a "three-peater" for this Saros, as I also

observed the most recent member of this eclipse family in July 11, 1991, at the southern tip of Baja, Mexico, with an eclipse group of over 500 participants.

Since that first eclipse experience, I have steadfastly pursued some 13 other total eclipses throughout the globe. In that time, I am happy to report that I have only been completely "skunked" out of seeing totality one time --- in Uruguay on 30 June 1992, when our small group (of which Bernie was a member) failed to see totality just minutes after sunrise that morning off the coast of San Ignacio, Uruguay.

I take the time to provide you some of this background information, to not only "credentialize" my qualifications to direct and operate our expedition, but also to reassure you that this group is in very capable hands. I have been organizing eclipse tours for over 22 years, and I am pleased to say that our past participants have consistently said that we provide them with one of the best products out there on the market.

That said, I'd now like to turn our attention to a number of procedural items that are important enough to take time to discuss in some detail in this first newsletter.

Registrant Information

Virtually everyone has now provided me with their tour registration form, the template of which is housed on the private portion of the Twilight

Tours web page, at: www.twilighttours.net/atmob . If you have by chance NOT downloaded and completed this form yet, I'd respectfully ask you to please see to that task, as it's critical that we have telephonic, email, and snail mail contact data on file for you, should we need to get in touch with you rapidly.

In a similar vein, I know I speak for Mario, Bernie, and myself, when we ask that in any event of a change in your plans --- e.g., if you find that you need to change or totally cancel your reservation on the tour, we'd like you to please immediately contact one of the three of us with this information. This is of critical importance, so that we can attend to determining who on our waiting list can register for the tour and, effectively, take your relinquished place(s).

Preferentially, we ask that you contact myself first with any changes you need to effect, as both Mario and Bernie have concurred that the plurality of the "tour work" needs to be administered by myself.

Rest assured that I will rapidly respond to your communications, and I will propagate the changes to both Mario and Bernie, so that we can respond to your needs for the expedition as quickly as possible.

Deposits/Progress Payments

Everyone on the tour has paid in a \$300 deposit to me, for each space/reservation that they want to

block off. As you are very familiar with, the registration form states that your deposits are fully refundable until 1 March 2008. In the event that anyone has to withdraw from the tour, the agreement that exists between Mario, Bernie and I is that you can "swap out" other participants for your relinquished space(s). Currently, this translates to replacing any drop outs with people from the waiting list.

As we "burn down" the wait list, it will then be necessary to actively recruit for and find replacements for any others who have to withdraw. In the remote event that replacements cannot be found for relinquished space(s), the published cancellation fees we've indicated on the tour registration form will apply.

Currently, I plan for tour participants to pay a total of two progress payments, over the course of the time period remaining before we depart. I do this, so as to lessen the impact of the cost of the tour, especially on those who have a significant number of reservations. This approach has always worked well with previous groups, and thus I have elected to employ it again here.

Some good news is that no further progress payments for the "short program tour" from July 18th-24th will be due until the spring of 2008. The precise date will be provided to you well before the payment is due. The final payment for the tour will be called for near year's end, in 2008,

as all tour costs must be paid up by 8 months prior to the tour's departure.

Should we offer the ATMoB group a separate, transpacific air fare add-on package, that cost will be paid off in two payments, with the balance to be remitted at least 5 months before the tour's departure. Currently, we do not have the ability to either reserve air seating space or accurately estimate the cost of such round trip airfare. We will communicate the best estimate for those international flights once we have the data in hand.

Extended Tour Itinerary

After much research and input from Mario and Bernie, we have put together an extended itinerary for the eclipse tour, beyond the short program dates of July 18th to 24th. That longer tour has a duration of 11 days, and effectively adds on to the end of the "short program" tour. The extension includes visits to both Xi'an and Beijing, with many of the most sought-after tourist sites and venues included in that longer program.

The cost for the Extended Tour program is \$2575 per person. This price includes the "short tour" program, as well as the additional days for Xi'an and Beijing. The price noted above also includes the two (2) domestic air flights necessary to take the group from Hangzhou to Xi'an, and from Xi'an to Beijing.

A detailed, daily itinerary for the extended tour is available from the Twilight Tours web site "hidden pages", as cited before, located at www.twilighttours.net/atmob. I invite you to take a few moments and review that itinerary, as it will address many of the potential questions you may have about the longer tour.

Very critically, you need to know that it is not currently necessary to make any additional deposits, should you choose to change from the short itinerary tour to the extended one at this time. I do anticipate that on June 1st, a nominal additional deposit of \$200 per person will be necessary for those choosing to take the longer tour. However, as of this time, no further deposits are required to "upgrade" to the longer trip.

Final Comments

I intend to send out 4 to 6 newsletters over the course of the next 30 months, as a means to both keep the group informed of important considerations, helpful tips, and other items of general interest to the members of the expedition.

I hope the preceding holiday season was a pleasant one for you, and that 2007 proves to be a terrific year for you and yours.

On an added note, Bernie, myself, and another eclipse colleague of mine will be conducting a site inspection to Shanghai/Hangzhou, during the first week of August, 2007.

During that one week visit, we will be assessing the hotel properties we will use in July 2009, and will be selecting a number of candidate observing sites from which a final site will be chosen for our group to use on July 22, 2009.

Bernie and/or I shall be reporting to the ATMobBs on the results of that inspection trip, both in another newsletter, and at a future ATMobB meeting later this year.

Again, I thank you for your patronage and for electing to join with Twilight Tours for what is sure to be the adventure of a lifetime!! Until next time, clear skies to you all...

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