

## China Diary: Part two

### East eases excesses

Marc Epprecht

There is a world of difference between the China I visited in 1977 and that of 1980. True, physically it looks much the same; the countryside—timeless; the cities—a tumble-down gray labyrinth of houses, row on row of identical, gloomy apartments, a flood of clanging bicycles on the congested streets. Yet even to someone totally unfamiliar with the events that have transpired there over the past three years, the differences would quickly become apparent. They are often intangible, but all the more exciting because of it.

Take, for instance, the very first few changes that struck me. In 1977 the stewardesses on board the China Airlines flight to Beijing wore drab gray 'Mao suits'. They did not speak to us. This time they wore pretty peacock blue skirts and jackets.

They could be engaged in halting but enthusiastic small-talk. Equally surprising was the atrocious Western muzak that blared throughout the plane.

Insignificant as all this may seem, against the background of the puritanical, intensely xenophobic outlook of the Cultural Revolution, it appears remarkable. So too does the fact that China Airlines now boasts a small fleet of American jumbo jets.

When I first visited Beijing it was already a year after Mao's death and the coup d'etat that had reeved his immediate, ultra-radical successors. The so-called Gang-of-four was being heartily vilified, but it was still uncertain as to how ideologically different the new leaders actually were. Violent power struggles, being endemic to Communist regimes, and China in particular, no one was yet convinced that the

former fanaticism and instabilities in China's political structure were well and truly rid of. In fact, it was not even certain who held the real power. Deng Xiaoping had been resurrected only months before and not until later did he emerge as the man who called the shots.

There had been no sharp break with Mao's brand of Communism. His portraits and statues were everywhere. Literally tens of thousands of people lined up for hours in the cold to view his obscenely preserved body on display in his vast mausoleum. The main square was still adorned with a huge portrait of Mao's megalomaniac inspiration—Joseph Stalin.

Soldiers of the Red Army were everywhere, including standing guard at the entrance to all hotels where foreigners stayed. Red posters screamed the ideals of the Revolution from every

corner. People, immersed in the ceaseless barrage of propaganda and omni-presence of authority, went glumly about their business. All those millions of them wore precisely three shades of uniform and rode one design of bicycle to work. China remained, quite obviously, a strictly totalitarian society.

There were, however, already a few signs that hinted that the coup had been much more than merely a cosmetic change of dictators. A definite shift in political climate seemed to be in the offing. That more practical men had assumed control was shown by the revived interest in trade and other contacts with the West.

The fundamental nature of the changes being prepared in 1977 was demonstrated over the next three years. Although it was only during my visit this September that these changes were finally

formally endorsed by the People's Congress, the foundations of a revolutionary new social, political and economic order were already firmly in place.

Gone are the political posters. Instead, major intersections are plastered with advertisements. Consumers are exhorted to buy anything from shoes and clothes to cigarettes to Japanese electronics and farm machinery. There were even ads for advertising agencies. I suspect though, that much of this is symbolic, for most Chinese are still too poor to even afford Coke at a dollar a bottle.

Gone too are the portraits of political figures. Marx and the boys are entirely banished, and even Mao has been taken down from everywhere except his one prominent perch over the entrance to the Forbidden City. His mausoleum, with its once

Association of Student Councils/National Union of Students

11th ANNUAL

# Vancouver Christmas Charters

## \$259

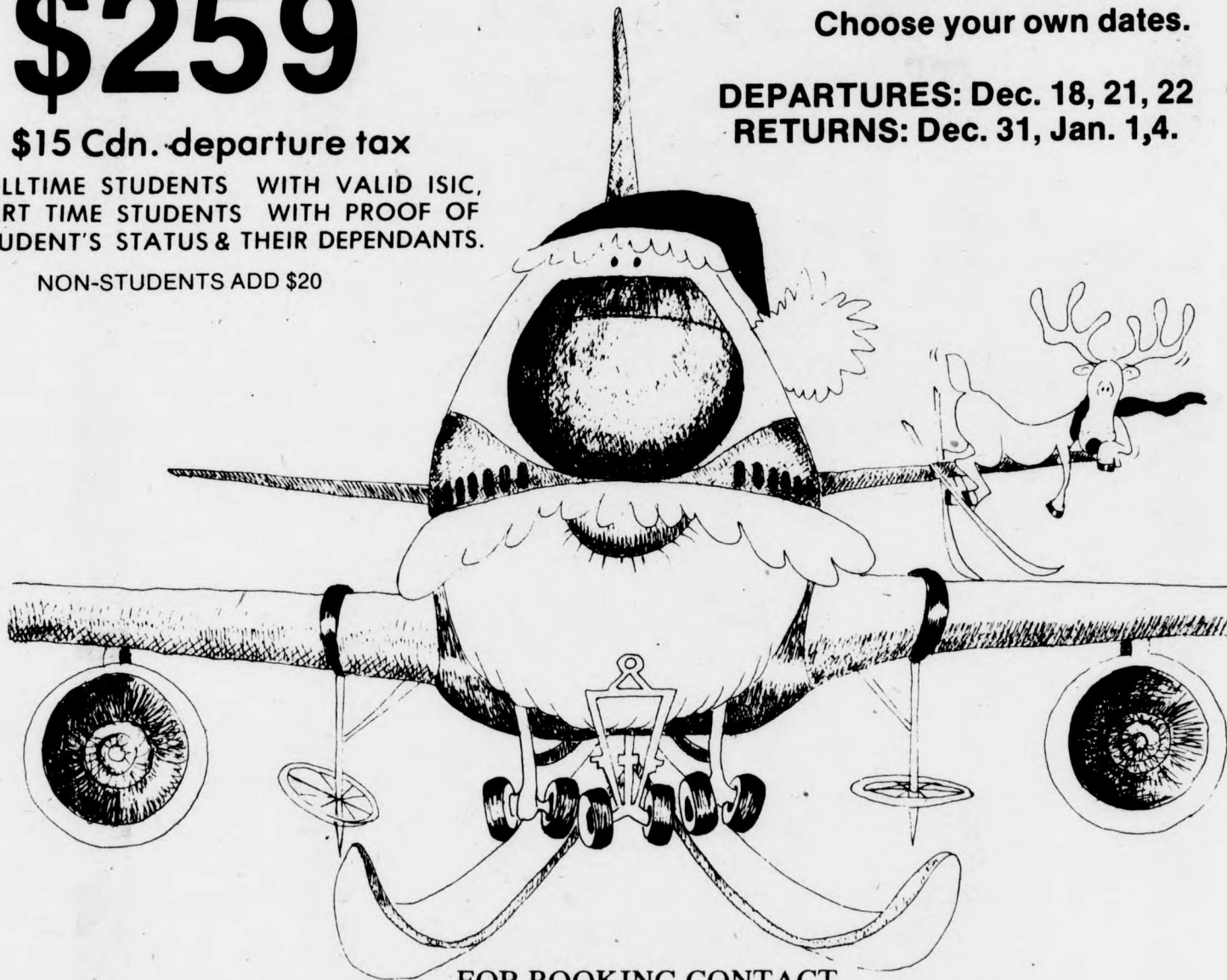
+ \$15 Cdn. departure tax

FULLTIME STUDENTS WITH VALID ISIC,  
PART TIME STUDENTS WITH PROOF OF  
STUDENT'S STATUS & THEIR DEPENDANTS.

NON-STUDENTS ADD \$20

MIX AND MATCH:  
Choose your own dates.

DEPARTURES: Dec. 18, 21, 22  
RETURNS: Dec. 31, Jan. 1, 4.



FOR BOOKING CONTACT

## Canadian Universities Travel Service Ltd.

44 St. George St.

979-2406

or your student council

Excal  
staff  
meets  
today  
at  
1 pm.

Be  
there.

Aloha.