

ASIA · HISTORY · CULTURE · FOOD · CITY BREAKS · MOUNTAINS · ARCHITECTURE



China

China rewards ambition: walk the Great Wall at Mutianyu, face the Terracotta Army in Xi'an, drift down the Li River between karst peaks, and eat your way from Beijing duck to Sichuan chilli. High-speed trains make the distances manageable, but a little preparation — mobile payments, apps and timing around national holidays — makes everything easier.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for China and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 27 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Beijing	 CURRENCY Chinese yuan (renminbi) (CNY) £1 ≈ CN¥8.93	 LANGUAGE Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese	 BEST TIME Apr–May, Sep–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £45–£220 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, C, I 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 10h 30m direct ~£500–£950 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+8 standard time

China is less a single destination than a continent of them, and first trips work best when they follow the high-speed rail spine. The classic route runs from Beijing, for the Forbidden City and the Great Wall, to Xi'an and the Terracotta Army, then south to Guilin and Yangshuo for limestone karst scenery, finishing in Shanghai's mix of treaty-port Bund and glass towers. Chengdu adds giant pandas and fiery Sichuan food, Zhangjiajie its sandstone pillars, while Yunnan's old towns and the Tibetan plateau reward a second visit.

Distances are vast but travel is fast and efficient: bullet trains, spotless metros and cheap domestic flights mean a fortnight covers a lot of ground. Costs sit somewhere between Southeast Asia and Europe, with food remarkably good value. Crowds are the main challenge — domestic tourism is enormous, and sights sell out during Chinese New Year and the October Golden Week. Visitors are often surprised by how cashless daily life has become, how few people speak English outside big hotels, and how smoothly the big cities run. It suits curious, organised travellers happy to lean on translation apps.

Top 5 highlights

1 HISTORY Great Wall at Mutianyu A restored stretch of Ming-dynasty wall about 70 km north-east of Beijing, with 22 watchtowers, a cable car up and a toboggan run down. It is far less crowded than Badaling; arrive at opening for quieter ramparts.	2 ARCHITECTURE Forbidden City The Ming and Qing emperors' palace complex, nearly 1,000 buildings behind vermilion walls, now the Palace Museum. Tickets must be booked online in advance with your passport number and often sell out; it is closed on Mondays.
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HISTORY

Terracotta Army

An estimated 8,000 life-size clay soldiers, archers and horses buried to guard China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, and found by farmers in 1974, an hour east of Xi'an. Hire a guide to make sense of the pits.

4

NATURE

Li River and Yangshuo

The river cruise from Guilin to Yangshuo winds between the jagged limestone peaks pictured on the 20-yuan note. Base yourself in Yangshuo to cycle the Yulong River valley, drift on bamboo rafts and climb Moon Hill.

5

NATURE

Zhangjiajie's sandstone pillars

Thousands of sandstone pillars rise from misty forest in Hunan's Wulingyuan, the landscape said to have inspired the floating mountains of Avatar. Walk the ridges of Yuanjiajie and Tianzi Mountain, using the Bailong lift to save your legs.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Shanghai

≈ 21.9 million people

China's largest city pairs the Bund's early-20th-century waterfront with Pudong's skyscrapers, the classical Yu Garden, excellent museums and the plane-tree lanes of the former French Concession.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Beijing

≈ 19 million people

The capital holds the Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, Summer Palace and surviving hutong alleys, and is the base for Great Wall day trips. Give it at least four days.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Shenzhen

≈ 17.4 million people

A small border market town turned tech megacity in four decades, Shenzhen is more about modern design, electronics markets and Cantonese food than sights; it is an easy hop from Hong Kong.

Ranked by 2020 census urban population. Chongqing municipality has more residents in total, but spread over an area the size of Austria; measured as one continuous built-up area, Guangzhou-Foshan would rank above Shenzhen.

When to go to China

Best time: **Apr–May, Sep–Oct.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

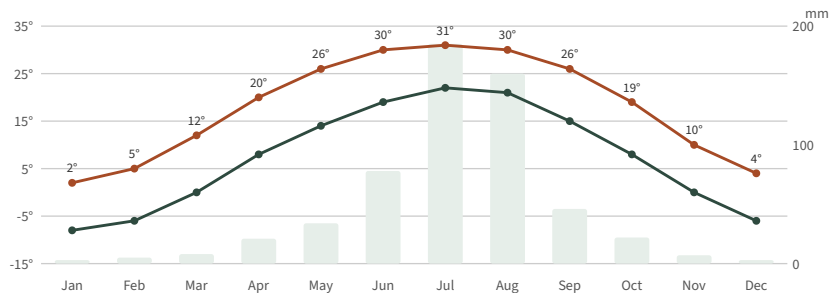
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Beijing

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan–Feb	Chinese New Year (Spring Festival) Lanterns, temple fairs, fireworks and family feasts mark the lunar new year. Atmospheric, but transport is jammed and many businesses close for the first week.
Jan–Feb	Harbin Ice and Snow Festival In China's far north-east, Harbin builds a glowing city of ice palaces and snow sculptures each winter, at temperatures that regularly drop below -20°C.
Sep–Oct	Mid-Autumn Festival Held on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, when families share mooncakes under the full moon and parks and waterfronts glow with lanterns.

How much does China cost?

SHOESTRING £45 per person / day ≈ CN¥402 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £100 per person / day ≈ CN¥893 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £220 per person / day ≈ CN¥1,966 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

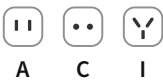
Peking duck Lacquered, crisp-skinned roast duck carved at the table and wrapped in thin pancakes with spring onion, cucumber and sweet bean sauce — Beijing's signature feast.	Xiaolongbao Shanghai's soup dumplings: delicate pleated parcels of pork and hot broth. Nibble a hole, sip the soup, then dip in black vinegar with ginger.	Mapo tofu Sichuan's classic of soft tofu in a glossy chilli-bean sauce with minced beef and tongue-tingling Sichuan peppercorns; best eaten in Chengdu.
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Getting around

China's high-speed rail network is the backbone: the fastest Beijing–Shanghai trains take about four and a half hours, and trains reach almost every city a visitor will want. Book on the official 12306 app or Trip.com using your passport, which you also show at the station. Cities have excellent metros, Didi handles ride-hailing in English, and domestic flights cover long hops to Yunnan, Tibet or Xinjiang.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-A/C/I adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **120**
Fire: **119**
Police: **110**
Traffic Police: **122**
Maritime Search and Rescue Centre: **12395**
Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+86

TIME ZONE

UTC+8 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not expected in restaurants, taxis or most hotels; tipping private tour guides and drivers is the main exception.

ETIQUETTE

Offer and receive business cards, gifts and payments with both hands, don't stand chopsticks upright in rice, and steer clear of political topics such as Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Beijing Capital International Airport (PEK), Beijing; Shanghai Pudong International Airport (PVG), Shanghai; Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport (CAN), Guangzhou

Visas & entry for China

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

Until 31 December 2026, you can enter China visa free for stays of up to 30 days for business, tourism, family or friend visits or transit.

This policy applies to all holders of standard British passports whose nationality is listed as 'British citizen.' Holders of British Crown Dependency passports whose nationality is listed as 'British citizen' are eligible for this policy.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Japanese encephalitis

Measles

Rabies

Tick-borne encephalitis

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in China

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Fri 5 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year's Eve
Sat 6 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year (Spring Festival)
Sun 7 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year (Spring Festival)
Mon 8 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year (Spring Festival)
Tue 9 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year (Spring Festival) (observed)
Wed 10 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year (Spring Festival) (observed)
Mon 5 Apr 2027	Tomb-Sweeping Day
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 2 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 3 May 2027	Labour Day (observed)
Tue 4 May 2027	Labour Day (observed)
Wed 9 Jun 2027	Dragon Boat Festival
Wed 15 Sep 2027	Mid-Autumn Festival
Fri 1 Oct 2027	National Day
Sat 2 Oct 2027	National Day
Sun 3 Oct 2027	National Day
Mon 4 Oct 2027	National Day (observed)
Tue 5 Oct 2027	National Day (observed)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Mandarin Chinese

ENGLISH	MANDARIN CHINESE	SAY IT
Hello	你好	<i>nee HOW</i>
Thank you	谢谢	<i>shyeh-shyeh</i>
Please	请	<i>ching</i>
Excuse me	不好意思	<i>boo how ee-suh</i>
How much is this?	这个多少钱?	<i>jay-guh dwor-shaow chyen</i>

Know before you go

Set up Alipay or WeChat Pay and link your UK card before you fly; both accept foreign Visa and Mastercard. Carry some cash too, though small vendors may be short of change.

Google, WhatsApp and most Western social media are blocked; a roaming plan or foreign eSIM usually still reaches them. Install a translation app, Trip.com and Amap before you arrive.

Avoid the Spring Festival travel rush and the 1–7 October Golden Week if you can: trains sell out, prices jump and famous sights hit capacity.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.