

China on a Shoestring

Country(ies): China

Tour type: Shoestring

Transport: Trains, buses & public transport

Group size: Min: 7 | Max: 20

Days: 27 days

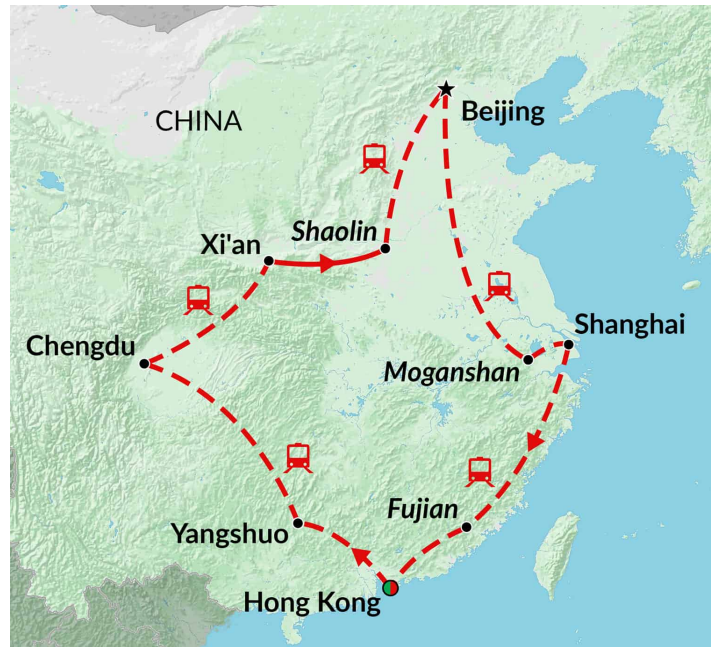
Start Location: Hong Kong, China

End Location: Hong Kong, China

Meals: Breakfasts - 0, Lunches - 0, Dinners - 0

Highlights:

Bright lights of Hong Kong, active adventure in Yangshuo, cute Pandas, the Terracotta Warriors, Kung Fu monks of Shaolin, bustling Beijing & Great Wall of China, rural landscapes of Fujian & Hangzhou, night out in lively Shanghai



Itinerary

Day 1: Meet in Hong Kong. Visit Victoria Peak

Your Hong Kong to Beijing adventure starts today! After arriving in bustling Hong Kong, make your way to your hostel where you can drop your belongings. Meet your adventure leader early this afternoon.

We'll then take you for your first glimpse of incredible Hong Kong, with a trip up Victoria Peak to see the sunset over the skyline. After that, we're heading to Tsim Sha Tsui, where you'll watch the 'Symphony of Light' show from the Avenue of Stars. Finally, if your busy day has you ready to eat, you're in luck. You'll head to the Temple Street Night Market, where your Adventure Leader will be on hand to show you the best places to grab a late dinner.

OVERNIGHT: Hong Kong hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 2: Head to Yangshuo

At 10:00 AM, the group should meet in the hostel reception for the final briefing and check-out. Immediately afterwards, you will leave the hostel and take the MTR to Austin Station, exiting at the adjacent Hong Kong West Kowloon Station. From here, you will board the high-speed train destined for Guilin West Station (Gui-lin Xi). Upon arriving at Guilin West Station, a private coach will be waiting to provide the transfer directly to your accommodation in Yangshuo, where you will check in to the hostel. The remainder of the evening is free for you to explore the town at your leisure, culminating in your first group dinner in China.

OVERNIGHT: Yangshuo hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 3: Yangshuo (free day, options available)

You have a free day in Yangshuo today. To help you make the most of your time here, why not try some of these exciting optional activities?

- Try your hand at cooking up some traditional Chinese foods, at a friendly culinary institute.
- Enjoy kayaking among the mountains along the Li River!
- Experience some relaxing Chinese traditional therapies – like Hot Cupping!

OVERNIGHT: Yangshuo hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 4: Yangshuo, bike ride & bamboo rafting

Today begins with an unmissable bike ride around the local area, along with a cruise down the Yulong River on bamboo rafts. If you're bringing your camera (which you definitely should!) – make sure it's waterproof!

Later, you have the option of heading to the Moon Hill complex to get dirty! In this cave complex, you'll find mud baths and hot springs galore. In the evening, you have the option of joining your fellow travellers for a spot of fun out in the local area.

OVERNIGHT: Yangshuo hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 5: Yangshuo, free day (optional excursions available)

You day if free today to relax and enjoy the idyllic setting, or alternatively you can try your hand out at one of the many adventure activities on offer. These include rock climbing, kayaking, fishing, mountain biking and more. You can also jump on bikes to explore the surrounding countryside.

OVERNIGHT: Yangshuo hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 6: Travel to Chongqing. Yangtze cruise and visit Hongya Cave

You'll say goodbye to Yangshuo this morning and take the bus back to Guilin to board the train to Chongqing. Upon arrival, you'll check in to your hostel and have a chance to freshen up. The afternoon's main activity will be a cruise on the magnificent Yangtze River. As evening approaches, you will head to Hongya Cave to take in the stunning night views of the complex before having dinner at one of the many nearby eateries.

OVERNIGHT: Chongqing hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 7: Chongqing (free day). Optional activities

Today is a free day for you to explore Chongqing at your own pace, or you may choose to join one of our optional activities.

The morning offers a unique exploration of the city, beginning with an optional visit to Liziba Station to witness the incredible sight of the monorail passing directly through a residential building. Following this, you will delve into Chongqing's fascinating 'underground culture' by visiting some of the unique air-raid shelters. The morning concludes with a stop at the impressive People's Great Hall.

In the afternoon, you could head to Chaotianmen Dock to see the spectacular confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers. Afterwards, make your way to Eling Park, a quiet oasis perched atop a hill, where you can enjoy a spot of hiking, refreshing breezes, and glimpses of the Yangtze River.

OVERNIGHT: Chongqing hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 8: Train to Chengdu. Optional afternoon activity

Today, you'll say goodbye to Chongqing and board the train for Chengdu. After you arrive and check in to your hostel, your Adventure Leader will join you for an optional afternoon outing. You'll first visit the bustling local life at People's Park before exploring the charming historic lanes of Kuanzhai Alley.

OVERNIGHT: Chengdu hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 9: Chengdu's Pandas, Learn Mandarin & Optional Sichuan Opera

Today's main activity is a visit to the Giant Panda Breeding & Research Center, the world's largest and most important facility of its kind, where you will have the chance to see the pandas. Please note that this visit must be booked in advance. Later, you will have an included Mandarin Lesson led by your Adventure Leader. In the evening, you can choose to enjoy an optional treat: a traditional Sichuan Opera & Culture Show.

OVERNIGHT: Chengdu hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 10: Chengdu (free day). Optional activities

Are you ready for a big adventure? Today offers an exciting optional trip out to Leshan to see the world's largest stone Buddha, a magnificent figure carved directly into the cliffs overlooking the river. Once back in Chengdu, why not "fire things up" with a classic local experience: the city's famous hot pot, known for its spicy, flavour-packed broth loved by locals. When night falls, the rest of the city is yours to explore; just round up your crew and see where the evening takes you.

OVERNIGHT: Chengdu hotel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 11: Xi'an Bound - Cycle the City Walls or Explore the Muslim Quarter

Say goodbye to your Adventure Leader in Chengdu and take the train to Xi'an, one of China's most historic cities. After checking in to your accommodation, the city is yours to explore. You might choose to hire a bike and cycle along the ancient Ming Dynasty City Walls for a unique, elevated view of Xi'an. Alternatively, head into the city centre to visit the Bell and Drum Towers and wander through the vibrant Muslim Quarter, where the spirit of the Silk Road is palpable through its history and local culture. Stay here for the evening, tucking into the area's mouth-watering street food before browsing the nearby Silk Road Market for a relaxed end to the day.

OVERNIGHT: Xi'an hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 12: Witness The Terracotta Warriors & Explore Xi'an

Today is dedicated to one of China's absolute highlights: the magnificent Terracotta Warriors. You'll visit the site where thousands of life-sized soldiers stand guard over the mausoleum of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, an unforgettable experience to see them up close. The afternoon is then free for you to explore as you wish. A great option is to visit the Big Goose Pagoda and stay in the area until the evening to catch the spectacular music and light show that illuminates the square.

OVERNIGHT: Xi-an hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 13: Master Kung Fu at Shaolin Temple & Mandarin Lesson

It's time to hop on the bus to Dengfeng for your exciting "Dragon Moment"! The day revolves around Kung Fu, starting with a practical lesson at a local school led by a master from the legendary Shaolin Temple. Afterwards, you can sit back and watch the professionals in action during an impressive Kung Fu show. Later, you'll sharpen your linguistic skills with another Mandarin lesson to build on what you've already learned. If the group is keen, you can round off the night with a pub quiz for some friendly competition.

OVERNIGHT: Dengfeng hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 14: Free day in Dengfeng. Optional activities

For today's activities, you have a choice of two fantastic optional activities. You can opt to visit the legendary Shaolin Temple, the birthplace of Kung Fu. While there, you could hike up to Dharma Cave, a key spiritual spot for Buddhist pilgrims, and take in the sweeping views of the temples and shrines below. If you prefer a different kind of cultural experience, another excellent option is a trip to the Longmen Grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage site filled with thousands of intricate, carved Buddhas. As you have an early start tomorrow, it might be sensible to use your free evening to relax and get an early night.

OVERNIGHT: Dengfeng hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 15: Camp Under the Stars on The Great Wall

It's an early start today, as you'll be catching the bullet train to Beijing! After arriving, you'll drop off your bags before heading straight out to the magnificent Great Wall of China. Get ready for a memorable afternoon hiking along a fascinating, partly unrestored section of the wall. As the sun begins to set behind the mountains, you'll set

up camp on a quiet, deserted stretch to spend a truly special night under the stars on one of the Wonders of the World. To make the evening even more unique, you'll have a Mandarin lesson around the campfire.

(Please note: due to cold weather, from October 1st to the end of April, you will stay in a guesthouse near the Wall instead of camping).

OVERNIGHT: Beijing hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 16: Beijing (free day, options available)

Wake up to potentially breathtaking sunrise views over the Great Wall—it truly doesn't get more epic than this (weather permitting, of course). Once you're back in Beijing, the rest of the day is yours to play with. You could head to the lively and quirky galleries of the 798 Art District, spend a peaceful afternoon chilling out in the stunning gardens of the Summer Palace, or simply round up your crew to explore more of the city's highlights together.

OVERNIGHT: Beijing hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 17: Beijing. Free day

You can begin the day with the option to wander across Tiananmen Square before entering the awe-inspiring Forbidden City. With a history spanning 24 emperors and encompassing 980 buildings, this imperial palace is absolutely bursting with stories. For the best views in the city, be sure to climb Jingshan Park and look out over the palace grounds sprawling below. When evening arrives, you have a choice: you can go big with a thrilling Chinese acrobatics and circus show, or keep it delicious by trying Beijing's most famous dish, Peking Roast Duck. This incredible meal was once reserved exclusively for emperors and trust us, it is on a completely different level to your usual takeaway.

OVERNIGHT: Beijing hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 18: Beijing - Markets, Temple of Heaven & Hutong Strolls

Your final day in Beijing offers the flexibility to tailor your experience. You could start by exploring the city's renowned fake goods markets before heading to the serene Temple of Heaven nearby. Alternatively, immerse yourself in the past in the Nanluoguxiang district, one of Beijing's most beautifully preserved historical areas. Here, you can wander through the maze of hutongs (narrow alleyways) and traditional siheyuan courtyards, pausing at quaint cafés, lively bars, and small handicraft shops. In the evening, transfer to the station to board your overnight train to Hangzhou.

OVERNIGHT: Overnight train to Hangzhou

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 19: Arrive Hangzhou, West Lake visit & Sunset Hike

After arriving in Hangzhou this morning, transfer to your hostel for a late breakfast. We hope you slept on the train! Next, we're off to the famous West Lake, ready to take a stunning boat tour to one of the Lake's beautiful islands.

Once you've checked in this afternoon, you'll have some free time. If you're keen to stay vertical, why not check out China's National Tea Museum, or the Lingyin Temple?

This evening, it's an unmissable hike up Jiuyao Mountain to see the stunning sunset from there. Before you head back down to street level for dinner and a free evening to explore. Make sure you check out Hefang Road – the most famous ancient street in town!

OVERNIGHT: Hangzhou hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 20: Nine Creeks Hike, transfer to Shanghai

This morning you have time to take a hike through misty woods to the Nine Creeks. Returning to the hostel for lunch we then catch the bullet train to Shanghai where we transfer via metro to your hostel.

OVERNIGHT: Shanghai hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 21: Shanghai, optional Mandarin Lesson (optional excursions available)

After a lazy morning, you have the option to join a Mandarin Lesson. This extra special class will be held by professional teachers, all the way from the Mandarin Garden Chinese Language School.

Later in the day, there is an option to join a visit to the Yu Gardens, a busy historical site, formerly the site of a lavish family home. You could also visit People's Square before heading to the world's busiest shopping street 'Nanjing Road'

In the evenings, you can enjoy Shanghai's lively bar scene, and perhaps try out the largest bar crawl in China "the Drunken Dragon Pub Crawl". If you're looking for something a little more sophisticated try sipping champagne in a hot tub on the rooftop of a skyscraper, taking in Shanghai's spectacular skyline.

OVERNIGHT: Shanghai hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 22: Shanghai, free day (optional excursions available)

Today is another free day in Shanghai. There's lots to do to keep yourself busy, with plenty of sightseeing and shopping on offer. Alternatively you can let us do it for you and choose to take one of the many optional sightseeing tour available (see the Options tab for all available local options).

OVERNIGHT: Shanghai hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 23: Shanghai Your Way - French Concession & Jinmao Tower City View

Start your day exploring the charming French Concession, taking time to visit a secret propaganda museum and wander through the artsy lanes of Tianzifang. Later, experience a contrast as you travel to the financial district for a taste of ultra-modern Shanghai. Here, your entry includes access to the Jinmao Tower, where you can take in incredible panoramic views from the observation platform. For the adventurous, there is an optional skywalk 340 metres up. The evening is free; your Adventure Leader will provide recommendations for local food and drink spots. However, be sure to get an early night, as tomorrow begins bright and early.

OVERNIGHT: Shanghai hostel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 24: Fujian Bound & Hakka Roundhouse Stay

Today, we take a bullet train to Nanjing in Fujian Province to meet your new Adventure Leader. From there, a minivan will transport us deep into the stunning tea-growing hills to explore a traditional Hakka tulou—the unique, centuries-old mud homes. Tonight is a truly rare opportunity, as you will be staying inside one of these historical roundhouses, allowing you to fully absorb the atmosphere and history of this incredible setting. Your evening is free to relax and socialise: you might choose to join a movie night, head out for karaoke, or even practise your Mandarin with the locals.

OVERNIGHT: Fujian guesthouse

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 25: Explore Hakka Villages & Tea Fields

Lace up your boots for an immersive day exploring the stunning Fujian countryside. We'll start by wandering through the UNESCO-listed Hakka tulou (roundhouses) and strolling through several picture-perfect villages. Take in the charm of the endless tea fields before participating in a traditional tea ceremony and tasting. In the afternoon, you can hike up into the mountains for magnificent, sweeping views and drop by the very plantations where the region's famous leaves are cultivated.

OVERNIGHT: Fujian guesthouse

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 26: Cycle Through the Fujian Countryside

Get ready to jump on a bike and cycle deep into Fujian's incredible tea country. You'll follow winding trails and be surrounded by epic views. We'll make a stop at the biggest Hakka tulou (roundhouse), where you can head inside and climb upstairs to explore its many hidden nooks and corners. Continue pedalling through the lush landscape until you roll into a nearby village for a genuine slice of local life.

OVERNIGHT: Fujian guesthouse

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 27: Train to Hong Kong, tour ends

This morning, we'll take a minibus back to Zhangzhou Station, ready to transfer by train back to Hong Kong. It's here that your China backpacking tour comes to the end, and you'll bid farewell to your fellow travellers.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Included:

- All accommodation as stated in the itinerary in basic hostels
- All transport and transfers in trains, buses & public transport
- Sightseeing tours as detailed in the itinerary
- Visa invitation letter
- Entry fees to included activities and attractions
- Bilingual western and local adventure leaders

Excluded:

- International flights (available on request)
- Visa fees
- Travel insurance (mandatory, [get quote here](#))
- Airport arrival & departure transfer service (optional on request)
- All meals
- Optional activities
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tour guide tips
- Any other items not mentioned above

Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

Private Room Supplement (CHSHCS)

Min numbers: 1

This tour is based on twin-share accommodation, with single bookers paired up with another traveller of the same sex in the group. If the final group make-up means that no room share is available, you do not need to pay this supplement. However, if you would like to guarantee yourself a single room throughout the tour, then please add this option to your booking.

Note: Single supplement prices may vary seasonally.

Extra day in Hong Kong - pre-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport arrival transfer is not included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Extra day in Hong Kong - post-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the end of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport departure transfer is not included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

1. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

2. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

3. Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

4. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

<https://x.com/encounterstravel> (yes, without the 'e')

5. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? [World Nomads Travel Insurance](#) offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.

6. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's ['Travel Aware' campaign](#) which provides further useful and invaluable information.

7. Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

How Water-to-Go Technology works:

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can't fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon's efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
 - They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
 - Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
 - The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
 - The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.
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8. Private & Tailor-made Tours

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please [contact us](#).

9. Group Size / Age Restrictions / Tour Leaders / Guides

The group size on our budget China tours is min 5, max 20. Due to the nature of the way the trip runs, we set a minimum age of 18, and a maximum age of 55 to join this trip.

Each trip is accompanied by a mixture of western and local tour leaders who are all bilingual in Mandarin and English. Local tour leaders are often young professionals who work for a couple of seasons after graduating university. They are highly educated and thoroughly trained, but as they are doing it more for personal experience rather than to make money, they are cheaper, helping to keep the tour cost down, and some may argue, are more enthusiastic than the 'career tour guides' used by most tour companies in China.

Tour leaders tend to be specialists in their own local region and generally do not accompany the group between the main cities of locations on the tour. Instead they will look after you throughout your time in each main hub and then get you settled onto the train to the next location where you'll be met by your next tour leader.

This tour is run in conjunction with our friends at The Dragon Trip, so you will be joining travellers booked with them.

10. Passports and Visas

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport. Visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities.

If you renew your passport between the time you book and your final travel date, please let us know as soon as possible. When purchasing your train tickets in China, we must have the details of the passport that you will be carrying while you are on the trip.

In general, all nationalities (except Singapore, Brunei & Japan) need to apply for and obtain a China tourist visa before entering Mainland China (**Please take note of the May 2025 update to UK applications explained below**). Most nationalities are not required to have a visa for travel solely to Hong Kong. If your flight into Hong Kong connects in mainland China (for example, in Beijing or Shanghai), you will need to tell the Immigration officer in the airport NOT to cross out a single-entry visa, as you are only transferring. If the Immigration officer crosses out a single entry visa, you will encounter difficulties when you start your trip with us and need to cross the border from Hong Kong back into mainland China.

In order to apply for your China tourist visa to travel on this tour, you will need the following:

- 2 passport photos

- an invitation letter (which we will provide)
- an itinerary (you can download and provide these tour notes for this)
- photocopy of your passport
- a completed visa application form
- a confirmed flight/train ticket with entry and exit dates shown clearly

Please send us a scanned / photographed copy of your passport identity pages as soon after booking as possible so that we can start to arrange your invitation letter. We also need a copy of your passport in order to book your accommodation and train tickets in China, so please ensure we get it as quickly as possible. We'll send your visa invitation letter to you together with a detailed itinerary as soon as its ready. You should then apply for your visa within three months of your travel start date.

Visa application form assistance:

You can download a copy of the official [China visa application form](#).

Please note the following when completing the form:

- You must print the form off as double-sided. This is an embassy requirement.
- Please fill the form out using black capital letters.
- In Chinese culture dates are written in the order of year / month / day, so please follow this on your form.
- 1.9 - Leave this blank, it is not referring to your passport number.
- 2.1 - Tick the Tourism box.
- 2.2 - Unless you plan to enter Mainland China again before or after your tour with us, you will require a single entry, 3-month visa.
- 2.4 - Please write the number of days of how long your tour in Mainland China will be. For example: China on a Shoestring - 25 days, please input 24 days here (Day 25 is in Macau and Hong Kong, both of which are not in Mainland China). Highlights of China should be 15 days, and Beijing to Shanghai Express should be 9 days.
- 2.5 Please enter the following addresses and phone numbers in the 'Detailed Address' column according to your itinerary.
 1. Yangshuo 11 international Hostel NO. 11 Lian Feng Xiang West, Street YangShuo GuiLin GuangXi, Yangshuo
 2. Mr Panda Guesthouse 75 2nd Ring Road North Chengdu Tel: +86 028 8662 8336
 3. Shuyuan Youth Hostel No. 2 West Shuncheng Road Xian Tel: +86 029 8728 7720

In the fourth row, just write the following note: "please see detailed itinerary for further accommodation details"
- 2.8 Please enter the following:

Name of Inviter: Shanghai Zhonglei Travel Service Co. Ltd.
 Address of Inviter: 822 Zhennan Road, Shanghai, China
 Contact Telephone Number of Inviter: +86 21 6150 3200
 Relationship with applicant: Tour Operator

May 2025 Update to UK based Chinese Visa applications:

Key Changes to the Visa Process (UK-based Applications):

- **Online Pre-Approval Application** – Clients must now first complete an online application, which is sent to Beijing for approval. This stage takes approximately 2–3 weeks.
- **Approval Document** – If approved, the client will receive an official approval document. If the application is rejected, they must reapply, restarting the 2–3 week process.
- **Submission at Visa Centre** – Once approved, the client must submit their approval document & passport to the Chinese Visa Application Service Centre
- **Visa Collection** – The visa will be ready 4 days later, and must be collected in person from the centre.

This updated process means that obtaining a visa can now take a minimum of 3–4 weeks, and potentially longer if reapplication is necessary!

We strongly recommend that you allow sufficient time for the full process when planning travel to China.

Further details are available via the official [Chinese Visa Application Service Centre UK website](#):

11. Accommodation

Our Shoestring China tours are based on basic but comfortable and fun hostel accommodation. These are safe and have good showers, internet, washing machines, and real Chinese character. Like hostels around the world, they tend to be most popular with young travellers aged 18 to 35 who are travelling on a small budget and who are keen to meet people and make new friends in the lounge or bar. While these are subject to change, the main hostels we use are:

- Yangshuo 11 international Hostel Yangshuo – 11 Lian Feng Xiang West, Street YangShuo, GuiLin, GuangXi, Yangshuo
- Mr. Panda Guesthouse Chengdu – Mr Panda Guesthouse, 75 2nd Ring Road North, Chengdu (Tel: +86 028 8662 8336)
- Shuyuan hostel Xi'an – Shuyuan Youth Hostel, No.2 West Shuncheng Road (Tel: +86 029 8728 7720)
- Bandeng Guest house Shaolin – Bandeng Guest House (Tel: +86 159 3871 9599)
- Leo Hostel Beijing – Leo Hostel 52, Da ZhaLanXiJie, Qianmen, Beijing (Tel: +86 010 6303 3318)
- Xiwuli Lodge Moganshan – Xiwuli Lodge, Houwu Village, Paitou Township, Deqing County (Tel: +86 1865936 9855)
- Phoenix Hostel Shanghai – Phoenix Hostel 15-17 South Yunnan Road Shanghai (Tel: +86 021 6328 8680)
- Camping/Tulou stay Fujian – WanheKezhan Tulou (Tel: +86 1395 9628 178)

Accommodation is in shared dorm rooms with all bedding and linen provided (this includes sleeping bags and mats during camping excursions at the Great Wall). Luggage is tagged, recorded and stored at the hostels while you are out on day excursions.

Camping at the Great Wall is only available between April and the end of September.

Upgrades to private rooms are available at the time of booking or up to 4 weeks before departure. Prices are per room (so couples can split this price between them): HK-HK 25 days = \$780; BJ-BJ 18 days = \$380; HK-HK 16 days = \$350; SH-SH 18 days = \$380; HK-BJ 15 days = \$350.

Important Note:

Accommodation is not included in the standard tour itinerary for the night before Day 1 of your trip or for the night of the last day of your trip.

If booking your own accommodation for these pre/post-tour nights we recommend the hostels listed above. If you are booking accommodation in Hong Kong we recommend doing this as far in advance as possible as it can get very expensive if you leave it until close to your check in date.

12. Voltage

A variety of different electrical sockets can be found in China (Type A, C, I), with the majority accepting two flat pins. Voltage is 220V. Plug sockets in Hong Kong are three flat (like UK) or round pins (Type G, D). Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Most hotel & hostel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc.

If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

13. What to take

As this is a Shoestring tour with plenty of travelling from place to place including on and off trains, we strongly recommend packing light. Suitcases are OK, but you will find a rucksack or holdall much much more convenient and easier to transport around. Low cost laundry is readily available hostels, and bear in mind that much of the world's clothing is made in China, so cheap replacements and extra items are readily available if required. If you are returning to Hong Kong at the end of your tour after starting there, you can leave a main bag in Hong Kong for the duration of your trip for HK\$300.

We recommend you bring:

- Sandals / Flipflops

- Comfortable walking shoes
- T-shirts
- Shorts/skirts
- Swimming costume
- Lightweight waterproof
- Towel
- Washbag
- Sunglasses, sunhat and aftersun
- Camera & charger
- Socket adapter
- Copies of your travel insurance policy, credit cards, passport and visa (also email a copy of these to yourself)
- Small first aid kit including paracetamol, disinfectant, medicine for diarrhoea
- Books and other entertainment for the night trains (bring electronic gadgets at your own risk)
- Small day pack
- If travelling in October to April, bring a hat, gloves, warm coat, jumper and warm trousers
- Your passport & credit card!

14. Money

The Chinese currency is Renminbi, shortened to 'RMB' ('the people's coins'). RMB is also referred to as 'yuan' or 'kuai'. You can generally withdraw money in RMB from ATM machines all over China using your home debit/credit cards – just make sure you've told your bank that you'll be travelling there in advance and be prepared to pay a percentage conversion / commission fee. Alternatively, you can carry cash round with you and convert into RMB in banks in in Honk Kong or mainland China. Travellers cheques also remain widely accepted.

Food in China is very cheap. We advise you to budget approximately 80 RMB per day for food in great local restaurants your tour leader will suggest which they know are safe and tasty. If you want to eat cheaper than this you can by eating more simple dishes like fried rice/noodles which come in at less that 10 RMB per meal. As an example of prices of everyday items:

- Small bottle water- 2 RMB
- Basic Chinese meal- 35 RMB
- Drink in a night club- 70 RMB
- Beer in a restaurant/hostel 10-20 RMB
- Coke/soft drink - 6 RMB
- Taxi- 10 minutes- 20 RMB (taxi prices vary depending on the city, but are very cheap compared to Europe/North America)

15. Health and Vaccinations

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions.

In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

China: Hepatitis A. [Malaria map](#). Malaria risk is low throughout the year throughout the country apart from areas that border Myanmar and Vietnam which have high risk. It is not generally present in Hong Kong unless contracted abroad. Yellow Fever vaccination certificates are required for travellers over 1 year of age arriving from countries with a risk of yellow fever transmission and for all travellers having transited through the airport of

a country with risk of yellow fever transmission

Hong Kong: Hepatitis A. Malaria is not generally present in Hong Kong unless contracted abroad.

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the lowland regions Bhutan are considered malarial zones, while higher altitudes including central Bhutan including Paro, Thimphu, Punakha and Bumthang are not. Nepal is considered mainly low risk with prophylactics not normally required.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary. Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

16. Trains

Due to the huge size of China and the excellent quality of the public rail network, we use train journeys extensively on our Shoestring tours in China. Typical train times are given below, though these are subject to change:

- Guilin to Chengdu is from 12:50 – 13:30 the following day
- Xi'an to Beijing is from 19:30 – 9:00
- Beijing to Hangzhou is from 19:30 – 8:30
- Shanghai to Fujian (day train) 10:00 – 18:00
- Fujian to Guangzhou 22:00 – 7:00

You will have your own sleeper seat on each overnight train journey (full flat bed). We try to ensure that all our travellers are booked in the same compartement so you can have fun getting to know each other better, play some games, and share a few drinks. If you or a fellow traveller have a seat that is not with the rest of the group, the tour leaders have a process in place to try to switch seats. In some stations they will be able to board the train and arrange a seat swap with another passenger. In other cases you can make use of the emergency phone that we provide to accompany every group, and the tour leader will then use this to speak in Mandarin to the conductor or directly to another passenger to help arrange a seat swap. This normally works very smoothly and without incident.

Upgrades to a four-berth soft sleeper are also available (you must book this with us at least 1 month before departure). Please contact us for details and prices if required.

17. Airport transfers

Airport transfers are not included in the price of the tour. However, they are available on request if required. Prices are given per vehicle (up to 4 people), and if you would like a bilingual guide to meet you and travel with you from the airport to your destination (or vice-versa) this can also be arranged for an extra fee (generally GBP 20 / US\$25) each way. This airport transfer service is available from and to the following airport locations: Guilin, Chengdu, Xian, Beijing, and Shanghai.

18. Tipping

Tipping in China is not customary and is not necessary. Of course, voluntary tipping is completely up to you, but in places like restaurants, bars or taxis it is extremely rare.

19. Internet & Communication

Language: While there are nearly 300 living dialects in China, today's modern mainland China has a dominant dialect which is Mandarin. All schools teach in Mandarin, politics, business and the national media all use Mandarin and the entire middle class and above speak it fluently. There remain many people who don't speak or understand it well though, but if you're going to learn some 'Chinese', then Mandarin is the dialect to go for. You will find that Chinese people will love you if you do try and speak in their language - your efforts will definitely be rewarded. You don't need to read Mandarin to get by (which is a relief!), but learning some words and phrases is very useful. If you are struggling, then most public places (eg. stations) have an official English speaker on hand to help, and 12-18 year old school children are also a great help as they learn English at school and are invariably delighted and keen to help out. You can also check out [Pleco](#): This is a great tool - a free dictionary to help you communicate in China. You can download it from the Android Market or App Store.

Internet: Wi-Fi and computers are available for use in all hostels used on our Shoestring tours. Some websites are blocked in China, including Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. If you would like to use a VPN while in China to access the internet it is much easier to do this before you leave. Two examples of free options you can access via your device are [Betternet](#) or [ExpressVPN](#).

Phone: You can use your mobile phone in China, as long as it has been unlocked for international usage. If you want to use your phone while in China, we recommend bringing an unlocked handset and then buying a cheap prepaid SIM card from one of China's main 3 mobile phone providers (these are China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom). You can buy these directly from their retail outlets, but in order to do so you will need to show your passport. SIM cards can then be recharged at most convenience stores and roadside newspaper stands (for around 100 RMB). Most SIM cards can be used for 3G/4G data, texting and domestic calls. Your tour leader can help you with this.

20. Joining instructions

Hong Kong:

The joining point is the Yes Inn @ Causeway Bay (hostel). The address is 2nd Floor, Nan Yip Building, 472 Hennessy Road, Causeway Bay. The building entrance is nearby the Stanley mini bus station on Tang Lung Street. [Click here](#) for directions to Yes Inn.

The meeting time is 7.00 am sharp in the lobby. Please check out at the front desk and have your bags packed and ready to go in the lobby before 7.00 am. If we haven't seen you or heard from you by 7.00 am, then we do need to leave without you. Please note that we will return to Yes Inn for 10.30 am to pick up anyone who missed the 7.00 am departure time. At 10.30 am, we must leave in order to cross the border with mainland China and board the train to Guilin. This is the last chance to meet your group in Hong Kong – if you miss this, it will be your own responsibility to catch up with the group in mainland China.

Please bring details of your travel insurance along with you to the pre-departure briefing so that we can contact your insurance company on your behalf in the event of an accident.

If you miss the 7 am meeting time, please immediately contact us by calling us on any of the emergency telephone numbers on your tour confirmation voucher.

Beijing:

The joining point is the Beijing Heyuan Courtyard International Hostel. The address is 1 Zhiqiang BeiYuan, Wenhuiyuan Road, Hai ian, 100088 Beijing. Tel. +86 10 6227 7138. If you are travelling from the airport by subway, take the airport express to DongZhiMen metro station, then get on the subway line 2 and get off at JiShuiTan metro station. From Jishuitan station A exit, turn right and go to north on XinJieKou WaiDaJie. Cross the street at the first intersection. Continue north on XinJieKouWaiDaJie, then turn left at the large Chinese-style gate, on to WenHuiYuanLu, shortly after passing the China Film Art Research Center, turn right when you see the red sign for ZhiQiangYuanXiaoQu. Our hostel is ahead on your left.

If you have spent the previous night in the hostel, please check out at the front desk and have your bags packed and ready to go in the lobby by 10.45am. The meeting time is 11.00am in the lobby. Please bring details of your travel insurance along with you to the pre-departure briefing so that we can contact your insurance company on your behalf in the event of an accident.

If you miss the meeting time, please immediately contact us by calling us on any of the emergency telephone numbers on your tour confirmation voucher.

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Note: Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.
