ENCOUNTERS TRAVEL

Your passport to adventure

Highlights of China

COUNTRY(IES)	China
TOUR TYPE	Shoestring
TRANSPORT	Trains, buses & public transport
GROUP SIZE	Min: 7 | Max: 20
DURATION	18 days
STARTS	Hong Kong, China
ENDS	Beijing, China
MEALS	Breakfasts - 0, Lunches - 0, Dinners - 0

TOUR ROUTE MAP **18 Days**

ROUTE: **Hong Kong** (Start) → **Guilin** → **Yuzhong District** → **Chengdu** → **Xian** → **Zhengzhou** → **Beijing** (End)

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

Itinerary

DAY 1 Meet in Hong Kong. Visit Victoria Peak

This day introduces Hong Kong through a mix of orientation, skyline views, and street-level culture. The experience begins with a pre-trip briefing that sets the context for exploring this dynamic city. A visit to Victoria Peak offers sweeping views across Victoria Harbour, highlighting Hong Kong's dramatic urban landscape. The journey continues along the Avenue of Stars before ending at Temple Street Night Market, where evening crowds, local food, and market stalls reflect the city's vibrant after-dark atmosphere.

ACTIVITIES

- **Meet in Hong Kong in Pre-Trip Briefing**
  You meet your Adventure Leader and group in Hong Kong, China for a pre-trip briefing. This starts your journey through southern and central China.

- **Explore Victoria Peak in Hong Kong**
  You visit Victoria Peak in Hong Kong, China to enjoy iconic skyline views at sunset. The panoramas highlight the city's dramatic harbour and skyscrapers.
- **Explore Avenue of Stars in Hong Kong**
  You stop at the Avenue of Stars in Hong Kong, China to watch the Symphony of Lights show. The harbourfront location offers sweeping evening views.
- **Explore Temple Street Night Market in Hong Kong**
  You explore the bustling Temple Street Night Market in Hong Kong, China. The lively stalls and food vendors introduce you to the city's vibrant night culture.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Hong Kong hostel	None

DAY 2 Head to Yangshuo

This day marks the conclusion of your time in Hong Kong and the transition into southern China’s countryside. A final briefing and check-out wrap up the city stay before travelling through Hong Kong’s rail network to begin the cross-border journey. The high-speed train to Guilin West signals a shift from dense urban landscapes to the limestone regions of Guangxi. From Guilin, a drive to Yangshuo introduces a quieter setting shaped by rivers, karst hills, and rural scenery, setting the tone for the next stage of the journey.

ACTIVITIES

- **Final Briefing and Check-Out – Hong Kong**
  You complete a final morning briefing in Hong Kong, China before beginning your overland journey toward mainland China. The group prepares for departure.
- **Travel from MTR Hong Kong Hostel to Austin Station**
  You travel from your hostel in Hong Kong, China via the MTR toward Austin Station. This urban transfer brings you to the high-speed rail terminal.
- **Train from Hong Kong to Guilin West**
  A high-speed train departs from Hong Kong, China heading north toward Guilin. The journey connects the city with the Guangxi region.
- **Drive from Guilin West to Yangshuo**
  A road transfer from Guilin, China takes you into the scenic karst landscapes surrounding Yangshuo. You arrive at your hostel to settle in for the evening.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Yangshuo hostel	None

DAY 3 Yangshuo (free day, options available)

This day is set aside to enjoy Yangshuo at your own pace amid one of southern China’s most scenic regions. Free time allows you to explore the town, countryside, and river landscapes independently, whether by walking, cycling, or relaxing along the Li River. The slower rhythm highlights Yangshuo’s rural character and natural surroundings. It offers a flexible pause in the journey before continuing onward.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Yangshuo**
  You have a full free day in Yangshuo, China, surrounded by dramatic karst peaks. The relaxing riverside town offers many choices for independent exploration.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Yangshuo hostel	None

DAY 4 Yangshuo, bike ride & bamboo rafting

This experience explores Yangshuo’s rural scenery through gentle travel and time on the water. A countryside bike ride passes through farmland, villages, and limestone hills that define the region’s landscape. The journey continues on the Yulong River with bamboo rafting, offering a quiet perspective of karst peaks and riverside life. Together, these activities highlight Yangshuo’s natural beauty and slower pace of travel.

ACTIVITIES

- **Countryside Bike Ride in Yangshuo**
  You cycle through the rural landscapes of Yangshuo, China, passing rice fields and village paths. The scenery reflects the region's iconic limestone peaks.
- **Bamboo Rafting in Yulong River**
  You drift down the Yulong River on bamboo rafts in Yangshuo, China. The calm waters offer peaceful views of mountains and countryside.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Yangshuo hostel	None

DAY 5 Yangshuo, free day (optional excursions available)

This day is set aside to enjoy Yangshuo at your own pace amid one of southern China’s most scenic regions. Free time allows you to explore the town, countryside, and river landscapes independently, whether by walking, cycling, or relaxing along the Li River. The slower rhythm highlights Yangshuo’s rural character and natural surroundings. It offers a flexible pause in the journey before continuing onward.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Yangshuo**
  You have a full free day in Yangshuo, China, surrounded by dramatic karst peaks. The relaxing riverside town offers many choices for independent exploration.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Yangshuo hostel	None

DAY 6 Travel to Chongqing. Yangtze cruise and visit Hongya Cave

This journey moves from the karst landscapes of Yangshuo toward one of China's most dramatic river cities. After travelling to Guilin, the route continues by train to Chongqing, marking a shift from rural scenery to a major inland metropolis. Time along the Yangtze River introduces the scale and importance of China's great waterways within an urban setting. The day concludes at Hongya Cave, where layered architecture, river views, and evening lights reflect Chongqing's distinctive character.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Yangshuo to Guilin**
  A road transfer from Yangshuo, China takes you back toward Guilin for onward travel. The route passes scenic rivers and farmlands.
- **Train from Guilin to Chongqing**
  A train departs from Guilin, China heading to Chongqing. This long-distance connection brings you into southwest China.
- **Explore Yangtze River Cruise in Chongqing**
  You enjoy a cruise on the Yangtze River in Chongqing, China, taking in major waterfront views. The river is one of the longest and most important in Asia.
- **Explore Hongya Cave in Chongqing**
  You explore Hongya Cave in Chongqing, China, a multi-level complex known for its illuminated night views. The area blends traditional architecture with modern urban scenery.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Chongqing hostel	None

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.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Chongqing**
  You have free time in Chongqing, China to explore the city's hills, markets and cultural sites. The city's dramatic topography and river confluence create a unique setting.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Chongqing hostel	None

DAY 8 Train to Chengdu. Optional afternoon activity

Board the train in Chongqing and travel to Chengdu. The source contains no free-time period, transfer details or included activities after arrival, so none should be added. The collection is purely an intercity rail journey linking the two regional capitals. Any references to Sichuan culture or Chengdu’s atmosphere should remain contextual rather than implying scheduled sightseeing during this travel day.

ACTIVITIES

- **Train from Chongqing to Chengdu**
  A train departs from Chongqing, China toward Chengdu. You travel across Sichuan Province into the region's capital.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Chengdu hostel	None

DAY 9 Chengdu’s Pandas, Learn Mandarin & Optional Sichuan Opera

Spend part of the day at the Giant Panda Breeding Centre before joining the scheduled Mandarin lesson. The first visit focuses on conservation and research, while the second introduces basic language and communication. Panda behaviour and visibility depend on the animals and conditions, so specific encounters cannot be guaranteed. No additional Chengdu sightseeing is listed within this collection and should not be added.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Giant Panda Breeding Center in Chengdu**
  Visit the Giant Panda Breeding Center in Chengdu, China, a leading research facility for giant panda conservation. Learn about pandas in a protected natural environment.
- **Mandarin Lesson in Chengdu**
  You take part in a Mandarin lesson in Chengdu, China led by your Adventure Leader. This session builds on your language skills during the trip.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Chengdu hostel	None

DAY 10

Chengdu (free day). Optional activities

Spend the day at leisure in Chengdu with no organised sightseeing or transfers. Teahouses, markets, neighbourhoods and riverside areas are suggested possibilities from the source rather than included visits. The purpose of the day is flexibility, allowing independent exploration or rest before the journey continues. No specific attraction should be added unless separately confirmed elsewhere in the itinerary.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Chengdu**
  You enjoy a free day in Chengdu, China with opportunities to explore temples, cuisine and cultural districts. The city is known for its relaxed lifestyle and spicy food.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Chengdu hotel	None

DAY 11

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

Board the train from Chengdu to Xi’an and spend the remainder of the day at leisure after arrival. The city walls and Muslim Quarter are specifically suggested as popular ways to use the free time but should not automatically be treated as included activities. No guided sightseeing is stated. The collection therefore consists of the rail journey and an unstructured arrival period in Xi’an.

ACTIVITIES

- **Train from Chengdu to Xi'an**
  A train departs from Chengdu, China toward Xi'an. This route carries you across central China to one of its most historic cities.
- **Free Time in Xi'an**
  You have free time in Xi'an, China to continue exploring its temples, pagodas and historic squares. The city offers many optional cultural experiences.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Xi'an hostel	None

DAY 12

Witness The Terracotta Warriors & Explore Xi’an

This day centres on one of China’s most significant archaeological discoveries, offering deep insight into the country’s imperial past. A visit to the Terracotta Warriors reveals the scale, craftsmanship, and historical importance of the Qin Dynasty’s burial complex. The site highlights Xi’an’s role as the starting point of the Silk Road and a former imperial capital. Free time later allows you to explore Xi’an independently, whether wandering historic streets, visiting additional sites, or enjoying the local food scene.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an**
  You visit the Terracotta Warriors archaeological site near Xi'an, China. Thousands of life-size statues guard the mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huang.
- **Free Time in Xi'an**
  You have free time in Xi'an, China to continue exploring its temples, pagodas and historic squares. The city offers many optional cultural experiences.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Xi-an hostel	None

DAY 13

Master Kung Fu at Shaolin Temple & Mandarin Lesson

This day focuses on the martial arts traditions that originated in the foothills of central China. A visit to a Shaolin Kung Fu School in Dengfeng offers insight into the discipline, training methods, and philosophy behind one of the world’s most recognised martial arts traditions. The experience continues with a Shaolin Kung Fu performance, showcasing strength, balance, and technique rooted in centuries of practice. A Mandarin lesson rounds out the day, connecting physical tradition with language and everyday cultural understanding.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Xi'an to Dengfeng**
  A bus journey departs from Xi'an, China heading toward Dengfeng. You travel into the region associated with the legendary Shaolin Temple.
- **Explore Shaolin Kung Fu School in Dengfeng**
  You take part in a Kung Fu lesson in Dengfeng, China led by a master associated with the Shaolin Temple. The session introduces foundational martial arts skills.
- **Explore Shaolin Kung Fu Performance in Dengfeng**
  You watch a Kung Fu performance in Dengfeng, China showcasing discipline, strength and traditional Shaolin techniques. The show highlights the region's martial arts heritage.
- **Mandarin Lesson in Dengfeng**
  You participate in a Mandarin lesson in Dengfeng, China, reinforcing your language progress during the tour.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Dengfeng hostel	None

DAY 14 Free day in Dengfeng. Optional activities

Spend the day at leisure in Dengfeng with no included visits, transfers or activities. The town streets and Mount Song surroundings are general possibilities for independent use of the time rather than organised excursions. No Shaolin Temple visit, martial arts lesson or hike should be added unless confirmed elsewhere. The collection is solely a free-time period between structured travel days.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Dengfeng**
  You enjoy a free day in Dengfeng, China with opportunities to explore temples, mountains or cultural sites. The region is closely tied to Shaolin history.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Dengfeng hostel	None

DAY 15 Camp Under the Stars on The Great Wall

This journey returns north by rail from Dengfeng to Beijing before transitioning back into one of China’s most iconic landscapes. From the capital, travel continues to a remote section of the Great Wall, where hiking reveals its scale, setting, and historic purpose across mountain ridges. An overnight camping experience on the wall offers a rare chance to experience the site away from crowds and city life. A Mandarin lesson set in this unique environment adds a cultural dimension, blending language learning with one of China’s most powerful historic settings.

ACTIVITIES

- **Train from Dengfeng to Beijing**
  A train departs from Dengfeng, China carrying you back toward Beijing. The journey travels across northern and central China.
- **Great Wall Hike and Camping – Beijing**
  You hike an unrestored Great Wall section near Beijing, China before setting up camp for the night. The remote setting provides dramatic mountain views.
- **Mandarin Lesson in Great Wall**
  You enjoy a Mandarin lesson on the Great Wall near Beijing, China. The unique outdoor setting creates a memorable learning environment.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Beijing hostel	None

DAY 16

Beijing (free day, options available)

The day begins with a sunrise experience on the Great Wall, where early light reveals the scale and setting of this historic landmark across the surrounding mountains. After taking in the views, the journey returns from the wall to Beijing, transitioning back to the rhythm of the capital. The contrast highlights the balance between China’s ancient heritage and modern city life. Free time in Beijing allows you to explore independently, whether visiting local neighbourhoods, cultural sites, or enjoying the city’s food scene.

ACTIVITIES

- **Enjoy a Great Wall Sunrise Experience**
  You watch the sunrise over the Great Wall of China, a memorable moment surrounded by mountain scenery. Weather permitting, this is one of the tour's most iconic views.
- **Drive from Great Wall to Beijing**
  A road transfer from the Great Wall in China brings you back into Beijing. You return to the capital for an afternoon of exploration.
- **Free Time in Beijing**
  You enjoy free time in Beijing, China to explore sights such as the 798 Art District or the Summer Palace. The city offers a blend of modern culture and deep history.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Beijing hostel	None

DAY 17

Beijing. Free day

Enjoy an unstructured day in Beijing with no included visits or transfers. The source suggests general possibilities such as neighbourhoods, cultural attractions, markets and parks, but these should remain independent choices rather than organised activities. The purpose of the day is flexibility, allowing time for personal exploration or rest before the next scheduled stage of travel.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Beijing**
  You enjoy free time in Beijing, China to explore sights such as the 798 Art District or the Summer Palace. The city offers a blend of modern culture and deep history.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Beijing hostel	None

DAY 18

Beijing, tour ends

Spend the remaining time in Beijing at leisure before departure. The free period can be used independently for shopping, sightseeing or rest, depending on your interests and onward schedule. Later, continue with your personal travel arrangements and leave the city, bringing the journey through China to a relaxed and flexible conclusion.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Beijing**
  You enjoy free time in Beijing, China to explore sights such as the 798 Art District or the Summer Palace. The city offers a blend of modern culture and deep history.
- **Depart from Beijing**
  Your tour concludes with departure from Beijing, China. You say farewell to your group and continue your onward travels.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
N/A	None

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 (compulsory, available on request)
- Airport arrival & departure transfer service (optional on request)
- All meals
- Optional activies
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tour guide tips
- Any other items not mentioned above

Tour 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.

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 Beijing - 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.

Important Notes

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/encounterstravl (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.

travel aware
gov.uk/travelaware

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.

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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 Expres 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:

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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.

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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.

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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 recommed 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, disenfectant, 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!

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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)

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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 vacinnation 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.