



Exploring China

A journey through China is a journey through history and modernity, flavor and philosophy, futuristic skylines and staggering ancient achievements. On our two-week sojourn, we take in Beijing's immense scale, the majesty of the Great Wall, and the weight of Xian's history, plus spend a day with giant pandas in Chengdu and three nights in sparkling Shanghai.

Itinerary

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Day-by-Day Itinerary

DAY 1: Depart U.S. for Beijing, China

DAY 2: Arrive Beijing

We arrive in the Chinese capital and transfer to our hotel. As guests' arrival times vary, we have no group activities or meals planned.

DAY 3: Beijing

After meeting our fellow travelers at this morning's welcome briefing, we begin our discovery of this 2,000-year-old city at vast Tiananmen Square, one of Asia's most historic gathering spaces. We enjoy a hands-on cultural experience late this morning during a traditional Chinese dumpling making class, then enjoy the fruits of our labor for lunch. Then it's off to explore the Forbidden City, seat of imperial power from 1368 to 1911, before we visit a local teahouse to experience an authentic Chinese tea ceremony and sample a few varieties of this ubiquitous brew. We conclude our day with a traditional Peking Duck dinner at a local restaurant.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4: Beijing/Great Wall

We head this morning to the best-preserved portion of one of the New 7 Wonders of the World: the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall of China. For an aerial view of this 5,500-mile-long fortification, we board a cable car to ascend to one of the highest points on the wall. Before leaving, we enjoy lunch at the foot of this massive stone barricade. We return to our hotel midafternoon with the rest of the day at leisure.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5: Beijing

We begin our day by touring the splendid Temple of Heaven complex, where China's rulers once worshipped and where locals now practice Tai Chi. We then enjoy a traditional noodle lunch before we visit the Summer Palace, a former royal retreat now a lovely park, where we take a private boat ride on Kunming Lake (weather permitting). We return to our hotel in the late afternoon and enjoy dinner together this evening.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6: Beijing/Xian

This morning we fly to Xian, capital of 13 Chinese dynasties and famed as the eastern terminus of the Silk Road. Upon arrival we visit Yangling Mausoleum of Han, a tomb complex dating to 153 BCE which contains two large burial mounds, 86 smaller satellite pits, and the world's first fully underground, glass-covered museum. After our visit, we check in at our hotel and dine together at a local restaurant.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Xian

Our first stop today is the breathtaking Terra Cotta Warriors Museum, where we have time to marvel at this army of 7,000 life-size warrior statues that lay buried and forgotten for more than two millennia until their accidental discovery in 1974. We enjoy lunch together at a local restaurant known for their hand-made noodles, then return to our hotel midafternoon. This evening, we explore Xian's Muslim Quarter, famed for its unique culture and street food, which we can sample before dining at a local restaurant.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8: Xian/Chengdu

Our day begins with a visit to Xian's impressive nine-mile city walls, followed by an expert-led tour of the Beilin Museum, also known as the Stele Forest, housing more than 3,000 carved stone tablets (*steles*) preserving classical Confucian texts, Imperial decrees, and historical records. After lunch, we board a high-speed train bound for Chengdu, renowned as the home of the giant panda. Upon arrival, we check in at our hotel and enjoy dinner together tonight.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 9: Chengdu/Wolong National Preserve

On today's full-day excursion, we travel into the heart of the Wolong National Nature Reserve to visit the premier sites for giant panda conservation and breeding. Ranking as China's most iconic animal, the giant panda inspires deep affection and national pride. Our first stop is the Shenshuping Panda Center, where we learn about the breeding, reintroduction, and conservation efforts surrounding these beloved bears. We enjoy lunch with the center's staff, then continue to Hetaoping Panda Center to witness experts training pandas for reintroduction to the wild. We return to Chengdu late this afternoon.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 10: Chengdu

We encounter a slice of local life this morning at People's Park in Chengdu, famous for its Matchmaking Corner, where local residents post their dating profiles on physical paper in hopes of finding a match. We continue to pedestrian-only Jinli Cultural Street to admire its Qing Dynasty-style architecture, Sichuan restaurants, craft shops, and tea houses. After lunch at a local restaurant, we return to our hotel midafternoon. This evening marks a small group highlight, as we experience an authentic Sichuan hot pot dinner followed by a face changing performance, a 300-year-old tradition involving rapidly shifting colored masks, fire-breathing, acrobatics, and puppetry.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 11: Chengdu/Shanghai

We fly midday to the “Paris of the East,” where we visit Xintiandi, Shanghai’s car-free neighborhood blending traditional and modern architecture. After time to stroll and peruse the shops, we dine here at a local restaurant.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 12: Shanghai

Our full day starts at the Bund, Shanghai’s historic, mile-long embankment on the Huangpu River where foreign investors once held sway. We continue to beloved, 16th century Yu Yuan Gardens, dating to the Ming Dynasty and featuring plantings, courtyards, and pavilions creating the illusion of mountains, caverns, and lakes. After lunch at a local restaurant, we visit the Former French Concession, a leafy district known for its upscale shopping and dining options and reminiscent of old-world Europe. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 13: Shanghai

This morning, we visit Zhujiajiao, a canal-laced town often referred to as the “Venice of Shanghai”. This beautiful enclave is renowned for its stone bridges, narrow lanes, and traditional Ming and Qing-era architecture. We embark a *sampan* for a canal cruise, followed by lunch in town together. We return to Shanghai proper this afternoon, and bid farewell to China and our fellow travelers with dinner at a local restaurant.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 14: Depart for U.S.

This morning we depart for the Shanghai airport for our flight to the U.S.

Meals: Breakfast

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