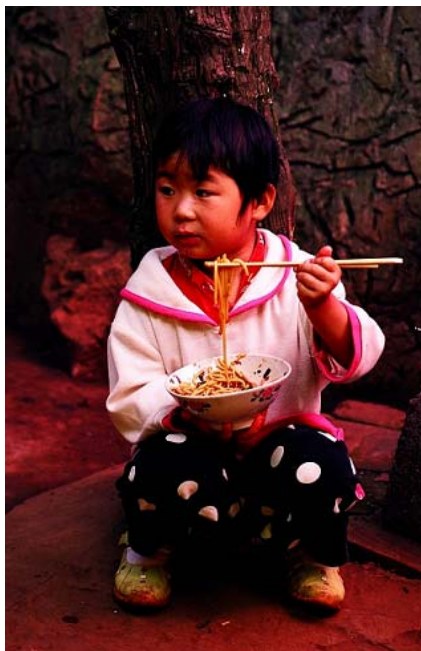




*HiddenChina.net*

## Highlights of China

- Enjoy sightseeing in some of China's most famous spots like:  
Shanghai, Guilin, Rice Terraces, Terracotta Army in Xi'An, Shanxi, Beijing



## HIGHLIGHTS OF CHINA

This tour will lead you to China's most famous sightseeing spots. This tour is specially designed for people visiting China for the first time to get an overview and to visit China's must-sees.

- Destinations: Shanghai, Guilin, Rice Terraces, Terracotta Army in Xi'An, Shanxi, Beijing
- Duration: 18 days
- Starting in: Shanghai
- Ending in: Beijing
- Group size: max. 14 pax

## QUICK INTRODUCTION

Your first stop will be in Shanghai. On the first tour day after arrival, you will get an impression of China's economical center. On the program is a walk along the Bund, a visit to Nanjing Lu and to the Oriental Pearl Tower, which will give you a great overview of Shanghai. A walk through the museum at the Oriental Pearl Tower leads you back into Shanghai's moving history.

Next day's visit will lead to Zhujiajiao. Like Suzhou, Zhujiajiao is a little town which is also known as "The Venice of Shanghai". Built along various water canals, but less crowded than Suzhou it offers you a first glance into the "real" China.

The next day, we will transfer to the airport and fly to the province of Guangxi. Guangxi's capital Guilin is famous for its spectacular karst scenery. For the moment we don't spend much time in Guilin, we will head directly north to Longsheng, the world famous dragon backbone rice terraces. In the small and cozy village of Longji Titian you will have the possibility to take a pleasant walk in the rice fields, offering you spectacular views and the possibility to take a photo of one of China's most famous sites. You will stay there overnight in a simple family guesthouse. The next day we head back to Guilin for some sightseeing. The following day we take a boat on the Li River down to Yangshuo. During the 5-hour cruise amidst impressive scenery you will have vast opportunities to take dozens of excellent pictures. Once arrived in Yangshuo we will stay for two nights and discover the surroundings of this famous spot for an entire day, visiting farm villages and the beautiful Water Cave.

From Yangshuo we transfer to Xi'An via Guilin, the next highlight of the trip. With the Terracotta Army and Xi'An's famous city wall, another UNESCO world cultural heritage site is on the program. From Xi'An we take the night train to China's former economical center, the province of Shanxi. Shanxi offers various fantastic sightseeing possibilities like the "Hanging Monastery", "Mu Ta" - one of the world's largest wooden structures - and Pingyao. Pingyao is one of the few preserved ancient Ming towns. Entirely surrounded by a city wall this town gives you the impression of traveling through China's history. After 5 days in the province of Shanxi we take you to our final destination, China's capital Beijing. During the remaining days we have a program with lots of surprises for you. You will not only explore the must-sees, but also visit local families, cycle through the Old Town and hike on an unrestored section of the Great Wall. In Beijing, we can offer an experience according to your personal needs and desires.

**DAY 1 SHANGHAI (L/D)**

After your arrival in Shanghai, you will be picked up by our tour leader and transferred to your hotel. The tour leader will accompany you for the entire trip and will be supported by local guides. Depending on your time of arrival we have time for a walk along the Bund or the famous Nanjing Road. In the evening we will have dinner in a local restaurant and you will learn more about the details of your trip from the guide. For the night owls among you, our guide can take you to discover Shanghai's nightlife. From big roof bars at the Bund with wonderful night views over Pudong to trendy clubs and KTVs (karaoke bars) to small beer shacks, Shanghai has something to suit just about everyone's taste.

**DAY 2 SHANGHAI (B/L/D)**

Depending on what you have already seen the day before, we will adapt today's itinerary. In spite of its size, Shanghai does not have a lot to offer when it comes to sightseeing spots. Some among them are the Bund, Qinmao Tower, Nanjing Road, Oriental Pearl Tower, the French Concession as well as several small temples and a few parks. In one of these parks we will organize an introductory lesson into Tai Chi by an experienced Chinese Tai Chi Master for you. For dinner we will discover Guangdong style dishes.

**DAY 3 SHANGHAI - GUILIN - LONGSHENG (B/L/D)**

In the morning we board the plane to Guilin, the capital of the province Guangxi. Famous for its marvelous karst scenery, Guilin is one of the most famous tourist destinations in China. Nevertheless, for the moment we don't spend too much time in Guilin, we will board a coach and head towards Longsheng, the world famous rice terraces. Constructed more than 700 years ago, located in the hills north of Guilin, it offers you wonderful views, combined with a very charming local village entirely made of wood and inhabited by the local Zhuang minority. Tonight you will sleep in a simple but charming guesthouse.

**DAY 4 LONGSHENG (B/L/D)**

Today you have the option to stroll around in this little village, to relax and wander around in the rice fields and to take fantastic pictures or go for a long hike and visit the nearby villages.

**DAY 5 LONGSHENG - GUILIN (B/L/D)**

From the Dragon Backbone Rice Terraces we return to Guilin today for some sightseeing such as the "Wave Subduing Hill" (Fubo Shan), the "Returned Pearl Cave" (Huanzhu Dong) and the "Thousand Buddha Cave" (Qian Fo Yan). In the evening we will enjoy a local dinner.

**DAY 6 GUILIN - YANGSHUO (B/L)**

In the morning we will transfer to the harbor of Guilin to take a boat down the Li River to Yangshuo. Cruising through this bizarre karst scenery for 5 hours, this will be a special experience for everybody. As Yangshuo has a lot of different foods to offer and also a lot of international dishes, everybody will have dinner on his own.



**DAY 7      YANGSHUO (B/L)**

Today we explore the surroundings of Yangshuo by car. Heading to some farmers villages we discover how the local people live and work. You will enjoy the picturesque landscape and eat some local food for lunch. Tonight you will have dinner on your own.

**DAY 8      YANGSHUO - GUILIN - XI'AN (B/L/D)**

After breakfast we board the coach to Guilin airport, from where we take the plane to Xi'An. After arrival in Xi'An we have a look at the city wall, the Big Goose Pagoda, the Drum Tower and the Muslim district.

**DAY 9      XI'AN - TAIYUAN (B/L/D)**

One of China's most famous cultural and historic sites is on today's program. The Terracotta army is probably one of the world's most stunning UNESCO world heritage sites. Even though everybody knows how the Terracotta Warriors look like, you will be more than impressed by the size of the whole site. Additionally, we will visit the site of the yet uncovered grave of the Yellow Emperor Qin Shihuang. In the evening we transfer to Taiyuan. No trip in China is a real trip without taking one of the night trains. Therefore we travel onboard of a so called "soft sleeper train" tonight. The soft sleeper consists of compartments where 4 people will sleep.

**DAY 10      TAIYUAN - PINGYAO (B/L/D)**

From Taiyuan we will head to Pingyao, which is one of the best preserved Ming cities. Its 6.4 km long city wall is also one of the best preserved city walls in whole China. Pingyao will give you an authentic feeling of the ancient China. It's huge and splendid courtyards and the fact that this area used to once be China's economical heart will beyond doubt impress you.

You will visit the city wall, the court of Pingyao as well as one of the first banks of China. You will stay overnight in a newly-built, high-class courtyard hotel in the heart of Pingyao.

**DAY 11      PINGYAO (B/L/D)**

Today you have plenty of time to discover the ancient Pingyao. Various museums, temples, courtyards etc. wait to be visited, where you can relax and feel the charm of this ancient town and its lovely people.

**DAY 12      PINGYAO - QIAO JIA - TAIYUAN (B/L / D)**

From Pingyao we transfer to the Qiao Family Courtyard House. This massive complex consists of 6 courtyards and over 300 rooms, which shows you a lot about decoration during the Qing Dynasty. This courtyard is also filming site of one of China's most famous movies "Raise the red Lantern". This film is about a wealthy Chinese man, who has 3 wives and is getting a fourth one (Gong Li, probably China's most famous actress). The story is entirely filmed in this courtyard and tells the story about 4 different aged women being wife to the same man and their social conflicts within this surrounding.



On the way back to Taiyuan, you will visit the Jinci, which is located 25 kilometers southwest of downtown Taiyuan City. It was built to worship Zhou Dynasty's Duke Tang Shuyu, the first duke of the Jin State. The temple is a garden-like scenic area with ancient buildings and very old trees. The Nanlao spring, the Song dynasty maidservant statues and the cypress of the Zhou dynasty (1100-771 B.C.) are known as the three wonders of the Jinci temple. Back in Taiyuan we will have a look at the 3 pagodas and enjoy a typical dinner in the evening.

**DAY 13      TAIYUAN - MU TA - XUANKONG SI - DATONG (B/L/D)**

With Mu Ta you will visit one of the largest wooden structures in the world. Apparently built without a single nail, this wooden tower is very impressive. From Mu Ta we head to the Xuankong Si, the famous "Hanging Monastery". Built into a sheer cliff some 700 years ago, it's one of the rare monasteries where the Buddhist, Taoist and the Confucian religions are represented in one single hall. After the Hanging Monastery we head to Datong with the possibility of seeing a few local villages on the way.

**DAY 14      DATONG - BEIJING (B/L/D)**

In the morning we visit the Yungang Shiku Caves. In several caves, more than 50'000 Buddha statues between 10 centimeters and 20 meters can be seen. After visiting the caves we head to the train station where we travel to Beijing in a soft seat compartment, where you will enjoy the comfort of a 5\* hotel again.

**DAY 15      BEIJING (B/L)**

You will have a good night's rest after the 14 days on the road. The morning is at your disposal and in the afternoon we meet for a visit of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. From the Forbidden City we take a bike to discover Beijing's "Hutongs" and discover the hidden alleyways, where you will have the opportunity to see how a Beijinger's home looks like. When the weather is good, we head to the Houhai Lakes, where we have a drink in one of the cozy bars after the bike tour.

In the evening the choice of restaurant is up to you. However, we will recommend you various possibilities, depending on what you would like to eat. Optionally we provide you with a nightlife guide, with whom you will discover Beijing's nightlife.

**DAY 16      BEIJING (B/L)**

In the morning we head outside of Beijing to explore the Ming Tombs. After a delicious trout meal in a countryside restaurant, we head for the wild Great Wall section at Huanghua, where we will hike on the wall for approx. one hour. Please note that good shoes (hiking boots) are required and people suffering from vertigo shouldn't join. Your guide could also take you to one of the less demanding, but much touristier sections of the Great Wall. Evening at your own disposal.

**DAY 17      BEIJING (B/L)**

This day is entirely dedicated to shopping. Our guide will take you to all the places where you get good value for your money. Whether it is clothes, silk, traditional or contemporary objects of art, we find the right place for you and assist you in choosing good quality products. Evening at your own disposal.



**IMPORTANT NOTE**

Traveling in China, especially off the beaten tracks and in rural areas, can be adventurous and carries also a certain amount of surprises and risks. Hiddenchina.net ensures that in every situation we and our guides are trying to get out a maximum of comfort for our clients. All our guides are carefully chosen and selected by their abilities and experience. Nevertheless, there might be surprises. We hereby express that a voyage in China needs patience, adaptation and tolerance. In addition due to lack of infrastructure, in rural areas in China there is often a lack of western sanitary standards. Clients of hiddenchina.net accept - upon signing a contract - to be aware of these circumstances, and accept changes which may occur in order to keep security and comfort of the clients according to the circumstances to a maximum during the trip.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR CHINA TRAVELERS**

Traveling in China is always an adventure. Quality of service can range from “top” in selected 5\* Hotels in the big cities to “very poor”. While traveling in China, even with an organized tour, the clients have to be ready for unexpected changes (e.g. due to natural disasters such as landslides or flooding) or other surprises. In hotels by example, it can happen that you will get phone calls in the middle of the night, offering you a special massage service. The following chapters will tell you more about what you should consider when traveling in China.

**FACE**

You may have heard it before and for the experienced China traveler it's a “must know”: In China, everything is about “giving and losing face”. Chinese people are very proud of their culture, food and traditions. Respect this fact and try not to bring a Chinese into an embarrassing situation, as he or she might lose his face in front of coworkers, friends, family members or even the authorities. Try to be polite, smile and - especially to English speaking Chinese - always praise their language skills. Chinese can be considered as reactive people. If you treat Chinese people in an arrogant and harsh way, you will be treated the same way. When you feel cheated, try to solve the situation in a gentle and charming way. You will achieve your goal much faster. Also try to react calmly in stress situations and stay friendly. For every problem in China there is a solution. It's up to you how effective you will get to this solution. Being angry and aggressive is contra productive in the most cases.

**SECURITY**

Especially large cities in China are extremely safe. Chinese people have to fear severe punishment when being caught by the authorities in illegal matters when foreigners are involved. However, be aware that pick pocketing happens everywhere, so keep an eye on your belongings and never leave your luggage unattended. When going out at night, China's large cities are much safer than practically all European cities. A single woman has nothing to fear when walking in a dark alley even at 4 o'clock in the morning.

## **HEALTH**

It is also recommended to visit your house doctor before you go on a China trip and make all the necessary vaccinations. Your doctor will inform you what you will need. For travelers going to south China, it is also recommended to carry a supply of Malaria remedies. As the avian influenza is getting more and more a serious issue in Asia and a pandemic outbreak will happen sooner or later, the traveler should also consider buying a box of “Tamiflu” before the trip begins.

When traveling in China and especially when eating a lot of local food, a supply of remedies for stomach problems is highly recommended. We will always take care of taking you to clean restaurants with high quality standards. However, your body will have to deal with a wide range of unknown food, spices and other ingredients in China and also with different bacteria and viruses than in Europe’s clean environment. When being on a 3 week China trip, you have to reckon with stomach problems at least once. To cure them it is recommended to take pharmaceuticals, which are rich in salt and minerals and give you back the elements you will lose during a diarrhea. From our longtime China experience, one of the best remedies is to eat well-boiled Chinese mushrooms and bananas as well as to drink tomato juice. On many of our private trips, this helped much better than the Western medication like e.g. Imodium. Always take toilet paper with you, as you won’t find any in public toilets! Travelers going to high altitude areas such as Tibet are also recommended to take a supply of Diamox in case of altitude sickness. Please get advice from your doctor.

## **CLIMATE**

China has several different climatic zones. From high-altitude to sub-tropic and desert climate, there is everything. Depending on your date of arrival in China, you might be traveling in the rainy season. E.g. in southern China, this time mostly starts late May / early June and lasts until August. This year, in the provinces of Guangxi and Guizhou heavy flooding took the life of several hundred local people. However, we will adapt the trip according to your travel time and avoid the areas with heavy rain.

## **LUGGAGE**

Most airlines allow you to check-in 20 kg of luggage (economy class). It is not allowed to take nutrition products (cheese, meat) as well as pornographic material. Please ensure that your “Swiss army knife” and other “dangerous products” are checked in with your luggage and not in the hand luggage.

China offers you a wide range of shopping possibilities. So if you plan to go for extensive shopping, take a minimum of luggage to China. However, whenever you forgot something, don’t worry, more or less everything you need in daily life, can be bought much cheaper in China (see chapter below). Be aware that many customs authorities like the ones in Paris and Milan can fine you heavily when finding out that you try to import faked products from China such as Yves St Laurent bags, Gucci items or Prada clothes.



## **SHOPPING**

Except for imported luxury goods and high-end electrical equipment such as beamers or imported laptops, more or less everything is cheaper in China than in Western Europe. Especially clothes can be bought at a very low price. Many shopping areas offer faked products (sometimes in extremely good quality). However, in many places where no prices are indicated you have to bargain about the price (see chapter below). Please note that when buying a faked product, especially at the airport in Paris, you can get into trouble. The fight against faked products is now at a point, that authorities can or will take away your purchase and will heavily fine you. For the golf lovers, there is a wide range of possibilities to buy whole golf sets at a ridiculously low price. Have your suits tailor-made, buy ties, silk products, pearls etc. at a very low price. For most Europeans, DVD's are of special interest. For a DVD you pay between 8 and 10 RMB (about 1 EURO) and most of the movies are available even before they are shown in European cinemas. The advantage is that DVD's take away only little space and weight. But be aware that in many cases you are buying illegally copied and distributed products.

Credit cards are only accepted in major stores, 3\* hotels and upwards and western restaurants. Money can be withdrawn at ATM's at the Bank of China. Please note that these are hard to find in remote areas. Money can be changed at major branches of the Bank of China or in western hotels. Please note that you need to show your passport for changing money.

## **BARGAINING**

As mentioned in the "shopping" chapter, in many places you have to bargain for your price. Western tourists are mostly looked at as "big dollar signs" and accordingly the price will be set 400 – 500% above the price the vendor is ready to sell his or her merchandise. The first rule is to go below the first offered price. So when the vendor asks for 100 RMB, you can set your offer to 20-25 RMB. Then it depends on your bargaining skills at what price you will get it. A simple trick is, when it seems too expensive for you, to walk away from the vendor. If he or she doesn't follow you, you know that your bid was too low. Please also note, always stay friendly and smile when bargaining. Once you agreed for a price, you have to buy the product. Otherwise you and the vendor will lose face.

## **LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR**

Even in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, it is most unlikely that you find English speaking taxi drivers or personnel in the shops. Therefore it is recommended to take a phrase book with you, where you can show what you need. Chinese people are mostly friendly and curious towards foreigners. However, Chinese are also very proud of their country and culture and some behavior will be strange for travelers who come to China for the first time. In many places (even sometimes in public buses) people smoke a lot and for the non-smoker, China can be a terrible place. You also often see Chinese people spitting accompanied by strange noises. The best way to get around it is to ignore it and live with it. For the smoker on the other hand China is a paradise, as it is more or less everywhere allowed to smoke and cigarettes are extremely cheap, although some foreign brands might be faked. Please also note that you might be invited to test your drinking skills. The easiest way to avoid it without losing face is to tell your hosts that due to liver problems you're not allowed to drink.

## **TIPPING**

Although China is - especially away from the big cities - a very poor country, tipping only exists in the 5\* surroundings of the big cities. In restaurants or taxis and hotels (except 5\* hotels) tipping is a no-no. However, tour guides and drivers of organized tours should be tipped. Most guides and drivers are roughly paid with 10 Euro per day and rely on additional income. With Chinese tour groups (which often go shopping) the guides always get a commission in the shops, where they make most of their salary. As European groups usually do not visit as many shops as Chinese tourists, guides and drivers have to rely on tips.

Generally a tip of RMB 30 per person and day is reasonable. When you are in a tour group it is recommended that the group collects the tips and hands it to the guides and drivers in an envelope. It is also very helpful to take some souvenirs with you, like for example watches or picture postcards from your home country.

## **SMALL TALK AND CONVERSATION**

Small talk in China is a bit different than in Europe, but there are also topics which should be avoided and topics which are perfect for small talk.

One of the most common greetings in China is “Ni chi fan le ma?” which literally means “Have you eaten yet?” This emphasizes the importance of eating in China, and it is much more a social event than in the West, therefore food is always a welcomed topic.

In some cases you also might be confronted with rather private questions such as about your marital status and about family. The Chinese are very family oriented, so don't feel embarrassed when people ask you rather private questions, it's just small talk. Sometimes, especially in business surroundings, people also might ask you about your salary, which is quite normal in China. Here you can escape (if you don't want to tell the truth) by telling some fictional figure, or when telling the truth and your counterpart's eyebrows rise, you explain how expensive the life in Europe is.

Topics which should be avoided at all costs are all political related such as the Cultural Revolution, critics against the system or chairman Mao, the Tibet and Taiwan question, human rights or how to treat animals. If you want to have answers to these questions you might do it through your guide. Do not overload your guide with too many hard questions in the beginning though. Tactically it is wise to hide these questions in some compliments and be as subtle as possible (see also the chapter about “face”). Please note that young Chinese (below 30) are more open to discuss critical topics than people above 30.

Please also note that Chinese people tend to touch you, which is not a sign of homosexuality but just a sign of sympathy. In such a situation, when you feel uncomfortable, don't react in a rude or harsh way; just try to escape the contact by elegant means. Mostly a hearty fit of coughing does the trick (SARS is still in Chinese people's mind).

## **TRAFFIC AND TAXI**

The public transport system in China is basically quite convenient. Every major city has an airport; there are many train routes (even though there is mostly only one train per day between two destinations) and public buses. Public buses are very cheap although the comfort is sometimes a bit poor.

In the cities, the most convenient public transport is the taxi. You can, compared to Europe, basically take a taxi anytime and everywhere at a very low price. Be careful that on major tourist sites there are also drivers trying to make extra money. When a taxi has no taximeter (make sure that the driver in taxis with a taximeter always puts it on), negotiate the rate before you get into the vehicle. However, some drivers will still try to make you pay an extra fee at the end. Just tell him that you pay the negotiated price, nothing more, and nothing less. Please also note that most drivers don't speak English. So take a bilingual map, a taxi card or a guidebook with you. Tell the reception in the hotel to write down the addresses for you so you can show it to the driver. Please note that highway fares have to be paid by the customer and not the driver (for example, in Beijing the fee for the airport expressway is 10 Yuan for passenger cars). This fee will be added to the amount shown on the taximeter.

## **USEFUL THINGS TO TAKE ON A CHINA TRIP**

Several Swiss army knives, a compass, pharmaceuticals (see health chapter), a first-aid kit, tape, watches (not too expensive), money clip, camera (films can be bought and developed on spot for a very reasonable price), deodorant (rarely available in China), sunglasses, altimeter (for Tibet and Himalaya tours), GPS, safety belt for money, literature, guidebooks, credit-/bank card and a lot of patience.

For ladies: tampons are rarely available in China.