Harbin Ice Festival
11 days | Starts/Ends: Beijing

Discover China this Christmas to see the Great Wall, Beijing’s Forbidden City and the Terracotta Warriors of Xi’an. Flying to Harbin, New Year’s is a 5 star event as we discover the extraordinary, inspiring, enchanting and often incredibly beautiful ice installations of the 35th Harbin International Ice & Snow Festival.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

• HARBIN INTERNATIONAL ICE and SNOW FESTIVAL including Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Expo, Harbin Ice and Snow World and Harbin Ice Lantern Show at Zhaolin Park (or Sunac Park, dependant on the parks program)
• BEIJING - Tiananmen Square, Forbidden City, UNESCO listed Emperor’s Summer Palace, Pearl Market, Jade Carving Factory, Hutong area of Beijing, Chinese Acrobatic Show
• BADALING - UNESCO listed Great Wall of China
• LUOYANG – UNESCO listed Longmen Caves and stone carvings, White Horse Buddhist Temple, Xiyuan Park activities

• XI’AN - UNESCO listed Terracotta Warriors, Clay warrior workshop, Big Wild Goose Pagoda, City Wall and bike ride, Muslim Quarter, Great Mosque and market

What’s Included

• 10 breakfasts, 2 lunches and 3 dinners and a traditional Peking Duck dinner (4 dinners total)
• 2 nights 5 star hotel in Harbin, 7 nights 3-4 star hotels
• Flight: Xi’an – Harbin
• 1 overnight train: Harbin - Beijing (4-berth soft sleeper cabin)
• High speed train: Beijing - Luoyang and Luoyang - Xi’an
• Touring of Beijing, Great Wall area, Luoyang, Xi’an and Harbin Ice Festival
• Chinese acrobatic performance in Beijing
• Rickshaw ride through Beijing’s Hutongs
• Xi’an - bike ride on medieval City Wall
• Escorted by an experienced English speaking Chinese Tour guide
• English speaking specialist guides at some sites
• All relevant transfers and transportation in private heated vehicles
• Beijing Capital Airport arrival transfer on day 1 and departure transfer day 11

What’s Not Included

• Tipping Kitty: USD$75-85pp, paid in local currency
• Entrance Fees: USD$200-220pp, paid in local currency
• International flights and visa
• Tip for your tour guide is not included in the Tip Kitty. We suggest USD$3-5 per day, per traveller for a job well done, however the amount is up to you

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Beijing
Wednesday 23 December 2020. Huan ying, welcome to China and the start of your holiday! Airport arrival transfer from Beijing Capital Airport to your hotel for check-in. The remainder of the day offers free time for you to independently explore this astonishing city.

If you require a transfers from Daxing International Airport, this can be arranged at an additional fee, please speak with your reservations consultant for further details.

Day one is designed to be an arrival day for all passengers, so there are no formal arrangements on this first day.

Overnight - Beijing
**Harbin Ice Festival**

**Day 2: The Forbidden City**

This morning we gather for a short Welcome Meeting. Your Entrance Fees and Tip Kitty will be collected at this time (as detailed in the exclusions section of your Trip Notes). Then, it’s time to set off and see some of Beijing. A patriotic vision of grandeur, Tiananmen Square is a square for the public and also home of the mausoleum of Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the striking Monument to the People’s Heroes. In the square Mao’s gargantuan mausoleum in granite where since his death in 1976, he has lain in state in his crystal coffin. We’ll have a stroll on the square, which attracts many tourists wishing to take photos, all under the watchful eye of the dutiful guards.

Perhaps one of Beijing’s most famous sights is the Gate of Heavenly Peace. Up above the gate and looking out across to all his people, is a famous colour portrait of Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Today, he is looking at a different Beijing, one that is quickly entering the 21st century. The Gate of Heavenly Peace is the main entry point into the Forbidden City. A vision in grandeur with its imperial yellow roofs and vermilion walls, the Forbidden City, once forbidden to all those except imperial business until 1911, when the last emperor, Puyi, was overthrown. Built between 1406 and 1420, it served as the imperial palace for the Ming and Qing dynasties. We enjoy a guided walk through the city’s many temples, grand halls and courtyards. The 720,000 square metre lavishly constructed Forbidden City boasts 9999 rooms!

This afternoon we take rickshaws to explore the Hutongs of Beijing. As our trusty rickshaw driver peddles us through the network of alleyways, old back lanes, traditional courtyards and compact houses we gain a fascinating snapshot of the city’s traditional way of life. There is time to meet a local family and take a peek inside their home, before returning to our hotel. It’s Christmas Eve and to get you in the festive mood we’ll enjoy a tasty Christmas banquet tonight. **Overnight - Beijing (B, D)**

**Day 3: Xmas at the Great Wall**

Merry Christmas! Today we drive beyond Beijing to Badaling, where we can walk a section of the famous Great Wall. An enduring symbol of Chinese civilisation and genius, the UNESCO protected Great Wall of China was built as a defensive structure. The immense construction took place over a period of 2,000 years and followed different routes and building extensions as required. Snaking some 6700 kms across barren hills, deserts, mountains and plateaux, the now partially ruined Great Wall stretches east to west in northern China. At one time perhaps nearly 9700 kms long, the wall was garrisoned by 1 million soldiers and featured over 1,000 fortified passes and 10,000 beacon towers. Climbing the Great Wall on Christmas day, now that’s something special. The wall is a little steep in sections, but the photo opportunities are worth a million dollars. Afterwards, we visit a Jade Carving Centre to learn about its importance in Chinese culture.

We celebrate our Christmas in China with a traditional Peking Duck dinner this evening, followed by an astounding acrobatic show. Doing the ‘splits’ is an elementary skill, when compared to what these showstoppers will pull out on the night. Bicycles and rings of fire are common props in a show that will leave you wanting to see more. **Overnight - Beijing (B, L, D)**

**Day 4: Summer Palace & Pearl Market**

Beijing - Luoyang. Opt for and early morning walk through the local, market before we set off to see the Summer Palace, set on Kunming Lake. The buildings date back only to the turn of the 20th century, though the site goes back to the 12th century. It is said that the Dowager Empress Cixi liked to travel with a retinue of at least 1,000. Her arrival at the rebuilt Summer Palace in 1905 was met by 458 eunuchs, and her two main meals consisted of some 100 dishes. Nice!

Perhaps most famous of all the structures at the Summer Palace is the wonderful Long Corridor, a covered walkway 730m long, and extraordinarily hand-painted with scenes from Chinese history, legend and literature. Look out for the solid marble boat on Kunming Lake. The lake may even be frozen solid. Afterwards we head back into the city and get a chanceto shop at the Pearl Market, bargain knock-off ski jackets, big brand handbags, jewellery, accessories and souvenirs. Some bling jewellery for the lady and perhaps a genuine copy Rolex Sub-Mariner watch and matching Mont Blanc fountain pen and rollerball set for the gent?

Later we drive past the Beijing 2008 Olympic Stadium en route to the train station where we take the late afternoon bullet train to Luoyang. Reaching speeds of up to 305km per hour the journey is an experience in itself! Check in to hotel in Luoyang, late evening.

Note: For those that are not interested in shopping at the Pearl Market, you have the option of visiting the Temple of Heaven if you haven’t done so already, the entrance gate is directly across the road from the Pearl Market. In 1998, the temple was added to the World Heritage List and in 2005 underwent
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a USD$5.9 million face-lift in preparation for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The temple is well worth a visit especially now renovated. Entrance fees are approx. 35¥pp (dependent upon time of year) and entrance tickets can be purchased on the day at the front gate. Overnight - Luoyang (B)

Day 5 : Longmen Grottoes

Today we head off in search the UNESCO world heritage listed 5th and 6th Century Longmen Caves. Carved into the cliffs along the Yi River, the 2,300 caves (grottoes) were hollowed out by humans to create temples inside the mountain. Adorned with more than 110,000 statues and images of Buddha and his disciples carved during the Northern Wei Dynasty. Experts consider them an artistic triumph of Buddhist stone carving. Later this afternoon we tour stunning White Horse Temple, the first Buddhist temple in China before having a delicious local dinner. Overnight - Luoyang (B, D)

Day 6 : Luoyang - Xi'an

Early this morning there is the option to walk to Xiyuan Park and witness or maybe even partake in a little local exercise. Hundreds of local people enjoy their daily exercise by practising ballroom dancing, performing tai chi, sword fighting and play sports like badminton and hacky sack in the early hours of the morning. It's a marvel to watch!

Afterwards we board a high speed train to Xi'an (journey time approximately 3 hours), evening at leisure. Overnight - Xi'an (B)

Day 7 : Terracotta Warriors

Most famous for the Terracotta Warriors, perhaps the find of the 20th century and only just usurped by the discovery of King Tut's gold-laden tomb in Egypt, Emperor Qin's Terracotta Warriors comprise more than 7,000 life-sized soldiers which stand in military formation in excavated pits under the cover of a modern protective hanger. Made of local clay, no two faces are alike, each is said to be an individual portrait.

Emperor Qin's army of 2,200 year old terracotta warriors were discovered in 1974 by local farmers who happened to be digging a well. Previous emperors used to be buried with their slaves but slavery had been abolished. So, to make up for this, Qin had the warriors made to be buried near him to protect him in the afterlife. Delicate excavation continues on site, where hundreds of warriors remain smashed like eggs, not due to the passage of time but rather a peasant revolt after the emperor’s death. We visit a workshop where you’ll see modern-day crafts people producing terracotta warrior figurines.

This evening, On Broadway - Chinese style performance with Chang'an music and dance can be attended a Tang Dynasty dinner and performance with Chang'an music and dance originally performed for the illustrious Tang emperors (bookable locally with your guide). Overnight - Xi'an (B, L)

Day 8 : Xi'an

Xi’an – Harbin. This morning we bike ride (solo or tandem) atop the amazing old City Wall with no vehicular traffic to mow us over. An awesome sight, the City Wall and moat is over 15km in perimeter offers unique views of the city and residence beneath, going about their daily lives. Visits to the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, the Muslim Quarter and Great Mosque with time to explore. Afternoon/evening flight to Beijing and onward flight to Harbin. Overnight - Harbin (B)

Day 9 : Snow Sculpture Festival & Ice World

Today, we hit Sun Island Park for the Harbin International Snow Sculpture Art Expo. The festival is open to visitors from 20 Dec, (though the official festival opening occurs on 05 Jan). This is a wonderful time to visit as scultors will still be adding final touches to their somewhat massive icy masterpieces.

Later we visit Harbin Snow and Ice World an otherworldly theme park where the incredibly large displays change from year to year. What will be on offer this year is anyone's guess. Imagine sliding down a 100m ice luge resembling the Great Wall of China. You can pick up some serious speed if wearing a slick winter coat. Climbing to the top of a replica of the Emperor’s Summer Palace in Beijing, complete with towers, guard house, moat and
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seven arched bridge or sail away on Empress Dowager Cixi’s ice marble boat. Living up to its name the ‘Ice World’ is totally beyond imagination, unusual, enchanting, inspiring and a little peculiar.

This evening we include dinner at hotpot restaurant before returning to our hotel to take a position our hotel bar to ring in the new year. With plenty of lights, ice and ‘Maitai firewater’, (the local alcoholic spirit) we welcome in the coming year. Overnight - Harbin (B, D)

Day 10 : Happy New Year!

Harbin - Beijing. Happy New Year! This morning offers free time before an afternoon visit to Zhaolin Park or Sunac Park (dependant on the parks program) to see the Ice Lantern Show, also known as the Ice Lantern Art Fair. In previous years we’ve seen ice blocks standing some 8 metres tall, resembling giant ice lollies. Ice is sculpted into the most unusual designs - from roosters to dragon boats and a pair of cupids fluttering in the heavens, or a cavalry about to do battle. Each is lit up with hundreds of traditional Chinese lanterns and a multitude of neon creating the most spectacular photo opportunities. Later this evening we bid farewell to Harbin, boarding our overnight sleeper train to Beijing. Overnight - Soft Sleeper Train to Beijing (B)

Day 11 : Beijing departure

Saturday 02 January 2021. Arriving into Beijing, hotel breakfast and onward departure transfer to the airport. Tackling Terracotta Warriors, seeing some amazing ice sculptures that will all be gone before the spring and climbing the Great wall on Xmas day, we hope you have had a wonderful Christmas and New Year’s tour in China! Note: Onward flights should be booked for departure after 2pm.(B)

HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard. Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.

Holiday Inn Temple of Heaven
The Beijing Holiday Inn Temple of Heaven is an elegant and comfortable hotel with well-furnished and spacious rooms. Practical in design, the guest rooms feature internet access and the hotel also boasts a range of restaurants and bars, as well as an indoor swimming pool. Located just a 10 minute walk from the Temple of Heaven, the hotel is the perfect base from which to explore this fascinating city.

Holiday Inn Express Beijing Minzuyuan
Located just a stones throw from the Beitucheng Subway station, with access to Line 10 & Line 8, the Holiday Inn Express Beijing Minzuyuan is a perfect base to explore the many amazing highlights of Beijing. Within walking distance of the hotel you'll find the famous Birds Nest Olympic Stadium. The hotel boasts a stylish restaurant offering breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Peony Plaza
The Peony Plaza Hotel is ideally located in Luoyang city centre, making it easily accessible from all parts of the city. The hotel benefits from a stylish, contemporary design and the guest rooms are tastefully furnished. All rooms feature minibars, free WiFi and LCD TVs with cable channels. The hotel also boasts a sauna and massage centre as well as a rotating restaurant for excellent views of the city.
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Grand Dynasty Culture Hotel
Located a stone’s throw away from the Ancient City Wall and Islamic Mosque, is the Grand Dynasty Culture Hotel. The hotel offers modern comforts in the heart of the city. Each air-conditioned guestroom features WiFi, a minibar and satellite TV. There is an onsite restaurant which serves a daily buffet or a la carte breakfast as well as a variety of Asian and Western dishes. During free time, guests can enjoy a relaxing massage or work out in the fitness centre.

Songbei Shangri-la Hotel
Ideally situated on the banks of the Songhua River, is the Songbei Shangri-la Hotel. The five-star property offers ample fine dining options as well as gourmet pub cuisine. Each guest room is fully equipped with LED TV, WiFi, mini bar, iron and ironing board and much more. Guests can enjoy a relaxing massage or dip in the indoor pool before sipping on a cocktail in the onsite bar.

Groups & Guides
On this special Harbin Ice Festival departure, another group tour may join your group for a sector of this larger tour (Harbin Ice Festival 5 days). Whenever there is 6 persons or more on your holiday you will have a tour guide escorting/ travelling along with you. Your guide will conduct the sightseeing arrangements, or accompany you where the local law dictates that a local guide must conduct the sightseeing in this region. Where the group number is less than 6 persons you will travel from place to place with a driver and meet a local guide at each new destination that will conduct your sightseeing arrangements in this location. This tour welcomes families with teens 12 years of age and over.

Weather in Harbin
Weather in Harbin at the time of the festival is understandably very very cold! Temperatures are commonly around the -25c mark! So be sure to bring with you adequate clothing including thermals, warm gloves, hats, scarves, balaclavas and sensible walking attire. A thick winter coat that is waterproof is also essential. Please also be mindful of what the weather can do to electronic equipment. It has been known for camera batteries etc to not work in such low temperatures so make sure you are prepared for any eventuality! Bring a padded bag and spare batteries just in case.

Entrance Fees
Entry fees to most sites are not included, although reasonably priced. In China, we collect entrance fees on Day 2 of the tour (the amount is noted under exclusions on page one of this document). A comprehensive breakdown of the entrance fee total is provided upon arrival.

All funds collected in China for entrance fees and optional excursions, that you may wish to undertake are payable in local currency - Chinese Yuan (CNY).

Note: If you are over the age of 60 at time of travel (tours departing in 2020) a discounted or free entry to some sites may be possible. Entrance Fees will be collected in full on day 2, and your guide/s will attempt to get a discount at each site on your behalf. If a discount is obtained your guide will issue a refund at this time. Please make your guide aware if you are eligible at the pre departure meeting so that the discount can be requested throughout the tour.

Tipping Kitty
At the start of your group tour, we take a small tipping kitty (the amount is noted under exclusions) from all tour participants to cover tips throughout your holiday. This saves you the hassle of knowing when and how much to tip bellhops, luggage handlers, bus drivers, train conductors and other support staff throughout the tour.

This amount does not include a tip for your tour guide. For a job well done, we would suggest USD$3 - 5 per person per day. Tipping your guide is an entirely personal gesture and ultimately the amount is up to you.

If travelling on a short stay, private tour or a group tour with less than 6 participants we do not collect a tipping kitty and recommend the following amount to cover tips paid directly by you to bellhops, luggage handlers, your driver and local guide: CNY50/USD$8 - per person per day of your tour.

Arrival Transfers
For tours starting in Beijing When arriving into Beijing Capital Airport and attending to immigration and customs formalities, please proceed to the arrival hall. If arriving to Beijing into Terminal 2, when exiting immigration to the arrivals hall, please turn right where our representative will be waiting. If arriving into Terminal 3 you will be met just outside the immigration and customs formalities, please proceed to the arrivals hall, turn left and our representative will be waiting. If arriving into Terminal 2, when exiting immigration to the arrivals hall, please turn right where our representative will be waiting. If arriving into Terminal 3 you will be met just outside the restricted area.

If you require a transfers from Daxing International Airport, this can be arranged at an additional fee, please speak with your reservations consultant for further details.

Please have your tour voucher handy and make it available to our representative who will be waiting for you in the arrivals hall, holding a prominent On The Go Tours logo signboard, ready to escort you to our awaiting transportation and onward to your tour start hotel.

If, for any reason you have trouble locating our representative (remember Beijing is a busy
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International Airport) after waiting 30 minutes in the arrival hall or your flight to China is delayed please call the emergency contact number as stated on your tour voucher. Please do not leave the airport and travel to the hotel yourself. Please call the contact number as stated on your Tour Voucher.

Groups & Guides
Some of our group tours are sectors of a larger tour. Some travellers on your trip may only travel with you for part of your tour. It also might be that you end your holiday part way through a longer tour and others in the group continue on.

Guides: We believe the best way to see a country is through the eyes of a local and as such we only employ tour guides native to the country you are visiting. Our guides are passionate, caring, knowledgeable and fun, and by travelling with a local you to get to see the wonders of the country through their eyes. Tour guides will remain with groups of 6 or more. Where groups are less than 6, travel between cities will be unescorted with transfers at either side of the airport/ train station and a local guide will conduct the scheduled sightseeing in that city.

China Country Guide

Visas
China Visa
Visas are required by all visitors to China. It is essential that a tourist visa is procured prior to travel. We will provide you with an invoice/ itinerary indicating that you are travelling to China on a pre-arranged holiday. The visa is valid for entry within 3 months, so you cannot apply any earlier. Please ensure your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of return from China.

If you’re a resident of the UK and would like someone to handle your visa application for you then we recommend CIBTvisas. Please visit http://www.cibtvisas.co.uk/onthego for more information.

Visa for Hong Kong
Most Western visitors to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People’s Republic of China do not require a tourist visa issued in advance of travel. Currently, UK nationals can stay up to 180 days. Nationals of Australia, Canada, Eire, most other EU countries, New Zealand and the US do not require a visa for a stay not exceeding 90 days, while holders of RSA passports can remain for up to 30 days. If entering Hong Kong from mainland China and returning to mainland China a multiple Chinese entry visa is required.

Visa for Tibet
Tibet - If travelling to Tibet, a Tibet Travel Permit is required. The permit will be arranged by our office in China. Please contact On The Go Tours prior to departure for the most up to date Tibetan entry information.

The information above is not applicable for the Beijing and Shanghai Visa Free Tours.

NOTE: Visa requirements are subject to change so please check with your embassy before booking your holiday.

Climate
In all, China has a great diversity of climates. To sum it up - China experiences hot summers in most parts of the country, very cold winters in the north and comfortable winters in the south! Sep-Oct is warm to hot and dry across the country. Nov-Mar is winter with very cool temps in the north, whilst mild in the south. If combining the north and south, you’ll experience 2 distinct weather patterns. Apr-May – perfect in the north, if a little humid and rainy in the south. Jun-Aug can bring a few showers.

Health & Water
You should seek medical advice before travelling to China from your local health practitioner and ensure that you receive all of the appropriate vaccinations. As a guide it is recommended that you be vaccinated for Tetanus and Polio, if you haven’t had a booster in the last ten years. Food and waterborne diseases are more common, so we recommend vaccinations for Typhoid (valid 3 years) and Hepatitis A (validity varies). There is a malarial risk in remote southern areas of China, so do check the current situation before travelling.

As tap water is not safe to drink in China, only drink bottled mineral water which is readily available from hotels, shops and restaurants. Make sure bottled water is sealed.

Currency
The currency of China is the Chinese Yuan.

Pound Sterling, US Dollars, Euro and other major currencies can be exchanged in China. Exchange facilities are available at various bureaux de changes and banks in major towns have ATMs or it is possible to get some before you leave home. It’s advisable to request bank notes in smaller denominations, as it can sometimes be hard to get change from large notes and smaller notes are handy for smaller purchases and gratuities.

Traveller’s Cheques are not recommended as they’re often difficult to exchange and incur high fees.

You could download a Currency Converter app to use during your travels.

Time & Voltage
China is 8 hours ahead of GMT. The country operates on one time zone, so clocks are set according to Beijing time, meaning, given the size of the country, sunrise and sunset can occur at peculiar times! Voltage is 220v, 50Hz AC. Chinese plugs come in many designs: 3-pronged angle pins as used in Australia; 3-pronged round pins as used in Hong Kong; 2-pronged flat pins as used in the USA; or 2 round narrow pins as used in Europe. To cover all bases, pack a travel adaptor!

Essential Packing
As light as possible! In China, most often portage is not available at railway stations and you will be required to carry your own luggage. Bags with wheels can be a hindrance when climbing several flights of stairs, though are a blessing when walking lengthy distances to reach our awaiting transportation. If travelling in early spring we recommend you pack warm clothes, layering works best this time of year.

• Food in China is very different and arguably works best this time of year.

Visa requirements are subject to change and are the responsibility of the traveller and not that of On The Go Tours.
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western snack food, consider bringing a supply
- Sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, swim costume, basic torch/flash light & umbrella for sun or rain
- Comfortable closed in walking shoes for climbing the Great Wall
- DEET based mosquito repellent & antihistamine cream
- Chinese plugs come in many designs: 3 prong angle pins similar, though smaller than those used in Australia; 2 prong flat pins (type A) or 2 round pins, European style (type C). To cover all bases, pack a travel adaptor!
- Two spare passport photos & a photocopy of your passport
- A small daypack for your day-to-day needs
- Plastic poncho to go over your jacket. Whilst site-seeing, you can be in the rain for an extended period and even a rain jacket can get soaked. You can purchase a cheap one locally, but we suggest taking one from home of a better quality that doesn’t rip easily

PLEASE NOTE:
- If your tour includes an internal flight, that most airlines have a 20kg baggage limit.
- As of July 2019, the Shanghai government has introduced a new policy for the purpose of environment protection, whereby all hotels will no longer supply disposable items such as slippers, shower caps, tooth brush/paste, body lotion, combs, nail files etc. Currently, these items are provided in Xian, Beijing, Luoyang etc, but this policy will be rolled out eventually throughout the rest of China also. Items that may still be provided by hotels (should they choose) are shampoo, conditioner and soap. With this in mind, please ensure you pack any necessities needed for your holiday.

Toilets/Washrooms
Public toilets, when found, are usually ‘squats’ - holes in the ground with footrests at either side and often don’t possess a door! The custom is to wash with water from a jug or little pipe attached to the toilet using your left hand. Delays can occur on the trips, although they are rare we recommend you do not book onward travel too close to the end of the tour to allow time for delays. We take no responsibility for any missed flights or additional expenses if the group arrives late to the departure city.

Chinese railway sleeper cabins have two compartments that comprise 4 bunks per compartment. Aboard each wagon are 9 compartments, which all tend to have Western style facilities
- Ask your tour guide to make a stop
- Pack a roll of toilet paper and anti-bacterial wipes for your own comfort

Media Restrictions
There are restrictions on all media, including social media and free press throughout China. Whilst on holiday, you will have limited or no access to social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google Plus - so no Google Maps and no Play Store. To bypass the firewall, you could look at downloading a VPN, which is much easier to do this before you go to China.

WeChat:
Communication between the group and Tour Guide or Adventure Leader is best via the app: WeChat. Please install this App prior to your holiday as it is hard to do download the app once you have arrived in China. If you opt to open the WeChat account prior to arrival and it requests that you have to be contacted by someone already on WeChat before opening your account, don’t worry, this can be done locally with your guide (just have the app downloaded ready to finalise opening your account locally).

There is also limited international calling options, so please check with your local provider before leaving home, to source the best roaming or online options to keep in regular contact with family and friends during your travels.

Travelling By Train
Fast and efficient, China’s first rail lines were laid in the 19th century, and today, the government continues to invest heavily in this crucial mode of transport which connects many parts of the country. When travelling during the day, ‘soft’ seats, that is to say ‘upholstered’ seats are provided.

For overnight travel on “Signature” tours, clients are accommodated in ‘soft class’ sleeper cabins. Aboard each wagon are 9 compartments that comprise 4 bunks per compartment. Four people of mixed sex share one compartment. On occasion, dependent upon group size, you may be sharing with local people on the overnight journey, though sometimes dependent upon how the Chinese Railways Booking Office configure the bookings, the cabin may be filled with four of our passengers.

For overnight travel on “Budget” tours, clients are accommodated in open 6 berth bunks. We try to get all of our travellers in the same compartment/seating area so that you can have fun getting to know each other better, playing games etc. It is possible to upgrade to a four-berth soft sleeper on your trip, please contact us at time of booking for rates (upgrades are only possible if the open class ticket has not already been purchased).

A dining wagon serves reasonably priced Chinese food of the noodles and rice variety, along with snacks and drinks. A very simple menu is published in English. On the Beijing - Xi’an service, there is also a small bar serving drinks including alcohol. Each wagon offers a WC and hand basin facility. At one end, is a Chinese squat-style WC, whilst at the other end is a modern Western-style WC. Cabins are lockable from the inside and luggage is stowed in overhead compartments and under the bottom bunk. Bed linen and slippers are supplied, and often there is a TV mounted on the wall at the end of each bed that may even work. Most channels are broadcast in Mandarin, excluding one English Channel, which has little of interest on it!

Time Keeping
Punctuality is very important throughout the tour and you will usually be given a time to meet your tour leader and the rest of the group in reception. In the event that you miss the meeting time you will have to make your own way to where the group are, this will be at your own expense.

Delays can occur on the trips, although they are rare we recommend you do not book onward travel too close to the end of the tour to allow time for delays. We take no responsibility for any missed flights or additional expenses if the group arrives late to the departure city.

This information has been compiled with care and good faith. They give an accurate illustration of the proposed arrangements for this holiday. Circumstances beyond our control such as changes in local conditions, inclement weather or other reasons could force us to make changes to this itinerary. Any costs shown are subject to change, though are an accurate reflection of costs at time of setting. Please also note that visa requirements are subject to change and are the responsibility of the traveller and not that of On The Go Tours.
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Porterage
In China most often porterage is not available at railway stations and you will be required to carry your own luggage. We recommend you pack as light as possible as there can be several flights of stairs and a lengthy walk to our awaiting transportation.

Shopping
China is a virtual Aladdin’s Cave. Government-run Friendship Stores in almost all cities stock a range of fixed-price souvenirs and handicrafts and can offer a reasonable idea of what is acceptable in terms of quality and price. After a visit to the Friendship Store, visit private stores, craft shops and local department stores. However, the best shopping is often at public markets. If you see something you want, buy it when you see it - prices don’t vary greatly, but selection can vary from location to location.

Top buys include silk products, embroidery, Chinese calligraphy and paintings, ceramics, jade and stone carvings, lacquer ware, Chinese tea, Cloisonne, Mao reproduction propaganda souvenirs such as the famous ‘Red Book’, caps and buttons, personalised ink seals and clothing of every kind. Markets in Beijing and Shanghai commonly sell top quality ski jackets and leisure attire by big name brands. Additionally, copied goods such as handbags, watches and shoes are available in plentiful supply in these markets. Ethnic crafts are a specialty in some regions including Xi’an and Kunming. If wishing to buy antiques, proceed with caution. It’s highly likely that the antique will be a skilful reproduction. However, if it is the real deal, you’ll need paperwork from the Chinese Administrative Department of Cultural Relics which must then accompany the article being exported.

On many of our tours we include some shop visits/stops, where you will learn about a product or craft and often these stops include demonstrations with the option to purchase items afterwards. Although these stops have been vetted, management or staff may change and if you feel that these stops are not to standard please inform your guide at this time so that this may be rectified immediately. Shopping stops are not for everyone so we don’t include many, the stops chosen bring an element of education of local culture or tradition for those that usually don’t like to shop. Depending on what side of the shopping fence you sit on, we offer this inclusion to cater to the majority, based on client feedback.

IMPORTANT: Set your budget and don’t be swayed, remember the caveat – ‘Let the buyer beware’. Any purchases made whilst on holiday with us, irrespective of whether the store is recommended by us or other, are at your own discretion. Please make sure that you are completely happy with the product you are purchasing and the delivery arrangements (we would recommend you take away with you any purchases rather than rely on shipping services). On The Go cannot be held responsible or accountable for items bought in country or shipping arrangements. Proceed with caution.

Holidays & Events
China has many important National Holidays and events that are celebrated throughout the country. During these times (the lead up to them and afterwards) there can be delays to public transport, the roads can be much busier and many sites are a lot more crowded as the locals take this time to visit family, celebrate the holiday and experience the wonders and amazing places within their own country.

During this time you’ll likely to encounter a celebratory atmosphere, but an additional level of patience, flexibility and understanding goes a long way so that you may enjoy your holiday.

As tourists, you will be generally unaffected and your tour leader will do their best to plan around these events. Though when initially planning your holiday, if you prefer not to travel when sites are crowded or are concerned about delays, then travelling during these holidays is possibly not for you. Below several of the holidays and the approximate dates, more information: https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/china/2020.

- 01 Jan - New Year (countrywide)
- 24-30 Jan - Chinese New Year (countrywide)
- 20 Mar-16 Apr - Peach Blossom Festival (Shanghai)
- 04-06 Apr - Tomb-Sweeping Day (countrywide)
- 19 Apr - Formula One World Championship (Shanghai)
- 1-3 May - Labor Day (countrywide)
- TBA Jun - Shanghai International Film Festival (Shanghai)
- 25-27 Jun - Dragon Boat Festival (countrywide)
- 25 Aug - Double Seventh Festival (countrywide)
- 1 Oct - Mid-Autumn Festival (countrywide)
- 1-8 Oct - National Day Holiday (countrywide)
- 25 Oct - Double Ninth Festival (Chongyang Festival, countrywide)
- 25 Dec -25 Feb 2021 - Harbin Ice Festival (Harbin)

It's Not Like Home!
Travel to far-flung corners of the earth involves lifestyles and conditions that are sometimes very different from what you are used to back home. You must come prepared to cope with unusual situations, local inadequacies and unpredictable events as and when they occur. Foreign travel is definitely not suitable for people who expect or demand everything to go exactly as planned. With the greatest respect and in the interest of your ultimate enjoyment you must understand this. Things can and do change in foreign countries.

- Be prepared as locals smoke everywhere in China
- The Chinese don’t have an awareness of personal space, be ready to have people standing very close to you, nudge you or even walk into you, they are not being rude, it’s just a very different culture
- Many tourists report scams in Shanghai, so be friendly but careful. Never ever follow a stranger anywhere
- Spitting and sneezing is common in China as they see the use of tissues as unhygienic.
- Some locals won’t queue and will often walk straight to the front of a line with no awareness or care of what they have done wrong
- Always take some antiseptic hand gel or antibacterial hand wipes with you and BYO toilet paper as its rare in public toilets. Squat
Harbin Ice Festival

toilets are very common, they can be a novelty and are easy to use

- Chinese people are delighted if you make any attempt to speak Mandarin, even if it’s only a couple of words