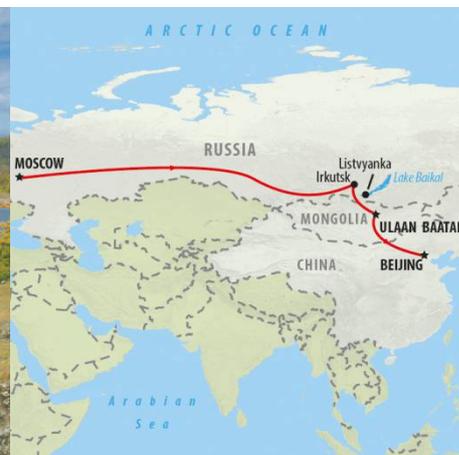


# Highway to China

## 15 days | Moscow to Beijing



*Ride the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Mongolian railway from Moscow east to Beijing; crossing Siberia the train pulls into Irkutsk, gateway to Lake Baikal and Ulaan Baatar in the heart of Mongolia.*

### HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

#### Trip Highlights

- Moscow, Russia's lively capital
- Trans-Siberian, Mongolian & Manchurian route
- Irkutsk - former Cossack garrison & trading centre
- Views of Siberian forest, Gobi Desert and Lake Baikal en route
- Ulaan Baatar - Mongolia's capital, set on banks of the Tuul River
- Beijing - extend your stay to visit the sights

#### What's Included

- 7 breakfasts
- 2 nights 3 star hotel in Moscow
- 3 nights 3 star hotel in Irkutsk
- 3 nights 3 star hotel in Ulaan Baatar
- 6 nights on board train (2nd class, 4 berth sleeper cabin)
- Train journey: Moscow - Beijing
- Moscow airport arrival transfer on day 1

- Transfer to Moscow train station (not platform) on day 3
- Return rail station transfers in Irkutsk and Ulaan Baatar

#### What's Not Included

- Flights and visas
- Meals aboard the train
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature
- This journey is semi-independent and is unescorted. It is not a group departure and you will not have a tour guide.

### DETAILED ITINERARY

#### Days 1-2 : Moscow

Moscow. Arrival transfer from Moscow airport to your hotel. Enjoy free time in Russia's lively capital. On day 2 there is an optional guided walk around Red Square, escorted by a knowledgeable local guide. If taking the optional guided walk visit the top spots in the Russian capital that spawned dozens of spy novels.

Catch the Metro to Red Square, from where you'll enjoy a guided walk. You'll spot Moscow's bastion of power, the gold onion-domed Kremlin, GUM Department store and more. Rest of day free. Lenin's fascinating granite mausoleum located in Red Square is a Mecca for the curious and worth a look, if open.

NOTE: If you plan to visit Lenin's Mausoleum or the Kremlin, please don't carry a large bag/rucksack because you'll have to store it (for a fee) before entry. **Overnight - Moscow (B:1)**

#### Days 3-6 : Train to Siberia

Moscow - Irkutsk. The morning of day 3 is free for you to relax before a midday transfer to the rail station to start your Trans-Siberian journey. Settle into life aboard the train as it plies its way across the Urals and large tracts of Siberia.

Settle into life on board as the train plies its way across the Urals and large tracts of Siberia on days 4 to 6. Enjoy the views of the changing landscape, relax and get to know your fellow passengers. **Overnight - Train (B:1)**

#### Days 7-9 : Irkutsk & optional Lake Baikal



Irkutsk. Days 7 - 9 are spent at leisure, Irkutsk is a town with Asiatic influences of nearby Mongolia and China and curious architecture -

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a legacy of Siberia's exiled aristocrats. Spend the next 3 days at leisure by beautiful Lake Baikal or perhaps choose one of the optional activities (see page 2 of the Go Guide for details).

## Listvyanka & Lake Baikal:

Spend two relaxing days in the village of Listvyanka by beautiful Lake Baikal and perhaps choose one of the optional activities.

## Irkutsk Summer Trek & Camp:

Enjoy an overnight trekking excursion through the scenic taiga of the Primorsky Mountain to Lake Baikal, camping overnight in a picturesque bay. **Overnight - Irkutsk (B:2)**

## Day 10 : Train to Mongolia

Irkutsk - Ulaan Baatar. Very early morning transfer to the rail station to continue your momentous journey into the heart of Mongolia, a land of endless steppe, towering mountains, pristine lakes, rivers and desert.

**Overnight - Train**

## Days 11-13 : Mongolia



Ulaan Baatar (Mongolia). Morning arrival into Ulaan Baatar after crossing the Mongolian border during the very early hours of day 11. The pine-covered mountains, wide boulevards, vast public squares and park give the city a feeling of spaciousness, while the ger communities, Buddhist temples and bustling market places give it a rustic charm. Transfer to your hotel and spend three days at leisure exploring the city. Or book an optional two night excursion to Terelj National Park:

## Terelj National Park & ger camp add-on:

Spend two nights camping out in a Mongolian ger on the steppe in Terelj National Park. Elevated Terelj is cool and the scenic alpine surrounds are spectacular. The protected area is host to diverse flora and fauna, and is

famous for its unique granite rock formations. Opportunities for outdoor pursuits abound.

The Mongolian ger is a sturdy wood and felt type tent. Ger means 'home' and it's your home on the steppe (level grassy unforested plains characteristic of Mongolia) for the next two nights.

On day 13 enjoy free time exploring the sights on and just off Sukhbaatar Square. Despite the prominence of grim, utilitarian Soviet architecture, Ulaan Baatar (otherwise known as UB to ex-pats) is a laid-back provincial capital set in the rolling foothills of the Bogd mountain range, on the banks of the Tuul River. Due to its high elevation, located 1350 metres above sea level, Ulaan Baatar is the coldest capital in the world, so make sure you wrap up warm! **Overnight - Ulaan Baatar (B:2)**

## Days 14-15 : Train to Beijing



Ulaan Baatar - Beijing. Morning transfer to rail station on day 14 for the final leg of your journey. Enjoy panoramic views of uninterrupted steppe, with the occasional nomad, camel and ger dotting the landscape. Continuing south the train enters the flat, dry and sparsely populated landscape of the Gobi desert before crossing the border into China on day 14. The train pulls into Beijing, China's bustling capital, in the afternoon on day 15.

**Overnight - Train (day 14) (B:1)**

## Optional Excursion: Listvyanka & Lake Baikal

**Starts/ends: Irkutsk. 2 night excursion**

Discover the beauty of Lake Baikal on this 2 night excursion to lakeside Listvyanka. Listvyanka is a charming village dotted with traditional Siberian wooden houses, with a main road that runs right along the shore of Lake Baikal, making it the perfect base to explore this picturesque region. The deepest

lake in the world (1620m) on merit of magnitude alone, Lake Baikal is renowned as one of earth's most impressive natural wonders and known as 'the pearl of Siberia'.

Upon arrival into Irkutsk, transfer to Listvyanka village stopping for lunch en route. Spend 2 nights in Listvyanka with free time to explore the town and visit the Lake Baikal Museum, soak up the scenery around the lake or choose from the exciting optional activities offered below. The next day transfer back to Irkutsk where you will spend a night, stopping for lunch en route.

Please note: This add-on is only available on Trans-Siberian journeys which have a stopover in Irkutsk. The 2 night stay in Listvyanka is in place of 2 of the nights spent in Irkutsk, not in addition to.

**Listvyanka & Lake Baikal Bolt-on includes:** 2 nights 3 star hotel stay in Listvyanka, private return transfer from Irkutsk to Listvyanka. 2 breakfasts and 2 lunches.

For prices please visit [www.onthegotours.com](http://www.onthegotours.com) or contact us for further details. This optional excursion must be booked prior to departure.

## Lake Baikal Optional Activities

If you are booking the Listvyanka & Lake Baikal excursion above, then make the most of your 2 night stay in Listvyanka by choosing one of our optional activities below. Should you wish to partake in either of these activities, please specify at time of booking.

### Cross Country Ski

Enjoy a guided walking tour of Listvyanka and the Lake Baikal Museum before having some fun in the snow, cross country skiing on the shores of Lake Baikal the following day. Includes a picnic lunch. Fitness level - high. Offered during the winter (November - March).

### Lake Baikal Discovery

Take a guided tour of Listvyanka and the Lake Baikal Museum, before a scenic guided walk the following day. Summer - From Listvyanka take a ferry to Port Baikal the next day, for a guided walk along the Circum Baikal route with picnic lunch. Winter - Guided walk on the

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shore of the frozen lake and lunch. Fitness level - standard. Offered all year round.

For prices please visit [www.onthegotours.com](http://www.onthegotours.com) or contact us for further details. These optional activities must be booked prior to departure.

## Optional Excursion: Terelj NP & Ger Camp

**Starts/ends: Ulaan Baatar. 2 night excursion**

Just a short distance from Ulaan Baatar is the beautiful Terelj National Park, a wonderful landscape of pine covered cliffs, grassy steppe and giant granite rocks which have been eroded by the elements into bizarre shapes, such as Turtle Rock. In this scenic setting, where opportunities for outdoor pursuits abound, camp out in a traditional Mongolian ger (a sturdy wood and felt tent) and explore the beautiful surrounds.

Upon arrival into Ulaan Baatar, transfer to nearby Terelj National Park visiting Turtle Rock en route. Spend 2 nights in a traditional ger camp within the national park, visit a local nomadic family to gain a fascinating insight into traditional Mongolian life and enjoy free time, allowing you to simply relax, trek or perhaps explore this beautiful wild region of Mongolia on horseback. The next day transfer back to Ulaan Baatar.

**Please note:** Your 2 night stay at the ger camp is in place of the 2 nights spent in Ulaan Baatar, not in addition to.

Due to extreme weather, clients undertaking this add-on during the winter can decide upon arrival whether to stay in permanent accommodation or a Mongolian ger.

**Terelj NP & Ger Camp includes:** 2 nights ger camping in Terelj National Park, a visit to a nomadic family and Turtle Rock, return transfer from Ulaan Bataar to Terelj National Park. Services of a local guide. 2 breakfasts, 3 lunches and 2 dinners.

Note: Due to train times only 2 lunches included on westbound journeys from Beijing.

For prices please visit [www.onthegotours.com](http://www.onthegotours.com) or contact us for

further details. These optional activities must be booked prior to departure.

## Optional Activities: City Tours

Enhance your stay by booking a guided sightseeing tour in the following cities. All tours are escorted by a local guide and include relevant transfers and transportation.

**Moscow Walking Tour** - A 3 hour guided walking tour through Moscow's city centre, taking in the sights of Red Square - the brightly coloured St Basil's Cathedral, the ritzy GUM department store and, if open, Lenin's Mausoleum. Meet your guide in the hotel lobby at 9am.

**Beijing Sightseeing Tour** - An excursion to Badaling to walk a section of The Great Wall and a guided tour of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. Full day tour, including lunch. Meet your guide in the hotel lobby at 08:30am.

For prices please visit [www.onthegotours.com](http://www.onthegotours.com) or contact us for further details. These city tours must be booked prior to departure.

## Homestay Option

If you're a grass-roots traveller that enjoys unique experiences, we offer a homestay option in Irkutsk.

If you choose homestay accommodation instead of a hotel in Irkutsk, you may be staying with a local family, couple or single person. In some cases the home owner may actually move out so that you have the home to yourself. Homestays in Siberia are basic, most are small apartments with shared bathroom facilities. Fold-out beds are common and your hosts are unlikely to speak English. There is usually only room for one or two guests so if you're travelling with a group of friends you'll be accommodated separately. Homestay accommodation includes breakfast and dinner.

If you would prefer to stay in a homestay, please let On The Go know at time of booking. A discount will apply - see the pricing page of our website for details.

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### Style of Travel

Our Trans-Siberian Railway journeys run as an independent package, combining the train journey and stopovers, booked specifically and exclusively for you.

You will not be travelling in a group and will not have a group 'tour' leader with you. You could be sharing your train carriage with Russians, Mongolians or Chinese and may find you are the only Westerner. Half the fun of the train journey is trying to communicate with your fellow travellers, learning new card games, taking time out to read or just sit back and watch the world go by.

If stopping at intermediate points en route, you will be met on arrival by one of our local drivers (who sometimes can speak English) and transferred to your accommodation. We offer a range of optional excursions that you can book before you travel or you can choose to independently explore each port of call.

### Are You A Trans-Siberian Traveller?

If you like everything to happen like clockwork, for everyone you encounter to speak English on command and cannot cope without 24 hour assistance from a travel representative, then a Trans-Siberian adventure is probably not the type of holiday for you!

Our Trans-Siberian railway journeys are suitable for adventurous, independent travellers, in search of new and sometimes intrepid experiences.

Please be aware that hotels and homestays en route are simple.

Though the cabins are cosy, the trains themselves are basic and whilst on-board you'll need to be happy to go without standard creature comforts such as a shower. On arrival, though friendly our transfer drivers are hired for their driving skills and do not always speak English.

Finally, do as much preliminary reading as possible. Both Russian and Mongolian cities

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and people are quite different to anything you will have encountered before. You may find that some the locals in Russia can be quite abrupt and curt at times and that the customer service offered at hotels en route, is not up to the high standard that we've come to expect in the West. You need to take this with a pinch of salt, it's just the Russian way, expect your service without a smile!

As long as you're aware of all these facts, you'll be mentally prepared for this epic journey!

## Hotels

We provide simple 3 star hotel accommodation on all of our Trans-Siberian journeys, with en suite rooms and breakfast included. However please note that in Siberia and Mongolia officially rated 3 star accommodation cannot be compared to hotels of a similar standard in Western Europe or, and in particular, the United States.

## Train Schedules

Trans-Siberian Railways do change their schedules from time to time, which could alter the itinerary. Please check with us at time of booking.

## Upgrades

If you wish to upgrade to a 2 berth cabin or a party of 3 wishing to exclusively occupy a 4 berth cabin, please contact us for rates and availability. Please note availability is limited with some trains only configured with one 2 berth cabin wagon (containing 18 seats) and on services between Irkutsk and Ulan Ude, 2 berth cabins are not available. From May - October, all routes are particularly busy, and an upgrade may prove difficult to obtain. On The Go Tours will advise on an individual basis, whether an upgrade will be possible.

Despite the myth, Cabins with shower or en-suite facilities do not exist. However there is a WC/wash basin is located at the end of every wagon, with a 220v AC 2-pin razor socket.

## Visas

Visas are required by all visitors to China, Mongolia & Russia. If booking at On The Go we will supply your Russian Invitation, required for a Russia visa.

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 details.

It is your responsibility to procure your visa in a timely fashion and visa fees are at your own expense. We recommend you apply for visas at least 6 weeks prior to departure. Further visa info is available online at [onthegotours.com](http://onthegotours.com).

## Time & voltage

One of the most disorienting aspects of the Trans-Siberian is working out what time it really is! On Chinese trains, everything works to Beijing Time so train and station clocks are set to this. The time will change again to Ulaan Baatar time in Mongolia & Moscow Time in Russia. Pack a travel alarm clock!

### Russia and Mongolia

Standard voltage is 220V, 50Hz AC. Sockets require a Continental or European plug with two round pins.

### China

Standard voltage is 220V, 50Hz AC. Chinese plugs come in at least 4 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.

Pack a worldwide travel adaptor.

## Vaccinations

It is suggested that you are vaccinated against Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid and Hepatitis A. If visiting Yekaterinburg between May-August, immunisations against Tick-borne Encephalitis is recommended. Requirements change so please check this information with your GP or Travel Doctor.

## What to pack

- A Frameless rucksack/backpack.
- Small daypack or bag for your valuables.
- Summer - Russia, Mongolia and China can be surprisingly warm during July & August, so it's suggested you pack accordingly with lightweight cottons (warmer clothes for evening).

- Winter – Russia, Mongolia and China get very cold and can experience frigid conditions October - March. Pack a scarf, top quality gloves, hat, thermal leggings and a heavy longer length coat. Wear water and slip-proof shoes or boots.

- Personal first aid kit (see 'Health precautions'), mosquito repellent & sunscreen (summer).
- Sunglasses, umbrella, torch, pocket knife, money belt & universal adaptor plug.
- Bathers/swimmers/trunks & towel for Russian banyas/sauna, lake swimming etc.
- Headscarf (ladies only) for entry into churches.
- Aboard the train - mug, spoon, instant coffee, tea bags, drinking chocolate, cuppa soups and pot noodles, chocolate bars, fruit such as oranges, snacks, slippers, plenty of reading material, pack of cards, puzzles, MP3 player, radio, Trans-Sib guide book, phrase books, small gifts from your country, flat-pack WC paper, wipes, pack-lock (for your pack).
- Two spare passport photos/passport photocopy in case of loss/theft.
- Your luggage should not exceed 20kg (44pounds). Pack light and leave room for souvenirs!

## What is it like aboard?

Plan to dress casually in T-shirts, jeans or jogging pants and comfortable shoes. Temperatures are regulated regardless of the season, so short-sleeves may be all that is needed.

Generally, each train is around 15 wagons long. At the end of each wagon, is a WC/wash basin. Each wagon is manned by a provodnitsa (wagon attendant).

All routes longer than 24 hours have a buffet/dining car service (operated by the railway company of the country you are in). Available to all passengers, you can sit down to café style food, paid for in local currency. Occasionally there is a shower available in the 'special services' wagon for an additional cost of approx: USD \$5 and you will need to provide your own toiletries, towel and shower shoes.

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## Luggage - suitcase or backpack?

Most people find that a frameless backpack/rucksack is easier to manoeuvre and preferable to a suitcase. They are easier to carry and stow on-board, and do not have wheels which can get mired in snow and dirt.

## Luggage Stowage

Train cabins offer a surprising amount of luggage space - beneath the bottom bunks and near the ceiling. It's a good idea to keep your valuables on you, and luggage should be locked at all times. Trains are used by Chinese, Mongolian and Russian traders, who try to use all available space for their goods and may try to store goods in your cabin - some sharp words may be needed - You are entitled enough space to store your luggage, which they may forget!

## The cabin

There are usually 4 berths (2 up, 2 down) to a compartment, with plenty of luggage space. The cabin door can be locked by turning the door catch, and pulling a metal catch out to the left of the door. Each cabin has a small table (with bottle opener underneath), a small fold-out ladder to help people to the upper berths and coat hangers and hooks for hanging.

## The provodnitsa

An attendant, known in Russia as a provodnitsa, staffs each train wagon. Their duties include checking your tickets, distributing pre-packaged linen (at additional and nominal cost) and keeping the public areas of the wagon clean. They also keep their eye on the WC, samovar and the cabins. Flashing your biggest grin upon boarding may keep you in favour with them during the journey!

## The routes

The term 'Trans-Siberian Railway' is used to describe the 3 main train routes which traverse the Eurasian continent. Starting in Moscow, all routes run parallel through Yaroslavl on the Volga, Yekaterinburg in the Urals and traverse Siberia. Soon after Irkutsk near Baikal's southern extremity, they diverge with the Trans-Siberian route continuing to

Vladivostok and the other two continuing on to Beijing:

**The Trans-Mongolian route:** Moscow - Ulaan Baatar - Beijing: Just beyond Ulan Ude on Baikal's east shore, it heads south across the Mongolian steppe to Ulaan Baatar and Beijing.

**The Trans-Manchurian route:** Moscow - Beijing. Just after Tarskaya, this route heads around the eastern border of Mongolia to Beijing.

## Boarding the train

All trains to Irkutsk, Ulaan Baatar and Beijing depart from Moscow Yaroslavl Station. Trains to Yekaterinburg depart from Moscow Kazanskaya Station. The nearest Metro stop is KOMSOMOLSKAYA. Both stations offer kiosks for the purchase of snacks and drinks. There are toilet facilities and seated waiting areas.

## Border crossings

Be prepared for long and tedious border delays, primarily due to passenger numbers and the volume of contraband the traders are carrying. Most of the time, you'll be on-board, though if you're asked or decide to disembark, take your coat and valuables. If you're not allowed off, remember the toilets will be out of action whilst you're halted. Overall, expect delays of some 5-6 hours.

## Russia-Mongolia border

Both Russia and Mongolia use the same railway gauge so a 'bogie-change' is not required at this border. Officials, however, take their time searching the compartments of Russian and Mongolia traders looking for goods that attract duty. You'll usually be subject to customs and immigration checks at both Naushki on the Russian side and Sukhbaatar in Mongolia and be required to complete the appropriate forms.

## Mongolia-China border

Most trains cross this border at night, so expect little sleep. You'll be subjected to customs and immigration checks at Zamyn-Uud in Mongolia and Erlian in China and customs forms will need to be completed.

Once your passport is returned, you're usually free to disembark and look around.

The train's bogies are changed at Erlian. If wanting to watch, stay on the train until it reaches the bogie changing sheds. Here, the carriages are raised and the bogies are replaced with those used in China. You may be able to take photos. You can then walk or take a rickshaw back to the station proper.

## 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.

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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 bureau 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 portorage 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 better than your local takeaway! If you prefer 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. Doesn't appeal? Here are some hints!

- Time yourself with the accommodations you are staying at
- If you are out and about, find the nearest hotel, restaurant, fast food outlet, or toilets at tourist attractions, 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:**

## Highway to China - 15 days

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# Highway to China

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.

## 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 speciality 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.

**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

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# Highway to China

level of patience, flexibility and understanding goes a long way so that you may enjoy your holiday.

As tourists, you will be generally be 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 2020 - New Year (countrywide)
- 24-30 Jan 2020 - Chinese New Year (countrywide)
- 20 Mar-16 Apr 2020 - Peach Blossom Festival (Shanghai)
- 04-06 Apr 2020 - Tomb-Sweeping Day (countrywide)
- 19 Apr 2020- Formula One World Championship (Shanghai)
- 1-3 May 2020 - Labor Day (countrywide)
- TBA Jun 2020 - Shanghai International Film Festival (Shanghai)
- 25-27 Jun 2020 - Dragon Boat Festival (countrywide)
- 25 Aug 2020 - Double Seventh Festival (countrywide)
- 1 Oct 2020 - Mid-Autumn Festival (countrywide)
- 1-8 Oct 2020 - National Day Holiday (countrywide)
- 25 Oct 2020 - Double Ninth Festival (Chongyang Festival, countrywide)
- 25 Dec 2020-25 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 snorting 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 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

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