China Golden Triangle

Beijing - Xi'an - Shanghai - 8 days / 7 nights

Sample itinerary - Subject to availability

Travel style: tailor made

Overview

Three cities, the classic first trip, comfortably paced.

The journey

Three cities that hold the spine of Chinese history - imperial Beijing, the ancient capital of Xi'an and the modern showcase of Shanghai - linked by fast trains and folded into eight well-paced days. This is the framework most first-time visitors ask for, and the one we most often re-build around a specific brief.

Highlights

- Great Wall at Mutianyu, cable car up and toboggan down
- Terracotta Army with a specialist guide
- The Bund and the old city of Shanghai
- High-speed rail between all three cities, no internal flights

Day by day



Day 1 - Arrive Beijing

Met at the airport by your guide and driven into the city - most arrivals reach the hotel by late afternoon. The first evening is deliberately left free: the streets around the hotel fill with barbecue smoke and queueing locals, and the guide is happy to point you towards whatever the neighbourhood is eating tonight. No fixed programme; rest and adjust.

Meals: - - Hotel: Beijing, city centre

Day 2 - The Great Wall at Mutianyu

Early departure ahead of the tour coaches, cable car up to the eastern towers. The morning walks the ramparts as they ridge over the hills, often to yourselves in the first hour; toboggan down for a farmhouse lunch under the wall. Back in the city by mid-afternoon. Restoration work closes wall sections now and then, and the guide reroutes on the day.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Beijing



Day 3 - Forbidden City and the hutongs

Into the Forbidden City as the gates open, before the queues build, walking the central axis as the guide reads the roofs and the rituals. Lunch is a courtyard-house spread in the hutongs - home cooking, not a set menu. The

afternoon drifts the old lanes on foot: grey brick, shared courtyards, chess players and songbirds out on the pavement. Peking duck tonight, with all the trimmings.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Beijing

Day 4 - Beijing to Xi'an by high-speed rail

Around 4h30 by bullet train southwest across the North China Plain - farmland, village roofs and high-rise edges trading places outside the window. Check in near the Bell Tower, then take the afternoon gently inside the city wall: the drum and bell towers first, and the Muslim Quarter's snack alleys as the griddles heat up. Xi'an eats late; the street-breakfast briefing can wait until tomorrow.

Meals: B - Hotel: Xi'an



Day 5 - The Terracotta Army

Full morning at the pits with the specialist guide, in before the midday crowds: Pit One's standing ranks first, then the smaller pits and the bronze chariot, at a pace that allows questions. Lunch near the site, then back into town to take the Ming city wall by bicycle or on foot in the cooler hours. The evening is free around the Muslim Quarter's night stalls.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Xi'an

Day 6 - Xi'an to Shanghai

About six hours by rail to Shanghai, crossing the Yellow River plain into the Yangtze delta - a window-seat day. Aim for the hotel by late afternoon, then walk the Bund as the lights come on across the river: couples, wedding photographers, old men with radios. The evening is free, and the guide's shortlist covers a first-timer's first proper Shanghai dinner.

Meals: B - Hotel: Shanghai



Day 7 - Shanghai

Yu Garden and the bazaar lanes in the morning - rockeries, latticed windows and a soup-dumpling queue worth joining once. The afternoon moves to the French Concession on foot: plane-tree streets, 1920s villas now cafés and studios, vegetable stalls and mahjong games a lane away from the boutiques. Finish early and pace the group; the evening stays free for a last riverside walk.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Shanghai

Day 8 - Depart

Transfer to the airport in good time for the international flight - leaving the city three hours ahead keeps check-in and security unhurried. If the flight allows a last morning, the riverside promenade and a final bowl of noodles among the commuter crowd make an easy ending.

Meals: B - Hotel: -

What makes this journey different

- Mutianyu, not Badaling - the wall section with toboggan descent and fewer coaches in the first hours.
- The Terracotta Army with a specialist guide before the midday crowds arrive.
- A hutong lunch inside Beijing's second ring, not a set-menu restaurant.
- One advisor in the UK and a coordination team in China, from brief to boarding.

Where you stay

Central four-star hotels throughout: walking distance to food streets in Beijing, near the Bell Tower in Xi'an, and on or near the Bund in Shanghai. Five-star and boutique upgrades are quoted on request.

Food & local life

Peking duck with all the trimmings, Xi'an street breakfasts in the Muslim Quarter, and a Shanghai dinner chosen for first-timers. Vegetarian and child-friendly options are worked into every day.

Included

+ Accommodation in the agreed grade, with breakfast
+ Private guide and private vehicle on touring days
+ All internal transport between cities as stated - high-speed rail, internal flights and transfers
+ Entrance fees for the sites named in the itinerary
+ Meals as stated (B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner)
+ Drinking water in the vehicle, and a 24-hour emergency contact while the group is in China
+ Two evenings left deliberately free

Not included

- International flights to and from China
- Chinese visa or visa-application costs
- Travel insurance, including medical and cancellation cover
- Meals not marked in the itinerary, drinks and personal spending
- Anything listed under subject to confirmation until it is confirmed

To be confirmed with suppliers

- hotel names and room categories per city
- train times and seat class for the quoted dates
- restoration closures on the Wall section
- walking and driving times on each day

Customisation

Every framework can be re-built around your client's dates, party size, hotel grade, pace and interests - or combined with scheduled small group departures where budget matters. Send us the brief and we will quote in writing.