Classic China with Guilin

Beijing - Xi'an - Guilin - Shanghai - 10 days / 9 nights

Sample itinerary - Subject to availability

Travel style: scheduled

Overview

The classics plus the karst scenery, on one trip.

The journey

Ten days that pair the two essential cities with the landscape everyone has seen on the banknotes - the karst towers of Guilin and the Li River. The route runs Beijing to Xi'an to Guilin to Shanghai, ending with a departure hub and a skyline dinner.

Highlights

- Li River cruise between Guilin and Yangshuo
- Forbidden City and the Terracotta Army
- Countryside cycling near Yangshuo
- High-speed rail between the northern cities

Day by day



Day 1 - Arrive Beijing

Airport meet-and-greet and a private transfer into town; most flights land with the evening still ahead. Nothing is scheduled on purpose. The hotel sits within walking distance of a food street, and the first night is best kept simple: a slow walk, a bowl of something hot among the locals, and an early night ahead of a full day tomorrow.

Meals: - - Hotel: Beijing

Day 2 - Forbidden City and the Great Wall

A demanding but rewarding pairing. The Forbidden City at opening - the central axis first, while the courtyards are quiet and the light is low - then north by road after lunch for Mutianyu: cable car up, an hour on the ramparts, toboggan down. Late-afternoon light and thinning crowds partly repay the early alarm; expect a long, full day.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Beijing



Day 3 - Beijing to Xi'an

High-speed rail to Xi'an, around 4h30, the North China Plain giving way to loess gullies outside the window. The afternoon is free inside the walled city: the Bell Tower first for orientation, then the Muslim Quarter as the bread ovens and nut stalls get going for the evening. Xi'an rewards walking; distances inside the wall are short.

Meals: B - Hotel: Xi'an

Day 4 - Terracotta Army

Morning at the pits with a specialist guide, ahead of the coach wave - Pit One's standing ranks, then the smaller pits and the bronze chariots, at a pace that leaves room for questions. Lunch near the site; afterwards the Ming city wall by bicycle or on foot, as the heat eases and the kite flyers come out on the ramparts. Evening free.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Xi'an



Day 5 - Xi'an to Guilin

Rail or a short flight south to Guilin, crossing from the loess plateau into the wet green geometry of the rice south. On arrival the evening is free around the riverside: the twin pagodas lit on the lake, night-market griddles, and a first bowl of Guilin rice noodles from a shopfront that has clearly been doing this for decades.

Meals: B - Hotel: Guilin

Day 6 - Li River to Yangshuo

Board after breakfast for the full day on the Li River: karst towers thickening from both banks, buffalo on the shallows, bamboo rafts and cormorants between the bends, a simple lunch on board. Arrival in Yangshuo mid-afternoon leaves time to walk the town's lanes before dusk - staying over while the day boats return to Guilin is the whole point. Vessel class and pier subject to confirmation, as noted. (vessel class and pier subject to confirmation)

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Yangshuo



Day 7 - Yangshuo countryside

An early, quiet start in the countryside: bicycles or a slow walk on the lanes between villages, rice flats and karst outcrops sharing the frame, farmers coming back from market as the mist lifts. Lunch in a village kitchen - river fish and whatever was picked that morning. The afternoon stays soft: a riverside stop, tea with a viewpoint, and time to do very little well.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Yangshuo

Day 8 - Guilin to Shanghai

Back north to Guilin for the flight to Shanghai, landing with the afternoon in hand. Settle near the Bund, then take the evening slowly: the riverside promenade at dusk, the historic facades lit on one side and the towers on the other, wedding photographs in progress every few metres. Dinner is free - the soup-dumpling pilgrimage can wait for tomorrow.

Meals: B - Hotel: Shanghai



Day 9 - Shanghai

Yu Garden and the old-town bazaar in the morning - rockeries, tea merchants and the famous dumpling queue. The afternoon moves to the French Concession on foot: plane trees, 1920s villas turned cafés and studios, wet-market stalls and mahjong tiles clattering a lane away from the boutiques. Dusk belongs to the Bund - the day's best photograph costs only the walk.

Meals: B, L - Hotel: Shanghai

Day 10 - Depart

Transfer to the airport in time for the international flight. With a morning to spare, the riverside makes a last easy walk - commuters, tai chi, the ferry horns - before the drive out. The China coordination team remains reachable through departure, and onward extensions can be discussed whenever the next brief starts to form.

Meals: B - Hotel: -

What makes this journey different

- A Li River day that favours the quiet reaches over the busy piers.
- Time in Xi'an beyond the pits - the wall by bike or on foot at dusk.
- Shanghai finishes with the Bund and the French Concession lanes, not just the tower.
- Established itineraries and shared ground services keep the price accessible without lowering the standard.

Where you stay

Four-star city hotels in Beijing, Xi'an and Shanghai; a river-side or town-centre stay in the Guilin/Yangshuo leg chosen for early starts on the water.

Food & local life

Beijing duck and hutong snacks, Xi'an street food through the Muslim Quarter, Guilin rice noodles at their source, and Shanghai's soup dumplings finished properly.

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
+ Li River cruise, second-class vessel as quoted

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

- Li River cruise pier and vessel class
- Guilin and Yangshuo hotel names
- transfer times between Guilin and Yangshuo

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.