



GUEST ITINERARY

CURATED CHINA JOURNEY
Dragon Discover







Beijing & Shanxi

10 Days 9 Nights

Imperial Capital & Ancient Heartland

BEFORE YOU GO

Key Travel Prep

-  Please book your own international flights.
-  Please arrange your own travel and medical insurance.
-  Please arrange your own mobile data plan before departure.
-  Check visa requirements for your destination before booking.
-  Bring any personal prescriptions needed.
-  Please inform us of any dietary needs, allergies, or restrictions when booking.

See the full "Prepare for Travel" section later in Before Booking.

Overview

Beijing's imperial palaces and the Great Wall, then the full Shanxi arc — cave Buddhas, walled merchant cities, and the Yellow River.

Three days in Beijing cover the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Great Wall at Badaling, and the haunted ruins of the Old Summer Palace. Then the route crosses into Shanxi for Yungang Grottoes, the world's oldest timber pagoda, the cliff-face Hanging Temple, Yanmen Pass, Pingyao Ancient City, a Daoist mountain with a permafrost ice cave and cave-courtyard lodging, Hukou Waterfall, and the sprawling merchant estates that once made Shanxi China's private banking capital. Bracket-joint carpentry, immersive theatre, regional banquets, and hot spring castle soaks weave through the landmarks.

Trip Snapshot

Accommodation

4-star or above throughout. Three heritage stays: cave-courtyard inn, guild-hall courtyard, hot spring castle.

Airport Transfers

Private airport transfers in Beijing on arrival and departure.

Guide & Transport

Private group with dedicated bilingual guide and vehicle. Includes Jiexiu–Beijing high-speed rail return.

Meals

Daily breakfast plus Donglaishun hotpot, Peking duck, farmhouse lunch, Datong hotpot, Northern Wei banquet, more.

Signature Experiences

Bracket-joint carpentry, flower-bread craft, glazed tile work, folk-music dinner, donkey ride, two hot spring evenings.

Trip Style

Heritage-led across two regions. Beijing imperial sightseeing then Shanxi's full arc with hot spring evenings.

Where You'll Stay

Heritage Stay

Mount Yunqiu Yaodong Courtyard

1 Night

Stone-vaulted cave rooms built into a hillside village on Yunqiu Mountain — naturally cool in summer, warm in winter. The most distinctive overnight on the route.

Heritage Stay

Pingyao Huiguan

1 Night

A Ming-Qing guild hall courtyard inn inside the walled city. Traditional kang beds, carved wooden windows, and courtyard garden — the old merchant city at your doorstep.

Heritage Stay

Chongning Castle Hotel

1 Night

A Qing dynasty fortress converted into a hotel — hot spring pools fed from 1,900m underground. Soak in herb-infused and mineral pools after a full day of sightseeing.

Scenic Stay

Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel

1 Night

Wellness-focused hotel in a quiet township setting outside Datong. Mineral spring pools rich in fluoride and sulphur compounds — the first recovery stop after the Great Wall drive.

4-Star Equivalent

Modern City Hotels

5 Nights

Well-located properties in Beijing (arrival, sightseeing, and departure nights) and Yingxian. IHG select-service and new-gen brands — functional, clean, and consistently well run.

Itinerary

Day 1 — Arrival & Welcome

Arrive in Beijing and transfer to your hotel. Your guide meets you at arrivals — from here, everything is handled.

The rest of the day is yours to recover from the flight and settle in at your own pace. No sightseeing is scheduled. Tomorrow morning begins with Beijing's imperial heart.

Day 2 — Forbidden City · Shichahai Lakes · Donglaishun Hotpot

 Forbidden City  Shichahai Lakes  Donglaishun lamb hotpot  +5 more

The morning opens at **Tiananmen Square** — the vast public plaza that has anchored Beijing's political geography for six centuries — before entering the **Forbidden City** through its southern gate. The world's largest surviving imperial palace complex unfolds across 72 hectares of vermillion walls, golden roofs, and ceremonial halls. A guided walk through the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Central Harmony, and the Hall of Preserving Harmony traces the arc of imperial power across the Ming and Qing dynasties. Audio headsets keep the commentary clear in the crowds.

Lunch is a **Huishang-style meal** near the palace district. The afternoon shifts to **Shichahai Lakes**, where 800-year-old courtyard homes still line the waterfront and locals play chess on the sidewalk, then through **Yandai Xiejie**, one of Beijing's oldest and most atmospheric slanting lanes. The day finishes along **Qianmen Street** and **Dashilar Street** — century-old shopfronts still selling silk, tea, and traditional medicine south of Tiananmen.

Dinner is **Donglaishun lamb hotpot** — Beijing's most famous copper-pot hotpot restaurant, serving paper-thin sliced lamb since 1903.

Day 3 — Summer Palace · Old Summer Palace · Peking Duck

 Summer Palace  Old Summer Palace  Peking duck  +3 more

The morning belongs to the **Summer Palace**, China's largest imperial garden — 300 hectares of lake, hill, and the world's longest painted corridor stretching 728 metres along the lakeshore. A guided walk through the Hall of Benevolent Longevity, Kunming Lake, and Longevity Hill traces the story of Empress Cixi, who famously diverted the imperial navy's budget to rebuild the gardens.

After a **Huaiyang-style lunch** — the refined river cuisine of the Yangtze Delta — the afternoon continues to the **Old Summer Palace**, the once-opulent garden of gardens burned by Anglo-French forces in 1860. Walking through the stone column ruins and Western-style fountain remnants puts the Summer Palace in a sharper frame: one survived, the other did not.

A drive past the **Bird's Nest** and **Water Cube** — the steel-lattice Olympic stadium and bubble-clad aquatics centre from 2008 — offers an exterior view of Beijing's modern architectural chapter before returning to the hotel district.

Dinner is **Peking duck**, served in the classic Beijing style: crisp skin carved tableside, thin pancakes, scallion, and sweet bean sauce.

Day 4 — Badaling Great Wall · Datong Ancient City · Hot Spring

 Badaling Great Wall Datong Ancient City  Mineral spring pool +1 more


An early departure heads north to the **Badaling Great Wall** — the best-preserved and most representative section of the Ming Great Wall, set in the Jundu Mountain passes of Yanqing. The wall here stands 7–8 metres tall with watchtowers, beacon platforms, and a full military defence system intact. The north line climbs steeply to the famous Hero Slope viewpoint; the south line is quieter and less crowded. Spring brings mountain wildflowers, autumn turns the slopes red, and winter coats the battlements in snow.

Lunch is a **farmhouse meal** in the Great Wall foothills — simple cooking served in a courtyard setting below the watchtowers.

From the wall, the route continues northwest to **Datong**, one of China's nine ancient capitals and the imperial seat of the Northern Wei dynasty. The afternoon explores **Datong Ancient City**, where a 7.24-kilometre Ming-dynasty city wall still stands 14 metres tall and the grid of streets follows a centuries-old chessboard layout — four main avenues, eight lanes, and a mesh of narrower alleys lined with Liao, Jin, and Ming-Qing architectural survivals.

Dinner is **Datong-style hotpot**, a regional variation worth trying alongside its more famous Sichuan or Beijing cousins. Check in at the **Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel** outside the city. The evening is yours to soak in the hotel's **mineral spring pool** and unwind after the long drive from the Great Wall.

Day 5 — Yungang Grottoes · Wooden Pagoda · Yingxian Night Market

 Yungang Grottoes Yingxian Wooden Pagoda  Bracket-Joint Workshop +2 more

The morning belongs to the **Yungang Grottoes** — a UNESCO World Heritage site with 45 surviving cave chambers housing 51,000 carved figures and colossal Northern Wei Buddhas cut directly into a kilometre-long cliff face in the 5th century. The guide walks the key chambers including the Tanyao Five Caves and the Five Flower Caves, with context on the Gandharan artistic influences that shaped the earliest carvings before Chinese Buddhist aesthetics fully took hold.

From Datong, drive to Yingxian to see the **Yingxian Wooden Pagoda** of Fogong Temple — 67 metres tall, built in 1056, and held together entirely by interlocking timber joints without a single iron nail. Its “five visible, nine hidden” floor structure is one of the most studied puzzles in Chinese architectural history. A hands-on **Bracket-Joint Workshop** (*dougong*) lets guests try assembling the same locking system the pagoda's builders used nearly a thousand years ago.

Dinner is a **Northern Wei heritage banquet** (*Beiwei Jiayan*). The evening continues into **Yingxian's old town night market** — local snacks including Yingxian cold noodles (*liangfen*), braised beef knuckle (*niuyao*), and the gelatinous street bite known as *diliu* are all worth trying standing up.

Day 6 — Hanging Temple · Yanmen Pass · Into Pingyao

 Hanging Temple Yanmen Pass Pingyao Ancient City +3 more

Two of Shanxi's most dramatic sites share the day. The **Hanging Temple** on Mount Heng clings to a sheer cliff some 60 metres above the ground — galleries, halls, and pavilions pinned to the rock face by wooden beams that have held for over 1,500 years. The structure fuses Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism under one impossible roof, and seeing it in person raises the obvious question: how, and why here.

Continue to **Yanmen Pass**, historically known as China's First Pass — the great northern frontier barrier where Chinese armies defended against steppe incursions across centuries of dynastic warfare. The watchtowers and wide views into the grassland landscape put a different kind of weight on the journey.

The route continues south to **Pingyao Ancient City**, a UNESCO World Heritage walled town where the Ming-Qing merchant streetscape is preserved so completely it can feel like stepping into a different century. Check in at **Pingyao Huiguan**, a guild-hall courtyard inn inside the walled city.

Dinner is a **Jinshang folk-music performance** paired with **Pingyao street-food specialties**. A nighttime walk through Pingyao's lantern-lit streets is a fine way to close the evening.

Day 7 — Pingyao in Depth · Flying Rainbow Pagoda · Cave Courtyard

 Pingyao Ancient City Flying Rainbow Pagoda  Glazed Tile or Cloisonne Workshop +5 more

A full morning inside **Pingyao Ancient City**. Walk the 6.4-kilometre city wall circuit, explore the old county government compound — one of the best-preserved in China — and visit the **Rishengchang Exchange Shop** where China's first private banking system was born in 1823. The merchant courtyards and guild buildings that line the streets tell the story of how Pingyao's merchants became the wealthiest private financiers in the Qing empire.

Lunch is along **Ming-Qing Heritage Street** — small restaurants and stalls with menus that haven't changed much in a century.

The afternoon continues to **Guangsheng Temple**, built on foundations dating to the Han dynasty and home to the **Flying Rainbow Pagoda** — a 13-storey glazed-tile tower covered in polychrome ceramic figures and considered one of the finest surviving ceramic pagodas in China. The Yuan-dynasty murals inside the Water God Temple are an important but easily overlooked part of the same complex. A hands-on **Glazed Tile or Cloisonne Workshop** (*liuli* or *diancui*) connects the decorative arts seen throughout the region's temples with techniques still practised locally.

The evening arrives at **Mount Yunqiu Yaodong Courtyard** in Kangjiaping Village on Yunqiu Mountain. The **Kangjiaping night market** is worth a wander before settling in — stone-vaulted cave rooms built into a hillside village, warm in winter, cool in summer, and unlike any other accommodation on the route.

Day 8 — Yunqiu Mountain · Hukou Waterfall · Hot Spring Castle

 Yunqiu Mountain Hukou Waterfall  Chongning Castle Hotel +4 more


Yunqiu Mountain is a national 5A scenic area and a Daoist cultural mountain in southern Shanxi. The morning explores the **Taerpo Ancient Village** (*Taerpo Gucun*), a thousand-year-old settlement of stone and earth still inhabited by local families, and the **10,000-Year Ice Cave** — a permafrost cavern where ancient ice formations persist year-round inside the mountain, even through Shanxi's hot summers. A hands-on **Flower-Bread or Plant-Dyeing Workshop** — flower-bread shaping (*niehuamo*) is an intangible heritage craft passed down through Yunqiu's villages, and plant dyeing (*zhiwuran*) uses natural pigments from the mountain's vegetation.

Lunch is a **Yunqiu wellness banquet** (*Zhonghe Yangsheng Yan*), drawing on the mountain's Daoist culinary traditions.

The afternoon continues south to the **Hukou Waterfall** — the second-largest waterfall in China and the only major falls on the Yellow River. The river narrows from 300 metres to 50 through a single rock chasm, forcing the full current into a roaring, mist-filled spectacle. The viewing platform puts you close enough to feel the spray. A **donkey ride** along the riverbank is a lighthearted included experience.

The night is spent at **Chongning Castle Hotel** in Lingshi — a Qing dynasty fortress dating to the Yongzheng reign, once part of the Wang Family Compound estate. **Hot spring pools** drawn from 1,900 metres underground are open throughout the evening — herb-infused, flower-bath, and mineral soaking pools. Alternatively, explore the castle grounds at night or stroll along the Wang Family Compound pedestrian street outside.

Day 9 — Wang Family Compound · Zhangbi Castle · Rail to Beijing

 Wang Family Compound

Zhangbi Castle

 Glazed Tile or Cloisonne Workshop

High-speed rail back to Beijing

The **Wang Family Compound** — sometimes called the Folk Palace — covers 250,000 square metres of Qing dynasty merchant architecture, making it one of the largest private residential complexes ever built in China. The Red Gate Fort and High Family Cliff sections alone take most of a morning to walk properly. The carved brickwork, woodwork, and stonework across the compound's facades represent a level of craft investment that becomes comprehensible only when you understand the scale of Shanxi merchant wealth at its peak.

The afternoon continues to **Zhangbi Castle** near Jiexiu — a Northern Dynasties-era fortified village built above a network of 1,400-year-old military tunnels that run beneath the entire settlement. The above-ground fabric is a mix of defensive walls, old temples, and inhabited historic lanes; the tunnels below are a reminder that Shanxi's villages were designed not just for living but for surviving. A hands-on **Glazed Tile or Cloisonne Workshop** at the castle lets you try the decorative craft techniques that adorn temples and merchant estates across Shanxi.

From Jiexiu, board the **high-speed rail back to Beijing** — the modern contrast that closes the Shanxi arc, with the province's full historical span compressed into one smooth return. Arrive in Beijing and transfer to your hotel for a final night in the capital.

Day 10 — Departure from Beijing

After breakfast, transfer to Beijing Capital or Daxing International Airport for the onward international flight. The final morning is kept simple — no sightseeing is scheduled so the departure feels orderly rather than rushed.

If your flight allows extra time in the city, the guide can suggest nearby options. Otherwise, the journey ends here.

Before Booking







✓ What's Included

- **Transport:** Private airport transfers on arrival and departure in Beijing, Jiexiu–Beijing high-speed rail, and private vehicle for all ground transport throughout the 10 days including the Beijing–Great Wall–Datong drive.
- **Guide:** Professional bilingual guide for the full journey.
- **Accommodation:** 9 nights at 4-star equivalent or above, including three heritage stays — Mount Yunqiu Yaodong Courtyard (cave-courtyard inn), Pingyao Huiguan (walled-city guild hall), and Chongning Castle Hotel (Qing dynasty hot spring castle) — plus a scenic stay at Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel.
- **Meals:** Daily breakfast plus Donglaishun lamb hotpot, Huaiyang-style lunch, Peking duck dinner, farmhouse lunch at the Great Wall, Datong-style hotpot, a Northern Wei heritage banquet, Pingyao Jinshang folk-music dinner with street-food specialties, Ming-Qing Heritage Street lunch, a Yunqiu wellness banquet, and night-market evenings in Yingxian and Kangjiaping.
- **Entrance Fees:** All scheduled sites including Forbidden City, Summer Palace, Old Summer Palace, Badaling Great Wall, Yungang Grottoes, Yingxian Wooden Pagoda, Hanging Temple, Yanmen Pass, Pingyao Ancient City, Guangsheng Temple, Yunqiu Mountain, Hukou Waterfall, Wang Family Compound, and Zhangbi Castle.
- **Workshops:** Bracket-Joint Workshop at the Wooden Pagoda, Glazed Tile or Cloisonne Workshop at Guangsheng Temple and at Zhangbi Castle, and Flower-Bread or Plant-Dyeing Workshop on Yunqiu Mountain.
- **Experiences:** Jinshang folk-music dinner performance in Pingyao and donkey ride at Hukou Waterfall.
- **Hot Springs:** Mineral spring pool access at both Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel and Chongning Castle Hotel.
- **Pricing Promise:** Everything in the itinerary is included in the tour price. No hidden on-trip charges.

+ Booking Options

Everything in the itinerary is included in the tour price. No paid booking options apply to this route.

Prepare for Travel

-  Please book your own international flights.
-  Please arrange your own travel and medical insurance.
-  Please arrange your own mobile data plan before departure.
-  Check visa requirements for your destination before booking.
-  Bring any personal prescriptions needed.
-  Please inform us of any dietary needs, allergies, or restrictions when booking.

🏠 Most scheduled venues accept international credit cards. For smaller shops, please have local cash or a local mobile payment app ready.

🏔️ Full days of walking with some uneven temple and fortress surfaces. The Great Wall at Badaling involves steep steps. Yunqiu Mountain involves moderate trails. No extreme altitude.

👕 Beijing has hot humid summers and cold dry winters. Shanxi is drier and cooler. Layers recommended year-round.

? FAQ

How physically demanding is this tour?

Full days of walking with some uneven temple and fortress surfaces. The Great Wall at Badaling involves steep steps but is well-maintained with handrails. Yunqiu Mountain involves moderate trails. No extreme altitude or strenuous hiking.

How do we get around during the tour?

Beijing to the Great Wall and onward to Datong by private vehicle on Day 4. Jiexiu back to Beijing by high-speed rail on Day 9. All other travel between sites is by private vehicle.

What is the cancellation policy?

Our cancellation and refund policy is tiered based on how far in advance you cancel. Full details at [Terms & Conditions](#).

Where does the tour start and end?

Starts and ends in Beijing. Private airport transfers are included on arrival and departure.

Can I fly a drone during the tour?

China requires all drone operators (including foreign visitors) to register with the CAAC before flying. Many heritage sites and city centres are no-fly zones. Inform your guide in advance if you plan to bring a drone.

Should I book pre/post-tour accommodation?

The tour starts with a private airport transfer on Day 1 and ends with a transfer back on Day 10, both in Beijing. If your flight arrives the night before or departs the morning after, consider booking one extra night in Beijing at either end.

What are the heritage stays like?

Two nights are in distinctive heritage properties: a cave-courtyard mountain inn on Yunqiu Mountain and a Ming-Qing guild-hall courtyard inside Pingyao's walled city. Two scenic stays include a hot spring hotel outside Datong and a Qing dynasty fortress converted into a hot spring castle. All meet or exceed 4-star comfort standards.

What kind of craft workshops are included?

Three workshops are woven into the route: bracket-joint carpentry at the Wooden Pagoda, glazed tile or cloisonne craft at Guangsheng Temple and at Zhangbi Castle, and flower-bread shaping or plant-dyeing on Yunqiu Mountain.

Is the Great Wall section difficult to walk?

Badaling is the best-maintained and most accessible section of the Great Wall. It has paved walkways and handrails on the steepest parts. The north line is more challenging; the south line is quieter and gentler. Your guide will recommend the best route for your group.

Are the wellness sessions included in the price?

Hot spring access at both Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel and Chongning Castle Hotel is included in the tour price. The evenings at both properties are free for soaking and relaxing at your own pace.

Local Names

Yungang Grottoes YOON-gahng

45 caves of colossal 5th-century Buddhas carved into a cliff face

Pingyao Ancient City PING-yow

China's most complete walled merchant city — first private bank founded 1823

Hukou Waterfall HOO-koh

The Yellow River forced from 300m to 50m through a single rock chasm

Yingxian YING-shyen

The Wooden Pagoda town — world's oldest timber tower, built 1056

Guangsheng Temple gwahng-SHUNG

Home of the Flying Rainbow Pagoda — 13 storeys of glazed ceramic figures

Yunqiu Mountain YOON-chyoh

Cave-courtyard mountain inn and permafrost ice cave on a Daoist peak

Zhangbi Castle jahng-BEE

1,400-year-old military tunnels hidden beneath a living village

Datong DAH-tong

Northern Wei capital with intact Ming-era walls and cave temples nearby

Yanmen Pass yahn-MEN gwahn

The great northern gate where dynasties once held the steppe at bay

Shichahai Lakes shih-chah-HIGH

Three linked lakes that were once the Grand Canal terminus of imperial Beijing