



GUEST ITINERARY

CURATED CHINA JOURNEY
Dragon Discover


Shanxi


10 Days 9 Nights


Sacred Stone & Merchant Heritage

BEFORE YOU GO


Key Travel Prep


 Please book your own international flights.


 Travel accident insurance is included (500,000 CNY per person). We recommend supplemental medical and evacuation coverage for international travel.

 WiFi is available at hotels and most scheduled venues. For mobile data on the go, please arrange your own SIM card or portable WiFi device before departure.

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

 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.

Overview

Ten days across the full Shanxi arc — cave Buddhas, walled merchant cities, and the Yellow River.

The route covers Yungang Grottoes, the world's oldest timber pagoda, a cliff-face monastery, Shanxi Museum's bronze treasures, Pingyao Ancient City's intact merchant streets, a Daoist mountain with cave-courtyard lodging, Hukou Waterfall, and the grand estates that made Shanxi merchants China's wealthiest private bankers. Bracket-joint carpentry, immersive theatre, Shanxi noodle-performance dining, costume photography, TCM therapy, and hot spring castle soaks weave through the landmarks.

Trip Snapshot

Accommodation

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

Airport Transfers

Private airport transfers in Beijing on arrival and departure.

Guide & Transport

Your private group with dedicated bilingual guide and vehicle. Includes Beijing–Datong and return high-speed rail.

Meals

Daily breakfast plus Datong hotpot, Northern Wei banquet, noodle performance, Jinci heritage feast, Yellow River carp.

Signature Experiences

Bracket-joint carpentry, paper-cutting, flower-bread craft, glazed tile work, immersive theatre, costume photography, TCM therapy, and two hot spring evenings.

Trip Style

Heritage-led with wellness evenings. Full sightseeing days balanced by TCM therapy, foot reflexology, mineral spring soaks, and free time.

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

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.

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.

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 rail journey.

4-Star Equivalent

New-Gen & Modern City Hotels

4 Nights

Well-located properties across Beijing (arrival and departure nights), Yingxian, and Taiyuan. Includes Atour in Taiyuan and Park Hyatt Select in Yingxian — smart rooms, modern design, consistently well run.

4-Star Equivalent

Jizhou Hotel

1 Night

County-seat hotel in Jixian, the closest town to Hukou Waterfall. Functional and well-located for an early start at the falls.


Itinerary


Day 1 — Arrival in Beijing


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 the high-speed rail into Shanxi.

Day 2 — High-Speed Rail to Datong · Ancient City Walls · Mineral Spring Soak

 Datong Ancient City

 Datong-style hotpot

 Mineral spring soak


+1 more

Board the **high-speed rail from Beijing to Datong** — one of China's nine ancient capitals and the imperial seat of the Northern Wei dynasty. The train itself is part of the experience: smooth, fast, and a sharp contrast to the deep historical landscapes waiting at the other end.

After check-in at the **Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel**, the afternoon explores **Datong Ancient City**, where a 7.24-kilometre Ming-dynasty city wall still stands 14 metres tall. Inside, 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. Back at the hotel, the evening offers two ways to unwind: a **TCM acupuncture and massage therapy** session — a personalised treatment plan targeting pressure points to ease tension and restore circulation after the journey — or a soak in the hotel's **mineral spring pool**, rich in fluoride and sulphur compounds with recognised therapeutic properties. Both are included.

Day 3 — Yungang Grottoes · Wooden Pagoda · Yingxian Night Market

 Yungang Grottoes

Yingxian Wooden Pagoda

 Bracket-Joint Workshop

+2 more

The morning belongs to the **Yungang Grottoes** — 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 4 — Hanging Temple · Yanmen Pass · Noodle Performance Dinner

 Hanging Temple  Yanmen Pass  Shanxi noodle-making performance  +2 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, Li Mu Shrine, and wide views into the grassland landscape put a different kind of weight on the journey.

Dinner is a **Shanxi noodle-making performance** at **Shanxi Merchant Hall** (*Shanxi Huiguan*) — the province's handmade noodle traditions performed tableside as both craft and theatre. The evening includes a **foot reflexology or light massage** session back at the hotel, or a stroll along **Zhonglou Street** (*Zhonglou Jie*), one of Taiyuan's best-preserved historic commercial strips — both options are included.

Day 5 — Shanxi Museum · Jinci Temple · Into Pingyao


 Bird Zun  Jinci Temple  Pingyao Ancient City  +6 more


The morning in Taiyuan opens at **Shanxi Museum**, home to 400,000 artefacts and a collection strong enough to reframe everything seen so far on the trip. The highlight is the **Bird Zun** (*Niaozun*) — a Western Zhou bronze vessel shaped as a bird with an elephant-trunk tail, excavated from the Marquis of Jin cemetery and so significant it is permanently banned from leaving China. The Jinhun (Soul of Jin) permanent exhibition traces Shanxi from Neolithic origins through Western Zhou bronzes, Northern Wei sculpture, and Tang murals in a sequence that makes the province's layered history suddenly cohere.

After lunch, visit **Jinci Temple** — China's oldest surviving imperial shrine complex, founded in the Western Zhou dynasty and still fed by the Nanlao Spring (*Nanlao Quan*), a natural source that has run without interruption for three thousand years. The Song-dynasty Sacred Mother Hall and its 42 painted clay attendant figures are among the finest surviving examples of Song sculpture anywhere. Dinner is a **Jinci intangible heritage banquet** (*Feiyi Yan*), built around dishes tied to the temple's ritual traditions.

The route continues 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. The evening includes a **Jinshang folk-music performance** paired with **Pingyao street-food specialties**. After dinner, a **Jinshang costume photography session** (*luepai*) lets guests dress as a Shanxi merchant lord or lady for a professional shoot in the walled city setting — or simply stroll Pingyao's lantern-lit streets at your own pace. Both are included.

Day 6 — Pingyao in Depth · Heritage Workshop · Youjian Pingyao

 Rishengchang Exchange Shop

 Paper-Cutting or Face-Painting Workshop

Youjian Pingyao

+4 more

A full day inside **Pingyao Ancient City**. The morning walks the 6.4-kilometre wall circuit, the old county government compound (one of the best-preserved in China), the **Rishengchang Exchange Shop** where China's first private banking system was born in 1823, and the merchant courtyards and guild buildings that made Pingyao's merchants the wealthiest private financiers in the Qing empire.

The day includes a **Paper-Cutting or Face-Painting Workshop** — paper-cutting (*jianzhi*) is one of Shanxi's most deeply rooted folk crafts, and opera face-painting (*hua lianpu*) connects to the region's rich performance traditions. The guide facilitates the group's choice on the day. Lunch is along **Ming-Qing Heritage Street** — small restaurants and stalls with menus that haven't changed much in a century.

In the evening, the group attends **Youjian Pingyao** (*You Jian Pingyao*), a 90-minute immersive walk-through performance directed by Wang Chaoge that uses the whole of a purpose-built multi-room theatre to tell a story of merchant loyalty, plague, and homecoming. It is one of the more affecting pieces of live theatre in China and a genuinely different kind of cultural experience.

Afterward, drive to **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 7 — Yunqiu Mountain · Folk Craft Workshop · Yellow River Carp Dinner

 Yunqiu Mountain

Permafrost Ice Cave

 Flower-Bread or Plant-Dyeing Workshop





+3 more

Yunqiu Mountain is a national 5A scenic area and a Daoist cultural mountain in southern Shanxi — less famous than the headline sites but genuinely different in character. 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 mountain's **Permafrost Ice Cave**, a geological feature that has preserved ice underground year-round for tens of thousands of years.

The morning also includes a traditional folk-customs experience and 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. The guide helps the group choose on the day.

Lunch is a **Yunqiu wellness banquet** (*Zhonghe Yangsheng Yan*), drawing on the mountain's Daoist culinary traditions. From Yunqiu, continue south to Jixian. Dinner features **Yellow River carp** (*Huanghe Da Liyu*) — a signature regional dish that appears on every serious table in this stretch of the river valley. The evening includes a **foot reflexology or light massage** session at the hotel, or free time to explore the county town — both options are included.

Day 8 — Hukou Waterfall · Donkey Ride · Flying Rainbow Pagoda · Hot Spring Castle




 Hukou Waterfall  Flying Rainbow Pagoda  Chongning Castle Hotel  +2 more

The **Hukou Waterfall** is the second-largest waterfall in China and the only major falls on the Yellow River — and unlike most waterfalls, its power comes not from height but from compression. The river narrows from 300 metres to 50 through a single rock chasm, forcing the full current into a roaring, mist-filled spectacle that shifts with the season. The viewing platform puts you close enough to feel the spray. A **donkey ride** along the riverbank is a lighthearted included experience.

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.

The night is spent at **Chongning Castle Hotel** in Lingshi — the fort itself dates to the Yongzheng reign of the Qing dynasty and was once part of the Wang Family Compound estate before conversion. **Hot spring pools** drawn from 1,900 metres underground are open throughout the evening — the property offers herb-infused, flower-bath, and mineral soaking pools as part of the stay. Alternatively, you can explore the castle grounds at night or stroll along the Wang Family Compound pedestrian street outside.

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

 Wang Family Compound  Zhangbi Castle  Glazed Tile or Cloisonne Workshop

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.

In the afternoon, continue 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** (*liuli* or *diancui*) connects the decorative arts seen throughout the region's temples and estates with techniques still practised locally.

From Jiexiu, board the **high-speed rail back to Beijing** — the same modern contrast that opened the journey on Day 2 now closes the Shanxi arc, with the province's full historical span compressed into one smooth return.

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, Beijing–Datong and Jiexiu–Beijing high-speed rail, and private vehicle for all ground transport throughout the 10 days.
- **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 Datong-style hotpot, a Northern Wei heritage banquet, Shanxi noodle-performance dining at Shanxi Merchant Hall, a Jinci intangible heritage banquet, Pingyao Jinshang folk-music dinner with street-food specialties, a Yunqiu wellness banquet, Yellow River carp, and night-market evenings in Yingxian and Kangjiaping.
- **Entrance Fees:** All scheduled sites including Yungang Grottoes, Yingxian Wooden Pagoda, Hanging Temple, Yanmen Pass, Shanxi Museum, Jinci Temple, Pingyao Ancient City, Youjian Pingyao, Yunqiu Mountain, Hukou Waterfall, Guangsheng Temple, Wang Family Compound, and Zhangbi Castle.
- **Workshops:** Bracket-Joint Workshop at the Wooden Pagoda, Paper-Cutting or Face-Painting Workshop in Pingyao, Flower-Bread or Plant-Dyeing Workshop on Yunqiu Mountain, and Glazed Tile or Cloisonne Workshop near Zhangbi Castle.
- **Experiences:** Donkey ride at Hukou Waterfall, Youjian Pingyao immersive performance, and Jinshang costume photography session in Pingyao.
- **Wellness:** TCM acupuncture and massage therapy session in Datong, foot reflexology or light massage in Taiyuan and Jixian, and mineral spring pool access at both Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel and Chongning Castle Hotel.
- **Insurance:** Travel accident insurance included (500,000 CNY per person).
- **Pricing Promise:** Everything in the itinerary is included in the tour price. Optional packages and room choices, if any, are shown clearly before payment. 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.

 Travel accident insurance is included (500,000 CNY per person). We recommend supplemental medical and evacuation coverage for international travel.

📶 WiFi is available at hotels and most scheduled venues. For mobile data on the go, please arrange your own SIM card or portable WiFi device 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. No extreme altitude or strenuous hiking. Yunqiu Mountain involves moderate trails.

🧥 Shanxi has cold dry winters and warm summers. Layers recommended year-round.

? FAQ

How physically demanding is this tour?

Full days of walking with some uneven temple and fortress surfaces. No extreme altitude or strenuous hiking. Yunqiu Mountain involves moderate trails. The pace is designed to give recovery time most evenings with hot springs or free time.

How do we get around during the tour?

Beijing to Datong by high-speed rail on Day 2, and Jiexiu back to Beijing by high-speed rail on Day 9. All other travel between sites is by private vehicle. You do not need to arrange any transport yourself.

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?

Three nights are in distinctive heritage properties: a cave-courtyard mountain inn on Yunqiu Mountain, a Ming-Qing guild-hall courtyard inside Pingyao's walled city, and a Qing dynasty fortress converted into a hot spring castle hotel. All meet or exceed 4-star comfort standards — the heritage is in the architecture, not a trade-off against amenities.

What kind of craft workshops are included?

Four workshops are woven into the route: bracket-joint carpentry at the Wooden Pagoda, paper-cutting or face-

painting in Pingyao, flower-bread shaping or plant-dyeing on Yunqiu Mountain, and glazed tile or cloisonne craft near Zhangbi Castle. Each connects to local heritage traditions.

Are the wellness sessions and hot springs included in the price?

Yes. TCM acupuncture and massage therapy in Datong, foot reflexology sessions in Taiyuan and Jixian, and hot spring access at both Datong Huangjing Century Hot Spring Hotel and Chongning Castle Hotel are all included in the tour price. No separate payment or package is required.

Is travel insurance included?

Yes. Travel accident insurance is included in the tour price (500,000 CNY per person). We recommend supplemental medical and evacuation coverage for international travel.

What is the Youjian Pingyao performance?

A 90-minute immersive walk-through theatre show directed by Wang Chaoge, set inside a purpose-built multi-room theatre in Pingyao. The audience moves through scenes rather than sitting in a fixed seat. It tells a story of merchant loyalty and homecoming drawn from Pingyao's real history.

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

Jinci Temple JIN-tsoh

3,000-year-old spring still feeding a shrine guarded by Song dynasty clay maids

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