

Terracotta Warriors by Day, Neon on the Bund by Night — An 8-Day China Itinerary

Beijing, Xi'an & Shanghai — A Real-World, First-Timer's China Loop

DURATION

8 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

April–May or Sept–Oct

mild, dry air before summer humidity
and Feb's New Year crowds

FROM

\$2,150 USD / person

for 2 people

DAY 1

Arrival in Beijing — Tiananmen Square & the Forbidden City

Landing into Beijing Capital International Airport, the first afternoon eases into the trip with the ceremonial heart of the city — the vast paved expanse of Tiananmen Square and the 180-acre palace complex just beyond it.

Airport Transfer — Beijing Capital Airport to City Center

~45–60 minutes · Airport Express train ¥25 or private transfer ~\$35 USD

The Airport Express light rail links Terminal 3 to Dongzhimen station in about 20 minutes for ¥25, connecting onward to the subway; a pre-booked private transfer is slower in traffic but drops directly at the hotel door.

Beijing Capital Airport Express · www.bcia.com.cn/en/

Tiananmen Square & the Forbidden City

~3 hours · ¥60 (~\$8.50 USD) Forbidden City entry

The world's largest public square opens onto the vermilion walls of the Forbidden City, home to 24 Ming and Qing emperors — the Meridian Gate, the Hall of Supreme Harmony, and the Imperial Garden are the essential stops for a first pass through the 980-building complex.

Palace Museum (Forbidden City) · en.dpm.org.cn

Overnight — Hotel Côté Cour Beijing

From \$150–190 USD / night, for 2 people

A 14-room courtyard hotel built around a restored Qing-dynasty siheyuan, tucked down a hutong alley an easy walk from both the Forbidden City and the Wangfujing shopping street — quiet, brick-walled, and lantern-lit at night.

Hotel Côté Cour Beijing · +861065129099 · www.hotelcotecourbj.com

DAY 2

The Great Wall at Mutianyu

A full day trip north of the city to the Great Wall's best-restored and least crowded major section, riding a cable car up and a toboggan run back down between the watchtowers.

Day Trip — Beijing to Mutianyu Great Wall

~1.5 hours each way · included in tour price

Mutianyu sits about 45 miles northeast of central Beijing, reached by a scenic drive through the Huairou hills — far enough to thin out the crowds that pack the closer Badaling section, without adding a second overnight.

Mutianyu Great Wall — Cable Car & Toboggan

~4 hours on the wall · from \$135 USD / person (private guide, driver & cable car)

A cable car lifts visitors to Watchtower 14, from which the wall's crenellated ramparts run in both directions across pine-covered ridgelines — walk as far as Watchtower 20 for the views, then ride the 1,580-foot alpine toboggan slide back down to the base.

Travel China Guide · +862985236688 · www.travelchinaguide.com

Lunch — Local Farmhouse Restaurant, Mutianyu Village

~1 hour · Est. \$12–18 USD / person

Most Mutianyu tours build in a stop at one of the family-run farmhouse restaurants at the base of the wall, serving home-style Beijing dishes like stir-fried local mountain vegetables and free-range chicken.

DAY 3

Temple of Heaven, Hutongs & Peking Duck

A quieter city day: the perfectly circular Temple of Heaven at sunrise with the tai chi crowds, a rickshaw ride through the hutong alleys of old Beijing, and the city's signature roast duck dinner.

Temple of Heaven Park

~2 hours · ¥34 (~\$5 USD) through-ticket

A Ming-dynasty complex where emperors once prayed for good harvests, built on principles of circular heaven and square earth — arrive early to see locals practicing tai chi, ballroom dance, and sword fans in the surrounding park before the tour groups arrive.

Temple of Heaven Park · www.tiantanpark.com

Hutong Rickshaw Tour — Nanluoguxiang

~1.5 hours · from \$28 USD / person

A pedal-rickshaw loop through Beijing's oldest surviving alleyways, past grey-brick courtyard homes, corner shops, and the Drum and Bell Towers — a street-level contrast to the palace grandeur of the previous two days.

Beijing Hutong Culture Tours · www.travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/beijing/hutong/hutongtour.htm

Dinner — Da Dong Roast Duck, Nanxincang

~1.5 hours · Est. \$35–45 USD / person

Beijing's most celebrated Peking duck restaurant, known for a leaner, less-fatty roasting technique developed by chef Da Dong himself — the duck is carved tableside into some 108 slices, served with paper-thin pancakes, scallion, and sweet bean sauce.

Da Dong Roast Duck — Nanxincang · www.dadongdadong.com

DAY 4

High-Speed Rail to Xi'an — City Wall at Sunset

A morning bullet train covers in under five hours what once took overnight — landing in Xi'an with time to bike a loop atop the best-preserved city wall in China before dinner.

G-Train — Beijing West to Xi'an North

~4.5–6 hours · Second class \$72–89 USD, First class \$115–141 USD

China's high-speed rail network covers the 750-mile run to Xi'an at up to 186 mph, with around 23 departures a day from Beijing West Railway Station — reserve second-class seats a week or more ahead in peak season.

Travel China Guide — Train Booking · +18003153949 · www.travelchinaguide.com/china-trains/beijing-xian-highspeed.htm

Xi'an City Wall — Bike the Ramparts

~1.5–2 hours · ¥45 (~\$6.50 USD) per bike, ¥100 deposit, 3-hour limit

The only fully intact ancient city wall in China, a 40-foot-high, 8.5-mile loop wide enough for cars — rent a bike at the South Gate and ride the full circuit as the late sun turns the ramparts gold over the Bell and Drum Towers.

Xi'an City Wall South Gate Rental Station · www.xiancitywall.com

Overnight — Bell Tower Hotel Xi'an

From \$95–130 USD / night, for 2 people

A four-star hotel standing directly across the traffic circle from Xi'an's 600-year-old Bell Tower, with the Muslim Quarter's food streets and the Drum Tower both within a five-minute walk.

Bell Tower Hotel Xi'an · +862987600000 · us.trip.com/hotels/xi-an-hotel-detail-450319/bell-tower-hotel/

Overnight — The Waterhouse at South Bund

From \$210–260 USD / night, for 2 people

A 19-room boutique hotel built inside a converted 1930s Japanese army warehouse on the South Bund, all raw concrete and reclaimed steel with a rooftop bar looking straight across the river at Pudong's skyline.

The Waterhouse at South Bund · +862160805555 · www.waterhouseshanghai.com

DAY 7

Yu Garden, French Concession & Zhujiajiao Water Town

A full day balancing classical Chinese gardens against the tree-lined avenues of the old French Concession, with a half-day detour to a canal town that predates Shanghai itself by centuries.

Yu Garden & the Bazaar

~2 hours · ¥40 (~\$5.50 USD) entry

A Ming-dynasty private garden of rockeries, koi ponds, and zigzagging covered corridors dating to 1559, surrounded by the Yuyuan Bazaar's souvenir stalls, teahouses, and the century-old Nanxiang soup dumpling shop.

Yu Garden · www.yugarden.com.cn

Half-Day Trip — Zhujiajiao Water Town

~4 hours round trip · ¥30–90 combo ticket for canal-side sites

A 1,700-year-old canal town about an hour outside Shanghai, with stone arch bridges, gondola boat rides, and waterside teahouses that give a sense of what the region looked like before the skyscrapers — the Fangsheng Bridge is the classic photo stop.

French Concession — Wukang Road & Tianzifang

~2 hours · Free (dining and shopping extra)

Tree-lined streets of 1920s villas and consulates, anchored by the curved Wukang Building and the boutique-filled lane maze of Tianzifang — a leafy, walkable contrast to the Bund's high-rise density.

DAY 8

Farewell Shanghai — Departure

A last free morning for any shopping or sights missed earlier, then a transfer to the airport for the flight home.

