CATHAYROUTE

China Trip Planning Checklist

12 checks that save you hours, cash and awkward moments — in the order you should do them.

Print this page, or keep it on your phone and tick items off as you go.

A BEFORE YOU BOOK

- ☐ **Check your passport first, not last**
  Most nationalities need 6+ months validity and two blank pages. Renewal queues can eat your whole planning window.
- ☐ **Pick the right visa route**
  55+ nationalities can transit visa-free for up to 240 hours with an onward ticket. Staying longer? Apply for the L tourist visa — US citizens can get a 10-year multi-entry.
- ☐ **Fly open-jaw, not round-trip**
  Into Shanghai, out of Chengdu (or Beijing → Guilin). One-way legs on Chinese carriers rarely cost more than returning to your entry city, and you skip a wasted travel day.
- ☐ **Choose your season by region**
  Yunnan: Mar–May & Sep–Nov. Beijing/Xi'an: Sep–Oct. Harbin: Dec–Feb only. Avoid Golden Week (1–7 Oct) and Lunar New Year — prices double and trains sell out.

B MONEY, APPS & CONNECTIVITY

- ☐ **Set up Alipay or WeChat Pay before you fly**
  Link your Visa/Mastercard at home, where verification works. Street food stalls, taxis and temples often take no cash and no plastic — just a QR code.
- ☐ **Sort out internet on day one**
  An eSIM bought before departure activates on landing. Hotel Wi-Fi is fine but still filtered — plan around it rather than fighting it.
- ☐ **Install a VPN before you arrive**
  Download and test it at home. Once inside China, VPN provider sites and app stores are blocked, so “buy it later” is not an option.
- ☐ **Carry ¥300–500 in cash as backup**
  Small towns, rural buses, temple donation boxes and the odd taxi still run on cash. ATMs at Bank of China accept foreign cards.

C PACKING, PAPERWORK & ARRIVAL

- ☐ **Pack the boring stuff that saves a day**
  Type A/C/I plug adapter, a pack of tissues (many public toilets stock none), hand sanitiser, and a refillable bottle — hot water dispensers are everywhere.
- ☐ **Bring prescriptions in original packaging**
  Keep them in your carry-on with a doctor's note. Some common Western medicines are controlled in China, so declare anything unusual.
- ☐ **Save everything offline in Chinese characters**
  Hotel name and address, your first-night booking, passport photo page, visa page. Screenshot them — taxi drivers can read a screen, not your pronunciation.
- ☐ **Register your address within 24 hours**
  Hotels do it for you automatically. Staying in a private apartment or with friends? You must self-register at the local police station — the slip is checked on exit.

THE ONE THING MOST PEOPLE GET WRONG

Booking a 5-province itinerary in 10 days. China is the size of a continent — two provinces per week is a comfortable pace, three is ambitious.

For reference only. Visa rules, opening hours and transport schedules change — confirm with official sources before you travel.

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China at a Glance

The reference sheet you will actually use on the ground.

BEST TIME TO VISIT, BY REGION

Beijing, Xi'an, Shanxi	Sep–Oct (crisp) · Apr–May (mild)
Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou	Mar–May · Oct–Nov
Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi	Mar–May · Sep–Nov
Sichuan, Chongqing	Mar–Jun · Sep–Oct
Harbin, Changbai, Inner Mongolia	Dec–Feb (ice) · Jul–Aug (grassland)
Hainan, Xiamen, Hong Kong	Nov–Mar
Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Tibet	May–Oct

APPS TO INSTALL AT HOME

Alipay	payments, translate, ride-hailing
WeChat	messaging, payments, mini-apps
Amap (Gaode)	best navigation inside China
DiDi	taxi, English interface
Trip.com	trains, flights, hotels in English
Baidu Translate	camera translation, works offline

NUMBERS TO SAVE

110	Police
120	Ambulance
119	Fire
12301	Tourist complaint hotline
12308	Consular protection (24h)
+86 10 8531 3000	US Embassy Beijing (24h)

EIGHT PHRASES THAT GO A LONG WAY

nǐ hǎo	你好	hello
xièxie	谢谢	thank you
duōshao qián?	多少钱？	how much?
bú yào	不要	no thanks / don't want
cèsuǒ zài nǎr?	厕所在哪儿？	where is the toilet?
wǒ bù chī là	我不吃辣	I don't eat spicy food
mǎi dān	买单	the bill, please
bāng wǒ yíxià	帮我一下	could you help me?

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34 provincial PDF guides. $6.99 each — or all 34 for $79.

Attractions, transport routes, food picks, tourist-trap warnings and ready-made itineraries.

www.cathayroute.com

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