



Proper holidays from the UK and Europe, smartly priced

The Founder's China Route: London to Tokyo

The real trip behind SunSaver: a Hainan beach break, a bullet-train sweep across China from Chengdu to Shanghai, then Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, home via Guangzhou.

About 31 days

7 train legs

14 stops

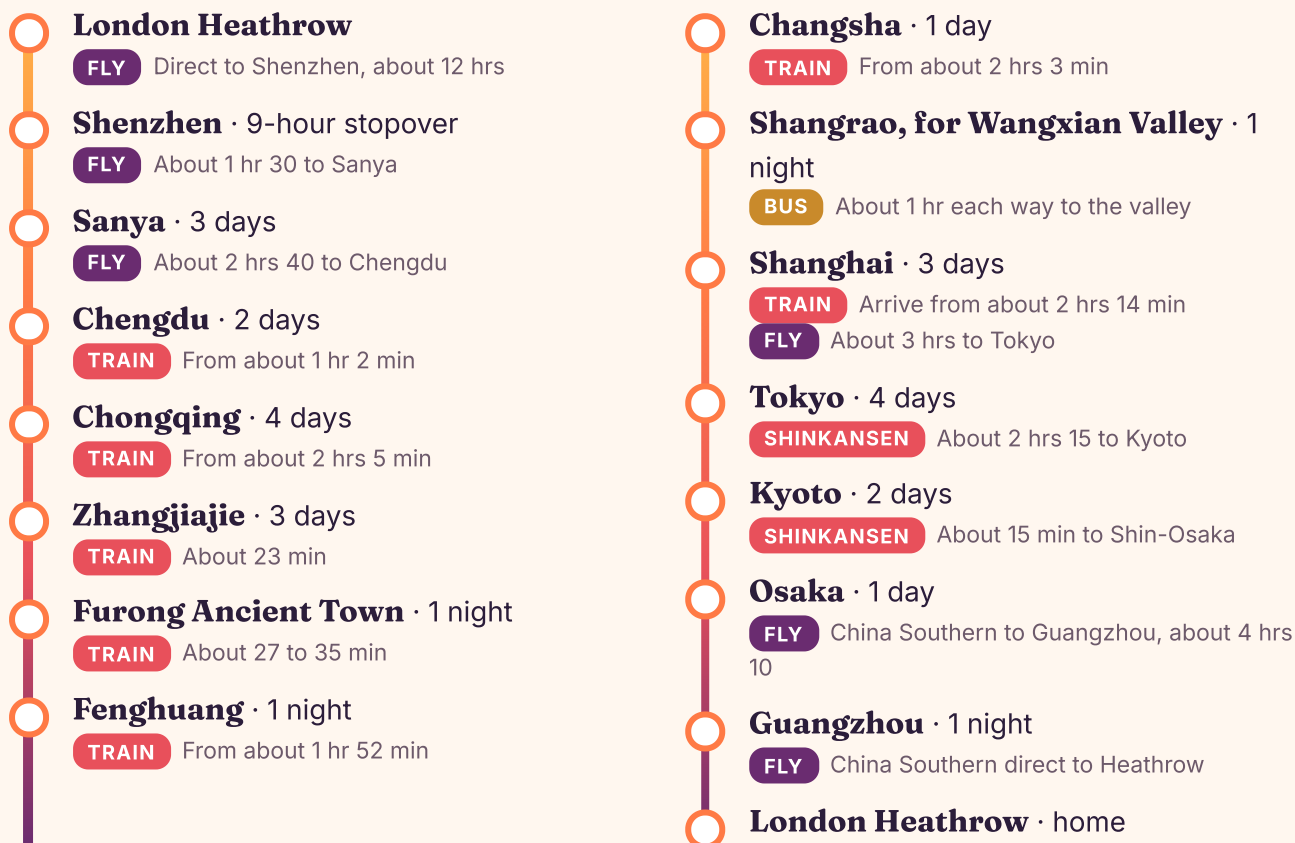
Verified train times

Free guide

THE ROUTE AT A GLANCE

One long, comfortable loop

This is the route our founder, Ra, actually travelled. It begins with a few days of sunshine, moves across China almost entirely by high-speed train, crosses to Japan and comes home on a direct flight. Use it as is, or as a starting point for your own version.



~22

days in mainland China, within
the 30-day visa-free stay

7

high-speed train legs

2

direct long-haul flights

Entry rules, checked October 2026

China: 30 days visa-free, until 31 December 2026

Ordinary British passport holders whose nationality is shown as British citizen can enter mainland China visa-free for up to **30 days** for tourism, business, family visits or transit. The policy started on 17 February 2026 and runs until **24:00 Beijing time on 31 December 2026**, according to the Chinese Embassy in London and GOV.UK. At the time of writing, no extension has been announced. **Travelling in 2027?** Check the embassy's latest notice before you pay for flights, and be ready to apply for a tourist (L) visa if the policy isn't extended.

Hainan (Sanya): its own 30-day rule

The UK is one of 61 countries eligible for 30 days visa-free in Hainan. The rule only applies if you **enter China directly at a Hainan port**, such as Sanya Phoenix or Haikou Meilan airport, and stay within Hainan. On this route you enter at Shenzhen first, so the nationwide 30-day rule is what covers your Sanya days.

240-hour visa-free transit

UK nationals can also transit visa-free for up to 10 days with a confirmed onward ticket to a third country or region, entering through an eligible port such as Guangzhou Baiyun. Osaka to Guangzhou to London qualifies as a transit, which is useful for the final night if you're travelling after the 30-day policy ends.

China arrival card

Since 20 November 2025, most foreign visitors complete a free arrival card online before landing. Use the National Immigration Administration website or app, or the official WeChat or Alipay mini-programme. Never pay a third-party site.

Passport

For China, GOV.UK says your passport must be valid for at least **6 months after arrival** and have **2 blank pages**. For Japan it must be valid for your whole stay, with one blank page.

Japan

British citizens don't need to apply for a visa before a holiday in Japan: GOV.UK says you're given permission to stay for up to 90 days on arrival. Register on **Visit Japan Web** before you fly to speed up immigration and customs.

Rules change. Check GOV.UK travel advice and the Chinese Embassy in London before you travel. This guide is information, not legal or immigration advice.

The seven train legs

These times come from October 2026 timetables published on gaotie.net, with spot checks against Trip.com. The example trains are among the fastest services. Train numbers and times change with each new timetable, so confirm on Trip.com before you book.

Leg	Fastest example	Typical train	2nd class fare*	Over 2.5 hrs?
Chengdu East → Chongqing Shapingba	About 1 hr 2 min · G8609, 09:25 to 10:27	1 hr 10 to 1 hr 40	About ¥164	No All trains under
Chongqing East → Zhangjiajie West	About 2 hrs 6 min · G2445, 09:52 to 11:58 (non-stop); also G2433, 14:18 to 16:27	2 hrs 30 to 3 hrs 5	About ¥246	Usually Only 6 of 23 daily trains are 2.5 hrs or less
Zhangjiajie West → Furongzhen	About 23 min · C7431, 10:20 to 10:43	About 23 min	About ¥40	No
Furongzhen → Fenghuang Gucheng	About 27 min · G6151, 10:07 to 10:34	About 33 to 35 min	About ¥53	No
Fenghuang Gucheng → Changsha South	About 1 hr 59 min · G221/G220, 15:32 to 17:31	2 hrs to 2 hrs 30	About ¥225	Rarely 18 of 19 trains are 2.5 hrs or less
Changsha South → Shangrao	About 2 hrs 3 min · G228, 12:30 to 14:33	2 hrs 40 to 3 hrs 30	About ¥316	Usually Only 3 of 44 trains are 2.5 hrs or less
Shangrao → Shanghai Hongqiao	About 2 hrs 15 min · G256, 11:02 to 13:17, or G228, 14:35 to 16:50	2 hrs 45 to 3 hrs	About ¥275	Usually Only 4 of 22 trains are 2.5 hrs or less

*Published second-class fares listed on gaotie.net in October 2026. Shown in yuan for guidance only; check live prices on Trip.com.

The 2.5-hour question, answered honestly

Every train leg can be done in under two and a half hours, but only on the fastest trains. On three legs (**Chongqing to Zhangjiajie**, **Changsha to Shangrao** and **Shangrao to Shanghai**), a typical train takes longer, at around 2 hrs 40 to 3 hrs 30. Book the fast services as soon as tickets open, usually 15 days ahead. You'll travel in comfort either way, with reclining seats, plug sockets and a trolley service.

Nice detail: **G228** runs Changsha South → Shangrao → Shanghai Hongqiao, so the same train serves both of the last two legs.

Sunshine, pandas and hotpot

Day 1

LONDON

Overnight to Shenzhen

Shenzhen Airlines flies Heathrow to Shenzhen direct (ZH888) on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. In the 2026–27 winter timetable it leaves Terminal 2 at 21:10 and lands at 17:15 the next day, after about 12 hours.

Day 2

SHENZHEN

Shenzhen stopover, then Sanya

Ra had a 9-hour stopover here. Leave your bags, take the metro into the city and enjoy Shenzhen Bay Park at sunset, the cafés at OCT Harbour and a Cantonese dinner. Then fly on to Sanya, which takes about 1 hr 30. If the late connection doesn't suit you, stay at an airport hotel and take a morning flight instead.

Days 3–5

SANYA

Three days of beach

Base yourself at Yalong Bay or Haitang Bay. Swim, sleep, and take a boat over to Wuzhizhou Island or visit the Nanshan cultural park. Sanya is at its best from November to March, so this is the perfect jet-lag cure before the trains begin. [Sanya guide](#)

Day 6

CHENGDU

Fly to Chengdu

Non-stop flights from Sanya to Chengdu Tianfu take about 2 hrs 40. Spend the evening strolling Kuanzhai Alley and have your first Sichuan dinner.

Day 7

CHENGDU

Pandas and teahouses

Get to the Giant Panda Breeding Research Base at opening time, when the pandas are most active. Have tea and people-watch in People's Park in the afternoon. [Chengdu guide](#)

Day 8

CHONGQING

Bullet train to Chongqing

Chengdu East to Chongqing Shapingba takes from about 1 hr 2 min, with trains all day. Go and see Hongyadong lit up after dark.

Days 9–11

CHONGQING

The mountain city

Watch the monorail pass through the building at Liziba, cross the Yangtze by cable car, wander Ciqikou old town and eat proper hotpot at least once. With four days you have time for a slower pace or a day trip to the Wulong karst landscape. [Chongqing guide](#)

Avatar mountains and ancient towns

Day 12

ZHANGJIAJIE

Train to Zhangjiajie

Leave from **Chongqing East** for the fastest trains (about 2 hrs 6 min on G2445). Check in near the city or at Wulingyuan, the gateway to the forest park.

Day 13

TIANMEN

Tianmen Mountain

One full day: the long cable car up from the city, cliffside glass walkways and the vast natural arch of Tianmen Cave. Go early to avoid the queues.

Days 14–15

FOREST PARK

Zhangjiajie National Forest Park

Two days among the sandstone pillars: Yuanjiajie and the Bailong Elevator on one day, Tianzi Mountain or Golden Whip Stream on the other. The park ticket covers several days, so check the current price and validity. [Zhangjiajie guide](#)

Day 16

FURONG

Furong Ancient Town

A 23-minute train from Zhangjiajie West to Furongzhen. The town sits on a waterfall and is at its most magical when lit up at night. [Furong guide](#)

Day 17

FENGHUANG

Fenghuang Ancient Town

About 30 minutes on to Fenghuang Gucheng. Stilted houses, stepping stones across the river and lanterns at dusk. Weekdays are calmer. [Fenghuang guide](#)

Day 18

CHANGSHA

A day in Changsha

About 2 hours by train to Changsha South. Visit Orange Isle, Yuelu Mountain or the Hunan Museum, and finish with a fiery Hunanese dinner.

Day 19

WANGXIAN

Shangrao and Wangxian Valley

G228 (12:30 to 14:33) is the fastest train to Shangrao. From the station, the scenic shuttle bus covers the roughly 50 km to Wangxian Valley in about an hour. Stay the night to see the cliffside village lit up. [Wangxian Valley guide](#)

Days 20–22

SHANGHAI

Finish in Shanghai

Take the bus back to Shangrao and a train to Shanghai Hongqiao (from about 2 hrs 15). Spend the next days on the Bund, in the former French Concession and Yu Garden, with a day trip to a water town. [Shanghai guide](#)

Japan, then home via Guangzhou

Day 23

TOKYO

Fly Shanghai to Tokyo

Frequent flights take about 3 hours. Haneda is the most convenient airport for the city. Settle in and have an easy evening. [Tokyo guide](#)

Days 24–26

TOKYO

Tokyo by neighbourhood

Asakusa and Senso-ji early in the morning, then Shibuya and Harajuku, Shinjuku at night, and a slower day in Yanaka or at a TeamLab exhibition.

Days 27–28

KYOTO

Shinkansen to Kyoto

The Nozomi takes about 2 hrs 10 to 15. JR Central's regular-season fare for a reserved ordinary seat is ¥14,170. See Fushimi Inari before 8am, explore Higashiyama's lanes and visit Arashiyama at dawn. For a one-way trip like this, single tickets usually beat the 7-day JR Pass, which rose to ¥53,000 on 1 October 2026.

Day 29

OSAKA

Osaka

About 15 minutes by Shinkansen, or around 30 minutes on a JR Special Rapid. Eat your way round Dotonbori and Kuromon Market and visit Osaka Castle.

Day 30

GUANGZHOU

Fly China Southern to Guangzhou

China Southern flies Osaka Kansai to Guangzhou daily (CZ390). It's currently scheduled at 16:00 to 19:10 and takes about 4 hrs 10. Spend one night in Guangzhou: dim sum, a riverside walk and Canton Tower lit up.

Day 31

HOME

Direct to London

China Southern's daily CZ303 flies Guangzhou to Heathrow Terminal 4. In the 2026–27 winter timetable it's scheduled at 13:40 to 18:35, with the larger Boeing 777-300ER from 11 December 2026 to 10 January 2027.

Make it your own

- Short on time? Cut Chongqing to two days and Tokyo to three.
- Want an open-jaw ticket? Book London to Shenzhen out and Guangzhou to London back on one multi-city search.
- Shangrao is also a stepping stone to Huangshan, the Yellow Mountain, if you have two extra days.

Flight times are from the airlines' published 2026 timetables and change by season. Confirm on Skyscanner or with the airline before booking.

How to book each part

SunSaver doesn't sell travel. You book each part yourself, directly with the partners we use and trust. Here's what we use for each type of booking.

Flights: Skyscanner

- Use **multi-city** search for the long-haul legs (London to Shenzhen, Guangzhou to London) and compare them with two one-way tickets.
- Use the whole-month view and set price alerts. Avoid Chinese New Year (6 February 2027) and Golden Week (1 to 7 October).
- Book the domestic flights (Shenzhen to Sanya, Sanya to Chengdu, Shanghai to Tokyo, Osaka to Guangzhou) once your long-haul dates are fixed.

Trains: Trip.com

- China rail tickets usually go on sale **15 days** before departure. Set reminders and book the fast trains the day sales open.
- Enter your name exactly as it appears in your passport. You'll then board with your passport, with no paper ticket needed.
- Check the station carefully: Chongqing East, not North or West, for the fastest Zhangjiajie trains.
- If a train sells out, join the waitlist and pick a backup.

Hotels: Trip.com, Booking.com and Agoda

- Choose free cancellation so you can adjust if the train times change.
- In Zhangjiajie, stay at Wulingyuan for the forest park and in the city for Tianmen, or split your nights between the two.
- In the ancient towns, book a riverside room. It makes the evening lights unforgettable.

Activities: Trip.com

- Pre-book timed entry where it's offered, such as the Tianmen cable car and the Panda Base.
- Carry your passport, because many Chinese attractions check ID at the gate.

Rail luggage rules

There's no checked baggage on Chinese trains, so you carry your own. The limit is 20 kg per adult, and each bag's length, width and height should add up to no more than 130 cm. Arrive 30 to 45 minutes early for security and ticket checks at the big stations.

Packing and entry checklist

Documents and entry

- ☐ Passport valid for 6+ months after arrival in China, with 2 blank pages
- ☐ China entry date on or before 31 December 2026, or a visa or a confirmed extension
- ☐ China online arrival card completed (it's free)
- ☐ Visit Japan Web registration
- ☐ Travel insurance covering China and Japan
- ☐ Printed or offline copies of flight, train and hotel bookings
- ☐ Hotel addresses saved in Chinese characters for taxis

Money and phone

- ☐ Alipay and WeChat Pay set up, with a UK Visa or Mastercard linked
- ☐ A backup card and some yuan in cash
- ☐ A data plan for China and Japan, either UK roaming or a travel eSIM
- ☐ Trip.com app with all bookings in one place
- ☐ An offline translation app and offline maps
- ☐ A power bank (in your hand luggage, not your hold bag)
- ☐ Suica, PASMO or ICOCA IC card for Japan

Packing

- ☐ A medium-sized case, ideally under 20 kg and within 130 cm combined dimensions, for the trains
- ☐ Swimwear and sun cream for Sanya
- ☐ Layers and a light waterproof for the mountains
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes with good grip for steps and trails
- ☐ A compact umbrella
- ☐ Socks without holes (you take your shoes off at many places in Japan)

On the day

- ☐ Passport in your hand luggage for every train
- ☐ Arrive at the station 30 to 45 minutes early
- ☐ Check which station you're leaving from
- ☐ Water and snacks for the longer legs
- ☐ Ticket screenshots and seat numbers saved

Everything on [sunsaver.travel](#)

- [The Founder's Route \(web version\)](#)
- [China by bullet train](#)
- [China travel hub](#)
- [Sanya](#)
- [Shenzhen](#)
- [Chengdu](#)
- [Chongqing](#)
- [Zhangjiajie](#)
- [Furong Ancient Town](#)
- [Fenghuang](#)
- [Wangxian Valley](#)
- [Shanghai](#)
- [Tokyo](#)
- [Guangzhou](#)

Build your own version in minutes

Reorder the stops, drop a few or add Huangshan, and get flight, train and hotel links for every leg with our free multi-city trip builder.

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Flights

[Compare UK to China flights on Skyscanner](#)

Trains and hotels

[Book China trains and hotels on Trip.com](#)

About this guide

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Prices checked October 2026. Train times and fares come from October 2026 timetables (gaotie.net and Trip.com). Flight times come from the airlines' published 2026 schedules, and entry rules from GOV.UK, the Chinese Embassy in London and China's National Immigration Administration. Everything can change, so check live prices and the latest rules before you book.