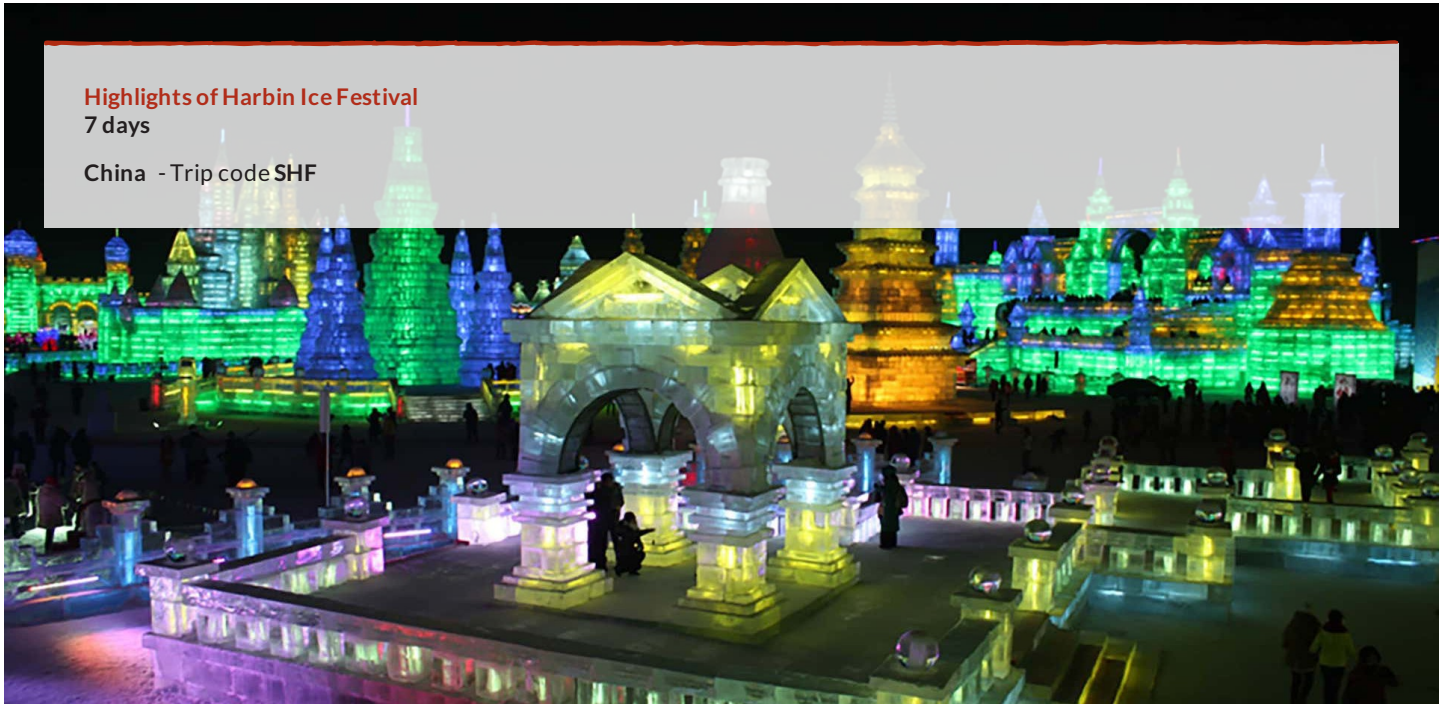


EXPLORE!

Highlights of Harbin Ice Festival

7 days

China - Trip code SHF



Highlights of Harbin Ice Festival

This exciting holiday travels to the far north of China, close to the border with Russia, where the winter months see the city of Harbin come to life with an incredible display of ice sculptures and snow carvings. After taking in the highlights of Beijing we travel by overnight sleeper train to the city of Harbin and spend time walking on the frozen Songhua River, marvelling at huge snow sculptures in Sun Island Park and taking in the brightly lit, life size buildings carved from ice at the Snow and Ice World.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Harbin Ice Festival** - Spend three full days exploring the incredible frozen city of Harbin and its dramatic snow and ice sculptures
- ★ **Snow and Ice World** - Climb up and slide down full size ice carvings of famous buildings
- ★ **The Great Wall** - Walk on the iconic Great Wall of China
- ★ **Beijing** - Stroll through Tiananmen Square and discover the sprawling Forbidden City

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Moderate

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:

12 - 18

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Beijing

Our trip begins today in Beijing. After checking in to our hotel there will be a short briefing before we head out to a local restaurant for dinner.



Accommodation: Xiao Xiang Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Visit Tiananmen Square and Beijing's Forbidden City

Our journey begins today with a drive to the impressive expanse of Tiananmen Square, the heart of Beijing, covering some 40 hectares and enclosed on all sides by memorials to the past and present. After visiting the square we will cross to the magnificent Forbidden City, the one-time home of the Ming and the Manchu (Qing) emperors and a treasure trove of eastern wares. So named, because for 500 years it was off limits to all but a privileged few, the Forbidden City is the largest and best preserved collection of ancient buildings in China, covering an area of 720,000 square metres and containing an incredible array of some 800 buildings. After our visit the rest of the day is free to continue exploring as you wish, perhaps taking the opportunity to explore the alleyways or 'Hutongs' that make up the older and rapidly disappearing residential quarters of this fascinating city. Then there are the numerous parks and markets, selling everything from live frogs to deep fried bluebottles and scorpions! This evening there may also be the opportunity to experience the unique atmosphere of a traditional Beijing Opera performance or acrobatic display (optional) or perhaps sample a famous Peking duck dinner.



Accommodation: Xiao Xiang Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Walk on the Great Wall and explore the Summer Palace

This morning we drive some 90km north of the city, to a particularly well preserved section of the Great Wall at Mutianyu, where two kilometres of restored wall gives us something of the idea of this immense structure in all its glory. Meandering across an undulating landscape of folded hills, this section of the wall was started by the Northern Dynasties during the 6th century, with much of the restoration that we can see today being completed during the reign of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Nearly 8 metres high and up to 5 metres thick, the wall provided a formidable barrier along the northern edge of the empire and its 22 watchtowers and enhanced defensive features indicate that this section was of particular importance. After making our way down from the wall we head back towards the city, stopping at the Summer Palace. Set in extensive manicured gardens, the Summer Palace was built in 1750 as a place for the ruling dynasty to relax. The palace itself sits on a hill overlook a large lake which at this time of year is usually semi-frozen. Locals may brave walking on the lake but Beijing doesn't get as cold as Harbin and the water isn't frozen solid so is best avoided! We then transfer to the train station to board our overnight train to Harbin. We travel in second class sleeper compartments which have four bunk beds, with bedding provided. We will be sharing with locals on the train and it's a great way to get to understand a little more of the culture. Each train carriage has a boiling water dispenser and locals bring on noodles and tea for the journey, we'll stop at the station and pick up the same supplies.



Accommodation: Overnight Train: Beijing/Harbin



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 4 - Discover incredible sculptures at Harbin's Snow and Ice World

We arrive in Harbin early this morning and transfer to our hotel for breakfast. Lying on the southern bank of the Songhua River, Harbin has long been known as the 'Ice City', the cold winter Siberian winds plunging the temperatures down to as low as -38 degrees C. One of China's most beautiful cities, Harbin is littered with Russian and European influenced architecture and even its local cuisine still retains the reminders of a time when this once remote enclave was the largest Russian settlement outside of the old empire. Today the city is famous for its annual Ice and Snow Festival, one of the largest in the world. We hope to see some winter swimming, before taking a stroll along the famous Zhong-Yang Street, which affords a chance to take in the Baroque and Byzantine inspired facades, Russian bakeries and the old Jewish district of the city. Later this afternoon we will head to the magnificent Snow and Ice world to see the beautiful ice sculptures that take on an almost ethereal presence in the gathering twilight. The sculptures are full size carvings of famous buildings, lit up from within to create an incredible icy city. Some of the buildings have built in ice steps and slides and tunnels to walk through so you can really get involved and create some incredible photo opportunities.



Accommodation: Longda Jiari Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Wander through the giant snow sculptures at Sun Island Park

This morning we have time to explore more of the festival with a visit to the Sun Island Park, site of the Snow Sculpture Exposition. To reach the park we walk across the frozen Songhua River which comes alive in winter with games, stalls and even horse and carriage rides taking place. Sun Island Park is one of the world's largest ice sculpture parks and it includes an outdoor ice and snow art museum housing sculptures that have been influenced by Chinese folklore and some of the world's most iconic images. We spend plenty of time here taking in the scale and talent of the sculptures. In the early evening, as the sunsets we visit the famous Zhaolin Park. The park is close to the centre of town and during the winter is filled with beautiful, brightly lit ice sculptures. Whilst the sculptures are not to the same scale as those at the Snow and Ice World they are very impressive and often interactive with ice

tunnels to walk through and sections you can climb on.



Accommodation: Longda Jiari Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Free time to explore Harbin

Today is left free for you to explore Harbin at your own pace. You can choose to revisit the Snow and Ice World, Sun Island Park or Zhaolin Park and spend more time wandering through the incredible sculptures. Or if you prefer you can spend time wandering the streets of the city, where almost every time you turn a corner you will be met with another impressive ice statue. The creations are so varied, from love seats to giant beer bottles, mythical characters to animal sculptures that your camera will be constantly in use. Harbin's architecture is also interesting with the European style buildings on Zhong-Yang Street and Saint Sophia Cathedral, a Russian Orthodox Church, well worth a visit.



Accommodation: Longda Jiari Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Trip ends in Harbin

Our trip ends in Harbin this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

Every year the city of Harbin plays host to an incredible festival where artists carve huge sculptures from snow and ice. This trip takes in each element of the festival and also the opportunity to explore Beijing and the Great Wall without the crowds of tourists that visit during the summer months.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 6
Lunch: 1



Transport

Bus
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

5 nights standard hotel
1 nights simple overnight train

Trip information

Country information

China Holidays & Tours

Climate

China has primarily a temperate climate, with a wide spectrum of extremes due to its huge area. Summer months are hot and rainy though in the south the climate is tropical and we can experience rain at any time of the year, often falling in sharp tropical rain-storms which are heavy but short lived. Winter is colder and drier, temperatures in Beijing can be as low as -12c.

Time difference to GMT

+8

Plugs

3 Pin Flat

Religion

Mainly Buddhist

Language

Mandarin

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

In Beijing there are some optional activities that you may wish to take part in: Chinese Opera performance - 150 yuan. Chinese acrobate performance - 190 yuan. Hutong tour - 130 yuan. While in Harbin there is some free time and you may wish to re-visit some of the festival sites. Snow and Ice World - 300 yuan entrance fee, a taxi there and back will cost around 150 yuan. Zhaolin Park - 150 yuan entrance fee. The park is walking distance from our hotel. Sun Island Park - 240 yuan entrance fee. You can walk across the river or a taxi there and back will cost around 100 yuan.

Clothing

It will be very cold so bring lots of layers. A thermal base layer is essential, along with good socks and gloves as your extremities will feel the cold first. It is better to have lots of thin layers so you can adjust each day. As a guide a pair of fleece lined trousers will be

useful, several long and short sleeved tops along with thin fleece jumpers and a good waterproof jacket. A hat is essential and a buff is well worth having to stop any drafts getting in.

Footwear

Good walking shoes with a good grip are as must as it will be icy underfoot whilst we are in Harbin, and we also spend time walking on the frozen Songhua River.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

A suitcase, rucksack or holdall are all suitable for this trip. Space for luggage on the overnight sleeper train is limited so so bear that in mind. Soft sided bags are also easier to store on the train as luggage is either stored underneath the bottom bunk or in a compartment over the door. You will need to carry your bag at train stations and hotels as no porters are available.

Equipment

You will definitely want a camera with you and because of the cold temperatures it is worth having a spare set of batteries as they can drain very quickly at low temperatures. If you are a keen photographer it is well worth bringing a tripod for the Snow and Ice World and Zhoalin Park which we will visit in the evening - even the steadiest hand might struggle when it hits minus 25 degrees centigrade!

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly you should allow approx. £20 for gratuities for local staff. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Country Information

China Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£5

Dinner price

£6.00 - 10.00

Beer price

£2

Water price

£1.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Renminbi/Yuan

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Either EUR, USD or GBP.

Where To Exchange

In all towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival. When changing money ask for a receipt so you can change Yuan back into your own currency when leaving China.

ATM Availability

All major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance

Most major restaurants and stores.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques can be changed in Hong Kong and at the Bank of China in all major cities but only during bank opening hours. Please note this is very time consuming and is not recommended.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Train

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click here.

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click here

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

China: A visa is required by all nationalities. A single entry visa should be arranged in advance of travelling. In order to apply for your Chinese visa you will need to submit supporting documents from our local supplier confirming your itinerary and travel arrangements, which we will obtain on your behalf. So that we can provide this for you, and to ensure all local arrangements are in place, we require a copy of your passport no later than 8 weeks before you are due to start your trip. Once we have your passport copy we shall process and pass on the documents you require 6-8 weeks before your trip, please be mindful of this when applying for your visa. If you require the supporting documents earlier than this, please contact Explore so we can arrange this. Passengers wishing to extend their stay in China should be aware that current visa regulations only allow foreigners to stay in the country for up to 30 days. Please consider this when planning your trip. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the

dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

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Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, infectious hepatitis, typhoid, tetanus and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Travellers may wish to take immunisation against Japanese Encephalitis. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.
