

# EXPLORE!

## Harbin Ice Festival

11 days

China, Hong Kong - Trip code SHC



## Harbin Ice Festival

On this exciting trip through China we experience Beijing and visit two festivals. We travel north to the city of Harbin to enjoy the vibrant and creative atmosphere of the annual Ice Festival. We also travel to Hong Kong, visiting the Terracotta Army at Xian on the way, to join in with the biggest event on the Chinese calendar - New Year!

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Harbin** - Wander through dramatic lifesize ice buildings, around huge snow sculptures and admire the brightly coloured ice lanterns of Harbin's annual Snow and Ice festival
- ★ **Hong Kong** - Explore Hong Kong and take in the spectacular New Year celebrations of the 'Year of the Rooster'
- ★ **Xian** - Meet the 'Terracotta Army' of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi
- ★ **Beijing** - Walk along the Great Wall at Mutianyu

### 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:**

**Full on**

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

**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 tour Beijing

Our tour begins today in Beijing. Depending on your arrival time there may be the opportunity to visit the Temple of Heaven.



**Accommodation: Xiao Xiang Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Discover 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).



**Accommodation: Xiao Xiang Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

## DAY 3 - Walk on the Great Wall then take an overnight train to Harbin

Begun 2000 years ago, the Great Wall of China snakes from the east coast to the Gobi Desert, stretching for over 5,000 kilometres across five provinces and two autonomous regions. It was originally designed to keep out the barbarian tribes that raided across the northern boundaries of the empire, later being strengthened and fortified in an attempt to keep out the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan. Despised for much of its life as a symbol of tyranny and oppression, the Wall exacted a heavy toll in both resources and lives, with thousands of conscripted workers labouring on the project over the centuries, many of them ending their days buried in its brick and stone ramparts. 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, the wall at Mutianyu 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. These magnificent parapets cross a breathtaking landscape of valleys, out towards the purple hills in the distance. En-route today we also hope to visit a Cloissonné workshop where you can see examples of this ancient metal-working technique. Late afternoon we transfer to the train station to board our overnight train to Harbin.



**Accommodation: Overnight Train: Beijing/Harbin**

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**Simple Overnight Train**

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## DAY 4 - Explore the ice sculptures of Harbin

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 these beautiful ice sculptures that take on an almost ethereal presence in the gathering twilight.



**Accommodation: Longda Jiari Hotel (or similar)**

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**Standard Hotel**

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**Single room available**

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## DAY 5 - View snow and ice sculptures before a flight to Xian

This morning we have time to explore more of the ice festival with a visit to the Sun Island Park, site of the Snow Sculpture Exposition. One of the world's largest ice sculpture parks 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 also visit the famous Zhaolin Park, home of the spectacular ice lanterns before we transfer to the airport for the flight to Xian (Chang'an), the capital of China's Shaanxi province and a city that once served as the Imperial powerhouse for 11 dynasties. Lying at the starting point of the Silk Road between Central Asia and Europe, the city was the gateway to a journey that spanned a diversity of cultures and landscapes, as goods from China made their way across mountains and deserts, into the exotic kingdoms of Asia and the Indian subcontinent and then into the unknown lands of the west.



**Accommodation: City Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Visit the Terracotta Warriors

Today we visit one of the highlights of not only Xian, but of China itself - the magnificent Terracotta Warriors and Horses who guard the Qin Shi Huangdi Tomb. Considered one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of the last century, there are thousands of life-size warriors here, dating from 200BC and guarding the tomb of the first emperor of a unified China. Each figure, measuring approximately 1.8 metres in height, was individually crafted to represent, some say, actual members of the Imperial Guard. When they were discovered in 1974 the warriors were armed with actual bows, crossbows, swords and spears, many of them still as sharp as they had been when they were buried. We will visit the three excavated pits that hold this incredible army, viewing an array of bowmen, charioteers and the incredible sight of a thousand soldiers lined up in battle formation before the tomb of the emperor. Our visit with a local guide will also include a video presentation and the bronze chariot exhibition, which features two superbly preserved half sized representations of the Emperor's chariot and that of the Imperial Fleet leader. The rest of the afternoon is free to perhaps take an optional bike ride around the city walls, or pay a visit to the National (Shaanxi) Museum, a rich repository of artefacts that span some one million years of Chinese history, including Buddhist sculptures from the 5th century, Confucian texts from the Tang dynasty and a number of remarkable steles, including one portraying a map of Chang'an at the height of its power.



**Accommodation: City Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - A free day to explore Xian's Muslim Quarter

Today we are free in Xian and able to take in some of the cities major sights, such as the Tang Dynasty Big Wild Goose Pagoda, a 64 metre high structure that supplies some quite superb views out across the city. We also pass by the Bell and Drum Towers and explore the intimate network of alleys and streets that make up the engaging Muslim Quarter. Said to be descendants of 8th century Arab soldiers, the occupants of these rambling quarters belong to Xian's Hui minority people and during our walk we will see the impressive Great Mosque, the largest in China. You may also have the chance to visit the spectacular Han Dynasty tombs (optional).



**Accommodation: City Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Fly to Hong Kong

Today we take a late morning flight to Hong Kong where, on arrival, we will transfer by bus to our hotel and our 3-night stay in this

most energetic of cities. Please note that during Chinese New Year many shops and businesses will be closed.



**Accommodation: Panda Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Explore Hong Kong and watch the New Year's Parade

This morning we take an orientation tour of Hong Kong, which will include Kowloon's bustling waterfront, a ride on the famous Star Ferry and some of the city's more memorable buildings. We will also take in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange and Des Voeux Road, wander through the shops and stalls of Li Yuen Street markets, visit the Man Mo Temple, one of the oldest in Hong Kong and finish up in Hong Kong Park. At lunch time we plan to have a traditional Dim Sum lunch to mark the start of New Year - we expect many Hong Kong families to do likewise. In the evening we watch the Chinese New Year's Parade. One of the country's most auspicious day's, New Year is the biggest event of the Chinese lunar calendar and is marked by a rich fusion of ancient tradition and a spectacular night parade that snakes along the harbour front area to herald in the Year of the Rooster. A cavalcade of colourful floats turns the heart of the city onto one giant street party, presenting spectators with one of the best loved and most eagerly awaited events in the entire New Year's festivities



**Accommodation: Panda Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

## DAY 10 - Watch the firework display over Hong Kong harbour

Today is left free for you to explore this fantastic city. Perhaps take the famous tram to the top of Victoria Peak for great views across the city. Alternatively it is possible to arrange a tour of Hong Kong Island and Aberdeen Fishing Village, a traditional set up that takes us back to a time before Hong Kong's skyscrapers defined the skyline. This evening there is an opportunity to continue enjoying the New Year celebrations by taking in the mesmerising firework display that lights up the spectacular backdrop of Victoria Harbour. The best point to make the most of the show is generally along the waterfront in the Tsimshatsui district of the city.



**Accommodation: Panda Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available

# DAY 11 - Tour ends Hong Kong

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.



# What's included?



## Included meals

Breakfast: 10  
Lunch: 2



## Transport

Bus  
Ferry  
Flight  
Train



## Trip staff

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



## Accommodation

9 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

### Hong Kong Holidays & Tours

#### Climate

Hong Kong enjoys more of a sub-tropical climate and the winter months tend to produce temperatures in the high teens, with January being more susceptible to cloud cover, with occasional rain and cold fronts.

#### Time difference to GMT

+8

#### Plugs

3 Pin Flat

#### Religion

3 main religions - Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism

#### Language

## Budgeting and packing

### Optional activities

Beijing - Opera performance £15.00, Acrobatic display £19.00, Hutongs tour £13.00, Summer Palace £15 including transport. Xian - Han Dynasty tombs £20.00, City Walls by bike - £10.00. Hong Kong - Hong Kong Island tour £30.00.

### Clothing

You are best to bring in multiple layers of clothes that can be added or removed according to your level of activity. Thermal winter clothing is ideal and a down jacket is recommended. We also suggest a warm hat, gloves and neck warmer. Salopets may be useful.

### Footwear

Warm insulated bootshoes for northern China, trainers for Hong Kong.

### Luggage

20kg

### Luggage: On tour

One main piece and a daysac. Remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage - so don't overload yourself. It is essential that your baggage is lockable; the airport authorities insist on this. Please be aware, before boarding a flight in China that the Chinese authorities will only allow bottles onto aircraft if they have been checked in as main luggage. Any bottles in the hand luggage may be confiscated.

### Equipment

A torch, water bottle, high factor suncream (at least factor 15), good quality sunglasses and a lip salve with sun protection. Please note that camera batteries loses their charge quickly in the extreme cold, so these may need to be recharged frequently in Harbin.

### 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. £25 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.

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**Lunch price**  
£7.5

**Dinner price**  
£14

**Beer price**  
£2.4

**Water price**  
£1.3

### Foreign Exchange

**Local currency**  
Hong Kong Dollar.

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Either EUR, USD or GBP

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## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, Ferry, Flight, Train

### Accommodation notes

#### Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

When travelling on sleeper trains we use 'hard sleeper' berths, these are berths with 6 beds (3 on each side) and a curtain to separate from the main carriage. Due to the nature of booking train tickets in China we cannot guarantee that the entire group will be in the same carriage and you may be sharing your berth with non-Explore passengers or both sexes.

## 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](http://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.

## **China Holidays & Tours**

### **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.

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