

Shanxi: Ancient China in Winter



trip highlights

Explore the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Yungang Grottoes and their extensive collection of Northern Wei Buddhist carvings

Visit the Hengshan Hanging Temple, built into a sandstone cliff above the valley floor

See the 67.31m / 221ft Yingxian Wooden Pagoda, constructed using traditional timber joinery without metal nails

Travel with experienced local guides, vehicle support and carefully designed logistics throughout

Discover UNESCO World Heritage-listed Pingyao Ancient City, including its walls, historic streets, temples and merchant heritage

View the seasonal ice formations of Hukou Waterfall along the Yellow River during northern China's winter



Trip Duration	8 days	Trip Code: SXW
Grade	Adventure touring	
Summary	7 nights hotel	

welcome to World Expeditions

For over 50 years, we've been creating high-quality, expedition-style adventures for active travellers with a curious spirit. From our very first trek in the mountains of Nepal to pioneering remote routes across all seven continents, our journeys are built for those who want to truly explore – not just visit.

At the heart of what we do is a simple philosophy: take the paths less travelled.

This means travelling with care, supporting local communities, minimising our impact, and unlocking experiences that most travellers will never have.

If you're ready to go further and dig deeper, we invite you to join us on the Shanxi: Ancient China in Winter, a journey that captures the essence of a unique adventure.

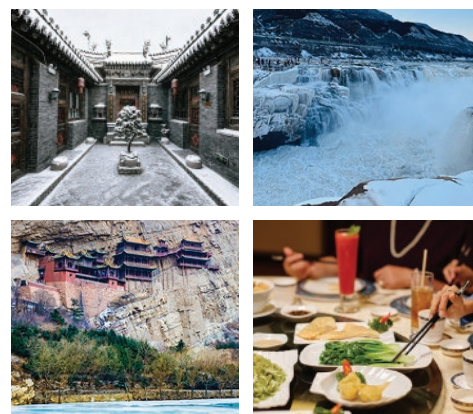
why travel with World Expeditions?

This itinerary brings together Shanxi's major architectural, cultural and winter attractions in one carefully sequenced journey. First-class rail travel and private vehicle transfers connect the region's historic cities, while guided visits provide access to Buddhist grottoes, ancient temples, timber buildings and merchant-era neighbourhoods. Included meals also introduce local dishes from northern Shanxi, adding a regional food experience to the cultural program.



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World Expeditions does not require single travellers to pay a surcharge for travelling alone. We will arrange for you to share accommodation with another traveller of the same gender and if we cannot match you up we will provide a single room at no extra charge. If you prefer not to share a single supplement is payable to guarantee your own room. Please refer to our website for the additional cost.

the trip

Travel from Beijing into Shanxi province to explore Buddhist grottoes, cliffside temples, ancient wooden architecture and walled towns in their winter setting. The journey links Datong, Xinzhou, Pingyao and Linfen by first-class rail and private vehicle, with visits to the Yungang Grottoes, Hanging Temple, Yingxian Wooden Pagoda and several historic temple complexes. Time in Pingyao reveals traditional lanes, merchant history and courtyard architecture, while regional meals introduce the hearty flavours of northern Shanxi. The journey concludes at Hukou Waterfall, where winter conditions may create ice falls, icicles and frozen formations along the Yellow River.

at a glance

DAY 1	JOIN BEIJING
DAY 2	HIGH-SPEED RAIL TO DATONG, YUNGANG GROTTOES
DAY 3	HANGING TEMPLE, YINGXIAN WOODEN PAGODA & XINZHOU
DAY 4	QICUN HOT SPRINGS & PINGYAO ANCIENT CITY
DAY 5	EXPLORE PINGYAO ANCIENT CITY
DAY 6	GUANGSHENG TEMPLE, GREAT PAGODA TREE & LINFEN
DAY 7	HUKOU WATERFALL
DAY 8	HIGH-SPEED RAIL TO BEIJING & DEPART

what's included

- 7 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 7 dinners as indicated in the itinerary
- Entrance fees and sightseeing specified in the day-to-day itinerary
- Comfortable (4* and 3*) hotel accommodation on a twin-share basis
- First-class rail travel from Beijing to Datong and Linfen to Beijing
- Expert local guides and a tour leader throughout
- Airport transfer on the final day

Local cash payments are becoming increasingly popular with many operators in the adventure travel industry. The policy seems to benefit the tour operators, more than the local economies or travellers, as it avoids local taxes and transfers the cost and risk of cash handling to travellers. In accordance with our Responsible Travel practices we have chosen a policy not to ask for such payments.

what's not included

- International airfares and departure taxes
- Visa fees (if applicable)
- Travel Insurance (compulsory)
- Arrival transfer to hotel in Beijing
- Meals and drinks not listed as included
- Personal expenses
- Tips and gratuities
- Any items not listed as included

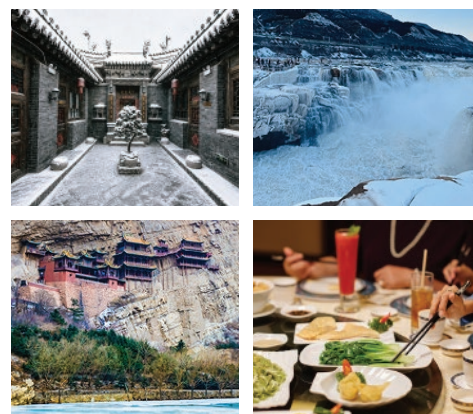
detailed itinerary

DAY 1 Join Beijing

On arrival in Beijing you will need to make your own way to the group hotel. The afternoon is free time for sightseeing in the central city district. Perhaps barter for a bargain in the colorful silk markets or do as the locals do and hire a bike for a spin

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trip dates

2026 27 Dec - 03 Jan

2027 17 Jan - 24 Jan
21 Feb - 28 Feb

fast facts

Countries Visited:
China

Visas:
Yes*

Vaccinations:
Please consult a travel vaccination specialist for up to date information

Private Groups:
Private group options are available for this trip*

Singles:
A single supplement is available for this trip*

Leader:
Expert local leader

Advice for people with limited mobility
This trip is not suitable for people with limited mobility.

*Ask our staff for more information.

through the bustling back roads of this vibrant city. This evening we will meet in the hotel lobby at approximately 18:00 (please check with reception to confirm this time) for a group meeting before we head out to enjoy our first meal together.

Accommodation: Dong Fang Hotel or similar

meals: D

DAY 2 High-speed rail to Datong, Yungang Grottoes

This morning we board a first-class high-speed train to Datong (2 hours), the historic northern gateway to Shanxi Province. After sampling Datong's famous sliced noodles for lunch, we visit the magnificent Yungang Grottoes, one of China's finest collections of Buddhist cave art and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Carved into sandstone cliffs during the Northern Wei Dynasty, the complex contains more than 51,000 Buddhist statues ranging from tiny carvings to monumental figures. During winter, snow-covered cliffs create a striking contrast against the ancient sculptures, offering exceptional photographic opportunities in a peaceful setting with fewer visitors. This evening enjoy a regional dinner featuring local Shanxi specialties.

Accommodation: Ailai Hotel or similar

meals: B,L,D

DAY 3 Hanging Temple, Yingxian Wooden Pagoda & Xinzhou

Today we explore two of Shanxi's most extraordinary architectural masterpieces. Our first stop is the remarkable Hanging Temple (Xuankong Si), dramatically suspended from a sheer sandstone cliff approximately 50 metres (164ft) above the valley floor. Built in 491 AD, the temple uniquely combines Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian traditions within its timber halls and walkways clinging to the mountainside.

Continuing east, we visit the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda, the world's oldest and tallest surviving all-timber pagoda. Constructed in 1056 without the use of a single metal nail, this remarkable 67.31-metre (221ft) structure has withstood earthquakes and harsh winters for almost a thousand years. Snow resting on its layered eaves highlights the beauty of its traditional timber construction before we continue to Xinzhou for the evening.

Accommodation: Fanhua Jinlun Hotel or similar

meals: B,L,D

DAY 4 Qicun Hot Springs & Pingyao Ancient City

This morning we enjoy a relaxing soak in the natural mineral waters of Qicun Hot Springs, a welcome opportunity to unwind before continuing our journey south. This afternoon we travel to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Pingyao Ancient City, one of China's best-preserved walled towns. After checking into our hotel within the ancient city walls, there's time to wander the narrow laneways lined with traditional courtyard houses, merchant shops and glowing red lanterns. In winter, a light covering of snow transforms Pingyao into one of northern China's most atmospheric historic towns, creating a memorable introduction to this remarkable living museum of Ming and Qing dynasty China.

Accommodation: Pingyao Grand Theater Guild Hall East Garden or similar

meals: B,L,D

DAY 5 Explore Pingyao Ancient City

Spend today discovering the rich history and architecture of Pingyao Ancient City. Walk sections of the impressive city wall before exploring historic merchant streets, the renowned Rishengchang Draft Bank and beautifully preserved courtyard

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thoughtful travel

Our World Expeditions adventures are grounded in a deep commitment to regenerative travel, going beyond minimising harm to actively restoring and enriching the places we visit. We partner closely with local communities, ensuring that our trips support cultural preservation, fair livelihoods, and community-led initiatives. Each expedition is designed to protect and regenerate natural ecosystems through low-impact practices, climate action, and education that fosters respect for biodiversity. We prioritise meaningful connections between travellers and place, encouraging a sense of stewardship that lasts well beyond the journey. By embedding sustainability into every layer of our operations, we aim not only to explore the world responsibly but also to leave it healthier, more resilient, and more vibrant for future generations.

trip grading Adventure touring

The theme behind most of our trips is action holidays and the fitter you are, the more easily you will adjust and enjoy yourself. On a trekking trip such as this you need to be in general good health and moderately fit. The grading overall would be moderate, with some “strenuous” activity. Before departure aerobic-type exercise, which increases your breathing, is an obvious advantage. We recommend that for about two to three months prior to departure you try to exercise most days for 30 - 45 minutes or aerobic type activity.

residences that illustrate the wealth of Shanxi’s influential merchant families. This afternoon we visit Shuanglin Temple, renowned for its remarkable collection of more than 2,000 painted clay sculptures, before continuing to Zhenguo Temple, home to one of China’s oldest surviving timber buildings dating from the 10th century. The quiet winter setting provides an excellent opportunity to appreciate these important cultural treasures before returning to Pingyao for the evening.

Accommodation: Pingyao Grand Theater Guild Hall East Garden or similar
meals: B,L,D

DAY 6 Guangsheng Temple, Great Pagoda Tree & Linfen

Leaving Pingyao behind, we travel south towards Linfen, stopping to visit the impressive Guangsheng Temple. The temple is famous for its magnificent Feihong Pagoda, whose colourful glazed tiles create a striking contrast against the surrounding winter landscape. Later we continue to the Hongtong Great Pagoda Tree, one of China’s most significant ancestral sites. For centuries this landmark symbolised the departure point for large-scale migration during the Ming Dynasty and remains an important place of remembrance for countless Chinese families. We arrive in Linfen later this afternoon for a two-night stay.

Accommodation: Swan International Hotel or similar
meals: B,L,D

DAY 7 Hukou Waterfall

Today’s highlight is a full-day excursion to Hukou Waterfall, the second-largest waterfall on the Yellow River. Winter transforms this powerful river into one of China’s most spectacular seasonal landscapes as freezing temperatures create dramatic icefalls, crystal icicles and frozen curtains of ice stretching across the gorge. Depending on seasonal conditions, sunlight reflecting through the frozen formations may create colourful displays above the snow-covered valley. After spending time exploring this remarkable natural phenomenon, we return to Linfen for our final evening in Shanxi.

Accommodation: Swan International Hotel or similar
meals: B,L,D

DAY 8 High-speed rail to Beijing & Depart

After breakfast we transfer to the railway station for the first-class high-speed train back to Beijing. Train journey is 09:50-15:38. On arrival, a transfer is provided to the airport where our journey concludes.

meals: B

This itinerary is subject to change with any change in Community regulations as well as Governmental changes and natural circumstances beyond our control.

country information

China is a destination that captures the imagination with its vast landscapes, enduring traditions and deep historical legacy. Stretching across nearly four million square miles (over 9.5 million square kilometres) and home to more than 1.3 billion people, it is a land of extraordinary contrasts – from alpine plateaus to subtropical forests, bustling megacities to quiet rural villages.

Long shrouded in mystery for Western travellers, China began opening its doors to tourism in the late 1970s. Since then, dozens of previously restricted regions have become accessible, and many ancient sites have been sensitively restored. Today, visitors can explore a remarkable

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adventure travel

By its very nature adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected. In remote and developing countries do not expect standards you are used to at home. Remote areas are sometimes unpredictable and itineraries may be altered. To get the most out of your adventure it is important that you are flexible, positive and eager to take on all the challenges that arise. If you are uncertain about your suitability for this trip we recommend that you speak with your consultant or travel agent.

important note

These trip notes represent the most current information for this itinerary, and may supersede any information on our website, including but not limited to the itinerary and price. The itinerary should be seen as a guide only. This itinerary may change at any time due to inclement weather, forces of nature and other circumstances beyond our control.

breadth of cultural and natural wonders – including ancient temples, imperial palaces, sections of the Great Wall, and sacred mountains such as Huangshan and Emei.

China is home to 56 officially recognised ethnic groups, each with distinct customs, dress, languages and traditions. This cultural richness is visible in everything from local festivals and tea ceremonies to regional cuisines and architectural styles. While Mandarin is the national language, dialects and minority languages are widely spoken across different provinces.

Modern infrastructure including high-speed rail, well-connected airports and an expanding domestic tourism network makes travelling within China increasingly smooth. Yet much of the country still retains its traditional rhythm, especially in smaller towns and remote landscapes where daily life continues as it has for generations.

This striking blend of old and new, along with the hospitality of its people, makes China a truly rewarding destination for those seeking insight, challenge and cultural depth.

climate

Winter temperatures vary across Shanxi, with Pingyao Ancient City typically experiencing the coldest conditions on the itinerary, where daytime temperatures generally range from -10°C to 0°C (14°F to 32°F). Datong is usually slightly milder, with temperatures of around 2°C to -6°C (36°F to 21°F). As this is a winter journey, roads and walking surfaces may be affected by snow and ice, particularly at mountain attractions, historic sites and around Hukou Waterfall.

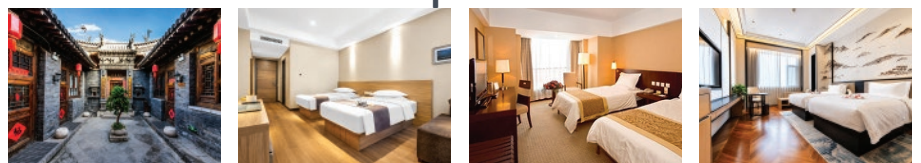
a typical day

Leaving the hotel after breakfast, each day is spent exploring Shanxi's remarkable cultural and natural heritage, travelling by private vehicle between some of northern China's most significant historic sites. Guided visits to ancient temples, UNESCO World Heritage sites, grottoes and traditional towns are balanced with opportunities to sample regional cuisine and take in spectacular winter scenery. Most days involve several hours of sightseeing with regular stops and short walks through historic precincts, temple complexes and scenic areas. Evenings are spent in comfortable hotels, where you can relax and enjoy local hospitality after a rewarding day discovering Shanxi's rich history and unique winter landscapes.

dietary requirements

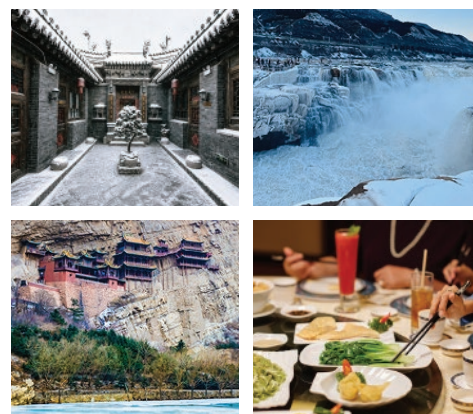
Provided we are advised in advance of your departure we are able to cater for vegetarian diets and can assist with medically recommended diets (allergies and intolerances). Please ensure you discuss your requirements with us well in advance (at least 1 month prior to your trip) to determine whether we can cater to such dietary requirements on your chosen adventure. Please note that options are likely to be limited in very remote locations or alternatives may be more expensive or unavailable. There may be times when those with special requirements may need to provide their own food. We are unable to guarantee a peanut-free or allergen-free trip, and therefore, we strongly encourage that travellers with life-threatening or severe allergies take all necessary medical precautions to prepare for the possibility of exposure. Passengers must travel with all necessary medications for food allergies and be capable of self-administering these medications.

accommodation on the trip



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Accommodation is provided in 3-4* hotels throughout the journey. The itinerary uses centrally located properties in Beijing, Datong, Xinzhou and Linfen, together with a hotel inside Pingyao Ancient City.

what you carry

In your daypack you will need to carry everything you need for the day such as rainjacket, water bottle, camera gear, valuables and personal items such as sunscreen, lip-eze etc. You will also be responsible for carrying your main luggage on and off the trains.

equipment required

The tour involves regular walking through grottoes, temple complexes, ancient streets, courtyards and scenic areas. While the main pathways are maintained and snow is cleared where possible, some surfaces may remain slippery. We recommend dressing in warm layers, including thermal underwear, a down jacket, waterproof outerwear, hat, scarf, gloves and sturdy footwear with good grip. Sunglasses are also recommended on bright, snowy days. As with all winter travel, snowfall and ice formations are seasonal natural phenomena and cannot be guaranteed.

vehicles & safety

During the course of your trip, we will use a variety of vehicles, all of which are fit for purpose and the conditions encountered. It should be noted that laws governing transportation safety may differ from those in your home country and whilst wherever possible, vehicles with seatbelts are provided, on occasion some vehicles may not have seat belts fitted.

visas

Australian, New Zealand, Canada and the UK passport holders can travel to China for tourism without a visa if their stay is 30 days or less. This visa-free policy is effective to 31 December 2026. If you are staying over 30 days you will need to apply for a visa before your trip.

If you require a visa, it is advisable to apply for your visa approximately 6 weeks before your intended entry into China, but not earlier than three months prior. Applying too early may result in your visa expiring before your arrival. Passport holders from Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States, please visit: <https://consular.mfa.gov.cn/VISA/> to be directed to your dedicated city and countries website for instructions.

If you have any doubt about your eligibility, verify the conditions for visa free entry with your nearest Chinese Embassy.

Depending on your passport and location, different requirements apply and they change at short notice. Please refer to websites above for the latest information.

All other nationalities should check with your nearest embassy or consulate.

You must complete an electronic Digital Arrival Card (CDAC) prior to arrival to China. This free, mandatory, and 100% digital process is done via the National Immigration Administration (NIA) website, generating a QR code for immigration inspection. <https://s.nia.gov.cn/ArrivalCardFillingPC/entry-registation-home>

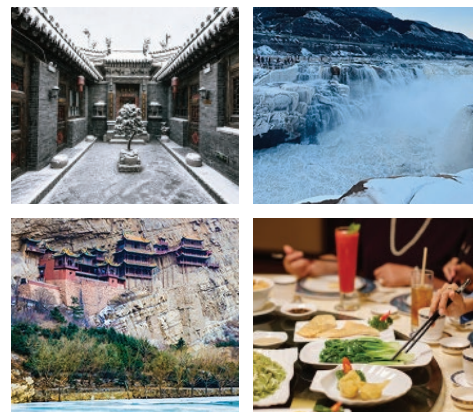
Please bear in mind that visas may be required for countries you are visiting en route or transiting through on the way to your destination. It is important that you check the requirements of all countries you will visit. Visa costs and requirements do change regularly so we suggest you check with your travel agent or World Expeditions reservations consultant. It is your responsibility to obtain all necessary visas.

webinars & events

Catch a Webinar – Live or On Demand - to learn more about a particular trip. Make sure the trip you choose is right for you. Watch them live, so you can ask our presenters a question, or catch the

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recording later at your leisure and watch it On Demand. Visit our website or keep an eye on our newsletter for upcoming presentations.

private groups

The adventures that you see on our website are just a starting point. We operate many of our trips, which means we can be flexible and create an itinerary to suit your interests and dates. Talk to our team, you'll be surprised how much more affordable it can be when you get a group of friends, colleagues, a club – you name it, to travel with you!

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social networking

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Share the love

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trip availability

We operate small group adventures, which means availability is always worth checking early. Check trip availability online or call our team who might be able to dig a little deeper for you to find what you want, when you want.

Many adventures require services that, if not available at the time you book (like an internal flight or permit) could mean the trip is unavailable. So, book early to avoid missing out on your dream adventure.

how to book

Check trip availability and book your tour online, or call or visit one of our offices. To book a trip, you will need to complete a Booking Form (online or request a PDF) and pay a non-refundable deposit. Please note that when booking our tours to not confirm any additional arrangements until all services related to your tour are confirmed by your dedicated Reservations Consultant.