

GREAT WALL OF CHINA

A Visitor's Quick Guide



Tourist map of Great Wall



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Welcome to the Great Wall of China

Getting an opportunity to visit the Great Wall of China is truly an once-in-a-lifetime experience. Getting to view places so different from our normal surroundings is in itself a fantastic experience. If you wish to savor the beauty of China you must visit the Great Wall and what better way to experience it than hike through the Wall. Hiking through the Great Wall is a very enriching way of knowing the history and geography of the place. But hiking alone without any guide of sorts can be a bit unnerving and daunting. We have therefore compiled a guide to the Great Wall which we are sure will help you immensely in your journey through China and more so as you hike through the Great Wall.

Average temperature

	MAX	MIN
January	36°F/2°C	16°F/-9°C
February	41°F/5°C	21°F/-6°C
March	54°F/12°C	32°F/0°C
April	68°F/20°C	46°F/8°C
May	79°F/26°C	57°F/14°C
June	86°F/30°C	66°F/19°C
July	88°F/31°C	72°F/22°C
August	86°F/30°C	70°F/21°C
September	79°F/26°C	59°F/15°C
October	66°F/19°C	46°F/8°C
November	50°F/10°C	32°F/0°C
December	39°F/4°C	21°F/-6°C

The main sections of Wall in Beijing

Getting an opportunity to visit the below mentioned sections are the most probable one's you would visit outside Beijing. They are:

- 1 Badaling
- 2 Juyong Pass
- 3 Jiankou
- 4 Mutianyu
- 5 Gubeikou
- 6 Jinshaling
- 7 Simatai

The Great Wall being huge, it would take a lot of time to traverse the entire wall but if you are interested in hiking a short stretch then Mutianyu is the ideal place for you to indulge in some bit of hiking.

Half day options

Mutianyu, Juyongguan, Shuiguan and Badaling.

Full Day options

Jinshanling, Jiankou, Huanghuacheng and Gubeikou

Easiest winter walks

Mutianyu, Badaling, Juyongguan.

Most interesting

Jiankou, Jinshanling, Simatai.

More suitable for photographer

Simatai, Jinshanling and Jiankou are great places for taking pictures of sunset & sunrise. Mutianyu and Huanghuacheng are equally beautiful.

1 Badaling

This is by far the most popular section of the Great Wall. Being easily accessible, it has become overtly commercialized with tour groups having included it as part of their tourist circuit. The fact that it is well-equipped with facilities like guardrails, restaurants, cable cars, viewing telescopes make it popular with tourists earning it the name of Disneyland of Great Wall.

During peak season this place is extremely crowded with all tour groups making it a point to stop here. The north-east portion of Badaling is usually more crowded, so if you are in search of some peace then it is better that you head towards the south-west part as it is relatively less crowded. About 2-4 hrs are required to cover the 3.7 km stretch.

Hiking difficulty

A very easy climb with smooth surfaces.

Getting There

A train leaves from Beijing North Station every 90 minutes.

2 Juyong Pass

First constructed in the 5th century, rebuilt by the Ming and more recently restored, Juyongguan is the closest section of wall to Beijing. Juyongguan has two sides: north and south. The south side is comprised of two lower sections which join part way up and is very steep. The "easy" side, the north is less steep on average and appears to have less steps.

Some tour groups probably switch to Juyongguan from Badaling because it is a little closer and also might be less crowded. As higher you are climbing the less people you will see. If it's too much of a challenge for you to climb the southern section, north eastern section of the Wall that goes across the river is a little less steep and not crowded. Both sections offer terrific views. You may prefer the quieter north eastern section. You won't see loads of souvenir stalls as you get to see in Badaling.

The hike up is definitely worth it as you get a really unparalleled view of the surrounding areas. The steps are wide enough for the amount of people climbing – if you have a heart problem or high blood pressure you may need to think about it. Be sure to get your running or walking shoes on.

3 Jiankou

Jiankou is remote and secluded as compared to Jinshanling or Mutianyu and as expected this portion of the Great Wall is for the adventurous in body and spirit. The path to the top is not properly paved with some of the steps missing and portions of the walls overgrown with trees. Here it is risky to travel without a guide as the paths can be slippery and dangerous. However, if you are prepared to brave this journey then you won't be disappointed at all. Travelling through this lonely stretch of the Great Wall will add that extra dimension to your experience. If you are of the adventurous kind and are physically fit you must not miss this hike. If perchance it's raining or snowing when you are there then do not undertake this hike as it can be risky.



4 Mutianyu

Mutianyu is a great option to overcrowded Badaling. Although it is fairly developed it is comparatively quieter and considerably greener as compared to Badaling. There are cable car facilities available, a great help for those who are not much interested in taking the stairs. 2 cable cars ferry passengers back and forth. Single one-way tickets are a bit expensive compared to a return ticket. Children are bound to have a fun day at Mutianyu and so also adults who can take ample pictures without being jostled around.

Hiking difficulty

The trail is 2.2 km long and hiking time generally takes about 2–4 hrs. The path is not steep at all so hiking this stretch is a pleasant experience in itself.

Getting there

Mutianyu is located at a distance of 95 km from Beijing and the travel time is around 2hrs and 30 minutes.

Bus No 867 departs from Beijing at 7:30 am and 8:30 am respectively and makes the return trip at 2 pm and 4 pm.

Another way to reach Mutianyu is to take 916 bus from Dongzhimen Station, but this bus doesn't go all the way to the top. It goes only up to Huairou Bus Shelter.

From here you have the option of taking a minibus or a rented car. A minibus ride would cost you about 40–50 Yuan.

You can get water at the top but as expected they are expensive, hence carry a bottle of water with you. Toilets facilities are a bit limited at the top so be prepared.

5 Gubeikou

What makes Gubeikou truly special is the fact that it has not been restored and has been pretty much left the way it was originally. Badaling and Mutianyu have not been able to avoid restoration – restorations that have decimated portions of the Great Wall to accommodate the large number of tourists. Gubeikou, on the other hand, has not been tampered with much and still maintains its

natural look. It therefore remains beautiful. About 2–3 hours are required to hike this 6km stretch which has some good portions and some difficult ones.

Hiking difficulty – Moderate

Since this place has not been restored the path is broken and there are steep hills to cross in some portions. The last leg of the trek involves crossing the Wohushan Mountain which is difficult to say the least and can only be attempted by experienced hikers. Therefore amateur hikers are advised to leave this trek alone.

Getting There

Gubeikou is located about 120 kms from Beijing and the travel time is around 3 hours. The ideal way to reach Gubeikou is to take a bus outside Sanyuanqiao subway stop on line 10. This will take you directly to Gubeikou town.



You can also take the 980 bus from Dongzhimen bus station but it doesn't go all the way to Gubeikou. It goes up to Miyun, a small town located on the route from where you have to take another bus to Gubeikou.

6 Jinshaling

Jinshanling famous for its 24 watchtowers, located near the town of Gubeikou is fairly underdeveloped. From here trekkers can go on a 10 km trek to Simatai West. The hike takes about 4 hours where one has to pass through some difficult paths with the road not being in good condition. Once in Simatai, you will have to purchase another ticket though.

If you wish you can also hike back to Jinshanling but you might face a bit of difficulty in finding public transport in Jinshaling. Of course if you have arranged a car beforehand then it is not much of a problem.

Hiking difficulty – Moderate

7 Simatai

This is a lovely portion of the wall and also one of my favorites. The only problem is that if you are visiting the Simatai Great Wall only you will be taken up there as part of a large group at a set time, either 10am or 2pm. If you have both the Gubei Town ticket and the Simatai ticket (Combo) you can visit Simatai at any time during its opening hours. The Simatai wall is constructed on mountain ridges and extremely severe and rugged terrain. Adjectives such as perilous, dense, diverse, artful and peculiar have been used to describe the uniqueness of Simatai. This section of the wall is 5.4 kms long and would take about 3 – 4hrs to hike.

If you are only going to Simatai Great Wall you have to reserve / pre buy tickets. 40CNY (trial opening price). Add 120CNY for the return cable car ride. We can help you with this 1 to 2 days before: www.wtown.com (The website is in Chinese only at the moment). Once you

register they will send a code to a nominated mobile phone. The mobile phone needs to have a Chinese SIM card. Because the pre buying of tickets is not English friendly at the moment, this is why you will need help.

Simatai has some unique features known as “obstacle walls”. Obstacle walls in effect are walls within walls where walls have been built into the already existing walls to create an additional line of defense against an invading force. One can take the cable car to the top and save time in the process. A round trip will cost you merely 80 Yuan. Hawkers however are undaunted by the harsh topography and can be found even here selling their wares.

Hiking difficulty – Very difficult.

Certain portions of this wall are so steep that one has to scramble over them and not hike them. Only those hikers who are truly experienced should undertake this hike. Still I would recommend this place; such is the beauty of it.

Getting there

Since reconstruction work is going on buses have stopped plying on this route.



Best Time to Go/Climate



Weather

Winter in China lasts from December through March while summers are dry and hot. Places that lie north of the Great Wall such as Inner Mongolia or Heilongjiang are colder than places that lie south of it. Here temperatures fall below freezing point, evidence of which can be found in the snow capped mountains surrounding the Great Wall. In the extreme north winters are often dry. During summer northwest China

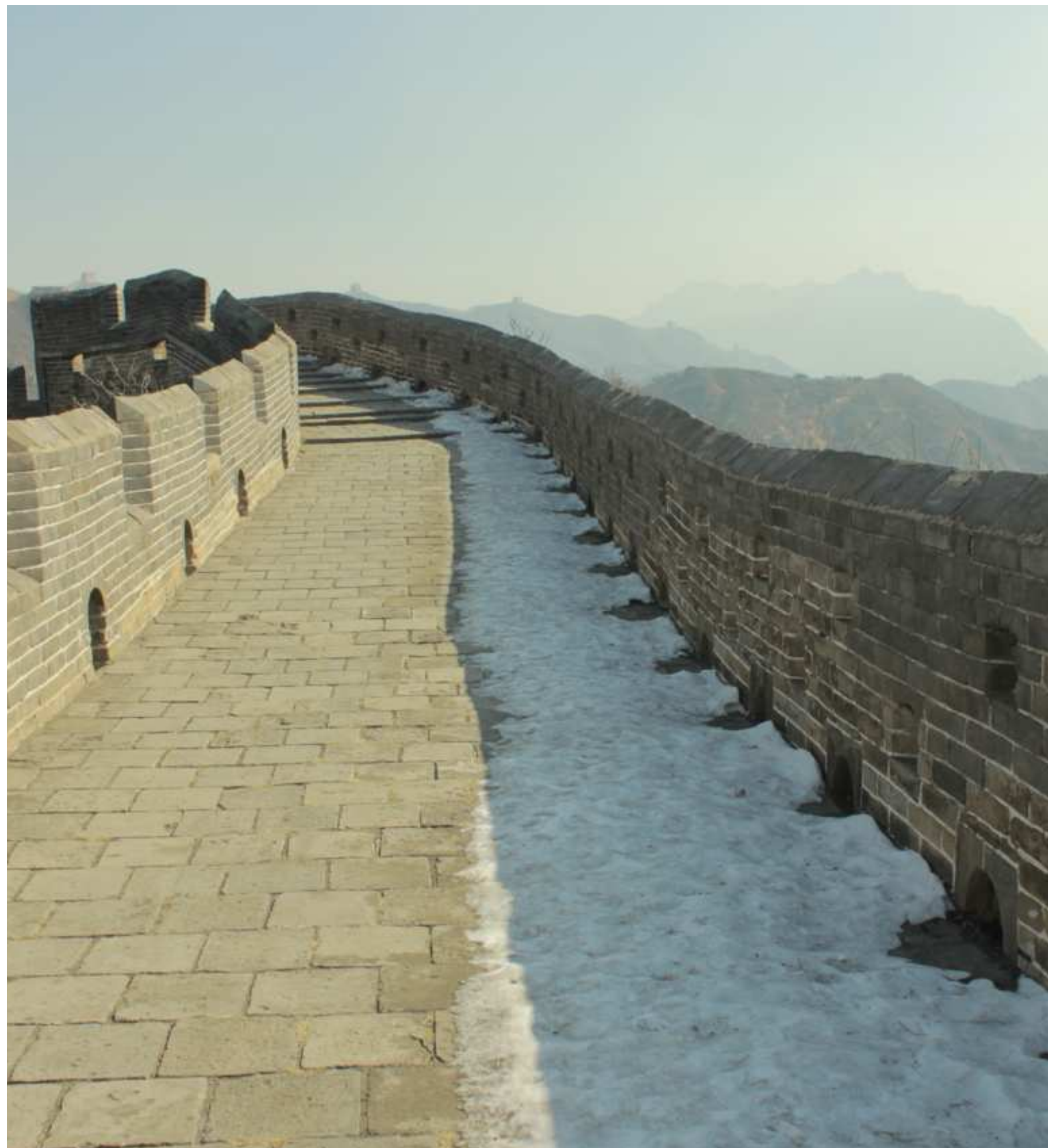
including the Great Wall are hot and dry whereas in winter the place is as cold as up north.

The summer season lasts from May to August with sometimes extending into September as well. It becomes extremely hot and humid when visiting the Great Wall during the summer months. The temperatures in Beijing sometimes reach levels of 43°C making travel difficult.

Rainfall in Beijing occurs mostly during the summer months but it receives less rainfall than South China. The ideal time to visit is spring (March to May) or autumn (September to early November). Although the days are hot, the nights are infinitely cooler.

Best Time to Visit

Beijing suffers from extremities of temperature. During the summer it is very hot while in



the winter it is cold and dry making for a difficult travelling experience. September and October are the months suited for travelling when the weather is pleasant. One can visit in

spring but then dust storms are more frequent leading to an unpleasant stay. In summer apart from the stifling heat there are a lot many people present. The crowds, the heat and the

pollution all combine to create a scenario which makes travelling and sightseeing difficult. One can go in winter but the winters are extremely cold and people might face difficulties.



What to bring



One of the essential pieces of item you must carry along with you is a good pair of hiking shoes. Running shoes are ok as long as it doesn't rain. Bring along with you quick dry fabrics like merino wool or polypropylene as they tend to dry faster than cotton or denims. If you are visiting in winter don't forget to pack your jacket, hat and gloves. The sun is very harsh in Beijing and if you do not want to burn yourself then bring along your sunscreen, sunglasses and sunhat.

Suggested clothes for walk, hike in Fall/Winter (October–March):

- gloves and scarf/headband
- 1 pair leggings, or light sweat pants
- 1–2 button-up-front long sleeve shirt
- 1–2 long sleeve t-shirts
- 1–2 short sleeve t-shirts
- 1 PolarTec fleece Jacket*
- 1 water resistant/windproof jacket (can be layered over PolarTec fleece)*
- 1 pair “hiking” boots or good walking shoes
- 1 pair light-weight trousers (in a neutral color-khaki, black, or navy)

Suggested clothes for walk, hike in Spring/Summer (April–September):

- 1 pair jeans
- 1 pair light-weight trousers (in a neutral color-khaki, black, or navy)
- 1 pair shorts or a skirt
- 3–4 short sleeve t-shirts or tank tops
- 1 button up front long sleeve shirt
- 1 light sweat shirt or long-sleeve t-shirt
- 1 water resistant/windproof jacket
- 2–4 pairs socks (depends on how much or if you plan to wear sandals)
- 1 pair “hiking” boots or good walking shoes
- 1 pair sport sandals

Accommodation

Near the Great Wall you can find local home stays owned by farmers. Although the amenities might be a bit basic the hosts more than make up for it by their warmth and hospitality. Staying in one of these farmhouses is a wonderful way of getting to know the locals and experiencing the culture of the place. The food that is served in these places is farm fresh and absolutely delicious. The rooms are equipped with ACs, television sets (some might not have TVs) and 2 single beds. Toiletries are limited so bring along your own set of towels and kits.



Tours and trips

There are three portions of the wall which deserve an entire day of trekking and those are Jiankou and Mutianyu in the west and Gubeikou, Jinshaling and Simatai West.

Gubeikou to Jinshanling then to Simatai West

5 6 7

The trek from Gubeikou to Jinshanling then to Simatai West takes about 9–12 hours and can be done in 2 days. As Simatai East is closed, the original hike from Jinshanling to Simatai can be done only halfway—Simatai West. You will go from tower to tower until you walk to tower 22 of Simatai West. Jinshanling to Simatai West hike is around 7–8 kilometres (4–5 miles) with a total vertical climb of

around 200 meters (660 feet). The track is well formed and easy to follow but there are some places where you must walk on vertical steps, rugged terrain or through broken towers.

Gubeikou to Jinshanling hike is a good complement to Jinshanling–Simatai. As part of Gubeikou goes through military area, You need to bypass the military section. Still this hike will offer you something less touristy and more challenging. If you are lucky enough to go on this hike you will be amply rewarded with wonderful views of the mountains and countryside and also get a unique picture of the un-restored wall at Gubeikou as compared to the restored wall at Jinshanling.

If you are planning to hike in this region during late Spring to early Spring you can sleep somewhere near the wall but if you feel that is a bit risky you can always put up for a night at the many hotels in the towns adjoining the wall.

Jiankou (Zhengbeilou) to Mutianyu

3 4

The Jiankou portion is the most difficult to hike through as it has steep walls and the path is quite uneven making hiking a difficult affair. The hike will take about 5–6 hours and can be completed in 1 day.

As the majority of Jiankou hikers are here for the first time, this hike is suitable for all age groups with average fitness. Children under ten to

senior citizens, have successfully hiked from Jiankou towards Mutianyu. You don't need ropes or climbing gear. No previous hiking / backpacking experience is required. However, weather conditions can make the hike a lot tougher than what you have expected. For example, in hot summer, you will feel much more difficult due to the heat and humidity. In winter, frozen snow and ice make the Wall difficult to walk through.



Safety Advice

1. During winter the conditions are less than ideal. Snow and ice make the path slippery and dangerous. It is therefore wiser if you travel in a group. If you are travelling alone, at least inform your close family and friends of your whereabouts. Anyways travelling in a group with family and like-minded people is always a lot of fun. Moreover when travelling in a group, people have a support system to lean upon; hence they are less likely to panic.
2. It is a wise idea to carry your own water with you. The hike necessitates drinking water at regular intervals. You can buy water at the top but that is expensive, therefore it is better to carry your own water.
3. Attempt the hike only if you are well-prepared for it. For instance, it would be foolhardy if you went on a 3 day hike without any advance preparation for it.
4. Ensure that you are wearing multiple layers of clothing so that you can remove or add clothes as the need arises.
5. Keep a mental note of landmarks as you hike your way up to the Great Wall. If in case you are unable to complete the hike and turn back, at least you know the way back.
6. Whenever humans come in contact with nature there is a possibility of being hurt. Do read the signs along the way to remain safe.
7. The weather is generally dry in Beijing. Liberally apply moisturizer to keep your skin hydrated.
8. Also remember to carry scarves and windcheaters as it is quite windy at the Great Wall.
9. If you are travelling in summer, remember to carry your sun protection gear with you as it becomes very hot during summer.
10. When hiking through the Great Wall take ample breaks as and when required. If necessary carry hiking poles with you to make the journey smoother.

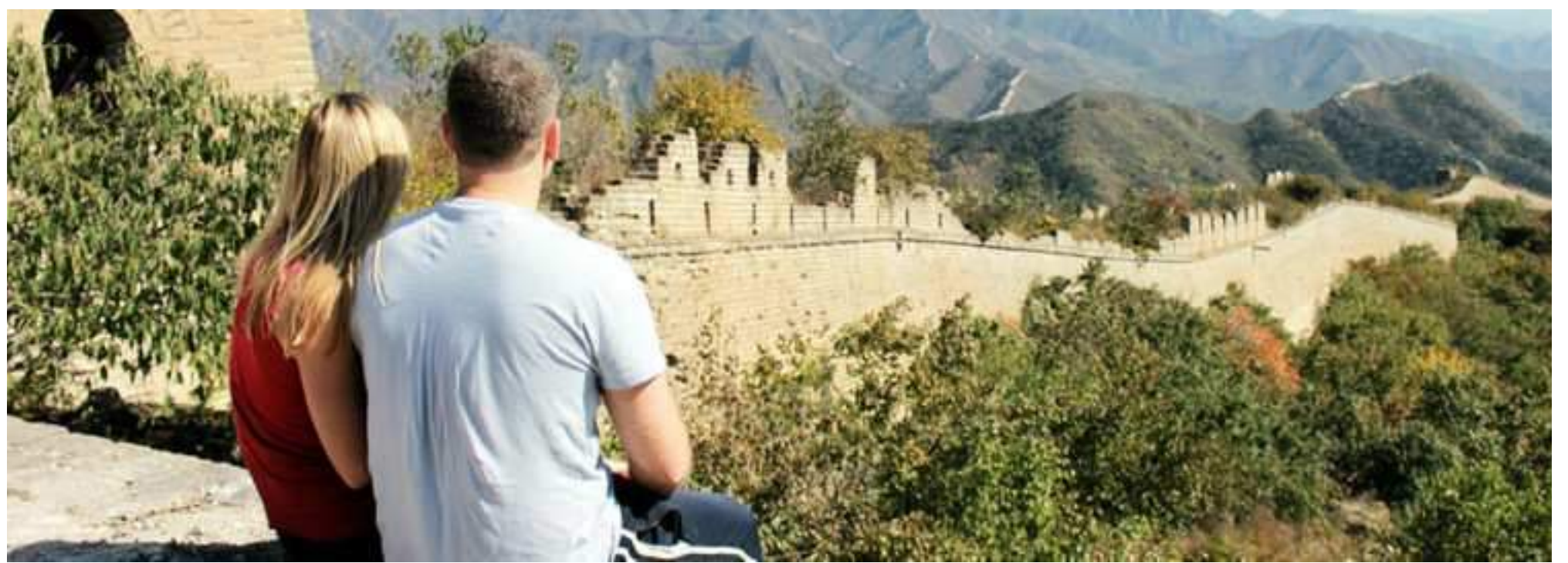
Money Saving Tips

1. If you are intent on saving a bit of extra money then use the services of a local travel agency to plan your trip. Not only are these travel agencies a lot more experienced as compared to their international counterparts but they charge a lot less too. You can research for yourself but if you have to use somebody's services then it has got to be the local ones as they ensure that the tourist gets the best possible deal.

2. If you want to hire a guide then be prepared to shell out 300–500 Yuan at the minimum depending on which place you are visiting. For instance, if you wish to see Beijing then the rates would be around 300–450 Yuan per day. If it is Xian it would be 300 Yuan per day while a Great Wall tour guide will charge you about 400 Yuan or more.

3. Keep some cash handy. If there is an option then pay by credit card so that you do not run out of cash when the need arises.

4. Traveling in the off-season is another great way to save money. During the peak season the rates are at the maximum. A better idea is to travel in the off-season when not only the flight and accommodation costs come down but even the entry fees of places. Add to it there are fewer tourists so you get a peaceful traveling experience.





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RESERVATIONS

Personalized Great Wall hiking & camping tours are booked on an individual / family / group basis and created especially for your interests, abilities, and time frame. Please contact us to learn more.

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