

China – Mountains, Monkeys & Terracotta Warriors

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

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| Day 1 | Depart London. |
| Day 2 | Xi'an. |
| Day 3/4 | Foping. |
| Day 5/6 | Tangjiahe Nature Reserve. |
| Day 7/8 | Wanglang Nature Reserve. |
| Day 9/10 | Jiuzhaigou National Park. |
| Day 11/13 | Wolong NNR & Balang Mountain. |
| Day 14 | Dujiangyan. |
| Day 15 | Fly London. |

Departs

April.

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code CHN06) or the Naturetrek brochure.

Grading

Grade A/B. Slow paced walks, but sometimes over rough ground. Evening spotlighting & some long travel days.

Focus

Birds & Mammals. Plus Terracotta Army.

Highlights:

- Visit the Terracotta Army of Xi'an.
- Spend time with the Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys of Foping.
- Spectacular mountain scenery.
- Early morning & evening spotlighting walks & drives.
- Search for Chinese Serow, Golden Takin, Chinese Ferret Badger & Tufted Deer.
- Birds including Golden Pheasant, Grandala, Little Forktail and the rare Asian Crested Ibis.
- Led by expert naturalist guides.



From the top: Jiuzhaigou National Park, Blue Eared-pheasant & Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys



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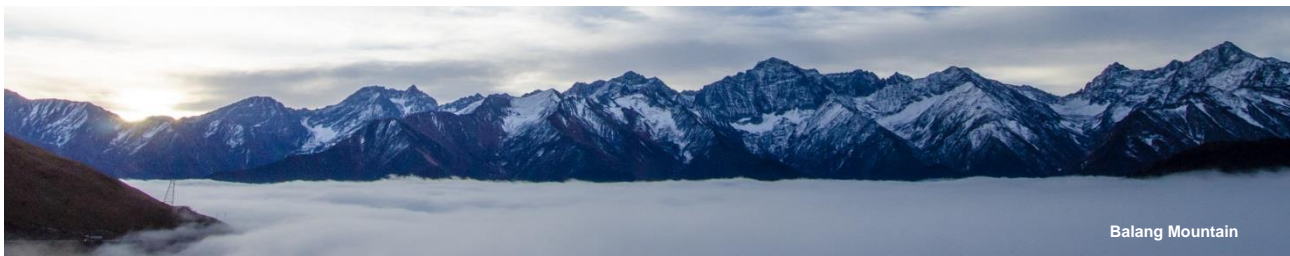
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Introduction

China may be the most populous country on Earth, but there are still corners of this vast and beautiful land where the wildlife reigns supreme. Spectacular national parks and reserves, such as Tangjiahe, Foping and Jiuzhaigou, protect some of the country's most exciting mammals and birds, as well as some truly awe-inspiring landscapes. The provinces of Shaanxi and Sichuan lie in the mountainous heart of China, at the foot of the great Tibetan Plateau. Here, forested hills and high alpine meadows are home to some of Asia's most sought-after mammals including the rare Golden Snub-nosed Monkey and Golden Takin, plus many colourful birds such as White-throated Redstart and Blue Eared-pheasant. Indeed, in a few select corners of the most remote and inaccessible reserves, China's star inhabitant, the Giant Panda, still roams free! These two provinces are also rich in cultural, as well as natural, history and no visit to the region would be complete without time in the company of Xi'an's Terracotta Warriors, one of the world's great archaeological treasures!

This new tour commences with a flight to the city of Xi'an and a visit to the Terracotta Warriors which date back 2,000 years to the reign of China's first emperor. Moving on, we will visit Foping Nature Reserve to view its Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys, one of the most bizarre – but at the same time beautiful – species of primate. Then we will cross into Sichuan, stopping to view the endangered Asian Crested Ibis en route, for two nights at Tangjiahe Nature Reserve. Here, on a series of day walks and night drives, we will look for Tufted Deer, Hog-nosed Badger and perhaps even Chinese Leopard Cat, plus Tawny Fish Owl and Little Forktail. After two nights in Wanlang Nature Reserve, on Sichuan's northern border, and a further two nights in the spectacular Jiuzhaigou National Park, we will move on to Wolong Nature Reserve for a 3-night stay. Here we will ascend Balang Mountain to 4,500 metres, where we will be rewarded with the most dramatic of views and, hopefully, find both Tibetan Snowcock and the stunning Grandala. Although visitor access to the habitats of wild Giant Pandas is no longer permitted, we will end our tour with a visit to the Dujiangyan Giant Panda Centre, near Chengdu, a facility that specialises in the rehabilitation of captive-born pandas with the goal of reintroducing them into the wild.



Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart London

We depart London Heathrow's Airport on an overnight flight to Hong Kong.

Day 2

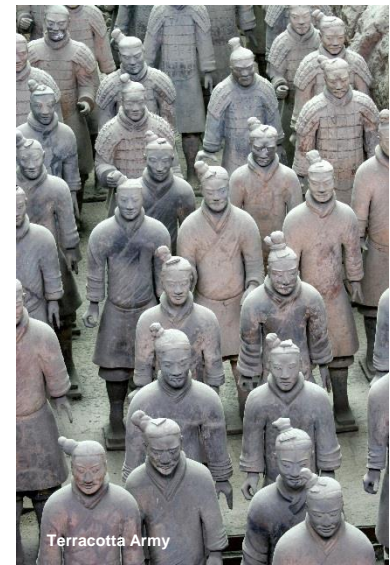
Xi'an

Following a change of aircraft in Hong Kong we complete our journey to Xi'an, arriving in the mid-afternoon. Xi'an, with its large international airport and towering skyscrapers is one of China's modern 'mega-cities'. This huge metropolis, however, also has a long and fascinating history and its ancient rulers have been key players in the shaping of Chinese culture. Here we will meet our local naturalist guide and will then transfer to hotel in the centre of the city. Depending on the time of our arrival, we can eat in the vicinity of Xi'an's ancient city and walk along the old city walls which were originally built in the 14th century under the reign of the Hongwu Emperor, the founding emperor of China's Ming Dynasty.

Day 3

Foping

We will spend this morning in the company of one of the world's great archeological treasures, the Terracotta Army. Discovered in 1974 by a group of peasant farmers digging a well, the Terracotta Warriors are, without doubt, one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century. The 6,000 figures and horses, many of which have been beautifully restored, face east in a rectangular battle formation and guard the tomb of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang who ruled in the late 3rd Century BC. Nowadays the area is protected from the elements by two large buildings that offer excellent views of the main burial pits, where visitors can both view the sheer number of warriors and better understand the excavation, conservation and restoration processes. The parkland around the museum is also home to an interesting variety of birds including Eastern Azure-winged Magpie, White-cheeked and Red-billed Starlings, and, if lucky, Chinese Grosbeak.



Terracotta Army

The Terracotta Army is around one and a half hours from our hotel in Xi'an and a further three hours from Foping, our next destination where we will spend two nights. On arrival into Foping, if time permits, we will explore close to our hotel in search of some of the commoner farmland and woodland species such as Red-billed Blue Magpie, Collared Finchbill and Black-throated Bushtit. More difficult, but always possible are Wallcreeper and Ibisbill, both of which have been found close to the town!

Day 4

Foping



Golden Snub-nosed Monkey

The town of Foping shares its name with the world-famous Foping National Nature Reserve which focuses on the conservation and protection of Giant Pandas. The main part of the reserve – in which the wild pandas roam – has been closed to the public for nearly a decade, but we can still visit a park on its edge called 'Panda Valley'. Although the only Giant Pandas to be seen here will be in an enclosure, we will be able to enjoy close views of a troop of habituated, but totally wild, Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys. This endangered and striking-looking primate, with its strange nose, blue lips and golden shaggy pelt, is endemic to central China. They inhabit temperate mountain forests between 1,500 to 3,400 metres in altitude, and in most of their very

restrictive range are shy and difficult to observe. The troops at Foping, however, are now very tolerant of humans and we hope for wonderful encounters with this endearing primate during our time here and plenty of excellent photographic opportunities.

As we walk through the park we will also keep our eyes open for birds which may include Brown Dipper, Little Forktail and Plumbeous Redstart on the fast-flowing mountain streams, plus Blue Whistling Thrush, White-throated Laughing-thrush and various yuhinas, fulvettas and flycatchers. If fortunate, there's even the chance of finding a spectacular Golden Pheasant, creeping around in the base of the bamboo. After a busy day we will return to our comfortable hotel in the town of Foping.

Day 5

Tangjiahe Nature Reserve



Asian Crested Ibis

Today we have a long drive of around eight hours out of the province of Shaanxi and into neighbouring Sichuan. Our ultimate destination is Tangjiahe Nature Reserve, but before we reach the provincial border we will stop at Yangxian to look for the Asian Crested Ibis. This is one of the rarest birds in the world, but one that has made a remarkable recovery from a low of just seven birds in the early 1980s to the current population of around 500 individuals. As well as looking for the ibis we will keep our eyes open for a variety of other species such as White-breasted Waterhen, Chinese Sparrowhawk, Collared Finchbill, Red-billed Starling and Vinous-throated Parrotbill.

It is likely to be late afternoon or early evening before we reach our comfortable, but simple, hotel in Tangjiahe Nature Reserve for a 2-night stay.

Day 6

Tangjiahe Nature Reserve

Established in 1978, Tangjiahe occupies an area of approximately 40,000 hectares and offers some of the best bird and mammal viewing in China. According to a recent census, the park is home to over 430 different species of vertebrates and close to 2,500 species of plant, including a large number of state-level and internationally protected species. Although seldom seen, the park is believed to have a population of 60 Giant Panda, as well as over 1,200 Golden Takin and a wide variety of other mammals. From an avian perspective, over 260 species have been recorded, accounting for 41% of the total in Sichuan province.



Little Forktail

Our time in Tangjiahe will be split between a mix of early morning and late afternoon/evening drives, principally searching for mammals and daytime forays in to the forest on foot, exploring the many trails on offer in search of birds. We have an excellent chance of finding the extraordinary Golden Takin during our stay here, alongside a fabulous variety of other mammal species, including Reeve's



Golden Takin

Muntjac, Hog-nosed Badger, Chinese Ferret Badger, Leopard Cat and Masked Palm Civet, with the possibility of such rarities as Asian Black Bear and Forest Musk Deer. Birding in Tangjiahe can be very exciting, with possible highlights including Tawny Fish Owl, Temminck's Tragopan, Golden Pheasant, Little Forktail, Sooty Bushtit, Red-billed Leothrix, Himalayan Bluetail, David's Fulvetta, Slaty Bunting and Crested Kingfisher.



Day 7 - 8

Wanglang Nature Reserve

After a last morning drive inside Tangjiahe we will be head 150 kilometres north-west along the northern border of Sichuan towards Wanglang Nature Reserve which sits in the beautiful Minshan Mountains. Wanglang is one of the earliest Giant Panda reserves and is home to a very rich fauna and flora. Here we have the opportunity to explore an alpine forest habitat, and – although the Giant Pandas themselves are almost impossible to find and live only in the most inaccessible corners of the reserve – we do hope to see an interesting variety of birds here such as Blue Eared-pheasant, Chinese Grouse, Sukatchev's Laughing-thrush and Sichuan Treecreeper. Night walks can also be rewarding for mammals.

Wanglang like Tangjiahe has a comfortable hotel inside the park and our group will be staying within walking distance of a range of excellent wildlife habitats.

Day 9 - 10

Jiuzhaigou National Park

After a final morning exploring Wanglang Nature Reserve we head a further 150 kilometres to the north-west towards one of China's most famous national parks, Jiuzhaigou. Our journey will take us through some wonderful mountain scenery, past rushing rivers and mist-shrouded slopes, forests, meadows and rural villages. We will stop from time to time and break our journey with short walks in search of such species as Golden Bush Robin, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Great Parrotbill and Chinese Wren Babbler.

We then have a full day to explore the spectacular landscapes of Jiuzhaigou National Park. Although this site is a tourist magnet, there are plenty of areas where we can get away from the crowds to enjoy both the incredible scenery and interesting wildlife in peace and quiet. Nestling in valleys between high mountains, the park is famous for its lakes and waterfalls, where on sunny days the lake water takes on a stunning shade of brilliant blue. Because of these unique features the park has been declared a UNESCO world heritage site! Our nature watching will be mainly focused on birds with speciality species including Chinese Nuthatch, Pere David's Tit and Spectacled Parrotbill.

We spend our first night here in a comfortable hotel inside Jiuzhaigou town and the second night in the town of Songpan, around a two hour drive to the south. Staying in Songpan will break our journey to our next destination, Wolong.

Day 11

Wolong

Today we leave Songpan and complete the drive to Wolong, a journey of around 6 hours. We will stop frequently enroute, however, to admire the scenery and look for a variety of interesting birds aiming to arrive at our hotel in the late afternoon. This will be our base for the next 3 nights of the tour.

Day 12 - 13

Wolong National Nature Reserve & Balang Mountain

We have two days to explore Wolong National Nature Reserve, a protected area at the core of Sichuan's Giant Panda sanctuaries and listed as a World Natural Heritage Site. Designated in 1963, Wolong is the largest, and perhaps best known, of China's Giant Panda reserves. Although, once again, an encounter with a Giant Panda is extremely unlikely due to their preference to reside in the most inaccessible areas of the forests, there is a fantastic array of other wildlife to enjoy and it is often cited as 'Bio-gene Bank', due to the wide variety of rare and endangered animals and plants present.



Tibetan Snowcock

During our time in the area we will explore the reserves forests and meadows and spend one day within the high alpine habitats of Balang Mountain. On the lower slopes, amongst the mixed forests and up the treeline we will be hoping to encounter one or two of the resident (but elusive) gamebirds including Chinese Monal, White Eared-pheasant, Koklass Pheasant, Blood Pheasant and Chestnut-throated Partridge. Smaller birds may include Giant Laughingthrush, Chinese White-browed Rosefinch, Pink-rumped Rosefinch, Dark-breasted Rosefinch, Common Rosefinch, Sichuan Tit

and White-browed Tit Warbler. As we gain altitude, following a steep winding road that takes up to a rocky pass at 4,500 metres the terrain begins to open out, first through Yak pasture and eventually into a harsh alpine habitat of rocky ridges and scree. Here we will look for Tibetan Snowcock, Snow Partridge, Grandala, Alpine Accentor, Brandt's and Plain Mountain Finches and Red-fronted Rosefinch, with a chance of passing Lammergeyers and Himalayan Griffons. Blue Sheep can often be found in the area and although extremely rare, in recent years Snow Leopards have even been captured on camera traps and are believed to be making a comeback. Birding at such high altitude is always a challenge and we must keep our fingers crossed for clear skies!



Grandala

Day 14

Dujiangyan



This morning we will drive for around an hour to Dujiangyan Giant Panda Centre. A satellite site of the main ‘Chengdu Panda Base’ that specialises in the rehabilitation of captive born animals into the wild, this quieter centre offers a chance for less crowded, and more relaxed, views of these endearing mammals. The surrounding parkland may also yield a few new species of birds including Black-headed Sibia, Vinous-throated Parrotbill and Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler.

If time permits, we can also visit the nearby Qingcheng Mountains, where Great Barbet and Grey-winged Blackbird can be found. We will spend our final night in China in a comfortable hotel in the town of Dujiangyan which is around one and a half hours from Chengdu Airport.

Day 15

Fly London

Departing Chengdu mid-morning, we expect to arrive at London’s Heathrow Airport later that evening (via a change of aircraft in Hong Kong).

Accommodation & Food

Throughout the tour we will be staying in simple, but comfortable, tourist hotels with private facilities. All meals are included in the price of this holiday from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 15.

Extra expenses

The cost of the holiday does not include drinks, tips, Chinese entry visa (for prices see www.visaforchina.org), locally paid airport taxes and all items of a personal nature.

Tour Focus & Grading

Grade A/B. This tour is a dedicated mammal and bird watching holiday – with time to enjoy Xi’an’s Terracotta Army – that includes several long travels days and time at high altitude (Balang). Whilst we have allowed at least two nights at each of the key locations, this holiday will be quite demanding and participants should be prepared for an action-packed itinerary, with a variety of day walks in search of wildlife, coupled with optional spotlighting walks/drives after dinner and sometimes pre-dawn too. On the travel days, we will be accompanied by an expert naturalist at all times, who will be on hand to point out any wildlife of interest en-route and will endeavour to provide comfort breaks and opportunities to ‘stretch your legs’ where possible.

Weather

April is early spring in Shaanxi and Sichuan, with average daily temperatures rising into the low 20 degrees celsius in Xi'an and Chengdu. However, at higher altitude it will be colder than this and we may well encounter some wintery showers from time to time on the high passes such as Balang. Warm, wind-proof clothing, with plenty of layers will be important, particularly during our time at high altitude. Some rainfall is likely, especially in the mountains.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to China. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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