

**By Megan Eaves**

China has long drawn Western travelers with its immense diversity, historic sights and amazing food, and these things continue to attract European travelers every year. But where do Western travelers, and in particular Europeans, want to visit in China? Unsurprisingly, China's major cities are a constant draw.

This is due in part to the new rules that have been implemented in the last several years, which allow for visa-free stopovers in most of China's major cities. This means that it is easier than ever for Europeans to stay in the Middle Kingdom for short trips. As well, a number of China's major airlines have expanded their European routes, opening up new options for travelers further south and west in the country. Chongqing, Chengdu, Guangzhou and Tianjin are all names that many Europeans might not have known until these recent changes.

Here we highlight the top 10 destinations in China that are most popular at the moment with European travelers.

**The Great Wall**

The Great Wall will top any list as the No.1 thing that most Western visitors want to see in China. Its fame as one of the world's most iconic sights means it is generally included on almost every traveler's first visit to China, if they are able. While Badaling remains the most well-known section of the wall, travellers often want to experience a less crowded section of the Wall, such as Mutianyu, and will opt for finding seclusion through "wild hikes" along sections of the wall that are unrestored, such as Gubeikou.

**Imperial Beijing**

Experiencing the grandeur of China's history at the Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven and Summer Palace is a must, especially if it's your first trip. Beyond these perennial bucket list items, Beijing is increasingly drawing European travelers who are taking advantage of the 72-hour visa free transit scheme to use the city as a stopover destination.

nation enroute to somewhere else. Younger travelers are looking for unique dining experiences and hip, hidden bars in Gulou and exploring the burgeoning Chinese contemporary art scene at the 798 Art District. Beijing has a growing craft beer scene, with small breweries creating unique-to-Beijing beers.

**Glamorous Shanghai**

Shanghai has always been a city with a scene for foreigners, and in 2016 a lot of travelers are looking to Shanghai for its new openings. The Shanghai Tower, which is slated to open this year, will certainly draw people looking for great heights, while Shanghai's new Disney Resort is set to bring more European family travelers to the city.

**Hong Kong**

Hong Kong remains a staple destination for travelers, both as a place to visit in its own right and a stopover enroute to elsewhere in southeast Asia or further afield to Australia and the Pacific. Many come in search of Hong Kong's mix of old and new and its fantastic dining scene, though increasingly travelers are searching for unique experiences in the New Territories, including the Hong Kong Global Geopark, with its unusual rock formations and secluded beaches.

**Xi'an, Shaanxi Province**

The Terracotta Warrior Army ranks among China's most famous sights, and European travelers with enough time in their itineraries will surely want to see these incredible clay warriors up close. But Xi'an is also earning a newfound reputation as one of China's hippest cities, with an exciting nightlife and art scene, as well as cycling opportunities along the city's historic wall.

**The Li River**

Ranking with the Longji Rice Terraces for iconic images of China is the Li River in Guangxi, with its ethereal karst rock formations and traditional cormorant fisherman. It's easiest to incorporate a visit to the Li River – especially for a float on a bamboo raft or a cycle along the riverside – a visit to Guilin and the three are close and accessible from one another.

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**Harbin, Heilongjiang Province**

The annual Harbin Ice and Snow Festival in January/February is a reason for travelers to don their winter coats and head north for a chance to stand in an icy version of the world's iconic buildings. A visit here is especially handy when scheduled as part of a trip to or from Beijing along the Trans-Siberian Railway. The festival itself consistently ranks among China's most intriguing events on the annual calendar.

**Pingyao, Shanxi Province**

Pingyao is considered the most well-preserved walled ancient town in China. It's smaller size and the beauty of its historic atmosphere is what many travelers come to China hoping to see. And while China may be a place that is rapidly modernizing, for Europeans, the pull of history remains a top travel priority, and Pingyao delivers in spades with its lantern-lit laneways and ancient architecture – a slice of China's historic romance.

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**Lijiang & Tiger Leaping Gorge**

The allure of hiking Tiger Leaping Gorge in Yunnan Province and casting an eye down the vast ravine to the icy blue waters of the Jinsha River is undeniable. Many Western travelers, prefer to get outdoors on their holidays and see Tiger Leaping Gorge as one of China's most unspoiled landscapes. This trip is often combined with a few days in Lijiang to explore the historic old town.

**Longji Rice Terraces**

There is perhaps no more widely known image of China's timeless landscape than the surreal, shimmering green layers of the Longji Rice Terraces. This iconic image alone is enough to put Longji Rice Terraces in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on many Europeans' bucket lists, and its relative accessibility from Guilin means it's easy for foreign travellers to reach, making it a very popular destination for those with a longer China itinerary.

China's top 10 destinations for European travelers  
**ONLY THE BEST**

Tourists take in the sites at Tiger Leaping Gorge in Yunnan Province

From Top: The Longji Rice Terraces in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region  
Tourists take in the sites in Pingyao

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