



## Travel Tips During Chinese National Holidays



For two weeks out of every year, China makes U.S. shopping malls on Black Friday look like paragons of tranquility. During these sacred weeks - each one a semi-annual national holiday in China, known as "Golden Week" - 1.3 billion Chinese citizens swarm their country's cities, roads and resorts in epic proportions. Many visit relatives in the rural countryside or seek out national attractions.

There are currently two Golden Week holidays, the Spring Festival, also known as the Chinese New Year, which happens in late January or early February, and National Day in October. During each Golden Week, Chinese citizens receive three paid vacation days that are strategically placed next to surrounding weekends so that workers can get up to seven consecutive days off. The massive gridlock that blankets the foreign country during each Golden Week makes travel impractical, if not downright impossible. And yet, it isn't always avoidable. In which case, travelers should use the following tips to find peace in the chaos.

**Traffic is typically heaviest on the first and last days of a Golden Week, so it's often best to travel a week prior or after the holiday.**

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### 1. Plan Ahead and Seek Out Travel Tips

Traffic is typically heaviest on the first and last days of a Golden Week, so it's often best to travel a week prior or after the holiday, says Maeve Nolan, general manager of Backyard Travel, an international travel and tour company that services travelers in eight Asian countries, including China.

Since many restaurants and shops close up, it's wise to call ahead of time. "Make sure that you speak with your hotel concierge or travel operator before heading to a [business] to ensure that it will be open," says Nellie C. Connolly, director at the Beijing-based travel company WildChina.

### 2. Choose Your Destination Wisely

Consider booking a hotel in a big city like Beijing, Nolan suggests, since many people flee to rural China to visit family, making the cities less congested. Since resorts are extremely busy during national holidays in China, Nolan also suggests staying at a boutique hotel, which will likely be a quieter choice.

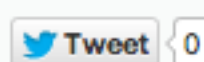
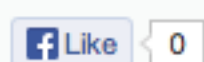
Business hotels are another option when choosing to travel in China. "Some of the most wonderful hotels have amazing deals because business comes to a standstill [during Spring Festival]," says Judith von Prockl, managing director of Gourmet On Tour Ltd., a U.K.-based tour operator that provides culinary tours in Shanghai.

### 3. Steer Clear of Trains and Buses

Visitors should avoid trains at all costs, Connolly says. "This is the major way for Chinese to move around the country, and as a result it will be nearly impossible to buy a train ticket," she says. "If you are, by some bizarre miracle, able to buy a train ticket, it will be oversold and extremely crowded. The experience will be quite unpleasant."

When possible, therefore, anyone who needs to travel domestically during national holidays should do so by plane. "Air travel is for now still out of reach for most [Chinese] budgets, so you should still be able to get a reasonably-priced airline ticket," von Prockl says.

To pay for airline tickets or other travel-related costs, individuals can use a trusted online foreign exchange service to send money overseas. This can also help to avoid transaction fees associated with foreign purchases on some personal credit cards. Plus, travelers can access a free online currency converter and 24/7 customer service while on the go.



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