

FREE · Updated 6 Oct 2026

Singapore → China Starter Kit 2026

The 8 things Singaporeans panic about before a first trip to China, answered in plain English, with a source on every rule.

1 Do I need a visa? How long can I stay?

2 Arrival card and hotel registration

3 Money: Alipay / WeChat Pay with my SG card, and cash

4 Data: eSIM, roaming and blocked apps

5 The apps to install before you fly

6 High-speed rail with a passport

7 Taxis and metro

8 The 8 traps that catch first-timers

How to read this kit

Policy rules (visa-free entry, stay length, registration) come from official Chinese government sources and carry a **POLICY** mark. **Practical tips** (payments, eSIM, trains) are checked online on the date above and carry a **CHECKED** mark, or are flagged **[TODO: 待核]** when we could not confirm them. Every ^[n] points to a source URL printed at the end of that section. Rules change: re-check before you fly.

Who this is for

Singapore passport holders (ordinary passport) taking a short leisure trip to mainland China. Prices in this kit are quoted in SGD or CNY as published by the source; we convert at the mid-market rate shown with each conversion.

1 Do I need a visa? How long can I stay?

POLICY Singapore ordinary-passport holders can enter China visa-free under the China-Singapore mutual visa exemption agreement, for a single stay of up to 30 days. The agreement has applied to ordinary passports since 9 February 2024.^[1]

What this means for your trip

- Your stay clock is 30 days for a single stay. A 4-day Shanghai trip fits well inside it.
- Always carry your passport: you will need it for hotels, trains and attraction tickets.
- **[TODO: 待核]** Which activities the mutual exemption covers (tourism versus work or study): the official card we use records the stay limit only. The NIA transit page says work, study and news reporting still need a proper visa.

Other visa-free options you may hear about

POLICY The 240-hour visa-free transit policy (up to 10 days) is for travellers continuing from China to a third country or region on a confirmed onward ticket, and Singapore is on the list of 57 eligible countries.^[2]

Our reading: a round trip Singapore to Shanghai and back is not a transit to a third country, so your visa-free stay is the 30-day exemption above.

POLICY Hainan has its own 30-day visa-free entry for ordinary-passport holders from 61 countries including Singapore, limited to Hainan province and to short-term purposes such as tourism and business (not work or study).^[3]

POLICY ASEAN tour groups of 2 or more, organised by a China-registered travel agency, can enter visa-free for up to 6 days at Xishuangbanna (Yunnan) or Guilin (Guangxi), moving in and out as a group.^[4]

POLICY A 24-hour transit without a visa applies to all nationalities at all open ports, for travellers with a confirmed onward ticket who stay inside the port's restricted area.^[5]

Still to confirm

- **[TODO: 待核]** The official table we use does not say whether a cumulative cap (such as 90 days in any 180) applies to Singapore passports. Do not plan a trip that stacks many 30-day stays before checking.
- **[TODO: 待核]** Passport validity: one vendor blog says 6 months but no official page confirmed it. Check with your airline or the Chinese Embassy in Singapore before booking.

Singapore MFA travel page for China: <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Countries-Regions/C/China/Travel-Page> ^[6]

Sources

1. China-Singapore mutual visa exemption (MFA table; NIA) https://cs.mfa.gov.cn/gyls/lsgz/fwxx/202504/t20250414_11594222.shtml <https://en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c181470/content.html>
2. 240-hour transit visa-free (NIA, Chinese and English pages) <https://www.nia.gov.cn/n741440/n741577/c1731205/content.html> <https://en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c183412/content.html>
3. Hainan 30-day visa-free (NIA) <https://en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c180637/content.html>
4. ASEAN tour groups: Xishuangbanna and Guilin, 6 days (NIA) <https://en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c180637/content.html>
5. 24-hour transit visa-free, all nationalities (NIA) <https://www.nia.gov.cn/n741440/n741577/c1731205/content.html>
6. Singapore MFA, China travel page <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Countries-Regions/C/China/Travel-Page>

2 Arrival card and hotel registration

Online arrival card

CHECKED Since 20 November 2025 foreigners can fill in China's arrival card online before they travel. It is required for most foreign visitors (seven categories are exempt) and is free on the official NIA site.^[1] A vendor guide says you can complete it up to 72 hours before arrival; the NIA pages we opened give no day count, so confirm on the official site.^[2]

Use only the official NIA site

The NIA warns about fraudulent arrival-card websites. Do not pay anyone to fill it in: the official form is free.

Where you sleep: registration

POLICY If you stay in a hotel, the hotel registers your stay. If you stay anywhere other than a hotel (for example a friend's flat or a short-term rental), you must register with the local police within 24 hours of check-in (Exit-Entry Administration Law, Article 39).^[3]

CHECKED The National Immigration Administration states the same rule on its English site.^[4]

CHECKED For non-hotel stays, NIA began an online registration pilot on 20 March 2026 in seven provinces (NIA website, 12367 app, WeChat or Alipay mini-program), with gradual nationwide expansion.^[5]

[TODO: 待核] Whether Shanghai is covered, and the current rollout date, needs checking before you rely on it.

Pick a hotel that takes foreign passports

CHECKED Some budget hotels still turn foreigners away, even though three ministries said in May 2024 that hotels must not reject foreign guests for lacking foreign-related licences. Book properties whose listing clearly accepts foreign passports, and keep the confirmation.^[6]

Sources

1. Chinese Embassy notice on the online arrival card; NIA English fraud warning https://bb.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/lsws/202511/t20251128_11762211.htm
2. Trip.com guide to the entry card <https://www.trip.com/guide/arrival/china-entry-card-online.html>
3. Stay registration under the Exit-Entry Administration Law, Article 39 (MFA table as cited in traveldatabase) https://cs.mfa.gov.cn/gyls/lsgz/fwxx/202504/t20250414_11594222.shtml
4. NIA English page on accommodation registration <https://en.nia.gov.cn/n147423/n147478/n147715/c158241/content.html>
5. gov.cn: online registration for foreigners in non-hotel accommodation https://english.www.gov.cn/services/visitchina/202603/21/content_WS69ce124cc6d00ca5f9a0a368.html
6. ABC News Australia on hotels refusing foreign tourists <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-04/hotels-in-china-continue-to-knock-back-foreign-tourists/105229128>

3 Money: Alipay, WeChat Pay and cash

CHECKED **Alipay:** open Me > Bank Cards and add your Visa or Mastercard; the bank verifies it, typically with a one-time password.^[1]

CHECKED **WeChat Pay:** Me > Services > Wallet > Add a Card, with your passport as ID. WeChat is listed as accepting Visa, Diners Club, Mastercard and JCB.^[2]

The fee, as published

WeChat Pay waives the 3% fee on every international-card transaction under 200 yuan; new card-linkers also get a 60-day waiver on daily transactions under 1,000 yuan (maximum saving 30 yuan per transaction).^[3] The Chaoyang district page adds that a 3% fee applies to single transactions above 200 yuan.

[TODO: 待核] Alipay fee: sources conflict (Trip.com says no fee; a Beijing district page lists a fee). Check inside the app before a big purchase.

Limits

CHECKED In March 2024 the PBOC said it would guide Alipay and Tenpay to raise the foreign-visitor single-transaction limit from US\$1,000 to US\$5,000 and the annual limit from US\$10,000 to US\$50,000.^[4]

[TODO: 待核] The limits shown inside each app (and your own bank's overseas cap) can be lower: check both.

Do I need cash?

CHECKED A 2024 notice from four central bodies says key cultural and tourism venues should keep manual ticket windows and support cash, while 3-star-and-above tourist hotels and 5A/4A attractions must accept foreign and domestic bank cards.^[5] Our advice: carry a small amount of RMB cash as a backup, link a card to both Alipay and WeChat Pay before you fly, and keep one physical card.

[TODO: 待核] Reported rule that businesses may not refuse RMB cash from 1 Feb 2026: only a secondary source (a Singapore news site) was found; the primary PBOC notice was not opened.

Sources

1. Trip.com: how to use Alipay; Beijing Foreign Affairs Office page on accepted networks <https://www.trip.com/guide/phone/how-to-use-alipay.html>
2. Beijing Chaoyang district government site: overseas cards on WeChat Pay and Alipay <https://english.bjchy.gov.cn/overseas-bank-cards-accepted-weixin-pay-and-alipay>
3. Beijing municipal government: inbound tourism facilitation measures, 26 Mar 2026 https://english.beijing.gov.cn/travellinginbeijing/essentials/inboundtourismfacilitationmeasures/202603/t20260326_4566766.html
4. gov.cn: PBOC announcement, 1 Mar 2024 https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202403/01/content_WS65e1dacdc6d0868f4e8e487b.html
5. SAFE: notice on payment services for inbound visitors, Apr 2024 <https://www.safe.gov.cn/en/2024/0409/2198.html>

4 Network: eSIM, roaming and blocked apps

CHECKED Airalo says its eSIMs let you use blocked apps such as WhatsApp in China without a VPN, because traffic is routed through servers outside China. This applies to mobile data, not hotel or cafe Wi-Fi.^[1]

CHECKED Singtel states that roaming data in China, Hong Kong and Macau gives easy access to your usual apps with no VPN setup required.^[2]

CHECKED The UK FCDO says China blocks major platforms including Google, Facebook, YouTube and X, and that VPNs require government licensing.^[3] This is why a roaming-style eSIM, installed at home, is the simplest fix.

Singapore telco roaming, as listed

Option	Price shown	Note
M1 Daily Passport	S\$3.95 per day	China is in this tier (3 GB data); S\$4.95 per bill-cycle subscription charge in the travel month. ^[4]
StarHub DataTravel Unlimited	S\$40 per day	Uniform rate across listed destinations including China; page shows rates effective 1 Oct 2026. ^[5]
Singtel roaming	[TODO: 待核]	The Singtel page shows only a "from \$19" headline with no China table; check the Singtel app.
Travel eSIM (Airalo, Holafly and others)	[TODO: 待核]	Plan prices change daily: compare on the vendor site.

Plug and power

CHECKED China uses 220 V / 50 Hz with Type A, C and I sockets, and UK-style plugs do not fit directly, so you need an adapter.^[6] Singapore sockets are UK-style (Type G) [TODO: 待核] (not confirmed on a page we opened).

Sources

1. Airalo blog: best eSIM for China <https://www.airalo.com/blog/best-esim-for-china>
2. Singtel roaming plans <https://www.singtel.com/personal/products-services/mobile/roaming/all-plans>
3. UK FCDO: China safety and security <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/safety-and-security>
4. M1 Daily Passport <https://www.m1.com.sg/roaming/daily-passport>
5. StarHub DataTravel Unlimited <https://www.starhub.com/personal/mobile/mobile-phones-plans/value-added-services/roaming/postpaid-roaming/data-plans/datatravel-unlimited.html>
6. Electrical Safety First: travel adaptor for China <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/guidance/advice-for-you/when-travelling/travel-adaptor-for-china/>

5 Must-have apps

Install and sign in to everything at home, on your home Wi-Fi, before you fly: some verification texts fail on foreign numbers once you land.

App	Why you want it	What to know
Alipay	Pay almost anywhere, scan metro QR codes, hail taxis through a mini-program	Link your SG Visa/Mastercard first (see section 3).
WeChat	Pay, message, mini-programs for attraction bookings	Link a card with your passport as ID (section 3).
Didi / DiDi Greater China	Ride-hailing	A Beijing government guide says foreign travellers can book rides with Alipay, WeChat or the Didi-Greater China app, which accepts foreign phone numbers and international credit cards. ^[1]
AMap Global (Gaode)	Maps and taxi hailing in English	AMap has an English international version on Android and iOS. ^[2]
Trip.com	Hotels, flights, train tickets for foreigners	Use it to confirm a hotel accepts foreign guests and to book trains (section 6).
Translate app of your choice	Camera and voice translation	Download an offline Chinese pack before you fly.

Five-minute test at the departure gate

1. Open Alipay and WeChat: is a card linked and verified?
2. Turn on the eSIM and check that a blocked app loads on mobile data.
3. Screenshot your hotel name and address in Chinese.
4. Save a photo of your passport page offline.

Sources

1. Beijing municipal government: guide to daily life services https://english.beijing.gov.cn/specials/aguidetoworkingandlivinginc hinaasbusinessexpatriates2024/dailylifeservices/202404/t20240424_3635102.html
2. Shanghai municipal government English site: useful apps <https://english.shanghai.gov.cn/en-UsefulApps/20241213/59a549d4bdf1440c8e86251d5ac7d5a9.html>

6 High-speed rail with a passport

CHECKED Foreigners can register on 12306 with a passport, and the account goes through manual identity verification before you can buy tickets.^[1] Do this well before you leave, not on the day.

CHECKED Most China train tickets go on sale 15 days before departure (14:00 Beijing time per Trip.com).^[2]

CHECKED You can collect tickets at stations (windows or automatic machines) or, for e-tickets, board directly with your passport. Singapore MFA says: "You will need a valid ID (e.g. passport) to buy a train ticket and may need to show it again before boarding."^[3]

Still to confirm

- **[TODO: 待核]** Whether 12306 accepts foreign Visa/Mastercard directly: sources conflict. Trip.com and station windows are the safer fallback.
- **[TODO: 待核]** Trip.com booking fee per ticket: not stated on the page we opened.

Day-trip examples from Shanghai

Route	Second-class fare (CNY)	Time
Shanghai to Suzhou	about 21-52 (source range)	fastest about 15 min per source ^[4]
Shanghai Hongqiao to Hangzhou	about 30-123 (source range)	52-60+ min on most trains ^[5]

There is no official "China Rail Pass" (baseline note in the traveldatabase practical index, not independently re-checked in this run). Buy from 12306 or a licensed agent.

Sources

1. Trip.com guide: 12306 for foreigners <https://us.trip.com/guide/train/12306.html>
2. Trip.com blog: how to buy China high-speed rail tickets for foreigners <https://www.trip.com/blog/how-to-buy-china-high-speed-rail-tickets-for-foreigners/>
3. Trip.com train booking guide; Singapore MFA China travel page <https://www.trip.com/guide/train/china-train-booking.html>
4. TravelChinaGuide: Shanghai-Suzhou trains <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/china-trains/high-speed/shanghai-suzhou.htm>
5. TravelChinaGuide: Shanghai-Hangzhou trains <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/china-trains/high-speed/shanghai-hangzhou.htm>

7 Taxis, ride-hailing and metro

CHECKED DiDi works in Shanghai for foreign visitors and accepts international Visa/Mastercard in its app or via the Alipay mini-program, with pickup zones at Pudong Airport.^[3] Show the Chinese address on your phone to the driver (the Chinese cards in the Shanghai guide help here).

CHECKED Singapore's Consulate-General in Shanghai warns of unlicensed taxis, especially at airports, that claim a spoilt meter or pose as limousines and charge higher fares. Use the official taxi queue or an app.^[4] The UK FCDO also advises avoiding unmarked or unmetered taxis.^[5]

Pudong Airport to the city

Option	Cost	Time
Maglev to Longyang Road, then Metro	CNY 50 single (\$9.5 at 5.2412)	about 8 min on the Maglev ^[6]
Metro Line 2 (no change)	about CNY 7	about 70-90 min ^[7]
Taxi	about CNY 150-250	about 45-70 min per source ^[7]

Conversion: 1 SGD = 5.2412 CNY, mid-market rate, 6 Oct 2026 (Pluang currency converter). Bank and money-changer rates are worse.

CHECKED Most Shanghai Metro stations open between about 05:00 and 06:00 and close between about 22:30 and 23:00; last trains on Line 2 are around 22:30 (about 23:00 on Fridays, weekends and holidays).^[8] Plan the last ride home before 22:30.

CHECKED A Shanghai taxi meter starts at CNY 14 for the first 3 km in the daytime, and the starting fare is higher at night (23:00 to 05:00), about CNY 18.^[1] **[TODO: 待核]** Per-km rates differ between sources; check the meter or app estimate.

CHECKED Shanghai Metro charges CNY 3 for trips of up to 6 km, plus CNY 1 for every additional 10 km. You can ride by scanning a QR code in Alipay or WeChat, or by tapping eligible contactless Visa, Mastercard, American Express, JCB or UnionPay cards.^[2]

Sources

1. TravelChinaGuide and Shanghai Tourism: Shanghai taxi <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/shanghai/transportation/taxi.htm> <https://www.shanghaitourism.org/shanghai-taxi-tips/>
2. Shanghai municipal government English site: metro; Shanghai Tourism metro guide <https://english.shanghai.gov.cn/en-Travel/YourWay/20251010/6f1beb560360472b8edaffd6187f4988.html> <https://www.shanghaitourism.org/shanghai-metro-guide/>
3. China For Travelers: Pudong Airport guide; Shanghai Tourism <https://chinafortravelers.com/guides/pvg-airport-guide/>
4. Singapore Consulate-General in Shanghai: advisory on common scams <https://shanghai.mfa.gov.sg/mission-updates/advisory-on-common-scams/>
5. UK FCDO: China safety and security <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/safety-and-security>
6. Trip.com blog: Shanghai Maglev <https://us.trip.com/blog/all-you-need-to-know-about-shanghai-maglev/>
7. China Highlights: airports to downtown Shanghai <https://www.chinahighlights.com/shanghai/airports-to-downtown-shanghai.htm>
8. Wikipedia: Shanghai Metro https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Metro

8 The 8 traps that catch first-timers

1. Unlicensed airport taxis

Walk to the official taxi queue or book in an app. Drivers who approach you in the arrivals hall are the ones to avoid.^[1]

2. The tea-house invitation

Friendly strangers inviting you to practise English or taste tea can lead to an inflated bill. Say no and keep walking.^[1]

3. A hotel that cannot take foreigners

Confirm in writing that the property accepts foreign passports before you pay.^[2]

4. No data, no maps

Google and other major platforms are blocked. Install your eSIM at home and test it before the gate.^[3]

5. Staying at a friend's flat

Non-hotel stays must be registered with the police within 24 hours of check-in.^[4]

6. The 3% fee above 200 yuan

WeChat Pay charges 3% on single transactions above 200 yuan on a foreign card; plan for it on large purchases.^[5]

7. Fake rail passes

No official China Rail Pass exists (baseline note). Buy tickets on 12306 or a licensed agent.

8. Leaving your passport at the hotel

You need it for trains and real-name attraction entry. Keep it on you, plus an offline photo of the page.^[6]

Sources

1. Singapore Consulate-General in Shanghai: advisory on common scams <https://shanghai.mfa.gov.sg/mission-updates/advisory-on-common-scams/>
2. ABC News Australia on hotels refusing foreign tourists <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-04/hotels-in-china-continue-to-knock-back-foreign-tourists/105229128>
3. UK FCDO: China safety and security <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/safety-and-security>
4. Stay registration under the Exit-Entry Administration Law, Article 39 (MFA table as cited in traveldatabase) https://cs.mfa.gov.cn/gyls/lsgz/fwxx/202504/t20250414_11594222.shtml

5. Beijing municipal government: inbound tourism facilitation measures https://english.beijing.gov.cn/travellinginbeijing/essentials/inboundtourismfacilitationmeasures/202603/t20260326_4566766.html
6. Singapore MFA China travel page <https://www.trip.com/guide/train/china-train-booking.html>

Your countdown checklist

When	Do this
2-3 weeks out	Check passport validity with your airline; register on 12306 if you plan any train; book a hotel that accepts foreign passports.
1 week out	Link your card to Alipay and WeChat Pay; install the apps; buy your eSIM or arrange roaming.
3 days out	Fill in the official online arrival card (free, NIA site); screenshot your hotel address in Chinese.
At the gate	Run the five-minute test (section 5). Carry passport, a card, and a little RMB cash.

Want the whole plan?

Shanghai 4D3N for Singaporeans: hour-by-hour itinerary, budget in SGD, metro and taxi plan, halal and vegetarian picks with spice levels, and Chinese cards for taxis and food.

US\$4.99 → US\$2.99 with code **SGLAUNCH** until 2026-10-31.

Get it here: **[TODO: 待核]** (store link is filled in after the Gumroad page goes live)

This kit is general information, not legal advice. Policy statements follow the traveldatabase policy card for Singapore (as of 6 Oct 2026; MFA table updated to 29 May 2026). Practical items were checked online on 6 Oct 2026. Rules, prices and app features change.