

China Travel Apps Master Guide

(2026 Edition)

For foreign tourists, China is not just a country, but more like an independent digital ecosystem. Following apps act as the operating systems for daily life – and knowing which tools to use for navigation, transport, dining, and communication will transform your trip. Set everything up before you depart.

The Super Apps: Your "All-in-One" Keys

In China, these two super apps are the most important for daily life. You should set them up before you depart.

Alipay (支付宝)


Main Use: Your primary payment tool. Link your international Visa or Mastercard directly.

- **Transport** — Metro & Bus QR codes
- **Didi** — Ride-hailing mini-app
- **Exchange Rate** — Currency tools built in

WeChat (微信)

Main Use: The primary communication tool. Hotel staff, local friends, and businesses all use this.

- **Attraction Bookings** — The Forbidden City, Museums
- **Official Accounts** — Search via the built-in search bar
- **Mini-Programs** — Hundreds of services in one app

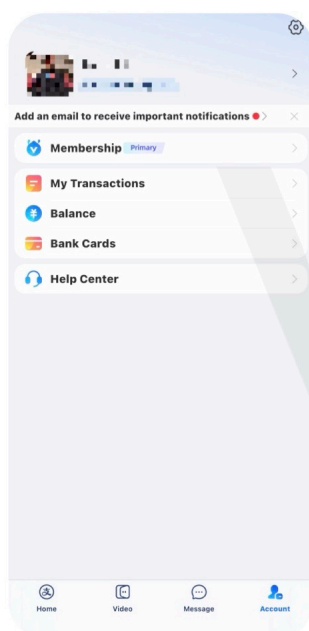
 Both apps support international credit cards. Set them up at home — some verification steps require a non-Chinese phone number.



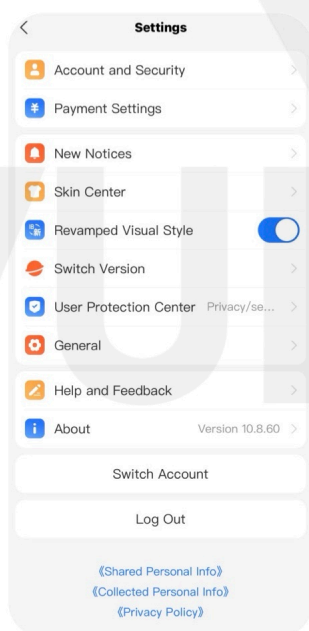
Alipay Step-by-Step Setup

Alipay Registration Steps

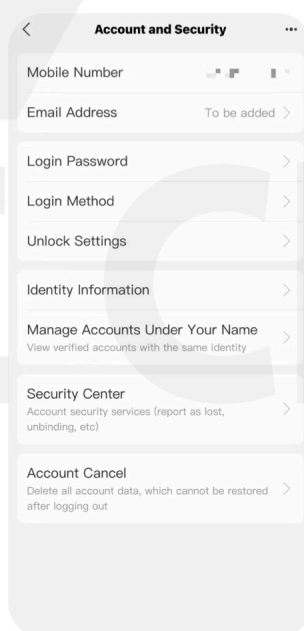
- **Download & Sign Up:** Download the latest Alipay app from the Google Play Store or Apple App Store. Select "Sign Up" and choose to register with an international phone number.
- **Verification:** Enter your mobile phone number, ensuring the correct country code is selected, and enter the SMS verification code received.
- **Setup Password:** Set a secure login password (typically 8–20 characters, including letters and numbers).
- **Verify Identity:** Go to "Account and Security" or "Identity Information" to provide your personal information and scan/upload your international passport and complete facial recognition. Alipay will review your information for verification.



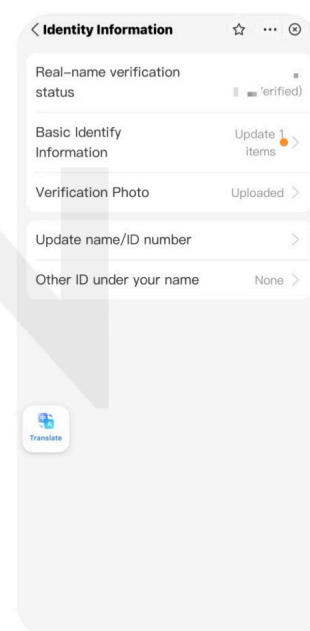
Go to "Account", Tap on "Setting" at the Top Right Corner



Tap on "Account and Security"

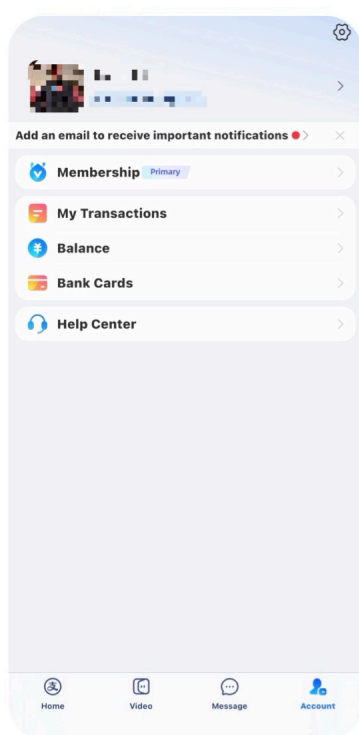


Tap on "Identity Information"

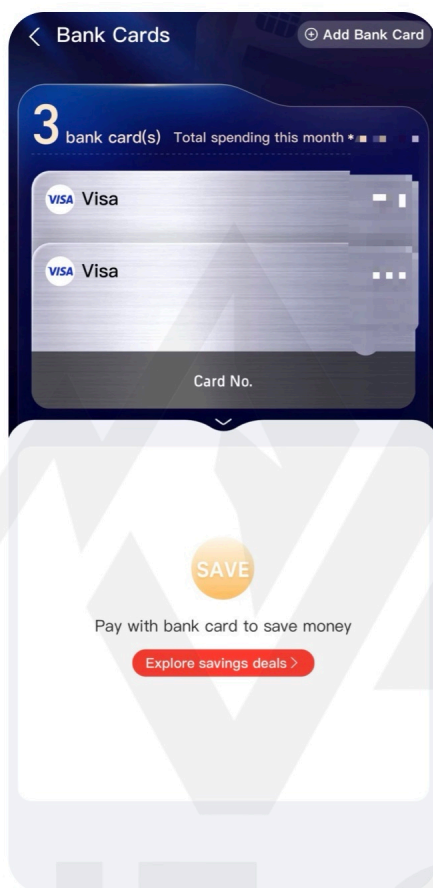


Follow the steps to complete "Real-name verification"

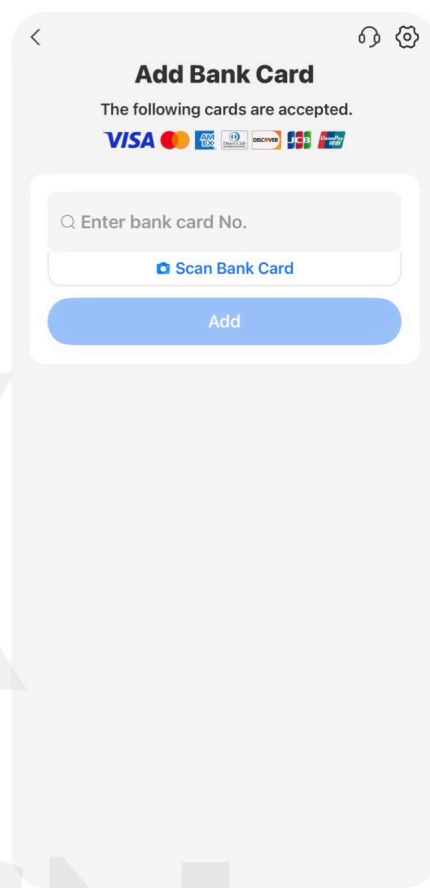
- **Link Bank Card:** Tap "Add Card" and enter your bank card details and personal information to enable payment functions.



Go to "Account", Tap on "Bank Cards"



Tap on "Add Bank Card"



Add your international bank card

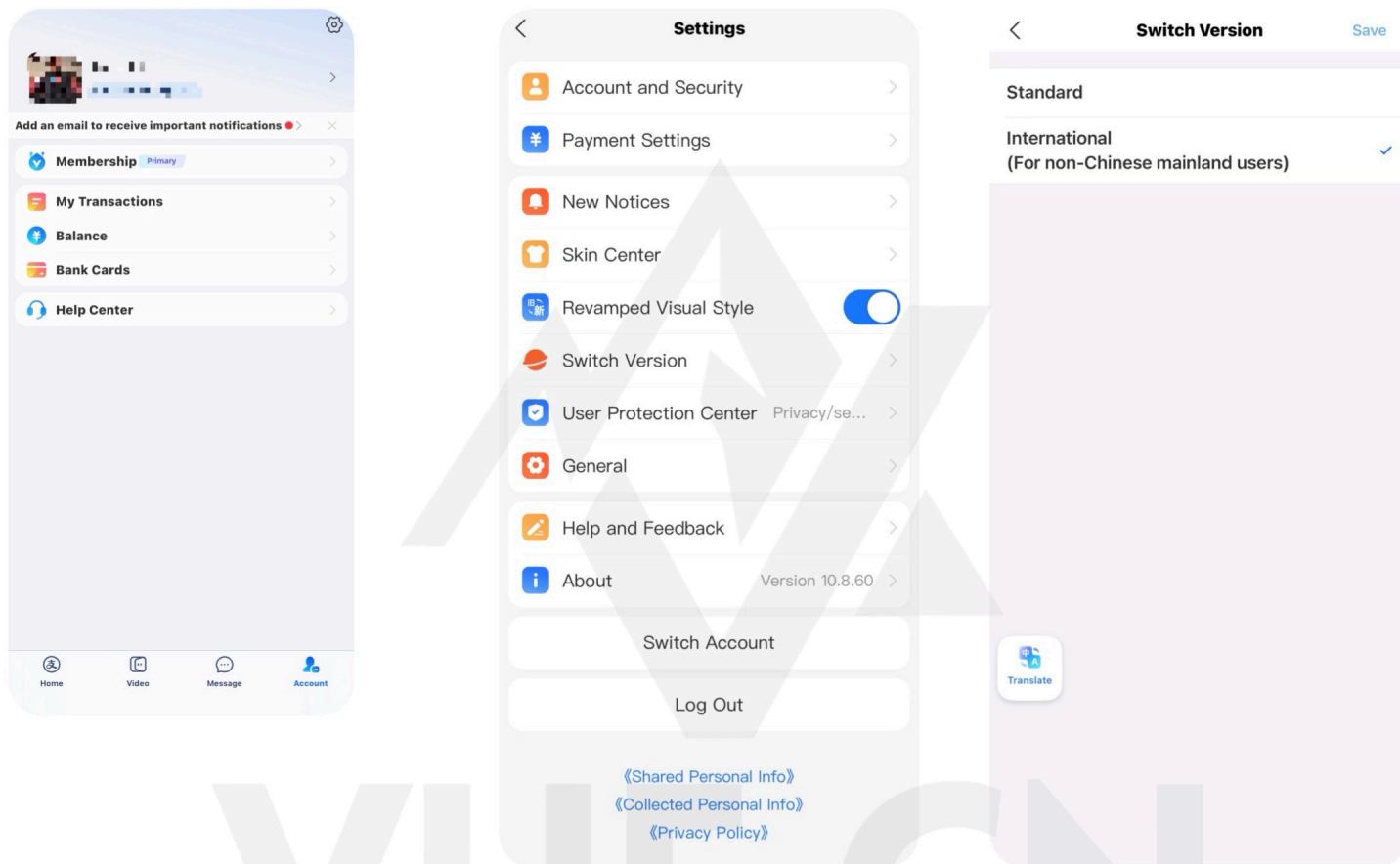
If your card appears on the screen, this means that it's successfully linked

? Is Alipay Safe?

Yes. Alipay is one of the most secure fintech platforms in the world. It uses:

- End-to-end encryption
- Two-factor authentication
- Secure SSL protocols
- Real-time fraud detection

- **Activate International Version:** Navigate to the "Account" tab, then "Settings", Tap on "Switch Version" to ensure you are using the International Version.

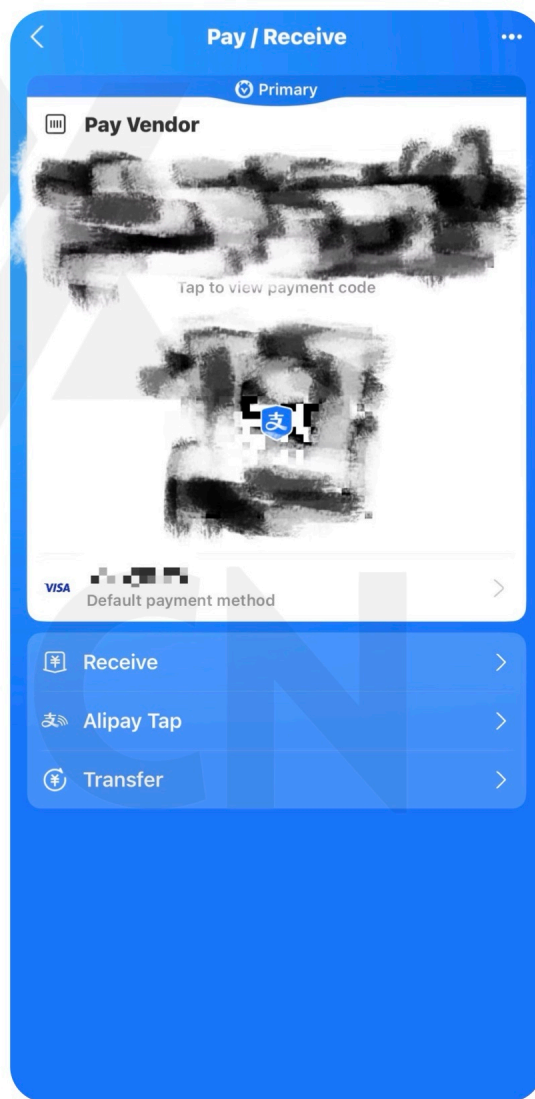
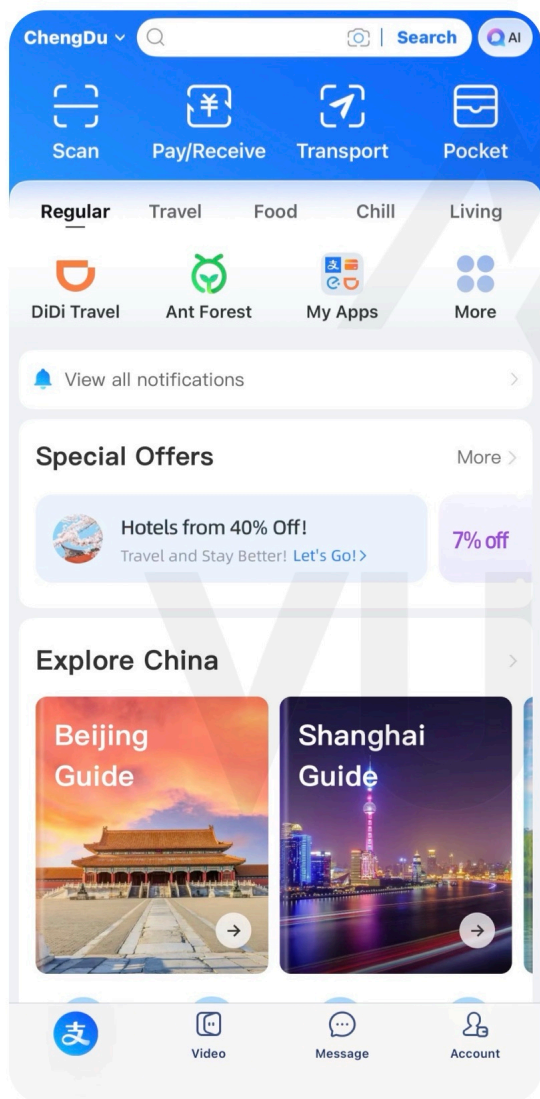


Key Tips

- **Phone Number:** You can use an overseas phone number, but a Chinese number is better for full functionality, though not mandatory for initial sign-up.
- **Payment Security:** You will need a **Payment Password** (separate from the login password) for transactions. You can change the **Payment Password** in "Account" > "Settings" > "Payment Settings". Also, you can add Biological ID Pay (like Face ID) in "Payment Settings"
- **Verification Difficulty:** Some users may need to try different methods, such as email registration, if SMS verification fails.

Making payments with Alipay is straightforward:

1. **Scan the merchant's QR code:** Tap the 'Scan' button on your 'Home' tab and scan the QR code displayed by the merchant, then enter the **AMOUNT** you are paying.
2. **Allow merchants to scan your QR code:** Tap 'Pay/Receive' to generate your unique payment QR code for the merchant to scan.



- ❑ **Always confirm the denomination before authorizing payment with your 6-digit payment password.**

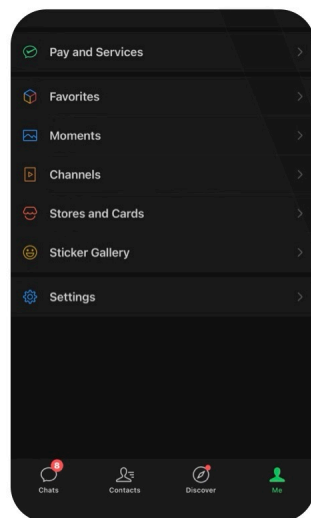
WeChat Pay Setup

WeChat Pay (aka **Weixin Pay**, "Wei Xin 微信" is WeChat's Chinese Name) is a popular digital wallet service integrated into the popular all-in-one Chinese messaging app **WeChat**. Although we already have primary payment tool – **Alipay**, in some scenarios merchants may not accept **Alipay**, so set up both payment tools just in case.

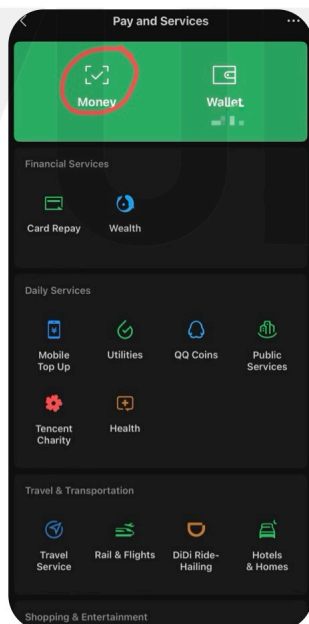
1. Download the latest **WeChat App** via your phone's App Store
2. Launch the app > tap '**Sign Up**'.
3. Fill in your personal details > tap '**Sign Up**'.
4. Follow the on-screen instructions until your account is successfully created.

 Any questions on Signing up (The most common issue: Verification problem).

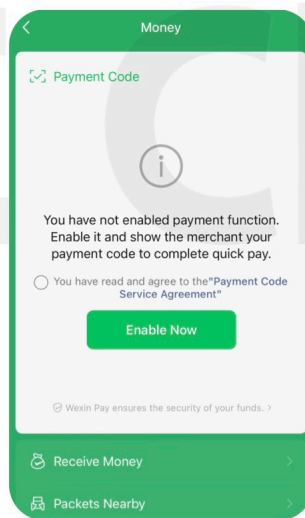
See [WeChat Help Center](#)



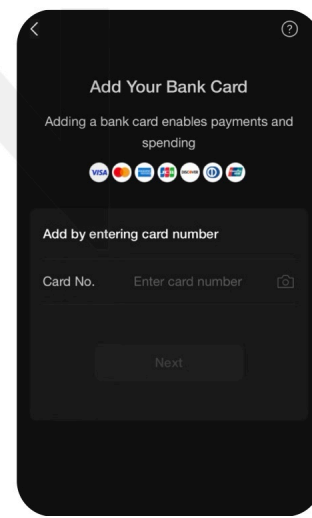
Select "**Me**" in WeChat Homepage, Tap "**Pay and Service**"



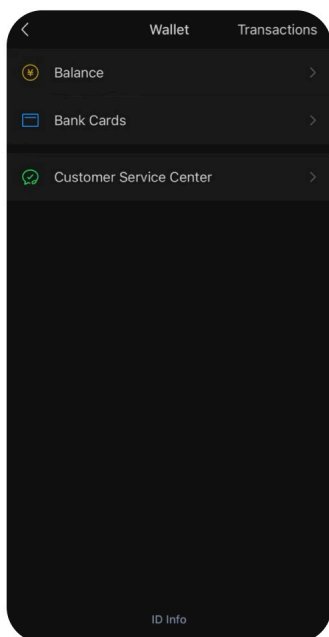
Tap "**Money**"



Enable the payment feature, Tap "**Enable Now**"



Follow the steps on the screen to finish WeChat Pay setup



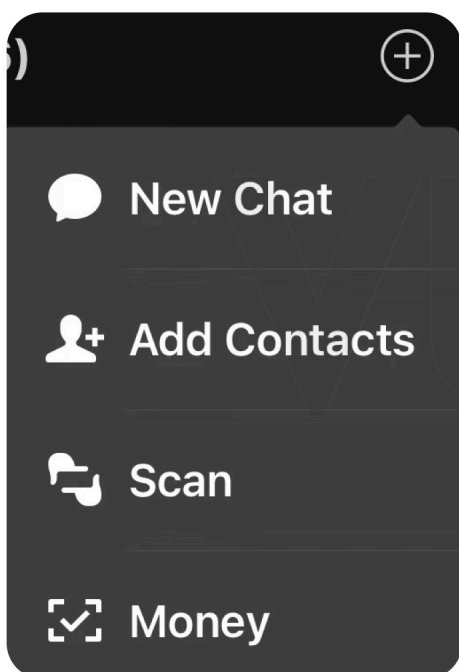
Verify Identity and Add a Bank Card

Another method: In **Wallet**, tap **Bank Cards** – Add a Bank Card. Read the WeChat Pay User Service Agreement and Privacy Policy and tap Agree.

Follow the steps on the screen to fill in your identity information. Tap Next to add your card. Follow the instructions on the screen to complete the process.

Tips: If you use your passport to verify your identity, you will get a notification asking you to upload a copy of your passport.

Using WeChat Pay



1. Scan to Pay
 - a. On the top right corner of the homepage, Tap "+", Select **"Scan"**
 - b. Scan the merchant's QR Code to pay
2. Present your Payment QR code to the merchant to pay
 - a. To obtain your Payment QR code, Tap "+", Select **"Money"**. Or go to **"Me">"Pay and Service">"Money"**
 - b. Let the merchant to Scan your Payment Code.
3. Select **WeChat Pay** in the merchant's App to complete the payment. For example, when using **Didi App** or **Railway 12306 App**, you can choose **WeChat Pay** as payment method. It will lead you to **WeChat**, after payment is done, you can go back to the merchant's App.

Navigation & Maps

Google Maps is **not updated in China**. For accurate directions and real-time public transport, use these alternatives instead.

Amap (高德地图)

The most accurate data for walking, driving, and the subway — trusted by locals nationwide.

- Real-time subway & bus routing
- Walking directions with lane-level accuracy
- Copy-paste Chinese characters for 100% search accuracy

✓ VUE CN provides Chinese characters for major attractions in China city travel guides — paste directly into Amap for more accurate results.

Apple Maps

For iPhone users, Apple Maps provides a reliable **English-labeled map** that works natively — no VPN required.

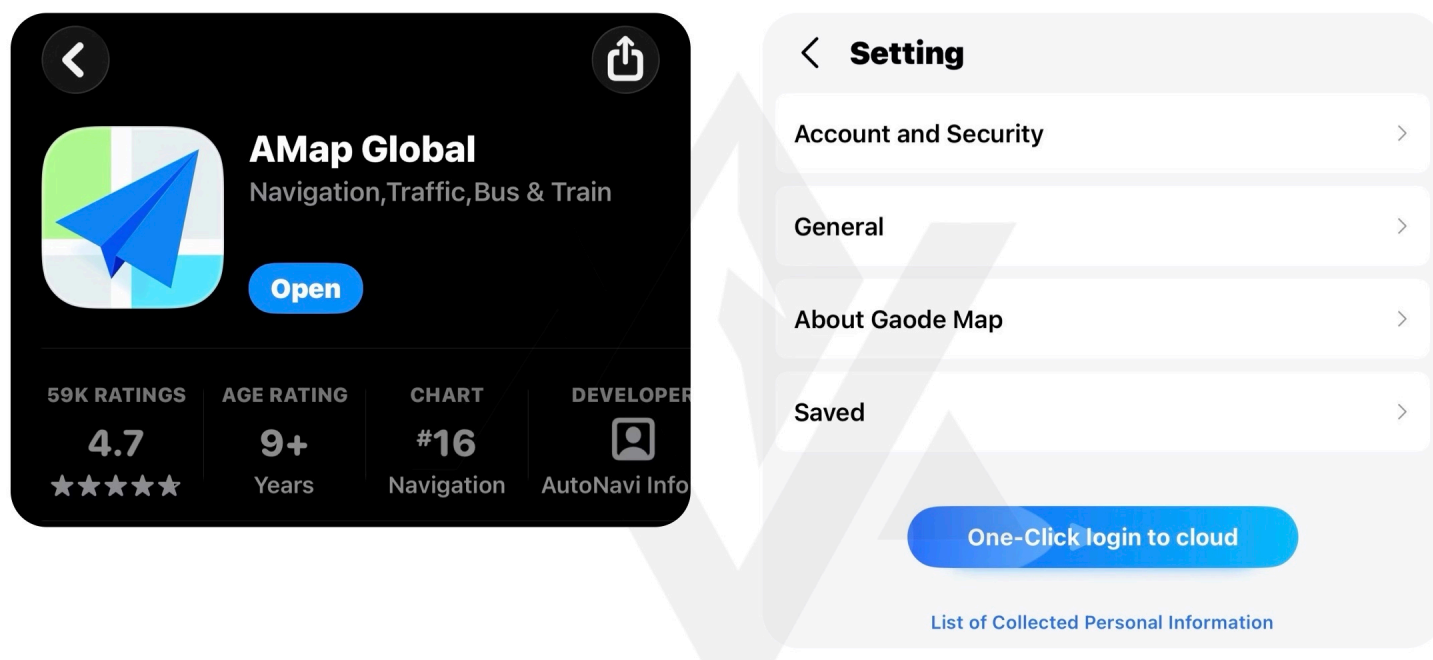
- Full English interface
- Works without a VPN
- Integrated with iOS navigation

⚠ Android users: Amap is your primary option. Download it before arrival.

Steps to Set Up and Use Amap:

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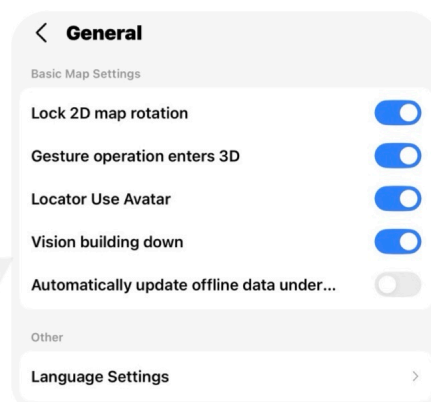
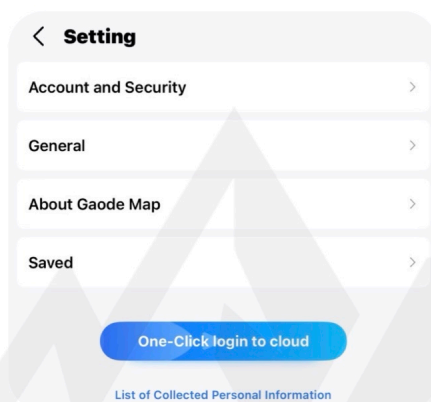
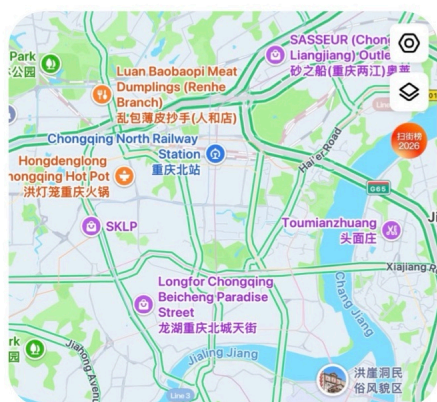
- **Download & Install:** Search "Amap" or "高德地图" (Gaode Map) in the iOS App Store or Android app stores.



① You may have a trouble to sign in **Amap** or link with your phone number while you are **Not Physically** in China (like I'm in USA, and it will not allow me to log in directly). Many people want to save some preferred places before departure. Here is how we solve it. Go to your **Phone "Settings"** > Find the App **Amap** > Turn off "**Location Access**" > Restart the App > Test it whether you can log in > If Not, Reinstall it (Remember to set Location Access off before you start the App) > Still not able to log in > Close the App, **find a VPN and set your IP in Mainland China** > Still leave Location Access off, then start the App.

Find the places you plan to go and save them in **Amap**. When arrive in China, turn on Location Access for **Amap**.

- **Language Change:** If you download Amap Global version, the language should be the same of your cell phone system. if not, Click on the Settings Gear Icon at upper right , Go to "General" find the "Language Settings", and select your language and restart the app.



- **Enable GPS:** Allow the app access to your location for accurate real-time navigation.
- **Navigate/Plan Route:** Enter your destination in main page. The app accepts both Chinese and English input (e.g., 虹桥机场 "Hongqiao Airport"). Generally, using Chinese characters will be more accurate.
- **Save Locations:** Use the star icon to save locations like hotels and restaurants.

Key Tips for Using Amap:

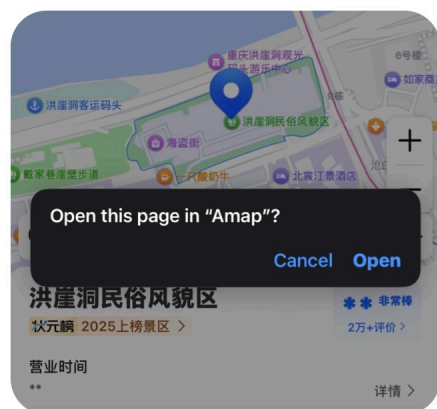
- **Inputting Addresses:** If searching in English does not work for a specific destination, use the original Chinese address, as suggested by.
- **Transportation Options:** Toggle between walking, driving, subway, and taxi options to compare routes and times.
- **Taxi/Ride-Hailing:** You can book a Ride/Taxi directly through the app, although this feature is best used when your account is set up with a payment method. You can pay via Alipay.

Smart Navigation with VUE CN

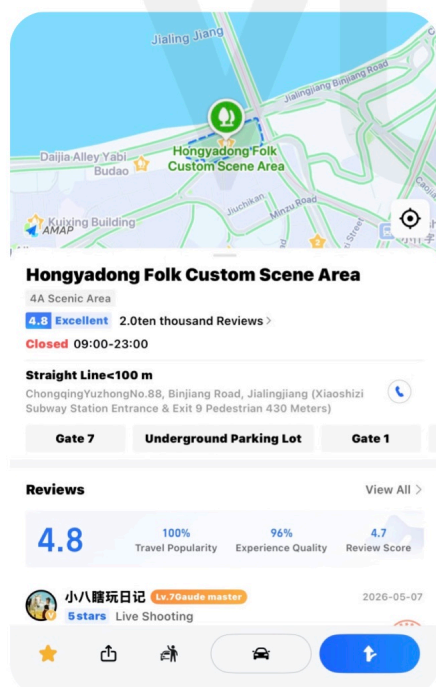
To save you from typing Chinese characters, we have embedded direct location links into our city guides.



1. Tap the Name: Click on any highlight and underlined attraction name (e.g., **Hongya Cave**) within this PDF.

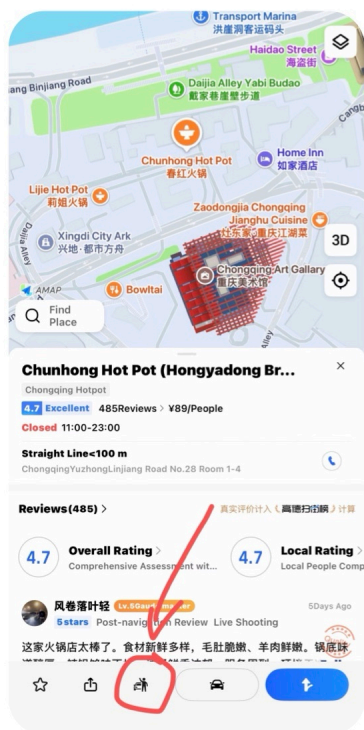


2. Auto-Redirect: It will instantly open the exact coordinate page on **Amap**. If not, just Tap the Blue Bar to open the link in **Amap**

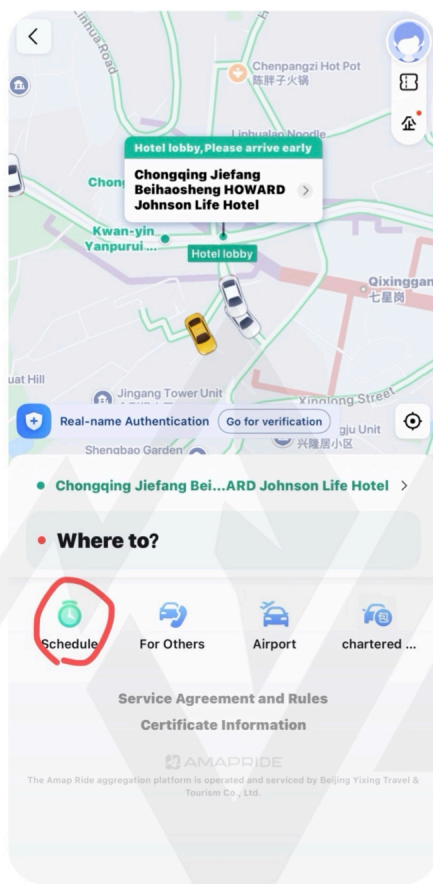


3. Save & Go: The location page will turn to your set language. You can save the location for your travel plan and navigation.

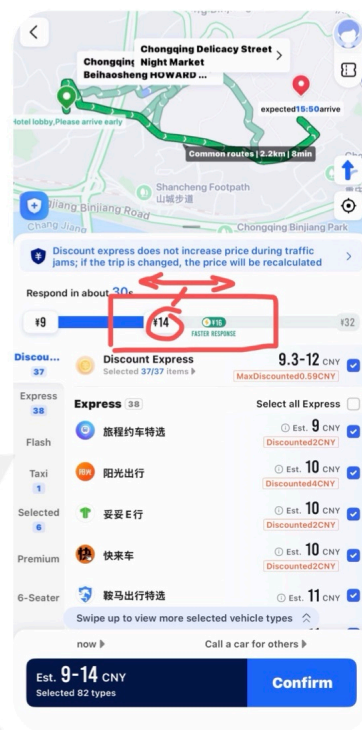
Using Ride-hailing in Amap



Find the place you want to go, in its page, Tap the Ride-hailing icon.



Confirm the pick-up point and destination. Also, you can use "Schedule" for future ride.



Choose the max amount you are willing to pay (it affects respond time). Select your payment method and confirm the ride. Track the driver in real time.

- ☐ The driver will ask you for **last 4 digits of your phone number**, prepare them in writing while waiting, so you can show them directly to the driver.

Transportation & Travel

Moving between cities or across town is **entirely digital** in China. These three apps cover every scenario.



Trip.com (携程)

The best **English-language platform** for booking Chinese hotels, domestic flights, and High-Speed Rail tickets. Largest selection of international-friendly accommodations.




Railway 12306

The official China Railway app. The **2026 version** features a dedicated English portal specifically for foreign passport holders — a major upgrade for international travelers.



Didi (滴滴)

The "Uber of China." You can either download Didi app, or Use the **Didi mini-program inside Alipay** — full English interface with automatic payment through your linked card.

 For how to take a Subway & Bus in the city, we will introduce Alipay and WeChat Mini-Programs in later chapter.

A Right Way to Find your Hotel

A common problem for first-time solo travelers in China is finding their hotel. Most bookings only show the English name. However, China has so many hotels, and many lack a standard English translation unless they are international chains. This can make the first day frustrating. Don't worry—follow these simple steps, and you will never get lost again.



Chongqing Jiefangbei Hongya Cave Houju High-altitude River-view Hotel

46th Floor, Xinhua International, No. 27 Minquan Road, Jiefangbei Subdistrict, Yuzhong District, Chongqing, China
[View on map](#)

9.5/10 Outstanding 5,685 reviews

"The interior design features a retro yet elegant style, and the screen mirroring for movie viewing is excellent."

Highlights

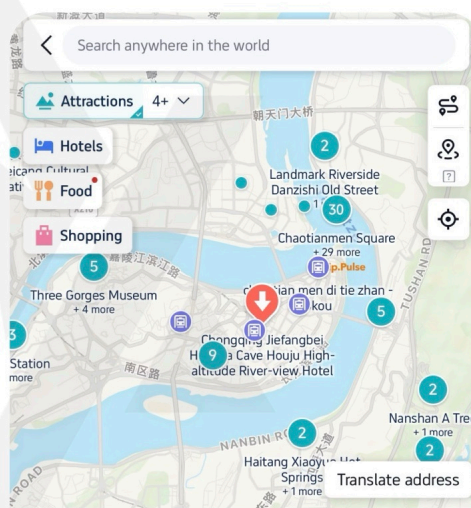
- China travel essentials
- Scenic nightscapes
- Traditional arts & crafts experience
- Laundry service (on-site)

Outstanding Location

- Attraction: Jiefangbei Pedestrian Street 591 ft
- Attraction: Hongya Cave 2231 ft

\$49 ~~\$90~~
44% off

Select Rooms



Chongqing Jiefangbei Hongya Cave Houju High-altitude River-view Hotel

46th Floor, Xinhua International, No. 27 Minquan Road, Jiefangbei Subdistrict, Yuzhong District, Chongqing, China
1.6 miles from city center (straight-line)

Nearby

Transport Attractions Hotels Restaurants Shopping



Jiefangbei Pedestrian Street

4.7/5 5,571 reviews | Free

Trip Best No. 3 of Night Attractions in Chong...



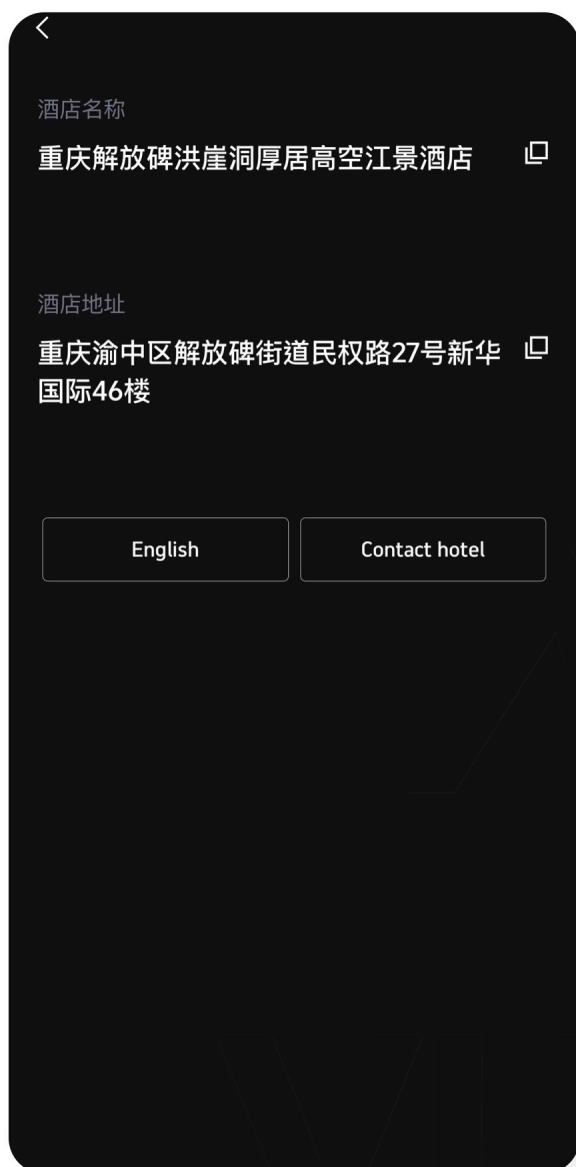
Sign in

Getting there

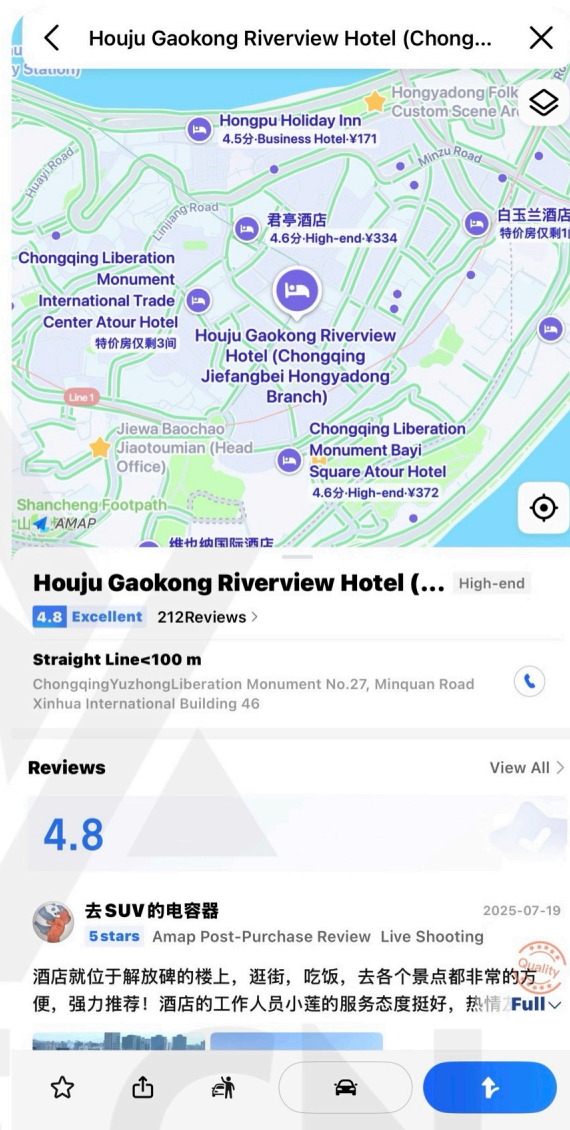
Open the main page of your booked hotel in **Trip.com APP**, Tap "**View on map**".

On the bottom right of the map, Tap "**Translate address**".

In Chinese, its name is just "Houju Hotel", and they put "The Humble" on its Chinese name, obviously, the name is different from what shows in Trip.com APP, so it will be easy to make foreigners confused.



After "Translate Address", you will get the Chinese Characters of the Hotel name and its address. Tap the copy icon, and paste it in **Amap**. Or take a Screenshot and show it to your Taxi driver.



Paste its Chinese name in **Amap** and search, you will get the right place. If your **Amap** is already set to English or other languages, it will still show it in English or other languages. You can see the English translated hotel name is not the same as the one in **Trip.com**. Also, Double-check the address.

Book a Train Ticket in China

China's High-Speed Rail (HSR), known as **Gaotie** (高铁), is the world's largest and most advanced bullet train network. As of 2026, it covers over 50,000 kilometers, connecting nearly every major city with a population of over 500,000.

High-Speed Trains (The "Bullet" Trains)

These use modern, streamlined train sets and usually depart from new "South" or "North" stations.

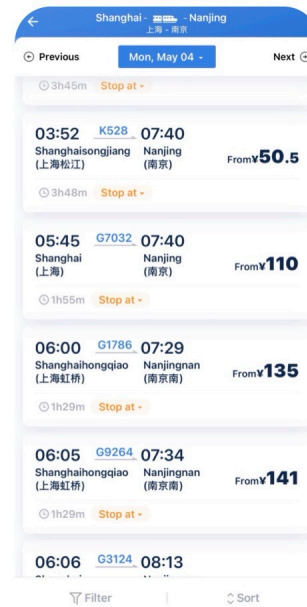
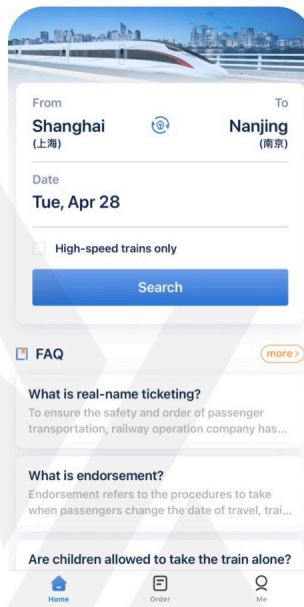
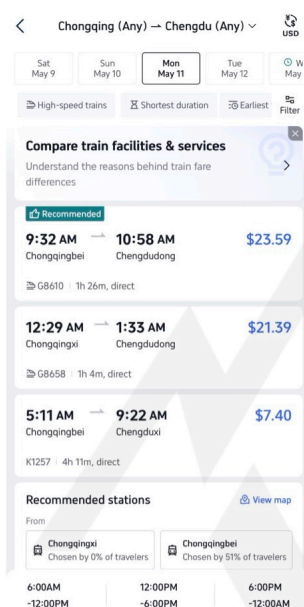
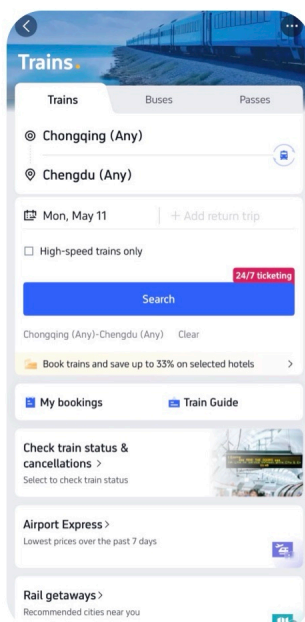
- **G (Gaotie - High-Speed):**
 - **The fastest:** Up to 350 km/h.
 - Best for long distances and major cities.
- **D (Dongche - EMU):**
 - **The "Standard" high-speed:** Up to 250 km/h.
 - Includes daytime seats and some overnight sleepers.
- **C (Chengji - Intercity):**
 - **Short commutes:** Short-distance lines (e.g., Beijing to Tianjin).
 - High frequency, similar to a subway between cities.

Normal-Speed Trains (Conventional)

These are traditional green or red trains that use older tracks and older "Central" stations.

- **Z (Zhida - Direct Express):**
 - **Fastest of the old fleet:** Up to 160 km/h.
 - Fewest stops; usually connects major hubs overnight.
- **T (Tekuai - Express):**
 - **Mid-range:** Up to 140 km/h.
 - Stops at provincial capitals and larger cities.
- **K (Kuaisu - Fast):**
 - **Slowest "Fast" train:** Up to 120 km/h.
 - Stops at almost every significant town or county.

Trip.com & Railway 12306



In Trip.com APP, you can change the shown currency by tapping the icon at upper right corner. However, Railway 12306 only shows Chinese Yuan (¥). Trip.com only have English names of the stations shown while Railway 12306 showing in both English and Chinese, but don't worry, they have the same prices, just different units. Tap the prices shown in both APP, you will see the prices for different classes (2nd Class, 1st Class, Business Class and Standing for High-speed Trains; Hard Seat, Hard Sleeper and Standing for Normal-speed trains).

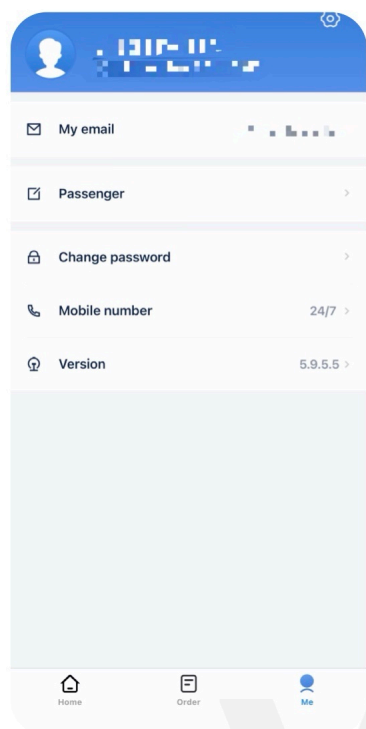
Choose your train and class > Add Passengers > Select your payment method > Done!

i You might notice that city train station names often end with words like "dong," "nan," "xi," or "bei." These mean **East, South, West, and North**. You may also see names like "Hongqiao" or "Songjiang," which indicates different districts in a city.

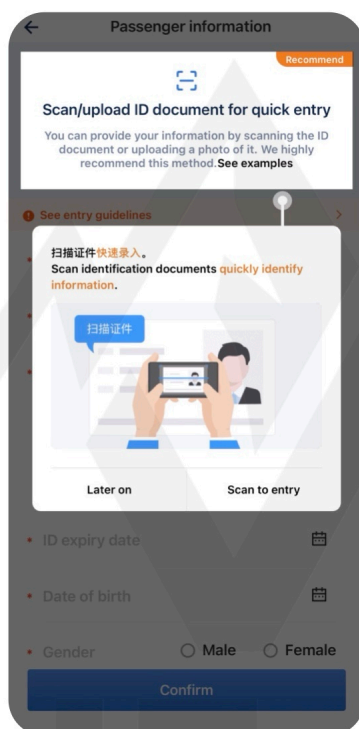
This is because many Chinese cities have several stations built in different areas and times. Each station usually handles different types of trains. Always double-check which specific station is on your ticket before heading to the platform

Add Passengers before Booking in Railway 12306

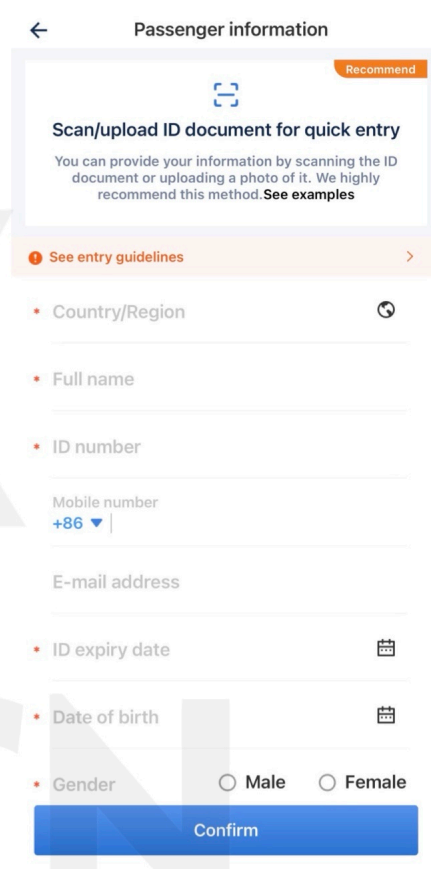
Railway 12306 is the only official international ticketing platform for China Railway. Its English Version has very simple interface, but there are a few little issues happened when adding the foreign passengers.



Go to "Me" tab, Select "Passenger", then "Add Passenger"



It will pop up this page. Do not "Scan to entry" now. You can do it later.

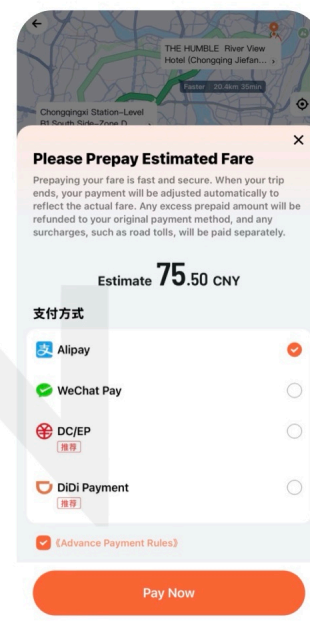
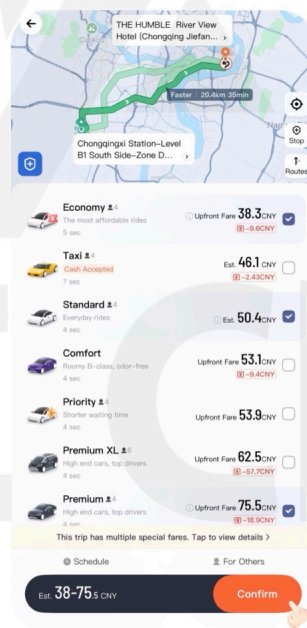
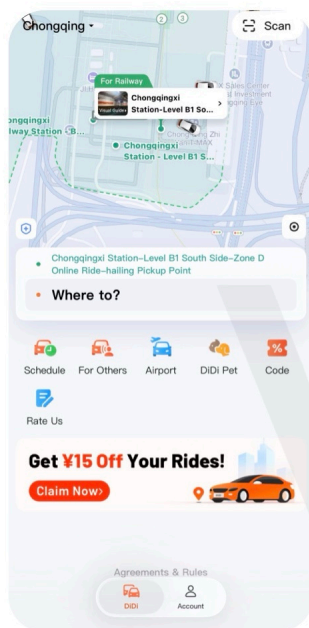
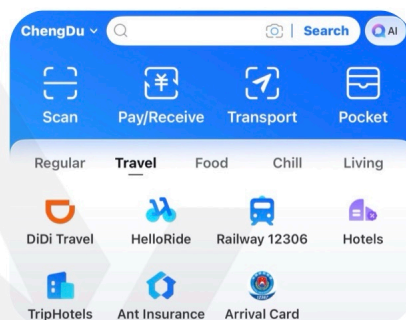
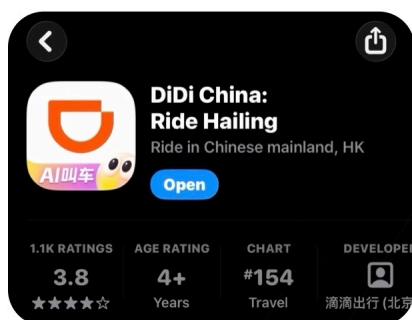


Highly Recommend to read "See entry guidelines" before you start entering your info.

Go over "Name Entry Guidelines" to avoid future verification trouble while catching a train. It will teach you how to enter your name in current form.

Didi for Ride-Hailing

You can either download Didi in App Store or directly use it in Alipay built-in Mini-apps. They basically have the same functions and operation interfaces. Simple registration and sign-in with your phone number.



In the Main page,
Tap "Where to"

Paste the **Chinese name** of your destination (for better accuracy). Here, copy the hotel name from Trip.com, but it has another English name.

Select the Ride Types, then hit "**Confirm**".

Very similar process as calling a Ride in **Amap**.

Select Payment Method and Pay.

If using Didi in **Alipay's mini-apps**, you can only use Alipay to pay for the Ride.

Local Exploration & Dining

To find where the locals actually eat and avoid "tourist traps," these apps are your **secret weapons**.



Dianping (大众点评)

A mix of Yelp and TripAdvisor — millions of photos and rankings for every restaurant in China. The latest version has English setting and **built-in translation feature** (Although not great as a full English version App, but good enough to help finding local food.)

- Browse real customer photos by dish
- **Point-to-Order:** Show servers food photos directly from the app
- Filter by neighborhood, cuisine, and price



Meituan (美团)

China's dominant food and grocery delivery platform — perfect for hotel-room meals.

Meituan App only has Chinese version, however, we can use it in **Alipay's Mini-apps**.

- Delivers food directly to your hotel room
- Groceries and convenience items available
- Covers virtually every city in China

Local Tip: In Dianping, sort by "Most Popular" (人气) to find the dishes locals actually order — not the tourist menu.

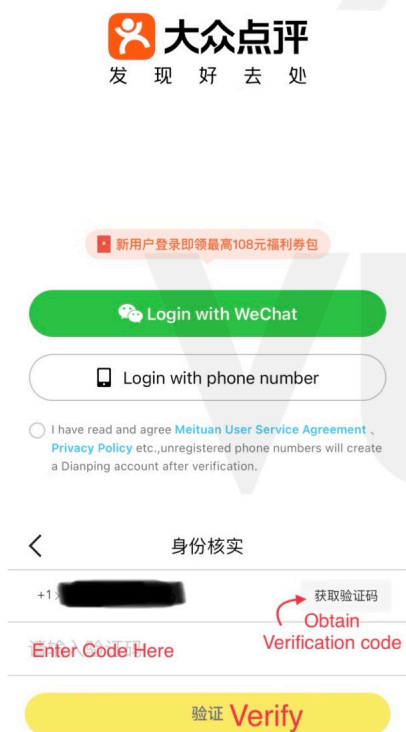
Traveling in China, food is an essential experience you shouldn't miss. There is an ancient Chinese proverb, "Food is the first necessity of the people," and every city and region in China boasts its own unique culinary culture.

How to Use Dianping App

To help our foreign friends discover authentic local cuisine, we have curated a selection of restaurants in our city travel guides based on recommendations from locals. You can simply use the **Dianping App** to scan the QR codes provided in the guides and instantly access these saved restaurant collections.

Every city in China has thousands of amazing eats, but I've narrowed it down to 30 - 50 "must-try" spots to get you started. Think of this list as your appetizer; feel free to browse the app and explore the thousands of other incredible flavors waiting for you around every corner!

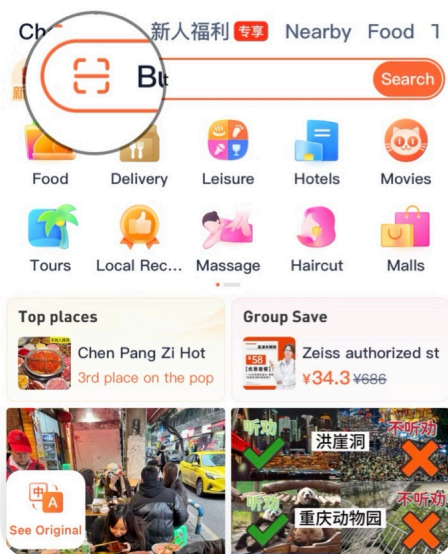
Download & Registration



Select your way to Login

1. Login with WeChat. You need to allow the app to access your WeChat information. You may also need to verify it with your phone.
2. Login with phone number. Select your country code and enter your phone number. On the verification page, they only have Chinese version shown on the left. Tap **"Obtain Verification Code" > Enter your Code > Tap "Verify"**

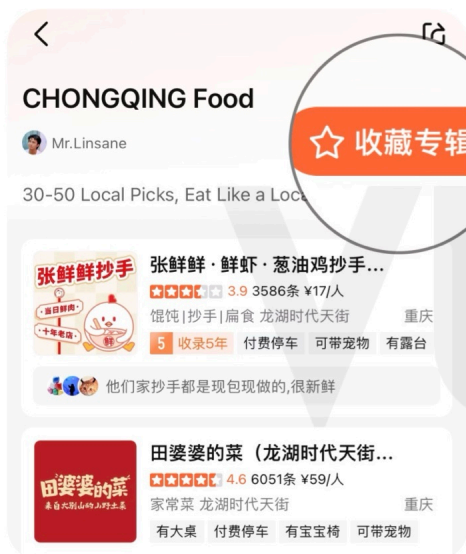
To Obtain the Restaurant Collection by Scanning QR Code



To Scan the QR code, Tap the Scan Icon on homepage



Scan the code to see our collection. Tap "Open App (打开App)" to enter

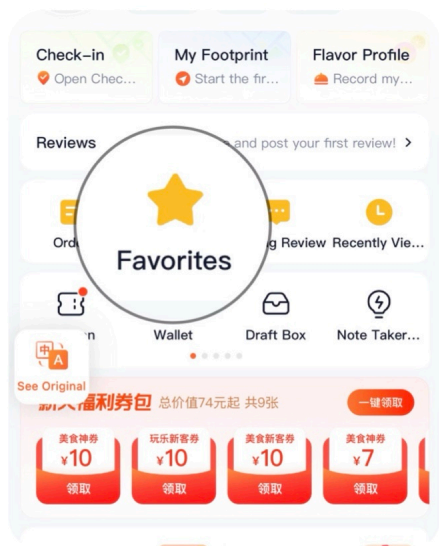


Tap "Save Collection (收藏专辑)"



It will pop up "Successfully Saved, Go "My Collection" to check

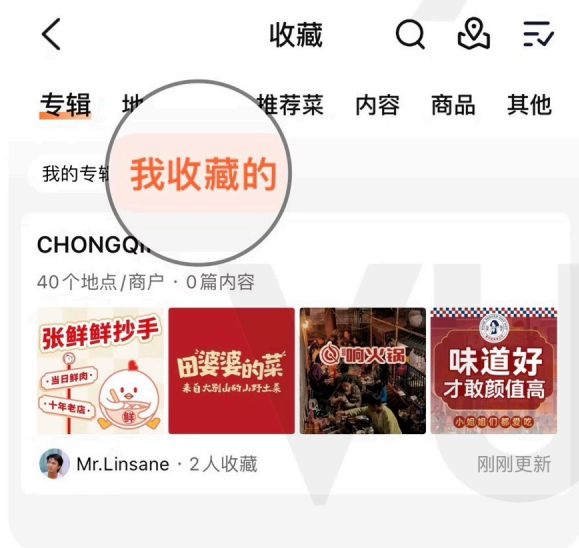
Again, this app is not Fully English supported, like some parts will not be translated by the built-in translator, but it is very good for exploring authentic local Chinese food, and we are trying our best to help.



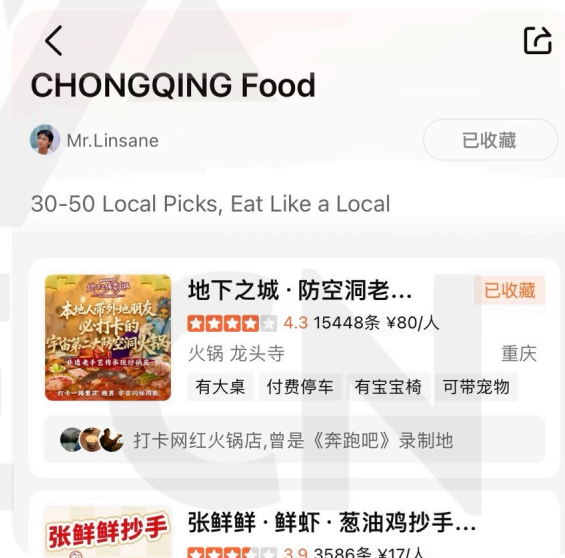
Go to your "Profile" Tap "Favorites"



From here, the app becomes Chinese. Tap "Collection 专辑"



Under "Collection 专辑", Select "I Saved 我收藏的"



Now you can scroll to see our restaurant collection

① When you are on our shared collection page, unfortunately, the App translator button is not working on that page. You enter restaurant profile, it will work again. See Followings. For better experience of our foreign friends, our team already noticed Dianping App this problem. Hope they can improve the International version soon.

Continued



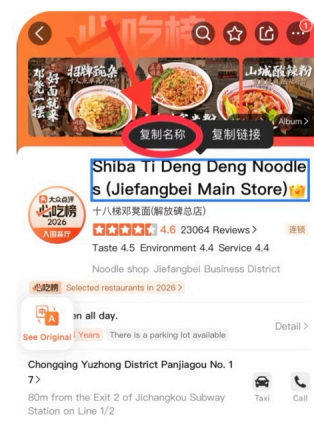
On a restaurant profile page, Tap ">" at address info



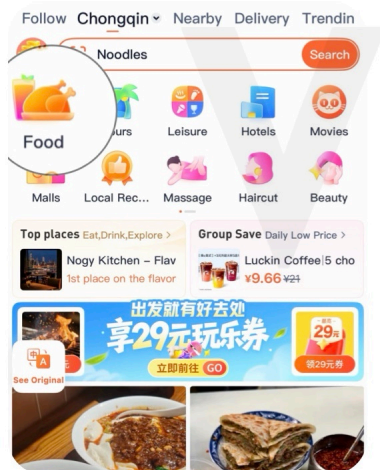
You will enter a map, you can see if the restaurant is close to you or not. Well, we know it's all Chinese



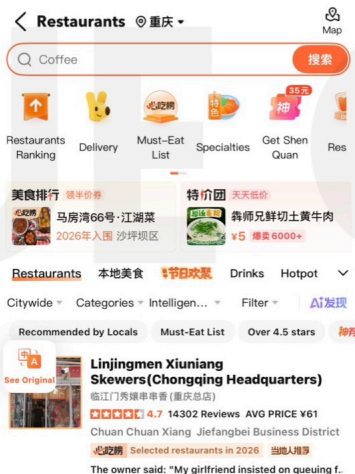
Unfortunately, the Map on the main page is also all Chinese, so you do not use the built-in map to get there



Long-press on the name, Tap "Copy Name 复制名称" (It will copy its Chinese name, even it shows in English), paste it into Amap or Didi to get there



You can explore the food and other merchants nearby on Homepage



Thousands of restaurant and places are waiting for you to be explored.



On Homepage, many posts by locals and tourists, look for people with badge (like Google Local Guide), you may find some specials

Pro Tip: Using Mini-Apps

You don't need to download 50 different apps. Many services are "**Mini-Programs**" — built-in apps inside Alipay or WeChat that launch instantly and pay automatically.

Why Use Mini-Apps?

→ Instant Launch

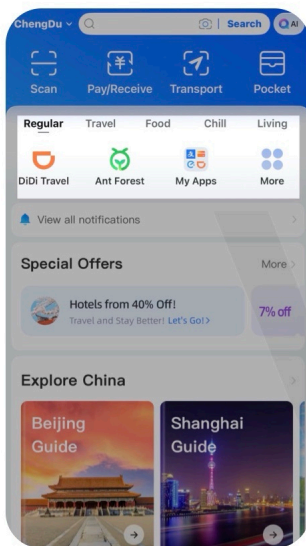
Open in under 1 second — no installation, no storage used on your phone.

→ Auto Payment

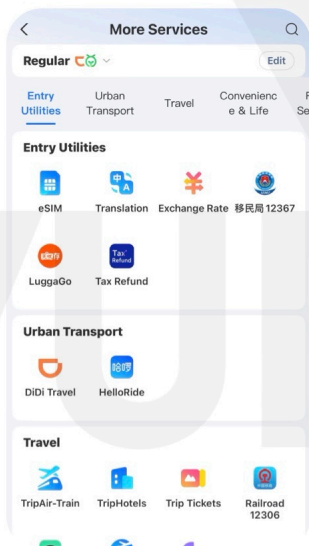
Automatically charge the card linked to your Alipay or WeChat account.

→ Built-in Translation

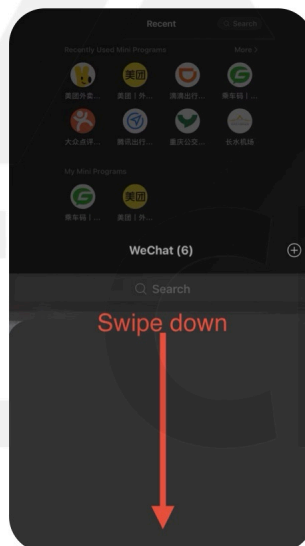
Most mini-programs feature a "Translate" button covering 18 languages.



For Alipay, find Mini-apps on Home Screen



No need to search Mini-Apps



For WeChat, swipe down on Home Screen to find them



For WeChat Mini-Apps, you need to search them to use. Or you can find some like Didi and Metro in Pay and Services Page

i How to find them: In Alipay, look at the icons on the home screen. In WeChat, swipe down from the main chat list to open the Mini-Program portal.

Essential Mini-Apps to Use

You don't need to download 50 different apps. Many services are "Mini-Programs" — built-in apps inside Alipay or WeChat that launch instantly and pay automatically.



Didi

Reliable, English-language car hailing with automatic payment.



Metro / Bus Code

Scan in and out of subways in every major Chinese city.




Food Delivery

Meituan or Taobao Flash Shopping for hotel-room delivery.



Attraction Tickets

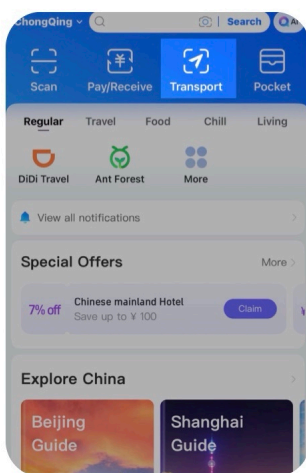
Search "Shanghai Disney" or "Panda Base" to book tickets directly — no third-party fees.

 We will do the demonstration of Mini-Apps on Alipay, it will be very similar operation on WeChat for the same program.

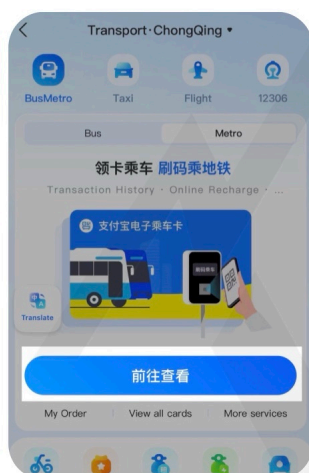
Transportation with Mini-Apps

Didi-hailing is basically same operation in both App and Mini-App. Refer to the previous Apps introduction.

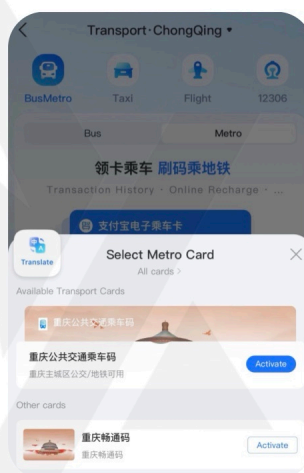
Metro/Bus Code Setup



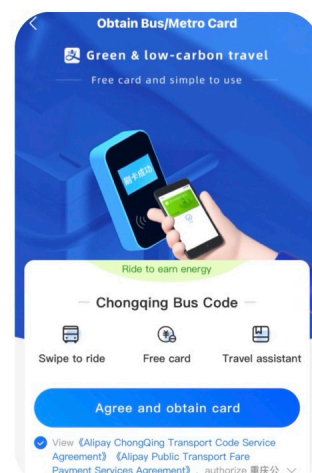
On home screen, Tap "Transport"



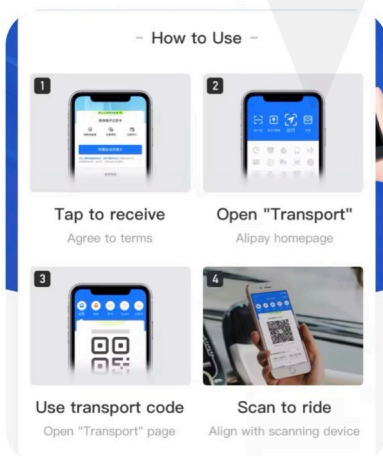
Search the city at the top, Tap the Blue Bar to move on



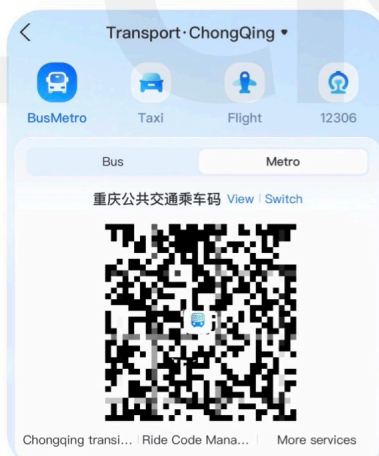
Tap "Activate"



Read the agreement, Tap "Agree and Obtain Card"



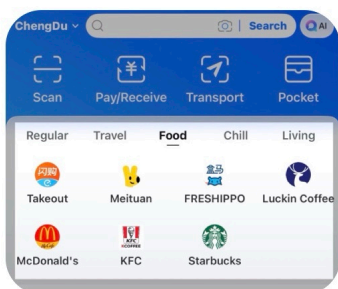
Once you finish the setup, go back to home page.



Tap "Transport" > Scan your Code to take a metro.

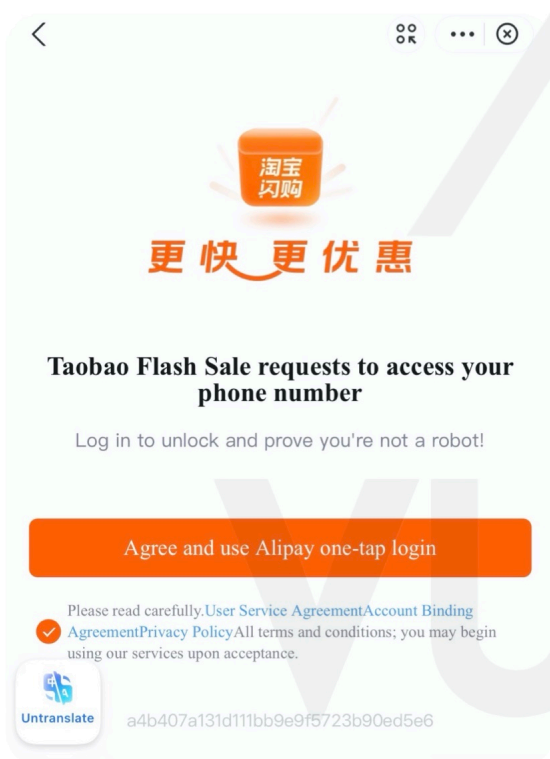
Foods & Goods Delivery

Meituan & Taobao Flash Shopping (Taobao Shangou)

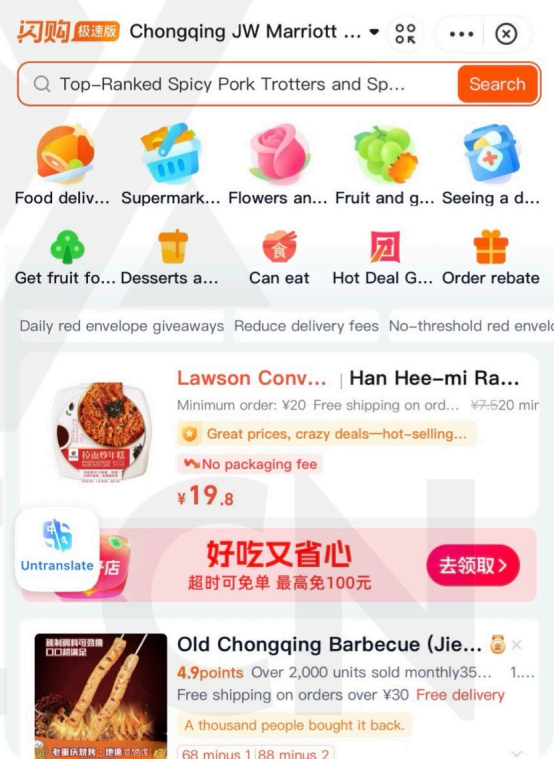


Taobao Flash Shopping is named "Takeout" in Alipay Mini-Apps.

We mainly recommend to use Taobao Flash for delivery in Alipay, because it is currently supported to use an international phone number. Meituan is also a very good delivery app in China, but our goal is Convenience for foreigners.



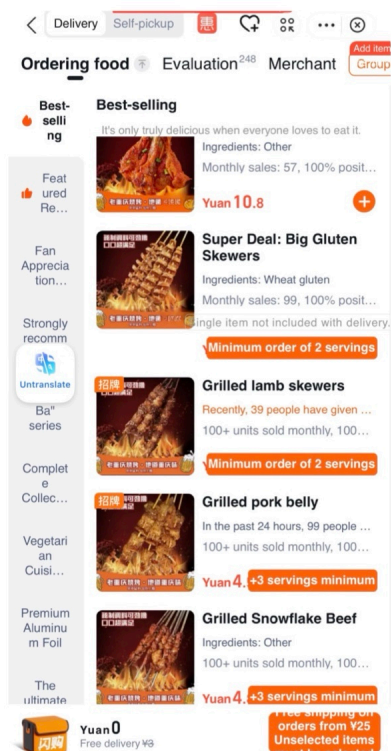
First time Tap into Taobao Flash, easily login with your phone number that is used for Alipay



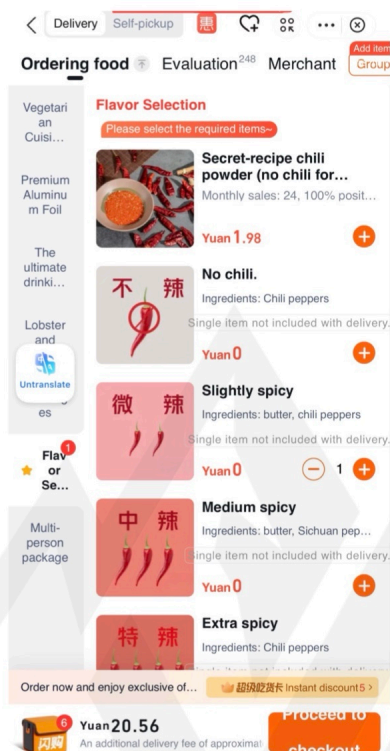
Once you login, the homepage shows restaurants nearby. Also, you can select other deliveries: Convenience store, Fruit, Pharmacy

❗ Honestly, Built-in Translator is not also working, but good enough. Hope they will improve it later.

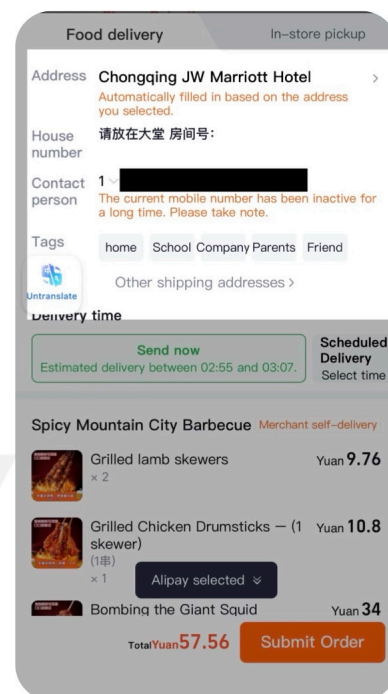
Example to Make a Delivery Order



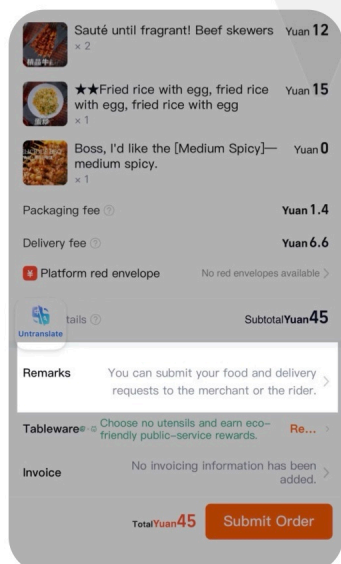
Select what you want, translator may not work sometimes, see pictures



For some foods like Chinese BBQ, choose spicy levels. Tap "Proceed to Checkout"



If not address in your profile, add it here. Copy your hotel CHINESE NAME or address from Trip.com, and paste it here. Scroll down, you can see "Remarks/notes"

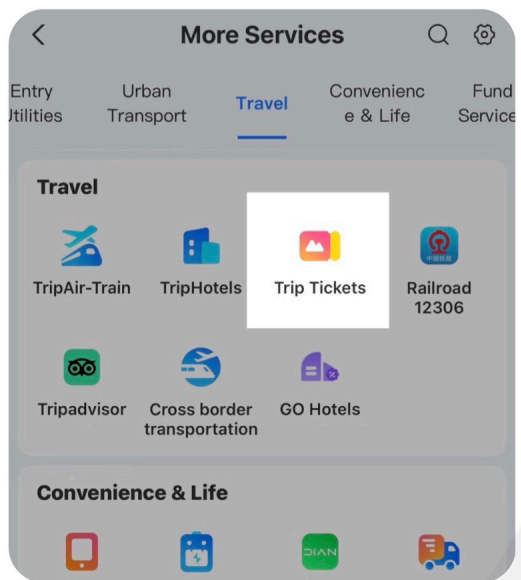


For your convenience, Copy this "请放酒店前台，房间号: xxx" in "House number" (Translation: Please Leave at hotel front desk, Room#:xxx)

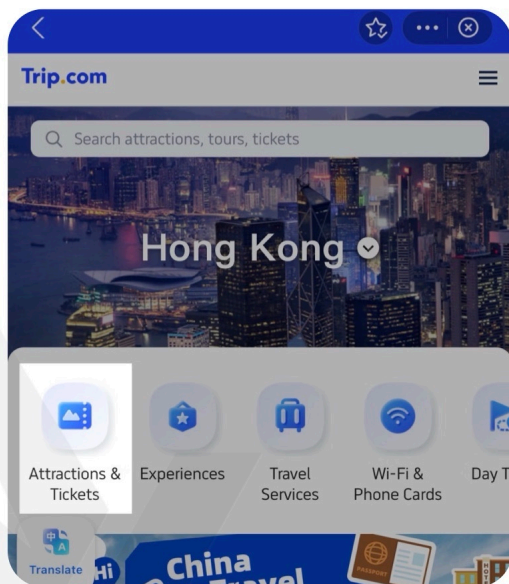
Copy this "无需致电，请放酒店前台，缺货的商品请直接退款" in Remarks (Translation: No need to call, Please leave at hotel front desk, refund for unavailable items)

After Tap "Submit Order", Payment page will pop up, and pay for your order with Alipay. Check your order on homepage, Tap "Order" at bottom.

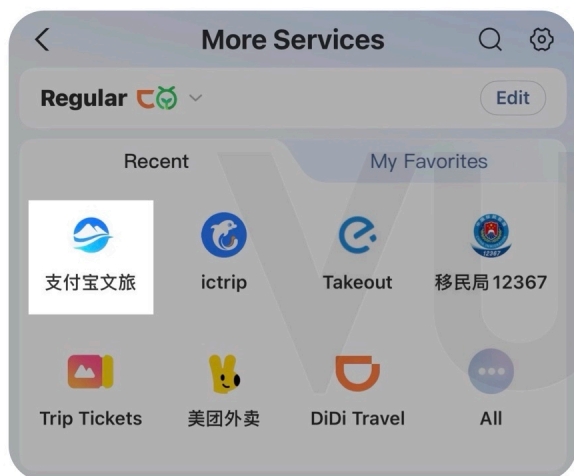
Attractions & Tickets



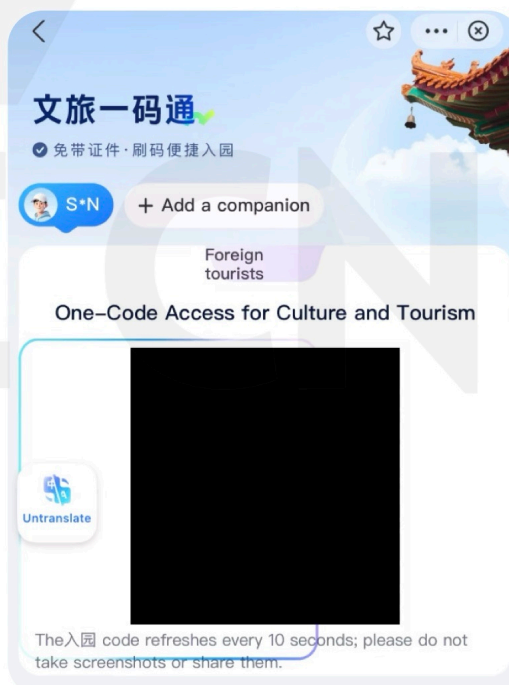
To book attractions tickets, Find "Trip Tickets" mini-app in Alipay



This service is provided by Trip.com, so you can use it in Alipay or Trip.com its own app.



There are many free attractions in China, but they require ID registration for entry. This mini-app called "支付宝文旅" (Alipay Culture&Tourism) will help foreigners to enter easily. Also, it is useful for some paid attractions, Scan the code > Charge on your Alipay > Entry.



Obtain and Activate the code for first time use. It will automatically sync your Alipay ID Info.

Communication & Connectivity

Ensure you have these ready **before** you pass through Chinese customs. Once inside China, downloading certain apps may become difficult.



VPN

Mandatory.

ExpressVPN or Astrill are required to access WhatsApp, Instagram, Google, and Netflix. You **cannot** download these once inside China.



eSIM (Airalo / Holafly)

Purchase a digital data plan **1–2 days before** your trip. Ensures 4G/5G data the moment you land — no airport SIM queues. In Alipay mini-apps, you can find eSim service.



Translation (DeepL / Microsoft Translator)

Use **Bilingual Conversation mode** for real-time talking, or **Camera Mode** to instantly translate menus and street signs.

If you forget to have these translator ready, you can find translation service in Alipay Mini-Apps.



VPN downloads are blocked inside China. Install and test your VPN at home before departure — this is non-negotiable.