

China Narrow Gauge III Tour

updated 15 November 2019

8-28 September 2020

plus optional

Shibanxi extension 28 September - 5 October

Jun (Liu Xue Jun) will be in charge of arrangements for this tour and it is expected that Alan (Wang Feng) will be the main guide. I plan to be the tour leader.

The dates have moved forwards to avoid the Chinese national holiday starting on 1 October and lasting for several days after that. Those who continue for the extension at the end of the tour should be at Shibanxi on 1 October for an increased number of tourist trains.



Banshi Iron Ore Railway - Photo © Ichiro Junpu 2019 used with permission

Revised Itinerary 13 November 2019:

Day	Date	Activity	Overnight	Comment
Day -1		Optional: Arrive in Dalian, explore the tram system (individual or guided to be decided)	Dalian	Option to arrive one day early to explore Dalian trams
Day 1	Tues 8	Fly into Dalian for tour start, meet Dalian Airport or Dalian hotel (if arrived the day before) morning and	Xietun	

Day 2	Weds 9	transfer to Xietun - part day with salt railways Salt railways (Jincheng and Wudao) diesel	Xietun	
Day 3	Thurs 10	Salt Railways	Xietun	
Day 4	Fri 11	Transfer to Linghai by road (half day) via the reed railway	Linghai	
Day 5	Sat 12	Shengtai Paper Reed Railway (diesel)	Linghai	visit Jincheng Paper Factory railway en route although access can't be promised
Day 6	Sun 13	Shengtai Paper Reed Railway (diesel)	Fuxin	flexibility to drive to Fuxin early or late
Day 7	Mon 14	Fuxin to Baishan by road	Baishan	morning to explore what is left at Fuxin, NB: depart by 11 am for Baishan - 6 hrs
Day 8	Tue 15	Banshi Iron Ore Railway (electric)	Baishan	
Day 9	Wed 16	Banshi Iron Ore Railway	Baishan	
Day 10	Thu 17	Drive from Baishan to Shenyang (4.5 hrs)	on train	overnight train from Shenyang to Beijing
Day 11	Fri 18	High speed train Beijing - Zhengzhou then minibus transfer to Yujian Railway	Dengfeng	You could leave or join the tour in Shenyang, Beijing or Zhengzhou

Day 12	Sat 19	Yujian Tourist Railway steam & diesel	Dengfeng	expected to start operating May 2020
Day 13	Sun 20	Yujian Tourist Railway steam & diesel	on train	overnight transfer Zhengzhou - Xiangyang
Day 14	Mon 21	transfer to Laohekou by road Laohekou Limestone Railway diesel	Laohekou or Xiangyang	
Day 15	Tues 22	Laohekou Limestone Railway diesel	Laohekou or Xiangyang	
Day 16	Weds 23	Laohekou, then late afternoon road transfer to Xiangyang for overnight train to Chenzhou	on train	
Day 17	Thurs 24	Arrive Chenzhou early morning, part day at Matian Coal Railway diesel	Matian	several overnight trains all arrive before 9 am (railway operates Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri, Sat only - not Wed or Sun)
Day 18	Fri 25	Matian	Matian	
Day 19	Sat 26	Matian part day, overnight	on train	if we have sufficient

		train to Chongqing (dep 19:16 or 20:10)		coverage of Matian, option to visit Huangshaping
Day 20	Sun 27	arrive Chongqing lunchtime (12:47 or 13:50),		option to return home evening or remain in Chongqing
Day 21	Mon 28	option to return home or transfer to Shibanxi		Shibanxi has steam passenger and tourist trains but steam-outline diesel also in use
	Mon 5 October	proposed end of the Shibanxi extension		depart Chengdu for home

Once firmly fixed when the tour is confirmed 'go', the start and end dates for this tour will not change. This itinerary could change if we find that any of the lines are not functioning. Matian is probably the most likely to close before we visit, so the plan would be to travel on to Chongqing from Laohekou and visit the Honglu/Yongchuan electric coal line instead.



Jincheng Paper Factory railway - reed storage yard. It's yard work only here these days. We will make a stop on our way to the Shengtai Paper Railway.

Post-Tour Extension to Shibanxi

The extension to Shibaxi will allow participants to see the intensive steam passenger service operated at holiday times. There will also be an opportunity for the following options:

- walk the whole line 19km (in sections) - the line includes 6 tunnels
- overnight in Sanjin and Bagou
- lunch in the mine canteen at Sanjin with a chance to walk through the mine railway maintenance area to get there.
- visit the back end of the Sanjin mine to see battery electrics bringing spoil out of the mine and tipping it.
- drive round the neighbouring area to see what small coal mines we can find. One good candidate which I would make first priority uses diesel locos and features an open-sided tunnel on a ledge.
- visit Water Heart Village an ancient fortification on top of a flat hill with 4 of 5 gates remaining and try to arrange (in advance) lunch there in one of the houses using local farm produce.



Shengtai Paper Railway - on our previous visit only a permanent way train was seen - hence the need to return. Behind the train are the stored reeds.

It's not clear what work the steam-outline diesel pretender will do. At the maximum it may pilot most tourist trains from Mifeng to Xianrenjiao and possibly operate the early and late local passenger trains. To get to and from Mifeng, it may also pilot a train from Shibaxi. So with maximum use, it's a total pain and forces one to focus on downhill or tender-first uphill shots of steam-only trains. However, with less than maximum use of the diesel,

Shibanxi is still a very attractive place to be. With maximum use of the pretender, the options above are likely to come into play.



Loading salt on the Jincheng Salt Railway

Prices

The price for the 21 day main tour 8 - 28 September is Yuan 29,400. Prices for a part tour available on request but I hope you will join for the whole tour. The length of the post tour extension to Shibanxi is currently flexible. My current preference is for an extension ending in Chengdu on Monday 5 October. This would make the cost of a 7 day post tour Yuan 9,800 (KLM flies direct from Chengdu to Amsterdam on Mon, Wed, Thu, Sat so this would allow for the Monday flight home.)

Discounts

The most useful discount for the tour organisers and other participants is an early-booking discount as this may encourage participants to sign up earlier and help confirm the tour is go in good time. Having discussed this with Jun, I can offer a tour discount (for full tour participation only, not part tours) of Yuan 900 which will be deducted from your total tour price. This discount is available until end December 2019.

Deposits

You can book your place on this tour with a refundable deposit of £400. This deposit is fully refundable until the end of February 2020. After this it becomes

partially refundable with deductions for any expenses already incurred on your behalf. Two months prior to the start of the tour on 8 September, the deposit is non-refundable.



Jincheng Salt Railway - loaded salt train on its way to the factory

Balance of tour costs

These can be paid in Yuan cash at the start of the tour or remitted to Jun in advance. Given the Yuan 20,000 limit on taking Yuan cash into China without declaration, I recommend that you remit some or all of the balance to Jun well in advance of the start of the tour.

Tour Itinerary and Tour Dates

Please note that this itinerary is subject to change but the start and end dates will be totally fixed once the tour is confirmed go and any changes before that will be discussed with those already signed up.

Overview

This is the third Linesiding with John China Narrow Gauge tour and we plan to visit eight of the longer lines that run through public areas (4 new and 4 repeats). Attempts will be made to obtain permission to visit works area and depots but this can rarely be arranged in advance and cannot be guaranteed. Where possible, we will engage a local 'guide' to help obtain access permission.

Steam is not the main focus but there is the option to end the tour at Shibaxi

on the Jiayang Railway where steam (and one diesel pretender) are the motive power.



Wudao Salt Railway - engineers' train with some interesting crew cars

The places to be visited are either lines we have previously visited or which have been visited recently by Keiichi Kii or Peter Haworth. I will be in contact with them about lines, local guides and other useful information. Both of them document their trips on their websites:

http://www.kii762mm.com/modules/pico/index.php?cat_id=251

<http://www.chinesemodeltrains.com/webtrips.html>

as I do on mine:

<http://rabylee.uk/linesidingindex.html>

Minimum Numbers

The tour will run with a minimum of 8 people. It may be able to run with fewer people. The Shibaxi extension will run with a minimum of 6 people. In practice, Jun never likes to cancel a tour so with reasonable support, there is every chance that this tour will run.

Included in the Tour Price

The tour price includes transport (except high speed trains and flights), the services of a guide or guides, single hotel rooms, three meals including beer with lunch and dinner.

Not Included in the Tour Price

The tour does not include any expenses prior to joining the tour in Shenyang,

nor internal flights and high speed trains which will be charged at cost (plus a proportion of the guide's flights and trains if less than 6 people). The overnight train Xiangyang - Chenzhou and Chenzhou - Chongqing are included in the tour price.



Yujian Railway Special Train for Local Government Staff April 2019 - expected to be operating tourist trains from May 2020

At any location where we expect to be able to observe the normal operations of industrial railways, we may find the railway not operating, not much happening or that we are denied access. This will only be known at the time. If you join this tour, it is on the basis that on a tour such as this, the unexpected is likely to happen. Your guides and tour leader will do their very best to provide the best possible alternatives in such cases and will discuss the options with you.

The tour has been timed to give an excellent chance that seasonal railways such as the reed railways and cement railways will be operating. We also expect that salt, iron ore and coal railways will also be operating at this time.

Terms & Conditions

This is essentially the small print but I encourage you to read this to understand the thoughts behind these plans. Should there be an discrepancy in the information below with the information in the first part of this proposal, the information in the first part should be taken as the correct version. [Please let me know](#) about any discrepancies you may find.

This tour will be up to the normal 'Linesiding with John' standards and will include single rooms, 3 meals a day, free beer, transport except flights and high-speed trains, the services of national and local guides along with my own

participation as tour leader.



Yujian Railway - Also has some operating diesels

Joining the tour

We will collect you from the designated airport or other central location, guide you throughout and then make sure you are in position to catch your flight home from a major airport at the end of the trip.

Before & After the Tour

Our local guides can make local arrangements such as hotels and train reservations for you for prior to and after the end of the trip on request. Support will be given and paperwork will be provided to obtain your Chinese visa. Please note that the new Chinese visa regulations may require anyone under 70 to visit the visa office to have their fingerprints taken.

Internal Flights & High Speed Trains

Internal flights and high speed trains are extra on this tour because it is more difficult to absorb these than overnight sleeper trains in the daily tour budget. If any leg of the tour runs with less than 6 people, those flying or taking a high speed train may be asked to pay a contribution to the guide's flight costs. If you join this tour, you accept that.

This tour has been planned based on recent first-hand observations of these lines by me (John Raby), Jun (Liu Xue Jun), Keiichi Kii or Peter Haworth. We (expected to be Jun or his colleague Alan and me) will take you to the lines listed above in the anticipation that they will be working and that there will be interesting operations to see from areas accessible to the public. However, you accept that at the time of our visit, the line may not be operating or there may be little to see from public areas.



Laohekou Limestone Railway - Photo © Ichiro Junpu 2019 used with permission

A note on Deposits and Refunds

Your deposit is a guarantee both of your place on the tour and also of your commitment to participate in the tour and to pay the balance of the price of your tour. Should you need to cancel your participation, it's reasonable for you to expect a deposit refund if that decision is made early enough. However, especially if a tour has been declared go with small numbers, one person withdrawing from a tour close to the tour start can push the tour from profit to loss. For that reason, there has to be a point when your deposit becomes non-refundable. I have chosen 2 months out from the start of the tour as that point - 8 July. If you cancel before that point but after the tour has been declared go, your deposit is partially refundable and the level of the refund will depend on any expenses that may have been incurred in China on your behalf. In most cases, you can expect a full refund. In the unlikely event that I have to cancel a tour, your deposit is fully refundable but that, along with the refund of any additional money remitted to Jun or me, that will be the limit of my liability. Please note that it may still be necessary for the tour to operate in order for me to personally collect any money owing to you from Jun. However, it has recently become easier to remit money from China abroad.



Matian Coal Railway from our 2019 visit

Travel Insurance

You should have travel insurance for this trip and you are strongly recommended to take this out starting from the day you book your place on the tour and certainly by the time you book your flights. If you only take out travel insurance to start from the date the tour starts, you will not be covered in case you need to cancel the tour - say on medical grounds - for expenses incurred before the date your travel insurance starts which could include your deposit payment, flights, cost of visa, etc. If you need a formal letter from me to make a claim on travel insurance in case of cancellation, I can provide that.

Payment methods

Participants from the UK can pay the deposit by bank transfer which is free. Those who live outside the UK can make a bank transfer or use PayPal. Both have advantages and disadvantages. International bank transfers are not reversible without the payment of additional fees. Should you withdraw from the tour and need to ask for a refund, there will be bank charges involved (at your expense). The advantage is the possibility of lower costs than PayPal to transfer money based on a service charge not a percentage. PayPal payments are fully refundable/reversible for 60 days. However, the charge for transferring (for example) £400 is based on a percentage not a flat fee and could be £20-£30. Some people have managed to make a PayPal money transfer for which I am not charged a fee. The rules for this are complicated but worth pursuing. I recommend that you discuss the best method for you with me before you go ahead.



Huangshaping Lead & Zinc Mine - a strong contender for a repeat visit on the day we leave Chenzhou

Balance of tour price

The balance of the tour price can be paid in cash at the start of the tour or by bank transfer to the local tour organiser or guide. □

Tour Focus

This is a tour for those interested in still and video lineside photography of real railway operations especially of trains in attractive or unusual scenery. They are not for those primarily interested in riding (although there will be a chance to ride steam-hauled passenger and tourist trains at Shibanzi on the post tour) nor for those who like to see re-creations of how things used to be. No charters are planned on this tour.

Minimum and maximum numbers

Minimum 8 people and (ideally) no more than 10 people maximum. However, we are flexible on this and tours with only 3 participants have run and also slightly more than 10 on occasion. When tours are offered in several parts, it's important that the main part of the tour has enough people. Joining the tour late and leaving early may be possible but is not encouraged as it can have a negative effect on tour logistics and tour viability.

Room Sharing

Should two people wish to sign up to share a room for the tour, this can be arranged. I will ask Jun for a discount price for you to share a room. Should one person wish me to find another person to share a room, I will ask others who have signed up if they would like to share for a discount price. However, I cannot guarantee that another person will come forward to share with you and if not, the only way to join the tour will be at the full price on a standard single-room basis.



Honglu/Yongchuan Coal Railway - a popular favourite close to Chongqing. This will be the substitute line if Matian closes prior to the tour.

The reality of going to see industrial railway operations

We will be visiting real industrial operations. As with any real operation, we could experience days when things don't operate as we would like.

Derailments, loco failures, plant failures, shut downs, safety inspections are just the most obvious examples of things we hope will not happen while we are there (but just might). There is also the chance that we will be denied access to private areas and only able to observe the operation from public areas. In signing up for this tour, you accept these possibilities. Should any changes to the itinerary be necessary, we will create the best alternative programme after consultation with the participants.

We could find hotels that have promised single rooms do not have enough rooms for the group or that hard rather than soft class sleepers on overnight trains are all that are available for some or all of the group or that we need to travel by different trains to obtain sleeper berths. We will do what we can to ensure that frustrations and minor discomforts such as these do not happen but we depend on the cooperation of others to ensure that everything goes totally to plan. You sign up for these tours in full knowledge that things don't always go right all the time and accepting that flexibility and compromise may be required by you at times.

If single rooms are not available then the decision on sharing arrangements will be made by the organisers. You agree to accept our decision on this. A refund equal to half the price of a single room per night will be paid to anyone who has to share.



Shibanxi is not just about steam tourist trains - this is one of several battery electrics working the spoil at the back end of the Sanjin mine.

You should have travel/medical insurance to cover you in the event that you are hospitalized or if you should need to be medically evacuated back home. You may also want to cover yourself for missed flights, lost luggage, etc. but medical emergency is the most important item to insure against. The tour organisers will not be able to support you financially should you have a medical emergency and will only be able to support you in other ways so far as successfully running the tour allows.

If you have any existing medical issues that could affect your ability to join or participate fully in the tour, please let me know. Also let me know if you need to consult your doctor before the tour to get his/her approval to join the tour. This does not mean that you cannot join the tour but it's something that I need to know about as I plan the tour. In the past, participants with quite serious medical conditions which could have affected the operation of the tour have not let me know until the start of the tour. Please let me know in advance so this can be factored in to the tour planning.



Shibanxi steam tourist train above Mifeng in 2018

Participants are responsible for moving their own luggage. While our guides and other participants are normally willing to help, we don't offer a porter service! This can be especially important at railway stations where there may be a reasonable walk including stairs, rough surfaces and narrow carriage corridors. A key element to this is not to bring a case that is too big nor pack things you won't need. For comfort, I suggest limiting yourself to 3 bags including a camera case and making one of these a backpack.

To get the best shots, participants should have no problem walking some distance over rough ground or along railway tracks sometimes on the ballast. Our transport will normally park near the railway giving a shot of sorts but the best shots could be some walk away. If you do not feel able to walk (say) 3-5 km at a medium pace, please let me know before or when you sign up. This does not mean that you cannot join the tour.

The hotels will vary from luxury to 1 star but all should provide hot water for baths/showers (although hours for this may be limited) and heating or cooling in the rooms as required by the season. Toilet and bathroom will normally be en suite.



Shibanxi tourist train stops for the runpast at the yellow flower curve above Mifeng

Free wi-fi is generally available in most hotels in China these days but may be restricted to the lobby and restaurant areas. Please be aware that a number of common internet sites and services are blocked in China. These include Google Search and Google Maps, Gmail and Facebook. To get around the Gmail problem, I suggest you have an alternative email address. Traditionally Yahoo and Microsoft have offered free email addresses that are not blocked. To get around these problems, you can also use a VPN (Virtual Private Network) which has not itself been blocked in China (something that is subject to change. If you use Gmail as your main email, you may want to set up a VPN in advance. I am not aware of any free VPNs which can be used for this purpose. I use <https://vpn.ac/> which has worked in the past and which has a useful help desk that will sort out any issues. However, most visitors can live with these restrictions for the relatively short period that they are in China especially if you don't use Gmail.

John Raby □□

30 October 2019

updated 15 November 2019