



Sìchuān

POP 80.8 MILLION

Includes ➔

Chéngdū	734
Dùjiāngyàn	744
Éméi Shān	746
Lè Shān	750
Liǔjiāng	752
Zigòng	754
Yíbīn	755
Kāngdìng	757
Sōngpǎn	773
Jiǔzhàigōu National Park	777
Lángzhōng	780
Guǎngyuán	781

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Chén Mápó Dòufu (p739)
- ➔ Taste of Tibet (p760)
- ➔ Chóngqīng Yúanlǎosì Old Hotpot (p739)
- ➔ Ā Bù Lǚ Zī (p779)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Hóngchún Píng (p748)
- ➔ Ancient Hotel (p781)
- ➔ Dōngpō Tibetan Homestay (p762)
- ➔ Talam Khang Guesthouse (p764)
- ➔ Tiānyī Youth Hotel (p781)

Why Go?

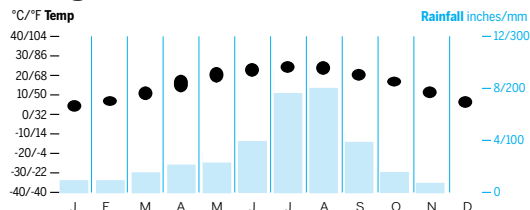
It's fitting that an ancient form of opera and magic called *biànliǎn* (face-changing) originated here, for Sìchuān (四川) is a land of many guises.

Capital Chéngdū shows a modern face, but just beyond its bustling ring roads you'll find a more traditional landscape of mist-shrouded, sacred mountains, and a countryside scattered with ancient villages and cliffs of carved Buddhas. Central Sìchuān is also home to the giant panda, the most famous face in China. In the south, expect a veil of history and a muted beauty that sees far fewer travellers than the rest of the region.

To the north the visage changes again into a fairyland of alpine valleys and blue-green lakes. Sìchuān's Tibetan face appears as you venture west. This is Kham, one of the former Tibetan prefectures: a vast landscape of plateau grasslands and glacial mountains where Tibetan culture still thrives and you're certain to have your most challenging, yet most magical, experiences.

When to Go

Chéngdū



Mar-May Prime time for Chéngdū; not too humid, peach blossoms and little rain.

Jul & Aug In the west in the warm grasslands bloom in technicolour and festivals abound.

Sep & Oct Turquoise lakes to the north offer secluded camping amid autumn leaves.

History

Sichuān's early history was turbulent. The region was the site of various breakaway kingdoms, ever skirmishing with central authority, but it was finally wrested under control and established as the capital of the Qin empire in the 3rd century BC. It was here that the kingdom of Shu (a name by which the province is still known) ruled as an independent state during the Three Kingdoms period (AD 220–80).

During the Warring States period (475–221 BC), local governor and famed engineer Li Bing managed to harness the flood-prone Mín River (岷江; Mín Jiāng) on the Chuānxī plain with his revolutionary weir system; the Dūjiāngyàn Irrigation Project still controls flooding, and supplies Chéngdū and 49 other provincial cities with water 2200 years after it was constructed. It's one of the reasons the Sichuān basin is synonymous with fertile soil.

Another more recent factor was the efforts of Zhao Ziyang, the Party Secretary of Sichuān in 1975. After the Great Leap Forward, when an estimated 10% of Sichuān's population died of starvation, Ziyang became the driving force behind agricultural and economic reforms that restored farming output. He reinstated the 'Responsibility System', whereby plots of land were granted to farming families on the proviso that they sold a quota of crops to the state. Any additional profits or losses would be borne by the families. This household-focused approach was so successful that it became the national model. Sichuān continues to be a major producer of the nation's grain, soybeans and pork.

Catastrophe struck the region on 12 May 2008, when the Wēnchuān earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale hit the province's central region. Some sources reported it killed more than 88,000 people, as many as 10,000 of them school children, and left millions more injured or homeless. The trillion-yuan aid and rebuilding effort continues in the remote, mountainous areas. The main road linking Chéngdū with Jiūzhàigōu took four years to reopen, and now travellers on that route will see brand-new villages rising from the rubble. In the areas surrounding the Wēnchuān, the earthquake's epicentre, significant damage is still apparent nearly a decade on.

Language

Sichuanese is a Mandarin dialect, but with its fast clip, distinctive syntax and five tones instead of four, it can challenge standard

Mandarin speakers. Two phrases easily understood are *yàodé* (pronounced 'yow-day', meaning 'yes' or 'OK') and *méidé* (pronounced 'may-day', meaning 'no').

Sichuān's other major languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman family and are spoken by Tibetans and Yi minorities. Don't expect much help from standard phrasebooks. In western Sichuān, Tibetan dialects vary from region to region or even town to town.

i Getting There & Around

Chéngdū serves as the province's transit hub. Smooth expressways to eastern and southern Sichuān make for short trips to many destinations, but heading north or west is a different story; many roads are in poor shape or are under construction. Weather conditions are unpredictable at high elevations, and hazards ranging from landslides to overturned semis are common.

Chéngdū Shuāngliú International Airport is the largest airport in southwest China. Several small airports in Sichuān's furthest corners are connected to it by one-hour flights – Jiūzhàigōu in the north, Kāngdīng in the near west, Dàochéng-Yāding in the southwest, and Yùshù just across the western border with Qīnghǎi province – significantly cutting travel times to these otherwise remote destinations.

Trains head from Chéngdū to major cities across China, including to Lhasa via the famous high-altitude link. High-speed trains now connect Chéngdū to Qīngchéng Shān and Dūjiāngyàn in the north, Lè Shān and Éméi Shān in the south, and on to China's other provinces in every direction.

PRICE RANGES

Sleeping

The following price ranges refer to a double room. Unless otherwise stated, private bathroom is included in the price.

¥ less than ¥100

\$\$\$ ¥100–¥400

\$\$\$ more than ¥400

Eating

The following price ranges refer to a main course.

¥ less than ¥30

\$\$\$ ¥30–¥50

\$\$\$ more than ¥50