

# CHENGDU (成都)



Known for being home to the giant panda and for its mouth numbingly spicy cuisine, Chengdu is the bustling capital of Sichuan Province and the gateway to the mysterious regions of Tibet and Western China. Though quite dull at first glance, Chengdu is in fact an extremely popular destination that boasts a vibrant nightlife, a rich cuisine and a large student and expat population, as well as of course, those gorgeous furry creatures that have made the city one of China's top tourist destinations. Yes, under its industrial, grey surface, Chengdu is an exciting city that combines ancient history and modern culture to provide something for everyone.



## ATTRACTIONS

**Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding:** This is without a doubt the No.1 tourist attraction of Chengdu and any visitor to the centre it's clear why. After having heard horror stories about how animals are (or rather, aren't) looked after in Chinese zoos, I was reluctant to visit the Research Base. Soon after arriving though, I realised that this was a completely different standard to zoos across China and the pandas were in fact very well cared for.



Located around 6km outside of the city centre, the Research Base is a huge area designed to imitate the natural habitat of giant pandas and give them the chance to live and breed in a safe environment. Visitors can take various routes around the huge centre to see and learn about different breeds of panda in three different exhibition halls. The signs in the centre are well translated into English and there is also a video hall where you can learn more about the lives of giant pandas and how they have come to be in the Chengdu Research Base. It's possible to get fairly close to the pandas and take photos, but of course it can get very busy, so it's advisable to head there early to beat the crowds.



**Getting there:** Take bus no. 87, 198, or 198A and get off at this base station OR take bus no. 9, 18, 25, 32, 64, 70, 85, 87, 99, 146, 150, 156A, 156B, 166, 193, 245, 527, 650, 1030 or 1035 and get off at Dong Wu Yuan (Chengdu Zoo) Bus Station, then change to bus 198 or 198A to the base.

By Metro: Take [metro line 3](#) and get off at Dong Wu Yuan Station. Get out from Exit B and then take bus 198 or 198A direct to the base.

**Jinli Street:** Jinli Street is an ancient area of Chengdu, which was famous during the Qin Dynasty for its rich, ornate cloth known as 'baldachin'. Today Jinli street is a popular tourist attraction, where

various local snacks and souvenirs can be bought and traditional-style buildings admired. Though usually fairly busy, the area has a very relaxed vibe to it and is a great place to wander and witness the local culture and traditions. After exploring the area, you might choose to unwind in one of the many teahouses that can be found in Jinli Street.



**Getting there:** Take bus no. 1, 82, 109, 334 or 335, and get off at Wu Hou Ci Station.

**Wuhou Temple:** Wuhou Temple is an ancient temple that is said to have been built some time before the Ming Dynasty. It was rebuilt in 1672 and still stands today. The temple is divided into five sections named after various figures in Chinese history and contains sculptures, calligraphy and cultural relics. The temple is located very near to Jinli Street and costs 60 RMB to enter.



**Getting there:** Take no. 1, 57, 82, 334 and 335 to get off Wuhouci Station. By metro: [metro line 3](#) and get off at Gaoshengqiao. Then walk eastwards along Wuhouci Avenue for 3-5 minutes to find the temple.

**Chunxi Road:** Chunxi Road is a must-see for any first-time visitor to Chengdu. As the city's main pedestrian street and commercial centre, Chunxi Road is home to hundreds of shops, restaurants and fast food chains, as well as numerous street food stalls offering a variety of delicious local snacks. Covering an area of 200,000 square metres, Chunxi Road is the busiest commercial street in central and western China.



**Getting there:** Take bus line 58, 81, 98 or 98A and get off at Chunxi Road North Exit station. Take bus line 43, 47, 48, 55, 56, 56A, 104, or Night Line 298 and get off at Chunxi Road South Exit station. By metro: take [line 2](#) or [line 3](#) and get off at Chunxi Road. Leave from exit C or D to find it.

**Tianfu Square:** Tianfu square is located in the centre of Chengdu and has come to be known as the symbol of the city. It is the largest city square in southwestern China and is as famous in Sichuan as Tiananmen Square is in Beijing. The square is ironically in a circular layout and is the CBD, meaning that it is surrounded by skyscrapers and shopping malls. Around the square you can shop and visit a number of museums and art galleries and the square lights up at night to make for a beautiful sight. It is said that if you haven't been to Tianfu Square, you haven't been to Chengdu!



**Getting there:** Take [metro line 1](#) or [line 2](#), and get off at the Tianfu Square Station, which is on the second floor of the east sunken square. You can also take the [bus](#).

**Jiuzhaigou National Park:** Located about 400km from Chengdu, Jiu Zhai National Park is an area of stunning natural beauty that covers 720km and contains an unbelievable number of natural lakes, waterfalls, mountains and wooded areas. Words don't really do this place justice, so I will let the pictures speak for themselves!



**Getting there:** How you get to Jiuzhaigou very much depends on where you are travelling from. It is possible to travel there by air or bus, which takes 40 minutes and 11 hours respectively. It's best to [check here](#) on your travel options.

## FOOD

**Mapo Doufu:** One of the most iconic dishes of Sichuan Province, Mapo Doufu is a delicious stew made from tofu, ground meat, chili bean paste, Sichuan peppercorns and red-hot chili oil. These ingredients combine to create a very rich dish that is the perfect example of Sichuan cuisine.



**Lazi ji:** This dish is made by combining marinated, deep-fried chicken with dried chilis, garlic and Sichuan peppercorns. This Sichuan dish is famous all over China and can be found in restaurants across the country.

**Kungpao Jiding:** This popular dish has found its way into Chinese cooking in the West, but it in fact originates from Sichuan Province. Kungpao jiding is made by stir frying pieces of chicken in a rich sauce made from Shaoxing wine, Sichuan peppercorns, chilis and peanuts. It's nice in the West, but even more delicious in Chengdu!



**Dan Dan Mian:** Another dish that has become quite well-known outside of China is Dan Dan Mian; Chengdu's noodle dish. Unlike in the West, these noodles are extremely spicy in Chengdu, so eat with caution!



**Shuizhu Yu:** The deep red colour of this dish can be extremely intimidating, even to those who can handle their spice! This is a fish dish that is made using tender fillets of carp or catfish, which are cooked in a hot broth made from chili oil, peppercorns and dried chilis to make a spicy, yet delicious dish.



## ACCOMMODATION

**Flipflop Backpacker Lounge Hostel:** This hostel is great for anyone looking to meet fellow travellers and sightsee. Located only a few minutes' walk from Chunxi Road, the hostel is very close to the bustling centre of Chengdu and the metro, making it easy to reach most of the city's popular tourist spots. I didn't have my most comfortable night's sleep here, but the rooms were cheap, the communal area nice and several trips and events were offered, which made up for the room!

**Cloud Atlas Hostel:** This hostel is located in the centre of Chengdu, very close to Chunxi Road and Tianfu Square and it is close to a bus stop from which you can get to most of the city's tourist destinations. Cloud Atlas Hostel offers a variety of private and dorm rooms and a number of facilities such as laundry, luggage room, air conditioning and a bike rental service. The social atmosphere here isn't so good, but the beds are more comfortable!

**Dreams Travel International Hostel:** Dreams Travel International Hostel is located very near to the Wuhou Temple, making it very easy to find. It is a popular hostel that offers both dorm and private accommodation and a free shuttle bus to the main tourist attractions of Chengdu! There is a nice atmosphere in the hostel and the staff are very friendly and helpful.

## ENTERTAINMENT

In a city as large and vibrant as Chengdu, it should come as no surprise that there's a lot to do in the evenings. From modern nightclubs to traditional shows, Chengdu at night has something for everyone and is sure to impress.



**Jinli Street:** Jinli Street should definitely be visited at dusk as well as during the day. It is just as vibrant during the evening and is made even more beautiful by the sun setting and illuminating the red lanterns that line the street.

**Sichuan Opera:** Sichuan Opera a traditional performance that began in Qing Dynasty and that forms a very important part of Chengdu's culture. You may also hear Sichuan Opera referred to as Changing Faces, which is one of the best-known features of a Sichuan Opera performance. Sichuan Opera performances are very impressive and entertaining and are well worth a watch!



**Where to watch:** Sichuan Opera Theater, at No. 20, Zhuangyuan Street or Shunxing Old Tea House.

**Teahouses:** If you're looking for a quiet evening, then a Chengdu teahouse is a good option. Teahouses play a very important role in the lives of local people and are often filled with people relaxing, partaking in social activities and in some cases enjoying a Sichuan opera performance. Yuelai Tea

House (Huaxingzheng Street) provides free Sichuan opera performances between 14:00 and 16:00 every Tuesday to Saturday.

**Other good teahouses are:** Heming Tea House, Dabei Temple Tea House and Wenshu Monastery Tea House.

Chengdu is also home to a number of bars and clubs, which can be found in busy places like Renmin South Road. Below are some of the most popular bars and clubs:

#### **Kakadu Club & Disco**

Location: No. 16, the third section, south of the first Ring Road  
This club tends to play dance music and frequently has themed parties.

#### **Hongse Niandai (Red Age) Club**

Location: Entrance of Nijia Bridge Road. Close to the American Consulate  
This club has about 10 KTV boxes of various styles, as well as a restaurant and dance floor.

#### **Meigaomei International Recreational Club**

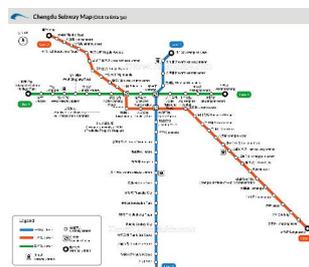
Location: Floor 5, Yanshikou Square, Lihua Street  
This is a KTV club with VIP box, club, performance hall and sports bar

## **GETTING AROUND CHENGDU**

Chengdu operates an extensive bus network that takes passengers to various points in the city for 1-2 RMB per journey. This is probably the cheapest and most convenient method of transport, though it won't be the quickest, since Chengdu is known for its traffic!

Just like most other Chinese cities, Chengdu is served by thousands of taxis. The price for these starts at 9-12 RMB and increases by 2-4 RMB per kilometre depending on what type of car you are travelling in. Though a convenient mode of transport, you should try to avoid taking a taxi during the rush hour periods of 07:30 – 09:00 and 17:00 – 19:00, as you will end up spending far more than you should for any given journey!

Chengdu has a metro system, which currently has 4 lines in operation; lines 1-4. The functioning lines stop at most of the city's main attractions, making this one of the quickest ways of getting around the city.



## **TRAVEL**

Chengdu has one airport; [Shuangliu International Airport](#) (CTU), in the southwest of the city. It is the largest aviation hub in central and western China, and connects the region with over 70 domestic cities and 20 international cities. Destinations include Lhasa, Jiu Huang (for Jiuzhaigou) and Kunming.

As well as being the largest air transport hub, Chengdu is also the largest rail transport hub of southwest China, connecting Chengdu with many major and small cities all over China. The high-speed rail system in central and western China is still being developed, therefore the majority of trains taken from Chengdu are slow and take a long time.

Chengdu – Chongqing: 2-4 hours

Chengdu – Xi'an: 10 – 15 hours

Chengdu – Kunming: 18 – 20 hours

Chengdu – Beijing: 14-25 hours

[Long-distance bus](#) is a good method of transport from Chengdu and the city has numerous coach stations that operate buses to destinations both within and outside of Sichuan Province.