



CHINA TRAVEL ADVISORY INTERNET ACCESS

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This advisory is for general guidance only. We accept no liability for any issues arising from the use of VPNs or eSIMs in China. Use at your own risk.

What You Need to Know

China's "Great Firewall" blocks access to most Western websites and apps including Google, Gmail, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and many more. Without preparation, **you will not be able to access these services.**

It is strongly advised that all eSIMs, VPN apps, and any other apps mentioned in this document are downloaded, installed, and tested before you leave the UK. Most of these services cannot be purchased, downloaded, or configured once you are inside China.

Mobile Phones: Holafly Esim

The simplest way to maintain normal internet access in China on your mobile phone is an international travel eSIM from **Holafly** (holafly.com). This routes your data through servers outside China, bypassing the firewall entirely. It includes a built-in VPN and unlimited data — no additional software or configuration required.

Important: This only works if your phone supports eSIM. Most modern phones do, including iPhone XS and later and Samsung Galaxy S20 and later. You must check your phone is compatible before purchasing. A full list of supported devices can be found at: <https://esim.holafly.com/how-to/esim-phones/>

If your phone does not support eSIM, your only options are UK carrier roaming (which bypasses the firewall but is significantly more expensive) or purchasing a local Chinese SIM card paired with a VPN app (less reliable — see Laptop section below).

Using Your Phone as a Hotspot

Holafly does support personal hotspot, allowing you to share your phone's connection with a laptop or tablet. However, **hotspot usage is limited to 500MB per day**. This is sufficient for light use such as checking emails or brief web browsing, but will not support prolonged use, video calls, or large file downloads. If you need regular laptop internet access, see below.

Laptops: VPN Required

Laptops connected to hotel WiFi or other local networks in China are fully subject to the Great Firewall. To access blocked services on a laptop, you will need a VPN application. No VPN is guaranteed to work 100% of the time in China, but the following are currently considered the most reliable:

- **Astrill (astrill.com)** — Widely regarded as the most reliable VPN for China. More expensive than alternatives at around £12–24/month, but consistently rated highest for maintaining connections behind the Great Firewall.
- **NordVPN (nordvpn.com)** — Good mid-range option at around £3/month on a longer plan. Generally reliable but can be inconsistent on hotel WiFi networks.
- **Surfshark (surfshark.com)** — Budget-friendly option at around £2/month on a longer plan. Decent performance but less proven than the options above.

Note for business travellers: Microsoft 365 (Teams, Outlook, OneDrive) generally works without a VPN in China, though performance may be slower than usual. **All Google services (Gmail, Drive, Docs, Calendar) are completely blocked without a VPN.**

Before You Leave the UK

- Check your phone supports eSIM (see link above)
- Purchase and install your Holafly eSIM (it activates automatically on arrival)
- If you need laptop access: download and test a VPN app
- Download WeChat and Alipay — essential for payments and messaging in China
- Save any important documents, maps, or travel information for offline access

Legal Notice

The UK FCDO advises travellers to “stay informed and follow Chinese law.” Chinese law requires that VPNs and similar tools be government-licensed. Use of eSIMs and VPNs in China is entirely at your own discretion and risk.

This advisory is accurate as of April 2026. Internet restrictions in China change frequently. We recommend checking for updated guidance closer to your travel date.