

January 2018 Sandaoling Winter Visit

The Concept

Winter China Steam Tour - China in the cold one last time?

Do you remember when everyone used to visit China in the winter and why they used to go there then?



There was a time when everyone outdid each other to be in China in the depth of winter with temperatures in the -20s, -30s or worse. Perhaps like me, several years ago, you decided that visiting the remaining Chinese steam locations in warmer weather was much more pleasant. It certainly was but the sight and sound of steam is at its best at the coldest time of year when the exhaust is much more visible and the thermal efficiency of the loco is reduced by the low temperatures meaning they have to be worked harder.



The Vision for January 2018



Sandaoling - the line to Erjing deep mine with the Tianshan Mountains in the background

Are you ready for the real cold one more time? Are you interested in some great steam effects at the world's last great standard gauge real working steam location?



Sandaoling - engineers train



Sandaoling - fireworks coming out of the pit

All 3 Sandaoling shots by Jun (Liu Xue Jun) taken in January 2017

Sandaoling - the last major Chinese standard gauge steam location

A full week at Sandaoling is the core of this program. Days will be short and cold but there will be night shots to work on - shorter days means that night shots can be had at less antisocial hours and there is a better chance of good sparks without too much inducement! I expect temperatures to stay below freezing day and night at this time of year (based on January 2016 figures). Snow is also possible at this time of year in Sandaoling but is unpredictable at any time.

(Sandaoling - Lowest temperature 2016 January -11, Highest temperature -4, average -7, 2011 January was the last really cold year -23 the coldest recorded) see

<https://www.worldweatheronline.com/hami-weather-averages/xinjiang/cn.aspx>

Sandaoling is now the only major standard gauge steam railway left in China. Up to 10 JS locos may be in use on the two separate systems serving the open cast and the deep coal mines.

Itinerary

10 January

Arrive in Beijing, option to visit the Beijing Railway Museum in the afternoon or as a group decide prior to the tour start on another destination, overnight hotel near Beijing Airport.

11 January

Early morning flight Beijing - Hami, transfer to Sandaoling by tour bus, part day at Sandaoling

12 - 18 January

Seven full days at Sandaoling

19 January

Morning at Sandaoling, early lunch, transfer to Hami Airport, fly Hami - Beijing, overnight near Beijing Airport

20 January Breakfast and airport transfer, tour ends

Six people have signed up for the tour. The tour will definitely run.

The Price

The program of 7 full days at Sandaoling (total 11 days Beijing - Beijing 10 - 20 January) is priced at Yuan 14,300 (discounted from Yuan 15,400) for the first 8 to sign up.

The internal flights Beijing - Hami, Hami - Beijing are extra but will be arranged by Jun. The extra price for these flights is the real cost plus a proportion of the airfare for the guide (Alan or Jun) if they need to fly to Hami to guide you.

The discounted price is to encourage early booking. Once we reach 8 people, any additional bookings will be charged Yuan 15,400 for the full tour.

The tour discount will be given to those in the first 8 to sign up who join the tour on 10 or 11 January in Beijing or 11 January in Hami and who leave the tour 19 January in Hami or 19 or 20 January in Beijing. The final price will depend on when you join and leave the tour.

There are 2 discounted places left on the tour.

Book your place

To secure a place on this tour - and to secure the discounted price for the first 8 people, you need to pay a deposit of £400. Once 8 people have paid their deposits for the main tour, the price of the tour will be the non-discounted price. At the time of writing, there are still 2 discounted places available.

Deposits

Please make a fully refundable deposit payment of £400. Please email me to confirm the best method (HSBC Bank Account for UK participants, HSBC or PayPal for non-UK participants).

Balance of tour price

You can pay the balance of the tour cost either by bank transfer to Jun (Liu Xue Jun) in China prior to the tour or by taking Yuan cash with you for the start of the tour. The balance will be fixed on 10 November when your deposit will be converted to Chinese Yuan using the rates on Oanda.com

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 - 10 November. If you cancel before that point but after the tour has been declared go (as is the case), 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. No expenses have been incurred so far. In most cases, you can expect a full refund.

In the unlikely event that I have to cancel a tour, your deposit is full refundable but that will be the limit of my liability.

Travel Insurance

You are strongly recommended to take out travel insurance 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.

Notes

This is essentially the small print but I encourage you to read this to understand the thoughts behind these plans.

This tour will be up to the normal 'Linesiding with John' standards and will include single rooms, 3 meals a day, free beer, transport, the services of national and local guides although at present I do not intend to participate in this tour myself as tour leader. Guides Jun and Alan are very competent and do not require my presence to give you a great Sandaoling experience.

Once the tour is declared 'go' with fixed dates, your deposit becomes semi-refundable. Two months prior to the start of the tour (10 January start so 10 November deadline), your deposit will be non-refundable.

Support will be given and paperwork will be provided to obtain your Chinese visa.

There are more extras to pay on this tour than on other 'Linesiding with John' China tours primarily because it is more difficult to absorb internal airfares in the daily tour budget. So, internal airfares are extra including a contribution to our guide's air fares (with 8 participants, each will pay 1/8th of his fare). A visit to the workshop at Sandaoling is extra (as usual).

I'm aware of 6 other surviving standard gauge steam operations in China and one of them - **Baiyin** - was strongly considered for this trip. However, with no-one at Baiyin 1. willing to confirm that an SY will be used as a mobile steam

heat boiler in the 2017 - 2018 season and 2. definitely no-one willing to discuss returning the passenger train to steam haulage as a charter, after listening to feedback, I've dropped this from the program.

The other steam locations we will not currently be visiting:

Wujiu - a long way to go and having got there last season FarRail needed to arrange a charter. See

<http://trains-today.blogspot.co.uk/2017/03/wujiu-2017-winter-steam-in-china.html>

Jiutai - also remote from other steam lines and with a good chance of nothing happening and probably no charter option. Last reported working in November 2016

At long last, first hand confirmation that working steam continues. Peter Haworth visited on 26 November and reports that SY1407 made a trip to the exchange sidings from the mine and returned about an hour later with three empties. <http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Fushun - frustrating little access to what could be an interesting operation with as many as 2 SYs in steam. There seems to be a blanket ban on steel works visits with little chance of any change and without more access, it's just not worth it. Last reported 13 January 2017

At Fushun 2 SYs were in steam, but during our stay they had no work. The workers were kind but the manager and police were so nervous because of the flood damage, or maybe because of fears that foreign visitors are trying to find evidence of steel over-production. Taking pictures at the steam stabling point was strictly prohibited but tolerated from the road and level crossings. I suggest not to go to Fushun now. The electric lines were busy, including a train carrying dynamite and the steam crane with a DF5.

<http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Tianjin - a good chance of nothing happening at this factory shunt.

A visitor on 13 December found SY1524 in seemingly derelict condition but operations continuing in the hands of SY1007, possibly a candidate as the oldest SY in regular use. Work for the day was over by 13.30.

<http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Xifeng Phosphate works - one SY used for shunting but not line work. The management here are willing to arrange a steam charter with line work but it is very remote from all of the other remaining steam locations (south of Chongqing) - there is a recent clip on YouTube here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-5YF93r-j8>

This location is now likely to be steam free (22 August 2017).

According to an article on a Chinese blog-site steam working at Xifeng in Guizhou finished at the start of 2017 when the fertiliser plant acquired a GKD1c diesel. If confirmed, this would mean that all steam working in south-west China, excluding the tourist operation at **Shibanxi**, has now finished.

However, it appears to contradict the information given here on 21st April (below) and the article itself is vague on details. Any more information, especially first hand, would be very welcome.

<http://www.sy-country.co.uk/qjc/news.htm>

Two other locations (Diaobingshan on the Tiefu Railway where they organise a steam festival every January but which has no regular working steam) and

Pingzhuang (where steam may or may not resume work) were originally included in a pre-tour but with no interest from those signed up so far for the Tiefa Steam Festival and with no return to steam at Pingzhuang so far, the pre-tour will not now go ahead.

Having said that, should anything disastrous happen at Sandaoling, all of these places will be re-evaluated as possible alternative locations and preferences will be discussed.

John Raby
25 September 2017