

The China Medical Travel Checklist 2026

Everything you need to decide, plan, and prepare — with real prices, the correct visa path, and the seven things that most often go wrong.

Real prices, dated & sourced

No hospital commissions

No hospital rankings

Updated October 2026 · Free to share

Prices reflect publicly listed Chinese hospital pricing and change over time. Verify before you commit.

01 What this is — and what it is not

What this is

A practical checklist for anyone considering medical treatment or a health checkup in China. Every price in here is sourced and dated. Every risk is something we have seen go wrong.

What this is not

It is **not medical advice**. We are not doctors, and nothing in this document recommends any treatment for any person.

It is **not a hospital ranking**. We do not name "the best" hospitals, because "best" depends on your specific diagnosis — and because sites that rank hospitals often rank them by how much those hospitals pay.

We receive no money from hospitals, clinics, or drug companies.

Our only revenue is a flat fee paid by patients. That means if the honest answer to your question is "don't travel" or "you don't need us," our revenue does not change. That is the entire reason we can write a document like this one.

02 Before you look at prices, answer four questions

Most people start with "how much does it cost." That is the wrong first question, because you cannot interpret a price until you know what you are pricing.

QUESTION	WHY IT MATTERS
1. What exactly do I need?	"A checkup" is not an answer. "A colonoscopy and a cardiac workup" is. The more specific you are, the more accurate every quote you receive will be — and the less likely you are to be quoted a package that does not fit.
2. Is this available at home, and how long is the wait?	If the wait at home is three weeks and the cost is manageable, travel is probably not worth it. If the wait is three months, or the procedure is not offered at all, the calculation changes completely.
3. Can I afford the whole trip — not just the treatment?	Treatment is typically 60–70% of the total. Flights, hotel, food, a companion, and follow-up make up the rest. Budget the trip, not the procedure.
4. What happens if something goes wrong?	Do you have a plan for a complication, a longer stay, or a billing dispute? If not, that is the first thing to solve — before flights, before deposits.

One hard rule. If your condition could become an emergency in the next 30 days, do not travel. That is not caution — it is triage. Travel removes you from the medical system that knows your history.

03 What things actually cost

Public tertiary hospitals, October 2026. Converted at approximately 1 USD = 7.1 CNY. International departments charge more — see the next page.

Diagnostics and procedures

ITEM	CNY	USD APPROX.
Complete blood count (CBC)	25 – 40	3.5 – 6
Liver function panel	60 – 120	8 – 17
Kidney function panel	50 – 100	7 – 14
Lipid panel	40 – 80	6 – 11
Thyroid function (TSH, FT3, FT4)	120 – 200	17 – 28
Tumor markers (per marker)	50 – 130	7 – 18
ECG	30 – 60	4 – 8
Abdominal ultrasound	120 – 300	17 – 42
Thyroid ultrasound	120 – 200	17 – 28
Chest X-ray	80 – 150	11 – 21
Low-dose chest CT	300 – 600	42 – 84
MRI (single region)	400 – 1,200	56 – 168
PET-CT	7,000 – 9,500	980 – 1,330
Gastroscopy (sedated)	900 – 1,800	126 – 252
Colonoscopy (sedated)	1,200 – 2,500	168 – 350
Bone density (DEXA)	200 – 400	28 – 56

Checkup packages

"Health checkup" (体检) in China is not one product — it is a menu. Most foreign patients who ask for "a full checkup" actually want the Standard tier and should add imaging separately.

TIER	WHAT IT INCLUDES	CNY
Basic	Blood panel, ECG, abdominal ultrasound, chest X-ray, vitals	500 – 1,200
Standard	The above + thyroid ultrasound, tumor markers, extended bloodwork	1,200 – 2,500
Comprehensive	The above + CT, gastroscopy, colonoscopy, cardiac screening	2,500 – 5,500

The international department premium

Public hospitals run two doors. The international department (国际医疗部) is much more expensive — and it is *not* buying you a better doctor.

ITEM	STANDARD CLINIC	INTERNATIONAL DEPT.
Registration fee	¥10 – 50	¥300 – 1,000
Specialist consultation	included	¥800 – 3,000
Ward per day	¥200 – 500	¥1,500 – 5,000
Tests and imaging	government price	1.5× – 3×

What the premium actually buys: English-speaking coordination staff, advance scheduling, shorter waits, help with translated reports, and — at some partner hospitals — direct billing to international insurance.

What it does not buy: a better specialist (the same doctors often work both clinics), faster lab results (turnaround is the same), or automatically translated reports (you usually have to ask, and sometimes pay extra).

04 The total cost of a checkup trip

A realistic three-day trip from Southeast Asia, standard clinic, one person.

ITEM	CNY
Standard checkup (public hospital)	1,500
Round-trip flight (e.g. Jakarta – Shanghai)	2,500 – 4,500
Hotel, 3 nights	900 – 2,400
Meals and local transport	400 – 800
Visa, if required	200 – 1,000
Total	¥5,500 – 10,200 (USD 780 – 1,450)

At the international department, add roughly ¥2,000 – 4,000.

How comparable destinations stack up

PROCEDURE	CHINA	INDONESIA	SINGAPORE	THAILAND
Basic / standard checkup	\$70 – 352	\$22 – 139	\$900 – 2,100	\$200 – 600
MRI (single region)	\$56 – 168	\$83 – 333	\$400 – 900	\$250 – 500
Gastroscopy / colonoscopy (sedated)	\$127 – 352	\$139 – 667	\$800 – 1,500	\$400 – 800
PET-CT	\$634 – 1,330	\$605 – 972	\$1,500 – 2,500	~\$1,700

Sources: publicly listed hospital prices, cross-checked, October 2026. Converted at 1 USD ≈ 7.1 CNY, 18,000 IDR, 1.28 SGD. Prices change — verify before you commit.

The honest framing — and a correction. China is not the cheapest place in the region for a *basic* checkup. **Indonesia is — by a wide margin.** Routine surgery is not cheaper here either: for hernia repair, joint replacement and cardiac bypass, Indonesian private hospitals overlap or beat Chinese prices.

PET-CT is not a China advantage. Published Indonesian prices overlap and at the low end beat the Chinese range. If you are in Southeast Asia, flying to China for a PET-CT alone does not save you money.

Where China genuinely wins: advanced imaging (MRI), endoscopy (gastroscopy and colonoscopy, where the gap is widest), **prescription drugs** — Chinese-made oncology drugs cost a fraction of imported equivalents — and treatments your country simply does not have, such as proton and heavy-ion therapy.

And the arithmetic that matters most: a single test rarely justifies a trip. An MRI saving of about USD 140 against USD 400–700 of flights and hotels is a loss. **The trip pays when you stack several procedures into one visit,** or when you need something your country does not offer at all.

05 Which visa do you need?

Your nationality and your length of stay determine this. There are four paths — and one of them is "no visa at all," which most guides do not mention.

PATH	DETAILS
No visa ✓ safest if it fits	Many nationalities now have unilateral visa-free entry to China for stays up to 30 days . This covers checkups, consultations with imaging, and short outpatient courses. It does not cover anything that might run long. If there is a realistic chance your stay extends, get the S2 instead.
Hainan 30-day visa-free ✓ medical treatment is listed	61 countries, 30 days. The one policy that explicitly names medical treatment as a permitted purpose . Restriction: you must remain within Hainan Province.
S2 visa ✓ the correct visa	Short-term private affairs, including medical treatment . Up to 180 days per entry. Requires a hospital invitation / medical treatment letter. Should carry a "medical treatment" (诊疗) annotation — without it, extending later is far harder.
S1 visa	For treatment exceeding 180 days. You must obtain a residence permit within 30 days of arrival . Missing that step means being in the country without valid status.
240-hour transit visa-free ⚠ do not rely on this for surgery	57 countries, 10 days. Permitted purposes are tourism, business, visits, and family — medical treatment is not listed, and not explicitly prohibited . Diagnostics are low-risk. Surgery is a gamble: a complication that extends your stay past 10 days turns you into an overstayer, which is an immigration offence, not a paperwork issue.

The most common and most costly visa mistake.

Do **not** use an **L (tourist)** or **Q2 (family visit)** visa for treatment. Your entry purpose and your actual activity will not match — and that mismatch surfaces in three places at once: immigration, travel insurance claims, and any later application to extend your stay.

If you are travelling for treatment and you need a visa, the category is **S**.

S2 application checklist

- ☐ Passport valid 6+ months, at least 2 blank pages
- ☐ **Hospital invitation / medical treatment letter** — confirm the hospital will issue this *before* booking anything
- ☐ Medical diagnosis summary from your treating doctor at home
- ☐ Medical records, translated
- ☐ Proof of financial capacity (bank statement)
- ☐ Completed application form + compliant photo
- ☐ Notarized proof of kinship, if a family member is accompanying you
- ☐ Travel insurance covering China

Requirements vary by consulate and nationality. Verify with the Chinese embassy or visa application service center in your country — only they can give you a definitive list.

06 Before you fly

Documents

- ☐ Passport and visa
- ☐ **Imaging on disc or film — not just the paper reports.** Chinese specialists re-read images, not summaries
- ☐ Pathology slides or blocks, if relevant to your case
- ☐ Printed medical records in Chinese or English
- ☐ Medication list, using **generic names and doses** — brand names differ
- ☐ Allergy list, in writing
- ☐ Your home doctor's contact details, for follow-up questions

Money

- ☐ Set up **Alipay or WeChat Pay before you arrive**, linked to an international card
- ☐ **Test it with a small purchase** — at a shop, not at the hospital
- ☐ Bring a backup card from a different issuer *and* a different card network
- ☐ Bring cash for the gaps
- ☐ Tell your bank you are travelling, so a Chinese transaction is not flagged as fraud
- ☐ Note: **many hospitals require payment before treatment**, not after
- ☐ Keep every receipt and the official invoice (发票, *fapiao*) — you will need them for insurance at home

Apps to install

- ☐ Alipay or WeChat — payment
- ☐ A translation app with **offline mode**
- ☐ Your hospital's official app or WeChat account
- ☐ Didi — ride-hailing

Health and logistics

- ☐ Vaccination records
- ☐ If you take controlled medication, check China's import rules **before** travelling
- ☐ Arrange a companion if you will be sedated — most hospitals require one
- ☐ Ask about **English reports when you book**, not after
- ☐ Budget for translation if your home doctor will need the report

07 Seven things that actually go wrong

This section is why we wrote this document. Every item below is something we have seen happen.

1 You pick the wrong department

"I need a heart specialist" might mean 心内科 (cardiology), 心外科 (cardiac surgery), or 血管外科 (vascular surgery). "I need a cancer doctor" might mean medical oncology, surgical oncology, or radiation oncology. Getting this wrong costs you a trip — sometimes two.

→ **Fix:** ask the hospital's international department to confirm the *department*, not just the hospital, before you book flights. Get it in writing.

2 You get quoted a price that is not the price

The first quote is often just the procedure itself. It may exclude pre-treatment workup and imaging, anaesthesia, implants or consumables, extra inpatient days, and management of complications.

→ **Fix:** request an *itemized* estimate in writing, and ask explicitly: "If I stay three days longer than planned, what does that cost?"

3 Your records get lost in translation

A translated report that changes a number, a unit, or a date can lead to a wrong clinical decision. Reference ranges differ between countries, which makes this worse.

→ **Fix:** use medical translators, not general ones. Check that numbers, units, reference ranges, and dates match the original. Keep the original alongside the translation.

4 The language gap is bigger than you expected

International departments have English-speaking coordination staff. The specialist who actually treats you may not speak English at all. "The hospital has English service" and "my doctor speaks English" are different statements.

→ **Fix:** ask specifically — "*Will the doctor treating me speak English?*" Not "does the hospital have English services?"

5 You cannot pay

Some hospitals accept international cards; many do not. Mobile payment has per-transaction and annual limits, and success rates for linking foreign cards vary by nationality and issuer. Some hospitals require payment before treatment.

→ **Fix:** set up Alipay or WeChat Pay before you arrive, link a card, and test it with a small purchase. Bring a backup card, bring cash, and keep every receipt.

6 You did not plan for follow-up

You go home. Your local doctor cannot read the Chinese report, does not know the regimen, and cannot obtain the medication. This is the single most commonly skipped step.

→ **Fix:** decide *before* you travel who monitors you afterwards and whether they can access what you need. Get it in writing.

7 You used a facilitator who works for the hospital

Many facilitators are paid on commission — commonly quoted between 7.5% and 30% of what you spend at the hospital they send you to. If Hospital A charges USD 30,000 and Hospital B charges USD 15,000, a 15% commission pays USD 4,500 for recommending A and USD 2,250 for recommending B. Even when the person is honest, the incentive points one way. And when a facilitator works with a fixed partner network, hospitals outside it are never mentioned.

→ **Fix:** ask directly — "*Who pays you?*" If the answer is "the hospital," you are not receiving neutral advice. That is not an accusation; it is the structure.

08 Seven questions to ask any provider

Get written answers before you commit. If a provider cannot answer all seven, they are not ready for your case.

1. Is the department you're recommending the right one for my specific diagnosis?

If they answer with a hospital name instead of a department name, they have not read your case.

2. What is the total cost — itemized — including workup, implants, and extra days if needed?

"About USD 20,000" is not an answer. An itemized estimate is.

3. Will the doctor treating me speak English (or my language)?

Ask about the treating doctor, not the coordination staff.

4. Can you provide an English translation of my medical records and the final report?

Ask when you book. Asking at discharge is usually too late.

5. What happens if I have a complication while I'm in China?

The answer tells you whether they have thought about your case or just your booking.

6. How do you handle payment — before or after treatment — and what methods do you accept?

Do not arrive planning to figure this out on the ground.

7. Who handles my follow-up after I return home?

The answer to this one is where most trips quietly fail.

Save the answers in writing. If something goes wrong later, this is your record — and it is the difference between a dispute you can resolve and one you cannot.

09 If you want help with the above

Reading this document tells you what to do. Doing it takes roughly 20–40 hours of research, emails, and phone calls — most of it in Chinese, most of it during business hours you may not share.

If you would rather not do that yourself, we offer two services.

Medical Trip Assessment

USD 250 — flat fee

We research your specific situation and send you:

- A shortlist of 2–3 hospitals and **departments**, with reasoning — including why some were ruled out
- Itemized cost estimates, with sources
- The visa pathway that applies to *your* nationality
- A day-by-day itinerary template
- A risk briefing specific to your nationality and type of condition

Medical Record Translation

From USD 75 — per page

Chinese to English, medical-grade. Numbers, units, and reference ranges verified against the original. You receive both the translation and a copy of the source document.

We take no money from hospitals. We are paid by you. That is why we can tell you when a trip is not worth it — and we will.

If you are not ready, that is genuinely fine. Keep this document. It is yours, and you are welcome to share it.

Disclaimer. This document is informational only. It is not medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment, and nothing in it recommends any medical procedure for any individual. It is not legal or immigration advice. Always consult a qualified physician about your own health, and verify visa rules with the Chinese embassy or consulate in your country before applying. Prices reflect publicly listed Chinese hospital pricing as of October 2026, converted at approximately 1 USD = 7.1 CNY; they change over time and actual charges depend on the hospital, department tier, and your specific tests. Commission ranges referenced are based on publicly reported industry figures and vary by market and provider; no allegation is made about any specific company. We are not affiliated with any hospital, clinic, government agency, or pharmaceutical company named or implied in this document.

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