CHINA NAVIGATION SETUP — ONE PAGE

Google Maps will not navigate you in mainland China. This is the setup that does. Print it, or keep it offline on your phone. Every number below was checked or computed on **28 October 2026**.

A / 48 HOURS BEFORE YOU FLY

[ ] Install **AMap** (Gaode). In the App Store and on Google Play it is listed as **AMap Global**, and it has an English interface.
[ ] Install **DiDi** for rides. If you carry an iPhone, keep **Apple Maps** as well — it uses Chinese map data, so its pins line up with the streets.
[ ] Open each app once on home wifi and allow **location** and **notifications**. Permissions that are refused on first launch are painful to fix later.
[ ] Download the **offline map pack** for every city on your route (the steps are in section 4 of the guide).
[ ] Copy your hotel name in **Chinese characters** from the booking confirmation into your notes app.
[ ] Screenshot the hotel **address and phone number**. Drivers and front desks can read a screenshot; they cannot read your accent.

B / AT THE AIRPORT, BEFORE BOARDING

[ ] Activate an **international roaming eSIM** or your home carrier's roaming plan. Roaming data is routed outside the mainland, so Google services keep working — that is the only reliable way to keep Google Maps half-alive.
[ ] Turn **off** auto-join for public wifi. Airport wifi in the mainland will not load Google Maps.
[ ] Put the hotel screenshot in your **favourites album**, not in a chat thread you will have to scroll for.

C / ON ARRIVAL, FIRST TEN MINUTES

[ ] **Turn the VPN off** before you open AMap. A VPN can degrade or break the location accuracy of Chinese map apps.
[ ] Search your hotel in AMap. If it returns nothing, **paste the Chinese name** instead of typing English.
[ ] Test the offset once: search a landmark you can see, and compare the pin with the building. If the pin is a block away, the map is using shifted coordinates — trust the street, not the dot.
[ ] Save three pins: **hotel**, **nearest hospital**, **police station**.

D / HOW FAR OFF THE DOT IS — COMPUTED 28 OCT 2026

City	Landmark	Offset	In feet	In miles	Direction
Beijing	Forbidden City (Taihe Hall)	555 m	1,821 ft	0.34 mi	east
Shanghai	The Bund	479 m	1,571 ft	0.30 mi	south-east
Guangzhou	Canton Tower	625 m	2,052 ft	0.39 mi	south-east
Shenzhen	Futian Station	606 m	1,988 ft	0.38 mi	south-east
Xi'an	Bell Tower	463 m	1,519 ft	0.29 mi	east
Chengdu	Tianfu Square	361 m	1,183 ft	0.22 mi	south-east
Hangzhou	West Lake, Broken Bridge	521 m	1,709 ft	0.32 mi	south-east
Urumqi	Grand Bazaar	266 m	871 ft	0.17 mi	north-east
Lhasa	Jokhang Temple	337 m	1,107 ft	0.21 mi	south-east

Offset = the distance between the same place in the world coordinate system (WGS-84, what your phone's GPS reports) and the coordinate system Chinese maps are required to publish (GCJ-02). Computed with the public GCJ-02 conversion algorithm on 28 Oct 2026; landmark coordinates rounded to 0.0001 degrees.

E / CONVERSION CRIB

100 m	328 ft	0.06 mi	about 1 city block
250 m	820 ft	0.16 mi	about 3 minutes on foot
500 m	1,640 ft	0.31 mi	about 6 minutes on foot
1 km	3,281 ft	0.62 mi	about 12 minutes on foot
5 km/h	—	3.1 mph	normal walking pace

F / TWO LINES TO SHOW A DRIVER

请带我去这个地址。 qing dai wo qu zhe ge di zhi — please take me to this address
我迷路了。 wo mi lu le — I am lost

Show the line, do not say it. A phone screen works better than pronunciation.