

# CHINA ACCELERATES RAIL-TOURISM INTEGRATION WITH ENHANCED TOURIST SERVICES



Not only are more travelers choosing trains, but spending patterns shift as China's rail network expands its influence on leisure travel. A surge in ridership coincides with fresh service models blending transportation directly into tourist activities. Innovation emerges where tracks meet destinations, reshaping how people move and experience places. Growth of rail-tourism unfolds quietly through daily commutes turned scenic journeys, supported by infrastructure that adapts fast.

Early this year, between January and May, passenger numbers across China's national rail network reached 1.969 billion. This figure represents a rise of 5.7 percent compared to the same months last year. **Growth has pushed totals to their highest level ever recorded for that timeframe.** Train services dedicated to tourism made up part of the activity during these months. A total of 1,400 such trips were operated. These included 705 specially arranged tourist trains. Alongside them ran 695 designated tourist routes.

Working hand-in-hand with regional culture and tourism offices, rail operators have shaped journeys meant to draw visitors through unique themes. One such route is the "Panda Special Train," while others go by names like "Yangtze River Delta Star" or "Fujian-Jiangxi Elegance." Not far behind stands "Central Plains Railway - South of the Great River," along with a reimagined long-haul option called "New Oriental Express." Each service leans into quality experiences, opening up fresh ways to explore the country. Behind these lies a quiet push to energize tourist spending, particularly among aging populations traveling more now than before. What results are paths across regions that feel different, yet connected by purpose.

## Personalized Themed Adventures

Running alongside regular schedules, trains adjust routes when festivals happen nearby. Because concerts draw crowds, some lines add special departures themed around music fans. When schools organize trips, dedicated carriages appear for student groups. These adjusted timetables follow public interest closely. As art shows open, transport links shift slightly to match attendance patterns. Cultural activity shapes train planning more than before. Passenger numbers rise where services reflect local moments. Spending increases in towns that host events linked to rail access. Service industries benefit without needing large campaigns. Growth of rail-tourism comes quietly through timing and location choices.

Comfort grows when journey details improve. Midweek deals give older travelers lower fares outside busy times. On the Beijing-Zhangjiakou route, bikes ride along inside rail cars - just a test for now. Quiet zones spread quietly across over eight thousand fast trains. Where pets go, rules shift: 126 stations plus 265 trains allow them aboard. Lighter trips begin at 111 stops under new trial plans. Volunteers step in where manners matter, helping shape better behavior on board. Pictures of scenery appear in carriages and halls - one way to stir pride. Culture slips into commutes through moments like these.

## Ambitious Plans Through 2030

By 2030, over 160 new tourist trains could be running across China. Railway upgrades are underway, driven by a multi-ministry plan to reshape travel experiences. Instead of generic routes, services will adapt to distinct traveler needs. Modernized tracks and refreshed carriages form part of broader changes. While infrastructure gets attention, so do behind-the-scenes operations. Fifteen targeted actions guide the shift, aiming beyond mere updates. Travel by rail gains priority within national development goals. Specific improvements include facility makeovers alongside service redesigns. Coordination among government branches supports implementation. Rather than isolated fixes, integrated strategies take shape.

Last year saw China's rail system carry over 4.25 billion travelers, driven by a notable rise in leisure travel - up well beyond one-third compared to earlier periods. Such expansion supports wider efforts to boost internal demand across a nation exceeding 1.4 billion residents.

### **Challenges and Opportunities of the Rail-Tourism**

Still, hurdles linger - Professor Yin Ping from Beijing Jiaotong University's School of Economics and Management points out. While some offerings blend transit with routine tour elements, they often skip meaningful theme development, falling short on niche needs like learning-focused trips, wellness travel, or international experiences.

Still, Professor Yin pointed out gaps in the product framework, with limited industry linkages alongside weaker support services. Reaching the goal of running over 160 specialty tourist trains by 2030 could bring broader choices and better standards in rail-based travel offerings.

The market has already seen successful branded offerings, such as the Panda Train and New Oriental Express. **These themed experiences deliver vibrant, high-quality journeys built around distinctive concepts, meeting rising demand for personalized travel in the era of mass tourism.**

China keeps expanding both high-speed and regular train systems, blending travel routes with tourist opportunities. Because trains reach more areas, people spend more on culture, fun activities, and local services along the way. This connection between riding rails and exploring places adds depth to journeys. Growth follows as spending rises in towns connected by track. New links mean fresh chances for businesses tied to sightseeing and downtime.

Date: 2026-06-22

Article link: <https://www.tourism-review.com/chinese-rail-tourism-reports-more-travelers-news15517>