

How to Take High-Speed Rail in China

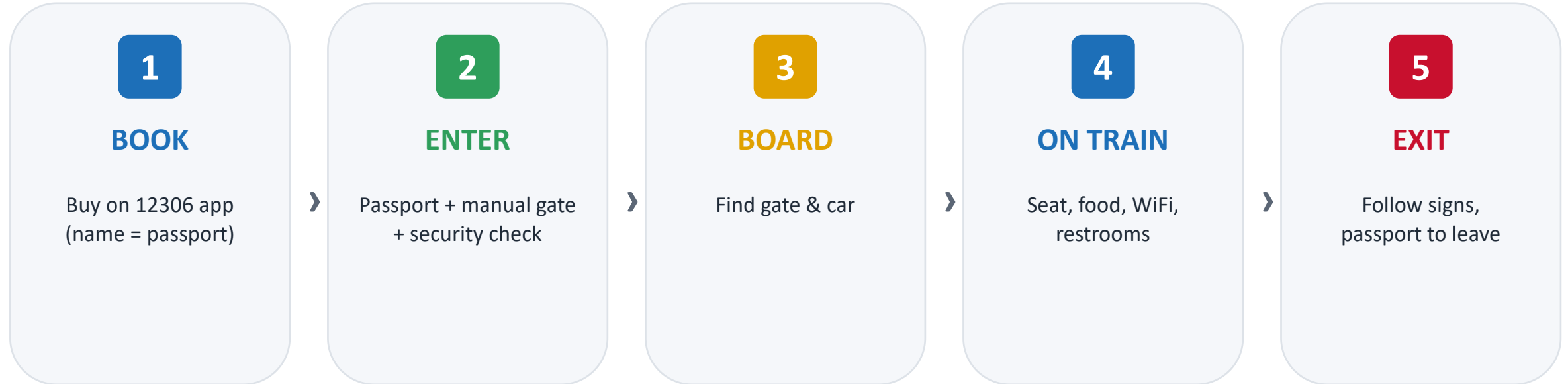
A 5-minute first-timer's guide — from booking to exit

Plan · Buy · Board · Ride · Arrive



*For foreign visitors riding China's bullet trains for the first time, you might need to **zoom in** to check the details in this guide.*

Your 5-Step Journey at a Glance



Most stations and trains share the same flow. **Allow extra time at big city stations — they are huge.**

Know Your Train: G · D · C



高铁 Gāotiě

300–350 km/h

Long distance, fastest, most cities



动车 Dòngchē

200–250 km/h

Medium distance, very common



城际 Chéngjì

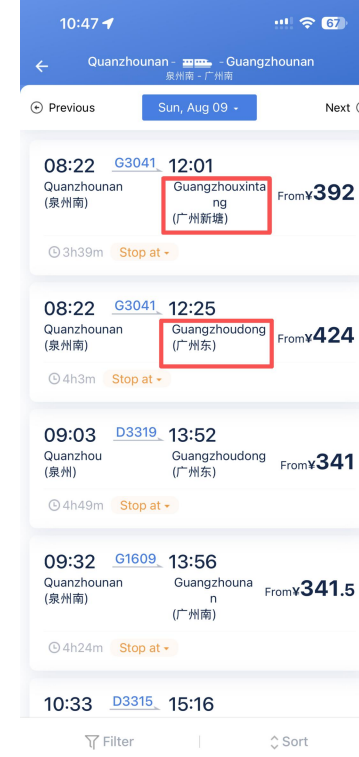
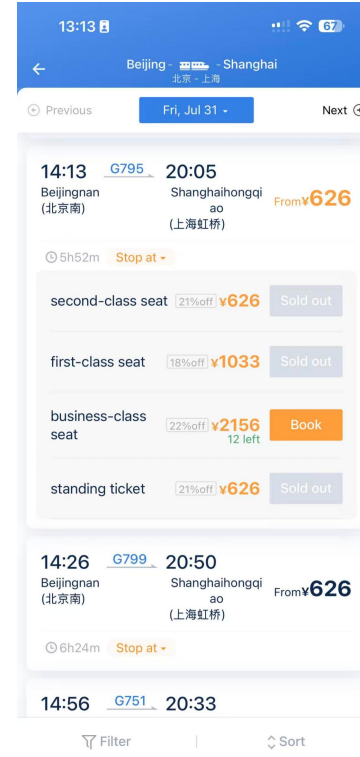
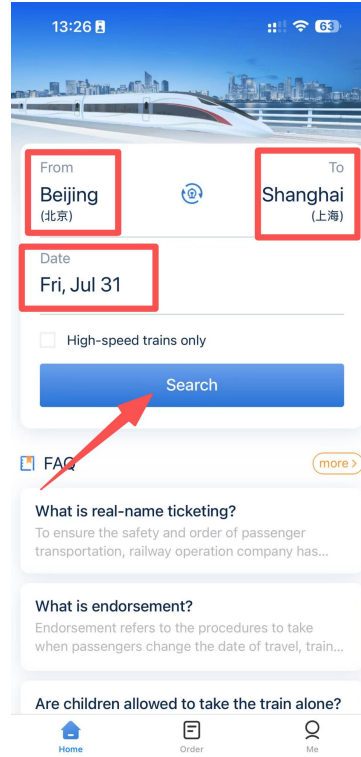
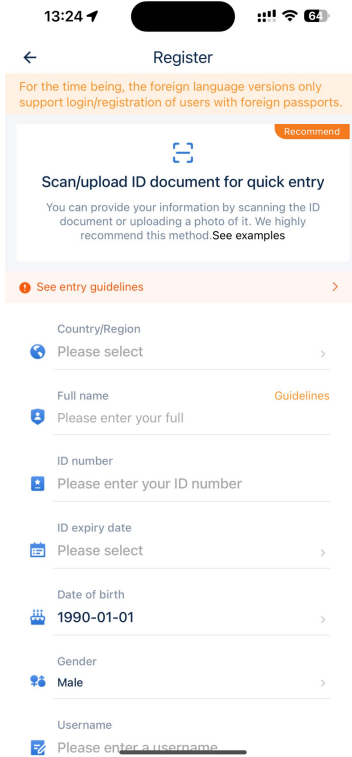
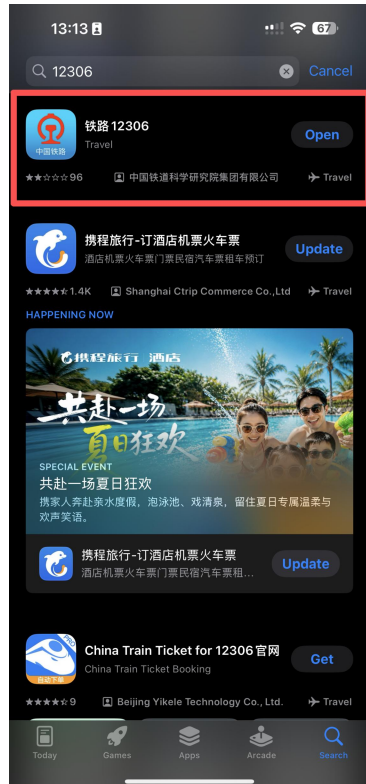
160–200 km/h

Short intercity hops (e.g. Beijing–Tianjin)

All three use the same stations and the same ticket system — your 12306 ticket works on any of them.

Step 1 — Buy Your Ticket (12306)

The official app is 12306. Download → register by email → book. Make sure the buyer's name matches the passport exactly.



Double-check From / To

— my friend Farwa once booked them reversed and missed her train!

-- I planned to go to **Guangzhouxiantang** once, but I forgot to check and booked the ticket to **Guangzhoudong**. That's two different places!

① Download & “Me”--register

② Route · date · train

③ Seat class & tickets

Can't register 12306 or in a hurry? See “Other ways to buy” (page 11-13) in this guide.

Step 1 — Finish & Save Your Ticket



④ Add passenger



⑤ Choose seat



⑥ Save & find it

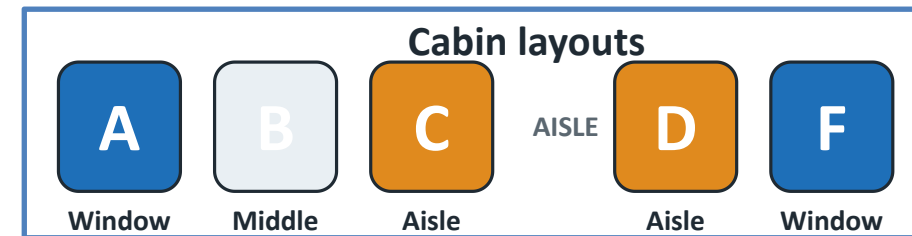
Seat letters

A / F = window

C / D = aisle

No "E" seat

Find your ticket on the home screen or My → My Orders (gate + seat number).



1. Arrive early

Get there 30–60 min before departure. Big stations are massive.



3. Security check

Liquids: officers may ask you to take a sip. Everything else goes on the conveyor belt. **Details about luggage are in the page 14**



2. Passport = your ticket in

Foreign passports use the **MANUAL channel** (face-scan gates read Chinese ID only).



4. Find your gate

Match gate, train No., departure time, platform & landmark color on your phone. Sit nearby and wait — boarding usually starts around 15 min before, with voice announcements in major stations. **I would suggest you to take a picture of the screen**



find your gate

BEFORE YOU BOARD

Manual channel

Scan passport at the staffed gate to enter the platform.



Go to the platform

Follow the crowd down. Check the BIG screen — **trains can arrive on BOTH sides** of one platform. or ask staff for help



Find your car

Match the platform's **colored ground** markers to your **car number**, then queue.



ON THE PLATFORM

Verify & board

Check the train & car number on the train exterior before stepping on.



Find your seat

Letters A/B/C/D/F — A & F by the window, C & D by the aisle. **My fav is F**



Stow luggage

Big bags: back of the car or the dedicated rack. Small bags: in front of you or the overhead shelf.





Restrooms

At the ends of each car. Usually clean; bring your own tissue.



Order food

Scan the QR code at your seat, or visit the dining car, or pre-order via 12306 delivery.



WiFi

Some trains offer free WiFi — look for the network name on board.



Accessibility

Accessible cars & restrooms, braille signs, and “key passenger” service you can book in advance.



**1**

Listen for the announcement

When it says your stop is next, gather your things and stand by the door.

**2**

Follow the signs & crowd

Exit arrows lead you out of the paid area. Follow other passengers.

**3**

Passport to leave

Use the MANUAL channel and show your passport to exit the station.

Seat Classes Compared

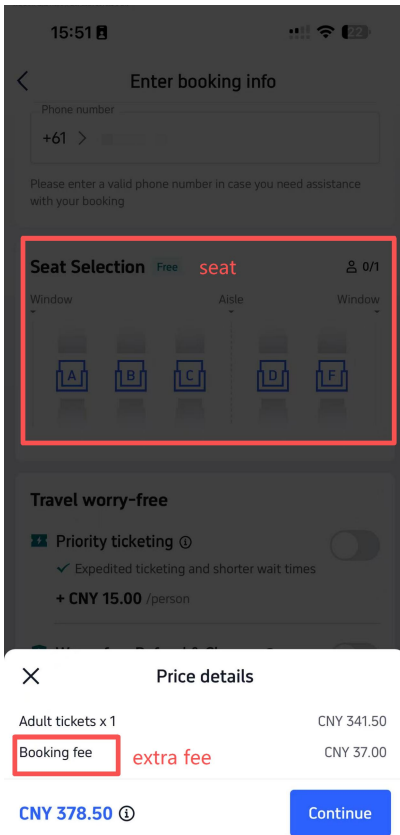
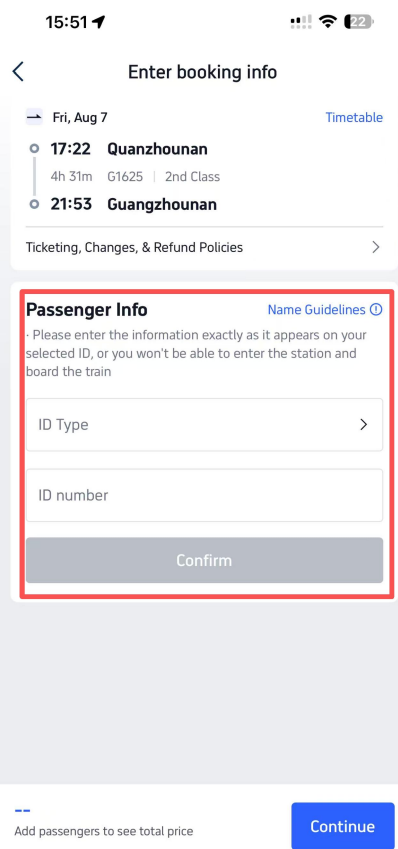
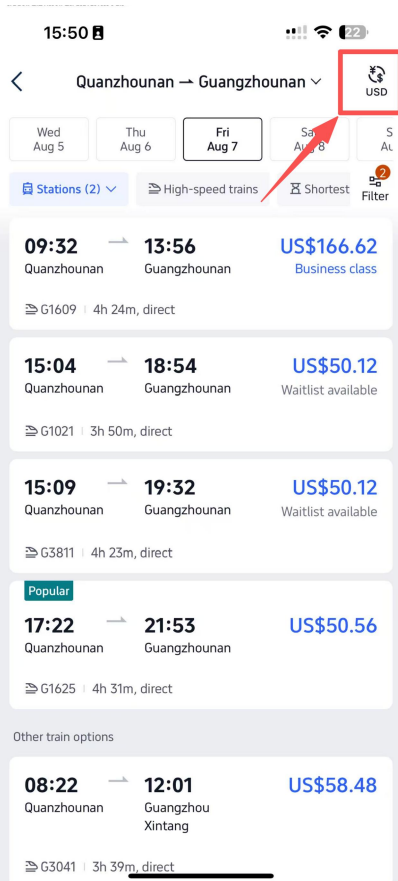
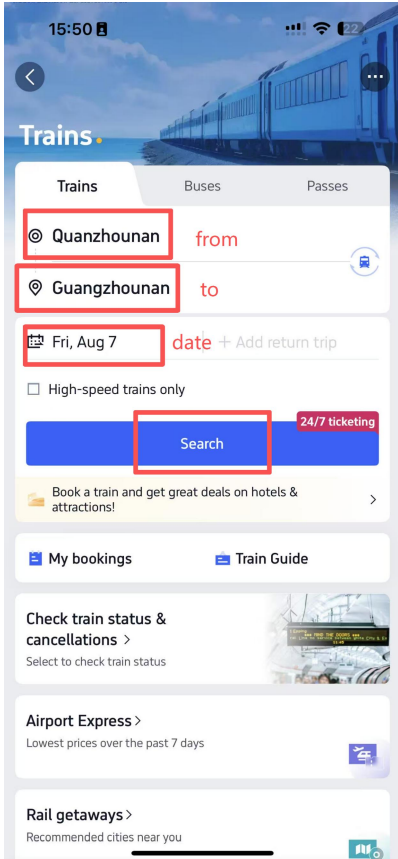
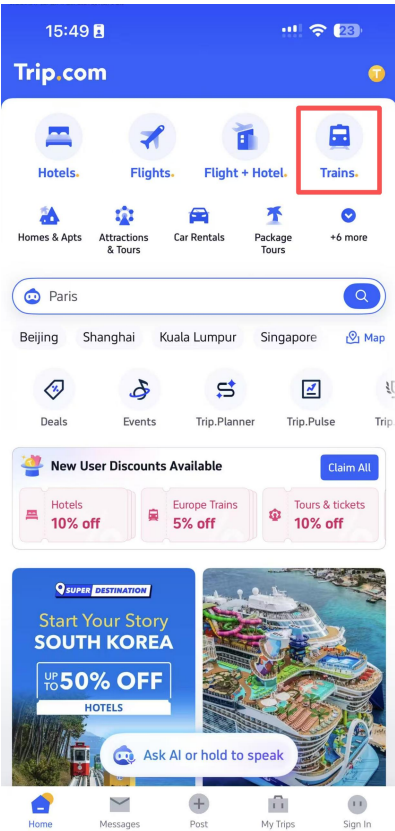
Feature	2nd Class Normally we choose this one	First Class	Select/ Premium First	Business
Seat width	Standard	Wider	Wider + more legroom	Lie-flat spacious
Recline	Limited	More	Noticeably more	Near flat / flat
Power / USB	At seat	At seat	At seat	At seat + wireless
Food & drink	Buy / bring	Free water + snack	Free meal	Full meal + lounge
Waiting lounge	—	—	Some stations	Business lounge
Price (guide)	¥¥	¥¥¥	¥¥¥¥	¥¥¥¥¥

Other Ways to Buy a Ticket

Use these when 12306 registration fails or you prefer English / credit card:

Trip.com

English UI, credit-card payment, same inventory. Its convenient and comfortable to use, someone said” you dont need to verify your foreigner ID”(im not so sure) , but booking train tickets here requires **extra service fees**, so tickets cost more.

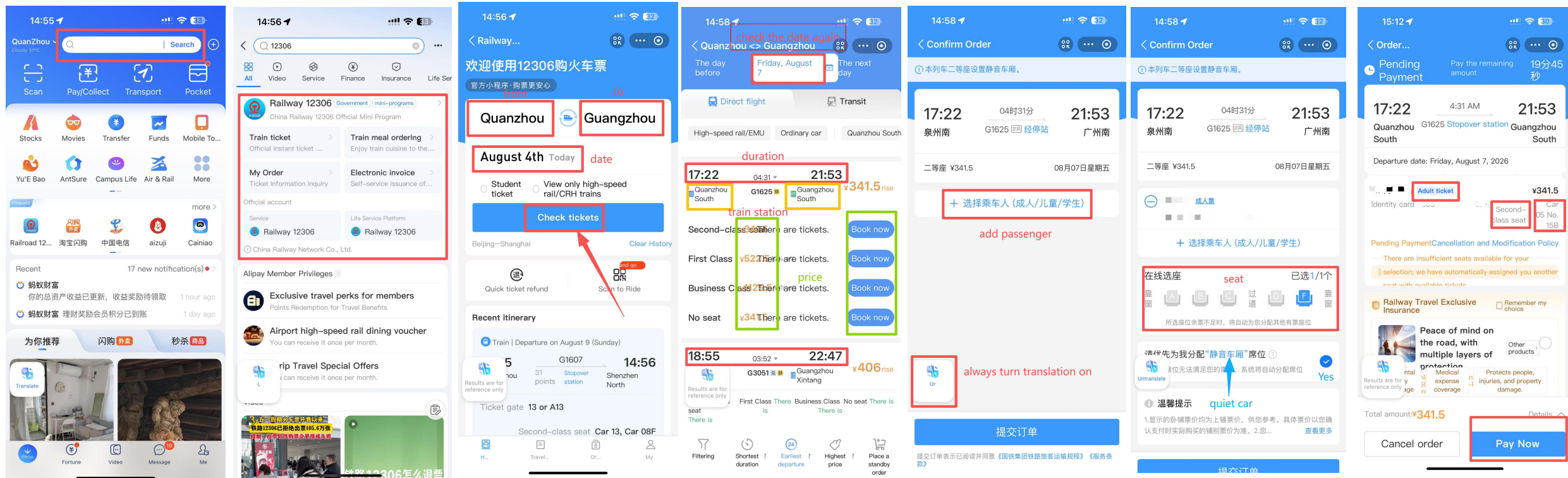


Other Ways to Buy a Ticket

Use these when 12306 registration fails or you prefer English / credit card:

Alipay mini-program

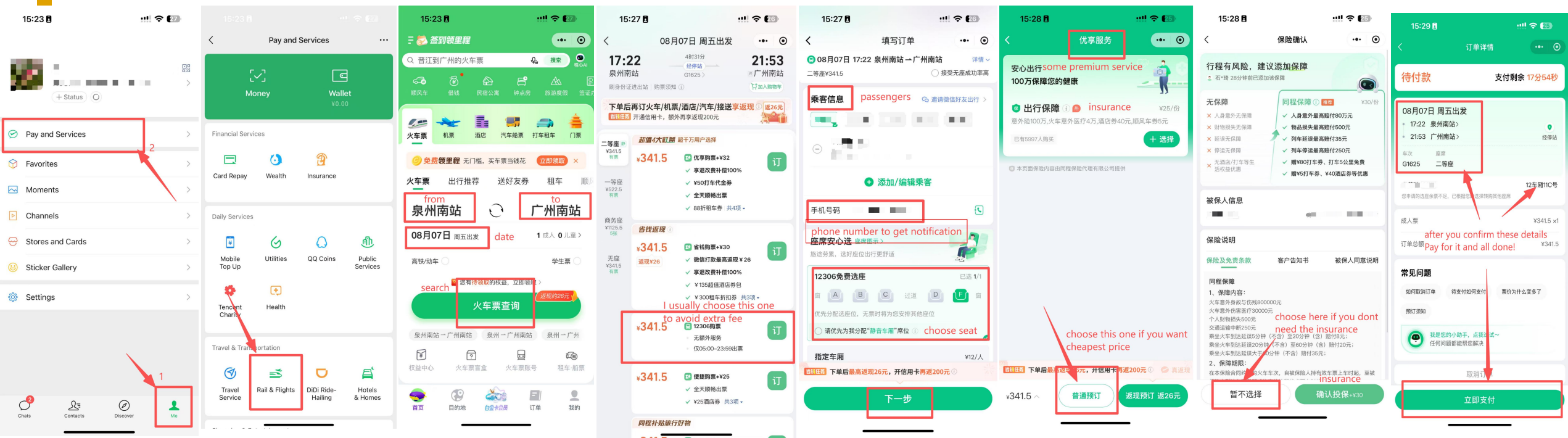
Search "12306" inside Alipay. Chinese UI but familiar if you use Alipay. **ZOOM IN TO CHECK DETAILS**



Other Ways to Buy a Ticket

Use these when 12306 registration fails or you prefer English / credit card:
WeChat mini-program

Chinese travelers book train tickets via the“同程” Mini Program. It offers alternative trips when tickets sell out. However, it has no English version even if you set WeChat to English.



What NOT to Bring

Security is strict. Leave these at home or in your checked bag:

-  Knives & sharp tools (any blade)
-  Flammable / explosive items
-  Liquids over 100 ml in some checks*
-  Guns, replicas & ammunition
-  Strong-smelling foods (no durian!)
-  Pets (only small caged ones in carriers)

* If you carry liquid, officers may ask you to take a sip to prove it's safe.

**High Speed Rail :
What You Can & Cannot Bring**

 Permitted	 Prohibited
permitted Beauty & Cosmetics - Setting spray / Sunscreen spray: ≤150 ml - Hair spray, mousse, hair dye, perm lotion, repellent spray: ≤150 ml - Orfume / Toilet water / Gel: ≤100 ml Food & Drinks - Dried meat & dried groceries - Seafood, aquatic products, eggs: sealed packaging - Unopened bottled wine: ≤300ml - Oil: sealed packaging - Ring Electronics - Power bank: ≤27000 mAh, with 3C mark - Laice cooker, hair dryer, tryer, hair curler, shaver, electric toothbrush, fan, mini iron, soymilk maker, juicer	FOOD Liquids & Aerosols - Sunscreen / moisturizing >150 ml - Toner, essence, other liquids: other liquids: >100 ml - Air fresheners, insecticides - alcohol, & from memory, insecticides 日用品 - Alcohol, 84 disinfectant, 84 disinfectant, hydrogen peroxide - Odorous, celohone, ato, paint - Hazrdous chemicals: benzene, acetone, paint 食品类 Food - Self-heating meals - Strong-odour food: durian, stinky tofu - Cellloid table tennis balls - Long ice crampons - Fuel canisters, gas canisters, fire-fire-starting rods - Compressed gas: LPG, hydrogen 其他类 Others - Sharp blades: fruit knives, utility knives - All pets: hamsters, birds - Guide dogs with official permits are exempt

Feel Hungry On The Train

1. Scan the QR code at your seat

Use Alipay or Wechat to scan the QR code at your seat (right side!), select the meal you like.

Price around 30-80 chinese yuan



2. Visit the dining car

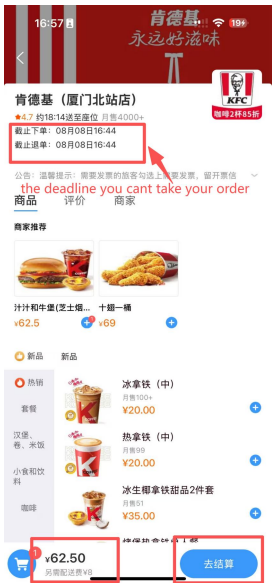
Ask the staff where is dining car 餐车, go and pick the food you like.

It can avoid the delivery fee, and sometimes there are some cheap set around 15 yuan



3. Pre-order via 12306 delivery

I only find this feature in 12306 Chinese version (switch your language system to Chinese). Would suggest you book 1 hour in advance



Transferring / Connecting Trains

1. Follow 换乘 Transfer signs

They lead you from one platform to the next without leaving the paid area.

2. Check the screen again

Confirm your next train's platform & gate — they change by the minute.

3. Mind the clock

Some transfers are 10–15 min. If tight, **tell staff** — they can guide you fast.

4. Keep your passport handy

You'll pass manual gates between trains too. AND don't forget your luggage!



Add a Passenger / Let a Friend Buy

Add a foreign passenger in 12306

- Open 12306 → “我的” (Me) → “乘车人” (Passengers).
- Tap “添加” and enter the passport name + number exactly as on the document.
- Save it once; you can reuse it for every trip.

A Chinese friend can buy for you

- They log into their 12306 and add YOUR passport as a passenger.
- They pay and send you the ticket screenshot (gate + seat).
- You just show the passport at the manual gate — no ticket paper needed.

Change & Refund Rules (改签 / 退票)

改签 Free Re-booking

- 48h+ before: change to any train in the sale period.
- <48h before: change to a train before departure, or up to 24:00 on the travel day.
- **Only ONE change per ticket.**
- Pay the price difference; if cheaper, the gap is refunded minus a fee.

退票 Refund fee

When	Fee
8+ days before	Free
48h – 8 days	5%
24–48h	10%
< 24h	20%

Special cases (no fee): train delayed/cancelled = full refund; illness with a medical certificate = full refund before departure.

 Rules vary by station — always confirm at the counter. Source: official 12306 policy.

To takeaway

Still nervous and confused? I can be your personal guide, just send me an email, we would discuss about all details!

- ✓ Keep your passport on you at all times.
- ✓ Screenshot the ticket (Chinese name + gate + seat).
- ✓ Save the 12306 app before you travel.
- ✓ When unsure, follow the crowd and read the big screens or **ask the staff for help directly**.

Safe travels & enjoy the ride! 