

CHINA Travel Magazine

DISSIDENT EDITION

June 4, 2025

SURVEILLANCE IN THE SUN

THE **TOP 8** HOTTEST
DESTINATIONS
FOR DISSIDENTS

SECRET RETREATS

YOUR QUESTIONS ON
FORCED TRAVEL
ANSWERED

NOT JUST TIANANMEN

THE LATEST UPDATES
ON SENSITIVE DATES

保护卫士
人权基金会

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CHINA

Travel Magazine

Dissident Edition

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About Safeguard Defenders

Safeguard Defenders is a human rights NGO founded in late 2016. It undertakes and supports local field activities that contribute to the protection of basic rights, promote the rule of law and enhance the ability of local civil society and human rights defenders in some of the most hostile environments in Asia.

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Letter From The Editor

Welcome to this first edition of *China Travel Magazine: Dissident Edition*

Every year, like clockwork, when major political events or sensitive anniversaries are about to occur, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sends activists and petitioners on “forced travel”. Often those targeted include the same list of long-established rights scholars, lawyers, journalists and intellectuals. There are now so many sensitive dates that these people end up being routinely “forced travelled” several times a year. It doesn’t matter if they are young or old,

in good health or ailing, almost without fail they will be escorted by a team from the Public Security Bureau (police) or government department on a “holiday” so that they cannot “cause trouble” at home.

Take the CCP National Congress in October 2022 for example. The CCP Congress is a key date in the Party’s political calendar that lasts two weeks and happens once every five years. It is an extremely sensitive period from the CCP’s perspective. As the opening day drew near, publisher and elderly human rights activist Bao Pu and his wife were taken on a tour outside Beijing; outspoken journalist, then in her late 70s, Gao Yu, was

sent to Huairou in northern Beijing; while veteran rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang was driven to Changping, also in the capital’s northern suburbs. Gao ran out of medicine during her forced travel, having only taken enough for 14 days. Police were still “holidaying” with her on day 16 when she began to feel unwell without her medication.

Earlier that same year in Beijing, Yin Dengzhen and her husband Xiao Shujun, who completely relies on her because of his ill health, were also sent away on a trip. The two have been petitioners for many years, enduring spells in black jails and numerous beatings at the hands of police and government agents. It

was just before the Two Sessions, an annual political meeting in spring that lasts two weeks and is often used to announce major policy changes. Police from Xiao’s hometown in Heilongjiang province were trying to prevent him petitioning

by forcibly bringing him home. A petitioning office from Hubei province was also targeting Yin. They messaged her ordering her to leave Beijing for another location and that they would arrange accommodation for her “trip”. Fearing that

if she refused, she would be detained, leaving her husband alone and helpless, Yin agreed. “The main thing is Xiao is very ill,” Yin told Rights Protection Network, a Chinese human rights blog. “If they detain me, Xiao will starve to death in Beijing.”



China Travel Magazine: Dissident Edition examines the Chinese Communist Party’s practice of forced travel on human rights defenders and petitioners.

Through interviews with recent victims and analyses of media stories, this report traces how the practice of **forced travel declined** (but did not completely disappear) during the Covid pandemic (2020 to end 2022) when strict lockdowns were periodically implemented. It also notes how China’s economic problems have shaped a **more budget form of forced travel** in the post-Covid era.

The use of parody in this report, including in the cover, design and headlines, is not to diminish the seriousness of forced travel. **Forced travel is still an illegal and arbitrary form of detention.** It violates the fundamental human rights to freedom, liberty of movement, expression and privacy. Rather, parody is employed as a novel approach to raise attention to this repressive practice and to highlight the absurdity of the CCP in pretending forced relocation, surveillance and detention is just a “holiday”.

Your questions
on ***forced travel***
answered

/1 WHAT IS FORCED TRAVEL?

Forced travel is a type of arbitrary detention where rights defenders are pressured to leave their homes, usually but not always under police or government escort, on the pretext of “going on holiday” during **sensitive events**.

/2 HOW COMMON IS FORCED TRAVEL?

Using interviews and media research, Safeguard Defenders **found 84 cases of forced travel between 2018 and March 2025** from media reports. Some of these include mass events, such as groups of people who belong to the same underground church. Since many cases of forced travel will go unreported, the true number is likely much higher than this.

/3 WHY DOES THE CCP FORCE TRAVEL ACTIVISTS?

The main aim of forced travel appears to be to **silence rights defenders**—to prevent them from gathering, protesting,

petitioning or talking to foreign officials or the media during politically sensitive times. For the CCP, it has the advantage of looking less repressive than detention or house arrest thus making it less likely to arouse international criticism. It also takes place outside the law

enforcement system, meaning there is no need to justify the measure with the justice system (procuratorate) as they would eventually have to do with a regular detention.

An additional possible motivation is the attraction for officers or government agents to enjoy an all-expenses paid trip.

Secret Retreats



/4 WHAT DOES FORCED TRAVEL LOOK LIKE?

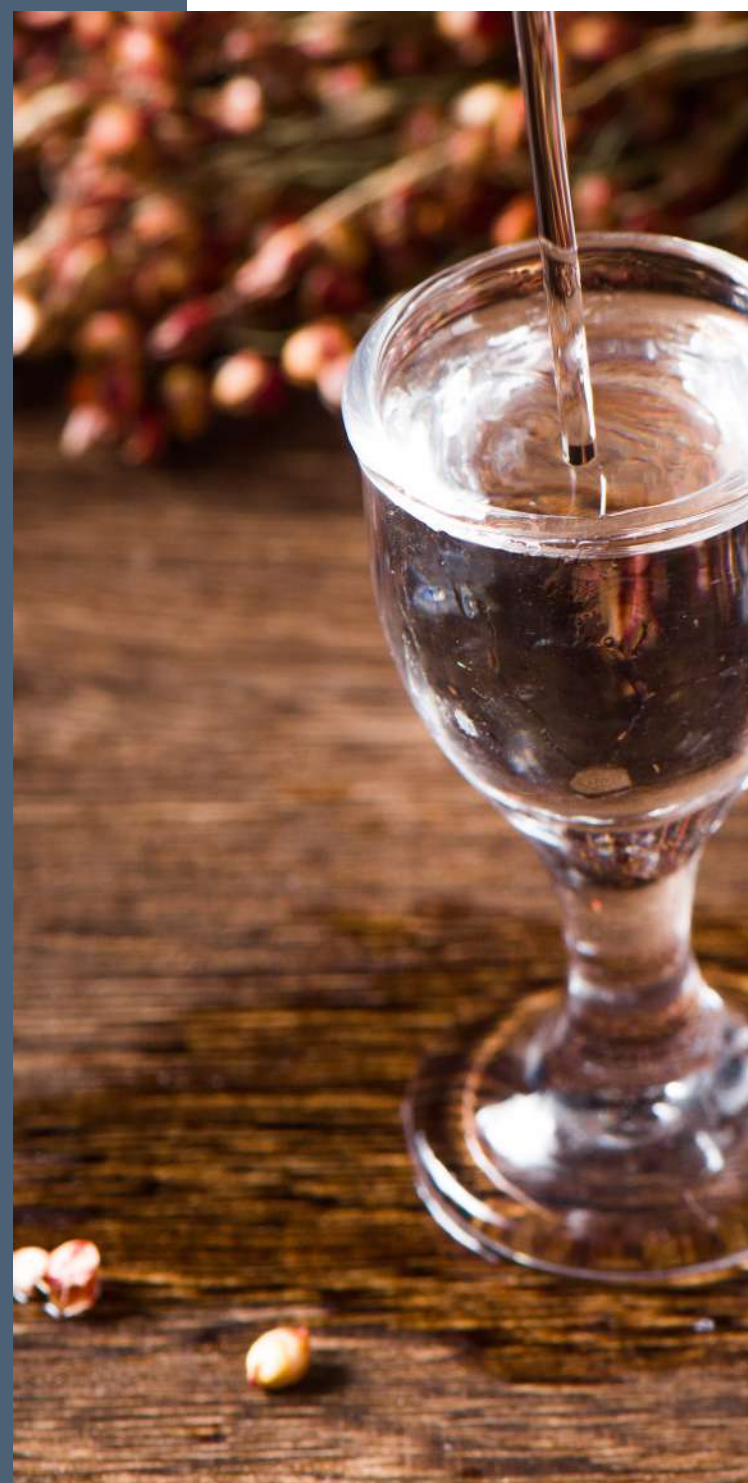
Forced travel can take many forms from a **strict detention** in a locked hotel room to **travel under police surveillance**, with sightseeing trips and dinners out, to an **independent trip out of town** with occasional monitoring. The victim could be taken to a **far-off province** or simply driven to the **suburbs of the city they live in**. It can last just a **few days** to **several weeks**. Forced travel is usually inflicted on an individual, but sometimes family members are allowed to join.

Occasionally, the target is able to negotiate the destination and activities, especially if they are a veteran activist who is regularly forced travelled. For example, in June 2018, government agents told now deceased Hunan province-based activist Ouyang Jinghua that he must go on a forced travel with them before the June 4 Tiananmen Square anniversary. Ahead of departure, they took him out for dinner in order to plan the itinerary together. The officers listened to his thoughts, but rejected his

suggested destinations – Xiamen city or Guangxi province – as being too far for a five- or six-day trip. Instead, they planned a tour of former residences of CCP officials within Hunan. During his forced travel, Ouyang refused to visit Mao's former house and so the officers left him in the car under the guard of the driver while they attempted to visit. When they found they had to use their ID cards to enter they abandoned their plan and continued the tour. That night, Ouyang fell asleep in the hotel, while the police played poker next to his bed. Over the next few days, they drove around, taking in a temple, a martyrs' monument and visiting a local official for a fancy dinner.

A small number of forced travel incidents fall under Non-Release Release (NRR) detentions, when high profile activists are released from prison but are spirited away by police to a distant hotel for days, weeks or months, to prevent them talking to the media.

Whatever form the forced travel takes, victims are usually **not permitted to speak to media or to post anything sensitive online, including the fact they are being force travelled**.



Perks for police

Some activists also report that police and government agents opt for forced travel because it represents an all-expenses paid holiday for themselves, and sometimes their family too.

Especially in pre-Covid times, these trips could be extravagant. One rights defender told us in an interview that his forced travel typically included sightseeing, hotels and lavish meals in restaurants. "There was also unlimited cigarettes and alcohol," he said.

Another interviewee, a rights lawyer, said that between 2021 and 2024 officials from the township government would compete with police over who would have the right to take him on forced travel trips because it was so popular.

Teng Biao, a human rights lawyer who now lives in exile in the US, remembered how officers who accompanied him on his forced travel would pressure him to take part in tourist activities even if he would rather just rest in the hotel. He interpreted this as a sign they saw forced travel as a way to enjoy a free holiday. This was before 2014, the year he left China.

/5 IS IT POSSIBLE TO REFUSE TO GO ON A FORCED TRAVEL?

Refusal usually means undergoing another kind of punishment. For example, in August 2024, to punish journalist Gao Yu for rejecting the police's "suggestion" to go out of town ahead of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, services to her landline, mobile phone and internet were cut.

In 2023, veteran activist Hu Jia was forced to go on a travel during the Two Sessions period even though his father was dying of pancreatic cancer. Police eventually allowed him home, just a few days before his father passed away.

/6 WHO ENFORCES FORCED TRAVEL?

Forced travel is usually handled by **police** or local **government agents** (such as officers from county-level petitioning offices). Forced travel is part of the CCP's **stability maintenance** programme and comes under the stability maintenance budget.

/7 WHEN DID THE CCP FIRST START FORCE TRAVELLING RIGHTS DEFENDERS?

One of the earliest reports of forced travel in China emerged in 2007 when local government agents took an activist on a six-day trip to stop her campaigning for better retirement pay for teachers

while the local CCP branch held its Congress in Hubei province. In 2021, a member of the Guizhou Human Rights Forum, a banned group of activists that are long-time victims of forced travel, wrote that they were first sent on trips back in 2008.

By 2009, forced travel cases were being widely reported, so much so that activists had coined a name for it -- 被旅游 beilüyou (to be travelled). For example, the 2009 edition of Chinese Human Rights Defenders' annual report commented that the high number of sensitive events that year had prompted the largest number of human rights defenders to be sent on forced travel in "recent history". In subsequent years, forced travel was regularly reported in the international press.

from meeting foreign officials and punishing them for attempting to do so. For example, to block rights lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan from keeping an appointment with EU Ambassador to China Jorge Toledo, Chinese police detained the couple while they were enroute to the meeting. A year later, husband and wife were sentenced to several years in prison. Xu was released in early 2025.



The CCP has taken much more repressive measures to prevent human rights defenders

Forced travel regularly made global headlines in the mid-2010s.

South China Morning Post

Forced to go five-star:
How China sends dissidents on all-expenses paid trips to keep them quiet

rfa | Radio Free Asia

China 'Disappears' Dozens of Dissidents As G20 Summit Opens in Hangzhou

Reuters

For some Chinese dissidents, party congress means a paid 'vacation'

THE NEW YORKER 100

CHINA'S BIZARRE PROGRAM TO KEEP ACTIVISTS IN CHECK

The Guardian

China sends dissidents on free holidays

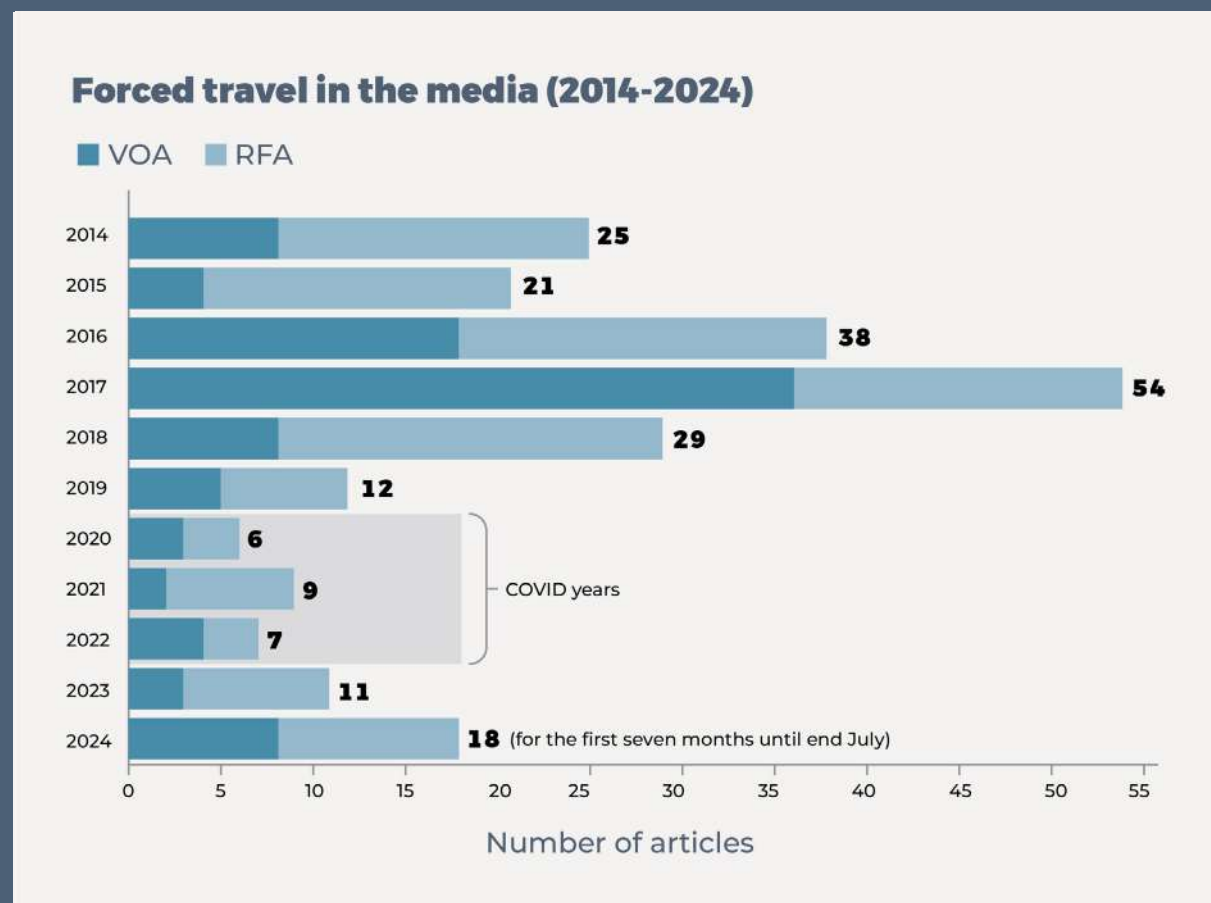
8 WHAT HAPPENED TO FORCED TRAVEL DURING COVID?

Forced travel cases appeared to fall in number during the COVID pandemic (2020 to 2022).

Local governments would periodically place cities and regions under lockdown, making it difficult and unnecessary to take rights defenders on forced trips.

There are no publicly-available official data on forced travel so we used the

number of media stories on cases by Radio Free Asia and Voice of America as a proxy for trends in the frequency of forced travel. There are likely many more cases of forced travel than are reported by media, but the number of reports should mirror any changes.



The chart above tracks the number of reports (a single report may include one or more cases of forced travel) in each of the two media outlets from 2014 to July

2024. During the years 2020 to 2022 (the COVID years), the total annual number of reports was lower than in any other year by a significant margin. In 2024,

the number of reports in the first half of the year has already surpassed any of the COVID years, indicating the CCP has likely re-embraced the practice.



9 WHAT ABOUT AFTER COVID?

Post-Covid China has struggled with economic challenges, and there are reports that stability maintenance budgets have fallen as a result. Radio Free Asia reported that 2024 funds were only around RMB 227.6 billion, around half of what was allocated in 2010.

This appears to be impacting forced travel in the following ways:

(1) Mostly gone are the tours to exotic destinations cross

country, trips now are more likely to be in the city suburbs closer to home. (2) Durations are shorter. (3) Police may now opt for house arrest or just simple warnings to stay at home and not talk to media during the sensitive period.

As the 35th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre was approaching in the summer of 2024, veteran victim of forced travel, rights activist Ji Feng, told media that his forced travel trips were being limited to areas around Zunyi city in Guizhou province in southern China,

where he lived. In previous years, he said he was taken much further afield, such as areas around Beijing. “I even went to the ancient city of Pingyao (Shanxi province) the year before last.” Other activists reported that for the 2024 “June 4” sensitive period, the usual 10 days of forced travel had been shortened to one week, with some being allowed home early. Others were placed “under guard”, a form of house arrest where targets are followed whenever they leave home.

/10 WHAT HUMAN RIGHTS DOES FORCED TRAVEL VIOLATE?

While forced travel is not as harsh as the CCP's many other tools of harassment and control, such as psychiatric detention, residential surveillance at a designated location, prison sentences, collective punishment and forced evictions, it is still a form of arbitrary and extralegal detention and a violation of the right to freedom of movement and expression and the right to privacy. It is illegal under both Chinese domestic law and international human rights law.

Forced travel violates Article 37 of China's Constitution, which says **"the unlawful deprivation or restriction of a citizen's personal freedom by other means, is prohibited."** Similarly, it infringes on the right to liberty and freedom of movement as enshrined in Articles 9 and 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

When police or government agents sleep in the same hotel room in order to keep close watch on the person being forcibly travelled, it is also an infringement of their right to privacy, as spelled out in Article 12 of the UDHR: **"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy [and] family."**

Since forced travel is a preventative measure aimed at keeping activists and petitioners silent and out of sight at specific times, it is also a violation of the right to freedom of speech. This is enshrined in the Chinese Constitution (Article 35) and the UDHR (Article 19).

For more extreme types of forced travel, such as those inflicted as part of NRR, or when the individual is simply disappeared with no phone access, it can be classified as an enforced disappearance. This is explicitly defined as a human rights violation in the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances.



After Hong Kong passed its National Security Law in 2020, many observers have pointed to examples of CCP-style human rights violations that have crept into the city. These include censorship, propaganda, collective punishment of political targets, proposals to restrict lawyer access and even one example of psychiatric detention.

While there have been no reports of forced travel in Hong Kong that fit our definition as yet—relocating a rights defender to silence them during a sensitive event—in 2023, pro-democracy activist Agnes Chow was subjected to a similar coercive measure. Hong Kong national security police escorted her to Shenzhen in China on a CCP propaganda tour. During the trip, she was required to pose for photos at an exhibition praising CCP leaders and to visit gaming giant and technology company Tencent's headquarters, where she was lectured about China's technological achievements. Going on the trip was a requirement for getting her passport back. Chow explained that she was terrified to go to China but she went because that was the only way she could obtain her passport and leave Hong Kong. She now lives in exile in Canada.

Is Forced Travel being rolled out in Hong Kong?



Surveillance in the Sun

The top 8 hottest destinations for dissidents

Media reports and interviews reveal that the locations of forced travel vary widely. Many factors play a part, such as duration of the sensitive event, and local government or police budgets etc., in whether the trip is close to home or at a far-flung resort, although it seems that in the current economic climate, shorter and more modest trips are becoming the norm. On this map we have plotted some of the forced travel incidents that have taken place in the last decade in China.



The CCP'S Forced Travel Calendar

Not just Tiananmen

The latest updates on *sensitive dates*



Events that prompt forced travel include **sensitive anniversaries** such as the Tiananmen Square massacre (4 June), **key political dates** such as the Two Sessions (every March) and the National Day holiday (the first week of October), **trials** of prominent rights defenders, **major international events** staged in China such as the 2020 Winter Olympics and visits by foreign officials, such as diplomats and heads of state.

In recent years, the list of sensitive dates has grown as new major human rights incidents occur and as China hosts more international events. Recent additions include the anniversaries of the 709 Crackdown on human rights lawyers (2015), the death of imprisoned intellectual Liu Xiaobo (2017) and China's Belt and Road forums.

On the opposite page we have plotted the approximate forced travel periods linked to key annual sensitive events.



Note

This calendar does not include CCP Central Committee plenums (once or twice a year), other ad hoc important political meetings, international events staged in China, visits from foreign officials and sensitive dates tied to regional human rights events.

Approximate dates for forced travel

Postcards from Prison

Stories from forced
travellers *in China*



China Travel Magazine: Dissident Edition

was researched using interviews and media stories. Sources for specific forced travel, quotes and commentary are in the following pages.

Letter from the Editor

The October 2022 CCP National Congress forced travels of Bao Pu and his wife, Gao Yu and Pu Zhiqiang:
Gu, T. (2022, October 25). 二十大闭幕维稳未停 多名异议人士仍受监控. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

The forced travel of Yin Dengzhen and her husband Xiao Shujun in 2022:
Wei quan wang (2022, March 1). 忧丈夫肖书君遭黑龙江截访人员害, 尹登珍答应湖北十堰中院信访办“两会”离开北京.

[LINK](#)

Secret Retreats

In this *The New Yorker* piece, Zha Jianying describes how her brother, Jianguo, was taken on multiple, lavish forced travels. “Once, Jianguo told me why an elderly policeman was assigned to his team for a trip south: the man was about to retire, and he’d never been to any tropical beaches.”

Zha, J. (2018, December 17). *China’s Bizarre Program to Keep Activists in Check*. The New Yorker.

[LINK](#)

Ouyang Jinghua’s 2018 forced travel:
Civil Rights & Livelihood Watch (2018, June 10). 湖南欧阳经华“六四”被旅游昨获释.

[LINK](#)

We profiled NRR in detail, including locating hotels used in the illegal practice, in this 2021 report:
Safeguard Defenders. (2021). *Access Denied 2: China’s False Freedom* [PDF].

[LINK](#)

The sentencing of Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan:
Thibault, H. (2024, November 1). *Chinese lawyer and his wife sentenced to prison for a meeting with European diplomats*. Le Monde.fr.

[LINK](#)

The release of Xu Yan:
Wang, Y. (2015, January 14). 北京人权捍卫者许艳刑满获释. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

The Beijing police’s punitive measures against Gao Yu for refusing to go on a forced travel:
Qian, L. (2024, August 27). *China cuts off internet, phones of outspoken journalist Gao Yu*. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

Hu Jia sent on forced travel despite dying father:
Gao, F. (2023, March 10). 遭强制旅游期间父亲病逝 胡佳获准返京. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

The earliest report on forced travel we found (2007 in Hubei province):
Civil Rights & Livelihood Watch. (2007, June 11). 图文|武汉市民师代表今日被强制外出“旅游”.

[LINK](#)

Guizhou Human Rights Forum’s forced travel in 2008 when three of its members were taken by police to stay in small hotels in the suburbs of Guiyang city ahead of Human Rights Day:

Shen, Y-L. (2021, March 6). 致函联合国高专办揭露人权灾难 贵州人权研讨会成员申有连被警方带走逾3天. Banned Books.

[LINK](#)

The 2009 edition of Chinese Human Rights Defenders’ annual report that first mentioned forced travel:
NCHRD. (2010, April 29). *Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in China (2009)*.

[LINK](#)

For our analysis of media coverage of forced travel before, during and after COVID, we chose to focus only on RFA and VOA because they are both respected and reliable sources of news on human rights issues in China.

China's economic troubles and the impact on forced travel:

Qian,L. (2024, June 5). *Beijing dissidents allowed home early due to security funding cuts*. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

Ji Feng's account of being taken on more budget forced travel:

Chen, Z. (2024, May 27). *“六四”35周年前夕 北京启动维稳机制*. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

Accounts of shorter forced travels:

Qian, L and Liu, B. (2024, June 5). *受财政因素影响 今年六四敏感期缩短*. Radio Free Asia

[LINK](#)

Accounts of forced travel being changed to being placed “under guard” instead:

Qian, L and Liu, B. (2024, May 31). *中国多地异议人士受监控 “被旅游”维稳经费窘迫*. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

Our 2022 report on China's psychiatric detentions:

Safeguard Defenders. (2022, October). *Drugged and Detained: China's Psychiatric Prisons* [PDF].

[LINK](#)

Our 2021 illustrated report on China's Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location detention system:

Safeguard Defenders. (2021). *Locked Up: Inside China's Secret RSDL Jails* [PDF].

[LINK](#)

Our 2023 report on China's practice of collective punishment:

Safeguard Defenders. (2023). *Families in Fear: Collective Punishment in 21st Century China* [PDF].

[LINK](#)

The politically-motivated forced evictions of human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang and his family:

Wu, H. (2023, June 23). *Chinese human rights lawyer chased out of 13 homes in 2 months as pressure rises on legal advocates*.

Associated Press.

[LINK](#)

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (in English):

National People's Congress. (2019, November 20). *Constitution of the People's Republic of China*. The National People's

Congress of the People's Republic of China.

[LINK](#)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

United Nations. (n.d.). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations.

[LINK](#)

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance:

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d.). *International Convention for the Protection of All*

Persons from Enforced Disappearance. United Nations.

[LINK](#)

For examples of the mainlandization of Hong Kong's freedoms and rights please see:

On censorship, propaganda and lawyer access:

United States Department of State. (2024, March 29). *2024 Hong Kong Policy Act Report*. United States Department of State.

[LINK](#)

On collective punishment of political targets:

Safeguard Defenders. (2023). *Families in Fear: Collective Punishment in 21st Century China* [PDF].

[LINK](#)

On psychiatric detention:

Doughty Street Chambers. (2024). *Jimmy Lai's National Security Law trial: Urgent appeal filed with United Nations raising grave*

concerns over the treatment of prosecution witness, Andy Li, and the reliability of his evidence against Jimmy Lai [Press release].

[LINK](#)

Agnes Chow's videoed interview in Japanese where she describes her “forced travel” in Guangdong province:

テレビ東 BIZ. (2023, December 8). Full ver.“Agnes Chow the 1st Exclusive Interview” [Video]. YouTube.

[LINK](#)

Surveillance in the Sun

Bu Yongzhu's forced travel in 2018

Civil Rights & Livelihood Watch. (2018, March 21). *卜永柱失踪逾一个星期实因被旅游*.

[LINK](#)

He Depu's forced travel in 2018

Zha, J.Y. (2018, December 17). *China's Bizarre Program to Keep Activists in Check*. The New Yorker.

[LINK](#)

Hu Jia's forced travel in 2018

Zha, J.Y. (2018, December 17). *China's Bizarre Program to Keep Activists in Check*. The New Yorker.

[LINK](#)

Su Changlan's forced travel in 2018

Civil Rights & Livelihood Watch. (2018, February 8). *广东维权人士苏昌兰会友遇阻再被旅游*.

[LINK](#)

One rights defender told us in an interview that they were sent to Wuyishan during the Two Sessions in 2022.

Pu Zhiqiang's forced travel in 2022

Gu, T. (2022, October 25). *二十大闭幕维稳未停 多名异议人士仍受监控* . Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

Gao Yu's forced travel in 2023

Ye, B. (2023, June 2). *6.4忌日临近 北京强迫旅游异议人士 加紧驱赶人权律师*. Voice Of America.

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Tong Menglan's forced travel in 2024

Qian, L. (2024, July 10). *Chinese police target dissidents, petitioners ahead of plenum*. Radio Free Asia.

[LINK](#)

