

Chinese New Year travellers overload ticket system

January 4 2012, by Allison Jackson



Thousands of travellers crowd a railway station in Wuhan, central China's Hubei province during the Lunar New Year holiday in February 2011. The week-long holiday, also known as the Spring Festival, begins on January 23 and is the world's biggest annual migration of people as more than 200 million board trains and buses to celebrate with their families.

A new online system designed to make it easier for people to buy train tickets home for the Lunar New Year has been overwhelmed by huge demand from millions of travellers across China.

The week-long holiday, also known as the Spring Festival, begins on January 23 and is the world's biggest annual migration of people as more than 200 million board trains and buses to celebrate with their families.

Demand for train [tickets](#) is high for weeks ahead of the holiday, with

migrant workers desperate to return to their home villages or towns queueing for hours to buy tickets.

The railway ministry launched the system on Sunday hoping to ease the problem this year.

But many people have complained that problems with the website have left them out of pocket and with no ticket -- if they were lucky enough to log on to the site at all.

"I paid 218 yuan (\$34) for a ticket from Shanghai to Chengdu online. When I went to collect the ticket a railway official told me he could not find the sales record," Huang Siling told the Global Times.

Many travellers flooded [social networking sites](#) to vent their anger at spending hours trying to access the new system, only to find that tickets allocated for that day had already sold out.



File photo of Chinese passengers at a railway station in Hefei, east China's Anhui province, waiting to catch a trains home ahead of the Lunar New Year. A new online system designed to make it easier for people to buy train tickets home for the Lunar New Year is struggling to cope with huge demand from millions of travellers across China.

"Three days on end rushing for a ticket. It's almost 10 o'clock and I still can't log on. What's going on?" one web user posted on weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter.

Another said buying tickets online was "horrible".

"It releases the tickets at 8 o'clock. At 8:15 there are none ... I can't go home," the web user said in a posting under the name woshiduoqipa.

As ticket queues grow at train stations in Beijing, Shanghai and the southern city of Guangzhou, where millions of [migrant workers](#) are employed in offices and factories, officials have promised to improve the website's design.

Officials in Shanghai have set up 100 temporary ticket booths at the city's train station to handle the hoards of travellers.

The rail ministry has also vowed to increase the network bandwidth to handle the demand and refund money to out-of-pocket travellers within 15 days, state media said.

They have also introduced a real-name ticketing system, which requires identification before boarding trains, to stop scalpers selling tickets to desperate travellers.

China has invested heavily in expanding and modernising its vast railway system, including building the world's biggest high-speed train network in less than five years.

But a high-speed train crash in July in which at least 40 people were killed, and the sacking of the railways minister in February in a corruption scandal, have led to public anger and fears over safety.

Despite the large number of complaints, some people said they were very happy with the new system, which means they no longer have to leave their home to buy a ticket.

"This morning I bought a ticket from Beijing to Harbin while lying in bed. After three years of queuing overnight at the train station for tickets, this is a luxury for me," said Yuyebugui in a posting on weibo.

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