

TRAVEL IN CHINA

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Hostelling International MN - Travelers Circle

CULTURE

General insights into contemporary China:

<http://www.chinese-culture.net/>

Wikipedia explanation:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_China

Doing business in China:

<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Others/china-culture-guide-part1.html>

Cultural Etiquette:

http://www.culturalsavvy.com/chinese_culture.htm

General Culture:

<http://www.wku.edu/~yuanh/China/culture.html>

Chinese Cultural Center:

<http://www.c-c-c.org/>

- What not to say in a first conversation with someone: the three Ts - Tibet, Taiwan, and Tiananmen Square. It would be best to start relationships with other, less-controversial topics.
- Names are family name first, then given name.
- When greeting someone, a brief handshake is fine; no need to bow or anything like that. When saying goodbye, it's very rare to hug. The Chinese do not show emotions in public.
- Be on time! It is disrespectful to be late for things.
- When giving a gift, never give a timepiece such as a watch or a clock. This character is very similar to that of "death" and will not be received very well. Other gifts to avoid are white or yellow flowers, pears, or red ink.
- They may refuse a gift the first time, but offer it multiple times and they will eventually accept it.
- Also, keeping the price tag on the gift indicates the level of importance you view the relationship.
- Watch out for pick-pockets in crowded areas and on buses.

HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY & RELIGION

Comprehensive History: <http://www-chaos.umd.edu/history/toc.html>

Classical Historiography: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/history/elman/ClassBib/>

Weather Updates:

<http://www.chinatour.com/china-travel-tools/china-weather/>

Maps:

<http://www.chinatour.com/maps/maps.htm>

Chinese Religion:

<http://www.sacu.org/religion.html>

Religious Freedom:

<http://www.cfr.org/publication/16272/>

- Chinese history is about 6,000 years old, give or take a few hundred. It's filled with dynasties, emperors, wars and legends.
- Most young people you meet will know everything about America's 300 year history so you should at least know a thing or two about theirs
- The land mass of China is almost exactly the same as the contiguous United States. Also, it lies along the same latitude so the climate is very similar to that of America. In the north, it gets really cold. In the south and on the islands, it can be very hot.
- There are lakes, rivers, mountains, and deserts - pretty much whatever you're looking for.
- There are three major Chinese religions, Chinese Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Islam and Christianity have grown tremendously in the last century, though.

POPULATION & PEOPLE GROUPS

<i>China Population:</i>	http://www.cpirc.org.cn/en/eindex.htm
<i>Wikipedia explanation:</i>	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_minorities_in_China
<i>Ethnic Minority Essay:</i>	http://www.askasia.org/teachers/essays/essay.php?no=18
<i>Individual explanations:</i>	http://www.orientaltravel.com/people.htm

- China has about 1.3 billion people making it the most populous country in the world.
- There are 56 recognized ethnic groups in China. The Han people make up 93% of the population, while the remaining 55 groups such as the Tibetan, Mongolian, and Miao, make up the other 7%.
- One-Child-Per-Couple policy affects population in the city, but gives exceptions to people in under-populated areas of the country. Young people you meet in the city rarely have siblings, but sometimes refer to their cousins as siblings.

PRE-TRIP PLANNING

<i>General Resources:</i>	http://www.chinatravel.com/
<i>General Resources:</i>	http://www.chinatour.com/tips/tips.htm
<i>Frommers:</i>	http://www.frommers.com/destinations/china/3330010002.html
<i>Lonely Planet:</i>	http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/china/
<i>About.com:</i>	http://gochina.about.com/b/2006/06/28/start-planning-your-trip-to-china.htm

- Don't schedule your trip during the Chinese New Year/Spring Festival (Varies between late January and early February), May Day (First two weeks of May), China National Week/Golden Week (Two weeks of October); these times are when the entire population of China seem to travel and would appear chaotic to any foreigner.
- You're definitely not going to see the whole of China in one trip. I'd recommend mixing up the famous tourist sites and the little-known ones.
- Bring your "unlocked" GSM tri-band cell phone and purchase a prepaid mobile phone card from China Mobile/China Unicom when you get there. Just take out your SIM card and put this one in and it works fine.
- Country code for China is +86.
- Power adapter. Voltage is around 220V which is in the range of most American appliances, but make sure the plug will work in China.



LOCAL/DOMESTIC TRANSPORTATION

<i>Help with trains:</i>	http://www.chinatravel.com/china-travel-tools/china-trains/
<i>General Information:</i>	http://www.lostlaowai.com/local-transport-in-china
<i>General Information:</i>	http://echinacities.com/main/news/shownews.aspx?n=75&pageindex=1&TwotypeID=1
<i>Help with flights:</i>	http://www.chinatravel.com/china-flights/
<i>Train specifics:</i>	http://www.seat61.com/China.htm
<i>Railway Map:</i>	http://www.johomaps.com/as/china/chinarail.html

- Buses cost as little as \$.10 - \$.20 a trip. They are dirty and crowded, but they run regularly during the day.

- Taxis are easy to use and are available at all hours. Starting fares vary from city to city, and make sure they start charging immediately when you start moving or some drivers will try to overcharge you.
- If traveling from city to city by train, it would be best to purchase your tickets in advance at your hotel or through a travel agency. Purchasing rail tickets at the station is hectic.
- There are different levels of comfort when it comes to trains and the price goes up with each level. For overnight rides, I'd recommend a "soft sleeper."
- Find someone at the rail station who speaks English to help get pointed in the right direction for your train.
- For domestic flights, there's a strict baggage weight limit; no limit for trains, though.

LODGING

<i>Hostels</i>	http://www.hihostels.com/dba/country-CN.en.htm
<i>TripAdvisor:</i>	http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotels-g294211-China-Hotels.html
<i>General Hotel Search:</i>	http://www.hotelscombined.com/
<i>Hotel Travel:</i>	http://www.hoteltravel.com/china/index.htm
<i>China Highlights:</i>	http://www.chinahighlights.com/hotel/

- Hostels are always a good option and have a range of services. Check with each when booking them.
- Hotels range from 1 star to 6 stars. Cheap does not mean bad, but expensive should mean really *really* nice, including meals and concierge, etc.
- Always acquire a business card of the hotel you're staying at that has the address in Chinese. This is very helpful when explaining to a taxi driver where you want to go.
- Most hotels that I stayed at had restaurants attached with very good meals, some included in the cost.

FOOD

<i>Wikipedia explanation:</i>	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_cuisine
<i>Indexed Chinese food:</i>	http://www.index-china-food.com/
<i>History of Chinese food:</i>	http://www.chinatownconnection.com/chinese_food.htm
<i>A general menu:</i>	http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/menu/
<i>Recipes:</i>	http://www.chinesefood-recipes.com/
<i>Health facts:</i>	http://www.cspinet.org/nah/chinese.html

- Most restaurants have menus with pictures. The easiest way is to point to what you want and try something new!
- Different cuisines depending on where you are in the country. Food from Beijing is typically the standard, food from the south is sweet, and food from Sichuan is extremely spicy.
- Make sure to always leave a bit of food on your plate. This indicates to the host that you were filled to the fullest without any room left for more. If you eat everything on your plate, they will most likely keep bringing more.
- Don't stick your chopsticks straight up in your food. This is a reminder of incense on someone's grave.
- Tipping in restaurants is not practiced in China except in high-end luxury hotels where tourists have conditioned the practice.

LANGUAGE

<i>Travel Chinese:</i>	http://www.chinesefortravel.com/
<i>Learn Chinese:</i>	http://www.chinese-tools.com/learn/chinese
<i>Wikipedia explanation:</i>	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard_Mandarin
<i>Online class:</i>	http://www.minmm.com/
<i>Phrase listing:</i>	http://chinese.travel-way.net/
<i>YouTube help:</i>	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTnFUdaPw04

- Although it is not absolutely necessary to know Chinese to visit China, if you know some very simple Chinese words, it will make you look better and more friendly to local people and will make your trip more enjoyable.
- There are two main Chinese dialects and many regional ones. Mandarin Chinese is spoken in Beijing and is known as the national standard. Cantonese is spoken in the southern coastal regions of China and Hong Kong. Cities like Shanghai have their own dialect and sound really different than the standard Mandarin.
- There is no alphabet in the Chinese language. Looking at a character, you can't tell how to pronounce it or what it means unless you've memorized it. There are thousands and thousands of Chinese characters in Mandarin. It is said, though, that if you know around 8,000, you should be able to read and understand the newspaper.
- I recommend going over the simple pronunciations and easy phrases before you go. If you have an MP3 player, put some spoken Mandarin on it so you can listen to it on the plane over there.

MONEY

<i>Pictures of notes:</i>	http://www.chinatoday.com/fin/mon/
<i>Currency Exchange:</i>	http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/moneyconverter.htm

- RenMinBi(RMB) / Yuan ¥
- The unit of Renminbi is the yuan and the smaller units are the jiao and fen (10 fen = 1 jiao, 10 jiao = 1 yuan). Denominations of yuan banknotes are 1 yuan, 2 yuan, 5 yuan, 10 yuan, 20 yuan, 50 yuan and 100 yuan.
- Most all the bank notes have images of Chairman Mao on them so it is very disrespectful to deface their money.
- The average exchange rate which stayed the same for me was 8 RMB to 1 USD. Divide all costs by 8 and you'll get a general dollar amount.
- It's easiest and cheapest to exchange money at the bank or if you have a debit card that works at international ATMs.
- Many hotels and stores accept major credit cards.

SITES MENTIONED IN PRESENTATION

The Forbidden City, Beijing	The Gardens of Suzhou, Suzhou
The Great Wall of China, Outside Beijing	Real Chinese Pottery, JingDeZhen
The Summer Palace, Beijing	Yellow Mountains, Huang Shan
TianAnMen Square, Beijing	Old Chinese City, FengHuang
TerraCotta Warriors, Xi'an	Three Gorges, Yichang
The Bund, Shanghai	Three Gorges Dam, Yichan
Shanghai Museum, Shanghai	