

CHINA TRAVEL INFORMATION



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BEFORE YOU GO

Vaccinations and Health

Although not compulsory, typhoid, Hepatitis A, tetanus and polio vaccinations are recommended. You will not need to take anti-malarial medication unless travelling to the tropical regions of Yunnan Province and Hainan Island. We suggest you consult your GP for further advice.

We recommend that you carry a vaccination certificate and that people on prescription medication carry a note from their doctor stating the treatment, drug name and dosage, which should be kept safe and separate from the medicine.

Pollution, especially in the summer months in the major cities in China, can be horrendous, much worse than that experienced at home. Asthma sufferers and clients with conditions affecting their breathing should prepare for this with the appropriate medication.

Customs

Before landing in China, the airline staff will usually hand you a Health Declaration Form, an Entry Card and a Customs Declaration Form. The forms are quite straightforward to complete.

Visas

You will need to apply for a visa for travel to China, and a form can be downloaded from www.visaforchina.org.uk, the Chinese Visa Application Service Centre in London who will handle the visa process on behalf of the Chinese Embassy in London or the Consulate General in Manchester. Complete the form and return it with your passport, a passport-sized photo and the relevant fee to the Centre. The cost of a single entry visa for a British citizen is £30 plus the standard processing fee of £35.25 which takes around 4 working days. If you need a multiple entry or other visa, or a faster service, the fees are higher, full details are on the website. Please ensure you have a full empty page in your passport and that it is valid for at least six months after the date you are due to exit China.

British passport holders visiting Hong Kong for less than six months do not require a Hong Kong visa.

If you do not hold a British passport the visa charges may differ, please check before travel what is required.

Transfers

Airport transfer costs vary from city to city and can be expensive. We usually recommend taxis, which can cost anywhere from £2 to £30 depending on the distance from the airport to downtown. Taxis in the large cities work on a meter that prints out a receipt at the conclusion of your journey but passengers should ensure that the meter is running.

Most hotels in Hong Kong have a shuttle transfer system that can be booked at the reception desk and costs 100 to 140 HKD per person. A public transfer by express rail and coach costs about 120 HKD (around £9) per person. A taxi will cost in the region of £40-£45.

Currency

The Chinese currency is Renminbi (RMB) which is divided into Yuan, Jiao and Fen. (10 Fen = 1 Jiao; and 10 Jiao = RMB 1 or Yuan). At the time of going to print the exchange rate was approximately £1 = 11 Yuan (as of Jun 2009). Sterling cash is widely accepted throughout China so there is no need to carry US Dollars, unless you wish to take about 50 US Dollars (in small denomination notes) for buying souvenirs from street vendors as they may offer a better price for dollars. Also, in some rural areas sterling is not accepted but dollars are. We recommend that you carry most of your money in sterling cash, in small denominations, and that the notes you carry to China are in pristine condition and have the silver embossed stamp on them (no torn or shabby notes, or any with graffiti-type writing on them). Note that Scottish banknotes will not be accepted, and travellers' cheques are becoming less and less common. Many establishments nowadays accept credit cards.

Renminbi can be bought in mainland China and Hong Kong and generally, and unlike in the UK, hotels offer much the same rate as banks and in most cases do not charge commission. Up to 50% of your leftover Chinese currency can be reconverted into sterling etc. in mainland China before departure. Any other leftover amounts can be reconverted in some Hong Kong banks. However we advise that you use up as much as you can of your leftover Yuan before you depart mainland China.

As a guideline, £10 is more than enough for an average dinner (without drinks) but meals in some hotel restaurants may cost between £15 and £25. Prices offered by restaurants that are used by the local Chinese people tend to be a lot cheaper. It can be extremely cheap to eat from food stalls or small local restaurants but it does require a spirit of adventure. Such restaurants often have a shortened menu in English. It is worth noting that a small bottle of beer that may cost 40 Yuan (about £3) in a 4-star hotel will cost about 5 Yuan (about 35 pence) outside the hotel; such is the mark-up in some establishments.



Clothing and Climate

Almost three times the size of Europe, China is a vast country, so its weather and climate vary from region to region. Generally, the north is dry and cold during winter; humid and often rainy in the central and southern parts during July and August, and temperate year-round in the south-west.

From November to March it is bitterly cold in the northern areas and along the Yangtze River, so winter clothing is necessary including thermal underwear, a winter coat and heavier items of clothing to keep out the icy winds.

Most regions are very hot in the summer months (from June to August), except in the mountainous regions where it is chilly in the morning and at night, but pleasant throughout the day. Recommended clothing would include very light and easy-to-dry T-shirts, short-sleeved shirts, sandals, sunglasses and waterproof shoes and umbrella or rainwear. Also, air-conditioning in most hotels and restaurants tends to be very high so a light jacket or sweater will prove handy.

Spring and autumn are quite mild. Northern China suffers from dusty winds during early spring, while autumn (September to early November) is the ideal time to travel. Suggested clothing includes a wind-breaker, light jacket, or sweater, jeans and light rainwear.

On cruises, particularly the Yangtze, it is advised that you wear a warm jumper or light coat when on the observation deck in spring and autumn. Warmer clothing is required during winter. The boat is travelling at a fair rate of knots and therefore there is a chill factor to consider.

A sturdy pair of comfortable walking shoes or trainers is essential. Adult Chinese in city centres tend not to wear shorts even in the middle of summer but this expectation is not extended to tourists.

There is no formal standard of attire in China. However, on cruises, passengers do seem to raise their standard of attire for the captain's welcome and farewell dinners. This usually means a shirt and tie for the gentlemen and possibly a jacket.

Credit Cards

American Express, Diners Club, Master Card and Visa are widely accepted in hotels as well as on the Yangtze cruise boats, tourist shops and Friendship Stores that cater to foreigners. Cash machines are available in all the major cities to withdraw money in local currency. You can get cash advances from some of the hotels but they generally levy a 4-5% charge for this facility.

Please remember that the most common form of crime suffered by westerners in China is pick-pocketing. All money, credit cards, travellers' cheques, passports and other valuables should be kept in a safe place – either with you or in the hotel safe or safety deposit box.

Electricity

The voltage in China is 220 volts. However, there are many different types of electrical sockets throughout the country, some taking plugs similar to the UK's, others for two or three thin prongs. Should you plan to use your own hairdryer, travel iron, video camera, battery charger, electric shaver etc, it is advisable to bring a multi-adaptor.

Tea & Coffee

Chinese coffee and Chinese green tea (taken without milk) are normally served. If you prefer your own brand of tea or coffee, it is advisable to bring your own supply with you. Most hotels in big cities provide kettles in the room. You may wish to bring milk powder or milk sachets as these will not be provided in your rooms.

Hairdryer

If travelling to remote areas of China where hotel standards are not as high as in major tourist centres, you may wish to bring your own hairdryer although most of the bigger hotels will provide them.

Medicines

You should bring your own prescribed medicines as well as other non-prescribed medication such as pain killers, throat tablets, rehydration powder, band aids, cold remedies and stomach settlers. You may also wish to consider bringing your own sterilised hypodermic needles in case of any emergency requiring a blood transfusion or injection. If your visit is between April and September, you should also take mosquito repellent.

ITEMS TO TAKE WITH YOU





BAGGAGE ALLOWANCES AND HANDLING

The baggage allowances vary according to the international airline used, see table below. However the baggage allowance for internal flights within China is only 20kgs, so you should take this as your baggage allowance guideline.

All baggage must be labelled with your full name and home address. Extra baggage is subject to a surcharge and we recommend that you travel as light as possible in order to leave enough luggage capacity for any shopping you may do whilst travelling in China.

Baggage handling systems in China can be rough on luggage, so please bring a sturdy case with a lock. Both the Chinese railways and airlines prefer that suitcases be locked. If they are not, your luggage may be refused on board.

X-ray machines in Hong Kong and mainland China are usually film safe. Airline hand luggage rules are strict and you will be restricted to one item per person, including duty free goods.

All domestic flights within China are non-smoking and serve Chinese tea, coffee and soft drinks, and some also serve beer. Crews on these services speak only limited English, so please communicate with them slowly and patiently.

No alcohol may be carried in hand luggage on any domestic flight, and will be confiscated immediately if found. You should therefore transport alcohol only in your checked-in suitcases. If you carry a bottle of water you may be required to drink from it to prove that it is water rather than a spirit.

AIRLINE	CHECKED-IN LUGGAGE WEIGHT (kg)	CHECKED-IN LUGGAGE DIMENSIONS (cm)	HAND LUGGAGE WEIGHT (kg)	HAND LUGGAGE DIMENSIONS (cm)
BRITISH AIRWAYS				
First	3 bags, each no more than 23kg	Height + Length + Width of each bag not to exceed 158cm	Passengers must be able to lift bag into cabin lockers unaided	1 bag no more than 56 x 45 x 25cm
Club	2 bags, each no more than 23kg	Height + Length + Width of each bag not to exceed 158cm	As above	1 bag no more than 56 x 45 x 25cm
World Traveller Plus	2 bags, each no more than 23kg	Height + Length + Width of each bag not to exceed 158cm	As above	1 bag no more than 56 x 45 x 25cm
Economy	1 bag, no more than 23kg	Height + Length + Width not to exceed 158cm	As above	1 bag no more than 56 x 45 x 25cm
VIRGIN ATLANTIC				
Upper Class	3 bags, each no more than 32kg	Each bag no more than 90 x 75 x 43cm	16kg together, neither more than 12kg	2 bags, each no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
Premium Economy	2 bags, each no more than 23kg	Each bag no more than 90 x 75 x 43cm	6kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
Economy	1 bag, no more than 23kg	Each bag no more than 90 x 75 x 43cm	6kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
CHINA EASTERN				
First	50kg		10kg	1 bag
Business	40kg		5kg	1 bag
Economy	30kg		5kg	1 bag
AIR CHINA				
First	40kg		7kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
Business	30kg		7kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
Economy	30kg		5kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
CATHAY PACIFIC				
First	2 bags, together no more than 40kg	Height + Length + Width not to exceed 203cm	15kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
Business	2 bags, together no more than 30kg	Height + Length + Width not to exceed 203cm	10kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm
Economy	2 bags, together no more than 20kg	Height + Length + Width not to exceed 203cm	7kg	1 bag no more than 56 x 36 x 23cm

Please note that airline regulations are subject to change without notice. The above details are correct at the time of writing, but you can check BAA's website before you travel, particularly for hand baggage restrictions. www.baa.com

OTHER USEFUL TIPS

Travelling by train

There are two classes on Chinese trains. Overnight journeys are best taken in tourist class soft sleepers that comprise four-berth compartments. Sheets and blankets are provided. Cabin doors can be locked by the train guard when not in use. A guard, in charge of each carriage, will provide free hot water for drinking but Chinese tea bags have to be purchased separately. Soft sleepers and seat compartments are generally air-conditioned. Toilet facilities are very basic and have low hygiene standards, so please be prepared.

Taxis

Metered taxis are readily available from most hotels and are reliable and safe to use. Most drivers do not speak English, so you are advised to have the name and address of your destination written clearly in Chinese, as well as that of the hotel where you are staying. Most hotels have a credit card-sized card that have the name and contact details of the hotel written in Chinese on one side and English on the reverse.



Telephones

In most hotels there is a service charge of up to 45% on phone bills so long-distance call charges can be exorbitant. A telephone card is required to operate the public phones generally found in certain hotels and most stations/airports. This is a cheaper method when calling home as cards generally cost between 50 and 100 Yuan (£3.50 to £7.00) providing you do not purchase the card from a hotel (higher mark-ups apply). Cards are sold at most airports but be careful to purchase the right one. There are many cards available that can only be used within certain Chinese cities.

All hotels have business centres where e-mails and faxes can be sent at a reasonable cost. You may be charged for any incoming faxes (around 10 Yuan / 70p a time) and you should not rely on any incoming emails being delivered. Some business centres may be available 24 hours a day but the majority do close for the night so it is better to check if their services are important to you. Telephone and fax facilities on the Yangtze are limited to cruise boats that have their own satellite dish. On-shore facilities are more reliable.

Mobile phones work throughout China with network connection only being a problem in extremely remote areas or where it is difficult to pick up a signal, such as on Yangtze cruises where the mountainous terrain obstructs the signal.

Hotels

It is common practice for hotels to charge guests for the use of the sauna and steam room, though use of the gym and swimming pool is usually free. Many hotels insist on guests wearing swimming caps in the pool and these can be purchased in the hotel for 20 to 30 Yuan.

It is strongly recommended you do not drink from any taps in China. Bottled or flask water is generally provided in your hotels but be aware that whilst bottled water placed in the bathroom is free, placed elsewhere in your room it will be charged for unless it is stated to the contrary. Mineral water is widely available in your minibar (at cost), in the hotel shop and around tourist sites. Please make sure however, that if buying water from outside the hotel, the cap and seal are unbroken as it has been known for disreputable vendors to refill bottles with tap water.

Shopping

Shopping opportunities for a wide variety of Chinese speciality goods, souvenirs and handcrafts are plentiful and outlets range from department stores and factory shops to small stalls, not to mention individual hawkers.

Apart from the larger stores and government-run shops where prices are fixed, bargaining is a must and you are recommended to compare prices before buying. Shops are normally open 9am to around 8pm. Most tourist stores have foreign exchange facilities and will arrange the export of large items, but as handling services may not be of a high standard and shipments may take a long time to arrive. Extreme caution should be adopted over the purchase of jewellery and antiques.

Bargaining is a way of life and you will be expected to enter into the spirit. In such situations there are a few things to bear in mind.

- It is always helpful to have a reasonable idea of a realistic price for the goods concerned by comparing prices in different stalls.
- Never bargain for something you are not interested in buying – this only creates ill feeling and achieves nothing.
- Decide what you are willing to pay – it is not a disgrace to walk away if you are not satisfied with the price quoted.
- Ensure both the vendor and you understand the goods and price quoted. Many will have calculators for you to type your offered price; if not it is always helpful to write it down on a piece of paper to prevent any misunderstanding as most stall owners speak little English.
- Be patient and diplomatic and you will procure your goods at very good prices.

You may at times be confronted by large numbers of hawkers selling everything from books and postcards to carvings and tee-shirts. If you are not interested in purchasing such items simply ignore their advances and move on; do not get involved in dialogue.



Photography

Cameras and video cameras are allowed, but cine-cameras larger than 8mm are not permitted in mainland China and Mongolia without special authorisation. Please strictly observe any restrictions on taking photographs or using a video- or cine-camera, as failure to do so could result in an immediate fine or confiscation of film and equipment. Photographing the terracotta warriors, once not permitted, is now allowed but not with a flash or the use of a tripod. Most people now carry a digital camera and memory sticks for such cameras are very cheap in China compared to the U.K. If you are carrying cameras using film, film for both prints and slides is widely available in the larger cities and hotels, but you are advised to carry sufficient supplies from home in order that you do not miss out on any of the enormous amount of photo opportunities that will come your way on your travels. Please note that print and slide film on sale on board the Yangtze cruise boats are extremely expensive and all film purchased in China should be bought from reputable establishments and not from street vendors as the quality cannot be guaranteed.

Toilet Facilities

Toilet facilities in restaurants outside hotels, sightseeing areas and other public places may be of a poor hygiene standard, and are quite often of the 'hole-in-the-ground' variety. Outside hotels, toilet tissue is in short supply so you are advised to carry your own. Some public toilets levy a charge of 1Yuan (approx. 7p).

CHINA RECOMMENDED READING



General/History Through Literature

Wild Swans

Jung Chang

A modern classic which catalogues the modern history of China through the experiences of three generations of a Chinese family.

Falling Leaves

Adeline Yen Mah

The life story of a Chinese woman and her difficult childhood in China and Hong Kong during the 1940's & 50's.

The Empty Throne

Tony Scotland

A British scholar travels to China to trace the ancestors of the last emperor, Pu Yi.

Historical

The Dragon Empress

Marina Warner (Hamish Hamilton)

Red Star Over China

Edgar Snow (Gollancz 1969)

Imperial China

Ray Dawson (Penguin 1976)

The Walled Kingdom

Witold Rodzinski (Fortina 1984)

The Gate of Heavenly Peace

JD Spence (Faber & Faber 1981)

The Silk Road

Frontiers of Heaven

Stanley Stewart

Stanley Stewart travels beyond the Great Wall in this journey from Shanghai in the east, to the Indus valley tracing the route of the old Silk Road.

In Xanadu

William Dalrymple

A humorous account of the author's travels as a student, from Europe, via Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, in search of the lost city of Kublai Khan.

Foreign Devils on the Silk Road

The Great Game

Trepassers on the Roof of the World

Peter Hopkirk

An invaluable insight into the activities of the early explorers, spies and raiders along the old Silk Road and into Tibet.

Danziger's Travels

Nick Danziger

A dynamic and gripping account of the author's travels beyond the forbidden frontiers of Asia.

News From Tartary

One's Company

Peter Fleming

In the 1930's long before the advent of modern transport, the author set out from Peking to trace the Silk Road to Kashgar and travelled by camel through central Asia in what were to be pioneering and, at times, perilous journeys.

Travelogue

Riding the Iron Rooster

Paul Theroux

The classic companion to rail travel in China.

Behind the Wall

Colin Thubron

Great insight into the culture, politics and lives of everyday people at a time when China was just opening its door to foreigners.

Yangtze

The River at the Centre of the World

Simon Winchester

The author explores the lives, history and culture of the people along the banks of the world's third longest river.

Trans Siberian

The Big Red Train Ride

Eric Newby

The revered travel writer and his wife accomplish one of the world's greatest rail journeys.

Etiquette

Culture Shock! China

A reference guide telling how to win friends, influence people and understand the social norms in China.

Religion

Travels Through Sacred China

Martin Palmer

An insight into the background of religious life in modern China, explaining the customs and places most sacred in modern China.

Factual

The Chinese

Jasper Becker

Solid introduction to the economic and social aspects of China's recent development.

Art

The Chinese Garden

M Keswick (Academy Editions 1978)

Chinese Art

M Tregear (Thames & Hudson 1980)

Chinese Illustration

Frances Wood

(British Library Publication 1985)



FINALLY...

Please bear in mind:

China is a rapidly developing country that in the space of a generation has hauled itself out of self-imposed isolation to be a major player in world commerce and politics. This does not come naturally to a country that for some three thousand years has looked inwardly in a very parochial fashion. The newly developed culture and pace of change taking place can appear bewildering. Things will not be the same as at home nor perhaps operate as smoothly, but then again if everything is the same as at home there would be no need to travel. Travelling in China is an exciting and enlightening experience that should be approached with an open mind and a spirit of adventure. Thus armed you will appreciate this remarkable country and have an immensely rewarding experience.

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