

# China

中华人民共和国



NAME: People's Republic of China  
CAPITAL: Beijing  
LANGUAGE: Mandarin & Cantonese  
RELIGION: Buddhism & Others  
CURRENCY: Yuan Renminbi

## Getting Started

### When to Visit

It's always the perfect time to visit [China](#) depending on what you're looking for. If you want tropical weather and coastlines, the weather in the south and on Hainan island is hot nearly year round. If you want snow and skiing, northern China, near the border with Siberia, offers both for a few months every year. The western part of the country is quite mountainous and at elevation making winters cold and summers crisp. Also, during the winter the snow in some areas, like the Himalayas, prevents travel so plan your trip accordingly.

Due to its vast size, temperatures in [China](#) vary greatly. [Hong Kong](#), in the south average about 60° F (15° C) during the coldest months, but for most of the year it averages about 80° F (27° C) and is humid, whereas Harbin averages -2° F (-18° C) in January, and only the mid-70's (about 22° C) in July.

The busy tourist season for foreigners visiting [China](#) is the summer, typically July & August. The Chinese are becoming avid travelers, particularly during major holidays, like Chinese New Year (usually falling in January or February), meaning the entire country seems to be traveling and tourist sites tend to shut down. However, due to its size and numerous attractions, any time outside of festivals (if you don't plan on attending the festivals) is a good time to visit. The spring and fall (autumn) offer shorter lines, but also cooler temperatures. Large cities like [Beijing](#) and [Hong Kong](#) will be busy year round.

Before booking your trip, review [China's Holiday Schedule](#).

### Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit

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weather websites like [weather.com](http://weather.com); many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

## **Tours & Cruises**

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip that involves little effort on your part, you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price. All the options below will help you arrange all the details of your trip so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

**Note** - Travel to [Tibet](#) requires that all foreigners are on an organized tour, so even if you don't want to go on a tour, if you plan on visiting Tibet, you'll have to arrange at least that part of your trip with a tour company. Many of the below tour companies offer tours to Tibet.

[China Highlights](#): Reputable local company offering dozens of tours from single-day to multiple weeks.

[Contiki Tours](#): A tour company that only offers tours to 18-35 year olds; known as offering fun and social tours for young singles and couples.

[Gap Adventures](#): Known best among young adults, Gap Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food, which cuts costs and introduces the local culture, but can also be challenging for those seeking luxury.

[Gecko's Adventures](#): Active in "responsible" tourism, Gecko's Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food in smaller group settings.

[Holland America Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Intrepid Travel](#): Boasts more "off the beaten track" destinations; do your research though since some tours are very adventurous and involves camping and local hotels.

[Oceania Cruises](#): Cruises for "mature and discerning travelers"

[Princess Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Road Scholar](#): For older adults, Road Scholar offers tours with an educational emphasis; formerly known as Elder Hostel.

[Royal Caribbean Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

## **Guidebooks**

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with [China](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there are a number of great country-wide, region-wide, and city-wide guidebooks available for travel to China.

[Eyewitness Guides](#): Incredible pictures and detailed maps of popular tourist sites including museums. Those living abroad can't put these books down.

[Fodor's](#): Good maps and information for the major tourist locations, but has little information for anyone heading off the beaten track. Great for those on organized tours.

[Frommer's](#): Incredible number of lists, which divide travel into various categories based upon your interests. Travelers looking to spend most of their time in a single location or on organized tours enjoy these books.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

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[National Geographic Traveler](#): Almost more of an information book about China, than a guidebook; offers great pictures, maps, history, and culture. Popular with armchair travelers and history buffs on organized tours.

# Culture

## Personality, Culture, & Identity

The relationship between the [Chinese](#) people, their government, and their history reads much like a well-disciplined and proud family. This relationship reflects Chinese society today as the people have been taught to be respectful and proud, but with this came a fear of stepping out of line and a need to constantly save "face." Honoring their past and maintaining their image often times holds the people as slaves, not willing to speak their opinions or chase their dreams on both a personal and a national level.

Fortunately for [China](#), a part of their past is of innovation, progress, and forward-thinking, which placed them at the forefront of technology for hundreds of years. Additionally, the government has improved education, infrastructure, and communications while transitioning to an open market economy, allowing these past strengths to resurface in the present. Today, the Chinese people remain tied to their past through their monuments and traditions and they are attached to the government as loyal children, not willing to speak out, but also trusting in their leadership.

[China's](#) future is still uncertain, but their industrious spirit is sure to forge them ahead, while their need to save "face" leads to a fear of insults and of insulting others, which may prevent progress from moving as quickly as it otherwise might.

The Chinese people today consist of dozens of ethnic groups and most of them identify either as a citizen of [China](#) or by their ethnic roots, whether that be Han Chinese, [Tibetan](#), or Dai. The Chinese government has been quite successful in installing a pride of being Chinese citizens in their people and many people proudly claim themselves "Chinese" (referring to the nationality, not the ethnicity). Few people openly protest the government so it's rare to find people clinging to an identity based upon political leanings, legal issues,

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philosophical beliefs, or even religion, which is somewhat suppressed by the government.

## History

[China](#)'s recorded history is one of the longest in the world and for much of that time they ruled the region of the Far East and were more technologically advanced than any place in the world. Written records have been gathered from as long ago as 1300 B.C., but their "modern" recorded history begins in 214 B.C.

After unification and division for years, in 214 B.C. [China](#) was united under the rule of Emperor Qin Shi Huang. Although his family's rule was short lived, he created what is known today as the beginning of "Imperial China." The Qin Dynasty created, or began, two of the world's greatest architectural feats ever: the [Army of Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an](#) and the [Great Wall of China](#). Although Qin Shi Huang is best known for his protectorate soldiers near his tomb, the Army of Terracotta Warriors, he also created a centralized government and made standards for the legal system and for the development of business.

Following the Qin Dynasty came the Han Dynasty, whose most profound contribution was the introduction of Confucianism to the entire country. They were also a very outwardly looking dynasty, known for being active in the Silk Road, which began on their land, and for making contact with and regularly communicating with the Romans.

After the Han Dynasty came chaos, ethnic tensions, the Sui Dynasty in the 500s, the Tang Dynasty and external trade in the 600s, and the Song Dynasty in the 900s, who brought with them the arts and sciences.

Despite the building of the [Great Wall of China](#) over the years, the country was overcome by the Mongols, which led to the collapse of the Song Dynasty and the beginning of Mongol rule in China. The

Mongols established their capitals in Beijing and the greatest of their rulers, Kublai Khan, adopted local customs and united [China](#) once again. Although the empire was vast, it fell quickly to the emerging Ming Dynasty in 1368.

Following the Ming Dynasty, came the ethnic Manchurian Qing Dynasty, who forced Manchurian customs and dress on the Han Chinese. They had a strong rule, but created tension with both their own people and foreigners. Under Qing rule, [Hong Kong](#) fell to the [British](#) in 1842 and the country, during that same century, was involved in numerous opium wars with Britain. The Qing Dynasty also faced a number of internal rebellions, including the Boxer Rebellion in the early 1900s, which demanded a return to former ways. This chaos eventually led to the fall of "Imperial [China](#)" and caused the formation of the Republic of China in 1912, which soon proved itself extraordinarily corrupt after the overthrow of their first president.

The country again fell into chaos under Japanese rule, but the Chinese Nationalist Party led the suppressed people and united the country, however not without resistance from the ruling Japanese, the Soviets and the Communist Party of [China](#).

In 1934 the Nationalist Party almost destroyed the communists, but they escaped north on an event now known as "The Long March." During this time the Nationalist Party weakened as they fought their Japanese occupiers and the communists gathered momentum in recruitment. This struggle lasted throughout the Sino-Japanese war, which by 1941 was little more than one battle within World War II. By 1949 Mao Tse-tung and the Communist Party had defeated the Nationalist Party and had taken most of [China](#) as the Nationalist Party leadership and many of their supporters retreated to Taiwan.

Since the communists took power in [China](#), the country has been approached with various viewpoints, but what is certain is the enormous amount of change that has occurred. Almost immediately, Mao introduced the "Great Leap Forward," which was a plan to advance technologically and militarily. The plan succeeded, but at the

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expense of millions of lives. Next came the "Cultural Revolution," which destroyed much of China's physical history.

Since Mao's death in 1976, the country has been, relatively, opened up. [China](#) has introduced a free market economy, welcomed tourists, hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics, and improved education and healthcare, but the government still controls the country and this is particularly true in small towns and villages.

## Dress & Behavior

There are few dress restrictions in [China](#). The most important thing to note is to avoid anything the government will see as provocative, like "Free [Tibet](#)" shirts, the Tibetan flag, or anti-communist slogans on shirts. Another point to note is that, although few locals wear shorts, especially men, there is no discourtesy involved in wearing them. Finally, unlike many beaches in [Europe](#), sunbathing naked is rarely permitted; check with locals before doing so.

Behaviorally, the [Chinese](#) people are very proud people and insulting them or putting a person down in anyway can be very offensive as the person will feel "shamed." In much the same way, the Chinese will rarely give you critical advice or insult you in fear of "shaming" you. This is especially true in business. Turning down a business offer in the wrong way may, unknowingly be an insult and could force your contact to feel so shamed that he will actually quit his job; if all hope is lost on a deal, allow your Chinese counterpart to gracefully exit the situation so he can save "face." However, the opposite is also becoming more common and if you do (intentionally or unintentionally) insult another, that person may defend his honor by insulting you and will pursue a shouting match. Fortunately, this is more common among locals arguing over driving etiquette.

Dinning etiquette in [China](#) has a number of customs; to learn about dining etiquette in China, continue reading below.

# Food

## Dining Etiquette

If you're from a culture that uses forks and knives be prepared for what may seem like "food chaos." Dining etiquette, habits, and customs in [China](#) will at first seem very odd, and perhaps even rude, however the meanings and reasonings behind their actions will help you understand how to eat in China.

As you sit down to dine, you'll be greeted by little more than chopsticks, a spoon, a saucer, and a welcoming host. Hopefully not too welcoming, since fish eyes are a delicacy reserved for guests of honor or the oldest male of each generation. If you're served these, it's rude to turn them down. The chopsticks are obviously for eating (never place these sticking up in the rice, it's a sign of death); most locals will understand if you request a fork and knife. The spoon is for the soup, and the saucer is a "discard tray" of sorts; reserved for bones and shells that you pick out of your food.

When the meal arrives, the dishes (including the soup) are placed in the middle of the table. Eating begins in order of honor so don't begin until you're directed to do so by your host. Also, don't fill up on the main course since, later in the meal, each person will receive his or her own bowl of starch, typically rice or noodles and this is the most important dish.

As you eat the soup, suck it into your mouth so you make a slurping sound; this will cool the soup and all locals use this technique to prevent burning. The food shall be picked at with your chopsticks and eaten directly from the communal plates, as will the soup. If one of those dishes is fish, don't flip the fish over (locals believe it will flip over the boat of the fishermen).

When the starch arrives, you should pick up the entire bowl and shovel it into your mouth bite by bite if eating in a home; not picking up your

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bowl is a sign that the food was unsatisfactory. Also, leaving any of the starch behind is considered an insult to the workers who farmed it. When finished, join the locals with a tooth pick in hand to clean any remaining food from your teeth.

Most Chinese will order only as much food as is needed, however for business dinners or for celebrations, an excess of food should be ordered and the number of dishes ordered must always be even.

## History & Influences

Due to the size of [China](#) and their contact with people from various ethnic groups, China's cuisine is quite varied. Over time their food has been influenced by those who came by sea like the Japanese, those who came by land like the Mongols, and from the people who the country took over as their borders expanded like the [Tibetans](#) and Uyghurs. The one constant among all of these groups is that they all use locally available ingredients.

Along the coasts and major rivers, seafood dominates as the protein of choice. In areas with less water access, pork, soy, or lamb are the primary proteins. The staple foods in each region are also primarily determined by availability; rice dominates the south while wheat and noodle dominate the north. Additionally, the vegetables used are typically determinant on what's grown locally. One glaring exception to the menu is dairy products; which has never made its way onto the Chinese dinner tables.

As transportation increased in [China](#) the most common vegetables spread to all parts of the country and these vegetables became more common throughout the country. Cabbage, Chinese onions, mushrooms, garlic and ginger are some of the more notable vegetables. Vinegar and sauces, like soy and oyster also began to be distributed more nationally.

Today, "Chinese food" in [China](#) remains primarily local and regional dishes rule what's served in most restaurants and homes. However, due

to a large number of Chinese immigrants, there are dozens of adaptations of "Chinese food," particularly in immigrant countries like the [United States](#), [Canada](#), & the [United Kingdom](#).

## Staple Foods

**Rice** - served with nearly every meal in the south, but not as popular in the north

**Noodles** - more commonly served in the north; often made of wheat, soy, or rice, although additional varieties exist

**Dumplings** - more common in the north, often when dumplings are served, other starches, like noodles, are not

## Regional Varieties & Specialties

**Beijing** - Beijing's most famous dish (although not its most popular) is *Peking Duck*

**Hong Kong** - *dim sum* are small dishes so each person can try various foods at one meal; the ingredients and cooking styles of each varies widely

**Sichuan** - this area is known for their hot and spicy foods

## Drinks

Water in [China](#) is best approached with caution. Even most of the locals drink bottled water. However, the country's most common drink, tea uses the water after being boiled. Tea is drunk daily by most people and, although it can be served with food, it is more commonly served with snacks, dim sum, or alone. When someone fills your tea glass, tapping the table with two fingers is a way of saying "thank you." Coffee is quickly growing in popularity, especially in the big cities.

Rice wine is popular in [China](#) and beer is growing in influence as well.

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# Practical Information

## Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter [China](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. Plus, there are also different visa requirements going to mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau; plus Tibet needs an additional visa to enter. To learn more about who needs visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [Website of Your Local Chinese Embassy](#).

**Note** - It's important to note that most Tibetan travel agencies recommend not mentioning your intention to visit [Tibet](#) on your Chinese Visa Application form. The Chinese government has been known to turn down Chinese visa applicants who mention this destination on their Chinese visa application. It is easier to obtain your Tibetan visa through a travel agent after you already have a Chinese visa.

## Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including [China](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, China didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

## Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to [China](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices.

**Largest International Airlines:** [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

**Largest Chinese Airlines:** [Air China](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Eastern](#); [China Southern](#); [Hainan Airlines](#); [Hong Kong Airlines](#).

**Largest Rental Car Agencies in China:** [Avis](#) & [Payless](#).

**Flight & Rental Car Search Sites:** [FlyChina.com](#); [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

## Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping information.

**Popular International Hotel Chains:** [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges);

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[Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

**Hotel Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

**Hostels:** Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

**Camping:** There is very little information available for camping options in [China](#). Visit the website of the locations you plan to visit to determine camping requirements, what permits (if any) are needed to camp, and to determine what camping costs are.

## Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

[China](#) is on the same time schedule as much of northern [Europe](#). Shops and tourist attractions tend to open at about 8:00-9:00 am and close at about 5:00 pm, but inconsistencies are everywhere. Most places close an hour or two for lunch, while shops and attractions may open late, close early, or shut down mid-afternoon based upon whose working that day and what their personal schedules look like. Having said that, all major tourist attractions are on a set schedule (typically open 7 days a week) and don't tend to shift based upon whose working. Most places close on weekends, which are Saturdays and Sundays in China, although most restaurants and some public institutions, like the post office, are open seven days a week.

Restaurant hours vary; most [Chinese](#) eat three meals a day, although if they are busy they may only have two larger meals; this is especially common in the rural areas during busy farming seasons. In tourist locations restaurants tend to be open all day or are on the Northern [European](#) or [North American](#) eating time schedule (lunch at about 11:30 am-2:00 pm and dinner anywhere from 5:00-9:00 pm).

Bars in [China](#) fall into a number of categories. What [Europeans](#) consider a bar or pub can be found, however they tend to be in tourist cities and cater to foreigners. Most of the locals go to karaoke bars and all who enter are expected to sing at least one song. Bars open late and tend to close later (about 9:00 pm-2:00 am).

[China](#) is currently on three currencies: the Chinese yuan, the Hong Kong dollar, and the Macanese pataca. It is easy to exchange yuan, or any other currency, in both [Hong Kong](#) and Macau, while exchanging money (including the Hong Kong dollar and Macanese pataca) in mainland China is more difficult; banks are your best place to exchange money and ATM machines are common everywhere.

[China](#) is relatively inexpensive on [European](#) standards, however prices can add up quickly if you plan on doing any cross-country travel or sign up for an organized tour. Hostels and even decent hotels can easily be found for about 100 yuan (\$15) a night per person (make sure they have air conditioning included if you're in the south during the summer), while business and western hotels in cities like [Beijing](#), Shanghai, and [Hong Kong](#) can be well over 1,500 yuan/1,800 Hong Kong dollars (HKD) (\$230) if a meeting's in town or you're near the tourist sites. Food can range greatly from street food for about 20 yuan/HKD (\$3) and up; average prices are about 100-150 yuan/HKD (\$15-20) for a good meal in a clean restaurant. Local transportation costs in China are reasonable if you take buses and the subway; however due to the country's size, many times flying is your best and most convenient option. Domestic flights are similar to what you'd pay in Europe or [North America](#) (based upon similar flight times), being about 650-2,600 yuan/800-3,000 HKD (\$100-400) for a one way flight. The great variation is dependent on the distance being traveled and whether or not you are flying out of or into any of the semi-autonomous regions (Hong Kong, Macau, or [Tibet](#)), which increases the price to the high end of that spectrum.

In general there is no tipping in [China](#), however there are a couple exceptions. First, whatever the taxi meter reads in most places, the driver will demand 1 yuan more, this is not a tip, it is a gas charge and

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even the locals pay it (and you may also be charged a 10 yuan airport fee if coming from or going to an airport). No additional tip is expected for taxi drivers. Organized tour drivers and guides also expect tips in addition to what you pay for the tour. Guides should receive about 80-150 yuan (\$12-22) a day and drivers should receive 40-75 (\$6-11) a day, but these tips should only be given when their service warrants it. Western hotels expect a tip for the bell hops, 5-10 yuan (or Hong Kong dollars) a bag is sufficient. [Hong Kong](#), and to a lesser degree Macau tip more often since they were under foreign rule for so many years. Generally, restaurants in these cities will add 10% service charge to their bills. If service was excellent you may add another 10-20 yuan/HKD, but this is by no means necessary. No other restaurants in China expect tips.

## **Crime & Safety**

[China](#) is a relatively safe place to visit, however has its share of crime. Major cities, tourist locations, and public transportation are breeding grounds for pick pocketers so keep your passport and wallet protected at all times if they're not locked away in your hotel safe. Violent crime is rare, especially against foreigners, but is increasing, particularly against foreigners who display their wealth and against solo travelers in the countryside.

There are also numerous scams, particularly among fake travel agencies and black market money exchangers so be careful before putting yourself in these situations.

Spitting and children urinating on the cities' sidewalks is common so watch where you step.