

Overview of China

For thousands of years China has been shrouded in mystery and intrigue, and foreigners, especially Westerners, still find it difficult to penetrate the inner depths of this fascinating and enigmatic nation. However, in recent decades and particularly since the Olympic Games in 2008 when Beijing showcased some of its most spectacular attractions, there has been a major increase in travellers interested in exploring this vast and intriguing destination. And it's no wonder, as there is a great deal to discover in China, the world's third largest country.

What makes it so attractive as a travel destination is its unique culture and ancient antiquities. Ruins and relics from Neolithic settlements and the dynastic reigns of the mighty emperors of yore await, while there are plenty of adventures to be had and exciting attractions that have to be seen to be believed. The Forbidden Palace, the Great Wall of China and the Terracotta Army of Xi'an are some of the prominent and tourist-heavy, but no less breathtaking, attractions in this ancient Eastern empire, but there are many, many more.

The People's Republic of China has been under a communist government since 1949, but is currently undergoing a boom in social and economic development with a great emphasis placed on tourist facilities and infrastructure. The country has been opening the doors to its wealth of historical and cultural treasures, with awed visitors flooding in.

Organised tours are still the favoured way to explore China, but independent travel is slowly becoming easier. Major cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, are modern metros offering fast food and glitzy stores alongside centuries-old historical buildings and traditional eating houses. Archaeological wonders vie with amazing architecture in the interior, while majestic mountains and remote monasteries crown the country's northern territories.

With all this to marvel at, China would take several years' worth of holidays to explore properly, so keen travellers best get started...

Key Facts

Language:

The official language is Mandarin Chinese, but there are hundreds of local dialects.

Passport/Visa:

There are a few complex exceptions to Chinese visa requirements, which will not apply to the majority of visitors, but all requirements should be confirmed with a Chinese embassy before travel. All documents necessary for further travel and sufficient funds to cover intended period of stay are required; travel to Tibet will require a special Tibet Entry Permit. It's recommended that passports be valid for six months after intended period of travel.

Currency:

China's currency is the Renminbi Yuan (CNY), which is divided into 10 jiao or 100 fen. Cashless payments via smartphone applications such as WeChat Pay are increasingly commonplace in main cities, and major credit cards are widely accepted. ATMs are widely available in major cities. It is not possible to exchange Scottish or Northern Irish bank notes; banks are closed on weekends.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 220 volts, 50Hz. Plug types vary, but the two-pin flat blade and oblique three-pin flat blade plugs are common. Adapters are generally required.

Travel to China

Overview

China's attractions are so many, and its landscapes so vast, that travellers will need a lifetime to fully explore this fascinating and impossibly diverse country. That said, the must-see sights are fairly obvious and highly accessible and, as previously restricted areas open up, the list of world-class attractions keeps growing. In addition to big draw-cards such as the Great Wall, the Xi'an Terracotta Army, and the Forbidden City, travellers can choose from a huge range of cultural treasures, traditional temples, incredible landscapes, national parks, and festivals. Travellers should choose areas that they would like to explore wisely, especially if travelling on a budget, because the country's vastness can make travelling from place to place considerably expensive.

One of the most amazing sights in China can be seen in every Chinese city every day: the incredible pace of modernisation reflected in the energy of the people, frenetic urban development, and the relentless embrace of capitalism, with all its virtues and vices. These impressions are likely to leave the deepest mark on visitors to China. The contrast between the ancient and the new is intriguing and makes exploring China a joy for both history and culture buffs as well as the more modern tourist interested in technology and development.

China is a year-round destination, although visitors might want to plan around Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) in late January and early February, when much of the country shuts down for a week and public transport is completely booked up.

Climate in China

China covers extensive territory and has a complex topography, so the weather differs substantially from region to region. The southeast, below the Nanling Mountains, tends to be very wet with high temperatures all year round. In the central Yangtze and Huaihe River valleys there are four distinct seasons with very hot summers and extremely cold winters, and rain all year round. The dry north experiences a short but sunny summer, with long, bitterly cold winters (between December and March), with temperatures in Beijing dropping as low as -4F (-20C). The coast is humid and experiences Typhoons during summer. Travellers are advised to research the climate for the specific region they are visiting.

Health Notes when travelling to China

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers coming into China from infected where there is a risk of transmission. There is a risk of malaria throughout the low-lying areas of the country, and it is recommended that travellers to China seek medical advice about malaria before departure. All eligible travellers should be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines; vaccinations are recommended against hepatitis A and hepatitis B, typhoid (not necessary if eating and drinking in major restaurants and hotels), Japanese encephalitis (usually only recommended for rural areas), and rabies (only recommended for travellers at risk of animal bites). Tap water shouldn't be drunk unless it has first been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected. Street food should be treated with caution. High levels of air pollution in major cities and industrialised areas in China may exacerbate bronchial, sinus or asthma conditions. There is generally a high standard of health care in major Chinese cities, but it is not provided free of charge; travellers are advised to have comprehensive travel health insurance.

Safety Notes when travelling to China

China is one of the safety countries to visit in Asia. Serious crime against foreigners is rare but does occur, particularly in isolated or sparsely populated areas. If travelling alone, including following parts of the Great Wall, it is advisable to leave an itinerary and expected time of return with a third party. Travellers should take extra care in street markets and at tourist sites, which attract thieves and pickpockets, and around the popular expat bar areas at night, where lone foreigners have occasionally been targeted. Travellers should be cautious about using pedicabs in Beijing, as tourists have reportedly been mugged by the drivers. Disputes over taxi fares can occur. Passengers should insist on paying the metered fare and should ask for a receipt; this has the taxi number on it.

Seasonal heavy rains and typhoons cause hundreds of deaths in China each year, particularly those areas bordering the Yangtze River in central, southern and western China. Demonstrations have taken place in Lhasa, Tibet, as well as in some Chinese provinces in protest against Chinese rule in Tibet. Even though the situation seems to have stabilised, visitors are advised to stay up to date on the situation before travelling to the region and to avoid all protests. The Chinese government sometimes suspends the issue of permits for travel to Tibet due to unrest.

There is currently little threat from global terrorism. The risk of terror attacks is higher in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and travellers should exercise caution if travelling to or around Xinjiang.

Customs in China

Chinese people usually have three names, the first of which is their surname, or family name. As a result, visitors should be prepared for hotels mistakenly reserving rooms under their first names. For clarity, surnames may be underlined. When addressing Chinese people, the surname should come first and official titles should be used. Chinese handshakes last longer than those in western countries, and it is customary to stand close together when in conversation. Politeness in western terms is often foreign to the Chinese, and they rarely bother with pleasantries. It is considered disrespectful to keep prolonged eye contact, avoiding eye contact is considered reverential rather than rude. All foreigners should carry their ID on them at all times, as spot checks are common. Failure to show evidence of ID when requested by an official may result in a fine or detention.

Duty Free in China

Travellers to China do not need to pay customs duty on 400 cigarettes or 100 cigars or 500g of tobacco; 1.5 litres of alcohol; perfume for personal use; and personal articles up to the value of CNY2000. Prohibited goods include arms, ammunition, or printed material that conflicts with the public order or moral standards of the country. Also prohibited are radio transmitters and receivers, exposed but undeveloped film and fresh produce. Strict regulations apply to the import and export of antiquities, banned publications, and religious literature. All valuables must be declared on the forms provided.

Doing Business in China

The Chinese are strict timekeepers and being late for a meeting is considered rude. When meeting people for the first time it is normal to shake hands and say 'ni hao', which means 'how are you'. Handshakes generally go on for longer in China than in most western countries. Business cards are commonly exchanged at the start of meetings in China; it is customary to have one side printed in Chinese and one in English. When giving or receiving business cards or a gift, it is customary to hold it with both hands. Chinese consider gifts an important show of courtesy. Decision-making may take longer than expected during negotiations. During a meal or reception, a host is likely to offer a toast; foreigners may be expected to offer them one in return.

Women are generally treated with respect and courtesy when doing business in China and it is increasingly common to find Chinese women in senior positions, especially in the big cities. Businesswomen should, however, avoid showing too much skin. Business dress for both men and women tends to be conservative and plain without much ornament or bright colour.

Business hours are 8am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday. A five-day week is more common in larger cities and international companies. Workers usually take their lunch break between 12pm and 2pm and it is not unusual to find offices empty during this time.

Communication in China

The international dialling code for China is +86. Hotels, cafes and restaurants offering free WiFi are widely available. As international roaming costs can be high, purchasing a local prepaid SIM card can be a cheaper option.

Tipping in China

Tipping is not officially recognised in China, though the practice is has become increasingly common among tour guides, top-end restaurants, tour bus drivers and hotel staff. Travellers wanting to tip should leave a gratuity of about 10 percent. Large hotels and restaurants often include a service charge in their bills, usually of around 10 percent, so travellers should make sure that they aren't doubling up.

Passport/Visa Note

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

US nationals require a passport that is valid for six months after the date of departure. A visa is required for entry into China.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadians require a passport that is valid for six months at the time of entry. A visa is also required.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

UK nationals require a passport that is valid on arrival for six months after the date of departure. UK Emergency

Travel Documents (ETDs) are accepted for entry, airside transit and exit from China. Travellers may need to show

a police report indicating how they lost your full passport. A visa is required for entry.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australians require a passport valid on arrival, and a visa for entry to China. A valid visa is required.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish nationals require a passport valid on arrival, and a visa for entry to China.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand nationals require a passport valid on arrival, and a visa for entry to China.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South African nationals require a passport valid on arrival, and a visa for entry to China.

Tourist Offices

Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Guangxi: +86 773 288 5326, <http://www.topchinatravel.com/>

China Embassies

In the United States:

Chinese Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 495 2266.

In Canada:

Chinese Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 789 3434.

In the United Kingdom:

Chinese Embassy, London, United Kingdom: +44 (0)20 7299 4049.

In Australia:

Chinese Embassy, Canberra, Australia: +61 (0)2 6228 3999.

In Ireland:

Chinese Embassy, Dublin, Ireland: +353 (0)1 219 6651.

In New Zealand:

Chinese Embassy, Wellington, New Zealand: +64 (0)4 473 3514.

In South Africa:

Chinese Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 (0)12 431 6500.

Foreign Embassies in China

American Embassy

United States Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 8531 3000.

Canadian Embassy

Canadian Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 5139 4000.

British Embassy

British Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 5192 4000.

Australian Embassy

Australian Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 5140 4111.

Irish Embassy

Irish Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 8531 6200.

New Zealand Embassy

New Zealand Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 8531 2700.

South African Embassy

South African Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 8532 0000.

Currency

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Exchange rate for 1 CNY - Chinese Yuan

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	0.13 EUR Euro	0.14 USD U.S. Dollar	0.11 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	21.13 JPY Japanese Yen	0.19 CAD Canadian Dollar
0.13 CHF Swiss Franc	0.21 AUD Australian Dollar	5.44 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	61.30 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	12,853.51 LBP Lebanese Pound	0.67 LYD Libyan Dinar
0.95 BOB Bolivian Boliviano	0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	0.19 SGD Singapore Dollar	1.49 SEK Swedish Krona
0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar	0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	8.03 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	2.34 MXN Mexican Peso	84.31 XOF West African CFA Franc
0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina	0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	18.49 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat
0.00 BWP Botswana Pula	0.51 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	129.60 CLP Chilean Peso	53.42 AMD Armenia Dram	3.22 CZK Czech Koruna	2.43 MDL Moldova Lei
19.32 ISK Icelandic Krona	1,737.61 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	0.51 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.10 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	5.27 UYU Uruguayan Peso
0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee	0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	1.50 NOK Norwegian Krone	0.56 PLN Polish Zloty	0.52 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee
5.08 THB Thai Baht	0.51 AED U.A.E Dirham	0.70 BRL Brazilian Real	0.64 RON Romanian New Leu	1.08 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	84.31 XAF Central African CFA Franc
3,508.49 VND Vietnamese Dong	121.30 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	1.39 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar
0.14 PAB Panamanian Balboa	0.23 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	541.35 COP Colombian Peso	12.21 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	49.99 HUF Hungarian Forint	1.50 TJS Tajikistan Ruble
2,219.75 IDR Indonesian Rupiah	6.62 EGP Egyptian Pound	187.65 KRW South Korean Won	1,029.73 PYG Paraguayan Guarani	0.65 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	70.20 CRC Costa Rican Colón
0.23 NZD New Zealand Dollar	38.37 PKR Pakistani Rupee	12.62 RUB Russian Rouble	2.56 ZAR South African Rand	0.43 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar
0.25 BGN Bulgarian Lev	4.47 TRY Turkish Lira	7.91 PHP Philippine Peso	4.46 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	160.86 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc
0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi	0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	15.04 RSD Serbian Dinar	0.96 DKK Danish Krone
0.48 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	11.52 INR Indian Rupee				

Overview of the Attractions in China

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Public Holidays in China

	2023	2024
New Year's Day	Mon. January 1	Mon. January 1
Spring Festival	Sun. January 21 to Sat. January 27	Fri. February 9 to Thu. February 15
Qingming Festival (Tomb Sweeping Day)	Thu. April 4	Thu. April 4
Dragon Boat Festival	Sat. June 22 to Mon. June 24	Mon. June 10
Mid-Autumn Festival	Sun. September 29 to Mon. September 30	Tue. September 17 to Wed. September 18
National Day Golden Week	Tue. October 1 to Sun. October 6	Tue. October 1 to Mon. October 7
May Day	Wed. May 1	Wed. May 1