

Beijing Information, Tips and Etiquette July 2006 | Beijing, China

History

China is the oldest uninterrupted major world civilization, with records dating back over 3,500 years. Successive dynasties developed a system of bureaucratic control which gave the agrarian-based Chinese an advantage over neighboring nomadic and hill cultures. Chinese civilization was further strengthened by the development of a common written language that bridged the gaps among the country's many local languages and dialects.

The People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was established on October 1, 1949, with Beijing as its capital city. It is the third largest country in terms of territory, bordering most Asian countries and Russia. China is undergoing rapid, profound economic and social growth and development. Political power remains centralized in the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese Government is subordinate to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); its role is to implement party policies. The primary branches of state power are the National People's Congress (NPC), the President (the head of state), and the State Council. Under the Chinese constitution, the NPC is the highest branch of state power in China. When the NPC is not in session, the Standing Committee exercises state power.

Visiting Beijing is an interesting and unique experience. It is a city steeped in culture while at the same time embracing more contemporary western values. Hosting the Olympic Games in 2008, the city of Beijing is undergoing major changes and is heading towards modernization. As the capital city of the world's most populous nation, Beijing is the center of national politics, economics, culture, transportation, and tourism in China. Some other popular areas of interest include: Shanghai, Xian, the Yellow and Yangtze rivers, Hong Kong, Macau SAR, the Himalayas, Tibet, and Mongolia. China's most popular man-made wonder is the Great Wall, which was built in the 3rd century BC and extends for about 1500 miles.

**Remember that China is the People's Republic of China and Taiwan is the Republic of China.*

Language

There are several major Chinese dialects and many subdialects. The Beijing dialect, often called Mandarin (or Putonghua), is taught in all schools and is the medium of government. Almost two-thirds of Han Chinese are native speakers of Mandarin; the rest, concentrated in southwest and southeast China, speak one of the other major Chinese dialects.

Climate

China has a continental and seasonal climate. Most parts are in the temperate zone, but southern areas are in the tropical or subtropical zone; while northern areas are in the frigid zone. In the summer, you can expect the weather to be hot and humid with an average high of 87°F/31°C and an average low of 70°F/21°C in Beijing. It can also be rainy with an average of 6.9 inches of rain in July.

Ailments such as sore throats and chest colds can occur at any time of year considering China's climatic extremes. With the hot summer months, it is imperative to combat the extreme summer heat with a sufficient supply of liquids to prevent dehydration.

The People

With well over one billion citizens, China is easily the world's most populous country. The largest ethnic group is the Han Chinese, who constitute about 92% of the total population. The remaining 8% are Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uygur, Yi, Tibetan, Mongol, and Korean.

Meeting the Chinese

Punctuality is very important in China, so make sure you arrive for a meeting with plenty of time to spare. Handshaking is the most common form of greeting in China; some people may follow with a slight nod or bow with a broad grin. Chinese prefer to be formally introduced to someone new. This applies to both the Chinese and foreigners. You should try to use formal titles as the Chinese value rank and status. Always stand up when being introduced, and remain standing throughout the introductions.

Business Card Etiquette

Upon meeting, the Chinese will offer their business card with their information inscribed on two sides - one in Chinese, the other in Western script. It is customary to receive the card with both hands, then read it and comment on the contents before placing it in an inner coat pocket or wallet. It is considered rude to immediately put the card in a pocket without reviewing it first; also, never write on the business card.

After presentation of a card, people from this region expect in turn, to receive your card. *The best policy is to have cards that have Chinese script on one side.* Use both hands when presenting business cards and be sure the writing faces the person to whom you are presenting your card.

Titles and Forms of Address

The Chinese will state their last name first; followed by the given name. For example, Liu Jianguo, in Chinese would be Mr. Jianguo Liu using the Western style. Never call someone by only his or her last name. Unless specifically asked, do not call someone by his or her first name. Addressing someone by his or her courtesy or professional title and last name conveys respect. In Chinese the name precedes the title. For example, Liu Xiansheng would be Mr. Liu, and Liu Jingli would be Manager Liu.

Women's names cannot be distinguished from men's names. Chinese women use their maiden names even after marriage, but may indicate marital status by using Mrs., Ms., Miss, or Madam. Mrs. Wang might be married to Mr. Liu.

Chinese who frequently deal with foreigners or travel abroad on business may adopt a Western first name, such as David Liu. They may request that they be referred to as David, once a relationship has been established.

Conversations with Chinese

The people in Beijing are usually friendly, but tend to stare at foreigners, so do not be offended. Do not be surprised when asked personal questions regarding age, marital status, children, family, income, job, etc. This is done to seek common ground. On the other hand, the Chinese will be uncomfortable with American familiarity, particularly early in a relationship.

Social Distance, Touching, and Gestures

Every culture defines proper distance. Westerners, particularly Americans, find that the Chinese comfort zone regarding distance is a bit too close for their comfort. Instinctively, Westerners may back up when others invade their space. Do not be surprised to find that the Chinese will simply step closer. The Chinese do not like to be touched, particularly by strangers. Do not hug, back slap or put an arm around someone's shoulder. Do not be offended if you are pushed and shoved in a line. The Chinese do not practice the art of queuing, and courtesy to strangers in public places is not required.

Western gestures that are taboo or considered rude in China include:

- Pointing the index finger--Use an open hand instead;
- Using the index finger to call someone--Use the hand with fingers motioning downward as in waving;
- Finger snapping;
- Showing the soles of shoes; and
- Whistling.

Chinese customs that are unique to Westerners:

- Belching, spitting or blowing your nose without tissue on the street;
- Lack of consideration when smoking and failure to ask permission to smoke;
- Slurping food; and
- Talking while eating.

What to Wear in Beijing

Business Attire: Conservative clothing that is both subtle and neutral in color is considered acceptable for both men and women. Women should avoid high heels and revealing clothing. A sports coat and shirt for men, and one or two dresses or pantsuits for women will suit the most formal occasions to be encountered in China.

Vacation Attire: The rule of thumb is to pack lightly and bring casual clothes including a sturdy, comfortable pair of walking shoes. Travelers should bring shirts, sweaters, and jackets that can be worn in layers to suit a range of climates. Shorts (for both men and women) are fine for summer days, though not recommended when visiting religious shrines. Remember, dress for comfort, not for style. Be prepared for rainy weather; bring an umbrella and rain gear.

Traveling Abroad

If you are planning to stay for a long period of time in China, or are visiting an area that is experiencing political unrest or other problems, please register with your nearest embassy or consulate. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency.

Remember to ALWAYS safeguard your passport. The loss or theft of a passport should be reported immediately to the police in the city where the loss occurs, as well as to your embassy or nearest consulate general. You should also photocopy the data page of your passport and keep it in a separate place from your passport. In the event that your passport is lost, stolen, or in the possession of government officials, travel agents or tourism representatives, you will have the requisite information available, as well as proof of your identity and citizenship.

Currency Regulations

Chinese currency is called Yuan or, more commonly, renminbi (RMB). Foreign currency (cash or traveler's checks) may be exchanged for Chinese currency at licensed exchange facilities of the Bank of China and other authorized banks. Money exchange facilities are available at major airports, hotels, and department stores. Major brands of traveler's checks are accepted at such exchange facilities and cash advances against a credit card can be arranged. A service charge is usually added. Consult with your bank before departing your country of origin to be sure that your brand of check or credit card will be accepted. Major credit cards (American Express, MasterCard, and Visa) are accepted by most major hotels and in many well-known restaurants. ATMs compatible with other countries' bankcards are available to a limited extent in major mainland cities such as Shanghai and Beijing.

For the most favorable rates, change money through banks. Although ATM transaction fees may be higher abroad than at home, ATM rates are excellent because they're based on wholesale rates offered only by major banks. *Don't exchange money on street corners, even if the rate is favorable. Counterfeit money is rampant on China's black market.*

Tax

There is no sales tax in China. Hotels charge a 5-15% service fee and some restaurants charge a 10% service fee.

Health and Hygiene

China is a remarkably healthy country despite its relative poverty and climatic variations. Standards of hygiene varies from place to place so all visitors must be aware of potential hazards and act cautiously.

Water

Although many locals do drink the tap water, it is recommended that you drink only bottled water or boiled water. Bottled water is available everywhere. Also, you will be provided complimentary bottled water on a daily basis in your guest room at the Grand Hyatt Beijing. You may use the tap water to brush your teeth as long as you remember to rinse your mouth once or twice after brushing. You should always carry a bottle of water with you to help prevent dehydration in extreme heat.

Rest

Tourist travel in China can be extremely strenuous. Tours often involve walking long distances and up steep hills. All, especially those with a history of coronary/pulmonary problems, should have a complete medical checkup before making final travel plans. It is very important to schedule rest periods during your touring activities. Also, air pollution in the large cities can be severe and respiratory ailments are common.

Handicapped Accessibility

China lacks handicapped-accessible facilities. Even travel to popular destinations such as the Great Wall and the Forbidden City can present problems to persons with disabilities. If you require such facilities, please discuss this with your travel agent.

Vaccinations

No vaccinations are required for travel to China but it is advisable to check with your doctor for current information. Tetanus and typhoid vaccines are essential for travel anywhere, and rabies and hepatitis vaccinations are recommended. If you are traveling to remote areas of Southern China, please note that there is a risk of malaria, and you should take precautionary measures before you go.

Medication

It is recommended that you bring along a supply of antibiotics, an anti-diarrhea agent, and any other prescription drugs required by your current medical conditions. Often the drugs sold in China are fake. Genuine drugs can typically be bought from the lobby of any international five-star hotel. Medications should be kept in their original packaging and should be carried on your flights instead of checked in your luggage.

You can obtain US information on vaccinations and other health precautions on the CDC's Internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov>. For health regulations please check with your local health unit for required vaccinations and inoculations.

Health Insurance

It is strongly recommended that you check with your healthcare provider prior to travel on what is covered when overseas. Even when insurance does cover services received in China, it will usually be necessary to pay first and then file for reimbursement with the insurance company upon returning home. If your health insurance does not cover you overseas, you may want to consider purchasing traveler's insurance that includes medical evacuation.

Two private emergency medical assistance firms, SOS International, Ltd., and Medex Assistance Corporation, offer medical insurance policies designed for travelers and also have staff in China who can assist in the event of a medical emergency.

- SOS International, Ltd. (formerly known in some areas as Asia Emergency Assistance)
Beijing Clinic address: Building C, BITIC Leasing Center, No. 1 North Road,
Xingfu Sancun, Sanlitun, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100600.
Beijing SOS International Clinic, telephone: +86 10.6462.9112, Fax +86 10.6462.9111.
For information on purchasing health or travel insurance from SOS International, please call in the US at +1 800.523.6586 or visit their web site at www.intsos.com.
- MEDEX Assistance Corporation, Regus Office 19, Beijing Lufthansa Center, No. 50 Liangmaqiao Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100016.
MEDEX US telephone: +1 800.537.2029 (24 hours) or +1 410.453.6300. Beijing Office Fax: +86 10.6465.1240 or +86 10.6465.1269. Email: medexasst@aol.com (Baltimore, Maryland). You can visit their web site at www.medexassist.com. Medex members calling with a medical emergency call: +1 800.527.0218 or +1 410.453.6330. Medex members in China, who are calling with a medical emergency should call Medex-Emergency at +86 10.6465.264.

Medical Facilities in Beijing

This information is provided as a service, but, TTI/Vanguard cannot specifically recommend any medical assistance firm or guarantee the quality of services offered by private companies.

In case of an emergency, it is recommended that you first contact the hotel's security.

For comprehensive medical care, go to the Beijing United Family Hospital at Jiangtai Lu, two blocks southeast of the Holiday Inn Lido. Open 24 hours, it is staffed with foreign-trained doctors, a pharmacy, in and out patient care, and an ambulance service. Other reputable hospitals are the International Medical Center, inside the Lufthansa Center; and the International SOS Clinic and Alarm Center, in Building 'C' of the BITIC Leasing Center.

You can select hospitals in major Chinese cities that have so-called VIP wards (gaogan bingfang). These wards feature reasonably up-to-date medical technology and physicians who are both knowledgeable and skilled. Most of these VIP wards also provide medical services to foreigners, feature English-speaking doctors and nurses, and may even accept credit cards for payment.

The Australian firm, GlobalDoctor, Ltd., has opened clinics staffed by English-speaking doctors within the VIP wards of government-run hospitals in Chengdu, Nanjing, and Beijing and plans to open additional facilities within several months in Xian and Shenzhen. GlobalDoctor can be reached by telephone from China at +86 10.8315.1914 or on the Internet at www.eglobaldoctor.com.

Travel Arrangements Within China

Package tours, while often more expensive than self-arranged travel, will insulate you from the difficulties of booking travel by air, rail, bus, or car in China. Transportation systems have not expanded as fast as the number of Chinese and international travelers has increased. Planes and trains are often overbooked. Tickets or reservations for onward travel should be reconfirmed at each stop. Hotels, for a fee, will assist in making reservations and purchasing tickets.

Train travel can be difficult to reserve, even for the experienced traveler. Round trip rail tickets are not generally available without the services of a travel agency. Beware of counterfeit train tickets. Unethical entrepreneurs manufacture and sell such tickets at railway stations.

Restrooms

Hotel and restaurant bathrooms will provide the cleanest environment and often meet international standards. Many public bathrooms are simply a hole in the floor that may or may not have running water. It is a good idea to carry toilet paper or tissues and antibacterial hand sanitizer with you at all times.

Crime

China has a low crime rate due to severe penalties (execution is most common); however, crime has increased in the past few years, principally in the major cities. Foreigners have seldom been victims of violent crime. You should still be careful to not wear anything that will make you stand out as a tourist (money belts, waist packs). The following link will provide up-to-date information on current travel warnings offered by the US government: [Consular Information Sheets, Public Announcements & Travel Warnings](#).

Traffic

Traffic is heavy and as out of control as it looks. Be very careful when crossing streets as pedestrians do NOT have the right-of-way, and drivers seldom watch for pedestrians. Also, be wary of the bicyclists as they do not watch for pedestrians either.

Electricity

The electrical current in China is 220V 50 Hz. If your appliances are dual-voltage, you will only need an adapter; but if not, you will also need a converter. A variety of electrical outlets can be found in China including the two- and three-prong round plugs, plus, the two-prong flat sockets. The hotel guest rooms are equipped with universal adaptors to accommodate most plugs and we will use universal outlets for the meeting that should also accommodate most plugs. It is always recommended to be prepared with an adapter plug, converter and even a power-surge protector.

Telephone

In towns and cities, IDD service is provided at all hotels and post offices. Phone cards are available in post offices, inside hotels, or in the streets. Even more conveniently, most newsstands in major cities also carry phone cards. Telephone booths in the streets are mostly for local calls.

Cell phones: If interested, you can rent a cell phone with a SIM card for travel in China, as this allows you to take advantage of low rates. The SIM card, which slips into the cell phone, is prepaid and rechargeable, so you never receive a phone bill. A course to contact: www.cellularabroad.com/chinasg.html

Calling Cards: AT&T, MCI, and Sprint access codes may work from your hotel room, but you may need to request an international operator. If your card doesn't work in the hotel, try a pay phone.

Phone Cards: Phone cards can be purchased from post offices, convenience stores, and street vendors. You should bargain to pay less than face value of the card, as little as Y70 or Y100 per card.

There are two kinds of phone cards:

1. IP card : international calls
2. IC card: used for domestic local and long-distance calls on any public phone that has an IC card slot.

For international calls, you will need an IP and IC card to make your call. Both cards' minutes are deducted at the same time.

Tippling Practice for Visitors to China

Until recently, tipping was officially forbidden by the government, and therefore, while it is still not required, it's expected in many cases.

Recommended:

Tour guide	=	Y10 per guide per day	=	\$1.25USD
Driver	=	Y10 per day	=	\$1.25USD
Hotel bellmen	=	Y5-Y10 per bag	=	\$.60 -\$1.25USD
Taxi drivers	=	round up the fare		

It is not customary to leave tips at hotels or local restaurants as the bill usually includes 10-15% service charge. If the restaurant doesn't include a service charge, you should leave 10% of the bill for a gratuity.

Shopping

There are numerous shopping districts in Beijing with something for everyone. Popular items to buy in China include: cloisonné, jade, fans, tea sets, chops (stone stamps), silk, and pearls. Please note, this info is not an endorsement or advertisement.

- Located near Tian'anmen Square, Dachilan is the best place to buy silk in Beijing. Also found here are many clothing stores, restaurants, and department stores.
- Jianguomenwai is another popular shopping spot, with the Youyi Shangdian, or the Friendship Store that sells everything from souvenirs to everyday items. Also in Jianguomenwai, you'll find clothing stores like Gap and Prada.
- Liulichang has some of Beijing's oldest antique shops where you can find many unique artifacts. However, remember to bargain here and carefully make your purchases as you can be swindled. Sanlitun has a smaller clothing market and is less crowded than the other shopping areas. Here shoppers can find good silk and clothing, as well as enjoy a quick drink at the many local bars and pubs.
- The most popular shopping area in Beijing is Wangfujing. It has the city's first super mall, the Xindong Plaza. The markets Panjiayuan & Hongqiao are two of the best markets in the city. Panjiayuan is a weekend market, while the Hongqiao is a three-story market that has sells nearly everything from antiques to fake designer products.

Beware of:

- “Student artists” who seek out foreign tourists and persuade them to visit their studios. Their artwork is mass-produced and marked up way beyond market value. Many of these students will approach you near the Forbidden City and Tian’anmen Square;
- Vendors who claim their products are authentic, even with the stamp of authenticity; this is often forged as well; and
- Deals that are too good to be true; the item may be fake.

Travel Around Beijing

When traveling by yourself in Beijing, be sure that you know exactly where you want to go, as most people do not speak or understand English very well. **You should have the hotel concierge write your destination down in Chinese and you should also always have the hotel’s address and phone number with you.** Always carry a map which is easily available at the hotel’s concierge desk.

Traveling by taxi is the easiest way to get around Beijing. Taxis are available in front of hotels, train stations, and the airport, and are a very inexpensive way to get around compared to US or European taxi rates. Always make sure the taxi driver turns the meter on before you get in. Taxis that do not go by the meter are illegal. The Chinese government has mandated that all cab drivers must learn English by the time the Olympics are held; however, many cab drivers don’t speak or read ANY English. Beijing is an enormous city, making it impossible for a driver to know every location. So before getting into the taxi, make sure the driver knows how to get to your destination.

Buses are everywhere in Beijing; however, they are very crowded and the signs and stops are only in Chinese. It is not recommended that you take public transportation.

Dining in Beijing

Learn to eat with chopsticks, as this is the most common eating utensil found all over. Forks are rarely used and are only given in more modern restaurants and hotels. Chinese like to eat family style where everyone shares from common dishes. The meal usually begins with a set of at least four cold dishes, to be followed by the main courses of hot meat and vegetable dishes. Soup then will be served to be followed by staple food ranging from rice to noodles to dumplings. If you wish to have your rice to go with other dishes, you should say so when ordering, for most of the Chinese choose to have the staple food last or have none at all. As a cultural courtesy, you should taste all the dishes you are offered. It is recommended that you sample meals only, as there are often several courses. By the way, you will find many American fast food restaurants near the Grand Hyatt Beijing.

Generally, there are four regional categories of food found across the country:

- **Mandarin/Peking** (Northern): Characterized by fine cutting and pure seasoning, providing dishes with strong garlic, ginger, and onion flavors, oily. Most familiar to westerners.
Example: Pecking duck served with pancakes and hoisin, hot and sour soup
- **Cantonese** (Southern): Lightest and least oily of the four categories.
Examples: Dim sum, wonton, rice noodle dishes, sesame seed buns filled with bean paste. Known for exotic as well, such as: snake, turtle, monkey, rabbit, and many other animals and reptiles.
- **Shanghainese** (Eastern): Characterized by heavy use of oil; chicken and fresh seafood simmered, boiled, or braised in own juices.
Examples: Harry crabs, snails, beggar’s chicken, shark’s fin soup, steamer buns filled with either vegetables, pork, or black bean paste.
- **Sichuan/Szechwan** (Western): Known as pungent and the spiciest of the categories; chile pepper is common ingredient
Examples: Tea smoked duck, hotpots, Kung pao chicken, twice cooked pork, sweet and sour flavors

Although food is prepared fresh and cooked or cleaned thoroughly, stomach upsets are possible so it is advisable to take some medicine with you. We’ve been informed that there has not been one case of the Avian flu inside Beijing’s city limits and therefore, has not been concern. Still, it is recommended that you avoid eating undercooked poultry and food from street vendors. You should continuously check the CDC’s website for the most current information: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/eastasia.htm>.

Dining Etiquette

- Considered acceptable: shovel rice into your mouth, talk with your mouth full, reach across the table, spit bones directly onto the table.
- Considered unacceptable: put fingers in your mouth, not let the food touch your plate before bringing it to your mouth, eat directly from the serving dish.

People in China tend to over-order food for they will find it embarrassing if all the food is consumed. When you have had enough, just say so. Or you will always overeat!

Beijing Nightlife

Beijing's nightlife and entertainment scene are rapidly evolving, with many nightclubs, discos, karaoke bars, and pubs all over the city. Open all night, most clubs charge an entrance fee of Y100-200. The most popular bars are in Sanlitun, the northeast part of the city, which are pretty lively and frequently visited by foreign expats.

Legal Matters

Remember: While in China, you are subject to Chinese laws and regulations. Laws in China sometimes differ significantly from those in other countries and do not afford the protections available to the individual under their country's law. Please exercise caution and carefully obey local laws. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in your country for similar offenses. Persons violating the law, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned.

US Embassy and Consulates in China

<http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/>

US Embassy in China

2 Xiu Shui Dong Jie, Beijing 100600

Tel: +86 10.6532.3431, 6532.3831 After-hours: +86 10.6532.1910 Fax +86 10.6532.4153, 6532.3178

The Embassy consular district includes the following provinces/regions of China: Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Hebei, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, and Jiangxi.

Foreigners may find their embassy or consulate information here:

Australia: <http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/> **Belgium:** <http://www.chinaembassy-org.be>

Canada: <http://www.chinaembassycanada.org> **France:** <http://www.amb-chine.fr/fra>

Germany: <http://www.china-botschaft.de/det/> **India:** <http://www.chinaembassy.org.in>

Japan: <http://www.china-embassy.or.jp/chn/> **Netherlands:** <http://www.chinaembassy.nl>

United Kingdom: <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/>

Information Sources

The above information has been compiled from the following sources:

Fodor's "China", 4th Edition

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/regional/regional_1173.html

<http://www.discoverasia.org/China/tipsforvisitingbeijing.html>

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

http://www.protocolprofessionals.com/articles_china_print.htm

<http://www.cyborlink.com/besite/china.htm>

http://www.shanghai.intercontinental.com/shgha/visitors_01.html