

INSPIRING
VACATIONS

INSPIRING CHINA

WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO DO & MORE



WELCOME TO CHINA

At Inspiring Vacations, we're on a mission to inspire you to see the world.

If you're dreaming of travelling to the most iconic destinations across the globe, you're in the right place. We couldn't be more excited to get you there.

Inside these pages, we showcase one of our most popular destinations, China. It offers so much to the first time visitor and repeat explorer alike — one visit is just not enough. By the end of this eBook, we're sure you'll be as eager to visit China as we are to get you there!

Happy travel planning and, as always — safe travels.

Paul Ryan
CEO
Inspiring Vacations

To view our
China tours,
scan here



(Images: Unsplash)



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WHY TRAVEL WITH INSPIRING VACATIONS?



GLOBAL EXPERTS

When you travel with Inspiring Vacations, you can expect thoughtfully curated tours to iconic destinations across the globe. Our authentic and culturally-rich tours are packed with must-see sights, lesser-known locations and enriching local experience, all at an unbeatable price.



ONLINE ADVANTAGES

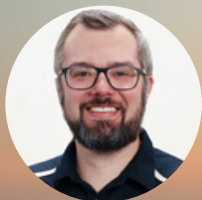
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INSPIRING COMMUNITY

Our travel articles, digital magazine, destination videos and member-only Facebook community groups will inspire your wanderlust or if you prefer, have a phone chat with one of our travel specialists for their recommendations.

WHY VISIT CHINA NOW?



Brendon Cooper

CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER
Inspiring Vacations



HISTORY & CULTURE

For history buffs and cultural watchers alike, China would have to be one of the most fascinating destinations in the world to visit. The oppressive Mao years are well and truly over, now it's all about evolving and evolving it is—at an eye-watering rate. Because of this, China is one country you're best to visit sooner rather than later.

China holds a special place in my heart as one of my all time favourite destinations. It offers so much diversity across its vast lands that it will have you coming back time and time again to experience the areas you missed last time.



UNFORGETTABLE TOURS

Our itineraries are designed to show you the best that there is to see in China—start ticking off your bucket list! On our journeys, we want to ensure you can say: “I have been there.” For many, the eastern area of China is where most dream to visit. Encompassing Beijing, with thousands of years of imperial history, Shanghai and its modern heart, Xi'an's Terracotta Warriors, the mighty Yangtze River and, of course, the vast sections of the Great Wall.

No matter which tour you decide on, all our tours offer unparalleled comfort, quality and price— we strive to deliver unbeatable value to China.

What are *you* waiting for? See you in China!

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT CHINA?

The Middle Kingdom—a land of extraordinary landscapes and ancient history. But, when is the best time to go?

FROM SPRAWLING LANDSCAPES to one of the world's oldest continuous civilisations, the biggest population in the world, and of course, mind-blowing development — China really does have it all. Thanks to its enormous size, China experiences climatic extremes. One moment, you could be basking in the sizzling Shanghai summer, but head west and you'll need a coat to explore the snowy peaks of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain range. These variant weather patterns mean there's somewhere to visit year-round, no matter the season.

If you love heat and the sultry feel of the monsoon season, then **summer** from June to August is your time to travel. There is plenty to do in these months, as major events like the Dragon Boat Festival take place,

local school children are on holidays and families are out enjoying the outdoors. Expect temperatures around 30 degrees celsius, with some heavy rainfall in tourist hotspots such as Beijing and Shanghai. Milder temperatures can be found in southern Kunming at this time.

Autumn is one of the most popular times to visit China, as the summer humidity disappears and temperatures drop to the comfortable twenties. The autumn colours are a highlight between September and December, decorating the country in vibrant foliage. Guangzhou and Guilin are still warm, in the high twenties, while the rest of China enjoys temperatures around 20 degrees celsius, with some scattered rain and cloud. ▶

Watch
our China
weather video.
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*Pictured left to right: The West Lake in autumn;
Nanjing Confucius Temple; snowfall at the Great Wall*



WINTER COOLS CHINA DOWN SIGNIFICANTLY, WITH MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY DIPPING BELOW FREEZING. BUT IF YOU'RE PREPARED TO BRAVE THE WEATHER, WINTER IS A GREAT TIME TO EXPLORE THE MIDDLE KINGDOM. “

One of China's two 'Golden Weeks' is held in early October to celebrate the founding of the People's Republic of China. While it is one of the busiest times of the year, it's a fantastic opportunity to experience one of China's biggest holidays and enjoy traditions like parades, flag-raising ceremonies, exhibitions and grand firework displays.

Winter cools China down significantly, with many parts of the country dipping below freezing. But if you're prepared to brave the weather, winter is a great time to explore the Middle Kingdom. Between December and February, expect far fewer tourists crowding the streets, and a spectacular, snow-covered Great Wall.

Chinese New Year (late January or February) marks another of the country's Golden Weeks, where

many locals head to their hometowns to celebrate the New Lunar Year. This wonderful tradition, capped off by the Lantern Festival, is well-worth enduring the weather and crowds for. Beijing averages around 2 degrees celsius in January, but down south in the winter, it is still warm – Guangzhou averages temperatures in the high tens.

If you prefer dry days and mild temperatures, **spring** is the best time to plan your visit. Flowers bloom across the country, including the fabled cherry blossoms, and the pleasant weather is ideal for exploring. Temperatures are comfortable, hovering around 20 degrees in Beijing and 21 degrees in Xi'an.

China really does have a season to suit everyone.

When will you go? ●

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China videos
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INTRODUCING →

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SNAPSHOT ON → SHANGHAI

Modern architecture, old-world charm and traditional Chinese design live in harmony in China's economic centre

UNLIKE SOME of China's biggest cities, Shanghai was never a dynasty capital, nor has it been a place of religious importance. In fact, although the city has been inhabited for thousands of years, it wasn't until the 19th century that it was declared a treaty port by the British and the population exploded. The following decades saw the city grow into an integral industrial and trade hub, both for the east of China and Asia as a whole. Today, China's most international city is home to over 24 million people. ▶

(Image: Unsplash)



Clockwise from top left: Shanghai skyline; Nanjing Road, Shanghai's main boulevard; Yuyuan (Yu Garden); Pearl Tower in Century Avenue; Shanghai streetscape

IN THE MID-1800S, SHANGHAI WAS ASIA'S MOST MODERN CITY AND THE MOST DESIRABLE PLACE TO BE “”



Shanghai — often referred to as the ‘Paris of the East’ — is known globally as a cultural and economic powerhouse. It is China’s leading city for manufacturing and, since 1990, is home to the country’s largest stock exchange. A wander down Nanjing Road, Shanghai’s main boulevard, is a feast for the senses — from tastes and smells to sights and sounds, buzzing energy radiates from every corner.

Get your bearings with a 5.5 km ride on the world’s oldest trolley car system, the Dangdang sightseeing tram. History buffs will be captivated by the opulent temples and buildings that dot the streets, while those seeking to discover the city’s contemporary side won’t be disappointed by bold skyscrapers and neon billboards.

In the mid-1800s, Shanghai was Asia’s most modern city and the most desirable place to be. When the first Opium War ended in 1842, the US, French, British and Japanese governments established territories in Shanghai. As a result, Shanghai’s architecture is a mix of both Chinese buildings, and elaborate art-deco and colonial buildings which wouldn’t look out of place on a Parisian street.

The city is broken into 14 districts, each offering very different experiences. The former French Concession area is perhaps the most charming, while those seeking a fusion of the modern and traditional best head to The Bund. Packed full of food stands, stalls and entertainers, the Bund offers the

best views of the city skyline and is a constant hive of activity with an electric atmosphere. Instead of walking along the promenade, leave the crowd behind and take a boat ride on the Huangpu River and view the city from a different perspective.

Shanghai is also known for its vibrant art scene — Shanghai Bowuguan (Shanghai Museum) is a treasure trove of over 120,000 items dating back to Chinese antiquity. It’s free to enter and English translations accompany most exhibits. Yuyuan (Yu Garden) is a classical garden dating back to the Ming Dynasty. Although small in size, this 400-plus-year-old garden contains all the elements of a traditional Chinese garden: pavilions, halls, rockeries, ponds and cloisters. ●



SNAPSHOT ON →
BEIJING

The jewel in China's crown is a proud capital city that is ever-evolving and never disappoints



FORMERLY KNOWN AS Peking, Beijing has been an important city throughout Chinese history. It has functioned as a political, economic and cultural hub for six different dynasties including the current People's Republic of China, and is home to approximately 21 million people. Thanks to its rich history and capital stats, Beijing's must-see list is a long one: imperial gardens, opulent palaces and ancient temples. It's no surprise that the city is the most visited destination in China.

In addition to its function as a strategic and financial capital, the city was also home to an early ancestor of the Homo sapien. In the 1920s, palaeontologists uncovered the fossilised remains of an extinct hominid known today as the Homo erectus. It's believed that the Peking Man and other members of human lineage lived in the area of Zhoukoudian in southwest Beijing approximately 500,000 years ago, and scientists have located dozens of their bones. ►

(Image: Unsplash)

German anthropologist, Franz Weidenreich, once proclaimed the Peking Man was an ancestor of the Chinese people and as a result, Beijing gained the nickname ‘cradle of humanity.’

The most efficient way to get around the city is by public transport. To do that, you’ll need a *yikatong* (metro smart card). The reloadable card will grant you access to the city’s vast subway and bus network, airport express trains, public phones and long-distance buses. Even a few supermarkets take yikatong cards in place of cash. If you’re feeling energetic you can always traverse the busy grid on foot or bike, taking in the sights as you go. Beijing is safe for pedestrians and cyclists, but it is a sprawling city with eight ring roads.

Tiananmen Guangchang (Tiananmen Square) sits at the heart of Beijing in all its 440,000 sqm. Far from being a disused square, it is said to be able to hold anywhere between 500,000 and one million people. Tiananmen expanded in the 1950s and is home to important monuments such as the Great Hall of the People (which hosts the Chinese Parliament and the annual meeting of the National People’s Congress), the National Museum of China, and Mausoleum of Chairman Mao Zedong.

Tiananmen is also the focal point for an important daily attraction:



Clockwise from top: Tiananmen Square; The CCTV Headquarters on the East Third Ring Road; Beijing skyscrapers from downtown; the Forbidden City; a Beijing pagoda.



the flag-raising and flag-lowering ceremonies, which are held to coincide with sunrise and sunset.

The north side of Tiananmen Square faces the breathtaking Gu Gong (Forbidden City) which housed the imperial palaces of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The largest ancient palatial structure in the world was built during the reign of Emperor Chengzu of the Ming dynasty. In total, 980 buildings and over 8,000 elaborately decorated rooms complete the Forbidden City. Many of the public rooms have been transformed into galleries which display artwork, while others remain frozen in time, untouched and closed to the public.

Situated in the northwest of Beijing, the Yiheyuan (Summer

Palace) is considered the most beautiful and well-preserved royal park in China. Known as the royal families summer playground, the gardens and lake provide respite from Beijing’s scorching summer heat. Tiantan (The Temple of Heaven), located in the Chongwen district, is a where Qing and Ming emperors held heaven worship ceremonies for bountiful harvests. There are two circled walls which make up the Temple – an inner part and outer part. The most magnificent buildings are the Huanqitian (Circular Mound Altar), the Huangqiongyu (Imperial Vault of Heaven) and the Qiniandian (Hall of Prayer for Good Harvest). These two ancient monuments are beautifully maintained and a trip to Beijing is not complete without a visit. ●



An icon of China and a feat of engineering, the Great Wall of China continues to amaze thousands of years after its construction

SNAPSHOT ON → THE GREAT WALL



THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

(Changcheng) is without a doubt, one of the most remarkable man-made structures on Earth. Nestled into the northern Chinese landscape, the wall snakes over mountains and follows the lay of the land from west to east, using the topography to its advantage. In fact, almost one-quarter of the 'wall' utilises naturally occurring rivers and valleys, negating the need for any stone constructions. Despite holding the title of the longest wall in the world, the Great Wall of China is beginning to show its age.

Today, just a handful of sections are open to the public as thousands of kilometres have crumbled over time and are unsafe for visitors to traverse. The Chinese government is constantly working to repair parts of the wall and preserve as much of its structural integrity as possible, but some sections — particularly those ▶

(Image: Unsplash)



Pictured: Beautiful views of the Great Wall at every turn, no matter the season

of the Ming Dynasty — are still in great condition considering their immense age.

The wall itself was built with various materials including stone, wood, earth and brick, depending on what was available in the region it was built. Heights are between four to eight metres, while the total length of is estimated at over 21,000 km. The Great Wall of China is unique for many reasons, but perhaps the most profound is the fact that it's one of the only projects that was continuously worked on by different dynasties over the course of two millennia.

Experts believe that the first sections of the wall were constructed during the Zhou

the Qin Dynasty workforce, of which tens of thousands perished during the construction. Without modern technology, workers were forced to transport materials and build by hand or use archaic tools like ropes and pulley-systems.

After the death of Emperor Qin, the Han Dynasty continued to reinforce and rebuild the wall in parts where it had started to disintegrate. He also prioritised a section called the 'hexi corridor' in order to protect the Silk Road trade route that connected China with western Asia. Various dynasties continued to maintain and extend the wall for centuries, adding fortresses and other defensive mechanisms.



IT'S ESTIMATED THAT 300,000 SOLDIERS, PRISONERS AND PEASANTS MADE UP THE QIN DYNASTY WORKFORCE, OF WHICH TENS OF THOUSANDS PERISHED DURING THE CONSTRUCTION “ ”

Dynasty, over two thousand years ago, in order to defend themselves against the neighbouring regions they were conflicting with. Other sections of the wall were built by various states, but it wasn't until the reign of Qin Shi Huang that the sections were joined to create one continuous wall. Ultimately, this was done to create a physical barrier against nomads encroaching from Mongolia. It's estimated that 300,000 soldiers, prisoners and peasants made up

The next significant period of the wall's history began with the Ming empire in the 14th century. During their reign, Emperors of the Ming Dynasty mobilised labour forces once again to extend the Great Wall by thousands of kilometres and transform existing sections into multi-line walls. To this day, the Ming section is the best preserved and most extensive part of the wall, hosting a majority of the four million tourists that visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site every year.



A visit to the Great Wall can be customised to your level of fitness. If you're a keen hiker, the Jinshanling section offers stunning panoramic views of the surrounding mountains but requires moderate fitness levels. The Mutianyu section is the most popular and child-friendly, with its relatively intact stone walls and towers. For those seeking accessibility, the Juyongguan section is closest to Beijing and easy to get around. It also boasts one of the most intact forts along the entire wall. ●

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(images: Unsplash & Pexels)

SNAPSHOT ON →

TERRACOTTA WARRIORS



INSPIRING
VACATIONS

One of
the greatest
archaeological
discoveries of all
time and one of
China's most visited
attractions

IN 1974, Chinese farmers were digging a well when they encountered a life-sized soldier made of clay. Confused and intrigued, they reported their findings to the government who promptly sent scientists to the Xi'an site to begin further excavations. Unbeknownst to the farmers, this solitary figure was part of an entire army of life-size soldiers, horses and chariots. This remarkable discovery is still considered one of the biggest in archaeological history.

Historians believe the Terracotta Army was built as part of an opulent mausoleum for the first Emperor of the Qin dynasty and the man credited for uniting China, Qin Shi Huang. It's thought that the army was constructed to guard the tomb of Emperor Qin in the afterlife and to ensure he would have the same imperial status and power in death that he enjoyed during life. ►

(Image: Unsplash)



Clockwise from below: Archaeological marvel, the Terracotta Warriors, showcase China's ancient cultural heritage



It's estimated that the tomb took almost forty years and 700,000 people to construct. Although the site is open to the public, it's important to note that it is an active dig site; archaeologists believe there are an additional 6,000 figures yet to be uncovered.

Upon entering the Terracotta Warriors Museum, you'll watch a short movie explaining their significance and how the army was

were modelled after real people. In addition to the nearly 2,000 soldiers, archaeologists discovered chariots, cavalry and weapons, which are also on display across the three pits.

While the warriors are a significant component of First Emperor Qin's mausoleum, they're merely one part of his enormous necropolis. Interestingly, his actual tomb has never been opened. Although advances in science have reduced

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AND YOU'LL NOTICE THAT NO TWO SOLDIERS ARE ALIKE – EACH TERRACOTTA FIGURE HAS BEEN MOULDED WITH INTRICATE DETAILS “”

first uncovered, before proceeding to the open pits to view the clay statues. The rows and rows of warriors are a phenomenal sight to behold, especially when you consider that each figure was created by hand without the use of tools. Take a closer look and you'll notice that no two soldiers are alike—each terracotta figure has been moulded with intricate details like facial expressions, hairstyles, and gestures. This, in addition to their organisation by military rank, suggests that the figures

the risks involved with ancient excavation, experts believe the chances of damaging such an important part of Chinese history are still too high. For now, less invasive techniques such as remote sensing and radar are being used to deduce information about what lies inside. Results of these tests have shown the complex to be almost 100 sq km and contain interconnecting caverns. Information about the suspected contents of Emperor Qin's tomb is exhibited inside the museum to read at your leisure. ●

(Images: Unsplash & freemages.com)

GUIDE TO → 10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

From eating and transport to vaccinations and the internet, here's what you need to know before your Middle Kingdom adventure

A VISIT TO CHINA is unlike a visit to any other place on earth. As a nation overwhelmingly rich in culture, history, art and cuisine, it's little wonder China is an increasingly popular destination for travellers. Changcheng (The Great Wall), Gu Gong (The Forbidden City) and Bing Ma Yong (Army of Terracotta Warriors) are known across the world and appear on plenty of bucket lists. Its industrious people have made an indelible mark on the world stage in scientific, economic and cultural pursuits. The first Chinese dynasty began in 1046 BC and the nation hasn't stopped evolving—and achieving—ever since. The country is a significant record holder, too; it's home to 57 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Italy nudges ahead with 59.

Geographically speaking, China is incredibly diverse. As it borders the Pacific Ocean in the south, the

country boasts breathtaking beaches to rival any in the world. There's even a healthy—albeit little known—surf scene in Haikou, China's very own Hawaii. This is juxtaposed against mountain ranges and the Gobi desert which runs 1,500 km along the Mongolian border. From ultra-modern international cities to traditional villages, China offers plenty.

While its most popular attractions and sprawling cities are well-documented tourist destinations, China still holds a distinct air of mystery. Food and ease of travel top the list of questions, but wary travellers need not worry: China is a welcoming country, relatively easy to navigate, and, as for the food, who doesn't have a go-to Chinese dish they love? If you don't, you might just discover one (or three) on your trip!

Here, the 10 most commonly asked questions about China are answered... ▶

(Image: Pixabay)



1 DO I NEED A VISA?

From July 1, 2024 until December 31, 2025, nationals exempt from visa requirements to travel to China for no more than 15 days are: France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand. If you require a visa, the easiest way to organise one is through Visalink, a global online service. Alternatively, visa applications can be submitted directly to the Chinese Visa Application Service Centre at the Chinese embassy in your nearest capital city. You'll need to book an appointment and go in person. Walk-ins are accepted but be prepared to wait.

2 DO I NEED VACCINATIONS?

According to most Government Foreign Affairs sites, no vaccinations are required to enter China, however there is the recommendation to ensure polio and hepatitis vaccinations are up to date. You might also want to consider the Japanese Encephalitis vaccination. For detailed and personalised advice, visit your GP 3-4 months prior to departure.

3 CAN I DRINK THE TAP WATER?

Although the water quality is improving, drinking the tap water is not recommended, it must be boiled first. This advice applies to all major cities, as well as rural areas. Bottled water is readily available at restaurants and mini-marts, and bottled water is often available free of charge in hotels.

4 CAN I ACCESS THE INTERNET IN CHINA?

While the internet is widely accessible across China and wifi is available in most hotels and restaurants upon request, there are some restrictions in place. Popular sites such as Facebook and YouTube are inaccessible without a VPN, as are international news sites such as BBC and CNN. There are many different VPN options depending on your budget and usage, so do some research before you depart.

5 WHAT IS THE TRANSPORT LIKE?

Public transport in China is reliable and modern. Most infrastructure, from roads to rail, is highly advanced in major cities. Much of the travel on tour will either be on an air-conditioned coach or train, while cities can be navigated by underground trains, buses or on foot.

China is also home to a network of high-speed railways (HSR) capable of reaching speeds between 250-350 km per hour. Despite Japan being best known for bullet trains, the HSR in China is the most extensively used and longest railway network in the world.

If you're intimidated by the idea of using public transport in China, be rest assured that train stations in major cities are as easy to navigate as any found in other countries. Signage is in both Chinese and English and route maps are available. Alternatively, taxis are cheap but not especially fast thanks to the growing number of cars on the road. If you're opting for a *chuzu che* (taxi), leave with plenty of time to spare and carry business cards or addresses written in Chinese characters to make things easier. And remember, a friendly smile and chuckle goes a long way. ►



➤ Clockwise from right: the Great Wall in winter; alcohol is widely available in China; dumplings in their homeland; shopping in China whether high-end or budget, is a fun experience

6 WHEN IS THE BEST TIME OF YEAR TO TRAVEL?

China is a sprawling country with a varied climate, so there is no right or wrong time to visit. It's a good idea to consider specific destinations when selecting travel dates, however. In cities south of the Yangtze River, winter tends to be mild. While in the north, expect a biting cold winter with heavy snowfall. July to September is considered peak season. Autumn and spring transform the country's parks into vibrant vistas. If you don't mind the cold, there is nothing more beautiful than seeing The Forbidden Palace and The Great Wall covered in a blanket of snow.

The major national holidays are Spring Festival, or as we know it, Chinese New Year (usually February), and Golden or National Week (October).

7 CAN I BUY ALCOHOL?

Alcohol is accessible in China, with Chinese wines and spirits being widely available in both major cities and rural areas. Local and international supermarkets in cities tend to carry a large selection of international beer and wine. With Chinese wine and beer now on the world stage, why not go local? Tsingtao, China's most recognisable beer, was founded in Qingdao in 1903 by German settlers—and since Germans know beer, you can trust it's a decent brew. Baijiu, on the other hand, is the most widely consumed spirit and packs a punch with an alcohol content upwards of 50%—tread lightly, and *gan bei!* (cheers!).



8 WHAT SORT OF FOOD IS AVAILABLE?

Chinese food in its native land is quite different from the creative adaptations found in western restaurants. Popular dishes such as sweet and sour pork are available but will taste and look a little different than you're used to. Like their European counterparts, authentic Chinese cooking also tends to change according to the season: if you're visiting the north, rich, warming dishes (like hot pot and soupy noodles) are commonly served in the cooler months, while lighter dishes (such as stir-fried egg and tomato, and smashed cucumbers with garlic) will be served in the warmer seasons. If you need a break from Chinese food while touring, international fast food outlets are widely located and select western dishes are increasingly available in restaurants around tourist precincts.



9 IS IT EXPENSIVE?

China is on par with other Asian destinations when it comes to your back pocket—your experience of it, however, can be as low-budget or as plush as you like it.

The average cost of a meal in a restaurant serving local cuisine tends to be between RMB20-80 (approximately A\$4-17). Street food is typically less. Another factor to consider is how to pay—cash is king, and many vendors and stallholders will not accept foreign bank cards. ATMs are found all over the country, but use one that accepts both international and local cards. Chinese Renminbi (RMB) can usually be ordered prior to departure from a foreign exchange service or, you can withdraw cash from an ATM on arrival.



10 WHICH ESSENTIALS SHOULD I PACK?

As with any overseas trip, there are essentials from home that might need to be included. Tissues are especially important in China as some toilets—particularly outside of major attractions—don't provide toilet paper. If you're planning to travel in the summer, bring sunscreen from home as the alternatives can be pricey in China and contain limited SPF.

There are three types of plugs used in China—three-pronged angled pins, two flat pins (the most common) or two narrow round pins. Electricity is 220V AC, 50 cycles AC so you'll be able to use your devices if you're from Australia, New Zealand or Europe. Adaptors are usually available from your hotel or can be easily purchased.

Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan tend to have different plugs, so if you're planning a stop in these regions, be sure to bring a UK or US style adaptor. ●

A FIRST TIMER'S GUIDE TO → HAGGLING & BARGAINING

It might seem odd to westerners but haggling is a positively enjoyable pastime for Chinese shoppers. Get the most out of your shopping experience without paying over the odds

CULTURALLY IN CHINA, haggling and negotiating on price is not only acceptable—it's expected. Someone 'driving a hard bargain' is actually seen as someone smart and to be treated with respect rather than someone who is just 'cheap.' Outside of the largest department stores, the price of every transaction can be 'discussed.' Not every discussion will result in a discount but you'll be surprised at how many do.

Because of this, sellers artificially inflate prices in China so if you don't haggle, you'll be paying over the odds in many cases. It may sound like a lot to take in, but a smile and a request, *pianyi yidian* (to lower the price a little), is often enough to do the trick.

The key thing to remember is to haggle before you engage in any service or use any product. After you've taken that rickshaw journey or eaten those bowls of noodles, the vendor can determine the price and there's not a lot you can do about it.

Thanks to this style of pre-negotiating for products and

services, tips are never expected in China. In fact, tips are often refused. Sometimes seen as patronising or charity, a self-respecting Chinese person would rarely take a tip. Furthermore, in some local restaurants, where the staff is searched at the end of their shift, they could be accused of theft if found with extra money.

In western-style restaurants or high-end hotels and bars, tipping will be treated in a similar way to other western countries. A few RMB for a bell boy delivering room services or finding you a cab is perfectly acceptable. It's worth noting that where tips are expected, they are usually included as a standard addition (usually 12%) to the bill. So always check the bill in a restaurant before adding a further tip.

If someone has gone above and beyond then a tip is perfectly ok. A tour guide who has done a great job or a taxi driver who has raced you to the airport on time will both be over the moon with some extra *xiaofei* or pocket money. ▶

(Image: Pexels)



Pictured: Vintage markets, antique shops, food stalls and beyond — try out your bargaining skills when you tour China and have fun with it

WHERE TO HAGGLE AND WHERE NOT TO HAGGLE

Vintage markets, antique shops, food stalls and boutique stores—all places you can try out your bargaining skills. If there is no labelled price, then this is an invitation to let the games begin. Even with labelled prices, these are guidelines rather than set-in-stone prices. Services are also open to negotiation. Hiring a car and driver for a day or a guide to take you hiking is also an open conversation.

Large department stores, supermarkets and global chains are unlikely to offer much of a discount. However, it doesn't hurt to ask. Many luxury stores provide a sales commission to their staff and some might be willing to reduce the price a little if it means making their targets. Likewise, many larger hotels will have standard rates but smaller hotels and privately run places will often provide a discount if it's the difference between a sale and an empty room.

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF HAGGLING IN CHINA

Never take the first price as the real price

Many people who come to China think they are being ripped off but more often than not, sellers are just starting high so they have room to manoeuvre. A driver might offer a ride for RMB400 but a friendly smile and an offer of RMB100 may well do the trick. In China, it's a tradition to ask for (and mostly give) a discount.

Keep it friendly

If this is fun for you then it's probably fun for them, too. As soon as it becomes nasty or, if you insult the vendor or their products, then you've lost and you're not going to get a deal. Keep smiling throughout the experience and whether you buy the product or not, you'll still have a fun time.



Don't be afraid to lowball

As mentioned, sellers will usually start negotiating at an overly high price, expecting it to be reduced in the haggling process. So don't feel awkward about going in very low. It isn't offensive to offer just 10% of what they are asking for. If you're not sure, ask the vendor to make it cheaper and see how quickly they reduce the price.

Don't be afraid to walk away

It is sometimes only when you're ready to walk away from the deal you discover how low they are really ready to go.

Think about what the item is actually worth to you

Have a think about how much you actually want the item and don't get bamboozled by currency conversions midway through negotiations. Go in knowing how much you're willing to pay.

Know your limit

Have a maximum price in mind before you start the battle. A tailored shirt is a bargain at \$20 but perhaps less so at \$100. Could you get better quality for a lower price at home?

Buy in bulk

Buying four items from one seller means you'll get a better deal and will help you negotiate a much better price than buying one item from four sellers.

Make friends with the seller

Ask them about themselves, tell them who you are buying gifts for and show them you're human. Chinese people are very family-orientated and helpful to those they perceive as friends. You'll certainly get a better price if they like you. On the other hand, don't be nervous if they play offended. It isn't uncommon to hear phrases such as: "At that price, I lose money," or "you're stealing from me." This is just a tactic they use. Remember, they will *never* sell at a loss.

Find out what locals are paying

If you saw an RMB10 note exchange hand for a bunch of grapes, then you've got a rough idea of what you should be paying—knowing this will help enormously. Don't expect to always get it as cheap as the locals because you haven't built that relationship with the vendor, but it's a good place to get a starting price.

Ultimately have fun

Enjoy haggling. It's not a competition but should be an enjoyable experience. If it stops being enjoyable then simply walk away—there will be someone else selling something similar a few stalls down. ●

(images: Unsplash & Pixabay)

EVERYTHING YOU NEED
TO KNOW ABOUT →

THE YANGTZE RIVER

INSPIRING
VACATIONS

A Yangtze River
cruise winds
through hundreds of
miles of incredible
natural beauty
taking in centuries
of Chinese
culture

THE YANGTZE RIVER is the longest river in Asia and the lifeblood of China with nearly a third of China's population living within its basin area. The river bisects the country and runs 6,380km from the high Tibetan Plateau in the west, to the East China Sea in Shanghai to the east.

The cruises start from the city of Yichang in central China and head inland upriver. The first port of call is the Three Gorges. Arguably the largest construction project on earth and certainly the biggest hydro-electric power station in the world, the Three Gorges Dam spans the length of the Yangtze near Yichang. Although somewhat controversial when it was built for displacing over a million people and the ecological impact it made, it is thought to provide as much as 10% of the country's power needs, significantly reducing the need for coal-burning power stations. ▶

▼
The Three Gorges



Clockwise from top: Qutang Gorge; the Three Gorges; a scenic spot along the Yangtze River; admiring rock formations on the Yangtze



At the start of the cruise, there is a visit to the Dam to learn more and an optional visit to the Tribe of the Three Gorges—one of the only remaining scenic spots not affected by the Dam project.

The cruise continues and passes some breathtaking landscapes including the Shennong Stream and the stunning Mianzhu Gorge where Hanging Coffins, containing the remains of the Tujia people, can be seen. It is these Gorges that many ancient *shanshui*—or ink wash paintings—were painted by skilled master artists. These ancient artworks of gorges, rivers and mountains hang in museums and temples around the world today.

Continuing onto the ancient city of Fengdu, known as the City of Ghosts, consider an optional tour to visit a complex made up of shrines, temples and monasteries dedicated to the dead. An incredible 48 temples from various eras and in different architectural styles have been built on Ming Mountain, over the centuries, including the most famous Hall of the Jade Emperor—a temple dedicated to one of China's mythical founders. The cruise continues up the river with a number of other optional stops and excursions until it gets to Chongqing where, after a farewell banquet, guests disembark.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What are the rooms like?

You'll be staying on a Yangtze Gold 6 or similar ship. The rooms are all at least 24 sqm and have two single beds or a double bed. All rooms have a balcony, air-conditioning, a safe and a refrigerator. Hot water thermos flasks are in each room as are a limited amount of bottled water. The voltage in the cabins is 220v.

Is there wifi?

Although the cruise ships have limited Internet access, the wifi is very patchy and certainly not to be relied on but it works best in the lobby and it is free. Why not enjoy a few days unplugged instead.

Are meals included?

Yes, all meals are included and there are places to buy additional snacks on the ship. The buffet restaurant includes both western and Chinese meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner. For those that prefer western dining in the evening, a VIP dining option is available and there are a wide variety of western dishes on offer. A reminder to never drink the tap water either on the cruise ship or elsewhere while visiting China. Water and ice served in the Yangtze Club and dining room are safe. Bottled water is cheap and accessible everywhere in China.

Is there any on board entertainment?

From welcome parties to fashion shows, film screenings and lectures, Tai Chi classes to karaoke—there is a wide array of entertainment options on offer with a full schedule provided to you upon arrival. There is also a gym, swimming pool, spa, library and a variety of small shops, too.

What should I wear on board?

Casual attire is recommended both on board and on shore excursions. Be sure to have a pair of comfortable walking shoes for excursions. For the Captain's Welcome Reception and Farewell Banquet, a jacket and tie for men and dress or dress pants for women is suggested.

What about payments and tips?

There is no cash on board, but major credit cards are accepted and all purchases (in the gift shop, at the bar) will be put on your final cabin bill and paid on your last day or night on board. Generally, in China, it is not necessary to tip excessively but a tip of around 150 RMB (AU\$31) paid upon checkout is appreciated. This is then pooled and shared between the staff. ●

OUR CUSTOMERS.

Our customers love our China tours — here's what some of them have to say

“Well organised”

The trip to China was well-organised and went smoothly. The planned tours were also well organised and covered all of the major attractions. The optional tours added greatly to our overall experience. The tour guides and leaders were all extremely knowledgeable and helpful. This would have to be one of the best value for money tours that I have been on.

★★★★★

Peter

“Guides were very good”

Guides were very helpful. Hotels were excellent. We were given enough time at the sites and all guides very informative. We were taken to all the must-see sites in China. Would recommend the trip to anyone.

★★★★★

Joanne

“Wonderful time”

I can't fault the trip we did — you'll have a wonderful time! Inspiring Vacations are very professional. We have travelled quite extensively and loved our Inspiring China tour.

★★★★★

Patricia



(Image: Unsplash)

For more customer testimonials, scan me



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