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TRAVEL

# Destination Guide: China

What to know before you go  
Essential preparation and planning tips  
Accommodation and transport

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**Who is CHOICE?** Set up by consumers for consumers, **CHOICE** is the [consumer advocate](#) that provides Australians with information and advice, free from commercial bias.

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

## OVERVIEW

Best time to go, culture, language, health, safety, laws, watchouts, scams, emergency contacts and more.

### Travel-size tips

- Australians can [fly to China](#) in as little as 10 hours.
- Australian passport holders need a [visa](#), although [visa-free passes](#) are available at some Chinese airports if transiting for less than 72 hours.
- Travel to Tibet is [restricted](#) - you'll need to book a tour through a travel agency in China.
- The weather in China can vary from sub-tropical summers in the south to icy cold winters in the north.
- [Chinese New Year](#) is a great time to visit, but transport will be crowded and booked out well in advance.

### Know before you go

- Only Chinese driver's licence-holders can [drive or hire cars](#).
- Some cities experience extreme levels of [air pollution](#). If you have respiratory problems, speak to your doctor before you go.

- Your doctor may recommend [vaccinations](#) before you travel to China.
- China has [laws](#) restricting free speech, and the government blocks access to many internet sites.

### Best time to go

China is an enormous country with a climate that varies from steamy monsoonal summers near the southern borders with Vietnam and Myanmar to freezing cold winters near the northern borders with Russia and Mongolia, as well as icy weather to the west, where China meets with the Himalayas of Nepal, India and Pakistan.

Check the [average temperature and rainfall](#) in the area of China you're planning to visit.

- Temperatures in Beijing rarely rise above freezing during winter, and can reach over 30°C in summer.
- Winters are a little milder in Shanghai, summers are hot and humid.



- › Summers can be uncomfortable in the south of the country where daily downpours make for a sticky, sub-tropical heat and coastal areas experience the occasional typhoon.
- › Tibet and Inner Mongolia experience bitter winters and are best visited in the warmer months.
- › Harbin, in the far north, attracts hundreds of thousands of locals and visitors to its Ice and Snow Festival in January and February.
- › Chinese New Year (Spring Festival) in January or February ([dates change](#)) is a great time to see the country in party mode. Most Chinese people take up to two weeks off work and travel home to visit their families. With more than 700 million people squeezing onto the nation's trains, buses, planes and boats, it's been described as the [world's largest annual human migration](#). You'll find many cities surprisingly empty during this time. It's best to pick a good place to see in the New Year and then stay put, as you'll face crowds and sold-out tickets on inter-city transport.
- › Transport comes under strain again during the [Labour Day](#) holiday on May 1, and during the [mid-autumn](#) festival in September - which is often combined with [National Day](#) on October 1 to

make for a week-long break.

- › School holidays - particularly university holidays - drive up demand for train tickets as students travel home to their families. Chinese schools have two semesters, with breaks just before Spring Festival (January/February) and in mid-summer (July).
- › Other key dates include the Dragon Boat Festival across much of the country in June, the International Fashion Festival in Dalian in September, and the International Trade Fair in Guangzhou in April and October, when hotels are likely to be fully booked.

### Culture

- › Family and community are at the centre of Chinese culture. The group is more important than the individual, and Chinese people show great respect for their elders.
- › 'Face' is a very important concept. Arguments and emotional scenes in public mean a 'loss of face' and are very embarrassing for all involved.
- › The Chinese are a little more conservative than most Australians when it comes to public displays of affection and styles of dress. Avoid wearing very revealing clothing, particularly in rural areas, and try not to shock the locals with anything more than a peck on your partner's cheek.
- › City dwellers won't look twice at foreigners, but if you travel off the beaten track you may attract a lot of attention. People may want to have their photo taken with you or they might encourage their children to practise English with you. Try to oblige if you have the time.
- › Don't be offended if you're quizzed about your age, marital status and even your income.



- Queuing isn't compulsory and personal space is less respected than in Australia, so don't get upset if people push and shove their way ahead of you in crowded places.
- At the dinner table, never play with your chopsticks, lick them, use them to stir food, or to point at a person. Cover your mouth with your hand when using a toothpick.
- Try to eat everything on your plate, but don't worry about turning some things down. The Chinese are quite understanding if there are certain foods that you don't like to eat.
- Cultural taboos include touching a person's head, showing a person the soles of your feet and pointing with your finger (use your hand if you have to point).
- Numbers are very important in Chinese culture. Eight is the luckiest number and four is the unluckiest. Many buildings won't have a fourth floor and many hotels won't have any room numbers with four in them.
- Tipping is not customary, but it is appreciated. In tourist areas and cities frequented by foreigners, tipping is more likely to be expected.

### **Official language: Chinese Mandarin**

Dialects vary all over China but Mandarin is the official language.

English is taught in Chinese schools, so many younger people can speak at least a few words. Older people are unlikely to speak any English, particularly outside of the cities. You'll find a greater number of English-speakers in international cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, and of course in hotels and tourist areas.



Chinese characters are difficult to master, but most street signs include pinyin (Chinese words written in the English alphabet) or English translations.

### **Health and safety**

- The standard of health care in China varies from place to place. In rural areas, medical staff may be poorly trained and are unlikely to speak English, but most cities have [private hospitals](#) and clinics with at least some English-speaking staff. Expect to pay fees up-front, even in an emergency. Medical evacuations from China are extremely expensive, so make sure you're covered by [travel insurance](#).
- The tap water in China is not safe to drink. Stick to bottled or boiled water, ask for no ice in your drinks, and check the seal on water bottles (some stores sell boiled water in recycled bottles).
- Traveller's diarrhoea, including giardia, is common in China. Wash your hands regularly, opt for fully cooked, fresh food and peel fruit before eating it.

- Hepatitis A, spread via food and water, is common. Speak to a doctor about vaccinations before you go.
- Dengue fever is quite common in the south of the country. There is no vaccination, so do your best to avoid mosquito bites.
- Malaria is rare in most parts of China, but try to avoid mosquito bites and check with a doctor about prophylactics if you're travelling to areas bordering Myanmar, Laos or Vietnam, particularly during the wet season.
- Hand, foot and mouth disease is common in China, particularly among children. To avoid it, wash your hands regularly.
- The air quality in some Chinese cities is poor. If you have respiratory or other health problems, speak to your doctor. Pollution levels vary day-to-day, so check local reports (eg. [aqicn.org/city/beijing/](http://aqicn.org/city/beijing/)) and consider staying indoors or wearing a mask on bad days.
- For the latest health and safety advice about China, including disease outbreaks, natural disasters and civil unrest, check [smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au)
- You should carry ID with you at all times.
- The legal drinking age is 18.
- Gambling and prostitution are illegal in mainland China.
- Most religions are tolerated by the secular government, but foreigners have been evicted for distributing religious material.
- Protesting or speaking out against the government is not tolerated. Tourists are unlikely to be of much concern, but you could land yourself in trouble if you voice your opinions on China's human rights record, for example, or try to photograph political protests.
- There are no laws against homosexuality in China.
- All foreign visitors are required to register with the Public Security Bureau (PSB) within 24 hours of arrival. If you're staying at a hotel, they'll do this for you. Otherwise, you should report to the local police station.
- Travel to Tibet is restricted. Applications can only be made through travel agents in China, and you can only travel in Tibet as part of an organised tour.

### [Do I need vaccinations to travel to China? > Page 9](#)

**Tip:** Have you registered your travel plans with [smartraveller](#) and checked the latest safety advice on the region you're travelling to?

## Laws and watchouts

### Laws

- Drugs are illegal and convictions can result in the death penalty. It is even illegal to have drugs still in your system, regardless of which country they were taken in.





- The Chinese criminal justice system gives police the power to arrest and detain suspects without charge for weeks or even months, and to confiscate passports and impose travel bans on people suspected of crimes.
- China may seem like a very strict place, but the [China Highlights travel guide](#) points out, many laws exist but are rarely enforced. Still, it's always best to behave yourself.

### Watchouts

- Violent crime rates in China are low. Scams and petty theft do still happen though, so keep your wits about you.
- Taxis should be licenced and metered. Don't try to negotiate a flat fare unless you're confident you know what you're doing.
- Taxi drivers have been known to take travellers to an alternative hotel, telling them their preferred hotel is 'closed'. They've also been known to demand higher payment, for example by insisting the quoted price is 'per person'. If you have a problem with a taxi, note down the licence plate and driver ID

number and make a complaint.

- Always keep small change on you, many taxi drivers and shopkeepers won't have change for larger notes.
- Always cover the keypad when using ATMs, and never let your credit card out of your site when paying at restaurants.
- As a foreigner, you're likely to face 'foreigner prices' sometimes. Stand your ground if you feel you're being ripped off, but remember that haggling is a normal part of Chinese culture and you can probably afford to pay a little more than most locals.
- Common scams in tourist areas include friendly locals inviting foreigners to traditional tea houses and then sticking them with an exorbitant bill, and 'art students' luring tourists to their studio only to pressure them into buying mass-produced paintings.
- Read our article on [tourist scams around the world](#), or search travel forums such as Tripadvisor for the latest warnings from travellers.

### Making a complaint

If you fall victim to theft or any other serious crime, contact the police (numbers below).

If you need a police report for travel insurance purposes, contact the nearest Foreign Affairs Branch of the Public Security Bureau.

Consumer rights aren't upheld in China to the same degree as in Australia, but if you have a disagreement with a Chinese accommodation provider or tour company, follow the complaints procedure suggested by [travelchinaguide.com](http://travelchinaguide.com) or contact the China National Tourism Administration ([en.cnta.gov.cn](http://en.cnta.gov.cn)).

If your gripe is with an Australian or international tour



operator, airline, or booking site. See CHOICE for the [usual procedures](#) for making a complaint or seeking compensation.

### Emergency contacts

**Police:** 110 (SMS: 12110)

**Ambulance:** 120

**Fire:** 119

**Traffic accidents:** 122

**SOS in water:** 12395

If you are calling from your Australian mobile, insert China's country code +86.

Operators may not speak English, so try to have an interpreter available. Alternatively, call your hotel, your insurance provider, the Australian embassy or an English-speaking hospital. Public ambulances may be slow and may not be staffed by trained paramedics, so consider catching a taxi to hospital if you can.

#### Hospitals and clinics

Private medical care is available in most Chinese cities. See [china.org.cn](http://china.org.cn) for a list of English-speaking hospitals and clinics across China.

#### Australian Embassy - Beijing

[china.embassy.gov.au](http://china.embassy.gov.au)

21 Dongzhimenwai Street, Chaoyang District

+86 10 5140 4111

Email: [embassy.beijing@dfat.gov.au](mailto:embassy.beijing@dfat.gov.au)

#### Australian Consulate-General - Shanghai

[shanghai.china.embassy.gov.au](http://shanghai.china.embassy.gov.au)

Level 22, Citic Square, 1168 Nanjing West Road

+86 21 2215 5200

Email: [consular.shanghai@dfat.gov.au](mailto:consular.shanghai@dfat.gov.au)

#### Australian Consulate-General - Guangzhou

[guangzhou.china.embassy.gov.au](http://guangzhou.china.embassy.gov.au)

Level 11 & 12, Development Centre, No. 3 Linjiang

Road, Zhujiang New City

+86 20 3814 0111

#### Australian Consulate-General - Chengdu

[chengdu.china.embassy.gov.au](http://chengdu.china.embassy.gov.au)

Level 27, Square One, 18 Dongyu Street, Jinjiang

District

+86 28 6268 5200

To view/print these addresses in Chinese characters, go to [china.embassy.gov.au/bjng/Contact](http://china.embassy.gov.au/bjng/Contact)

#### 24-hour Australian Consular Emergency Centre: +61

2 6261 3305 (from overseas) or 1300 555 135 (from within Australia) or SMS +61 421 269 080





# WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

## PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Visas, vaccinations, phone roaming, SIM cards, internet, power adapters, money, travel insurance, handy apps and more.

### Visas and passports

Australian passport holders need a visa to enter China. You can apply for a tourist visa by mail or in person at [application centres](#) in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

You'll need:

- A passport with at least six-months' validity and with blank visa pages, as well as a photocopy of the passport's data page and photo page.
- A photocopy of any previous Chinese visas or passports.
- A completed visa application form.
- A 48mm x 33mm photo.
- A travel itinerary with proof of a return ticket and hotel reservations, or a letter of invitation (for example, from a local government, enterprise or individual in China).
- A money order or payment authorisation form (if applying by mail).
- A pre-paid self-addressed return envelope (if

applying by mail).

**Tip:** The embassy only accepts registered mail or express post via Australia Post. Be sure to write down your tracking number.

Visa rules and requirements may change. For up-to-date information check with the Chinese Embassy: [au.china-embassy.org](http://au.china-embassy.org)

Processing generally takes four working days for in-person applications and 10 working days for postal applications. A two-day 'rush service' is available for in-person applicants who pay a higher fee and submit their application before midday. You should apply at least a month (and no more than three months) in advance of travel.

**Tip:** China does not recognise dual nationality. If you are a Chinese-Australian dual national, travel on your Australian passport with a visa for China and present yourself as Australian at all times, otherwise you'll be considered by authorities as a Chinese national and you won't have access to Australian consular services if you need them.

### 72-hour visa-free transit

Australian passport holders can visit certain Chinese cities visa-free for up to 72 hours. You can apply for transit without visa (TWOV) in Beijing (at Beijing Capital International Airport), Shanghai (at Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport or Pudong International Airport), Guangzhou (at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport), Chengdu (at Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport), Chongqing (at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport), Shenyang (at Shenyang Taoxian International Airport) or Dalian (at Dalian Zhoushuizi International Airport).

You'll need to:

- inform your airline at check-in so they can forward your request to Chinese customs before landing
- fill in the necessary paperwork when you arrive in China, before passing through immigration.

See [au.china-embassy.org](http://au.china-embassy.org) for more information and check with your travel agent or airline before booking flights - you don't want to get stuck in an airport for 72 hours if you're ineligible to enter the country!

### Travel to Tibet

Australian passport holders need a special permit to enter Tibet. Applications can only be made through travel agents in China, and you can only travel in Tibet as part of an organised tour.

## Vaccinations

Your doctor may recommend vaccinations before you travel to China, depending on your health status and your travel plans. The Travel Doctor recommends you

make sure your routine vaccinations are up to date, and that you consider shots for typhoid, hepatitis A and B, rabies, Japanese Encephalitis and tick-borne encephalitis, and consider a prophylactic for malaria if you're travelling to affected areas. See their [China health planner](#) for more information or speak to your doctor.

**Tip:** Some vaccinations need to be given four to six weeks before departure, so get in early.

More about [health and safety in China > Page 4](#).

## Phone and internet

### Global roaming and coverage

China has an extensive GSM network, so your Australian phone should get good coverage in most populated areas. If you use your phone more than occasionally (particularly for accessing the internet) be prepared for huge bills. Check global roaming rates with your telco:

➤ [Telstra](#)





➤ [Vodafone](#)

➤ [Optus](#)

➤ [Virgin](#)

**Tip:** Switch off data roaming on your phone before you leave Australia. Likewise, switch off your voicemail and ask friends and family to text you rather than calling (you'll be charged if you answer incoming calls).

### Local SIM

A pre-paid Chinese SIM card is a much cheaper option than paying global roaming rates on your Australian SIM. China Mobile and China Unicom operate on the GSM network so they should be compatible with your Australian handset, provided it's unlocked. China Telecom operates on the CDMA network (used in the USA and Japan) so it won't be compatible.

**Tip:** China Mobile has the widest coverage and is ahead of the competition with its expanding [4G network](#).

You can buy SIM cards at Chinese airports, phone stores, or convenience stores. Ask the person selling you the SIM to help you set it up, as phone prompts are unlikely to be available in English. Technically you should show your passport as ID, but they might not

ask for it. Avoid buying SIM cards on the street as you may have trouble setting them up on your own or they may even be expired or invalid.

**Tip:** All Chinese SIM cards are regional, which means if you travel to a different province you'll pay higher rates, so try to buy a SIM card in the province where you'll be spending the most time.

You can top up your credit using vouchers from convenience or phone stores, but the credit will need to be purchased in your SIM card's 'home' province. If you've moved on to a different part of the country, you'll need to top up online. The China Mobile and China Unicom websites won't accept foreign credit cards, so you'll need to use a global service such as [worldremit.com](#).

**Tip:** If you run out of credit, you'll be blocked from receiving calls, and your text messages will be deleted unless they're saved on your phone.

**Scam alert:** Most Chinese telcos will SMS you advertisements, most of which are in Chinese and are easily deleted. You may also get the occasional one-ring call from an unknown number. Don't ring back - you'll be charged an extremely high call rate.

### Travel SIM

If you'd prefer to be organised before you go or if you're travelling through a number of countries, a pre-paid travel SIM is an easy option, though the rates probably won't be as cheap as with a local SIM. Travel SIMs are available online and from some travel agents and post offices.

**Tip:** China Mobile Hong Kong has [pre-paid SIMs](#) which will work in both China and Hong Kong. The rates will be higher than a Chinese mainland SIM, but their website and phone service is in English.



**Remember:** Your phone will need to be unlocked to accept a SIM from another network.

[Beat global roaming bill shock](#) - our guide to unlocking your phone and changing your global roaming settings.

### Wi-Fi

You'll find free Wi-Fi in most hotels and many western-style cafes across China, and always at Starbucks. In rural areas internet access may be harder to come by. Some Wi-Fi hotspots might ask for a Chinese phone number in order to register and activate. If staying connected is very important to you, consider renting a [USB modem](#) or a portable pocket-sized hotspot such as [MiFi](#) while you're in China.

The Chinese government blocks or limits access to a huge array of online content, including pornography and political information, and some major sites such as Google, Wikipedia, Twitter and Facebook. See this [list of sites blocked](#) by the 'Great Firewall of China'.

Many people use proxy servers to circumnavigate the bans, if only to tweet that they're in China!



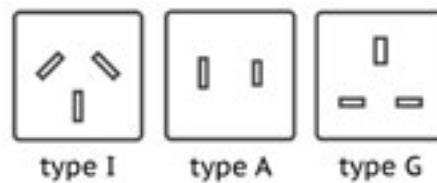
## Power plugs

**Standard voltage:** 220-240V

**Frequency:** 50Hz

China's frequency is the same as Australia's, and the voltage range is similar enough to Australia's 230V that you can use your appliances without fear of frying them.

**Power sockets:**



China's power plugs and sockets vary between the Australian type (I), the US/Japanese type (A) and the British type (G), so it's recommended you pack a universal adapter.

## Money

**Currency:** Yuan Renminbi (RMB)

Check [xe.com](http://xe.com) for the latest exchange rates.

**Tip:** Chinese people rarely use the word 'yuan' when referring to money. Instead they say 'kuai', which is more like 'bucks'.

**Important:** Tell your bank about your travel plans two weeks before you leave. Card activity in a foreign country could be mistaken for fraud and you could find your account frozen.

### Credit cards

Credit cards are accepted at almost all hotels and are becoming more common in restaurants and shops. Check how much (if any) commission is being charged, and remember your bank will charge you a conversion

fee for overseas purchases. Credit cards are a must, but so is cash, which you'll need for everyday purchases.

### ATMs

ATMs are easy to find in Chinese towns and cities, but some won't accept foreign cards. Bank of China, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), and China Construction Bank are your best bets. Instructions will be in English and in Chinese. The withdrawal limit may be low on some machines, which can be frustrating when you're paying a withdrawal fee every time.

**Tip:** Chinese PINs are generally six digits long, but most ATMs should accept your four-digit PIN. If not, try inserting two zeros first. Don't try to enter your PIN a third time though - the machine will confiscate or lock your card if it's incorrect.

### Money changers

Currency exchange is only legal at hotels, banks and exchange booths using the official rate set by the central government through the Bank of China. You'll find plenty of money changers at Chinese airports, and you'll get a better rate once you're on the ground than if you change money in Australia (although you may want to pack a small amount of yuan for peace of mind).

**Scam alert:** Say no to anyone who tries to offer you a different exchange rate to the official one set by the government. This is illegal, and you may even end up with counterfeit bills.

### Travellers' cheques

Travellers' cheques are becoming a thing of the past and they're not a practical way of taking money to China. Only the Bank of China is authorised to cash travellers' cheques, and the process can take hours.



Outside of the cities you're unlikely to find anywhere that can cash your cheque.

### Travel money cards

If you're concerned about money security, consider a pre-paid travel money card or 'cash passport'. They can be pre-loaded with a foreign currency and used like a credit or debit card, and cancelled if lost. Read more about the pros and cons of [travel money cards](#).

**Tip:** Carry at least two cards and more than one cash currency (Australian and Chinese). Split your money and cards between separate bags. That way if you lose one, you have a back-up.

For more advice on overseas spending see our [travel money guide](#).

## Travel insurance

Travel insurance is essential. Buy insurance at the same time as you book your trip, that way you'll be covered if you have to cancel for some reason before you go.

For more information read our [buying guide](#) and to choose the best cover, see CHOICE's [travel insurance reviews and comparisons](#).

Check with your insurer about exclusions that may affect you, including some sports and pre-existing medical conditions.

Be aware that anything that happens to you [while under the influence](#) of drugs or alcohol is unlikely to be covered by insurance.

### Tips:

- Keep a print-out of your travel insurance details with you at all times while on your trip.
- Share your insurance details with family or friends before you leave.

## Handy links and apps

Consider adding these links and apps to your phone, tablet or laptop before you go.

**Tip:** Try to find apps that work offline so they won't chew up your data or stop working when you don't have an internet connection.

- [Travel apps](#) such as [Triposo](#) offer maps, hotel search, restaurant recommendations and other travel tips.
- [City Guides](#) offer self-guided tours of Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong.
- [China Metro](#) provides timetables and information for metro systems in 15 different Chinese cities.
- [Currency conversion apps](#) help you work out costs in Australian dollars.
- [Translation apps](#) help with communication. [Pleco](#) comes with voice recognition and handwriting recognition - eg. draw a Chinese character with your finger to find out what it means!

**Tip:** To save a map onto your mobile device for offline use, select the area on Google Maps then select 'Save offline map' from the menu and follow the directions on the screen. Your GPS positioning will still work on the saved map, even when you don't have access to the internet. Alternatively, download the Google Maps app, go to 'Offline maps' in the menu and select a city.

### Websites

- [cnto.org](#) (China's official tourism website)
- [travelchinaguide.com](#) claims to be the largest online tour operator in China.
- [wikitravel.org/en/China](#) for crowd-sourced information on culture, travel tips and more (may not always be accurate).





# ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORT

## GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Flights to China, airport guides, key destinations, transport, car hire, accommodation, tours and more.

### Flights

**Flight time from Australia:** 10+ hours

- Airlines that fly directly between Australia and China include Air China, Qantas Airways, Air New Zealand, China Southern Airlines, China Eastern Airlines and Sichuan Airlines.
- [Direct flights](#) are available from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth to Guangzhou (Canton), and from Sydney and Melbourne to Guangzhou and Shanghai.
- Air China flies directly from Sydney to Beijing.
- Qantas and China Eastern Airlines fly directly from Sydney to Nanjing.
- Sichuan Airlines flies directly from Sydney to Chongqing and from Melbourne to Chengdu.
- Many other airlines, including budget carriers AirAsia and Tigerair, fly indirectly to more locations China. Domestic flights can also connect you with your final destination.
- Another common way of entering China is by the rail bridge or ferry from Hong Kong.

### At the airport

China takes its borders seriously, so don't expect immigration officials to wave you through with a smile. Your paperwork is likely to be checked thoroughly, but you should have no problems as long as your passport, visa and entry/exit card (you'll be given this on the plane) are all in order.

If you're entering China on a [72-hour visa-free](#) transit, look for the appropriate queue in the immigration area.

**Departure tax** and airport fees should be included in the price of your ticket, so there's no need to worry about setting cash aside.

#### Beijing - Beijing Capital International Airport (PEK)

- 25km north-east of downtown Beijing.
- [Taxis](#) leave from outside all three terminals. All taxis should be metered and you may be charged extra for tolls and surcharges depending on when and where you go (see [rates](#)). The journey to the city centre takes about 45-60 minutes, depending on traffic.

- › The [Airport Express](#) subway line connects Terminals 2 and 3 with central Beijing in 20 minutes, and connects with the rest of Beijing's metro network. Trains leave every 12 minutes between 6:20am and 10:50pm.
- › [Shuttle buses](#) run to various parts of the city and to major hotels.
- › [Intercity buses](#) run long-distance services to locations outside of Beijing.
- › There is a [free shuttle bus](#) between the airport terminals.
- › Airport website: [en.bcia.com.cn](http://en.bcia.com.cn) (or see [travelchinaguide.com](http://travelchinaguide.com) for more detailed advice on transportation).
- › **Tip:** If you have a layover of more than eight hours, day tours to Beijing city or the Great Wall depart from (and return to) the airport.

### Shanghai - Shanghai Pudong International Airport (PVG)

- › 30km east of downtown Shanghai.
- › Taxis leave from an official taxi rank outside both terminals. They should be metered (see [rates](#)) and will cost more between the hours of 11pm and 5am. The journey to the city centre takes about 50 minutes, depending on traffic.
- › The [Maglev Train](#) runs express to Longyang Rd Station (where you can connect with taxis or the metro) in just eight minutes - at speeds of up to 430km/h! Trains leave every 15-20 minutes between 7am and 9:40pm.
- › [Metro Line 2](#) (Green) departs the airport at least every eight and a half minutes between 6am and 10pm, connecting with the rest of the metro network and with Shanghai's second airport, Hongqiao.

Tickets are much cheaper than the Maglev, but the journey can be slow, with many stops, and passengers from the airport have to change from a four-car train to an eight-car train at Guanglan Road Station.

- › [Shuttle buses](#) run to various parts of the city, to major hotels and to Hongqiao Airport.
- › [Intercity buses](#) run long-distance services to locations outside of Shanghai.
- › Airport website: [en.shairport.com/pudongair](http://en.shairport.com/pudongair) (or see [travelchinaguide.com](http://travelchinaguide.com) for more detailed advice on transportation).

### Guangzhou (Canton) - Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport (CAN)

- › 28km north of downtown Guangzhou.
- › Taxis leave from outside the terminal. Queues are generally quite orderly and all taxis should be metered, with an airport flag fall of 10 yuan and a 50% surcharge for trips longer than 35km. Depending on traffic, the journey takes about 40 minutes to the city centre.



- Metro Line 3 runs from the airport to the city, connecting with the rest of the metro network. It takes about 40 minutes to reach the city centre.
- [Shuttle buses](#) run to various parts of the city as well as major hotels.
- [Intercity buses](#) run to Shenzhen and other parts of Guangdong Province, and beyond.
- Airport website: [guangzhouairportonline.com](http://guangzhouairportonline.com) (information is limited on the official site, you'll find more useful advice on transportation at [travelchinaguide.com](http://travelchinaguide.com)).

**Scam alert:** Ignore anyone who approaches you in airport terminals offering you a lift. All Chinese airports have taxi ranks with licenced, metered taxis.

**Tip:** You'll need your hotel address written in Chinese characters. Some taxi drivers may not be able to read, so check that they understand where you want to go before you get in the cab. Another option is to call your hotel and have them give the driver directions.

## Key destinations and their airports

Beijing	<a href="#">Beijing Capital International Airport</a>	(PEK)
Shanghai	<a href="#">Shanghai Pudong International Airport</a>	(PVG)
	<a href="#">Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport</a>	(SHA)
Guangzhou (Canton)	<a href="#">Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport</a>	(CAN)
Shenzhen	<a href="#">Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport</a>	(SZX)
Chengdu	<a href="#">Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport</a>	(CTU)
Kunming	<a href="#">Kunming Changshui Airport</a>	(KMG)
Xi'an (75km to the Terracotta Warriors)	<a href="#">Xi'an Xianyang International Airport</a>	(XIY)
Chongqing	<a href="#">Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport</a>	(CKG)
Hangzhou	<a href="#">Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport</a>	(HGH)
Guilin (65km to Yangshuo)	<a href="#">Guilin Liangjiang International Airport</a>	(KWL)
Lijiang (120km to Tiger Leaping Gorge)	<a href="#">Lijiang Sanyi Airport</a>	(LJG)
Dalian	<a href="#">Dalian Zhoushuizi International Airport</a>	(DLC)



## Getting around

**Tip:** Check if you need to pre-book any tickets.

China has a population of 1.3 billion people and very few of them drive cars, so the public transport system is extensive and (for the most part) extremely efficient.

### Trains

One of the best ways to see China, and meet the locals, is on a train. Modern high-speed trains connect many of China's cities at speeds of up to 430km/h, but the old-style slow trains can also be a great way to travel.

High-speed trains have first- and second-class seats. Some services have business class 'pods' with reclining flat beds and complimentary drinks. Classic trains generally have four ticket classes: hard seat, soft seat, hard sleeper and soft sleeper. Some services offer a deluxe soft sleeper option - a two-berth compartment with private toilet.

**Tip:** Chinese trains usually have both western and squat-style toilets. It's a good idea to BYO toilet paper.

The official Chinese Railways website isn't available in English and doesn't accept foreign credit cards, but you can check train timetables and buy tickets up to 60 days in advance at [chinahighlights.com/china-trains](http://chinahighlights.com/china-trains), [china-diy-travel.com](http://china-diy-travel.com) or [chinatraintickets.net](http://chinatraintickets.net). Tickets can also be bought directly from train stations up to 58 days in advance, or via hotels or travel agents. Be sure to book ahead if you're travelling during peak times or if you want one of the better class seats. For more advice on train travel in China, including descriptions of specific trains, routes and ticket classes, see [seat61.com/China](http://seat61.com/China).

The China Trains app ([Apple](#) / [Android](#)) provides



country-wide train timetables and ticket booking.

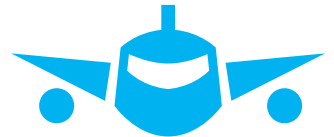
### Buses

Buses connect even more towns and cities in China than the train network. Fares are generally cheaper than trains, but journey times may be longer, depending on traffic. Vehicle types vary from comfortable air conditioned coaches to overnight sleepers fitted out with beds, or cheap and cheerful crowded mini buses. Tickets can be bought at bus stations (it's best to buy in advance) or through a local hotel or travel agent. Schedules are hard to find online, so ask your hotel or a travel agent for help.



### Domestic flights

Domestic flights connect over a hundred Chinese cities and are an ideal way to get around such a large country. Fares are competitively priced and some can be found on international booking sites, but you'll find a greater range on Chinese (English language) booking sites such as [chinahighlights.com](http://chinahighlights.com), [ctrip.com](http://ctrip.com) or [flychina.com](http://flychina.com).



**Booking tip:** The Chinese are very superstitious about numbers. Eight, associated with wealth, is the luckiest number, and four, associated with death, is the unluckiest. Often, people will avoid travelling on dates, times or flight/train/seat numbers with the number four in them, so you might find cheaper tickets, or more empty seats, if you look for the number four.

**Transport tip:** [rome2rio.com](http://rome2rio.com) is a great resource for working out how to get from A to B, anywhere in the world, by any means of transport.

The best way to get around towns and cities varies from place to place. Many Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, have excellent metro systems that are easy to use, even for English speakers (**tip:** the [China Metro](#) app provides timetables and information for metro systems in 15 different Chinese cities). Public buses may be more difficult to figure out. Bicycle hire and [bike share](#) are commonplace (cycling in China is not as scary as it looks - there's safety in numbers and many roads have separated cycleways). And of course, taxis are always easy to come by.



### Taxis

Taxis are everywhere in China, since very few people own private cars. You can hail one on the street or find them queuing outside train stations, airports and other hubs. Official taxis are metered, but you will encounter drivers with private cars willing to negotiate a flat fare. Often this will work out fine, occasionally you'll find yourself fleeced, or worse. If in doubt, opt for the licenced cab.



If you're feeling adventurous, a ride on the back of a motorcycle taxi can be cheaper and faster (and more fun) than a standard taxi. Be warned that your driver is unlikely to give you a helmet and it's very unlikely your [travel insurance](#) will cover you if you have an accident. Negotiate the fare before you accept a ride - obviously they don't have meters.

**Scam alert:** Taxi drivers have been known to take travellers to an alternative hotel, telling them their hotel is 'closed'. They've also been known to demand higher payment, for example by insisting the quoted price is 'per person', or to short-change passengers. If you have a problem with a taxi, note down the licence plate and driver ID number and make a complaint.

**Tip:** Always keep smaller notes on you, many taxi drivers won't have change for larger notes.

**Tip:** Make sure you have your hotel address written in Chinese characters, or take a photo of the hotel sign or street sign. Some taxi drivers may not be able to read, so check that they understand where you want to go before you get in the cab. Another option is to call your hotel and have them give your driver directions.

### Car hire

Car hire isn't an option for most tourists, since you need a local licence



to drive in China. Plenty of visitors hire private drivers or enlist taxis for a half day or full day. If you do this, make sure you agree on the rate first. Try to use a driver recommended by your hotel or by other travellers.

**Tip:** Have you booked your accommodation for at least the first night?

### Accommodation and tours

Accommodation options range from five-star hotels to cheap and crowded hostels. Bookings can be made on the usual sites, such as [wotif.com](http://wotif.com), [lastminute.com](http://lastminute.com), [booking.com](http://booking.com), [hotels.com](http://hotels.com), [expedia.com](http://expedia.com) or [hostels.com](http://hostels.com), or you may find a more competitive rate through the hotel's own website (if it has one, and if it's in English) or through a Chinese (English language) booking site such as [chinahighlights.com](http://chinahighlights.com) or [ctrip.com](http://ctrip.com). Check customer reviews on Tripadvisor before you book.

Airbnb can be a good place to find a cheap apartment rental or a homestay.

All foreign visitors are required to register with the Public Security Bureau (PSB) within 24 hours of arrival. If you're staying at a hotel, they'll do this for you. Otherwise you should report to the local police station.

Hotel taxes are generally included in the bill, but some cities, such as Guilin, Haikou, Sanya and Lijiang, charge tourists an "old town maintenance fee" or a "city construction fee".

Tours can be organised once you've arrived in China, or in advance through a travel agent or travel booking site. Search Tripadvisor or Viator for recommendations from other travellers.

If you're travelling in a group, hiring a private driver for

the day might be just as cheap, or cheaper, than joining an organised tour.

**Tip:** Most national parks charge an entry fee, and some have caps on the number of visitors.

**Travel to Tibet** must be organised through a travel agent in China in order to get the necessary permit.

Layover tours are available to travellers making use of the [72-hour visa-free pass](#). For example, bus trips run from Beijing airport to the Great Wall and back in under eight hours. Two- or three-day tours can also be arranged.

**Package tours** are a low-stress option for travellers who don't want to organise their flights, accommodation and on-the-ground transport separately. For deals, check airline and travel booking sites as well as travel agents. ■

