



GROUP TRAVEL 2008 PRE DEPARTURE INFORMATION GUIDE TO CHINA

Thank you for choosing Jetabout Asia Vacations for your journey into China.

We are enthralled by the magic of the Middle Kingdom and we're sure you will be too. To assist with your travel arrangements we have prepared the following pre-departure information. Please read this carefully before you travel to China and be mindful of some of our suggestions while you are traveling.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The first thing that strikes visitors to China is its vastness in terms of both geography and population. It is a country with an incredible history of dynastic rule, which was eventually replaced by communist domination and closed to the outside world for many years. However, modern day China has advanced far from the image of uniformly clothed peasant workers on bicycles. The country now has a growing middle class determined to practice their capitalist principles in what is still a communist political system. In larger cities you may experience the shove of railway station crowds, the noise of construction work and the sight of young entrepreneurs holding mobile phones and eating "fast food". But venture away from the large cities and you will be rewarded with an experience that stays with you for years after you leave. From the deserts of Xinjiang, to the Terracotta Warriors in Xian, from the beauty of the Li River near Guilin to the mystery of the "Silk Road", from the relaxing getaway towns of Yangshuo, Lijiang and Dali to Tibet's magnificent mountains and monasteries - China's diversity is more evident than perhaps in any other country in the world.

The travel industry in China has for quite some time now been growing at a rapid pace. However, there are still a number of areas in China where the freshness and novelty of tourism is still evident. Major cities now offer facilities and services at western standards; however traveling in the more remote areas of China may involve road travel on bumpy roads, noisy trains and the use of clean but more basic accommodation. You may also find that attitudes towards customer service may not always be at the standard you would expect in a western country.

Whilst traveling through China please also be prepared for possible changes to tour travel plans. Flight, train and boat schedule changes throughout China are common and are a reality of traveling through this part of the world. Travel Indochina and your tour leader or local guide will keep you fully informed of any changes and amendments to the order of sight-seeing. Be aware that if you plan to travel around Chinese national holidays (listed in this guide), you may experience more disruptions than usual to your normal itinerary.

RESPONSIBILITY

Information herein was correct at the time of preparation; however the rapid development of tourism in China has the potential to make some of the information in this guide irrelevant. This information is intended as a guide only and Jetabout Asia Vacations is not responsible for any inaccuracies. This document does not, in any way, alter the booking terms and conditions in our Jetabout Asia Vacations brochure. This document does not, in any way, alter the booking terms and conditions in our Jetabout Asia Vacations brochure. Please contact us with your comments if you find during the course of your travels that the information in this guide is incorrect or out of date.

VISA REQUIREMENTS & DEPARTURE TAXES

To enter China you will require a passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of entry. All persons entering China require a visa, and it is your responsibility to ensure you have the appropriate visas essential to your travel. Travelers require a tourist visa which must be obtained from a Chinese Embassy or Consulate abroad before arrival and is valid for all international points of entry into China.

No prior "letter of visa approval" is necessary. Previously, it was helpful if your client had a copy of an airline ticket or itinerary confirming that they are booked on an organized tour. This formality is changing as the country opens its doors to independent travelers.

Please Note: China visas are automatically **SINGLE ENTRY** unless you have specifically requested **MULTIPLE ENTRY** at the time of application and this is stamped into the passport. Please ensure clients have a multiple entry visa if they are intending to enter China twice on other travel arrangements (Important: this includes entering China from Hong Kong). It is difficult to change the status of a tourist visa from **SINGLE ENTRY** to **MULTIPLE ENTRY** once a client has arrived in China. Tourist visas are issued for 30 days unless a 60 day validity is specifically requested at time of application.

Tibet is a part of China and as such the normal China tourist visa applies for Tibet. In addition to the China tourist visa, permits are required for visits to each region of Tibet. Note that permits are arranged by Travel Indochina for client travel to Tibet and thus do not need to be arranged by the client or the agent. The client however does need to arrange the China visa in advance of arrival into China and a copy of this visa will need to be faxed to Travel Indochina office. This application process can be more complicated if the client specifies they will be visiting Tibet on their visa form. In such cases the Chinese Embassy or Consulate may request a "Visa Invitation Letter" to be obtained from the Tibet Tourism Bureau. Travel Indochina can assist with obtaining this at a small additional cost but it is recommended you allow a minimum of ten working days for processing.

Rates charged by embassies and consulates abroad for China visas vary but are usually in the range of \$US30 to \$US60. The visa application process usually takes approximately five to ten days.

Hong Kong: Note that visitors from most countries, including citizens of the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada and Japan, can enter Hong Kong (a Special Administrative Region of China) without a visa for periods of 90 days to six months, depending on nationality. Check with any Chinese embassy or consulate for the latest status.

ARRIVAL INSTRUCTIONS

The ground operator taking you through China is **Travel Indochina**.

If you have pre-arranged an airport arrival transfer you will find a representative from Travel Indochina waiting to meet you outside the customs hall. Please look for a sign with your name on it (not a hotel sign). The airport arrival area tends to get crowded with lots of people holding signs, so you may need to look carefully for your transfer. If you cannot find a sign with your name please call the relevant emergency contact numbers that should also be listed on your itinerary:

Beijing: 1370 124 3678

Kunming: 1370 889 1687

If you have no airport arrival transfer pre-arranged, metered taxis are available at the airport. To catch a metered taxi, make your way out to the "Taxi Stand" (labeled in English) directly outside the airport terminal building. Taxis will be queued at the taxi stand. Board the taxi as directed by staff and make sure that the taximeter is turned on once your journey begins. You should not pay more than USD\$15 to reach your hotel in Beijing or Shanghai, and even less in Kunming. Any road tolls are to be paid by the passenger (usually at the end of the journey).

There are also usually a number of taxi touts outside the customs hall more than willing to take you to your hotel - be aware of these though as they will usually charge an inflated price or their meter may tick over at a faster rate.

INSURANCE

You must be comprehensively insured as a condition of traveling with Jetabout Asia Vacations. Insurance should cover personal accident and medical expenses, evacuation and repatriation, baggage loss, and cancellation or curtailment of holiday. Insurance details must be supplied to us at the time of booking, and where they are not provided we reserve the right to cancel bookings and apply charges as per our cancellation policy. Travelers will be asked to present their insurance details upon arrival in Asia as part of a registration process, and in the event that possession of insurance is unable to be confirmed, in the interests of the traveler and fellow travelers, Travel Indochina reserves the right to prevent participation in the journey. In such instances, we will assist with onward travel arrangements, however full cancellation penalties will apply. Note that travel insurance 'attached' to credit cards is often limited in scope (eg. not covering serious medical, repatriation or evacuation expenses) and in any case is usually effective only if travel arrangements have been purchased with the card. Please note also that government regulations in Asia do not always require or enforce the possession of liability insurance by hotels, transport and other suppliers. Even when insurance is in place, it can be for very limited coverage only. Travel Indochina does its best to work with suppliers who possess liability insurance, however it is not always possible to find and contract with such suppliers. Travelers who book private touring arrangements with Travel Indochina will also be asked to provide insurance details at the commencement of touring, as part of a tour registration process.

MONEY

The currency in China and Tibet is known as the Renminbi (RMB) or "People's money". This basic unit of currency is informally known as the Yuan (Y). Hong Kong has its own currency, the Hong Kong Dollar (HK\$). Approximate exchange rates as follows at time of print but you are advised to check prevailing rates prior to your travel:

Y 7.6 / HK\$7.8 equals US\$1

Y7.1 / HK\$7.4 equals CAD\$1

You are advised to carry a mix of cash and travelers checks (US\$, AUD\$, CAD\$ & GBPE are accepted throughout major cities of China). Travelers checks can be exchanged at most major hotels. It is a good idea to keep the exchange receipts as you may need these if you want to change the Chinese currency back to your local currency at the end of your trip. Credit cards can be used in many of the hotels and in some shops and restaurants in major cities; however they are not widely accepted in more rural areas. Visa and Mastercard are the most commonly accepted in cards. Cash advances can be obtained using these cards at most Bank of China branches. ATM access is available throughout the country at Bank of China particularly in the bigger cities. When the ATM is not working, you can get cash out over the counter. This is usually only during business hours and you may need to have your passport with you to do this.

CLIMATE

Because of its size, China has great climatic diversity. In general the best time to visit China is during spring and autumn (May and October), when temperatures are less extreme. Tibet and the mountainous areas of western China are most comfortable in summer and late spring/early autumn (June to August). Note however that pleasant climates will usually also be accompanied by more crowds of tourists.

In the north around Beijing, summer is from May to August. During these months it can get very hot and humid with temperatures rising to 85 or 95 degrees, but the average temperature is generally cooler. Winter in the north is from December to March and can be extremely harsh and cold with chilly temperatures often below zero degrees Celsius. Snowfall during mid winter is not uncommon. Spring and autumn have warm days and cool nights with average temperatures 70 to 90 degrees.

In the south, summer is from April to September and is generally wet, hot and humid except in mountainous areas in Yunnan. Winter in the south from December to March is short and chilly and can get down to 30 to 40 degrees at night but is generally milder than the north. Spring and autumn have pleasant temperatures around 70 to 80 degrees, but can be wet.

Central China around Shanghai, Nanjing & sections of the Yangtze, experience brief cold winters where temperatures can slip below 30. Summer between May and September is long, hot and humid.

The northwest part of China around Turpan along the Silk Road is characterized by bitter cold winters (November to March) and intense dry hot summers (July to August).

The high altitude areas of Zhongdian (North West Yunnan), Xiahe (Gansu province), and Jiuzhaigou (Sichuan province) have much cooler climates and are more likely to experience sudden changes in weather. It is possible for these mountainous areas to have freezing temperatures even during the spring and summer periods.

As Tibet is at an average altitude of 4000m, year-round temperatures are quite cool. The weather is very changeable and it is not uncommon to experience four seasons in one day.

Highs in the summer (June to August) reach 70 degrees and the winter months can see the temperatures plummeting below 15 degrees with fierce winds.

BAGGAGE & CLOTHING

Your baggage should be clearly labeled and kept to a reasonable minimum. Luggage limits on airlines are strictly enforced and space on vehicles and trains is limited. Porters are not always available, so be prepared to carry your own bags. You should be capable of carrying your own bags on and off trains, and up and down stairs. Comfortable casual clothes made of cotton are best in tropical and semi tropical climates - packing one set of smart casual clothes is advisable. Laundry services are available throughout the country, although hotel laundry costs can be expensive. We suggest you include:

- Flat walking shoes and sandals
- Hat & sunglasses
- Jumper/coat/thermals - if visiting in winter
- Bathers & beach towel
- Money belt
- Raincoat or umbrella
- Basic first aid kit (see below)
- Insect repellent
- Alarm clock
- Small torch
- Swiss Army pocketknife
- Power adapter
- Slide or any specialized film if used (print film is widely available in China)
- Women's sanitary products
- Ear plugs and eye patches for the train

Please note that airlines insist all sharp items (knives, scissors, nail clippers etc.) are packed in your 'check-in' luggage!

ELECTRICITY

The electric current in China operates on 220 volts. Electric plug types come in at least four sizes and vary throughout the country, however the two rounded pin standard plug is usable in most parts of the country. You will need to purchase a power adaptor suitable for this region prior to your departure. You may want to bring a small hair dryer or portable iron, as not all hotels will have these.

HEALTH

Travelers to Indochina should take precautions as they would elsewhere in Asia. In remote areas medical facilities can be particularly basic. Some of the diseases known to exist in Indochina include malaria, hepatitis A & B, typhoid, tuberculosis, Japanese encephalitis, dengue fever, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, rabies and HIV/AIDS. We recommend you take adequate preventative measures to minimize your risk of exposure to these health risks. We are a travel company and we are not qualified to provide detailed medical information appropriate to your individual needs; it is recommended you consult with your local doctor or a specialist travel medical centre for current health information on vaccinations and medicine for your trip at least one month prior to departure.

We suggest you bring:

- Aspirin or paracetamol

- Antihistamine
- Cold & flu tablets
- Diarrhea medication
- Nausea medication
- Rehydration sachets
- Insect repellent
- Antiseptic & bandages
- Sunscreen & lip balm
- Antibiotics (discuss with your doctor)

As part of our registration process at the start of any trip with Travel Indochina, you will be asked to declare any serious pre-existing medical conditions or allergies.

FOOD & WATER

Chinese food incorporates a number of styles and each region specializes in its own cuisine. Breakfast is included each day on our tours and is usually buffet style. In the major cities lunch should cost around RMB50 and dinner RMB50-100 - depending on the restaurant. Meals are generally cheaper in small rural towns or more remote regions such as along the Silk Road in Northwest China. Vegetarian meals are available but can be harder to find outside of the bigger cities. Please ensure your tour leader or local guide are aware of special dietary requirements in advance so they can assist you with ordering suitable food. Drinking local tap water is not recommended. Bottled water is cheap and readily available throughout China.

SAFETY & SECURITY

China is generally a safe country; however petty street crime is on the rise as tourist numbers increase. In larger cities we recommend you wear as little jewellery as possible and make sure your spending money is kept in a secure place close to your body. We also recommended you take taxis rather than walk at night. Taxis are mostly metered and inexpensive, but make sure the driver activates the meter and clear on your destination - carry a hotel card so your taxi driver knows where to take you as many drivers cannot read or speak English. Only take essentials out with you on the streets. Leave valuables (passport, credit cards, excess cash, jewellery) in hotel safety deposit boxes where available. It would also be advisable to make photocopies of your passport, credit card numbers, and airline tickets, and keep a detailed record of your travelers checks. These documents should be kept in a safe place separate from the originals. When traveling on trains, clients may wish to take extra precautions with their finances by using money belts.

POST & COMMUNICATION

International mail generally takes 10 to 14 days to reach its destination and prices are a little less than western postal charges. Parcels must be inspected by a customs official at the post office before being sealed and boxes are usually available at the post office. Reverse charge (collect) calls are available in many cities. International phone and fax facilities are widely available however they are expensive (RMB20-30 per min). International direct dial is available from most hotels for additional charges but the service is not always reliable. Email services are inexpensive and available in almost all tourist areas. Hotels often have internet and email services which are convenient but a little more costly.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Print film, such as Kodak, Konika or Fuji is widely available and costs approximately RMB30 per roll. China has good and fast processing facilities. A roll of 24 exposures can be developed for approximately RMB40. Slide films, APS and Hi8/V8 video cassettes are not widely available outside major cities. The x-ray machines at all airports are film safe. Digital photography is easily catered for in key cities in China and most film developers are able to place digital photos onto a disc for approximately RMB40 (256mb). Take care to request that the memory stick is not wiped after the download.

HOTELS

In the cities, all hotels we use have private western style bathrooms, hot water, air-conditioning, television, IDD telephones, laundry and other facilities. Where possible we will endeavor at passenger's request to accommodate couples in double rooms. Please note however that on occasions during your journey, this may not be possible and a twin room will be supplied. All cabins on the Yangtze cruises will be twin rooms. Some group tour itineraries involve overnight stops at basic towns, where the accommodation is clean but basic.

Check in and check out times can vary by hotel but most hotels in China require guests to check out by 12 noon and do not allow check in until 2pm. Many hotels may allow an earlier check in or later check out subject to availability on the day. However, if you are arriving early in the morning to a destination or leaving late in the evening you should consider pre-booking a guaranteed early check in/late check out. The additional cost varies from hotel to hotel but is usually between 50-100% of the nightly rate.

TRANSPORT

On the road we generally use late model air-conditioned buses with either 26 or 30 seats - depending on the size of the group. Modern sedan cars and minibuses are used for transporting smaller numbers. Most tours include domestic flights. China has a number of regional airlines that operate relatively modern fleets, however schedules frequently change and this can sometimes result in alterations to your tour program. Some tours also involve overnight rail journeys. Accommodation (1st class) is in mixed gender, four berth, soft sleeper cabins that are usually air-conditioned. These have 2 lower bunks and 2 upper bunks with storage space underneath the lower bunks and above the door to the cabin. Sheets and blankets are provided and are generally of good standard. Note that many Asian train stations will have crowded areas and lots of stairs. Keep this in mind when packing luggage as it not only needs to fit into the areas designated for storage on overnight or day trains, but you will also need to carry it on and off trains and through train stations.

GROUP DYNAMICS

Our small group journeys provide you with a good balance of group activity and personal discovery. Travelers need to be aware of certain personal responsibilities when traveling with a group. Simple things like being ready at agreed times and keeping to schedule will ensure the smooth running of the program. Furthermore, the traditions and culture of the country you are visiting should be respected. Correct behavior includes wearing the appropriate dress when visiting religious sites and refraining from making comments or acting in a manner that would be viewed as unacceptable by your fellow group members or by the local people in the country you are visiting. Please ask your tour leader for further clarification of the issues mentioned above.

TOUR LEADERS & GUIDES

Providing the group tour reaches a minimum of seven passengers a western tour leader will guide you on your entire journey through China. All our tour leaders have an in-depth knowledge of China and an enthusiasm for the country that is contagious. Your tour leader is your link with China and is there to ensure the smooth running of the trip. Your tour leader will try - wherever practicable - to cater for your individual interests. Local English-speaking guides also accompany you on your tour. They impart local information about history, customs and culture that can only come from living in the area. Generally we have a different local guide for each city or region we visit and so local guides are usually only with the group for one to two days.

LOCAL TIME

China is set to Beijing time:

- 13hrs ahead of Canada Eastern Time
- 16hrs ahead of Canada Pacific Time
- 13hrs ahead of US Eastern Time.
- 16hrs ahead of US Pacific Time.

SHOPPING

Clothing, paintings, scrolls, silk, ceramics, antiques and a huge selection of souvenirs are favorite buys for visitors. A few guidelines to follow when shopping:

- Except in department stores, bargaining is the norm. To get the best price you will have to haggle hard.
- Export of certain antiques is not permitted. Make sure you are aware of relevant regulations before purchasing.
- Fake reproductions are common. Make sure you know what you are buying - especially in the case of antiques.

MASSAGE SERVICES

Many countries in Asia are deservedly renowned for their massage techniques and the quality and value for money of these services. Unfortunately, many massage parlors including some in otherwise 'reputable' hotels are also linked to the paid sex industry. We advise you to check carefully before using massage services in Asia.

LANGUAGE

The official Chinese language is Mandarin (or Putonghua). There are also numerous dialects spoken throughout different parts of China, including Cantonese. The Lonely Planet phrasebook is recommended for those wanting to learn more about Chinese languages.

IMPORTANT DATES AFFECTING TOURING

5 Feb - 14 Feb 2008 - Chinese New Year / Spring Festival:

Public holiday across the country. Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Potential cancellations and schedule changes to touring, flights, trains and hotel bookings. Significantly more crowds at popular sites due to increase in numbers of domestic tourists traveling.

30 Apr - 8 May 2008 - International Labor Day:

Public holiday across the country. Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Potential cancellations and schedule changes to touring, flights, trains and hotel bookings. Significantly more crowds at popular sites due to increase in numbers of domestic tourists traveling.

Late Sep/ Early Oct 2008 (exact dates still to be released) - Formula 1 / Grand Prix in Shanghai:

Increased number of visitors to Shanghai for the Grand Prix event. More crowds at tourist sites, and limited hotel availability. Surcharges applied to hotel bookings. Potential cancellations and schedule changes to touring, flights, trains and hotel bookings.

30 Sep - 8 Oct 2008 - Chinese National Day:

Public holiday across the country. Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Potential cancellations and schedule changes to touring, flights, trains and hotel bookings. Significantly more crowds at popular sites due to increase in numbers of domestic tourists traveling.

GROUND OPERATOR CONTACT DETAILS

The ground operator taking you through this fascinating part of the world is **Travel Indochina**. Travel Indochina has been running tours to Asia since 1993, and offers unique, innovative and exciting itineraries that allow you to experience the best a destination has to offer as well as giving you plenty of free time to explore.

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