

Visiting China

China is a vast country with countless attractions for the traveller. China is as diverse as it is large, and it is difficult to generalize about many aspects of the country. This section provides an overview of things the traveller should know, based mainly on the experience of visitors to the major population centres. If you will be travelling off the beaten path, take extra time to research your destination carefully, and be prepared for the unexpected.

Travel

The Chinese government has been gradually opening the country to outside influences since 1978. Every year, additional parts of China are opened to visitors. But travel permits are still required for some parts of the country. If you will be travelling outside established tourist areas, find out in advance if you will require a permit. Travel permits can be obtained from local offices of the Public Security Bureau.

All foreigners (tourists, visitors or long-term residents) are required to register their place of residence with the local Public

Security Bureau within 24 hours of arrival. If you are staying in a hotel, this is done as part of the check-in process. Those staying with family or friends in a private home must also observe this requirement. Failure to do so can result in fines and/or detention.

The simplest form of travel within China is scheduled air services. Air China, the national airline, and its regional carriers serve all the major cities. Domestic flights generally involve large wide-bodied jets. Tickets can be obtained from any travel agency, or directly from Air China or one of the many domestic carriers serving the regional markets, such as China Eastern or China Southern. Departure taxes are levied at both domestic and international airports.

China has an extensive system of passenger trains, providing an interesting way to see the countryside. Most trains are slow, although there are express trains on the well-travelled routes. Many visitors consider a train trip to be an adventure as well as part of the cultural experience, and overnight trips offer a fascinating look at Chinese life.