

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.

Taxis are plentiful in major cities and can be obtained at hotels or taxi stands. Drivers generally don't speak English, so you should arrange for a Chinese-speaking person to write out your destination in detail on a card before you go. Rental cars are available only in the largest cities, generally only with a driver. To drive a vehicle in China, you must obtain a Chinese driver's licence, which is available only to those foreigners who possess a residency permit. Cars with experienced Chinese drivers may be hired at a reasonable cost.

Tipping is not necessary, but it is no longer considered an insult and may be expected in some

situations, especially in foreign hotels.

### *Time*

In spite of its large size, all of China is in one time zone, which is GMT+8 or EST+13. However, customary opening and closing hours vary significantly across the country. Daylight savings time is not used.

### *Language*

The official spoken language of China is *Putonghua* (standard language or common speech), or Mandarin, but there are dozens of regional dialects including Cantonese, Shanghainese and Sichuanese. Cantonese is usually spoken in Hong Kong and adjacent Guangdong province. Mandarin is spoken in Beijing and throughout most of China.

Business meetings (outside Hong Kong) are likely to take place in Mandarin. Interpreters are readily available at reasonable prices and can often be arranged through your hotel. Many Chinese people are studying English, so don't be surprised if you meet people who want to practise their English.