

WestChina

Adventure Tours

in association with



Hiddenchina.net

Horse Riding/Trekking Tour Jiadengyu - Lake Kanas

- Ride a horse or trek along River Kanas and River Hemu to nomad villages and the deepest freshwater lake in China
- Stay overnight at local family inns, in yurts or tents
- Get in touch with the local Tuwa minority
- Visit one of China's most impressive birdwatcher's paradises



HORSE RIDING/TREKKING TOUR FROM JIADENGYU TO LAKE KANAS

This tour will lead you to nomad villages like Hemu and Baihaba in the north-western part of Xinjiang, to China's deepest freshwater lake surrounded by snowcapped mountains and a birdwatcher's paradise around the alpine Black Lake, Lake Kanas and Lake Baisha and is specially designed for people, who want to explore this quiet, mountainous region with its lakes, mountains and forests on horseback or on foot, observe the local people's ancient way of life amidst impressive scenery far away from the noise of the big high-tech cities.

- Best Travel Date: 16th – 23rd September
- Destinations: Burqin, Jiadengyu, Hemu, Black Lake, Lake Kanas, Baihaba, Lake Baisha
- Duration: 8 days
- Starting in: Beijing
- Ending in: Beijing (optional extension possible)
- Group size: min. 6 pax, max. 10 pax

QUICK INTRODUCTION

Hemu:

Hemu is located in the northern part of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, tucked within the hills and among the lush birch woods of Burqin County, near China's borders at Mongolia, Russia and Kazakhstan. Receiving no mobile phone signals, the villagers rely on satellite telephones to contact the outside world and only a few government offices have electricity. Hemu is inhabited by several hundred families descended from nomadic Mongols, Kazakhs, and Tuvas.

Kanas:

"Kanas" is Mongolian for "The Lake in the Canyon". Lake Kanas is an alpine lake hidden in the deep forest of the Altai Mountains and is China's deepest freshwater lake (the deepest area of this lake being about 184 meters). It is also a paradise for birdwatchers as about 117 different kinds of birds make their home along this lake. It covers an area of 44.78 square km. Its heavenly scenery consists of the surrounding snowcapped mountain, dark green forests, colorful butterflies and blossoming wild flowers.

The area around Lake Kanas is the only part of China that has plants and animals typical of south Siberian flora and fauna. Trees include the tall, straight Siberian larch, pagoda-shaped Siberian dragon spruce, sturdy Korean pine and Siberian fir. The known numbers of species living here amount to 798 plants and over 200 animals, birds, fishes and insects, many of which you do not find in other parts of Xinjiang and even China. With its forests, pastures, lakes and rivers the colorful nature is of great value for tourism, scientific research, history and culture.

Climate:

The Kanas is situated in the cool temperature zone. The long winter season lasts seven months; spring and autumn link up without a clear summer all the year round and frost-free period reaches 80 to 108 days. From early June to Mid-October each year, the climate here is pleasant; the mean temperature is around 16°C, with relative humidity of 63% even in the hottest month of July.

Best time for trekking:

July to September

During this time the temperature averages between 14.2 and 18.8 degree centigrade. Changing weather can turn a sunny sky into a mostly cloudy sky very quickly as it often rains in the late afternoon and evening.

Options: horse riding or trekking

Travelers who have horse-riding experience may cover a greater distance. You could actually enjoy galloping across a vast plain on the 3rd and 4th day.

But if you have never ridden a horse before, it might get quite painful after the initial excitement; especially if the horse breaks into a canter or goes at a gallop. You would rather want the horse to walk or trot. Furthermore, it might be difficult to take pictures when you have to take care of your horse.

For first-time riders it would not make a great difference when it comes to distance, although you could rest your feet from time to time when you sit on the back of your horse. For non-experienced riders we recommend that two people share one horse.

DAY 1 BEIJING - URUMQI - ALTAI - BURQIN (L/D)



After your arrival you will be picked up by your guide. Then you drive 110km (1.5 hours) to Burqin. During the drive we will have a chance to see the Black Aerolites Hill, Altai grassland, Eerqis River - China's only river that runs into the Arctic Ocean (it originates from south Mt. Altai, 546km long in China, covering an area of 57,000 square km, with an annual flow of 12 billion cubic meters). In the

evening you can stroll around this charming little town on the banks of River Eerqis and see how people live on what the river produces and you can visit the night market in this northernmost territory of Xinjiang. You will stay overnight at a 3 star hotel (the best hotel available in Burqin).

Flight details: HU 7245, departure 07:55, arrival 11:50
 CZ 6845, departure 13:30, arrival 14:45

DAY 2	BURQIN - JIADENGYU - HEMU DELTA - KANAS	(B/L/D)
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We meet our horses in Jiadengyu Village. The local guide will take care that the villagers will provide us with the best horses available. The moment we start our journey on foot or on horseback, you will enjoy the impressive scenery that never reveals itself to bus tourists. After 4km we will be traveling along River Kanas until we reach the delta where River Kanas joins River Hemu, where we will camp 2.5km north of it.



Scenery: birch forest, rivers, fields, Bulalehan Bridge
 Drive: 130km
 Ride/Walk: 21km
 Grading: mild climbing, downhill
 Accommodation: camping
 Food: packed meals (meat, vegetables, rice)

DAY 3	DELTA - HEMU	(B/L/D)
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Walking in the flat and broad valley, we will come across forests and grassland. A little bridge shows us the way to Hemu Village. The evening is at your own disposal to watch the sunset over this nomad village, visit the local school and observe the shepherds coming home with their sheep and cattle. We will stay in a family inn and be treated with a local feast cooked by the owner's family. You even have the opportunity to sauna in a wooden cabin.

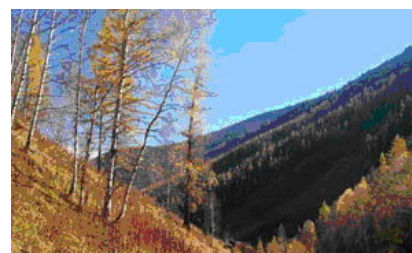


Hemu Village is inhabited by Mongols, Kazak and Tuwa people. Some scholars hold the view that Tuwa people are offspring of the old, weak, sick and disabled soldiers left by Genghis Khan when he led his troops to attack the West. But Tuwa elders say that their ancestors migrated from Siberia 500 years ago, and that they are the same ethnic group as the Tuwa people of the Tuwa Republic of Russia. The village is surrounded by mountains with poplar and birch trees on the outskirts. At dinner time, you will see nomads herd their animals back home and smoke rising from kitchen chimneys. The village is rarely known to most travelers, fortunately in this way it could preserve its old way of life.

Ride/Walk: 13km

DAY 4 HEMU - BLACK LAKE (B/L/D)

We recommend you to get up early as you do not want to miss the opportunity to take a few pictures of the sunrise over this the misty valley. The path starts to ascend more steeply as we get closer to the Black Lake. The surrounding snowcapped mountains throw a shadow on the water, hence the name “Black Lake”. You will witness a fascinating sunset in this unique place.



Accommodation: camping or yurt

Ride/Walk: 24km

Temperature: This will be the coldest night of the trip; temperatures could drop to 0°C.

DAY 5 BLACK LAKE - LAKE KANAS (B/L/D)

We will say goodbye to our horses and set out on foot. A walk through the sky-reaching pine forest leads us towards Lake Kanas (or Hanas). We will arrive early in the afternoon and spend some time wandering around Lake Kanas - a great alpine lake located in a beautiful valley.



Walk: 6km

Accommodation: 3 star twin standard in Kanas Lake Resort

DAY 6 LAKE KANAS - BAIHABA (B/L/D)

In the morning you can get a spectacular bird’s eye view of Lake Kanas on top of the hill. You could also visit a local Tuwa family or go rafting on the lake (optional). For the night we set out for an undisturbed village – Baihaba – the most north-western village of China, bordering Kazakhstan.

Food: home-made dishes

Accommodation: family inn in Baihaba Village

DAY 7 BAIHABA - LAKE BAISHA - BURQIN (B/L)

Capture some pictures of the sunrise (around 9am) before we head back to Burqin. You will drive amidst impressive scenery, forests, lakes and mountains.

Drive: 494km

Accommodation: 3 star hotel (the best hotel available in Burqin)

DAY 8 ALTAI - URUMQI - BEIJING/OPTIONAL EXTENSION (B/L)

We drive 1.5hr to Altai to catch the morning flight to Urumqi and your next destination.

Please read our section about [optional extensions](#) of this trip.

[Contact us](#) per mail for a tailor-made itinerary.

Our other trekking tours in China:

[17-days Northern Yunnan and Eastern Tibet](#)

[9-days Silk Road – Mount Bogda](#)

RATES

Group Size	Rate per person		Specification
	RMB	Euro	
6-8	8,200	820	
	7,800	780	Walk (without horse)
	8,600	860	With horse all the time
9-10	7,200	720	
	6,800	680	Walk (without horse)
	7,600	760	With horse all the time
Other group size	Please contact us for detailed information.		

INCLUDED SERVICES:

- experienced tour leader for all days, English/Chinese-speaking
- local trekking tour guides
- all transfers as mentioned in the itinerary
- horses and porter to help carry the equipment
- horses to ride (2 people share one horse)
- in the cities accommodation in selected hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- outside the cities accommodation in simple but clean guesthouses in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- on camping trips, tent (double occupancy), Karrimat mats or similar, sleeping bags will be provided. However it is suggested to bring your own sleeping bag for sanitary purposes.
- all meals except on free afternoons/evenings (outlined as B,L,D: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)
- entrance tickets for attractions and activities as stated in the itinerary
- trekking gear except personal clothing on trekking + camping tours

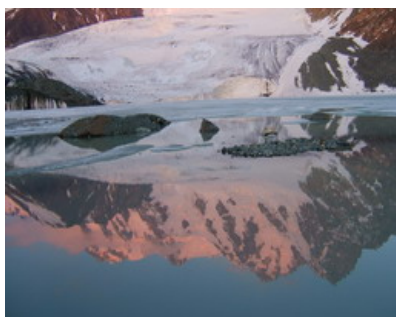
Please visit our website www.hiddenchina.net for more information.

NOT INCLUDED:

- international flights
- flights to and from Urumqi (due to the fluctuation of the flight ticket rates, but we will help clients to book tickets with the best discount rate we can get)
- expenses of personal nature such as laundry, tips, etc.
- alcoholic drinks, food and beverages other than those provided
- tips for drivers, tour guides or leaders
- personal clothing on trekking tours
- insurances (travel insurance, travel cancellation insurance)
- repatriation flights in case of emergencies (REGA membership is recommended)

INSURANCE IS RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARTICIPANT!**Optional Extension 1****- 3.5 days Kashgar, Karakul Lake and overnight in yurt****DAY 8 URUMQI - KASHGAR**

In the late afternoon we will drive to the airport and fly to Kashgar. After arrival in the westernmost city in China we will get picked up by our local driver. We will have dinner at a wonderful orchard sitting under a grape trellis. One or two local Uygur authority men, who will help us to understand more on the life and customs of this minority, will be invited to join the dinner. You can also watch or take part in a Uygur dance performance. (optional: 60 CNY/6 Euro per person). The rest of the evening after the dinner is free.

DAY 9 KASHGAR - KARAKUL LAKE

We will have breakfast at the “Caravan Western Restaurant”, run by several foreigners, who have been living in Kashgar for as long as 15 years and have learnt the Uygur language. Have a chat with them and learn why these expatriates chose to live in this fabulous city.

After breakfast we will visit the renowned Sunday Bazaar, which has been operating since ancient times, and the scale has become larger and larger, attracting merchants from all over Xinjiang and neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Kirghizstan. Farmers from the suburbs of Kashgar come to the bazaar early in the morning, using various means of transportation, such as bicycles, motorcycles, tractors, trucks and donkey-drawn carts. The highways leading to Kashgar are crowded with these vehicles and pedestrians on Sunday mornings, as well as with flocks of sheep.

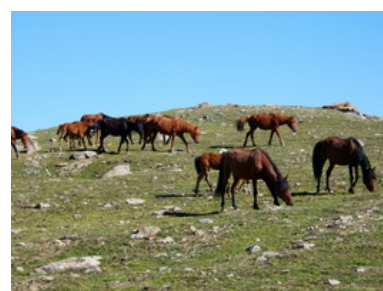
Afterwards we head to Karakul Lake (5-6hours), located approximately 200km from Kashgar. At an altitude of 3600m, it is the highest lake of the Pamir plateau. Surrounded by mountains which remain snow-covered throughout the year, the three highest peaks visible from the lake are the Muztagata (7546m), Kongur Tagh (7649m) and Kongur Tiube (7530m).

Explore a rural Uyghur village on the way by donkey cart. And check out a small musical instrument workshop. You will cross green fields under the bright blue sky, Uyghur men and women working under the sun in the fields, and if you are lucky you may see very pretty female Uyghur donkey cart drivers. Once again you will have a unique opportunity to take outstanding pictures of this beautiful region and its lovely people.

We will stop on the way for lunch and arrive at Karakul Lake in the afternoon. You will have free time to walk around the lake, ride a horse, visit Tajik yurts and enjoy the sunset. In the evening we will have an outdoor barbecue dinner and stay overnight in a Tajik yurt or camp.

DAY 10 KARAKUL LAKE - KASHGAR

We recommend you to get up early in the morning to take a few pictures of the sunrise amidst impressive scenery. After breakfast in a Tajik yurt we drive back to Kashgar and cycle around the city to check out some historical sites. We will have lunch on the way from Karakul Lake back to Kashgar.



DAY 11 KASHGAR



Many streets in the old districts of this city have "bazaar" as part of their names. Although most of the bazaars have ceased to exist except in name, there are still some that are still in use. From the names of these streets people can imagine the past glory of this ancient trading city on the Old Silk Road. Today we go shopping at the International Bazaar and around the more than 500 years old Atigar Mosque, the largest mosque in Xinjiang, situated on Atigar Square in the center of the city.

Your driver will take you to the airport for your flight to Urumqi and back home.

Group Size	Rate per person	
	RMB	Euro
1 – 10	1,600	160

Optional Extension 2

- 1.5 days Turpan: Emin Minaret, Astana Tombs, Jiaohe Silk Road Kingdom

DAY 8 URUMQI - TURPAN

After arrival at the airport in Urumqi we drive to Turpan – which is a basin in the mountains of eastern Xinjiang and is also called “an oasis in the desert”. You will explore a 2000-years old village outside of Turpan in the afternoon and stay overnight in Turpan.

DAY 9 TURPAN

Today we will go to the ruins of “Jiaohe”. Jiaohe - about 10 kilometers west of Turpan County - was a strategically important city on the ancient Silk Road that travelers must pass through. Afterwards we will visit the Astana ancient tombs, which used to serve as the cemetery of the citizens of Gaochang from 273 in the Western Jin Dynasty to 778 in the Tang Dynasty and where mummies were discovered. Gaochang is situated at the foot of the Flaming Mountains, was founded in the first century B.C. and abandoned by the end of the 13th century.



The next highlight will be Emin Minaret, which is the largest extant old tower in Xinjiang and the only Islamic tower among the hundred famous towers in China. Standing 2 km east of Turpan, Emin Minaret was built in 1777 in honor of the heroic Turpan general, Emin Khoja. He was an outstanding patriot who defended the unification of China throughout his life.

You will then explore the “Karez” System, an irrigation system of wells connected by underground channels, considered as one of the three great ancient projects in China, the other two being the Great Wall and the Grand Canal. The structure of the karez basically consists of wells, underground channels, ground canals and small reservoirs. Your driver will take you to the airport for your flight to Beijing and back home.

Group Size	Rate per person	
	RMB	Euro
1	2,700	270
2 – 10	1,800	180
Single supplement	450	45

Optional Extension 3

- 3.5 days trekking tour to the base camp of Mount Bogda

DAY 8 URUMQI - TREKKING TOUR

After a briefing with the Urumqi mountaineering association, you will collect your gear and buy supplies for the trekking. Then we drive 1.5 hours to the starting point. After a two to three hours walk we arrive at the camp, where we stay overnight.



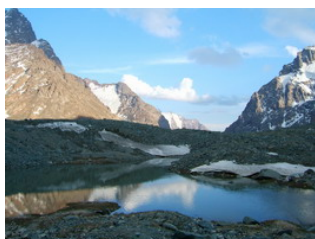
DAY 9 URUMQI - MT. BOGDA



For today's ascension we need to rent horses from the Kazak. After arrival at the base camp of Bogda peak, we will have a "feast" at a height of 3250m above sea level.

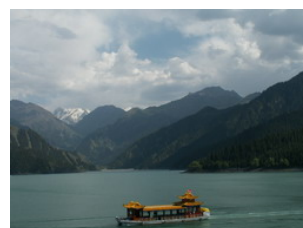
Note: Take several batteries for your camera as you will certainly want to take a lot of pictures of this picturesque, breath-taking area.

DAY 10 MT. BOGDA - TIAN CHI - URUMQI



We make our way back to Urumqi. You can choose to ride or to walk. Visit a local Kazak family and join them for lunch or snacks. Inquire about the Hazak nomads and discuss about their changing way of life: in 5 years you will not see their yurts together with their horses, sheep and oxen, as the government will force them to leave the area and find a new life in towns and cities.

In the afternoon we will reach the south bank of "Tian Chi", the Heavenly Lake. The Heavenly Lake is situated to the east of the Tianshan Mountain range, north of Bogda Peak, 97 km south of Urumqi. Known as Yaochi in ancient times, the lake surface elevates 1,910 meters above sea level, with an average depth of 60 meters. Surrounding the Heavenly Lake are snow mountains, glaciers, forests and grassland alpine lakes, featuring a vertical natural landscape belt. We will cross the lake on a speed boat. After arrival in Urumqi, we will get picked up by our driver. After check-in at the hotel you will be rewarded with the last lamb feast in Xinjiang.



DAY 11 URUMQI - BEIJING

Your driver will take you to the airport for your flight to Beijing and back home.

Group Size	Rate per person	
	RMB	Euro
1	2,600	260
2	1,700	170
3 - 10	1,500	150

Please visit our website www.hiddenchina.net for more information.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Traveling in China, especially off the beaten tracks and in rural areas, can be adventurous and carries also a certain amount of surprises and risks. HiddenChina.net ensures that in every situation we and our guides are trying to get out a maximum of comfort for our clients. All our guides are carefully chosen and selected by their abilities and experience. Nevertheless, there might be surprises. We hereby express that a voyage in China needs patience, adaptation and tolerance. In addition due to lack of infrastructure, in rural areas in China there is often a lack of western sanitary standards. Clients of hiddenChina.net accept - upon signing a contract - to be aware of these circumstances, and accept changes which may occur in order to keep security and comfort of the clients according to the circumstances to a maximum during the trip.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR CHINA TRAVELERS

Traveling in China is always an adventure. Quality of service can range from “top” in selected 5* Hotels in the big cities to “very poor”. While traveling in China, even with an organized tour, the clients have to be ready for unexpected changes (e.g. due to natural disasters such as landslides or flooding) or other surprises. In hotels by example, it can happen that you will get phone calls in the middle of the night, offering you a special massage service. The following chapters will tell you more about what you should consider when traveling in China.

FACE

You may have heard it before and for the experienced China traveler it's a “must know”: In China, everything is about “giving and losing face”. Chinese people are very proud of their culture, food and traditions. Respect this fact and try not to bring a Chinese into an embarrassing situation, as he or she might lose his face in front of coworkers, friends, family members or even the authorities. Try to be polite, smile and - especially to English speaking Chinese - always praise their language skills. Chinese can be considered as reactive people. If you treat Chinese people in an arrogant and harsh way, you will be treated the same way. When you feel cheated, try to solve the situation in a gentle and charming way. You will achieve your goal much faster. Also try to react calmly in stress situations and stay friendly. For every problem in China there is a solution. It's up to you how effective you will get to this solution. Being angry and aggressive is contra productive in the most cases.

SECURITY

Especially large cities in China are extremely safe. Chinese people have to fear severe punishment when being caught by the authorities in illegal matters when foreigners are involved. However, be aware that pick pocketing happens everywhere, so keep an eye on your belongings and never leave your luggage unattended. When going out at night, China's large cities are much safer than practically all European cities. A single woman has nothing to fear when walking in a dark alley even at 4 o'clock in the morning.

HEALTH

It is also recommended to visit your house doctor before you go on a China trip and make all the necessary vaccinations. Your doctor will inform you what you will need. For travelers going to south China, it is also recommended to carry a supply of Malaria remedies. As the avian influenza is getting more and more a serious issue in Asia and a pandemic outbreak will happen sooner or later, the traveler should also consider buying a box of “Tamiflu” before the trip begins.

When traveling in China and especially when eating a lot of local food, a supply of remedies for stomach problems is highly recommended. We will always take care of taking you to clean restaurants with high quality standards. However, your body will have to deal with a wide range of unknown food, spices and other ingredients in China and also with different bacteria and viruses than in Europe’s clean environment. When being on a 3 week China trip, you have to reckon with stomach problems at least once. To cure them it is recommended to take pharmaceuticals, which are rich in salt and minerals and give you back the elements you will lose during a diarrhea. From our longtime China experience, one of the best remedies is to eat well-boiled Chinese mushrooms and bananas as well as to drink tomato juice. On many of our private trips, this helped much better than the Western medication like e.g. Imodium. Always take toilet paper with you, as you won’t find any in public toilets! Travelers going to high altitude areas such as Tibet are also recommended to take a supply of Diamox in case of altitude sickness. Please get advice from your doctor.

CLIMATE

China has several different climatic zones. From high-altitude to sub-tropic and desert climate, there is everything. Depending on your date of arrival in China, you might be traveling in the rainy season. E.g. in southern China, this time mostly starts late May / early June and lasts until August. This year, in the provinces of Guangxi and Guizhou heavy flooding took the life of several hundred local people. However, we will adapt the trip according to your travel time and avoid the areas with heavy rain.

LUGGAGE

Most airlines allow you to check-in 20 kg of luggage (economy class). It is not allowed to take nutrition products (cheese, meat) as well as pornographic material. Please ensure that your “Swiss army knife” and other “dangerous products” are checked in with your luggage and not in the hand luggage.

China offers you a wide range of shopping possibilities. So if you plan to go for extensive shopping, take a minimum of luggage to China. However, whenever you forgot something, don’t worry, more or less everything you need in daily life, can be bought much cheaper in China (see chapter below). Be aware that many customs authorities like the ones in Paris and Milan can fine you heavily when finding out that you try to import faked products from China such as Yves St Laurent bags, Gucci items or Prada clothes.

SHOPPING

Except for imported luxury goods and high-end electrical equipment such as beamers or imported laptops, more or less everything is cheaper in China than in Western Europe. Especially clothes can be bought at a very low price. Many shopping areas offer faked products (sometimes in extremely good quality). However, in many places where no prices are indicated you have to bargain about the price (see chapter below). Please note that when buying a faked product, especially at the airport in Paris, you can get into trouble. The fight against faked products is now at a point, that authorities can or will take away your purchase and will heavily fine you. For the golf lovers, there is a wide range of possibilities to buy whole golf sets at a ridiculously low price. Have your suits tailor-made, buy ties, silk products, pearls etc. at a very low price. For most Europeans, DVD's are of special interest. For a DVD you pay between 8 and 10 RMB (about 1 EURO) and most of the movies are available even before they are shown in European cinemas. The advantage is that DVD's take away only little space and weight. But be aware that in many cases you are buying illegally copied and distributed products.

Credit cards are only accepted in major stores, 3* hotels and upwards and western restaurants. Money can be withdrawn at ATM's at the Bank of China. Please note that these are hard to find in remote areas. Money can be changed at major branches of the Bank of China or in western hotels. Please note that you need to show your passport for changing money.

BARGAINING

As mentioned in the "shopping" chapter, in many places you have to bargain for your price. Western tourists are mostly looked at as "big dollar signs" and accordingly the price will be set 400 – 500% above the price the vendor is ready to sell his or her merchandise. The first rule is to go below the first offered price. So when the vendor asks for 100 RMB, you can set your offer to 20-25 RMB. Then it depends on your bargaining skills at what price you will get it. A simple trick is, when it seems too expensive for you, to walk away from the vendor. If he or she doesn't follow you, you know that your bid was too low. Please also note, always stay friendly and smile when bargaining. Once you agreed for a price, you have to buy the product. Otherwise you and the vendor will lose face.

LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR

Even in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, it is most unlikely that you find English speaking taxi drivers or personnel in the shops. Therefore it is recommended to take a phrase book with you, where you can show what you need.

Chinese people are mostly friendly and curious towards foreigners. However, Chinese are also very proud of their country and culture and some behavior will be strange for travelers who come to China for the first time. In many places (even sometimes in public buses) people smoke a lot and for the non-smoker, China can be a terrible place. You also often see Chinese people spitting accompanied by strange noises. The best way to get around it is to ignore it and live with it. For the smoker on the other hand China is a paradise, as it is more or less everywhere allowed to smoke and cigarettes are extremely cheap, although some foreign brands might be faked. Please also note that you might be invited to test your drinking skills. The easiest way to avoid it without losing face is to tell your hosts that due to liver problems you're not allowed to drink.

TIPPING

Although China is - especially away from the big cities - a very poor country, tipping only exists in the 5* surroundings of the big cities. In restaurants or taxis and hotels (except 5* hotels) tipping is a no-no. However, tour guides and drivers of organized tours should be tipped. Most guides and drivers are roughly paid with 10 Euro per day and rely on additional income. With Chinese tour groups (which often go shopping) the guides always get a commission in the shops, where they make most of their salary. As European groups usually do not visit as many shops as Chinese tourists, guides and drivers have to rely on tips.

Generally a tip of RMB 30 per person and day is reasonable. When you are in a tour group it is recommended that the group collects the tips and hands it to the guides and drivers in an envelope. It is also very helpful to take some souvenirs with you, like for example watches or picture postcards from your home country.

SMALL TALK AND CONVERSATION

Small talk in China is a bit different than in Europe, but there are also topics which should be avoided and topics which are perfect for small talk.

One of the most common greetings in China is “Ni chi fan le ma?” which literally means “Have you eaten yet?” This emphasizes the importance of eating in China, and it is much more a social event than in the West, therefore food is always a welcomed topic.

In some cases you also might be confronted with rather private questions such as about your marital status and about family. The Chinese are very family oriented, so don't feel embarrassed when people ask you rather private questions, it's just small talk. Sometimes, especially in business surroundings, people also might ask you about your salary, which is quite normal in China. Here you can escape (if you don't want to tell the truth) by telling some fictional figure, or when telling the truth and your counterpart's eyebrows rise, you explain how expensive the life in Europe is.

Topics which should be avoided at all costs are all political related such as the Cultural Revolution, critics against the system or chairman Mao, the Tibet and Taiwan question, human rights or how to treat animals. If you want to have answers to these questions you might do it through your guide. Do not overload your guide with too many hard questions in the beginning though. Tactically it is wise to hide these questions in some compliments and be as subtle as possible (see also the chapter about “face”). Please note that young Chinese (below 30) are more open to discuss critical topics than people above 30.

Please also note that Chinese people tend to touch you, which is not a sign of homosexuality but just a sign of sympathy. In such a situation, when you feel uncomfortable, don't react in a rude or harsh way; just try to escape the contact by elegant means. Mostly a hearty fit of coughing does the trick (SARS is still in Chinese people's mind).

TRAFFIC AND TAXI

The public transport system in China is basically quite convenient. Every major city has an airport; there are many train routes (even though there is mostly only one train per day between two destinations) and public buses. Public buses are very cheap although the comfort is sometimes a bit poor.

In the cities, the most convenient public transport is the taxi. You can, compared to Europe, basically take a taxi anytime and everywhere at a very low price. Be careful that on major tourist sites there are also drivers trying to make extra money. When a taxi has no taximeter (make sure that the driver in taxis with a taximeter always puts it on), negotiate the rate before you get into the vehicle. However, some drivers will still try to make you pay an extra fee at the end. Just tell him that you pay the negotiated price, nothing more, and nothing less. Please also note that most drivers don't speak English. So take a bilingual map, a taxi card or a guidebook with you. Tell the reception in the hotel to write down the addresses for you so you can show it to the driver. Please note that highway fares have to be paid by the customer and not the driver (for example, in Beijing the fee for the airport expressway is 10 Yuan for passenger cars). This fee will be added to the amount shown on the taximeter.

USEFUL THINGS TO TAKE ON A CHINA TRIP

Several Swiss army knives, a compass, pharmaceuticals (see health chapter), a first-aid kit, tape, watches (not too expensive), money clip, camera (films can be bought and developed on spot for a very reasonable price), deodorant (rarely available in China), sunglasses, altimeter (for Tibet and Himalaya tours), GPS, safety belt for money, literature, guidebooks, credit-/bank card and a lot of patience.

For ladies: tampons are rarely available in China.