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Sustainable Mosuo Trips and Projects

- Visit real Mosuo villages away from the tourist traps
- Come into contact with one of the few remaining matriarchal cultures on the planet
- Experience this unique culture first-hand, by living with the Mosuo in their homes
- Hike around Lugu Lake with its breathtaking scenery and visit other minorities
- Visit some of the local projects being done to preserve the Mosuo culture
- Combine this trip with a trek through Tibetan Sichuan and Yunnan, trips to other Chinese ethnic minorities or a classic China trip



LUGU LAKE MOSUO VILLAGE STAY AND SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS

This trip will be organized in cooperation with the Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association, a non-profit organization run by Mosuo leaders, to promote and protect the Mosuo culture. One of our biggest goals is to promote responsible tourism, mostly in the form of cultural tourism. For those interested in the Mosuo culture (which really is a fascinating and unique culture), we can take them away from the tourist traps, into real Mosuo villages, to live with real Mosuo families, and learn about their lives and culture first-hand.

The trip will begin in Lijiang, then on to Lugu Lake, where you can ride around the lake on local hand-crafted boats, visit island temples, and watch performances of traditional Mosuo music/dance. From there, we will go to more remote villages, where you can have the chance to experience 'real' Mosuo life – living in a traditional Mosuo home with a Mosuo family, seeing the daily life, eating meals with them, etc.

On the way from Lijiang to Lugu Lake, our experienced tour leader will also give a background 'lecture' about the Mosuo people, their organization and projects that focus on economic development, cultural preservation, environmental protection...and much, much more! For more information, please visit our [project section](#) or visit the website of the [Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association](#).

Tourism provides great benefits to the Mosuo. It provides economic income, and fuels economic development. It increases awareness and knowledge of the Mosuo culture. It provides opportunities



for exchange and interaction which otherwise would not exist.

On the other hand, it carries with it all the pitfalls associated with tourism. Already, Luoshui, the main tourist destination for people going to Lugu Lake, has become a tourist trap with very little that represents real Mosuo culture. Instead, it is a strip of hotels, souvenir shops, bars, etc. Some of these businesses are owned by non-Mosuo, who don't understand the Mosuo culture, and present it in a way that is not at all accurate. Pollution is drastically increased, threatening the natural beauty of the area.

In close cooperation, HiddenChina.net GmbH and the Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association do their best to work with the Mosuo to maximize the benefits, while minimizing the problems.

This trip can also be combined with a classic China tour, a trek through Tibetan Sichuan and Yunnan, trips to other Chinese ethnic minorities or one of our other itineraries. Please [contact us](#) for a detailed program.

- Best travel date: May - October
- Destinations: Lijiang, Lugu Lake, Walabi
- Duration: 3 -5 days
- Starting in: Lijiang
- Ending in: Lijiang
- Group size: min. 2 pax, max. 10 pax

QUICK INTRODUCTION

China has many unique minority groups; but few are as unique as the Mosuo. Living high in the Himalayan Mountains, close to the border with Tibet, the Mosuo are one of the few remaining matriarchal cultures on the planet. In the Mosuo culture, women are the head of the house, and lineage is traced through the mother's side of the family.

The Mosuo are also famous for the fact that they do not practice marriage; instead, they have a system called "walking marriages", where they can choose and change partners as they wish. And they are one of the few Tibetan Buddhist cultures to exist outside of Tibet. The Mosuo also live in one of the most remote and undeveloped regions of China; some villages still have no electricity, most have no running water. The economy is still mostly an agrarian economy, based on barter.



We offer you the opportunity not only to visit this incredibly beautiful area of China (high in the Himalayas, on the shores of Lugu Lake), but to experience this unique culture first-hand, by living with the Mosuo in their homes, and seeing their day-to-day life from their perspective. The Mosuo are a very friendly and open people, and are eager to share their lives with others, and make more people aware of their culture.

DAY 1 LIJIANG - LUGU LAKE (B/L/D)

In the morning, we depart Lijiang for Lugu Lake, with a lunch stop at a beautiful mountainside diner. Upon your arrival at Lugu Lake in early afternoon, you will check into your hotel, and can spend the afternoon taking boat rides, riding horses, visiting the local Mosuo Cultural Museum, etc. Lugu Lake is a large, crystal clear lake located on the border of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, at about 3500 meters above sea level. In the evening, we will attend a performance of traditional Mosuo singing and dancing, followed by a late-night outdoor barbecue where you cook your own food over a grill while listening to (and sometimes participating in) performances of Mosuo singing.



DAY 2 **LUGU LAKE - WALABI (B/L/D)**

We go to visit the village of Walabi, about 1 hour from Lugu Lake. This is a very traditional Mosuo village, where you will have the chance to live with Mosuo families in their homes. Mosuo homes are large, two-story log structures, each having a large open central courtyard, surrounded on all four sides by living, cooking, and stabling areas. During the day, you will have the opportunity to explore the village, or perhaps go trekking in the surrounding mountains. There are also natural hot springs close to Walabi, where you can go to soak and have a bath.



For those interested in some of the work being done to preserve the Mosuo culture, you can visit some of the local projects (schools, training centers, traditional arts, etc.). Local guides will explain the culture, and the daily life. All meals will be traditional Mosuo meals in their homes, hand-cooked over wood fires. In the evening, there will be an opportunity for you to learn how to do traditional Mosuo dances, and perhaps try on some of the local Mosuo clothing.

DAYS 3 - 5 **WALABI AND LUGU LAKE HIKE (B/L/D)**

Having acquainted yourself with Mosuo culture, we will then take you on a three-day hike around Lugu Lake itself. This hike enables you not only to see some breathtaking scenery, but also to see and experience more of the Mosuo culture. In addition, you will have the opportunity to see several other minority groups – particularly the Yi and the Pumi – and learn something about their cultures, also. Each evening will be spent in a different Mosuo village, again housed with local families in their homes.



Instead of the hike you can also stay at Walabi and learn more about the projects we are doing with the Mosuo or visit more remote villages in the mountains. Please [contact us](#) for a custom itinerary.

Our other ethnic minorities tours in China:

[13 days Southwestern Minorities Tour through Guizhou and Guangxi](#)

[9 days Spiritual Tour from Lhasa to Kathmandu](#)

RATES

RATE PER PERSON IN TWIN: ON REQUEST

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: ON REQUEST

INCLUDED SERVICES:

- experienced Canadian tour leader from Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association (if available) and local tour guides for all days, English/Chinese-speaking
- accommodation in Lijiang in double rooms
- at Lugu Lake, in Walabi and during the hike accommodation at local Mosuo families
- full board (described as B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- all transfers mentioned in the itinerary

NOT INCLUDED:

- international and national flights to and from Lijiang (if this trips is not combined with another tour)
- personal expenses such as laundry, tips etc.
- transports not mentioned in the itinerary
- drinks and all meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- expenses for medical care
- insurances (travel insurance, travel cancellation insurance)
- repatriation flights in case of emergencies

INSURANCE IS RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARTICIPANT!

HIDDENCHINA.NET GMBH RECOMMENDS THAT YOU PURCHASE TRAVEL CANCELLATION INSURANCE.

PROJECTS

1) Culture and Religion

We tie culture and religion together because, in the Mosuo culture, the two are so closely interwoven. The native Mosuo religion, Daba, is in many ways the repository of Mosuo history and culture; having only an oral language, the Daba priests have the responsibility to memorize a long, detailed oral tradition that encapsulates much of the Mosuo history and culture. And, of course, much of the Mosuo culture is derived from the influence that both Daba and Tibetan Buddhism have had on them.

Our focus in this regard is two-fold; both to engage in projects that promote cultural preservation and to promote awareness of the Mosuo culture among other people.

One of our biggest and most aggressive projects in this regard is our work to develop a written form of the Mosuo language. Other projects are not as large, but are equally important. From supporting the Mosuo Cultural Museum, to hosting an annual Mosuo Arts Festival, to setting up an Artist Retreat Center where artists can come and learn about the Mosuo while engaged in artistic projects, the scope of our plans is very broad, and our goals are very ambitious.

1a) Mosuo Language Project

The Mosuo have their own unique language; it belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language group, but is a distinct language, not simply a dialect of another language. However, the Mosuo language is oral only...there is no written form of the language. As a result, all history/stories/geneology/etc. are passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. One of the greatest priorities for the Mosuo is to create a written form of their language; this is, in many ways, crucial to long-term preservation of their culture. The reasons for this are:

* The Daba priests are responsible for memorizing huge amounts of information, which make up the majority of the Mosuo oral history and tradition. Yet there are fewer and fewer Daba priests, and as each one dies without passing on his information, a wealth of knowledge, history, and tradition is lost forever. Of course, this information could be recorded and transcribed in Chinese (or other languages), and this is in fact already being done to a certain extent. However, just as reading an English story translated into another language can lose some of its more subtle aspects, the same is true of the Mosuo oral history. The best way to preserve this heritage for future generations is in their own language.

* While other minorities are able to have some classes conducted in their own language, the Mosuo are not, for the simple reason that there is no written language for them to study/learn. Therefore, all classes are in Mandarin Chinese only. This leads to a situation where many young Mosuo are forgetting their own language entirely.

* Language is every bit a part of a local culture as any other aspect. The complete loss of a language represents the loss of yet another part of our diverse human heritage. Creating a written language helps to preserve that heritage, for the Mosuo, and for others who are interested in their culture.

It is important to point out here that this is not an attempt to create an 'official' written language. Only the Chinese government can designate an official written language. Rather, we seek to set up a prototype, and test it with distinct groups, to determine the viability and set a precedent for the adoption of an official written form.

There are three stages to our project: first, to develop the written form; second, to teach that to designated groups of adults and children; and third, to begin creating records of Mosuo oral history/heritage in that written form.

1b) Artist Retreat Center

This project, rather than directly focusing on Mosuo culture, seeks instead to promote awareness of the Mosuo culture by inviting international artists to live at Lugu Lake for periods of one to three months. It is our hope that the work they produce as a result of their time there will both reflect their experience of the Mosuo people and culture, and help to make other people more aware of the Mosuo.

We are open to many different kinds of artist – musicians, painters, sculptors, writers, composers, etc. We don't seek to put a limit in this regard, so long as the artist will be able to produce some kind of product that can reflect their experience with the Mosuo. For example, a musician/composer could write music that integrated aspects of traditional Mosuo music. A writer could write about their experience, or set a story in the Mosuo culture. A painter could do paintings of the local people, scenery, etc. If you are interested, and have a suggestion, please do [contact us](#).

On our side, we will provide accommodations in a really nice Mosuo home, which is traditional Mosuo architecture, but also has an attached coffee shop that offers a few more 'conveniences'. It is located on an isthmus (almost an island) that is surrounded on three sides by the clear waters of Lugu Lake, and behind it is the majestic "Mother Mountain" that is the center of much of Mosuo culture and religion. Although it is on Lugu Lake, it is relatively isolated from the major tourist traffic, so allows more freedom for individual work and study.

We offer sponsorships for periods of one to three months (we can consider renewing a sponsorship after three months), which will cover your costs for room and board while there, plus the assistance of a translator/interpreter when needed. We do not cover transportation costs for you to get there, you must cover that yourself.

Any/all products which result from your time there will remain 100% your own property and you will retain all rights to them. However, we would ask that you repay our support by providing whatever reciprocal support and assistance you can. At the very least, that would mean including information about our organization in any display of your product; in the case of things like pictures or videos, we'd ask to have the right to use those products ourselves at no cost; and if you'd be willing to donate something, such as a painting, that would of course always be appreciated and welcome. Our goal is to have a result which is beneficial to both parties.

One note for prospective candidates – as we will be providing the funds for your stay at Lugu Lake, we have a reasonable expectation of a suitable finished product. For that reason, we will be screening potential candidates quite closely, and will take only the best. In that regard, you have the best chance of being accepted if you are an established artist, with a demonstrable history, and who are currently actively involved.

We are *not* a place for struggling artists to go to try to “find themselves”, nor are we seeking to provide someone who's hit a block of some kind to try to find inspiration. There is too much risk in such cases that we end up just financing someone's holiday, with no real results for either side.

Of course, if you are able/willing to cover all these costs yourself, we are more than happy to provide you with a place to stay, and help you get settled in. If you'd like to discuss your ideas please [contact us](#) directly.

1c) Daba religion

The Daba religion is in many ways the “heart” of Mosuo culture. Although the Mosuo actually practice two religions, Daba contains the majority of their historical and cultural heritage.

There are several challenges in this regard. First, the Daba priests (who are also called Daba) are required to memorize a long, detailed oral history which really encapsulates most of the Mosuo history and culture; however, due to past policies that restricted training new Daba priests, most of the remaining priests are old, and many will die soon. Without a younger generation to learn this oral tradition, and without written records of it, this means that huge portions of Mosuo history and culture could be lost forever.

Today, many of the restrictions on becoming a Daba priest have been lifted, so one of our goals is to provide support and encouragement for younger Mosuo who seek to become Daba priests. In this way, the tradition can be continued into future generations.

We also seek, through our Mosuo Language Project, to create a written form of the Mosuo language which we could then use to create written records, in their own language, of all the oral traditions that the Daba priests have memorized.

These projects are, by their nature, very long-term. But we believe that they are also very important and worthwhile.

1d) Anthropological studies

The Mosuo are an anthropological treasure trove, and quite a few anthropologists have done studies of the Mosuo culture. However, the majority of this work is relatively inaccessible; and there is still much more work to be done.

Our major goal in this area is to organize a central 'library' of resources about the Mosuo culture. To collect the various research papers that have been written; to track down the various presentations

(particularly video) about the Mosuo; and, where necessary, to translate such materials into English, Chinese, and/or other languages.

For example, there is a Mosuo scholar, Lamu Gatusa, who has done phenomenal research on his peoples' culture and history; however, at present, his work is available only in Chinese language. We'd like to translate that into English, and possibly other languages. There have been many documentaries produced – in Chinese, English, and other languages – about the Mosuo, and we would like to track them down, and get the proper permissions for their use.

Another goal is to work with and assist any anthropologists coming in to study the Mosuo. We will not provide funding for such anthropologists (we expect them to find funding on their own); but we will be happy to help them in any way we can. By providing translators/interpreters, by giving them access to our library of resources, by introducing them to local people/communities, etc.

Anyone who is interested in this, and would like more information, please [contact us](#).

1e) Mosuo Arts Festival

This is an idea which was begun by an American anthropologist, Tami Blumenfield, who has spent a number of years living with and studying the Mosuo. What she did was to organize a “Mosuo Film Festival” at which they showed the Mosuo various documentary films and programs that have been produced about the Mosuo. The purpose was to help the Mosuo understand how the outside world sees them, and how other people are portraying their culture.

This film festival had a very positive effect, and a very strong response. It is our hope to expand and build on this in future years, by holding a “Mosuo Arts Festival”. This festival will include the film festival, but will also be expanded to include other activities such as contests to write new songs in the Mosuo language, to have dancing performances/contests, etc. We also hope to have the Mosuo produce their own videos about themselves, and show them at this festival.

The purpose of this is to generate greater excitement among the Mosuo, particularly in the younger generation, for their own culture and heritage. In addition, hopefully this will serve as a major resource for non-Mosuo to learn about and better understand the Mosuo culture and life, from their point of view.

1f) Mosuo Cultural Museum

Two local Mosuo at Lugu Lake have, through tremendous sacrifice of time and money, built a Mosuo Cultural Museum. Rather than being a tacky tourist attraction, this is a museum which seeks to record and preserve the Mosuo culture, and to present that culture to others.

The Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association will work directly with the museum, to provide whatever support they can. This will include grants to fund new projects at the museum; to improve facilities; and to do further research.

2) Education

The best schools, and the best materials, are useless if you don't have teachers, also. Therefore, we focus a significant amount of our resources on Mosuo teachers. And there are significant challenges to face in this regard.

The areas in which most teachers will work are extremely poor; and most people who have a high enough education to be qualified as a teacher can probably get better jobs (ie. higher paying, in more developed regions). Of course, there are many very dedicated teachers who commit their lives to educating the youth, and who deserve a great deal of respect for doing so. However, the fact remains that there simply are not enough qualified teachers to fill existing needs.

In many communities, local residents have volunteered to become teachers. While they are to be highly commended for their willingness and commitment in doing so, the fact remains that many of these volunteers themselves have minimal education.

We seek to work with teachers at all levels, to provide the support and resources necessary to help them; both by supporting existing teachers, and by bringing in new teachers.

2a) Teacher training

One of our most immediate goals is to provide teacher training for the existing teachers in Mosuo schools. This training will take two main forms:

1) Central Training – during major school holidays, when teachers are free, we will set up training programs at central locations. Teachers will come to those locations for a period of 5-7 days, and go through intensive training programs, to help increase their knowledge and skills. This training will be available to all teachers, regardless of their previous educational background; and we will provide financial support to cover their costs (transportation, accommodation, etc.) whenever possible.

2) On-the-job Training – during the rest of the year, when teachers are working at school, we will have trainers who will travel from school to school, and provide on-the-job training. This will involve seminars for the teachers in the school; and observation of classroom teaching; so that they can effectively identify the greatest needs, and focus efforts in those areas.

An important note here: schools throughout this region actually have a mixture of students from different minorities, including the Mosuo, Naxi, Yi, and Pumi, as well as Han Chinese. Therefore, most schools will have a mixture of students, and teachers.

We will have two criteria for teachers/schools who are involved in this program. First, we will accept any teachers who come from schools in which the majority of students are Mosuo, regardless of whether the teacher themselves are Mosuo or not; and second, we will accept any teachers who are Mosuo, regardless of whether or not they work in a school which has a majority of Mosuo students.

In future, certainly, we would like to expand the program to improve any and all teachers from this region, regardless of ethnicity; however, at present, our funding is limited, and we necessarily need to limit participation. It is our hope that, as this model proves effective and successful, and support increases, we will be able to extend support to all teachers and schools throughout the region.

2b) Teacher scholarships

While we see it as important to work with existing teachers, we also think it is of great importance to encourage a new generation of teachers. With this in mind, we seek to provide scholarships for Mosuo students who express a desire to become teachers.

In order to qualify, students must be Mosuo, and must have good academic standing in high school. They must also be willing to commit to a minimum of 5 years teaching in local Mosuo villages after graduating from university. In return, we will cover all of their costs – education, transportation, room & board, etc. – to complete their teaching certification at university.

As long as students complete 5 years of teaching in local Mosuo communities after they graduate, this support will be entirely free for them; if, after graduating, they take other jobs and do not complete the terms of this scholarship, they will be expected to reimburse us for the money we gave them (and they will sign a contract to this effect). After they have completed 5 years of teaching, they will then be free to do as they please; but it is our hope that they will continue to teach in their home communities.

We hope to also set up other programs to further encourage teachers to work in their local communities, such as providing stipends to supplement their teaching salary, or providing special awards to those who excel.

2c) Students

The opportunities for Mosuo students to gain a higher level education are extremely minimal, and they face many challenges. Grades one and two of primary school are the easiest, as almost every village has a local school for the students there. However, the teachers at these schools are often volunteers, who don't have much education themselves; and teaching is exclusively in Mandarin Chinese, but many of the students have not learned Chinese before this, and speak only the Mosuo language. This also puts them at a significant disadvantage, and can discourage students.

Grades three to six are a little more centralized, with students from surrounding communities traveling to get to the school. For students who live farther away, this can be a significant barrier. Not only do they have to walk many kilometers over mountain paths, but they may have to pay for room and board at the school if they are too far away to travel back and forth every day. This cost, as minimal as it is, can still be too much for many families to support, especially if they have several children.

Next, there are three years of junior high school. There are fewer junior high schools, which means that students often have to travel even farther to go to school; and tuition costs are higher as well. This is followed by three years of senior high school, which again is often even farther away, and costs yet more money.

It is little wonder, then, that few Mosuo students complete senior high school. And getting into university is even more of a challenge; in fact, fewer than 0.1% of Mosuo students will make it to university.

Our goal is to set up projects that improve the opportunity – and lessen the cost – for Mosuo students to get a good education, and to have access to higher levels of education. We will do this both through direct financial aid in the form of scholarships, and through providing resources and materials to assist their education.

We are not, as an organization, directly involved in the building of new schools. We are, however, very happy to work with any organizations who wish to do so, and will be happy to lend whatever support we can to such projects.

2d) Student Scholarships

One of our primary goals is to provide scholarships to promising students, in order to encourage them to continue in their education, and to decrease the financial burden on their families. Specific amounts will vary, and will be determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the specific situation of each student.

In order to qualify, students must have and maintain a minimum 75% grade average (80% for senior high school). Scholarships, depending on the situation, may include funds to cover:

- cost of tuition
- cost of room & board
- cost of travel
- cost of books
- small stipend for student's family

These scholarships will be given free of charge, with no expectation of reimbursement; however, they will be subject to review, twice each year, to determine whether students are maintaining the minimum requirements for sponsorship.

In cases where donors are interested to do so, we would also be happy to provide pictures and biographical information on the student(s) they are supporting, regular updates as to their progress, and even correspondence with the students. We also hope to set up periodic trips to the Lugu Lake region for sponsors, where they can meet the students they have sponsored face-to-face, and see their schools.

2e) Resources & materials

Due to the financial limitations of schools and students alike, many students have no access to quality materials or resources. For example, they may be using textbooks that are 10 or 15 years out of date; or they may not have computers; or they may not have suitable audio-visual equipment for learning English.

However, for students to enter senior high school, or university, they must pass examinations both on computers, and in English. Obviously, this creates a significant barrier for Mosuo students seeking to further their education.

We plan to do our best to provide such materials and resources to as many schools as possible. In some cases, the Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association will buy these things; in other cases, we hope that others will donate suitable equipment (for example, a company that is buying new computers could donate its older computers to a school). The primary resources and materials we seek to provide are:

- textbooks
- computers
- audio-visual equipment
- DVDs of educational materials and programs

In the cases of some of the smaller and more remote schools, funds may also be used to buy electric generators, or even things as basic as chairs, desks, and writing supplies for the students.

3) Economics

Another area which is both important and controversial is economic development. Many Mosuo want economic development to improve their standard of living, to get greater opportunities for their children, etc.

However, the barriers facing them are quite significant. With annual incomes that average US\$ 150-200 in some communities, it is hard even to get started. And even if they can get the money, most Mosuo have little or no experience or knowledge about how to run a business.

A lot of younger Mosuo girls are being taken out of school because of the perception that men have a better chance of getting jobs when they graduate. This leads to a situation where many young women, not seeing any alternatives to make money, turn to prostitution.

Our projects seek to address these issues directly; to provide resources and knowledge that give the Mosuo more choices, and more opportunities.

4) Environment

One of the most immediate concerns for this region is environment. Increased tourism means increased pollution. Not just from trash thrown in the streets, and in the lake; or increased vehicular traffic.

At present, none of the main tourist areas around the lake have viable sewage or septic systems. This means that all human waste goes directly into the soil, and is then washed into the lake. When the number of people at the lake was small, this wasn't an issue. But as tourist traffic increases steadily, it is becoming more and more of an issue. If not addressed, this could lead to the destruction of Lugu

Lake's ecology, which includes a number of plants and animals that are unique to that area.

We seek to work with other organizations with interest and expertise in this area; to find low-cost alternatives that can prevent this pollution before it becomes too serious.

There are other environmental issues, such as deforestation, overfarming, and the general impact of increased tourism and development. We will institute programs to increase awareness and knowledge of these issues, to encourage the Mosuo to take action and be involved in preserving their ecology. After all, if the beauty of the area is destroyed, they lose the travelers, as well.

5) Medical

There are a number of vital medical issues that need to be addressed. First, there are a significant number of preventable diseases and disorders. Tumors left to grow for years. Cleft palates, cataracts, deformed bone structures, etc. Not to mention various parasites, and sexually transmitted diseases.

We have a variety of strategies to deal with this. In some situations, there are established organizations who already work in these areas (for example, Orbis provides free eye surgery, and The Smile Train does free surgery on cleft palates). In such cases, we would seek to work with such organizations, to facilitate their work in Mosuo communities.

In other situations, education and awareness is crucial. We hope to work with various Chinese organizations to improve health awareness, particularly in regards to sexually transmitted diseases.

And finally, in cases where necessary surgery or medical care is needed that cannot be afforded, we hope to set up a fund to provide financial support; however, it will be awhile before we are ready to do this. If you have a particular interest in this area – to provide financial support, or to get involved as a volunteer/trainer – please [contact us](#).

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.