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## Silk Road Trip

Trip from the Silk Road's eastern to western end in China

### Shaanxi Province

Xi'An: City Wall, Wild Goose Pagoda, Drum and Bell Tower,  
Muslim Street and Mosque, Terracotta Army

### Gansu Province

Lanzhou: capital city of Gansu province, Bingling Monastery  
Xiahe: Labrang Monastery, night train to Dunhuang  
Dunhuang: Mogao Grottoes, Crescent Moon Oasis, camel ride on the dunes

### Xinjiang Province

Turpan: Tuyu Valley, Astana Ancient Tombs, Karez Irrigation System,  
Emin Minaret, Jiaohe Ruins  
Kashgar: Atigar Mosque, excursion to Karakul Lake  
Urumqi: optional trekking extension to Mt. Bogda and Heavenly Lake (3 days)



## TRIP ALONG THE SILK ROAD

Travel from China's capital through the provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu and along the Silk Road to Xinjiang, China's westernmost province.

This 14 day tour starts in Beijing, from where you take the night train to Xi'An, capital city of Shaanxi Province. You explore Xi'An City and its most famous site - the Terracotta Warriors (UNESCO) and then travel from the easternmost end of the Silk Road to Lanzhou - capital city of Gansu province, where you will visit the Bingling Monastery. The next destination will be Xiahe and its impressive Labrang Monastery.

From Xiahe your journey will take you via Lanzhou to Dunhuang, an amazing oasis town at the northwestern end of Gansu Province. Visit the Mogao Grottoes (UNESCO), Crescent Moon Lake and explore the desert on the back of the traditional "transport vehicle" of the Silk Road: the camel.

From Dunhuang we enter into the "Wild West" of China - Xinjiang Province - where we will visit the cities of Turpan, Kashgar and Urumqi (Xinjiang's capital city). Furthermore we will make a 2 day excursion to Karakul Lake located about 200km away from Kashgar and stay overnight in a Tajik yurt.

At the end of your trip you can either directly fly back to Beijing from Urumqi or extend your stay for three days and trek to Mount Bogda and the Heavenly Lake "Tianchi".

- Travel date: March - November
- Destinations: Beijing, Xian, Lanzhou, Xiahe, Dunhuang, Turpan, Kashgar, Urumqi
- Duration: 14 days
- Starting in: Beijing (other cities on request)
- Ending in: Beijing (other cities on request)
- Group size: min. 2 participants



**DAY 1      BEIJING - XIAN**

In the evening you take the train to Xi'An. Overnight on board of the train (soft-sleeper compartment)

**DAY 2      XIAN    (L/D)**

Upon arrival you will get picked up by our guide and driver. Today we have a look at the city wall, the Big Goose Pagoda, the Drum Tower and the Muslim Street. The Big Wild Goose Pagoda was built in 652 during the Tang Dynasty and back then had five stories. The pagoda was built to store sutras and figurines of Buddha, which were brought to China by the Buddhist translator and traveler Xuanzang. In the beginning of 8th century under the ruling of Empress Wu Zetian five more stories were added to the pagoda. Sadly wars on later times damaged the pagoda reducing its height to current seven stories. It stands 64 meters tall and from the top it commands a fine view over the city of Xi'An. Known as the symbol of Xi'An, the history of the Drum and Bell Tower can be traced back to



the Ming dynasty. Each Ming city had a bell tower and a drum tower. The bell was sounded at dawn and the drum at dusk. The Bell Tower was originally set at the intersection of Xi Dajie (West Street) and Guangji Jie (Guangji Street) in the Yingxiang Temple, which was the center of the site of the old Tang Imperial City. It was removed to its present place in 1582 in the center of the southern section of the walled city and was restored several times.

The Great Mosque of Xian is located in the "Huajue Xiang" district, inhabited mainly by the Muslims Hui minority. The 60,000 strong Muslim community that lives and works today in Xi'An traces its history to Arab and Persian merchants who, after traveling the Silk Road, became permanent residents of such cities as Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, Yangzhou, and Xi'An.

You stay overnight in a hotel in Xian.

**DAY 3      XIAN - LANZHOU    (B/L/D)**

One of China's most famous cultural and historic sites is on today's program. The Terracotta army is probably one of the world's most stunning UNESCO world heritage sites. Even though everybody knows how the Terracotta Warriors look like, you will be more than impressed by the size of the whole site. In the evening, you board the night train in direction of Lanzhou.



Overnight on board of the train (soft-sleeper compartment)



**DAY 4 LANZHOU - XIAHE (L/D)**

Upon your arrival in Lanzhou you will get picked up by our guide and driver and visit the Bingling Monastery – one of the most famous caves in China only second to the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang (see day 7) in respect of artistic value. In Tibetan, Bingling means “ten thousand Buddhas”. The



starting construction time of the Bingling Caves dates back to the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316). In the following dynasties, the caves had been excavated many times so there are now 183 niches, 694 stone statues, 82 clay sculptures and some 900 square meters of murals, which are all well preserved.

We will arrive in Xiahe in the late afternoon.

**DAY 5 XIAHE (B/L/D)**

Today we visit Labrang Monastery and the town of Xiahe. The First Living Buddha Jamyang built the monastery in 1709. It has since grown to include six major colleges, 48 Buddha halls and residences for the Living Buddhas, and some 500 compounds for monks.

The Labrang Monastery boasts more than 10,000 statues of Buddha made of gold, silver, copper, aluminum, ivory, sandalwood, jade, crystal and clay, a collection of close to 10,000 tangka paintings by artists from Wutum (hometown of Tibetan paintings) in Qinghai Province, about 65,000 Buddhist scriptures in 18,200 volumes (one of the richest collection of Buddhist scriptures). These scriptures fall into a dozen categories, including philosophy, collected works, Tantricism, medicine, “sabda” (grammar and composition), history, biography and craftsmanship and some 70,000 pieces of sutra printing wood blocks.

Overnight in Xiahe

**DAY 6 XIAHE - LANZHOU - DUNHUANG (B/L)**

Today we drive back to Lanzhou (3-4hours) to catch the night train to Dunhuang. Dunhuang lies at the western end of the Gansu Corridor, called “Hexi Zoulang”. The name Dunhuang originally meant “prospering, flourishing” - a hint that Dunhuang must once have been an important city. Its position at the intersection of two trade routes was what made Dunhuang flourish. The coming and going of horse and camel caravans carried new thoughts, ideas, arts and sciences to the East and West.



Overnight on board of the train (soft-sleeper compartment)

**DAY 7      DUNHUANG    (L/D)**

Upon arrival you will get picked up by your driver and guide to visit the Mogao Cave. It is said that in the fourth century a Buddhist monk had a vision of 1000 Buddhas, and began to carve grottoes into



the sandstone cliff and fill them with Buddhist images. They were abandoned and forgotten in around the 11th century until archaeologists arrived to carry away huge quantities of manuscripts, textiles and other art objects. However Mogao remains a brilliant trove of statues and wall paintings from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Note: it is strictly forbidden to take pictures inside the grottoes. You will need to hand in your camera at the entrance before you are allowed to enter the premises!

Then you will have the chance to explore the desert. Climbing on top of the dunes can be sweaty work. But don't worry - why don't you ride a camel to get a first hand experience of how goods were delivered along the Ancient Silk Road. We will also visit "Crescent Moon Lake", an oasis in the shape of a crescent.

Your hotel - built in castle style - is also a highlight of the trip. Besides the unique view provided from the hotel's patio of the sand dunes, it lies within walking distance of the desert.

In the evening, we recommend that you visit the city's night market and try the local specialty: Dunhuang donkey meat noodles.

Accommodation: 4 star, stylish hotel by the sand dunes

**DAY 8      DUNHUANG - TURPAN    (B)**

Enjoy a western breakfast on the hotel's patio. This day is at your own disposal to explore Dunhuang. In the evening you take the night train to Turpan.

Overnight on board of the train (soft-sleeper compartment)

**DAY 9      TURPAN    (L/D)**

Early in the morning you arrive in Turpan - which is a basin in the mountains of eastern Xinjiang and is also called "an oasis in the desert". In the morning we will make an excursion to the Tuyu valley, which also goes by the name of "Mecca of China", since seven Mohammed seers are laid to rest here. It is said to be the best preserved Uygur ancient village built in a green valley at the foot of the Flaming Mountains (the Gobi Mountain) with ancient Buddhism rock painting and Muslim tombs. Furthermore 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.

In the afternoon we will visit 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.



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. Dinner will be in the hotel with Uygur style kebab and noodles.

Accommodation: 3-star hotel in Turpan

### **DAY 10      TURPAN - KASHGAR    (B/L/D)**

Today we will go to the ruins of “Jiaohe” - about 10 kilometers west of Turpan County - which was a strategically important city on the ancient Silk Road that travelers had to pass through. Then we will drive 2.5 hours to Urumqi. Urumqi is the capital of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China. With its population of about 1.6 million people, it is the largest city in the western half of China. In Urumqi your guide will show you the way to the History Museum with its 3000-year-old mummies on display, where you will gain insight into the history of the most ancient states along the Silk Road - nowadays only ruins are left. In the evening you fly to Kashgar.

### **DAY 11      KASHGAR    (B/L/D)**

We recommend that you have breakfast at the “Caravan Western Restaurant”, run by several foreigners, who have been living in Kashgar for more than 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.

The historic spots in Kashgar are all within 5km from the city centre. Today you will explore the city, including the 500 years old Atigar Mosque, the largest mosque in Xinjiang, situated on Atigar Square in the center of the city.

Overnight in Kashgar

**DAY 12 KASHGAR - KARAKUL LAKE (B/L/D)**

After breakfast we will head to Karakul Lake (about 4 hours), 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).

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 stay overnight in a Tajik yurt or camp.

**DAY 13 KARAKUL LAKE - KASHGAR - URUMQI (B/L)**

We head back to Kashgar and explore a rural Uygur village on the way. You will cross green fields under the bright blue sky, Uygur men and women working under the sun in the fields, and if you are lucky you may see very pretty female Uygur donkey cart drivers. Once again you will have a unique opportunity to take outstanding pictures of this beautiful region and its lovely people. We take the evening flight to Urumqi.

Overnight in 4-star hotel in Urumqi

**DAY 14 URUMQI - BEIJING (B)**

In the morning you fly to Beijing. End of trip.

For inquiries and bookings please contact Mr. Roman Lange:

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**OPTIONAL EXTENSION: TREKKING TOUR FROM URUMQI TO MOUNT BOGDA (3 DAYS)****DAY 14 URUMQI - TREKKING TOUR (B/L/D)**

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 15 MOUNT BOGDA (B/L/D)**

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 16 MOUNT BOGDA - HEAVENLY LAKE TIANCHI - URUMQI (B/L/D)**

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 17 URUMQI - BEIJING (B)**

Transfer to the airport for your flight home. End of trip. Optional evening flight to Beijing on day 16



## Rates

Rates in standard twin rooms, single supplement on request

Number of Persons	Rate per Person	Rate per Person	Rate per Person	Rate per Person
	CNY	EURO	USD	CHF
2	on request	on request	on request	on request

Prices subject to change due to exchange rate fluctuations.

Prices based on the value of the Chinese Yuan CNY.



### INCLUDED

- experienced local tour guides for all days, English/Chinese-speaking
- flight tickets Urumqi - Kashgar, Kashgar - Urumqi, Urumqi - Beijing, economy class
- train tickets Beijing - Xi'an, Xi'an - Lanzhou, Lanzhou - Dunhuang, Dunhuang - Turpan
- accommodation in selected hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- all meals as described in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- all highway fees and airport taxes
- entrance fees to sightseeing spots mentioned in the itinerary
- all transfers mentioned in the itinerary

### NOT INCLUDED

- international flights
- personal expenses such as laundry, tips etc.
- transports not mentioned in the itinerary (such as taxis in the evening, etc.)
- 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**

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**

Traveling in China, especially off the beaten tracks and in rural areas, can be adventurous and also carries a certain amount of surprises and risks. HiddenChina.net ensures that in every situation we and our guides arrange for a maximum of comfort for our clients. All HiddenChina.net guides are carefully chosen and selected for their real-world abilities and experience; this allows us to manage the unexpected that is encountered along our tours. We hereby state that a voyage in China requires a degree of patience, adaptation and tolerance. Additionally, due to lack of infrastructure in the rural areas there is often a lack of western sanitary standards. Clients of HiddenChina.net accept – upon contract signing - that they are aware of these circumstances in China, and accept that in order to keep the client(s) security and comfort at a maximum during the trip, incidental changes may occur.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR CHINA TRAVELERS**

Traveling in vastness of China is always an adventure. Quality of service can range from the international standards of 5-star hotels in the big cities, to “very poor” in remote villages. While traveling in China, even with an organized tour, clients have to be ready for the unexpected (e.g. due to natural disasters such as landslides, flooding, and weather) or other surprises. In hotels for 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 be aware of 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 a 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 and you will achieve your goal much faster. Also try to react calmly in stress situations and stay friendly. Be reassured that for every problem in China there is a solution, it is up to you how effective you will get to this solution. Being angry and aggressive is counterproductive, in most cases.

**SECURITY**

Large cities in China are extremely safe! Chinese people have to fear severe punishment when being caught by the authorities in illegal matters especially 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, you will find that China's large cities are much safer than practically all European and North American cities. A single woman has nothing to fear when walking even at 4 o'clock in the morning.

**HEALTH**

It is also recommended to visit your house doctor or general practitioner before you go on a China trip and take the necessary vaccinations. Your doctor will inform you what you will need; you may also want to consult your country's national health authority. For travelers going to south China, it is also recommended to carry a supply of malaria remedies. The avian influenza is a serious issue in Asia and has been the focus of the World Health Organization (WHO) for several years. As a traveler should also consider taking appropriate medicines under the advice of their physician and buy some common incidental remedies (e.g. Tamiflu, appropriate cold medicines) before the trip begins.

We at HiddenChina.net will always take particular care to introduce you to clean restaurants with high quality standards. However, when traveling in China and especially when eating a lot of local food, carrying a supply of remedies for stomach problems is highly recommended. Your body will have to deal with a wide range of new foods, spices and other ingredients in China and also adjust to different bacteria (micro flora) than found in Europe's and North America's clean environments. When going on a China trip of a few weeks, you may have to reckon with stomach problems at least once. It is recommended that you take appropriate pharmaceuticals which are rich in salt and minerals and give you back the elements you may lose during a bout of diarrhea or intestinal discomfort. 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, e.g. Imodium, Pepto-Bismol. Always carry convenient packets of tissues and toilet paper with you, as you will not 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. In all instances of traveling to China, we recommend getting specific, up-to-date advice from your doctor on appropriate vaccinations and medications.

**CLIMATE**

China has several different climatic zones. From high altitude, to sub-tropic, and desert, China has every environment. Depending on your date of arrival in China, you might be traveling in the rainy season. In southern China this season usually begins late May or early June and lasts into August. This is a serious problem in China and this year alone in the provinces of Guangxi and Guizhou heavy flooding took the life of several hundred local people. However, we will adapt your tour according to the season and avoid the areas with heavy rain, or other such weather related problems.

**LUGGAGE**

Most airlines allow you to check baggage of 20 kg (economy class); please refer to your airline for specific allowances. The Chinese Border Control does not allow certain food products such as cheeses, meats, pornographic, or political material. Please ensure that your "Swiss army knife" and other "dangerous products" are checked with your luggage and not in your hand luggage/carry-on luggage.

China offers you a wide range of shopping possibilities. If you plan to go for extensive shopping, take a minimum of belongings. However, do not worry if you forget something, almost everything you need for daily life, can be bought much cheaper in China (see chapter below). Please be aware that many customs authorities, like the ones in Paris and Milan, can fine you heavily if they discover fake, brand name products from China in your luggage. Copied brand name products such as Yves St Laurent, Gucci, Prada, etc. are openly available in most major cities.

### **SHOPPING**

Except for imported luxury goods more or less everything is cheaper in China than in Europe and North America; clothes especially can be bought at very low prices. Many shopping areas offer fake/copy products (sometimes of extremely good quality), however, prices are not always indicated and you will have to bargain about the price (see chapter below). Please note that when buying a fake/copy product, you can get into trouble in Customs especially at major airports such as Paris, London, or Milan. The campaign against fake/copy products is now at a point which authorities can or will take away your purchase and possibly fine you heavily. For golf lovers, there is a wide range of possibilities to buy high-quality whole golf sets at a ridiculously low price. Similarly, you can have your suits tailor-made, buy ties, silk products, pearls, etc. all at very low prices. For most Europeans and North Americans, DVD's are of special interest. For a DVD in China you pay between ¥8-10 (about 1 EURO) and ironically most of the movies are available here even before they are shown in European and American cinemas. The advantage of DVD's is that they take only a little space and weight in your luggage, but be aware that in most cases you are buying illegally copied and distributed products.

Credit cards in China are only accepted in major stores, 3-star hotels and upwards, and western restaurants. Cash can be withdrawn conveniently at ATM's at the Bank of China. Please note that these are hard to find in remote areas. Money can be changed most reliably at major branches of the Bank of China or in western hotels; you will 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 viewed as "big dollar signs" and accordingly the first price given by many shop keepers will be set 400–500% above the final price they will sell his or her merchandise. So when the vendor asks for ¥100, you can set your offer to ¥20-25. Then it depends on your bargaining skills as to what price you will finally pay. A simple trick is, when an item seems too expensive for you, walk away from the vendor. If he or she doesn't follow you, you know that your bid was too low. Please also keep in mind that staying friendly and smiling when bargaining is the best approach. Once you have agreed for a price, you have to buy the product, otherwise you and the vendor will lose face. Note: the Chinese Yuan (¥), is also called RMB within China.

### **LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR**

Even in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, it is most unlikely that you find English-speaking taxi drivers or shop assistants. We recommended that you take a phrase book with you, so that you can



show what you need to express. Chinese people are mostly friendly and curious towards foreigners and they are also very proud of their country and culture. However, some of their 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 difficult place. You also often see Chinese people spitting accompanied by rather obvious throat-clearing noises. The best way to get around these differences in social graces is to ignore them and accept it as part of the culture; for even in China they also say “Ru Xiang Sui Su!”, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. On the other hand for the smoker, China is a paradise, as it is more or less acceptable everywhere to smoke and cigarettes are extremely cheap. Social drinking in China is also noteworthy as you might be invited to test your skills. Even modest social contact can include unexpected rounds of drinks, as the Chinese find this is an opportunity to be more indulgent than most European or North Americans. The easiest way to avoid unwanted drinking without losing face is to tell your hosts that due to “health” 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 5-star surroundings of the big cities. In restaurants, taxis, and smaller inns and hotels tipping is a “no-no” (except in 5-star hotels). However, the other exception is for tour guides and drivers of organized tours, these individuals should be tipped. Most guides and drivers are roughly paid 10 Euro per day and rely on the additional tip income. This is acceptable because with Chinese tour groups (which often go shopping) the guides and drivers usually get a commission from the shops. European tour groups usually do not visit as many shops as Chinese tourists, for European tour groups then the 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 inexpensive souvenirs with you from your home country, for example watches or picture postcards.

### **SMALL TALK AND CONVERSATION**

Small talk in China is a bit different than in Europe and North America, but similarly there are 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, job, and about family. The Chinese are very family oriented, so don’t feel embarrassed when people ask you rather private questions, it is 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 an awkward direct question (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 can explain how expensive life in Europe is.

Topics which should be avoided at all costs are all political-related discussions such as the Cultural Revolution, criticism of the system or Chairman Mao, the “Tibet” and “Taiwan” questions, human rights, and the treatment of 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. For the sake of social tact, it is wise to hide these questions in compliments and be as subtle as possible (see also the chapter about “Face”). Please note that young Chinese (below 30) are much more open to discuss critical and inflammatory topics than people above 30.

Please also note that Chinese people may tend to physically touch you, which should not be taken as 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 polite means –to feign a hearty fit of coughing does the trick (SARS is still in Chinese people's mind).

### **TRAFFIC, TAXI AND SUBWAY**

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. Subways are the most convenient way to get around town as you will not get stuck in traffic jams. In Beijing, tickets for lines 1 and 2 cost 2 Yuan for however far you are going. All signs and announcements in the subway system are in Chinese and English.

In the cities, taxis are quite convenient as well. You can, compared to Europe, basically take a taxi anytime and everywhere at a very low price. Be wary of taxis found at major tourist sites as there are also unofficial drivers trying to make extra money. We at HiddenChina.net recommend that you always take a licensed taxi, however, if you take a taxi that has no meter (make sure that the driver in taxis with a taximeter always puts it on), be sure to negotiate the rate before you get into the vehicle. Even in taking this precaution, some drivers will still try to make you pay an extra fee at the end of your ride. 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 it is a good habit to take a bilingual map, a taxi card, or a guidebook with you. A convenient method is to tell the reception staff in the hotel to write down the addresses for you so you can show it to the driver. Please note that highway toll fees/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 (RMB) 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 (rolls of film can be bought and developed on the 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. Ladies please note: tampons and similar hygiene products are rarely available in China outside of the major cities.