



## Eco-Friendly Train and Bus Trip

- Explore China by train and bus on this eco-friendly train and bus trip
- Travel from the former capital of Kazakhstan to the capital of the Middle Kingdom
- Visit the following UNESCO World Heritage Sites:  
The Great Wall at Jiayuguan and Huanghuacheng,  
Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, Terracotta Army in Xi'An,  
Imperial Palace and Temple of Heaven in Beijing
- Enjoy the landscape of this beautiful region with its deserts, snow mountains, oases, plateaus and pasturelands on this extraordinary travel experience



**TRAIN AND BUS TRIP ALMATY-BEIJING ALONG THE SILK ROAD**

This train and bus trip will lead you from the former capital of Kazakhstan through the “Wild West” of China along the Silk Road to the world-famous town of Xi’An and on to the capital of the Middle Kingdom and is specially designed for travelers, who want to explore China in a eco-friendly way.

- Best travel dates: May – October
- Destinations: Almaty, Urumqi, Turpan, Dunhuang, Jiayuguan, Tianshui, Xi’An, Beijing
- Duration: 15 days
- Starting in: Almaty
- Ending in: Beijing
- Group size: min. 2 pax, max. 16 pax

**QUICK INTRODUCTION**

Lying in northwestern China, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, also called Xin for short, was referred to as the Western Region in ancient times. It has an area of 1,66 million square kilometers, roughly about one-sixth of the total territory of China. Xinjiang is the largest and has the longest boundary line among China’s provinces and autonomous regions. It shares 5,600 kilometers of frontier with Mongolia in the northeast; Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, and Tadjhikistan in the west; and Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in the southwest. Xinjiang is divided into two basins by Mount Tianshan, Dzungarian Basin in the north and Tarim Basin in the south. The Karakorum highway links Islamabad, Pakistan with Kashgar over the Khunjerab Pass.

Xinjiang’s lowest point is 155 meters below sea level (lowest point in China). Its highest peak is 8611 meters above sea level on the border with Kashmir. The Xinjiang-Kyrgyzstan border is marked by the Tian Shan mountain range. The Torugart Pass (3752 m) is located on this border.

In Xinjiang live 1,073,300 people from 46 ethnic minority groups, or 61.42 percent of the total population, and 6,601,000 Han people. Thirteen of the 47 ethnic groups – the Uygur, Han, Kazak, Hui, Mongolian, Kirgiz, Tajik, Xibe, Uzbek, Manchu, Daur, Tartar, and Russian – have lived there for generations.

Gansu is a province located in the northwest of the People’s Republic of China. It lies between Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, and the Huangtu Plateaus, and borders Mongolia to the north. The Huang He River passes the southern part of the province. It has a population of approximately 25 million and has a large concentration of Hui Chinese. The capital of the province is Lanzhou, located in the southeast part of Gansu. Gansu province has an area of 454,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and the majority of its land is above 1 km over sea level. The Huang He (Yellow) River passes through the southern part of the province. The Yellow River gets most of its water from Gansu province. The Yellow River also flows straight through Lanzhou. Part of the Gobi Desert is located in Gansu.

The landscape in Gansu is very mountainous in the south and flat in the north. The mountains in the south are part of the Qilian mountain range. At 5,547 meters high, Qilian Shan Mountain is Gansu's highest elevation.

Gansu province is home to 26,033,400 people. Most of the population, 73%, is still rural. Gansu is 92% Han and also has Hui, Tibetan, Dingxiang, Tu, Manchu, Uyghur, Yugur, Bonan, Mongolian, Salar, and Kazakh minorities.

Shaanxi is a north-central province of the People's Republic of China, and includes portions of the Loess Plateau on the middle reaches of the Yellow River as well as the Qinling Mountains across the southern part of the province.

Shaanxi (and the city of Xi'An therein) are considered one of the cradles of Chinese civilization. Thirteen feudal dynasties established their capitals in this province during a span of more than 1100 years, from the Zhou dynasty to the Tang dynasty. It is also the starting point of the Silk Road which leads to Europe, Arabia and Africa.

During the Mongol rule in the 13th century, Shaanxi became a provincial unit. In the ensuing years, wars and famine had decimated and depopulated the province. As a result, large populations of Muslims, or Hui people, emerged, as evident today. Under the Ming dynasty, Shaanxi was incorporated into Gansu but was again separated in the Qing dynasty.

The northern part of Shaanxi is cold in the winter and very hot in summer with dry winter and spring. Its southern portion generally receives more rain. Annual mean temperature is roughly between 9°C and 16°C with January temperature ranging from -11° C to 3.5° C and July temperature ranging from 21°C to 28°C.

<b>DAY 1</b>	<b>ALMATY (KAZAKHSTAN)</b>
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Our guide will meet you at the airport and drive you to the hotel. In the afternoon you can relax from the flight and in the evening we will take you to a welcome dinner in a local restaurant and you will learn more about the details of your trip from the guide.

Almaty is the former capital and largest city in Kazakhstan, with a population of 1,185,900. The city is located at the foot of Tianshan Mountains in the southeast of Kazakhstan on the border to Kyrgyzstan at the altitude of 1500-2000 meters above sea level. Almaty is Central Asia's most cosmopolitan city with a colorful mix of nationalities like the Kazaks, Russians, Uygurs, Tatars, Turks, Ukrainians and others. 1998 the capital was moved to Astana. Almaty, however, remains the country's major commercial and cultural center.

The climate in the city is markedly continental, with considerable fluctuations in temperature not only between different seasons but also between day and night. From a height of 500 meters, the streets lead to the north, to the steppe and semi-desert, coming close to the hot Kaskelen Moyunkuins.

**DAY 2      ALMATY - URUMQI**

In the morning we will explore Almaty. The city has a lot to offer: a fascinating landscape with its remarkable apple orchards, plantations and vineyards as well as cultural sites such as the National Museum of Kazakhstan, the Presidential Palace, the Republic Square or the Archaeological Museum, which houses Kazakhstan's major treasures, and several theaters and libraries – just to mention a few examples. The main attraction might be the Saint Ascension Cathedral though: once the political and cultural centre of the Turkistan region and another wooden creation of architect Paul Zenkov, it is said to be built in 1904-1907 without a single nail. The building has survived the notorious 1911 earthquake measuring 10 on the Richter scale and all subsequent earthquakes. You might also want to visit the city's several other churches and mosques, the Green Bazaar, the Merchant Iskhak Gabdulvaliev's store or the beautiful parks, the most renowned being the Central Park, still known by its Soviet name of "Gorky Park", which contains a modern movie theatre, boating lakes, restaurants, rides and a zoo.

At 371 meters in height, the TV Tower on Kocktobe (Kazakh for Green Hill) hill is one of the world's tallest buildings.

After the sightseeing tour we will take the train to Urumqi in the Chinese province Xinjiang. Overnight on board of the train.

**DAY 3      URUMQI**

We will arrive in Urumqi at 07:30 in the morning. 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. After check-in at the hotel we visit the Grand Bazaar, the Red Hill Park and the Historical Museum in Urumqi 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 and have lunch in a local restaurant. In the afternoon we drive to a Kazakh pastureland of the Tianshan mountain range and return to Urumqi in the evening.

**DAY 4      URUMQI - TURPAN**

Today we drive from Urumqi to Turpan, which is a basin in the mountains of eastern Xinjiang and is also called "an oasis in the desert". We will have lunch on the way from Urumqi to Turpan. You will 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.

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.



Afterwards 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 must pass through. In the evening we join a Uygur family for dinner. After the meal you will watch a Uygur dancing performance. Get invited by the prettiest girls and most handsome boy dancers to join the merry crowd -- just relax and enjoy the cool summer night!

**DAY 5      TURPAN - SHANSHAN - DUNHUANG**

Today we will visit the Thousand Buddha Grottoes „Bezilik” and the ancient city of Gaochang, which 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. 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.

After lunch we will drive 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.

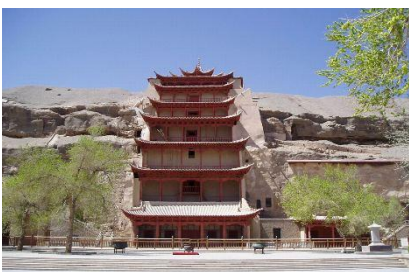


Afterwards we drive to the oasis town Shanshan. Shanshan is the Chinese name for Loulan, a kingdom that existed roughly from 200BC-1000AD at the north-east of the Taklamakan desert. In the evening we will take the train to Dunhuang in the province Gansu.

**TAG 6      DUNHUANG**

After breakfast we drive from Liuyuan to the city of 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.

We will visit the “Mogao” grottoes. 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 4th to 10th centuries.



In the afternoon you can stroll through the city and visit the bazaar and the museum to get a picture of the former importance of Dunhuang.

We will then drive to the Crescent Lake and Echoing-Sand Mountain (Mingsha Shan). Crescent Lake is a lake in the oasis near the city Dunhuang. Rumor has it that there is a lake monster living in this lake. These attractions are essentially part of the same area. The Crescent Lake is within the Sand-Mountain. This lake is apparently an oasis surrounded by the highly sandy area composed of high dunes. The Mingsha Shan is so named for the sound of the wind whipping off the dunes. Along the side of the Crescent Lake is a pagoda in traditional Han Chinese architecture.

**DAY 7      DUNHUANG - JIAYUGUAN - TIANSHUI**

We have breakfast at the hotel and leave for Jiayuguan; home to Jiayuguan Pass, the largest and most intact pass, or entrance, of the Great Wall. Jiayuguan Pass was built in the late Ming dynasty, somewhere around the year 1372. It was built near an oasis that was then on the extreme western edge of China. Jiayuguan Pass was the first pass on the west end of the great wall so it earned the name “The First and Greatest Pass under Heaven.” Legend goes that the official in charge asked the designer to calculate how many bricks would be used. The designer gave him the number and when the project was finished, only one brick was left. It was put on the top of the pass as a symbol of commemoration. The bus ride amidst impressive scenery will take quite a while because of rather poor road conditions. In the evening we drive to Tianshui by train. Overnight on board of the train.

**DAY 8      TIANSHUI**

After arrival in Tianshui - the second largest city in Gansu province with a population of approximately 3,250,000 - we will drive to the hotel. The rest of the day is at your own disposal.

The Qin state, later to become the founding dynasty of the Chinese empire, grew out from this area. Qin tombs have been excavated from Fangmatan near Tianshui, including one 2200 year old map of Guixian county.

**DAY 9      TIANSHUI - XI'AN**

In the morning we will visit Mt. Maijishan. This mountain near Tianshui was first used as a Buddhist hideaway at the end of the 4th century. The grottoes in this curious mountain contain more than 7000 Buddha and Bodhisattva steles, some dated from as early as the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534). In the afternoon we visit a Taoist temple in the city and take the evening train to the capital of Shaanxi province: the world-famous town of Xi'An. Known as one of the most important cities in Chinese history, Xi'An is listed as one of the Four Great Ancient Capitals of China because it has been the capital of 13 dynasties, including the Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang. Xi'An is also the eastern end of the Silk Road. The city has more than 3,100 years of history. Xi'An is the largest and most developed city in the central to northwestern part of China and is ranked among the 10 largest cities in the nation. Overnight on board of the train.

**DAY 10 XI'AN**

Today we have a look at the well-preserved city wall, the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, the Drum and Bell Tower and the Muslim district. You will have a dumpling dinner and join a Tang-dynasty song-and-dance show in the evening.

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 offers great 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 Xian 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.

**DAY 11 XI'AN - BEIJING**

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. Additionally, we will visit the site of the yet



uncovered grave of the Yellow Emperor Qin Shihuang. Qin Shi Huang was king of the Chinese State of Qin from 247 BCE to 221 BCE, and then the first emperor of a unified China from 221 BC to 210 BC, ruling under the name First Emperor. Having unified China, he passed a series of major reforms aimed at cementing the unification, and they undertook some Herculean construction projects, most notably the precursor version of the current Great Wall of China. Therefore he is still regarded by many today as the founding father in Chinese history. The Terracotta Army is a collection of 8,099 life-size terracotta figures of warriors and horses located near the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, which were buried with him after his death.

In the evening we will take our last train trip on this tour. The destination is the capital of the Middle Kingdom: Beijing. Overnight on board of the train.

**DAY 12      BEIJING**

The morning is at your disposal and in the afternoon we meet for a visit of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. From the Forbidden City we take a bike to discover Beijing's "Hutongs" and discover the hidden alleyways, where you will have the opportunity to see how a Beijinger's home looks like. When the weather is good, we head to the Houhai Lakes, where we have a drink in one of the cozy bars after the bike tour.



In the evening the choice of restaurant is up to you. However, we will recommend you various possibilities, depending on what you would like to eat. Optionally we provide you with a nightlife guide, with whom you will discover Beijing's nightlife.

**DAY 13      BEIJING**

We will visit the Ming Tombs today and take a hike on a wild section of the Great Wall.

The Ming Tombs lie 50 km north-west of Beijing. 13 of the 16 Ming emperors are buried at this impressive site. The second-largest tomb Ding Ling – the tomb of Emperor Wan Li (1573 – 1620) - was the first to be excavated. Two others – the largest tomb Chang Ling and Zhao Ling – are now open to the public. It took the emperor six years, hundreds of thousands of workers and a big amount of money to build his necropolis. Nowadays, travelers can visit the underground passageways and caverns.



Construction on the biggest tomb Chang Ling – the resting place of Emperor Zhu Di (also known as Yongle, 1402-1424) – started in 1409 and took 18 years to complete. According to legends, 16 concubines were buried alive with Zhu Di's corpse.

Zhao Ling – the resting place of Emperor Longqing and three of his wives - is the 9<sup>th</sup> of the Ming Tombs.

The seven km road known as the Spirit Way "Shen Dao" starts with a triumphal arch, then goes through the Great Palace Gate, where officials had to dismount, and passes a giant tortoise (made in 1425) bearing the largest stele in China. This is followed by a guard of 12 sets of stone animals. Beyond the stone animals are 12 human statues of officials, ministers and generals. The stone figures terminate at the Lingxing Gate.

After the visit of the tombs, we head to a lovely countryside restaurant where an excellent trout meal awaits you. After lunch we head to a wild section of the Great Wall. We hike for about an hour on the unspoilt and overgrown Great Wall at Huanghua.



The Great Wall stretches from Shanhai Pass on the east coast to Jiayu Pass in the Gobi desert – an important link on the Silk Road. The “original” wall was begun 2000 years ago during the Qin dynasty



(221-207), when China was unified under Emperor Qin Shihuang. Separate walls, built by independent kingdoms to keep out “barbarians” and nomads, were linked up. The construction required hundreds of thousands of workers and according to legends, one of the building materials apart from the estimated 180 million cubic meters of rammed earth was the bodies of deceased workers. The wall actually never performed its function as a defense line. However, it worked very well as a kind of highway, along which men and

equipment could be transported across mountainous terrain. Its beacon tower system using smoke signals transmitted news of enemy movements quickly back to the capital.

Please note that good shoes (hiking boots) are required and people suffering from vertigo should not join. We could also take you to one of the less demanding, but much touristier sections of the Great Wall.

#### **DAY 14      BEIJING**

Today we visit the Summer Palace as well as the Temple of Heaven in the south of Beijing.

The Summer Palace – declared by UNESCO as an “outstanding expression of the creative art of Chinese landscape garden design“ is an immense park mainly dominated by Longevity Hill (60 meters high) and the Kunming Lake. This site had long been a royal garden and summer resort for the



residents of the Forbidden City. It was enlarged by Emperor Qianlong (1735-1796) as a present for the 60th birthday of his mother. During his reign, Kunming Lake was expanded by extending an existing body of water to imitate the West Lake in Hangzhou and artisans reproduced the garden architecture styles of various palaces in China. Anglo-French troops damaged the buildings during the Second Opium War (1860). Empress Dowager Cixi diverted 30 million taels of silver, said to be originally designated for the Chinese navy (the immobile marble boat at the edge of the lake still reminds the visitor of this story), into the reconstruction and enlargement of the Summer Palace. In 1900 the palace complex suffered another attack by foreign

troops during the Boxer Rebellion and was once again badly damaged. Restorations took place a few years later and the Summer Palace was opened to the public in 1924.

The Temple of Heaven „Tian Tan“ – the perfection of Ming architecture situated in southeastern Beijing in Xuanwu District – has come to symbolize Beijing. Construction of the complex began in 1420, and was thereafter visited by all subsequent emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties to pray for good harvests, seek divine clearance and atone for the sins of the people. The northern end of the park is semicircular and the southern end is square – a pattern deriving from the ancient Chinese belief that heaven is round and earth is square. The Temple of Heaven is the grandest of the four great temples located in Beijing. The other prominent temples include the Temple of Sun in the east, the Temple of Earth in the north, and the Temple of Moon in the west.

The main building of the whole complex is the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, which is a magnificent piece mounted on a three-tiered marble terrace. It was built 1420 by the Emperor Zhu Di (Yongle), consumed by fire in 1889 and re-erected the following year. The wooden pillars support the 38m high ceiling without a single nail.

The octagonal Imperial Vault of Heaven is structured along the lines of the older Hall of Prayer of Good Harvests, though it is smaller. It used to contain tablets of the emperor's ancestors, which were used in the winter solstice ceremony. Surrounding the Imperial Vault of Heaven is the Echo Wall, where a whisper can travel clearly from one end to the other. The Three Echo Stones are just outside of the gate of the Imperial Vault of Heaven. If you speak facing the vault while standing on the first stone, you will hear one echo; standing on the second and then the third stone, you will hear two and three echoes respectively.



The 5m high Round Altar was constructed in 1530 and rebuilt in 1740. It is composed of white marble arrayed in three tiers, and its geometry revolves around the imperial number nine. Odd numbers were considered heavenly and 9 is the largest single-digit odd number. The top tier – thought to symbolize heaven – has nine rings of stones, each ring composed of multiples of nine stones, so that the ninth ring has 81 stones. The middle tier – earth – has the 10th to 18th rings and the bottom tier – man – has the 19th to 27th rings, ending with a total of 243 stones in the largest ring. The number of stairs and balustrades are also multiples of nine.

The 360m long and 30m broad Danbi-Bridge connects the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvest and the Imperial Vault of Heaven. The south end of the Bridge is lower than its north end. The emperors believed that they could go to heaven through this bridge, which is why it is also called “Sacred Way”.

## DAY 15    BEIJING

Transfer to the airport for your flight back home.

**Note:** Beijing has much more to offer than just the famous sightseeing spots. The activities on days 12 to 14 should therefore be considered as recommendation. We can tailor-make a program according to your personal needs and desires. You could for example learn how to cook traditional Chinese dumplings from a local family, visit an acrobatic show, learn how to make Chinese kites under the guidance of an experienced craftsman living in a courtyard, visit a local winery, etc. We also offer daily excursions to hidden places outside of Beijing. Please contact us for details.

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

Our other classic tours in China:

[18-days Highlights of China](#)

[12-days Yunnan discovery tour](#)

## **RATES**

**RATE PER PERSON IN TWIN: ON REQUEST**

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: ON REQUEST**

### **INCLUDED SERVICES:**

- experienced English-Chinese-speaking tour leader and local tour guides for all days
- full board except on free afternoons/evenings
- entrance fees to sightseeing spots mentioned in the itinerary
- all train tickets as mentioned in the itinerary
- accommodation in selected hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- all transfers mentioned in the itinerary in a comfortable, air-conditioned bus
- bikes for the bike tour in Beijing

### **NOT INCLUDED:**

- 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 (REGA membership is recommended)

**INSURANCE IS RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARTICIPANT!**

### **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.