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Trekking Northern Yunnan

- Discover Northern Yunnan, one of China's most famous travel destinations
- Trek along the famous Tibetan Pilgrim Paths around Kawakarpo (6'740m), one of the most sacred mountains in Buddhism
- Visit must-sees such as Kunming, Shangri-La and Lijiang
- Learn more about the matrilineal Naxi Society and its Dongba Shamans
- Enjoy a fauna and flora of one of the world's most diversified ecological areas, which boasts half of China's animal and plants species
- Get access to very remote areas only few Western travelers discover



TREKKING NORTHERN YUNNAN

This trip is ideal for people who would like to combine a China experience focused on the Tibetan minority in Northern Yunnan with some fantastic trekking along the Tibetan pilgrim routes around Mt. Kawakarpo. Kawakarpo is at an altitude of 6'740 meters not only the highest peak in the region; it is also one of the most beautiful massifs in China. In addition it is one of the most sacred mountains for Buddhists. Yunnan is famous for being one of the richest ecological systems world-wide, it also boasts many of China's minorities, such as Tibetans, Yi, Naxi and Mosuo.

- Best travel date: 7th May - 26th May 2008
- Destinations: Beijing, Kunming, Shangri-La (Zhongdian), Deqin, Lijiang
- Duration: 20 days
- Starting in: Beijing
- Ending in: Beijing
- Group size: min. 8 pax, max. 12 pax

Alternative: Trip start and end also possible in Kunming (without stay in Beijing)

QUICK INTRODUCTION

Yunnan is probably one of the most visited destinations by Chinese travelers. Nevertheless, Chinese travelers mostly visit the obvious tourist attractions such as Lijiang and go on less adventurous journeys than most western travelers. Yunnan boasts half of China's animal and plant species and is also China's most diversified province, offering more or less everything from rain forest to close to 7000 meter high peaks. With one third of China's ethnological minorities, it provides an insight into these cultures.



With its mild climate, Yunnan basically means "south of the clouds" and its capital Kunming is also known as "spring city". During this trip we take you from Kunming to Lijiang. The Old Town of Lijiang is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Here, you will visit Baisha Village, the former capital of the Naxi Kingdom. From Lijiang, we travel further northwards to China's self-proclaimed Shangri-La (Zhongdian) named after the famous novel "Lost Horizon" by James Hilton¹, and then on to Feilai via Deqin to start our trekking tour on the Inner Kora, which leads to the heart of Eastern Kham's Holy Mountain Kawakarpo. On this quite demanding tour, you will trek along the Minyong Glacier, visit different Buddhist monasteries and Catholic villages, get in touch with local people and get a unique insight into the daily life of local communities. After you have paid tribute to one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in Tibet - the Holy Waterfall near Yubeng Village - you will take a bus ride through the Mekong Valley to Weixi and then back to Lijiang and Kunming to conclude this stunning trip.

¹ recommended literature: „Lost Horizon“ Author: James Hilton ISBN: 0-671-66427-1

WEDNESDAY, 7TH MAY 2008 **ARRIVAL BEIJING** **(L/D)**

After your arrival in Beijing, you will be picked up by our guide and transferred to your hotel. After check-in you will have some time to refresh. In the afternoon we take you to the Forbidden City and the Square of Heavenly Peace „Tiananmen“. Afterwards we explore Beijing's hutongs - the traditional residential areas - and visit a local family.

For dinner we will have the world-famous Beijing duck, brief you on the program of the days ahead and make final preparations. Overnight at Grand Hyatt or Kempinski Hotel (5*).

THURSDAY, 8TH MAY 2008 **BEIJING - MING TOMBS - GREAT WALL** **(B/L)**

In the morning we head outside of Beijing to explore the Ming Tombs 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.

After the visit of the tombs, we head to a lovely countryside restaurant where an excellent trout meal awaits you. Then we head to a wild section of the Great Wall to get in the right mood for the trekking days ahead. We hike for about 1.5 hours on the unspoilt and overgrown Great Wall at Huanghua. We return to Beijing in the late afternoon. Individual dinner.

FRIDAY, 9TH MAY 2008 **BEIJING - KUNMING** **(B/L/D)**

Transfer to the airport of Beijing and flight to Kunming. After check-in at the Green Lake Hotel (5*), a short sightseeing tour of the city and a visit to one of the lively local markets, you will enjoy a welcome dinner in an excellent local Muslim restaurant.

SATURDAY, 10TH MAY 2008 **KUNMING - LIJIANG** **(B/L/D)**

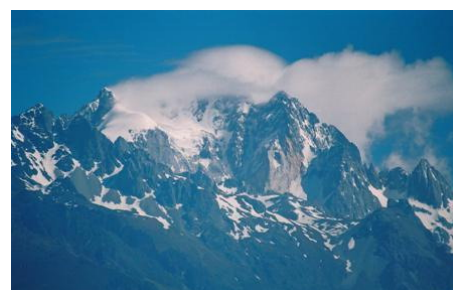
After breakfast transfer to the Stone Forest with its picturesque karst formation. In the afternoon, take a relaxing walk around Kunming's Green Lake and the Yuantong Temple, a unique Buddhist site which unites all 3 great schools of Buddhism. Take the evening flight to Lijiang and visit the Old Town, which is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and attracts visitors from all over the world. In its narrow winding alleys one finds a good selection of comfy restaurants, cafes and shops selling traditional handicraft and antiques. Traditional Naxi dinner and overnight in the excellent Grand Lijiang Hotel (3*).

SUNDAY, 11TH MAY 2008 **LIJIANG** **(B/L)**

After breakfast transfer to Yuhu, home to Austrian-American explorer Joseph Rock, who lived there from 1922 until 1949, pioneering in exploring the indigenous flora and various peoples in the Sino-Tibetan border area. From his home, we go to the Yufeng Temple and further to Baisha Village, the former capital of the Naxi Kingdom, located on the Lijiang plains, through which the Mongols led by Kublai Khan invaded the Nanzhao Kingdom and conquered the Chinese Imperial armies in the 13th century. Baisha's old Taoist/Buddhist frescoes are some of the last of their kind in China and show a gathering of immortals and deities of both religions. In the evening visit a unique concert of traditional Chinese Taoist music performed on original instruments. Individual dinner.

MONDAY, 12TH MAY 2008 **LIJIANG - SHANGRI LA** **(B/L/D)**

In the morning, we make an excursion up onto Lion Hill, with its beautiful views over the tiled roofs of the Old Town of Lijiang and its quiet surrounding park. Before lunch, we travel on towards the Tibetan Plateau. On the way you will visit the Tiger Leaping Gorge, one of the deepest gorges in the world. During the millenniums, the Yangtze River carved a gorge into the massifs of the Haba and Jade Dragon Snow Mountains, both over 5'000 m high with their glacier peaks towering over the rice terraces on the Yangtze banks. In the late afternoon, we will reach the Tibetan Plateau, at an altitude of 3'200 m the highest county in Yunnan Province. Hotpot dinner and overnight at Paradise Hotel (4* - 5*).

**TUESDAY, 13TH MAY 2008** **SHANGRI LA** **(B/L)**

An easy hiking tour in the morning amidst impressive scenery near a little monastery in the environs of Shangri La provides the chance of getting used to walking at high altitude, which should be no problem after acclimatizing in Lijiang and Kunming. In the afternoon exploration of one of the most important strongholds of Tibetan Buddhism in Yunnan, the Songtsanlin Monastery where over 700 monks live and eight ceremonial halls can be visited. The evening is free for relaxing and strolling in the unique Old Town of Shangri La.

WEDNESDAY, 14TH MAY 2008 **SHANGRI LA - DEQIN - FEILAI (3300 M)** **(B/L/D)**

After breakfast drive amidst impressive alpine scenery to Deqin. On the way there, the Dongzhulin Monastery waits to be explored. The monastery is an important branch of the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism (Yellow Hats) and features 3 huge three-dimensional mandalas made of gold and jewels, unique to eastern Tibet. Overnight in a simple hotel in Feilai (20 min. outside of Deqin city), with stunning views over the Kawakarpo Range (Meili Snow Mountains, 6'790 m), a very much frequented holy mountain for Tibetan pilgrims and the destination of this extraordinary journey.

15TH - 21ST MAY 2008**TREKKING KAWAKARPO - INNER KORA (B/L/D)**

This quite demanding trekking tour leads to the heart of Eastern Kham's Holy Mountain Kawakarpo. At the beginning, we trek along the Minyong Glacier with its two small monasteries related to the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism.

The glacier-trek is followed by the ascent to Yubeng Village and the goal of all pilgrims - the Holy Waterfall at the end of a picturesque valley, one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in Tibet. The route follows the 'inner kora', the path the pilgrims take on their way to the waterfall. Along this trail, accompanied by the countless donations left by the pilgrims, many small treasures and holy sites are to be explored. We will stay overnight in basic guest rooms of Tibetan families' farmhouses or in simple guest houses.



Due to the accessibility and the harmonious routing, which allows flexibility such as horseback-riding as an alternative to a demanding ascent on foot, this tour is an excellent chance for a try-out of Himalayan trekking. The tour offers both culturally and naturally unique experiences - the sometimes quite well-maintained paths lead through wild gorges and over soft alpine pastures, to huge glaciers and to the banks of the roaring Mekong River, whereas the opportunity to stay with local families offers an unseen chance for a deep insight into the daily life of the Tibetan community.

THURSDAY, 22ND MAY 2008**NYNONG - KYABI - CIZHONG - WEIXI (B/L/D)**

In the morning another 3 hours of trekking lead back to the road just above the beautiful Kyabi village. Today's goal is the multi-cultural county capital Weixi, reached by a 7-hours bus ride on a stunningly beautiful road through the enormous Mekong valley. En route, the Catholic Church of Cizhong waits to be explored, established 200 years ago by French missionaries. Although the French had to leave in the 1950's, still most of the community is of Christian belief and the neighboring yards are filled with grapes for the production of quite decent red wine. Overnight at Yatai Hotel (2* - 3*) in Weixi County.

FRIDAY, 23RD MAY 2008**WEIXI - LIJIANG (B/L)**

Leave for Lijiang in the morning, passing by the first bend of the Yangtze River, a location of great importance for the water supply of central China. The evening is free for individual dinner in one of Lijiang's numerous restaurants and cafes.



SATURDAY, 24TH MAY 2008 **LIJIANG** **(B/D)**

On this last day in Yunnan you will have time to relax and reflect on the experiences. In the evening you will enjoy a farewell dinner of the excellent Thai-style cuisine.

SUNDAY, 25TH MAY 2008 **LIJIANG - KUNMING - BEIJING** **(B)**

Transfer to the airport for the flight to Kunming and Beijing. Individual lunch and dinner. Overnight at Grand Hyatt or Kempinski Hotel (5*).

MONDAY, 26TH MAY 2008 **BEIJING** **(B)**

Transfer to the airport for your flight home. End of trip.

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

Our other trekking tours in China:

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

[9 days Silk Road Highlights and Trekking Tour Mount Bogda](#)

[8 days Horse Riding and Trekking Tour Jiadengyu - Lake Kanas, Xinjiang](#)

[18 days Mount Genyen Trekking in Tibetan Yunnan and Sichuan](#)

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

For this tour you have to be in good condition. You need adequate travel gear and some preparation according to the local customs and special characteristics. For this tour, there are some special requirements:

Once arrived in China we will take care of a slow and adequate acclimatization and provide you with professional advice, but there always is some risk involved that due to the high altitude of some passages, some people might suffer from discomfort like headache, sleeplessness and other symptoms of altitude sickness. Please inform yourself about possible risks and preventive measures before the start of the trip.

Furthermore, this tour requires you to be in good condition suitable for trekking. You should have a secure step and no acrophobia. For the case that an ascent is too demanding, there is the opportunity of horseback-riding with a local personal horse-guide (as horses are rather small of size, therefore the weight limit for the rider is 90 kg).

As this tour leads into regions with very restricted infrastructure, accommodation facilities and meals can be very basic! As compensation, the traveler gets a unique insight into daily life of the local communities.

For the case of health problems, please bring a personal stock of medicines for your private use, as we are not allowed by Chinese law to provide any medication. Please also be aware that personal travel insurance for the entire trip is also necessary.

Please be informed that we cannot take any responsibility for incidences occurring due to act of nature beyond control, alpine risks or high altitude as long as they are not caused grossly negligent by our staff. Furthermore we reserve the right to make changes in the itinerary without prior notice.

RATES

RATE PER PERSON IN TWIN: EURO 3390.- (2250.- EURO WITHOUT STAY IN BEIJING)

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: EURO 500.- (380.- EURO WITHOUT STAY IN BEIJING)

CANCELLATION CHARGES

30-60 DAYS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE: 50%

15-30 DAYS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE: 75%

00-15 DAYS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE: 100%

INCLUDED:

- experienced European tour leader in Yunnan for trekking days; English-German-Chinese-speaking
- local tour guides for all days, English/Chinese-speaking
- accommodation in selected hotels in double rooms as mentioned in the itinerary
- outside the cities accommodation in basic, but clean guest houses in double rooms or dormitories, in unexpected cases in tents (camping equipment provided by us)
- full board except on free afternoons/evenings (described as B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- all transfers as mentioned in the itinerary in comfortable, air-conditioned coach
- all highway fees as mentioned in the itinerary
- all flight tickets in China (Beijing - Kunming, Kunming - Lijiang and Lijiang - Kunming - Beijing), economy class
- all entrance fees as mentioned in the itinerary
- pack-animals (mules or horses) for baggage and equipment (max. 15 kg personal baggage per participant!)

NOT INCLUDED:

- international flights to and from China
- expenses of personal nature such as laundry, tips, etc.
- alcoholic drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- optional ascent on horseback with local horse guide (surcharge 25 Euro per day)
- 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 3 Yuan (RMB) and 5 Yuan (RMB) for line 13 (with transfer to other lines) 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.