

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Hotels in this book are divided into three categories: budget, midrange and top end. The majority of rooms in China are 'twins', two single beds placed in one room. Single rooms (one bed per room; 单间; *dānjiān*) are rare. Double rooms (双人房; *shuāngrénfáng*; also called 标准间; *biāozhǔn jiān*) are often twin, with two beds. Suites (套房; *tàofáng*) are available at most midrange and top-end hotels.

China's Southwest has a wide variety of accommodation options, from rudimentary rooms in cheap family homesteads (农家; *nóngjiā*) to inns (客栈; *kèzhàn*), youth hostels (青年旅社; *qīngnián lǚshè*), cheap Chinese guesthouses (招待所; *zhāodàisù*) and hotels

that range across the spectrum from two- to five-star through budget, midrange and top end. Hotels are called either *bīnguǎn* (宾馆), *jiǔdiàn* (酒店), *dàjiǔdiàn* (大酒店), *fàndiàn* (饭店) or *dàfàndiàn* (大饭店).

Be warned that the star rating at China's hotels can be misleading. Hotels are often awarded four or five stars, when they are patently a star lower in ranking.

When checking into a hotel you must complete a registration form. A copy of this is sent to the local Public Security Bureau (PSB). The form will ask what type of visa you have. For most, the type of visa is 'L', from the Chinese word for travel (*lǚxíng*). For a full list of visa categories, see p476.

The policy at most hotels is that you check out by noon to avoid being charged extra.

The Chinese method of designating floors is the same as that used in the USA, but different from, say, that in Australia. What would be the ground floor in Australia is the 1st floor in China, the 1st is the 2nd, and so on.

A deposit (押金; *yājīn*) is required at most hotels; this will be either a cash deposit, or your credit card details will be taken. If your deposit is paid in cash, you will be given a receipt, which you should hold on to, for later reimbursement. Credit cards can usually be used for payment at three-star hotels and up, but always check beforehand.

Single males at midrange hotels are routinely pestered on the phone by girls providing massage (*ànmó*).

Budget

Until recent years, foreigners were barred from very cheap guesthouses as a matter of course, but times have changed and increasing numbers of bargain accommodation options now accept Westerners.

Rooms in family homesteads (*nóngjiā*) – typically family homes in smallish villages and towns with a handful of rooms – cost as little as Y10 a night. English skills will be non-existent, but you won't get any cheaper. Owners can usually cook up meals and travellers can get closer to the authentic China.

Youth hostels (*qīngnián lǚshè*) typically cluster in the big backpacker destinations,

PRACTICALITIES

- There are four types of plugs – three-pronged angled pins (as in Australia), three-pronged round pins (as in Hong Kong), two flat pins (US style but without the ground wire) or two narrow round pins (European style). Electricity is 220V, 50 cycles AC.
- The standard locally published English-language newspaper is the *China Daily* (www.china-daily.com.cn). China's largest circulation Chinese-language daily is the *People's Daily* (*Rénmín Ribào*). It has an English language edition on <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn>. See www.onlinenewspapers.com/china.htm for a more exhaustive list.
- Imported English-language newspapers such as the *Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Asian Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times* and *South China Morning Post* can be bought from five-star hotel bookshops, as can imported English-language international magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Far Eastern Economic Review* and the *Economist*.
- Listen to the BBC World Service (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/tuning/) or Voice of America (www.voagov.gov). China Radio International (CRI) is China's overseas radio service and broadcasts in about 40 languages. The national TV outfit, Chinese Central TV (CCTV), has an English-language channel – CCTV9. CCTV4 also has some English programmes. Your hotel may have ESPN, Star Sports, CNN or BBC World.
- China officially subscribes to the international metric system, but you will encounter the ancient Chinese weights-and-measures system that features the *liǎng* (tael, 37.5g) and the *jīn* (catty, 0.6kg), which are both commonly used. There are 10 *liǎng* to the *jīn*.

such as Guilín (p154), Kūnmíng (p220) and Yángshuò (p166). Expect dorm rooms here to kick off from around Y25 in a four- to six-bed dorm. Hostel facilities will generally include common internet access, washing machine, a DVD machine for common use (with films), notice board, lockers, perhaps a café or bar, and bicycle rental. Beyond dorms, many youth hostels also have single and double rooms. Staff are young, speak good English and can be very helpful for travel advice. Certified youth hostels should carry the 'Hostelling International' logo, but a huge number of independent hostels also exist. For a list of youth hostels in China, see www.chinayha.com and look out for its handy guide listing current hostels (available from youth hostels). Useful online hostel booking websites include www.hostelworld.com and www.hostelbookers.com.

Chinese guesthouses tend to congregate near bus and train stations and can offer beds in shared rooms (typically with shared loo and shower) for as low as Y10 per night. They can be handy but are often grubby and housed in characterless buildings; English skills will be minimal or zero. If looking for a cheap room, always be on the lookout for the characters '有房' (*yǒufáng*; literally 'room available') on boards outside shops and establishments.

Certain temples and monasteries (especially on China's sacred mountains) can provide accommodation. They can be very cheap, but extremely ascetic, with no running water or electricity.

Midrange

Midrange hotels (three to four stars) offer comfort and a measure of style, but are often bland and unimaginative. You should find someone who can speak English, but other language skills are often problematic. When making a choice, opt for Sino-foreign joint-venture hotels over Chinese-owned hotels, wherever possible. Furthermore, opt for newer establishments and chain hotels over older midrange options. Rooms will all come with air-con and may have cable TV or an in-house movie channel and telephone, and should also come with kettle (and coffee sachets), water cooler, safe and minibar, and there should be broadband internet connection. You may receive a free newspaper, but at best only the *China Daily*.

Top End

Whenever possible, aim for luxury international chain hotels that have a proven standard of excellence and quality across the board when opting for top-drawer accommodation.

Staff speaks better English and standards are more closely approximate to international standards, as opposed to top-end Chinese-owned hotels that mainly cater to Chinese guests.

Five-star hotels should be equipped with top-notch sport (including swimming pool and tennis courts), recreational and shopping facilities, and there should be a wide selection of dining options and ATMs that take international cards. Five-star hotel rooms will have a kettle (and coffee sachets), safe, minibar, satellite or cable TV, broadband internet connection, free newspaper (typically the *International Herald Tribune*) and nightly turnover.

Superior comfort should also be available on executive floors, which typically provide free drinks upon arrival and in the afternoon, complimentary breakfast and business facilities. All hotel rooms are subject to a 10% or 15% service charge.

Discounts & Reservations

It is essential to bargain for rooms at reception as discounts are always in force in all but the cheapest accommodation options. Apart from during the busy holiday periods (first week of May and October and Chinese New Year),

rooms should be well below the rack rate and rarely booked out. At reception, discounts of 10% to 50% off the tariff rate are possible, and around 30% is typical. Booking online is an excellent way to secure a good price on a room, and should be the first place you look. Often you actually get a discount by booking through an agency – and these can be substantial, up to 40% to 50% off the walk-in rate (although don't use Chinese online agencies, which simply offer rates you can get from a hotel itself). A useful accommodation website for travellers booking accommodation is **Ctrip** (☎ 800 820 6666; www.english.ctrip.com). Airports at major cities may have hotel-booking counters with discounted rates.

BUSINESS HOURS

China officially works a five-day week. Banks, offices and government departments are normally open Monday to Friday (but some banks are open limited hours at weekends as well). Most open around 8.30am, possibly closing for one to two hours in the middle of the day, before reopening until 5pm or 6pm. Saturday and Sunday are both public holidays, but many museums stay open on weekends and close one or two days during the week instead (usually Monday).

HOTEL PRIMER

hotel	fàndiàn/jiǔdiàn/dàjiǔdiàn	饭店/酒店/大酒店
single room	dānjiān	单间
double room	shuāngrénfáng	双人房
triple room	sānrénjiān	三人间
quad	sìrénjiān	四人间
suite	tàofáng	套房
bathroom	wèishēngjiān	卫生间
key	yàoshi	钥匙
lift	diàntī	电梯
visa	qiānzhèng	签证
broadband	kuāndài	宽带
reception	zǒngtái	总台
passport	hùzhào	护照
deposit	yājīn	押金
youth hostel	qīngnián lǚshè	青年旅社
TV	diànshì	电视
telephone	diànhuà	电话
air-con	kōngtiáo	空调
taxi	chūzūchē	出租车
check out	tuìfáng	退房
discount	zhékòu	折扣
toilet paper	wèishēngzhǐ	卫生纸

In Xishuāngbǎnnà most government buildings operate on the siesta system and working hours are normally around 8am to 11.30am and then 3pm to 6pm or even 8pm.

Travel agencies and foreign-exchange counters in tourist hotels and some local branches of the Bank of China have similar opening hours, but are generally open on Saturday and Sunday as well, at least in the morning. Post offices and telecommunication offices usually stay open to at least 7pm and many are open 24 hours. Internet cafés are either open 8am to midnight, or more popularly, 24 hours.

Many parks, zoos and monuments are also open on weekends and often at night.

Restaurants are generally open from around 10.30am to 11pm or midnight; but some shut at around 2pm and reopen at 5pm or 6pm, others are open through the night. The Chinese are accustomed to eating earlier than Westerners, lunching at around midday and having dinner in the region of 6pm.

Department stores and shops are generally open 10am to 10pm, seven days a week. Note that some businesses in China close for three week-long holidays.

CHILDREN

Children will feel more at home in China's principal points of entry (Hong Kong, Běijīng and Shànghǎi), but could feel out of place in smaller towns and in the wilds of the Southwest.

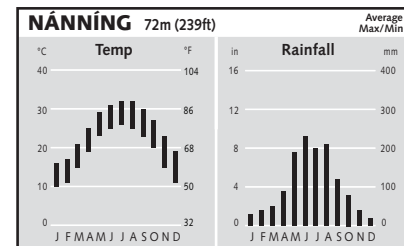
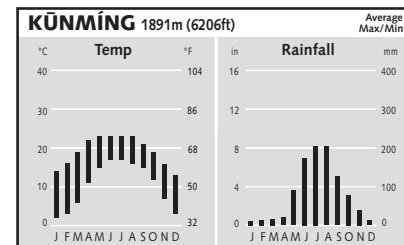
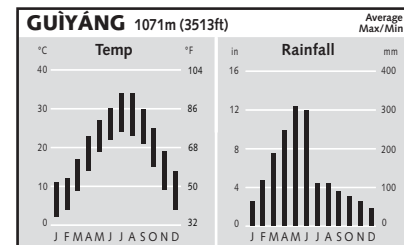
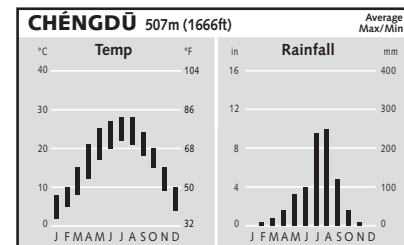
Baby food, milk powder, nappies and other essentials are widely available in supermarkets. Practically no cheap restaurants have baby chairs and finding baby-changing rooms is next to impossible. Ask a doctor specialised in travel medicine for information on recommended immunisations for your child.

Admission prices to many sights and museums have children's rates, usually for children under 1.1m to 1.3m in height. Always ensure that your child carries a form of ID and a hotel card, in case they get lost.

CLIMATE CHARTS

China's Southwest generally enjoys a pleasant climate, but large regional differences exist; as a general rule temperature is ruled by altitude.

Summer lasts from around May to August. Xishuāngbǎnnà in southern Yúnnán experiences a mild monsoon during this period, when the most rain falls in Guìzhōu. High spots like Èméi Shān are a great relief from



the heat. Sichuān is foggy and cloudy all the time; Chóngqīng is sweltering.

Winters vary in intensity according to altitude so you'll need to bring a varied wardrobe. In Yúnnán, winters are short and cold north of more clement Kūnmíng, especially as the land ascends into Tibet. Northern Guǎngxī sees temperatures dropping to freezing from November to February. Temperature statistics don't really indicate how cold it can get,

so bring very warm clothes. The mountainous areas in the west of Sichuān freeze at this time, as does much of Guizhōu. The warmest regions in winter are found in Xishuāngbǎnnà and the south coast of Guǎngxī, which remains a balmy 24°C to 27°C (75°F to 80°F).

The cooler seasons of spring (March and April) and autumn (September and October) are the best times to visit the region.

COURSES & ACTIVITIES

Travellers are increasingly making the overall journey to China an educational experience. Whether it's traditional Chinese medicine, tai-chi, learning Mandarin or turning your hand to Chinese cooking, visitors are aiming to learn a skill while in China. Yángshuò (p169) is a popular place to learn both tai-chi and kung fu, and Chinese cooking and language classes can similarly be found in the village. When selecting a Chinese-language school, talk to other students beforehand. Mandarin is the most commonly taught dialect, but classes in Cantonese also exist. Several schools in Yángshuò offer free food and accommodation in exchange for English lessons; see p171 for details. **Chinastudies.com** (www.chinastudies.com) runs Chinese medicine, massage and fengshui courses in China.

For a rundown on outdoor activities in the region, see the Southwest China Outdoors chapter.

CUSTOMS

Chinese customs generally pay tourists little attention. There are clearly marked 'green channels' and 'red channels'. Duty-free, you're allowed to import 400 cigarettes or the equivalent, two bottles of wine or spirits and 50g of gold or silver. Importing fresh fruit and cold cuts is prohibited. You can legally only bring in or take out ¥6000 in Chinese currency. There are no restrictions on foreign currency; however, you should declare any cash exceeding US\$5000 (or its equivalent in another currency).

Anything made before 1949 is considered an antique and needs a certificate for export; objects manufactured before 1795 cannot legally be taken out of the country.

Some travellers have had their Lonely Planet guides confiscated at the border for their on-map depiction of Taiwan in a different colour scheme from China. Whatever your opinion on the status of the Republic of

China, it may be a good idea to have some scissors handy for on-the-spot editing.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

For information on bird flu, consult the Health chapter.

Crime

The China we see in the Western (and Chinese) media – Shànghǎi's glittering high-rises, fleets of black Audis and stock-market winners – is a fabulously warped take on China. For the majority of the population, China remains very poor indeed and yawning disparities between rich and poor generate crime. Guizhōu province, for example, is very destitute in areas and parts of Yúnnán are impoverished.

Most crime, however, occurs between Chinese people and travellers are generally, but not exclusively, left alone. Visitors are usually victims of petty economic crime, such as theft, rather than serious crime. Incidences of crime increase around the Chinese New Year (p470). Certain cities are worse than others – Guiyáng is notorious.

Hotel rooms are generally safe, but dorms require more care. All hotels have safes and storage areas for valuables – use them.

Violence against foreigners is not common, but does exist. Again, financial motives are in the main and foreigners have been killed for their valuables, or killed when resisting theft. Solo travellers are most at risk, so travel in groups.

If something of yours is stolen, report it immediately to the nearest Foreign Affairs Branch of the PSB. They will ask you to fill in a loss report before investigating the case and sometimes even recovering the stolen goods. For travel insurance purposes (very recommended), it is essential to obtain a loss report.

Photocopy the information page and visa page of your passport in the event of theft.

Scams

Scams are rife in China. Ostensibly friendly types invite you for tea or an expensive meal of snake meat and confess they have no money when the bill arrives, while practising their English on you. Be naturally vigilant when approached by English speakers in the street and don't immediately assume that an approach is a hospitable gesture (but it may be).

Spitting

Campaigns to stamp out the practice have been partially successful in the major urban centres – there is less public spitting in Guǎngzhōu, Shànghǎi and Běijīng these days (some areas impose a ¥50 fine), but in the country, the phlegm still flows.

Transport

Your greatest danger will almost certainly be crossing the road, so develop avian vision and a sixth sense. Crossing only when it is safe to do so could perch you at the side of the road in perpetuity, but don't imitate the local tendency to cross without looking. China's roads kill without mercy, with an estimated 600 traffic deaths per day (World Health Organization figures), and are the major cause of death for people aged between 15 and 45. Many cheaper long-distance buses still come without seatbelts. Taxis frequently only have seatbelts in the front passenger seat.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Embassies & Consulates of the People's Republic of China Abroad

For a full list of diplomatic representation abroad go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website at www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/.

Australia (www.chinaembassy.org.au) Canberra (☎ 02-6273 4780, 6273 4781; 15 Coronation Drive, Yarralumla, ACT 2600); Melbourne (☎ 03-9822 0604); Perth (☎ 08-9321 8193); Sydney (☎ 02-9699 2216)

Canada (www.chinaembassycanada.org) Ottawa (☎ 613-789 3509; 515 St Patrick St, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5H3); Calgary (☎ 403-264 3322); Toronto (☎ 416-964 7260); Vancouver (☎ 604-736 3910)

France (☎ 01 47 36 02 58; www.amb-chine.fr; 9 Ave V Cresson, 92130 Issy les Moulineaux, Paris)

Japan Tokyo (☎ 03-3403 3389, 3403 3065; 3-4-33 Moto-Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106); Fukuoka (☎ 92-713 1121); Osaka (☎ 06-445 9481); Sapporo (☎ 11-563 5563)

Malaysia Kuala Lumpur (☎ 03-242 8495; 229 Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur); Kuching (☎ 82-453 344)

New Zealand Wellington (☎ 04-587 0407; 104A Korokoro Rd, Petone, Wellington); Auckland (☎ 09-525 1589)

Singapore (☎ 65-734 3361; 70 Dalvey Rd)

Thailand (☎ 02-245 7032/49; 57 Th Ratchadaphisek, Bangkok)

UK (www.chinese-embassy.org.uk) London (☎ 020-7636 8845, 24hr premium-rate visa information 0891 880 808; 31 Portland Place, London, W1N 5AG); Edinburgh (☎ 0131-316 4789); Manchester (☎ 0161-224 7480)

USA (www.china-embassy.org) Washington DC (☎ 202-338 6688; room 110, 2201 Wisconsin Ave NW, Washington

DC, 20007); Chicago (☎ 312-803 0098); Houston (☎ 713-524 4311); Los Angeles (☎ 213-380 2508); New York (☎ 212-330 7410); San Francisco (☎ 415-563 9232)

Embassies & Consulates in China EMBASSIES IN BĚIJĪNG

Embassies in Běijīng are open 9am to noon and 1.30pm to 4pm Monday to Friday, but visa departments often open only in the morning.

Australia (☎ 010-6532 2331; www.austemb.org.cn; 21 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Cambodia (☎ 010-6532 2790; fax 6532 3507; 9 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Canada (☎ 010-6532 3536; www.beijing.gc.ca; 19 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

France (☎ 010-8532 8080; www.ambafrance-cn.org; 3 Dongsan Jie)

Germany (☎ 010-8532 9000; www.deutschebotschaft-china.org; 17 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

India (☎ 010-6532 1908; www.indianembassybeijing.org.cn; 1 Ritan Donglu)

Ireland (☎ 010-6532 2691; fax 6532 2168; 3 Ritan Donglu)

Italy (☎ 010-6532 2131; www.italianembassy.org.cn; 2 Sanlitun Dong Erjie)

Japan (☎ 010-6532 2361; fax 6532 4625; 7 Ritan Lu)

Laos (☎ 010-6532 1224; 11 Dongsi Jie)

Malaysia (☎ 010-6532 2531; fax 6532 5032; 13 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Myanmar (Burma) (☎ 010-6532 0359; www.myanmarembassy.com; 6 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Nepal (☎ 010-6532 1795; fax 6532 3251; 1 Sanlitun Xi Liujie)

Netherlands (☎ 010-6532 0200; fax 6532 4689; 4 Liangmahe Nanlu)

New Zealand (☎ 010-6532 2731; www.nzembassy.com/china; 1 Ritan Dong Erjie)

Singapore (☎ 010-6532 3926; www.mfa.gov.sg/beijing; 1 Xiushui Beijie)

South Korea (☎ 010-6505 2608; www.koreaemb.org.cn; 3rd & 4th fl, China World Trade Center, 1 Jianguomenwai Dajie)

Sweden (☎ 010-6532 9790; www.swedenabroad.com; 3 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Thailand (☎ 010-6532 1749; www.thaiembassy.org/beijing; 40 Guanghua Lu)

UK (☎ 010-5192 4000; www.uk.cn; 11 Guanghua Lu)

USA (☎ 010-6532 3831; <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn>; 3 Xiushui Beijie)

Vietnam (☎ 010-6532 1155; fax 6532 5720; 32 Guanghua Lu)

CONSULATES IN CHŌNGQĪNG

Canada (☎ 023-6373 8007; 17th fl, Metropolitan Tower, Zourong Lu)

Denmark (☎ 023-6373 6008; 31st fl, Metropolitan Tower, Zourong Lu)

Japan (☎ 023-6373 3585; 14th fl, Commercial Wing, Chongqing Hotel, 283 Minsheng Lu)
UK (☎ 023-6369 1500; 28th fl, Metropolitan Tower, Zourong Lu)

CONSULATES IN GUǎNGZHŌU

Australia (☎ 020-8335 5911; fax 8335 0718; Room 1509, 15th fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)
Canada (☎ 020-8666 0569; fax 8667 2401; Room 801, Wing C, China Hotel, Liuhua Lu)
Germany (☎ 020-8330 6533; fax 8331 7033; 19th fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)
Japan (☎ 020-8333 8999, ext 197; fax 8387 8835; 2nd fl, East Tower, Garden Hotel, 368 Huanshi Donglu)
Thailand (☎ 020-8188 6968, ext 310; Room 310, White Swan Hotel, 1 Shamian Nanjie)
UK (☎ 020-8335 1354; fax 8332 7509; 2nd fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)
USA (☎ 020-8121 8000; fax 8121 8428; 1 Shamian Nanjie, Shāmian Dǎo)
Vietnam (☎ 020-8330 5911; 2nd fl, B Bldg, Hotel Landmark, Qiaoguang Lu)

CONSULATES IN HONG KONG

Australia (☎ 0852-2827 8881; 23rd fl, Harbour Centre, 25 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai)
Canada (☎ 0852-2810 4321; 11th-14th fl, Tower I, Exchange Sq, 8 Connaught Pl, Central)
Germany (☎ 0852-2105 8788; 21st fl, United Centre, 95 Queensway, Admiralty)
Japan (☎ 0852-2522 1184; 46th & 47th fl, Tower I, Exchange Sq, 8 Connaught Pl, Central)
New Zealand (☎ 0852-2877 4488, 0852-2525 5044; Room 6508, 65th fl, Central Plaza, 18 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai)
UK (☎ 0852-2901 3000; 1 Supreme Court Rd, Admiralty)
USA (☎ 0852-2523 9011; 26 Garden Rd, Central)
Vietnam (☎ 0852-2591 4517; 15th fl, Great Smart Tower, 230 Wan Chai Rd, Wan Chai)

CONSULATES IN KŪNMÍNG

Laos (☎ 0871-317 6624; Room N120, ground fl, Camellia Hotel, 96 Dongfeng Donglu; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)
Myanmar (☎ 0871-360 3477; fax 360 2468; www.mcg-kunming.com; B503, Longyuan Haozhai, 166 Weiyuan Jie; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri)
Thailand (☎ 0871-314 9296; fax 316 6891; ground fl of the South Wing of the Kunming Hotel, 52 Dongfeng Donglu; ☎ 9-11.30am Mon-Fri)
Vietnam (☎ 0871-352 2669; 2nd fl, Kaihua Plaza, 157 Beijing Lu; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

CONSULATES IN NǎNNÍNG

Vietnam (☎ 0771-1551 0562; 1st fl, Touzi Dasha, 109 Minzu Dadao)

CONSULATES IN SHÀNGHǎI

Australia (☎ 021-5292 5500; www.aus-in-shanghai.com.cn; 22nd fl, Citic Sq, 1168 West Nanjing Rd)
Canada (☎ 021-6279 8400; www.shanghai.gc.ca; Suite 604, West Tower, Shanghai Centre, 1376 West Nanjing Rd)
Germany (☎ 021-3401 0106; www.shanghai.diplo.de; 181 Yongfu Rd)
Japan (☎ 021-5257 4766; www.shanghai.cn.emb-japan.go.jp/cn; 8 Wanshan Rd, Hongqiao)
New Zealand (☎ 021-6471 1108; www.nzembassy.com; 15a, Qihua Tower, 1375 Central Huaihai Rd)
UK (☎ 021-6279 7650; www.britishconsulate.sh.cn; 3rd fl, Room 301, Shanghai Centre, 1376 West Nanjing Rd)
USA (www.usembassy-china.org.cn/shanghai) Central Huaihai Rd (☎ 021-6433 6880; 1469 Central Huaihai Rd, entrance on Wulumuqi Rd); Westgate Tower (☎ 021-3217 4650, after-hours emergency number for US citizens 021-6433 3936; 8th fl, Westgate Tower, 1038 West Nanjing Rd)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Visiting temples during festival periods will reward you with colourful ceremonies and events. Sights can, however, become rapidly swamped with holidaying Chinese.

The various minorities in China's South-west each have their own colourful festivals and these are excellent opportunities to appreciate traditional customs, attire and cuisine. Many take place during the winter period when there is little work to be done in the fields and people have more time for festivals. Almost all are dated by the lunar calendar and fall on auspicious dates such as the third day of the third lunar month.

Guizhōu (especially around Kǎilì) and Yúnnán (Dǎlì and Xīshuāngbǎnnà) have the best of these festivals. For details of local and minority festivals see the start of each province chapter and the Top 10 Festivals section of the Getting Started chapter (p14). With the exception of the Spring Festival, festivals that don't qualify as national holidays (see opposite) include the following:

February

Spring Festival (春节; Chūn Jié) Usually in February – this is otherwise known as Chinese New Year and starts on the first day of the first month in the lunar calendar. Although officially lasting only three days, many

people take a week off from work and enjoy big family get-togethers. Be warned: this is China's biggest holiday with transport booked solid. The Chinese New Year will fall on the following dates: 7 February 2008 and 26 January 2009.

Lantern Festival (元宵节; Yuánxiāo Jié) It's not a public holiday, but it is very colourful. Children make (or buy) paper lanterns and walk around the streets in the evening holding them. It falls on the 15th day of the first moon, and will be celebrated on the following dates: 22 February 2008 and 9 February, 2009.

April

Tomb Sweeping Day (清明节; Qīngmíng Jié) A day for worshipping ancestors; people visit and clean the graves of their departed relatives, placing flowers on tombs and burning ghost money. The festival generally falls close to Easter, on 5 April in most years, or 4 April in leap years.

April

Mazu's Birthday (妈祖生日; Māzǔ Shēngrì) Mazu, goddess of the sea, is guardian of seafarers and those who make their living off the seas and waterways. Also called Tianhou (Tin Hau in Cantonese) her birthday is widely celebrated at Taoist temples in coastal regions as far south as Vietnam. Mazu's birthday is on the 23rd day of the third moon; 28 April 2008 and 18 April 2009.

May/June

Dragon Boat Festival (端午节; Duānwǔ Jié) This very popular festival sees crowds watching dragon boat races and eating zòngzi (triangular glutinous rice dumplings wrapped in reed leaves). The festival falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month; 8 June 2008 and 28 May 2009.

September

Mid-Autumn Festival (中秋节; Zhōngqiū Jié) Also known as the Moon Festival, this is a traditional time to eat tasty yuè bing (moon cakes) and for families to get together. The festival takes place on the 15th day of the eighth moon, and will be celebrated on the following dates: 14 September 2008 and 3 October 2009.

FOOD

Don't settle for that Chinatown schlock any more, China is where it's at (see p72) and food should top your priorities. It depends on where you travel, but a meal for one at budget eateries should cost under Y20; midrange dining options will cost between Y20 and Y100, while top-end meals can cost anything over Y100.

If you want to eat bread and cakes, look out for bakeries (面包店; miànbāo diàn), which are all the rage even in small towns.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Greater tolerance exists in the big cities than in the more conservative countryside. However, even in urban China it is recommended that gays and lesbians are clandestine about their sexual orientation. On the other hand, recognised gay discos, bars and pubs in big cities appear to function without official harassment, although they tend to keep a fairly low profile.

Check out www.utopia-asia.com/tipschin.htm for loads of tips on travelling in China and a complete listing of gay bars nationwide. You can also contact the **International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association** (☎ 1-954-776 2626; fax 776 3303; www.igla.com) in the USA.

Useful publications include the *Spartacus International Gay Guide* (Bruno Gmunder Verlag), a bestselling travel guide for gay travellers.

HOLIDAYS

The People's Republic of China has nine national holidays, as follows (Hong Kong and Macau have different holidays):

New Year's Day 1 January
Chinese New Year (Spring Festival) Usually February
International Women's Day 8 March
International Labour Day 1 May
Youth Day 4 May
International Children's Day 1 June
Birthday of the Chinese Communist Party 1 July
Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Liberation Army 1 August
National Day 1 October

Many of the above are nominal holidays that do not result in leave. The 1 May holiday is a week-long holiday, as is National Day on 1 October and the Chinese New Year is also a week-long holiday for many. It's not a great idea to arrive in China or to go travelling during these holidays as things tend to grind to a halt. Room prices all over China rapidly shoot up during the May and October holiday periods. International Women's Day is a half-day holiday for women.

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss, trip cancellation and medical problems is a good idea. Travel agents can sort this out for you although it is often cheaper to find good deals with an insurer online or from a broker. Some policies offer lower and higher medical expense options; the higher ones are chiefly

for countries such as the USA, which have extremely high medical costs.

Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities' such as skiing and even trekking. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home. If you have to claim, make sure you keep all documentation. See the Health chapter (p493) for further information on health insurance.

Note that private medical care is limited to large cities and medical care can be rudimentary in smaller towns.

INTERNET ACCESS

Handy internet cafés in towns, cities and destinations are listed under Information throughout this book. Internet cafés tend to cluster near train stations and commercial areas of town. Look for the characters *wǎngbā* (网吧) – or the more rarely used *wǎngluò* (网络) – which mean internet café.

Internet cafés are far easier to find in the Southwest than in Běijīng or Shànghǎi and protocol is also more relaxed down here; you probably won't be asked for ID. From 2007, China was preparing to ban the opening of new internet cafés, so don't expect accessibility to improve.

Online prices are cheap – ranging from as little as Y1 to Y3 per hour, depending on which zone you sit in, but you may have to pay a deposit (usually around Y10). Normally you are given a ticket with a user number and a password (usually a sequence of numbers), which you key into the on-screen box to get online. Internet cafés may operate a nonsmoking policy, but it may not deter your neighbour from puffing away like a madman.

The majority of internet cafés are crowded with teenagers playing games, so things can get noisy and weekends can be totally packed. Opening hours are generally from 8am to midnight or, more commonly, 24 hours.

Youth hostels and other backpacker hotels should have internet access in common areas; if not gratis, rates will be around Y5 per hour.

Objective news and news analysis is feared by the authorities, who strictly control internet content. Even so, most English-language newspapers can be read online, although the BBC News website is invariably inaccessible and you may find other websites unexpectedly becoming blocked; it all depends on the whim of the censors.

Occasionally – as in May 2006 – sites such as Hotmail can go down for long periods, so having a backup email address is a good idea.

LEGAL MATTERS

Anyone under the age of 18 is considered a minor, and the minimum age at which you can drive is also 18. The age of consent for marriage is 22 for men and 20 for women. There is no minimum age that restricts the consumption of alcohol or use of cigarettes. China's laws against the use of illegal drugs are harsh, and foreign nationals have been executed for drug offences (trafficking in more than 50g of heroin can result in the death penalty).

The Chinese criminal justice system does not ensure a fair trial and defendants are not presumed innocent until proven guilty. Note that China conducts more judicial executions than the rest of the world put together, up to 10,000 per year according to some reports. If arrested, most foreign citizens have the right to contact their embassy, see p469.

MAPS

Outside of Hong Kong, English-language maps of towns published in China are uniformly third-rate and rarely have scales; the Southwest is no exception. Ask at concierge desks in five-star hotels for freebie English-language maps, if available. Chinese-language maps are hawked at every turn in tourist towns; look out for transport maps (交通图; *jiāotōng tú*) that list bus routes. New editions are typically annual, but the volume of updated cartographic information is often minimal. Maps can also be bought at newspaper kiosks (报刊亭; *bàokān tíng*) and from bookshops such as Xīnhuá Bookstore (新华书店; *Xīnhuá Shūdiàn*), branches of which are listed under Information sections throughout the destination chapters in this book.

MONEY ATMs

In China's Southwest, ATMs that take international cards include branches of the Bank of China and the Industrial & Commercial Bank of China where you can use Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus, Maestro, Plus and American Express (Amex) to withdraw cash. The network largely applies to sizeable towns and cities. Large airports, five-star hotels and some department stores have ATMs.

Counterfeit Bills

Counterfeit notes are a problem in China. Very few Chinese will accept a Y50 or Y100 note without first checking to see if it's a fake. Many shopkeepers will run notes under an ultraviolet light looking for fakes. Visually checking for forged notes is hard unless you are very familiar with bills, but be aware that street vendors may try and dump forged notes on you in large denomination change.

Credit Cards

Credit is not big in China. Foreign plastic is therefore of limited use, but cards used include Visa, MasterCard, Amex and JCB. Don't expect to use them everywhere and always carry enough cash. You should be able to use them at upmarket hotels and restaurants, supermarkets, department stores and shops in tourist towns. Money can also be withdrawn at certain ATMs (see opposite) in large cities on credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard and Amex.

Credit card cash advances have become fairly routine at head branches of the Bank of China. Bear in mind, however, that a 4% commission is generally deducted. The Bank of China does not charge commission on Amex cash withdrawals.

Currency

The Chinese currency is the Renminbi (RMB), or 'People's Money'. Formally the basic unit of RMB is the *yuán* (元), which is divided into 10 *jiǎo* (角), which is again divided into 10 *fēn* (分). Colloquially, the *yuán* is referred to as *kuài* (块) and *jiǎo* as *máo* (毛). The *fēn* has so little value these days that it is rarely used.

The Bank of China issues RMB bills in denominations of one, two, five, 10, 20, 50 and 100 *yuán*. Coins come in denominations of one *yuán*, five *jiǎo*, one *jiǎo* and five *fēn*. Paper versions of the coins remain in circulation. For images of Chinese currency, click on www.chinatoday.com/fin/mon/.

Hong Kong's currency is the Hong Kong dollar and Macau's is the *pataca*.

Exchanging Money

Renminbi is still not freely convertible outside China, but it's easy to exchange money at the airport when you arrive. Foreign currency and travellers cheques can be changed at border crossings, international airports, branches of the Bank of China, tourist hotels, and some large department stores; hours of operation

for foreign exchange counters are 8am to 7pm (later at hotels). The official rate is given almost everywhere and the exchange charge is standardised, so there is little need to shop around for the best deal. See the exchange rate table in the Quick Reference inside the front cover and consult a newspaper for the current exchange rate. In some backwaters, it may be hard to change lesser-known currencies – US dollars and UK pounds are still the easiest to change (travellers have also reported seeing Australian dollars go far).

Keep at least a few of your exchange receipts. You will need them if you want to exchange any remaining RMB you have at the end of your trip.

Tippling

In China, almost no-one asks for tips. Many midrange and top-end eateries include their own service charge; cheap restaurants do not expect a tip. Taxi drivers throughout China do expect tips.

Travellers Cheques

These are worth taking with you if you are principally travelling in large cities and tourist areas. Not only will they protect your money against theft or loss, but the exchange rate for travellers cheques (旅行支票; *lǚxíng zhīpiào*) is higher than for cash (around 2% higher). They cannot be used everywhere, however. You should have no problem cashing them at tourist hotels in China, but they are of little use in budget hotels and restaurants. As with credit cards, ensure that you always carry enough ready cash on you. If cashing at banks, aim for the larger banks such as the Bank of China or the Industrial & Commercial Bank of China. Stick to the major companies such as Thomas Cook, Amex and Visa. In big cities they are accepted in almost any currency, but in smaller destinations its best to stick to common currencies such as US dollars or UK pounds.

PASSPORTS

You must have a passport with you at all times; it is the most basic travel document and all hotels will insist on seeing it. The Chinese government requires that your passport be valid for at least six months after the expiry date of your visa. You'll need at least one entire blank page in your passport for the visa.

Have an ID card with your photo in case you lose your passport; even better, make

photocopies of your passport. Your embassy may need these before issuing a new one (a process that can take weeks). Also report the loss to the local PSB (公安局; Gōngānjú). Long-stay visitors should register their passport with their embassy.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

In large towns and cities, good photographic outlets where you can find colour slide film, a range of batteries and get digital images downloaded to CD or converted to prints are reasonably easy to find. Kodak is the main player in the market, with branches everywhere.

POST

The international postal service is efficient, and airmail letters and postcards will probably take around five to 10 days to reach their destinations. Domestic post is swift.

China Post operates an Express Mail Service (EMS), which is fast, reliable and ensures that the package is sent by registered post. Not all branches of China Post have EMS, so try larger branches.

Apart from local post offices, branch post offices can be found in tourist hotels where you can send letters, packets and parcels, but you may only be able to post printed matter. Other parcels may require a customs form attached at the town's main post office and a contents check. Even at cheap hotels you can usually post letters from the front desk – reliability varies, but in general it's fine.

In major cities private carriers, United Parcel Service, DHL, FedEx and TNT Skypak, have a pick-up service as well as drop-off centres, so call their offices for the latest details.

SHOPPING

Since foreigners are often overcharged in China's Southwest, bargaining is essential. You can bargain (讲价; jiǎngjià) in shops, markets and hotels, but not everywhere. In large shops and department stores where prices are clearly marked, there is usually no latitude for bargaining. In small shops and street stalls, bargaining is expected, but there is one important rule to follow – be polite.

TELEPHONE

International and domestic calls can be easily made from your hotel room (or from public telephones on the street). International phone calls are expensive and it is best to

ESSENTIAL NUMBERS

There are several telephone numbers that are the same for all major cities. However, only international assistance is likely to have English-speaking operators:

Ambulance	☎ 120
Fire	☎ 119
Police	☎ 110

buy a phone card (opposite). The majority of public telephones take Intergrate Circuit (IC) cards (see below) and only a few take coins. Domestic and international long-distance phone calls can also be made from main telecommunications offices and 'phone bars' (话吧; huàbā).

The country code to use to access China is 86. To call a number in Kūnmíng for example, dial the international access code (00 in the UK, 011 in the USA), dial the country code (86) and then the area code for Kūnmíng (0871), dropping the first zero, and then dial the local number. For telephone calls within the same city, drop the international and area codes (*qūhào*). If calling internationally from China, drop the first zero of the area or city code after dialling the international access code, and then dial the number you wish to call.

Area codes for all cities, towns and destinations appear in the relevant chapters.

Mobile Phones

Mobile-phone shops (手机店; shǒujīdiàn) such as China Mobile can sell you a SIM card, which will cost from Y60 to Y100 and will include Y50 of credit. When this runs out, you can then top-up the number by buying a credit-charging card (充值卡; chōngzhí kǎ) for Y50 or Y100 worth of credits.

The Chinese avoid the number four – 'sì' – (四; which sounds like but has a different tone from the word for death – 'sǐ'; 死) and love the number eight – 'bā' (八). Consequently, the cheapest numbers tend to contain numerous fours and the priciest have successions of eights.

You can certainly take your mobile phone (手机; shǒujī) to China, but ensure it is unlocked, so you can use another network's SIM card in your phone. Alternatively, global SIM cards are available from airports but you might as well wait till you get to China and visit a branch of China Mobile, which is far

cheaper. Contact your network (eg Orange, Vodaphone) to see if your phone can use international roaming in China. If it can, it will probably be expensive; the cheaper option is to obtain a new SIM card in China, but make sure your mobile phone is unlocked first.

Phonecards

For local calls, IC cards (IC卡; IC kǎ) are available from kiosks, hole-in-the-wall shops, internet cafés and from any China Telecom office. They've prepaid cards that can be used in most public telephones, telecom offices and hotels. Some IC cards can only be used locally (depending on where the card was purchased), while other cards can be used throughout China. International calls using IC cards are much more expensive than using Internet Phone (IP) cards.

If you wish to make international calls from your hotel phone, it is much cheaper to use an IP card. International calls on IP cards are Y1.80 per minute to the USA or Canada, Y1.50 per minute to Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and Y3.20 to all other countries; domestic long-distance calls are Y0.30 per minute. You dial a local number, then punch in your account number, followed by a pin number and finally the number you wish to call. English-language service is usually available. IP cards come in various denominations and substantial discounts are offered. IP cards can be found at the same places as IC cards. Some IP cards can only be used locally, while others can be used nationwide, so buy the right card (and check the expiry date).

TIME

The Chinese live by both the Gregorian and the lunar calendar. Time throughout China is set to Běijīng time, eight hours ahead of GMT/UTC. When it's noon in Běijīng it's also noon in Kūnmíng and all other parts of the country. There is no daylight-saving time in China.

When it's noon in Běijīng the time is 2pm in Sydney, 4am in London, 11pm in New York (previous day) and 8pm in Los Angeles (previous day).

TOILETS

Despite proud claims to have invented the first flushing toilet, China has some wicked loos, but in a country of 1.3 billion, that is

perhaps unsurprising. When out and about, make a beeline for fast-food outlets, top-end hotels and department stores for more hygienic alternatives or swallow hard and brave the stench. Toilet paper is rarely provided in street-side public toilets so *always* keep a stash with you. Squat toilets are common in budget hotel rooms so if that's not what you want, shop around. In many hotels and buildings, especially old ones, the sewage system can't handle paper. As a general rule, if you see a wastebasket next to the toilet, that's where you should throw the toilet paper; otherwise the loo could choke up and flood.

Hyperventilate before tackling toilets on the older trains, or enter with a strong cigarette.

Remember the following: men 男 (*nán*); women 女 (*nǚ*).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information in many large cities and towns – apart from Kūnmíng – in China's Southwest are rudimentary and of little use. Large cities such as Běijīng and Shànghǎi have more evolved tourist-information infrastructure, but even in Shànghǎi, tourist information facilities are primitive. Backpacker haunts such as Yángshuò (p166) and Dǎlǐ (p257) are equipped with helpful English-speaking bar and hotel staff who can offer free advice. Elsewhere, you may have to fall back on your hotel or the China International Travel Service (CITS; 中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójì Lǚxíngshè). Most towns and cities have a branch of CITS and addresses and contact details of offices are listed throughout this book, although extracting useful advice can be like pulling teeth from many branches; CITS outfits in traveller havens such as Kǎilǐ (p126) are far more on the ball.

TOURS

Adventure-travel companies that organise treks to China's Southwest include the following:

Active Travel (☎ 64 3-445 2320; www.activetravel.co.nz) New Zealand-based outfit running small-group treks to remote parts of Yúnnán and treks through Tiger Leaping Gorge and beyond.

Bike China (www.bikechina.com) Yúnnán-based company that specialises in bicycle tours of China's Southwest.

Earth River Expeditions (☎ 800-643 2784; www.earthriver.com; 180 Towpath Rd, Accord, NY 12404, USA) Offers rafting and trekking around Tiger Leaping Gorge.

Intrepid Travel (☎ 44 0 1373 826611; www.intrepidtravel.com; 76 Upper St, Islington, London N1 0NU, UK) Runs a large variety of tours to China's Southwest, including 15-day trips from Beijing to Künming via Chéngdū, 10-day trips from Künming lassoing in Lijiang, Tiger Leaping Gorge, Dali and Shangri-la plus five-day Chinese cooking-oriented trips to Yángshù.

Journeys International (☎ 800-255 8735, 734-665 4407; www.journeys-intl.com; Suite 3, 107 April Dr, Ann Arbor, MI 48103-1903, USA) Tours that take in the highlights of the Southwest.

Mountain Travel-Sobek (www.mtsobek.com) Specialises in rafting and trekking.

Peregrine Adventures (☎ 61 3-8601 4444; websales@peregrineadventures.com; www.peregrine.net.au; 380 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000, Australia) Small-group adventure tours, family, trekking and wildlife tours to Yúnnán and the Southwest.

White Pearl Associates (www.chinarivers.com) Runs tours in the Nüjiāng region of Yúnnán that directly benefit local community organisations and protected areas.

Wild China (www.wildchina.com) Runs a selection of tours around the Southwest and other parts of China. Treks include six-day expeditions within Xīshuāngbǎnnà, a week-long trek to Yading Nature Reserve in west Sichuān and a 12-day journey through the minority region of southeast Guizhōu.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

As with the rest of the land, China's Southwest has few facilities for disabled travellers, but it's not totally impossible. Most hotels have lifts, so booking ground-floor hotel rooms is not essential, unless you are staying in very budget accommodation. Some hotels at the four- and five-star level have rooms for those with physical disabilities.

However, roads and pavements make things very difficult for the wheelchair-bound or those with a walking disability. Pavements are often crowded, in a dangerous condition and have high kerbs. It is recommended that you take a lightweight chair so you can collapse it easily for navigating around obstacles or loading into the back of taxis.

You will find loads of useful information for wheelchair-bound travellers – including recommended travel agents geared towards disabled travellers – online at www.disabilitytravel.com.

VISAS

Apart from citizens from Japan, Singapore and Brunei, a visa is required for the PRC, but at the time of writing visas were not required

for most Western nationals to visit Hong Kong (p94) or Macau. Refer to the Passports section (p473) for details on passport validity requirements and what to do in the event of passport loss while in China.

For most travellers, the type of visa is an L, from the Chinese word for travel (*lǚxíng*). This letter is stamped right on the visa. The L visa can be either a multiple- or single-entry visa.

Visas are readily available from Chinese embassies and consulates in most Western and many other countries. A standard 30-day, single-entry visa from most Chinese embassies abroad can be issued in three to five working days; visa charges vary, but prices have risen steadily over recent years. Express visas cost twice the usual fee. You normally pay up front for the visa, rather than on collection. You can get an application form in person at the embassy or consulate, or obtain one online from a consular website (try www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/-click on About China, then Travel to China and then Visa Information). A visa mailed to you will take up to three weeks. Rather than going through an embassy or consulate, you can also make arrangements at certain travel agencies. Visa applications require at least one photo (normally a 5cm one). When asked on the application form, try to list standard tourist destinations such as Guilín or Künmíng as your choice is nonbinding.

Thirty-day visas are available at the Macau-China border at Zhūhǎi. Visas are also available at the Luóhú border crossing between Hong Kong and Shēnzhèn, although at the time of writing this did not apply to US citizens, who will need to apply in Hong Kong or have a visa already. A 30-day visa is activated on the date you enter China, and must be used within three months of the date of issue. Although a 30-day length of stay is standard for tourist visas, 60- and 90-day visas are generally also available. On request, you can receive a double-entry or multiple-entry travel visa. If you have trouble getting more than a 30-day visa, or a multiple-entry visa, try a local visa-arranging service or a travel agency in Hong Kong. You need to extend your visa in China if you want to stay longer. A Chinese visa covers virtually the whole of China, although some restricted areas still exist, which will require an additional permit (opposite) from the PSB, at a cost.

At the time of writing, Chinese embassies in the US were no longer accepting mailed visa applications, so this may mean you will

have to mail your passport to a visa service agency, who will then deal with it.

Many people in the US use the **China Visa Service Center** (☎ 1-800 799 6560; www.mychinavisa.com), which offers impeccable and prompt service. The procedure takes around 10 to 14 days.

The letter specifying what type of visa you have is usually stamped on the visa itself. There are eight categories of visas, as follows:

Type	Description	Chinese name
L	travel	<i>lǚxíng</i>
F	business or student	<i>fāngwèn</i>
D	resident	<i>dīngjū</i>
G	transit	<i>guòjìng</i>
X	long-term student	<i>liúxué</i>
Z	working	<i>rènzhí</i>
J	journalist	<i>jìzhě</i>
C	flight attendant	<i>chéngwù</i>

Important note: if you visit Hong Kong or Macau from China, you will need to be on a double-entry or multiple-entry visa to re-enter China or else will have to get a new visa (below).

Getting a China Visa in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is still a good place to pick up a visa for China. China Travel Service (CTS) and any of the other companies listed under Travel Agencies (p94) will be able to obtain one for you or you can apply directly to the **Visa Office of the People's Republic of China** (☎ 0852-3413 2300; 7th fl, Lower Block, China Resources Centre, 26 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri). Visas processed here in one/two/three days cost HK\$400/300/150. Double/six-month multiple/one-year multiple visas are HK\$220/400/600 (plus HK\$150/250 if you require express/urgent service). Be aware that American and UK passport holders must pay considerably more for their visas. You must supply two photos, which can be taken at photo booths in the Mass Rapid Transit (MTR) and at the visa office for HK\$35.

Travel Permits

Travellers to certain areas of a military or sensitive nature require a travel permit (旅行证; *lǚxíng zhèng*), although most of the regions covered in this book are open to foreign travellers.

If you are in any doubt whether an area is restricted, ask at the nearest branch of the PSB. A travel permit for travellers to Tibet is mandatory.

Visa Extensions

Extensions of 30 days are given for any tourist visa. You may be able to wangle more, for reasons such as illness or transport delays, but second extensions are usually only granted for one week, on the understanding that you are on your way out of China. Visa extensions (fees vary depending on nationality) are dealt with by the PSB.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Principles of decorum and respect for women are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. Chinese males are not macho, and there is a strong sense of balance between the sexes. Nonetheless, in its institutions, China is a patriarchal and highly conservative country where virtually all positions of political and state authority are occupied by (old) men.

In general, foreign women are unlikely to suffer serious sexual harassment in China. Try to stick to hotels in the centre, rather than the fringes of town.

Taking a whistle or alarm with you would offer a measure of defence in any unpleasant encounter. If you have to travel alone, consider arming yourself with some self-defence techniques.

Tampons (卫生棉条; *wèishēng miántiáo*) can be found almost everywhere, especially in big supermarkets. It's best to take plentiful supplies of the pill (避孕药; *biyùnyào*) unless you are travelling to the big cities where brands such as Marvelon are available from local pharmacies.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING CHINA

There are no particular difficulties for travellers entering China. As a general rule, visas (see p476) cannot be obtained at the border. At the time of writing, visas were not required for most Western nationals to visit Hong Kong or Macau, and some visa-free transits exist. Chinese immigration officers are scrupulous and, by definition, highly bureaucratic, but not difficult or overly officious. Travellers arriving in China will be given a health declaration form and an arrivals form to complete.

Passport

You will not be allowed to enter China if your passport expires within six months. All travellers to mainland China (apart from Hong Kong and Macau residents, who need a permit) will require a visa and a valid passport to enter (see p476). You'll need at least one entire blank page in your passport for the visa. In case of loss or theft, photocopy the information page and visa page of your passport and keep copies in a separate place from your passport. Contact the Public Security Bureau

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

(PSB) and your consulate or embassy in the event of loss or theft.

AIR

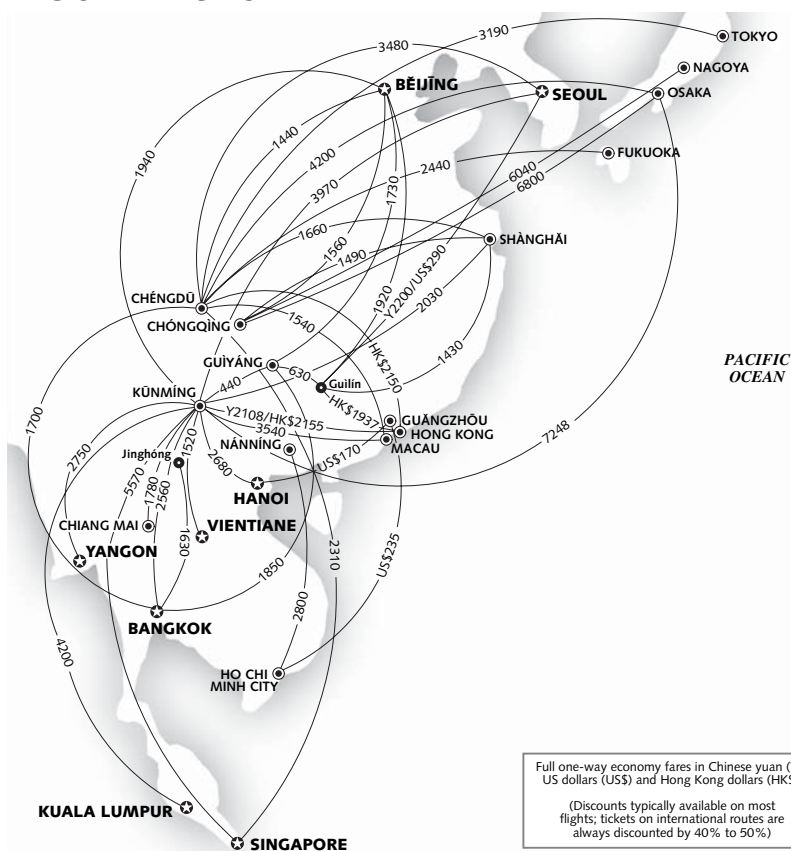
For convenience and accessibility, most arrivals are by air, with relatively small numbers of foreign travellers reaching China by sea and overland. The proliferation of direct international flights to China makes air access increasingly convenient, although direct international flights into China's Southwest are largely limited to northeast and Southeast Asia.

Most long-haul international flights to China go via Běijīng, Hong Kong or Shànghǎi; see the Běijīng, Hong Kong and Shànghǎi gateway chapters for details on arriving and spending time in those cities. Flights between Hong Kong and China's Southwest are classed as international.

Airports & Airlines

Hong Kong, Běijīng and Shànghǎi are China's principal international air gateways. **Hong Kong International Airport** (airport code HKG; ☎ 852-2181 0000; www.hkairport.com) is located at Chek Lap Kok on Lantau Island in the west of the territory. Běijīng's **Capital Airport** (airport code PEK; ☎ arrivals & departures 010-6454 1100) has benefited from considerable investment, a new terminal and a further terminal is under construction. International flights to Shànghǎi arrive at **Pudong Airport** (airport code PVG; ☎ 021-6834 1000, flight information 021-6834 6912) in the east; domestic flights use **Hongqiao Airport** (airport code SHA; ☎ 021-6268 8899, 021-6268 3659) in the west of the city. Domestic flights from all gateway cities fly into China's Southwest.

REGIONAL FLIGHTS



The cheapest direct ticket deals are generally available from China's international carriers, such as China Eastern.

The number of direct international routes into China's Southwest is growing. Chéngdū's Shàngliú Airport has the most international air connections (to/from Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Nepal; flights to Austria, Netherlands and Macau are also in the pipeline). Kùnmíng in Yúnnán similarly has substantial international connections (to/from Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos). Other provincial capitals in China's Southwest with international connections include Guiyáng (to Hong Kong and Thailand). Guílín's Liangjiang International

Airport has connections to Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. Nánníng has occasional flights to Hanoi in Vietnam, but at the time of writing these had been suspended.

International and domestic departure tax is included in the price of the ticket.

Airlines flying to and from China include the following:

Air Canada (AC; www.aircanada.ca); Běijīng (☎ 010-6468 2001); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6279 2999)
Air China (CA; www.airchina.com.cn); Běijīng (☎ 800 810 1111); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-5239 7227)
Air France (AF; www.airfrance.com); Běijīng (☎ 4008 808 808); Shànghǎi (☎ 4008 808 808)
Air New Zealand (NZ; www.airnz.com); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2862 8988)

All Nippon Airways (NH; www.ana.co.jp); Běijīng (☎ 800 820 1122); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-5696 2525)
Asiana Airlines (OZ; www.us.flyasiana.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6468 4000); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6219 4000)
British Airways (BA; www.british-airways.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-8511 5599); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2822 9000); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6375 8866)
Cathay Pacific (CX; www.cathaypacific.com); Běijīng (10800 852 1888); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2747 1888); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-375 6000)
China Eastern Airlines (MU; www.ce-air.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6464 1166); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2861 0322); Shànghǎi (☎ 021 95108)
Dragonair (KA; www.dragonair.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6518 2533); Chéngdū (☎ 028-8676 8828); Chóngqīng (☎ 023-6372 9900); Hong Kong (☎ 852-3193 3888); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6375 6375)
Japan Airlines (JL; www.jal.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6513 0888); Shànghǎi (☎ 4008 880 808)
KLM (KL; www.klm.nl) Běijīng (☎ 010-6505 3505); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6884 6884)
Korean Air (KE; ☎ 4006 588 888; www.koreanair.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-8453 8137); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6275 2000)
Lufthansa Airlines (LH; www.lufthansa.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6468 8838); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-5352 4999)
Malaysia Airlines (MH; www.malaysiaairlines.com.my); Běijīng (☎ 010-6505 2681); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6279 8607)
Northwest Airlines (NW; www.nwa.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6505 3505); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2810 4288); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6884 6884)
Oasis Hong Kong Airlines (O8; www.oasishongkong.com); Hong Kong (☎ 852-3628 0628; ✈ 8am-8pm)
Qantas Airways (QF; www.qantas.com.au); Běijīng (☎ 010-6567 9006); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2822 9000); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6145 0188)
Scandinavian Airlines (SK; www.sas.dk); Běijīng (☎ 010-8527 6100); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-5228 5001)
Singapore Airlines (SQ; www.singaporeair.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6505 2233); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2520 2233); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-6289 1000)
Thai Airways International (TG; www.thairways.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6460 8899); Kūnmíng (☎ 0871-351 1515); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-5298 5555)
United Airlines (UA; www.ual.com); Běijīng (☎ 010-6463 1111); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2810 4888); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-3311 4567)
Virgin Atlantic (VS; www.virgin-atlantic.com); Hong Kong (☎ 852-2532 3030); Shànghǎi (☎ 021-5353 4600)

Tickets

The cheapest tickets to China and Hong Kong can often be found online or in Chinatown discount agencies around the world. Other budget and student travel agents offer cheap tickets, but the best offers are in agents that

deal with Chinese regularly returning home (festival times such as the Chinese New Year will be more expensive). Firms such as STA Travel (www.statravel.com) with offices worldwide also offer competitive prices to most destinations. The cheapest flights to China are with airlines requiring a stopover at the home airport such as with Air France to Běijīng via Paris or Malaysian Airlines to Běijīng via Kuala Lumpur. Air fares to China peak between June and September.

Several routes can be considered, depending on where you want to fly from. If you are flying long haul or round-the-world and can find a cheap ticket to Bangkok, you can buy an onward ticket from Bangkok to Kūnmíng, Chéngdū or Guilin. This gives you the flexibility to fly into one city (eg Chéngdū) and out of another (Kūnmíng) or to combine your trip with one or more regional countries (eg fly into Kūnmíng then overland to Vietnam). Most visitors arrive in China via Běijīng, Hong Kong or Shànghǎi and then fly or take the train to the Southwest.

With the opening of the long-haul budget **Oasis Hong Kong Airlines** (www.oasishongkong.com) in late 2006, getting to Hong Kong by air has suddenly become much cheaper. At the time of writing, Oasis Hong Kong Airlines was flying to Hong Kong from the UK and Canada, but plans to expand its service to the USA, Germany, Italy and other destinations in future. With other airlines, there is little difference in air prices to Běijīng, Hong Kong or Shànghǎi, so it could depend on which city you want to stopover in; see the gateway chapters on Běijīng (p79), Hong Kong (p92) and Shànghǎi (p86) for further information. Stopping off in Hong Kong allows you to sort out your China visa. Domestic tickets to the Southwest are marginally more expensive from Hong Kong than from Běijīng or Shànghǎi.

The cheapest available airline ticket is called an Advance Purchase Excursion (APEX) ticket, although this type of ticket includes expensive penalties for cancellation and changing dates of travel. Tickets listed below are tickets quoted by airline offices and you will be able to find cheaper rates through travel agencies.

For browsing and buying tickets on the internet, try these online booking services:

www.cheapflights.com No-frills website offering flights to numerous destinations.

www.expedia.com Offers discounted tickets.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & climate change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon offset schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

www.lonelyplanet.com Use the Travel Services tool book multistop trips.

www.onetravel.com Offers some good deals.

www.travel.com.au A New Zealand version also exists (www.travel.co.nz).

www.travelbag.co.uk Good for holiday bargains and speciality travel.

To bid for last-minute tickets online, one site to try is **Skyauction** (www.skyauction.com). **Priceline** (www.priceline.com) aims to match the ticket price to your budget.

Discounted air-courier tickets are a cheap possibility, but they carry restrictions. As a courier, you transport documents or freight internationally and see it through customs. You usually have to sacrifice your baggage and take carry-on luggage. Generally trips are on fixed, return-trip tickets and offer an inflexible period in the destination country. For more information, check out organisations such as the **Courier Association** (www.aircourier.org) or the **International Association of Air Travel Couriers** (IAATC; www.courier.org).

Australia

STA Travel (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) have offices throughout Australia. For on-line bookings, try www.travel.com.au.

From Australia, Hong Kong is a popular destination and is also the closest entry point into China. Although it's a shorter flight, fares from Australia to Hong Kong are generally not that much cheaper than fares to Běijīng or Shànghǎi. Low-season return fares to Shànghǎi or Běijīng from the east coast of Australia start at around A\$1000, with fares to Hong Kong starting from A\$910.

Canada

Canadian discount air ticket sellers are known as consolidators and their air fares tend to be about 10% higher than those sold in the USA. Check out travel agents in your local Chinatown for some real deals and browse agency ads in the *Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Montreal Gazette* and *Vancouver Sun*. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency. For online bookings try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

From Canada, **Oasis Hong Kong Airlines** (www.oasishongkong.com) has cheap flights six days a week to Hong Kong from Vancouver from as little as US\$275 one-way (plus taxes and charges) in economy. Air Canada has daily flights to Běijīng and Shànghǎi from Vancouver. Air Canada, Air China and China

Eastern Airlines sometimes run very cheap fares. Return low-season fares between Vancouver and Běijīng start at around US\$700.

Continental Europe

Generally there is not much variation in air fare prices from the main European cities. The major airlines and travel agents generally have a number of deals on offer, so shop around. **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) have branches throughout Europe.

Return fares to Běijīng from major Western European cities start at around €900 with Lufthansa, Air France and KLM. Flights to Hong Kong are slightly more expensive, with return fares starting from around €1000 to €1100.

FRANCE

Recommended agencies include the following:

Anyway (☎ 08 92 89 38 92; www.anyway.fr)

Lastminute (☎ 08 92 70 50 00; www.lastminute.fr)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

OTU Voyages (www.otu.fr) This agency specialises in student and youth travellers.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01 40 15 11 15; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

The budget long-haul airline Oasis Hong Kong Airlines are planning to launch direct flights between Cologne–Bonn–Hong Kong and Berlin–Hong Kong in the near future.

Recommended agencies include the following:

Expedia (www.expedia.de)

Just Travel (☎ 089 747 3330; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 01805 284 366; www.lastminute.de)

STA Travel (☎ 01805 456 422; www.statravel.de) For travellers under the age of 26.

ITALY

One recommended agent is **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it), specialising in student and youth travel.

The very cheap airline **Oasis Hong Kong Airlines** (www.oasishongkong.com) is planning to launch a Milan–Hong Kong direct flight in the near future.

THE NETHERLANDS

One recommended agency is **Airfair** (☎ 020 620 5121; www.airfair.nl).

SPAIN

Recommended agencies include **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902 116 226; www.barceloviajes.com) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 90 217 09 79; www.nouvelles-frontieres.es).

Hong Kong

More than 60 airlines operate between Hong Kong International Airport and about 140 destinations worldwide. Competition keeps fares relatively low, so Hong Kong is a great place to find discounted tickets. For airlines flying to Hong Kong and everything you could ever want to know about Hong Kong International Airport, check out www.hongkongairport.com. Dragonair flies to cities in the Southwest, including Chóngqīng, Chéngdū, Guilín and Kūnmíng. It is far cheaper to take the train or bus to either Guǎngzhōu or Shēnzhèn and then fly to destinations in the Southwest.

India

STIC Travels (www.stictravel.com) has offices in dozens of Indian cities, including **Delhi** (☎ 11-233 57 468) and **Mumbai** (☎ 22-221 81 431). Another agency is **Transway International** (www.transwayinternational.com).

Japan

Daily flights operate between Tokyo and Běijīng, with one-way fares starting at around US\$775. There are also regular flights between Osaka and Běijīng, with one-way fares at around US\$600. Daily flights link Shànghǎi to Tokyo and Osaka.

Reliable travel agencies used to dealing with foreigners include the following:

No1 Travel (03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com)

STA Travel (www.statravel.co.jp); Osaka (☎ 06-262 7066); Tokyo (☎ 03-5391 2922)

Macau

Air Macau has regular flights to Chéngdū, Guilín, Kūnmíng and Guiyáng. International flights include Seoul, Bangkok, Manila and Taipei. New long-haul budget airline **Viva Macau** (www.flyvivamacau.com) flies to Jakarta and the Maldives and plans to service destinations including Milan, Moscow, Mumbai, Delhi, Manila and Abu Dhabi. Website www.gomacau.com acts as a consolidator so is a good place to look for cheap fares.

New Zealand

Both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel

.co.nz) have branches throughout the country. The site www.travel.co.nz is recommended for online bookings.

International airlines such as Malaysia Airlines, Thai Airways International and Air New Zealand have return fares from Auckland to Shànghǎi for around NZ\$1380 during the low season. Return low-season fares to Běijīng start at around NZ\$1560.

UK & Ireland

Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free online magazine *TNT* (www.tntmagazine.com).

Travel agents in London's Chinatown that deal with flights to China include **Jade Travel** (☎ 0870-898 8928; www.jadetravel.co.uk; 5 Newport Place, London WC2H 7JN), **Sagitta Travel Agency** (☎ 0870-077 8888; www.sagitta-tvl.com; 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2 7JJ) and **Reliance Tours Ltd** (☎ 0800-018 0503; www.reliance-tours.co.uk; 4th fl, 62 Shaftesbury Ave, Astoria House, London W1D 6LT).

From the UK, the cheapest flights to Hong Kong are with **Oasis Hong Kong Airlines** (☎ 0844 482 2323; www.oasishongkong.com), with one-way daily flights between Gatwick Airport and Hong Kong starting from as low as UK£75 (plus taxes and charges). The cheapest low-season return fares to Běijīng start at around UK£350 with British Airways.

Recommended travel agencies include the following:

Bridge the World (☎ 0870 444 7474; www.b-t-w.co.uk)

Flightbookers (☎ 0870 814 4001; www.ebookers.com)

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 890 8099; flightcentre.co.uk)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245 608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) North-South Travel donate part of its profit to projects in the developing world.

Quest Travel (☎ 0870 442 3542; www.questtravel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 0870 160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk) For travellers under the age of 26.

Trailfinders (www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0870 890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA

Discount travel agents in the USA are known as consolidators (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'Consolidator'). San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can be

found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

From the US west coast, low-season return fares to Hong Kong or Běijīng start at around US\$850. Fares to these destinations increase dramatically during summer and Chinese New Year. From New York to Běijīng or Hong Kong, low-season return fares start at around US\$890. The supercheap airline **Oasis Hong Kong Airlines** (www.oasishongkong.com) is also planning to launch direct services from Chicago and San Francisco to Hong Kong in the near future.

The following agencies are recommended for online bookings:

www.cheaptickets.com

www.expedia.com

www.itn.net

www.lowestfare.com

www.orbitz.com

www.sta.com (for travellers under the age of 26)

www.travelocity.com

LAND

If you're heading overland from Europe or Asia, it's entirely possible to travel all the way to China and back without having to leave the ground. There are several fascinating routes, including the Vietnam–China border crossing, the Trans-Siberian Railway from Europe, or the exotic Tibet-to-Nepal, Xinjiang-to-Pakistan and Xinjiang-to-Kazakhstan routes. For more on these routes see Lonely Planet's *China* guide.

It's generally not possible to bring your vehicle into China, although bringing your bicycle should present few problems (although regulations can be capricious). Overland travel between provinces in China's Southwest is largely straightforward, as is transport into the rest of China beyond (see the destination chapters for details).

Border Crossings

China shares borders with Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Vietnam. China also has official border crossings between its special administrative regions, Hong Kong and Macau. The borders with Afghanistan, Bhutan and India are closed. If planning an extensive trip to China overland, make sure you enter China within the given time after your visa is issued (see p476).

HONG KONG

Hong Kong is an excellent place to enter China overland and there is a variety of options for crossing over the border. From Hong Kong you can reach Guǎngzhōu and virtually any major destination in Guǎngdōng province by bus, from where you can continue by bus or train to destinations in the Southwest. Buses are frequent and run by a multitude of companies and depart from locations around the territory; bus companies include **CTS Express Coach** (☎ 852-2365 0118; <http://ctsbus.hkcts.com>) and the **Motor Transport Company of Guangdong & Hong Kong** (GDHK; ☎ 852-2317 7900; www.gdhkmtc.com).

To reach Shēnzhèn by train, board the KCR East Rail train at Hung Hom in Kowloon (1st/2nd class HK\$66/33, 35 minutes) or at any KCR East Rail station along the way, and ride it to the China border crossing at Lo Wu. From Shēnzhèn you can take a local train or bus to Guǎngzhōu and beyond.

The most comfortable way to reach Guǎngzhōu is via the Kowloon–Guǎngzhōu express train, which covers the 182km route in approximately 1¼ hours. Trains leave Hung Hom station for Guǎngzhōu East 12 times a day between 7.30am and 7.15pm, returning between 8.35am and 9.23pm. One-way tickets cost HK\$230/190 in 1st/2nd class for adults and HK\$115/95 for children under nine.

Guǎngzhōu has rail connections to everywhere in the Southwest, but it's a major rail bottleneck and it can sometimes be difficult to get an onward ticket leaving the same day or even the next day. This is one city where it's worth trying the **China International Travel Service** (CITS; Zhōngguó Guójiā Lǚxíngshì; ☎ 020-8666 6889; 179 Huanshi Xilu; ☎ 9am–6pm), located near the main train station.

From Hong Kong International Airport buses and boats connect to airports in Macau, Shēnzhèn and Guǎngzhōu, where domestic flights are cheaper. The **TurboJet Sea Express** (☎ 852-2859 3333; www.turbojetseaexpress.com.hk) links Hong Kong International Airport to Shenzhen Airport (HK\$230, 40 minutes) seven or eight times daily between 10am and 9.15pm; it also runs to Macau. Buses run by **CTS Express Coach** (☎ 852-2261 2472) and other companies run from Hong Kong International Airport to Guǎngzhōu and other cities in Guǎngdōng.

LAOS

From the Měnglà (p335) district in Yúnnán it is legal to enter Laos via Boten in Luang Nam

Tha province if you possess a valid Lao visa. You can now get an on-the-spot visa for Laos at the border, the price of which depends on your nationality (although you cannot get a Chinese visa here). The border doesn't officially close until 5.30pm Běijīng time (and don't forget that Laos is an hour behind), but things often wrap up earlier on the Lao side. As the bus journey from Jīnghóng to Měnglà takes the better part of the day, you will probably have to stay overnight at Měnglà. For more details, see the boxed text (p334). Lao visas can also be obtained in Běijīng (p469); the Lao consulate in Kūnmíng (p470) issues 15-day tourist visas (valid for two months from date of issue; visa extensions in Laos possible).

MACAU

On the other side of the border from Macau is the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of Zhūhǎi; the border is open from 7am to midnight. Simply take bus 3, 5 or 9 to the Border Gate (Portas de Cerco) and walk across. A second, less busy crossing is the **Cotai Frontier Post** (☎ 9am–8pm) on the causeway linking Taipa and Coloane and allows visitors to cross over the Lotus Bridge by shuttle bus (HK\$4) to Zhūhǎi. Buses 15, 21 and 26 will drop you off at the crossing.

For buses further afield, the **Kee Kwan Motor Road Co** (☎ 853-933 888) operates from the bus station on Rua das Lorchas, 100m southwest of the end of Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro. Buses for Guǎngzhōu (MOP\$70, four hours), from where you can get good connections to the rest of China, depart every half-hour, and for Zhōngshān (MOP\$25, 70 minutes) every 20 minutes between about 8am and 6.30pm. There are buses to Guǎngzhōu (MOP\$75) and Dōngguān (MOP\$80) from Macau International Airport.

MYANMAR (BURMA)

Travellers can legally cross the border in only one direction – from the Chinese side into Myanmar at the Jiegao Border Checkpoint connecting Ruili (p350) to Muse in Myanmar's Shan State. Land crossings from China are only possible if you join an organised tour group from a Chinese travel agency (eg Ko Wai Lin Travel in Kūnmíng; p225), who can arrange permits. Myanmar visas cannot be arranged in Ruili and must be done in Kūnmíng. See p353 for details on journeying to Myanmar. You cannot legally leave Myanmar by this route.

VIETNAM

Travellers can enter Vietnam overland from China and exit Vietnam to China on a standard visa. You cannot obtain visas at the border, but visas for Vietnam can be acquired in Běijīng (p469), Kūnmíng (p470), Guǎngzhōu (p470), or at either CITS (p191) or the Vietnam consulate (p470) in Nánning; Vietnam also has a consulate in Guǎngzhōu. Chinese visas can be obtained in Hanoi. The Vietnam–China border crossing is open from 7am to 4pm, Vietnam time, or 8am to 5pm, China time. Set your watch when you cross the border – the time in China is one hour later than in Vietnam. There are currently three border checkpoints where foreigners are permitted to cross between Vietnam and China. There is a possibility that others will open in the future. For details of the Beijing–Hanoi train, see below.

Friendship Pass

The busiest border crossing is at the Vietnamese town of Dong Dang, an obscure town (the nearest city is Lang Son 18km to the south) 164km northeast of Hanoi. The closest Chinese town to the border is Pingxiang (p208) in Guǎngxī province, which is about 10km north of the actual border gate. The only place in Guǎngxī where foreigners can cross is Friendship Pass, known as Huu Nghi Quan in Vietnamese and Yóuyì Guān in Chinese. Buses and minibuses on the Hanoi–Lang Son route are frequent. For details on reaching Friendship Pass from Pingxiang, see p208.

Express buses between Pingxiang and Nánning are regular and fast (Y60 to Y70, 2½ hours). Pingxiang is also connected by train to Nánning, capital of China's Guǎngxī province, 220km away. Train 5518 (Y9 to Y18) to Nánning departs Pingxiang at 2.45pm, arriving in Nánning at 6.05pm. In the other direction, train 5517 departs Nánning at 8am, arriving in Pingxiang at 11.30am.

As train tickets to China are expensive in Hanoi, some travellers buy a ticket to Dong Dang, walk across the border and then buy a train ticket on the Chinese side. This isn't the best way because it's several kilometres from Dong Dang to Friendship Pass, and you'll have to hire someone to take you by motorbike. If you're going by train, it's best to buy a ticket from Hanoi to Pingxiang, and then in Pingxiang buy a ticket to Nánning or beyond.

From Nánning's Langdong bus station, a daily bus (Y68, five hours) runs to Friendship Pass at 8.10am and you can buy a ticket on this bus all the way to Hanoi (Y120, 6½ hours).

Twice-weekly trains run from Běijīng to Hanoi. The T5 leaves Beijing West Train Station at 4.16pm on Monday and Friday, arriving in Hanoi at 8.10am on Wednesday and Sunday. The T6 departs Hanoi at 6.30pm on Tuesday and Friday, arriving in Běijīng at 1.38pm on Thursday and Sunday. The train stops at Shǐjiāzhuāng, Zhèngzhōu, Hǎnkǒu (in Wūhàn), Wūchǎng (Wūhàn), Chángshā, Héngyáng, Yǒngzhōu, Guǐlín North, Guǐlín, Liǔzhōu, Nánning and Píngxiáng.

Lao Cai–Hékǒu

A 762km metre-gauge railway, inaugurated in 1910, links Hanoi with Kūnmíng; at the time of writing international train services were suspended due to floods and landslide damage; ambitious plans are afoot to upgrade the ageing rail link. The border town on the Vietnamese side is Lao Cai, 294km from Hanoi. On the Chinese side, the border town is Hékǒu, 468km from Kūnmíng. Buses to Hékǒu run from Kūnmíng (Y119, 12 hours, 9.45am, 1.30pm, 7.30pm and 8.40pm; see p234) for more details on crossing the border at Lao Cai–Hékǒu.

Mong Cai–Dōngxīng

Vietnam's third but little known border crossing is at Mong Cai in the northeast corner of the country, just opposite the Chinese city of Dōngxīng.

RIVER

For details on boats between Chiang Saen in Thailand and Jīnghóng, see the boxed text, p331.

SEA

There are no direct international boats to ports in the Southwest. Weekly ferries link Osaka and Shànghǎi (roughly 44 hours) and twice-monthly services run between Kōbe (Japan) and Shànghǎi (roughly 44 hours). From Tiānjīn, a weekly ferry sails to Kōbe. There are also boats from Qīngdǎo to Shimonoseki every two weeks. Travelling from Korea, international ferries connect the South Korean port of Incheon with Weihǎi, Qīngdǎo, Tiānjīn (Tánggū), Dǎlián and Dǎndōng. See

Lonely Planet's *China* guide for more details on all routes.

Hong Kong

Regularly scheduled ferries link the China ferry terminal in Kowloon and/or the Macau ferry pier on Hong Kong Island with a string of towns and cities on the Pearl River delta (but not central Guǎngzhōu or Shēnzhèn).

High-speed ferries run by **TurboJet** (☎ 852-2921 6688; www.turbojet.com.hk) connect the China ferry terminal with Fúyǒng ferry terminal (Shēnzhèn airport) regularly throughout the day. **CMSE Passenger Transport** (☎ 852-2858 0909) has regular services from the China ferry terminal and the Macau ferry pier to Shékǒu, 20km west of Shēnzhèn.

Regular ferries to Zhùhǎi in Guǎngdōng can also be reached from Hong Kong from the China ferry terminal and the Macau ferry pier.

Hong Kong is connected to Macau by two ferry companies that run high-speed vessels virtually 24 hours a day.

Macau

A daily ferry by the **Yuet Tung Shipping Co** (☎ 853-574 478) connects Macau with the port of Shékǒu in Shēnzhèn. Boats run three times a day and take 80 minutes. Tickets can be bought up to three days in advance from the point of departure, which is pier 14, just off Rua das Lorchas and 100m southwest of the end of Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

China's air network is extensive and rapidly growing: its civil aviation fleet is expected to triple in size over the next two decades, with up to 2000 more airliners being added to the existing fleet by 2022. Airports are being built and upgraded all over the land. China is actually running out of airline pilots to fly its growing fleet and foreign pilots have reportedly been hired.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC; Zhōngguó Mínháng) is the civil aviation authority for numerous airlines, including for **Air China** (CA; www.airchina.com.cn), **China Eastern Airlines** (MU; www.ce-air.com), **China Southern Airlines** (CZ; www.cs-air.com) and **Sichuan Airlines** (3U; www.scal.com.cn). Sichuan Airlines is

based in Chéngdū and China Southern in based in Guǎngzhōu.

CAAC publishes a combined international and domestic timetable in both English and Chinese in April and November each year. This timetable can be bought at some airports and CAAC offices in China. Individual airlines also publish timetables and you can buy these from ticket offices throughout China.

Shuttle buses often run from CAAC offices in towns and cities through China to the local airport.

On domestic and international flights the free baggage allowance for an adult passenger is 20kg in economy class and 30kg in 1st class. You are also allowed 5kg of hand luggage, though this is rarely weighed. The charge for excess baggage is 1% of the full fare for each kilogram. Remember to keep your baggage receipt label on your ticket as you will need to show it when you collect your luggage.

International and domestic departure tax is included in the price of the ticket.

Tickets

You need to show your passport when reserving or purchasing a ticket, and you definitely need it to board the aircraft. Tickets are easy to purchase as at most times there is an oversupply of airline seats (except during major festivals and holidays). Tickets can be purchased from branches of CAAC, travel agents, or from the travel desk of your hotel (the latter will tack on a service charge); it pays to shop around. Discounts are common, except when flying into large cities such as Shànghǎi at the weekend, when the full fare can be the norm; prices quoted in this book are the full fare. Fares are calculated according to one-way travel, with return tickets simply costing twice the single fare.

Children over 12 are charged adult fares; kids between two and 12 pay half-price. Toddlers under the age of two pay 10% of the full fare. You can use credit cards at most CAAC offices and travel agents.

BICYCLE

Most of China's Southwest is ideal for biking, a form of transport that opens up vast areas to exploration and the opportunity to see parts of the region you would miss traveling by bus or train. Minority and rural areas are particularly rewarding, though they are

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS



normally pretty hilly, so you will need to be fit. Hiring a bicycle (*zìxíngchē*) in towns such as Guilín (p154) and Yángshuò (p166) is also an excellent way to get around, but you won't see any bicycles in Chóngqǐng (p438), as the gradients are way too fierce.

Refer to the Cycling section in the Southwest China Outdoors chapter (p65) for more details on cycling in this region.

Hazards

Cycling is a popular albeit hazardous means of transport. China's roads – both urban and rural – are lethal, and according to the WHO 600 people a day die in traffic accidents. The exponential increase in vehicle numbers has made cycling increasingly hazardous, so keep your wits about you.

Night riding is particularly dangerous. On country roads look out for tractors, which often have no headlights at all. Chinese bicycles are rarely equipped with lights. Chinese cyclists and pedestrians tend to favour black clothing, which camouflages perfectly with the night sky.

Dogs, the enemy of cyclists the world over, are less of a problem in China than elsewhere but can be a real menace in Tibetan areas of western Sichuān and northeastern Yúnnán.

Hire

Established bicycle-hire shops exist in most traveller centres in China's Southwest, the best being at Yángshuò, Dàlì, Lǐjiāng and Jǐnghóng. In touristy places like Yángshuò

it's even possible to rent electric bikes and scooters.

Most hire shops operate out of hotels popular with foreigners, but independent hire shops also exist. The range of bikes is generally good, but examine your vehicle carefully before handing over a deposit (typically in the region of ¥150 to ¥500; avoid leaving your passport as deposit).

Day, half-day and hourly hire are the usual options; you can also hire for several days, so touring is possible. Rates for Westerners are typically around ¥10 to ¥20 per day. Note that some big hotels charge ridiculous rates.

Bike repair shops are everywhere and repairs are cheap.

Off the Road

Most travellers who bring bikes take at least a couple of breaks from the rigours of the road, during which they use some other means of transport. Bicycles can be conveyed by bus, air and train, and even by taxi, although avoid shipping your bike in the build up to and during the Chinese New Year or the major holiday periods.

On the train, your bike won't arrive at the same time as you unless you send it on a couple of days in advance. You will be charged for your bicycle as cargo according to its weight. At the other end it is held in storage for a small daily fee of around ¥2 and a small administration fee is payable when you collect it.

Transporting your bike by plane can be expensive, but it's often less complicated than

NAVIGATING CITIES

At first glance, Chinese street names can be bewildering, with name changes common every few hundred metres. The good news is that there is some logic to it, and a little basic Chinese will help to make navigating much easier.

Many road names are compound words made up of a series of directions that place the road in context with all others in the city. Compass directions are particularly common in road names. The directions are: *běi* (north; 北); *nán* (south; 南); *dōng* (east; 东); and *xī* (west; 西). So Dong Lu (东路) literally means East Rd, while Xi Jie (西街) means West St.

Other words, which regularly crop up are *zhōng* (central; 中) and *huan* (ring, as in ring road; 环). If you bring them together with some basic numerals, you could have Dongsanhuan Nanlu (东三环南路), which literally means 'east third ring south road' or the southeastern part of the third ring road.

by train. Some cyclists have not been charged by CAAC; others have had to pay 1% of their fare per kilogram of excess weight.

BOAT

The best-known river trip is the boat ride through the Three Gorges along the Yangzi River from Chóngqing (p458). The six-hour Li River (p166) boat trip from Guilín to Yángshuò is also popular.

BUS

Long-distance buses are an excellent way of getting around China's Southwest. Routes are extensive, tickets easy to get, vehicles are improving, roads are becoming smoother and buses stop in small towns and villages not served by trains or planes. On the downside, prepare for cramped and painful trips on long, time-consuming journeys; appalling and often dangerous driving; and occasional breakdowns that can throw a spanner into your itinerary.

Not all long-distance buses have seatbelts, but all invariably come with looped *wǔdǔ*, kung fu movies or karaoke DVDs with three-dimensional sound. Most buses are now no-smoking, but intransigent male smokers light up regardless on smaller, short-haul routes.

The plushiest long-haul coaches have airline-style reclining seats, ample legroom and toilets. Bottles of mineral water are handed out by hostesses on many long-distance routes; but still stock up with snacks.

The shock absorbers on small buses (小巴; *xiǎobā*), minibuses and more ancient long-distance buses are poor, so avoid sitting at the rear of the bus if possible. Long-distance trips can eat into your travel time, so taking a night sleeper (if available) can save time. If you do sit in the back and the road is rough, expect to become

airborne every time the bus hits a bump. Aim for an aisle seat if you have long legs. Chinese tend to avoid sitting next to the *lǎowài* (see the boxed text, p199), so you may have an empty seat next to you on all but the fullest buses.

Minibuses on shorter routes can wait infuriatingly until the bus is full before departing, dawdling at the side of the road and press-ganging hesitant pedestrians onto seats. Consequently what should be a 60-minute trip can take 1½ hours or more. Between towns bus speeds are high, but growing urban traffic can slow things to a crawl as your bus makes its way to and from the local bus station. The smaller the bus the less luggage room. Luggage racks can be wafer-thin and bulky backpacks may have to go on the floor; you'll only find luggage compartments on bigger buses.

Drivers can develop cast-iron bladders from a life of slurping cold tea from jam jars, so toilet stops can be few and far between. As drivers lean on the horn at the slightest sign of movement ahead, things can get cacophonous. Overtaking on blind corners doesn't much faze drivers, so journeys are frequently of the white-knuckle variety.

On long routes, sleeper buses (*wòpùchē*) can be useful for reaching a destination overnight. Bunks can have limited legroom and no luggage storage, however. Try to keep an eye on your valuables.

On some rural routes you'll find *miàndī* (面的) or taxivans that seat around seven. You'll probably run into these on the way to Detian Waterfall in Guǎngxi.

Tickets

Tickets for long-distance buses are easier to obtain than train tickets. Tickets for same-day travel are generally straightforward and usually

you can get a seat just before the bus departs, although if there are only one or two departures a day, try to book earlier otherwise you may get a bad seat (towards the rear of the bus) or you may have to wait till the next departure. If possible, book the day before. Optional insurance is provided for an extra Y2 or so. On large buses, seats are generally numbered on the ticket, but if the bus is only half-full you can sit anywhere. When buying tickets, ask what different buses go to your destination; tickets for plusher express buses will be more expensive, but far more comfortable.

Long-distance bus stations are often huge and chaotic. There is often more than one bus station in town, each one generally serving the compass direction of your destination.

Local Chinese maps have a special symbol for a bus station, meant to resemble the steering wheel of the bus.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving a hire car around China is impossible unless you have a residence permit (p476) and a Chinese driving licence, so don't think you can just jump in a car and blaze off into the wilds. For the latest update, contact **Hertz** (☎ countrywide 800-810 8883; www.hertz.net.cn), but don't expect regulations to relax any time soon. Hiring a motorcycle is similarly impossible unless you have a residence permit. Finding a car with a driver can be arranged through major hotels, CITS or other travel agencies. Parts of the Southwest require hiring a 4WD and driver.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

Many people have hitchhiked in China, and some have been amazingly successful. It's not officially sanctioned and the same dangers that apply elsewhere in the world also apply in China. Exercise caution, and if you're in any doubt as to the intentions of your prospective driver, say no.

Hitching in China is rarely free, and passengers are expected to offer at least a tip. Some drivers might even ask for an unreasonable amount of money, so try to establish a figure early to avoid problems later. There is no Chinese signal for hitching, so just try waving down a truck.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

While China boasts a huge and often ingenious choice of local transport, vehicles can be slow and overburdened, and the transport network is confusing for visitors. Unless the town is small, walking is not usually recommended, since Chinese cities tend to be very spread out. On the plus side, local transport is cheap. Chóngqing now benefits from a limited light-rail system.

Bus

Apart from bikes, buses are the most common means of getting around in the cities. Services

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

* Distances are approximate

Chóngqing	340																		
Géjiù	1000	1020																	
Guǎngyuán	280	610	1300																
Guilín	1380	950	1400	1550															
Guǎngyáng	680	350	670	950	870														
Kūnmíng	770	790	230	1050	1150	450													
Nǎnníng	1260	930	830	1500	360	850	740												
Wúzhōu	1400	1070	1370	1680	380	980	1270	400											
Xiāngguān	850	1050	480	1300	1630	700	260	1000	1530										
Chéngdū	Chóngqing	Géjiù	Guǎngyuán	Guilín	Guǎngyáng	Kūnmíng	Nǎnníng	Wúzhōu											

are fairly extensive, buses go to most places and fares are inexpensive (typically ¥1). The problem is that they are almost always packed, traffic can be slow and bus routes and signs are in Chinese only.

Taxi

Taxis (出租汽车; *chūzū qìchē*) can be the best way to get around. They are cheap and plentiful and always pursuing customers, so finding one is rarely difficult. Some cities such as Liūzhōu (p189) sport fleets of new Hyundai taxis.

Taxi rates per kilometre are clearly marked on a sticker on the rear side window of the taxi; flag fall rates vary from city to city and also depend upon the size and quality of vehicle.

Taxi drivers speak little, if any English. If you don't speak Chinese, bring a map or have your destination written down in characters. It helps if you know the way to your destination; sit in the front with a map.

If you encounter a taxi driver you trust or who speaks a smattering of English, ask for his card (名片; *míngpiàn*). You can hire them for a single trip or on a daily basis – the latter is worth considering if there's a group of people who can split the cost.

While most taxis have meters, they are often only switched on in larger towns and cities. If the meter is not used (on an excursion out of town for example), a price should be negotiated before you get into the taxi, and bargaining employed. If you want the meter to be used, ask for *dǎbiǎo* (打表).

It is hard to find rear seat belts in China's older taxis, and front passenger seat belts are so rarely used they are often grimy or locked solid.

Other

An often bewildering array of ramshackle transport options infests China, providing employment for legions of elderly Chinese. The motor tricycle (三轮摩托车; *sānlún mótuōchē*) – for want of a better name – is an enclosed three-wheeled vehicle with a driver at the front, a small motorbike engine below and seats for two passengers behind. They tend to congregate outside the train and bus stations in larger towns and cities.

The pedicab (三轮车; *sānlúnchē*) is a pedal-powered tricycle with a seat to carry passengers.

In some towns (eg Běihài) you can get a ride on the back of someone's motorcycle for about

half the price of what a regular four-wheeled taxi would charge. If you turn a blind eye to the hazards, it's a quick and cheap way of getting around. You must wear a helmet – the driver will provide one. Obviously, there is no meter, so fares must be agreed upon in advance.

Prices of all of the above can compare with taxis, however, so check beforehand and bargain. Also note that none of the above offer decent protection in a crash, so taking a taxi is often the more sensible option.

TRAIN

Although crowded, trains are a fantastic way to get around in reasonable speed and comfort. The network covers every province, except Hainan Island, with the link to Lhasa in Tibet completed in 2006. At any given time it is estimated that more than 10 million Chinese are travelling on a train in China, except at Chinese New Year when the whole country seems to be on the railway.

Trains are punctual and leave on the dot. A variety of classes means you can navigate as you wish: if you can endure a hard seat, getting from A to B is very cheap. Opting for a soft sleeper means things can get pricey.

The new fleet of trains that run intercity routes is a vast improvement on the old models – they are much cleaner and equipped with air-con. The new 'Z' class express trains are limited to routes between Běijīng and Shànghǎi and Běijīng and Xī'ān: they are very plush, with meals thrown in on some routes, mobile phone charging points and well-designed bunks.

Most trains have dining cars where you can find passable food. Railway staff also regularly walk by with pushcarts offering snacks.

Many train stations require that luggage be X-rayed before entering the waiting area.

Virtually all train stations have left-luggage rooms (寄存处; *jìcún chù*) where you can safely dump your bags for about ¥5 to ¥10 (per day per item).

An excellent online source of information on China's rail network is www.seat61.com/China.htm, which also has useful links to rail timetables in English, maps of the Chinese rail network and tips on buying tickets.

Classes

Train tickets are calculated simply according to the kilometre distance travelled and, on longer routes, the class of travel.

Hard seat (硬座; *yìng zuò*) is actually generally padded, but the hard-seat section can be hard on your sanity – it can be very dirty and noisy, and painful on the long haul. Hard seat on tourist trains, express trains or newer trains is more pleasant, less crowded and air-conditioned.

Since hard seat is the only thing most locals can afford it's packed to the gills. You should get a ticket with an assigned seat number, but if seats have sold out, ask for a standing ticket (无座; *wúzuò*; or 站票; *zhànpiào*), which at least gets you on the train, where you may find a seat or you can upgrade (see below). Because hard-seat tickets are relatively easy to obtain, you may have to travel hard seat even if you're willing to pay for a higher class.

On some short journeys, trains have soft-seat (软座; *ruǎn zuò*) carriages. These trains have comfortable seats arranged two abreast and overcrowding is not permitted. Soft seats cost about the same as hard sleeper and carriages are often double-decker.

Hard-sleeper (硬卧; *yìng wò*) carriages are made up of doorless compartments with half a dozen bunks in three tiers, and sheets, pillows and blankets are provided. It does very nicely as an overnight hotel. There is a small price difference between berths, with the lowest bunk (下铺; *xiàpù*) the most expensive and the top-most bunk (上铺; *shàngpù*) the cheapest. You may wish to take the middle bunk (中铺; *zhōngpù*) as all and sundry invade the lower berth to use it as a seat during the day, while the top one has little headroom and puts you near the speakers. As with all other classes, smoking is prohibited in hard sleeper. Lights and speakers go out at around 10pm. Hard-sleeper tickets are the most difficult of all to buy; you almost always need to buy these a few days in advance.

Soft sleeper (软卧; *ruǎn wò*) is the most comfortable, with four bunks in a closed compartment. Soft sleeper costs around twice as much as hard sleeper (the upper berth is slightly cheaper than the lower berth), so it is usually easier to purchase soft rather than hard sleeper; however, more and more Chinese are travelling this way.

If you get on the train with an unreserved seating ticket, you can find the conductor and upgrade (补票; *bǔpiào*) yourself to a hard sleeper, soft seat or soft sleeper if there are any available.

Reservations & Tickets

The vast majority of tickets are one-way (单程; *dānchéng*) only. Buying hard-seat tickets at short notice is usually no hassle, but you will not always be successful in getting a reserved seat. Tickets can only be purchased with cash.

Tickets for hard sleepers can usually be obtained in major cities, but with more difficulty in quiet backwaters. Don't ever expect to obtain a hard-sleeper ticket on the day of travel so plan ahead and buy your ticket two or three days in advance, especially if you are heading to popular destinations. As a general rule there is an advance-purchase limit of up to 10 days prior to departure.

Buying hard-sleeper tickets in train stations can be trying. Some large stations have windows manned by someone with rudimentary English skills. Purchasing your ticket from the main ticket hall (售票厅; *shòupiàotīng*) – typically accessed by a separate entrance from the departure hall – can be a trial of endurance, especially at the larger train stations. Some stations are surprisingly well run, but others are bedlam. There are windows at large train stations for partial refunds on unused tickets.

If you can't face the queues and uncertainty of getting a sleeper ticket at the train station, turn to your hotel travel desk or travel agent (such as CITS), who can sell you a ticket for a service charge. Telephone booking services exist, but they only operate in Chinese. Many towns and cities also have ticket offices dotted around town where you can obtain train tickets (for a surcharge of around ¥5); such outlets are listed in the relevant chapters.

Touts swarm around train stations selling black-market tickets; this can be a way of getting scarce tickets, but foreigners frequently get ripped off. If you purchase a ticket from a tout, carefully check the departure date and the destination. As with air travel, buying tickets around Chinese New Year and the 1 May and 1 October holidays can be hard and prices increase on some routes.

Tickets can also be bought online at www.chinatripadvisor.com or www.china-train-ticket.com, but it's much cheaper to buy your ticket at the station. For trains from Hong Kong to Shànghǎi, Guǎngzhōu or Běijīng, tickets can be ordered online at no mark up from www.krcr.com.

Timetables

Paperback train timetables for the entire country are published every April and October, but they are available in Chinese only (Y5). Even to Chinese readers, working one's way through their Byzantine layout is draining. The resourceful **Duncan Peattie** (www.chinatt.org) publishes an English-language Chinese Railway Timetable, at the time of writing in its 4th edition. Both quick reference and full train timetables are available, as well as supple-

ments. The full timetable details 2400 trains, available either in printed form or as two pdf files (for a fee). The quick reference timetable pdf can be downloaded for free. Also consult www.travelchinaguide.com/china-trains/ which allows you to enter your departure point and destination, and gives you the departure times, arrival times and train numbers of trains running that route. Try www.chinahighlights.com/china-trains/index.htm for user-friendly timetables in English.

Health

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Overall China is a reasonably healthy country to travel in, but there are a number of health issues worthy of your attention. Pre-existing medical conditions, such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents), account for most life-threatening problems. However, becoming ill in some way is not unusual.

Outside of the major cities medical care is often inadequate and food and waterborne diseases are also common. Malaria is still present in the Southwest and high-altitude sickness can be a problem, if you are going to Tibet.

HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

UK (www.dh.gov.uk) Search for travel in the site index

US (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

In case of accident or illness it's best just to get a taxi and go to hospital directly – try to avoid dealing with the authorities if it is at all possible.

The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications (using generic names) is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition, bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.

If you take any regular medication bring double your needs in case of loss or theft. In China you can buy many medications over the counter without a doctor's prescription, but it can be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressant drugs, blood pressure medications and contraceptive methods. In general it is not advised to buy medications locally without a doctor's advice.

Make sure you get your teeth checked before you travel, and if you wear glasses take a spare pair and your prescription.

INSURANCE

Even if you are fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company *will* check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undeclared.

You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing. If you're uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive (receiving bills of more than US\$100,000 is not uncommon).

Make sure you also keep all the documentation related to any medical expenses you incur.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for short-term travellers to China:

Adult diphtheria and tetanus Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever. A new ADT vaccine containing pertussis is also available and may be recommended by your doctor.

Hepatitis A Vaccine provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months will also provide at least another 20 years protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm do occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. In 95% of people lifetime protection results.

Measles, mumps and rubella Two doses of MMR are recommended unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many adults under 40 require a booster.

Typhoid Recommended unless your trip is less than a week. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available; however, the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur. A vaccine combining Hepatitis A and typhoid in a single shot is now available.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

The following immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk:

Influenza A A single shot lasts one year and is recommended for those over 65 years of age or with underlying medical conditions such as heart or lung disease.

Japanese B encephalitis A A series of three injections with a booster after two years. Recommended if spending more than one month in rural areas in the summer months, or more than three months in the country.

Pneumonia A A single injection with a booster after five years is recommended for all travellers over 65 years of age or those travellers with underlying medical conditions that compromise immunity such as heart or lung disease, cancer or HIV.

Rabies Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.

Tuberculosis A A complex issue. High-risk adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine is given in a lifetime. Children under five spending more than three months in China should be vaccinated.

Pregnant women and children should ensure they receive advice from a doctor specialised in travel medicine.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give specific recommendations for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as past vaccination history, the length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't produce immunity in individuals until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor six to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for

an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

The only vaccine that will be required of you by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of this vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country that is in the yellow fever zone within the six days prior to entering China. If you are going to be travelling to China directly from South America or Africa, check with a travel clinic as to whether you need yellow fever vaccination.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- Antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- Antibiotics for skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- Antibiotics for diarrhoea, including Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin, or Azithromycin for bacterial diarrhoea; or Tinidazole for giardia or amoebic dysentery
- Antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- Antihistamine – there are many options, eg Cetirizine for daytime and Promethazine for night-time
- Antiseptic, eg Betadine
- Antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopan
- Decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- Diamox if going to high altitudes
- An oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and antinausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine)
- Elastoplasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers
- Ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory
- Indigestion tablets, such as Quick Eze or Mylanta
- Iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or you have a thyroid problem) to purify water
- Laxative, eg Coloxyl
- Paracetamol
- Permethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets
- Steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- Sunscreen and hat
- Thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- Ural or equivalent if prone to urinary infections

INTERNET RESOURCES

A wealth of travel health advice is on the internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int/ith/) publishes a superb book called *International Travel & Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD**

Travel Health (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily. The **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) website also has good general information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* is a handy pocket size and packed with useful information including pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation, and information on diseases and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – check out the website (www.travellingwell.com.au).

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis is a condition that occurs when blood clots form in the legs during flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco. Those at increased risk should wear compression socks.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), promethazine (Phenergan) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN CHINA

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

There are now a number of good clinics in major cities catering to travellers. Although they are usually more expensive than local facilities, you may feel more comfortable dealing with a Western-trained doctor who speaks your language. These clinics usually have a good understanding of the best local hospital facilities and close contacts with insurance companies should you need evacuation.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), you are carrying the relevant medication and you cannot attend a clinic. If you think you may have a serious disease, especially malaria, do not waste time – travel to the nearest quality facility to receive attention.

Buying medication over the counter in China is not recommended, as fake medications and poorly stored or out-of-date drugs are common. To find the nearest reliable medical facility, contact your insurance company or your embassy.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

'Bird flu' or Influenza A (H5N1) is a subtype of the type A influenza virus. This virus typically infects birds and not humans; however, in 1997 the first documented case of bird-to-human transmission was recorded in Hong Kong. As of June 2007, there have been 25 confirmed cases of bird flu in China, of whom 15 have died. Currently very close contact with dead or sick birds is the principal source of infection and bird-to-human transmission does not easily occur.

Symptoms include high fever and typical influenza-like symptoms with rapid deterioration leading to respiratory failure and death in many cases. The early administration of antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu is recommended to improve the chances of survival. At this time it is not routinely recommended for travellers to carry Tamiflu with them – rather immediate

medical care should be sought if bird flu is suspected. At the time of writing there have been no recorded cases in travellers or expatriates.

There is currently no vaccine available to prevent bird flu. For up-to-date information check these two websites:

www.who.int/en/
www.avianinfluenza.com.au

Dengue

This mosquito-borne disease occurs in China's Southwest. It can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites; there is no vaccine. Dengue-carrying mosquitoes bite day and night, so avoid insects at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (previously dengue was known as 'break bone fever'). Some people develop a rash and diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment – just rest and Paracetamol. Do not take aspirin. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Hepatitis A

A problem throughout China, this food and waterborne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A, you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to China should be vaccinated.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease preventable by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by contact with infected body fluids, including via sexual contact. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis. All travellers to China should be vaccinated.

HIV

HIV is transmitted via contaminated body fluids. Avoid unsafe sex, blood transfusions and injections (unless you can see a clean needle being used) in China. Always use condoms if you have sex with a new partner and never share needles.

Influenza

Present particularly in the winter months, symptoms of the flu include high fever, muscle aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be very severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes – vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and painkillers.

Japanese B Encephalitis

This is a rare disease in travellers; however, vaccination is recommended if spending more than a month in rural areas during the summer months, or more than three months in the country. There is no treatment available and one-third of infected people will die, while another one-third suffer permanent brain damage.

Malaria

For such a serious and potentially deadly disease, there is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria. Before you travel, seek medical advice to see if your trip warrants taking antimalaria medication and if it does, to ensure you receive the right medication and dosage for you.

Malaria has been nearly eradicated in China and is not generally a risk for visitors to the cities and most tourist areas, but it occurs in rural areas in China's Southwest – principally Yunnan and Guangxi bordering onto Myanmar (Burma), Laos and Vietnam and Hainan.

There is more limited risk in remote rural areas of Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Sichuan. Generally medication is only advised if you are visiting rural Hainan, Yunnan or Guangxi.

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur. Diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance and antimalaria medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

You should always take general insect avoidance measures, to help to prevent all insect-borne diseases, not just malaria. Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- Use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin. Wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as Citronella can be effective, but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET.
- Sleep under a mosquito net impregnated with permethrin.

- Choose accommodation that has screens and fans (if not air-conditioned).
- Impregnate clothing with permethrin in high-risk areas.
- Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours.
- Use mosquito coils.
- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal.

Rabies

This is an increasingly common problem in China. This fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence post-exposure treatment. Having pretravel vaccination means the post-bite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply an iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not prevaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible, followed by a series of five vaccines over the next month. Those prevaccinated require only two shots of vaccine after a bite. Contact your insurance company to find the nearest clinic that stocks rabies immunoglobulin and vaccine. It is common to find that immunoglobulin is unavailable outside of major centres – it is crucial that you get to a clinic that stocks immunoglobulin as soon as possible if you have had a bite that has broken the skin.

Schistosomiasis

Also known as bilharzia, this disease is found in the central Yangzi River (Chang Jiang) basin. It is carried in water by minute worms which infect certain varieties of freshwater snail found in rivers, streams, lakes and particularly behind dams. The worm enters through the skin and attaches itself to your intestines or bladder. The infection often causes no symptoms until the disease is well established (several months to years after exposure) and damage to internal organs irreversible.

Avoiding swimming or bathing in fresh water where bilharzia is present is the main method of prevention. A blood test is the most reliable way to diagnose the disease, but the test will not show positive until a number of weeks after exposure. Effective treatment is available. There is no way of knowing if water is infected.

STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases most common in China include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels have an STD check on your return home.

Tuberculosis (TB)

Medical and aid workers, and long-term travellers who have significant contact with the local population, should take precautions against TB. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended to have pre- and post-travel TB testing. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is spread via food and water. Symptoms are a high and slowly progressive fever, headache and it may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink. All travellers spending more than a week in China should be vaccinated.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea is by far the most common problem affecting travellers – between 30% to 50% of people will suffer from it within two weeks of starting their trip. In most cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by a bacteria (there are numerous potential culprits), and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics.

Treatment with antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc. Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions like Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, for example if you have to go on a long bus ride. Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Amoebic Dysentery

Amoebic dysentery is actually rare in travellers and is overdiagnosed. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea, ie fever, bloody diarrhoea and generally feeling unwell. You should always seek reliable medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs: Tinidazole or Metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut, and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated complications such as liver or gut abscesses can occur.

Giardiasis

Giardia is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed solely to giardia, but work in Nepal has shown that they are not specific to giardia. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second option.

Intestinal Worms

These parasites are most common in rural, tropical areas. Some may be ingested with food such as undercooked meat (eg tapeworms) and some enter through your skin (eg hookworms). Infestations may not show up for some time, and although they are generally not serious, if left untreated some can cause severe health problems later. Consider having a stool test when you return home to check for these and to determine the appropriate treatment.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Air Pollution

Air pollution is becoming a significant problem in many Chinese cities due to increasing industrialisation. People with underlying respiratory conditions should seek advice from their doctor prior to travel to ensure they have adequate medications in case their condition worsens. It is very common for healthy people to develop irritating coughs, runny noses etc while in urban Chinese centres as a result of the pollution. It is a good idea to carry symp-

tomatic treatments such as throat lozenges, and cough and cold tablets.

Altitude Sickness

There are bus journeys in Tibet and Qinghai where the road goes over 5000m. Acclimatising to such extreme elevations takes several weeks at least, but most travellers come up from sea level very fast – a bad move!

Acute mountain sickness (AMS) results from making a rapid ascent to altitudes above 2700m. It usually commences within 24 to 48 hours of arriving at altitude and symptoms for AMS include headache, nausea, fatigue and loss of appetite (it very much feels like a hangover).

If you have altitude sickness the cardinal rule is that you must not go higher as you are sure to get sicker and could develop one of the more severe and potentially deadly forms of the disease. These are high altitude pulmonary oedema (HAPE) and high altitude cerebral oedema (HACE). Both of these forms of altitude sickness are medical emergencies and there are no rescue facilities similar to those in the Nepal Himalaya here, so prevention is the best policy.

AMS can be prevented by 'graded ascent' – it is recommended that once you are above 3000m you ascend a maximum of 300m daily and have an extra rest day every 1000m. You can also use a medication called Diamox as a prevention or treatment for AMS after discussion with a doctor experienced in altitude medicine. Diamox should not be taken by people with a sulphur drug allergy.

If you have altitude sickness you should rest where you are for a day or two until your symptoms resolve. You can then carry on, but ensure you follow the graded ascent guidelines. If symptoms are getting worse you must descend immediately before you are faced with a life-threatening situation.

There is no way of predicting who will suffer from AMS but certain factors predispose you to it – rapid ascent; carrying a heavy load and working hard; and having a seemingly minor illness such as a chest infection or diarrhoea. Make sure you drink at least 3L of noncaffeinated drinks daily to stay well hydrated.

The sun is intense at altitude so take care with sun protection and ensure you have adequate clothing to avoid hypothermia – temperatures drop rapidly once the sun goes down and winds can be intense.

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water.
- Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase.
- Avoid ice.
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down.
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it.
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, eg less than four microns.

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food, and avoiding food that has been sitting around in buffets.

Peel all fruit, cook vegetables and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Heat Exhaustion

Dehydration or salt deficiency can cause heat exhaustion. Take time to acclimatise to high temperatures, drink sufficient liquids and do not do anything too physically demanding.

Salt deficiency is characterised by fatigue, lethargy, headaches, giddiness and muscle cramps; salt tablets may help, but adding extra salt to your food is better.

Hypothermia

Too much cold can be just as dangerous as too much heat. If you are trekking at high altitudes or simply taking a long bus trip over mountains, particularly at night, be aware. At high altitude it can go from being mildly warm to blisteringly cold in a matter of minutes – blizzards have a way of just coming out of nowhere. If you're out walking, cycling or hitching, this can be dangerous.

It is surprisingly easy to progress from very cold to dangerously cold due to a combination of wind, wet clothing, fatigue and hunger,

even if the air temperature is above freezing. It is best to dress in layers; silk, wool and some of the new artificial fibres are all good insulating materials. A hat is important, as a lot of heat is lost through the head. A strong, waterproof outer layer (and a space blanket for emergencies) is essential. Carry basic supplies, including food containing simple sugars to generate heat quickly, and fluid to drink.

Symptoms of hypothermia are exhaustion, numb skin (particularly the toes and fingers), shivering, slurred speech, irrational or violent behaviour, lethargy, stumbling, dizzy spells, muscle cramps and violent bursts of energy. To treat mild hypothermia, get the person out of the wind and/or rain, remove their clothing if wet and replace with dry, warm clothing. Give hot liquids – not alcohol – and some high-kilojoule, easily digestible food. The early recognition and treatment of mild hypothermia is the only way to prevent severe hypothermia, a critical condition requiring medical attention.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine. Lice inhabit various parts of the human body but most commonly the head and pubic areas. Transmission is via close contact with an affected person. Lice can be difficult to treat and you may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as permethrin. Pubic lice (crab lice) are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks are contracted after walking in rural areas. Ticks are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents some tick-borne diseases.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is the second trimester (between 14 and 28 weeks); the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there is a risk of miscarriage and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with a companion. Always carry a list of

quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transportation and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour. Malaria is a high-risk disease in pregnancy. WHO recommends that pregnant women do *not* travel to areas with Chloroquine-resistant malaria.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

Supplies of sanitary products may not be readily available in rural areas. Birth control options may be limited so bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as Clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) views the human body as an energy system in which the basic substances of *qi* (气; vital energy), *jing* (精; essence), *xue* (血; blood, the body's nourishing fluids) and *tiye* (体液; body fluids; blood and other organic fluids) function. The concept of Yin and Yang is fundamental to the system. Disharmony between Yin and Yang or within the basic substances may be a result of internal causes (emotions), external causes (climatic conditions) or miscellaneous causes (work, exercise, sex etc). Treatment modalities include acupuncture, massage, herbs, diet and *qigong* (气功), and aim to bring these elements back into balance. These therapies are particularly useful for treating chronic diseases and are gaining interest and respect in the Western medical system. Conditions that can be particularly suitable for traditional methods include chronic fatigue, arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome and some chronic skin conditions.

Be aware 'natural' doesn't always mean 'safe'; there can be drug interactions between herbal medicines and Western medicines. If using both systems ensure you inform both practitioners what the other has prescribed.

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