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ACCOMMODATION

Overall, accommodation in China is no cause for great excitement, although it is gradually improving. Beyond Hong Kong and Macau, you won't find a classic hotel of real stature and pedigree like the Raffles Hotel in Singapore. Few historic hotels of character exist outside Hong Kong, Macau, Běijīng and Shànghǎi (and at a stretch Tiānjīn).

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. This might not be immediately obvious to guests approaching

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

the reception desk (总台; *zǒngtái*) with high expectations, so take time to wander round and make a quick inspection of the overall quality or stick to chain hotels with recognizable names.

Hotels in this book are divided into three categories: budget, midrange and top end. The majority of rooms in China are 'twins', which means two single beds placed in one room. Single rooms (one bed per room; 单间; *dānjiān*) are quite rare. Double rooms (双人房; *shuāng rén fáng*; also called 标准间; *biāozhǔn jiān*) will often be a twin, with two beds. Suites (套房; *tàofáng*) are available at most midrange and top-end hotels. For most accommodation listed in this guide, addresses are provided in Chinese. If you're having difficulty finding your hotel, show the address to a Chinese speaker.

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

The policy at almost every hotel in China is that you check out by noon. If you check out between noon and 6pm there is a charge of 50% of the room price – after 6pm you have to pay for another full night.

Almost every hotel has a left-luggage room (*jìcún chù* or *xíngli bāoguān*), and in many hotels there is one on every floor. If you are a guest in the hotel, use of the left-luggage room should be free.

Male guests regularly receive phone calls from prostitutes, who ask whether *ànmó* (massage) or *xiǎojie* (a young lady) is required; if you don't want their services, unplug your phone, as they can be persistent.

Budget

Budget rooms can be found in hotels rated two stars or less. Outside of the belatedly growing band of fresh youth hostels (www.hostelchina.cn), expect basic facilities, grimy bathrooms, dirty carpets, flickering TVs, noisy neighbours, very basic or nonexistent English-language skills and a simple restaurant or none at all. Virtually all budget hotel rooms should come with air-conditioning and TV, but not all rooms have telephones (at youth hostels, for example), so ask beforehand.

Foreign travellers have traditionally been steered away from ultra-cheap Chinese guesthouse accommodation towards lodgings approved by the Public Security Bureau (PSB), which were invariably more expensive. This is beginning to change, but many cheaper guesthouses still refuse foreigners. In far-flung villages, families open their houses to guests, generally for a pittance; such accommodation options are called *nóngjiā* (农家).

In some cities and towns it is worth going with tourists who collect at the train and bus stations, as they can introduce you to cheap accommodation, but only if they can offer a good price.

In all cases, ask to see a room before taking it and check for smoke alarms. Hotel fires are quite common in China, and fires can get the upper hand because of the lack of smoke alarms and locked fire exits (check the exits on your floor and complain if they are locked).

The pinyin and Chinese characters for guesthouses:

| | |
|-----------|-----|
| zhāodàisù | 招待所 |
| lǚdiàn | 旅店 |
| lǚguǎn | 旅馆 |

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.

Staying in a university dorm is sometimes one of your cheapest options. Many universities will rent out vacant dorm rooms in the foreign student dormitory. Universities also sometimes have actual hotels, although the prices are usually on a par with regular budget hotels.

Midrange

Midrange hotels (three to four stars) offer comfort and a measure of style, but are often

PRACTICALITIES

- There are four types of plugs in China: 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 220 volts, 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 at www.english.peopledaily.com.cn. Imported English-language newspapers such as the *Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times* and the *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*. Look out for expat English-language magazines with local bar, restaurant and events listings in town. Magazines include *That's Beijing*, *That's Shanghai* and *That's Guangzhou*.
- Listen to the BBC World Service (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/tuning/) or Voice of America (www.voagov.gov), although these websites are quite often jammed. China Radio International (CRI) is China's overseas radio service and broadcasts in about 40 foreign languages. The national TV outfit, Chinese Central TV (CCTV), has an English-language channel – CCTV9; CCTV4 also has some English programs. Your hotel may have ESPN, Star Sports, CNN or BBC News 24.
- China officially subscribes to the international metric system, but you are also likely to 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*.

bland and unimaginative, and housed in recently built and sterile exteriors. You should find someone who can speak English, but language skills are rarely good and often problematic even at reception. When making a choice, opt for Sino-foreign joint-venture hotels over the Chinese-owned hotels, wherever possible. Furthermore, try to opt for the newer establishments as midrange hotels rapidly get set in their ways and quickly lose their freshness. Several new chains such as **Home Inn** (www.homeinns.com) and **Motel 168** (www.motel168.com) are expanding across China, offering lower midrange comfort and convenience; these are often superior to the more established midrange options. Chinese midrange hotels should, but may not, have a Western restaurant and a bar.

Rooms will all come with a bath/shower room, air-con and telephone; they may have satellite TV, cable TV or an in-house movie channel; they should also come with a kettle (and coffee sachets), water cooler, safe and minibar; and there could be broadband internet connection. You may receive a free newspaper, but at best only the *China Daily*.

Top End

Hotels in the top-end range can cost anything up to US\$300 – prices in this category vary considerably – and they are typically four to five stars.

As China, outside of Hong Kong, has few independent hotels of real distinction, it's advisable to select chain hotels that offer a proven standard of excellence and quality across the board when opting for top-drawer accommodation. Shangri-La, Marriott, Holiday Inn, Hilton, St Regis, Marco Polo and Grand Hyatt all have a presence in China and can generally be relied upon for high standards of service and comfort.

Some Chinese-owned hotels display five stars, when they are clearly four stars, so be warned. Five-star hotels should be equipped with top-quality 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 should have a kettle (and coffee sachets), safe, minibar, satellite or cable TV, broadband internet connection, free newspaper (typically the *International Herald Tribune*) and nightly turn-down service. 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. Service should be top-notch. Most top-end hotels list their room rates in US dollars, but you will have to pay in local currency. Practically all hotels will change money for guests and most midrange and top-end hotels accept credit cards. All hotel rooms are subject to a 10% or 15% service charge.

Discounts & Reservations

It is always important to bargain for a room, as discounts (*dǎzhékòu*) are generally in force in all but the cheapest accommodation options (see the boxed text, p23). It is best to do this in person at reception; if you book ahead, you can end up paying well over the odds. Apart from during the busy holiday periods (the first week of May and October, and Chinese New Year), rooms should be well below the rack rate and rarely booked out. At reception, you should be able to get a discount of 10% to 50% off the tariff rate, and 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 the hotels themselves). Accommodation websites that could be useful for travellers booking accommodation include www.redflag.info, www.asia-hotels.com, www.sinohotel.com and www.china-hotelguide.com. Airports at major cities often have hotel-booking counters that offer discounted rates. Once in China, you can always contact **Ctrip** (☎ 800 820 6666; www.english.ctrip.com) to book a discounted room in many cities across China.

At check-in, you will need your passport and a registration form will ask what type of visa you have. For most travellers, your visa will be 'L'; for a full list of visa categories, see the table under Visas, p953. A deposit (*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.

ACTIVITIES

A whiff of the tourist dollar has sent Chinese entrepreneurs scrambling up the rock face of the adventure-sport economy. Even in and around Běijīng the choice of activities is mushrooming, including paragliding, hang-gliding, rock climbing, diving with sharks, skiing, bungee jumping, horse riding and more. Glance at expat magazines in Běijīng, Guǎngzhōu and Shànghǎi for information on other activities such as running, mountain biking, football, cricket, swimming, ice skating, skateboarding and water-skiing.

Outfits in China itself, such as **Wildchina** (www.wildchina.com), offer a host of dramatic treks in remote parts of China.

Golf

Golf is an increasingly popular sport in China, with courses springing up everywhere. Běijīng has more than a dozen golf courses and others can be found throughout China, from Guǎngzhōu to Shànghǎi. For details of well-known golf courses, check www.worldgolf.com/courses.

Horse Riding

Horse-riding expeditions aimed at tourists can be found in Xinjiāng, Gānsù, Inner Mongolia, Sìchuān and beyond. Lángmùsì in Gānsù offers good horse-trekking opportunities, and horse riding around both Gānzǐ and Sōngpān in Sìchuān are popular.

In the big cities, a growing number of equestrian clubs can be found: check the classified pages of expat mags for details.

Skiing

It is not worth going to China for a skiing holiday, but if you are in China during the winter months you can visit northeast China, which is the venue for downhill skiing (see p395 and p380). In the vicinity of Běijīng there are several ski resorts, such as the Nanshan and Saibei ski resorts.

ADMISSION COSTS

At some sights, such as temples and palaces, after you have bought an entrance ticket (门票, *ménpiào*), you can be hit with further charges for drawcard halls or sights within the complex. A more expensive through ticket (套票, *tàopiào*; also referred to as *tōngpiào*, 通票) can be bought at the entrance that will grant you access to all sights.

Tickets must be purchased for virtually every museum, temple, park or sight in China and you will find there is precious little you can do for free. Furthermore, ticket prices for many temples and historical monuments are increasing way ahead of inflation, which raises concerns about regulation. At the time of writing, entry to Huáng Shān was Y200 (in 2001 it was Y82), while entry to Wútái Shān was Y90, up from Y48 in 2001. At certain sights that carry heavy ticket prices, there is little attempt at either conservation or restoration, which makes you wonder where all the money goes.

BUSINESS HOURS

China officially has a five-day working week. Banks, offices and government departments are usually open Monday to Friday, roughly from around 9am (some closing for two hours in the middle of the day) until 5pm or 6pm. Saturday and Sunday are both public holidays, but most museums stay open on weekends and sometimes make up for this by closing for one day during the week. Museums tend to stop selling tickets half an hour before they close. Travel agencies and foreign-exchange counters in tourist hotels have similar opening hours, but generally do not close for lunch and are usually open on Saturday and Sunday (at least in the morning). Department stores and shops are generally open from 10am to 10pm, seven days a week. Note that businesses in China close for three week-long holidays (p945). Many parks, zoos and monuments have similar opening hours; they're also open on weekends and often at night. Internet café opening hours vary; they typically open at 8am and close at midnight, but many are increasingly open 24 hours.

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

CHILDREN

Children will feel more at home in the large cities of Hong Kong, Běijīng, Shànghǎi and Guǎngzhōu, but may feel out of place in smaller towns and in the wilds. Don't be surprised if a complete stranger picks up your child or takes them from your arms:

Chinese people openly display their affection for children. If taking a buggy (stroller) with you, prepare for much inconvenience as pavements are often uneven (the Chinese rarely use buggies) and escalators at metro stations are often up only.

Practicalities

Baby food and milk powder is widely available in supermarkets, as are basics like nappies, baby wipes, bottles, medicine, dummies (pacifiers) and other paraphernalia. 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.

Bear in mind that the simple convenience of family car travel is almost out of the question in China, even in large cities (see p970), so be prepared for long train and bus rides or plane journeys and the difficulties associated with them. Protesting infants on a long-haul train trip can make travel very stressful.

Many sights and museums have children's admission prices, which usually apply to children under 1.1m to 1.3m in height. Infants under the age of two fly for 10% of the full airfare, while children between the ages of two and 11 pay half the full price for domestic flights and 75% of the adult price for international flights.

Always ensure that your child carries a form of ID and a hotel card, in case they get lost.

For more information on travelling with children, turn to the following:

- *Travel with Children* (Maureen Wheeler, Cathy Lanigan; Lonely Planet)
- *Travelling Abroad with Children* (Samantha Gore-Lyons; Arrow)
- *Take the Kids Travelling* (Helen Truskowski; Take the Kids series)
- *Backpacking with Babies and Small Children* (Goldie Silverman; Wilderness Press)
- *Adventuring with Children* (Nan Jeffrey; Avalon House Travel Series)

CLIMATE

Spread over such a vast area, China is subject to the worst extremes in weather, from bitter cold to unbearable heat. The land can be roughly divided into the following climatic regions: north and northeast, northwest, cen-

tral, south and Tibet. See p22 for advice on the best times to visit China's various regions; climatic information is also included in each destination chapter.

The best time to visit China is generally either spring (March to May) or autumn (September to early November). Winters in China's north and northeast fall between November/December and March/April, and are very cold. North of the Great Wall and into Inner Mongolia and Hēilóngjiāng, temperatures can drop to -40°C. Summer is hot and dry, and falls roughly between May and August.

In central China – in the Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) valley area, including Shànghǎi – the summers are typically uncomfortable, long, hot and humid. The three cities of Wūhàn, Chóngqīng and Nánjīng are called the 'three furnaces', sweltering between April and October. Winters are short, wet and cold, and the weather can be miserable.

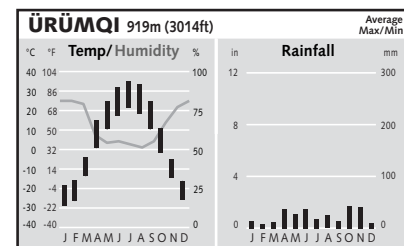
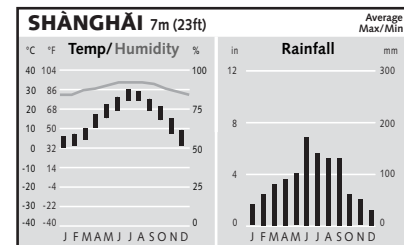
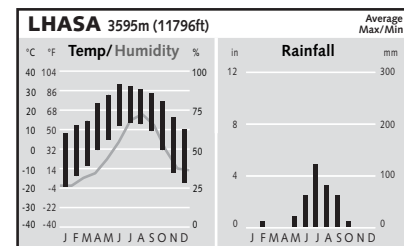
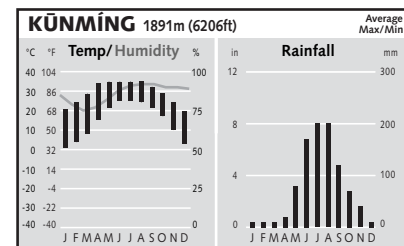
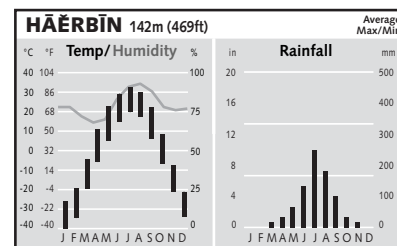
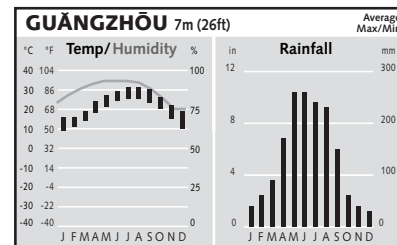
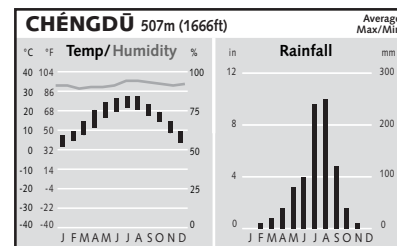
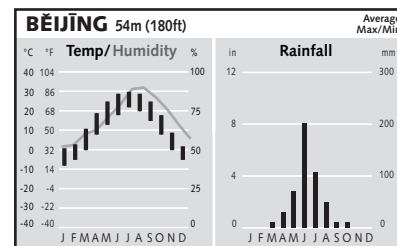
Hǎinán, Hong Kong and Guǎngdōng province in the south of the country are hot (temperatures can reach 38°C) and humid from April to September. This is also the rainy season, with typhoons liable to hit the southeast coast between July and September. Winters are short, between January and March; it's not nearly as cold as in the north (Hǎinán is warm and, apart from the north of the province, Yúnnán is pleasant), but you will still need warm clothes as far south as Hong Kong.

China's northwest is very hot and dry in summer, while in winter this region is as formidably cold as the rest of northern China. In Ürümqi, the average temperature in January is around -10°C, with minimums down to almost -30°C.

In Tibet you can easily get the impression that all four seasons have been compressed into one day. Temperatures can be below zero during the evening and early morning, and can soar to a sizzling 38°C at midday, but it always feels remarkably cool in the shade. Winter brings intense cold and fierce winds. Tibet is arid, with rainfall scarcest in the north and west. Kūnmíng in Yúnnán is famed for its clement weather.

COURSES

An abundance of courses can be found in China, whether you want to learn Mandarin (or any other dialect), Chinese cookery (see



p105), Chinese martial arts, Chinese medicine, *qigōng*, paper-cutting, feng shui, calligraphy, Chinese painting or how to play a traditional Chinese musical instrument. One popular organisation is the enterprising Běijīng-based **Chinese Culture Club** (☎ 010-6432 9341; www.chinesecultureclub.org), which offers a range of events and courses from taichi to Beijing Opera face-painting as well as regular

Chinese culture-related seminars and tours around China. When searching for Chinese language schools, weigh up the fees and syllabus carefully as many outfits charge expensive fees while using non-international teaching methods that may not suit Westerners. A good place to start looking for a course is in expat magazines such as *That's Beijing*, *That's Shanghai* and *That's Guangzhou*.

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).

Objects considered as antiques require a certificate and red seal to clear customs when leaving China. To get the proper certificate and red seal, your antiques must be inspected by the **Relics Bureau** (Wénwù Jiāngdìng; ☎ 010-6401 4608, no English spoken). Basically anything made before 1949 is considered an antique and needs a certificate, and if it was made before 1795 it cannot legally be taken out of the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime

Travellers are more often the victims of petty economic crime, such as theft, rather than serious crime. Foreigners are natural targets for pickpockets and thieves, but as long as you keep your wits about you and make it difficult for thieves to get at your belongings, you shouldn't have any problems. Certain cities and places are worse than others – Guangzhou, Guiyang and Xi'an are notorious. Incidences of crime increase around the Chinese New Year.

High-risk areas in China are train and bus stations, city and long-distance buses (especially sleeper buses), hard-seat train carriages and public toilets. Don't leave anything of value in your bicycle basket.

Hotels are generally safe; many have attendants on each floor, keeping an eye on the rooms and safeguarding the keys. Dormitories obviously require more care. Don't be overly trusting of your fellow travellers – many of them are considerably less than honest. All hotels have safes and storage areas for valuables – use them. Don't leave anything you can't do without (passport, travellers cheques, money, air tickets etc) lying around in dorms.

Carry just as much cash as you need and keep the rest in travellers cheques. Always take a money belt for larger sums of cash, along with your passport and credit cards.

A worrying trend is the increasing number of reports of foreigners attacked or even killed for their valuables, especially in more rural locations (a Western tourist was killed on Moon Hill in Yangshuo and another was killed camping out on the Great Wall), so be vigilant at all times. Travelling solo carries obvious risks; it's advisable to travel with someone else or in a small group.

LOSS REPORTS

If something of yours is stolen, report it immediately to the nearest Foreign Affairs Branch of the PSB. Staff will ask you to fill in a loss report before investigating the case and sometimes even recovering the stolen goods.

If you have travel insurance (highly recommended; see p946), it is essential to obtain a loss report so you can claim compensation. Be warned, however: many travellers have found Foreign Affairs officials very unwilling to provide a loss report. Be prepared to spend many hours, perhaps even several days, organising it. Make a copy of your passport in case of loss or theft.

Scams

Con artists are widespread in China. Ostensibly friendly types invite you for tea, then order food and say they have no money, leaving you to foot the bill, while practising their English on you.

Don't leave any of your belongings with someone you do not know well. The opening economy in China has also spawned a plague of dishonest businesses and enterprises. The travel agent you phoned may just operate from a cigarette-smoke-filled hotel room.

Be alert at all times if changing money on the black market. One trick is for the moneychanger to take your money and then say he has made a mistake and wants to recount the money he has just given you. Taking the money back as if to recount it, the last you see of him and your cash is his heels moving at velocity down the road.

Lǎowài!

You will often hear calls or muttered whispers of 'lǎowài' when walking down the street. An excruciating 'Helloooooo', with ensuing hoots of laughter, often follows. *Lǎowài* means 'foreigner' and is used by one Chinese person to indicate to others the presence of someone

non-Chinese. *Lǎowài* is used in conversation by all Chinese to refer to foreigners.

Some travellers find it annoying to hear the word uttered by onlookers wherever they go. It is hardly ever said with anything but surprise and curiosity, however. Despite decades of foreign TV and films, and ever increasing droves of Western travellers, the Chinese still find novelty in the sudden appearance of foreigners. Calls of *lǎowài* are far more common and more vocal in smaller towns than in the big cities. More neutral terms for foreigners are *wàiguórén* (foreigner) and *wàibīn* (foreign guest).

Pollution & Noise

Pollution (see p113) is a serious problem in China and can make travel unpleasant for everyone, but especially if you have allergies, skin conditions or chest, eye, nose and throat problems. According to the World Bank, China has 16 of the world's 20 most polluted cities, and by some counts Beijing is the world's most polluted city. The pollution in the capital and Shanghai can be astonishing, and with some estimates predicting that China's air pollution could quadruple over the next 15 years, an environmental disaster could be in the making.

In recent years the Chinese government has launched an anti-noise-pollution campaign. The government is on a loser with this one, but a number of cities have banned the use of car horns within the city. The Chinese are generally much more tolerant of noise than most foreigners. If it's peace and quiet you want, head for a remote part of China – try the desert in Xinjiang, or a mountain top in Tibet.

Spitting

When China first opened to foreign tourism, many foreign travellers were shocked by the spitting, which was conducted noisily by everyone everywhere. Campaigns to stamp out the practice have been partially successful in the major urban centres – there is less public spitting in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing these days (some areas impose a ¥50 fine), but in the country, the phlegm still flows.

Queues

In China a large number of people with a common goal (a bus seat, a train ticket, purchasing a mobile phone, ordering a Big Mac

etc) generally form a surging mass, although elements of queuing are appearing (see p277). It is one of the more exhausting parts of China travel, and sometimes it is worth paying extra in order to be able to avoid train and bus stations.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

China has few facilities geared for disabled travellers, but that doesn't necessarily put it out of bounds for those with a physical disability (and a sense of adventure). 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 specially designed rooms for people with physical disabilities.

The roads and pavements make things very difficult for the wheelchair-bound or those with a walking disability. Pavements can often be crowded, in an appalling and dangerous condition and with high kerbs. People whose sight, hearing or walking ability is impaired must be extremely cautious of the traffic, which almost never yields to pedestrians. Escalators leading from subways in large cities like Beijing frequently go up only. Travelling by car or taxi is probably the safest transport option.

Hong Kong is more user-friendly to the disabled than the rest of China, but it presents substantial obstacles of its own, such as the stairs at the subway stations, numerous overhead walkways and steep hills.

Get in touch with your national support organisation before leaving home. They often have travel literature for holiday planning and can put you in touch with travel agents who specialise in tours for the disabled.

In the USA, contact the **Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality** (SATH; ☎ 212-447 7284; www.sath.org; Suite 601, 347 Fifth Ave, New York, NY).

In the UK, try the **Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation** (RADAR; ☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk; 12 City Forum, 250 City Rd, London) produces three holiday fact packs for disabled travellers.

In France, try the **Comité National Français de Liaison pour la Réadaptation des Handicapés** (CNFLRH; ☎ 01 53 80 66 66; 236 bis rue de Tolbiac, Paris).

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

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Chinese Embassies & Consulates

To obtain a complete list of Chinese diplomatic representation around the world, go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website at www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng and click on Missions Overseas.

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 4783, 6273 7443; <http://au.china-embassy.org>; 15 Coronation Dr, Yarralumla, ACT 2600); Sydney consulate (☎ 02-8595 8000; <http://sydney.chineseconsulate.org/eng/>); Melbourne consulate (☎ 03-9822 0604; <http://melbourne.china-consulate.org/eng/>); Perth consulate (☎ 08-9222 0302)

Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-789 3434; www.chinaembassy.canada.org/eng/; 515 St Patrick St, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5H3); Toronto consulate (☎ 416-964 7260); Vancouver consulate (☎ 604-736 3910); Calgary consulate (☎ 403-264 3322)

Denmark Copenhagen (☎ 039-460 889; www.chinaembassy.dk; Oerogårds Alle 25, 2900 Hellerup, Copenhagen)

France Paris (☎ 01-47 36 77 90; www.amb-chine.fr; 20 rue Washington, 75008 Paris)

Japan Tokyo (☎ 03-3403 3389, 3403 3065; www.china-embassy.or.jp; 3-4-33 Moto-Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo) Consulates in Fukuoka, Osaka and Sapporo.

Malaysia Kuala Lumpur (☎ 03-242 8495; 229 Jln Ampang, Kuala Lumpur) Consulate in Kuching.

Netherlands The Hague (☎ 070-355 1515; Adriaan Goekooplaan 7, The Hague)

New Zealand Wellington (☎ 04-472 1382; www.chinaembassy.org.nz; 2-6 Glenmore St, Wellington) Consulate in Auckland.

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

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

UK London (☎ 020-7299 4049, 24hr visa information 0891-880 808, visa section 020-7631 1430; www.chinese-embassy.org.uk; 31 Portland Pl, London; ☎ visa section open 2-4pm); Manchester consulate (☎ 0161-224 7478); Edinburgh consulate (☎ 0131-337 3220)

USA Washington (☎ 202-338 6688; www.china-embassy.org; Room 110, 2201 Wisconsin Ave NW, Washington DC); Chicago consulate (☎ 312-803 0098); Houston consulate (☎ 713-524 4311); Los Angeles consulate (☎ 213-380 2508); New York consulate (☎ 212-330 7410); San Francisco consulate (☎ 415-563 9232)

Embassies & Consulates in China EMBASSIES

There are two main embassy compounds in Běijīng – Jianguomenwai and Sanlitun. Embassies are open from 9am to noon and 1.30pm to 4pm Monday to Friday, but visa departments are often only open in the morning.

The following embassies are in the Jianguomenwai area:

India (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1908; fax 6532 4684; 1 Ritan Donglu)

Ireland (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2691; fax 6532 2168; 3 Ritan Donglu)

Japan (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2361; fax 6532 2139; 7 Ritan Lu)

Mongolia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1203; fax 6532 5045; 2 Xiushui Beijie)

New Zealand (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2731; fax 6532 4317; 1 Ritan Dong Erjie)

North Korea (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 5018; fax 6532 6056; Ritan Beilü)

Philippines (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1872; fax 6532 3761; 23 Xiushui Beijie)

Singapore (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 3926; fax 6532 2215; 1 Xiushui Beijie)

Thailand (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1903; fax 6532 1748; 40 Guanghua Lu)

UK (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-5192 4000; fax 6532 1937; 11 Guanghua Lu)

USA (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 3831; fax 6532 3431; 3 Xiushui Beijie)

Vietnam (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1155; fax 6532 5720; 32 Guanghua Lu)

The Sanlitun compound is home to the following embassies:

Australia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-5140 4111; fax 6532 6957; 21 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Cambodia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2790; fax 6532 3507; 9 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Canada (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 3536; fax 6532 4072; 19 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

France (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1331; fax 6532 4757; 3 Sanlitun Dong Sanjie)

Germany (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2161; fax 6532 5336; 17 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Italy (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2131; fax 6532 4676; 2 Sanlitun Dong Erjie)

Kazakhstan (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 6182; fax 6532 6183; 9 Sanlitun Dong Liujie)

Laos (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1224; 11 Sanlitun Dong Sijie)

Malaysia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2531; fax 6532 5032; 13 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Myanmar (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1425; fax 6532 1344; 6 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Nepal (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1795; fax 6532 3251; 1 Sanlitun Xi Liujie)

Netherlands (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1131; fax 6532 4689; 4 Liangmahe Nanlu)

Pakistan (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 2504/2558; 1 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

Russia (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1381; fax 6532 4853; 4 Dongzhimen Beizhongjie) West of the Sanlitun Compound in a separate compound.

South Korea (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6505 2608; fax 6505 3067; 3rd & 4th fl, China World Trade Center, 1 Jianguomenwai Dajie)

Spain (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 1986; fax 6532 3401; 9 Sanlitun Lu)

Sweden (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6532 5003; fax 6532 5008; 3 Dongzhimenwai Dajie)

CONSULATES

Chóngqing

Canada (Map p802; ☎ 023-6373 8007; 17th fl, Metropolitan Tower, Zourong Lu)

Denmark (Map p802; ☎ 023-6373 6008; 31st fl, Metropolitan Tower, Zourong Lu)

Japan (Map p802; ☎ 023 6373 3585; 14th fl, Commercial Wing, Chongqing Hotel, 283 Minsheng Lu)

UK (Map p802; ☎ 023-6369 1500; 28th fl, Metropolitan Tower, Zourong Lu)

Guǎngzhōu

Australia (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8335 5911; fax 8335 0718; Room 1509, 15th fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)

Canada (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8666 0569; fax 8667 2401; Room 801, Wing C, China Hotel, Liuhua Lu)

France (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8330 3405; fax 8330 3437; Room 803, 8th fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)

Germany (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8330 6533; fax 8331 7033; 19th fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)

Japan (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8333 8999, ext 197; fax 8387 8835; 2nd fl, East Tower, Garden Hotel, 368 Huanshi Donglu)

Netherlands (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8330 2067; fax 8330 3601; Room 905, 9th fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)

Thailand (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8188 6968, ext 310; Room 310, White Swan Hotel, 1 Shamian Nanjie)

UK (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8335 1354; fax 8332 7509; 2nd fl, Main Tower, Guangdong International Hotel, 339 Huanshi Donglu)

USA (Map pp590-1; ☎ 020-8121 8000; fax 8121 8428; 1 Shamian Nanjie, Shamian Dao)

Hohhot

Mongolia (蒙古领事馆; Ménggǔ Lǐngshìguǎn; Map p889; ☎ 680 3540; 5 Dongying Nanjie; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm Mon, Tue & Thu) It's possible to get a one-month visa for Mongolia here. Visas take a week to be issued (Y236) or there's an express 24-hour service for Y446; you'll need a letter of invitation from a travel

agency to get one. US citizens do not need a visa to visit Mongolia.

Hong Kong

Australia (Map pp530-1; ☎ 0852-2827 8881; 23rd fl, Harbour Centre, 25 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai)

Canada (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852-2810 4321; 11th-14th fl, Tower I, Exchange Sq, 8 Connaught Pl, Central)

France (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852-3196 6100; 26th fl, Tower II, Admiralty Centre, 18 Harcourt Rd, Exchange Sq, Admiralty)

Germany (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852-2105 8788; 21st fl, United Centre, 95 Queensway, Admiralty)

Japan (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852-2522 1184; 46th & 47th fl, Tower I, Exchange Sq, 8 Connaught Pl, Central)

Laos (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852 2544 1186; 14th fl, Arion Commercial Centre, 2-12 Queen's Rd West, Sheung Wan)

Netherlands (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852-2522 5127; Room 5702, 57th fl, Cheung Kong Centre, 2 Queen's Rd, Central)

New Zealand (Map pp530-1; ☎ 0852-2877 4488, 2525 5044; Room 6508, 65th fl, Central Plaza, 18 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai)

South Africa (Map pp530-1; ☎ 0852-2577 3279; Room 2706-2710, 27th fl, Great Eagle Centre, 23 Harbour Rd, Wan Chai)

UK (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852-2901 3000; 1 Supreme Court Rd, Admiralty)

USA (Map pp526-7; ☎ 0852-2523 9011; 26 Garden Rd, Central)

Vietnam (Map pp530-1; ☎ 0852 2591 4510; vnconsul@netvigator.com; 15th fl, Great Smart Tower, 230 Wan Chai Rd, Wan Chai)

Kūnmíng

Laos (Map p690; ☎ 0871-317 6624; Room N120, ground fl, Camellia Hotel, 96 Dongfeng Donglu; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Myanmar (Map p690; ☎ 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 (Map p690; ☎ 0871-314 9296; fax 316 6891; Ground fl, South Wing, Kunming Hotel, 52 Dongfeng Donglu; ☎ 9-11.30am Mon-Fri)

Vietnam (Map p690; ☎ 0871-352 2669; 2nd fl, Kaihua Plaza, 157 Beijing Lu; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Lhasa

Nepal (Map p917; ☎ 0891-682 2881; fax 683 6890; ☎ 10am-12.30pm Mon-Fri for visa applications) On a side street between the Lhasa Hotel and Norbulingka. Visas are issued in 24 hours. The current fee for a 30-day visa is Y255. Bring a visa photo. It's also possible to obtain visas for the same cost at Kodari, the Nepalese border town, although you'd be wise to do this in an emergency only.

Qīngdǎo

South Korea (Map pp226-7; ☎ 0532-8897 6001; fax 8897 6005; 101 Xianggang Donglu; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Shànghǎi

Australia (Map pp244-5; ☎ 021-5292 5500; www.shanghai.china.embassy.gov.au; 22nd fl, CITIC Square, 1168 West Nanjing Rd)

Canada (Map pp244-5; ☎ 021-6279 8400; www.shanghai.gc.ca; Suite 604, West Tower, Shanghai Centre, 1376 West Nanjing Rd)

France (Map pp248-9; ☎ 021-6289 7414; www.consul.france-shanghai.org; Room 1204, United Plaza, 1468 West Nanjing Rd)

Germany (Map pp244-5; ☎ 021-3401 0106; www.shanghai.diplo.de; 181 Yongfu Rd)

Italy (Map pp248-9; ☎ 021-6471 6980; 12th fl, Qihua Tower, 1375 Central Huaihai Rd)

Japan (Map pp242-3; ☎ 021-5257 4766; www.shanghai.cn.emb-japan.go.jp; 8 Wanshan Rd, Hongqiao)

Netherlands (☎ 021-6209 9076; 4th fl, East Wing, Taiyang Plaza, 88 Xianxia Rd)

New Zealand (Map pp248-9; ☎ 021-6471 1108; www.nzembassy.com; 15A, Qihua Tower, 1375 Central Huaihai Rd)

Russia (Map pp244-5; ☎ 021-6324 2682; fax 6306 9982; 20 Huangpu Rd)

South Korea (Map pp242-3; ☎ 021-6219 6417; fax 6219 6918; 4th fl, International Trade Centre, 2200 West Yan'an Rd)

Thailand (Map pp244-5; ☎ 021-3313-0365; fax 6323-4140; www.thaishanghai.com; 7 East Zhongshan No 1 Rd)

UK (Map pp244-5; ☎ 021-6279 7650; www.uk.cn/bj; 3rd fl, Room 301, Shanghai Centre, 1376 West Nanjing Rd)

USA (Map pp248-9; ☎ 021-6433 6880; http://shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn; 1469 Central Huaihai Rd)

Entrance on Wulumuqi Rd. Another branch is in the Westgate Tower (Map pp244-5; ☎ 021-3217 4650, after-hr emergency number for US citizens 021-6433 3936; 8th fl, Westgate Tower, 1038 West Nanjing Rd).

Shěnyáng

Japan (Map p360; ☎ 024-2322 7530; fax 2322 7490; 50 Shishi Wei Lu)

North Korea (Map p360; ☎ 024-8690 3451; fax 8690 3482; 37 Beiling Dajie) Visas for North Korea are more likely to be obtained at the North Korean embassy in Beijing.

Russia (Map p360; ☎ 024-2322 3927; fax 2322 3907; 31 Nanshan Wei Lu)

South Korea (Map p360; ☎ 024-2385 7845; 14th fl, Mingzhe Dasha, 51 Shishi Wei Lu)

USA (Map p360; ☎ 024-2322 1198; fax 2323 1465; 52 Shishi Wei Lu; ☎ 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri)

Ürümqi

Kazakhstan (Häsàkèsitàn Lingshiguān; Map p822; ☎ 0991-383 2324; 31 Kunming Lu; ☎ 10am-1.30pm Mon-Thu) At the time of writing you could get a three-week visitor visa here for US\$30 to US\$50 (price depends on nationality), plus a Y45 handling fee. A letter of invitation was not obligatory, but if one is required, CITS (p823) can help. The visa takes three days to be issued, but a week isn't unheard of. Show up early and don't expect calls to be taken. A taxi here will cost about Y30. If you take bus 2 to Xiǎo Xī Gōu, turn right at the first intersection and then again five minutes later; this will put you on Kunming Lu. From there it's a five-minute walk. The Kazakhs are notorious for changing their visa requirements – check the Lonely Planet website for the latest.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS**January/February****Chinese New Year/Spring Festival (Chūn Jié)**

This starts on the first day of the first month in the lunar calendar. Many people take a week off work. Be warned: this is China's biggest holiday and all transport and hotels are booked solid. Demand for accommodation skyrockets and prices rise steeply. If you can't avoid being in China at this time, then book your room in advance and sit tight until the chaos is over. The Chinese New Year will fall on 7 February 2008 and 26 January 2009.

Lantern Festival (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 22 February 2008 and 9 February 2009.

March**Guanyin's Birthday (Guānshīyīn Dàchén Shēngri)**

The birthday of Guanyin (see p196), the Goddess of Mercy, is a fine time to visit Buddhist temples, many of which have halls dedicated to the divinity. Guanyin's birthday is the 19th day of the second moon and falls on 26 March 2008 and 15 March 2009.

April

Tomb Sweeping Day (Qīng Míng Jié) A day for worshipping ancestors, when people visit and clean the graves of their departed relatives. They often place flowers on the tomb and burn ghost money for the departed. The festival generally falls close to Easter, on 5 April in most years, or 4 April in leap years.

Water-Splashing Festival (Pō Shuǐ Jié) Held in the Xīshuāngbǎnnà region in Yúnnán, this event is held in mid-April (usually 13 to 15 April). The purpose is to wash away the dirt, sorrow and demons of the old year and bring the happiness of the new. The event is staged virtually daily for tourists.

April/May

Mazu's Birthday (Mǎzū Dàchén Shēngri) Mazu, Goddess of the Sea, is the friend of all fishing crews. She's called Mazu in Fujian province and Taiwan. She is also called Tianhou (pronounced 'Tin Hau' in Hong Kong) and Niangniang. 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; 9 May 2007, 28 April 2008 and 18 April 2009.

June

Dragon Boat Festival (Duānwū Jié) This is the time to see dragon boat races and eat zòngzi (triangular glutinous rice dumplings wrapped in reed leaves). It's a fun holiday despite the fact that it commemorates the sad tale of Qu Yuan, a 3rd-century BC poet-statesman who hurled himself into the mythological Mi Lo river in Húnán to protest against the corrupt government. This holiday falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month; 19 June 2007, 8 June 2008 and 28 May 2009.

August

Ghost Month (Guǐ Yuè) The devout believe that during this time the ghosts from hell walk the earth and it is a dangerous time to travel, go swimming, get married or move house. If someone dies during this month, the body will be preserved and the funeral and burial will be performed the following month. The Chinese government officially denounces Ghost Month as a lot of superstitious nonsense. Ghost Month is the seventh lunar month, or really just the first 15 days (usually from early August).

September**Birthday of Confucius (Kōngzǐ Dàchén Shēngri)**

The great sage has his birthday on 28 September. This is an interesting time to visit Qūfū in Shāndōng, the birthplace of Confucius, although getting a hotel room may be tricky. A ceremony is held at the Confucius Temple (p220) starting around 4am, and other similar temples around China observe the event.

September/October

Mid-Autumn Festival (Zhōngqiū Jié) This is also known as the Moon Festival, and is the time to gaze at the moon and eat tasty yuè bǐng (moon cakes); it's also a traditional holiday for lovers. The festival takes place on the 15th day of the eighth moon, and will be celebrated on the following dates: 25 September 2007, 14 September 2008 and 3 October 2009.

FOOD

Don't settle for that sweet Chinatown schlock any more, China is where it's at (see p96) and food should be one of the main reasons you come to China in the first place. Although it

depends where in China you travel, a meal for one at budget eateries should cost under Y30, midrange dining options will cost between Y30 and Y100, and top-end choices can cost up to Y800 or more.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

The Chinese Psychiatric Association no longer classifies homosexuality as a mental disorder. Greater tolerance exists in the big cities than in the more conservative countryside. However, even in urban China it is not recommended that gays and lesbians be too open about their sexual orientation in public, even though you will see Chinese same-sex friends holding hands or putting their arms around each other. The situation is changing slowly as an increasing number of gay singers and actors in China are 'outed', but the police periodically crack down on gay meeting places.

On the other hand, there are many recognised gay discos, bars and pubs in the big cities that appear to function without official harassment, although they tend to keep a fairly low profile (see individual city entries for listings of these venues). Venues are listed for cities where gay and lesbian bars exist.

Check out www.utopia-asia.com/tipschin.htm for loads of tips on travelling in China and a complete listing of gay bars nationwide. Other links with useful information and pointers for gay travellers include www.mygayweb.com, www.gayguide.net, www.outandabout.com and www.gaytimes.co.uk. You can also contact the **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association** (☎ +1-954-776 2626; fax 776 3303; www.iglt.com) in the USA.

Useful publications include the *Spartacus International Gay Guide* (Bruno Gmunder Verlag), a best-selling travel guide for gay travellers, currently in its 35th edition.

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) Falls on 18 February in 2007, 7 February in 2008, 26 January in 2009 and 14 February in 2010

International Women's Day 8 March

International Labour Day 1 May

Youth Day 4 May

International Children's Day 1 June

Birth day 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 go travelling during these holidays as things tend to grind to a halt. Hotel prices all over China rapidly shoot up during the May and October holiday periods.

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 scuba diving, skiing and even trekking. A locally acquired motorcycle licence is not valid under some policies. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home. You may prefer a policy which pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made. See the Health chapter (p977) for further information on health insurance.

Note that there is a choice of private medical care in large cities and booming towns such as Běijīng, Shànghǎi, Guǎngzhōu and Qīngdǎo, but in smaller towns and backwaters, facilities can be basic.

A few insurance brokers in Běijīng and Shànghǎi (eg Pacific Prime) offer international medical and travel insurance.

INTERNET ACCESS

Chinese may be linked up to be the world's largest online language by 2007, but the authorities closed scores of internet cafés (网吧; wǎngbā) after a fire in a Běijīng internet


café in 2002 killed 25 people. Internet café numbers in some large cities such as Běijīng are way down after authorities were startled to find online consoles appearing in hairdressers and even butchers. Cafés that are allowed to operate have to use filters to strain out irregular content. In large cities, the area around the train station is generally a good place to find internet cafés.

Rates at China's internet cafés should be around Y1.5 to Y3 per hour for a standard, no-frills outlet, but comfier and smarter options naturally charge more (up to Y20 per hour), sometimes with a coffee thrown in. Deposits of Y10 are sometimes required or you may be asked for ID.

Agonisingly slow connections are frequent, especially on congested sites. Up to 10% of websites are inaccessible in China due to a policy of censorship. This does not seem to upset the Chinese very much, but it can be very inconvenient for foreign travellers wanting to access, for example, the BBC.

Most travellers make constant use of internet cafés and free web-based email such as **Yahoo** (www.yahoo.com), **Hotmail** (www.hotmail.com) or **Gmail** (www.gmail.com). For information on websites with China content, see p25.

If your laptop has a wireless modem, many café chains and tourist hotels now have broadband wi-fi access. If you're travelling with an old notebook or hand-held computer, your modem may not work once you leave your home country. For more information on travelling with a portable computer, see www.teleadapt.com.

Most hotels in big cities have in-room broadband connections. To access the internet using a laptop from your hotel room (if it has no broadband internet connection), free dial-up access can be achieved by hooking up through the phone line and using the local dial-up number (usually ☎ 163 or 169, but ask your hotel what the local number is). Use the same number as the account name and password, and you can get online. Throughout this book the internet icon  is used in hotel reviews to indicate the presence of an internet café or a terminal where you can get online.

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 (27 per day) according to some reports. If arrested, most foreign citizens have the right to contact their embassy.

MAPS

Top-quality maps of almost every Chinese city and many small towns are readily available in China. Many are detailed, illustrating bus routes (including names of bus stops) and the locations of hotels, shops and so on, and cost around Y2 to Y4. Unfortunately, most maps are only in Chinese. They can be purchased from bookstalls or street vendors around train and bus stations, from branches of the Xinhua Bookshop or from hotel front desks. City and town road atlases can also be purchased from the same places, but again, they are largely in Chinese.

Tourist centres, hotel gift shops, Friendship Stores (Yóuyì Shāngdiàn) and from time to time foreign-language bookshops in large cities stock English versions. Here you may also find Chinese- and English-language atlases of China. Also ask at the concierge desk as it could well have a map of town in English.

Some of the most detailed maps of China available in the West are the aerial survey 'Operational Navigation Charts' (Series ONC). These are prepared and published by the Defense Mapping Agency Aerospace Center, St Louis Air Force Station, Missouri, USA. Cyclists and mountaineers have recommended these highly. In the UK you can obtain these maps from **Stanfords Map Centre** (☎ 020-7836 1321; www.stanfords.co.uk; 12-14 Long Acre, London) or the **Map Shop** (☎ 0800 085 4080; www.themapshop.co.uk; 15 High St, Upton upon Severn, Worcestershire).

Australians can contact **Mapland** (☎ 03-9670 4383; www.mapland.com.au; 372 Little Bourke St, Melbourne) or the **Travel Bookshop** (☎ 02-9241 3554; 20 Bridge St, Sydney). In New Zealand try **MapWorld** (☎ 0800 627967; www.mapworld.co.nz; 173 Gloucester St, Christchurch).

In France see **Ulysse** (☎ 01 43 25 17 35; 26 rue Saint Louis en l'Île) or **IGN** (☎ 01 43 98 80 00; 107 rue de la Boétie) in Paris.

In the United States, contact **MapLink** (☎ 1-800 962 1394; www.maplink.com; Unit 5, 30 S La Patera Lane, Santa Barbara, CA).

GeoCenter publishes an excellent map of China. Lonely Planet publishes *Beijing* and *Hong Kong* city maps. The *Hong Kong Guidebook* by Universal is a first-rate colour map of the city that is regularly updated. Nelles publishes good detailed regional maps of China, and Berndtson has an excellent detailed *Beijing* map.

MONEY

Consult the Quick Reference on the inside front cover for a table of exchange rates and refer to p23 for information on costs.

ATMs

ATMs (Automated Teller Machines) advertising international bank settlement systems such as GlobalAccess, Cirrus, Maestro Plus and others are common in Hong Kong and Macau. On the mainland, ATMs that take international cards include branches of the Bank of China and the Industrial and 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 sizable towns and cities. Large airports such as Beijing Capital Airport, five-star hotels and some department stores have ATMs. Most other ATMs in China can only be used for withdrawing Renminbi in domestic accounts. The exchange rate on ATM withdrawals is similar to credit cards but there is a maximum daily withdrawal amount. If you plan on staying in China for a long period, it is advisable to open an account at a bank like the Bank of China with a nationwide network of ATMs.

For your nearest ATM, consult the ATM locator on www.international.visa.com/ps or on www.mastercard.com/cardholderservices/atm; both have comprehensive listings. For those without an ATM card or credit card, a PIN-activated **Visa TravelMoney card** (☎ US 1-877-394 2247) will give you access to predeposited cash through the ATM network. ATMs are listed in the Information sections (under Money) in destinations throughout this book.

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. Old, tattered or torn notes are also sometimes hard to spend. You can exchange old notes for new ones at the Bank of China – counterfeits, however, will be confiscated. Examine large denomination notes if given to you as change by street vendors; they could well be dumping a forged banknote on you.

Forgeries vary in quality from poor to good: inspect the watermark (not distinct on fake notes), the metal thread (which should again be distinct), the colour of the bill, the paper quality and its feel. Use a genuine note, eg a Y100 note given to you by the bank, as a reference.

Credit Cards

Credit is not big in China. The Chinese don't like to be in debt, however short-term that debt may be. Increasing numbers of young people are using credit cards, but numbers remain low compared to the West. Foreign plastic is therefore of limited use, but cards that can be used include Visa, MasterCard, AmEx and JCB. Don't expect to be able to use them everywhere, and always carry enough cash. You should be able to use credit cards at upmarket hotels and restaurants, supermarkets and department stores. Where they are accepted, credit cards often deliver a slightly better exchange rate than in banks. Money can also be withdrawn at certain ATMs in large cities (see p947) on credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard and Amex. Credit cards can still not be used to buy train tickets, but Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) offices readily accept international Visa cards for buying air tickets. Certain cards offer insurance and other benefits.

Credit card cash advances have become fairly routine at head branches of the Bank of China, even in places as remote as Lhasa. 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*, which is divided into 10 *jiǎo*, which is again divided into 10 *fēn*. Col-

loquially, the *yuán* is referred to as *kuài* and *jiǎo* as *máo*. 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.

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

Exchanging Money

Renminbi is not readily convertible in many countries outside China, so you will probably have to wait till you reach China to exchange money. Those travelling to Hong Kong and most Southeast Asian countries can get Renminbi there. 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). Top-end hotels will generally change money for hotel guests only. 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 on the inside front cover and consult a newspaper for the current rate of exchange.

Australian, Canadian, US, UK, Hong Kong and Japanese currencies and the euro can be changed in China. In some backwaters, it may be hard to change lesser-known currencies – US dollars are still the easiest to change.

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.

Tipping

In China (including Hong Kong and Macau) almost no-one asks for tips. Tipping used to be refused in restaurants, but nowadays many midrange and top-end eateries include their own (often massive) service charge; cheap restaurants do not expect a tip. Taxi drivers throughout China do not ask for or 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 is higher than for cash (around 2% higher). You can make a large saving, especially if you have paid no commission for your travellers cheques in the first place. 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 them at banks, aim for the larger banks such as the Bank of China or the CITIC Industrial Bank. Bear in mind that most hotels will only cash the cheques of guests. It's a good idea to change your money at the airport when you arrive as the rate there is roughly the same as everywhere else. Keep your exchange receipts so you can change your money back to its original currency when you leave. Cheques from most of the world's leading banks and issuing agencies are now acceptable in 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 it's best to stick to big currencies such as US dollars or UK pounds. Some banks won't change travellers cheques at the weekend.

PASSPORTS

You must have a passport with you at all times; it is the most basic travel document (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. Be careful who you pass your passport to (eg dodgy bike-rental operators as a deposit), as you may never see it again.

PHOTOGRAPHY

In large towns and cities, good photographic outlets where you can find colour slide film, a range of batteries and you can have digital images downloaded to CD are reasonably easy to find. Kodak is the main player in the

market, with branches everywhere. If your camera uses nonrechargeable batteries, it's a good idea to stock up in town before heading to far-flung sights, as batteries sold by hawkers are astronomically expensive. Stick to Duracell (*jǐnbàwǎng*) and avoid cheap local Chinese batteries such as Nanfu and White Elephant, which don't last long.

POST Sending Mail

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 – perhaps one or two days from Guǎngzhōu to Běijīng. Intracity it may be delivered the same day it's sent.

Postage is no longer cheap. Postcards to overseas destinations cost Y4.50. Airmail letters up to 20g cost Y5 to Y7 to all countries except Taiwan and Hong Kong and Macau (Y1.50). Domestic letters cost Y0.80 and postcards Y0.50. Like elsewhere, China charges extra for registered mail, but offers cheaper postal rates for printed matter, small packets, parcels, bulk mailings and so on.

China Post operates an Express Mail Service (EMS) which is fast, reliable and ensures that the package is sent by registered post. Parcels sent to domestic destinations by EMS cost Y20 (up to 200g); Y5 for each additional 200g). International EMS charges vary according to country and sample minimum rates (parcels up to 500g) include Australia (Y164), USA (Y184) and UK (Y224). Not all branches of China Post have EMS, so try larger branches.

Apart from local post offices, branch post offices can be found in major 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.

If you are sending items abroad, take them unpacked with you to the post office to be inspected and an appropriate box or envelope will be found for you. Most post offices offer materials (for which you'll be charged) for packaging, including padded envelopes, boxes and heavy brown paper. Don't take your own packaging as it will probably be refused.

If you have a receipt for the goods, put it in the box when you're mailing it, since it may be opened again by customs further down the line.

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

Receiving Mail

There are fairly reliable *poste restante* (*cúnjū hòulíng*) services in just about every city and town, usually in the main post office. The collection system is not uniform, but the charge should be Y1 to Y2.30 for each item of *poste restante* mail you collect. Take your passport along for retrieving letters or parcels. Some larger tourist hotels will hold mail for their guests.

SHOPPING

Bargaining

Since foreigners are often overcharged in China, bargaining is essential. You can bargain (*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 (although if you ask, the staff sometimes can give you a 10% discount). In small shops and street stalls, bargaining is expected, but there is one important rule to follow – be polite. Keep in mind that entrepreneurs are in business to make money – they aren't going to sell anything at a loss. Your goal should be to pay the Chinese price, as opposed to the foreigners' price – if you can do that, you've done well.

Where to Shop

The place to go to really roll up your sleeves and get to grips with local rock-bottom prices is the local markets. Blankets spread on the pavement and pushcarts in the alleys – this is where you find the lowest prices. In street markets, all sales are final; forget about warranties and, no, they don't take AmEx. Nevertheless, the markets are interesting, but be prepared to bargain hard.

The Friendship Stores you will encounter in China's larger cities are an anachronistic echo from an earlier epoch when imported luxury goods were hoarded under one roof for the privileged few.

Hotel gift shops should be avoided, except for newspapers, magazines or books. Don't ever buy paintings or antiques from such shops – visit local markets, otherwise you'll be hit with a vastly inflated price.

The explosion of shopping malls and department stores, feeding the consumer revolution in China, has been a slap in the face to communist-era service standards. Market forces have jolted sleeping sales staff awake, but you may still meet a defiant clique of the old guard: slumped comatose on the counter or yacking to each other, oblivious to customers shrieking at them.

While journeying the land, don't get too weighed down with souvenirs and trinkets – there's nothing worse than buying a replica Buddha statue in Dūnhuáng, only to spot exactly the same one in a Běijīng market the day before you fly home.

It's sensible to save your shopping for imported electronic consumer items for Hong Kong and Macau – import duties are still too high in the rest of China.

Some shopping tips: make sure you keep receipts and try to hang on to the bag from the shop where you bought each item in case you need to return it. When returning something, try to return to the same store where you bought it; be as firm as possible, as perseverance often pays off. If returning clothes, the sales tags should still be on them and there should be no signs that you have worn the item. Exchanging items is easier than getting a refund. Find out what the time limit is for returning goods bought at the store. Some stores, such as the clothing outlet Esprit, have a no-quibble refund policy; others won't refund or exchange goods.

Antiques

There are very few antiques of real worth left in China, apart from those that remain sealed in tombs, temples, in private hands or museums – basically beyond reach. Most of the antiques you'll find in markets and shops are replicas or ersatz. The quality of replication technology can be quite dazzling, but that monochrome Qing Guangxu imperial yellow bowl in your hands is far more likely to be a Hu Jintao-era imitation. It's worth bearing in mind that even auction houses get caught out quite regularly, and experts assume that a considerable percentage of material that passes under the gavel is of dubious authenticity.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE...

Once upon a time in China you got what you paid for. If the sales clerk said it was top-quality jade, then it was top-quality jade. Times have changed, and cheap forgeries and imitations flood the market with Tibetan jewellery to Qing coins, guidebooks and pirate DVDs to bogus Nike, Burberry, Gucci, train tickets and beyond. The reason why Chinese TV is stuck showing US and German films from the 1970s and '80s is probably because the pirate DVD market brings you the very latest, without the adverts in between.

Despite all the government's bluster and periodic CCTV footage of steamrollers grinding fake Rolexes and CDs, the pirating industry is in fine fettle. Fake goods just reappear in force after hitting the deck for a while. Wherever you voyage in China, you'll be cursing the number of forgeries, then snapping them up when you glance at the price tag. Just make sure your change doesn't include a counterfeit note. And if you are after genuine antiques, try to get an official certificate of verification – and make sure the ink is dry.

Street markets are the best places to try your luck at antique shopping. Professional antique hunters will need to have a real nose for the business – you need to know the culture intimately. For your average traveller, take everything with a pile of salt.

Only antiques that have been cleared for sale to foreigners are permitted to be taken out of the country. When you buy an item over 100 years old it will come with an official red wax seal attached. However, bear in mind that this seal does not necessarily indicate that the item is an antique. You'll get a receipt of sale, and you have to show this to customs when you leave the country; otherwise customs will confiscate the antique.

Paintings & Scrolls

Watercolours, oils, woodblock prints, calligraphy – there is a lot of art for sale in China. Tourist centres like Guilin, Suzhou, Běijīng and Shànghǎi are good places to look out for paintings. Convincing imitation oils of Níngbō-born artist Chen Yifei (who died in 2005) can be found everywhere, along with copies of other contemporary artists. Don't buy these from hotel shops, however, as you will be massively ripped off.

Much calligraphy is very so-so and some is downright bad; you will have to know your subject, and don't take anybody's word for the quality of the brushwork.

Stamps & Coins

China issues quite an array of beautiful stamps that are generally sold at post offices in the hotels. Outside many of the post offices, you'll find amateur philatelists with books full of stamps for sale; it can be extraordinarily hard

bargaining with these enthusiasts. Stamps issued during the Cultural Revolution make interesting souvenirs, but these rare items are no longer cheap. Check out www.cpi.com.cn/cpi-e, a website on Chinese philately. Old coins are often sold at major tourist sites, but many are forgeries.

TELEPHONE

Both international and domestic calls can be easily made from your hotel room or from public telephones on the street. Local calls from hotel-room phones are generally cheap (and sometimes free), although international phone calls are expensive and it is best to buy a phonecard (see p952) if calling abroad. Public telephones are plentiful, although finding one that works can be a hassle. The majority of public telephones take IC cards (p952) and only a few take coins. If making a domestic call, look out for public phones at newspaper stands (报刊亭; *bàokāntíng*) and hole-in-the-wall shops (小卖部; *xiǎomàibù*); you make your call and then pay the owner (local calls are typically around Y1. Domestic and international long-distance phone calls can also be made from main telecommunications offices and 'phone bars' (话吧; *huàbā*).

Domestic long-distance rates in China vary according to distance, but are cheap. Cardless international calls are expensive (Y8.2 per minute or Y2.2 for calls to Hong Kong and Macau), but calls made between midnight and 7am are 40% cheaper; it's far cheaper to use an IP card.

If you are expecting to receive a call to your hotel room, try to advise the caller beforehand of your room number as hotel operators and staff at reception frequently have trouble

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:

- International assistance ☎ 115
- Local directory assistance ☎ 114
- Long-distance assistance ☎ 113/173
- Police ☎ 110
- Fire ☎ 119
- Ambulance ☎ 120

with foreign names. Otherwise, inform the receptionist that you are expecting a call and write down your name and room number for them.

The country code to use to access China is 86; the code for Hong Kong is 852 and Macau is 853. To call a number in Běijīng, 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 Beijing (010), dropping the first zero, and then dial the local number. When calling China from Hong Kong or Macau, you also use the country code 86. 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*) can sell you a SIM card, which will cost from Y60 to Y100 depending on the phone number (Chinese avoid the number four as it sounds like the word for death) and will include Y50 of credit. When this runs out, you can top up the number by buying a credit-charging card (*chōngzhí kǎ*) for Y50 or Y100 worth of credits. The local per-minute, nonroaming city call charge for China Mobile is seven jiǎo if calling a landline and 1.50 jiǎo if calling another mobile phone. Receiving calls on your mobile is free from mobile phones and costs seven jiǎo from landline phones. Intraprovincial calls are Y1.40 per minute. Roaming charges cost an additional two jiǎo per minute, but

the call receiving charge is the same. Overseas calls can be made for Y4.80 per minute plus the local charge per minute by dialling ☎ 17951, followed by 00, the country code, then the number you want to call. Otherwise you will be charged the IDD call charge plus seven jiǎo per minute.

Phonecards

A wide range of local and international phonecards exists in Běijīng.

Integrated Circuit (IC) cards (IC 卡; *IC kǎ*), available from kiosks, hole-in-the-wall shops, internet cafés and from any China Telecom office, are prepaid cards that can be used in most public telephones, in Telecom offices and in most hotels. IC cards come in denominations of Y20, Y50, Y100 and Y200, and appear in several varieties. Some cards can only be used in Běijīng (or locally, depending on where the card is purchased), while other cards can be used throughout China. If you want to call abroad, make sure the IC card can make international calls (*dǎ guójì diànhuà*), although international calls using IC cards are much more expensive than using Internet Phone (IP) cards. Purchasing the correct card can be confusing, as the instructions for use on the reverse of the card are usually only in Chinese.

If you wish to make international calls, it is much cheaper to use an IP card. International calls on IP cards (IP 卡; *IP kǎ*) 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 denominations of Y50, Y100, Y200 and Y500, and substantial discounts are offered, so bargain (you should be able to buy a Y100 card for around Y35). Extra credits are also regularly included on IP cards. IP cards can be found at the same places as IC cards (although in some cities they can be impossible to find), and placards for vendors of both IC and IP cards are commonplace. Again, some IP cards can only be used locally, while others can be used nationwide, so it is important to buy the right card (and check the expiry date). If you want to use an IP card from a public telephone, you will need an IC card for the local call (you may find that the public telephone will

not connect you, so you will have to use your hotel phone).

TIME

The Chinese live by both the Gregorian and the lunar calendar. Time throughout China is set to Běijīng time (see the boxed text, p824), which is eight hours ahead of GMT/UTC. When it's noon in Běijīng it's also noon in far-off Lhasa, Ürümqi and all other parts of the country. Since the sun doesn't cooperate with Běijīng's whims, people in China's far west follow a later work schedule so they don't have to commute two hours before dawn. 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

Travellers on the road relate Chinese toilet tales to each other like comparing old war wounds. Despite proud claims to have invented the first flushing toilet, China really does have some wicked loos. Large cities and towns have made a start on making their public toilets less of an assault course of foul smells and primitive appliances, but many are still pungent and sordid. Steer towards fast-food outlets, hotels or department stores for cleaner alternatives. Toilet paper is rarely provided – always keep a stash with you. In some places the sewage system can't handle paper. In general, if you see a wastebasket next to the toilet, that's where you should throw the toilet paper. Some public loos levy a small fee (around five máo) which you pay as you enter. Squat loos are ubiquitous, so be prepared.

Rural toilets are ghastly – just a hole in the ground or a ditch over which you squat, and many cannot be flushed at all. Hyperventilate before tackling toilets on the older trains, or go in with a strong cigarette (eg Temple of Heaven brand).

Remember:

| | |
|-------|---|
| men | 男 |
| women | 女 |

TOURIST INFORMATION

Outside Hong Kong (Hong Kong Tourism Board; www.discoverhongkong.com) and Macau (Macau Government Tourist Office; www.macautourism.gov.mo), tourist information facilities in China are rudimentary

and of little use. Western travellers, used to relying on nationwide chains of helpful tourist information centres for free maps and useful info, will be disappointed. In the absence of a national tourism board, individual provinces, cities, towns and regions promote tourism independently. Large cities such as Běijīng and Shànghǎi have relatively better tourist information infrastructure, but even in Shànghǎi, tourist information facilities are primitive. Elsewhere, you may have to fall back on 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. There is usually a member of staff who can speak English who may be able to answer questions and offer some travel advice, but the main purpose of CITS is to get you onto a tour.

VISAS

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 (see p522) or Macau (p569). Be aware that if you visit Hong Kong or Macau from China, you will need to have a multiple-entry visa to re-enter China or else get a new visa.

For most travellers, the type of visa issued is an L, from the Chinese word for travel (*lǚyóu*). 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. Prices for visas have risen steadily over recent years, and express visas cost twice the usual fee. At the time of writing, prices for a standard 30-day visa are US\$50 for US citizens and US\$30 for citizens of other nations. For double-entry visas, it's US\$75 for US citizens and US\$45 for all other nationals. For multiple entry visas (for six months) it's US\$100 for US citizens and US\$60 for all other nationals.

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 51mm x 51mm).

When asked on the application form, try to list standard tourist destinations such as Běijīng and Chéngdé; if you are toying with the idea of going to Tibet or western Xīnjiāng, just leave it off the form as it may raise eyebrows; the list you give is not binding in any way.

Three-day visas are available at the Macau–Zhūhǎi border (see p608 for details).

A 30-day visa is activated on the date you enter China, and must be used within three months of the date of issue. Sixty-day and 90-day travel visas are no longer issued outside China. 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 (eg Yìxiàn, p443) still exist that will require an additional permit from the PSB, at a cost. In addition to a visa, permits are also required for travel to Tibet (p916).

At the time of writing, Chinese embassies in the US were no longer accepting mailed visa applications, so this may mean that you will have to send your passport in the mail to a visa service agency, which will then deal with it.

Many people 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.

Be aware that political events can suddenly make visas more difficult to procure.

When you check into a hotel, there is a question on the registration form asking what type of visa you hold. 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>guòjīng</i> |
| X | long-term student | <i>liúxué</i> |
| Z | working | <i>rènzhí</i> |
| J | journalist | <i>jìzhě</i> |
| C | flight attendant | <i>chéngwù</i> |

Getting a China Visa in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is still the best place to pick up a visa for China. China Travel Service (CTS) and any of the other companies listed under Travel Agencies (p522) will be able to obtain one for you or you can apply directly to the **Visa Office of the People's Republic of China** (Map pp530-1; ☎ 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 for 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 MTR and at the visa office for HK\$35.

Getting Other Types of Visas

LAOS

It is now possible to get a visa for Laos at the border (p738). Alternatively, you can visit the Laos consulate (p943) in Kūnmíng for a 15-day tourist visa. For those from Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, visas cost Y270 and for American, Japanese and German nationals the cost is Y320. You must bring one passport photo with your application. Visas take three working days to process or you can pay a surcharge for next-day service.

MYANMAR

Travel to Myanmar is slowly getting easier. For a start, you no longer have to change US\$200 prior to entering the country. The Myanmar consulate (p943) in Kūnmíng can issue a 28-day tourist visa (Y185). Visas take three working days to process or you can pay a Y100 surcharge for same-day processing and Y50 for next-day processing. Overland travel into Myanmar is possible, although you must be part of a tour (p748).

THAILAND

Travellers from most countries won't need a Thai visa unless they're planning on staying in the country longer than 30 days. The Thai consulate (p943) in Kūnmíng can issue a 60-day tourist visa for Y200. Visas take two days to process.

VIETNAM

Kūnmíng has a Vietnam consulate (p943) where you can pick up a 30-day tourist visa

(Y400). Visas take three working days to process or you can pay an extra Y200 for the express service. You must bring along a passport photo with your application.

Residence Permit

The 'green card' is a residence permit, issued to English teachers, foreign expats and long-term students who live in China. Green cards are issued for a period of six months to one year and must be renewed annually. Besides needing all the right paperwork, you (and your spouse) must also pass a health exam (for which there is a charge). Families are automatically included once the permit is issued, but there is a fee for each family member. If you lose your card, you'll pay a hefty fee to have it replaced.

Visa Extensions

The Foreign Affairs Branch of the local PSB (公安局; Gōngānjú) – the police force – deals with visa extensions.

First-time extensions of 30 days are easy to obtain on single-entry tourist visas, but further extensions are harder to get and may only give you another week. Offices of the PSB outside of Běijīng may be more lenient and more willing to offer further extensions, but don't bank on it.

Extensions to single-entry visas vary in price, depending on your nationality. American travellers pay Y185, Canadians Y165, UK citizens Y160 and Australians Y100; prices can go up or down. Expect to wait up to five days for your visa extension to be processed.

The period of extension can differ from city to town. Travellers report generous extensions being decided on the spot in provincial towns and backwaters. If you have used up all your options, popping into Hong Kong to apply for a new tourist visa is a reliable option.

The penalty for overstaying your visa in China is up to Y500 per day. Some travellers have reported having trouble with officials who read the 'valid until' date on their visa incorrectly. For a one-month tourist (L) visa, the 'valid until' date is the date by which you must enter the country (within three months of the date the visa was issued), not the date upon which your visa expires. Your visa expires the number of days that your visa is valid for after the date of entry into China.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Principles of decorum and respect for women are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. Despite the Confucianist sense of superiority accorded to men, women often call the shots and wield considerable clout (especially within marriage). 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, but there have been reports of problems in Xīnjiāng. Wherever you are, it's worth noticing what local women are wearing and how they are behaving, and making a bit of an effort to fit in, as you would in any other foreign country. 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. As with anywhere else, you will be taking a risk if you travel alone. 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 like Marvelon are available from local pharmacies, as are morning-after pills (紧急避孕药; jǐnjí biyùnyào). Condoms (避孕套; bì'yùntào) are widely available.

WORK

Go East, young man. With its booming economy, China offers considerable scope for travellers looking for work. Teaching English can be particularly lucrative, and there are opportunities for acting, modelling work, editing, proofreading, freelance writing and IT work. Large numbers of Westerners work in China through international development charities such as **VSO** (www.vso.org.uk), which can provide you with useful experience and the chance to learn Chinese. Although finding employment is easier in Hong Kong than on the mainland, those with Chinese-language skills will find it much easier to source work. Useful places to start looking for positions include **Chinajob.com** (www.chinajob.com) and **Chinaonline** (www.chinaonline.cn.com). To legally work in China, you will require a work permit (left).

Transport

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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.

est – was under construction at the time of writing. Shanghai has two airports: **Hongqiao airport** (SHA; ☎ 021-6268 8899/3659) in the west of the city and **Pudong airport** (PVG; ☎ 021-6834 1000, flight information 021-6834 6912) in the east.

The best direct ticket deals are available from China's international carriers, such as China Eastern. Air China, China's national flag carrier, has a good safety record, and to date it has only had one fatal crash (in 2002). Air China should not be confused with China Airlines, the crash-prone Taiwan carrier.

Airlines flying to and from China:

Aeroflot Russian Airlines (SU; www.aeroflot.org) Beijing (☎ 010-6500 2412); Shanghai (☎ 021-6279 8033)

Air Canada (AC; www.aircanada.ca) Beijing (☎ 010-6468 2001); Shanghai (☎ 021-6279 2999)

Air China (CA; www.airchina.com.cn) Beijing (☎ 800 810 1111); Shanghai (☎ 021-5239 7227)

Air France (AF; www.airfrance.com) Beijing (☎ 4008 808 808); Shanghai (☎ 4008 808 808)

Air Macau (NX; www.airmacau.com.mo) Beijing (☎ 010-6515 8988); Shanghai (☎ 021-6248 1110)

Air New Zealand (NZ; www.airnz.com) Hong Kong (☎ 852-2862 8988)

All Nippon Airways (NH, ANA; www.ana.co.jp) Beijing (☎ 800 820 1122); Shanghai (☎ 021-5696 2525)

Asiana Airlines (OZ; www.us.flyasiana.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6468 4000); Shanghai (☎ 021-6219 4000)

Austrian Airlines (OS; www.aa.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6462 2161); Shanghai (☎ 021-6340 3411)

British Airways (BA; www.british-airways.com) Beijing (☎ 010-8511 5599); Shanghai (☎ 021-6375 8866)

China Eastern Airlines (MU; www.ce-air.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6464 1166); Shanghai (☎ 021-95108)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

There are no particular difficulties for travellers entering China. The main requirement is a passport (valid for travel for six months after the expiry date of your visa; see p949) and a visa (see p953). As a general rule, visas 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. For travel to Tibet, see p916. 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.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai are China's main international air gateways. **Hong Kong International Airport** (HKG; ☎ 0852-2181 0000; www.hkairport.com) is located at Chek Lap Kok on Lantau Island in the west of the territory. Beijing's **Capital airport** (PEK; ☎ arrivals & departures 010-6454 1100) has benefited from considerable investment and a new terminal. An even newer terminal – due to be the world's larg-

China Southern Airlines (CZ; www.cs-air.com) Beijing (☎ 010-950 3333); Shanghai (☎ 021-950 3333); Guangzhou (☎ 020-9503333)

Dragonair (KA; www.dragonair.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6518 2533); Shanghai (☎ 021-6375 6375)

El Al Israel Airlines (LY; www.elal.co.il) Beijing (☎ 010-6597 4512)

Garuda Indonesia (GA; www.garuda-indonesia.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6505 2901)

Iran Air (IR; www.iranair.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6512 4945)

Japan Airlines (JL, JAL; www.jal.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6513 0888); Shanghai (☎ 4008 880 808)

KLM (KL; www.klm.nl) Beijing (☎ 010-6505 3505); Shanghai (☎ 021-6884 6884)

Korean Air (KE; ☎ 4006 588 888; www.koreanair.com) Beijing (☎ 010-8453 8137); Shanghai (☎ 021-6275 2000)

Koryo Air Beijing (JS; ☎ 010-6501 1557)

Laos Airlines (QV; ground fl, Camellia Hotel, 154 Dongfeng Lu, Kunming)

Lufthansa Airlines (LH; www.lufthansa.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6468 8838); Shanghai (☎ 021-5352 4999)

Malaysia Airlines (MH; www.malaysia-airlines.com.my) Beijing (☎ 010-6505 2681); Shanghai (☎ 021-6279 8607)

MIAT Mongolian Airlines (OM; www.miat.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6507 9297)

Northwest Airlines (NW; www.nwa.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6505 3505); Shanghai (☎ 021-6884 6884)

Pakistan International Airlines (PK, PIA; www.piac.com.pk) Beijing (☎ 010-6505 1681)

Qantas Airways (QF; www.qantas.com.au) Beijing (☎ 010-6567 9006); Shanghai (☎ 021-6145 0188)

Royal Nepal Airlines (TG; www.royalnepal.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6505 5071); Shanghai (☎ 021-6270 8352)

Scandinavian Airlines (SK, SAS; www.sas.dk) Beijing (☎ 010-8527 6100); Shanghai (☎ 021-5228 5001)

Singapore Airlines (SQ; www.singaporeair.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6505 2233); Shanghai (☎ 021-6289 1000)

Thai Airways International (TG; www.thaiairways.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6460 8899); Shanghai (☎ 021-5298 5555); Kunming (☎ 0871-351 1515)

United Airlines (UA; www.ual.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6463 1111); Shanghai (☎ 021-3311 4567)

Uzbekistan Airways (HY; www.uzbekistan-airways.com) Beijing (☎ 010-6500 6442); Shanghai (☎ 021-6307 1896)

Virgin Atlantic (VS; www.virgin-atlantic.com) Shanghai (☎ 021-5353 4600)

Tickets

The cheapest tickets to Hong Kong and China can often be found either online or in discount agencies in Chinatowns around the world. Other budget and student travel agents offer cheap tickets, but the real bargains are with agents that deal with the Chinese who

regularly return home (travelling at 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 Beijing via Paris or Malaysian Airlines to Beijing via Kuala Lumpur. Air fares to China peak between June and September.

An increasing number of airlines fly to China, with Air China and China Eastern offering some of the cheapest fares. The cheapest available airline ticket is called an APEX (Advance Purchase Excursion) ticket, although this type of ticket includes expensive penalties for cancellation and changing dates of travel. Tickets listed in this section are 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:

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

Expedia (www.expedia.com) Offers discounted tickets.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Use Travel Services to book multistop trips.

One Travel.com (www.onetravel.com) Offers some good deals.

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

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

To bid for last-minute tickets online, try **Sky-auction** (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, round-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) has offices in all major cities and on many

university campuses. **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) has offices throughout Australia.

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.

Cambodia

China Southern Airlines has a daily flight from Phnom Penh to Guǎngzhōu (one way/return US\$280/400). Shanghai Airlines flies three times weekly to Phnom Penh (one way/return US\$290/390).

Canada

Canadian discount air ticket sellers are also 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*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Vancouver Sun*. **Travel CUTS** (☎ 1866 2469762; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency and

has offices in all major cities. For online bookings try **Expedia** (www.expedia.ca) and **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.ca).

From Canada, fares to Hong Kong are often higher than those to Běijīng. Air Canada has daily flights to Běijīng and Shànghǎi from Vancouver. Air Canada, Air China and China Eastern Airlines sometimes run super 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 usually 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

France has a network of student travel agencies that can supply discount tickets to travellers of all ages.

Recommended agencies:

Anyway (☎ 0892 302 301; www.anyway.fr)

Lastminute (☎ 0899 785 000; www.fr.lastminute.com)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

OTU Voyages (☎ 0155 823 232; www.otu.fr) This

agency specialises in student and youth travellers.

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

GERMANY

Recommended agencies:

Expedia (www.expedia.de)

Just Travel (☎ 089-747 3330; www.justtravel.de) An English-language travel agency.

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

STA Travel (☎ 0697-4303 292; www.statravel.de) For travellers under the age of 26; branches in major cities.

ITALY

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

NETHERLANDS

A recommended agency is **Airfair** (☎ 0900-7717 717; www.airfair.nl).

SPAIN

Recommended agencies include **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902 200 400; www.barceloviajes.com) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 902 124 212).

Hong Kong

Dragonair has 11 flights daily from Běijīng to Hong Kong (one way Y2530) and 15 flights from Hong Kong to Shànghǎi (one way Y1780). It's cheaper to fly to Guǎngzhōu or Shěnzhèn and then take the train or bus to Hong Kong.

Iran

Iran Air has twice-weekly flights from Tehran to Běijīng (one way/return US\$620/900).

Israel

El Al Israel Airlines has twice-weekly flights between Běijīng and Tel Aviv (one way US\$630).

Japan

There are daily flights operating 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, and there are

also flights from Japan to other major cities in China, including Dàlián and Qíngdǎo.

Reliable travel agencies used to dealing with foreigners:

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

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

Kazakhstan

China Southern Airlines has four flights weekly between Ürümqi and Almaty (one way US\$290). There are three flights weekly between Běijīng and Almaty with Kazakhstan Airlines (one way US\$390).

Kyrgyzstan

There are flights from Ürümqi to Bishkek and Osh.

Laos

Laos Airlines has two flights weekly from Vientiane to Kūnmíng. China Eastern Airlines has three flights weekly between the two cities (one way/return US\$140/260)

Macau

Air Macau has daily flights between Běijīng and Macau (return US\$510) and several flights daily between Shànghǎi and Macau (return US\$360).

Malaysia

Malaysia Airlines operates four flights weekly between Běijīng and Kuala Lumpur (return US\$630) and two flights daily between Shànghǎi and Kuala Lumpur (return US\$480).

Mongolia

MIAT Mongolian Airlines has five flights weekly between Běijīng and Ulaanbaatar (return US\$410). Air China also flies between Běijīng and Ulaanbaatar. It can sometimes take a week to get a ticket and schedules are reduced in winter.

Myanmar (Burma)

Air China has two flights weekly from Yangon to Běijīng, with a stopover in Kūnmíng (one way US\$694). There are two flights weekly from Kūnmíng to Yangon (Y1630, Wednesday and Sunday) and three flights from Kūnmíng to Mandalay (Y1450, Monday, Wednesday and Friday). Air tickets and visas are available from the Myanmar consulate (p943) in Kūnmíng.

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 motor transport 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 greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports 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.

Nepal

Royal Nepal Airlines operates two flights weekly between Kathmandu and Shànghǎi (one way/return US\$200/400) and three flights weekly between Hong Kong (one way/return US\$200/400) and Kathmandu. There are also two or three flights weekly from Lhasa to Kathmandu (Y2511). See the Tibet chapter (p912) for advice on travel to Tibet.

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.

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.

North Korea

There are four flights weekly between Běijīng and Pyongyang with Koryo Air and China Northern Airlines (one way/return US\$160/300).

Pakistan

Pakistan International Airlines operates two flights weekly from Karachi to Běijīng (one way/return US\$510/950). Air China has a weekly flight to Karachi from Běijīng. There is one weekly flight between Ürümqi and Islamabad on Xinjiang Airlines (one way US\$280). A flight to Lahore from Ürümqi is a possible new route in the future.

Russia

Aeroflot has daily direct flights connecting Běijīng and Moscow (one way US\$510), and China Eastern Airlines has three flights weekly between Shànghǎi and Moscow (one way US\$560). Moscow and Novosibirsk are also connected to Ürümqi by air.

Singapore

STA Travel (☎ head office 6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg) has three offices in Singapore. Singapore, like Bangkok, has hundreds of travel agents offering competitive discount fares for Asian destinations and beyond. Chinatown Point Shopping Centre on New Bridge Rd has a good selection of travel agents.

Fares to Běijīng are about US\$550 return, while fares to Hong Kong start at US\$350

return; there are also daily flights to Shànghǎi for US\$500 return.

South Korea

Discount travel agencies in Seoul include **Xanadu Travel** (☎ 02-795 7771; fax 797 7667; www.xanadu.co.kr).

Air China, Asiana Airlines and Korean Air have daily flights between Běijīng and Seoul (return US\$510). Flights to Shànghǎi with China Eastern Airlines and Asiana Airlines are similar (return US\$490). Seoul is also connected by air to Hong Kong, Tianjin, Shěnyáng, Qīngdǎo and Guǎngzhōu.

Thailand

Khao San Rd in Bangkok is the budget travellers headquarters. Bangkok has a number of excellent travel agents but there are also some suspect ones; ask the advice of other travellers before handing over your cash. **STA Travel** (☎ 02-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th; Room 1406, 14th fl, Wall Street Tower, 33/70 Surawong Rd) is a good and reliable place to start.

One-way fares from Bangkok to Běijīng with Thai Airways or Air China are around US\$300 or US\$470 return. Other one-way fares from Bangkok include Hong Kong for around US\$200, Chéngdū for US\$230, Kūnmíng for US\$190 and Shànghǎi for US\$300. There are two flights weekly between Kūnmíng and Chiang Mai (Y1344, Thursday and Sunday).

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 magazine *TNT*.

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), **Sagitta Travel Agency** (☎ 0870-077 8888; fax 075 2888; www.sagitta-tvl.com; 9 Little Newport St, London) and **Reliance Tours Ltd** (☎ 0800-018 0503; www.reliance-tours.co.uk; 12-13 Little Newport St, London).

For further agents, look at **Chinatown Online** (www.chinatown-online.co.uk), which also includes a list of travel agents outside London that specialise in tickets to China.

From the UK, the cheapest low-season return fares to Běijīng start at around UK£350 with British Airways; flights to Hong Kong are a little bit pricier.

Recommended travel agencies:

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

Flight Centre (☎ 0870-499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

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

Omega Travel (☎ 0870-027 8668; www.omegatravel.ltd.uk)

Quest Travel (☎ 0871-423 0135; www.questtravel.co.uk)

STA Travel (☎ 0870-163 0026; www.statravel.co.uk) For travellers under 26 years.

Trailfinders (☎ 0845-058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0800-082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA

Discount travel agents in the USA are known as consolidators. San Francisco is the ticket-consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can also be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities. Consolidators can be found through the *Yellow Pages* or the travel sections of major daily newspapers.

From the US west coast, low-season return fares to Hong Kong or Běijīng start at around US\$850. Fares increase dramatically during summer and the Chinese New Year. From New York to Běijīng or Hong Kong, low-season return fares start at around US\$890.

STA Travel (☎ 800-781-4040; www.sta-travel.com) has offices in most major US cities.

The following agencies and websites are recommended for online bookings:

- www.cheaptickets.com
- www.expedia.com
- www.flychina.com
- www.itn.net
- www.lowestfare.com
- www.orbitz.com
- www.sta.com
- www.travelocity.com

Uzbekistan

From Běijīng there are thrice-weekly flights to Tashkent with Uzbekistan Airways (one way/return US\$450/600), and there are also flights between Ürümqi and Tashkent.

Vietnam

Air China and Vietnam Airlines fly between Ho Chi Minh City and Běijīng (return US\$410). China Southern Airlines flights are via Guǎngzhōu. From Běijīng to Hanoi there are two flights weekly with either China Southern Airlines or Vietnam Airlines (one way/return US\$180/350). Shanghai Airlines

has five flights weekly to Ho Chi Minh City (return US\$420) from Shànghǎi.

LAND

If you're starting in Europe or Asia, it's possible to travel all the way to China by land. Numerous routes include the Trans-Mongolian and Trans-Manchurian Railway trek from Europe or the border crossings of China–Vietnam, Tibet–Nepal, Xinjiāng–Pakistan, Xinjiāng–Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiāng–Kazakhstan.

Border Crossings

China shares borders with Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, 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 p953). Note that some travellers, as they enter China, have had their Lonely Planet *China* guides confiscated by officials, primarily at the Vietnam–China border. We recommend you copy any essential details before you cross and put a cover on your guide.

HONG KONG

Hong Kong is an excellent place to enter China and there is a range of options for crossing over the border by land. See p561 for details on how to enter China from Hong Kong overland.

KAZAKHSTAN

There are border crossings from Ürümqi to Kazakhstan via the border post at Korgas, Ālāshānkǒu, Táchéng and Jimūnà (see p826); crossing the border shouldn't really be a problem as long as you have a valid Kazakhstan (obtainable in Běijīng) or China visa. Apart from Ālāshānkǒu, China's rail link with Kazakhstan, all of these borders crossings are by bus, though you can generally get a bike over. Remember that borders open and close frequently due to changes in government policy; additionally, many are only open when the weather permits. It's always best to check with the Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gōngānjū) in Ürümqi for the official line, or Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree to see what other travellers are saying.

Two trains weekly also run between Ürümqi and Almaty (see p826 for details).

KYRGYZSTAN

There is a weekly bus from Kashgar via Irkesh-tam to Osh (see p836 for details). Ensure you have a valid Kyrgyzstan visa (available from Běijīng or Hong Kong). From June to September it's theoretically possible to cross the dramatic 3752m Torugart Pass (p837) on a rough road from Kashgar to Bishkek.

LAOS

From the Měnglǎ district in China's southern Yúnnán province it's legal to enter Laos via Boten in Luang Nam Tha province if you possess a valid Lao visa. The good news is that you can now get an on-the-spot visa for Laos at the border, the price of which depends on your nationality (but you cannot get a China visa here). From Měnglǎ there are buses to Móhān every 20 minutes or so from 8am. Although the border doesn't officially close until 5.30pm Běijīng time (and don't forget that Laos is an hour ahead), things often wrap up earlier on the Lao side. The majority of travellers from Kūnmíng go via Jīnghóng to Měnglǎ and then on to the border at Mohan (which shuts at 5.30pm). As the bus journey from Jīnghóng will take the better part of the day, you will probably have to stay overnight at Měnglǎ. See p738 for more information.

Lao visas can be obtained in Běijīng (p942); alternatively, the Lao consulate in Kūnmíng (p943) issues 15-day tourist visas (valid for two months from date of issue; visa extensions in Laos are possible). See p954 for more information on visas.

MACAU

See p583 for details on entering China by bus from Macau to Zhūhǎi.

MONGOLIA

As well as Trans-Mongolian Railway trains that run from Běijīng to Ulaanbaatar via Dàtóng (see p964), the K23 departs from Beijing Train Station at 7.40am every Tuesday, reaching Ulaanbaatar at 1.20pm the next day. In the other direction, the K24 departs from Ulaanbaatar every Thursday at 8.05am, reaching Běijīng the following day at 2.31pm. Two trains weekly also run between Hohhot and Ulaanbaatar.

MYANMAR (BURMA)

The famous Burma Road, originally built to supply the forces of Chiang Kaishek in

his struggle against the Japanese, runs from Kūnmíng, in China's Yúnnán province, to the city of Lashio. Today the road is open to travellers carrying permits for the region north of Lashio, although you can legally cross the border in only one direction – from the Chinese side (Ruili) into Myanmar via Muse in the northern 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 or Way Thar Li Tour & Travel Company Ltd in Ruili), who can arrange visas and permits. See p748 for more details on journeying to Myanmar.

A second route, a little further northwest, from Lwaigyai to Bhamo, is also open in the same direction. You cannot legally leave Myanmar by either route.

NEPAL

The 920km road connecting Lhasa with Kathmandu is known as the Friendship Hwy. It's a spectacular trip across the Tibetan plateau, the highest point being Gyatso-la Pass (5220m). By far the most popular option for the trip is hiring a 4WD through a hotel or travel agency and then organising a private itinerary with a driver (see p924).

Visas for Nepal can be obtained in Lhasa (p943), or even at the Nepalese border (see p933). When travelling from Nepal to Lhasa, foreigners still have to arrange transport through tour agencies in Kathmandu.

If you already have a Chinese visa, you could try turning up at the border and organising a permit in Zhāngmù (p933), but transport out will be a problem and rules and regulations regularly change – it's far better to join an economy tour to Lhasa in Kathmandu. See p933 for further information, including transport from Kodari to Kathmandu.

In 2005 Nepal's state bus company Sahja Yatayat started a weekly direct bus service between Kathmandu and Lhasa. The service costs US\$70 per person, plus US\$60 for three nights' accommodation and a service fee. Foreigners currently aren't allowed to take the bus due to Chinese visa and permit hassles but this could change.

The following agencies in Kathmandu operate trips to Tibet. Most agencies advertising in Thamel are agents only; they don't actually run the trips.

Ecotrek (☎ 442 4112; www.ecotrek.com.np, www.kailash-tour.com; Thamel)

Explore Nepal Richa Tours & Travel (☎ 442 3064; www.explorenepalricha.com; 2nd fl, Namche Bazaar Bldg, Tri Devi Marg, Thamel)

Green Hill Tours (☎ 470 0968; www.greenhilltours.com.np; Thamel)

Royal Mount Trekking (☎ 424 1452; www.royal-mt-trekking.com, www.royaltibet.com; Durbar Marg)

Tashi Delek Nepal Treks & Expeditions (☎ 441 0746; www.tashidelektreks.com; Thamel)

NORTH KOREA

Visas are difficult to arrange to North Korea, and at the time of writing it was impossible for US and South Korean citizens. Those interested in travelling to North Korea from Běijīng should get in touch with Nicholas Bonner or Simon Cockerell at **Koryo Tours** (☎ 010-6416 7544; www.koryogroup.com; Red House, 10 Chunxiu Lu, Chaoyang), who can get you there (and back).

There are five weekly flights and four international express trains (K27 and K28) between Běijīng and Pyongyang.

PAKISTAN

The exciting trip on the Karakoram Hwy, over the 4800m Khunjerab Pass and what is said to be the world's highest public international highway, is an excellent way to get to or from Chinese Central Asia. There are daily buses (10am) from Kashgar for the two-day trip to Sost when the pass is open, with customs procedures conducted at Tashkurgan. See p837 for more information.

RUSSIA

A twice-weekly train (N23 and N24, Wednesday and Saturday) connects Haerbin East train station with Vladivostok. Also see Trans-Siberian Railway (p964) for information on trains to Moscow from Běijīng. The Russian border 9km from Mǎnzhōulǐ is quite busy and reliable. Officially, the only public transport that crosses the border is the Trans-Manchurian, but there are also ample opportunities for picking up a lift in Mǎnzhōulǐ or at the border.

TAJIKISTAN

The Kulma Pass (4362m), linking Kashgar with Murghob (via Tashkurgan), opened in 2004, with three monthly buses making the trip. At the time of writing the pass was not open to foreign travellers: go to **Travel Tajikistan**

(www.traveltajikistan.com/roadrail/road.html) for the latest updates.

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 Vietnam visas can be acquired in Běijīng (p942) or Kūnmíng (p943). 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 two border checkpoints (see below and p964) where foreigners are permitted to cross between Vietnam and China.

There are two weekly trains from Běijīng to Hanoi. Trains leave Beijing West Train Station at 4.16pm on Monday and Friday, arriving in Hanoi at 6.50am on Wednesday and Sunday. Trains depart from Hanoi at 6.50pm on Tuesday and Friday and arrive in Běijīng at 1.38pm on Thursday and Sunday. The train stops at Shìjiǎzhūāng, Zhèngzhōu, Hànkǒu (in Wūhàn), Wūchāng (Wūhàn), Chángshā, Héngyáng, Yǒngzhōu, Guǐlín North, Guǐlín, Liǔzhōu, Nǎnníng and Píngxiáng.

Friendship Pass

The busiest border crossing is at the Vietnamese town of Dong Dang, an obscure town (nearest city is Lang Son 18km to the south) 164km northeast of Hanoi. The closest Chinese town to the border is Píngxiáng in Guǎngxī province, but it's 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 or Yǒuyì Guān in Chinese. Buses and minibuses on the Hanoi–Lang Son route are frequent. For details on reaching Friendship Pass from Píngxiáng, see p645.

Píngxiáng is connected by train to Nǎnníng, capital of China's Guǎngxī province, 220km away. Train 5518 to Nǎnníng departs from Píngxiáng at 2.40pm, arriving in Nǎnníng at 6.36pm. In the other direction, train 5517 departs from Nǎnníng at 7.58am, arriving in Píngxiáng at 11.40am. There are more frequent buses (once every 30 minutes), which take four hours to make the journey and cost US\$4.

A word of caution – because 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 Nanning or beyond.

From Nanning, there's a daily Hanoi-bound bus (Y110, 10 hours, 8am) that runs to the Friendship Pass, after which you can cross into Vietnam on foot and board a Vietnamese bus to Hanoi.

Lao Cai–Hékǒu

A 762km metre-gauge railway, inaugurated in 1910, links Hanoi with Kūnmíng, although at the time of writing the twice-weekly international train service had been suspended due to floods and landslide damage. 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.

When operational, domestic trains run daily on both sides of the border. On the Chinese side, Kūnmíng–Hékǒu takes about 16 hours.

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.

Train

TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY

The Trans-Siberian Railway and connecting routes comprise one of the most famous, romantic and potentially enjoyable of the world's great train journeys. Rolling out of Europe and into Asia, through eight time zones and over 9289km of taiga, steppe and desert, the Trans-Siberian makes all other train rides seem like once around the block with Thomas the Tank Engine.

There is some confusion here as there are, in fact, three railways. The 'true' Trans-Siberian line runs from Moscow to Vladivostok. But the routes traditionally referred to as the Trans-Siberian Railway are the two branches that veer off the main line in eastern Siberia to make a beeline for Běijīng.

Since the first option excludes China, most readers of this book will be making the decision between the Trans-Manchurian and the Trans-Mongolian; however, it makes little difference. The Trans-Mongolian (Běijīng to Moscow, 7865km) is faster, but requires you to purchase an additional visa and endure another border crossing, although you do at least get to see the Mongolian countryside roll past your window. The Trans-Manchurian is longer (Běijīng to Moscow, 9025km). A useful source of information on the Trans-Siberian Railway can be found at www.seat61.com/Trans-Siberian.htm.

Trans-Mongolian Railway

Train K3 leaves Běijīng on its five-day journey at 7.40am every Wednesday (arriving in Moscow on the following Monday at 2.19pm), passes through Dàtóng and travels to the Mongolian border at Erenhot, 842km from Běijīng. The train continues to Ulaanbaatar before reaching the last stop in Mongolia, Sukhe Bator. From Moscow, train K4 leaves at 10.03pm on Tuesdays, arriving in Běijīng on the following Monday at 2.31pm. Departure and arrival times may fluctuate slightly.

The train offers deluxe two-berth compartments (with shared shower), 1st-class four-berth compartments and 2nd-class four-berth compartments. Fares start at around US\$253 one way in 2nd class or US\$418 in 1st class.

Trans-Manchurian Railway

Departing from Běijīng at 10.56pm Saturday (arriving in Moscow the following Friday at 5.55pm), train K19 travels through Tiānjīn, Shānháiguān, Shěnyáng, Chángchūn and Hāěrbīn before arriving at the border post Mǎnzhǒulǐ. 2347km from Běijīng, Zabaykal'sk is the Russian border post and the train continues from here to Tarskaya, where it connects with the Trans-Siberian line. Train K20 leaves Moscow at 11.58pm every Friday, arriving in Běijīng on the following Friday at 5.20am. Note that departure and arrival times may fluctuate slightly.

Trains have 1st-class two-berth compartments and 2nd-class four-berth compartments, with prices similar to the Trans-Mongolian Railway.

Visas

Travellers will need Russian and Mongolian visas if they take the Trans-Mongolian Rail-

way, as well as a Chinese visa. These can often be arranged along with your ticket by travel agents such as China International Travel Service (CITS, Zhōngguó Guójiā Lǚxíngshè). Mongolian visas come as two-day transit visas (three-day process US\$30, express process US\$60) or 90-day tourist visas (three-day process US\$40, express process US\$60). A transit visa is easy enough to get (just present a through ticket and a visa for your onward destination). The situation regarding visas changes regularly, so check with the Mongolian embassy (p942) or consulate. All Mongolian embassies shut down for the week of National Day (Naadam), which officially falls around 11 to 13 July.

Russian transit visas (one-week process US\$50, three-day process US\$80, one-day process US\$120; see p942) are valid for 10 days if you take the train, and will only give you three or four days in Moscow at the end of your journey. You will need one photo, your passport and the exact amount in US dollars. For a transit visa, you will also need a valid entry visa for a third country plus a through ticket from Russia to the third country.

Tickets

In Běijīng, tickets can be conveniently purchased from CITS (Zhōngguó Guójiā Lǚxíngshè; ☎ 010-65120507) in the **Beijing International Hotel** (Běijīng Guójiā Fāndiàn; 9 Jianguomen Neidajie). Abroad, tickets can be arranged through one of the following agencies.

Intourist Travel (www.intourist.com) has branches in the UK, USA, Canada, Finland and Poland, and offers a range of Trans-Manchurian and Trans-Mongolian tours and packages, including flights to and from Moscow, 2nd-class travel, and accommodation in Moscow, Běijīng and Irkutsk.

White Nights (☎ /fax 1800 490 5008; www.wnights.com; 610 Sierra Dr, Sacramento, CA) in the USA offers a range of trips, including Trans-Manchurian tickets for US\$460 (2nd class) or US\$710 (1st class) and Trans-Mongolian tickets for US\$400 (2nd class) or US\$710 (1st class). The company also offers visa support, and has contact addresses in Russia, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Intours Canada (☎ 416-766 4720; fax 766 8507; www.tourussia.com; Ste 308, 2150 Bloor St West, Toronto, ON) in Canada offers tours and packages on the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Mongolian. A typical 13-day Moscow–Beijing Trans-Mongolian

tour costs C\$2195/C\$2825 (2nd/1st class), including hotel accommodation.

The Russia Experience (☎ 020-8566 8846; www.trans-siberian.co.uk; Research House, Fraser Rd, Perivale, Middlesex) in the UK has a great choice of tickets and is in the know (it's also the company to get in touch with for trips to Mongolia and Russia). Get full details and prices from its downloadable website brochure.

Gateway Travel (☎ 02-9745 3333; www.russian-gateway.com.au; 48 The Boulevard, Strathfield, NSW) in Australia can arrange tickets and tours.

Travel Service Asia (☎ 07351-373 210; www.tsareisen.de, in German; Schmelzweg 10, Biberach/Riß) in Germany offers package tours and tickets on Trans-Mongolian and Trans-Manchurian routes.

Moonsky Star Ltd (Map p532; ☎ 2723 1376; www.monkeyshrine.com; Flat 6, 4th fl, E block, Chungking Mansions, Nathan Rd) in Hong Kong arranges trips on the Trans-Siberian and has an informative website with a downloadable brochure. It has an info centre in Běijīng called **Monkey Business** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 010-6591 6519; www.monkeyshrine.com; Room 35, Red House, 10 Chunxui Lu, Chaoyang).

SEA Hong Kong

Some ships still ply the waters between Hong Kong and the mainland, but numbers and destinations have been cut back and largely travel to destinations in Guǎngdōng. See p560 for details.

Japan

There are weekly ferries between Osaka and Shànghǎi (roughly 44 hours) and twice-monthly services between Kōbe and Shànghǎi (roughly 44 hours). Ticket prices to both destinations range from Y1300 to Y6500. Boats depart from Shànghǎi at 1pm on Saturday and arrive in Kōbe at 9.30am on Monday. Boats leave Kōbe on Tuesday at noon and arrive in Shànghǎi at 9.30am on Thursday. Ticket prices start at Y1300. See p274 for more details.

From Tiānjīn (Tánggǔ), there is a weekly ferry to Kōbe in Japan (p184; Y1540 to Y5250, 51 hours). Check in two hours before departure for international sailings. The **Tianjin Jinshen Ferry Company** (☎ 022-2420 5777; www.tifeco.com.cn/jinshen) operates a boat that departs from Tiānjīn at 11am on Monday and arrives in Kōbe at 2pm on Wednesday. From Kōbe, it departs at noon on Friday and arrives in Tiānjīn at 2pm on Sunday.

There are also boats from Qingdao to Shimoda (Y1200) every two weeks; see p230 for details.

Korea

Travelling from Korea, international ferries connect the South Korean port of Incheon with Weihai, Qingdao, Tianjin (Tanggu), Dalian and Dandong.

The **Weidong Ferry Company** (☎ 822-3271 6710; www.weidong.com; 10th fl, 1005 Sungji Bldg, 585 Dohwado-gu, Mapo-gu, Seoul) runs boats on the routes to Weihai (Y750 to Y1370, three weekly in each direction) and Qingdao (Y750 to Y1370, three weekly in each direction) in Shandong province. It can also be contacted at the **International Passenger Terminal** Incheon (☎ 8232-777 0490; 71-2 Hangdong); Weihai (☎ 0631-522 6173; 48 Haibin Beilu); Qingdao (☎ 0532-8280 3574; 4 Xinjiang Lu). Check its website for the latest timetables and prices. Children under two years are free; children between two and 12 years get 30% discounts, while seniors over 65 years garner discounts of 20%.

In Seoul, tickets for any boats to China can be bought from the **International Union Travel Agency** (☎ 822-777 6722; Room 707, 7th fl, Daehan Ilbo Bldg, 340 Taepyeonglo 2-ga, Chung-gu). Prices cost US\$88 to US\$300, and depending on the destination, boats leave anytime from once to three times weekly.

For the Tianjin ferry you can also get tickets in Seoul from **Taeya Travel** (☎ 822-514 6226), in Kangnam-gu by the Shinsa subway station. In China, tickets can be bought cheaply at the pier, or from CITS – for a very steep premium. The cheapest price is Y888 for a dorm bed.

To reach the International Passenger Terminal from Seoul, take the Seoul–Incheon commuter train (subway line 1 from the city centre) and get off at the Dongincheon station. The train journey takes 50 minutes. From Dongincheon station it's either a 45-minute walk or five-minute taxi ride to the ferry terminal.

INCHEON TO WEIHAI

There are three boat services a week between Incheon and Weihai (2nd/1st class Y750/1370, 15 hours, departs Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 7pm from Weihai). See p236 for more details, and **Weidong Ferry** (www.weidong.com) for an updated schedule.

INCHEON TO QINGDAO

There are three boats a week between Qingdao and Incheon (Y750 to Y1370, 15 hours, de-

parts Monday, Wednesday and Friday). Phone or consult the website of **Weidong Ferry** (☎ 0532-8280 3574; www.weidong.com; 4 Xinjiang Lu) in Qingdao to confirm days.

INCHEON TO TIANJI

There are two boats a week between Tianjin and Incheon (from Y1000, 25 hours). Boats from Incheon depart at 1pm and 9pm on Tuesday, and boats leave Tianjin at 11am on Thursday and Sunday. As with boats from Japan, the boat does not dock at Tianjin proper, but rather at the nearby port of Tanggu, where there are buses to speed you to either Tianjin or Beijing. Boats to Tianjin are run by the **Jinchon Ferry Company** Seoul (☎ 822-517 8671); Incheon (☎ 8232-777 8260); Tianjin (☎ 022-2331 1657). See p184 for more details.

INCHEON TO DALIAN

A boat leaves for Incheon in South Korea at 3.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (Y850 to Y1469, 18 hours) from Dalian; tickets can be bought at the ferry terminal. Boats leave Incheon for Dalian at 4.30pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Contact **Da-In Ferry** Seoul (☎ 822-3218 6551); Incheon (☎ 8232-891 7100); Dalian (☎ 0411-8270 5082).

INCHEON TO DANDONG

Three boats a week run between Dandong and Incheon in South Korea. Boats leave for Incheon at 3pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (Y1000 to Y1900, 15 hours). Boats leave Incheon for Dandong at 5pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Contact **Dandong Ferry** Incheon (☎ 8232-891 3322); Dandong (☎ 0415-317 0081).

GETTING AROUND

AIR

While trundling around China in buses or chugging across the land by train is great on occasion, China is a country of vast distances. If you don't have the time or inclination for a drawn-out land campaign, take to the air.

China's air network is extensive and the country's rapid economic development means that 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. With predictions that China could become the world's most visited tourist

destination by 2020, the nation is shaping up for a further upsurge in domestic air travel. Airports are being built and upgraded all over the land, making air transport increasingly appealing, with new airports including Shanghai's Pudong airport, Beijing's new Capital airport terminal (and a new terminal currently under construction), Hong Kong's spiffing Chek Lap Kok airport and Guangzhou's Baiyun International Airport. China is running out of pilots to fly its growing fleet and foreign pilots have reportedly been hired.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC; Zhongguo Minhang) is the civil aviation authority for numerous airlines, which include the following:

Air China (☎ in Beijing 010-6601 7755; www.airchina.com.cn) Largely flies economically priced international routes.

China Eastern Airlines (☎ in Shanghai 021-6268 6268; www.ce-air.com) Range of international destinations, including London and Los Angeles, with flights out of Beijing and Shanghai.

China Southern Airlines (☎ 020-8668 2000; www.cs-air.com) Guangzhou-based airline serving a number of international routes as well as a nationwide web of air routes, including Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an and Tianjin.

China Southwest Airlines (☎ in Chengdu 028-666 8080; www.cswa.com) Chengdu-based airline serving a number of international routes as well as domestic cities.

Chunqiu Airlines (☎ 021-6252 0000; www.china-sss.com) Shanghai-based budget airline, with connections between Shanghai and tourist destinations, including Qingdao, Guilin, Xiamen and Sanya. No food or drink served on board.

Some of the above airlines also have subsidiary airlines; for example, subsidiaries of China Southern Airlines include Xiamen Airlines and Guangxi Airlines. Note that not all Chinese airline websites have English-language capability. Airline schedules and airfares are listed within the relevant chapters.

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. You can buy these from ticket offices throughout China.

Shuttle buses often run from CAAC offices in towns and cities through China to the 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. Baggage reclamation facilities are rudimentary at the older airports and waits can be long; lost baggage compensation is Y40 per kilogram. Remember to keep your baggage receipt label on your ticket as you will need to show it when you collect your luggage.

Planes vary in style and comfort. The more regularly travelled routes between cities employ Boeing or Airbus, more far-flung regions still depend on Soviet-built passenger jets. You may get a hot meal, or just a small piece of cake and an airline souvenir. On-board announcements are delivered in Chinese and English.

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

Tickets

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 nationwide, other airline offices and travel agents or from the travel desk of your hotel. Discounts are common, except when flying into large cities such as Shànghǎi on 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 years are charged adult fares; kids between two and 12 years pay half-price. Toddlers under two years pay 10% of

the full fare. You can use credit cards at most CAAC offices and travel agents.

Cancellation fees depend on how long before departure you cancel. On domestic flights, if you cancel 24 to 48 hours before departure you lose 10% of the fare; if you cancel between two and 24 hours before the flight you lose 20%; and if you cancel less than two hours before the flight you lose 30%. If you don't show up for a domestic flight, you are entitled to a refund of 50%.

When purchasing a ticket, you may be asked to buy insurance (Y20). It's not compulsory and the amount you can claim is very low.

BICYCLE

Bicycles (*zìxíngchē*) are an excellent method for getting around China's cities or patrolling tourist sights.

Outdoor bicycle-repair stalls are found on every other corner in larger cities, and repairs are very cheap.

Despite the convenience of cycling, take care when you're on your bike. Helmets can be difficult to find in China as virtually no Chinese cycle with protection. Cycling at night can be hazardous, mainly because few Chinese bikes are equipped with lights. But your greatest concern will probably be China's pernicious traffic conditions and bad driving. Also note that cycling is prohibited on some major roads in large cities, so you will have to join everyone else cycling on the pavement.

Hire

Bicycle hire outlets that cater to foreigners can be found in most traveller centres. Many hotels also hire out bicycles. Bikes can be hired by the day or by the hour and it's also possible to hire for a stretch of several days, so

touring is possible. Rates for Westerners are typically Y5 per hour or Y20 to Y40 per day but you could pay as much as Y20 per hour at some tourist sights. Note that big hotels typically charge ridiculous rates, so it's worth looking around.

Most hire outlets will ask you for a deposit of anything up to Y500 (get a receipt) and to leave some sort of ID. Sometimes the staff will ask for your passport. Give them some other ID instead, like a student card or a drivers' licence. In most large towns and cities bicycles should be parked for a small fee at designated places on the pavement (typically Y0.50 to Y1).

Purchase

If you're planning to stay in one place for any length of time, it may be worth buying your own bike and then selling it later. Bike shops are plentiful and prices should be clearly marked. The very cheapest mountain bikes start in the region of Y250, but single-speed bikes are even cheaper. A good local brand is Giant. It's important to buy a decent cable or U-lock as theft is common. If you want to sell your bike, advertising it on local university notice boards is a good idea, or in expat magazines like *That's Beijing* or *That's Shanghai* (which often means you can advertise online – an ideal place also to look for secondhand bikes).

Touring

Touring China by bike can be immensely rewarding, although there are problems with 'open' and 'closed' areas. It's illegal for foreigners to visit closed areas (eg Yixian, p443) without a permit (permits can be obtained from the PSB). Foreigners can transit a closed area – that is, you can travel by train or bus through a closed area as long as you don't exit the vehicle in this 'forbidden zone'. The question is: Should riding a bicycle through a closed area be classified as 'transiting' or 'visiting' it?

Chinese law is as clear as mud on this issue. Most of the time, the police won't bother you.

If you get caught in a closed area, it's unlikely to be while you are on the road. The law keeps firm tabs on transients via hotels. If you're staying overnight in an open place, but you are suspected of having passed through a closed area, the police may pull a raid on your

hotel. You can be hauled down to the police station where you will have to submit to a lengthy interrogation, sign a confession and pay a fine. Fines vary from Y50 to whatever they think you can afford. There is some latitude for bargaining in these situations, and you should request a receipt (*shōujiù*). Don't expect police to give you any tips on which areas are closed and which are open – they seldom know themselves – although such areas are usually near international borders or zones of a sensitive military nature, as well as much of Tibet.

BOAT

Boat services within China are limited. In coastal areas, you are most likely to use a boat to reach offshore islands like Pūtuóshān or Hǎinán. The Yántái–Dàlián ferry will likely survive because it saves hundreds of kilometres of overland travel, despite the loss of more than 200 lives when a ferry on this route sank in heavy seas in 1999. Elsewhere the outlook for coastal passenger ships is not too good.

There are also several inland shipping routes worth considering, but these are also vanishing. For details of each trip see the appropriate sections in this book.

The best-known river trip is the three-day boat ride along Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) from Chóngqìng to Yìchāng or Wùhàn (p811). The Lǐ River (Lǐ Jiāng) boat trip from Guilin to Yángshuò is a popular tourist ride. You can also travel the Grand Canal from Hángzhōu to Sūzhōu on a tourist boat.

Hong Kong employs a veritable navy of vessels that connect with the territory's myriad islands, and a number of popular boats run between the territory and other parts of China (principally Guǎngdōng province), including Macau, Zhūhǎi, Shékǒu (for Shénzhèn) and Zhōngshān. See p560 for details.

Boat tickets can be purchased from passenger ferry terminals or through travel agents, such as CITS.

BUS

Long-distance buses (长途公共汽车; *chángtú gōnggòng qìchē*) are one of the best means of getting around. Services are extensive, main roads are rapidly improving and with the increasing number of intercity highways, bus journeys are getting quicker (often quicker than train travel). Another plus is that it's easier to secure bus tickets than train

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* (北; north), *nán* (南; south), *dōng* (东; east) and *xī* (西; west). So Dōng Lù (东路) literally means East Rd, while Xī Jiē (西街) means West St.

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

tickets and they are often cheaper. Buses also stop every so often in small towns and villages, so you get to see parts of the countryside you wouldn't see if you travelled by train, although breakdowns can be a problem.

On the down side, some rural roads and provincial routes (especially in the southwest, Tibet and the northwest) remain in shocking condition, dangerously traversed by bone-rattling hulks that shatter the nerves. Precipitous drops, pot holes, dangerous road surfaces and reckless drivers mean that accidents in black-spot areas, such as parts of Sichuān, remain common. Long-distance bus journeys can also be cramped and noisy, with Hong Kong films looped on overhead TVs and 3-D sound. Drivers lean on the horn at the slightest detection of a vehicle in front.

Routes between large cities sport larger, cleaner and more comfortable fleets of private buses (many equipped with toilets and you could get a free bottle of mineral water), such as comfy Volvos; shorter and more far-flung routes still rely on rattling minibuses into which the driver crams as many fares as is possible and waits to fill up before departing.

On popular long-haul routes, sleeper buses (卧铺客车; *wòpù kèchē*) may cost around double the price of a normal bus service, but many travellers swear by them, although bunks can be short. Watch out for your belongings on them, however.

It's safe to estimate times for bus journeys on nonhighway routes by calculating the distance against a speed of 25km/h. Also factor in driving techniques – drivers are loathe to change gears and appear to prefer to almost stop on a slope rather than change from third into second. Coasting in neutral downhill is common.

If taking buses to high-altitude destinations in winter, make sure you take plenty of warm clothes. A breakdown in frozen conditions can prove lethal for those unprepared.

Bus journey times given throughout this book should be used as a rough guide only and do not factor in variables, such as weather, breakdowns or bad traffic conditions.

Bus Stations & Ticketing

All cities and most towns across China have one or more long-distance bus station (长途汽车站; *chángtú qìchēzhàn*). Tickets are easy to purchase, and it's usually just a case of turning up at the bus station and buying your ticket

there and then, rather than booking them in advance. Wherever you're going, weigh up the options: besides that bone-rattling tin creature that you're being shoved onto by ticket operators, a plush, air-conditioned (albeit slightly more expensive) coach could well be heading to the same destination. Bus drivers and ticket sellers at bus stations can press gang you aboard their vehicles; try to resist until you know what other choices exist.

In many cities in China, the train station forecourt doubles as a bus station.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

For those who'd like to tour China by car or motorbike, the news is bleak. It's not like India, where you can simply buy a motorbike and head off. The authorities remain anxious about foreigners driving at whim around China, so don't plan on hiring a car and driving off wherever you want.

Driving Licence

To drive in Hong Kong and Macau, you will need an International Driving Permit. To drive in China, you will need a residency permit and you will need to apply for a Chinese driving licence. You also have to perform a health examination and perform a written test. Foreigners can drive motorcycles if they are residents in China and have a Chinese motorcycle licence.

Hire

Cars can be hired in Hong Kong and Macau, but at the time of writing you needed a residency permit and a Chinese driving license to hire a car elsewhere (eg in Běijīng or Shànghǎi), effectively barring tourists from the roads.

If you want to use a car, it's easy enough to book a car with a driver. Basically, this is just a standard long-distance taxi. Travel agencies like CITS or even hotel booking desks can make the arrangements. They generally ask excessive fees – the name of the game is to negotiate. If you can communicate in Chinese or find someone to translate, it's not particularly difficult to find a private taxi driver to take you wherever you like for less than half the CITS rates.

Road Rules

Cars in China drive on the right-hand side of the road. You're more likely to get fined for

illegal parking than speeding. Indeed, with China's gridlock traffic, opportunities for speeding are vanishing, except on the highways. Even skilled drivers will be unprepared for the performance on China's roads; cars lunge from all angles and chaos abounds. You see cars driving from minor onto major roads, their drivers totally ignoring oncoming vehicles. The figures make for grim reading: China tops the highway mortality charts with 450 people losing their lives daily on China's roads (a figure that is growing by 10% yearly), despite there being fewer vehicles per head than in Western countries.

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.

The main reason to do it is to get to isolated outposts where public transport is poor. There is, of course, some joy in meeting the locals this way, but communicating is certain to be a problem if you don't speak Chinese. There is no Chinese signal for hitching, so just try waving down a truck.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Long-distance transport in China is not really a problem – the dilemma occurs when you finally make it to your destination. While China boasts a huge and often inventive choice of local transport, vehicles can be slow and overburdened, and the transport network very confusing for visitors. Hiring a car in China is largely impractical or impossible for tourists, and hiring a bike may be inadequate. 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.

Bus

Apart from bikes, buses are the most common means of getting around in the cities. Services are fairly extensive, buses go to most places and fares are inexpensive. The problem is that they are almost always packed. If an empty bus pulls in at a stop, a battle for seats ensues. Even more aggravating is the slowness of the traffic. You just have to be patient, never expect anything to move rapidly and allow lots of time to get to the train station to catch your train.

Improvements in bus quality have been matched by a steady increase in congestion on the roads. Bus routes at bus stops are generally listed in Chinese only, without Pinyin, so navigation can be difficult. In larger towns and cities, more expensive private minibus operations follow the same routes as the larger public buses.

Good maps of Chinese cities and bus routes are readily available and are often sold by hawkers outside the train stations. When you get on a bus, point to where you want to go on the map and the conductor (who is seated near the door) will sell you the right ticket. They usually tell you where to get off, provided they remember, but the bus stop may be quite a distance from your destination.

Metro & Light Rail

Going underground is highly preferable to taking the bus, as there are no traffic jams, but this transport option is only possible in a handful of cities: Hong Kong, Běijīng, Shànghǎi, Guǎngzhōu, Tiānjīn, Nánjīng and Shēnzhèn. Wūhàn has a limited light rail system in Hānkǒu, as does Tiānjīn (linking it to Tǎnggǔ), while Chóngqīng now benefits from a monorail.

By far the best and most comprehensive is Hong Kong's funky system; Běijīng's network is limited but is being expanded in preparation for the 2008 Olympics. The Shànghǎi metro system is also being massively extended.

Taxi

Many large Chinese cities endlessly sprawl and taxis (出租汽车; *chūzū qìchē*) are the best way to get around for first-time visitors. Taxis are cheap and plentiful and always on the lookout for customers, so finding one is rarely difficult. In fact, the ceaseless honking at or sidling alongside foreign travellers can be wearing. If you can't find a taxi, likely congregation points include the train and

long-distance bus stations. Some large cities also have taxi pickup points.

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 a taxi driver 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.

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 the vehicle.

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. Write the price down if you have to and secure an agreement, so that the price is not suddenly upped when you arrive. If you want the meter to be used, ask for *dābiào* (打表). Try to remember to ask for a receipt (发票; *fāpiào*); if you leave something behind in the taxi, the taxi number is printed on the receipt so it can be tracked down.

Chinese cities impose limitations on the number of passengers a taxi can carry. The limit is usually four – though minibuses can take more – and drivers are usually unwilling to break the rules and risk trouble with the police.

It's 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. Even so, take the front seat if you are travelling alone and ignore inane protestations from taxi drivers that you don't need to wear a seat belt. Be prepared for bad driving. If sitting in the rear, try to position yourself so you don't lose an eye on one of the sharp corners and edges of the security cage the driver sits in if he suddenly halts (or crashes). Watch out for tired drivers – they work long and punishing shifts.

Useful phrases for solo travellers include *pīnchē* (拼车) – to share a car or minibus, ie to pay per seat, rather than pay for your own car (包车; *bāochē*).

Other Local Transport

An often bewildering variety of ramshackle transport options can be found throughout China, providing employment for legions of elderly Chinese. The motor tricycle (三轮车; *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. Chinese pedicabs have the driver at the front and passenger seats at the back. Pedicabs congregate outside train and bus stations or hotels in parts of China. In a few places, pedicabs cruise the streets in large numbers (Lhasa, for example); Qūfū (p218) has pedicabs in pestilential proportions.

In some towns 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, this is 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, 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 (unless the seatbelts don't work...).

TRAIN

Although crowded, trains are the best way to get around in reasonable speed and comfort. The network covers every province, except Hainán, and the link to Lhasa was completed in 2006 (p924). At any given time it is estimated that over 10 million Chinese are travelling on a train in China, except during Chinese New Year when most of China seems to be on the railway.

Travelling by train is an adventurous, fun and efficient way of getting around China and meeting the local people. 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 safety record of the train system is also good (despite the grim and graphic photographs displayed in train stations warning

of the perils of transporting fireworks and explosives), but keep an eye on your belongings (see p940).

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-conditioning. The new 'Z' class express trains (eg between Běijīng and Shànghǎi) are very plush, with meals thrown in on some routes, mobile-phone charging points and well-designed bunks. The ultrafast maglev train that connects Pudong airport to the Shànghǎi metro system is perhaps a sign of things to come. Trains nationwide are very punctual and leave on the dot.

Most trains have dining cars where you can find passable food. Railway staff also regularly walk by with pushcarts offering *miàn* (instant noodles), *miànbāo* (bread), *héfàn* (boxed rice lunches), *huǒtuǐ* (ham), *píjiǔ* (beer), *kuàng quán shuǐ* (mineral water) and *qīshuǐ* (soft drinks).

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; *jīcún chù*) where you can safely dump your bags for about Y5 to Y10 (per day per item).

An excellent online source of information on China's rail network is www.seat61.com/China.htm. For bundles of info on China's railways and trains, consult the tremendous **Railways of China** (www.railwaysofchina.com).

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 class 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. 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 short express journeys (such as Běijīng to Tiānjīn) some 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. Each compartment is equipped with its own hot-water flask (热水瓶; *rèshuǐpíng*), which is filled by an attendant. 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 very comfortable, with four comfortable bunks in a closed compartment, with lace curtains, teacups, clean washrooms, carpets and air-conditioning. Soft sleeper costs 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 tickets; 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 expect to obtain a hard-sleeper ticket on the day of travel. 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 a five-day, advance-purchase limit, but in large cities, such as Běijīng or Shànghǎi, you may find you can book further ahead.

If you try to buy a sleeper ticket at the train station and the clerk says *méi yǒu* (not have), 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.

Buying hard-sleeper tickets in train stations can be trying. Some large stations have special ticket offices for foreigners where procuring tickets is straightforward; otherwise there should be a window manned by someone with basic 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 larger stations. Some stations are surprisingly well run, but others are bedlam. On a few rare routes (such as Běijīng to Tiānjīn) cash-taking automatic ticket machines exist (with instructions for use in Chinese only). There are windows at large train stations for partial refunds on unused tickets.

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 the 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 **China Trip Advisor** (www.chinatripadvisor.com) or **China Train Timetable** (www.china-train-ticket.com), but it's 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 **KCR** (www.krc.com).

Timetables

Paperback train timetables for the entire country are published every April and October, but they are available in Chinese only (¥5). Even to Chinese readers, working one's way through their Byzantine layout is taxing. Thinner versions listing the major train services from Běijīng can be bought at train stations for about ¥2 – again in Chinese only. The resourceful **Duncan Peattie** (www.chinatt.org) publishes an English-language Chinese Railway Timetable, at the time of writing in its fourth edition. Both quick reference and full train timetables are available, as well as supplements. 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 **Travel China Guide.com** (www.travelchinaguide.com/china-trains/), which allows you to enter your departure point and destination, and then gives you the departure times, arrival times and train numbers of trains running that route.

Health

Dr Trish Batchelor

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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 common. Malaria is still present in some parts of the country and high-altitude sickness can be a problem, particularly in Tibet.

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 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 medi-

cal 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 (bills of over US\$100,000 are not uncommon).

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

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and can 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 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 required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a

country in the yellow fever zone within the six days prior to entering China. If you are 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
- Anti-spasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopan
- Decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- Diamox if going to high altitudes
- An oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte) for diarrhoea, diarrhoea ‘stopper’ (eg Loperamide) and anti-nausea 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 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

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for 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** Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm 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 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** 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 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 3 months in the country.
- Pneumonia** A single injection with a booster after five years is recommended for all travellers over 65 years of age or 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 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 receive advice from a doctor who specialises in travel medicine.

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/)

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice 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 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. An 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 July 2006 there have been 19 confirmed human cases in China, of whom 12 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 some parts of southern China. It can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites – there is no vaccine. The mosquito that carries dengue

bites day and night, so use insect avoidance measures 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 that can be prevented 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, runny nose, muscle aches, 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 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, be sure to seek medical advice to see if your trip warrants taking antimalaria medication and if it does, to ensure that 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. It is found mainly in rural areas in the southwestern region – principally Hainán, Yúnnán and Guǎngxī bordering onto Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. There is more limited risk in remote rural areas of Fújiàn, Guǎngdōng, Guǎngxī, Guìzhōu, and Sìchuān. Generally medication is only advised if you are visiting rural Hainán or Yúnnán.

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 in order to help 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 with 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. 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's common that immunoglobulin is unavailable outside of major centres – it's crucial that you get to a clinic that has 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 (Cháng Jiāng) 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 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 headache and a high and slowly progressive fever, which 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 in 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 symptomatic treatments such as throat lozenges, and cough and cold tablets.

Altitude Sickness

There are bus journeys in Tibet, Qinghai and Xinjiang where the road goes over 5000m. Acclimatising to such extreme elevations takes several weeks at least, but most travel-

lers come up from sea level very fast – a bad move! Acute mountain sickness (AMS) results from a rapid ascent to altitudes above 2700m. It usually commences within 24 to 48 hours of arriving at altitude and symptoms 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.

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.

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.

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. In Tibet 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, first get the person out of the wind and/or rain, remove their clothing if it's wet and replace it with dry, warm clothing. Give them hot liquids – not alcohol – and some high-calorie, easily digestible food. The early recognition and treatment of mild hypothermia is the only way to prevent severe hypothermia, which is a critical condition and requires 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 in the second trimester (between 14 and 28 weeks), when 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* (vital energy), *jing* (essence), *xue* (blood, the body's nourishing fluids) and *tiye* (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*, 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 that 'natural' doesn't always mean 'safe', and there can be drug interactions between herbal medicines and Western medicines. If you are utilising both systems ensure you inform both practitioners what the other has prescribed.

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