

2004 TCVM Conference and China Trip Information

Suggested Checking List:

1. Passport and visa;
2. Air tickets;
3. Travel itinerary and contact names issued by the conference planner;
4. Emergency contact name in the United States;
5. Credit cards or travelers checks besides \$300 to \$500 dollar cash;
6. Travel insurance;
7. Medical assistance programs that you have;
8. Common toiletries, cold and digestive medications, lip balm, sanitary napkins and any over-the-counter medicines you generally use;
9. Razor and small electrical converter and adapter plugs. Appliances designed to operate at 110 volts will need a converter since China is using 220V;
10. Chewing gum, mints, or throat lozenges to keep your mouth moist;
11. Reading materials. It is long flight, so a guidebook on the places you will see and a novel that you love to read;
12. Suntan lotion and a pair of sun glasses;
13. Battery. Battery for your camera or small appliance.
14. A pocket notebook, a calculator and a pen;

Documents Need for Entering China

1. Passport. You will at least need a passport valid more than 6 months from the departure date.
2. Visa . Visa is required for Americans and most other nationalities. Visas for leisure travel to China are quite easy to get, usually granted for a one month stay. Your travel agent or visa services can help you, or it can also be obtained from Chinese embassies or consulates. In the United States, you can contact Chinese Embassies in Washington DC, or the Consulates in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and New York.
US citizens can stay in Hong Kong without a visa for up to 30 days.

A tourist visa requires an application form, a passport-size photo and a fee depending on visa types. It takes about seven business days for an application to be processed.

3. For application and fee, please visit the China Embassy homepage

<http://www.china-embassy.org>

We advise bringing a photocopy of your passport as well as 2 extra passport photos in case your passport is lost during the tour.

Getting there

Air service from U.S. gateways to major cities in China is provided by Northwest Airlines, United Airlines, Air China, Cathay Pacific Airways, China Eastern Airlines, China Southern Airlines, Japan Airlines, Korean Airlines, and Singapore Airlines. From North America West Coast, it takes around 14 hours to reach China or Hong Kong.

Weather in China

China is almost on the same latitude zone as the US. In spring, a sweater would be more than adequate. Summer is typically hot, but most sightseeing areas are air conditioned unless in the open. Fall is usually considered the best weather. October is the best time to visit China.

Clothing and Packing

Pack lightly, and bring casual clothes.

1. A sturdy, comfortable pair of walking shoes is an absolute.
2. Sports coat and tie for man, and one or two dresses or pantsuits for women, will suit the most formal occasions in China.
3. Travelers should bring shirts, sweaters, and jackets that can be worn in layers to suit a range of climates.

Remember: dress for Comfort, not for Style. Wash-and-wear clothing is preferable, although all hotels offer reliable laundry and dry cleaning services.

Health Requirement and Immunizations

Travelers are advised to check with their doctors before visiting China. A Health Declaration form must be completed upon arrival. No immunizations are required for short-term travelers. You should also bring any special health remedies or medications you require, as well as over-the-counter items.

Baggage Limits

As different airlines have varying policies, you should check with your carrier for restrictions and allowances. Usually, each trans-Pacific passenger is allowed two check-in bags totaling 106 inches of three dimensions, and one carry-on bag not over 39 inches.

For domestic China and intro-Asia flights, you are allowed to check in one piece of luggage under 20 kilograms (44 pounds) total, and one carry on, of not over 10 lb. The fee for extra baggage or overweight baggage could be very high.

Tipping

Tipping was traditionally not required in China. However, with the huge influx of Western tourists in recent years, tipping is now becoming the norm. Many classy hotel restaurants will automatically add a 10-15% service charge to your bill, so tipping is not required in such cases, unless you feel that the service was exceptional and wish to show your gratitude. It is not customary to leave tips at local restaurants.

Books, music tapes and personal items, as well as money, are appropriate tips for guides and drivers. It is best to ask your meeting planner, china tour guide for the amount you should pay. Usually it is based on your group size and time you travel. For example, for a group of 16 people: hotel porter is \$1 per member for helping with baggage, \$2 per member per day to national guide and local guides respectively, \$1 per member per day to bus drivers.

Money

The official currency is the Renminbi (RMB). Its basic unit is yuan. Denominations come in 100 Yuan, 50 Yuan, 10 Yuan, 5 Yuan, 2 Yuan and 1 Yuan. Each Yuan consists of 100 Fen. Hong Kong uses HK dollars. The official exchange rate at this time is 8.2 yuan to 1 U.S dollar and 7.7 HK dollars to 1 US dollar. Visitors are advised to carry a credit card -- Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Diner's Club -- and traveler checks that can be accepted by most hotels and major stores and can be exchanged for cash of RMB. Keep the receipt of the transaction as you might need when you leave China to change your US dollars back in Bank of China at the airport.

About the Laundry

There is no public laundry on the streets. Laundering services are available in hotels, usually through the floor attendant or housekeeping. One-day dry cleaning and pressing services are available at better hotels.

Hotels

Hotels in China are star-rated by international standard, from one star to five stars. A 3-star hotel is just like Holiday Inn, Days Inn, etc. in the United States, or better. For my personal opinion, the hotels among four or five star rank are much nicer than most hotels in the United States.

Food throughout the Trip

All breakfasts, Lunch and dinner are Chinese food in family style. The round table dining accommodates 8 - 10 people.

Tap water is not drinkable in China. All hotel rooms are supplied with a thermos of boiled water, to make tea or drink as you wish. Bottled water is recommended. It can be purchased for about \$0.25 to \$0.75 per bottle everywhere. Try to find the brand-named.

For First Time Traveler

China is a very safe place for foreigners to visit. Even minor crimes are punished severely, especially if related to foreigners. Vendors at some sightseeing locations may be persistent but are usually polite. Just ignore them if you don't want to buy something. If you travel with a guide, just follow the guide and his direction. If you explore alone, be alert and use common sense.

Airport Tax

Airport tax (they call it airport construction fee) is of 50 yuan (about US\$6) per airport. This fee must be paid in cash before check-in. International Departure Tax (even flying to Hong Kong) is 90 yuan (about US\$11). In Hong Kong, it is HK\$50 (around US\$6.5).

Suggestions for Travel Insurance

Travel to a country far from your home, one should always expect the unexpected. It is part of the nature of travel. Travel insurance always helps. With a small sum of premium, it covers trip cancellation, baggage damage or loss, accidents on the trip, etc. Check your travel agent for more detailed programs.

Language

Mandarin is spoken throughout China, and most people in Hong Kong speak Cantonese and English. English is the first foreign language of China and becoming more and more common. In areas frequented by tourists, you won't have problem using English.

Contact Your Family when You Travel in China

You can always use the hotel telephone. But be aware that it could be as expensive as US\$3 per minute.

Suggestions:

- #1: leave the phone numbers at home and ask them to call you;
- #2: send faxes from the business centers at the hotels;
- #3: send emails from those business centers at the hotels;
- #4: Purchase a phone card. It costs around \$.25 per minute.

More questions? Feel free to ask Allen Dong at TCVM Center, INC

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