

THE CHINESE GUEST

1. Travel

Chinese citizens are only permitted to go on holiday trips in groups of three or more, and only to countries with approved destination status. Group tours – usually exclusively package tours – are the usual means of travel.

2. Motives for Travel

The main age segment of travellers is between 45 and 59 years. This is due to the fact that China's pensioners are relatively young, make up a fairly large percentage of the population and therefore have the time to travel. Business travellers are usually male. Overseas travel is seen as an important status symbol of the wealthy. About 80-million Chinese can afford to travel overseas and they have even surpassed the Japanese in their spending.

3. Trip Structure & Duration

Although Chinese labour law does not prescribe a minimum of leave days, it is standard for government employees to have between 7 and 14 working days' annual leave. Foreign companies offer up to 15 days a year. Special public holiday schedules also allow employees to take an additional week's leave, which is usually used for travel. A standard round-trip tour lasts 10-15 days, and when in Europe, this includes travel through a minimum of five countries. Hence the short stays in any given hotel.

Family travel which includes children usually takes place in July, August and September. The group sizes vary greatly. Business travel groups can be between 3 and 20 persons, whereas groups of package tour travellers can be much larger. One third of the group travel consists of smaller groups of up to 12 persons.

4. Travel Mentality

The Chinese seldom use their free time for beach holidays; they much prefer sight-seeing trips. The majority prefer city tours or round-trip tours. Sight-seeing trips make up 75% of all Chinese travel.

The packed daily itineraries depend on the smooth succession of events and do not allow for any waiting periods. Fixed itineraries will however be changed at short notice to accommodate special needs/requests, and flexibility is therefore expected.

Due to the lack of experience and language barriers, Chinese groups are always accompanied by tour guides. Chinese guests expect to be lodged in modern hotels, usually with twin beds, and prefer eating Chinese food. More often than not they do not understand any foreign languages, which can lead to difficulties in communication. In addition, the Mandarin knowledge of the hosts is usually minimal.

5. Information and Booking Behaviour

In the past, the most important source of information in the planning of a trip was the information received via friends, followed by travel catalogues, travel agents, newspaper articles and travel magazines. The internet and TV/radio were less important owing to the restrictions on these formats.

The majority of trips booked are all-inclusive package deals. Business travellers however tend to book directly with airlines and other service providers.

6. Trip Content

Cultural trips are valued most and preferably experienced first-hand. The packed itineraries tend to concentrate on well-known and modern sites, famous cities and beautiful landscapes. The Chinese only visit places that they know of or have heard of. New things are seldom tried. A must during trips are casino visits, musical programmes and, in the evening, a visit to the red light districts.

Shopping is one of the highlights of every trip as it is customary to bring back gifts for the family, with presents often costing more than the trip itself. As brand names are very important in China, hotels should have the addresses of all major brands at hand.

7. Communication

Whenever people of different cultures and languages meet one another, their differences in behaviour can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. This is not only due to language differences, but also due to differences in intonation, speech pauses and body language. Most problems occur not because of the spoken words, but because of the varying cultural interpretations.

For example: In Europe the avoidance of direct eye contact is considered to show a lack of interest, whereas in China, this is considered to be polite and adhering to etiquette. Having a basic understanding of varying cultural behaviours can therefore help to eliminate unintentionally offending anyone.

Also, in Germany for example it is rude to interrupt conversations, whereas in China, it is normal to hold a conversation with several people at once and to listen to these at the same time. This often causes an increase in conversational volume within a group. A lack of interest is seen as being particularly rude. It is therefore important never to lose one's cool and not to ignore people wanting to say something.

Successful communication between the tour guide and the hotel plays an important role, as the guide is the link between the hotel, the group and the travel agency. The guide is the one who decides which information reaches the agency, and intense communication with him/her is the only way of finding out whether problems exist. It is therefore advised that a good relationship with the guide is pursued on check-in.

Should a request from a Chinese guest not be do-able, a direct 'no' is to be avoided; instead, a feasible alternative should be offered.

Chinese tourists are also very offended when they are confused with Japanese tourists. The reasons reach back through many centuries of history. However, Chinese pride and the fact that they can now afford to travel also play a role. It is therefore better to ask a guest directly where he/she comes from than to make this mistake.

When personally addressing someone, the surname is usually said first. 'Zhang Wengqiang' would therefore be 'Mr Zhang'. First names are reserved for close friends only. In China it is popular to add an age-identifying address to the surname, e.g. 'lao' means 'dear older Sir/Madam', 'xiao' means 'dear young Sir/Madam' and 'da' means 'dear middle aged Sir/Madam'. Luckily this is not expected from anyone non-Chinese.

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The Chinese rarely express in words a 'thank you' or 'please', which should not be taken as an offence. In China one thanks a lot less than in Europe. Instead, these things are expressed with friendly smiles and nods.

The Chinese have their own written symbols which vary greatly from those of the Japanese, which means that the Chinese cannot read Japanese. Although they also have their own symbols for numbers, the Arabic/Latin numerical system has been integrated and is well known.

As counting on fingers is done differently in China, one should always double check numbers. Showing the thumb and index finger for example signifies '8' and not '2'. To express the number '2', the index and middle finger are shown.

Silence is golden ... this adage definitely applies in China and is valued, rather than being embarrassing. It is considered naive to constantly express what one is thinking. Chinese communication is indirect and actual meanings are often only hinted at. The Chinese weigh up the effect of what is said to another person very carefully. This requires time, which is why pauses in conversation are a normal occurrence and not considered impolite. To the contrary, if one speaks too fast it is felt that one is interrupting or when the pauses are too long, that one has not understood. Because our conversational pauses are much shorter, the Chinese tend to feel that we are too quick in answering.

Many Chinese habits such as spitting, loud conversations and the ignoring of cues are contrary to our habits and values. The Chinese government has therefore implemented a campaign to stop 'unbecoming behaviour' by Chinese tourists travelling abroad. Chinese travel agents offer tourists courses during which they learn about acceptable behaviour in foreign countries. It is however advisable to be tolerant when it comes to unfamiliar behaviour by guests.

7.1 Topics of Conversation

Generally, negative subjects are to be avoided. Chinese guests even find it unpleasant when bad weather is discussed. One simply does not speak about negative things, even if it is just the weather! Politics, religion and sexuality are also subjects that could cause conflict. Addressing the current political situation, human rights and freedom of speech are subjects definitely to be avoided.

Humour can also prove problematic as it is not easily translated between cultures. Language and cultural backgrounds complicate humour in such a way that translations are no longer funny.

In China, personal matters are differently defined from those in Europe. Questions pertaining to age, income, prices of clothing and why someone is not married are commonplace and are not considered to be impolite.

7.2 Non-verbal Communication

Smiling is valued and considered to be a show of friendliness. Stern expressions in contrast are generally considered to be unfriendly. A smile from staff can therefore go a long way in making guests feel welcome. However, Chinese guests expect restraint and caution, as staff are seen as servants and should therefore keep themselves in the background.

The Chinese do not use exaggerated body language. Hands and feet are seldom used in conversation, but because they are knowledgeable about European habits, this should not pose any problems. Any body contact however – although shoving and pushing is common in China's public transport system – should be avoided, except of course for the obligatory shaking of hands. Also, the personal space between people when conversing is much smaller than in the West.

The Chinese generally do not bow. Instead, they shake hands, even though this might not be as widespread as in Europe. Friendly nodding however is very important and is considered as a sign of politeness. As a sign of respect, the Chinese will normally lower their gaze. Eye contact that lasts too long is seen as intrusive and causes them to feel uncomfortable. Traditionally it is considered impolite and aggressive to stare directly at someone. A lack of eye contact should therefore not be seen as dismissive.

Showing emotions in public is considered ignoble. To be able to hide emotions is a virtue. This does not mean that the Chinese have fewer emotions. To save face and so as not to embarrass the other person, emotions – apart from smiling – are not shown externally. This behaviour is expected from others as well.

Generally, Asians recommend that Europeans show more courtesy and empathy. In Asia, there is a greater willingness to take time out to address a guest's needs/wishes. Turning one's back on a Chinese guest should be avoided.

7.3 Guest Complaints

Complaints from Chinese guests differ greatly from those of Europeans. Complaints are played down and are not as direct as those from European guests, but they should never be taken lightly. Whilst the Japanese usually complain after the fact by writing a letter, the Chinese guest will complain directly to the hotel. The initiative to complain however depends very much on the personality of the tour guide. It is therefore vitally important to intensively communicate with the tour guide, so as to identify problems and solve them. As it is difficult to judge whether a guest is really happy or not, it is safer to ask a guest whether all is in order once too often rather than not enough. Should a complaint not be dealt with satisfactorily in the hotel, it will be forwarded to the travel agent, which can have far-reaching consequences for the hotel.

Despite the fact that Chinese guests will show their annoyance in a quiet and respectful manner, it will be noticeable. In this situation it is important to help him save face. This entails apologising immediately, irrespective of where the fault lies. A lack of apology is seen as impolite.

8. Hotel

8.1 Choice of Hotel

The most popular hotels are in the 3–5-star category. Deciding factors are: price, cleanliness, friendliness of staff, big rooms and the breakfast on offer. Distance to the city can also play a role, although hotels outside the city in beautiful surroundings are also popular.

8.2 Welcome and Check-in

The welcome Chinese guests receive is of the utmost importance and should not be neglected. Chinese politeness dictates that each guest is given undivided attention; smiling should be a priority and is the easiest and most effective method of ensuring a satisfied guest.

Although the check-in is handled exclusively by the group's guide, each guest must be heartily welcomed as well. Even though the Chinese do not understand much English, a friendly 'hello and welcome', with a smile, gives the guest a feeling of really being welcome. Simple Chinese phrases can be used by the staff and show an interest in Chinese culture and are very much appreciated. It is the norm to first greet the delegation leader, not his wife first! Although preferential treatment of a woman would leave her feeling embarrassed, the Chinese are familiar with the 'ladies first' principle, and a slip-up in this regard would be tactfully overlooked.

One of the main criteria for choosing a hotel is quick check-in and check-out. As soon as the guests start disembarking from their bus, the guide is already sorting out the room allocations. Once the guests enter the reception area, he should have their room keys in hand and know exactly where the rooms are. Waiting periods are regarded as unpleasant and are to be avoided. Many hotels offer a separate check-in, which will not interfere with other guests.

Should a Chinese guest offer his business card, it should be treated with the greatest of respect, as it reflects the personality of the owner. The card is offered using both hands, writing facing the recipient. In reciprocation, the card should also be accepted using both hands.

Chinese guests are grateful for city maps and guides in their home language. Chinese editions can usually be obtained at large tourist information centres. It is also recommended that the guest be given a small card with the hotel's details, as well as marking the hotel on the guest's city map.

As package tourists have an itinerary planned by the minute, it is not necessary to inform them of any special events going on as they will not be able to change their plans anyway.

Should guests request a newspaper, the *People's Daily* is recommended.

8.3 Room Allocation

When allocating rooms one should bear in mind that in some Chinese regions the number '4' is considered to be unlucky. When pronounced, it sounds very similar to the word 'dead'. A room with the number 444 should therefore not be allocated. One could compare the unlucky connotation of the number 13 in Europe to that of the number 4. Although not all Chinese will mind it, one should try to avoid any potential problems from the start. In contrast, the number '8' is considered to be very lucky, the pronunciation being similar to that of 'flourishing', and therefore associated with wealth. The number '9' is also a positive number and associated with 'long-lasting'. In Europe one says one is in seventh heaven; in China one is in ninth heaven.

It should also be noted that the Chinese count the number of floors differently. The ground floor in Europe is equal to the first floor in Chinese terms. Although the guide usually informs his guests accordingly, it is advisable to double check this with the guests on check-in.

The hierarchical way of thinking in China also dictates the upholding of certain rules. The rooms of all guests travelling in a group should be identical. Those of business travellers should be allocated according to their standing in the company. Anything else would be most unpleasant for the parties involved. This differs from the Japanese way of thinking, where an executive would not be worried about sharing the same floor with a subordinate. The manager of a group will expect to be treated with the necessary respect, which is why it is important to check the hierarchical structure beforehand.

8.4 Room Furnishings

Rooms should at least be of a standard size. Double rooms are booked more frequently as – different to the Japanese – Chinese couples share a double bed. As family travel is on the increase, guests often request rooms with three beds to accommodate children. Delegations should be offered the choice of twin rooms, as the men in a delegation often share a room. These twin beds should be further apart than usual, not right next to one another.

The older Chinese drink large amounts of tea or hot water, which is why kettles should be provided in the room. Thermos flasks are an alternative, although a bad one, as the water is generally not hot enough. Should a kettle facility not be available the hotel should be prepared for an increase in requests for hot water and should definitely provide it.

The minibar must be stocked with still water, as the Chinese drink very little sparkling water and also because they are very hesitant to drink the tap water.

Because the interest in Chinese TV is big and because TV plays a big role in China, this must be catered for. Recommended channels are 'CCTV' and 'Phoenix TV', both of which are available via satellite.

As the Chinese are very brand conscious, give-aways and gifts should be something special and typical of the area/country. Fruit is also very popular with the Chinese. The colour combination black and white should however be avoided, as these symbolise mourning. Purely white bouquets should also be avoided, but white table cloths and bedding are not a problem. Red and green are considered to be pleasant colours as red stands for luck, and green is considered to be the colour of life.

Signage in Chinese goes a long way in minimising the unease guests feel when they do not know their way around. Priority areas would be the breakfast room, toilets and the guest rooms. Chinese brochures on the hotel and its services are gladly accepted and leave a lasting impression.

In contrast to Japanese guests, the Chinese have no problem with only having a shower in their room. A bathtub is therefore not a necessity. However, Chinese guests do expect to find a comb, toothbrush set and slippers in their room. Should these items not be a standard of the hotel, there should at least be a notice advising where these items can be obtained.

Although saunas are becoming more and more popular in China, they are seldom used in hotels and when travelling as guests are usually too tired from the day's programme. However, should they use the sauna, men and women are always kept separate.

9. Eating Habits

Food plays an important role in China, and words of greeting are often: '*Chi fan le ma?*', which means 'Have you eaten already?'. The three daily meals are treated with equal importance, and it does not happen that one 'quickly grabs some food in between'. To leave out a meal is unheard of.

As many Chinese have problems with European cuisine, they prefer Chinese restaurants when overseas. Local specialities are seldom tried because the food is so much richer, and tends to cause gastric discomfort after a couple of days.

When it comes to cooking the Chinese are very demanding. Even original Chinese recipes are of no help, as only a Chinese can truly get the taste right. Hoteliers should therefore, especially when it comes to breakfast, stick to their normal buffet.

Just as it is unthinkable to skip a meal, the agreed-upon eating times are strictly adhered to. This is done not only to accommodate Chinese eating habits, but also so as not to interfere with the tight daily schedule. Experience has shown that Chinese groups come for breakfast between 05h30 and 08h00.

9.1 Etiquette During Meals

The Chinese are said to be keen experimenters when it comes to food. A plate is simply a display on which everything is laid out, which is why one will see fish next to fruit yogurt and similar strange combinations. Plates are usually filled to the brim, and because the Chinese are unfamiliar with European eating habits, tolerance should be shown.

It is not considered rude to eat loudly (with an open mouth), to slurp, burp, talk loudly and smoke, or to clean one's teeth whilst at the table. Talking with a full mouth is also acceptable, as well as swallowing down large bites with tea or even gargling. It is also common to leave indigestible leftovers on the table, e.g. chicken bones are eaten clean and then discarded on the table. Also, due to the composition of Chinese food, there is more waste. Food that falls from the chopsticks onto the table is left there, as it is considered greedy to pick these bits up and eat them.

In European terms Chinese eating habits are definitely not considered to be exemplary, but many tour guides these days advise their guests of the European standards.

9.2 Service

The supplying of chopsticks at meals is seen as a nice gesture, but the meal must then also have been prepared in the appropriate way, i.e. small bite-size chunks that can easily be picked up with chopsticks. At breakfast knives and forks are the most useful. Toothpicks, which are almost always requested, should always be laid out or available upon request.

As the Chinese are unaccustomed to eating large quantities of meat, large meat portions are off-putting to them. Should you want to win them over with local specialities, these should be served in small portions, or laid out on platters containing various meats,

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vegetables and accompaniments that can be passed around. This way everyone can help themselves to what they would like.

Cold dishes are rarely eaten at breakfast or at dinner.

The Chinese are used to eating fast, which is why quick service is a must. Guests are unfamiliar with long waits before, between or after courses, and guests do not linger after having finished their meal. Usually they leave the table immediately after having finished. The practice of relaxing at the table after a meal is unknown.

Waiters are usually shouted for, which is something service staff should get used to. Bills are never split between guests; one person usually pays for everything. The leaving of tips is also unusual for Chinese.

9.3 Breakfast

A breakfast buffet is definite must, as each guest wants to be able to help themselves to as much of everything as possible. A substantial breakfast is of the utmost importance to them, and tour operators often choose a hotel based on the breakfast buffet on offer. The most basic on offer should be a continental breakfast (cold meats, cheese, jam etc.), but should also include a selection of hot dishes. The hot breakfast should not be left out and should include soups, eggs, sausages, bacon and hot drinks. Yoghurt, fruit, cake and bread should not be forgotten. White bread is preferred to wholewheat breads.

- ❖ Breakfast on offer:
Continental
- ❖ Bread:
White bread
- ❖ Cold meats:
Well liked, provide good selection
- ❖ Egg dishes:
Boiled eggs, fried eggs and scrambled eggs should definitely be available
- ❖ Milk produce:
Rarely eaten
- ❖ Hot chicken broth:
Containing vegetables, glass noodles or egg royal
- ❖ Popular beverages:
Milk, juices, still water
- ❖ Tea:
The usual assortment of teas including high quality green teas. Especially popular are oolong teas.

As the Chinese rise very early they are usually the first at breakfast, sometimes as early as 5h30. There is however no need to adjust the standard breakfast times unnecessarily. 6h00 – 8h00 is usually also acceptable. Time spent at breakfast is about 30 minutes.

Many hotels offer their Chinese guests a separate breakfast venue so as not to disturb the other guests with the unusual noises. However, Chinese guests often feel discriminated against because of this. Should a separate venue be required for operational reasons however, the tour guide should be advised in a diplomatic way.

As Chinese groups are often divided into breakfast time slots, it is vital that staff do not begin clearing until they have made sure that the entire group has come in.

9.4 Food and Beverages on Offer

Fish and other seafoods are considered delicacies and are therefore very popular. Beef is unpopular due to the BSE scare, and this includes game meats. The most popular meats are chicken and pork, but all meat served should be prepared and served 'well done'. A clear broth containing egg or vegetables is served with every meal, but creamy soups should be avoided as these are less popular. Guests often bring their own soups that only require hot water to be added.

The most popular drink is tea. An assortment ranging from herbal teas to Ceylon teas is usually sufficient. Green teas in teabags are not ideal and neither are green tea infusions. Once again many Chinese bring their own tea, so that enough hot water should always be available. A lack of hot water is the most common complaint! The provision of hot milk is also appreciated. Apart from tea, coffee is also a popular breakfast beverage. Still water or soft drinks are usually consumed during meals. When it comes to alcohol the Chinese like beer and sweet red wines, and they like to try special liqueurs.

10. Summary of Important Tips

- ❖ Respect the need for the precise travel planning
- ❖ Avoid waiting periods
- ❖ Always provide twin beds
- ❖ Consideration must be shown towards older guests lacking English skills
- ❖ Staff must be flexible and be aware of the need for this

Verbal Communication

- ❖ A trusting relationship must be built up with the tour guide on arrival
- ❖ The tour guide must be given plenty of attention
- ❖ Chinese guests must never be confused with Japanese guests
- ❖ A straight 'no' should never be used. Alternatives must always be offered.
- ❖ The fact should be noted that the surname is mentioned first, e.g. 'Zhang Wengqiang' is Mr. Zhang
- ❖ Indirect communication should be used when speaking to guests
- ❖ Question comments on guest satisfaction
- ❖ Leave enough time for Chinese counterparts to answer
- ❖ Avoid negative subjects
- ❖ Stick to subjects such as family, children, age, income, prices

Non-verbal Communication

- ❖ Smile!
- ❖ Avoid physical contact
- ❖ On greeting, a handshake or nod is sufficient
- ❖ Beware: do not bow!
- ❖ Behave in a reserved and careful manner

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- ❖ Do not force eye contact
- ❖ Do not turn your back on someone
- ❖ Remember differences when counting on fingers

Complaint Behaviour

- ❖ Take every complaint seriously, no matter how meekly it is brought forward
- ❖ Always ensure that the counterpart saves face
- ❖ Immediately and proactively excuse any mishaps

Greeting

- ❖ Advise staff about greeting terminology
- ❖ Treat the highest-ranking person with preference
- ❖ 'Ladies first' does not apply to the Chinese
- ❖ Humour inquisitive behaviour
- ❖ Do not neglect to greet all individuals in a group
- ❖ Be tolerant of unusual behaviour
- ❖ Offer business cards using both hands and with the writing facing the recipient
- ❖ Accept business cards using both hands
- ❖ Offer Chinese newspapers
- ❖ Offer city maps and travel guides in Chinese

Check-in

- ❖ Offer a separate check-in to avoid waiting times
- ❖ Advise guests on how floors are counted

Hotel Interior

- ❖ Check and ensure cleanliness
- ❖ Be aware of the room sizes

Room Interiors

- ❖ Rooms should all be of a standard size
- ❖ Hierarchical structures must be taken into consideration when allocating rooms
- ❖ For groups, sharing rooms must have twin beds
- ❖ Kettles should be available in rooms
- ❖ Minibar to contain only still water
- ❖ If possible, Chinese TV channels should be on offer

Bathroom Interior

- ❖ A comb, toothbrush and slippers should be offered

Colour and Number Knowledge

- ❖ Take the rules for numbering and colours into consideration

Food and Beverages

- ❖ Only offer Chinese foods prepared by a Chinese in the original way
- ❖ Should this not be possible, stick to the menu as it is
- ❖ Offer smaller portions on platters to the whole group simultaneously
- ❖ Offer a substantial breakfast buffet
- ❖ Offer warm breakfasts including broths
- ❖ Offer fewer milk products and more egg dishes
- ❖ Offer a selection of teas
- ❖ Ensure friendly, courteous and quick service
- ❖ Before clearing the buffet ensure that all guests have been served
- ❖ Offer less beef and more chicken and pork, always prepared 'well done'
- ❖ Avoid separating Chinese guests from other guests

Etiquette During Meal Times

- ❖ Be tolerant of lip-smacking, belching and slurping
- ❖ Avoid blowing your nose in public, unless it is done soundlessly
- ❖ Be quick at presenting the bill

Drinks

- ❖ Always have boiling water available
- ❖ Offer Chinese teas and tea bags. Avoid infused green teas.
- ❖ Offer hot milk
- ❖ Beer, sweet red wine and liqueurs

Chinese Phrases

Good day	<i>Nia hao</i>
Good morning	<i>Zao shang hao</i>
Good evening	<i>Wan shang hao</i>
Welcome	<i>Huan ying</i>
Thank you	<i>Xie xie</i>
Please	<i>Qing</i>
See you again	<i>Zai jian</i>
I wish you a pleasant stay	<i>Zhuni vande yokoai</i>
Enjoy your meal	<i>Zhuni hao uei kou</i>
One moment please	<i>Qing shao deng</i>

Chinese Finger Counting

- 1: Index finger
- 2: Index and middle finger
- 3: Middle, ring and little finger together (or thumb, index and middle finger)
- 4: All fingers excluding the thumb
- 5: All fingers
- 6: Thumb and little finger
- 7: Index, middle finger and thumb (the thumb is placed against the index and middle finger so that the finger tips nearly touch)
- 8: Thumb and index finger
- 9: Bent index finger
- 10: Index fingers of both hands crossing each other