

Destination China

Cathay, the Middle Kingdom, the Celestial Empire, a superpower-in-waiting, a nation of 1.3 billion souls: China is the nation on everyone's lips. Descriptions of China 'taking centre stage' and assuming its mantle as the 'powerhouse of the East' litter the global media, and the nation hit the headlines again when it grabbed the largest number of gold medals at the 2008 Olympic Games.

Indeed, China has made the news again and again in recent years. Pressured into honouring its commitments to unfettered internet access during the Games, Běijīng allowed the 'great firewall' to partially come down in August 2008, with the Chinese-language BBC World Service website and other previously forbidden content becoming accessible for the first time. At the time of writing, it was still uncertain whether Běijīng's 30,000-strong force of cybercensors were out of a job or just enjoying a long tea break.

The worst violence for almost 10 years flared in restive Xīnjiāng when Han Chinese policemen were killed in various attacks in the immediate run-up to the Olympics. Similarly, Tibet was out of bounds to foreign travellers for several months in 2008 after the violent riots in Lhasa. Běijīng immediately sought to accentuate its achievements in Tibet while simultaneously closing the doors, sending in troops and complaining bitterly of bias in the Western media.

On the other side of China, a rapprochement with Taiwan was becoming perceptible with the exit of Taiwanese president Chen Shuibian and the return of the Nationalist Party to power. Direct flights from Taipei to Běijīng and Shànghǎi were the first fruits of the thawing in relations.

China was badly rocked in May 2008 by the Sìchuān earthquake, which killed an estimated 70,000 people and flattened entire towns. Běijīng came in for considerable praise for its rapidly mobilised earthquake-relief efforts.

China has also made news with some notable statistics – after all, when the nation runs out of superlatives, it simply generates a few more. The world's fastest intercity train started running in 2008 between Běijīng and Tiānjīn, but even that will be eclipsed in speed within a few years by the Běijīng–Shànghǎi high-speed rail link. China sits on the world's largest foreign-exchange reserves, and it recently overtook the US as the world's largest broadband market. Despite downsizing, the country also has the world's largest standing army (which helps sponge up the world's largest number of permanent bachelors, a by-product of the one-child policy). Eventually finished in 2008, the stratospheric Shanghai World Financial Centre was originally planned to be the world's tallest building. It had to settle for third place behind the Burj Dubai and Taipei 101 but, rising from the Pudong New Area like a vast bottle opener, it remains a striking and monumental edifice.

But, although these achievements are impressive, any seasoned China traveller will tell you that they're not particularly useful yardsticks for quantifying today's China. If you want your China experience to be all Christian Dior boutiques, Bentley showrooms and glistening skyscrapers, by all means make your choice and be suitably wowed. But this is only a small part of the picture.

A purely random trawl through China turns up something very different, but considerably more fascinating. Běijīng and Shànghǎi are brimming with self-confidence, but if you wander a few miles from either city you'll be reminded that China remains a largely agricultural nation, with its economy – measured by per-capita wealth – roughly in the same league as

FAST FACTS

Population: 1.3 billion

GDP per capita: \$5870

Adult literacy: 91%

Number of mobile phones: 500 million

Major exports: textiles, clothing, footwear, toys and machinery

Religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity

Number of Chinese characters: more than 56,000

Most strokes in a Chinese character: 57

Namibia. As many as 500 million rural Chinese do not have access to clean drinking water, while Guizhōu province – with a population of almost 40 million – has a per-capita GDP that's one-tenth of Shànghǎi's.

Even short trips around the nation reveal China as a gigantic work in progress, caught somewhere between the 1950s and the early 21st century. The fruits of the economic boom are tangible and easy to assess, but on other development indicators – take democracy, human rights, education, health care, the rule of law, intellectual-property rights and the environment, to name a few – China is either making negligible progress or moving backwards.

Railways to Tibet, Bird's Nest Stadiums and huge dams are all momentous achievements, but they give a disjointed and misleading impression of modern China. By encouraging Chinese immigration to Lhasa, the Tibet railway – an admirable work of engineering purpose, for sure – may have contributed to the anti-Han riots that killed more than 20 people in 2008. The Bird's Nest Stadium – a magnificent piece of architecture and the setting for China's greatest sporting triumphs – was designed by Ai Weiwei, an artist who is an outspoken critic of China's government. The Three Gorges Dam (p812), for so long trumpeted as a triumph, is equally a symbol of Běijīng's ability to impose itself on its population, regardless of dissenting voices. In a nutshell, there are two sides to each story in China.

China's heritage has also been battered by the paroxysms of change. Linguists are wringing their hands at the inevitable demise of the once glorious Manchu language, now spoken natively by fewer than 20 old-timers huddled away in China's slow-moving northeast. But in Shànghǎi, heritage aficionados were elated when Waibaidu Bridge was whisked away for a clean-up, part of a massive spruce-up for the Bund.

On another nostalgic note, the Hénán village of Nánjiē – China's last surviving bastion of collectivisation – succumbed to bankruptcy in 2008 after accumulating debts of over one billion yuán. It emerged that the Maoist collective had been less motivated by Marxist-Leninist goals than bankrolled by the Agricultural Bank of China. It would be hard to find a more fitting symbol for the contradictions of contemporary communist China.

At the heart of this momentous transformation – the most dramatic in China's history – are the Chinese people. Despite the rebellious paroxysms of the 20th century, they are deeply pragmatic. They are respectful and fearful of authority, so you won't see any antigovernment graffiti. You won't see speakers standing on soap boxes to vent their political views (unless they chime with government opinion). Instead, most Chinese keep their heads down and work hard for a living. This continues to create a country that is increasingly wealthy, for sure, but one that is widely considered intellectually stifled.

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Getting Started

China – a country catering to each and every budget – could be the journey of your lifetime, and hitting the ground running with a bit of homework and preparation can save you much hassle. But first things first: take a long, hard look at the map of China and envisage what kind of experience you want your China trip to be. The world's third-largest country, China has a daunting topographical diversity, so turn to p6 and p28 for inspiration. In terms of restraints, the only part of China you should need to carefully plan is Tibet, as bureaucratic obstacles, travel restrictions and health issues will require consideration, although in 2008 parts of other provinces adjoining Tibet (eg west Sichuān, north Yúnnán and Qinghǎi) were also periodically inaccessible.

WHEN TO GO

Travel to China is possible year-round, as long as you're prepared for what the season can throw at you. Spring (March to May) and autumn (September to early November) can be the best times to be on the road, as you avoid the blistering heat of summer (June to August) and stinging chill of winter (November to February/March). Autumn in Běijīng, for example, is particularly pleasant, as are early spring and autumn in Hong Kong. Summer is the busiest tourist season, and getting around and finding accommodation during the peak summer crush can be draining.

Northern China is hot and often dry in summer, with occasional dramatic downpours in northern cities such as Běijīng. The Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) region is very hot and humid, and southern China, with a coastline harassed by typhoons, also swelters. Rain rarely falls in quantities that can disrupt travel plans, except on the southern coastline during the typhoon season. Shànghǎi sees some epic summer rainstorms that transform roads to rivers within minutes.

Winter is the low season (except for Hàinán) and can be the quietest time of year, but while Hong Kong in winter is comfortably nippy, northern China is a frozen expanse, especially in the northeast, northwest and Inner Mongolia; precipitation is generally low. Wintering in clement central and southern Yúnnán province is enjoyable, but the higher altitude in the north of the province is frigid. Winter is inadvisable (and often dangerous) for travel to high-altitude areas in China such as west Sichuān, although summer visits to high-lying areas such as Qinghǎi and parts of Tibet can be recommended.

The major public holiday periods can make travel stressful, with crowded-out sights. Travelling China's transport network during the Chinese New Year (p948) can be overwhelming, but you also get to see the country at its most colourful and entertaining. Hotel rates (see the boxed text, p27) skyrocket during the May Day holiday (now a three-day holiday from 1 May) and National Day holiday period (one week, starting on 1 October), when train tickets can be difficult to procure.

COSTS & MONEY

The days when China was fantastically cheap are long gone. However, China can be either far cheaper or far more expensive than the West, depending not only on where you go, but how you spend your money: simply knowing where and how to travel according to your budget allows you to live well within your means.

See Climate Charts (p943) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- checking the visa situation (p957)
- consulting travel advisory bureaux
- checking on your recommended vaccinations (p978)
- a copy of your travel insurance policy details (p950)
- reading matter for epic bus and train journeys
- picking up some sustainable travel tips (p96) and cancelling the milk
- a sense of adventure

The most expensive destinations are Běijīng, Shànghǎi, Hong Kong, Macau, Guǎngzhōu, the eastern coastal provinces and the Special Economic Zones (SEZ). Běijīng and Shànghǎi especially can be intolerably dear. Hong Kong has become an extremely pricey destination, but if you stay in dormitories and eat budget meals, you can survive – just – on around HK\$300 per day. For anything approaching comfort double that figure. Macau is generally cheaper than Hong Kong, though prices do rise on weekends and, in the case of hotels, the rise can be sharp.

Look around, get savvy and acquire a sense of where locals shop. Quickly try to get a sense of proportion; be sensible and cautious about where you shop and what you buy. Learn to haggle and avoid scams (p946). Even Běijīng and Shànghǎi can be cheap if you're shrewd and careful.

Staying in dormitories, travelling by bus or bicycle rather than taxi, eating from street stalls or small restaurants, refraining from buying anything and resisting the urge to splurge means it is possible to live on less than Y140 per day. Accommodation will take the largest chunk, but in cities where dormitory accommodation is either unavailable or booked out, you may have to settle for accommodation with rates from Y140 for a double or a single.

Western China, southwestern China and the interior remain relatively inexpensive. Popular backpacker getaways, such as Yúnnán, Sìchuān, Guǎngxī, Guìzhōu, Húnán, Gānsù, Xīnjiāng, Qīnghǎi and Tibet, abound in budget accommodation and cheap eats. Youth hostels are becoming increasingly widespread, and family guesthouses and homestays (农家; *nóngjiā*) are always good value.

Food costs remain reasonable throughout China. In the cheaper western provinces you can eat for under Y25 per day; in the more expensive regions, figure on at least Y40 to Y70 per day. Transport costs can be kept low by travelling 'hard seat' on the train or by bus, but bus ticket prices have begun to rapidly increase in line with oil price hikes. Travel by hard sleeper is very good value and doubles as a good-value hotel. Flying in China is, of course, more expensive, but discounting is the norm and those with less time will find it indispensable for covering vast distances.

Midrange hotel doubles start at around Y240 and you can eat in midrange restaurants from around Y35. Midrange comfort – decent accommodation and food, local transport and admission to important sights – can be bought in China for around Y500 a day, making it neither a very cheap nor an exorbitant way to see the land.

Top-end travel in China? Five-star double-room rack rates can reach Y2000 a night in the big cities, and you can expect to pay upwards of Y800 for a meal at one of Běijīng or Shànghǎi's best restaurants.

HOW MUCH?

500mL bottle of mineral water Y2

International Herald Tribune from a five-star hotel Y24

City bus ticket Y1-2

Hour in an internet cafe Y2-4

City map Y4-6



TOP MOVIES

Some cinematic homework is a sure way to hit the ground running in China. The country's film genres sprawl from energetic Hong Kong *wǔdǎpiàn* (kung fu), violence and slapstick, through the decadent excesses of the mainland fifth generation to the sombre palette of the sixth generation and beyond.

- 1 *Hero* (2004) Director: Zhang Yimou
- 2 *The Painted Veil* (2007) Director: John Curran
- 3 *The Banquet* (2006) Director: Feng Xiaogang
- 4 *Infernal Affairs* (2002) Directors: Lau Waikung and Mak Siufai
- 5 *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) Director: Zhang Yimou
- 6 *Chungking Express* (1994) Director: Wong Kar Wai
- 7 *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) Director: Stephen Chow
- 8 *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) Director: Wang Xiaoshuai
- 9 *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (1995) Directors: Richard Gordon and Carma Hinton
- 10 *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) Director: Chen Kaige

TOP READS

Getting some paperwork done can also gear you up for your China trip, so try some of the following, penned by Chinese and non-Chinese authors.

- 1 *Mr China: A Memoir* (2005) Tim Clissold
- 2 *Mao: The Unknown Story* (2005) Jung Chang and Jon Halliday
- 3 *Village of Stone* (2005) Guo Xiaolu
- 4 *The Uninvited* (2007) Yan Geling
- 5 *The Writing on the Wall: China and the West in the 21st Century* (2007) Will Hutton
- 6 *The Tiananmen Papers* (2001) Compiled by Zhang Liang; edited by Andrew J Nathan and Perry Link
- 7 *Sky Burial* (2005) Xinran
- 8 *Beijing Coma* (2008) Ma Jian
- 9 *The Rape of Nanking* (1998) Iris Chang
- 10 *The Republic of Wine* (2001) Mo Yan

TOP TEMPLES

China's far-flung temple brood can have your compass spinning as fast as your head, but ease the way and pick from this definitive list of top shrines.

- 1 Lama Temple (p141), Běijīng
- 2 Jokhang Temple (p922), Lhasa
- 3 Temple of Heaven (p135), Běijīng
- 4 Confucius Temple (p216), Qūfù
- 5 Puning Temple (p191), Chéngdé
- 6 Kumbum Monastery (p905), Huángzhōng
- 7 Tashilhunpo Monastery (p931), Shigatse
- 8 Dai Temple (p207), Tà'ān
- 9 Labrang Monastery (p856), Xiàhé
- 10 Dafo Temple (p184), Zhèngdìng

HOTEL ROOM RATES

Rack rates are quoted for hotels in this book, although generally the only time you will pay the full rate is during the major holiday periods, namely the first three days of May and the first week of October. At other times, you can expect to receive discounts ranging between 10% and 50%. This does not generally apply to youth hostels, budget guesthouses or express lower-midrange hotels such as Motel 168 or Home Inn, which tend to have set rates (although weekend and weekday rates can differ).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

A vivid and gritty account of his penniless three-year meandering around China in the 1980s, *Red Dust: A Path Through China* (2001) by Ma Jian traces the author's flight from the authorities in Běijīng to the remotest corners of the land.

Author Sun Shuyun follows in the footsteps of 7th-century Buddhist monk Xuanzang (who trekked to India from China to return with bundles of Sutras), setting off along the Silk Road from Xi'an in her absorbing *Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud* (2003). Ideal reading matter for travellers doing the northwest.

River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze (2001) by Peter Hessler is full of poignant and telling episodes from the author's posting as an English teacher in the town of Fúling on the Yangzi River. Hessler perfectly captures the experience of being a foreigner in today's China in his observations of the local people.

Fried Eggs with Chopsticks (2005) by Polly Evans, an occasionally hilarious account of travel around this huge country, is a good companion for those long, long bus journeys.

The Hotel on the Roof of the World: Five Years in Tibet (2001) by Alec le Sueur is a highly amusing account of running a hotel in Lhasa.

INTERNET RESOURCES

China Culture Center (www.chinaculturecenter.org) Běijīng-based outfit with tours around Běijīng and China plus China-related lectures.

China Minority Travel (www.china-travel.nl) Offers tailor-made trips to south China and Tibet.

China Today (www.chinatoday.com) Reams of info on China.

Learn Chinese with the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk/languages/chinese) A very useful introduction to learning Mandarin Chinese, with video.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Useful summaries on travelling through China, plus tips from travellers on the Thorn Tree Travel Forum.

WildChina (www.wildchina.com) Far-flung treks around China, organised within China. Monthly email newsletter.

Zhongwen: Chinese Characters and Culture (www.zhongwen.com) Includes a Pinyin chat room and an online dictionary of Chinese characters.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

SOUTHWEST TOUR

Two to Four Weeks / Hong Kong to Yúnnán

Four days in **Hong Kong** (p522) and **Macau** (p561) will prime you for deeper forays into China proper, with a night or two in **Guǎngzhōu** (p581) for the city and its surrounding sights. Then get on a sleeper train or bus to **Guilín** (p634) and a boat trip to famed **Yángshuò** (p641), where it's easy to be seduced into long stays. Jump on the daily bus to delightful **Huángyáo** (p647) before backtracking to Guilín and hopping on a bus to the **Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces** (p640) and **Sānjiāng** (p641) for its spectacular blend of scenery and minority villages. If you have time, incursions over the border into minority-rich **Guizhōu** (p658) are tempting diversions. Onward travel from Guilín to **Kūnmíng** (p681) by train or plane allows you to spend a few days there before flying or taking the bus northwest to **Dàlǐ** (p699) and from there on to **Lǐjiāng** (p704). Alternatively, fly or take the bus to the fertile **Xishuāngbǎnnà region** (p734) south of Kūnmíng, where an abundance of hiking opportunities around China's southwest borders rounds off your tour.

You'll be journeying to some of China's most alluring destinations on this 2000km tour, which takes in key landscape panoramas and ethnic-minority areas. The journey can be done in a whistle-stop few weeks, but a month will give you time to savour the region.



HISTORY TOUR

Three to Four Weeks / Běijīng to Dūnhuáng

Five days in **Běijīng** (p116) should just about do for its top sights, from the **Great Wall** (p167) to the **Forbidden City** (p137) and the **Summer Palace** (p145). Take the bus or train to **Dàtóng** (p398) in Shānxī to admire the Buddhist magnificence of the **Yungang Caves** (p401) outside town. Hop on a bus from Dàtóng to the Buddhist mountain of **Wútái Shān** (p402) and spend several days here before bussing it to **Tàiyuán** (p404), en route to the old walled town of **Píngyáo** (p407). A detour east by train from Tàiyuán to **Shìjiāzhuāng** (p181) and the charming temple town of **Zhèngdīng** (p184) north of the city is feasible. From Tàiyuán or Shìjiāzhuāng take the train south to Zhèngzhōu and on to the historic walled city of **Kāifēng** (p470), traditional home of China's Jews, before heading west by train to the former dynastic capital of **Luòyáng** (p462) and the magnificent Buddhist spectacle of the **Longmen Caves** (p465). Take the train west again from Luòyáng to **Xī'ān** (p415) for four days of sightseeing in the former capital of the Tang dynasty, visiting the **Army of Terracotta Warriors** (p423) and clambering up the Taoist mountain of **Huà Shān** (p428). Xī'ān traditionally marked the start of the Silk Road and the **Mogao Caves** (p866) outside **Dūnhuáng** (p864) – reachable by train from Xī'ān via Lánzhōu or by plane – are one of the trade route's most spectacular marvels. Return to Běijīng by plane from either Xī'ān or Dūnhuáng.



For many travelers, this tour is what China is all about. Traveling 2500km, you will be visiting the major imperial monuments and religious sites of northern China. The trip is manageable in three weeks, but a month-long tour would allow for a more relaxed expedition.

COASTAL HIGHLIGHTS & TREATY PORTS TOUR

Four Weeks /
Beijing to Macau

Having toured **Běijīng** (p116), take the train to **Tiānjīn** (p175) and spend a day wandering around its historic collection of European-style buildings. From Tianjin jump on the train for at least two days in breezy **Qīngdǎo** (p220), the port city in Shāndōng province that has been brewing up China's best-known beer (Tsingtao; p225) since 1903. From Qingdao take the overnight train to **Jǐ'nán** (p203) and seek out the earthy charms of the Ming and Qing dynasty village of **Zhūjiāyù** (p206). From Jǐ'nán continue by train to booming **Shànghǎi** (p233) – but do stop off in **Tà'ān** (p207) to climb **Tài Shān** (p210) if your legs can handle it. Spend three days touring Shànghǎi's intoxicating blend of old European-style buildings and dashing modern architecture before taking in day trips to the gardens and temples of **Sūzhōu** (p289) and the canal scenes of **Tónglǐ** (p297), **Lùzhí** (p297) and **Zhūjiājiǎo** (p275). Also consider joining pilgrims taking the bus/ferry from Shànghǎi to the Buddhist island of **Pǔtuóshān** (p323), insular home of the goddess Guanyin. From Shànghǎi take the train (or from Pǔtuóshān take the ferry/bus) to **Hángzhōu** (p305) for several days in the historic capital of Zhèjiāng. Then board the overnight sleeper to coastal **Xiàmén** (p333) for two days exploring the pleasant port city and admiring the gorgeous, historic European architecture and charm of sleepy **Gǔlàng Yǔ** (p337). If you have time, make a trip to **Yǒngdīng County** (p339) to spend the night in a Hakka *túlóu* (roundhouse) and a day or so exploring the surrounding countryside. An inevitable conclusion to this loop along the coast comes with three days in **Hong Kong** (p522), perched on the south of Guǎngdōng, with the Chinese-Portuguese heritage of **Macau** (p561) a short boat trip away.

One of China's most fascinating journeys, this four-week, 3000km trip down the eastern flank of the country takes in the coast's major highlights and historic maritime towns, including the must-see sights of Qīngdǎo, Sūzhōu and Hángzhōu.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

QĪNGHĀI TO SĪCHUĀN

One Week / **Xīníng to Chéngdū**

Skirt the flanks of Tibet on your way from **Xīníng** (p902) to **Chéngdū** (p749) in Sichuān. The scenery en route is magnificent and perfect for a more extreme China experience – but do this trip only in summer (it can be dangerously cold even in spring), and take cash and lots of food with you (you won't be able to change money or cash travellers cheques). Be prepared for wild dogs, bus breakdowns, irregular transport connections and spartan accommodation. You can jump on a 14-hour sleeper bus (Yùshù's airport is due to open in 2009–10) from Xīníng to the Tibetan trading town of **Yùshù** (Jyekundo; p909) in the south of Qīnghǎi, which stages a marvellous annual three-day horse festival starting on 25 July. Spend several days visiting the surrounding monasteries and exploring the deeply Tibetan disposition of the region and its valleys. Trips south into Tibet are feasible but tricky without permits (p913). Hop on a minibus to **Xiēwǔ** (Zhiwu; p912) and continue east to **Sěrxu Dzong** (Shíqú; p784) in northwest Sichuān, then on to **Sěrxu** (Shíqú Xiàn; p784), where bus connections run through some stunning scenery all the way to **Kāngdīng** (Dardo; p772), via **Manigango** (Yùlóng; p781) and **Gānzǐ** (Ganze; p780). Continue along the Sichuān–Tibet Highway by bus to Kāngdīng and then on to Chéngdū.



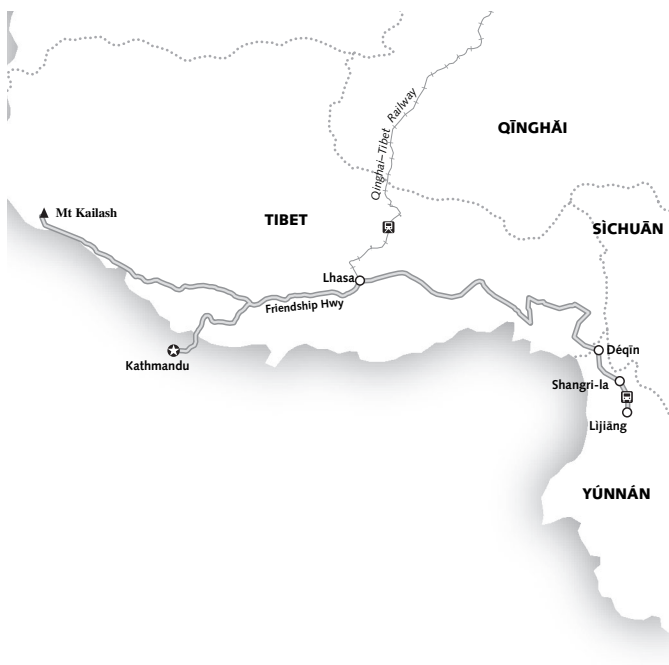
Traversing the wilds of western China, this spectacular overland 1000km tour takes you into Sichuān through Qīnghǎi's mountainous back door. The trip is manageable in one week, but allow more time for unforeseen complications.

YÚNNÁN INTO TIBET

Eight Days / Lijiang to Lhasa

Kick off this trip walking **Tiger Leaping Gorge** (p713), north of gorgeous **Lijiang** (p704), before taking the bus to **Shangri-la** (Zhōngdiàn; p718), where your adventure proper begins. This epic, once-in-a-lifetime journey takes you from Shangri-la (Tibetan name: Gyalthang) through Tibet's breathtaking landscape of valleys, mountains and villages. Note that this trip can become unviable if foreign access to Tibet is suddenly restricted (as occurred in 2008). You'll need a minimum of eight days for the trip, and the optimum months for travel are late spring (April and May) and autumn (September and October); winter is definitely out, as the route crosses half a dozen passes over 4500m. Embark on this journey only if you are in good health (medical facilities en route are basic) and ensure you read the Health chapter for information on acute mountain sickness (p983). Joining a tour (which can arrange all the necessary permits, vehicle, driver and guide for you) is the best and safest way, as individual travel through Tibet is not permitted. Several outfits in Shangri-la (p722) can make all the necessary arrangements. Your first stop after Shangri-la is **Déqin** (Dechen; p723) before reaching southeastern Tibet's Chamdo Prefecture. You'll then continue your journey through Tibet's stunning scenery via towns such as Pasho, Pomi and Bayi; the picturesque lake Rawok-tso is a highlight. From **Lhasa** (p920), you then have numerous options, including continuing on to Kathmandu on the **Friendship Hwy** (p929), heading to western Tibet to trek sacred **Mt Kailash** (p936), or taking the **Qinghai-Tibet Railway** (p926) back into China proper.

This enticing 1000km overland adventure takes you from south-west China into Tibet through some of China's most spectacular scenery. Concluding in Lhasa (with numerous onward options), the tour is second to none for those seeking a more exploratory taste of China.



TAILORED TRIPS

CHINA'S TRADITIONAL VILLAGES

For barrel loads of rusticity, start this bucolic tour with a visit to **Chuāndìxià** (p173) outside Běijīng before journeying to the unspoiled village of **Zhūjiāyù** (p206) in Shāndōng. From Jǐ'nán voyage west to the ancient stony hamlet of **Yújiācūn** (p186) in Héběi before popping down south to the high-altitude, tranquil village of **Guóliàngcūn** (p469) in Hénán, but pack a torch for power cuts and an easel and canvas for the views. You're literally spoiled for choice in southern Ānhuī, where a cluster of irresistible villages – **Hóngcūn** (p442), **Xidi** (p441), **Nánpíng** (p442), **Guānlù** (p442) and **Yúliáng** (p444) – vie for your attention. Just across the border in northeastern Jiāngxī, the villages surrounding **Wùyuan** (p496), including **Little Likeng** (p499), **Xiǎoqí** (p500) and **Qīnghuá** (p498), lie embedded in some of China's most idyllic scenery. Also in Jiāngxī, the trinity of small villages around **Luótiāncūn** (p492) makes a great escape from drab Nánchāng. Don't forget to also explore the magnificent fortified villages of **Lóngnán** (p501), as well as the Hakka *tūlóu* of **Yǒngdīng County** (p339) in Fújiàn. To the west, Húnán abounds with minority villages and towns, from **Déhāng** (p515) to riverine **Fēnghuáng** (p516), and intrepid explorers could even make the long trip to the isolated Tujia village of **Yúmùzhài** (p487) in the far-off southwestern corner of Húběi. Continue west to the ancient town of **Làngzhōng** (p771) in Sìchuān before rounding off your trip by seeking out the 600-year-old village of **Dāngjiācūn** (p430) outside Háchéng in Shaanxi.



CHINA'S SACRED SITES

Follow the temple trail around **Běijīng** (p116) and journey to **Chéngdé** (p187) to be amazed by the divine statue of Guanyin in **Puning Temple** (p191). Travel southwest to the Buddhist mountain of **Wútái Shān** (p402) for its constellation of Buddhist shrines, before voyaging southeast to **Zhèngdīng** (p184) for a lazy stroll around its pagodas and temples. East in Shāndōng rises massive **Tài Shān** (p210), China's most sacred Taoist peak, overlooking magnificent **Dai Temple** (p207). The Buddhist Goddess of Compassion (p325) dwells on **Pǔtuóshān** (p323). Rising up from Hénán province, **Sōng Shān** (p459) is home to the renowned **Shaolin Temple** (p459) and its warrior monks. Outside **Luòyáng** (p462), the Buddhist **Longmen Caves** (p465) draw both the devout and sightseers, while in Shaanxi, **Xī'ān** (p415), famed for its Tang dynasty pagodas, is the gateway to Taoist **Huà Shān** (p428). Martial arts students can immerse themselves in the Taoist mysteries of **Wūdāng Shān** (p483) to the southeast, while **Éméi Shān** (p763), in Sìchuān to the southwest, is one of China's most celebrated Buddhist peaks. The world's largest Buddha sits at nearby **Lěshān** (p767). In the far west rises Tibet, with its unique and idiosyncratic Buddhist traditions, exemplified by **Jokhang Temple** (p922), **Barkhor** (p921), **Potala Palace** (p922), **Samye Monastery** (p929) and **Tashilhunpo Monastery** (p931) in **Shigatse** (p930).



SUPERLATIVE TOUR

China abounds with superlatives, from the world's highest lake to the planet's largest statue of Buddha. Kick off your trip in **Hong Kong** (p522), where you can take a ride on the **Mid-Levels Escalator** (p537), the world's longest escalator. East along the coast, **Shànghǎi** (p233) inevitably has a crop of superlatives: the stunning **Jinmao Tower** (p253) contains the world's longest laundry chute and the world's tallest atrium, both in the **Grand Hyatt** (p262), the world's highest hotel above ground level. A journey by boat from **Chóngqíng** (p796) – by some estimates the world's largest city – through the **Three Gorges** (p809) gets you up close to the biggest **dam** (p812) in the

world, while a trip to **Běijīng** (p116) brings you to the world's largest public square – **Tiananmen Square** (p130) – and the world's longest fortification, the **Great Wall** (p167). Head to **Chéngdé** (p187) to gaze at the world's largest wooden statue in **Puning Temple** (p191) and size up the world's largest Buddha at **Lěshān** (p768). If you get as far as **Ürümqi** (p819), make a note that you're in the world's furthest city from the sea. Naturally **Tibet** (p915) has a few choice superlatives, including the **Qinghai-Tibet Railway** (p926), the world's highest railway; **Nam-tso Lake** (p928), the highest lake in the world; and **Mt Everest** (p933), the world's highest mountain.



WORLD HERITAGE SITES

China has 37 Unesco World Heritage Sites; **Běijīng** (p116) alone has the **Forbidden City** (p137), the **Summer Palace** (p145), the **Temple of Heaven** (p135) and, outside the city, the **Great Wall** (p167), the **Ming Tombs** (p171) and the **Eastern Qing Tombs** (p172). En route to the Manchu **Imperial Palace** (p352) in **Shěnyáng** (p351), stop off in **Chéngdé** (p187) to admire the **Bishū Shānzhuāng** (p189) and the **Eight Outer Temples** (p190). The quaint town of **Píngyáo** (p407) is a charming snapshot of old China. Also in Shānxī, the **Yungang Caves** (p401) have – like the **Mogao Caves** (p866), the **Longmen Caves** (p465) and the **Dàzú County grotto art** (p806) – the most important array of Buddhist carvings in China. In Shāndōng the Taoist mountain of **Tài Shān** (p210) and the hometown of Confucius, **Qūfú** (p214), are places of national veneration. China's most picturesque peak is surely **Huáng Shān**

(p445), but there are other mountains, including **Eméi Shān** (p763) and **Qīngchéng Shān** (p761), and the European charms of **Lúshān** (p493). The classic gardens of **Sūzhōu** (p289) are a picturesque tableau, but if you want rugged and scenic getaways, explore **Jiūzhàigōu** (p791), **Wúlíngyuán** (p511), **Huánglóng** (p790) or **Wúyí Shān** (p346). The **Historic Centre of Macau** (p567) brings a charming Portuguese flavour to your trip; **Hóngcūn** (p442) and **Xidi** (p441) are both beautiful villages; **Lǐjiāng** (p704) remains lovely; the fortified residences of **Kāipíng** (p597) are unique; and the Hakka **tǔlóu** of **Yǒngdīng County** (p339) are magnificent. The whole of Tibet to the northwest deserves to be a World Heritage Site; for now only the **Potala Palace** (p922) in Lhasa gets on the list.



The Authors



DAMIAN HARPER

Coordinating Author, Shànghǎi, Jiāngsū, Zhèjiāng, Húnán, Cruising the Yangzi

Damian first reached China in 1992 by way of a Chinese degree at London's School of Oriental Studies. Since then he has lived for several years in Shànghǎi, shackled up in a Běijīng *sihéyuàn* (courtyard house), reached the Tàishān summit three times, grappled with the Cantonese dialect in Hong Kong, and experienced the best and worst of China's hotels while developing a formidable tolerance for long-distance bus journeys. Married with two children, Damian has been authoring Lonely Planet books (*China, China's Southwest, Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong*) for over a decade. He also wrote *Discover China, Destination China, Getting Started, Itineraries, Environment, Directory, Transport and Glossary*.



CHUNG WAH CHOW

Guǎngdōng, Xīnjiāng

Born and bred in Hong Kong, Chung Wah first visited the home of her ancestors in Guǎngdōng, China, when she was four. Since then she has been a frequent visitor to the mainland, and during an expedition to its wild west in college she became obsessed with discovering new sounds and words. She later travelled the Silk Road from Istanbul to Xīnjiāng, where the Turkish she picked up helped more than once, and researched how Sanskrit Buddhist scripts transformed to poetic Chinese verse. When not travelling, she is a freelance writer and translator in Hong Kong, where she enjoys the island's dim sum. She has contributed to Lonely Planet's *Hong Kong & Macau*.



DAVID EIMER

Liáoníng, Hēilóngjiāng, Jílín, Shaanxi (Shǎnxì)

David travelled to China for the first time in 1988, a time when both Westerners and cars were in short supply. After reading law at university, he abandoned the idea of becoming a barrister in favour of the peripatetic life of a freelance journalist. A five-year stint in Los Angeles was followed by a return to his home town of London, where he became increasingly intrigued by events in China. He moved to Běijīng in early 2005, where he writes for a variety of newspapers and magazines, including the *Sunday Telegraph* and *South China Morning Post*; he is also the coauthor of Lonely Planet's *Beijing and Shànghǎi* guides. David wrote the Cinema section for the Culture chapter.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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CAROLYN B HELLER

Sichuān, Chóngqìng

Born and raised in the USA, Carolyn studied Mandarin in earnest when she relocated to Vancouver, British Columbia – home to some of North America's best Chinese restaurants. An avid traveller and passionate food lover who has eaten on the streets, in fine restaurants and everywhere in between in nearly 40 countries, she recently completed her fifth extended trip to China. She currently enjoys Canadian expat life with her husband and daughters, and is the author of the expats' guide *Living Abroad in Canada*. She has also written for publications ranging from the *Boston Globe*, *Zagat Survey* and *Los Angeles Times* to *FamilyFun* magazine and *SmarterTravel.com*. This is her fourth book for Lonely Planet.



THOMAS HUHTI

Guìzhōu, Yúnnán

Thomas hails from Wisconsin in the USA and still calls it home when he's not slogging around with a backpack somewhere else. A linguistics major in university, he chanced upon Mandarin while fleeing the pesky grammar of Indo-European languages. A semester abroad was followed by a two-year language-and-research stint (with lots of travel!) in Taiwan and the PRC. He spent five years bumming around as a freelancer before joining Lonely Planet. This is his sixth tour for *China*; he also coauthored *Southwest China*. He would always rather be playing ice hockey or tromping through forests with his better half, Yuki, and his yellow lab, Bobo.



ROBERT KELLY

Hāinán, Qīnghǎi, Tibet

Ever since he learned that his dad's airline job meant he could fly for peanuts, Robert has been travelling. He first landed in China in the mid-'80s and has popped around Asia ever since, eventually settling down 12 years ago in Taiwan, where he writes children's stories, leads hikes and attempts to make the perfect cup of oolong tea. Though his Taiwanese-Mandarin accent strikes many mainlanders as, well, a little sissified, Robert can bark at errant taxi drivers with the best of them. *China 11* is his fourth title for Lonely Planet.



MICHAEL KOHN

Gānsù, Níngxià, Inner Mongolia

Michael is a Silk Road addict and has spent the past 10 years traipsing along various sections of the ancient caravan route from Xi'an to the Mediterranean. An expert on Mongolia, he enjoys exploring remote bits of northern China to uncover the legacies of Genghis Khan and his unruly hordes. He joined Lonely Planet in 2003 and has worked on more than 10 titles, including *Central Asia*, *Mongolia* and *Tibet*. Michael's work frequently appears on the BBC World Service and AFP wires, and he is also the author of *Dateline Mongolia: An American Journalist in Nomad's Land*, which describes his travels in northern China and Mongolia.



DANIEL McCROHAN

Shānxī, Húběi, Guǎngxī

Daniel's writing career kicked off with a seven-year spell in London as a news and sports journalist before his first taste of China – as a backpacker in 2004 – proved too delicious to ignore. Having decided there was more to life than interviewing footballers, Daniel upped sticks and moved to Běijīng, where he has lived ever since. He now splits his time between studying Chinese, teaching English and travel writing, the last of which has dragged him – and his trusty rucksack – across more than two-thirds of the country's provinces.



MIN DAI

Běijīng, Tiānjīn & Héběi, Fújiàn, Hénán

A Shāndōng native, Min Dai studied for a degree in English at Beijing Normal University before moving to the big smoke (London) in the mid-1990s. Although she's lived in Singapore and Hong Kong, and completed further spells in the big smoke (Běijīng), she still calls London home, despite an aversion to Marmite, Worcestershire Sauce, and fish and chips. Married with two children, Min Dai worked on the last edition of Lonely Planet's *China*.



CHRISTOPHER PITTS

Shāndōng, Ānhuī, Jiāngxī

Chris was first drawn to China after reading a collection of Tang poetry one blustery winter night on the Appalachian Trail. He went on to study Chinese literature at Colorado College, and then in Kūnmíng and Táinán, interspersing his years abroad with working for a publisher in Berkeley. He now works as a freelance editor, translator and writer in Paris, where he lives with his family, Perrine, Elliot and Céleste. Christopher also wrote the Culture chapter.



ANDREW STONE

Hong Kong, Macau

Andrew lived in Hong Kong in 2000 and 2001, where he made leafy Lamma island his base for exploring the city and nearby regions. He returns every year to research articles and guidebooks – and to get a fix of the city's amazing energy and cuisine.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

David Andrew's passion for wildlife and wildlife-watching has led him to study and write about the subject in all corners of the globe. As a biologist he has studied giant pandas in southwest China and seabirds in Antarctica, and as an author he has written or cowritten all five of Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife* series. He was the founding editor of Birds Australia's *Wingspan* magazine and a former editor of *Wildlife Australia*; he has also travelled to and written about wildlife and ecotourism in places as diverse as Madagascar, the Galápagos Islands, Borneo and New Guinea. David wrote the Environment chapter.

Dr Trish Batchelor is a general practitioner and travel-medicine specialist who works at the CIWEC Clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as being a medical advisor to the Travel Doctor New Zealand clinics. Trish teaches travel medicine through the University of Otago, and is interested in underwater and high-altitude medicine, and in the impact of tourism on host countries. She has travelled extensively through Southeast and East Asia, and particularly loves high-altitude trekking in the Himalayas. She wrote the Health chapter.

Kerry Brown is senior fellow on the Asia Programme at Chatham House, London. Educated at Cambridge University, he worked in Inner Mongolia before joining the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. He served as first secretary, Běijīng, and as head of the Indonesia East Timor Section. He completed a PhD at Leeds University in modern Chinese language and politics in 2004. His *Struggling Giant: China in the 21st Century* was published in June 2007, and he is currently working on a history of the Communist Party of China. Kerry wrote the Economy boxed text in the Culture chapter.

Zoe Li left her native Hong Kong for mainland China and – armed with little more than her wits and a stash of herbal digestive aids – bravely faced the annihilation of all her foodie preconceptions while boldly tackling the massive creature that is Chinese food culture. Formerly the dining editor for *That's Beijing* (now known as the *Beijinger*), Zoe is now a freelance writer and editor. She wrote Have You Eaten Yet? and the Food & Drink chapter.

Professor Rana Mitter is professor of modern Chinese history and politics at Oxford University. He has written and edited several books, including the prize-winning *A Bitter Revolution*, and he appears frequently on television and BBC radio in Britain. He has been visiting China regularly since the early 1990s. Rana wrote the History chapter.

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