

welcome to China



Awe-Inspiring Antiquity

China is modernising at a head-spinning pace, but slick skyscrapers, Lamborghini showrooms and Maglev trains are little more than dazzling baubles. Let's face it: the world's oldest continuous civilisation is bound to pull an artefact or two out of its hat. You won't find history at every turn – three decades of full-throttle development and socialist iconoclasm have taken their toll – but travel selectively in China and rich seams of antiquity pop into view. With tumble-down chunks of the Great Wall, mist-wreathed, temple-topped mountains, quaint villages, water towns and eye-catching ethnic borderlands, China is home to one of the world's oldest and most remarkable

civilisations. You'll need a well-made pair of travelling shoes and a strong stomach for long-distance wayfaring: China's artefacts are strewn about, so put some serious mileage under your soles.

Stupendous Scenery

China is vast. Off-the-scale massive. You simply have to get outside: island-hop in Hong Kong, gaze over the epic grasslands of Inner Mongolia or squint up at the mind-blowing peaks of the Himalayas. Expect to trek, cycle between fairy-tale karst pinnacles, or merely stand and ponder the desiccated enormity of the northwestern deserts or the preternatural mists of China's sacred mountains. Swoon before the rice terraces of the



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Antique yet up-to-the-minute, familiar yet unrecognisable, outwardly urban but quintessentially rural, conservative yet path-breaking, space-age but old-fashioned, China is a land of mesmerising contradictions.

(left) Watchtowers along the Great Wall near Běijīng (p113)
(below) Canals of Zhūjījiǎo (p220)



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south, size up some awesome sand dunes in Gānsù, trace the Great Wall as it meanders across mountain peaks, get lost in forests of bamboo, sail through dramatic river gorges or, when your energy fails you, flake out for a tan on a distant beach. China's sublime scenery is also richly flecked with seasonal shades, from the crimson leaves of autumn maples to the colourful azaleas of spring in Huángshān and the ice-encrusted roofs of mountaintop Buddhist temples. Your camera will be glued to your hand.

Cuisine

China may be fixated with food but treat yourself by swapping your meagre local Chinatown menu for the lavish Middle

Kingdom cookbook. Wolf down Peking duck, size up a sizzling lamb kebab in Kāifēng or gobble down a bowl of Lánzhōu noodles on the Silk Road. Spicy Húnán or Sìchuān dishes really raise the temperature but don't forget about what's cooking along China's frontier lands – always an excellent excuse to get off the beaten path. Impress your friends as you *gānbēi* (down-in-one) the local firewater, sip an ice-cold beer in a slick Běijīng bar or survey the Shànghǎi skyline through a raised cocktail glass. Culinary exploration is possibly the most enticing aspect of Middle Kingdom travel: you'll return with stimulated taste buds and much cherished gastronomic memories.