

# Welcome to China

*Whether it's your first visit or your twentieth, China is so big, so diverse and so fast-changing, it's always an adventure.*

## Breathtaking Antiquity

Let's face it: the world's oldest continuous civilisation is bound to pull an artefact or two out of its hat. There isn't history at every turn – three decades of perpetual development and socialist town-planning have taken their toll – but travel selectively in China and rich seams of antiquity await exploration. With tumble-down chunks of the Great Wall, mist-wreathed, temple-topped mountains, quaint villages, water towns and sublime Buddhist cave statues, China insists on a couple of requirements: a well-made pair of travelling shoes and a strong stomach for long-distance wayfaring.

## Stupendous Scenery

Běijīng, Shànghǎi and Hong Kong are portraits of modern Chinese wherewithal and ambition, but it's the big outdoors that should top your list. From the placid mountain lakes of Tibet, the impassive deserts of Inner Mongolia to island-hopping in Hong Kong or cycling between fairy-tale karst pinnacles around Yángshuò, China's landscapes are beguiling. Swoon before the rice terraces of the south, size up some awesome sand dunes in Gānsù or 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.

## Cuisine

Treat yourself by trading 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 Sīchuān 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. Culinary exploration is possibly the most enticing aspect of Middle Kingdom travel: you'll return with stimulated taste buds and much cherished gastronomic memories.

## Diversity

China is vast. Off-the-scale massive. A riveting jumble of wildly differing dialects and climatic and topographical extremes, it's like several different countries rolled into one. Take your pick from the tossed-salad ethnic mix of the southwest, the yak-butter illuminated temples of Xiàhé, a journey along the dusty Silk Road, spending the night at Everest Base Camp or getting into your glad rags for a night on the Shànghǎi tiles. You're spoiled for choice: whether you're an urban traveller, hiker, cyclist, explorer, backpacker, irrepressible museum-goer or faddish foodie, China's diversity is second to none.



## Why I Love China

By Damian Harper, Author

A passion for Chinese martial arts saw me enrolling for a four-year degree in modern and classical Chinese at university in London back in the 1990s. They were fun days, when travelling China was testing but exciting in equal measure. Must-see hotspots like Píngyáo were unheard of and Shànghǎi's Pǔdōng was a cocktail-free flatland. I could say it's the fantastic food, the awesome landscapes, the fun of train travel, the delightful people or pitching up in a small town I've never been to before, and I wouldn't be lying. But it's the Chinese language I still love most of all.

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