



Great Wall of China - Additional Tips and Advice

- Toilets - These range from very basic ('communing with nature' on the trek itself) to normal western standards in the accommodation. There are generally en-suite toilet and washing facilities at hotels and lodges; however, depending on the season, hot water may be limited.
- Certain sections are un-renovated, with crumbling and uneven terrain, and some sheer drops at either side. Your leader will help you get through these sections if you have a fear of heights!
- Smoke alarms are not a legal requirement in China - your leader will explain all emergency fire procedures to you.
- On the final day of the trek there may be an opportunity to ride on a toboggan run on the wall. The British Heart Foundation strongly discourages the use of the toboggan run, if you choose to do so this will be at your own risk. Also be aware that the Charity travel insurance policy will not cover you for this specific activity.

Emergencies

Please keep in mind that this event is not intended as a race and there is always a large discrepancy in people's walking abilities. This is allowed for. There will be a staff member at the back of the group at all times to ensure that you are not left behind and can take things at your own pace.

In the event of an emergency on the Wall, all guides and leaders maintain contact via radio and the backup vehicle will not be far away. If somebody is unable to walk at all, then the guides will arrange evacuation off the Wall to the vehicle. Some areas of the wall are very remote, with no car access, and emergency evacuation may take up to 4-hours. However, there are several escape routes off the wall and the nearest medical facilities will be by stretcher and then vehicle.

Before You Leave

The more you know about your holiday destination of China before you leave, the more you will be able to appreciate and understand it once you're there. Try to read up on the history, wildlife and culture of China. You might also want to try and learn some of the local language – even if it's just "hello", "good-bye" and "thank you".

China doesn't have many waste collection services, particularly in rural area, so try to leave as much excess packaging (e.g. film boxes, plastic bags etc.) at home and when you're buying toiletries and other stocks, stick to biodegradable products.

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Consider the clothes you're packing. China has modest dress codes. By dressing inappropriately, you may be putting up a barrier between yourself and the people you want to interact with. Loose clothing that covers limbs not only protects you from the sun and insects, but also will ensure you're more readily accepted by the local people.

Likewise, leave expensive jewellery at home – not only can it attract thieves, it's a tactless reminder of the differing standards of wealth between the west and the third world.

Local People and Customs

Meeting and interacting meaningfully with the local people and experiencing foreign cultures are often the most memorable highlights of a holiday. Your Great Wall Trek will provide many opportunities for both, however just as at home, respect, consideration and an open mind are needed for these interactions to be mutually enjoyable. Don't be surprised if the local people – especially in remote areas – treat you with an equal measure of curiosity, and even suspicion! Put yourself in their shoes. It's easy to judge another culture by our own standards and assumptions, but it's worth keeping in mind:

- You are a guest in their community – please respect your hosts and behave as you'd expect a guest to behave in your home.
- Keep an open mind and don't be too quick to judge: we do things differently back home – not better, just differently.
- Don't be too quick to generalize. For example, one bad experience with a taxi driver doesn't mean all cab drivers are not so friendly.
- Please be respectful of local customs. Read up before you go and ask your tour leader, or a local, if you're unsure. Observe, listen and take your cue from the local people.
- Nudity, scanty or inappropriate dress often causes offense, particularly in Muslim regions. Modest dress will help minimize the risk of sexual harassment (locals won't readily assume you're "available") and you'll be treated with a lot more respect.
- Formalities such as greetings can be quite different to what you're used to. It's often best to wait for the local person to make the first move – be it a handshake or a nose rub! Public displays of affection are taboo in many communities.
- Please respect private property and sites where access may be limited, by asking permission. Please also abide by the laws of the country and community you're visiting.

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Begging

It's often painfully hard to resist the pleadings of beggars, whether that's from children calling for "bonbons" or adults with terrible disabilities. In most cases, we strongly recommend you do not give money or other "gifts" to beggars. In some cases, children skip school or are forced out by their parents, and are even deliberately maimed or drugged to increase their earning capacity as beggars.

If you bring stationery or other things from home for the local children, give them to the school teacher or village chief for distribution, rather than directly to the kids.

Photography

Please always ask before taking someone's photo, and respect his or her wishes. Usually just lifting your camera with a questioning look will suffice as a request, although asking in the person's own language is even better. A smile goes a long way!

We suggest that you don't pay for taking photos of people – it becomes another form of begging, with similar consequences. Usually, if you take a little time to talk to your subject, they will agree to be photographed – you end up with a far more relaxed subject, and you each have a more enjoyable and memorable experience.

If you promise to send someone a photo, please try to follow through. Guides can sometimes help, delivering the prints the next time they're passing through. A digital camera can be a great asset, enabling you to immediately show your subjects their photos.

Bargaining

Bargaining is a fundamental part of the shopping experience in China, but what many westerners don't realize is that it's not about securing the lowest possible price. It's about fair trade and reaching a tactical agreement that suits both parties. The social interaction is as much a part of the process as the financial outcome. Have fun with it and keep things in perspective, but don't be mean-spirited.

Religious & Historic Sites

Please respect the physical and cultural integrity of religious and historic sites. Ensure you are appropriately dressed and aware of particular actions that may cause offence. If you're exploring archaeological ruins, be mindful of where you're putting your feet. Don't succumb to the temptation to souvenir a piece of stone or pottery or other artefact.

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Food

China has a distinctive and exciting cuisine – sampled local delicacies and shared meals with the local people are invariably the stuff of rich memories. We encourage you to support local restaurants, often family-run, by trying out their food. If you're eating on the street or in markets, stick to hot food cooked in front of you, and eat from establishments where there is a high turnover, where freshness is more likely to be assured. Avoid raw foods or any that may have been washed in un-purified water or drinks containing un-purified ice. If in doubt, ask your guide – he or she can also provide restaurant recommendations.

Trekking Phase: Food is basic but filling. In recent years, breakfast has become more westernised, with eggs, tomato and cucumber, as well as cooked meats. Lunch will usually be a sandwich along with nuts, snacks and fruit. Dinner will consist of Chinese dishes and of course rice or noodles. There will, of course, be vegetarian options provided, although the choice is more limited. It is important that you eat as much as possible during the trekking phase in order to replace body salts lost due to increased perspiration.

All participants, but especially those with personal eating restrictions, should bring snacks to supplement their meals. You may also wish to bring additional treats like marmite, peanut butter etc. as you will be eating Chinese food everyday – this can become monotonous for even the most adventurous eater!! The tap-water is not safe to drink. Bottled water will be provided during the trekking sections, and you can buy bottled water or soft drinks in hotels and lodges for meals. Please advise prior to departure if you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies.

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