



China 'on a Shoestring'

A chance to use your old b&w film. for the pandas!

Tourcode: **SCB**

Groepsgrootte: **2-24**

Aantal dagen: **22**

Reisbeschrijving

Terracotta Army in Xi'an

In the late afternoon of day 4 we'll board the night-train to Xi'an. This trip allows us to interact with the locals as we watch North China's scenery fly by. The city of Xi'an is a great place to wander around. The Islamic part is a very pretty and lively quarter that houses an ancient mosque in its centre, restaurants, numerous little shops, and stalls that sell baubles. Of course Xi'an's most important attraction is the **Terracotta Army** which guarded the mausoleum of China's first emperor, Qin Shihuang.

Panda Breeding?

On day 6 the night-train takes us to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. **Traditional old houses** sit anachronistically alongside **ultra modern skyscrapers**. In the old town you'll find the Wenshu Monastery, where you can still breathe in the medieval atmosphere. You can also pay a visit to the Giant Panda Breeding Centre (an ideal opportunity to use up any old black and white camera film). After **watching the panda-breeding** you may well feel in need of a cup of tea in one of the many teahouses. These are Sichuan's social hot-spots, particularly for the elderly who spend their time chatting, playing chess and dozing off in the afternoon heat. Who says that old age doesn't bring wisdom and enlightenment?

Lijiang and Dali

The night-train then, on day 8, takes us to Panzhihua and from there we take a spectacular coach-trip to Lijiang. You'll enjoy strolling around its maze of narrow alleys and traditional houses which are **home to the Naxi people**, who have their own language. This is an excellent opportunity to hire a bike and explore the beautiful countryside. The old town of Dali is largely car-free and great for walking, taking a boat trip on Lake Erhai, and meeting **the colourful Bai people**. The shops and restaurants are appealing but the real must-see attraction is the Three Pagodas (from the Tang dynasty, different emperors, but arranged across a 'square' which is in fact an equilateral triangle).

Kunming and the Stone Forest

We'll then travel to Kunming and have the chance to admire **the fabulous Stone Forest**, a geological miracle of freakish limestone rocks.

Beautiful Yangshuo



On Day 16 we'll fly to Yangshuo, a region famous for the **Karst Mountains** that seemingly spring vertically from the paddy-fields in which you can watch farmers ploughing with buffalo, planting, or harvesting with a sickle. At night you can **join the fishermen** who use trained cormorants. The main street is packed with restaurants and terraces..

Guangzhou

On day 19 we take the night train to Guangzhou to gather our final impressions of the country before we say our farewells and head in our separate directions on day 21.

Routekaart



Uitgebreide reisbeschrijving

Welkom

Welcome to Shoestring!

Shoestring is looking forward to welcoming you on one of our unforgettable journeys. Be well prepared, get informed about your destination and make sure you know which vaccinations or other medication you require. During the trip, be flexible and don't feel obliged to always stay with the group. Your guide will advise and assist you, but remember that he or she will have a lot on their mind to ensure that everything is running smoothly. We hope you have a fantastic time in this beautiful destination.



Before you travel

If your trip is unexpectedly cancelled, we will let you know at least three weeks prior to departure. Cancellations are very rare though, so go ahead and prepare yourself for your trip.

Moeilijkheidsgraad Informatie

This holiday is classified as Category B

The difficulty of our travels varies greatly. Added to this is the fact that travel difficulty is a very personal perception. To give an impression of the difficulty of a particular holiday we have developed a classification system.

Category A: Light travel, possible for anyone. Short distances, good hotels, and low travelling speed.

Category B: Feasible for anyone who prepares for the trip. Sometimes longer distances, good hotels or camping facilities, some adventure nights, average travelling speed.

Category C: Feasible for anyone who prepares well and is flexible, but some parts of the journey are difficult, distances may be long or require a day's walk, there may be some basic facilities.

Category D: Reasonably difficult trip because of long travel distances, often-primitive facilities or tents, long walks.

Category E: Difficult trip. The traveller knows him/herself and is well prepared, he or she realises that the holiday can be demanding.

China 'on a shoestring' is a **Category B** holiday. It can be made by any reasonably healthy individual. In the summer the trip is considerably more difficult than during the rest of the year. Although in the cities we stay in simple medium-priced hotels, remember that you are travelling in a developing country with much lower living standards than you are used to at home. Also, roads may be temporarily blocked because of the weather or owing to their state of repair, in which case a detour is unavoidable. A flexible and positive attitude is just as important as a good physical condition.

Nature of the trip

A visit to the cities Beijing and Xi'an consists of a succession of cultural and historical highlights. You can also fully experience Chinese rural existence during this fabulous trip; in places such as Yangshuo and Dali you can experience this by bicycle, by boat or by foot. We will travel the routes through the most beautiful parts of the landscape in our own bus, and the less interesting ones by night train, so that you can enjoy this captivating ancient empire to the full extent. And all this at a very fair price!

Wat is inclusief

Accommodation in hotels; train journeys; domestic flight Kunming-Guilin; Lijiang protection fee; transportation in (mini)buses only for transfers from hotel to hotel; English speaking tour leader.

Wat is exclusief

International flights; all meals; tips; visas; optional excursions; all entrance fees; airport transfers; booking fee; travel insurance.

Let op



◆ You will generally travel with other UK clients. However, if less than 6 people book the tour on the UK website then your group may be combined with a Dutch, German, Italian or Spanish group. Your tour would still be conducted in English.

Dag-tot-dag schema

	Vervoer	Route	Overnachting
1.		Beijing	Beijing
2.		Beijing	Beijing
3.		Beijing	Beijing
4.		Beijing - Xi'an	Beijing
5.		Xi'an	Xi'an
6.		Xi'an - Chengdu	Xian
7.		Chengdu	Chengdu
8.		Chengdu	Chengdu
9.		Panzihua - Lijiang	Lijiang
10.		Lijiang	Lijiang
11.		Lijiang	Lijiang
12.		Lijiang - Dali	Dali
13.		Dali	Dali
14.		Dali	Dali
15.		Dali - Kunming	Kunming
16.		Kunming - Yangshuo	Yangshuo
17.		Yangshuo	Yangshuo
18.		Yangshuo	Yangshuo
19.		Yangshuo - Guangzhou	Night train Guilin - Guangzhou
20.		Guangzhou	Guangzhou
21.		Guangzhou	End of tour

Dag-tot-dag schema

Dag 1 - 3: Beijing

You will arrive into Beijing, where you will have some free time to explore this wonderful city. Beijing has been the capital of one of the greatest realms in the world for centuries and was founded by the Mongolians in the thirteenth century, in order to govern the domain that extended its power from Korea to Hungary and later on it became the capital of the Ming Dynasty. In the city and its surroundings we find some of the most important places of interest in this immense country. With a surface area measuring 9,596,960 sq km, it is 40 times greater than the UK. With a billion people, making up the population. Since 1949, the heart of Beijing and China has been Tian An Men Square, the square of Heavenly Peace. On October 1st of that year, Mao Zedong, chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, proclaimed the People's Republic of China. At the beginning of his Cultural Revolution, in 1966, he was repeatedly worshipped like a god there by a million practically fainting teenagers. In 1989 a student protest was smothered with brute force and hundreds of people died. These memories form a sharp contrast with the present peaceful atmosphere. Chinese families walk around it, people fly kites, there are stalls selling photographic equipment and ice-cream vendors. On one side of the square there



are colossal buildings in Stalinist style: the Great Hall of the People and the National Museum of China. On the south side of the square is the Mao Zedong memorial Hall. More important is the beautiful Forbidden City. The dimensions of this complex are enormous. It measures nearly one kilometre by 700 metres and there are 9,999 rooms. Italian film director Bertolucci in his masterpiece, 'The Last Emperor', beautifully captured this imperial city on screen. The emperors could choose from thousands of women, and over time provided work for 70,000 eunuchs. Ordinary mortals were prohibited from entering the Forbidden City. On the other hand, some of the emperors would hardly leave the palace and lived a secluded and totally unworldly existence. Another imperial palace is the Summer Palace. This palace is situated on the edge of the city and has magnificent buildings and temples. There is also a big marble boat that was commissioned by the empress dowager Cixi for her dinner parties. Another milestone is the Temple of Heaven. This temple was built completely without nails during the Ming Dynasty period. You will find it in a big park, where the Beijing people often come together early in the morning to practise Tai Chi or a form of sword fighting. Whoever feels like it can calmly begin the afternoon by taking a walk through the hutongs, the old working-class areas of Beijing. The people live in small courts with a number of closely built houses. There are grandparents playing with their grandchildren and you will see small shops selling all kinds of daily necessities. In the evening you could visit the Peking Opera, not to be compared to our western opera at all. The singing, which sounds plaintive, is very slow. It is a wonderful experience to go and see once, if only to behold the splendid costumes. Another highlight is the Great Wall of China, which winds itself through the mountains, starting from the north of Beijing. There are a couple of places where you can climb the wall and admire this massive edifice. Your tour guide can be helpful in organising a day tour to the Chinese Wall. Then there is the culinary tour de force: Peking Duck. It is fun to have this special meal with a group of people. In China, people usually have dinner with a number of people sitting at a round table with a kind of turntable in the middle. Meals are ordered for the whole group and not, as in Europe, by each person individually. You can find western cutlery in most hotels, but in local restaurants you will have to eat with chopsticks! You will get used to this quickly.

Dag 4: Beijing - Xi'an

In the afternoon we will take the night train (with couchettes) to Xi'an, where we will arrive the next morning. During this entire journey we will take the night train four times in order to cover the enormous distances required to complete this trip. We have second class pre-booked couchettes, with three beds above each other. The bottom bed will be used as a sofa during the day and you will be supplied with bedding. Each carriage has a supervisor who inspects the tickets, cleans from time to time, looks after the music, makes announcements and is responsible for the procedures in the carriage. There are toilets (not entirely clean) and wash basins. For most Chinese, the train is the only way to cover large distances. They make themselves completely at home on the train. They take off their shoes, put on their slippers and take out the inevitable tea mugs. It is amusing to see how all of them hurry to the end of the carriage with their mugs, thermos flasks and bowls with instant noodle soup, as soon as the rumour spreads that there is hot water boiling again. The Chinese pass their time eating, drinking, sleeping, playing cards, nattering, reading, or listening to music. There is no need to get bored during these train journeys. Besides the above-mentioned pastimes, you can also watch China pass by your window. These trains are the best place for striking up a conversation with English speaking Chinese people. Covering 1,160 kilometres, the first train journey is the longest. It will take us about 15 hours. By Chinese standards this is not unusual.



Dag 5: Xi'an

A day to explore Xi'an, it is a very important city from a historical point of view. Just outside the city is the famous Terracotta Army of Emperor Qin Shihuang. Thousands of man-sized clay soldiers guard his tomb from the third century BC. The emperor united China and standardized weights and measures and the written language. Qin Shihuang was also responsible for building the Chinese Wall. During the first centuries of our era the town was the beginning of the Silk Route, connecting China to the Roman Empire. Caravans transported silk, lacquer ware and spices to the west, and products such as earthenware, glass and fabrics to the east. Later on, Islam spread as far as China by this route. In Xi'an you can roam about in the Islamic part of the city. It is a very enjoyable and lively district with the old mosque in the middle. You will see children being educated in Arabic, men and women preparing the most delicious meals and many small bric-a-brac shops and stalls. The mosque is a mix of Islamic and Chinese architecture and has a rustic walled-in garden. In this area you can eat kebabs on the streets. From the seventh to the ninth centuries, when the Tang Dynasty reigned over China, Xi'an experienced another 'Golden Age'. It developed into one of the biggest cities in the world with an estimated two million inhabitants. The 14 kilometre city wall, dating back to this period, is still largely intact. With its height and width of 12 metres it is an impressive place of interest. These imposing walls are often the scene of kite flying competitions and you have a good view of the city from there. For a good insight into the history of Xi'an and the Shaanxi province, explained in English, you should visit the beautiful historical museum.

Dag 6: Xi'an - Chengdu

In the afternoon we take the sleeper train to Chengdu. We will arrive the next morning

Dag 7 - 8: Chengdu

Time spent freely exploring Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan. With its 100 million inhabitants, this is China's most densely populated province and the most important rice production area in the country. In the old part you will find traditional tiny two-storey wooden dwellings next to five-story communist tenement buildings. Towering above these are ultramodern skyscrapers with coloured, reflecting glass. In this city you can cross over centuries within a couple of hundred yards. In the old city centre you can find the Wenshu Monastery. This is the largest and most important Buddhist monastery of Chengdu, older than Buddha himself, dating from the tenth century BC. There is a medieval atmosphere in the narrow street in front you, where you will find beggars and stalls selling incense, statues of Buddha and religious trinkets. In the monastery, devout worshippers kneel down in worship in dimly lit areas. Have tea in the most important meeting place in Sichuan: one of the many teahouses, where the elderly doze away in the afternoon heat or spend many hours chatting, gossiping and playing Chinese Checker's, Chess and Xiangqui. Sichuan is the home province of the giant Panda. You can see these charming animals in the Panda Breeding Centre on the outskirts of town. About one thousand Pandas still live in the wild. In the evening of day 8, we will take the night train to arrive in Panzihua the following day.

Dag 9: Panzihua – Lijiang

We arrive in from the night train in the morning. We take the bus in the direction of



Lijiang on the way to the colourful minorities of the Middle Country. (To Chinese people, the name of their country is Zhong guo - The Middle Country, The Centre of the World). This bus trip is the most spectacular of the whole journey. We drive into deep valleys, only to climb up again to the same heights on the other side; we follow fast-moving rivers and see brilliant panoramic views from the summits. This magnificent journey takes a whole day, including stops and lunch.

Dag 10 - 11: Lijiang

Free days spent in the ancient town of Lijiang, home ground of the Naxi minority. This small town has a beautiful old centre with a maze of alleyways. You will see traditional wooden houses here. Many Naxi people still walk around in traditional clothes. In the middle of the old part of the town is the beautiful Chief Mu's Mansion, an extensive palace with the most splendid buildings that cling to the hillside. From the terrace of the top building you have a sublime view over the ancient town centre. Our hotel is within walking distance from the colourful marketplace and the old centre. A classic piece of China is to be found in the Black Dragon pool, with traditional architecture and the most wonderful view of Jade Mountain. Lijiang is also a good place to rent a bicycle for a day and explore the rural surroundings. The nearby Jade Dragon Snow Mountain is situated about 30 kilometres from Lijiang and towers high above the town at 5500 metres. An excursion is certainly worth your while. Here you will find the world's highest cable lift. It takes you, at a swift pace, up to 4500 metres (Lijiang itself is situated at 2400 metres). From this high point you can climb another 150 metres to a plateau, which will offer you a magnificent view of the mountain, the glacier and the valley at the bottom. It is wise to drink a lot in order to avoid altitude sickness. And take along warm clothes (if necessary you can rent a warm coat and moon boots at the base of the cableway). A fun way to spend your evening is a visit to a traditional Naxi music performance in Lijiang. Most performers are old Naxi men, who look wonderful in their traditional attire.

Dag 12: Lijiang - Dali

On this day we continue to Dali by bus. Again you can enjoy the magnificent mountain scenery. At the end of the journey you will see Dali rising up at the foot of the 4000 metre mountains.

Dag 13 - 14: Dali

Days spent at your leisure in Dali. You can enjoy the rural surroundings here, just like in Lijiang. It is perfect hiking and cycling territory. You could take a boat trip on the Erhai Lake and meet the colourful members of the Bai ethnic group, it's a fantastic experience. It is a must to visit one of the three pagodas. These buildings are some of the oldest in China. There is a pleasant carefree atmosphere in the town, which is teeming with small restaurants and shops. On Mondays there is a market day in nearby Shaping, where the Bai minority sell their goods. This colourful market is held in the morning and is a good photo opportunity. There is also the possibility to go horse riding in the surrounding area.

Dag 15: Dali - Kunming

Today we travel by bus to Kunming, the capital of the province of Yunnan. We arrive at noon. From here we can visit the Stone Forest, a geological wonder of ruggedly formed limestone rocks. The admission fee for the Stone Forest is not included in the cost of the



journey.

Dag 16: Kunming - Yangshuo

We drive from Kunming and take the plane to Guilin. Situated near Yangshuo is the world famous karst landscape of South China

Dag 17 - 18: Yangshuo

Today you have free day to explore another, amazing sight in China. You are now in the middle of China's most distinctive landscape. The Karst mountains rise almost vertically from the paddy fields; the view interrupted only by bamboo forests and small villages. In the early summer, the land is tropically green; in the autumn the fields turn shades of golden brown. Depending on the season, you can see the farmers ploughing the fields with their buffaloes, bedding out the rice by hand, or mowing with a sickle. You can take a beautiful cycling tour in the surrounding area of Yangshuo. Local farmers like to show you their village district and house for a small fee, and will invite you in for a meal. This will give you a good impression of how the millions of Chinese farmers live today. You can also enjoy the karst landscape from a boat on the River Li. In the evening, you can join the fishermen. They lure the fish with bright gas lamps, which are then caught by trained cormorants. Due to the ring placed around their necks the fish cannot be swallowed. The fishermen conjure the fish out of the birds' throats with one skilful movement. Yangshuo itself is a bustling little town; the high street is full of small restaurants, shops and outdoor cafés.

Dag 19: Yangshuo - Guangzhou

We will travel to Canton (Guangzhou) by night train, where we will arrive the next day. In this city you can look around and buy your last souvenirs.

Dag 20: Guangzhou

Canton (also called Guangzhou) has always played a special role in Chinese history. The city has always behaved in a self-willed and independent manner: it is more than two thousand kilometres away from Central Chinese Rule. In 1911 the imperial dynasty was overthrown and Sun Yat Sen proclaimed the republic. Twelve years later the Kuomintang was founded here. The Shamian Island district is an old concession by the European powers from the time of the Opium War. You will recognize European influences in the architectural style of the stately houses. Near Shamian Island is the Qingping Market. This is an authentic South Chinese market where you will feast your eyes on the most eccentric delicacies such as snakes, dried turtles, owls and cats. Though the market is smaller and tidier than it used to be, it is still worth seeing. Then it's time for a nice taste of South Chinese cuisine. The smooth flavours of Cantonese dishes are extremely pleasing to the palate. It is the last day of your tour but rather than being about 'Goodbye' your thought should be 'Go further'!

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Dag 21: Guangzhou



When booking your tour, please check to see whether you need any post-tour nights, bearing in mind that accommodation for the night of the final day of the tour (day 21) is not included.

Landinformatie China

Achtergrondinformatie

Celebrations and festivals

Festivals and celebrations

China has 9 national holidays: January 1st (New Year), Chinese New Year in (this date varies each year and depends on the Chinese lunar calendar, in 2008 it is on February 7th); March 8th (International Women's Day); May 1st (Labour Day); May 4th (Youth Day); June 1st (Children's Day); July 1st (the CCP's Birthday - founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 in Shanghai); August 1st (anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army); October 1st (National Day - founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949).

Special ceremonies are held in Taoist and Buddhist temples on full moon and new moon days. It is fun to get an inside view on such days. The Lantern Festival is especially colourful (Yuàxi-o Jié). **It marks the end of the Chinese New Year season; the people make paper lanterns and walk through the streets with them in the evening.** There is also the Moon Festival on September 14th in 2008.

Communications

Sorry, this information is not available at this moment. Please check back later.

Cultural differences and habits

Cultural differences between the Chinese and Europeans are so enormous that you could write a complete book about them. Underneath we have picked a few which might be of daily interest when associating with the local people.

'We don't have': 'Meiyou' was the first Chinese that foreigners learnt in China during the first years after the country opened its borders for individual travellers at the beginning of the eighties. It means, "We don't have". You would often hear it, whatever you asked for: railway tickets, bus tickets, hotel beds and what not. Often these things were not obtainable or sold out. We can, however, account for this puzzling and uncooperative behaviour. In the communist economy, the Chinese had no personal financial interest in accommodating their customers. Why make an effort? Within Chinese society there were all kinds of shortages, which could only be obtained through the use of connections. The Chinese themselves call this 'guanxi', 'using the back door'. Services and commodities are often delivered by unofficial means. You then have the right to a service in return. 'Meiyou' always stayed 'meiyou'. Chinese will not be the first to own up to being mistaken. This is seen as a loss of face, one of the worst things that can happen to you in social situations.



Haggling: Gradually 'meiyou' made its way out. Greed for money took its place. Nowadays, Chinese people want to supply you with everything and overcharge you for it. They have no qualms about heavily overcharging at all. We consider this to be cheating. They probably consider this to be quite normal and would like to get their share of our wealth. You have to keep up your guard where there are no fixed prices. You have to haggle at souvenir shops in China, Tibet as well as Nepal. If you eat at the street stalls, you always should agree the price up front.

Etiquette: Be aware of the deeply rooted Chinese idea that China and the Chinese are the standard and the rest of the world is deviant. Most Chinese are kind and curious with regard to foreigners. But at very best they consider us to be 'different', though usually 'barbarians'. Neighbouring people learned from the Chinese, not the other way round. In the modern world, this mentality may not be very appropriate anymore, though is still largely present. According to western etiquette, a few local habits are downright distasteful. Chinese eating habits include loud slurping and belching. After a meal, the table and surrounding area is left in a chaotic and messy state with leftovers, chicken bones, fish bones and so on, everywhere. We also can't bear the rattling and spitting that the Chinese dedicate themselves to so completely. There is loud honking, snorting and spewing. The best thing is just to be cheerful about it all.

Clothing: In China there are no strict clothing rules and it is possible to show up in shorts and tops. It is amusing to see how Chinese men walk around in a vest and rolled up trouser legs (till above the knee) when it's warm. As a rule, people are somewhat more covered up than we are used to. It is respectful to adapt oneself to this, although the Chinese might not expect this from us 'deviant' westerners.

Amusement: The Chinese, who work six days per week, have little spare time in comparison to westerners. In the country people meet to talk to each other and watch television together in their spare time. In the cities, people watch television or take a walk in the streets or parks. You can do this as well, following Chinese custom. You could also visit the cinema. China has over 140,000 cinemas. Usually it is quite noisy there; people sympathize out loud and give a running commentary on the films, which are **mostly in Chinese. Most films finish at 9 pm. In larger cities it is possible to visit a café, pub or discotheque.** In Xi'an there are all kinds of little market stalls along the road until late at night. In Beijing you could visit a performance of the famous Peking Opera. In these operas singing, dancing, acrobatics and spoken texts are combined. The traditional subjects of the Peking Opera are derived from history and mythology. The central theme is usually the struggle between right and wrong. During the Cultural Revolution the Peking Opera was forbidden and after this the Opera has gone through various changes. The subjects are now either new or traditional. Acrobatics has been the most beloved form of amusement in China for over 22 centuries.

In general

Be continuously aware that you are staying as a guest in a country where people have different manners. They are not different, you are.

Food and drinks

Chinese basically eat everything alive. This is the result of centuries of famine and deprivation. Not only are all animals looked upon as a possible meal, every scrap is eaten, including snout, brains and intestines. A visit to a local market offers a view of Chinese



cuisine. You could make a game out of guessing what you see: anteaters, scorpions, snake, dog. Every non-vegetarian should have no difficulty with dishes prepared from these ingredients. Westerners usually find the cruel treatment of the animals repugnant. Frogs and snakes are skinned alive. All animals are locked up in oppressive and suffocating small cages. The Chinese do not humanise animals in any way. It is food and that is all there is to it. However, normal everyday dinners are less exciting, for the Chinese as well as the visitors, than this market would suggest.

The only really exotic meals you might consume will consist of snake or grasshopper. As you might expect in a country with such enormous dimensions, there are regional differences. The most outstanding distinction concerns basic food: in the south people eat more rice; in the north there's more produce made of dough, such as noodles. In the north they also make bread from the grain, often taking the shape of steamed rolls, with or without vegetables or meat inside. The dichotomy does not fully apply.

The Szechuan cuisine is known for its highly seasoned dishes. One of the specialities is 'hotpot' (fondue) which can be especially spicy. You choose the ingredients yourself. In Lijiang you can order Naxi buffets, with all kinds of baked cheese. In Xi'an you'll sense the Muslim influence and you can order delicious kebabs: small skewers with beef or mutton that are barbecued on the spot. Beijing of course has Peking Duck on the menu, in countless varieties.

In the larger cities there is usually the opportunity to eat out on the streets. Since the start of the economic reforms, the Chinese are once again allowed to have their own small businesses, and you will see streets and small squares where they put up their little eating stalls in the evenings. You order by simply pointing out what you want. In this manner, eating is tasty, cheap and fun because you are surrounded by Chinese people. In the smaller tourist towns such as Yangshuo, Lijiang and Dali you will find small eating-places oriented towards westerners. Yoghurt, muesli, pizza and pancakes are very popular here among foreigners. During travelling days on the bus or train you will eat what's going. The meals will be simple but nourishing. On the train they will be made up of a bowl of rice with mixed vegetables and some meat or fish. During bus rides we will stop at the Chinese equivalent of wayside restaurants, where you will be able to choose, besides rice, from about four ready-made dishes.

For that matter, if the Chinese go out to dinner with a group of people, it is not customary for everyone to order only for themselves.

Several dishes are placed on the table and everybody takes from everything. In restaurants there is a kind of turntable in the middle of the table and all the dishes on it can be turned towards you at your convenience. It is fun to get used to eating in this way when going out to dinner with a group of people. And sure enough, you will eat with chopsticks.

China's national drink is tea, more specifically: green tea (which is actually not green but light brown). You will have to get used to the taste and you drink it unsweetened.

You will notice that Chinese take glass pots with a lid to work or when travelling. They will cover the bottom of the pot with tealeaves and pour boiled water over it all day long. Boiled water is always available on trains, boats and hotels free of charge. You can make use of it yourself. Coffee is not popular with the Chinese, though nowadays you can obtain instant coffee nearly everywhere. Coca Cola and other soft drinks are available everywhere, as well as alcoholic beverages. Maotai for instance can be compared to gin, though it smells of cheese. Chinese wine is different from European wine. The beer tastes good and is sold in large bottles of more than 0.6 litres. They contain only 2-3 percent alcohol, so you can keep on drinking if you like.



Landscape

The total surface area of China is 9,580,000 sq.km which makes it the second largest country in the world. China is roughly 300 times larger than the Netherlands and can best be compared - regarding surface area - to Western Europe.

China's landscape is immeasurably diverse: the vast lowland plains of the north easterly part; the hilly and watery south eastern part; the loess plateau of Central China; the highlands of Tibet and Qinghai; the desert and steppe areas of Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia and finally the rugged karst landscape of the south with its classical views. Topographically China is trapped between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan, Tadzhikistan, Mongolia and Korea in the north, and Pakistan, India, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam in the south. The total length of the border is over 20,000 kilometres.

Population

China has over a billion inhabitants. About 20% live in the towns, the rest of them live in the country. In order to put a stop to enormous increases in population, the Chinese government introduced the one-child policy. People living in towns are forced to have just one child. If they have more children, they are forced to make sacrifices in other areas. For instance they will have to live in a small house and education is no longer free of charge. With twins though this rule does not apply.

The Han Chinese make up about 93% of the population. Furthermore, there are about 55 other minorities, mainly living in the border regions.

Religion

The three greatest religions in China are Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Although the history of the three religions is completely different, there are a good many similarities: the founders are not gods, but people of flesh and blood. They are more of a way of life or a philosophy than a religion.

Buddhism: Buddha was born in Lumbini, in the Terai region of Nepal, in the 6th Century BC. During his luxury life as a prince he was confronted with the suffering of the people around him. After a long period of meditation he achieved Enlightenment and started to proclaim a new way of life. Buddhism is actually a reformatory movement of Hinduism and many elements of the two religions correspond. However, a few important aspects of the prevailing doctrine were rejected by Buddha. Two important matters that he found reprehensible were the Brahman ritual of idolising the gods and the caste system.

Hinduism: The Buddha claimed that everything that exists is in a perpetual sequence of creation and decay. In principle, nothing can escape this fate: not the gods, not the universe, not the people. However, Buddha himself did succeed in being released from the eternal wheel of reincarnation. His teachings show the way to rise up from daily affliction and go to nirvana: a condition of timeless rest and unity with everything. Of significance are the four noble truths: 1. All life means suffering. 2. This suffering is a consequence of our desires. 3. By removing the desires man can end the suffering. 4. The removal of the desires is obtained by following 'the right course'. The right course exists of the eightfold path, a system of thought and action that sees to it that the karma of the one who treads the path improves. As the karma improves by following the right path,



you reincarnate into a more pure form. At last you reach Bodhisattva, a state in which you long for nothing else but the fortune of all others. Subsequently you dissolve into nirvana, the state of enlightenment where you realize that everything that exists is an illusion, a mere mirage of an indivisible unity that rests within itself.

The most important form in present-day China is Mahayana Buddhism. For example, the great vehicle that promises redemption to all beings by means of bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattvas are those who have reached a state of enlightenment, but renounce this and postpone their own transition to nirvana in order to devote themselves to the redemption of the whole of mankind. They try to pass on good karma and thus lead mankind to enlightenment.

Buddhism developed between the third and sixth century AD and was presumably introduced by Indian traders who took Buddhist priests along on their travels. Shortly afterwards monasteries rose throughout China. These monasteries fulfilled the same role as the churches in Europe during the Middle Ages and acted as inns, hospitals and orphanages as well as places of worship. Travellers and refugees could always find shelter there.

Confucianism: the ideas of Confucius (5th century BC) have been of influence on Chinese culture for 2000 years. Because of this, his philosophies will be described here only briefly. Confucianism is not a religion; rather, it's a practical, ethical system; a system of law and order. The philosopher was worshipped like a god, however, and innumerable offerings were made to him. The universe is determined by the order and rhythm in the world: the sun, the moon and the stars move according to the laws of nature. In the same way, man has to live within the scope of the order of the world. This idea is based on the idea that people have the capacity to learn.

Confucius assumed that there was a strict hierarchy and he defined this very clearly and precisely. Only if each separate individual in society takes complete responsibility for his or her position, can society function well as a whole. Family ties and social duties are of the utmost importance. Between father and son (the son is to obey the father unconditionally), between husband and wife (women hardly have any individual rights), between the older and younger brother, between mutual friends and between the master and his subject.

Taoism: Taoism is the only religion that originated in China. Buddhism came from India and Confucianism is essentially a way of life. The founder of Taoism was Lao Tse, meaning 'grand old master', and it is commonly held that he was born in the year 604 AD. Yet there are doubts as to whether the man lived at all. Nothing is known about him, not even his name. Myth tells us that Lao Tse was born as an old man with white hair and a long beard, after having spent 82 years in his mother's womb.

The concept of Taoism is 'dao'. Though it is impossible to give an exact translation it means something like 'the path', 'the road', but also 'the method' or 'the principle'. Even the Chinese find it hard to translate the concept. Another tenet is 'wu wei', meaning "without action" or "swim with the tide". It is best described as being attuned to the deepest flow of life itself. Two opposite poles determine the course of events in the universe: yin and yang. Yang is the masculine, the clear and high heavens. Yin is considered to be feminine, obscure, passive and unfathomably deep. Without yin there is no yang and without yang no yin.

Weather and climate

Climate: China is an immense country with various climatic zones. In the north there is a



continental climate, with temperatures of - 20° centigrade in winter up to 30° centigrade in the summer. Travelling south we reach more moderate zones, finally converting to a subtropical and then genuinely tropical climate in Hong Kong. These vast areas are frequently flooded, but the chance of this affecting our journey is minimal.

The best time to travel: The best time to travel to China is between April to October. In the spring the fruit trees and meadows are in bloom, later in the year the paddy fields are a deep green and in the autumn, when the nights get colder once more, it is harvest time and the rural areas are full of commotion. During all journeys you will experience sunshine, rain and cloudiness. In the winter months it can be considerably cold.

Praktische informatie

Arrival information

The journey begins in the Chinese capital Beijing where you will be immersed immediately in a totally different culture: The classical architecture of the Imperial Forbidden City, a Peking opera performance, the commotion and swarming in the streets, eating with chopsticks. Take it easy for the first couple of days, recover from the flight and let your system slowly get used to this overwhelming country.

If you have not reserved the arrival transfer with us, please take a moment to read the following information regarding taxis at Beijing airport. Once you have arrived at the airport, go to the official taxi point. The queue may be long, but this is a safer way to travel to your hotel. Please don't follow anyone who offers to take you somewhere else to get a taxi. These cars are usually operating illegally.

The taxi from the airport to your hotel in Beijing normally costs around 150 to 200 CNY depending on traffic and the type of vehicle. Please ask the driver for a receipt (which must be printed out from the meter on the spot) so that you can find him/her later if you have left any belongings in the car or have any complaints about him/her. If the driver refuses to give you a printed receipt, please make a note of the number plate for future reference.

Electricity

Sockets supply 220 volt, 50-hertz alternating current. You will need an adapter if you want to use British electrical appliances in China. Power failures do not occur often, but it is a good idea to carry a pocket torch just in case. This can also be of use on the night trains.

Health

The following health information is a general text that applies to all our travellers in China. Those who pay some attention to hygiene and skincare don't usually run into health problems.

Food and drink: Tap water is unfit for human consumption; you should drink mineral water instead. In small eating places it is better not to eat fruit or salads that have been skinned beforehand. In the cities, preferably take your meals in busy restaurants. Do not eat ice cream, except in expensive restaurants. Clean your hands thoroughly before



eating, even if you are only having a snack.

Sunshine and heat: Sunburn is a frequent cause for health problems. Sunburn and sun/heat strokes are easier caught than you may think. You should therefore avoid the sun during the hottest hours of the day, always wear a hat and good sunglasses when you are walking, and use a good suntan lotion when sunbathing. The latter can best be brought along from home, where the choice of product is much larger and prices are lower. At high temperatures the body's need for water increases very rapidly, as does its need for salt. Make sure you drink enough when the heat is extreme and you will simply have to take it very easy during the hottest hours of the day. Make it a habit to treat wounds, however small, with something like iodine. Infections can occur and spread rapidly in the tropics, so take as much care as possible with scratches and insect bites.

Diarrhoea: Next to sunburn, the most common health problem is diarrhoea. Travellers are often hit by it after they have been on holiday for only a few days. In most cases it is an utterly innocuous phenomenon caused by the change of diet, the heat or harmless bacteria, against which the body will soon develop its defences. The main risk is dehydration, especially in children. It occurs when the body loses more fluid, salt and sugars than it receives. The result is a feeling of listlessness and weakness. It can be prevented by drinking a solution of water and ORS (Oral Rehydration Solution). It is sold in bags at the pharmacies and contains all the minerals and sugars that are evacuated with diarrhoea. Instead of this solution you can also take non-carbonated soft drinks or heavily salted broth. For many people, Coca Cola has a constipating effect in the first stages of diarrhoea. When the diarrhoea is accompanied by high fever and/or bloody defecation it is sensible to consult a physician. When the diarrhoea lasts for more than a few days without the above-mentioned symptoms or when you have to travel, you may take Imodium (or Diacure) a couple of times. It is an opium-like preparation that prevents bowel movement for a number of hours.

Insects: Mosquitoes are most active just after sunset or just before sunrise. So take your measures right then, and during the entire night. Covering up the skin with clothing is an effective measure. Or use an insect repellent like DEET. You can ask for mosquito coils from your hotel desk or the restaurant where you eat. These green spirals can be burnt underneath your table or chair, detaining the mosquitoes. Electric coils are better suited to closed-off spaces. Lastly, you can consider bringing a mosquito net.

Doctors: If you want to visit a doctor in China, please allow yourself to be advised by hotel staff or the tour guide. Doctors are well educated but usually speak little English. You can obtain nearly all medication without a prescription.

First-aid kit: An example of a first-aid kit: plasters, bandages, cotton wool, small pair of scissors, thermometer, iodine, painkillers, malaria tablets, ORS, Imodium, suntan lotion, earplugs, tweezers, a remedy against insects and ointment against itching. If you need to use vital drugs regularly, please take along an exact description in English (it is important not to use the brand name, but the composition and dosage). For the duration of the journey please take along a double amount and store it away separately, as a backup.

Contact lenses: Please take into account that (hard) contacts could give trouble due to dust and drifting sand. Taking a pair of extra lenses or glasses might come in handy.

Vaccinations: Stated below is the recommendation by the Health Authorities when this



edition went to press. This information may change. Furthermore the question is what your personal needs are, which depends on earlier vaccinations, possible sensitivity for certain medicines, pregnancy, age etc. ALWAYS contact your General Practitioner or the Practice Nurse for advice. We at Shoestring do not provide any further information by telephone. The complete overview for this journey is: DTaP, hepatitis A, Typhoid and antimalaria tablets. Take your precautions on time; some inoculations need time to achieve the desired effect.

Visa Information

Please note that British passport holders require a visa for entry into China. This is not arranged by Shoestring but please use the following link for further information:
<http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/>

Further advice to make your journey more pleasant: Allow your body and mind the time to steadily adjust to the new time zone and location. Avoid tension; do not draw up a plan immediately. In any event take it easy on the first day. Getting up early is a good habit; in warm weather countries the morning temperature is usually the most agreeable. The people in these countries are used to getting up early. If you adapt yourself to their rhythm you will see the most of their country. If you have had enough sleep you will be better able to cope with all the new impressions etc. and still have enough energy to do a lot of things.

Info for people at home

Make sure that those at home know which country you are in and how long you are planning to stay away. You may fix a date when you will contact them again. Provide those picking you up from the airport with your flight times and numbers. Shoestring will not provide flight and/or travel information, accommodation names and telephone numbers to third parties. Any information on delays can be retrieved via the information number at the airport or Teletext, not via Shoestring.

Contact person

In case of an emergency it is important for us to have details of someone we can contact on your behalf. You have entered a name on the booking form. It is possible that this person is on holiday during your trip. If so, enter a second person so that we are sure to be able to get in touch with somebody.

Luggage and clothing

During the summer months most parts of China are stiflingly hot. When in Yangshuo for instance, it is wise to wear a shirt with long sleeves and a pair of trousers for protection against mosquitoes. Rather bring along too little than too much. If there is anything missing you can usually buy it locally for a song. An umbrella and a light rain jacket could come in handy; the umbrella can protect you from the rain as well as the blazing sunshine. A sweater is certainly necessary in the spring and the autumn. A pair of good quality worn in walking shoes with a good profile and a pair of flip flops is all your feet will need.

Furthermore, you will need the following important things: sunglasses, suntan lotion, toiletries, a first-aid kit, head covering, photographic or film equipment, back-up batteries, a pocket torch, a pocket knife (don't put this in your hand luggage during the flight), an alarm, pen and paper, books, a valid passport with a visa for China, sufficient



cheques and cash, copies of your passport and travel insurance, a list of numbers of your cheques and the receipt, plane ticket(s), travel insurance card including the emergency number, pocket organizer with important addresses, travel guide. Optional: reading lamp, universal plug. All this is best packed into an overnight bag or rucksack, not a hard suitcase, because this is awkward to transport. In addition a small rucksack or shoulder bag will come in handy for daily use. For securing valuables it is best to buy a thin money belt that you can wear under your clothes. Take care that your luggage is not too heavy; 20 kilogram's is the maximum. At train stations you will have to carry your luggage to the train yourself. In the trains the sleepers are provided with bedclothes. For this journey it is not necessary to take a sleeping bag.

Money and currency

The amount of spending money suggested is the minimum required to pay for your meals, drinks, optional excursions, entrance fees, airport taxes and tips. The amount you actually need of course depends on your own spending pattern; that is why souvenirs are not included. We suggest £125-£150 per week.

Photography

Not all types of camera batteries are on sale. Videotape is not on sale everywhere in China. Be sure to have batteries that will last the entire holiday. Chinese people generally do not object to being photographed. However, some ethnic minorities do not always like being photographed. When in doubt you had better ask first. Sometimes they will say no. It is strictly prohibited to photograph the terracotta army in Xi'an. You will have to pay a fine and you will lose your film at least.

Safety

China is a reasonably safe country; there are hardly any acts of violence against foreigners. Pick pocketing does occur often, especially in the larger towns and cities. You have to beware of this in busy places. Local buses and station squares are notorious. The guideline is: carry your passport, airline ticket and traveller's cheques and most of your money under your clothing in a money belt. See to it that you have enough change for the day in an easily accessible place, so you won't have to reach for your money belt in public. Never leave money or valuables behind in your hotel room.

Time difference

The time difference with our summer time is plus 7 hours, during our winter time 8 hours. During our travels we remain in one time zone.

Tipping

Giving tips was not customary for a long time in China, but it is gaining ground increasingly. Local guides at excursions to the Chinese Wall or the Terracotta Army at Xi'an also expect a contribution. Taxi drivers and restaurant staff do not really expect a bonus, but they do appreciate it. The amount we suggest for chauffeurs and co-drivers working for us is 100 Yuan a day on behalf of the whole group. Apart from that the local travel guide will expect a tip at the end of the journey if he or



she has done a good job. We suggest £13 per traveller for the whole journey .

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