Language & culture: your checklist

Nine small things to sort before your first trip to China.



- [ ] **Expect English on big-city transport signs, not in conversation**
  Metro stations, airports and main train stations usually have English. Most taxi drivers don't speak it, so save your hotel address in Chinese characters.

- [ ] **Learn a few words (the eight are on page 2)**
  Start with 你好 · 谢谢 · 不好意思. Say them slowly; the tones don't need to be perfect. Download your translation app's offline pack too.

- [ ] **At the table, use the serving chopsticks for shared dishes**
  Dishes go in the middle and everyone shares. Never stand chopsticks upright in your rice. Toasting your host? Hold your glass a little lower.

- [ ] **Pack temple clothes: shoulders and knees covered**
  For men and women alike. Hats off inside, phone on silent, voices low. Shoes off if you see a pile by the door; leave closed doors closed.

- [ ] **Carry your original passport, every day**
  Printed copies aren't accepted. You need it to buy and board trains, at hotel check-in and at many big sights. Staying in a private home? Register with local police within 24 hours.

- [ ] **Book the big sights ahead, with your passport** CHECK BEFORE YOU GO
  Palace Museum (Forbidden City): real-name booking only, tickets out at 20:00 seven days ahead, no same-day tickets, official WeChat mini program only, closed Mondays except national holidays.

- [ ] **Check your dates against the big holidays** CHECK BEFORE YOU GO
  Spring Festival and Golden Week are when the whole country travels. Trains sell out early and sights get very crowded. 2027 dates are on page 2.

- [ ] **Know the few hard rules**
  No photos of military sites or government buildings. Drones are strictly regulated. Zero tolerance on drugs. You can't drive on your home licence.

- [ ] **Save the help numbers, and your embassy's**
  110 police, 119 fire, 120 ambulance. The English help lines are on page 2, and on the full card in our F3 video.

Point at this

8 words worth knowing

Say it, or just point at it.

你好	nǐ hǎo hello	谢谢	xièxie thank you
不好意思	bù hǎo yìsi excuse me / sorry	这个	zhège this one
多少钱?	duōshao qián? how much?	买单	mǎidān the bill, please
洗手间在哪里?	xǐshǒujiān zài nǎlǐ? where's the restroom?	我不会说中文	wǒ bú huì shuō Zhōngwén I don't speak Chinese

China's big holidays, 2027

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

- **Spring Festival:** 5–13 Feb
- **Labour Day:** 1–5 May
- **National Day (Golden Week):** 1–7 Oct
- **Make-up work days** (offices and shops open as normal): Sun 31 Jan, Sun 14 Feb, Sat 8 May, Sun 26 Sep, Sat 9 Oct

Save these

110 police · **119** fire · **120** ambulance · **122** traffic accidents

- **12345** city hotline, with English (Shanghai, Beijing)
- **12367** immigration hotline
- Your own embassy's number

Sources (checked 13 Nov 2026)

1. **English on transport:** english.beijing.gov.cn/livinginbeijing/transportation/beijingsubway/202408/t20240801_3764756.html · english.shanghai.gov.cn/en-Policies/20250402/589d2d4c557e48539549a502fa76fb01.html
2. **Taxis, photos, drones, drugs:** Global Affairs Canada, travel.gc.ca/destinations/china
3. **Table manners:** english.shanghai.gov.cn/en-LearnChinese/20240910/e8fe407acb494a41a5836f606eedf44b.html · english.visitbeijing.com.cn/article/47OMmtlyGNh
4. **Temples:** Visit Beijing, english.visitbeijing.com.cn/article/47ONUL61A8X
5. **Passport, laws, driving:** UK FCDO, gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/safety-and-security · 24 h registration: en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c197328/content.html
6. **Palace Museum:** english.beijing.gov.cn/latest/news/202607/t20260724_4785024.html
7. **2027 holidays:** State Council, 5 Nov 2026, gov.cn/zhengce/content/202611/content_7085101.htm
8. **Help numbers:** gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/getting-help · 12367: en.nia.gov.cn/n147413/c194788/content.html · 12345: english.shanghai.gov.cn/en/20231223/7b8359d283634bd99b4e7a2c5a89314c.html, english.beijing.gov.cn/12345hotline/

Mobile data in China
Our First Time Asia eSIM store: **shops.yonosim.com/firsttimeasia**
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Watch the video: F4 Language & culture, **youtu.be/5cCW-29Qi28** · **@firsttimeasia**

Rules and dates change. We checked everything on 13 Nov 2026; confirm the items marked "check before you go". Free to share, not for resale.



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