

Chinese Etiquette for Travelers

Know what to expect and what is expected of you when traveling to China. Being well-educated on the rules of etiquette and societal norms before you go to an unfamiliar place is always wise. It's an especially great idea when you're traveling somewhere like China, where very strict behavior rules exist. It is very easy to insult or offend someone in China simply by not knowing proper etiquette.



Greetings

If you're in a large Chinese city, it's a safe bet that most people speak some English. You can say "hello" or "how are you" and most urban Chinese will understand. If you aren't sure whether the person speaks English, just try smiling or waving at the person. Chinese don't normally shake hands, so bow from the shoulders in greeting. Shaking hands is acceptable, but if you shake a woman's hand, lightly grasp her fingertips rather than her entire hand. Never kiss a Chinese person in greeting.

Eating

Practices considered rude in the United States are normal and even welcomed in China. Don't be surprised if you see people chewing with their mouths open, slurping noodles or soup or talking with their mouths full. Burping also is a sign that you enjoyed the meal. Try to leave a little food on your plate at the end of the meal, because that signifies that the host has fed you more than enough.



Saying "No"

Chinese people will rarely tell you "no." They dislike losing face or making others lose face. Because of that, they will likely make an excuse rather than simply refuse something. For example, if you ask a Chinese person out for drinks and he doesn't want to go, he might say he has other plans. It's wise for

travelers in China to do the same to avoid the risk of making someone lose face.

In Public

The Chinese are quite modest and self-controlled when in public. Outbursts of emotion, whether it's laughter, tears or an argument, are looked down upon. It's considered extremely rude to embarrass or demean someone in public. Public displays of affection are considered undignified. Some actions you might not consider rude, but are considered so in China, are putting your hands in your mouth, nail biting, whistling, pointing with your index finger or showing the soles of your feet. However, the Chinese have no problem with spitting or blowing your nose onto the ground.

Gifts

Small gifts often are given as a symbol of courtesy when you go to someone's home or even business. Food is acceptable, as are items from where you live. Never give a Chinese person a clock as a gift, as they are symbols of death and funerals. Scissors and knives also are inappropriate presents because they symbolize cutting off a friendship. Expect a Chinese person to decline your gift several times before eventually accepting. It's considered rude to accept immediately.



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