

How to prepare when travelling to China

From navigating cashless payments to tackling language barriers, these essential tips will make your trip as smooth as ever

Planning a trip to China? The nation is rich with culture, culinary delights, diverse landscapes and colourful festivals. You'll still need to make a few preparations, but that's where we can help. Here's what to know ahead of travelling to China.

Making payments in China

China is predominantly cashless. You'll need to download one or two payment and communication apps to get around.

WeChat

It's best to download WeChat (Weixin) for easy communication during your travels. The app is available on both the [iOS](#) and [Android](#) app stores. Once you've downloaded it, you'll need to register your passport, a phone number that can receive a SMS verification (international numbers are accepted), and either a Chinese bank account registered under your Chinese phone number or a foreign credit card number.

WeChat is a [one-stop platform](#) for making payments, booking transportation, and performing just about every other daily task.

The app's e-wallet function is particularly useful in predominantly cashless China. You can use it to make payments everywhere from restaurants and hotels to supermarkets and buses. Here's a [step-by-step guide](#) to setting up your WeChat e-wallet: major international credit cards are supported and spending limits apply.

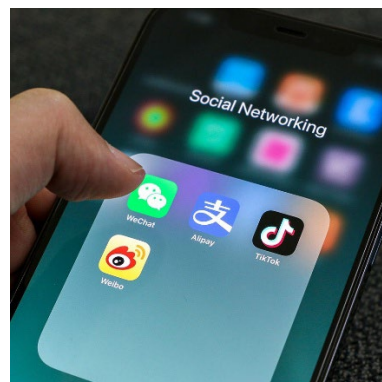
When making a payment at a checkout counter, you'll typically be presented with a QR code to scan. You can also create your own QR code with a pre-loaded amount of money.

Alipay

Another useful payment app is Alipay – not to be confused with AlipayHK – also available on both the [iOS](#) and [Android](#) app stores. This app can be used for payments to any merchant that displays an Alipay logo at their cashier. To set up your account, simply register with a phone number that can receive SMS, complete ID verification with your passport, then link your Chinese or foreign debit or credit card – Visa, MasterCard and JCB are all accepted. You can find detailed steps for Alipay registration [here](#).

To make a payment at an Alipay merchant, simply scan their QR code using the app or have the cashier scan your own personal QR code.

Beyond Alipay merchants, the app's TourCard function allows you to make payments at more than 30 million UnionPay merchants across China, topped up from stored funds transferred from your credit card.



Translating and speaking

Remember: [Baidu Translate](#) is a great option for speed and accuracy when you're on the move. And of course, understanding some basic phrases in Putonghua will go a long way.

Plugs, adaptors and charging essentials

Three types of plugs are used in China: A (the most common), C and I, so it's a good idea to pack a universal adapter. Travelers from North America should also bring a voltage converter, as the standard voltage in China is 220V compared to 120V in the United States and Canada. If you're visiting from Hong Kong, Europe, Australia, or the UK, a voltage converter is generally not necessary.

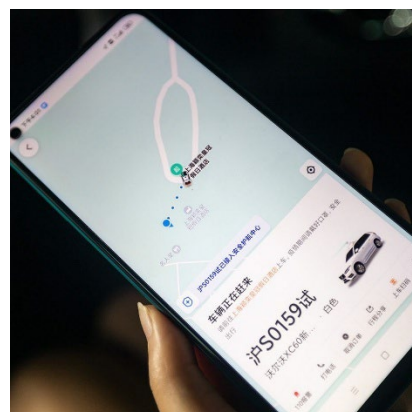


Getting around China

Exploring on foot? Apple Maps works on iPhones and Android users can try [Maps.Me](#), which has an offline function that won't eat up data. You can also download [Baidu Maps](#) and [Gaode Maps](#) – the maps may be more accurate, though the results and interface will be in Simplified Chinese unless the location itself is in English.

To use China's extensive metro system, you can make mobile ticket payments via WeChat or Alipay.

Ride-hailing apps are ubiquitous and inexpensive in China. The most widely used in China is [DiDi](#). It accepts payments through international credit cards as well Alipay and WeChat.

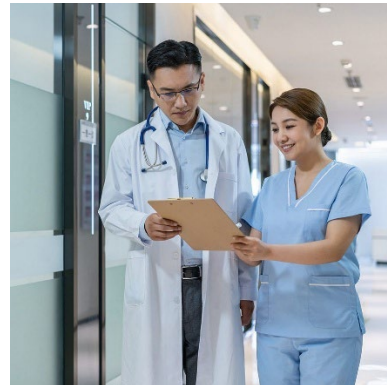


Finding healthcare services

If you've caught a cold or are suffering from minor ailments, you can pick up over-the-counter medicines at a dedicated pharmacy or drugstore such as Watsons, LBX Pharmacy, GuoDa Drugstore and China Nepstar. They're typically identifiable by a green cross sign at the shopfront.

For professional medical attention, visiting a hospital is your best option. China's public medical institutions are classified into a three-tiered system, with secondary and tertiary tier hospitals providing more comprehensive medical care and access to higher quality equipment. In major cities, some public hospitals feature VIP wards which provide shorter wait times, enhanced medical care, greater privacy, and English-speaking staff for an additional fee.

Private international hospitals are a good option for visitors who prefer to be treated by fluent English-speaking doctors and nurses. Fees will be higher here if paying out of pocket, so it's advisable to check your insurance policy to determine coverage for the medical services you may need.



Know your emergency contacts

While we hope for smooth travels abroad, it's important to be prepared for any incidents that may arise. Save these nationwide emergency numbers for China, which can be dialed free of charge.

Police: 110

Ambulance service: 120

Fire department: 119

Traffic accidents: 122

If you lose your travel documents or face serious emergencies such as a natural disaster or legal issue, your country's embassy or consulate will serve as a vital point of contact. Keep a copy of their contact details – including the address and phone number – to hand (typically available on their official website) to communicate with drivers or locals who can assist you with directions.

It's also a good idea to keep your travel insurance policy number and insurer's contact details handy so that you can reach out for assistance with a claim or ask about your coverage.

