

Planning Ahead for the Return Trip to China

Before you travel -

Traveling with a group can provide a support system for children and adults.

Discuss with adopted children that people in China may assume they speak Chinese; practice how they might respond.

Foreigners in China can attract some attention. For example, if a tourist is tall or has light hair or light eyes, they may be asked to have photos taken with them.

Chinese food varies province. Investigate ahead of time the food specialties in each area – such as Nanning noodles (delicious)!

Consider selecting a point person for the group to handle questions and updates. It can be helpful to delegate jobs within the group, such as collecting the tips for the tour guides and bus drivers.

At some point during your travels, you will likely encounter a pit toilet. Discuss pit toilets with children ahead of time – what they are and how to use them. Bring plenty of tissues and wipes. Where available, the Handicap Stall offers a regular toilet.

Itinerary –

Determine how long each family has to travel and brainstorm with the group the places you want to visit. Make a wish list and then prioritize it. Plan to visit the orphanage early in the trip and set aside at least ½ day for this event.

Think about special excursions – rafting, biking through countryside, caves, play or show, visiting farmhouse, Hutong, make a craft, take a cooking lesson. Visit cities and countryside.

Think about places you visited during the adoption trip. For example, the White Swan, Medical Building, U.S. Consulate, sightseeing spots, the children's finding place. Your child has heard about these places, seen photos - now they can experience them for themselves.

Consider what the children would like to see. For example, one or two formal Chinese gardens are probably enough – they tend to be very similar. Build in time for the group to rest, children to hang-out with each other and adults to catch up on reading, email, photos.

If traveling overnight by train the “soft seat” cabin is private and the door locks.

Traffic congestion in the large cities, such as Beijing, must be taken into consideration when planning how much can be accomplished in a day. The time it takes to get from place to place can be frustrating if you don't plan ahead. Be careful when walking, drivers can be very aggressive. Pay attention when crossing the road.

Flight over and back –

Bring snacks – chips, granola bars, gum

Airborne (or generic) tablets taken for immunity

Keep drinking water throughout the flight

Bring earplugs, neck pillows, a sweater/sweatshirt

To keep children entertained - iPods, books, magazines, a journal, movies (you can look up online which films are available for your flight).

When you land, you will need to adjust to the different time zone. In the beginning, you may find you are falling asleep earlier in the evening and waking up earlier the morning.

Money –

Bring an ample supply of cash, US and Chinese. In China, you can pay with cash, credit card, bank card, or convert traveler's checks to cash (although traveler's checks are not accepted in many places and the conversion rate is not as good as in the past). Credit cards are accepted at hotels and large tourist shops, but they are not always accepted at small shops, restaurants, etc. Check with your credit card company for fees that may be charged for foreign currency exchange.

Notify your credit card company that you will be traveling and using your card outside the United States.

Plan ahead for expenses not included in the Tour Package. For example: souvenirs, tips for guides and bus drivers in each location, additional food and sightseeing expenses, and gifts for the orphanage and foster family.

Communication with US –

Skype allows you to communicate with the US via computer connection. Practice a Skype session before leaving on the trip.

Email is a great way to communicate with home, Gladney, etc. Many hotel rooms have internet connection, or you can use the business center in the hotel for a fee if you don't have access to a laptop.

An international service plan is offered by many wireless phone carriers. The AT&T International Service Plan works in China, but it is expensive.

Electronic Equipment –

The electric current (voltage) in China is different than the United States, so you may need to bring a converter in order to use your battery chargers, laptops, iPods, etc. Note: the adapters for mainland China are different than those in Hong Kong.

Camera supplies should include more than one digital card. Rechargeable batteries and a charger are an option if you have a converter.

Having at least one laptop within the group is very helpful for accessing email, the internet, Skype, etc. You can load photos onto the laptop for back-up, or utilize a photo website.

Hong Kong –

The beds and rooms in Hong Kong are smaller and more expensive. You may need a larger room or suite for more than two people.

The Airport Express line of the MTR Rail System runs from the airport to Kowloon and Hong Kong Island. Most hotels have shuttle service at these stops.

Food/Drink/Digestive Issues –

Only drink water from a sealed water bottle or water that has been boiled or filtered. Ask your guide to have cases of water available – pay as you go. The hotels usually provide a couple of complimentary bottles of water each day, but make sure the bottles are labeled complimentary or you will be charged for them. Note: you cannot bring water into the airports.

Soda and beer is often included with meals. If you want water instead, make arrangements ahead of time. If the restaurant water is filtered, you can ask for free pitchers instead of bottles.

Discuss your dietary needs and food preferences with the local guide ahead of time. For example, plain green beans, broccoli, etc. for children may be available upon request.

Most hotels offer both western and Chinese foods for breakfast.

Shopping –

Think ahead about what you might want to buy and where. In many places you can barter, but in some stores it is not permitted. Practice negotiating. Be willing to walk away. The best deals often offered as you walk away.

Many larger cities have stores such as Walmart and Carrefour (a European supermarket and department store).

Ask your guide about when and where to purchase souvenirs. You will see many of the same items throughout the trip. For example, the local guide told one group that the best prices would be in Yangshou and they really were!

Street vendors can be very pushy as they try to sell trinkets, postcards, knock-off watches, snacks, etc. If needed, ask your guide for an appropriate, polite response.

It is a good idea to keep all of your receipts for larger purchases, and note what the expense was for and where the purchase was made. You will need a tally of all major purchases in order to complete a U. S. Customs form on the flight home.

Healthcare –

Big cities will have western style health care/pharmacies and access to western medication. Bring medications that may not be easily obtained in China, such as digestive aids for constipation or diarrhea

Some hotel pools require bathing caps; some require a certain type of bathing suit, e.g. men may have to wear Speedo type swim suit instead of swim shorts.

Create an “Important Information Sheet” –

Passport numbers, Visa numbers

Doctors’ names, numbers, addresses

Western medical facilities/pharmacies available in each area

Gladney contacts – Mr. Wu, phone, email, Skype

Travel Agent

Airline contact number, reservation number, frequent flier number

Credit card contact number (international contact number)

Email and phone numbers for emergency contacts back home

International calling card or cell phone information with directions, passwords

Make a mini version of your itinerary. Note all items that were prepaid and how much was paid.

Make a copy of your driver’s license, passport and healthcare card.

Traveling with Younger Children

1) If you are traveling with children under 12 or so, down-time is extremely important.

2) Be careful not to overschedule the first day or two when young children are recovering from the long flight over to China. The texture of everyday life in China is in and of itself a big deal for kids, and well worth exploring. Avoid overbooking too many major attractions the first couple of days. If you're going to an acrobat show or something in the afternoon, you might want to spend the morning going for a swim in the hotel pool or maybe walking to a nearby park or place where you can get a couple of cheap souvenirs or gifts to bring home. That, plus meals can be plenty for jet-lagged kids.

3) Bring some small, cheap new toys or games that kids are likely to take an interest in. Every once in a while, at a meal or somewhere else when you need something to hold their attention, introduce a new round of activities into the mix: an activity book, a deck of cards, whatever.

4) Ask your guide about playgrounds, they are much less common in China. Sometimes they appear in unusual places like department stores.

5) Carefully consider how much travel time you book into the tour. Time spent traveling to and from airports, in flight or on a train might be better spent in a large city such as Beijing or the children's birth city. A couple of days at the end of the trip in a place such as Guilin can work well. It is a little more relaxed and a little greener than some other places. The Li River day cruise is a perfect way to soak up some natural beauty after many days in hot, bustling cities.