

FOOD & DRINK:

WATER & BEVERAGES

Bottled water is readily available for purchase in all major locations and always in the hotel stores – usually about \$2 per bottle. Do not buy it from street vendors or in non-metropolitan areas. We arrange for all the bus drivers to provide a case or two of bottled water on their buses to afford each person TWO bottles per day free - and after that, it is offered for purchase, usually at the rate of \$1 per bottle – a win-win for them and for us. Some hotels will provide two small free bottles of water per room per day. UT if there are bottles in the hotel room with paper neck tags on them and/or they are Perrier or Evian brands, those are NOT free. If you consume those, you will be charged (more on that later). The hotel tap water is usually safe for brushing your teeth but many still prefer to only use the bottled water for that. We always use bottled water for drinking, though, even if a hotel says their tap water is safe to drink.

Tea, beer and soft drinks are available with the meals – the first (small) glass or cup is included in the tour price but they charge for refills. I always bring my water bottle with me to the meals just in case. Sometimes wine is available for purchase. Tea & coffee are always available for breakfast but coffee is much harder to get at lunch and dinner - and Asia Holiday Travel recommends you bring along packets of your favorite instant regular and/or decaf coffee, if that is your preference for later in the day, along with any sugar-free additives if desired.

ALCOHOL

You can buy duty-free alcohol before departure from the US but don't buy more than you can drink in the 3 nights you will be in Beijing (including your arrival night). Taking alcohol as part of your carry-on will end up with it being confiscated when you go through security, so don't even try. We saw one instance where it was detected in the checked bag in China, removed, and destroyed – perhaps because it exceeded the % proof level per the Chinese TSA. In China, once you clear airport security, you can find alcohol for purchase in the stores in the boarding area but there is no guarantee you will recognize what is offered nor be able to drink it. I am unclear how you can then carry any purchased alcohol aboard the flight due to recent changes. I bought a sealed bottle of water in the boarding area last year and was then forced to forfeit it when proceeding down the jet-way - totally confusing.

Here is what US airlines are saying about taking alcohol:

Alcoholic beverages placed in checked baggage must adhere to the following size restrictions and package guidelines.

-- When placed in checked baggage, glass bottles must be in a Styrofoam-type insert that is molded to the shape of the bottle and completely encloses the bottle.

-- Customs regulations outside the U.S. may have additional alcohol transport restrictions.

Proofs of alcohol vary. The guidelines for the varied proofs of alcohol are as follows:

Alcoholic beverages – less than 24 percent by volume (48 proof)

- Includes most beer and wine
- No limit on amount that can be accepted

Alcoholic beverages – 24 to 70 percent by volume (48 - 140 proof)

- Covers most alcoholic beverages
- Limited to 5 liters (1.3 gallons) per passenger

Alcoholic beverages more than 70 percent by volume (140 proof) are not permitted onboard the aircraft.

2017 - *I am no longer sure that you can officially take ANY alcohol in your checked luggage in China (although, I know that some of our folks have successfully carried an unopened bottle of wine in a sealed plastic baggie in checked luggage) - and you cannot take any as carry-on (you can still purchase Duty Free alcohol before boarding your international flight to drink in Shanghai). You will be able to buy it in the hotel stores, but don't buy more than you can drink in that city since it is highly unlikely that you will be able to carry it to the next destination! The boat does not permit you to bring your own aboard, either.*

The Chinese are not big on alcohol and some of their wine is not very good. The labels on the wine bottles are attractive, but we have seen serious alcoholics pour the contents down the drain, although their wine has truly improved over the years and already there are now some that are fairly decent. If you have a favorite mixed drink, bring the "recipe" with you as you may need to instruct the bartender on the proper concoction (this was especially true on the cruise ship one year). All the hotels have bars and the hotel

stores sometimes have alcohol for sale. Some places may offer recognizable hard liquor but most are in bottles with no clue as to its contents (all in Chinese) and they are notoriously strong (= kerosene). Their beer (“pi jiu”) is very light and good but order it “bing” if you want it cold (= “bing pi jiu” ... pronounced “BING Pee ZHEUW”) – otherwise they serve it warm (English style). We beg for “bing” (cold) but have been given our beer with ice in the glass on occasion! It’s an adventure!

FOOD & MEALS

All of the places where we will be dining are approved by China’s very developed tourism bureau as safe for the Western digestive system and no MSG. All your meals are included in the tour price except for where noted on the Itinerary sheet - plus your lunch and dinner on your last full day in China – your free day for shopping or more touring – since we don’t know where you will be that day. The ones we have eliminated from the tour are a result of customer feedback since they occur at hotels (Beijing, Chendu, Xi’an and Shanghai) which have an abundance of hotel and local restaurants, and many want to explore these.

Lunch and dinner will be representative of the local cuisine in each part of China we visit but Westernized a bit to be more palatable to our taste buds. You will not be served anything weird and there is always plenty - plus plenty of variety (different meats, poultry, fish, and vegetables). Also, lunch and dinner always include white rice (Soy sauce - which we can request but is not offered otherwise - and fried rice are not common in China, the latter being a Western concoction). Soup is commonly offered near the end of a meal as a filler, and I like to have my white rice placed in my soup bowl and then add the clear brothy soup to it to create a nice flavorful rice soup at the end of the meal just in case I was not completely sated by the meal.

Their fish is delicious and mild but often will contain lots of tiny bones – which we notice the Chinese tend to eat or not worry about much. Even though the bones are soft and may be (?) edible, I find it hard not to pick them out. The Chinese have never developed a sweet tooth, so their dessert is usually a fruit and quite often it is watermelon. Their pineapple is to die for. You can buy sweet things in the hotel stores if you find yourself having a sugar withdrawal. Note: Do NOT eat food off the street. Pre-packaged food in stores is OK.

The lunches and dinners are usually sit-down, round-table affairs using the Lazy Susan for moving the dishes around to you. You will be given a TINY TINY plate and a small soup cup and a small tea cup plus forks. Chinese style eating is to take bits of the food offered and taste a little of everything and replace or refill as desired. They never use large plates like we do. Dishes served are to cover all 10 at a normal table.

We always request that the served meals include serving spoons – not commonly used in China. You will always be offered chopsticks, Chinese soup spoons and normal Western forks – knives and regular spoons are not common, surprisingly. You can Google “chopsticks” and learn a lot – there are even little “videos” to show you how to use them, but they are not difficult and are really fun. You can turn them around to use the end that never goes near your mouth to serve yourself from the family dishes on the Lazy Susan if a serving spoon is unavailable. Using the “business” end that goes in your mouth to serve yourself may draw serious frowns from fellow diners who will worry about sharing germs, but the Chinese seem to accept that as OK for the most part – but they tend to take the food off the chopsticks and not touch them with their mouth.

Take care using the Lazy Susan as two problems often surface. Someone will start spinning the Lazy Susan while someone else is serving themselves, so please check BEFORE you start to move it. Also, take care that serving spoons are not sticking out where they will hit your glass, or etc., when the Lazy Susan is revolving - and watch how you place your own items so they don’t get whacked as things go by ...

The Itinerary shown on the web site shows the meals as (AB, L, D) for most days and (B, L, D) for the days on the cruise ship. “AB” stands for “American Breakfast” and “B” just stands for “Breakfast.” About the only difference I can determine is that “B” means you may not get bacon that day! All breakfasts are buffet-style with LOTS of both Western and Eastern choices. Some lunches are buffet while others are served to you, and all dinners are served except for the cruise ship (buffet). The standard served meal in China is always a round table with a Lazy Susan – usually seating from 10 per table. Breakfast buffets are open seating.