

Traveling to China

For onsite participants:

Beijing is a global city and one of the world's leading centers for culture, diplomacy, business, education, tourism, sport, technology and transportation. As a megacity, Beijing is the second largest Chinese city by urban population after Shanghai.

Combining both modern and traditional architectural styles, Beijing is one of the oldest cities in the world, with a rich history dating back over three millennia. The city has seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites - the Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, Summer Palace, Ming Tombs, Zhoukoudian, and parts of the Great Wall and the Grand Canal. Siheyuans, the city's traditional housing style, and hutongs, the narrow alleys between them, are major tourist attractions.

15-Day Visa-Free Travel for EU and Malaysia Citizens

Visa-free travel for citizens of Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland is available until December 31, 2025.

144-Hour Visa-Free Transit Scheme

This policy permits passengers from 54 countries or regions to transit through specific areas in China for up to 144 hours (6 days) without a visa. To qualify, book an interline ticket with a confirmed departure date and seat, leaving for a third country or region within 144 hours of your arrival in mainland China.

The eligible transit route follows this pattern:

A (Country/Region) → B (Participating Region in mainland China) → C (Third Country/Region)

Note: C cannot be the same as A.

It is essential to plan your travel itinerary carefully, considering the countries or regions you will visit immediately before and after your stay in mainland China. Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan can be included as either your entry or exit points. The 144-hour period begins at 00:00 hours on the day following your entry into China. For example, if you arrive in China at 8:00 am on July 6, 2024, the visa-free period starts at 00:00 hours on July 7, 2024, and you must depart by 23:59 hours on July 12, 2024.

Participating regions in mainland China include Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangdong, Hebei, Jiangsu, Kunming, Liaoning, Qingdao, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, Xi'an, Xiamen, and Zhejiang.

Sample Valid Routes:

1. US: New York/Chicago/Los Angeles > Seoul > Beijing > Taipei
2. Australia: Sydney > Beijing > Tokyo
3. UK: London > Hong Kong > Beijing > Kuala Lumpur

Please note that international flights into and out of China should be non-stop within mainland China. For

instance, a route like UK – Guangzhou – Shanghai - Hong Kong would not qualify. Once you enter China, you should directly depart to a third country or region without stopping at another city within mainland China.

For route qualification queries, it's advisable to check with your airline or the Chinese embassy or consulate before planning your trip. For more details, please refer to the 'China 144 Hour Transit Visa Free' subsection at the bottom of this page.

Visas

For most travelers, a visa must be obtained from a Chinese embassy or consulate prior to arrival in mainland China. We recommend initiating the visa application process at least one month in advance. Travel agencies can provide assistance with applications, and expedited services are available if needed.

For the most current visa requirements, please visit the website of the Chinese embassy or the Visa Application Service Center in your home country.

To enter mainland China, a passport with a minimum of six months validity remaining is required, along with a visa. These visas are issued by Chinese embassies, consulates, or affiliated Visa Application Centers.

Please note that while visitors to Hong Kong and Macau typically do not require visas, a visa will be necessary for travel onwards to mainland China.

Tourist visas permit single or multiple entries for durations ranging from 30 days to 6 months. Citizens of certain countries, such as the US and UK, may be eligible for 10-year multiple entry visas if they have previously visited China.

Visa applications generally necessitate proof of return travel, hotel reservations, and a comprehensive trip itinerary.

Please note that there are exceptions to these requirements, such as the 144-hour visa-free transit for travelers continuing onwards to a third country, and citizens of EU countries and Malaysia being able to visit China for 15 days without needing a visa. However, these exceptions may not apply to all travelers, so it's important to verify your specific requirements.

For further details, please refer to the [Visa](#) section of the official Beijing Municipal Government website.

Arriving by Air

Beijing has two international airports. Beijing Capital Airport (PEK) is closer to the city center with good public transport links. Beijing Daxing Airport (PKX) is farther from the center but also connected by public transit.

Airlines like Air China, Air France, American, Delta, Lufthansa, and United offer direct flights to Beijing from major international cities. It's also worth checking flights that arrive at neighboring Tianjin and taking the 30- to 40-minute bullet train, which runs every 10 to 15 minutes to Beijing. Indirect flights via Japan, South Korea, or Hong Kong are usually more plentiful and less expensive.

Transportation from the airports to the central business district (CBD) is available via taxi. The approximate travel times are a minimum of 32 minutes (26 km) from Capital International Airport (PEK), and 53 minutes (62 km) from Daxing International Airport (PKX). For detailed information, please refer to the 'Airport Taxis' section bottom of the page. Alternatively, you may inquire with your hotel's concierge or website regarding recommended ground transport options.

Arriving by Train

Beijing is a railway hub with direct international routes and trains to most Chinese cities. Key railway stations are Beijing Station, Beijing West Station, Beijing South Station, and Beijing North Station.

High-speed bullet trains efficiently connect Beijing to major cities across China, including a daily service from Hong Kong West Kowloon Railway Station to Beijing West Railway Station. This route, operated by the G79/G80 train from the G-series high-speed trains, takes approximately 8.5 hours. Ticket prices vary based on the class of travel and purchase date, with business class tickets costing around USD 529 for a one-way journey. It is advisable to purchase tickets early to secure your preferred travel dates. Tickets can be conveniently purchased online through reputable vendors such as China Highlights, Train Spread, and Klook.

Getting Around

Taxis & Rideshare

Taxis are an affordable and plentiful transportation option in Beijing. To ensure a smooth experience, print out your hotel's taxi card (in Mandarin) beforehand or have your destination written in Mandarin to show the driver. When arriving at the airport, only use the official taxi ranks and refuse unsolicited offers from drivers approaching you, as these are often unreliable and expensive. During your stay, your hotel can also arrange taxis for you.

Alternatively, ride-sharing services like Didi Chuxing can be a convenient choice for foreign visitors. Here's a concise guide to help you navigate to the designated pick-up points at Beijing's two major airports: Beijing Capital International Airport (PEK) and Beijing Daxing International Airport (PKX).

Before your trip:

- Install the Didi app designed for mainland China and Hong Kong from the appropriate app store.
- Set up your account in advance, including linking a valid international payment method (credit card, debit card, or mobile wallet like WeChat Pay or Alipay).

- Consider purchasing a Chinese SIM card upon arrival or inquiring with your mobile carrier about international roaming options, as account creation requires a valid phone number for verification.

At the airport:

- Look for prominent orange or white signage and arrows directing you to the "E-hailing" area when exiting the arrivals area.
- For PEK Terminal 2, cross the road to the car park and follow the signs to Parking Lot H.
- For PEK Terminal 3, follow the signs for "E-hailing" down to Level H, West Exit.
- For PKX, navigate to the P4 parking area by following signs with a yellow taxi icon and the word "E-hailing."

Tips for a smoother experience:

- Have your destination written in Chinese characters to show the driver, as there may be a language barrier.
- Consider using Didi's airport pick-up feature, which allows you to input your flight number and date for more personalized service.
- Premium Didi services offer nicer cars, amenities, and drivers more accustomed to serving international passengers.
- Be prepared for drivers to call with questions in Mandarin. In such instances, consider using translation apps or seeking assistance from hotel staff or local colleagues.

Language Assistance

Translation apps from Apple, DeepL, Google, Microsoft, and Yandex, available in both Apple and Android app stores, are excellent tools for aiding verbal communication and can do text translation via camera. It is highly recommended to download both input and output language packs for offline use prior to your journey. For added reliability, consider downloading multiple translation applications. Additionally, many travel e-books include sections on common phrases and words, and the Microsoft Translator app offers a free phrasebook feature which is accessible via Settings (gear icon) and selecting "Phrasebook".

Public Transport

The Beijing Subway is the world's busiest metro system, and is the oldest metro system in mainland China. It consists of 22 rapid transit lines, two airport rail links, one maglev line, two light rail lines, and 478 stations. It is a convenient way to travel about the city and has signs in English.

An extensive bus network also exists.

Cycling can be a good way to see Beijing, particularly the hutongs and historical areas. The city is very flat, making it ideal for getting around on two wheels but high pollution levels and chaotic traffic can often be an impediment. Bikes can be rented at many hotels or via an app.

Yikatong Card

The Yikatong card is a contactless smart card that can be used for transportation. It can be used on the Beijing subway, city buses, Airport Express trains, S2 trains, taxis, shared bicycles, and many other places. You can also apply for an electronic Yikatong via its app on a smartphone.

There are about 1,400 designated points in Beijing where you can buy a Yikatong or get a refund for it. These points are mostly located in subway stations as well as certain bus stations, convenience shops, banks, and Beijing Capital Airport (T2).

Money

Notify your bank ahead of time that you'll be traveling to China, and set up a travel notification on your credit cards. Many credit unions and major banks like Wells Fargo allow customers to order Chinese yuan (RMB) for delivery within 2-7 business days. You may wish to order at least some cash in advance, as exchange rates are typically better than at airport kiosks. Upon arrival in China, you can also withdraw yuan directly from ATMs using your debit card, at current market exchange rates. Just ensure you have an activated PIN and that your bank allows foreign ATM withdrawals. Currency converter apps like XE provide real-time rates as well. Direct use of foreign credit cards may be limited to international hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, and airports.

While carrying some cash is wise for initial expenses, China is rapidly becoming a cashless society dominated by mobile payment systems like WeChat Pay and Alipay. These "super-apps" go far beyond just payments, integrating features like ride-hailing, food delivery, and e-commerce through embedded "mini-apps." Paying with a QR code has become ubiquitous, used by everyone from street vendors to major retailers. Though cash is usually accepted, using the immensely popular WeChat or Alipay can greatly enhance convenience. These apps offer English options but some initial familiarity is recommended given their dizzying array of features.

Digital Wallets: WeChat Pay & Alipay

For visitors new to China's "super-apps," here are the steps to link your foreign credit or debit card to WeChat Pay and Alipay to make payments using your mobile phone. Follow these instructions after installing the app and creating an account.

WeChat Pay:

1. Open the WeChat app and navigate to the "Wallet" section (Me | Services | Wallet).
2. Select "Bank Cards" and then "Add a Bank Card."
3. Enter your card number and select the card type (Visa, or use drop-down menu).
4. Input the card's 'Validity' (expiration date) and CVV code.
5. Agree to the terms and conditions. Your card is now linked.
6. You can now make payments at millions of merchants by scanning QR codes.

Alipay:

1. Open the Alipay app and go to "Account" then "Bank Cards."
2. Tap the blue "+" symbol to add a card.
3. On the "Add Bank Card" screen, you can add Visa, Mastercard, Diners Club, Discover, JCB, or UnionPay.
4. Enter your card number; additional fields will appear as you proceed.
5. Input the card's expiration date and CVV2 number (3 digits; usually found on the back of the card).
6. Click "Agree to Terms and Add."
7. You can now make payments at millions of merchants by scanning QR codes.

Important Notes:

When making payments using WeChat Pay or Alipay, the funds are pulled directly from your linked foreign credit card without the need to load funds separately to the digital wallet. However, there are some limitations, as listed below.

- **Transaction Limits:** WeChat Pay has a maximum single transaction limit of RMB 6,000, a monthly limit of RMB 50,000, and an annual limit of RMB 60,000. Alipay has a maximum single transaction limit of RMB 3,000, with the same monthly and annual limits as WeChat Pay.
- **Identity Verification:** For Alipay, if your cumulative payment amount reaches RMB 15,000, you will be prompted to complete identity verification before proceeding with further payments.
- **Fees:** Both WeChat Pay and Alipay waive fees for transactions below RMB 200. For transactions above this amount, a 3% fee is applied.

Remember to check if your bank permits international mobile payments, double-check exchange rates, and start with small amounts until you are comfortable with the system. The convenience of going cashless and mobile in China is unparalleled. Have your foreign cards ready to sync up and enjoy a seamless payment experience!

Troubleshooting Electronic Wallet Setup

If you encounter difficulties setting up your WeChat Pay or Alipay electronic wallet while still in your home country, consider the following:

1. Ensure you have completed the identity verification process, which requires uploading a photo of your passport and a facial recognition scan. If you did not encounter these steps, you may need to backtrack and try again.
2. If you experience issues linking your credit card to the electronic wallet, try using a different credit card or switching between WeChat Pay and Alipay. Remember, you only need one functional electronic wallet, as either will be accepted by most vendors in China.

3. Setting up electronic wallets from overseas can sometimes be problematic. If you continue to face challenges, you may need to seek assistance upon arrival in China. WeChat Pay or Alipay might require manual verification, or other issues could have hindered the process.

4. As an alternative, if you are unable to link a credit card, consider asking a friend or colleague in China to transfer money to your electronic wallet. This will allow you to use the wallet's balance for payments without the need for a linked credit card.

Rest assured that help will be available during the conference if you continue to experience difficulties with your electronic wallet setup.

Accessing Online Services in China

Many Western websites and online services are restricted or blocked. To ensure seamless access, we strongly recommend securing a Virtual Private Network (VPN) before your arrival.

VPN Setup:

- If you are affiliated with a university or business, check that their VPN service is compatible with China and already installed on your devices (smartphones, laptops, tablets).
- Alternatively, you may consider subscribing to a reputable private VPN service based in Europe. We can provide recommended vendors upon request.
- Some VPN providers offer browser extensions for Firefox or Chrome, which can be a lightweight and efficient option for laptop users.

Accessing Specific Services:

- Apple Maps and Skype are generally accessible without a VPN.
- Google, Dropbox, Zoom, and social media require a VPN.
- To avoid VPN dependence, consider using European or non-Western alternatives such as Yandex (search engine, email, online storage), and Zoho (online office suite).

Internet Access:

- Free Wi-Fi is widely available at restaurants, cafes, and hotels across China.
- However, you may need to provide a mobile phone number to obtain an access code in some locations.

We encourage you to set up your preferred VPN solution before your trip to China, ensuring uninterrupted access to the online services and resources you require during the conference.

Mobile Phones

China operates on the GSM network so most cell phones brought overseas will work with a local SIM card. You can purchase a SIM card at the airport or at local shops. China Unicom, China Telecom, and China Mobile are the main network providers.

Check with your phone carrier regarding overseas roaming coverage in China; it may be more convenient than trying to switch SIM cards in Beijing. Some carriers, such as T-mobile, provide unlimited international texting.

Electrical Appliances

The electrical system in Beijing operates at 220 volts AC and 50 Hz. The standard socket/plug used in China is also common in Australia and New Zealand, so a plug adapter or converter is needed. Most hotels ranking above 3 stars in China provide electrical outlets of both 110V and 220V in the bathrooms, though in guest rooms usually only 220V sockets are available.

Opening Hours

Most shops and attractions are open daily from 8 or 9am until the evening, anywhere between 6 to 10pm. Many close for a few hours in the afternoon. Check opening hours in advance, as these can vary. Nearly all sights, stores and restaurants are closed on Mondays.

Weather

The updated weather forecast for Beijing from July 8-11, 2024, now calls for hot mid-summer conditions with highs ranging from 29-34°C (84-93°F) and lows between 24-26°C (75-79°F). Humidity levels will remain high, averaging around 70-80%, making the weather feel muggy. The UV index is expected to be very high, reaching values of 9 or above, so protective measures against sun exposure are strongly recommended. Air quality may vary, with pollution levels ranging from moderate to unhealthy for sensitive groups, particularly on hazy days. Prepare for hot, humid, and potentially stormy weather with occasional poor air quality. It is advisable to wear sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses, and to avoid outdoor activities during midday hours when the sun is at its peak. For the latest forecasts, please refer to Meteoblue or Foreca.

Recommended Travel Resources

- Lonely Planet China: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/china/places>
- Tripadvisor: <https://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g294212-Beijing-Vacations.html>
- Visit Beijing website: <https://english.visitbeijing.com.cn/>

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- VisaGuide: <https://visaguide.world/asia/china-visa/transit-visa/144-hour-visa-free/>
- China Discovery: <https://www.chinadiscovery.com/chinese-visa/144-hour-visa-free.html>

Airport Taxis

- Capital International Airport (PEK): <https://www.beijing-airport.com/taxi.php>
- Daxing International Airport (PKX): <https://daxing-pkx-airport.com/transportation/airport-taxi/>