



# HOSPITALITY FOR CHINESE GUESTS



*Winner of USA Today Award of Excellence*

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HOTEL ASSOCIATION OF CANADA  
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# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Preface</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Approved Destination Status</b> .....	2
<b>China Profile</b> .....	2
<b>Travel Facts and Issues</b>	
Who are the Travelers? .....	3
Trip Characteristics .....	3
Chinese Travelers Want to Shop .....	3
Chinese Travel Trends .....	4
<b>Leisure Activities</b> .....	4
<b>Characteristics of Chinese Culture</b>	
A Deep Historical Foundation .....	5
The Concept of Face .....	5
Chinese Zodiac .....	6
<b>Religion and Spirituality</b> .....	6
<b>Forms of Thought</b> .....	7
Rules of Conduct .....	7
Business Conduct .....	8
Negotiations .....	8
<b>Chinese Language</b> .....	9
<b>Chinese Names</b> .....	9
<b>Protocol and Etiquette Suggestions</b> .....	10
Demographics .....	10
Structure of Trips .....	10
Communications .....	11
Check-in and Welcome .....	11
Allocation of Rooms .....	12
Meals .....	12
<b>The Way Ahead</b> .....	12
<b>The Author</b> .....	13
<b>Selected Bibliographies</b> .....	14

## **Preface**

***Hospitality for Chinese Guests*** is the result of the need to update and inform those in the hospitality industry with changes in the Chinese inbound market.

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## **Introduction**

China had 109 million outbound visitors in 2015 and they spent \$229 billion US dollars, an increase of 16% compared with 2014. This rapid growth is not simply in leisure travel. Business travelers from China are expected to surpass those from the United States in 2017. In 2014 China outpaced the United States with more international travel and spending.

The Canadian tourism industry continues to target the growing Chinese market following Canada officially receiving Approved Destination Status (ADS) from China in 2010 allowing destination marketing organizations and the travel trade to actively market Canada directly to Chinese consumers. As a result of ADS, overnight arrivals in Canada have gained significant momentum. Since the agreement in 2010, Chinese tourism to Canada has grown at an astounding rate of 24% per year generating \$3B in export revenue. In 2014, year over year growth in visitation from China reached 30% with over a billion dollars in receipts.

In Canada, China shifted from 6<sup>th</sup> source of overseas travelers in 2010 to 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2014. Chinese visitors injected \$920 million into the Canadian economy in 2014 spending \$2,345 on average per person per trip.

Vancouver and Toronto welcomed more visitors from China in 2015 than any country besides the United States. That puts China on top of the overseas tourism podium, eclipsing the United Kingdom for the first time.

Toronto saw 230,485 recorded Chinese visits in 2014. Visits from the U.K. totaled 217,232. In 2010, that number was just 114,600.

Our Chinese guests have high hopes and expectations of Canada. We must, therefore, adopt the correct form of tact and diplomacy, and show ourselves to be most welcoming in our hospitality. In terms of succeeding in our relationships with the Chinese tourists, cultural sensitivity with regard to their needs and expectations plays a key role. Aside from having brochures, websites, menus and leaflets translated into Chinese, we must also take into consideration the customs in China, in organizing holiday or leisure activities, as well as in accommodating preferences in meals and in-room décor and amenities.

It is important to note that Chinese social conduct and etiquette differ from those of North America, and those differences should be accommodated in order to achieve a most agreeable relationship with your Chinese clientele.

## **China Profile**

China is the most populous country in the world with a population of 1.35 billion. Simply put, around one of every 5 people on earth lives in China.

It is the world's fastest-growing major economy. The Chinese economy expanded 7.7% in 2014.

The Chinese middle class is already larger than the entire population of the United States. Chinese demand for international travel is still young. However, it is expected to grow by 17% annually over the next decade, driven by rising incomes and aspirations. There will be an average of 25 million first-time Chinese travelers every year, or 70,000 every day, for the next 10 years. International travel from China is already a major source of growth for many countries. An increasing number of second and multiple times Chinese visitors are more likely to travel independently, and not part of a group, meaning that they have a greater choice of timing and destinations. They have the opportunity to explore 'off-the-beaten-track' venues and can look for holidays and activities that suit their personal interests.

Chinese tourists are knowledgeable and better educated with 84% having post secondary education versus 58% globally, sophisticated, increasingly travel savvy and on average younger at 36 years of age versus 46 globally. New Chinese tourists look for deeper experiences and closer contact with local host populations during their self-organized trips.

## **Travel Facts and Issues**

### **Who are the Travelers?**

- Middle and upper socio-economic groups
- Urban residents in 3 major geographic areas (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou)
- New private enterprise owners
- White-collar workers in foreign and joint-venture enterprises
- Teachers, lawyers, engineers and students
- Media, sport and entertainment professionals
- Families

### **Trip Characteristics**

- Long planning horizon
- Booked through approved travel agencies
- Internet searches
- Multi-destination trips
- Group packages still preferred – except for VFR and 25-34 age group
- Most travel in three Golden Weeks:
  - Chinese New Year (Jan/Feb)
  - Labour Day (May 1)
  - National Day (Oct 1)

### **Chinese Travelers Want to Shop**

As Canada opens up to tourists from China, we must focus on catering to Chinese tourists' shopping habits in trying to attract more visitors from that country.

While North American and European tourists generally focus on “leisure and culture” on their vacations, Chinese tourists, on the other hand, are more eager to visit popular tourist spots to take photos. They also tend to focus on shopping for items such as brand-name clothes, cosmetics, jewelry and electric home appliances. Most Chinese tourists come from wealthy coastal areas, and are government officials or employees of state enterprises; they generally tend to have higher incomes or enjoy government subsidies for air tickets, hotel accommodations and food.

## **Chinese Travel Trends**

- Chinese tourists are officially allowed to travel to countries that have been granted Approved Destination Status (ADS).
- In Chinese culture, traveling is a way of self-improvement and learning. They are seeking bragging rights through travel.
- Factors including increased disposable incomes, more leisure time and less travel restrictions have enhanced the opportunities for Chinese nationals to travel overseas.
- Those people who travel abroad are generally well educated and have a well-paid job.
- Safety and ease of obtaining visas for the destination influence how Chinese travelers choose their destination.
- 'Value for money' and attraction of the destination are two main reasons for the affluent Chinese to choose their travel destination.
- There are approximately 670 government-approved travel agencies authorized to organize group visits overseas.
- 'Word of mouth' is one main way for the Chinese tourists to share their information. Providing quality service and prestige should therefore potentially attract more Chinese customers.
- The peak times to travel are during the three golden weeks: Lunar New Year holiday (late January or early February), Labour Day holiday (1<sup>st</sup> May) and National Day holiday (1<sup>st</sup> October).
- Most Chinese tourists will not be afraid to voice their complaints to their Chinese tour guides if service levels and accommodation expectations are not met or they do not perceive 'value for money.'

## **Leisure Activities**

When traveling, the Chinese will have tastes and expectations that differ somewhat to those of the Western tourist.

The notion of leisure travel is still rather new to Chinese society. In fact, no clear distinction is made between the time spent at work and the time dedicated to family, friends or hobbies. Working life and more private moments are not considered to be mutually exclusive.

The Chinese tend to relate to more "busy" atmospheres, as they apply more directly to environments in larger cities in China. Enjoying a stroll in the evening after dinner among a downtown crowd, entertaining guests and family at home, and indulging in shopping are among the more popular activities.

Sports, however, do not rank as high for the Chinese as it does for the Western Hemisphere in terms of leisure activities.

The concept of "saving money at home and spending it abroad" for the Chinese, is quite prevalent. Presents and gifts for family and friends back home are a noticeable portion of spending habits among Chinese travelers, especially branded products with local characteristics.

Much of Chinese daily life revolves around food. Eating and dining are important social events. Typically, food is consumed at a large table with a large gathering of family and/or friends.

Keep in mind, therefore, as a service provider, that this is an important element to ensuring a hospitable reception for your Chinese guests.

The usual selection of wine, beer, water and soft drinks, along with hot tea or hot water would be quite adequate.

## **Characteristics of Chinese Culture**

### **A Deep Historical Foundation**

One of Chinese culture's most pronounced traits are its deep roots in history, which span almost five millennia. Despite various ruptures and discontinuities in this tremendously long and rich history, the Chinese see themselves as guardians of a unique heritage. Their history serves as a reference point for many customs, traditions and practices, whether in the form of iconic figures, such as Confucius, or recognized fact, and even epic tales.

The formation of the empire in 221 BC began a heritage of dynasties that bound the country together. The perception of China as a whole entity stems from a totally centralized and hierarchical administration. The Imperial period continued until 1911, and after a period of instability, the Communist Revolution brought about the advent of the People's Republic of China. Economic and cultural transitional pains took hold until the death of Mao Zedong, the father of Chinese Communism. The country then redeveloped its export market system and since then has experienced very strong economic growth over the last half century, showing percentage growths of 8% annually every year for the last two decades. This trend does not show any signs of slowing down.

Modern Chinese society is complex. Various elements of Chinese social, political and economic functionality contradict the more foundational and historic doctrines. One of the overarching elements of Chinese societal identity is the concept of rights and obligations. Rights belong to society; obligations belong to the individual. This notion extends from the holistic concept of a unified Chinese society. A greatly advantageous characteristic of Chinese society, however, is its ability to incorporate external thoughts and practices.

### **The Concept of Face**

Chinese society, generally speaking, is based on "face" which is very simple. All it means is not behaving in a way that would embarrass someone and cause them to lose status in front of their peers.

One sure way for foreigners to make someone from China lose face is to lose their temper in public. Not only will the person targeted lose face, the foreigner loses face as well for being weak and unable to control emotions. The Chinese pride themselves on self-control and when flustered or embarrassed will often giggle or give an evasive response, rather than deal with the situation directly. This does not mean the Chinese don't get angry but the general rule is that self-control goes a long way.

## The Chinese Zodiac

### THE CHINESE ZODIAC

Astrology has a long history in China and is integrated with religious beliefs. If you want to know your sign in the Chinese zodiac, look up your year of birth in the. Future years are included here so you'll know what's coming:

- **Rat:** generous, social, insecure, prone to laziness; 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996
- **Ox/Cow:** stubborn, conservative, patient; 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009
- **Tiger:** creative, brave, overbearing; 1938, 1950, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010
- **Rabbit:** timid, amicable, affectionate; 1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011
- **Dragon:** egotistical, strong, intelligent; 1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012
- **Snake:** luxury seeking, secretive, friendly; 1941, 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013
- **Horse:** emotional, clever, quick thinker; 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014
- **Goat:** charming, good with money, indecisive; 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015
- **Monkey:** confident, humorous, fickle; 1944, 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016
- **Rooster:** diligent, imaginative, needs attention; 1945, 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017
- **Dog:** humble, responsible, patient; 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018
- **Pig:** materialistic, loyal, honest; 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019

## Religion and Spirituality

Three major spiritual and/or ideological paths are outlined below, as an indicator of the mindset of Chinese ways of looking at life:

### **Confucianism**

According to Confucius, a philosopher from about 500 BC, man must conform to a social order and tradition. This philosophical doctrine became so strongly held that it is not part of state ideology. This extends to all aspects of life, public and private, and denotes the necessity for roles, be they official as in ministerial, or familial, such as the relationship between father and son or husband and wife.

### **Taoism**

Taoism is a passive approach to existence, preaching compromise and conflict resolution through detachment. Meditation and other characteristics of an ascetic life are recommended through Taoism.

### **Buddhism**

Buddhism has its roots in India, and reached China about 2000 years ago. It introduced the concept of karma, or the retribution of actions and ideas of reincarnation into Chinese life. Modifications of Buddhism have been developed, through a synthesis with Confucianism and other domestic philosophies and ideologies.

## **Forms of Thought**

The Chinese are pragmatic. Functionality and results are primary motivators: that which works is true. According to the tradition of the yin and yang, man must understand the movement and constant dynamics of these two opposing but complementary forces to maintain harmony in life.

Developing relationships is of great importance to the Chinese. Reciprocity is integral in relationship building, as in one good turn deserves another.

In keeping with the yin and yang concept and maintaining harmony, there are an abundance of practices and beliefs, such as:

- Favourable words: proverbs, maxims.
- Animals: incorporation of images of the dragon, phoenix, crane, fish and tortoise. All are considered good omens.
- Certain flora.
- Certain characters are regarded as bringers of good fortune or longevity.
- Colours have symbolic value as well; red is for good fortune, yellow is imperial, white is the colour of mourning.
- Numbers: "8" sounds like the word fortune, and is therefore considered lucky. "4" is similar to the word for "death", and has an opposite value.

## **Rules of Conduct**

During an exchange, it is essential to remember that Chinese culture is traditionally based on inequality of status. This is of paramount importance on rules of conduct.

- Establishing the rank of an individual is a vital factor. This involves, for example, handing a business card with both hands at the beginning of a meeting. Much more than just a piece of paper, the business card provides vital information for knowing what behavior is appropriate. The card should be studied at length.
- Personal image, which encompasses social standing and moral integrity, is used to establish trust and to check that the person is worthy of trust. Without this highly personal touch from the outset, it will not be possible to build on the relationship.
- Protocol assumes a great importance, as it must ensure that people are treated strictly according to their rank.
- The order of precedence must closely follow the hierarchy of status, and then comes the respect afforded to elders. Rules of gallantry generally do not apply.

When discussing an issue with a Chinese client, it is recommended to be indirect and diplomatic in your approach. Debate and discourse in Chinese society is reserved and modest, and attempts to avoid anger and direct confrontation.

## **Business Conduct**

Long-term vision is paramount

- Understand that the negotiation process calls for deep personal involvement. Progress is made cautiously, step by step.
- Emphasize a long-term partnership, as opposed to short-term objectives.
- Favour an amicable and peaceful atmosphere, which is key to ensuring harmony.
- Without trust, without good relations and without compromise, there will be no business deals.

## **Negotiations**

- Pay close attention to seating arrangements, as the highest-ranking persons sit opposite each other at the centre of a long table, furthest from the door.
- At dinner, the best seating place is to the right of the host, the next best to his left. The place of honour is opposite the door, but is far from it, and, if possible, faces south. The lowest-ranking person occupies the most vulnerable place, with the back to the door.
- Respect the speaking order. Express yourself slowly and in an intelligible manner, without interrupting the other party.
- Set aside ample time, as haste is ill advised.
- Understand that Chinese culture expects important information to be revealed only towards the end of any negotiation.
- Do not continue negotiations during the meal that follows, although this period is essential to the success of the process.
- Use interpreters who possess an excellent level of language skill and who are trained in the relevant area.

## **Chinese Language**

China has eight major dialect groups: Putongua (Mandarin), Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghainese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan and Hakka and many sub-dialects.

The language spoken in Beijing is often referred to as Mandarin or Putonghua. Putonghua, which means "common language" is the country's predominant language and is widely used by more than 70% of the population. Putonghua is variously referred to as the "Han language" (hanyu), "Mandarin", or simply Chinese.

About two-thirds of the Han people are native speakers of Putonghua, while Han people who come from the southwestern and southeastern sections of China often speak Putonghua as well as their own dialects, such as Shanghaiese and Cantonese.

### A. 23 letters in Pinyin:

Letter	Pronunciation	Letter	Pronunciation	Letter	Pronunciation
B	As in <b>b</b> ay	G	As in <b>g</b> o	Sh	As in <b>sh</b> irt
P	As in <b>p</b> ay	K	As in <b>k</b> it	R	As in <b>r</b> eisure
M	As in <b>m</b> ay	H	As in <b>h</b> it	Z	As in <b>z</b> eads
F	As in <b>f</b> at	J	As in <b>j</b> eeep	C	As in <b>c</b> hats
D	As in <b>d</b> ad	Q	As in <b>q</b> heer	S	As in <b>s</b> ay
T	As in <b>t</b> ime	X	As in <b>x</b> he	Y	As in <b>y</b> es
N	As in <b>n</b> ay	Zh	As in <b>z</b> hunk	W	As in <b>w</b> ay
L	As in <b>l</b> ay	Ch	As in <b>ch</b> urch		

### B. Useful words and phrases:

#### 1. Orientation and Geography

Pinyin	English	Pinyin	English	Pinyin	English
dong	East	hu	lake	qu	canal
xi	West	he	river	jie	street
nan	South	shan	mountain	lu	road
bei	North	hai	sea	xiang	lane
		wan	gulf		

#### 2. Numbers

Number	Pinyin	Number	Pinyin	Number	Pinyin	Number	Pinyin
1	yi	6	liu	11	shi yi	31	san shi yi
2	er	7	qi	12	shi er	100	yi bai
3	san	8	ba	20	er shi	200	er bai
4	si	9	jiu	21	er shi yi	1,000	yi qian
5	wu	10	shi	30	san shi	10,000	yi wan

#### 3. Useful phrases: Pronouns

English	Pinyin	English	Pinyin
I	Wo	hello	Ni hao
we/us	women	goodbye	Zai jian
you	Ni / nimen(plural)	thank you	Xie xie
he/ she/ it	Ta	please	qing
they / them	tamen	you're welcome	Bu ke qi
Excuse me	Qing ni	I'm sorry	duibuqi

English	Pinyin	English	Pinyin
How much is it?	duoshao qian?	train station	huo che zhan
That's too expensive.	tai guile	airport	fei ji chang
My name is...	Wo jiao...	bus station	qi che zhan
I'm from...	Wo shi cong...laide	hotel	jiu dian / fan dian
Where is the...?	...zai nail	hospital	yi yuan
I'm lost.	Wo mi lu le.	police	Jing cha
What's the time?	Ji dian le?	Restroom	cesuo
I fell ill.	Wo bu shu fu.	Train	huo che
Could you help me?	ni ke yi bang wo ma?	restaurant	can ting / fan dian
I would like...	wo xiang yao...	shop	Shang dian

I need	Wo xu yao	Taxi	chuzu qi che
I want to go to	Wo yao qu	Bank	yinhang
Do you have	You mei you	Book	shu
Here is my address	Zhe shi wode dizhi	Map	Ditu

## **Chinese Names**

The full name of a Han Chinese person is composed of two parts: the surname (family name) and the given name.

Today, there are 3,050 surnames in China. Among them, surnames like Zhang, Wang, Li, Zhao and Liu are the most popular. The surname, which comes first, is often passed down from father to son. It is generally composed of one word. There are also two word surnames, or compound surnames, such as Oyan, Zhuge and Sima. Chinese women always retain their family name even after marriage.

The given name, which contains one or two words, follows the surname. Take Chairman Mao's name for example: his name is "Mao Zedong". "Mao" is his surname and "Zedong" is the given name.

A full Chinese name normally has two or three words. Full names containing four words can also be seen because of a compound surname and two syllable given names.

Addressing a Chinese person directly by his (her) given name is considered to be offensive, unless you are longtime friends. The proper way to address a person is by his (her) surname (family name), followed by XIANSHENG (Mr.) for men and NVSHI (Mrs.) or XIAOJIE (Ms.) for women.

Similarly, the professional/functional title is also used after the family name when addressing an important person. Following are some examples:

English	Chinese	English	Chinese
Mr. Li	Li xiansheng	President Jiang	Jiang zhuxi
Mrs. Wang	Wang nvshi	Minister Zhu	Zhu zongli
Ms. Wang	Wang xiaolie	Manager Zhang	Zhang jingli

## **Protocol and Etiquette Suggestions**

### **Demographics**

The main age segment of Chinese travelers is between 35 and 59 years primarily due to China's pensioners being relatively young. Business travelers are usually male. Travel to foreign countries is seen as an important status symbol.

### **Structure of Trips**

It is standard for government employees to have between 7 and 14 days of annual holidays. Foreign companies offer up to 15 days a year. Family travel including children usually takes place in July, August and September. Group sizes vary. Business groups can be between 3 and 20 persons. Package tours can be even larger.

The Chinese seldom use their vacation time to visit beaches choosing to opt for sightseeing which makes up three quarters of travel. The Chinese only visit what they know or have heard of.

Typically they do not try new things. Casino visits and musical programs are in high demand. Shopping is key and brand names are very important to Chinese.

Packed daily itineraries depend on a smooth succession of events with no waiting periods. However, fixed itineraries can be changed at a moment's notice and flexibility is expected. Chinese groups are almost always accompanied by tour guides due to a lack of experience and language barriers. Chinese guests expect to be lodged in modern hotels and prefer eating Chinese food.

## **Communications**

### **Check-in and Welcome**

Breakdowns in communication between people from different countries are often due to not simply language differences but to varying cultural interpretations. For example North American culture shows that a lack of eye contact shows lack of interest in honesty. In China not showing eye contact is considered to be polite and demonstrating proper etiquette.

The tour guide is a key person as it is this person who is the link between the hotel, the group and the travel agency.

The surname is usually said first when addressing someone in Chinese. 'Li Xiansheng' would therefore be Mr. Li.

The Chinese use the words 'please' and 'thank you' much less than in western countries. This should not be taken as an insult. Their words are often expressed with friendly smiles and nods.

Much as Chinese tourists are very offended when they are compared with Japanese guests, the Chinese written word is very different from Japanese. They also have their own symbols for numbers although the Arabic / Latin numerical system is well known.

The Chinese do not bow. They shake hands. Frequent and friendly nodding is very important and is a sign of politeness. Chinese communication is generally indirect and frequently meanings are only hinted at. The Chinese take time to evaluate what is being said often resulting in pauses in conversation. Conventional pauses in North America are often shorter leading the Chinese to believe there is a lack of thoughtfulness in responses.

Negative subjects should be avoided in conversation including even bad weather. Politics, religion and sexuality must be avoided and references to current political situations including human rights and freedom of speech should never be raised. If in doubt avoid the topic. Avoid humor which more often than not loses its meaning in the translation.

Issues which are considered very personal in the west are often discussed openly in China. It is common place and not impolite for Chinese to ask questions about income, age, marital status and prices.

Non verbal communication is greatly valued. A staff smile goes a long way in making a guest feel welcome. However do not take this too far as the Chinese expect restraint at the same time. Staff is seen as servants and should therefore keep themselves in the background.

The Chinese rarely show emotion in public. The worst offence could be to lose one's temper. To save face is critical and hiding emotions is considered a virtue. One should never turn ones back on a Chinese guest.

Chinese guest complaints will be made by the tour guide directly with the hotel. Complaints will be noticeable however their annoyance will be displayed in a quiet and respectful manner. In this type of situation it is important for the hotel to have established a relationship with the tour guide and it is even more important to help he or she "save face". This should involve apologizing immediately, regardless of where the fault lies. A lack of an apology is seen as impolite. Upon check in each guest should be greeted with individual attention and a big smile. It is the accepted norm to greet the delegation leader first not his wife. Preferential treatment of women would leave the family feeling embarrassed.

If a Chinese guest offers his or her business card it should be treated with greatest respect. A business card is offered using both hands with the writing facing the recipient. A business card should always be accepted using both hands.

### **Allocation of Rooms**

Every effort possible must be made to avoid putting Chinese guests on the fourth floor. When pronounced the number four sounds very familiar to the word "dead". A room number such as 444 should never be allocated. Alternatively, the numbers 8 and 9 are considered to be very lucky. In the western world one says it is seventh heaven. In China it is ninth heaven. Contrary to the Japanese, Chinese couples share a double bed. At the same time Chinese have no problem with having only a shower in their room; a bathtub is unnecessary. However Chinese guests do expect to find a comb, toothbrush and slippers in their room.

### **Meals**

The Chinese drink great quantities of tea and hot water. Accordingly kettles should be available in each room. Chinese drink still water not sparkling and are very hesitant to drink tap water.

The three daily meals are treated equally by the Chinese who rarely skip a meal. Agreed upon eating times are strictly followed and breakfast is generally concluded by 8:00AM. Hotels are encouraged to supply chopsticks; however food must be prepared in bite size portions. At breakfast knives and forks should be provided. Toothpicks must be provided. Cold dishes are rarely eaten by the Chinese. Breakfasts should include soups, eggs, sausages and bacon. White bread is definitely preferred over whole wheat. Fish and seafood are usually looked upon as delicacies. The most popular meats are chicken and pork and should be prepared well done. Beef is unpopular due to BSE.

The most popular drink is tea and hot water and should always be available. Coffee is a popular breakfast drink. The Chinese like beer and sweet red wines.

### **The Way Ahead**

Now is the time to prepare for our Chinese Guests. An old Chinese Proverb says it best "A man without a smiling face must not open a shop".

If you don't look after your guest, someone else will.

Anthony P. Pollard  
June 2016

**Anthony P. Pollard**



The author was born and raised in Montréal and educated at Concordia University, The University of Western Ontario, McGill University and Carleton University. He holds a Masters Degree in Political Science and International Affairs. He has traveled extensively in China.

In December 2011 USA Today recognized Tony Pollard with its 2011 Award of Excellence for “Hospitality for Chinese Guests”.

## **Selected Bibliographies**

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World Tourism Organization  
World Travel Market Global Trends  
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