

TRIP ZEN

NO ONE WANTS TO LOOK LIKE A TOURIST WHEN THEY ARRIVE IN A NEW CITY, SO READ ON AND DIGEST FOR COMPLETE TRAVEL CONFIDENCE.

BESPOKE
Beijing





HOW TO
LOOK AS
THOUGH
YOU KNOW
WHAT
YOU'RE
DOING

If you're like us, the one thing you don't want to look like when on holiday is a tourist. Here's how to act smart and blend right

RELAX, BEIJING IS A SAFE CITY

It's hard to know how safe a city is when you're in it for the first time. Happily Beijing is one of the least worrisome on earth, especially for women. So don't go off with anyone who solicits you in the street (they're scammers), secure your personal belongings (especially in crowded public places) and then relax. Even Beijing's dark and winding alleyways (hutongs) are a pleasure to walk through at night. The only area with an occasionally risky profile is Sanlitun bar street after midnight.

BOOK AN AIRPORT PICK UP FOR YOUR ARRIVAL

We know this sounds

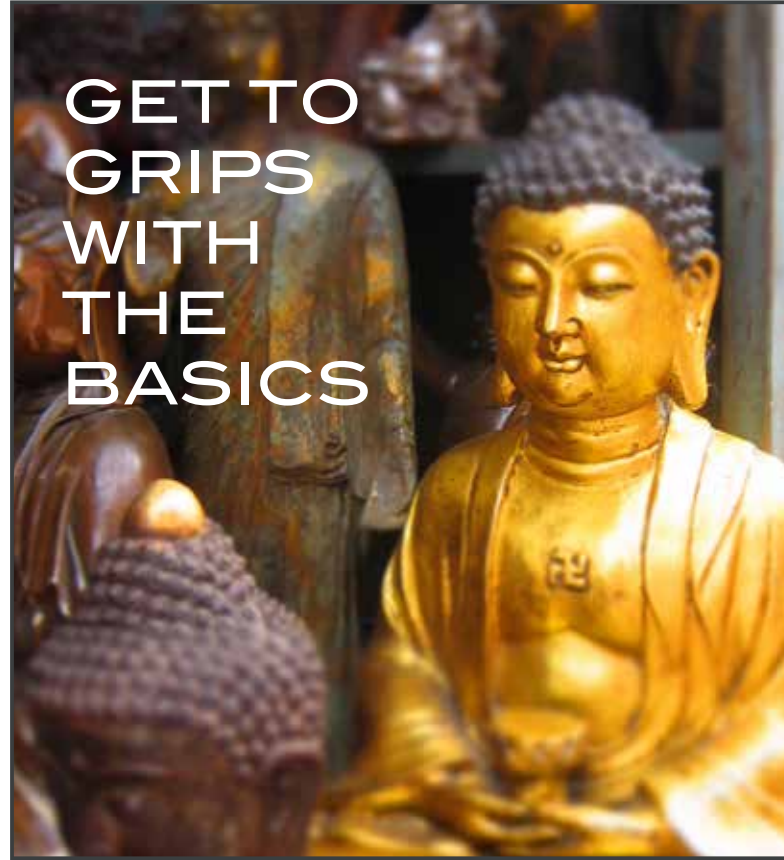
like upselling, but you'll have to believe us when we say that pre-ordering a transfer will make your life so much easier. If you haven't already booked one through Bespoke or your hotel then this is us attempting to persuade you one last time. The likelihood of you being stressed out trying to communicate, frustrated when they get lost and ripped off by a tweaked meter (and we're talking about the legal, licensed cabs here!) is high. When you've just stepped off a long flight, it's the last thing you need.

LEARN HOW (AND WHEN) TO BARGAIN

*If you have to ask the price in a market or shop (in other words it's not clearly labeled), then you should be bargaining. Here's how to ace it:

*Never pull out wads of cash to check how much money you have in front of sales people, they're

GET TO GRIPS WITH THE BASICS



hardly going to give you a rock bottom price if they see you're carrying a fat roll of red notes.

*Mentally pick a price you're prepared to pay before you start bargaining and stick to it for added confidence (initially bidding below that so you can eventually 'meet in the middle' on the price you're aiming for).

scarf or DVD either - only tourists do this. Locals long ago learned to ignore them. Don't worry, you won't be seen as rude!

PICK SMART PLACES TO CATCH A CAB

Seen other people get picked up from the same spot? Then it's a safe bet. More than one cab gone straight past you with their available light on? Move to a different spot away from street cameras / major tourist sights / government buildings / loitering policemen. Oh, and put that chunky guidebook/giant map/desperate expression away, it'll scare them.

CARRY HAND SANITIZER & TISSUES WHILE OUT AND ABOUT

Most public restrooms have neither soap nor toilet paper. But you're an adventurer aren't you? Remember your boy-scout motto and you'll be fine.



MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

What's expensive in Beijing and what's cheap? Here's how you'll be spending your hard earned cash...

Cash is still king in the 'Jing, so get familiar with your exchange rate like, now.

Know what the six main Chinese *renminbi* banknotes look like (the smaller the note, the less it's worth). They come in denominations of 1RMB, 5RMB, 10RMB, 20RMB, 50RMB and 100RMB, and they all have Chairman Mao's face on, so make sure you're not being given non-Chinese currency as change by shady vendors.

It's a good idea to have

smaller change handy if you plan on taking taxis (20s, 10s and 5s) to avoid being given the easily-faked 50RMB bank notes and so as not to annoy your driver.

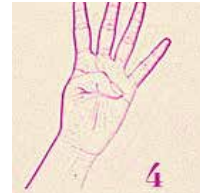
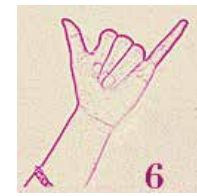
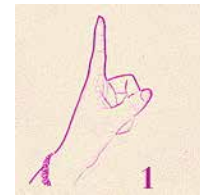
Compared to many international sightseeing spots, entrance tickets here are cheap: from 20-60RMB a pop. The most expensive you'll visit will be the Great Wall, because it usually requires cable car or chair lift tickets as well.

With the exception of the airport, no downtown

taxi journey should cost more than about 55RMB, with most costing between 25 and 35RMB. If the meter says much more than that you're likely being ripped off.

A soft drink or bottle of mineral water bought from a newspaper stand or similar should cost anywhere between 2 and 5RMB.

You don't need to leave tips in restaurants or for taxi drivers (see *What People Never Tell You That They Should*) below!



COUNT TO TEN USING CHINESE HAND SIGNS

ER, BUT WHY?

Back when Chinese men wore long sleeved robes to market, these hand gestures would be used to convey a bid without others seeing. This trick is still used today (minus the sleeve of course) so as not to have loud discussions about the lowest price in front of others. It may also have been developed in order to allow ease of communication between Chinese of different dialects.

FOOD



BESPOKE
Beijing

So...China. Isn't that the country where people delight in eating weird stuff? Well yes, but it's also the country that serves up some of the best food you will ever taste. Food that will completely defy and exceed all of your expectations. And don't forget to eat relatively early. Many Chinese restaurants will start to close around 9pm.

Here's how to get complete FOOD CONFIDENCE:

> Don't worry about the water. What you're served in restaurants is safe to drink, including the (boiled) water served as tea and ice cubes in your drink (made with mineral water).

> Know where's good. The majority of Chinese eat nice and early - between 6 and 8pm,

so if a restaurant is packed out between those times with locals, you can be sure it's good. A better way to plan your meals? With Bespoke's Savvy City Kit of course.

> Go easy on super-spicy foods. The most likely cause of discomfort while you're here won't be dodgy produce, but excess spice, so try not to eat that entire plate of Sichuan-peppercorns if you can help it.

> If in doubt, order the classic dishes. Beijing's restaurants have a handful of go-to plates that you can order almost anywhere and we guarantee you'll love them. This, if you like, is our definitive list of all-star dishes (including their Chinese translations, because we're helpful like that)...



Yu Xiang Qie Zi (stir-fried sweet eggplant)
鱼香茄子



Mi Fan (white rice) or Dan Chao Fan (egg fried rice)
蛋炒饭



Gong Bao Ji Ding (kung pao chicken, with diced leeks and peanuts)
宫保鸡丁



Gan Bian Si Ji Dou (stir-fried spicy French beans with ground pork)
干煸四季豆



Jiao Zi (dumplings, usually pork)
饺子



Jing Jiang Rou Si (stir-fried pork strips with pancake wraps in a delicious sauce)
京酱肉丝

WHAT PEOPLE NEVER TELL YOU THAT THEY SHOULD...

YOU DON'T NEED TO TIP.

Not even in restaurants? Yep! China has no tipping culture because service is included in your bill and staff are occasionally searched before leaving work. So shake off your guilt and walk out of your cab or restaurant with your change. Don't worry, you'll get used to it pretty quickly...(see below for one or two exceptions)

NO ONE SPEAKS ENGLISH.

Even the hand gestures you think are universal won't be, so don't underestimate how hard it will be to communicate and get around in Beijing. If you're desperate, make a beeline for a cosmopolitan-looking 20-something.

SWEET LITTLE CHINESE GIRLS AND OLD LADIES WILL SCAM YOU.

Think about it. It's the perfect crime: an old lady or young woman asks you to play badminton with them, or go and get some tea so they can practice their English. The next thing you know you've been hit with a massive bill and a few of their 'friends' are circling in a menacing manner. The moral of the story? Don't go off with anyone who solicits you unbidden (including rickshaw and taxi drivers). New scams emerge all the time so sticking to this rule is the best way to avoid them.

GETTING AROUND BY TAXI IS A NIGHTMARE.

No matter how fiercely independent you are when it comes to getting around in a new city, using a Beijing taxi is something else. To begin with, if taxi drivers could speak any English they probably wouldn't be taxi drivers! So communication is not their strong point. They're also generally underpaid and impatient, reluctant to drive into alleys or stop in places where they're worried a camera might slap them with a fine. Worse, their knowledge of the city and specific streets can be woefully inadequate, rendering printed 'postal' addresses useless.

So what's to be done? Your phone is key here. Prepare the phone number of the venue you're heading to, call that venue when you first get in the cab, and let them give your driver exact directions. Want to make the whole process cheaper and easier? Our Savvy City Kit is the best solution we've come up with after years of testing. Reading this more than 3 days before your trip? There's still time to purchase one!

**There are one or two exceptions to this rule: As a tourist, some of the people you encounter will appreciate a tip. Bellboys in five star hotels are used to small gratuities (20-50RMB) for helping you with your bags etc, and your tour guide and driver would appreciate a tip for their hard work (e.g. 100-200RMB per person per day).*

DON'T EAT THE STREET FOOD

This isn't really fair – chowing down on streetside snacks is one of the most enjoyable things you can do. Even Michelin-starred French chef Jean Georges declared the Chinese *jian bing* (a savoury crepe served out of street-side carts) to be the “best breakfast on earth”. Equally wonderful are the Muslim lamb kebabs roasted curbside wherever you see the glowing red 串 character. Get stuck in!

THE POLLUTION IS SO BAD YOUR TRIP HERE MAY MAKE YOU ILL

Hmm. This one makes us a little angry. Not because it's a lie, but because it's often reported out of context. The pollution can make you ill – after 6 years of breathing it, or if you already have an existing respiratory disease. Otherwise it shouldn't affect you physically at all. Most importantly, don't let it ruin your trip. A visit to Beijing was never going to be a beach holiday now was it? You're here for the culture. And besides, seeing it for yourself qualifies you to have your own opinion. Team Bespoke tends to re-imagine it as a mystical fog. Or a gust of dragon's breath. Hey, whatever works.

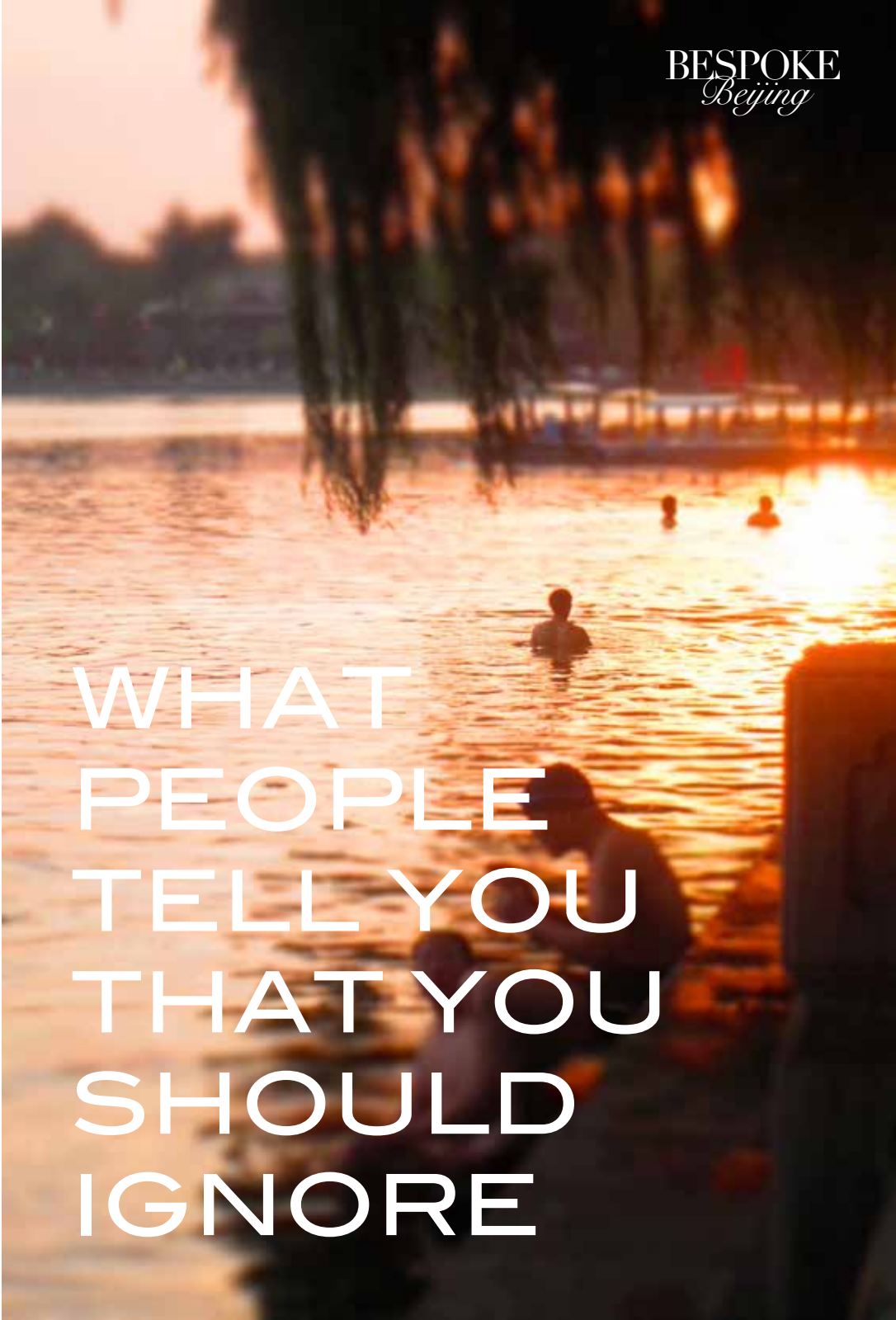
CHINA IS CHEAP

It used to be, but times have changed. Locals command increasingly high wages; fuel, rent and food prices have risen off the charts in recent years, and the government slaps quality imported goods (including wine and electronics) with large taxes. Nevertheless, certain things (getting the subway, even staying in five star hotels) can be a lot cheaper than their Western equivalent.

A GUIDE BOOK IS ESSENTIAL FOR BEIJING

On the contrary. The capital changes weekly, with new subway lines sprouting up and unexpected closures (even of tourist sights) making it hard to know what to do when. Great for historical background but with less practical use than they might have in other cities, be especially wary of using a guidebook for restaurant and bar recommendations.

Still got some unanswered questions? Just get in touch with the team by emailing info@bespoke-beijing.com. We're here to help!



WHAT
PEOPLE
TELL YOU
THAT YOU
SHOULD
IGNORE