



# Meeting the expectations of your Chinese visitors and making them feel welcome

## China Cultural Information and Training Resources for Tourism Operators

All visitors want to feel welcome and you wouldn't be in this business if you didn't appreciate that. As with any nationality, you can't assume all Chinese to be the same. The purpose of these guidelines is to give you sound understanding of this important visitor market to help them feel comfortable in Queensland while still enjoying our open friendliness and different culture.

### The Chinese FIT

Most Chinese visitors travel as part of a group. A small but growing number are travelling independently.

In the China market, independent travellers or FITs (Free Independent

Traveller) refer to those who structure their own travel. They search for information themselves and make decisions based on their experiences,

internet research and recommendations from friends, relatives or social media rather than the travel packages available.



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Structuring their own travel may include making some purchases through a travel agent or airline, such as flights, accommodation and visas or perhaps even an itinerary that includes some free days.

One important growing segment of this market is the VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) traveller. They accounted for some 8 per cent of Queensland's Chinese visitors in 2012, up 12 per cent from the previous year<sup>1</sup>. For more information about the China FIT market, refer to [www.tq.com.au/china](http://www.tq.com.au/china).



## Travel expectations

According to Tourism and Events Queensland research, Chinese independent travellers want to relax and unwind while visiting places with great natural attractions and world famous sights. They want to enjoy the comforts of a developed country and experience a different culture. Often they want to learn something new, visit natural and man-made attractions and experience value for money.

Chinese visitors desire genuine respect and appreciate a high level of enthusiasm, a positive attitude and a good understanding of Chinese culture from service providers.

Cultural understanding requires recognition of the diversity of Chinese travellers with varying needs and expectations depending on their travel experience, where they live, their age and travel style. As their travel experience grows so does their knowledge of tourism products and services provided elsewhere. They are Australia's most important and quickly growing overseas market.

*An insight into the expectations of Chinese independent travellers can be gained from the experience of middle-classed, internationally savvy Chinese traveller, Sean Han who organised an eight day family holiday in Australia for his family instead of booking an organised tour.*

*Sean and his family had several key objectives when planning their trip to Australia – to avoid group tours, enjoy the natural beauty of Australia and get a real feel for Australian life. After an initial China Eastern package, which included return flights to Sydney and two guided days in the city, the family set out to see sides of Australia not on the Chinese group traveller's agenda.*

*In Brisbane, he took the children to watch a drawing class at an arts college to open their minds to new ways of learning. On the Gold Coast, the family rented serviced apartments and then visited local supermarkets, cooking their own meals, and in Melbourne they spent a rainy day posing for photographs in the city's Royal Botanic Gardens.*

*"When I visit a new place, I want at least two days to really feel like I live there. If you go to a place as a tourist, all you come back with is a photo, but during this recent trip to Australia, we all came back with real memories."<sup>2</sup>*



## Service expectations

The key to succeeding in any visitor market, but in particular, the China market is delivering on their service expectations. If Chinese visitors don't receive great service, they don't feel welcome, and as the Chinese are prolific bloggers and social media authors, negative word of mouth will spread quickly. Here are some fundamental service expectations:

- Impeccable service delivered in a respectful way. The recollection of how they were treated will linger long after they return home.
- Fast, responsive service. For example, meals delivered within 10 minutes, room keys within 5 minutes of check-in, immediate attention from concierge.
- Chinese visitors tend to have a businesslike approach to service staff. The level of respect for service roles depends on their status in the eyes of the Chinese; for example, doctors and general managers have higher status than say cashiers and wait staff, so don't take offence or try to be their best friend.
- While they are accustomed to negotiating on price, they won't be offended if no discount is offered if this is handled politely.

You can make your Chinese visitors feel special by acknowledging important dates/events that have meaning to the Chinese during the period of time they are with you, if relevant. For example, in the year of the snake the snakelike Brisbane River could be used as an emblem to profile the city in collateral. During Chinese Spring Festival, red lanterns or Chinese Knots hung at entry gates can create a warm welcome. Regions may organise special events around a particular theme or display flags and local businesses could offer themed gifts. Here is a [useful link](#) to important dates/events in the Chinese calendar.

## Tips for meeting expectations

### Addressing visitors

Language is only a small component of your interaction with Chinese visitors for several reasons. Most Chinese independent travellers can speak some English. A smile and welcoming attitude that come from the heart are far more important in delivering excellent customer service than providing Chinese speaking staff or focusing on correct pronunciation.

### Here are some key points to remember in welcoming your Chinese visitors:

- Keep language simple. Focus instead on attitude rather than perfect pronunciation.
- A simple greeting in Mandarin creates a good impression, showing effort and a desire to make your Chinese visitors welcome.
- Don't feel you have to immediately hand your Chinese guests over to a Chinese-speaker on your staff. It's good to have a Chinese-speaker available if needed but handle respectfully after initial greetings so the guest doesn't feel like you're trying to get rid of them.
- A welcome from the general manager, or other senior manager, will give 'face' and recognition, which is particularly important to high-end travellers, especially of an older generation.
- A verbal greeting rather than physical contact such as a handshake is accepted. A good rule of thumb is

always to wait and see how the other person responds.

- In general do not hug, back slap or put an arm around your Chinese visitor's shoulders when you first meet them. The Chinese do not like to be touched by strangers. But after a successful visit, a farewell hug from a friendly Australian will help to make them feel welcomed.
- Always stand up when being introduced and remain standing throughout the introductions.
- Chinese guests may nod or slightly bow. Unlike the Japanese, the Chinese bow from the shoulders rather than the waist.
- Unless specifically asked, do not call your Chinese visitor by his or her first name. Address them by their surname first, followed by the given name (may be one or two syllables.) For example, the Chinese name, Liu Jianguo, would be Mr Jianguo Liu using the Western style, or Mr Liu.
- Be aware that women use their maiden names even after marriage. Marital status may be indicated by using Mrs, Ms, Miss, or Madam.
- Accompany your guests to the door. While not essential, this makes them feel respected and welcomed.
- Listen to pronunciations for simple greetings at [www.tq.com.au/china](http://www.tq.com.au/china) because Mandarin is a tonal language.





### Handling issues and complaints

If an issue arises, bring a high ranking staff person to address it. This gives the Chinese visitor 'face' and impresses them. Keep your body language non-threatening, keep emotion out of your face and voice and most of all, be patient.

Having pictorial aids in cases of safety and security can be useful; for example showing the no smoking symbol and then escorting the guest to an area where smoking is permitted should get a good positive result.



### Personal space and queuing

Understandably with China having so many huge, crowded cities the Chinese comfort zone regarding distance between others tends to be a lot closer than what most Westerners are used to. If you back away do not be surprised if your Chinese visitor simply steps closer.

Be prepared to guide your visitors to form a queue if necessary, by getting their attention and using deliberate movement and gesturing if you and your staff cannot speak Mandarin or Cantonese.

### Gestures and customs

Nodding the head up and down for agreement, side to side for disagreement, thumbs up indicating approval and the smile are gestures recognised and used in China. But not all gestures translate across cultures. For example, talking while eating and smoking wherever they choose is normal in China.

#### Some important Dos and Don'ts:

- Do not use the index finger to point or call someone over. Use an open hand in a gentle, passive movement.
- Do not snap your fingers.
- Do not put your feet on a desk or coffee table. It is rude to show the soles of the feet/shoes.
- Avoid whistling to catch their attention as this is considered rude.
- Do use both hands when handing someone an object, such as a teacup, a gift, or a business card.

**Immense population density means that speaking loudly, pushing and shoving and not queuing is commonplace to get their needs met. As they travel more, Chinese visitors are becoming increasingly aware of the importance placed on queuing in other cultures and are starting to adopt this behaviour.**



## Food and beverage

There's no such thing as 'Chinese' cuisine—there are more than 50 different varieties and regional variations across China. For example, people in the south may eat congee for breakfast where northerners might have a warmed soy milk dish with a deep fried pastry. Northern Chinese will typically eat noodles while some southern Chinese prefer rice.

Many Chinese visitors appreciate the opportunity to eat Chinese food, preferably food typical of their region at some time during the day while away from home. If providing meals to your Chinese guests, incorporate some Chinese food on the menu or give directions to a good Chinese restaurant.



### Some general food guidelines to consider:

- Provide hot soup and hot tea in cooler months during meals.
- Give your Chinese visitors the opportunity to access Chinese food at least once every day if they choose.
- Ensure your visitors have access to hot water so they can fill their tea flasks or have instant noodles if they wish. Having hot water at a central point will ensure kettles are not used as saucepans for noodles.
- If providing Chinese snacks ensure they are sourced from a Chinese food supplier so they are authentic.
- Always offer hot or warm water instead of iced water.
- When providing packed lunches, offer instant cup noodles for those who prefer a hot lunch rather than sandwiches.
- Be aware that the Chinese normally expect food to be served quickly (within 10 minutes of sitting down) and a typical Chinese meal would

last less than an hour. (If you offer a more slow-food style, do explain this to your visitors.)

- If providing a buffet, include discrete signs in simplified Chinese or pictures identifying the dishes and key ingredients.
- Provide chopsticks and Chinese soup spoons if you offer an in-house restaurant.
- Give Chinese travellers the opportunity to sample fresh local food, particularly seafood (including fresh oysters), kangaroo meat, vegetables, fruit and other popular dishes and provide explanations in Chinese of why they are special.
- Highlight the signature dishes in simplified Chinese—and say why they're special.
- Make sure you tell the story of the food, in simplified Chinese or with images, giving Chinese visitors information about the source of food ingredients, where and how it is cultivated, and anything special about it, if relevant.
- With a la carte menus, provide a Chinese version or use pictures.
- If you serve meat cooked to order, provide information in simplified Chinese on how they can choose how well done they want it.
- As most Chinese like to share dishes, it's preferable to provide side plates.
- Make clear smoking is illegal where food is served. The use of internationally recognised signage is acceptable.
- If your guests have to wait to be seated, consider providing extra chairs and give them an indication of when they can expect to be served.

## Housekeeping

Some considerations for the room set up to make Chinese visitors feel comfortable:

- Bottled water available at room temperature
- Mini-bar cup noodles with disposable chopsticks
- Explanation of Mini-bar pricing in simplified Chinese
- Electric jug
- Alarm clock
- Chinese or herbal tea sachets
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Disposable slippers
- Disposable razors and shaving cream
- Cable / satellite Chinese TV channels
- Room configuration allows for twin beds
- Welcome information in simplified Chinese (in compendium, TV channel or iPad)
- Local map in simplified Chinese and English
- Chinese newspaper (daily)





### Safety information

A sense of safety is key to making visitors feel comfortable and secure while away from home. Regardless of the market you are welcoming, you and your staff have a duty of care for the safety of your visitors. With safety a particular concern of Chinese visitors, every operator should consider what safety information is required for your operation and how best to deliver it to ensure it is understood. Examples include; areas where smoking is prohibited, keeping their heads down when exiting helicopters, not touching corals.

Some options for providing safety messages include written materials translated into simplified Chinese, audios, videos and Chinese speaking staff.

For general safety messages for Chinese visitors, see the [Travel Safely factsheet](#) which is available in both English and simplified Chinese.

### Colours and numbers

Different colours and numbers have certain meanings to Chinese people, so it is important to be aware of these in situations such as gift wrapping and decorations.

- White and black are related to death, although black also symbolises power.
- Red represents happiness, good fortune and luck.
- Gold is another auspicious colour as it represents wealth.
- Green represents long life but a green hat can also mean your wife is having an affair!

The numbers 6, 8 and 9 are considered lucky (good fortune and long life); while 4 is unlucky (death). Don't book your guests on level 4, in a room with 4 in the number or at table 4.

This document is part of Tourism and Events Queensland's suite of China Cultural Information and Training Resources for Tourism Operators. For more information, including the opportunity to hear pronunciations of common greetings, see [www.tq.com.au/china](http://www.tq.com.au/china).

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<sup>1</sup>In the year ending September 2012 there were 248,000 Chinese visitors to Queensland. Of these approximately 19,000 (8%) were visiting Queensland for VFR purposes, up 12% on the year ending September 2011. Tourism Research Australia's International Visitor Survey

<sup>2</sup>Australia China Connections: Profiling the Independent Chinese Traveller, 2012