

North-East Asia on a shoestring



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John H. Johnson



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First Edition

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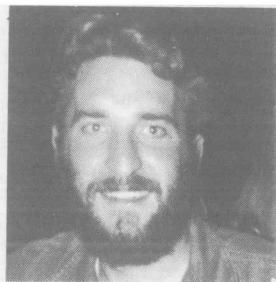
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The Authors

North-East Asia on a Shoestring combines the talents of five Lonely Planet authors, all of whom have travelled the East extensively. Collectively they have put together a guidebook which opens up this fascinating region. For more detailed information on the countries in this book refer to the Lonely Planet *travel survival kits* on China; Hong Kong, Macau & Canton; Japan ; and Korea & Taiwan.

China

Alan Samagalski came to Lonely Planet after a lengthy stay on the Indian sub-continent, where he'd fled from a life of genetics at Melbourne University and a stumbling career as the world's first 'Atomic Folk Musician'! After an initial research trip to Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong, for Lonely Planet's *Australia - a travel survival kit*, he was dispatched further afield. Alan is the co-author of *China - a travel survival kit* and has contributed to other Lonely Planet guides.



Michael Buckley was raised in Australia and has been on the loose since graduating from class 7C. Now resident in Vancouver, Canada, he makes a living out of freelance journalism. Michael first fell into the Middle Kingdom through the Hong Kong trapdoor back in 1981 when solo travel became possible. Lonely Planet sent him back to China to co-write *China - a travel survival kit*.



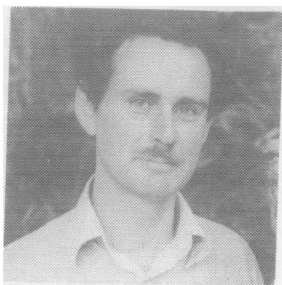
Hong Kong & Macau

Tony Wheeler was born in England, but spent most of his younger years overseas due to his father's occupation with British Airways. Those years included time spent in Pakistan, the West Indies, and his high school years in the US. He returned to England to do a university degree in engineering, worked for a short time as an automotive design engineer, returned to uni again and did an MBA then dropped out on the Asian trail with his wife Maureen. They've been travelling, writing and publishing guide books ever since, having set up Lonely Planet Publications in the mid-70s.



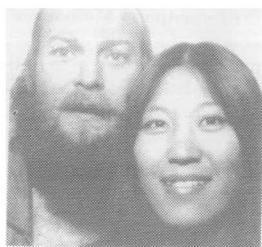
Japan

Ian McQueen is a Canadian who has been living in Japan for many years. He spent his earlier years in the port city of Saint John, New Brunswick, later graduating from the University of New Brunswick in Chemical Engineering. Travels to South America, Europe, Iceland and Trinidad were followed by trips through South-East Asia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Ian is also the author of Lonely Planet's *Japan - a travel survival kit*.



Korea & Taiwan

Geoff Crowther was born in Yorkshire, England. After short trips around Europe, two years in Africa and Asia and short spells in the fishing village of Hull and on the Cumberland fells, Geoff got involved in the London underground information centre BIT, putting together their first, duplicated overland guides. Geoff now lives with Hyung Pun, whom he met in Korea, on an old banana plantation near the New South Wales/Queensland border. He is author of LP's *Africa on a Shoestring*, and *Korea & Taiwan - a travel survival kit* and has collaborated on other guides including *India - a travel survival kit*.



This Book

Since this book has been delayed and pushed to one side more than almost any other title in Lonely Planet's history we'd better offer a few explanations. Several years ago, when we were working on the fourth editions of *South-East Asia on a Shoestring* and *West Asia on a Shoestring* we finally decided to go ahead with a project that had been kicked around for sometime - *North-East Asia on a Shoestring*. It would complete our work on the whole sweep of 'accessible' Asia and we thought there was a need for it.

We'd already researched Hong Kong and Macau for the South-East Asia guide and also for our travel survival kit on those two fascinating colonial relics so that was no problem. Our Japan survival kit was underway at that time, so researching that was also wrapped up. Geoff Crowther was despatched to South Korea and Taiwan to cover those areas and all we were left with was China. Which proved impossible to pin down. Every time we felt we had the China section sewn up, the travel situation

in China would alter again and we were stuck with either frantically rewriting what had already been written or, as actually happened twice, completely scrapping it and starting again. Eventually we decided to hell with it, we'd research a complete China travel survival kit first and develop the China section of this book from that. So *North-East Asia on a Shoestring* got taken right off the cooker and put in the freezer for two years.

Now, thawed out, re-researched and re-written, here it finally is!

And the next Edition

Things change - prices go up, good places go bad, new places open up, nothing stays the same. So if you find things better, worse, cheaper, more expensive, recently opened or long ago closed please don't blame us but please do write and tell us about these changes. We love our letters from travellers out 'on the road' and, as usual, the best letters are rewarded with a free copy of the next edition, or another LP guide if you prefer.

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Introduction

North-East Asia is many different and contrasting things: high-energy Hong Kong troubled by the puzzling intentions of its colossal neighbour. Tiny Macau, a curious and colourful colonial relic. Japan, the economic powerhouse of the west, with myriad glimpses of a picture postcard rural side still to be found. Korea, exotic and dynamic but split into two violently opposed halves. Taiwan, another dynamic economy but again uneasy about the intentions of its huge would-be-parent. Finally there is China, as vast and varied as its history.

Hong Kong, with its superb natural harbour, is the key to this whole region; it's the centre from where you fan out to explore other parts of North-East Asia. This over-populated city-state, offset by beautiful and sparsely-populated islands, wins this role through its central position and its reputation as an issuing house for visas and a supermarket for cheap air fares. Neighbouring Macau is an enigma – just why has it been allowed to sail merrily on, when the whole question of Hong Kong's existence has raised such passions?

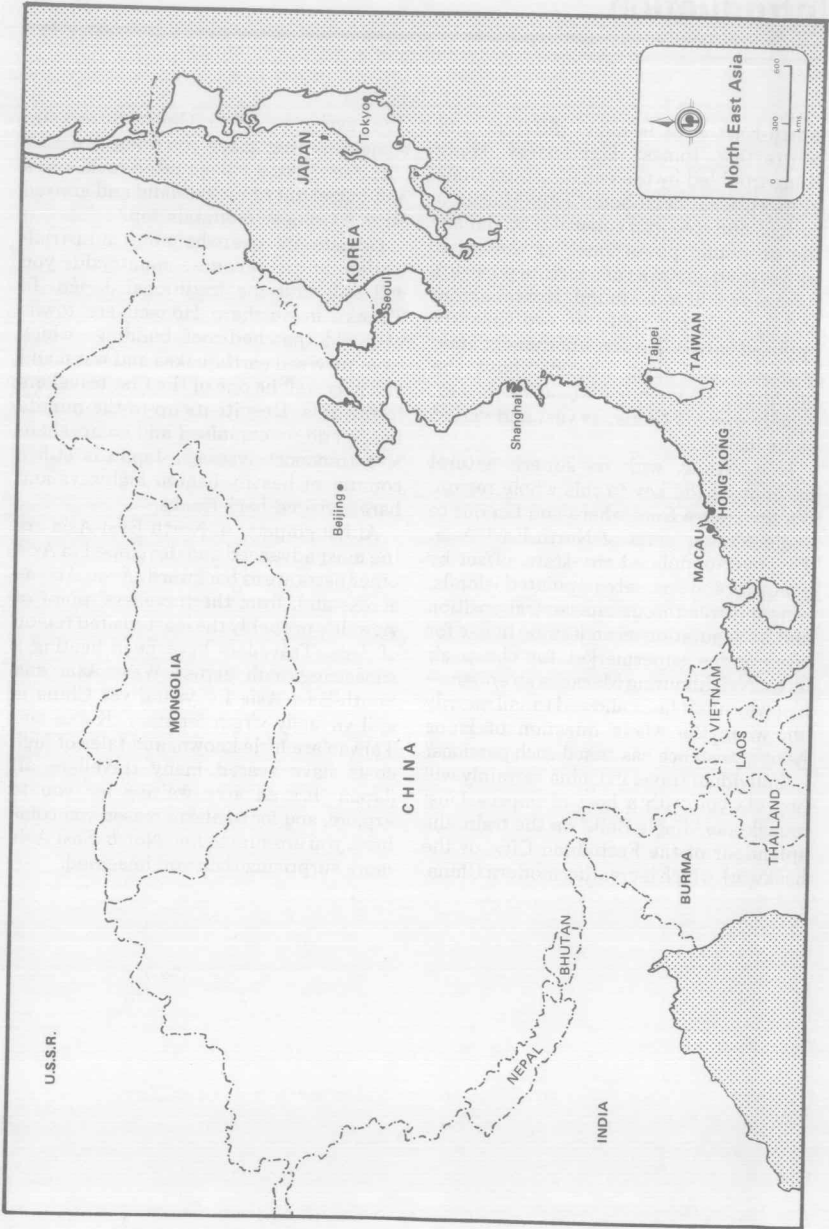
Individual travel in China certainly will provide you with a host of impressions: muzak-like 'Jingle Bells' on the train, the splendour of the Forbidden City, or the hackwork which is creating modern China.

And every so often China throws up something that takes you completely by surprise – like a village lifted lock, stock and barrel out of Switzerland and grafted on to a Chinese mountain top.

Despite its overwhelming industrialisation, in the Japanese countryside you will still find the traditional Japan. In Tohoku in northern Honshu are towns with old thatched-roof buildings which have survived earthquakes and wars, and you may well be one of the first travellers to the area. Despite its up-to-the-minute image and its organised and comprehensive transport systems, Japan is still a country of heavily beaten highways and barely visited back tracks.

Although parts of North-East Asia are the most advanced and developed in Asia other parts are as backward as you'll come across and, from the travellers' point of view, it's probably the least-visited region of Asia. Travellers have been beating a shoestring path across West Asia and South-East Asia for years, yet China is still virtually virgin territory, Korea and Taiwan are little known, and tales of high costs have scared many travellers off Japan. It's an area waiting for you to explore, and for whatever reason you come here, you are sure to find North-East Asia more surprising than you imagined.

8 Facts about the Region



Facts about the Region

DOCUMENTS

There are two documents you have to have and a number worth considering. You must have a passport and a health certificate. Make sure your passport is valid for a reasonably long period of time and has plenty of space for those rubber stamp happy Asians to do their bit. It could be embarrassing to run out of blank pages when you are too far away from an embassy to get a new passport issued (or get extra pages stuck in if you are a lucky American). The second 'necessary' document is an International Health Certificate – see Vaccinations for more details.

If you plan to be driving abroad get an International Driving Permit from your local automobile association. They are valid for one year only. An International Youth Hostel card can be useful even if you don't intend to use hostels. Although many Asian hostels don't require that you be a YHA member, they will often charge you less if you have a card. In Japan and Hong Kong the hostels certainly do require that you be a card carrying member, however.

Then there are student cards. The ISIC, International Student Identity Card, is a green and white card with your photograph on it, usually supplied in a clear plastic pouch. It can perform all sorts of wonders such as getting you 25% discounts on many international and domestic flights. In China it can sometimes get you discounts on rail travel and accommodation. So it is no wonder that there is a world-wide industry in fake student cards.

The authorities have tightened up on the abuse of student cards by several methods. You may be required to provide additional proof of student status – such as 'student' in your passport, a letter from your university or college stating that you

are a student, or a similar letter from your embassy. Additionally, maximum age limits are now imposed for granting many student association concessions and the fake card pedlars have been clamped down on.

Nevertheless cards are still widely available and usable. The going rate seems to be between US\$5 and US\$10. Some fake cards are quite poor quality, but most airlines would rather sell you a seat at 25% less than not at all, and a student card can be just as good an excuse as any to get you on the plane. Many places now stipulate a maximum age for student discounts.

Finally remember that 'student' is a very respectable thing to be and if your passport has a blank space for occupation you are much better off having 'student' there than something nasty like 'journalist' or 'photographer'.

Losing your passport is a real bummer. Things can be made a little easier if you've got a separate record of passport number, issue date, and a photocopy of your birth certificate. While you're compiling that info add the serial number of your travellers' cheques and US\$50 or so as emergency cash – keep all that material totally separate from your passport, cheques and other cash.

VISAS

Visas are an annoying, expensive and time-consuming piece of red tape. Effectively they are permits to enter certain countries and are stamped in your passport. You can either get them before you go or along the way. The advantage of pre-departure collection is that it doesn't waste time travelling; the post office can do the leg work and occasionally 'difficult' embassies are less difficult in your own country. The two major drawbacks are that some countries may not even be represented in your own country, and

often visas have limited 'tenability' – it is no good getting a visa which will expire in three months if you are not going to be in the country for four months. You can always get a visa at an embassy or a consulate in a neighbouring or nearby country, and often visas are available at the border or, even more likely, at the airport of arrival. It is often cheaper to get them in neighbouring countries.

Most visas require a stack of forms, photographs and money. There may be other requirements too, like having a certain amount of money or travellers' cheques on you. Your appearance may need to meet a certain standard, and you may have to provide the dreaded 'ticket out'. That means before you can obtain a visa to enter the country you must have a ticket to leave it. This can often be a real nuisance if you should want to leave by some obscure method for which tickets are only available within the country. The answer to that is to get the cheapest ticket out with a reputable airline and have it refunded later.

If you hit a sticky visa problem, shop around. In some other city or country the situation may be better. See the section on visas under the individual countries in this book. Remember the most important rule: treat embassies, consulates and borders as formal occasions – dress up for them.

MONEY

Take as much as you can. Take some in hard cash (US dollars are the favourite) and some in travellers' cheques. American Express or Thomas Cook travellers' cheques are probably the best to carry because of their 'instant replacement' policies. The main idea of carrying cheques rather than cash is the protection they offer from theft, but it doesn't do a lot of good if you have to go back home first to get the refund. Amex have offices in many major cities in the region but, of course, 'instant replacement' is not always as instantaneous as the adverts would have you think. Keeping a record of the cheque

numbers and the initial purchase details is vitally important. Without these you may well find that 'instant' is a very long time indeed.

Credit cards are accepted easily in some places (Hong Kong), but in others they are only just gaining acceptance so they may not be of much use to you (China). Sometimes they are not accepted at all (Japan).

In Japan foreign currency can be converted to yen only at banks displaying the 'Authorized Foreign Exchange Bank' sign. Travellers' cheques, including American Express, are often available in yen – if you're going to spend long in Japan they might be a good idea although it's generally only possible to change them at branches of the issuing bank. Taiwanese and Korean money is not accepted at all, and the yen is worthless in Korea so get it converted to US\$ before you leave. In China foreign currency and travellers' cheques can be exchanged at the main centres of the Bank of China and its branches in some Friendship Stores and tourist hotels.

When exchanging money for local currency remember to keep your transaction receipts as you will need these when you wish to convert the local currency back to hard currency, especially in Korea and Taiwan. The Hong Kong dollar is as readily accepted as the Macau dollar in Macau, but the same cannot be said for the M\$ in Hong Kong, so use all your M\$ before leaving. The exchange rate in Hong Kong is very bad.

How should you carry your money? Take some travellers' cheques, some hard cash, some local currency and carry it safely in a money belt. Carry some cheques in small denominations for last minute conversions. As you may be charged a service fee for each cheque, don't have it all in small amounts. It is often worth checking around a couple of banks – exchange rates do vary and there are those hidden extras like service fees.

Cash is very useful for the non-bank

transactions you have to make from time to time – legal and illegal, ie black market. Changing cash can be a lot easier than going through the hassles, red tape and paperwork of travellers' cheques and banks. Money changers can be found almost anywhere, and they generally don't keep regular hours.

To carry all this money, next to your skin is the only safe place. A money belt or pouch or an extra pocket inside your jeans will help to keep things with their rightful owner. Remember that if you lose cash you have lost it forever, so don't go overboard on the convenience of cash versus the safety of cheques. A useful idea is to put aside a totally separate little emergency stash, say US\$50, for use if everything else were to disappear.

Your budget is dependent upon how you live and travel. If you're moving around fast, going to lots of places, spending time in the big cities, then your day to day living costs are going to be quite high. You're not on some sort of travelling economy run – being tight with your money can spoil your trip as much as having it stolen.

If you run out of cash, accidentally or deliberately, and need more you can instruct your bank to send a draft to you (always assuming you've got some money back home to send!). Specify the city and the bank you want the money transferred to or ask them to tell you where it is being sent. In Hong Kong, for example, there are many banks and you could spend a long time tracking down which specific one has your money. Transferred by cable or telex, money should reach you in a couple of days; by mail allow at least two weeks. When it gets there it will generally be converted into local currency – you can take it as it is or buy travellers' cheques. Hong Kong and Japan are probably the best places in the region to transfer money to.

WHEN & HOW LONG

Anytime for any time might be the answer

to this one although the climatic conditions you might meet are widely variable. Depending on how long you want to stay, you may be able to follow the warm weather across the countries of north-east Asia.

The best times to be anywhere in the region are autumn and spring. In Korea the best times are before and after the monsoons (April, May, June or September and October). Taiwan is at its most subtropical from May to October. Hong Kong is at its best from September to December when the humidity drops, or in the spring from March to May. Japan is lovely from mid-September to late-November. If you can be in Kyoto in mid-November you will see one of the most beautiful places in the world at its loveliest. Unfortunately this is no secret to the Japanese either and *Sakura-mi* (cherry-blossom-viewing-time) is not only a very short period but the flowering time also varies over several weeks. It is best not to plan your trip around this elusive phenomenon! The entire season extends about six weeks nationwide from late March or early April.

As a rule of thumb the further north you are the cooler it will get in winter, and the further south in summer you are the greater the likelihood of monsoons and typhoons at certain times of the year, but it is warmer. To escape the heat take to the mountains, to escape the cold head south. As the area is so large, it takes in most weather types:

Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau & Southern China

This area is subtropical and the climate is temperate, although it can get quite cold during the winter months. Winter is quite short and falls around December to March. Taiwan gets almost its entire rainfall during January and February. Summers are long (May to October). They are hot and dry on Taiwan, but hot and humid on mainland China. It can rain a lot and there are also typhoons.

Central China & Okinawa

From Sichuan to Shanghai in China and the Japanese island of Okinawa, are in a temperate zone with short cold winters and long summers which are generally mild, but can get quite hot. Temperatures in winter are often below freezing. There is a long period from April to October which is usually hot and humid.

Northern China, Korea & Japan

The winters get longer the further north you travel. In Korea winter lasts from November to March and temperatures can be as low as -15°C at night and 0°C during the day. Japan, stretching a long distance from south to north, varies from very cold in Hokkaido in the north to less severe weather in the south. Incidentally temperatures in Inner Mongolia hover around the -44°C mark, and in Beijing it is usually 0°C from December to March. The Chinese wear a dozen or more layers of clothes to stay warm!

Summers in the north are either very hot and dry, or not so hot but humid. In northern China summer lasts from May to August with average temperatures of 38°C and rainy, while in Korea summer lasts from July to September and temperature start out at 20°C and creep up to 30°C and the humidity is 80%. Japanese summer is officially from 1 June to 1 September. It is humid and uncomfortable in the north but more bearable in the south.

HEALTH

Most possible medical problems are covered in health guides like *The Traveller's Health Guide* (Roger Lascelles, London) or *Staying Healthy in Asia* (Volunteers in Asia Publications). Health and fitness while travelling depend on two things – your pre-departure protection (immunisations) and your day-to-day health on the road.

Immunisations

Plan ahead for getting your immunisations.

Smallpox has now been wiped out worldwide so smallpox immunization is no longer necessary. Cholera is a disease of insanitation and usually occurs in epidemics. Cholera vaccinations offer protection for six months and are highly recommended. The initial shot is followed a month or so later by a booster, then another booster every six months to continue the protection. If cholera shots are a sneak preview of the real thing, it is definitely a disease to do without.

Immunization against both typhoid and tetanus is highly recommended. There are three types of vaccinations available – plain typhoid protection, TAB, which protects against typhoid and paratyphoid A and B, and TABT which provides the whole lot including protection against tetanus. TABT lasts for three years. If you've not had a recent polio booster it's not a bad idea to get one. Vaccination enthusiasts can also consider protection against typhus and plague but there is a limit!

Yellow fever shots, which last a nice round 10 years, are only necessary for Africa or Latin America. Then there's hepatitis and gamma-globulin shots. The period of immunity to hepatitis which gamma-globulin gives is relatively short and some people question just how efficacious it is, even suggesting that once its period of protection has finished you are more susceptible to the hep than before. Doctors say the latest gamma-globulin shots are better than before and also cause less reaction so you ought to have them. The best protection against the hep, as against most other diseases of insanitation, is to take care what and where you eat and to wash your hands frequently.

As proof of all these scratches, jabs and punctures, you need an International Health Certificate to be signed and stamped by your doctor and local health authority. In some countries (Australia, the UK, many countries in Asia) immunisations are available from airport or

government health centres. Travel agents or airline offices will tell you where.

Malaria

Malarial mosquitoes are found throughout north-east Asia apart from urban Hong Kong, Seoul and Japan. Prevention consists of weekly doses of chloroquine or daily paludrine which you start taking some time before your trip and continue taking for some time after it. Opinions differ on which is best amongst doctors and which is easiest to remember to take amongst travellers. There are now chloroquine resistant strains of malaria around so enquire before you depart if chloroquine alone is adequate in the areas you intend to visit. Should you be so unfortunate as to catch malaria the same tablets in much greater doses are also the cure. Don't take chances; once you have had malaria, even if cured there is a fair chance of it recurring later and it is not a pleasant experience. Further protection can be gained by keeping the little buggers away with mosquito nets or by burning mosquito coils.

Stomach Problems

The standard traveller's worry about bouts of diarrhoea is not as much a problem in north-east Asia as it is in other Asian countries. Standards in Japan for instance are the equal of any western country, and the water supply in Hong Kong is also up to international standards. China is a different story. Even the Chinese will tell you not to drink the water. Hotels do provide thermoses of boiled water for guests so finding something to drink is not too difficult.

Often stomach upsets are due simply to a change of diet or a system unused to spicy food. Many times, however, contaminated food or water is the problem. There are two answers to upset stomachs. First avoid them by taking care in what you eat and drink – make sure food is well cooked and hasn't been sitting around. Make sure fresh food has been properly

cleaned. And don't drink untreated water. Secondly, if avoidance fails, do something about it.

The simplest treatment is to do nothing. If your system can fight off the invaders naturally you'll probably build up some immunity. Stick to hot tea and try not to eat too much. If you do decide to resort to modern medicines don't do so too readily, don't overdo them and if you start a course of medicine follow it through to the end. There are various over-the-counter cures like the popular Lomotil. The name indicates that it 'lowers motility'; it simply slows your system down and lets it work things out. Plain codeine works as well and is cheaper. Antibiotics, on the other hand, actually go into battle for you but I have a suspicion that people who have the most stomach problems are the ones who resort too readily to antibiotics and other 'big guns'.

The word 'dysentery' is used far too lightly by many travellers. If you've just got loose movements you've got diarrhoea. If blood or pus are also present then you probably have amoebic dysentery which requires an anti-amoebic drug like metronidazole or flagyl. If on top of that you also have a fever then it's probably bacillary dysentery and you need an antibiotic like tetracycline or a sulfa drug. None of these drugs need the supervision of a doctor and are usually readily available.

Whether you just have travellers' diarrhoea or something worse the important thing is to keep your fluid intake up and avoid dehydration. Keep drinking.

Medical Kit

Carry a small, straightforward medical kit with any necessary medicines, band-aids, antiseptic, aspirin and a small thermometer. In the remoter parts of Asia you'll usually find that if a medicine is available at all it will generally be available over the counter and the price will be much cheaper than in the west.

General Thoughts

Bring your spectacle prescription with you if you're shortsighted. If you need glasses you can get them made up very cheaply and efficiently in Hong Kong where standards are high and costs are a small fraction of optical costs in the west. Get your teeth checked before you depart; dental problems in remote places are no joke. Rubber thongs are good protection against athletes' foot or other foot infections.

Take care with simple cuts and scratches – in tropical areas they can all-too-easily become infected. Make sure they're properly cleaned and kept that way. When the weather is very hot be careful to avoid dehydration. If your urine starts to turn dark yellow or orange or the need to urinate becomes very infrequent you should be drinking more. Avoid dogs and monkeys – rabies is a nasty thing to catch. If you should be so unfortunate as to get the dreaded hepatitis the only real cure is good food, no alcohol and rest. Don't forget to take out medical insurance; check if it will fly you home in a dire emergency.

If you need medical help your embassy or consulate can usually advise a good place to go. So can five-star hotels although they often recommend doctors with five-star prices. In Hong Kong the Queen Mary Hospital and the Princess Margaret Hospital in Kowloon provide consultation or treatment for a nominal fee. In Japan the least expensive place for vaccinations is the Tokyo Port Authority or the health facility at Narita Airport. Contact the TIC for more information. There are also a couple of western hospitals in Shanghai which may be able to help should you get stuck. They are listed under Shanghai in this book.

Last, but far from least, don't be overly concerned with your health. North-east Asia is generally a quite healthy region to travel in and it's unlikely you'll have any problems at all.

PLACES TO STAY

Accommodation in north-east Asia is not, generally, as straightforward nor, generally, as cheap as in other parts of Asia. In China the places where westerners can stay is strictly defined and limited and while not horrendously expensive they're not as cheap as places travellers head for in South-East Asia or west Asia. There are, however, dormitories in most hotels although getting in to them can involve some ingenuity.

In Hong Kong there are cheap guest houses, almost all of them in one convenient location, plus various hostels, YMCAs and YWCAs. In Japan if you're trying to travel on a shoestring you're going to have to stay in the youth hostels, of which there is an extensive and well organised chain. Other cheaper possibilities are the traditional *ryokan* and *minshuku*. See the Japan section for more details.

In South Korea cheap accommodation can be found at the traditional *yogwans* and *yoinsooks*. Hotels are generally fairly expensive in Taiwan although they're often dormitory-style *tatami* rooms. Taiwan also has youth hostels.

FOOD

Eat what you like when you want is the general rule as most food in north-east Asia is pretty healthy. The main thing to look out for is the cleanliness of the utensils, so check out the food stall or restaurant kitchen before worrying about the food. In Japan and Hong Kong there is no problem at all. On the other hand it's certainly a good idea to be careful about the water and uncooked food in China. Freezing things doesn't kill germs, so don't trust ice-cubes. You could always ask to have your ice-cubes boiled.

In general you should have few problems though and mostly you can eat anything with impunity. When in doubt the good old Uncle Sam standbys of Coca-Cola and (in Hong Kong or Japan) McDonald's will make you feel safe.

PEOPLE

It's people that make travel – seeing things may be great, doing things may be exciting, but it's the people who'll stay with you. So make the most of them, go out of your way to meet people and to get to know them. It's the only way you'll really get to know the countries you visit. The same consideration applies to your fellow travellers. For perhaps obvious reasons a cross-section of travellers seems to be a whole lot more interesting than a similar slice of the general population. Apart from making friends you'll run into time and again over the years, travel also provides a lot of immediate benefits through the friends you make. You rarely travel alone for long; it always seems that somebody else is going the same direction as you and you soon end up as part of a group heading who knows where. Remember also that your fellow travellers are the best source of information on what lies ahead.

THEFT

Although theft is generally not the problem in north-east Asia that it is in other parts of Asia it's still a good idea to keep a close eye on your valuables. Getting passports or other documents replaced can be far more trouble than their monetary worth. So be cautious, even in China where all the early and glowing reports of exceptional honesty have made some people far too trusting.

The most important things to avoid getting stolen are your passport, papers, tickets and money. It's best to always carry these next to your skin or in a sturdy leather pouch on your belt. Be especially careful on buses and trains and even in hotels; don't leave valuables lying around in your room. Be a little wary of your fellow travellers too – unfortunately not everybody on the road is scrupulously honest.

DOPE

Forget it! It is around, both in its light and heavy varieties, and everybody, including the authorities, know about it. If you are

caught with a joint you may be able to get out of having your trip shortened, but then again you may not. The Japanese made no exception for Paul McCartney and they won't make one for you. No-one knows what the Chinese attitude to drugs is yet, but you probably won't want to be the first to find out. Hong Kong, with its own internal drug problem, is very hard on drug users and incoming travellers – particularly from South-East Asia – can expect to get a thorough going over. It isn't legal anywhere.

WHAT TO TAKE & HOW TO TAKE IT

As little as possible is the best policy – but not so little that you have to scrounge off other travellers, as some of the 'super lightweight' travellers do. It's very easy to find almost anything you need along the way and since you'll inevitably buy things as you go it's better to start with too little rather than too much.

A backpack is still the most popular carrying container as it is commodious and the only way to go if you have to do any walking. On the debit side a backpack is awkward to load on and off buses and trains, it doesn't offer too much protection for your valuables and some airlines may refuse to be responsible if the pack is damaged or broken into. Fortunately they no longer have the 'pack = hippy' and 'hippy = bad' connotation they used to be saddled with.

Recently combination backpack/shoulder bags have become available. The straps zip away inside the pack when not needed so you almost have the best of both worlds. They're not really suitable for long hiking trips but they're much easier to carry than a bag. Another alternative is a large, soft, zip bag with a wide shoulder strap so it can be carried with relative ease if necessary. In either case get some tabs sewn on so you can semi-thief-proof it with small padlocks. Forget suitcases.

Indeed? You will, no doubt, be buying local clothes along the way (Levi jeans are cheaper in Singapore or Hong Kong than

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back home), wherever that might be, so start light. My list would include:

- underwear & swimming gear
- pair of jeans & a pair of shorts
- a few T-shirts
- sweater for cold nights
- a pair of sneakers or shoes
- sandals or thongs
- lightweight jacket or raincoat
- a dress-up set of clothes

Modesty rates high in most Asian countries. Nudity, or acres of flesh, are generally not a favoured sight of the locals, and there are religious objections in some countries to revealing various parts of the body. For example Muslims don't go in much for girls' legs, at least not officially anyway.

On the non-clothing side I'd bring:

- toiletries
- medical & sewing kit
- sunglasses
- padlock
- sleeping bag
- sarong

The sleeping bag is only necessary if you're going to be roughing it, getting well off the beaten track, climbing mountains and the like. It can also double as a coat on cold days, a cushion on hard train-seats, a seat for long waits at bus or railway stations and a bed top-cover, since hotels rarely give you one. The sarong is equally useful since it can be everything from a bed sheet to a towel, a beach wrap, a dressing gown and even something to wear.

The padlock will lock your bag to a train or bus luggage rack and will also fortify your hotel room – which often locks with a latch in any case. Soap, toothpaste and so on are readily obtainable but well off the beaten track toilet paper can be impossible to find and tampons are also difficult to find away from the big cities.

Two final thoughts: the secret of successful packing is plastic bags or 'stuff

bags' – they keep things not only separate and clean but also dry. Airlines do lose bags from time to time – you've got much better chance of it not being yours if it is tagged with your name and address *inside* the bag as well as outside. Other tags can always fall off or be removed.

APPEARANCES & CONDUCT

If you want to have a smooth trip, how you look can be important. When you arrive at embassies or consulates for visas, at the border to enter a country, or at docks or airports, you'll find life much simpler if you look neat and affluent. It's always advisable to have one set of completely conventional 'dress up' gear to wear for these formal occasions.

FILM & CAMERA

Bring plenty of film with you. Although film is readily available throughout north-east Asia, you may have trouble finding the one you want. In Korea you cannot get non-Korean film. Agfa, Kodak, Fuji and Polaroid are available in China through the Friendship Stores in the larger cities, but they are generally 50% more expensive than in Hong Kong. It is a good idea to bring your own as even a common film type such as Kodachrome 64 is very hard to get. In Japan Kodak, Fuji and Sakura film is available everywhere, but slide film is harder to come by.

Film in Japan can be processed just about anywhere quickly and cheaply. The prints are of good quality with reasonable colour. The major hotels in China will also process film, but they may not do such a good job, and they are inclined to lose 'controversial' pictures. Incidentally Japan is one of the few countries in the area to process Kodachrome; China and Hong Kong do not.

In Japan the lowest prices on cameras are found in Tokyo although they are often cheaper still in Hong Kong. Cameras are serviced quickly and efficiently in Japan.

When taking photographs it is a good idea to ask people if they mind. They