

A Practical Handbook for Anyone Traveling,
Living, or Doing Business

How to do what YOU want or need to do

By Fred Richardson

STREETWISE GUIDE

Getting Around in China



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

Tips

practical information not available in conventional guidebooks, such as just how to buy train tickets and how to find the publication date of maps — vital in a fast-changing country.

Tales

traveler's tales, including personal reminiscences and scrapes and can be detached in the interests of a lighter backpack.

Glossary

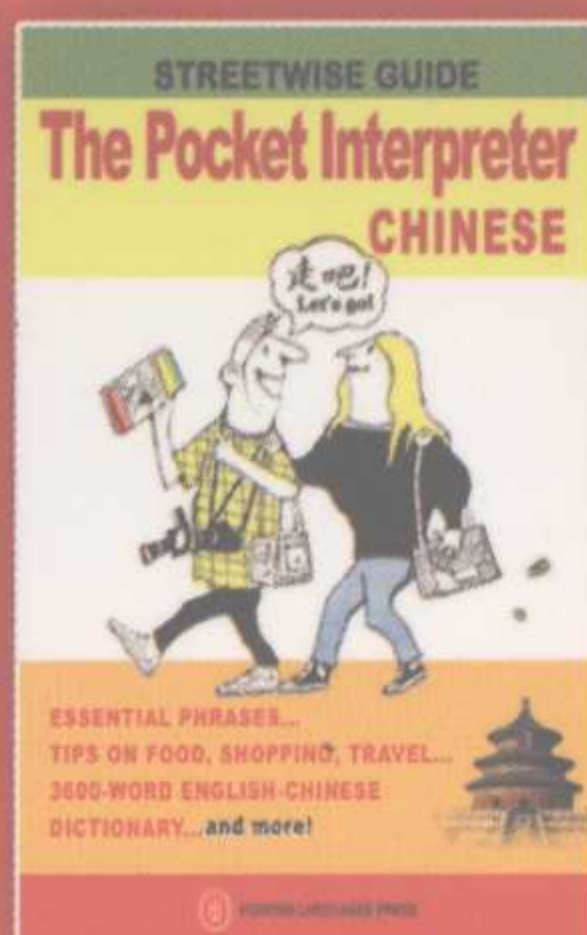
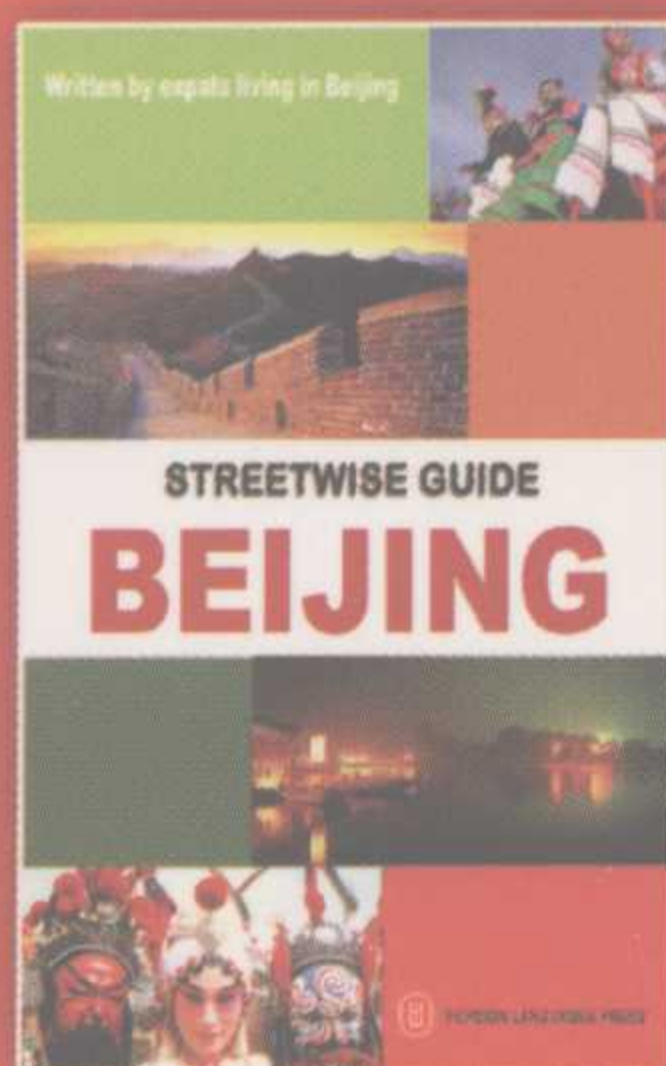
containing pinyin, Chinese characters and English meanings in a clear format.

这是一本我对中国印象和记忆的书
它记载着我在不寻常的旅程

"A useful book for anyone contemplating travel in China for the first or eleventh time."

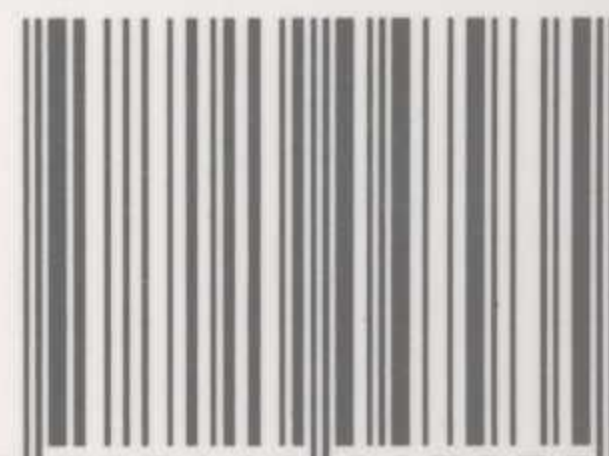
— Dr. Kevin Stuart (Qinghai Normal University)

Other Streetwise Guides:



Phrasebook

ISBN 978-7-119-04793-5



9 787119 047935 >

ISBN 978-7-119-04793-5

Getting Around in China

Notes from an American Traveler

Fred Richardson

Tips and Tales

A Practical Handbook for Anyone Traveling,
Living, or Doing Business
How to do what YOU want or need to do

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

First Edition 2007

<<http://www.gettingaroundinchina.com>>

Home Page:

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

E-mail Addresses:

info@flp.com.cn

sales@flp.com.cn

ISBN 978-7-119-04793-5

© Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China, 2007

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

漫游中国: 英文/ (美) 理查森 (Richardson, F.) 著.

北京: 外文出版社, 2007

ISBN 978-7-119-04793-5

I. 漫… II. 理… III. 旅游指南 - 中国 - 英文 IV. K928.9
中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2007) 第 051269 号

策划编辑: 许 荣

责任编辑: 王 琴

英文审定: 贺 军

封面设计: 何永妍

内文设计: 李 耀

印刷监制: 冯 浩

漫游中国

弗雷德·理查森 著

*

© 外文出版社

外文出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄大街 24 号)

邮政编码 100037

汇鑫印务有限公司印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044

2007 年 (32 开) 第 1 版

2007 年第 1 版 第 1 次印刷

(英)

ISBN 978-7-119-04793-5

04800 (平)

17-E-3791P

Dedicated to the memory of my sister
Betty Richardson
who inspired me to go to China the first time.

Acknowledgments

Many friends have assisted with the information in this book, far too many to list here, and I thank them all. However much help I've had, the errors are all mine.

Special thanks to Sun Weihua, Dr. Kevin Stuart, Litaiji, Tillie Scruton, Dana Pope, Alix Fortson, Shelly Sutton, my late sister Betty Richardson, Cai Zisheng, Lun Xin, Lobsang Tsering, Prof. Yingting Zhang, Ilse Huntley, Marv Vickers, Frans Hoenderken, Dave Zeretzke, Gretchen Wagner, Tan Jingyun, Dr. Stan Williams, Prof. Tao Renchuan, Carson Sprenger, Millie Thorson, Ollie Wilgress, Jim Lovering, Anita Anderson, Gerald Roche, Josie Scruton, Mark Minkler, Anthony Robinson, Sam and Sally Green, Sybil Wong, Jared Roach, Nurse Yan Aili, Niu Xiaojun, and many, many more.

Preface

The Book of Changes

China is changing at a breakneck pace. Nearly all aspects are changing, no matter where, no matter how poor or remote the area. For at least twenty years, China has continuously been the world's most rapidly growing economy. Some observers say China is the most rapidly changing country in the history of the world, and most Chinese citizens see this change as "better, better, better".

Some say this growth and change is closely controlled by central planning. Others argue it has long since flown entirely out of control, with the organs of central policy barely hanging on to their hats and seats. There are as many different guesses as there are "experts", and over the past quarter century many, perhaps most predictions about China have either completely failed to materialize or have occurred much earlier than anticipated. Some of the regularly repeated predictions have become stale, such as "the coming collapse" (this seems a common theme in the USA).

Some China specialists argue that the Soviet system had stability through the 1980s, but still collapsed suddenly and completely, and that the Chinese system is sure to follow this year. Well, okay, then next year.... Okay, okay, certainly the year after that. It doesn't look likely to me, but who knows? I sure don't claim to know, but I am curious and completely fascinated.

Where is it all going? Is it planned? Is it as stable as it seems? *Tianzhidao* (heaven knows).

My self-description as I watch China with amazement is "walking around with my mouth hanging open", as I ponder the changes day by day and year by year. Nothing in my life gives me the mental tools to fully comprehend this rate and scope of change. I often find it hard to believe what I'm seeing with my own eyes. It's impossible....

One thing is certain: tomorrow will be different, just as today is different from yesterday and last year was different from the year before. Dreams, too, are fluid.

Modern China is a fascinating and welcoming place. I feel honored to hear the hopes and dreams of some of the people there, and to know and share a little of their lives. It's wonderful that many of my best friends live in the middle of this great change. It is their country, their lives, and our shared future.

Notes on Language, Romanization, and Names

Hanyu pinyin (the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet) and simplified Chinese characters, standard in the PRC, the People's Republic of China, are used throughout. *Pinyin* is the standard Romanized spellings of *Putonghua*, or MSC (Modern Standard Chinese). For simplicity, I have omitted the *pinyin* tone signs in the body of the book. The glossary includes characters and the *pinyin* with tone signs.

Romanization of place names can be difficult, especially in autonomous regions and minority areas. A good example is "Nei Menggu" (Inner Mongolia). Official Chinese maps and many good dictionaries give the spelling as "Nei Mongol", but the correct *pinyin* for the Chinese characters is "Nei Menggu". The spelling "Mongol" more closely represents the Mongolian pronunciation, but I choose to use the *pinyin*. Similarly, "Bose" is the spelling officially used for a small city in Guangxi: I use the *pinyin*, "Baise". I use "Huhhot" for Huhehaote, the capital of Nei Menggu, and "Urumqi" for Wulumuqi, the capital of Xinjiang Autonomous Region.

"Uyghur" is the spelling I choose to use for the large Muslim minority group in Xinjiang. Of at least four common Romanizations, this one is preferred by many of my Uyghur friends, and seems the most correct.

I use the English words "China" to refer to the country and "Chinese" to refer to the people, and to the national language, which is correctly called *Putonghua*. I also use the English words, "Tibet" and "Tibetan", instead of Xizang and *Zangzu*, because they are more familiar to readers.

Pinyin spellings are italicized except when they are proper names; for example, Xizang, in the line above. Locations are given in conventional Western order (city, province) for the ease of readers, rather than the Chinese "big to small" (country, province, city, person) ordering.

I use 元, the Chinese character for *yuan*, the basic unit of RMB or *Renminbi*, China's currency. (A little less than 8元/US\$1 in 2007.)

I have changed people's names and occasionally adjusted places in all my stories.

Contents

1.	Introduction: Why China?.....	1
2.	Background: So ... 中国, China.....	7
3.	Maps, Dictionaries, and Other Resources.....	21
4.	Getting Around.....	31
5.	Trains.....	42
6.	Boats.....	55
7.	Bicycles.....	59
8.	Safety and Security.....	67
9.	Hotels.....	72
10.	Food.....	75
11.	Internet, <i>Wangba</i>	79
12.	Sick on the Road.....	85
13.	Money.....	92
14.	Standing in Line.....	95
15.	Telephones.....	97
16.	License Plates.....	103
17.	Getting Out, Coming Home Crazy.....	105
18.	Tales About Travel in China.....	111

Trains p.152, Boats p.168, Bikes p.180, Safety p.198,
Hotels p.204, Food p.225, Internet p.243, Sick p.248,
Money p.263, Queues p.266, Phones p.270

Appendixes

Suggested Reading.....	275
Glossary.....	278
About the Author.....	286

Introduction: Why China?

CHINA is important, and changing fast. This book is about China and about getting along, taking things as they come. It provides the information you need to get around on your own, to get to places not mentioned in your guidebook. It's not about famous sights, great villages, or the best hotels, but it will help you find those things for yourself, whether it's your first or fifteenth time in China. I hope it will help you accept your experiences calmly and help you see more, to be aware and appreciative of the differences, and help you to reduce your impact on the places you go and the people you encounter. Keeping the mutual negative impacts to a minimum is good for us all.

Maybe you are a businessman, and having problems with a supplier or factory in a more remote area: this book gives you the tools you need to drop in unexpectedly and see what's happening with your own eyes. Perhaps you won't enjoy the "getting there" as much as I do, but tools are tools; you use computers and probably don't like them very much, either.

Perhaps you are an "ordinary" tourist, happy with your tour: I've never met a tourist who didn't dream of stepping away from the group. Here is the information you need to do that, for a half-day or for a week, with comfort and safety.

Living or working in China? There's a lot here for you, too.

The "getting around" part of traveling — just getting to places, going somewhere, wandering, and all that involves — is what I focus on in this book. I won't tell you where to go or even in any detail the places I've especially liked. Rather, I offer broad information about gallivanting around China, and provide an authentic "feel" of it. I greatly enjoy this getting around process, with all its frustrations, and you can too. What I remember are the surprises, adventures, and people I meet, but to whet your appetite and prepare you, or maybe make you glad it happened to me and not you, I promise to tell a few terrible

stories. I've carefully preserved a thread of complaint: I whine a bit. Expect some hard work and travails when you get off the beaten track.

Traveling in China is the most exciting thing in my life. I've met many people from all over the world in both China and in the USA as a result of my travels, but mostly I meet citizens of China. I go back again and again, to see my old friends and the changes in their lives, to learn something of new places, and to gain new thoughts and insights. I make the most of opportunities to see how Chinese live. Simply trying to absorb the extremely rapid transformations happening everywhere in China keeps me fully occupied. What will the situation be tomorrow? Next year?

Famous sights and places, the "must sees", hold little interest for me. I want to know who lives out back. I'm pretty ordinary and interested in ordinary things. Daily life, work, schools, construction, in the cities and in the countryside: it all attracts me. I want to know what's different and what's the same. Sometimes it's hard to discover, as people in the middle of their "ordinary" lives often tend not to notice the details that stimulate my curiosity. I ask and they say, "What?"

I travel by myself, *yige ren* (one person). As I have no one traveling with me for company and support, I have little choice but to deal with the people around me. One of my American friends tells me I'm eccentric, but you don't have to travel the way I do to use the information in this book. Do it your own way and seek out your own interests. Use the knowledge and information I've gathered as a starting point and build on it.

You too are interested in China or you wouldn't be reading this; if you've never been there, perhaps you will travel to China and gain a firsthand feel for the country and the people. I hope you will glimpse some of my fascination and see that you too can get around in a very different and interesting culture, and enjoy yourself while you are doing it. If you've spent time in China, perhaps my notes will convey useful and interesting tips and make you want to return, or write your own stories.

Guides

Most travelers want to know something about their destinations and usually carry some kind of guidebook. Getting Around in China won't replace your guide, but it will provide more detailed and up-to-date information. Use it as a companion to your favorite

guidebook, or read it before you go. I offer some guidebook recommendations in the third chapter.

I try to not repeat information that is commonly available, but rather, to add to it. Unless I have something additional to offer, I don't waste space on subjects covered adequately in the better guides, or easily available from other sources. Topics such as toilets, tipping, foods and special food needs, seasons and weather in different areas, cultural and social etiquette, and common mistakes and misunderstandings are covered well in many books. Look through the background sections in your guide; read the useful parts. Seek out other information relevant to your interests: the Internet is a good place to start, and you can access the Internet easily everywhere in China; you don't need to carry it, or do all your research in advance.

Warning: Nothing you read or hear about China is up-to-date, including the latest you find on the Internet or in this book; everything is changing too rapidly. Visit this book's website for occasional updates and additional information <<http://www.gettingaroundinchina.com>>.

Organization

I've sifted through more than thirty notebooks containing my travel journals, looking for the pieces that may help while you pursue your own interests. Some sections of this book you may never need or read, while other parts may be useful as a continual reference.

The first seven chapters contain background and information about resources such as maps and dictionaries, travel in general, and common modes of transport. The next ten chapters are about safety, hotels, food, telephones, Internet, being sick, standing in line, and similar kinds of topics that are a part of the fun and reality of being on the road. The appendix contains a glossary of Chinese words used in this book.

I've assembled some stories as a second section, and include a suggested reading list. If you plan to carry this book with you as you travel, you can tear out the stories to make it smaller and lighter. Like most travelers, I'm always carrying too much; less is more freedom. This book is intended as a practical reference; you can skip parts that don't interest you without losing the flow. Read the chapters that interest you, and as much or as little of the stories as you like.

The stories and travel fragments come from my journals and are roughly organized by the same topics as the practical chapters, and dated. They contain examples of the usual, and the odd, special, and

crazy things that have happened to me while getting around. The full stories and the people that fill them are too long, too many, and too complex to be included here. The most recent three or four years of stories are possibly the most useful, but the older stories add some depth and a greater sense of the rapid change. China is a big and diverse country; even the oldest things I describe still exist somewhere.

Is China So Important?

What is it that has me so hooked, as I hitch a ride on the back of this dragon? What am I: A visitor, a guest? A nuisance? A traveler? An observer? A learner? How can I possibly presume to make observations, much less judgments? Is China being Westernized, or, heaven help us, Americanized? Or will China Sinicize the rest of the world? Is China being changed by the Internet? Or are the huge numbers of Chinese *wangchong* (net worms) changing the Internet, and thereby the rest of the world? China is already the world's largest broadband market, and as a first language, more people in the world use Chinese than any other.

Obviously China is a huge and powerful country, dynamic and complex, and engaged with the USA and the world in an unbelievably swiftly evolving relationship. If China's growth keeps on at the present rate, it will have the world's largest economy in less than twenty years, perhaps much sooner. A broadly cooperative relationship with the rest of the world is essential, but problems caused by misunderstandings and lack of current knowledge are rife. The Chinese view of the USA has long been positive: a golden land of dreams, riches, and freedoms, although recently this view has been shifting and becoming more realistic and balanced. Americans for their part are poorly informed about China, now the USA's biggest trading partner (replacing Canada in mid-2005). The American view of China seems able to switch alarmingly easily from positive to negative and back again. I see little reason for the Americans to be afraid of China, but it is easy to fear the unknown. Lack of understanding can lead to dangerous misjudgments and hostility.

Technology and Telecommunications

Where is China heading and where are they today? The mobile (cell) phone system is by far the world's largest, and considerably lower-cost than in the USA or Europe. It works better, too. Some industry experts say China's telecommunications system as a whole is now the most

advanced in the world. Government policy seems to be that communication is important and everybody must use it; therefore, anything that lowers the price or improves service is good. Wow, what a concept! (Look at the chapters on telephones and Internet).

Education and Minority Culture

China's education policies and performance: excellent, or mediocre? A huge plan is under way; China is rapidly expanding schools, colleges, and universities across the country. Teachers must be created, prepared, and educated years before classrooms are built, and classrooms, indeed whole new campuses, are being built at a great rate everywhere in China. The percentage of high school graduates who can attend a college of some sort is increasing steadily, and China's literacy rate is similar to that of the USA, according to United Nations statistics. Literacy in China may in fact be substantially higher than that of the US, but literacy is difficult to measure and many different standards are used, making comparisons problematic.

China has chosen English as a required foreign language that all students must study, and a test of English competence is a part of college entrance exams. Is China becoming bilingual, in English and Chinese? Are some of the minorities therefore trilingual? Are native minority cultures being preserved, or subsumed? How about the dominant *Han* culture? Are people preserving their identities and strengths in the face of globalization and Westernization, as I think and hope they are? Why do I care? Why should you care? Do answers to these questions shed some light on China's intentions toward the rest of the world?

Social and Sexual Revolution

How about changing sexual mores? China's current sexual revolution has spread fast to all corners, coastal cities and remote places alike, pushed or assisted by mobile phones and the Internet. What will be the result of the increasing numbers of pregnancies and secret abortions among students and other young women, and what about the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, given the common male reluctance to use condoms? Will sex education in China be improved? The central government recognizes that this is important, but it is difficult. How can teachers be required to teach about something that

embarrasses them? If new teachers must be trained for this, how quickly can enough teachers be created for the huge number of schools in China? What about the young people who are putting off marrying, or have married but are putting off having children? Who's going to take care of the previous generation when so many young people suddenly don't want to live with their parents, or want to live a great distance away? And who will take care of the kids if the grandparents aren't in the home and both parents are working? Life expectancy has increased substantially during the past generation, so the next twenty years will also see a huge increase in China's elderly population.

Background: So ... 中国, China

THERE are many ways to experience life in China: time spent walking or biking around anywhere is worthwhile. Meet some locals, find some new friends (even if they are only five or six years old). Try eating in local noodle shops. Find a teahouse and sit around for half a day; explore the local parks; go out for a walk early in the morning at first light, or even earlier, in the wee hours of the morning (see how clean the streets are!). You'll be perfectly safe. Wander off at right angles from the places mentioned in your guidebook: only a few blocks away, you probably won't see any other foreign visitors, and the locals will be surprised to see you. Spend time in places that have no tourist attractions and aren't mentioned in your guide. Visit some schools and universities; walk in as though you belong there. Go into small shops, hospitals, or factories you pass that attract your interest. You'll often be welcomed and only occasionally asked to leave. The main rules seem obvious: be polite, be open, and make yourself available.

I'm sometimes able to make the step "off the track" to small places because someone I meet (on the street, perhaps on the train, or at an English corner) invites me to go with them to their hometown, or on a business trip or something. Grab the chance. Go! It will rarely be boring and occasionally it will be supremely special.

Personally, I prefer "quests" to goals. It doesn't really matter whether I make it or not; instead, my quests give me direction, and I'm never finished. Of course, goals are mixed in continuously: buying a train ticket, getting to a particular place to see an old friend, or buying a new pair of socks....

The Dirt

Is China dirty? Many books tell you so, and standards are certainly different. Chinese toilets are honest: they tend to smell like toilets, not