Useful Information

- **Language**: Official language is Mandarin and most people also use their local dialect. The standard spoken Chinese is Putonghua. English can be understood by many young people and is used in hotels and big restaurants. In all tourist hotels, staff can speak in English, Japanese and other languages. They can also write down addresses or instructions in Chinese for taxi drivers or others. In addition, roads in major cities are signposted in Pinyin, the official Romanization system of the Chinese characters, which makes it quite easy to get around with the help of a map.

- **Currency**: Renminbi (RMB) is the only currency to be used in China. RMB is also called Chinese Yuan. The unit of Renminbi is yuan and with smaller denominations called jiao and fen. The conversion among the three is: 1 yuan = 10 jiao =100 fen. Paper notes are issued in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 50 and 100 yuan; 1, 2 and 5 jiao; and 1, 2 and 5 fen. Coins are issued in denominations of 1 yuan; 5 jiao; and 1, 2 and 5 fen.

  Money exchanges by cash or traveler's cheques can be made at the branches of Bank of China at Beijing International Airport, hotels and tourist stores. Please remember to keep the receipt to exchange back to foreign currency when leaving China.

- **Credit Cards:** Visa, MasterCard and American Express are the most commonly used in China. Cards can be used in most middle to top-range hotels, Friendship and department stores, but they cannot be used to finance your transportation costs.

- **Time**: GMT + 8 hours (the whole of China is set to Beijing time)

- **Electricity**: Electricity is 220 Volts, 50 AC; plugs can be three-pronged angled, three-pronged round, two flat pins or two narrow round pins.

- **Water**: Bottled mineral water can easily be bought in all stores and street kiosks for RMB 3. And sometimes hotels provide it free of charge. Furthermore, potable water is only available in a few 4 to 5 star hotels, while water in thermos flasks in rooms is usually non-potable tap water.

- **Measurement**: In Metric system.

- **Tipping**: Tipping is not customary outside of the foreign joint-venture hotels and is officially discouraged. But hotel bellboys usually expect RMB 2-5 per bag.

- **Attention**: Smoking is prohibited in public places in Beijing, such as hospitals, office buildings, theatres, cinemas, museums, planes, and trains

- **Hotlines**
  110: Police 119: Fire 120: Ambulance
  6525 5486: Foreigners Section of the Beijing Public Security Bureau
  6513 0828: Tourist Hotline
  6590 3419: International SOS Assistance