



## Guidelines for Low Impact Travel

### What Is Responsible Travel?

Responsible travel is about minimising your impact and maximising your connection with people and the environment. It's about making a positive contribution and having the most rewarding and inspiring travel experiences of your life. PANDA Responsible Travel is about providing and having a more rewarding and fulfilling holiday. It's about being culturally sensitive and minimising negative impacts on the environment. It's about getting involved with the local people - ensuring that your tourist dollar benefits the community and that the local people are involved in decisions that affect their lives. It's about helping to conserve the world's wild places. It's about sustainability and "giving something back".

PANDA has been operating environmentally and culturally sensitive holidays around China for many years. By travelling "responsibly", you'll be making a positive contribution to the host communities and environments you visit, and ensuring that future travellers will enjoy the same privilege.

Responsible Travel is a key plank of our corporate philosophy. You can read our Responsible Travel Policy on our site <http://www.pandaadventures.com/webpages/aboutUs.jsp>.

We do our best to adhere to our policy (and we welcome any feedback on our operations), and we need your help to fully realise our aims. Following are some suggestions on how to minimise your impact and to facilitate interaction and understanding. By following them, we believe you'll have a far richer and more rewarding holiday experience.

### Before You Leave

The more you know about your holiday destination, China, before you leave, the more you will be able to appreciate and understand it once you're there.

Try to read up on the history, wildlife and culture of China. PANDA provides a recommended Travel China Guidebook at <http://www.pandaadventures.com/webPro/chinaGuide2/index.jsp>.

Please try and learn some of the local language - even if it's just "hello", "good-bye" and "thank you".

China don't have many waste collection services, particularly in rural area, so try to leave as much excess packaging (eg film boxes, plastic bags etc) at home and when you're buying toiletries and other stocks, stick to biodegradable products.

Consider the clothes you're packing. China has modest dress codes. By dressing inappropriately, you may be putting up a barrier between yourself and the people you want to interact with. Loose clothing that covers limbs not only protects you from the sun and insects, but also will ensure you're more readily accepted by the local people.



Likewise, leave expensive jewellery at home - not only can it attract thieves, it's a tactless reminder of the differing standards of wealth between the west and the third world.

## People, Customs and Etiquette

### Local People and Customs

Meeting and interacting meaningfully with the local people and experiencing foreign cultures are often the most memorable highlights of a holiday. Your PANDA holiday will provide many opportunities for both, however just as at home, respect, consideration and an open mind are needed for these interactions to be mutually enjoyable. Don't be surprised if the local people - especially in remote areas - treat you with an equal measure of curiosity, and even suspicion!

Put yourself in their shoes. It's easy to judge another culture by our own standards and assumptions, but it's worth keeping in mind:

- You are a guest in their community - please respect your hosts and behave as you'd expect a guest to behave in your home.
- Keep an open mind and don't be too quick to judge: we do things differently back home - not better, just differently.
- Don't be too quick to generalize. For example, one bad experience with a taxi driver doesn't mean all cabbies are thieves.

Please be respectful of local customs. Read up before you go and ask your tour leader, or a local, if you're unsure. Observe, listen and take your cue from the local people.

- Nudity, scanty or inappropriate dress often causes offence, particularly in Muslim regions. Modest dress will help minimise the risk of sexual harassment (locals won't readily assume you're "available") and you'll be treated with a lot more respect.
- Formalities such as greetings can be quite different to what you're used to. It's often best to wait for the local person to make the first move - be it a handshake or a nose rub! Public displays of affection are taboo in many communities.
- Please respect private property and sites where access may be limited, by asking permission. Please also abide by the laws of the country and community you're visiting.

### Begging

It's often painfully hard to resist the pleadings of beggars, be they children calling for "bonbons" or adults with terrible disabilities. In most cases, we strongly recommend you do not give money or other "gifts" to beggars. In some cases children skip school or are forced out by their parents, and are even deliberately maimed or drugged to increase their earning capacity as beggars.

If you bring stationery or other things from home for the local children, give them to the schoolteacher or village chief for distribution, rather than directly to the kids.

### Sex Tourism

One of the saddest and most despicable sides of travel in developing nations is "child sex tourism". Many unscrupulous people in third world countries exploit innocent children;



prostituting them to tourists, business travellers and expatriates. Women are often sold, lured or forced into the industry against their will.

We vehemently discourage your participation in this industry, and if you are found to be breaking the law you will be asked to leave your tour.

### **Photography**

Please always ask before taking someone's photo, and respect his or her wishes. Usually just lifting your camera with a questioning look will suffice as a request, although asking in the person's own language is even better. A smile goes a long way!

We suggest that you don't pay for taking photos of people - it becomes another form of begging, with similar consequences. Usually, if you take a little time to talk to your subject, they will agree to be photographed - you end up with a far more relaxed subject, and you each have a more enjoyable and memorable experience.

If you promise to send someone a photo, please try to follow through. Our leaders can sometimes help out, delivering the prints the next time they're passing through. A small Polaroid camera that can produce "instant" prints is always a huge hit! These days, a digital camera can also be a great asset, enabling you to immediately show your subjects their photos.

### **Bargaining**

Bargaining is a fundamental part of the shopping experience in China, but what many westerners don't realise is that it's not about securing the lowest possible price. It's about fair trade and reaching a tactical agreement that suits both parties. The social interaction is as much a part of the process as the financial outcome. Have fun with it and keep things in perspective, but don't be mean-spirited.

### **Religious & Historic Sites**

Please respect the physical and cultural integrity of religious and historic sites.

- Ensure you are appropriately dressed and aware of particular actions that may cause offence.
- If you're exploring archaeological ruins, be mindful of where you're putting your feet.
- Don't succumb to the temptation to souvenir a piece of stone or pottery or other artifact.

### **Food**

China has a distinctive and exciting cuisine - sampled local delicacies and shared meals with the local people are invariably the stuff of rich memories. We encourage you to support local restaurants, often family-run, by trying out their food. If you're eating on the street or in markets, stick to hot food cooked in front of you, and eat from establishments where there is a high turnover, where freshness is more likely to be assured. Avoid raw foods or any that may have been washed in un-purified water or drinks containing un-purified ice. If in doubt, ask your leader - he or she can also provide restaurant recommendations.

On treks and safaris, PANDA cooks will prepare many of your meals. You can be assured of the



freshness of the ingredients, the purity of the water and hygienic preparation.

Food supplies in remote areas are often limited, and tourists can put pressure on local resources. Wherever possible, PANDA sources its food and supplies locally, thereby ensuring as much economic benefit to the community as possible. Where food supplies are limited, we will carry in our own supplies.

In Yunnan, Tibet and other remote areas, we suggest that you stick to the food prepared by our own chefs to ensure what you consume is prepared in a sustainable and hygienic manner.

## **Our Leaders, Guides and Staff**

A fundamental principle of our approach to Responsible Travel is our commitment to employ leaders and staff from the region we are operating in. PANDA tour leaders come from all corners of China. We operate comprehensive training courses for all our local leaders and each year we try to help them improve their skills. Not only does this policy mean the best possible holiday experience for our clients, it provides a career path for our leaders and staff and ensures the benefits remain in the local community.

Our leaders are a great source of information about the country and its people and can be invaluable in helping you understand and interact with them. They can help you avoid cultural blunders, and their knowledge gives you a great insight into all aspects of the country, including local customs and traditions. Not only can they speak the language, they're passionate about their homeland. On tour, they'll introduce you to friends and family, and help you to get to know the local people on their own terms.

## **Wilderness and Wildlife**

It is impossible to make no impact at all when visiting a wilderness environment. In the regions we do visit, we strive to minimise our impact and ensure it is as harmless as possible. To do this, we follow strict environmental guidelines. But only with your help can we ensure the sustainability of a wilderness travel, please do not ask your leader to break any laws regarding approach to wildlife or leaving roads or tracks.

## **Trail Etiquette**

- When walking or cycling, please stay on the trail wherever possible, even when it's muddy or there's room to walk or ride alongside. Don't be tempted to create, build, or follow, a new route or shortcut. This keeps erosion to the minimum.
- Watch where you put your feet! Particularly in high latitudes and altitudes, the flora can be very slow growing and may take many years to regenerate after being impacted by a careless boot. Avoid stepping on plants by stepping on rocks or compacted soil.
- If you carry it in, carry it out - please don't dispose of litter along the way. This includes cigarette butts and used matches, as well as paper, plastic, clothing and food scraps. Apple peels and other fruit rinds may be biodegradable but they are unsightly and can take a while to decompose. Carry a plastic bag to collect your litter during the day and



take it away with you (and if you're happy to set a good example; pick up litter left by other, less caring, people).

- We will provide you with adequate quantities of clean drinking water when trekking. Please be sure to bring two sturdy, 1-1.5 litre water bottles so you don't have to rely on buying bottled water.

## Camping

We try to keep our impact on a campsite to an absolute minimum - leaving the site in the same, or preferably better, condition than we found it.

We aim to locate tents at least 50 metres away from streams and lakes and, to prevent erosion, we ask that you do not dig drainage ditches around your tent.

While that patch of lush green grass looks like the ideal spot to pitch your tent, mountain meadows and tundra contain important - and very fragile - plants, which can easily be damaged, so we try to select a sandy or hard surface for our campsites (that's where roll mats and thermarests come in!).

When we break camp, please help us by doing a quick check of the site, removing any scraps left by your group, or by others.

## Toilet Hygiene

When trekking, please use the available facilities wherever possible and, if you do get "caught short" please dig a hole at least 15cm deep (or 30cm in hot areas), on the lower side of the trail. Tent pegs make good shovels!

- Make sure you're at least 100 metres away from any watercourse, and preferably 100 metres away from the walking trail. Carry a cigarette lighter to burn the paper (as long as there is no risk of starting a larger fire) - and don't forget to be sure the embers are extinguished before you move on! If there is a risk of fire, or the ground is too hard or stony to dig a hole, use leaf litter or rocks to cover.
- Please always dispose of tampons etc in camp - do not bury or burn them along the trail (carry a small plastic bag with you). Native wildlife can dig up and scatter rubbish if it's buried.
- If we are building a group latrine, we find an area with good ground cover and try to remove the top layer of soil intact. When in camp, always use the latrine in the toilet tent if one is provided - your leader will explain the details of "latrine etiquette" to you. Before leaving, we fill the hole, replace the top layer of soil and scatter soil or leaf litter over the top.
- Don't forget to thoroughly wash your hands - for your own health as well as that of other group members.

## Rubbish

Disposing of rubbish properly in China is a little more complex than that at your home. Most of the rural areas we visit don't have 'organised' waste disposal systems.



Local wildlife may also be affected when they wander into campsites, accidentally consuming harmful substances and altering their natural diet.

We encourage you to go the extra step and remove any rubbish left by others. Carry a plastic bag for collecting your rubbish during the day. If you can take your non-biodegradable waste, such as batteries and plastic film canisters, back home with you, you'll be making a positive impact on an enormous problem.

### **Washing and Water Pollution**

Protecting water resources is vital. Where practical, we camp well away from water sources.

- We urge you to use only biodegradable soaps and shampoos that don't contain phosphates, and please don't use them directly in fresh waterways, as even biodegradable soaps can be harmful.
- If you're washing pots and pans or clothes, carry a basin of water at least 50 metres away from the edge of the stream or lake - do not wash directly in the waterway. Go easy on the amount of soap - elbow grease and sand is a good alternative. Scatter the dirty water over a wide area rather than just tipping it out.
- If bathing or swimming, consider the sensibilities of local people - both regarding what you wear and using "their" water. Bathe downstream from water collection points or villages and, if you're using shampoos and soaps, lather up and rinse well away from the water's edge - your leader can give you a basin.
- Be aware that water attracts native wildlife and our presence should not be disruptive to their habits.

### **Campfires**

Campfires are, for many people, an important part of the camping experience. In many areas that we operate, such as Songpan, it is neither practical nor environmentally responsible to have fires.

Please don't throw materials such as plastics, which emit toxic fumes and do not completely decompose, into the campfire.

Wherever possible, we use, and encourage local operators to use, portable kerosene stoves rather than open fires. All our cooking on trekking holidays is done on kerosene stoves, for both camping and lodge-based treks.

### **Wildlife and Flora**

Encounters with wildlife are often a highlight of your trip. Many of the wildlife species we encounter are already endangered. The following tips will help to ensure we don't put them further at risk by disturbing their daily routine or causing them to behave abnormally.

- Your guide will discuss minimum approach distances with you - i.e. the minimum distance you can approach an animal without risk to either the animal or yourself. Please observe them. Particularly with breeding or nesting animals, your actions can have a



severe impact - for example, causing a parent to abandon its young, leaving them susceptible to attack by predators.

- If an animal alters its behaviour because of your presence, you know you're too close. While it may be tempting to force an animal to "do something", your wildlife experience will be far more rewarding if you have a little patience and observe the details of the animal's "natural" behaviour.
- Some animals are susceptible to human viruses and diseases, so keep your distance!
- Please keep noise to a minimum when observing animals at close quarters and, where appropriate, wear clothing that will help you blend into the background rather than stand out like a beacon.
- Consider taking a zoom lens and binoculars.
- Please don't feed wild animals. Food scraps should not be considered "biodegradable".
- Be aware that rabies and other diseases are prevalent in many countries. Wild animals should never be touched, but we also strongly suggest you refrain from touching domestic animals such as cats and dogs.
- When you're trekking, please don't cut back vegetation from the trail or pick the wildflowers - particularly in popular areas. This can impact on the ability of the plants to reproduce.
- Customs and Quarantine laws in most countries are very strict and offences carry harsh penalties. Be aware that it is illegal to import many wildlife products. Their purchase can also encourage poaching.

## Safety

We have many years of experience operating holidays. Our staff members are highly trained to act effectively in an emergency and we have operations offices in most of the regions we visit. This means we have staff on the ground that can keep abreast of situations that may present safety threats.

We will never knowingly risk the safety of our clients, however you must also take responsibility for your personal safety.

- Please follow the directions of your tour leader, particularly regarding approach distances to wildlife and at altitude in difficult terrain.
- Choose a trip within your physical capabilities and make sure you undertake the requisite training before departure. Relying on someone else to "rescue" you may put other people at personal risk.
- Ensure you have adequate travel insurance before you leave home, including provision for emergency evacuation.
- Be careful with food and drinking water - if you're unsure about the hygiene, ask your leader.

## Drugs

Drug use is against the law in China. Breaking the law not only puts you at risk, but also the other group members, your tour leader and any local people you may be associated with.



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Thank you for choosing PANDA and for adhering to these guidelines. It won't always be easy or even possible to stick to them to the letter, but by being aware, and thinking about the impact of your actions, you can make a difference. And we promise that your holiday will be a far more enjoyable experience as a result.

Have a wonderful adventure!