

Security Information for China

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City Threat Rating: 3 (Medium)

Country: China is the third largest market in the world and its fastest growing economy. Annual growth rates are as high as 8 percent. Despite being a communist country, much of China's economy is governed by market principles. China remains committed to economic development and is attempting to modify its economic regulations to keep up with its growing market. Although attempting to appease the international marketplace by adopting more capitalistic policies, the Chinese government strives to maintain its communist ideology. The split between a growing capitalist society and a staunchly communist government is increasingly prompting protests and social unrest, particularly in the lead-up to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

In addition to protests, crime is a security concern in China. Organized criminal activities, including kidnap-for-ransom, are a particular concern in areas of southern China. Government surveillance is a large concern for foreign travelers. Political tensions are also a concern, particularly as China and Taiwan continue to clash politically regarding the legal existence of the latter; Taiwan claims that it is a separate country, while China considers it to be a province.

Overall, China remains a stable country that is a relatively safe destination for foreigners. As China continues to maintain an ideological duality in terms of its economy and its government, long-term stability may remain problematic.

City: Beijing is the capital of the People's Republic of China and is regarded as the nation's most conservative city. The Chaoyang district is home to most of the foreign resident community and many first-class hotels. Street signs are now written in both Mandarin and English, illustrating the increasing role of foreign business in Beijing. A growing number of automobiles and the use of coal as an energy source have dramatically increased air pollution in the city in recent years. Such pollution may adversely affect visitors who are not accustomed to the higher levels or have respiratory ailments.

Security Situation: Crime and occasional non-violent demonstrations affect security conditions in Beijing. Surveillance is also a potential issue for foreign visitors.

Crime and Terrorism: The overall crime rate remains relatively low, especially when compared to Western cities of similar size. The most commonly reported crimes are petty thefts and scams. Visitors should be aware that mobile phone theft, the cloning of mobile phone numbers and car theft are also being reported more often. Although violent crime does occur, it rarely affects foreigners.

Since Beijing was announced as the Olympic Host city for the 2008 Games, the city has experienced rapid and forced migration of rural workers into the city for infrastructure projects. Officials believe that as the workers are placed in wealthy neighborhoods, the recognition of a large disparity of income can encourage theft.



As with any large event, crime will likely increase during the Beijing 2008 Olympics; however, the Chinese government has stated that more than 100,000 security personnel will be patrolling the various venues, streets and neighborhoods to decrease the likelihood of criminal activity that could potentially affect athletes and foreigners visiting Beijing.

The threat of terrorism is low in eastern China. There does not appear to be any organized terrorist effort behind any events in the past several years. At this time, there does not appear to be any significant international terrorist activity in China.

Surveillance: The Chinese government allegedly conducts surveillance against some foreign citizens and businesses, making corporate espionage a concern. Western missionaries and other foreign workers have reported that the government monitors their private conversations, including in seemingly private settings such as hotel rooms, and on telephones. Authorities may use informants, such as visitor-employed taxi drivers or interpreters, to report on the activities of foreigners. Authorities may view any documents left behind in hotel rooms, including those in safes, and may access any portable computers, PDAs or other devices. Security personnel are also known to monitor electronic transmissions, including e-mail exchanges and other Internet activity. Officials have detained or expelled visitors for engaging in improper activities, including political discussions with Chinese citizens and importing "political" material. Visitors should not transport any documents, electronic files or other items that the Chinese government may deem offensive or inappropriate, or any items that the traveler considers sensitive or confidential.

Strikes and Demonstrations: Demonstrations, which are most often non-violent, occur occasionally in Beijing, especially in Tiananmen Square. Although such demonstrations are usually peaceful, security personnel may react harshly toward demonstrators, often beating and dragging them away. Visitors should exercise caution when visiting Tiananmen Square, and avoid it altogether during protests. Visitors should never take photos of or videotape demonstrations.

The Beijing Olympics will likely spark a number of protests and demonstrations; however, the Chinese government has stated that such activity will be unacceptable during the games.

Corruption: Corruption is perceived as pervasive in China. In the past, many high-ranking officials have been arrested, and even executed, for participating in corrupt activities. Police officers with modest state salaries are easily bribed by criminals and local officials in collusion with organized crime gangs. Corrupt police officers and officials both protect and assist Chinese crime gangs. In the past, hundreds of thousands of police officers in mainland China have been caught breaking the law by a 10,000-officer-strong special supervisory unit established to monitor and discipline police officers.

Police: Most police officers have limited formal education, and their training and equipment usually fall below Western standards. Most speak only Chinese. Foreigners should note that, in the past, diplomatic staff sometimes have had trouble gaining access to their arrested citizens.



Airport: Beijing Capital International Airport is one of China's largest and busiest airports. The drive time from the airport to Beijing is approximately 20 minutes, depending on traffic. Taxis and limousines are available at the airport for travel to the city. Government-licensed taxis are distinctly marked and should have the driver's picture, and vehicle license clearly displayed. Many taxi drivers do not speak English, making it essential that travelers have destination addresses written in Mandarin in advance.

The Chinese Aviation Administration (CAA) has begun implementing increased security measures ahead of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. As such travelers should expect delays when traveling to the region during this time, including in customs, during baggage inspections and while boarding the aircraft.

Ground Transportation: Bus, taxi and subway services are available for travel within the city. Beijing's subway is clean, safe and efficient but services a very limited area. If taking a taxi, travelers should make arrangements through local agents to employ a driver who can act as an interpreter and guide. Visitors should be aware that regardless of the company, hired drivers are likely to be government informants.

Currency: The currency in mainland China is the Renminbi. The primary unit of the Renminbi is the Yuan, which is the most commonly recognized name. There are no coins. ATMs are widely available in malls and on main streets. Major credit cards are accepted at most mid-range to top-end hotels and some department stores, although most transactions in China require cash. Businesses that accept credit cards will have credit card signs in plain view.