



Table Manners

fact sheet

The main difference between Chinese and Western eating habits is that unlike the West, where everyone has their own plate of food, in China the dishes are placed on the table and everybody shares.



If you are being treated by a Chinese host, be prepared for a ton of food. Chinese are very proud of their culture of food and will do their best to give you a taste of many different types of cuisine. A typical meal starts with cold dishes. These are followed by the main courses, hot meat and vegetable dishes. Finally a soup is brought out, which is followed by the starchy "staple" food, which is usually rice or noodles. Many Chinese eat rice last. This is different to what we are used to, therefore if you would like to have your rice together with the other dishes, you should say so early on.



One thing to be aware of is that when eating with a Chinese host, you may find that the person is using their chopsticks to put food in your bowl or plate. This is a sign of politeness. The appropriate thing to do would be to eat the whatever-it-is and say how yummy it is. If you feel uncomfortable with this, you can just say a polite thank you and leave the food there, during the meal cover it up with a little rice when they are not looking.



Traditionally speaking, there are many taboos at Chinese tables, but these days not many people pay attention to them in large restaurants. A common cultural mistake people make is the teapot. Make sure the spout of the teapot is not facing anyone. It is impolite to set the teapot down where the spout is facing towards somebody. There is also particular etiquette with regards chopsticks, be sure to read the chopstick fact sheet to get an introduction.