

Airline information in China

General airline information

Here's an overview of general airline information for domestic and international travel within China:

Major Airlines in China

1. Air China:

Air China is one of China's largest airlines and a member of the Star Alliance. It operates a wide range of domestic flights and international routes to North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

2. China Eastern Airlines:

Services: China Eastern is a member of the SkyTeam alliance. It operates an extensive network of domestic flights, as well as international routes to North America, Europe, and Oceania.

3. China Southern Airlines:

China Southern is another of the country's largest carriers and a former SkyTeam member (it left the alliance in 2019). It offers a significant number of domestic and international flights.

4. Hainan Airlines:

Hainan Airlines is a large non-state-owned carrier offering both domestic and international services. Known for high-quality service, it flies to North America, Europe, and Asia.

5. Xiamen Airlines:

Services: A member of the SkyTeam alliance, Xiamen Airlines operates both domestic and international routes, particularly to Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe.

Common Classes of Service:

1. First Class and Business Class:

- Offered on international and some domestic flights. These cabins often feature lie-flat seats on international routes and enhanced services.

2. Premium Economy:

- Available on international flights for some airlines like Air China, China Eastern, and Hainan Airlines. It offers more space and comfort than regular economy.

3. Economy Class:

- The most common class of service on domestic flights. It offers basic comfort with standard seat spacing and meals or snacks on longer routes.

Baggage Policies:

- **Domestic Flights:** Generally, economy passengers are allowed 20 kg (44 lbs) of checked luggage, while business and first-class passengers can carry more. Policies vary slightly depending on the airline.
- **International Flights:** International allowances can vary greatly depending on the destination and ticket class, typically allowing for 23 kg to 32 kg of checked luggage.

Airport Facilities and Services:

- Major airports like Beijing Capital International Airport, Shanghai Pudong, and Guangzhou Baiyun are modern with comprehensive services, including dining, shopping, lounges, and transportation connections.
- Some airports, like Beijing Daxing International Airport, are known for their innovative design and state-of-the-art facilities.

Online Booking and Mobile Apps:

- All major Chinese airlines offer online booking through their websites and mobile apps.
- Apps like Ctrip (Trip.com) and Fliggy are popular for booking flights within China, often offering discounted fares and easy management of itineraries.

Check-in process:

The airline check-in process in China is generally straightforward and similar to other international standards, though it may vary slightly depending on whether you're flying **domestically** or **internationally**. Here's a detailed guide on what to expect:

1. Arriving at the Airport

- **Domestic Flights:** Arrive at least **1.5 to 2 hours** before your flight.
- **International Flights:** Arrive at least **3 hours** before departure, especially for flights out of major airports like Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou.
- **Peak Times:** During holiday seasons or busy times (like Chinese New Year or Golden Week), it's advisable to arrive even earlier, as airports can be crowded.

2. Check-in Options

There are multiple ways to check in for flights within China, depending on the airline and airport:

a. Online Check-in

- **Availability:** Most major airlines in China (Air China, China Southern, China Eastern, etc.) offer online check-in through their websites or mobile apps. Typically, this opens **24–48 hours** before departure.
- **Procedure:**
 1. Enter your booking reference or ticket number and passport details.
 2. Select your seat (if allowed).
 3. Confirm the check-in and download or print your boarding pass.
- **Benefits:** Online check-in allows you to skip the line at the airport and go directly to the baggage drop (if you have checked luggage) or security (if traveling with hand luggage only).

b. Airport Kiosk Check-in

- **Availability:** Many airports in China have **self-service kiosks** for check-in.
- **Procedure:**
 1. Input your flight information or scan your passport/ID.
 2. Select your seat and print your boarding pass.
 3. Proceed to the baggage drop counter if needed.
- **Benefits:** This is a fast way to check in at the airport and avoid waiting in line at the counter.

c. Counter Check-in

- **Traditional Check-in Process:**
 1. **ID Verification:** Present your passport for international flights or your Chinese ID card for domestic flights.
 2. **Ticket:** Show your e-ticket or booking confirmation.
 3. **Baggage:** Hand over any checked luggage (if applicable) and ensure it adheres to the airline's weight and size limits.
 4. **Boarding Pass:** The airline agent will provide your boarding pass and check your flight details.
- **Note:** Lines can be long at the counter, especially during peak travel seasons, so it's advisable to check in online or use the kiosk if possible.

3. Baggage Drop

- If you checked in online or at a kiosk, you will need to drop your luggage at the designated **baggage drop counters**.
- Ensure your luggage complies with the airline's weight and size restrictions. Baggage allowances on domestic flights within China are typically:
 - **Economy Class:** 20 kg (44 lbs) for checked luggage
 - **Business/First Class:** 30-40 kg (66-88 lbs), depending on the airline.
- **Excess Baggage:** If your luggage exceeds the weight limit, you will need to pay excess baggage fees at the counter. Rates vary by airline.

4. Security Check

- **ID & Boarding Pass:** At the security checkpoint, present your boarding pass and ID (passport for international flights or Chinese ID card for domestic flights).
- **Baggage Screening:** Your carry-on luggage will go through an X-ray screening.
- **Liquids & Gels:** For domestic flights, you can carry up to **100 ml per container** of liquids or gels, similar to international flight standards. For international flights, standard international liquid restrictions apply (containers of 100 ml, placed in a clear, resealable plastic bag).
- **Laptops & Electronics:** Remove your laptop or large electronics from your bag and place them in a separate bin for screening.

5. Boarding Pass and Gate

- **Gate Information:** After passing security, verify your boarding gate on the airport's information screens or on your boarding pass. Gates in large airports can be far from the security checkpoint, so allow enough time to get there.
- **Boarding Time:** Boarding typically begins **30–40 minutes** before departure. The boarding pass will indicate a **boarding time** and **closing time**, which is usually 15 minutes before takeoff.
- **Final Boarding Call:** Airlines in China are strict about boarding deadlines. If you're late, they may close the gate without calling for you, so it's crucial to be at the gate on time.

6. Special Services

- **VIP Lounges:** Most Chinese airlines offer lounge access to business and first-class passengers, as well as frequent flyers. These lounges usually offer comfortable seating, food, beverages, and Wi-Fi.
- **Language Support:** In major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, English-speaking staff are usually available, but in smaller airports, English might be limited. It's helpful to have your flight details and destination written down in Chinese, especially if you need assistance.

7. Boarding Process

- **Priority Boarding:** First-class, business-class, and VIP passengers generally board first, followed by economy passengers.
- **Economy Boarding:** Economy passengers are often divided into zones based on seat numbers, with rear cabin passengers boarding first.
- **Ticket Scanning:** At the gate, present your boarding pass (either paper or mobile) for scanning before entering the plane.

8. Domestic vs. International Flights

- **Domestic Flights:** Passport control is not required for domestic flights, but you must still pass through security.
- **International Flights:** Passengers need to go through **immigration and customs** before boarding and upon arrival. Ensure you have your passport, visa (if applicable), and any required documentation for your destination.

9. After Landing

- **Baggage Claim:** Follow the signs to baggage claim to collect your checked luggage.
- **Customs for International Flights:** After baggage claim, you will go through customs if you're on an international flight. Declaring items and baggage inspection are standard procedures.

Tips for a Smooth Check-in Process:

- **Carry Identification:** Always have your passport (or Chinese ID for domestic flights) with you.
- **Mobile Boarding Pass:** Most airlines allow you to use a mobile boarding pass, but it's advisable to have a printed copy as a backup, especially if your phone battery dies or you have trouble with mobile reception.
- **Monitor Flight Status:** Flight delays are common in China, especially due to air traffic control. Use apps like **FlightAware**, the airline's app, or check the airport screens to stay updated.

By arriving early, preparing your documents, and knowing the check-in procedures, you can navigate the check-in process smoothly for both domestic and international flights in China.