

C O U N T R Y M I N I L E S S O N

CHINA





Welcome to China!



Before we dive in, meet Archie and his friends, the Intrepid Explorers. They are five adventurous Aussie kids who travel the world on missions to recover stolen artefacts or protect endangered species. This time, they are headed to China.

Before landing, they have decided to read up on the country's geography, history, and wildlife, and we hope you have fun learning with them!

And the adventure does not stop there. On our website, www.thelittleexplorersjournal.com, under the resources page, we've also shared fun resources from their journey, including landmarks, more wildlife facts, quizzes, games, and activities to keep your kids learning and having fun every step of the way.

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COUNTRY INTRODUCTION

China is a big country in East Asia, renowned for its rich history, diverse landscapes, vibrant cities, and a unique blend of traditional and modern culture.



GEOGRAPHY OF CHINA

China is a vast country in East Asia, stretching from the Pacific coast in the east to the mountains and deserts of the west. It is divided into several regions, including the bustling eastern cities, the historic heartlands, and the scenic landscapes of the south and southwest. The capital, Beijing, is home to iconic landmarks like the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square. China is renowned for its rich history, diverse landscapes, vibrant culture, and architectural wonders, from ancient temples and the Great Wall to modern skyscrapers.



GEOGRAPHY OF CHINA

China is full of amazing landscapes and has many different types of natural environments. There are very high mountains that seem to touch the clouds, like the Huangshan Mountains with their mist and sharp peaks. There are also big lakes, like Qinghai Lake, surrounded by forests, and deep valleys, such as Tiger Leaping Gorge, shaped by rivers over a very long time.

In China's national parks, you can see strange rock towers in Zhangjiajie, beautiful waterfalls in Jiuzhaigou Valley, and wide grasslands where animals can roam freely in Inner Mongolia. Every part of China offers a new adventure in nature, from misty mountains to rolling hills and winding rivers. There is even a desert, the Gobi Desert, with sand dunes and rocky land shaped by the wind!



HISTORY OF CHINA

From 2100 to 221 BCE, China was divided into many small kingdoms ruled by kings, generals, and other leaders. These rulers had to be loyal to the king and provide soldiers when needed, but they mostly governed their own lands. This was also the time of great thinkers like Confucius.

Over time, the kingdoms grew stronger and fought each other in what's called the Warring States period. In 221 BCE, Qin Shi Huang conquered all the kingdoms and became China's first emperor. He unified the country with one system of money, weights and measures, and writing. To protect China, he connected and expanded walls built by previous kingdoms, starting the construction of the Great Wall of China. He is also remembered for the Terracotta Army, built to protect him after death.



HISTORY OF CHINA

After Qin, other dynasties ruled China for centuries. The Han Dynasty (-202 BCE) brought many inventions like paper and the compass. Silk production grew, and trade along the Silk Road connected China to India, the Middle East, and Europe. Later dynasties ruled until the Qing Dynasty, which ended in 1912.

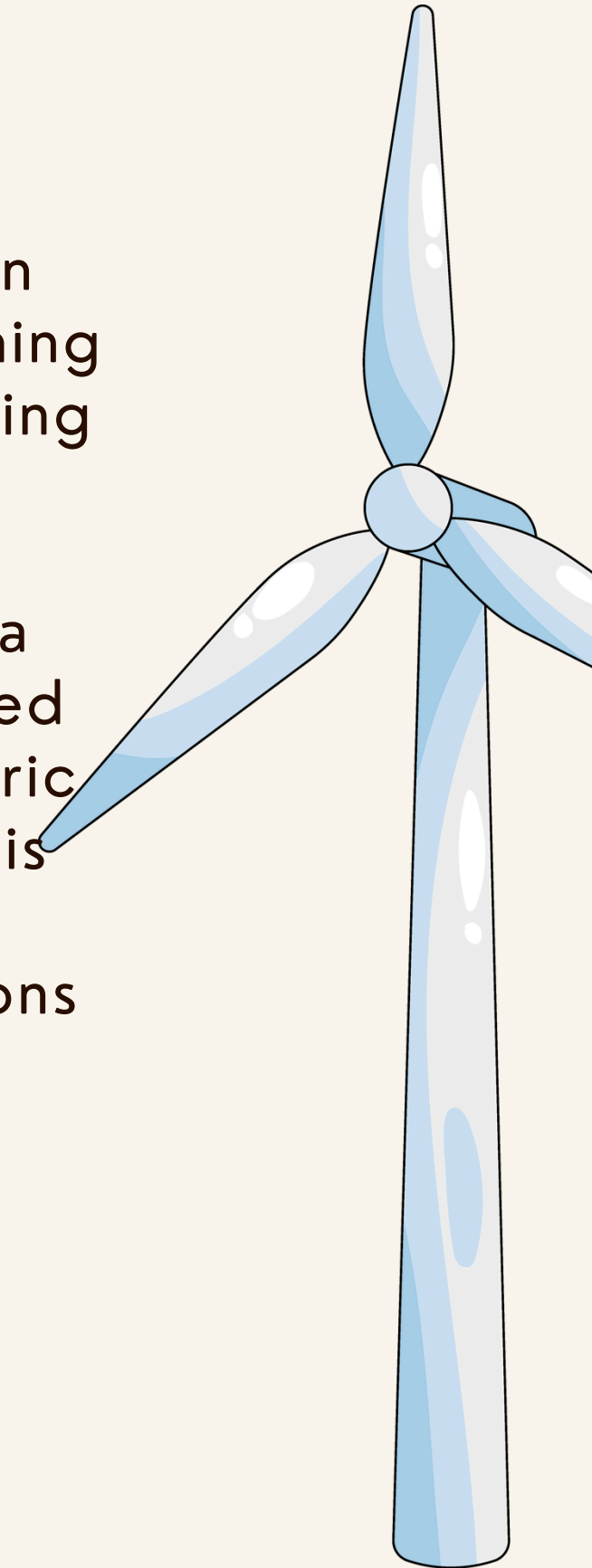
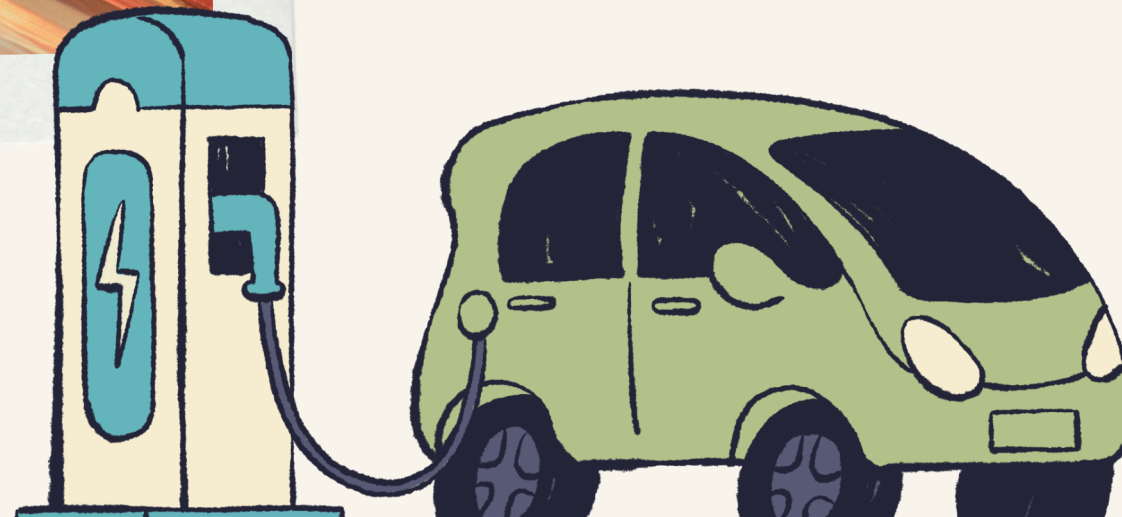
In the 1800s, China faced challenges from industrialized Western countries. The Opium Wars and other conflicts led to foreign control and internal struggles. After years of unrest and war with Japan, the Republic of China was created in 1912.

In 1949, the Communist Party, led by Mao Zedong, took control and founded the People's Republic of China. China went through major changes, including the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. In recent decades, China has modernized quickly and, by 2010, became the second-largest economy in the world, hosting the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Today, China is led by Xi Jinping.



ECONOMY OF CHINA

China is one of the largest economies in the world. Traditionally known for farming and manufacturing goods such as clothing and electronics, China now plays a leading role in new technologies and fast-growing industries. People in China also mine special metals that are needed for smartphones, computers, and electric cars. This shows how China's economy is growing and changing with new technology while still supporting millions of people across the country.



LANDMARKS IN CHINA

The Great Wall of China's construction started more than 2,200 years ago, when China was made up of many small kingdoms that often fought each other. Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China, united the country and wanted to protect it from attacks by the Xiongnu, a group of nomads from Mongolia. The first walls were made of packed earth, but later dynasties built stronger sections using bricks and stone. Most of the parts you can visit today were built during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The Great Wall isn't just one wall—it's a series of fortifications that stretch about 6,000 kilometers (almost 21,000 km if you count the parts that disappeared). It's 5–17 meters tall and has watchtowers every 75 meters.



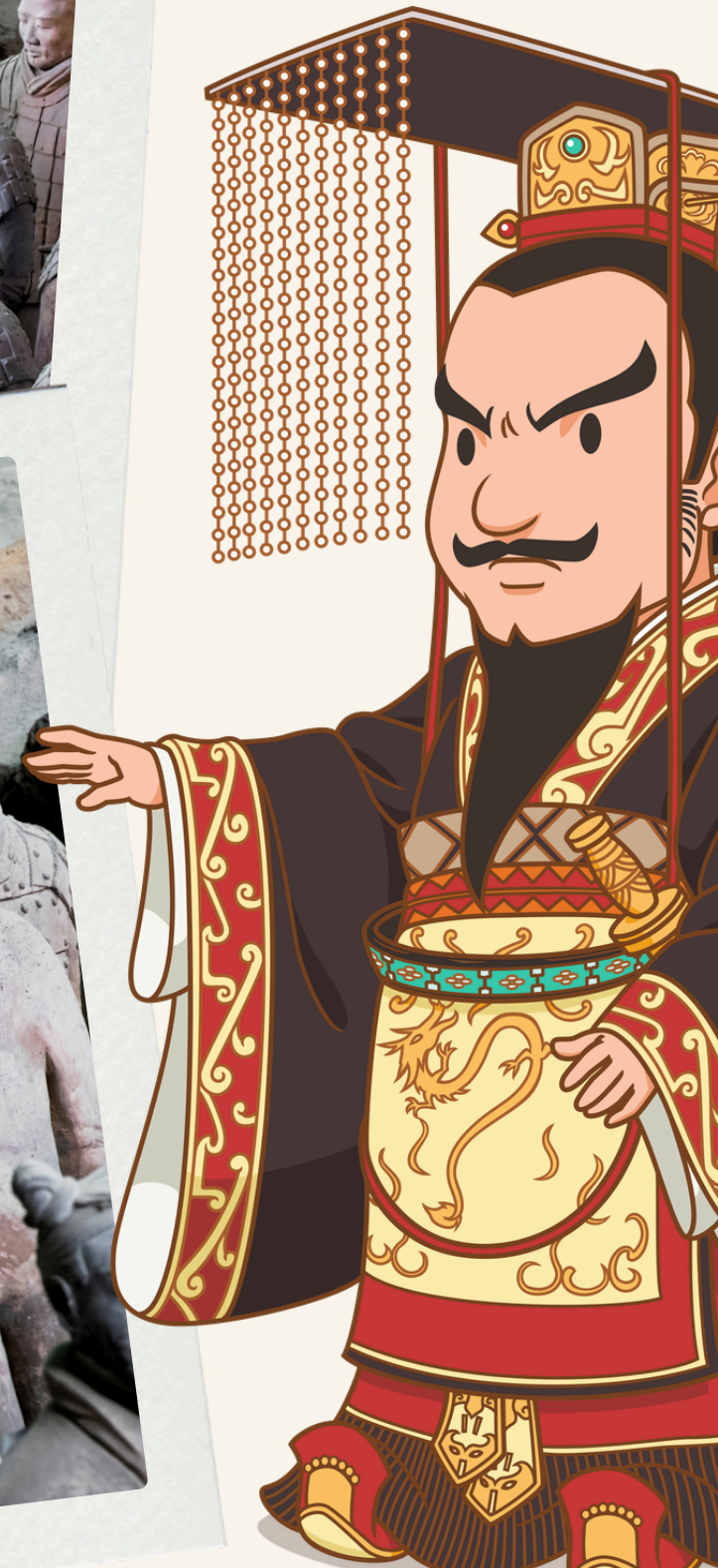
Did you know?

You might have heard that the Great Wall is the only human-made thing visible from the Moon—but that idea comes from the 18th century, long before anyone had been to space. Even from the International Space Station, it looks tiny, and from the Moon, it's impossible to see!

LANDMARKS IN CHINA

In 1974, a farmer in eastern China found a clay head while digging a well. It was part of the Terracotta Army; thousands of life-sized soldiers, horses, and chariots built to protect China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, in the afterlife.

Today, over 2,000 warriors have been uncovered, but the full army may have had around 8,000. Each figure is unique, with different faces, clothes, and weapons. Imagine how many workers it took to build them, and even redirect rivers! Qin Shi Huang also drank potions hoping to live forever, and his grand tomb was meant to show his power to future generations.



LANDMARKS in CHINA

The Forbidden City in Beijing was home to 24 emperors from the Ming and Qing dynasties, ruling China from the 15th to the early 20th century. Built between 1406 and 1420, it was like a city inside a city! The emperors and their families lived in the Inner Court, while the Outer Court was for politics, ceremonies, and meeting ministers.

With over 980 buildings, the Forbidden City was enormous and full of beautiful palaces and pavilions. After the last emperor, Puyi, left in 1924, it became a historic treasure. Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of China's most famous landmarks.



WILDLIFE IN CHINA



The giant panda is a symbol of China and a reminder to protect forests. It lives in mountainous regions of central and southern China, mostly in protected parks, and eats almost exclusively bamboo; up to 20 kg a day! Pandas are big and fluffy, with black-and-white fur, and have a special “thumb” to hold bamboo. They can only have babies a few days a year, usually one at a time. There are only about 1,000 to 3,000 left, so people work hard to keep them safe. Fun fact: for hundreds of years, pandas have been a symbol of peace in China!

The Golden Pheasant is a strikingly colourful bird native to the mountainous forests of China, known for its vibrant plumage and unique courtship behaviours. They ‘dance’ to show off their exquisite plumage as an elaborate courtship display!

WILDLIFE IN CHINA

The golden snub-nosed monkey, or *Rhinopithecus roxellana*, has shiny orange-golden fur and a flat, upturned nose. Males can weigh up to 20 kg and grow 76 cm long, while females are smaller. Their faces have light blue skin around the eyes and mouth, and they are the only monkeys that can walk in the snow!

These monkeys are very social and live in big groups of up to 400. They live in the mountains of central China, in protected, quiet forests. When trees lose their leaves, they eat lichens and tree bark, and their large groups help keep predators, like clouded leopards, away.

Golden snub-nosed monkeys are endangered because of deforestation, cities spreading, and hunting for meat, fur, and bones (some people believe the bones have medicinal powers).

Fun fact: They are called "golden monkeys" because of their shiny fur and their upturned noses and reddish hair reminded people of Roxellane, the wife of an Ottoman sultan!



WILDLIFE IN CHINA

The South China tiger used to live across much of China, but it is now extinct in the wild—all 221 left in 2021 live in captivity. Smaller than Bengal or Siberian tigers, males are about 2.5 meters long and weigh 150 kg. They have bright orange fur with black stripes and white spots on their bellies, plus “false eyes” on the backs of their heads to scare predators. These tigers lived in dense forests and mountains, were mostly active at night, and ate animals like wild pigs and deer. Sadly, they disappeared because people cut down forests, hunted them for food and medicine, and sometimes because they attacked livestock. The Chinese alligator is smaller than its American cousin, measuring 1.5 to 2 meters and weighing up to 45 kg. Unlike American alligators, its belly is fully covered in scales! It used to live all over China, but now is found only along the Yangzi Jiang River because farms and pollution have destroyed much of its habitat. Chinese alligators are mostly nocturnal and live alone, spending November to May hibernating in underground burrows like secret labyrinths.



FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS IN CHINA

China is full of colourful traditions, festivals, and fascinating stories! One of the biggest celebrations is the Chinese New Year, also called the Spring Festival (Chūnjié). Unlike our calendar, China uses a lunisolar calendar with 12 months and sometimes a 13th month to keep pace with the Sun. In 2026, the Chinese New Year fell on February 17 and celebrated the Year of the Fire Horse.

During the New Year, people say *xīn nián kuài lè* (Happy New Year!) and decorate with red lanterns, paper banners, and symbols of good fortune, because red is believed to scare away bad spirits and the mythical monster Nian, who, according to legend, used to eat children. Streets are often filled with lanterns, festive lights, and sometimes the loud pops of firecrackers, though mostly in smaller towns today. The Chinese zodiac also plays a big role in culture. Every year is linked to one of 12 animals and one of 5 elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water). These animals—like the Dragon, Tiger, Rabbit, and Horse—aren't just symbols; they influence arts, games, farming, and even marriage traditions. Each animal has traits too: Dragons are strong and mystical, Rats are clever, Horses are free-spirited, and Dogs are loyal.



FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS IN CHINA



China is also home to many languages, not just Mandarin! There are 200–300 languages and dialects spoken by over 1.4 billion people. Mandarin is the official language, and the most spoken in the world, but Cantonese, Shanghainese, Hokkien, Tibetan, and Mongolian are also widely used. All these languages use the same Chinese characters, so even if people speak differently, they can read and write together. Learning Chinese is tricky; characters don't always match the sound or meaning but it's like a puzzle that connects the whole country!

Other famous traditions include the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, dragon boat races, and the Lantern Festival, all full of colour, lights, and tasty treats like mooncakes.

These celebrations show how history, nature, and family are at the heart of Chinese culture.



CULTURE AND FOOD OF CHINA



Chinese cuisine is one of the most famous and oldest in the world, with lots of tasty dishes that vary from region to region. In the north, people enjoy dumplings (jiaozi) and noodles, while in the south, you'll find rice, steamed buns (baozi), and dim sum — small bite-sized dishes served with tea.

Some well-known favourites include Peking duck, known for its crispy skin, and sweet and sour pork, a dish kids often love. In Sichuan province, food can be spicy and bold, while in Guangdong (Canton), flavours are lighter and often steamed.



CURIOSITIES ABOUT CHINA

China is full of amazing and quirky facts! Found in northern China, long-eared jerboas have ears that are one-third longer than their heads! The Great Wall wasn't just huge — the mortar that held its stones together was made with sticky rice. In the 7th century, Emperor Tang of Shang had 94 "ice men" whose job was to make him ice cream! The Leshan Giant Buddha, a gigantic stone statue, has eyebrows that are 5.5 meters long. Many emperors thought they were descendants of dragons, and they loved celebrations with fireworks, which were invented in China using gunpowder.



SPORTS IN CHINA

In China, sports are a mix of ancient traditions and modern excitement! Ping-pong is the national favorite, played everywhere from schools to parks, while basketball is super popular with kids, thanks to stars like Yao Ming. Badminton and football are also big, and winter sports have boomed since the Beijing 2022 Olympics. Every morning, you can see people practicing tai-chi or Qigong in parks, and martial arts like Wushu have been part of Chinese life for centuries. China hosts hundreds of sports events each year, from the China Open tennis tournament to exciting Grand Prix races, making it a country where sports are fun, healthy, and everywhere you look!



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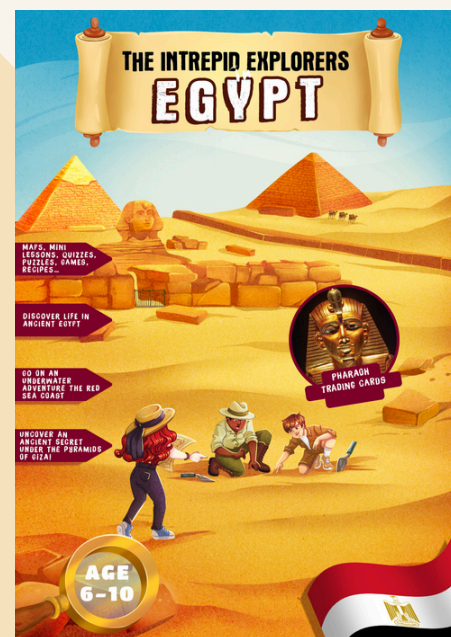
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AUSTRALIA!



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