



China Toolkit

Tools you need to understand and cater
for our growing Chinese visitor market

Colour in Chinese Culture

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新西兰旅游产品
官方质量认证标识

Colour for Tourism operators

Keep the following in mind when you are putting together marketing material (websites, brochures, signage, etc.) or redecorating.

Black

Black, corresponding to water, is a neutral colour. In modern China, black is used in daily clothing, but can carry meanings that include evil, morbid, corrupted, illegal, and/or greedy. As a colour it has a hint of formality and solemnness in the minds of the Chinese people. Take care not to over-use black.

White, not black, is associated with death and mourning and was formerly worn at funerals.

And when giving gifts of any kind, never wrap them in black. Don't put black borders around photographs of people. It means that they are dead and are being memorialized!

Red

Red, corresponding with fire, symbolizes good fortune and joy. Red is found everywhere during Chinese New Year and other holidays and family gatherings. A red envelope is a monetary gift which is given in Chinese society during holiday or special occasions. The red colour of the packet symbolizes good luck.

As the names of the dead were previously written in red, it may be considered offensive to use red ink for Chinese names in contexts other than official seals.

In modern China, red remains a very popular colour and is affiliated with both traditional values & holidays as well as the Communist government.

Yellow

Pure, bright yellow, corresponding with earth, signifies neutrality and good luck. Yellow is sometimes paired with red in place of gold.

Yellow also connotes pornography, so be very careful if using more than a small amount of yellow in marketing materials.

Bright Yellow was the colour of Imperial China and is held as the symbolic colour of the five legendary emperors of ancient China. Yellow often decorates royal palaces, altars and temples, and the colour was used in the clothes and architecture of the emperors.

Gold

Gold has long been used in China as a symbol of nobility and wealth. It is closely related to the ancient emperors' "bright, pure yellow" above. However, there is some recent connotations of 'nouveau riche' in modern Chinese society, as there was a huge use of the colour gold in the 90's and it has become a bit passé to overuse it today.

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Green

Generally green is associated with cleanliness (free of contaminants – both physical and social/mental/spiritual) health, prosperity, and harmony as well as nausea. The Chinese do not associate 'green' with eco-friendly as we do in New Zealand.

There is one specific negative connotation: green hats are associated with infidelity and used as an idiom for a cuckold. Therefore Chinese will not wear green hats.

Purple:

Means nobility or immortality. Like in many European cultures, purple is a symbol of nobility (however it was never the imperial colour). Unlike European cultures, purple has deep religious meaning in China. An ancient Taoist symbol of divine presence is canonized as "a purple cloud coming from the east". This phrase is always used in connection to anything mortal ascending to immortality.

White

White, corresponding with metal, represents silver and symbolizes brightness and fulfilment.

White is also the colour of mourning. It is associated with death and is used predominantly in funerals in Chinese culture. Ancient Chinese people wore white clothes and hats only when they mourned for the dead. Sometimes silver takes its place, as silver is often offered to the deceased in the form of joss paper.

Qing (Blue/Green with a bit of grey)

A traditional colour which if used well in marketing materials brings feelings of traditional China. Although Chinese now has a separate word for "blue" (蓝) and "green" (绿), it traditionally grouped most shades of blue and green together under the name "qing" (青), whose character derives from the idea of sprouting plant life. This colour corresponds to the Chinese element of wood (i.e., vegetative life), represents nature and renewal, and often indicates spring.

Colours Phrases

Black 黑色	Silver 银色	Yellow 黄色	Light 浅
Grey 灰色	Gold 金色	Green 绿色	Dark 深
White 白色	Clear 透明的	Blue 蓝色	
Cream 米色	Red 红色	Purple 紫色	
Brown 咖啡色/棕色	Orange 橙色	Pink 粉色	

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