

Sample Chapter from CHINA A TO Z:

Bargaining

Bargaining is an art form much beloved by the Chinese. However, there is a common misconception in the West that bargaining is simply about getting a cheaper price. No. Bargaining to the Chinese is like seduction to the French. The process is as important as the actual end result.

First and foremost, bargaining is about establishing a relationship between yourself and the merchant. The merchant is not your adversary and should not be treated as such. The merchant is the object of your seduction. Try to find a common ground. If you are Asian, emphasize common roots. “Can you give a special deal to a fellow Chinese (or a traveling Korean, a Japanese who loves China, etc.)?” If you are not, emphasize the distance you have traveled. “I’ve come all this way to see China. Such a wonderful country! Is there anyway you can give me a special price?” Flatter the merchant. Suggest options, such as, “Can you call your supervisor?” Not all salespeople are allowed to make price reductions themselves so do not say this in an insulting way but try to emphasize that you understand this salesperson would of course like nothing better than to give you a deal, as he or she is such a nice person, but of course you understand he/she must consult with a boss.

Watch how other people bargain. Make more than one trip if you can to the stall, stand, or store that you are visiting to show your interest, but like a good flirt, you play hard to get and act as though you cannot make up your mind about the item you wish to purchase. See if the merchant will make a first move and offer you a discount.

Then there's the more proletarian but ever effective, "If I buy more than one, can I get a discount?" Again, you are showing your love for the merchant's product and respect for his/her business instincts.

In big department stores, bargaining is generally not permitted. However, you can ask salesclerks if there are any sales and they will be glad to point out that merchandise to you. In fact, many Chinese department stores have myriad promotions going on at any given time--including free gifts with purchases (such as a freshwater pearl), scratch-type lotto tickets, discounts on other merchandise if you buy a certain amount of goods in the store, and even free digital photos of yourself (or rather your head transposed onto a model's body).

In large cities, some groups of Chinese bargain hunters have now taken to using the Internet to plot how to mob certain showrooms at a certain time to demand a group discount. This is not bargaining per se but bullying and not recommended for non-Chinese to participate in.
