

# CHINA

An everyday guide to expatriate life and work.

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# CHINA COUNTRY GUIDE

## Contents

|  |   |                           |    |
|--|---|---------------------------|----|
| <b>Overview</b>                        | 1 | <b>Employment</b>         |    |
| <b>Getting Started</b>                 |   | The job market            | 8  |
| Climate and weather                    | 2 | Income tax                | 8  |
| Visas                                  | 2 | Retirement                | 8  |
| Accommodation                          | 2 | Business etiquette        | 8  |
| Schools                                | 2 | <b>Finance</b>            |    |
| <b>Culture</b>                         |   | Currency                  | 9  |
| Language                               | 4 | Cost of living            | 9  |
| Social etiquette and cultural faux pas | 4 | Banking                   | 10 |
| Eating                                 | 4 | <b>Health</b>             |    |
| Drinking                               | 5 | Private medical insurance | 10 |
| Holidays                               | 5 | Emergencies               | 10 |
|  |   | Pharmacies                | 10 |
| <b>Getting In Touch</b>                |   | Health Risks              | 10 |
| Telephone                              | 7 | Vaccinations              | 10 |
| Internet                               | 7 |                           |    |
| Postal services                        | 7 |                           |    |



### Quick Facts

- Capital:** Beijing
- Population:** 1.4 billion
- Major languages:** Mandarin, Cantonese and English. Portuguese is also spoken in Macau.
- Major religions:** Folk religion and Buddhism
- Currency:** Renminbi
- Time zone:** While China spans five geographic time zones, it follows UTC +8 for the sake of unity.
- Emergency number:** 119
- Electricity:** 220 volts, 50Hz. Plugs have two flat pins but flat three-pin plugs are also used.
- Drive on the:** Right

### Overview



China is a global powerhouse and home to the world's second largest economy.

It's a fast-paced country that can lead to high levels of culture shock, but it remains an attractive expat destination. With employees of large international companies often lured by attractive packages, and English teachers and students moving there in search of an exciting cultural experience. China's affluent areas boast a strong and disciplined education system, a reliable healthcare sector and efficient public transport also make it attractive to families.

Chinese people value honor, respect and dignity, which influences everything from everyday interactions to business meetings and gift giving.

This guide will cover all the basics that expats need to know about making the most of their new life in China, including information on visas, business and social etiquette, accommodation, education and healthcare.





## Getting Started

### Climate and weather



Because China has such a vast geographic territory, the weather can vary dramatically across different regions. The Himalayas lie to the west, the Gobi Desert stretches to the north, and smog lies thick over city skylines, contributing to a myriad of climate shifts.

Temperatures can drop to subarctic or rise to high levels of tropical humidity. South China has hot summers, typically with frequent rainfall, which normally eases off in the winter months. This is mirrored in the east, with cities like Shanghai experiencing snow during colder periods.

Central China is warm all year round, with monsoons in the summer and light winter snowfall. Western China sees dry and cold winters, with the weather sweeping over deserts towards the region of Tibet. Northern China, including the city of Beijing, gets colder and colder as one moves to the northern border.

### Accommodation

There's a vast range of accommodation options in China, with the most affordable options being the fairly small yet functional units in large apartment blocks.

Apartments in China vary greatly, from tiny holes-in-the-wall to large, spacious living quarters with plush décor and beautiful tiled floors. They come both furnished and unfurnished.

Finding property can be hard work due to the language barrier and expats can enlist the help of Chinese estate agents. They usually expect commission of around 35% of a month's rent, which is paid by the tenant. Alternatively, there are English-language property portals on the Internet.

Restrictions on foreigners purchasing property in China have relaxed in recent years. But most still choose to rent. When doing so, tenants are expected to pay for their utilities and methods of payment differ from city to city. Rental agreements are usually valid for a year, with a two-month security deposit expected. This is in addition to an upfront cash payment of one month's rent on signing the lease.

### Schools

Schooling in China is known for its high quality, due to the importance society places on education. There is an intense focus on discipline and high test scores.

Expatriate parents will have a choice of three schooling options in China: public schools, international schools and private schools. Those planning a long-term stay may wish to assimilate their children into society by sending them to public school, but it's worth noting that public schooling is not bilingual and classes are taught in Chinese.

In China, school is compulsory for nine years, with public education funded by the state. This includes six years of primary school followed by three years of secondary education. While the general setup is the same, regulations may vary from province to province. Learning by rote is the main priority, as opposed to a more Westernised focus on critical thinking.



### Visas

China has a visa waiver program for nationals of some countries. Citizens of countries not on this list must apply for a travel visa before arrival. Although they can be extended, regular tourist visas are valid for 90 days.

Multiple entry visas are valid for six, 12 or 24 months. But visa requirements and regulations are constantly changing, so it's vital for expats to contact their nearest Chinese consulate to clarify exactly what is needed.

Expats planning on working in China for more than six months are required to have a work visa. A work permit must then be applied for, which will allow a person not only to enter the country, but to also actively work there. This application must be sponsored by a registered company in China.

People who plan on going to Tibet will need a special Tibet Entry Permit.

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/weather-in-china>

[http://www.visarite.com/china\\_tourist\\_visa.htm](http://www.visarite.com/china_tourist_visa.htm)

<https://www.travelchinaguide.com/embassy/visa/entry.htm>

[http://www.visainchina.com/china\\_work\\_visa.htm](http://www.visainchina.com/china_work_visa.htm)

<http://www.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/China/Visa>

International schools provide an easier transition for expat children. Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou contain the most concentrated groups of international schools. The medium-sized cities will have at least two or three in close proximity. Most of these institutions follow the International Baccalaureate curriculum, but there are various other options, predominantly the British or American curricula. Coursework normally contains sections on local culture, as well as Mandarin or Cantonese language courses.

Private schools in China are often seen as better versions of state education, mostly attended by the children of wealthy Chinese people. Many offer tuition in both English and Chinese. Alternatively, there are more specialized schooling opportunities like Montessori and Waldorf.

<https://www.classbase.com/Countries/China/Education-System>

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/education-and-schools-in-china>



## Culture

Tradition, honor and family are integral in Chinese society. Most social interactions and etiquette are based on respecting these qualities and furthering the capacity to be humble and dutiful. China has its roots set deeply in the past, traditions and cultural dynamics remaining unchanged for hundreds of years.

## Language

There are a number of languages spoken in China. Standard Mandarin is the most common language on the mainland. In fact, it is the most popular language on Earth. Cantonese and English are encountered in Hong Kong and Macau. Interestingly, the latter also contains speakers of Portuguese.

Mandarin can be extremely challenging for foreigners to learn, but getting to grips with the language can be beneficial, especially in the business setting.

<http://www.commisceo-global.com/country-guides/china-guide>

## Social etiquette and cultural faux pas

Expats in China may find themselves in completely unfamiliar territory when it comes to Chinese culture and etiquette. Here are a few tips to ease the transition.

- The concept of 'face' plays an integral role in Chinese society. Maintaining honor, gaining respect and building a good reputation will be important for those looking to progress in Chinese society. Doing good deeds and being respectful, openly recognising positive qualities in others and offering compliments are all important aspects of interacting with the Chinese.
- Chinese people value modesty, making an effort to downplay their achievements. Often, they will deflect praise to others or focus on the group accomplishments.
- Body language and nonverbal communication is important. As in most cultures around the world, different gestures have different meanings and it is important to learn these so that one does not mistakenly offend. For

example, it is rude to point with one's index finger. Instead, use an open hand. Placing a hand, palm facing up, beside one's teacup while it is being filled, shows gratitude.

- China has a collective culture that values society over the individual, so being a good team player rather than being individualistic will work in one's favor.
- Hierarchy plays a vital role in social etiquette and personal interactions, and it's imperative that foreigners learn these behaviors.
- Gifts are given on birthdays, at special business meetings, and even at dinner at a friend's home. Spending too much on a gift can be embarrassing if the individual cannot afford to reciprocate the gesture. The gift of a red envelope with money is an appropriate choice for occasions such as Chinese New Year or a wedding.

[http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural\\_etiquette/ce\\_cn.htm](http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_cn.htm)

## Eating

There are four major cooking styles in China, derived from eight regional cuisines. Chuan cuisine involves a heavy amount of spices, garlic and chili, as well as peanuts and ginger. Yue cuisine, from the south, focuses on balanced and fresh flavors in stir fries and stews.

Lu cuisine, from the north, is seen as the most influential and excels in thick soups and seafood dishes. But Su cuisine is the most well-known when it comes to its use of aquatic ingredients and rice.

While cuisine differs greatly across the country, there are a few staples which expats should come to expect. Rice is eaten nearly every day; mainly grown in the southern regions, it is by far the most popular food in China. Noodles are served in soup or stir fry, while tofu is a high protein bean curd with local origins.

Those wanting a taste of home can take comfort in the fact that there are plenty of Western-style chain restaurants, with massive fast-food brands



found throughout the big cities. International cuisine abounds, and expats should be able to find familiar ingredients. Keeping a Western lifestyle may prove to be expensive though, so newcomers might have to keep an eye on their budget.

<https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-food/eight-cuisine.htm>

<https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-food/chinese-food-type.htm>

## Drinking

The drinking culture is a complex one that places the person above the drink. Importance is placed on the company, with toasts made to show direct respect to others. "Ganbei" is the equivalent to "cheers" and it is expected to finish the drink. If a person is toasted, it is rude not to drink, and the amount one drinks in return shows the level of reciprocated respect. When clinking glasses, the Chinese always hold their drinks lower than

senior figures. Popular alcoholic drinks include beer, red wine and sorghum wine (baijiu).

<https://wikitravel.org/en/China#Eat>

## Holidays

China has seven official holidays, five of which are three-day long celebrations. The Chinese New Year, centuries old, is a celebration of spring, while National Day heralds the country's formation. Both last for a week. Foreigners will probably need time to adjust to the use of the lunar calendar, with three of the holidays determined by the moon.

New Year's Day - 1 January

Chinese New Year - Subject to lunar calendar

Qingming Festival - 4 or 5 April

May Day - 1 May

Dragon Boat Festival - 5th day of 5th lunar month

Mid-Autumn Day - Subject to lunar calendar

National Day - 1 October

<http://www.officeholidays.com/countries/china/index.php>







## Getting In Touch

### Telephone

Most of the Chinese population has mobile phones and services have expanded rapidly in recent years. China Mobile, China Unicom and China Telecom are the three main service providers. It's possible to purchase mobile phones at most major airports.

This may be the easiest option for expats as there will be less of a language barrier. With the correct phones, expats can talk via Viber, WeChat and WhatsApp, provided they are on one of the state-owned networks.

<https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/china/housing/setting-up-home/landline-telephone>

### Internet

There are two main Internet service providers: China Unicom and China Telecom. The Internet is heavily regulated and censored, with material deemed harmful towards the state being banned. In fact, according to Freedom House, China is considered last in the world in terms of Internet freedom. The state even monitors many individuals' online movements.

Wifi is often available at restaurants and cafés, and service quality is considered standard compared to the rest of the world.

<https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/china/housing/setting-up-home/internet>

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2016>

[http://shanghaiist.com/2016/11/16/internet\\_freedom.php](http://shanghaiist.com/2016/11/16/internet_freedom.php)

### Postal Services

China Post is the official postal service of China. Most choose to use it when sending official documents, as well as valuable products. It's also possible to send and receive packages from the various post offices across the country. However, most people choose to use private delivery companies such as STO Express, Shunfeng Express and YTO Express.

<https://www.travelchinaguide.com/essential/postal-service/>





## Employment

### The job market

China's GDP is the second largest in the world, continuing its drive to become a more service-oriented economy. The job market for expats generally consists of senior positions in international organizations or vacancies in human resources, finance, accounting or manufacturing. Positions are filled via online job portals or an internal transfer within a multinational company.

Many foreigners are employed as English teachers in big cities like Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. Generally speaking, it may be tough to break through the job market. This is because businesses may have reservations to hiring expats who don't speak the language and are unaware of Chinese work culture.

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/working-in-china>

### Income tax

Income tax in China, especially with the added status of being a foreigner, can be overwhelming. The tax laws in China are constantly changing and there is a myriad of rates, scales and exceptions. It's best to hire a tax professional when sorting out payments and deductions.

In determining the tax rate, the most important factors are one's income and the length of stay in the country. Additionally, tax payers are liable for paying tax on any income earned outside of the country. However, there may be a double taxation agreement in place depending on which other country a person has worked in.

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/banking-money-and-taxes-in-china>

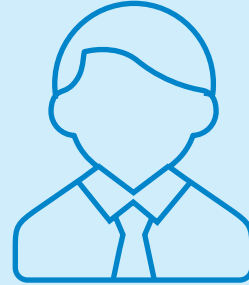
[https://www.internations.org/china-expats/guide/17876-social-security-taxation?ref=gec\\_emc](https://www.internations.org/china-expats/guide/17876-social-security-taxation?ref=gec_emc)

### Retirement

China is not particularly popular as a retirement destination for expats and there are no special retirement visas available. Those who do wish to spend their retirement in China will need to have invested in the country for at least three years. The investment thresholds vary depending on the region. Candidates will also need to show a good tax record.

<https://www.expatbriefing.com/country/china/living/retirement-for-expats-in-china.html>

### Business etiquette



Understanding the nuances and subtleties of Chinese business culture is essential. The cultivation of guanxi, a concept similar to networking, can be the difference between losing and sealing a deal. Related to this is mianzi, an integral facet of Chinese society. It is based on the values of respect, humility and reputation.

Age and experience are vital components of business dynamics. Status must always be respected and acknowledged. Exchanges are less direct, with outright refusal considered to be aggressive and rude. The language barrier may also prove difficult to overcome, so expats should try to learn at least a few basic phrases of Mandarin.

Gift giving, especially at the beginning or end of official business meetings, is expected. Again, there is certain etiquette to be adhered to: always give the gift with two hands; if in a delegation, the gift must be on behalf of the group; the gift must be appropriate and not cause the receiver shame due to their inability to reciprocate the gesture.

<https://www.internations.org/china-expats/guide/17861-jobs-business/doing-business-in-china-17865>



## Finance

### Currency

The official currency is the Renminbi (CNY), which is divided into 100 fen or 10 jiao.

Money is available in the following denominations:

- Notes: 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 CNY
- Coins: 0.1, 0.2, 0.5, and 2 CNY



### Cost of Living

While it is often the large salaries that lure expats to China, they should be aware that retaining a Western lifestyle can be expensive. Local brands, for example, are extremely affordable, but imported goods have significantly higher prices.

Living in the main cities obviously comes with many benefits. However, as is generally the case around the world, urban living is far more expensive than life in smaller towns and villages. In fact, accommodation will prove to be the biggest expense.

The school fees at international schools, the favored choice for expat parents, can be incredibly high. Private healthcare will also impact one's budget significantly, while money can be saved by using the reliable public transport system to get around.



## Banking

There are a number of local and international banks in China. While many expats prefer the latter due to existing accounts, it's important to note that there may be a lack of appropriate ATMs, particularly outside the major cities.

Opening a bank account in China is fairly straightforward. While there is potential for a language barrier, many services have English language options. In order to open an account, expats will need their passport and a small deposit.

<https://www.justlanded.com/english/China/China-Guide/Money/Banking>

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/banking-money-and-taxes-in-china>

## Health

Most expats choose to use private facilities as public hospitals are considered to be of lower quality, although still relatively acceptable to Western standards. Being so geographically spread out, it's not surprising that there are also levels of inconsistency, especially in rural areas. Expats working in the country may be required to contribute to social security in order to be covered for public health insurance in China. But these regulations differ from city to city, and there are often gaps in policies, making it unpredictable.

Many international hospitals are found in the major cities and have English-speaking staff. There have also been efforts to incorporate international wings at public institutions so as to bridge the quality gap. This means waiting times are less and treatments are cheaper than in private hospitals.

Most expats don't look for a GP as the Chinese health system is hospital-centered.

<https://www.internations.org/china-expats/guide/17874-health-insurance>

## Private Medical Insurance

Expats often opt for private healthcare, although it's more expensive than the state-funded public healthcare system.

Private medical insurance in China is vital if expats want to be treated at the country's more expensive private facilities, and it's important that this is arranged before arriving in the country.

## Emergencies

Emergency medical services in China are provided by the state. They are efficient in the urban areas but don't hold up to the same standards in the more rural regions. Expats can dial 119 for general emergencies. The number for a police emergency is 110, while 120 will put one through to the ambulance service. Translators are available for those who can't speak Mandarin.

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/healthcare-in-china>.

## Pharmacies

Access to medicine in China is not an issue, with expats able to visit modern pharmacies for prescription drugs as well as traditional healers and holistic treatment centers.

Pharmacies can be found in most built-up urban areas. However, the labels on medicines will most likely be in Chinese so requesting a translation of instructions and dosage may be necessary.

Make sure to check health insurance policies to see if it covers the costs.

## Health Risks

There are a number of health risks in China, mostly due to the extremely high levels of pollution.

Those who suffer from asthma or similar respiratory diseases should be wary, while serious threats such as bird flu have infected poultry, and subsequently humans, in the past.

The country has the second highest instance of rabies in the world, as well as hand, foot and mouth disease which can often be harmful to children in the summer.

The Government has also failed to address water pollution, with major cities having critically low levels of usable water. Expats should avoid drinking tap water and consume only bottled water.

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/healthcare-in-china>

## Vaccinations

The most important recommended vaccinations for expats in China include hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis and hepatitis A. Polio, MMR and chickenpox are also considered important immunizations, while a pertussis booster and tetanus shot are specifically recommended for adults. Other recommended vaccinations include tuberculosis, typhoid fever and rabies, especially for children.

Expats should visit a healthcare professional before departure to ensure that all routine vaccinations are up to date .

[https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/china?s\\_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/china?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001)

