

# *GUIDE TO LIVING IN CHINA*



英孚教育



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# WELCOME

This guide has been compiled by teachers who have lived in China for years and made all the mistakes before. We've drunk the tap water, run a marathon on one of the most polluted days of the year, fallen prey to scams and been the laughing stock of Chinese restaurants for miming "chicken with peanuts". Why? Because we didn't have this guide.

Each page here is dedicated to one topic and contains our best advice. At the bottom of each page we have a couple of Chinese phrases which you can either sound out or point to, whatever you find easiest. Remember, it's only a guide and it was made by people who are better at teaching English than writing guide books. Still, we hope it helps.

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# PART I GETTING SET UP

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# APARTMENT HUNTING

You've arrived, you've tried the food, you've found your nearest Starbucks. Next task: find somewhere to live. Here are some of your options...

- Look online. Go to websites that provide listings even before you reach China. We think the best sites are through expat online magazines such as Smart Shanghai and That's Beijing. Online searches are usually fruitful because you start the contact process of finding an agent and you can get an idea of how much you'll spend.
- Use an agent. Agents can help you to negotiate the rent and possibly translate. They can also help you get a fapiao (a receipt), which you might need to reduce your tax burden. You'll probably be charged a one-time fee for the agent. Make sure you check what this is and remember that they're working on commission, so they might have an alternate motive for offering you the deal of the century. Then again, they might not.
- Most things can be negotiable. It's common to pay rent three months at once and cough up a month's deposit before you move in. Yes, your wallet is going to take a big hit at the start. You might be able to negotiate a new TV, a fresh lick of paint for the living room or for the landlord to give you a 'nice guy discount' on the rent. The worst thing that can happen is they'll say "no".
- We also have a Chinesetown survival lesson on "Finding an Apartment", which you can access at [www.ChinesetownEF.com](http://www.ChinesetownEF.com).

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **How much is the rent?**

Zū jīn duō shǎo? 租金多少?

• **How many square meters is this apartment?**

Zhè ge fáng zǐ yǒu duō shǎo píng? 这个房子有多少平?

• **Can I get a fapiao?**

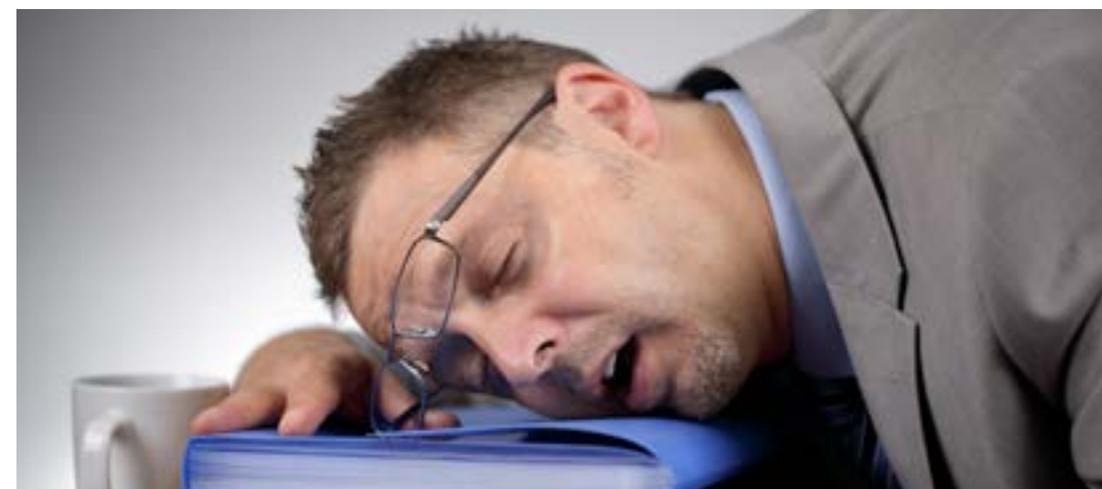
Kě yǐ kāi fā piào ma? 可以开发票吗?

# JETLAG

There's nothing worse than starting a new job jetlagged. Well, there are worse things, but they're less likely to happen to you in your first week in China. If it's your first day, you might be too tired to read this, in which case, you can move onto the next page tomorrow. If not, here are some tips on keeping your eyes open during your first few days.

- A good rule of thumb is that it takes about a day to get over every hour of time change. If you fly from the UK to China in summer, that's seven hours, so expect to feel back to 100% in about a week. If you're travelling over fewer than three time zones, you're unlikely to feel the effect of jetlag.
- "I don't suffer from jetlag, I just have problems sleeping" – if you're not sure if you're suffering from jetlag or not, here's a common list of symptoms: poor sleep at night time, frequent headaches, irritability, lower enjoyment of meals, lower ability to concentrate, poorer performance during mental and physical tasks.
- During your plane ride over, try to eat roughage (e.g. apples) and stay hydrated (drink water and fruit juices, avoid coffee and alcohol). If you're going to sleep on your flight, sleep at a normal time for your new time zone, not the old.
- When you arrive in China try to seek out natural daylight, avoid sleeping during the day and rehydrate. Take a shower in the morning to help you wake up and have some coffee, but don't go overboard. Oh yes, and avoid booze!

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Jetlag**

shí chā 时差

• **I'd like a coffee please.**

Wǒ yào yì bēi kā fēi. 我要一杯咖啡。

• **I'd like a bottle of mineral water please.**

Wǒ yào yì píng kuàng quán shuǐ. 我要一瓶矿泉水。

# LEARNING CHINESE

Every month, we meet dozens of new teachers, excited about learning Chinese. But when we meet the same people months or years on, many can do little more than order a cold Tsingtao, ask for a fa piao or get the mai dan at the end of a meal. Here are 5 tips to make your Chinese learning more successful than theirs.

1. Stop being shy. Use every opportunity you can find to practice. Avoid hanging out in Starbucks. Find some little restaurants in your neighborhood and practice your “ni hao’s” “chi le ma’s” with the natives.
2. Stop worry about tones. They are important, but probably not for what you’re saying. Think about it, Chinese songs don’t have tones and everyone can understand what the singer is singing about.
3. Forget characters, learn pin yin. Unlike English, pin yin has simple pronunciation rules. Once you learn these, you’ll be able to use your dictionary without resorting to pointing at words and showing them to people.
4. Stop spending all your time with other foreigners. The most successful Chinese speakers have Chinese friends to practice with. Local staff from your school, your students, your Ah Yi, the taxi driver, your neighbors, whoever it is, make friends with them and get talking.
5. Join [www.ChineseTownEF.com](http://www.ChineseTownEF.com) and start making use of the free lessons there. You can practice for free, with a real teacher five days a week. Did we mention that it’s free?

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Can I practice speaking Chinese with you?**

Wǒ kě yǐ gēn nǐ liàn xí shuō Zhōng wén ma? 我可以跟你练习说中文吗?

• **I'd like to buy a Chinese English dictionary.**

Wǒ xiǎng mǎi yī běn Zhōng Yīng cí diǎn. 我想买一本中英词典。

• **I'd like to buy a book for learning Chinese.**

Wǒ xiǎng mǎi yī běn xué Zhōng wén de shū. 我想买一本学中文的书。

# MOBILE PHONE APPS

We'll give you a free phone in your welcome pack when you arrive, but at some point, you're going to want to join the 21st century and buy a smart phone. We're not going to get into the apple vs. android debate, but we are going to get into the best “China apps” to download.

- **We Chat.** According to Xinhua, We Chat has over 600 million users. We Chat lets you send messages (voice or text) to other users for free as well as making free video calls (if you have Wi-Fi). A few of us use this as the cheapest (because it's free) way of calling home.
- **Air Quality China.** It's useful to know the current level of pollution in your city so you can plan if you're going to go for a run, smoke that cigarette or seek refuge in your iron lung. This app will show you the AQI over the past 24 hours for more Chinese cities than you can shake a face mask at.
- **Bai du maps.** Bai du is China's google. So, Bai du maps is China's google maps. You can search for places, get directions and do all the things you can do with a normal map. Except fold it in half. That would break your phone.
- **Pleco.** This is a Chinese language app that's great for figuring out street signs or menus as well as learning Chinese. You can scan or try to draw characters for Pleco to guess and make your own flashcards.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Download**

xià zǎi 下载

• **Baidu maps**

bǎi dù dì tú 百度地图

• **Can I add you on We Chat?**

Kě yǐ jiā nǐ wēi xìn ma? 可以加你微信吗?

# PASSPORT

You don't need us to tell you "don't lose your passport", but we're going to say it anyway. "Don't lose your passport!" Besides not losing it, what else is there to know?

## USEFUL PHRASES



- **Passport**

hù zhào 护照

- **I work for EF.**

Wǒ zài Yīng fú jiào yù gōng zuò。 我在英孚教育工作。

- **This is a photocopy of my passport.**

Zhè shì wǒ hù zhào de fù yīn jiàn。 这是我护照的复印件。

- The official government policy is that expats should carry their passports all times in China. Unfortunately, that heightens the chances of you violating rule #1 ("Don't lose your passport!") If you're a butter fingers with important documents you might want to keep your passport at home and carry a photocopy of your passport photo and visa pages with you.

- There are a few places where you need to carry your passport. You won't be able to buy train tickets in most places without it, and in some stations, you'll need to show your passport before you can either board your train, get into the station, or both. You'll need this to get past security at the airport (for domestic flights too), 99% of hotels won't rent you a room without one and we've occasionally been asked to show our passports to get admission to tourist spots.

- Although it hasn't happened to us much, police might ask for your passport just about anywhere. If you work for us, you're in the country legally, so there's no need to be nervous. If you encounter any more problems, get in touch with your visa officer.

# REGISTRATION

To make sure you stay on the right side of the law, you'll need to register with the local police (sometimes called "PSB" or "Public Security Bureau").

- You'll need to register whenever you move into a new apartment, receive a new visa or return to China after leaving the country (in that order of importance). In most circumstances the rule is that you need to register within 24 hours.

- When you move into your first apartment you'll need to bring a whole slew of documents, including your passport, your rental agreement/contract, your landlord's ID card, your landlord's property certificate and anything else your local PSB asks for. Your landlord or estate agent should be able to help you register, but you need to ask them.

## USEFUL PHRASES



- **Where's the nearest PSB?**

pài chū suǒ zài nǎ er? 派出所在哪儿?

- **I'd like to register.**

Wǒ xiǎng dēng jì。 我想登记。

- **Can you please help me register at the PSB?**

Nǐ néng bu néng gēn wǒ yì qǐ qù pài chū suǒ dēng jì?  
你能不能跟我一起去派出所登记?

# UNLOCK YOUR PHONE

Everything's better when you have your phone working. We'll give you a phone when you get here which is good for calling and texting, but if you have a phone you love and want it to work in China you'll need to get it unlocked.

- Ideally, ask your carrier how to do this before you leave your own country. We've known some teachers who's carriers have unlocked their phone for them for free. If that doesn't work, Google it.
- If your Chinese SIM card (which we give you, aren't we generous?), doesn't fit your phone, get it cut to the proper size. Head to a low rent mall which sells phones and covers and find a vendor to cut your SIM card down to size. They will have a chopper to cut that baby down to size for less than 100 RMB. You might want to keep the pieces, in case you ever get a new phone.
- For some phones, you might have to go to a special vendor, one that will specialize in unlocking your particular brand or carrier. To help with this, ask at your school where the best place to go is.

## USEFUL PHRASES



- **Cell phone**

shǒu jī 手机

- **Please cut my SIM card to fit nicely into this phone.**

bāng wǒ jiǎn yī xià kǎ。 帮我剪一下卡。

- **Is my phone working now?**

wǒ de shǒu jī xiàn zài kě yǐ yòng le ma? 我的手机现在可以用了吗?

# WATER

You can't live without, it makes up 53% of your body mass and the stuff that comes out of the taps in China isn't fit for drinking. Not without boiling first at least. We'll give you a 500 ml bottle of water in your welcome pack, but that's not going to last you the year. Here's the lowdown on H2O in China...

- If those student loans are weighing heavily on your mind, you can buy a kettle from a supermarket and boil your tap water before drinking it. Luckily, warm water is also the cheapest form of Chinese medicine and wards of everything from head colds to period pains.
- Bottled water is available cheaply in supermarkets and convenience stores. A 3 litre bottle might cost around 5 RMB.
- You can order huge bottles of water (called "tong") and get them delivered to your apartment. Ask a colleague for the phone number of the local water delivery company. A 15 litre bottle might cost around 20 RMB, including delivery. If you want to practice, we have a lesson on this topic at [www.ChineseTownEF.com](http://www.ChineseTownEF.com).

## USEFUL PHRASES



- **Tap water**

shuǐ lóng tóu de shuǐ 水龙头的水

- **Mineral water**

kuàng quán shuǐ 矿泉水

- **I'd like to have a gigantic bottle of water delivered to my apartment.**

Wǒ xiǎng dìng yì tǒng shuǐ。 我想订一桶水。



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# EATING OUT

We think that one of the best things about living in China is the food. Eating out doesn't have to be expensive and the fun is often inversely proportional to the cost.

- If you're eating with a big group, all the dishes will go in the center of the table and everyone eats a bit of everything. You'll get some funny looks if you try to bogart the Kung Pao chicken.
- Barbeque is especially common in the North and West. Sticks with lamb, mutton and a vast array of vegetables get barbequed over hot coals. This is usually cheap and is often sold on the street. Some people will tell you to beware of the meat. Keep your eyes peeled for the 串 signs.
- Sichuan cuisine is generally considered the best and probably the most popular in China. You might want to bring a supply of yoghurt or milk before going for dinner in case the spices get to you.
- In our experience, almost all Chinese restaurants will add MSG (monosodium glutamate) to food. MSG is a food additive and is classified by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as "generally recognized as safe". If you find that you're allergic to something in the food here, it may well be MSG.
- Dumplings deserve a special mention, Dumplings aren't really anything like the dumplings that go with your Christmas dinner, and are more similar to stuffed pasta without the sauce. Dumplings come boiled in the North, steamed in the South and fried the day after. The most popular filling is pork and cabbage, but in Beijing you can get just about any flavor and color you can imagine.

If you want to practice ordering food in Chinese before you get to a restaurant, go to [www.ChinesetownEF.com](http://www.ChinesetownEF.com) and look for the lesson on "food".

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **No MSG please.**

Má fan nǐ bié fàng wèi jīng。 麻烦你别放味精。

• **Pork and cabbage dumplings.**

bái cài zhū ròu jiǎo zi。 白菜猪肉饺子。

• **Go easy on the spices please.**

wǒ bù chī là。 我不吃辣。

# FOODS YOU'LL GROW TO LOVE

China has its fair share of food you never have come across before. Either to help you avoid accidentally feasting on Lassie's long lost cousin, or to give you a head's up about the most adventurous nosh out there, here are six foods you might grow to love. Or hate. Either way, at least you'll know about them.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **No thanks, I'd rather not eat that.**

Wǒ bù xiǎng chī nà gè。 我不想吃那个。

• **What on earth is that?**

Zhè dào dǐ shì shén me dōng xi? 这到底是什么东西?

• **Do you have rice instead?**

Yǒu mǐ fàn ma? 有米饭吗?

- Tofu with Thousand Year Old Eggs. The eggs aren't really a thousand years old. They look like they could be, but taste more or less like normal eggs. This is served as a cold starter and we're quite partial to it.
- Sea cucumber. Don't get this confused with a regular cucumber. They're about the same size and shape, but that's where the similarity ends. These live in the sea (you probably already worked that bit out yourselves), mostly crawling along the ocean floor. They're brown and have the texture of old boots.
- Chicken feet. These have about as much meat on them as you'll find at a vegan buffet, but gnawing on these little guys is a good jaw work out. And yes, we do mean real chicken feet. A "hot dog" isn't a dog that hot, but we're talking about the feet of a chicken.
- Mao xue wang, A.K.A. duck blood in chili sauce. The ingredient list for this dish sounds like a who's who of an abattoir floor on a Sunday morning after a busy Saturday night. In addition to the obvious there's also pork bones, lungs and intestines. Luckily it's usually so spicy you won't know what you're eating.
- Donkey & dog. No, not mixed together, we thought we'd just lump them in the same category, as they're likely to elicit the same response. Generally more popular both (a) in the North of China and (b) in the winter the braver amongst us report that they both taste "a bit like chicken." Look out for (or avoid) restaurants with either the 狗肉 (dog) or 驴肉 (donkey) characters.

# ORDERING TAKEOUT

You're worn-out after a stressful day at work and you don't feel like cooking. Time to order takeaway! You might be charged a small delivery fee, but no one will expect you to tip them. There are usually 3 ways to have food delivered to your doorstep:

- By phone. Keep a delivery menu from the restaurants you frequently visit and ask them if they offer home delivery service. Make sure your home is within the delivery radius. If you want to practice, we have a lesson on this topic at [www.ChineseTownEF.com](http://www.ChineseTownEF.com).
- Go online. You can probably access a lot of the take out restaurants near where you live on the internet. Some restaurants have sites where you can order over the internet. Ask your colleagues for their favorite sites or, if you're in Shanghai or Beijing, use Sherpa's. They charge a small delivery fee and can get you food from almost any eatery in the city.
- If you use smart phones, download home delivery apps (e.g. hungry house) to browse restaurant menus and read customer reviews, then order and pay for a takeaway food delivery.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Order takeaway**

jiào wài mài 叫外卖

• **Delivery address**

sòng cān dì zhǐ 送餐地址

• **How long does it take to have it delivered?**

Duō cháng shí jiān néng sòng dào?  
多长时间能送到?

# PAYING THE BILL

You wouldn't normally expect something as simple as paying the bill at a restaurant to get a page dedicated to itself in a guide book. But here it is! Paying the bill in a restaurant is a complicated topic. You might find your wallet being wrestled back into your pocket or witness what looks like a brawl over who gets to pay.

- Young people will often split the bill when going out with friends. This is often called "AA" or "going Dutch". You might find this the norm if you go for lunch.
- In certain parts of China, especially Manchuria, paying the bill is a serious business. If you're invited out for dinner your host may try to pay the bill on the sly, pretending to go to the bathroom while secretly picking up the tab. It's usually polite to offer to pay, but your hosts will probably refuse.
- There's not much of a culture of tipping in China. Leaving a tip is likely to result in confusion from whoever is serving you and might even cause offence.
- Last but not least, beware the classic 'tea house' scam, where a friendly stranger asks you to chat with them in English over some tea. A few cups of oolong later, the friendly stranger is nowhere to be found and in their place is a colossal bill. That's not to say every friendly stranger is trying to rip you off, but you might want to stick to Starbucks instead of the tea house, just to be safe.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Waiter, can you bring the bill please!**

Fú wù yuán, mǎi dān! 服务员, 买单!

• **I'd like tǎo pay.**

Wǒ qǐng kè。 我请客。

• **Let's split the bill.**

Zán men ba。 咱们AA吧。

# RICE OR NOODLES

A wise Chinese man once said “people in the world fall into two categories: those who divide the world into two categories, and those who don’t”. We fall into the first category, and divide the world’s largest population thus: noodle eaters and rice eaters.

- Rice is generally more common in the South of China, although it’s eaten throughout. Chinese people don’t usually pour soy sauce on their rice and they often save their rice for the end of the meal – not exactly as a dessert, but more as a way of filling up once the tasty food’s all gone. Whatever you do, don’t stick your chopsticks into your rice and leave them suspended there – that’s a cultural no-no.
- Noodles are considered more of a Northern food. Pretty much anything you can do with rice you can do with noodles. That means these guys get fried, boiled, cut up, made thin, made thick, eaten with soup, eaten without soup and anything else you can think of. If you’re interested in dinner with a show on the cheap, visit a Lanzhou noodles shop. You can usually watch the chefs pull the noodles while you wait.
- The exception that proves there is a rule is “mantou”. These are steamed buns which are popular in Shandong. All flavor is removed from these as part of the cooking process, but they’re good to soak up the left over sauces from your plate at the end of the meal. “Mantou” are also great barbecued – look out for them in a street stall near you!

## USEFUL PHRASES



- ***I’d like to have my rice now please.***  
Xiàn zài shàng mǐ fàn。 现在上米饭。
- ***Rice***  
mǐ fàn 米饭
- ***Noodles***  
miàn tiáo 面条

# VEGETARIANS

“I’m a vegetarian.” “Oh, do you eat chicken?” Funny, but not a joke! It can take a bit of effort to avoid meat in China, and that’s not just because China now has more McDonalds than Mao badges. People in the South say they’ll eat “anything with legs that isn’t a table and anything with wings that isn’t a plane.” But fear not! It’s still possible to live as a bona fide vegetarian here. Here are our ‘top tips’:

- Ordering a dish which doesn’t have meat in the title might still have meat in it. For example, if you order braised eggplant, it’ll probably come with a sprinkling of ground pork. This can be easily remedied with one of the phrases at the bottom of the page.
- Some vegetarian restaurants exist which serve veggie versions of all the classic Chinese dishes. Menus include tofu cut into the shape of fish. All of the fun, half of the taste, none of the guilt.
- The word “meat” (肉 ròu) in Chinese also doubles as the word for pork, so it’s not unusual to be asked if you want to order beef or chicken instead.
- Cook at home. Go to a ‘wet market’ and pick some non-meat ingredients, take them home and cook ‘em.
- Some Chinese foods (such as hotpot) will be made from animal stock. Some restaurants won’t be able to make you a vegetarian friendly version. If you don’t want to compromise, bring a sandwich.

## USEFUL PHRASES



- ***I’m a vegetarian.***  
Wǒ chī sù。 我吃素。
- ***Please don’t add any meat at all.***  
Qiān wàn bié fàng ròu。 千万别放肉。
- ***What vegetarian dishes do you have?***  
Nǐ men yǒu shén me sù cài? 你们有什么素菜?



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# AH YI

You wake up hung over and there's a middle aged Chinese woman wandering your apartment. Don't worry! It's probably just your Ah Yi!

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Please don't put this in the washing machine.**

Zhè ge bié fàng zài  
xǐ yī jī lǐ xǐ。  
这个别放在洗衣机里洗。

• **Can you change the bed sheets please?**

Má fan nǐ bāng wǒ  
huàn yī xià chuáng  
dān。麻烦你帮我换一下床单。

• **What day is it most convenient for you to come and clean?**

Nǐ xīng qī jǐ zuì  
fāng biàn lái dǎ sǎo?  
你星期几最方便来打扫?

- If you're too busy or lazy to clean your own apartment, you can find an Ah Yi (pronounced "Ah-eee" or, since we're English teachers, something like /æjɪ:/ and in pin yin written as "ayi") to do the hard work for you. It's pretty common amongst both foreigners and middle class Chinese to hire an Ah Yi (Chinese for "aunt") to wash your clothes, do your ironing, dust your apartment and maybe even cook you some meals.
- Some people with kids will hire a full-time Ah Yi to help out around the house, but unless your pad looks like Al Pacino's in Scarface, two or three hours a week will probably suffice. The going rate for Ah Yis varies, but we pay about 100 RMB a week for two, four hour visits.
- Your colleagues in your school will know much better than us where to find one. It's probably best to go with a recommendation so you have a better idea of what you're getting.
- It's unlikely your Ah Yi will have attended finishing school or be a mind reader, so you'll need to show her what you want her to do when she starts. Make sure she knows not to throw your suit in the washing machine and how you like your socks folded.

# BEST CITY EXPERIENCES

As the wise saying goes the best things in life are free...or at least, very cheap. Make sure you add these activities to your 'to-do' list to make the most of your city life in China...

- Learn from the masters of Mahjong and Chinese Chess by watching locals play daily tournaments in the parks and city squares.
- Start your day with a good stretch by joining morning Tai Chi or workouts in the outdoor gyms in the parks.
- If you are not much of a morning person, then you can head to the park in the evening and pick up moves for the dance floor by watching or joining one of the many dancing groups. If dancing is not your thing, then you can try roller-skating, jogging, badminton, kite-flying, cycling etc. There really is something for everyone at the park!
- No doubt you will be hungry after all the time you spent in the park exercising. Seek out the best stalls at outdoor food markets and streets with a local and/or an experienced expat to indulge in the local cuisine.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Park**  
gōng yuán 公园

• **Food market/Food street**  
měi shí jiē 美食街

• **Is it free to join?**  
kě yǐ miǎn fèi cān  
jiā ma?  
可以免费参加吗?

# GETTING CLOTHES MADE

You've arrived in China; you've eaten the food; your clothes don't fit anymore. No? Maybe you've found that your old togs don't contain enough neon for this season. No? How about your airline lost your luggage and your boss is getting impatient with you wearing Hawaiian shirts to work? Whatever the reason, if you need clothes, don't waste your time on the high street, head to a tailor.

- There's no shortage of tailors in China. If you're worried about being able to find clothes that fit, don't. Tailors can, well, tailor clothes to fit you at prices which are affordable on a teacher's wage. A decent tailored suit can cost 1000 RMB and shirts as little as 100 RMB.
- Who to trust? Well, as we don't have my A-Z of Chinese tailors handy, we're going to recommend you speak to your more dapper workmates and ask them for a recommendation. You're probably not the first foreigner in your city to get clothes dingzuo'd.
- Be specific about what you want. When you get to the tailors, look at examples, from magazines they're likely to have, or look at clothes they have hanging up in the store. Most importantly, when you go to pick up your new threads, tell them if you want anything changed. If the legs on your pants are too long, or you can't button your cuffs, ask then and there.

If you want to practice (ordering clothes, not making them) go to [www.ChinesetownEF.com](http://www.ChinesetownEF.com).

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **I'd like to get some clothes made.**

Wǒ yào dìng zuò yī fu。 我要订做衣服。

• **These are too long, can you make them shorter?**

tài cháng le, néng gǎi duǎn yì diǎn ma? 太长了, 能改短一点吗?

• **Nice cut. Do you have that in neon?**

Kàn qǐ lái hái bú cuò, yǒu méi yǒu qí tā yán sè? 看起来还不错, 有没有其他颜色?

# PAYING BILLS

You're sitting at home, watching TV, staying cool under the air conditioner and you've got a coffee brewing. Then the lights go out, the room starts warming up and you're staring at a blank TV screen. It's either a nuclear meltdown or you've forgotten to pay your bills. Time to read on!

- The method of paying bills is different in just about every city. Ask your local colleagues what the standard way is in your city. Regardless of where you are, you'll probably receive three bills every month: electricity, water and gas.
- Bills are usually cheaper in China than in the West. If you don't use your air conditioner to turn your apartment into an igloo in the summer or a sauna in the winter, your electricity bill could be as low as 100 RMB per month.
- In some cities (e.g. Shanghai), you'll get a bill sent to your apartment every month. You can take the bill to a convenience store, hand this over the counter and pay it then and there. These can only be paid before a deadline, after which someone might come to your apartment to ask for the money, or, even worse, you might have to travel to a government office to pay up. Not a great way to spend your day off.
- In Beijing and some other Northern cities, apartments come with a top up card. You'll need to pre-pay your electricity by putting money on the card.

If you want to practice the phrases at the bottom before the inflatable armbands are off in your local convenience store, head to [www.ChinesetownEF.com](http://www.ChinesetownEF.com) for a lesson on this topic.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Can I pay my electricity bill here?**

Zhè lǐ kě yǐ jiǎo diàn fèi ma? 这里可以缴电费吗?

• **gas bill**

méi qì fèi 煤气费

• **water bill**

shuǐ fèi 水费

# PHARMACIES

Even if you're inoculated up to the gills, you're bound to find yourself in a Chinese pharmacy before long. To make sure you don't leave with a traditional herbal remedy of crushed elk antlers for your hay fever, read on...

## USEFUL PHRASES



- **Ibuprofen**  
bù luò fēn 布洛芬
- **Aspirin**  
ā sī pǐ lín 阿司匹林
- **Imodium**  
yì méng tíng 易蒙停

- Most pharmacies will stock both Chinese and Western medicine. If you want Western medicine, tell someone who works there.
- Medicine is fairly inexpensive. We've found Chinese medicine to be a bit cheaper than the Western equivalents. You can probably pick up a packet of anti-histamines for between 10 and 30 RMB. You can buy common medicines over the counter, like Ibuprofen, Pepto-Bismol, Tylenol, etc. You can find translations in online dictionaries, or use the ones below.
- Ultimately, it's easiest if you simply bring your own medicine from home. This way you know you won't be allergic to anything you take here.

# PLANNING A VACATION

Planning your holiday can be an exciting time; the promise of getting away from the stresses of the world is hard to resist. Travelling in China is relatively safe and easy, but planning ahead will help you make the most of your holiday. Here are some tips:

## USEFUL PHRASES



- **Book (plane) train tickets**  
dìng (fēi jī) huǒ chē piào 订(飞机)火车票
- **High speed train**  
gāo tiě 高铁
- **How can I get to the Forbidden City?**  
qǐng wèn zěn me qù Gù gōng? 请问怎么去故宫?

- Avoid the Chinese public holidays. Because during these days, the domestic tourists also start their China tours, the peak time of tourism may cause most destinations are more crowded and more expensive than the rest of the year put together.
- Book your tickets and hotel in advance. Websites like eLong and Ctrip have reasonable prices for plane and train tickets and hotels in China and an English language website. If you're buying train tickets you'll probably need to show your passport at the station, or at least show a picture of it. Only the dodgiest hotels will let you stay without showing them your passport.
- China has the world's third largest rail network. If you joined the tracks end to end they'd stretch around the world two and a half times. China also has some of the fastest passenger trains in the world, which get up to 350 km per hour on some lines. We think trains are a fast, environmentally friendly and cheap (compared with flights) way of getting round the country. If you want to practice buying train tickets, we have a lesson on this topic at [www.ChineseTownEF.com](http://www.ChineseTownEF.com).

# POLLUTION

Air quality has been a hot topic in China for a couple of years now, but we're still here, so it can't be that bad. So, if you're new in town, what's the best way to keep your lungs in tip top condition?

- First, get informed. You can find out what the air quality is like in almost any city in China by downloading an app and monitoring the AQI (which stands for air quality index).
- If you exercise, you might want to avoid playing outdoor sports on days when the air pollution is high. An AQI of less than 150 is considered quite clean (by us!). We'd try to avoid running marathons or entering triathlons on days when the AQI is much above 200 and hit the treadmill in the gym instead.
- If you get easily affected by pollution, you might want to invest in a mask to wear on days when the AQI is high. You'll see Chinese people wearing these to stop pollution going in, or more commonly, to stop germs getting out when they have a cold.
- Finally, don't stress out. Most buildings and transport systems have air filtration systems which keep the air indoors clean.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Pollution**  
wū rǎn 污染

• **I'd like to buy a face mask please.**  
Wǒ xiǎng mǎi ge kǒu zhào.  
我想买个口罩。

• **What's the pollution level today?**  
Jīn tiān kōng qì zěn me yàng?  
今天空气怎么样？

# SENDING MONEY HOME

Credit card debts, student loans, money laundering, whatever the reason, you're likely to need to send money home at some point during your stay. Here's where to start.

- First, get the swift code from your home bank. In fact, get every number you could possibly need – account numbers, sort codes, the lot. If you don't have these, give your home bank a call or log into internet banking. You should be able to find most of these there.
- Not every bank will be able to help you transfer money, but most big branches should. You don't need to be a member of the bank to transfer money, you just need to fill out the forms, pay a (smallish) transfer fee and have a lot of patience. There is a 500 USD daily limit on international transfers for foreigners in China. If that's not enough for your needs you could ask a local colleague to help. (You can shout them a Starbucks coffee for their trouble on the gift card you receive from referring friends to EF).
- If Chinese bureaucracy is more than a match for your patience, go to Western Union. They'll be able to send money to someone (e.g. family member, loan shark, etc.) who can collect this from a bank / Western Union / Wall Mart / Post Office (depending on the country).

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **I'd like to transfer money.**  
Wǒ yào huì kuǎn.  
我要汇款。

• **How much is the transfer fee?**  
Huì fèi shì duō shǎo?  
汇费是多少？

• **How much longer do I need to wait?**  
Hái yào děng duō cháng shí  
jiān?  
还要等多长时间？

# SOCIALIZING

China offers a world of opportunity when it comes to socializing. Whether you like people watching in a park, having coffee on a roof bar or dancing the night away at a nightclub, China has something for you.

- China is traditionally a tea drinking country and you will find lots of teahouses where you can try different types of tea. Coffee is becoming more popular here but you but it might be more expensive than coffee at home.
- Parks in China are generally well maintained so there is usually a small fee of 5-10 RMB to enter
- China doesn't really have a bar culture, instead people will socialize over dinner and drink a few beers (pijiu) or the local sprit (baijiu) during the meal and afterwards. If you are looking for bars, clubs and western restaurants any of the expat magazines like Time Out and their associated websites will give you the lowdown on what's going on.
- If you are in a restaurant you may notice (or be part of) a good natured argument over the bill – with everybody clambering to pay for it. It's not normal to “go Dutch” in China, although your Chinese colleagues may be more familiar with this idea than your Chinese neighbors would. Remember that if your colleague pays this time, it's polite to make sure that you pay the next time, so eventually it works itself out.
- Karaoke is a popular social event which you'll see all over the place in China. You can rent karaoke rooms by the hour. Prepare a tune to impress your new colleagues.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Is there a cover charge?**

Yǒu zuì dī xiāo fèi ma? 有最低消费吗?

• **Can I see a drinks menu please?**

Gěi wǒ kàn yī xià jiǔ shuǐ dān. 给我看一下酒水单。

• **Can I have a non-smoking table?**

Yǒu wú yān qū ma? 有无烟区吗?

# SURVIVAL KIT

No, it's not a reference to Knight Rider, although we're all David Hasselhoff fans. We're talking about the stuff you'll want to jam in your back pocket or handbag before leaving the house. If you were to strip search any of us, here's what you'd find on our persons...

- Tissues! You will need them for public bathrooms, when you get more food on your face than in your mouth, mopping your brow on a humid day...
- Hand sanitizer. Because many public toilets have matching “no soap” to go with the “no toilet paper”. Plus, it's nice to keep your hands clean before eating street food.
- Your metro card. This card does more than get you from A to B by bus and metro. You can use your metro card in (some) taxis and (some) convenience stores instead of cash. Just remember to check first by asking the driver or cashier, and keep your card topped up with credit.
- If you are lost or in a fix, who are you gonna call? Your manager, that's who! Make a note of important phone numbers on a card.
- Your address! If your Chinese skills suddenly desert you between leaving the bar and getting in a cab, this will prove a life saver.

## USEFUL PHRASES



• **Tissues**

zhǐ jīn 纸巾

• **Metro card**

jiāo tōng kǎ 交通卡

• **Can I use my metro card to pay?**

Kě yǐ yòng jiāo tōng kǎ fù ma? 可以用交通卡付吗?

# USING THE SUBWAY

The chances are you're going to live in a city with a subway network. We think these are a great way to get around. They're quick, clean and cheap (subsidized by the government). China already has four of the ten busiest subway networks in the world and is planning on building 87 (yes, eighty-seven, that's not a typo) more by 2015. If things keep going the way they are, half of all the world's metro lines will be in China by 2050. Enough geeking out over stats - here's the DL on the metro

- **Pushing.** Unfortunately, the upshot of having up to 11 million people a day using the subway in some Chinese cities is that things get a bit crowded underground. Expect to get jammed in during rush hour and bumped into getting on and off trains. It's good etiquette to let people off before you get on the trains. Unfortunately, not everyone got the memo on this. If you really can't stand the pushing, buy a bike.
- **Closing times.** You're not in New York anymore Jim – make sure you get home before 11, or else take enough cash to grab a cab home. All the subway lines we've ever come across have closed this side of midnight and there's no skeleton service to get you through to dawn.
- **Maps.** You can get metro maps from most stations, but we're big fans of the "Explore Metro" apps, which will plan your routes for you, estimate journey times, tell you which station your closest to (if you have GPS) and work in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Shenzhen.
- **Use your metro card.** We'll give you a metro card in your welcome pack, so you don't need to queue with the out-of-towners every time you use public transport. You can top these up in subway stations, or in some cities, at convenience stores.

## USEFUL PHRASES

- **Let people off before you get on.**

xīān xià hòu shàng  
先下后上

- **Where's the nearest subway station?**

Zuì jìn de yí gè dì tiě zhàn zěn me zǒu?  
最近的一个地铁站怎么走?

- **What time's the last train?**

Mò bān chē jǐ diǎn kāi?  
末班车几点开?



# THE WEATHER

China is a big place so there is quite a variety in the weather in different parts of the country.

- In winter you'll need to bring or buy a warm coat, hats and scarves. You can haggle for these at the local market or buy them on the high street. Hand lotion and lip balm will also keep dry patches to a minimum if you're in a dry part of the country.
- It gets really hot in the summer, so you'll need to get some sun lotion. Girls – remember pale is fashionable in China and lots of lotions contain whitening cream. You'll see girls will use umbrellas in summer. They're not waiting for an unexpected shower – these are to protect that fashionable white skin from the sun. If you're hard up or want to do your bit for the environment, you might want to invest in a fan. This can also help keep the mosquitos away.
- You'll notice the local men will often pull their t-shirts up to expose their stomachs on hot days. We're reliably informed that this is to let hot air (or 'qi') exit the body from the belly buttons. Imitation is unlikely to win you any fashion awards.
- If you have hay fever this can get worse in spring when the trees bloom. Bring some anti-histamines with you or buy these at your local pharmacy

## USEFUL PHRASES



- **I want to buy an umbrella.**

Wǒ yào mǎi bǎ sǎn. 我要买把伞。

- **Do you sell sunscreen?**

Yǒu fáng shài shuāng ma? 有防晒霜吗?

- **I need anti histamines.**

Wǒ xū yào yì xiē kàng guò mǐn de yào. 我需要一些抗过敏的药。