

Arrival Guide: China



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China in General

With a population of over 1 billion people, China is the most populated country in the world. It is also the third largest country in terms of land and broken up into 23 difference provinces covering more than 9 billion sq km.

Language

Mandarin is the official language of China and is spoken by most people. However, Cantonese is the native language of the southern province of Guangdong and Hong Kong and most residents use it by default in that region.

Western Conveniences

As of 2017 almost all tier 1 and tier 2 cities will have a good selection of Western conveniences. It's not uncommon to see Starbucks, Wal-Mart, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Papa John's Pizza, Vanguard and Ole (grocery stores where you can buy some Western foods), as well as newer buildings and restaurants with Western toilets. These conveniences are usually confined to central districts but suburbs and smaller towns are starting to see similar changes. One thing to note is that for all things Western you should expect to pay considerably more than you would for Chinese products.

Public Transportation

China has an amazing public transportation system and even remote villages have access to buses for both inter- and intra-city travel. All of the larger tier 1 cities have sprawling and modern subways complete with signs in English that make it easy to navigate.

A word of caution though - traffic can be brutal in China and expect rush hour to result in gridlock for buses and packed cars for the metro.

If you prefer taxis then it's worth noting that while readily available and cheap compared to western prices, some teachers find that they eat away quickly at their Chinese salary and try to only utilize them late at night or if they are running late.

Safety and Security

Very little crime occurs here and most of the crime that you will come in contact with is petty theft – primarily pickpockets. There are certain parts of every city where you will learn to be more careful than others (example: the train station) and you will also learn the tricks of warding off pickpockets (example: put your hands in your pockets as you are getting on the bus with a large crowd of people).

There have also been a few isolated instances of home theft but again, rarely is any violence involved. Generally, the thief breaks into an apartment and steals cash, laptops, and other electronics that are easily carried but basic precautions like locking your door and keeping valuables out of site can make you less of a target.

Teaching in China

There is a tremendous variety of schools, administrations, teachers, and students in China and it would be impossible to cover all the nuances in a guide like this. Instead, let's focus on some tips that apply regardless of where you work or who your coworkers are:

- Do not expect to learn every student's name and instead try and recognize them by sight (at least at first).
- Do not feel too intimidated about lesson planning. In most cases, teachers use a basic lesson plan and adapt it as needed or the school will provide lesson outlines.
- Don't be surprised when you're asked to participate in an event outside of class - depending on your contract you might not be required to do things like judge a language competition or help put on an English play, but it can be interesting to get more involved with your school.

Like every aspect of life in China, the work environment and attitudes of the other teachers at your school can vary greatly. On one end of the spectrum, you may have schools full of friendly teachers who are going to basically roll out a red carpet to welcome you, invite you to eat with them in the school cafeteria, answer your questions before you have them, and help you acclimate to life in your particular city. You might receive numerous small gifts and be invited out to eat or to visit coworker's hometowns.

This is more in line with the general attitudes of Chinese towards foreigners as a whole. Foreigners are still somewhat of a rarity here, even in bigger cities, and Chinese people are rightfully proud of their generosity and hospitality.

On the other end of the spectrum, you might find yourself at a school with 2-5 other foreign teachers, or at a school that receives new teachers every year. Both of these situations will make it a little harder to make friends but having an open, friendly attitude towards your co-workers and making an honest effort to get to know people will go a long way.

Working for Multiple Employers

Officially, you're not supposed to hold any job outside of your teaching position at your school and your work visa is linked to that specific employer. However, it is not uncommon for teachers to hold private tutoring jobs in order to earn extra money.

With that being said, businesses operating as training centers are often raided by immigration police and if you are caught without a valid work visa specific to the company you are working for, you risk being arrested and deported.

Work Visas

Prior to your departure to China, you should receive a Chinese work (Z) visa that will be valid for 30 days.

Your actual work and residency permit will be processed once you arrive and can take up to a full month to complete. Because your passport is required to complete the process you will not be able to travel or leave the country during this time period.

Your permits will be multiple-entry which means that once they are completed you can exit and return to China as many times as you want until the visa expires. These permits should be valid until the end of your contract and can occasionally be extended or transferred if needed.

Your Salary

It is common practice to get paid a week or so after you complete a pay period (for example, if you start work on August 1st you might not get paid for August until September 10th. Some schools may advance part or all of your pay but it's best not to assume that and arrive with enough funds to last until your first payday (\$500-\$1000 depending on city and spending habits).

Most schools will help you open a bank account and then deposit your salary directly into that account. Some schools pay the foreign teachers in cash, but it is not common. It is recommended that you ask to be paid by direct deposit so that 1) you don't have large amounts of cash lying around your apartment and 2) you don't have to walk to the bank carrying large amounts of cash.

Housing

Each room and apartment in China is different and there is no way to know for sure what your living arrangement will be until you arrive. It's always a good idea to ask what your living situation will be like (and to see pictures) so that you can prepare.

Most apartments will either be within school grounds or very near (within walking distance) to your school's campus. Occasionally schools will provide teachers with a stipend and assistance with finding their own apartment but that should be laid out in your contract.

In almost every case your apartment is going to be smaller than your standard Western apartment. Chinese beds are typically hard as a rock and can be a bit short if you are tall. Bathrooms often lack a divider of any kind so you run the risk of soaking your stuff with every shower if you're not careful. It's usually a good idea to buy a long-handled squeegee once you move in so that you can squeegee the floor after a shower. You will eventually want a pair of shower shoes (flip-flops, readily available here) – they are nice to wear in the bathroom after your shower, before the floor dries.

Please note: all housing is not created equal – After you settle in, you will go to visit a friend and you may think "Shucks! His/her room is so much bigger/cleaner/better equipped/less smelly than mine!" However, you may later discover that you have a more friendly school or possibly you are able to rearrange your schedule for 3-day weekends more easily than your friend.

Dress Code and Personal Appearance

While there is rarely an enforced dress code in China, you should plan to dress professionally when you are teaching, especially when you are first starting. This does not mean suit and tie, but rather slacks, skirts, blouses, and button-downs or nice polo shirts. You will find that some schools are a bit more relaxed while others provide uniforms for the teachers. Your best bet is to dress nicely at first and then match the level of your Chinese co-workers.

There is a fairly strict shoe code for teaching here – no sandals, no flip-flops (generally referred to as “shower shoes” here), and no backless shoes.

As far as hair and personal appearance goes- Chinese teachers usually have a fairly strict code to follow - no dyed hair, no piercings, short hair for men, etc. - but those rules don't apply to foreign teachers. If you are male and have long hair, we suggest pulling it back during class, if possible. As for piercings, you don't need to remove them, but we suggest small, inconspicuous studs. Also, note that tattoos of all shapes and sizes should be kept covered. As a foreign teacher, you can get away with some things as long as you are considerate of your school while teaching and don't flaunt it. Be respectful of the example they want their teachers to set while working.

Health Exam

Depending on your city or province you may be asked to take a health evaluation upon your arrival in China. The exam usually includes: blood test, EKG, sonogram on your internal organs, vision test, height and weight check, lung x-ray, and perhaps some other non-invasive checks.

These exams can often affect whether or not you receive a final work permit so if there is any doubt as to if you will take one or if you will pass it's advisable that you discuss with your school before arriving.

Medical Insurance

Basic medical care in China is relatively inexpensive, but you never know when something serious will occur. Most insurance available through schools only covers your most basic needs and can be especially lacking if you require regular medications or doctor visits. With this in mind, you may want to consider purchasing extra coverage if you require regular checkups or you plan to travel a lot.

Grad School

If you are planning to apply to graduate school while you are in China, here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- The GRE is only offered in Asia about once or twice a year and only in part. It is recommended that you take the GRE before you come. If you decide to take it here, please take the opportunity right now to consult the GRE website and find out the date and location of the test.
- You will probably not find a reasonably priced GRE study book in English in China. Consider bringing your own study guide.
- Sometimes the online application websites for graduate schools are difficult to access from China. Generally, it is an issue of the internet service provider, not the entire Chinese internet system, so you will probably be able to access these sites from

someone else's computer if not from yours. This may be inconvenient and it is recommended that you have a backup plan in mind, just in case.

Drinking Water

Everyone buys bottled water here, even the locals. Do NOT drink the tap water unless you boil it first. Bottled water is readily available and very cheap. Do not bring a water filter. Finding clean water (bottled or boiled) isn't an issue, unless you have plans to camp for a week in the middle of a rice field in the middle of nowhere...

As a side note, those with sensitive stomachs should brush their teeth with bottled water initially, until they get used to the water here.

Vegetarian and Special Diets

It is not very difficult to maintain a vegetarian diet in China as long as you realize that occasionally you may be eating pork stock, chicken broth or fish sauce. Most dishes in China do contain meat, but it is relatively simple to ask for things without it. Sometimes it takes a couple of minutes for them to understand that you truly don't want meat, but eventually they'll get it. Also, after you move into your apartment, you'll start frequenting neighborhood restaurants and they quickly catch on to your dining quirks.

There are two things you should understand in order to make being a vegetarian in China bearable. First, there is no Chinese word for "meat" that covers all animal meat. Beef, pork, fish, seafood - these are all considered different things in the Chinese language, so if you ask for something without "meat," the server may tell you, "It doesn't have meat, just fish." Second, the concept of "vegetarian" doesn't truly exist in China, so you may hear, "This doesn't have meat; just a little bit for flavor." By "without meat," some restaurants will think you don't want big chunks of it. Especially if you don't speak Chinese, you may become a bit frustrated at the ordering process, but eventually you'll learn what dishes are and are not vegetarian.

If you are a very strict vegetarian, you will find the restaurant/cafeteria frustrating because you will be quite limited in what you can consume. You will find that cooking for yourself in advance of meeting up with friends is sometimes necessary (though it can be

challenging depending on your kitchen). Vegetarian restaurants are becoming more common in larger cities, but depending on where you're placed you may not have easy access to them except on weekends.

Internet and WiFi

While readily available, internet and wifi often only work at dial-up speeds when you are out and about in restaurants, malls, etc. However, all of China has seen a push to provide fast and reliable internet to homes and offices over the past few years and it's now quite common to get speeds similar to those in the west. In addition, mobile 4G is available in most major cities making accessing the internet on the go as easy as if you were back home.

VPNs and Google

Internet censorship changes daily based on the Chinese government's perception of the political situation. You will usually have access to the New York Times and BBC, but often articles about China are blocked. At this point in time, you can listen to NPR radio online. You usually can't access .gov or .edu sites. You can access most major credit card websites to pay your bills online. Oftentimes, specific websites will be blocked by your school or your internet provider. Generally, using someone else's computer solves the problem. Facebook and YouTube have been blocked for three years, and will be blocked indefinitely.

To get around any censorship you will need to purchase a VPN (Virtual Private Network). These tend to be about \$5-\$10 USD a month or you can purchase a 12-month plan for about \$50-60USD, which allows users to freely access the internet, including China's blocked sites. There's no way of knowing which VPNs are working until you are in China. To be safe, you can wait to purchase one until after you arrive and deem it necessary; some people are fine without accessing the blocked sites.

Electricity

As far as using foreign electronic equipment in China, you have two things to be concerned with – voltage conversion and plug adaptation.

First, the voltage is 220 in China, not 110 as in America. Many electronics, such as digital cameras, laptops, etc, have built-in voltage converters. Check on the cord in question, it should tell you if it is okay to use in 110 and 220V. (It will usually say "AC IN 100-240V.") As long as the range includes 220V, it is okay to use it in China. If you plan on bringing a hairdryer or razor or similar items, please make sure you buy dual-voltage ones. They are available at travel stores as well as Target/Wal-Mart/Your Favorite Super Store.

Second, many of the outlets in China are capable of housing plugs that you would use in America, as long as both sides of the plug are even (or not polarized). If the plug is polarized, you'll need to use a converter or transformer. You may need a converter or transformer in Hong Kong as well. There are a couple different types of plugs here and the most common is a three-prong triangle-looking.

If you are bringing anything that will need to be plugged in, you may need a plug adapter. It is not difficult to buy single adapters in China, and you can easily buy a power strip that will fit all types of foreign plugs. You can buy these power strips at travel stores and sometimes at luggage stores. Stores that sell them generally have a guide that will tell you what type of plug you need for China.

You can buy hairdryers, razors, and most other electronic equipment here. You should really consider whether you want to use space in your suitcase to pack these items or whether you want to buy one once you arrive here. Chinese battery-operated electronics run on the same batteries as the rest of the world, so you can easily find batteries if you need them.

Phones

Most internet- based phones, such as Skype, Yahoo! Voice, and Google Talk work without issue in China and you can use them to call overseas or your loved ones can

use them to call to China. A word of caution: Before committing money to any service, wait until you arrive in China and settle in so that you can fully assess your needs.

The vast majority of people in China use cell phones with service being quite affordable and text messaging cheap and convenient. Cell phones are also affordable and range from 300-600 RMB (unless you want a brand new, state-of-the-art phone with all the bells and whistles. Such phones will be more expensive, of course).

Cell phones here use the SIM card system (similar to most every other country in the world except the US, I believe). After purchasing a phone, you will need to purchase a SIM card that provides your phone number and keeps your account information. SIM cards usually run about 120 RMB, but you get about half of that back in minutes and data. Instead of paying a monthly bill, like in the U.S., in China you simply add money to your account whenever it runs low. A small monthly fee is automatically deducted from your account.

You are charged per minute of phone use and per text message sent, although your monthly service charge generally includes a certain number of free text messages. Adding money to your account is easy; you just buy a "recharge" card (sold everywhere), call into the "recharge" hotline, enter the PIN number from the card, and voila! You have money on your account. Most people average 100 RMB per month on their cell phones and are text message crazy, as sending them is cheaper than calling. However, if you plan to use your cell phone as your primary mode of communication, you will spend more.

If you plan to bring a cell phone from home, please check with your cell phone company and see if you need to "unlock" your phone or enter a code to use it in China. You will also need to research the correct power adapters. People who bring their phones should be careful about theft as an iPhone is often the equivalent of 2 months salary for some workers. If you do not have an acute sense of situational awareness, then do not bring your expensive phone or iPhone to China. It will be stolen.

Money to Bring

You should not expect to receive your first paycheck until after your first month of teaching. Therefore, you will want to bring enough money with you to get through the first 5-6 weeks of living in China. You will need to factor money for food (many schools will provide you with lunch in the cafeteria, if you so chose) and probably some money for setting up your apartment since the lodgings are furnished, but not immediately livable (you'll need to buy towels, hairdryer, or anything else you will need but might not bring.) \$500 should be an adequate amount to get you through the month, unless you anticipate buying a lot of housing goods. \$500 should be far less than what your monthly salary will be, so it will be good to try to set a budget from the beginning which will get you in the habit of saving for travel.

You will want to bring some money in cash, and traveler's checks are not recommended, but can be used. It is nice to have US dollars with you if you are going to be traveling around Asia, as you can use them or exchange them more easily than Chinese yuan. So, if you plan on traveling a lot, you may want to consider upping the amount you bring with you. Credit cards are not often accepted in China and even at hotels you often need to pay in cash. However, having a credit card for use in booking travel arrangements online can be useful. You may want to set up a bank account at home that a member of your family could write checks on to pay your bills, or set up to pay your bills online. Also, most credit cards accept online payments from a bank account now.

Banking

Once you are at your school in China, you will want to ask your contact teacher or manager to help you set up a bank account. With an account, you will receive an ATM card that you can use to access that account. ATM's are abundant throughout the country and there are a couple of different banks you can choose from with nationwide ATMs.

Credit cards are NOT common in China. There are all kinds of banking rules and regulations in China that prohibit electronic payments. However, more and more places are beginning to use the debit system and you will find that you can use your Chinese ATM card at many big grocery or department stores. Credit cards, however, are rarely

accepted anywhere in China. Therefore, "cash only" will be the motto you learn to spend by.

Some ATM's in China will allow you to get cash (in Chinese RMB) from your foreign bank ATM card. It is hit-or-miss, depending on what bank you use in your home country and what bank's ATM you use in China, but it is becoming easier and easier.

Most banks in China will allow you to deposit your foreign currency into your account, but keep them separate from the Chinese RMB. So, if you want, you could store your American dollars in the bank instead of in your apartment. It is possible that you would have to tell them in advance when you wanted to withdraw the money in USD.

Again, performing international bank transfers from a Chinese bank into a foreign bank is a terrible idea involving huge amounts of paperwork and stress. Please do not expect to be able to move funds between your Chinese bank account and your home bank account. "Online banking" does sort of exist here, but it usually only works with domestic transactions.

Here is another idea for getting money home: Almost all Chinese debit cards are part of the "Union Pay" credit system. Union Pay is the Chinese ATM, bank card, and (rarely) credit card organization and interbank network. Citibank accepts the Union Pay cards- before you leave home check to see if there is a Citibank ATM near you. Also check if your bank has the Union Pay logo. Then when your school opens up a bank account for you open a second account and send the card to a trusted person at home. You can add money as needed to your second account and your family can take it out (in US or whatever local currency) hassle free and only paying an outside bank ATM fee.

A few banking arrangements to keep in mind (these are subject to change):

- Bank of America has a deal with Industrial and Commercial Bank of China - you can use your American BofA credit/debit card at ICBC ATMs with no charge.
- Wells Fargo allows US Wells Fargo account holders to remit up to 1000USD per day to their Agricultural Bank of China account for a minimal fee.
- Citibank (America) account holders with a Citibank debit card may make inquiries and withdrawals free of charge from Citibank ATMs. Unfortunately there are only a handful of Citibank ATMs in Shenzhen.

Finally, just a heads up: Chinese RMB is also called yuan and kuai (pronounced like “why” preceded by a “k”) in spoken language. We usually don't say “RMB,” except maybe at the bank or when speaking about large amounts of money. So, don't be confused if you hear “2 kuai” or “10 yuan.”

Bill Paying

For those of you who will have bills to pay back home while you are in China, here are a few options for you to consider. (For our UK, Australian, and Canadian participants, perhaps these options will apply to you as well.)

- Open a joint checking account with a relative at a US (or home) bank. Place enough money in the account to cover your bills for the year. Have your relative write out the checks to pay your bills.
- Open a checking account with a bank back home. Place enough money in the account to cover your bills for the year. a) Set up "on-line bill pay" through your bank so that you can pay your bills through your bank's website. b) Pay your bills through the websites of the individual companies (i.e. Citibank, CapitalOne, Sprint, etc.)
- Follow option 1 or 2, above, but only place enough money in the account for a few months. After you have received your paycheck in China, convert the money to US Dollars and transfer the funds. You can send the money via Western Union and have someone you trust pick it up and deposit it into your bank account for you. That is the most common method our teachers have used in the past. Using a bank transfer in mainland China is an awful idea, they almost always screwed it up causing teachers to lose a lot of money and never see it again. Do not do bank transfers in mainland China if you can help it.

The following options are not realistic for most people, but may be useful to a few of you:

- Put a relative's name on all your bill accounts so that they can pay the bills while you are gone.

- Pay off all your bills before you leave for China. If you are making monthly payments on something, like a loan, you can submit the payments along with the whole year's worth of stubs. Make sure you send in the stubs so they count as monthly payments and not one large payment on the principal.

Taxes

This applies to people coming from the US. Those coming from Canada, UK, Australia, or anywhere else should check their local regulations.

You are typically able to exclude up to \$95,000 of foreign earned income. You will not be making anywhere near that much. Therefore, you don't have to pay taxes on the money you earn while here in China. You are supposed to fill out form 2555 for the foreign earned income. You can find relevant regulations at <http://www.irs.gov/>.

You do have to pay taxes on any income you may have earned from January-August, while you were in the States. You can e-file using an online tax program, or you could have someone do your taxes for you, either a relative or a paid service.

Some former participants filed for an extension so that they could do their taxes once they returned to the States this summer. You may want to consider doing this, if it seems like coordinating the forms across the ocean will be too difficult.

Things to Do Before Leaving

Register Your Travels with Your Country's Embassy

This allows them to contact you in case of emergency or disaster and to provide you with important travel warnings and information. We strongly recommend that you register your upcoming year-long stay in China. Here are links to register online. Just follow the links for embassy or consular registration.

Australia - <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/>

Canada - <http://www.voyage.gc.ca/index-eng.asp>

U.K. - <http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel>

U.S. - <http://travel.state.gov>

Ireland - <http://www.dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=40332>

It is important to do this before you come to China, because it can be difficult to access these websites once you get here.

Defer Your Student Loans

The following website should help you get started filing for student loan deferments. You will need to file under the "Economic Hardship" condition. This is for US federal loans only. If you have loans in Canada, the UK, or Australia or if you have private loans, you will need to contact your lender directly. <http://studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/deferment-forbearance>

You will likely need to provide proof of low income to receive a deferment under "Economic Hardship." Some schools and programs can provide this proof if you contact them.

Confirm Your Flights

You should confirm your flights a few days before leaving for China. Please check your airline's website for specific directions on how to confirm your flights.

Immunizations

We are not health professionals so it is not appropriate for us to advise you on immunizations. Please check your government's health and travel advisories for relevant information. Your doctor is really the best person to ask about this, since he or she knows your health history. Hepatitis shots are often recommended. A Tetanus booster is also often recommended if you are nearing the end of your cycle.

Here is a link to relevant information at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationChina.aspx>

If you further questions about this, please consult with your doctor.

For people who no longer have insurance - Travel Clinics are cheaper than traditional doctors' offices and have all the information, immunizations, and doctors trained in travel medicine specifically on hand. They're also geared to young people who travel and may not have insurance anymore, so they're able to recommend generic drugs (i.e. malaria pills) from the cheapest pharmacies. Just do a Google search for travel clinics in your area.

Packing

Many of the things listed here are suggestions from current and former teachers. These lists are to be used as guides, NOT as requirements. You can't possibly bring everything, especially since you are usually limited to one bag and one carry-on. Don't stress, just bring the things you absolutely cannot live without. If you think you can't live without it, just put a star by it.

You can find most anything you need in China. So, you don't need to bring a year's supply of contact solution or shampoo or anything. However, remember, you won't know where to buy anything when you first arrive so if you are going to want it right away, you may want to bring enough to last you for a month.

If you have specific questions ("Should I take my golf clubs?"), feel free to contact your school and they can help you think it through. A good rule of thumb – if you are wavering about whether or not to bring something – don't. You will probably want to bring much more than you can fit into the allowed baggage, so think about what you really need to bring.

Clothes

The dress code while teaching is similar to that of a teacher in the U.S. You do not have to wear suits, but you want to look nice. When you are not teaching, you can wear pretty much whatever you want if you are wise about it—please refer to the “**Dress Code and Personal Appearance**” section for more information.

Remember to pack appropriately for the weather. Depending on your location, it can be really hot in the summer and just hot in the fall and spring. Clothes that hide sweat and breathe are advisable, as even those who don't tend to sweat a lot may be soaked through after an hour of teaching during the hot months. In the winter it can get quite cold and it feels colder because there is almost always no central heating. A few pairs of pants and a few sweaters are suggested.

To maximize your packing, think 'layers'. Bring things you can wear by themselves when it is hot and layer when it is cold. Once you have settled into China you can have suits, pants, shirts, (basically anything you want) tailor-made for fairly cheap. This means that you don't have to bring your whole closet, nor do you need to bring an entire year's worth of clothing

Things to consider:

The washing machines are rough on clothes, so you will want to stay away from delicate fabrics unless you plan on doing a lot of hand-washing. Washing machines also only use cold water, so it is difficult to keep whites white. You will not have a clothes dryer – you will hang everything up to dry. So, you will want to bring things that will dry nicely.

For the ladies, consider bringing a year's supply of bras. It is difficult to find bras that fit western women, and the styles are also usually uncomfortable and/or heavily padded.

Again, pack lightly on clothes, and don't bring anything delicate unless you plan on hand-washing it.

Shoes

Some people have good luck finding shoes here and some people don't. If you have large or wide feet, you will have more difficulty finding shoes.

Health and Beauty

Buying basic medications is nearly impossible, and essentials should be brought from home. If you must have a specific medicine, bring a year's supply worth. If a year's

supply is impossible, bring enough to get you through the first month so you can try and locate it locally.

Most toiletry stuff you can find here, even most of your favorite brands – Pantene, Dove, etc. If you really can't live without your favorite product, bring a couple month's worth and then if you discover you cannot buy it here then you can have someone ship more to you.

Medicine

There are a lot of people who get sick in the first couple of weeks after arriving because their bodies are not used to the food and environment. It's a good idea to be prepared and bring a supply of any of the following:

- Pepto Bismol* tablets and or Imodium stops you up, Pepto latches on to whatever is making you sick and moves it out. Note: You most likely will get food poisoning or stomach aches here and Pepto and Imodium are a great thing to have. Both are hard to find here.
- Cold and Flu medicine, i.e. Thera Flu, Vapor Rub and NyQuil. If you get the flu, the pharmacy will usually recommend a Chinese immunity booster (which doesn't do much) and antibiotics, neither of which make you feel better.
- Any preferred name-brand medicine – For example Tylenol Sinus
- Aspirin/Ibuprofen – name brands are difficult to find here

Other recommendations:

- Sunblock – It is expensive here and they don't have high SP for those of us with fair skin
- Small First-Aid Kit with Band-aids, Neosporin, etc. You can buy this stuff here, but it is nice to have with you, just in case. Put a tiny bit of bug spray in it as well, as mosquitoes are vicious in all of China.

- Earplugs: The entire country is seemingly being torn apart by noisy 24-hour metro construction and building remodeling. Also you will want to be able to sleep when you travel by overnight bus and train over the course of the year.

Some things to consider, especially if you plan to travel a lot this year:

- Money belt – Essential. You will need to be carrying a large amount of RMB cash with you when you get to China and there are lots of pick-pockets throughout SE Asia.
- Small locks for backpack and bags
- Travel Alarm Clock
- Plug Adapter
- Febreze or Febreze Wrinkle Release – smells good and you don't have to iron!
- Two or three disposable moist towels for when you first get here (example: Olay "Daily Facials") to use on the plane, in the airport, on the bus, etc.
- Toilet paper or pocket-sized Kleenex – You can buy here, but it is nice to have some with you at the beginning. Will soon get used to carrying tissue paper with you at all times, since it is rarely provided in public or school bathrooms.
- Color photo copies of tickets, passports + visa page, everything in wallet, med. Insurance, emergency numbers. Would advise two copies in separate places and storing copies in your email and on your computer.
- Ziplock bags – Consider putting your shampoo, soap, and other liquid products in
- Ziplock bags in your suitcase, just in case they pop open. Also, you can keep make-up and other small things organized and they won't fall out, causing you to dig around in your suitcase.
- Plastic grocery bags – good for dirty laundry, wet shoes/clothes, and for those unexpected cases of travel sickness

Many teaching supplies you'll want, such as paper, markers, etc., can be found here. However, here are some suggestions from other teachers of things they have found

useful in their classes. Most classrooms have computer projection system, so if you can bring pictures and other things on CD, that's much more convenient for packing.

- Fun things to show your classes - baby pics, pics of home life, family holiday pics, yearbook, pictures from when you were their age (prom, graduation, school dances, etc.)
- Index cards – they have multiple uses and are impossible to find here
- USB/Thumb Drive for transporting your lesson from your computer to the class computer
- Teen magazines and local newspapers for students
- Music to share
- TESL/TEFL book/s – something with ready-made activities or lesson plans for those Sunday nights when you just can't squeeze out another creative idea. Many resources are also available online
- Elementary teachers may want to think about - easy story books, coloring books, cool, cheap prizes (stickers, stamps, erasers).

Note: Elementary kids LOVE stickers*. The elementary teachers here recommend bringing as many as you can. They are a great incentive and classroom control mechanism for the younger kids.

- Kindle or books. English books are available in most major cities, but the selection on the mainland is limited and books can be quite pricey in places like Hong Kong. If you are an avid reader, you should consider bringing an ebook reader instead, like a Kindle or a Nook.
- Pocket knife with bottle opener– Remember to pack this in the checked baggage, NOT your carry-on
- Small Gifts and Souvenirs – some people recommend having extras, just in case
- Thank you, Birthday, and Holiday Cards – only Chinese ones are available here
- Your favorite spices – These are available in some stores, but are a bit expensive

- No-bake mixes – No ovens in China!
- Power bars/granola bars/trail mix for when you get sick and can't stomach either Chinese food or just the thought of it.
- Pictures of family and friends (photos or pics on CD)
- Something that will make you happy when you are down-in-the-dumps or missing home
- Digital camera – you can buy one here, but it won't be less expensive and really is just a hassle to worry about finding a good-quality, real one.

Information Specifically for Female Teachers

OK, it's time for a little girl talk...

Tampons and Pads

There are a few different kinds of pads and liners here. Some better than what you find in the states and definitely a lot cheaper. Here is what is suggested: Pack about a month worth of pads and 5 months worth of tampons. People have found over the years that tampons pack well inside shoes. Then, you can see what's available after you arrive.

If not, then you will have to ask someone to send you some from home. OB tampons are pretty easy to find in China, but some women don't like to use them. However, if you don't mind that brand, then there's not much of a reason to take up space in your luggage with 5 months worth of tampons.

Bras

If you are large-chested, don't plan on buying bras in China. They are not nice. Someone once described them as bullet-proof.. There are more options for smaller-chested women, but then they tend to be super-padded. Washing machines here are very rough on delicate fabric and bras in particular. Therefore, it's recommended that you bring a few more than you had originally planned. It can be embarrassing to have to email home and ask family members to send bras for Christmas.

Additionally, under-wire bras are discouraged, as they will get malformed and uncomfortable. Most female teachers agree that cotton no-underwire bras are the way to go for China.

We know that we stress packing light, but we think this is a case where more is better.

Birth control

Generic brands are readily available in China (it's recommend that you write down exactly what you take – name, dosage, etc.). If you are one to go “a little nutty” with a change of hormones then do bring a year's prescription. You doctors should be able to help you if you explain why this is necessary. If you decide to search for and buy here, generic brands tend to be cheaper in China than they are in the US.

Gifts

It is customary to have 2 gifts to give upon your arrival in China. One will be for your headmaster and the other for your contact teacher. The one for the headmaster should be nicer than the one for your contact teacher, since s/he is in a higher position. One possible idea is something featuring your university/hometown/state, like a nice pen or something else they can display at the office. CD's and DVD's are very cheap here and would not be considered appropriate as gifts. Remember, you don't know if your headmaster or contact teacher will be male or female so chose something unisex. And, remember, you will need to pack this, so the really cool coffee table book might not be the best idea. You DO NOT need to spend tons of money on presents. Something thoughtful is better than something really expensive. However, the gifts shouldn't look like you bought them out of the discount bin.

You may also want to bring a few other small things as back-ups in case you meet someone else later and want or need to give them a gift. It is okay to give the same thing to multiple people of the same rank. (IMPORTANT - the gift to your headmaster needs to be nicer than your gift to your contact teacher.)

Restricted Materials

*Check airline websites for restrictions on items in your carry-on and checked luggage.

It is doubtful that your bags will be search upon arrival in China, but it is a possibility. Here are some general guidelines for you to follow:

- Don't bring anything that says "Overthrow the Communist Government," "China is bad," "KMT Rules," or "Independent Taiwan" on it. If you bring a Lonely Planet of any kind, cover the real cover with a fake one, as guards like to take those for whatever reason.
- Don't bring Playboy or Playgirl magazines or anything similar. There is quite an extensive availability of pornographic DVD's available here, for those of you who are sad at the prospect of leaving your collection at home.
- You may bring one or two Bibles, Koran, or other religious texts without issue.
- Don't bring firearms, knives (other than pocket knives – and remember to pack that in your checked luggage!), fireworks, explosives, or anything else you think falls in that category.
- Obviously don't bring drugs or alcohol.

Cultural Differences

This is not a comprehensive guide to all cultural differences between the West and China. Below is a short list of differences and quirks that new teachers often find the most surprising or frustrating.

“Now-ism” is the term often used to describe daily life in China. In contrast to professional and social habits generally seen in Western countries, “now-ism” the practice of waiting until seemingly the last minute to set plans, make schedule changes, etc.. For example, you may walk down to your 8am class one morning only to find the math teacher giving a lesson. He turns to you and says, “Oh, you don't teach this class today.” This is Now-ism. Or perhaps your school informs you that you have a five day vacation....the day before it begins, so you can't make any travel plans. This is now-ism.

This goes hand in hand with the China “maybe,” such as “Maybe you will have class tomorrow” which translates to “You have class tomorrow.” This applies to everything from your teaching schedule to the availability of coffee at your favorite coffee shop. On good days, you’ll find “Now-ism” to be ridiculous and sort of hilarious. On bad days, you will be frustrated and annoyed.

*It’s important to remember that you’re not being singled out-this is simply how the country operates.

China is approximately 92% percent Han Chinese, which means the majority of the country comes from the same cultural and ethnic background. Partially as a result of this, many Chinese people tend to assume that other countries are also composed of only one ethnicity. Americans are expected to be tall, blond, blue-eyed, and white. Any non-Asian-looking person can expect to be stared at, an experience many new arrivals find somewhat uncomfortable. In Chinese culture it is not considered rude to stare, so try to keep this in mind, take a deep breath, smile, and ignore it. If you are feeling social, smile and wave. Often, people do not realize they are behaving in a way Westerners see as rude, so angrily confronting gawkers often results in a cultural faux pas, that doesn’t benefit either party.

Given the largely physically homogenous population of China, there is no concept of equal opportunity hiring, political correctness, or anti-discrimination. Occasionally schools will not want to hire black teachers, but that is becoming less common. The same applies for ethnically Chinese teachers. Sometimes this means that some non-white teachers will find that they need to work a little harder to build a good relationship with their school. In almost all cases the school quickly adjusts and stops seeing race as a factor in the quality of the teacher. Although this is true in some cases, this should not be regarded as an outstanding quality of Chinese people. Its a cultural difference, while unacceptable in many areas of the world, its just something to be aware of in China.

Banquets are an important ritual. Banquets are large, formal dinners involving multiple courses, often of more exotic delicacies that Westerners find distasteful. Honored guests are often spooned the choicest morsels of food directly onto their plates. Toasting is also an important component of any banquet. The host of the banquet will toast each table and individuals with either bai jiu (Chinese grain alcohol) or red wine. It is impolite to drink alcohol alone, so each sip requires a toast. If you are toasted, you are required to at least sip your drink. Women can substitute tea or soda for alcohol

quite easily, but men will find there is more pressure to drink alcohol. A simple excuse like “I’m taking medicine so I can’t drink alcohol” usually relieves the pressure.

We've said this before (see “**Dress Code and Personal Appearance**”) but it’s worth emphasizing. Flip-flops or other open-backed sandals are inappropriate and offensive in any formal or semi- formal setting, including the police interviews and certainly while teaching. Teachers have been reprimanded for wearing flip-flops on campus, even when the teacher is finished teaching for the day and headed off-campus.

Women are expected to dress modestly. Shoulders and necklines below the collar bone are considered immodest. Cleavage is not the only fashion no-no; sleeveless shirts are also generally unacceptable, especially in the classroom. A scarf, shrug, or shoulder sweater can provide the necessary coverage. Just remember you are a teacher and also a foreigner which means your standards are a bit higher than everyone else’s - yes, not fair, sorry. A good rule of thumb for teaching clothes is if you feel awkward wearing it in front of your grandmother then you should change.