

## **Official Procedures:**

**Before you go to China,** there is a lot of paperwork to do and procedures to go through. You should get a big folder to keep all your forms and documents together. I also recommend you make a photocopy of everything and kept with your originals. Also, leave a copy of all your documents with your parents or someone to contact in an emergency. Also you should check your email everyday to make sure any urgent matters are dealt with as quickly as possible. It may happen that you'll need to submit forms within a few days to meet deadlines. Make sure your passport is in date. Also you'll need a lot of passport photos, you may need about 20. You'll need them to apply to the college, to apply for your visa, to sign into your dorm, to register in your Chinese college, to attach to your health certificate application, to apply for your residency permit etc.

The first step is to submit your intent to study abroad form. After this there may be a long wait to see what college you've been accepted to. The college will lead you through your application procedures. They'll tell you a list of documents you need and how they want you to submit them, you may be asked to scan them into a computer and send them by email. You made need things like your official transcripts, a copy of your passport, an application form to the college in China, an application to live in campus dormitories, passport photos etc. Each college is slightly different.

As soon as you know where you are going and what date you should arrive book your flights as soon as you can. Try not to arrive too early as your dorm room may be unavailable. Also within 30 days of arriving in China you will need to apply for a residency permit. The Chinese college might have certain days allocated to help you with this but if you arrive too early then your 30 days might pass before the college can help you. For example, I arrived around the 26<sup>th</sup> of August but the college, unawares to me, organised the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September to deal with residency permits. So when that day came I only had three days left to apply. The college told me that because I left it so late I had to pay a late fee. You don't need to apply through the college but it will make things so much simpler if you can.

Once you get your acceptance letters from your college in China then you can apply for your visa. The visa application procedure is quite simple. You can find the list of forms you need for this online. You'll need the visa application form, the supplementary visa application form, your passport, your acceptance letter from the college, your JW201/JW202 document, passport photos etc. These forms can be submitted to the visa department of the Chinese embassy near the RDS. It is paid for on collection usually by postal order and will be ready for collection in probably less than a week.

There are some other things that I highly recommend you do before you go. The first is I recommend you by travel insurance for the year. You may have to buy insurance through the Chinese college as a registration procedure even if you have insurance but the company I had to get insurance with doesn't actually cover you for some important things, for example, sexually transmitted diseases, accidents during surgical procedures, athletic activities like rock climbing, skating, judo, karate etc. Also it won't cover you if you decide to travel outside China. The Second thing I recommend is that you get vaccinations. If you go to the campus clinic they will be able to what ones you need and also advise you where to go to get them. Thirdly, when you arrive in China you will need to apply for a residency permit. In order to get your residency permit, something you will need is a health certificate, to get the health certificate you will need to have a health form completed, have blood

tests taken, have a chest X-ray and have an ECG done. This part can be done in Ireland. Again the campus clinic can help you, and you may only have to pay about €20 for the blood tests. The Health check procedures may cost more to do in China.

**When you arrive in China**, first you'll of course have to find your dormitory. Find out where you have to go when you arrive. It may be convenient for you to open a Chinese bank account if you have to pay bills with a Chinese account. If you plan on using your Irish card make sure you tell your bank before you go, and make sure your card won't expire before you come home.

The next thing is to attend any college orientation meetings and events. You can ask your contact person in the college if you're unsure of anything. One of the most important things is the day you register in the college. This may take a long time to go through all the procedures as there may be a couple thousand international students all needing to register too.

The last thing is applying for your residency permit. You'll need your health certificate to apply for this. Even though you may have your health forms all filled in and completed before you go to China you will still need to go to the health clinic in China to get the actual certificate. Then finally you can apply for your residency permit. If you didn't hate paperwork before, you definitely now.

## **Expenses**

Below is a list of common expenses. Of course they can differ a lot from place to place and depending on your college you may not need to pay some at all, like electricity or water. Food and living expenses are generally lower in China, but still keep an eye on your money. Even though it is fairly cheap to go out in China be careful not to fall into the trap of going to clubs every night of the week. You may end up spending more than you normally do because things seem so cheap.

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| Irish College Fees                   | €2600+                                  |
| Accommodation                        | €850-€2000+ (depending on your college) |
| Return Flights                       | €1000                                   |
| Registration fee for class           | €100                                    |
| X Visa fee                           | €40                                     |
| Residency Permit fee                 | €50 (€75 for late fee)                  |
| Health Certificate fee               | €7.50                                   |
| Medical Expense for the Health cert. | €80ish in China €20ish in Ireland       |
| College Insurance                    | €75                                     |
| Personal Insurance                   | €250                                    |
| Cheap Chinese Phone                  | €25, then €5 each month                 |
| Vaccinations                         | €300-€400                               |
| Passport Photos                      | €20                                     |
| Food                                 | €3-€5 minimum.                          |
| Water Bill                           | €8-€10 a month/ apartment               |
| Drinking Water                       | €2 for 18.9L                            |
| Electricity Bill                     | €25/month                               |
| Subway                               | 25c/journey (Beijing)                   |

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| Internet            | Modem €20, subscription €50 per semester/ apartment |
| Taxi to the Airport | €15   |
| Washing Clothes     | €2/week   |
| Trip to Shanghai    | €200  |

## **Safety:**

This list of tips are things that I've come across or heard about while in China, it is in no way comprehensive, so have your wits about you at all time! Beijing is not a particularly dangerous place; however, do be extra cautious while abroad.

- Air Pollution: The air pollution in Beijing can get quite bad. There are apps that you can download that tell you hourly the intensity of the pollution, there's plenty of them out there. The pollution is rated on a scale from 0-500, anything above 300 is classified as "hazardous" and a few times the pollution reached over 600, beyond the scale! Though you can see clearly just by looking outside what it's like. Many people don't ever wear a mask and some buy hi-tech gas masks. People have different reactions. Anytime I'm out in high pollution with no mask I will have a headache in about half an hour without fail and a sore throat to boot. Some people with asthma suffer really badly from it, so if you think this might affect you, of course talk to a doctor before you go, and I'd advise you learn the Chinese words for anything you may need emergency medical help for , like allergies, diabetes, asthma, hay fever etc.
- Food: Real Chinese food is delicious, though you may need some adjustment. I found the canteen food to be really oily and some street food might make you a little sick, so I recommend you bring any medication you take for upset stomachs etc. Also watch out for allergies! Lots of dishes are cooked with peanuts. Again, learn essential vocabulary.
- Fake notes: Keep a look out. Considering how it's a new currency to you, it'll be hard to tell a fake note from a real one. Also, it's not so easy to stand at an ATM checking all your cash. It's a tough one too because even if you find you have fake notes there's very little can be done about it. Three fake notes were taken out of a bank machine here and when it was established they were fake three days later, the bank couldn't do anything because there was no proof that they were taken out at the bank. Though, some Beijingers we've spoken to have never even seen a fake note, so chances are rare. Though it did happen to us.
- Jewellery: This goes for anywhere in the world really, wearing expensive or nice jewellery can be dangerous. I'd recommend not bringing expensive things. It may happen rarely but people have had things ripped off their neck and out of their ears...
- Tourist Scams: I often see a particular scam being discussed on the internet. In very touristy areas of Beijing like Tiananmen Square etc., you may be approached by people wanting to make friends and learn English. They may suggest a great tea house and after several cups your bill is something ridiculous like a few hundred Euros. So, beware of this, always be sure of how much something is, or go somewhere you've been before.

- Water: You shouldn't drink the water from the taps; some websites say not to even brush your teeth with it. Also ice cubes in restaurants may be made with tap water so maybe take them out if you're conscious about this.
- Buying Goods: Buying any appliances I'd recommend you open the box and have a look especially if it's expensive. The shopkeeper may show you anyway. I bought a small kettle and never checked it, when I did open it; it was covered in lime scale.
- Work: As a student with the X visa you can work BUT! You technically have to get permission from your college to do so and go through some official procedures. I have read some websites and it seems as though very few students do this. But be careful! So if you do take jobs keep your wits about you. I'd recommend somehow trying to find a local family who want their kid to learn Chinese. This is far better than finding work with a company. It's also possible to find volunteering opportunities which will really help your Chinese. There are some great opportunities for part-time work but if you go anywhere either go with a friend or leave the address of the place you're going and all the details you know about the person you're going to meet with a friend.

### **My Advice for a Good Year:**

Become as Chinese as you can, make Chinese friends, and actually call them and ask to have dinner even if you don't really know them. That's quite normal. Try not to spend too much time with English speaking people, and if you do just talk Chinese. The first few weeks are really difficult but struggle through them. I found it really useful to spend time with my classmates. It's much easier to have a conversation and get more comfortable using your Chinese.

Go see the sights. Your college may organise trips to Chinese acrobatics or the Great Wall etc. Go! It will be cheaper and you won't have to deal with the hassle of organising something like that yourself. Parks are a great display of Chinese culture. Big groups of people will gather to practice Taiji or Wushu or traditional Chinese dancing.

Earlier I mentioned to beware of people approaching you wanting to make friends and speak English. That being said, there are many genuine people looking to learn English and make friends. There are certain districts where a lot of foreigners hang out where you may be approached by a Chinese students asking to be language partners. This happened to me and I took them up on their offer and had a really good time with those friends for the rest of the semester. It's also very likely that you'll meet someone on campus looking to find a language partner.

If you're looking for work or some interesting experiences I recommend you look on [www.thebeijinger.com](http://www.thebeijinger.com). There are endless advertisements looking for English teachers to "start immediately". I'm concerned about work with an agency though lots of people seem to do it. Also if you're interested in doing something different there are opportunities to volunteer. I found an advertisement asking for volunteers to teach English to a group of women whose children are abroad studying or who plan to go abroad studying. They said they would pay 50RMB for travel and

teach me Chinese and about Chinese culture. Turns out this place was a club for people who are really enthusiastic about Chinese culture. The club was in an apartment, and almost everything in there was an antique. They had expensive tea and made me organic lunches. Also I got to go to their Chinese calligraphy classes for free which cost 300RMB each. They didn't seem like they were struggling for cash, so why they wanted volunteers I don't know, but I'm glad I found it. You may also find people who are willing to bring you around Beijing for free if you speak English. I found a small company who organise trips for families and wanted an English speaker to volunteer to go with them to see sites in Beijing and they would feed you too. It's a great way to make contacts.

Two more apps I recommend you download before you go are Wechat (Weixin in Chinese) and Pleco. Wechat is the everyday instant messenger used in China. Download it in Ireland if you can because when I tried to download it in China I couldn't as it kept saying "not available in this country" so I had to go through a whole rigmarole of changing all my phone's internal settings to allow it to download, though I seemed to be the only person with this problem. The second one, Pleco, is the best app in the world. It's a Chinese dictionary and I literally used it every day without fail. For the first few weeks I used it non-stop. It's perfect if a Chinese person is trying to tell you something important, just let them write in the words and up comes the translation.

### **Study Tips:**

I recommend you preview the chapter before you go to class. So try become familiar with the new words and scan through the text. Translate any words you don't know. Anyway, you'll rarely start a new chapter in class without the teacher asking you to preview it.

Get a white board and stick it on the door and write a few words on it, every time you go out you'll have a few words floating around your head. Or write the new words of a chapter on a piece of paper and stick it on your wall. Or both!

Every time you come across a new word, which will be hundreds, add it to your flashcards in Pleco. The next time you're on the subway, before bed, waiting for a friend etc. have a look through them to revise.

Upload the Chinese CD's that accompany your books to your music player and you can listen on the go or if you go out jogging.

Really try your best and go to class. Your attendance will be counted and may affect your grade if you miss too much.

Make friends with your classmates and speak Chinese. If you're shy and not sure what to say, the easiest thing to talk about is culture. Literally anything can make a topic with someone from another country. What time of the day people eat, what they eat, about their family, weather. People really feel flattered when you ask them about their culture and their language. Also when talking about Irish drinking culture be careful, try not to emphasise the badly behaved fighting puking screaming side of it, emphasis that we love a drink and an ould song and dance. People won't look down on you they just may not understand the extent of it and may be nervous to have a drink with you if they think they'll be pressured to drink a lot.