



CHINA STUDENT STARTER GUIDE

A pre-departure and arrival handbook for international students coming to China

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A Practical Welcome Guide for International Students in China

Welcome to China. This guide is written for students who are preparing to arrive, have just landed, or are still adjusting to campus life. It is meant to help you make decisions without feeling more complicated. You do not need to understand everything before departure. In the beginning, you only need a few things to work well: your documents, your first place to stay, your route to campus, your phone, your payment method, your daily food, and the right contacts.

How to Use This Guide

If you are still preparing for departure, start with Part 1. If you have already arrived in China, begin with Part 2 and Part 4. If you mostly need help with daily life, go directly to Part 3, Part 4, and Part 6. If you read the handbook in order, it follows the normal student journey from departure to arrival to settling in.

Part	Focus	What you will find
1	Before You Leave	Documents, visa, flights, hotel, insurance, luggage, packing, and first preparation
2	Your First Days in China	Arrival, registration, first priorities, and essential setup
3	Your Room and Daily Setup	Dorms, housing, room basics, canteens, deliveries, laundry, and household routines
4	Phone, Payment, Apps, Delivery, Food, and Transport	The systems that make daily life work
5	Study, Health, Safety, and Student Life	Academic habits, wellbeing, safety, adjustment, and routine
6	Useful Chinese, Festivals, Travel, Community, and FAQ	Survival Chinese, support channels, and quick answers

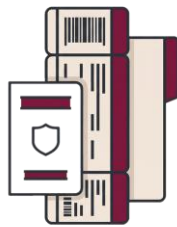
Quick Start: What matters most in your first week

If you only remember one page from this guide, remember this one. Your first week does not need to be perfect. It only needs to become stable. Focus on order, not speed.

Priority	What to do	Why it matters
1	Keep passport and key documents safe	You will need them repeatedly
2	Reach your accommodation safely	This gives you a stable base
3	Confirm registration time and place	University deadlines matter
4	Make sure your phone can get online	This supports maps, contact, and apps
5	Buy or borrow first-night essentials	Sleep and comfort affect everything
6	Learn one route to campus and one route to food	Daily life becomes easier very quickly
7	Get connected with the international student's office	You will be able to know every new update from the school



PART 1 | BEFORE YOU LEAVE



Preparation, documents, flights, packing, and arrival readiness

Part 1. Before You Leave

Keep your documents simple and organized

Document System

Get yourself one folder: passport, admission papers, visa pages, insurance, first-night address, and emergency contacts should all be reachable in under one minute.

Before your trip, prepare one clean folder with all important documents. Keep printed copies and digital copies.

Printed copies still matter during international travel and registration. Your folder should usually include your passport, admission documents, visa paperwork, insurance record, first-night accommodation details, flight itinerary, and important phone numbers.

The more organized your documents are before departure, the calmer your arrival will be. A surprising amount of first-week stress comes from people trying to search through screenshots, email attachments, or half-downloaded files while tired.

Pre-departure document checklist

Quick Tip

Keep one paper set in your carry-on, one phone photo set, and one cloud folder you can open even without mobile data. Extra preparation always helps.



A good rule is to store documents in four layers: original paper copies in one slim folder, one printed backup set in checked luggage, one clear photo set on your phone, and one cloud folder that can be opened even if your phone is lost. Students who prepare documents this way usually solve airport, hotel, registration, and bank questions much faster.

If a school asks for a specific form, do not assume a screenshot is enough. Keep original letters, insurance receipts, accommodation details, emergency contacts, and at least one passport-sized photo ready. If your family may need to help you from abroad, leave them one digital copy

of the most important documents too. Also make sure that if certain files need to be translated, get them done. [For more information on translation, please check here.](#)

Document group	Best place to keep it	Why it matters
Passport and visa page	Carry-on folder	Needed for boarding, entry, check-in, and registration
Admission and JW / visa-related papers	Carry-on folder	Often checked again after arrival
Insurance receipt and policy page	Carry-on folder and phone copy	Useful during registration or medical questions
Accommodation address and phone number	Phone and printed copy	Helpful for late arrival, taxi use, and check-in
Emergency contacts	Phone, wallet note, and cloud backup	Still available if battery or signal fails

Airport departure

Carry-on Priority

On airport day, keep your passport, boarding pass, phone, charger, and destination address together in one easy-to-reach pouch.

For an international departure, arriving too early to the airport is rarely a problem, but arriving late can turn a simple journey into a stressful one. As a practical rule, give yourself enough time for baggage drop, security screening, immigration, and walking between gates. Keep your passport, boarding pass, phone, power bank, and one copy of your destination address in the same easy-to-reach place.

Before security, check the basics: liquids are limited in carry-on baggage, sharp objects should not be packed where they will cause screening issues, and most airlines require power banks and spare lithium batteries to stay with you rather than inside checked baggage. If staff ask basic travel questions, answer simply and truthfully: you are a student, you are going to a university, and you have your admission documents ready.

Understand your visa early

Do not leave visa preparation until the final week. The most important first step is understanding which visa matches your program and what needs to happen after arrival.

For many students, entering China is not the end of the paperwork process. It is the beginning of registration, local reporting, and other formal steps.

The safest approach is simple. Start early. Check names, passport numbers, and dates carefully. Keep every document consistent. Do not assume a small mismatch will be ignored.

Confused by the visa application procedure? Check this [free video tutorial with hand-on-hand guidances](#).

Insurance

Insurance is required for all foreign students who study in China. To make it more convenient, we recommend you to get it done online before registration, complete it before departure and keep the payment record with your other documents. Here is the official insurance entry where you will have an 800 Yuan (around 120 USD) per year insurance plan covering medical care and accidents.

Official Insurance Access	Details
Official student insurance link	Official Insurance Access Introduction of the insurance
Student note	Save a screenshot or receipt after purchase

Booking flights and your first hotel

Arrival

A workable first-night hotel and a clear route can save much more energy than a small fare difference.

When booking your trip, think about arrival energy, not only ticket price. A cheaper flight with multiple long transfers may make your first day much harder than it needs to be.

If possible, give yourself a more comfortable arrival. It is also wise to book your first nights before departure, especially when your dormitory is not fully settled yet.

Your first hotel or accommodation should be easy to reach, easy to identify, and easy to show to a taxi driver or ride-hailing driver. Save the address in both English and Chinese if possible. It is

also worth checking whether a hotel accepts foreign guests, especially if you book a smaller or cheaper property.

Flight and first-stay checklist	Why it helps
Check baggage allowance before packing	Avoid airport stress and extra fees
Save hotel name, phone number, and address	Useful if you arrive tired or late
Keep arrival date shared with the university if needed	Helps with registration planning
Save airport-to-hotel route in advance	Just in case
Keep a little cash and one working payment method	Useful for the first hours
Prefer changeable tickets if visa timing is uncertain	Reduces last-minute stress

Travel booking recommendation

If you want one place to compare flights, student fares, and first-night accommodation, keep one travel platform ready before departure. Student discounts, extra baggage allowance, and foreigner-friendly hotel filters can make a real difference.

Travel booking option	Link	Suggested use
Flight and hotel booking guide	Hotel booking guide	Learn how to book more safely and cheaply
Travel booking platform	Recommended booking platform	Find discounts for booking hotels, air tickets, high-speed railways and even temporary SIM cards

Shipping luggage to China

Move Light First

If separate shipping is too complicated, choose the simpler route. Your goal is not moving every belonging in one trip.

Not every student needs a separate luggage-shipping service. If you are only coming for a short language course or one semester, a suitcase may be enough. But if you are moving for a full degree, carrying heavy winter clothes, books, or sports gear, or landing in one city and then taking a train to another, shipping some belongings separately can make the move much easier.

A door-to-door luggage service is often about reducing stress. Arriving with one manageable suitcase can make your first day much calmer than trying to move several heavy cases across airports, stations, and campus gates.

Important customs reminder for shipped luggage

Customs Check

If luggage is shipped separately, keep every receipt, list, and stamped form. Small missing paperwork can create major delay after arrival.



If you ship personal belongings separately, read the customs instructions carefully. On arrival, some students may need to declare those items as unaccompanied baggage and keep the stamped form for customs clearance. If you ignore this step, your shipment may become slower, more expensive, or more complicated to release.

What not to ship

Do not put everything into shipping boxes. Some items should stay with you on the plane. Make sure you check the customs requirements from both your departure place and China before packing up.

If your checked baggage is delayed or missing

If your suitcase does not appear on the belt, report it before leaving the airport arrival area. Keep your baggage tags, boarding pass, and luggage photos ready. Ask for the case reference number, the contact method, and the expected delivery process. This is another reason to keep

one change of clothes, medicine, chargers, and essential documents in your carry-on rather than in checked baggage.

Item type	Best practice
Passport and original documents	Keep with you in carry-on luggage
Prescription medicine	Carry personally with supporting note (in both languages) if needed
Lithium batteries and power banks	Carry personally rather than ship
Food and snacks	Avoid shipping in luggage boxes (can just buy them in China too)

Luggage service recommendation

Luggage support option	Link	Suggested use
Luggage shipping guide	Reference link	Decide whether shipping is worth it
Shipping company	One of the largest and supports 175+ countries including China	Door-to-door student luggage option

Standard packing checklist

Packing Principle

Pack for the first two weeks, not for your whole degree. Items that are bulky, easy to buy locally, or room-specific are often better bought after arrival. Another tip is that you can put a sticker on your luggage case for better identification.



Use the checklist below as a practical reference, not a rule. The goal is not to bring your whole life with you. The goal is to arrive with what you need for the first stage.

Category	What to pack
Documents	Passport, visa paperwork, admission letter, insurance proof, accommodation details, flight

	booking, emergency contacts
Money	Bank card, small amount of RMB or emergency cash, one backup payment method (1,000 RMB of cash is enough mostly)
Electronics	Phone, laptop, chargers, plug adapter, power bank, earphones
Clothing	Everyday clothes, one light jacket, one warmer layer if needed, comfortable shoes, sleepwear, underwear (check your destination's weather, our suggestion is that most places are in full summer, also you can just buy new clothes after settling down)
Health	Personal medicine carried with you, glasses or contact lens supplies if needed
First-night basics	Toothbrush, toothpaste, small toiletries, tissues, one change of clothes
Comfort items	Small towel, reusable water bottle, simple snacks for travel, one familiar personal item
Academic items	A few pens, a notebook, transcripts or certificates if needed, and one small folder for campus paperwork
Weather-specific items	Umbrella is needed for summer
Religious or personal comfort items	Small items that support prayer, routine, diet, or emotional comfort during the first month
Travel transit items	Neck pillow, slippers (very useful on the plane), empty water bottle for refill, luggage tag, and one printed address card

Better bought after arrival

Item	Why buying later may be better
Bedding	Dorm bed sizes vary

Laundry supplies	Easy to buy locally
Hangers and storage bins	Easier after seeing the room
Rice cooker or kettle	Only buy if your dorm rules allow it
Large winter items	Depends on your city and actual climate
Large toiletries refill packs	Heavy to carry and easy to buy locally
Desk lamp	Room lighting quality varies and you should see the desk first
Fan or heater	Depends on dorm rules, season, and what is already provided
Kitchen tools or cookware	Many dorms restrict heating equipment or do not support cooking
Bulk cleaning supplies	Better bought after you know your room size and storage space

Culture and etiquette before arrival

You do not need to become an expert in Chinese culture before your flight, but a little awareness helps. Communication may sometimes feel more indirect than what some students are used to. Shared meals are common. If you are not so certain, always ask someone politely with the help of translation tools.

Customs, immigration, and arrival questions

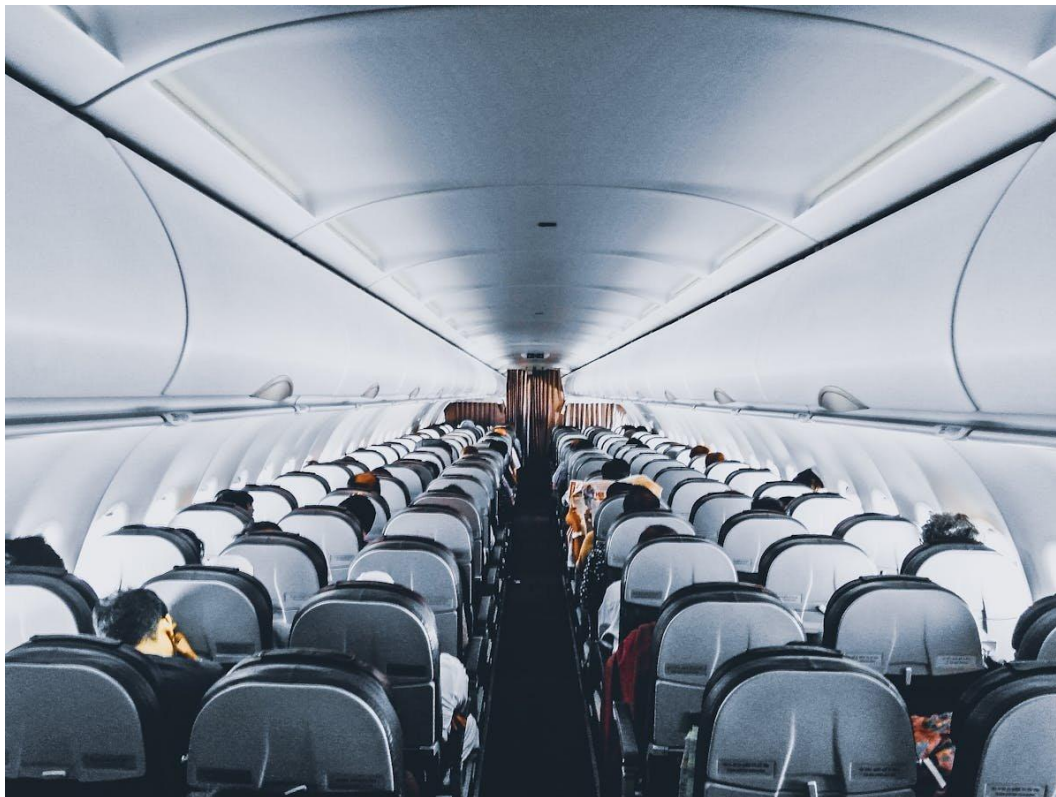
Tips

Short, calm, factual answers usually work best. Officials generally need clarity, not long explanations.

Most airport questions are simple and routine. Officials may ask why you are coming, where you will study, how long you will stay, or where you will sleep on your first night (sometimes they don't ask anything and just let you pass, which is also very common).

Keep your answers short, calm, and consistent with your documents. If you do not understand a question, it is fine to say so politely and show the relevant paper.

Situation	Simple response or action	Why it helps
Immigration asks your purpose	Say that you are coming to study at your university and show the admission document	Short clear answers reduce confusion
Customs asks about goods	Declare honestly if you are carrying restricted or high-value items (you are not likely to, but just in case)	Small mistakes are harder to fix later
You are asked for your first address	Show the hotel or campus address on paper or phone	Useful when tired or nervous
You do not understand the question	Politely ask them to repeat or show your documents	Calm cooperation is usually enough



PART 2 | YOUR FIRST DAYS IN CHINA



Arrival, registration, first priorities, and essential setup

Part 2. Your First Days in China

Your first 72 hours

Your first three days should stay simple. Arrive safely. Reach your accommodation. Keep your documents together. Confirm your university schedule. Make sure you can get online. That is enough for the first stage.

Many new students feel pressure to solve ten things immediately. That is not necessary. The first goal is stability, not speed.

Time	Main focus	What can wait
Day 1	Arrival, accommodation, rest	Most shopping
Days 2 to 3	Registration, campus route, basic connectivity	Non-essential purchases
First week	Room setup, payment, food delivery, parcel routines	Bigger upgrades
First month	Budget, habits, long-term comfort, deeper adjustment	Optional services

From landing to campus

Think of arrival as a sequence rather than one big problem. Land, pass immigration, collect baggage, clear customs, get online, reach your accommodation, inform one trusted person that you arrived, and sleep. Registration and shopping matter, but they work better after this basic sequence is stable. Sometimes your school will also help you settle down, ask them in advance!

Step	What to do	Why it matters
Airport arrival	Follow signs for immigration and baggage claim before checking messages	Moving in the right order prevents confusion
After baggage pickup	Check that you still have passport, phone, wallet, and documents before leaving the	Students often misplace items when tired

	airport	
Before transport	Confirm the destination address and save it in Chinese	Useful for taxi, ride-hailing, or asking staff
At accommodation	Take photos of the address, room number, and building entrance	Makes late-night returns easier
First communication	Send a short arrival message to family or school contact	Let others know you are safe

If you arrive late at night

Late-night arrival is manageable if you simplify it. Choose the safest direct route to your first accommodation, even if it costs more than a daytime option. Keep your phone charged, avoid wandering between unfamiliar pickup points, and do not start non-urgent paperwork after midnight. The best late-night plan is usually to check in, secure your documents, wash, eat something light, and sleep.

Hotel or dorm

If you want to arrive earlier than required, then in some cases school dormitories may not be available even if you have got it ordered. In this case, confirm with your school and you may need to book a hotel for temporary transition. If this is the case, we recommend you to [book your hotel online](#).

Registration

Registration includes university registration, local accommodation or police-related registration, and residence-related procedures depending on your visa and living situation. If the order feels confusing, follow the sequence given by your university instead of guessing.

If you are not sure what to do next, ask the international student office early.

Police or accommodation registration

If you are staying in a hotel or many on-campus residences, the registration process is often handled automatically. If you are staying off campus, with friends, or in a private rental, you may need to complete local registration yourself.

This is not a small detail. Contact the admission office to confirm if you find it uncertain.

Residence-related follow-ups

Some students must complete follow-up procedures after arrival within a limited number of days. If your school tells you there is another application or document stage after arrival, take it seriously and prepare the original papers in advance.

What to do first after arrival

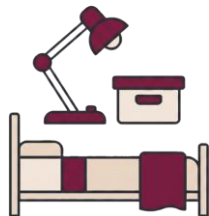
Once you are in your room or hotel, do four things first. Confirm where you need to report. Confirm how to get there. Confirm how you will stay online. Confirm where your passport and papers are. These four steps make everything else much easier.

What to do on your first evening

Task	What good enough looks like
Check documents	Passport, phone, wallet, and key are all in one safe place
Prepare the next morning	Know the reporting time, location, and route
Basic supplies	Have water, one simple meal, toiletries, and sleep items ready
Connectivity	You can open maps and message at least one person
Rest	Do not spend the whole night setting up every app or shopping list



PART 3 | YOUR ROOM AND DAILY SETUP



Dorms, housing, room basics, routines, and daily comfort

Part 3. Your Room and Daily Setup

See the room before buying anything

When you move into a dorm or apartment, do not order everything immediately. Look at the room first. Check the bed size, outlets, desk space, storage, bathroom setup, laundry situation, and dormitory rules. Some things that feel urgent before arrival turn out to be unnecessary once you see the actual room.

Dorm or private housing

If you have access to university dorms, they are often the easiest starting point for a first year because they are usually cheaper and place you close to student life. At the same time, not every student will get a dorm place, and not every dorm is equally comfortable. Some students will end up renting privately, which usually offers more space and privacy but also requires more paperwork and more money.

Housing option	Main advantage	Main trade-off
University dorm	Lower cost, easier first-year setup, close to campus	Less privacy, more rules, variable room quality
Private apartment	More space and freedom	Higher cost, deposits, contracts, more setup work (warning: it is not that easy to rent a house as a foreigner. Choose larger platforms/APPs like Wellcee , Lianjia or seek help from your school). For specific costs, check our <i>Cost-of-Living</i> sections.
Short-term hotel or serviced stay	Good for transition period	Not ideal for long-term living

Secure your dorm place early

Do not assume a dorm room is automatically guaranteed. Some universities, especially in larger cities, may have limited dorm capacity. If your school opens a room booking window, watch it carefully and apply early. Missing a booking deadline can push students into off-campus rental arrangements much earlier than expected.

By the way, most universities might not allow you to choose your roommate, so pay attention to your school's requirement!

What dorm life may actually be like

Many dorms are practical rather than comfortable. You may have a loft bed, shared facilities, communal laundry, building access rules, and separate systems for water or electricity. Some dorms are newer and easier to adapt to. Others may not.

The best approach is to expect a functional room and improve it step by step.

Access control and dorm curfews

Some dormitories have strict access systems. This may mean card entry, a guard at the door, limited visitor access, or late-night rules. In some schools, returning very late may mean your name is recorded. In others, the rules are more relaxed. Check your school's own dorm policy early rather than relying on assumptions.

Utilities and room systems

University dorms are not hotels. In some schools, electricity topped up through an app. Hot water may be charged separately. Laundry is often shared rather than inside the room. Room internet may require a separate campus package or student login. Campus network quality also varies by school and building. Some universities offer smooth and fast access for study and daily use, while others are stricter about device limits, packages, or network timing.

You may need certain tools to have full access to the internet. Due to compliance requirements, this guide do not cover this part. We also suggest you not to share any methods/tools with people who you are not familiar with to avoid any troubles.

Room inspection in the first hour

Before buying upgrades, inspect the room like a checklist rather than a first impression. Check the mattress size, the number of outlets, whether the shower drains well, whether the toilet has the supplies you need, how the door locks, where deliveries are left, and how laundry and drinking water actually work in your building.

Check point	Why to check it early
Bed and mattress size	Prevents buying the wrong bedding
Power outlets and extension needs	Helps you decide whether one adapter is enough
Bathroom and shower setup	Useful before buying slippers, hooks, or storage
Window, light, and noise level	Affects sleep and study comfort quickly
Wi-Fi or campus network access	Needed for classes, maps, and account setup
Laundry and water system	To avoid any extra issues

Roommate etiquette and shared-space basics

In most schools, you will be allocated with a random roommate instead of being able to choose one. Many student problems start as small shared-space habits rather than serious conflicts. In a dorm, it helps to keep your side organized, use earphones at night, dry clothes without blocking shared space, clean up quickly after eating, and ask before changing room routines that affect everyone. Respect matters more than perfect friendship.

If you share a room, communicate early about lights, sleep, guests, food smells, and alarm times. Short polite conversations in the first week can prevent bigger tension later. If there is a problem, describe the issue calmly and seek help from your school.

What to buy first

Start with the items that affect your first night and first week. These usually include bedding, one pillow, power access, basic toiletries, laundry supplies, and a few small room essentials. Buy larger items later, after you understand the space.

First-week room items	Chinese name	Where to buy
Adapter	转接头	<i>It is better to buy online on Taobao or Jingdong. Make sure that it supports your own plugs</i>
Power strip	排插	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Bedding set	床上用品（三件套 or 四件套）	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Pillow	枕头	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Laundry bag	洗衣袋	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Detergent and hangers	洗护用品、衣架	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Bed curtain or privacy setup	床帘	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Water bottle or thermos	热水壶	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Mattress	床垫	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Slippers	拖鞋	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Small desk lamp	小台灯	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Storage hooks or clips	挂钩	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Charging line	充电线	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Cup	杯子	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>
Toilet paper	卫生纸	<i>Local supermarkets/deliveries</i>

Water, electricity, and laundry

Do not assume every dorm works the same way. Drinking water may come from a dispenser, filtered machine, or delivered bottle. Laundry may be in a shared room rather than inside your own room. Dryers may be limited. Hot water may be managed separately. Electricity may require top-ups or may be monitored more closely than some students expect.

These are normal parts of student life. Once you understand the system in your building, daily life becomes much easier.

Canteens and daily meals

Most universities have one or more student canteens, and larger campuses may have several. These canteens are usually the easiest and cheapest place to eat regularly, especially in the first month when you are still adjusting. A canteen meal is often simpler, faster, and more affordable than ordering delivery every day.

Larger universities often also have halal food windows or halal canteens. If this matters to you, ask your school early where these are located. It is common for students to learn very quickly which building or floor has the food that suits them best.

Meal type	Typical student expectation
Breakfast in canteen	Usually inexpensive and quick
Standard lunch or dinner in canteen	Usually affordable for daily use
Off-campus restaurant meal	Usually more expensive than canteen food
Delivery meal	Convenient, but can cost more than regular canteen eating (also be careful on food safety/allergies)

Receiving deliveries at your building

Some dorms allow deliveries only to the gate or lobby. Some use parcel shelves or pickup rooms. Some buildings do not allow riders upstairs. Learn the delivery rule for your campus early. This will save time and prevent missed calls. Also remember that almost all delivery members do not

speak English, so you might need to learn Chinese or use built-in text chat to communicate with them.

Dormitory Appliances

You and your roommates might also need some appliances for daily needs and these appliances are a bit difficult to buy in nearby supermarkets. One alternative is to buy them online and here is a list of the recommended ones.

Appliances	Link
Washing machine	Jingdong Jingdong2
Cloth dryer	Jingdong1 Jingdong2 Taobao
Rice cooker (PLEASE ask your school/classmates if the dormitory allows it)	Jingdong Jingdong2
Induction stove (PLEASE ask your school/classmates if the dormitory allows it)	Jingdong Jingdong2
De-humidifier (for moist places, do not confuse with humidifier)	Jingdong Jingdong2
Humidifier (for drier north China climate)	Jingdong Jingdong2
Projector (for movie nights in your dormitory)	Jingdong Jingdong2
Small fridge (check size before buying)	Jingdong Jingdong2
Robot vacuum cleaner (suits larger dorms)	Jingdong Jingdong2
Noise-cancelling earphones (if you have a roommate who snores)	Jingdong
E-bike (convenient for daily commute, can also buy second-handed ones if there's any)	Jingdong Jingdong2



PART 4 | PHONE, PAYMENT, APPS, DELIVERY, FOOD, AND TRANSPORT



The systems that make daily student life work

Part 4. Phone, Payment, Apps, Delivery, Food, and Transport

Phone first, then everything else

Setup Order

Start with reliable internet connection. Once you are connected, you can then work on, payment, maps, ride-hailing, food delivery, messaging, and campus coordination.



A working phone makes daily life much easier. You will need internet access for maps, messages, registration updates, and app setup. Later, a local number helps with app verification, deliveries, university notices, ride-hailing, and everyday communication.

First, make sure you can get online when you land. Then get a local number after you have enough time and the right documents to complete the process properly.

eSIM first, local number second

If your phone supports eSIM, it can be a useful bridge for the first few days. That gives you enough data to contact family, open maps, reach your hotel, and receive directions before your permanent China number is ready (it also enables you to bypass internet restrictions without extra software). After that, a local +86 number becomes required for app verification, school notifications, delivery calls, and daily student life.

Many universities have telecom booths on or near campus during orientation weeks. Students usually register with their passport and sometimes an admission notice or student ID. In practice, this is often easier and cheaper than buying a tourist SIM at the airport. If your phone does not support ESIM, you can also try the [temporary SIM card here](#) (you need to collect it at the airport counter, so make sure you don't arrive by the middle of the night)

Connectivity option	Link	Suggested use
Phone number and eSIM guide	All-in-one guide here	Understand the best setup order

eSIM provider	Recommended eSIM provider here (with 10% discounts)	For the first few days
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Payment in China

Daily life in China runs on RMB (人民币 Renminbi), also called CNY or yuan. In practice, most daily payments happen digitally, but it is still wise to arrive with a small amount of cash for backup. In your first days, cash can help with small purchases, transport situations, or moments when your app setup is still incomplete.

Many students become anxious because they think they need to set up their payment on day one. You do not. What you need at the start is one reliable way to pay, a little backup cash, and the patience to finish the rest step by step.

In addition, you can just bind your local bank account to Wechat Pay/Alipay for the first few days (it will result in extra service fee though).

Payment point	What students should know
Main daily currency	RMB / CNY / yuan
Best arrival backup	A small amount of cash
Common daily method later	Mobile payment through local apps
Bank account	Usually helpful, but not always needed on day one
School support	Many universities will guide students on how to open a local bank account

Local bank account setup

Not every student needs to open a local bank account immediately, but they must still have one. Bring your passport and student documents when you go, and expect the process to take time.

Some branches are more familiar with international students than others. If possible, go with a friend or choose a branch near your university.

Many universities already know that students need help with this and will usually provide some level of guidance. Follow your school's process if it exists, because it often saves time.

Sending money to China

Students usually use a few different methods when moving money into China. The best choice depends on whether you need speed, simplicity, lower cost, or a direct path into a Chinese bank account or wallet.

Method	Best for	Notes
Wise (recommended)	Practical international transfers	Recommended option for many students (faster and cheaper than bank wires)
International bank transfer	Larger formal transfers	Slower and more bank-dependent
Family transfer to Chinese account	Tuition or living support	Works best after local account setup
Wallet-linked transfer routes	Smaller everyday support	Depends on account and wallet setup

Core apps

Practical Reminder

Only set up the essential apps first. It is better to have a few fully working accounts than many half-finished ones.



App registration: start with the essentials

You do not need to register every app immediately. A practical order is this: first a messaging app, then a payment app, then one shopping app, then one map app, then one ride-hailing app. Entertainment apps can come later.

Apps list

App	Official website	Main use	Registration note
WeChat	https://www.wechat.com/	Messaging, groups, daily life	Core app for student life
Alipay	https://www.alipay.com/	Payment and daily services	Very useful early on
Taobao	https://www.taobao.com/	Shopping	Good for room and daily items
JD	https://www.jd.com/	Shopping	Often good for faster delivery
Pinduoduo (Temu)	https://www.pinduoduo.com/	Shopping	For budget shopping options. Make sure that you only buy from trusted seller
Xianyu	https://www.goofish.com/	Shopping	For buying second-hand goods/services. Most sellers do not speak English, so a translation tool will help. Also verify them before making any decision.
DiDi	https://www.didi.com/	Ride-hailing	Useful for late arrivals and luggage
Gaode Maps / Amap	https://www.amap.com/	Navigation	Helpful for city movement
QQ	https://im.qq.com/	Messaging, account ecosystem	Sometimes still useful for campus or platform login
Meituan	https://www.meituan.com/	Deliveries	For ordering foods and find local restaurants
RedNote	https://www.xiaohongshu.com/	Social media	It has a lot of information for your daily life.

Verification for WeChat and QQ

WeChat and QQ require an extra QR-code verification step during registration for foreign mobile phone numbers or account recovery. In practice, students often ask a friend already in China or the university for help. If you do not know anyone who can assist, there are also paid service communities that sometimes help with verification support.

Verification support option	Link	Note
Optional support	Click here for link	Paid help may be required

Entertainment and Chinese-learning apps

Not every useful app in China is purely practical. Some local entertainment apps are also useful for listening practice, reading comments, getting used to daily expressions, and building comfort with Chinese content. If you are trying to improve your Chinese naturally, entertainment apps can help more than formal study apps alone.

App	Official website	Best use
NetEase Cloud Music	https://music.163.com/	Music, lyrics exposure, casual listening
QQ Music	https://y.qq.com/	Same as above
iQIYI	https://www.iqiyi.com/	Dramas, films, variety shows
bilibili	https://www.bilibili.com/	Video content, learning content, youth culture

These apps are useful not only for entertainment but also for passive language learning. Music apps help with repeated listening and lyrics. Video platforms help you get used to accents, everyday phrasing, subtitles, and internet culture. You can also find games that are popular in China once you are settled down (don't indulge!)

Do not confuse domestic and international versions

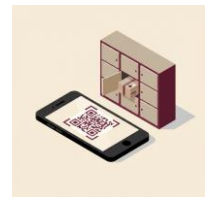
Some major apps have separate domestic and international versions. This can confuse new students. The name may look familiar, but the login system, available features, and account compatibility may be different.

App family	Common difference
Douyin / TikTok	Domestic and international versions are separate
Feishu / Lark	China-focused and international enterprise versions differ
Tencent Meeting / VOOV	Different target users but similar functionalities

If a school, employer, or service in China tells you to use a specific app, check carefully which version they mean before downloading.

How to receive parcels in China

Check only three things first: pickup location, pickup code or 取件码, and collection deadline. Showing the message calmly is often enough, even if your Chinese is limited. Most places may just use self-claim machines and if so, input the pickup code and remember to close the door once you take the items out.



How to pick up a parcel

When you arrive at the pickup point, look for the locker number, shelf, or counter that matches your parcel message.

If staff ask for your code, show them the code. If you are using a locker, follow the screen instructions and enter the code when asked.

If you cannot find your parcel, do not panic. Show the message, the code, and your name or phone number. Most of the time, staff can help quickly.

If the parcel message is only in Chinese, take a screenshot and do not rush. A translation app is usually enough to identify the pickup point, pickup deadline, and code. If the location is still unclear, show the message to a dorm guard, classmate, or parcel room staff member rather than guessing and walking around campus with the wrong code.

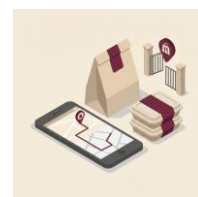
By the way, as mentioned before, the delivery person is very unlikely to speak English.

Parcel situation	What you usually need
Pickup station counter	Pickup code and phone message
Smart locker	Pickup code or QR code
Campus parcel room	Name, phone number, or message
Missed delivery call	Return the call or check the app message

How to order food delivery

Delivery Setup

For your first orders, save one reliable address format, one campus gate or pickup point, and one simple sentence you can send if the rider calls. This reduces stress much more than trying to explain everything live.



Food delivery is one of the easiest ways to settle into daily life, especially during the first month. Keep your first order simple. Choose a clear address. Check whether riders can enter your campus. Watch your phone in case the courier calls.

In many universities, delivery riders may stop at the campus gate or a designated shelf rather than entering the dorm building. Read the delivery message carefully and do not assume it will come directly to your room.

Tips for your first food delivery order

How to Make the First Order

Avoid rush hour, if possible. Also order from a place with many recent reviews (and a real photo showing that the place is real, and stay near your phone until the order is delivered or the rider message is clear.

Order at a normal meal time, not too late. Choose a restaurant with a clear rating and many recent orders. Save the exact address carefully. If your campus has a fixed drop-off point, write that clearly in the note section.

If the delivery rider calls you, stay calm and use the simplest possible information: your gate number, your building name, or the campus pickup shelf. If speaking feels difficult, send a short text, use a translation app, or share the exact location pin from your map app. Simple location language works better than long explanations.

Food and local cuisine

Chinese food is far broader than many new students expect. You do not need to understand all of it immediately. Start with simple, familiar meals, then explore gradually. Campus canteens are often the easiest place to begin because they are convenient, affordable, and part of daily student life.

If your stomach is adjusting, take it slowly. Choose cooked food, simple dishes, and regular meal times. There is no need to be adventurous during your first tired week. If your school is in a major city like Shanghai, then chance is that you can also find your hometown cuisine at ease.

Food safety basics

Tap water is generally not treated as drinking water. Use boiled, filtered, or bottled water instead. For food safety itself, it is generally considered alright, but still remember to buy foods only from school canteens or licensed vendors/restaurants. If you want to try out street vendors, make sure that you choose the popular ones.

Transport

In the first week, keep transport simple. Learn the routes you actually need: your dorm, your academic building, one food area, one store, and the nearest metro or bus stop. Once these routes feel familiar, the city becomes much easier.

A good rule is to master local travel first and long-distance travel second. Once you know how to move between your dorm, campus gate, city centre, and station, daily life becomes much less tiring.

Metro

In many large Chinese cities, the metro is the easiest and most reliable way to get around. It is usually faster and easier to predict than road traffic, especially during rush hour.

When using the metro, check the station name carefully before entering, especially if your city has multiple lines with similar transfer names. Follow the line color, direction, and final destination shown in the app or on the station signs. If you are unsure, stop and check before you go through the gate rather than getting lost after a transfer.

Another beginner tip is to check the exit number before you leave the station. Large stations can have many exits, and taking the wrong one can add twenty minutes of walking. Before you get off the train, look at your maps app for the recommended exit, especially when going to a campus gate, hospital, office building, or railway station entrance.

Metro tip	Why it helps
Save your destination in Amap or another maps app first	It reduces transfer mistakes
Check the last train time at night	Service is not 24 hours
Keep your phone charged	You may need the QR code, app, or map route
Travel light during rush hour if possible	Crowded trains are normal in big cities

Buses

Buses are useful once you know your local area a little better. They are often cheaper than taxis and can be convenient for short routes that do not connect well by metro. At the beginning, buses may feel harder because stops can look similar and the route may change direction quickly, so it is smart to use a maps app and board only after checking the bus number carefully.

If you are nervous about using buses, start during the daytime on a short route. Watch where other passengers tap in, where they get off, and how the stop names appear in the app. After a few trips, buses become much easier to understand.

Taxi and ride-hailing

Taxis and ride-hailing are especially useful when you are carrying luggage, arriving late, moving in bad weather, or going somewhere unfamiliar for the first time. If you use a taxi, it helps to keep your destination on your phone in Chinese. If you use ride-hailing, confirm the pickup point carefully because large stations, malls, and campuses may have specific pickup zones.

When you are tired, lost, or carrying too much, paying a little more for a direct ride is often worth it. The goal is not always to find the cheapest route. Sometimes the best route is the one that gets you there calmly. In most cases, a taxi ride within a city will not exceed 200 RMB even in major cities. Therefore, if you notice something wrong, make sure to seek help in order to confirm if you are scammed or not.

Taxi and ride-hailing safety basics

Situation	Best practice
Before getting in	Confirm the license plate or driver details match the app
When showing destination	Keep the address ready in Chinese on your phone
If you feel unsure	Share your live route or screenshot with a friend
Late-night travel	Use a well-lit pickup point and avoid isolated waiting areas
Payment confusion	Check the app or meter before leaving the car

High-speed rail and longer-distance travel

Many students eventually travel between cities by high-speed rail. This is one of the most practical ways to move around China once your phone, ID documents, and payment systems are more stable. High-speed rail is common, efficient, and worth learning early because it can make weekend trips, visa-related city visits, and holiday travel much easier.

The main idea is simple. Book with your real passport details, arrive at the station early, and follow the signs step by step. Major stations are large and busy, so extra time helps.

High-speed rail step	What students should do
Before booking	Check your passport details carefully
Booking	Use a reliable app or platform and save the ticket details
Before departure	Arrive early for security and platform checks
At the station	Follow signs for ticketing, security, waiting hall, and gate
On arrival	Check the station exit and local transport options before leaving

Practical train advice for students

Do not plan your first train trip too tightly. Large stations can take time to navigate. Bring your passport, keep your phone charged (most high-speed trains have USB portal for charging phones, but still bring portable chargers if you feel unsure), and check the departure station carefully because some cities have more than one major railway station.

If you travel during public holidays or major student travel periods, book early or just avoid them if possible. Spring Festival, late summer arrivals, and National Day periods can become VERY busy.

Transport habits that make student life easier

Map Routine

Save your dorm, academic building, campus gate, nearest hospital, and one trusted pickup point in your map app when you just arrive.

Save your home location, campus gate, dorm area, student office, and nearest hospital in your map app. Learn one metro route, one backup bus route, and one safe ride-hailing pickup point near your dorm. These small habits make the city feel much more manageable.

You do not need to know the entire transport system in your first week. You only need a few reliable routes that work.

How to ask for directions without stress

Directions

The safest habit is to show the address or map pin on your phone first, then ask one short question. In busy places, these pictures work better than words.



When you need directions, the easiest method is usually to show the address or map pin on your phone and ask one small question at a time. Instead of giving a long explanation, ask where the metro entrance is, which exit to take, or whether you are walking in the correct direction. Short questions are easier for both sides.

Situation	Best move
You are near a station but cannot find the entrance	Show the station name and ask where the entrance is
You are inside a station and confused about exits	Show the destination and ask which exit number you need
You miss your stop or take the wrong bus	Get off safely, recheck the map, and restart from your current location
You are speaking to a taxi or security staff member	Show the Chinese address rather than pronouncing it from memory



PART 5 | STUDY, HEALTH, SAFETY, AND STUDENT LIFE



How to keep up with coursework, maintaining wellbeing and safety

Part 5. Study, Health, Safety, and Student Life

Study habits matter early

The first semester usually feels easier when your routine stays simple. Attend class.

Check deadlines early. Ask questions early. Keep your study space usable. Do not wait until you feel completely lost before asking for help. Most schools have helpful teaching assistants or professors. You can also check [our curriculum lists](#) for each university to have a glimpse at what you may need to learn in the next 4 years.

Ask early, not late

If a class is confusing, speak to the teacher, the teaching office, or the international student office while there is still time to solve the problem (or talk in our community, it also helps). Small issues are easier to fix early than during exam season.

Health and wellbeing

It is normal to feel tired, overstimulated, or unsettled in the first weeks. A new country, different food, shared accommodation, and paperwork can all affect your energy. Give yourself time to adjust.

At the same time, do not ignore real problems. If stress, sleep, or health issues are affecting daily life or study, ask for help early. Using support is a practical decision, not a sign of weakness.

You may have also heard about food/water/air quality issues about China online. In most cases, these are exaggerated. However, please pay attention in following aspects:

Food: If you eat at the school cafeteria, it is generally safe. If you cook by yourself, make sure that you follow general hygienic rules. Buy ingredients from trusted sources only and make sure that they are not expired.

Water: DON'T drink tap water. Either drink bottled water or boil the water beforehand.

Air quality: It can be bad during winter, make sure that you prepare some masks just in case. You will know it via weather forecasts. If the air quality is bad, stay away from outdoor activities.

When to seek medical help

Medical Support

If symptoms feel unusual, urgent, or hard to explain, it is usually better to ask for help early. Save the nearest campus clinic, one hospital name, and one person you can message quickly when you feel unwell.

If you have a fever that does not improve, severe stomach pain, trouble breathing, a serious allergic reaction, or any symptom that feels urgent or unusual, seek medical help early rather than waiting alone in your room. Bring your passport, phone, payment method, and insurance information if available. If language is difficult, ask a friend, dorm staff member, or international office to help you reach the right clinic or hospital.

In addition, if you have known allergies/allergen, you may have to be careful. Bring medicines if possible or avoid certain foods that will exacerbate your allergies.

Safety in daily life

Most student life is safe, but common-sense habits still matter. Keep your passport and valuables secure.

Be careful on roads, especially around bikes, scooters, and unfamiliar traffic patterns. Use official taxis or well-known ride-hailing services. If a situation feels wrong, leave it early rather than waiting. Sometimes (especially in smaller cities), you may find curious local people asking you questions or wanting to take a picture with you. Most of them are friendly, but always pay attention to anything strange.

Road and transport awareness

Look carefully before crossing. Watch out for bikes and electric scooters, not only cars. If you are tired or distracted, slow down and cross with extra care. Don't play with your phone while walking.

Scam avoidance and practical caution

In most cases, the most common problems students face are small avoidable issues. These include overpaying for something, taking an unofficial taxi, misunderstanding a payment, or ordering the wrong product online. Read carefully, confirm addresses, and avoid rushing. If you find anything uncertain, consult your school before making any moves.

Food, weather, and environment

China is large, and local conditions vary widely. Some places are hot and humid, some are dry, some are rainy, and some may experience strong seasonal changes. If you choose September intake, then it is very likely that you will face a hot summer with occasional storms. Check your city rather than relying on general advice. Dress for the local climate. Use weather apps. Pay attention during heavy rain, storms, or sudden temperature changes.

Culture and etiquette in daily life

You do not need to get every cultural detail right immediately. What helps most is a respectful tone, patience in shared spaces, and a willingness to adapt. Be polite in queues, careful with shared dorm spaces, and open to different routines around food, communication, and time.

Managing your first-month budget

Budget Tips

A stable first month usually comes from having a sensible budget. Keep a small buffer for transport, household basics, and unexpected costs so you do not feel pressure every week.

The first month often costs more than students expect because it includes bedding, transport, deposit payments, paperwork, small room supplies, and other miscellaneous purchases.

Separate spending into three groups: must-have items for your first week, useful upgrades for your first month, and optional comforts that can wait. Students who pause before buying everything at once usually waste less money and adapt more easily.

Mental wellbeing, adjustment and religion

Adjustment Reminder

Feeling unsettled in the first weeks is common. Protect sleep, eat regularly, keep one routine contact at home, and ask for support before small emotional strain turns into isolation.

Feeling emotional, tired, or unusually quiet in the first weeks is common. Adjustment does not always look dramatic.

Sometimes it looks like poor sleep, low appetite, or losing patience more quickly than usual. Give yourself a stable routine before judging your new life too quickly. Eat regularly, go outside in daylight, keep one contact with home, and ask for help before isolation becomes a habit.

For people with religion beliefs, you can find major religion sites easily in major cities including temples, churches and mosques. China has almost 25% people practicing a religion, so it is alright if you have one. Meanwhile, please respect other people's beliefs and if someone offends yours, seek help from school or other official institutions.

Student life

Daily Life

A strong start does not need to look perfect. If your classes, meals, laundry, phone, and basic matters are functioning, your daily system is already working better than you may feel.

You do not need to feel perfectly settled in your first month. A good start is already enough if you can attend class, eat well enough, do laundry, receive parcels, keep your phone working, and ask for help when needed. That is already progress.

By the way, try reaching out to people who share the same hobbies with you or speak the same/similar languages, this may also help you get your first group of friends here. Also try to seek for students association in China from your own country, such as PPIT for Indonesian students in China.

Legal and Compliance Reminders

What Not to Do

Stay away from drugs (not to be mistaken with medicines) in ANY CASES as it is 100% illegal in China. Don't ever think about taking the risk. For anything uncertain, ask your school's international office!

1. The use of any drugs is strictly prohibited, regardless of their legal status in your home country.
2. Regarding digital safety, avoid accessing NSFW, private or other sensitive material on school or public.
3. If you stay off-campus at a private residence, you must legally register your stay to avoid fines, though staying on campus is managed by the school.
4. Student visas prohibit employment; any internship must be officially documented through the school, as unauthorized work is a visa-revocable offense.
5. Avoid taking photographs of anything military-related, non-public government buildings, or official vehicles on duty.
6. If you plan to drive, note that international driving permits are not recognized, though you may apply for a temporary Chinese license.
7. Finally, when shipping or purchasing items for people overseas, ensure you report them and pay the necessary taxes if the volume exceeds normal personal use.
8. If you find anything suspicious, be alarmed and ask for help from nearby persons.



PART 6 | USEFUL CHINESE, FESTIVALS, TRAVEL, COMMUNITY, AND FAQ



Survival Chinese, support channels, travel, and quick answers

Part 6. Useful Chinese, Festivals, Travel, Community, and FAQ

Common Chinese phrases for daily life

You do not need perfect Chinese to handle daily situations. A few short phrases are often enough. Speak slowly, show your phone if needed, and keep the sentence simple.

Situation	Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning
Excuse me / sorry	不好意思	bù hǎo yì si	Excuse me / sorry
Thank you	谢谢	xiè xie	Thank you
I am a student	我是学生	wǒ shì xué sheng	I am a student
I do not understand	我不太明白	wǒ bú tài míng bai	I do not really understand
Please speak slowly	请说慢一点	qǐng shuō màn yì diǎn	Please speak more slowly
Where is this place	这个地方在哪里	zhè ge dì fang zài nǎ li	Where is this place
I want to go here	我想去这里	wǒ xiǎng qù zhè lǐ	I want to go here
Can you help me	你可以帮我吗	nǐ kě yǐ bāng wǒ ma	Can you help me
Where is the international student office	国际学生办公室在哪里	guó jì xué sheng bàn gōng shì zài nǎ lǐ	Where is the international student office
Which exit should I take	我应该走哪个出口	wǒ yīng gāi zǒu nǎ ge chū kǒu	Which exit should I take
Can you show me on the map	你可以在地图上指给我吗	nǐ kě yǐ zài dì tú shàng zhǐ gěi wǒ ma	Can you show me on the map
Can I pay here by phone	这里可以手机支付吗	zhè lǐ kě yǐ shǒu jī zhī fù ma	Can I pay here by phone
Can you speak English	你会说英文吗	nǐ huì shuō yīng wén ma	Useful to begin a conversation

I will use translation to take to you next	我接下来用翻译跟你对话	wǒ jiē xià lái yòng fān yì gēn nǐ duì huà	Clear confusion
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Chinese for asking directions

Situation	Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning
Where is the metro station	地铁站在哪里	dì tiě zhàn zài nǎ lǐ	Where is the metro station
Which way should I go	我应该往哪边走	wǒ yīng gāi wǎng nǎ biān zǒu	Which way should I go
How far is it from here	离这里远吗	lí zhè lǐ yuǎn ma	Is it far from here
Which gate is this	这是哪个门	zhè shì nǎ ge mén	Which gate is this
I am looking for this address	我在找这个地址	wǒ zài zhǎo zhè ge dì zhǐ	I am looking for this address

Chinese for parcel pickup

Situation	Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning
I am here to pick up a parcel	我来取快递	wǒ lái qǔ kuài dì	I am here to pick up a parcel
This is my pickup code	这是我的取件码	zhè shì wǒ de qǔ jiàn mǎ	This is my pickup code
Where can I collect it	在哪里取	zài nǎ lǐ qǔ	Where do I pick it up
I cannot find my parcel	我找不到我的快递	wǒ zhǎo bú dào wǒ de kuài dì	I cannot find my parcel
Can you check it for me	你可以帮我查一下吗	nǐ kě yǐ bāng wǒ chá yí xià ma	Can you check it for me
My phone number	我的手机号尾号是	wǒ de shǒu jī hào wěi	My phone number

ends in		hào shì	ends in
Please check again	请再帮我查一下	qǐng zài bāng wǒ chá yí xià	Please check again

Chinese for food delivery

Situation	Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning
I ordered food delivery	我点了外卖	wǒ diǎn le wài mài	I ordered delivery
I am coming now	我现在下来	wǒ xiàn zài xià lái	I am coming down now
Please wait a moment	请等一下	qǐng děng yí xià	Please wait a moment
Please leave it at the gate	请放在门口	qǐng fàng zài mén kǒu	Please leave it at the gate
Please leave it at the pickup point	请放在取餐点	qǐng fàng zài qǔ cān diǎn	Please leave it at the pickup point
Which gate are you at	你在哪个门	nǐ zài nǎ ge mén	Which gate are you at
Please call me when you arrive	到了请给我打电话	dào le qǐng gěi wǒ dǎ diàn huà	Please call me when you arrive
I cannot come out right now	我现在不方便出来	wǒ xiàn zài bú fāng biàn chū lái	I cannot come out right now

Chinese for asking for help

Situation	Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning
I need help	我需要帮助	wǒ xū yào bāng zhù	I need help
I am not feeling well	我不太舒服	wǒ bú tài shū fu	I do not feel well
Please call the police	请帮我报警	qǐng bāng wǒ bào jǐng	Please call the police
Please call an ambulance	请帮我叫救护车	qǐng bāng wǒ jiào jiù hù chē	Please call an ambulance

I lost my passport	我的护照丢了	wǒ de hù zhào diū le	I lost my passport
Can you help me find this address	你可以帮我找这个地址吗	nǐ kě yǐ bāng wǒ zhǎo zhè ge dì zhǐ ma	Can you help me find this address
I need the international student office	我需要去国际学生办公室	wǒ xū yào qù guó jì xué sheng bàn gōng shì	I need the international student office

Learning Chinese gradually

Strategy

Do not try to memorize everything at once. Keep a small working set of phrases that solves real daily tasks, then expand from there. ALWAYS use Chinese in real life to better comprehend it.

You do not need to become fluent immediately. Start with useful words, campus phrases, and daily situations.

Learn what helps you buy food, ask directions, talk to staff, and solve small problems. Language learning becomes much easier when it is connected to daily life rather than treated as a separate task.

How to communicate when language is limited

When conversation becomes difficult, reduce the task. Show the written address, show the pickup message, show the route on the map, or type one short sentence into a translation app. Many daily problems are solved faster by shared visual information like gestures. This is especially useful at stations, hospitals, dorm gates, and delivery points.

Festivals and holidays

Travel periods can become crowded, campuses may empty out, and many services follow holiday schedules. It helps to know the major festivals early.

Festival	Usual time	What students should know
Spring Festival / Chinese New	Jan or Feb	The biggest holiday period,

Year		major travel rush
Lantern Festival	After Spring Festival	Cultural celebrations and family atmosphere
Qingming Festival	Spring	Short public holiday in many places
Labor Day	Early May	Another busy travel period
Dragon Boat Festival	Early summer	Traditional holiday, zongzi is common
Mid-Autumn Festival	Sep or Oct	Mooncakes, family gatherings, cultural events
National Day / Golden Week	Early Oct	Heavy travel, busy transport and tourism

Domestic travel between study periods

Travel Timing

Short, nearby trips usually work better than ambitious long-distance plans in your first semester. Travel becomes much easier once your phone, payments, and routine are stable.

China is large, and many students want to travel once they feel more settled. That is a good goal, but it becomes easier after your study routine, phone setup, and payment setup are stable. Start with nearby places first. Learn how to move around your own city before planning bigger trips.

Emergency contacts in China

Emergency Rule

Save the key numbers in advance and practice how to show your address quickly. In urgent situations, location is often the first useful piece of information.

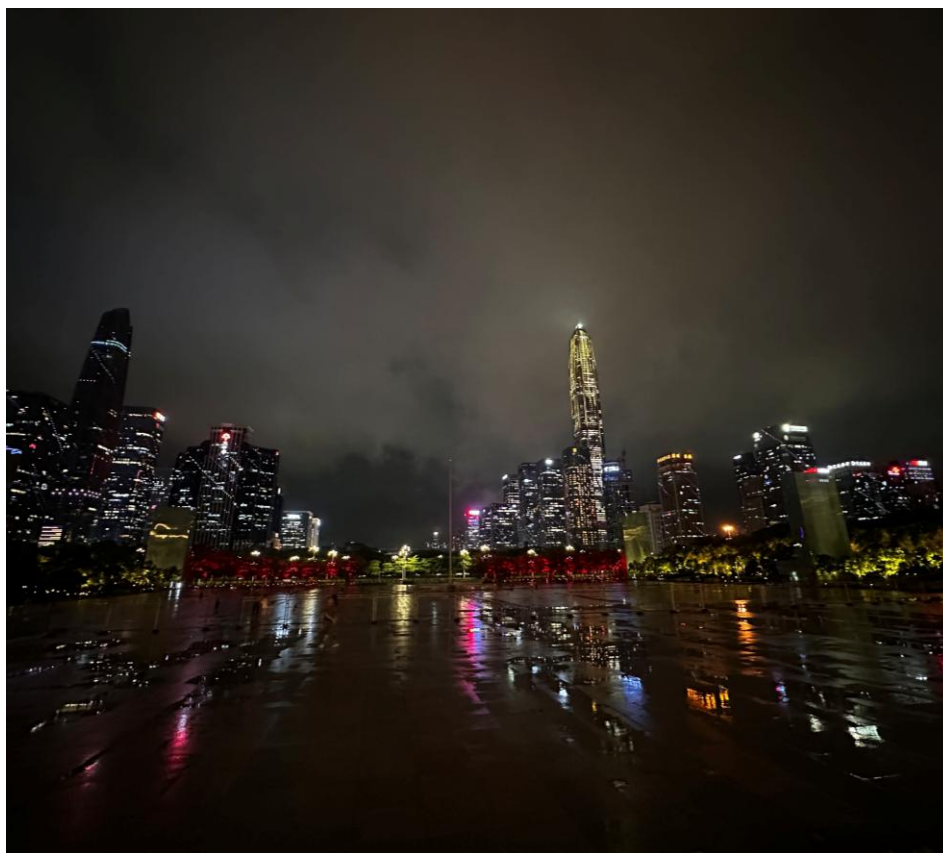
Save these numbers in your phone as soon as you arrive. If there is immediate danger, call first, then contact your university. These numbers mostly support English.

Service	Number	When to use it
Police	110	Crime, danger, urgent police help
Fire	119	Fire or smoke emergency
Ambulance	120	Medical emergency
Traffic accident	122	Road traffic emergency
Police SMS alarm	12110	Text-based police contact where useful
Your country's China embassy/consulate phone number	N/A	When coming across difficult scenarios and need help from your own country. Sometimes for major nations, they also have consulates in your place, make sure you keep their contacts just in case.

Personal emergency checklist

Save your university international office number, dorm office number, one teacher or coordinator contact, and one trusted friend in your phone.

Keep a passport copy and your home emergency contact easy to find. If you need help in an emergency, say your location first and speak in short sentences.



PART 7 | COST OF LIVING



How much does it really cost?

Part 7. Cost of Living

Location is the Key

Your living expenses in China will depend mostly on two factors: your city tier and your housing choice. While everyday items like public transport and canteen food are highly affordable nationwide, rent and lifestyle choices can change your monthly budget greatly.

Estimated Cost by City Tier

(Excluding tuition, which typically ranges from 20,000 to 40,000 RMB annually for self-funded students, assuming that you live in the school dormitory)

City tier	Cities (example)	Estimated budget
Tier 1	Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen	2,500 – 5,000 RMB
Tier 2	Nanjing, Hangzhou, Chengdu, Wuhan	2,000 – 3,500 RMB
Tier 3	Hefei, Dalian, Smaller regional hubs	1,800 – 3,000 RMB

Core Expenses

Do not let small costs add up invisibly. Here is what an average month looks like if you maintain a balanced student lifestyle:

Expense Category	Typical Monthly Cost (RMB)	Practical Advice
Accommodation (Dorm)	400 – 1,200 RMB	On-campus dorms are cheaper and mostly with good quality. The main downside is that you cannot choose your roommate mostly. Secure your spot as soon as the booking window opens.
Accommodation (Off-Campus)	1,500 – 4,000 RMB	Varies widely by city. Usually requires 6 months of deposit upfront for foreigners, also need to register to the police station. If your budget is tight, rent together with other classmates with shared public spaces.
Food & Groceries	1,200 – 1,800 RMB	That’s approximately 40 – 60 yuan per day, you mostly eat at school cafeteria but can also go out or buy deliveries every now and then.
Transport (Metro/Bus)	100 – 300 RMB	Public transport is exceptionally cheap; a single metro ride is usually 3–8 RMB.
Phone & Data	50 – 150 RMB	Local 5G data is affordable, usually running 60–120 RMB for a massive data package. Make sure that you ask if there’s a student discount.
Socializing & Leisure	800 – 1,000 RMB	Treating friends to a meal or grabbing bubble tea are normal parts of building your circle.

What are the Food Options (If Eating out)

TL; DR

School cafeterias are around 20-50% cheaper than meals outside, so if you run on a tight budget, stick to your cafeteria. If you crave your hometown’s cuisines, chances are that their prices are even higher.

Many students plan to live exclusively on 20 to 30 RMB per day by eating only at the university canteen. Yes, a full, delicious canteen meal is incredibly cheap (usually between 8 and 15 RMB), but eating the same food every day can quickly become dull, so we made a basic list on different food options that you may have (REFERENCE ONLY):

Food Type	Typical Cost Per Person	Practical Advice
Burger/pizza/generic “western cuisines”	40 – 200 RMB	Sometimes people in China will categorize all European and North American foods into “Western Cuisines” or 西餐 (yes, sometimes they even add Macdonalds into the list). If you want certain ones like Belgium/Georgian/Greek, then it is very hard to find unless in megacities like Beijing/Shanghai/Guangzhou. Price varies greatly, from affordable ones to fine dining ones (can be more expensive)
South Asian Cuisines	60 – 130 RMB	Rarer than “western cuisines” mentioned above. You are more likely to encounter them in megacities. Price is higher due to their scarcity.
Middle East / North Africa / Turkish /Central Asian Cuisines	60 – 130 RMB	Similar to South Asian ones, but if you are in certain cities with a large population of people from these places (such as Yiwu or Guangzhou), then it might be far more affordable and authentic. You may also see many of them in provinces like Xinjiang or in cities like Xi’An too.
Other African Cuisines	70 – 130 RMB	Most of them are located in business cities, again such as Guangzhou or Yiwu.
South East Asia Cuisines	50 – 100 RMB	There are a lot of Thailand restaurants in almost all major cities. As for Vietnam, Indonesia and other countries, the options are not so much but you can still find one if you live in Tier 1 or Tier 2 places.
Japanese/Korean Cuisines	40 – 100RMB	There are a lot of them. You will be able to find one no matter where you are.
Central/South American Cuisines	70 – 150 RMB	You can find many Mexican foods or Brazilian barbeques in major cities, but for other cuisines a bit harder to find.

First-Month Budgets

For the first month, prepare some extra money. Beyond your rent and tuition, you shall also buy some essentials—like proper blankets, pillows, laundry bins, and toiletries—and these can be a big expenditure if added up.

Prepare an extra 2,000 to 3,000 RMB for your first month. You will need this for bedding, residence permit medical checks (approx. 650 RMB), mandatory health insurance (800 RMB/year), and security deposits.

Renting Outside Costs

If you choose to rent off-campus, this will be your largest monthly expense. The rental market in China typically operates on a 2 to 6-months deposit payment structure. You will need to have a significant amount of cash ready. You may also need to pay around 1-2 months of agent fees if you rent through an agent. Make sure that you sign a contract with the rental company or the landlord, so that you can get your money back when the contract expires.

Expense Item	Tier 1 City	Tier 2 City	Notes
Shared Apartment (1 Room)	1,800 – 4,000 RMB/month	1,500 – 2,800 RMB/month	Varies heavily based on location.
Private Studio/1BR	6,000 – 10,000+ RMB/month	3,000 – 5,000 RMB/month	Ideal for privacy, but significantly increases budget.
Utilities (Water, Electricity, Gas)	150 – 400 RMB/month	150 – 400 RMB/month	Summer air conditioning and winter heating will increase your electricity costs.
Home Internet (Wi-Fi)	60 – 120 RMB/month	40 – 100 RMB/month	Often bundled with your local phone plan or paid annually.

Medical Costs

China has a multi-tiered healthcare system. As an international student, you need to buy the standard [800 RMB/year insurance plan](#), and to make the full use of it, here is an estimated cost list for different clinics/hospitals (most expenses can be reimbursed but please consult the insurance company beforehand).

Medical Facility	Estimated Cost	What to Expect
Campus Clinic	10 – 50 RMB	Extremely cheap registration fee. Best for cold medicine or minor first aid.
Public Hospital (Standard)	100 – 400 RMB	Includes registration (10–50 RMB) and basic meds. Long queues; bring a translation app.
Public Hospital (VIP/International)	500 – 1,500 RMB	Higher registration fee (200–500 RMB), but doctors usually speak English. Shorter wait times.
Private International Clinic	1,200 – 3,000+ RMB	Good service and fully English-speaking, but very expensive. Don't go there if your budget is limited, unless in emergency.

Remember to:

Save Your Fapiao: Always keep your official receipts (发票 Fapiao) and medical records for insurance reimbursement.

Bring Familiar Meds: Bring a small supply of your preferred over-the-counter medicines for headaches, allergies, or stomach issues from home, as local equivalents may have different active ingredients.

Entertainment & Leisure Costs

Student life is not just about studying. Managing your entertainment budget is key to maintaining a good work-life balance without running out of money by the end of the month.

Entertainment Type	Estimated Cost (RMB)	Practical Note
Digital Subscriptions (Music/Video)	15 – 30 RMB/month	Apps like NetEase Cloud Music, QQ Music, iQIYI, or Bilibili are incredibly cheap compared to Western equivalents.
Cinema Ticket	40 – 80 RMB	Cheaper if booked through mini-programs on WeChat or Alipay rather than at the counter.
KTV (Karaoke) Outing	50 – 150 RMB/person	Often cheaper in the afternoons or when split among a large group.
Gaming/Internet Cafes	10 – 25 RMB/hour	High-end esports cafes are very popular and affordable for PC gaming.
Museums & Parks	0 – 50 RMB	Most public parks and state museums are free, though you usually need to book entry via WeChat mini-programs in advance using your passport.

Stay Connected

Keep This Guide Useful

The handbook works best with saved contacts, bookmarked links, and one support channel you can actually reach when something changes unexpectedly.

A handbook is helpful, but students often need ongoing guidance after the first reading. A small support ecosystem makes the guide more useful. If you want updates, video guides, community discussion, or student-facing content, keep the following channels saved.

Channel	Best use
Website	Main information hub
Discord	Ask questions and connect with students (this is the largest overseas students in China community)
YouTube	Watch guide videos and practical explainers
Instagram	Student updates and lighter daily content
Facebook	Updates and broader community visibility

FAQ

Question	Short answer
Do I need to finish every app before I arrive?	No. Get online first, then add the essentials step by step.
Should I bring cash?	Yes, bring a small amount as backup even if you plan to pay mostly by phone later.
Can I use foreign currency directly in daily life?	Daily payments in China are generally made in RMB.
Do I need a Chinese bank account immediately?	Not ASAP, but you will need one very soon.
Will the school help with bank account setup?	Many universities usually provide some guidance.
What if WeChat or QQ asks for verification?	Ask a friend in China or your school first. Paid support may exist if needed.
Is food delivery normal on campus?	Yes, but many campuses have their own pickup rules.
Do large universities usually have halal food?	Many larger campuses do offer halal windows or halal canteens, but ask your school directly.
Is a dorm room always guaranteed?	Not always. Some schools have limited supply, so watch dorm booking notices carefully.
Do I need to speak Chinese immediately?	No. A few useful phrases and a translation app are enough at the beginning.
Is it normal to feel overwhelmed in the first weeks?	Yes. New systems, new language, and new routines take time.
What should I do if I am lost or confused?	Slow down, confirm your location, and contact your school or a trusted person.
What should I keep in my carry-on bag	Passport, documents, medicine, chargers, valuables, one change of clothes, and anything you cannot afford to lose on day one.
What if my luggage is delayed	Report it before leaving the airport, keep the case number, and make sure your essential

	items are already in your carry-on.
What if I arrive very late at night	Go directly to your first accommodation, avoid non-essential errands, and finish setup the next morning.
Do I need to know how to answer customs questions	Only at a simple level. Keep your answers short, truthful, and consistent with your documents.
How do I ask for directions if my Chinese is weak	Show the address on your phone, ask one short question, and let the map do most of the work.
Should I buy everything for my room immediately	No. Inspect the room first, buy the first-night basics, and upgrade step by step.
What should I do if I feel homesick or overwhelmed	Keep a simple routine, contact one trusted person, and ask your school or community for help early.

Final note

You do not need to understand everything about China in your first week. You only need a few things to work well enough: your documents, your room, your phone, your payment method, your food, your route to class, and your support contacts. Once these are in place, the rest of student life becomes much easier. Also remember the following tips:

1. Ask questions when feeling uncertain. Best is to ask someone who is actually responsible for your question. If they do not reply, seek help from communities or classmates.
2. Prepare for unexpected things caused by cultural differences. You will come across some interesting side quests so keep lighthearted about it with no stress.
3. Be curious about this new part of life journey.

Wish you a pleasant study in China adventure!

Regards,

Konrad

CrosslineEdu