

Teaching in China

An objective guide for the China-curious teacher

May 2023





Introduction



Thoughts on teaching in China, from founder of Venture, Julian Fisher

For three years China has isolated itself from the world. This has had huge implications for the way China is perceived by the rest of the world, as well as by the international community living there. Although many businesses, students and professionals uprooted and left

China, international teachers suffered a uniquely hard blow, as the impact of Covid was compounded by harder line policies around international education.

So what does today's China look like for teachers looking to work abroad? China as a place to live and work is very different to what it was before 2019. For one, policy has taken a very new direction, and not one that supports the international teaching community. That said, there is much about living in China that remains the same. Two facets in particular stand out:

China has a unique dynamism. Despite bleak economic predictions the world over, China is still set to grow by 5.2% this year. Although as a teacher China's economic growth won't be felt in your every day, you will benefit from the energy and momentum it creates. One day a new university will pop up near where you live, or a parent in your school will open a massive vegan restaurant on a whim, or one of your friends will find themselves being a keynote speaker at an international conference. Energy and excitement abound and it's infectious.

China is a great place to start and raise a family. As an intensely family-centric society, parents and grandparents are respected above all else. China is incredibly safe, whatever age or gender you are. It offers a comfortable life, as most teachers can afford some form of home support, and the ease of travel is a huge plus.

You'll note that neither of these mention students, schools or education in the country. There's more on those later in this guide. For now, please begin what we hope is an objective, comprehensive and engaging overview of teaching in China.

Education by numbers

500,000+

Schools in China (including kindergartens)

800+

Internationally oriented schools in China

293million +

Million students in China

1million +

Foreign teachers in China (pre-pandemic level)

18million +

Teachers in China (including kindergartens)

3000+

Higher education institutes in China

11million +

University graduates each year in China



Education in China

The education landscape in China is complex and ever-changing. This guide provides you with the core information you need if you are considering China as a place to live and work.

School types

China has three main school types, and each of them offer very different working experiences.

Foreign Passport Holder Schools:

Schools for the children of foreign nationals, such as embassy staff or employees in multinationals. They are often well-established and have a diverse student body.

Private Schools:

These schools are for Chinese nationals and have to deliver the Chinese national curriculum between ages 6-15. Many are bilingual and offer a more international education experience. All students intend to study higher education overseas.

Public Schools:

Many public schools have international high school departments where students might undertake qualifications such as A-Levels or AP, in preparation for study overseas.



Perks and packages

The million dollar question about teaching in China is "how much can I get paid?" The answer is not straightforward. Generally speaking, as a teacher, you will receive around 20,000-35,000RMB a month. This is about 3-4,000USD a month. What makes this complicated, is that many schools also offer housing, free schooling, flights home and many other perks that can supplement your earnings. It is not uncommon for young teaching couples to use a job in China as a springboard to enter the property market in their home country.

The legal stuff

To receive a work permit in China you will need at least two-years post study work experience and, if you're applying for a teaching role, a teaching certification. You'll also need a clean criminal record and a health check to enter the country. There are also rather strict rules around teachers teaching in their "native" tongue; German schools hiring German nationals etc. This can get a bit murky when it comes to English, but generally speaking a school that uses English as a medium of instruction will require you to come from a native English speaking country (although this definition may vary).

The positives

ACAMIS, an organisation which represents 66 international schools in China and they asked teachers and leaders why they liked teaching in China. Below are the nine most common responses with quotes from teachers:



Campus Life

"Before I came here teaching was just a job, here it is a way of life with so many activities and ways to be involved in the school and community"



Students

"Students are amazing. They are hungry to learn, come to class prepared, participate in discussions, ask questions and love to do projects"



Lifestyle

"It is still incredibly affordable to live in China. On an international teacher salary you can live comfortably, travel and enjoy life to the fullest"



Safety

"Family-friendly country - personal safety in China is exceptional. Crime is exceptionally low. You can go out without fear at night"



Travel

"China is massive. The diverse landscape, architecture and nature across the country is incredible. You can spend years and still have some amazing areas on your list"



People

"The people who live and work here are great. Almost everyone here is helpful, generous with their time, and keen to learn from each other"



Culture

"I never imagined 5000+ years of history being treasured and preserved as it is here. Museums of all kinds are present in every city."



Professional Development

"There are opportunities for leadership and middle leadership positions that would perhaps not be available in the home country"



Technology

"Whether it be at work or in daily life, technology makes life here cheap and convenient: Meituan, Didi, TaoBao, etc."



LIFESTYLE

We surveyed 150 teachers in China and asked them two very important questions:

1. What is your favourite Chinese food?
2. Where is your favourite Chinese tourist destination?

FOOD: TOP 10



PLACES: TOP 5

Yunnan
云南

52%

Guilin
桂林

36%

Chengdu
成都

35%

Sanya
三亚

33%

Xinjiang
新疆

31%

There's lots of great reasons to come to China, and food and travel sit very high up on teachers' lists! When you decide to visit, try to explore as much as you can, from stinky tofu (it really is very stinky) in the Muslim Quarter of Xi'an, to trying spicy hotpot in your favourite Chengdu restaurant, embrace every opportunity you get.





Relevance

China matters. It is the largest trading partner of almost every country on earth, it produces much of what we use in our everyday lives, and its influence on the world grows every day.

Purpose

All teaching is important, but in an increasingly fractured world, it can feel like teaching in China has added value. The children you teach will play a role in influencing the future peace and prosperity of the planet.

Energy

There is nowhere on earth that has the same energy, buzz and excitement of China. People think big, experiment and make ideas happen. It can be overwhelming, but it can also make every day an adventure.

Language

Mandarin is the most widely spoken language in the world, understood by 12.3% of the global population. Being able to speak Chinese, even a little bit, makes you stand out from the crowd.

Our own thoughts

In our years working in education and with teachers from all over the world, we have discovered several other key pulling factors for professionals working in China:



Adventure

Travel one hour from any major city and you could find yourself in an untrodden jungle, ancient burial site, or award-winning modern library.

Stories for life

Life in China is unpredictable, and often mystifying. You'll frequently find yourself in situations where you can only laugh. One of us has a very clear memory of a head of history at one of our schools being forced by burly men to mark the head of a barbecued goat on the steppes of Inner Mongolia during a field trip while all the children stood on their chairs chanting his name.

Friendship

The friends you make in China are friends for life, regardless of your background or nationality. With money and time to spend, expats live rich and varied social lives in China.

Opportunity

While for many, teaching is a lifetime profession, there are plenty of teachers in China who teach for a few years before moving on to other roles. We've seen everything from pizza chefs, to charity directors, to civil servants.

Safety

We're repeating this one from the page before because we just cannot emphasise enough. As a man or woman, you can walk through the streets anywhere, at any time, and feel completely safe. The same is true for your kids too. You stop noticing this after a while, and take it for granted, but it is something that is very hard to find anywhere else in the world.

The challenges

Language

While it's likely that many people in your school will speak English, learning Chinese is very difficult, and not a language you will learn through osmosis, but without it there may be times when you feel like an outsider.

Geopolitics

Depending on where you are from, it is likely that there will be some raised eyebrows when you say you are moving to China. We'd suggest that living here may change many preconceptions, but if you're worried about geopolitical instability, this will always be a big factor.

Pressure

Chinese parents have a lot of expectations for their children and this can often ramp up the pressure on schools. Finding a school that has a robust system to manage these pressures is extremely important.

Change

When an economy has grown this fast, change becomes the only constant. Regular changes in staff, regulation and direction in schools may test your notion that you're "just an easy going person"

Culture

China is an old culture and way things are done here are different. Not better, or worse, just different. And that can grate. Especially when you're in the middle of nowhere wishing Chinese bread wasn't sweet.

Intensity

The flipside of the excitement of China is its relative intensity. You'll quickly have to find your peaceful happy place and make sure you keep it secret from your millions of neighbours.

Difference

You will be different. In big Chinese cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou that won't matter. But you'll have to get used to being stared at while grandparents whisper to their grandchildren, "look, a foreigner."

Homesickness

This is not unique to China, but it's something to consider with any international posting. You'll be away from family and friends and all the comforts of life back home.



Pillars of life in China

Below are nine things which become integral to the lives of all foreigners living in China.



WeChat

A blessing and a curse, WeChat takes care of everything in your China life: work, bills, taxis, entertainment. Becoming a versatile user is key to smooth living in China.



Sharing Food

In China, you share food. Wave goodbye to food envy, and hello to the Lazy Susan. But also the person in the same train carriage who will peel some fruit for you. Selfish eaters stay home!



Old People

Old people run the streets. Whether they're square dancing, crowding around a mahjong table, or hustling for the best veg, you don't mess with the grannies in China.



Delivery

Delivery in China is simply unrivalled. Fast, affordable, it can even bring you the birthday candles you forgot to buy.



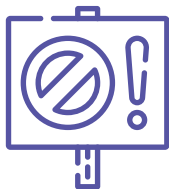
Bureaucracy

There will be times that you are queuing in a bank or applying for a visa extension that you will question why fifteen pieces of paper need to be individually stamped.



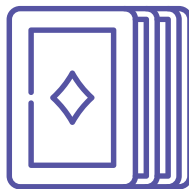
Bystanders

If two people are having a fight, or you dropped your shopping, or someone is crying on a park bench, it's entirely normal for a large crowd of bystanders to gather around and watch.



Access

China has its own digital ecosystem. This doesn't just mean you can't access Facebook. It means no WhatsApp, Google, Instagram... oh and you can't download VPN once you're in China, so once you're out, you're out.



Vices

Depending on where you come from, and your lifestyle, China could well be a detox. There are no drugs, no gambling, and you won't be adding to your collection of assault rifles



Convenience

We're boldly going to say China is the most convenient country in the world. Smashed your phone? A guy will come to your café, fix it, and only charge you 20USD.

A close-up photograph of a hand moving a wooden Go piece on a board. The board is a light-colored cloth with a grid pattern. Several other wooden pieces are scattered on the board, some with green characters and some with red characters. A dark blue rectangular box is positioned on the left side of the image, partially obscuring the text.

Honest Perspectives





On students in China

Name

Jeffrey Futcher

School name

Ningbo Xiaoshi High School

Job role

IBDP Chemistry Teacher

Age

32

Nationality

USA

Favourite food in China

Liáng Pí - 凉皮 cold agar noodle, often mixed with tofu, various vegetables, black vinegar and sesame oil

Favourite place you've visited in China

Chaoshan in Guangdong



How are students different in China from your home country?

In my experience, no matter the level, there are two main differences between the students that I have taught in China and the United States. One difference is the attitude towards teachers and school, the other towards scores and results. I have rarely during my time in China, had any serious issues with classroom management, behaviour problems or disrespectful students. As for scores and results, Chinese students are extremely results orientated. Of course this is not unique to China, but the level that both teachers and parents focus on assessments is much greater than anything I have experienced in the USA.

What challenges do you face teaching students in China?

The primary challenge is related to language. This is because academically my students tend to be quite strong, so they have found tricks and shortcuts to help learn content. These may include study guides and extra tuition. There is nothing wrong with either of these methods, but what tends to happen is they require additional language support at school. However, as stated above, results are often considered most important, so there are many skills, particularly basic language skills that are not emphasized. In the short term most Chinese students successfully get through the hoops, but if taken out of a bilingual or primarily Chinese environment, they will likely struggle. An important thing to remember is all educators of EAL students are responsible for students' success in their academic subject, as well as language acquisition.

What surprised you about teaching in China?

It served as a reminder that students all across the world have a lot in common. As previously mentioned, my students are very driven and hardworking, even more so when you consider that all of the complex skills they are learning is all done in a second language. When I first started teaching in China, students seemed very different to those back home, but in the end, they are still teenagers dealing with the social and academic pressures that are associated with growing up, and it is our job to help with that transition. This was not a realization I came to right away, as when I first started I focused a lot on the differences, and there is of course the language and culture barrier, but once you get past that they are like any other students.



What's been your best professional development (PD) experience?

My best professional development experience has undoubtedly been the iSENCO course. The support I received from the course tutors was exceptional, and I truly appreciated the sense of community among fellow participants from around the world, not just in China. This global network provided a platform for sharing ideas and supporting one another in our shared goal of enhancing our students' learning experiences. I gained a deeper understanding of the specific challenges surrounding inclusive education within the Chinese educational landscape. Exploring inclusion in China in greater depth allowed me to develop a more comprehensive perspective on how to effectively address the diverse learning needs of my students and create an inclusive classroom environment. The iSENCO course not only deepened my understanding of special educational needs coordination but also broadened my perspectives on inclusive education. The opportunity to collaborate and exchange insights with educators from diverse backgrounds has been invaluable, and it has greatly enriched my professional practice. Overall, the iSENCO course has been an outstanding PD experience that has empowered me to better support my learners and has connected me with a global community of passionate educators.

What limitations are there for teachers in China?

While teaching in China, teachers may encounter certain challenges adjusting to unfamiliar. These challenges can include language barriers, cultural differences, or educational systems. However, these limitations can be overcome through effective communication, cultural understanding, and embracing the diversity of the classroom. By proactively seeking ways to adapt teaching strategies and collaborating with local educators, teachers can create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. It is important to approach these limitations with a positive mindset, recognising them as chances to expand our teaching skills and foster cross-cultural understanding.

What opportunities have you had for PD?

I had the opportunity to undertake the iSENCO course, which has allowed me to train and specialise as a SENCO. This comprehensive training has provided me with valuable knowledge and skills to effectively support and coordinate the needs of students with special educational requirements within international settings. We have regular in-school training led by colleagues who have experience from all over the world and also from colleagues visiting from Sedbergh UK. We are a COBIS accredited school which means we have access to training from within the COBIS network.

on... professional development

Name

Rebecca Taylor

School name

Sedbergh School Fuzhou

Job role

Primary School Teacher / Trainee SENCO

Age

34

Nationality

British

Favourite food in China

Huǒ Guō 火锅 - Hotpot

Favourite place you've visited in China

The Tulou Houses, Fujian



on... sustainability

Name

Lydon Jaftha

School name

Wellington College International Shanghai

Job role

Geography Teacher

Environmental Systems and Societies Teacher

Age

32

Nationality

South African

Favourite food in China

Xiǎo Lóng Xiā 小龙虾 – Cooked crayfish

Favourite place you've visited in China

Baisha, Lijiang, Yunnan



What makes you optimistic about the future of sustainability in schools in China?

The fact that sustainability is a fast-growing sector and concept not only within schools but various other industries makes me hugely optimistic. An example of this is the growing development of ESG (Environmental, Sustainable, Governance) policies within trans-national corporations in China and I am confident that these will become compulsory among local companies as well. Knowledge will 'filter' down to the school level, creating more interest and curiosity have, I noticed my school's increase in awareness around this topic. Over the past month, during morning tutor time tutors were required to assist pupils in completing art projects and other initiatives to celebrate Earth month. We also have a Sustainable committee co-curricular activity for Upper Prep and Senior School, for which there has been keen interest from my Year 9 to Year 11 students, especially those intending to study environment systems and societies in IB. The daily exposure students receive about this topic, whether it's regarding the cafeteria, rubbish bins, coffee shop, corridors and classrooms, makes me excited among the future of sustainability.

What initiatives have you engaged in?

I volunteered to run the Sustainable Committee for the Senior School department. The reason I joined the committee was to help provide pupils with a platform to express their interest in the field of sustainability. The initiative allows pupils to take on projects that they would not necessarily have the opportunity to do in traditional subjects. Produce a podcast related to environmental sustainability and submit it to the New York Times podcast competition. I am also engaged in larger, longer-term projects for the school. For example, I am developing a GIS course for pupils which would allow them to create geographic map layouts related to the environmental sustainability of the school and local community and provide long term career prospects related to this field.

What makes sustainability challenging in China?

Firstly, sustainability it is still a relatively new area within curricula in China. Because of this, the true concept of sustainability is often obscured and confused with the term 'recycling'. Educating pupils that recycling is just one facet of sustainability is at times challenging. Secondly, China faces a complex balancing act between achieving mass urbanisation whilst having to maintain environmental accountability among carbon-intensive industries. Bringing the concept of sustainability to the fore of industrial policies on the local and national scale is going to be a long and slow process.



In what ways is safety in China different to that of your home country?

Most people within and outside of the United States with access to social media are aware of the issues surrounding gun violence and laws. When people envision "safety" in the U.S., it is often their first thought. Gun violence in the U.S. is alarming and a real threat. With living in China there is definitely a sense of security and lowered anxiety when it comes to gun violence. They aren't non-existent in China, but the average person does not own one, and many police officers walking the street do not carry them. It can be comforting knowing that if a problem does occur, it is not something you need to be worried about.

I love my country, but there are many problems that can make it uncomfortable and even unpleasant to live there. Being a minority female in particular, only makes the situation worse. As a minority, you will experience prejudice and even racism in many places. I have experienced this in the U.S. and China alike, however I have not experienced violence or fear as a result of my race here in China. For me, that is really a reassuring feeling. As a result, I think the way I live has changed. I have left my house at 1am to go to the gym, I socialize much more and I am not so hyper-vigilant about observing my surroundings, which has allowed me to have a more peaceful life.

There is never a situation that is completely good or bad. Here, one area of concern, not necessarily safety related, is your status as the foreigner, or 老外. You are an outsider and WILL feel that during your time here. The extent can vary in intensity depending on location, but it is ever present. You will not forget you are foreign, but you will never be in danger because you are foreign.

What risks are there in China?

In general, there just aren't the same dangers here compared to what I have experienced back at home. One of the top reasons I have stayed in China so long is that it is safety. The things I used to worry about, I just don't need to worry about here. Of course no country is perfect, but China is safer in many ways.

However, there can indeed be risks in China. I would say, there is a danger in staying too long and letting time "pass you by". I have often heard China, referred to as a "time machine"; it is definitely a place where you can lose track of how much time you have really spent here. It is not necessarily a bad thing, but you can begin to be out of touch with your own home country. Yes, I watch the news and connect with friends back home through social media, but the truth is I live thousands of miles away in a place that is VERY different from the United States. It can result with you being "out of touch" with your roots.

Lastly, the "dangers" are more related to lifestyle. After Covid-19, many areas, especially big cities, were left with a drastically smaller foreign population. Thus, social circles and groups got a lot smaller. Living here, I already felt that I was back in university, but the epidemic did not help social circles. It very much so became an instance of seeing the same people in the same places. Yet, on the other hand, this has personally inspired me to branch out more from expat social circles and look for friends that I would not have been likely to have back home.

A teacher on... safety

What has surprised you about living in China?

Everything, literally everything. When I first got on my flight to Beijing in 2016, I thought I would only be here for a year. I imagined that I would make no friends, have no love life, no possibility of mobility at my job, no life changing experiences and basically just exist here. I had family and friends who were unfamiliar with China telling me that I would be living a totally "controlled" life, the food would be terrible, and I would be living basically a rural "backwards" life. It couldn't have been farther from the truth. I found so many friends at work, outside of work, and traveling. I found a great job which I have worked at for over 6 years and been promoted several times. I have had wonderful life changing experiences here. I live a convenient life with most things being digitized and facilitated through WeChat and Alipay. My entire experience in China has surprised me and I will never regret my decision to come here.

Name

Shani Brown

School name

JPED Academy

Job role

Director of Studies

Age

32

Nationality

American

Favourite food in China

Zhá Jiàng Miàn 炸酱面 - a refreshing noodle dish with pork, soy sauce and fresh cucumber.

Favourite place you've visited in China

ediecun, Yunnan.



A teacher on... leaving

Name

Christopher May-Miller

School name

British School of Beijing

Job role

Maths and Physics Teacher

Age

29

Nationality

British

Favourite food in China

Lanzhou pulled noodles (Lán Zhōu Lā Miàn)
兰州拉面, hand-pulled noodles

Favourite place you've visited in China

Monasteries and nomadic herders in Qinghai.



What have been the biggest challenges?

Discounting Covid-19 and the language, the system is (understandably) set up for Chinese people not foreigners, so there are many simple tasks which are made much harder. There are lots of things which require a Chinese ID, including ordering things from a pharmacy or buying certain tickets. Any time when your name is required, you have to remember which order they put your names, did they put your middle name, did they include the hyphen (my surname is double-barrelled), did they use capital letters etc. If there's one small difference, the system doesn't accept it as the same name and you have to start again (sometimes after weeks of processing). This leads to everything taking so much longer than it should and it can wear you down after a while. China also has a strange relationship with technology where everything is on an app or a mini-programme, when sometimes it would be much easier if it wasn't, while at the same time lots of paper documents with the correct stamps and bells and whistles are needed for anything official like banking and visas.

Why are you leaving China?

My wife and I have been in China for 4 years and while we have loved our time here, we are ready for the next chapter of our lives. Over the last few years, travel, being one of the main reasons we chose to move to China, has been extremely difficult... so we are going to take a long trip through South America before settling down closer to the UK. I now have a young niece and I would like to be part of her life, and we want to have children soon ourselves and for them to be close to our families. If China was closer to the UK and we could take cheap quick flights home, I don't think we would be leaving!

My overall feeling is that I have completed most of the things I wanted to in China and I am ready for what is next. There are so many things I will miss from China but I think it's better to leave and miss those things than to stay too long and leave with a negative opinion of the experience.

What will you remember about your experience?

The thing I will miss the most is the community here. The expat community in Beijing is a village inside a mega-city and the relationships I have formed here have been extra strong because we have spent a lot of time cut off from the rest of the world; my friends really have become my family. Playing rugby here has also allowed me to have great Chinese friends and I have loved being part of that shared multinational community too. My Chinese has improved hugely but even when I spoke very little I could still have real friendships and great fun with my Chinese friends, who always made me feel welcome. More generally from China I have learned that nothing comes as you expect it to – whether that's people you meet, places you go, food you order, or something you buy online – but it is always an experience and you just have to embrace it! That way, you get a lot of good stories at the end of it!



Why are teaching qualifications important?

Teaching qualifications provide you with an invaluable opportunity to engage with relevant and recent research on teaching and learning practices. You also gain the opportunity to work with a mentor that will guide you to reach your potential as a teacher, whilst having a rich environment to explore how pedagogy applies to your students. Even if you have been teaching in an 'unqualified' role for some time undertaking a qualification will only enhance your practice, whether that be through learning about how and why you teach in specific ways or gaining a support network. There are a range of teaching qualifications including Undergraduate degrees in primary or secondary education, Postgraduate Certificates in Education (PGCE), Postgraduate Diplomas and Masters level qualifications. Whether you undertake a subject specialist qualification for English language teaching (CELTA, Cert TESOL), a PGCE or another appropriate teaching qualification

it will support your development as a teacher in the classroom and through your career. Professional recognition, important as it sets out standards, but also for potential employers and learners to know that they have a teacher who knows what they are doing. Qualifying as a teacher through a UK qualification may lead to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) for British schools or you may choose not to go down this route. There are a wide range of qualifications to choose from and the UK government have launched IQTS for those working in international schools who wish to teach in British schools in the UK or overseas.

Being a better reflective practitioner has not only helped my students but also my career progression.


What experience do you have with people becoming teachers in China?

I was first involved in teacher training in China in 2002. I was employed in Guangdong to support and develop English knowledge for teachers in China prior to the Olympics. I led a team of 9 teachers, based in Guangzhou, who provided rapid subject specific skills, through the Callan Method, to ensure that communication skills in English were fluent and that learners were confident in their abilities. We worked across 5 cities and trained around 2000 teachers, and worked with a number of schools to support their children's learning.

We rotated our teachers through the cities to ensure that learners were not dependent on only one accent and could communicate broadly in English with people from different countries. One of the issues we found was that variations in accent or dialect could hinder communication and our team of teachers, purposefully, had different accents and dialects to ensure that the brain and ear was accustomed to variations in pronunciation.

I have also been involved in working with Chinese teachers coming to the UK to develop teaching and learning practices through formal and informal training. Some Chinese students came to my university to undertake a PGCE for initial teacher training, whilst others came to undertake short continuing professional development courses to compare and contrast teaching approaches in the UK and China. We also had a number of students who then went on to study for Masters degrees and doctorates in enhancing teaching and learning.

In my current university we have Chinese students training to become teachers on a PGCE or Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) in Education route, and also English language students who are training to become teachers so that they can work in China and other countries in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) role or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). In addition, we have teachers across South East Asia developing their teaching skills through distance learning PGCEs and Masters programmes.



on... teaching

Name

Duncan Cross, PhD, QTLS, PFHEA, NTF

School name

University of Sunderland

Job role

Head of School of Education

Favourite food in China

Ròu Mò Shāo Qié Zi 肉末烧茄子 - aubergine with minced pork

Favourite place you've visited in China

Summer Palace, Beijing

Do your students mainly come straight from undergrad courses, or other professions entirely?

We see a broad range of students coming to teacher training. We have undergraduate teaching programmes that allow a longer period of teaching practice and develop subject knowledge alongside pedagogic practice. There are also postgraduate programmes that follow on from an undergraduate degree. We also have a large number of students who have decided to study later, and also those who would like a complete career change. I have seen a hairdresser who decided to go to university later in life to undertake an English Degree and then a PGCE very successfully, as well as a solicitor who decided to make a career change to become a Maths teacher.

Each of these paths bring different qualities to their teaching and allow them to engage and teach children and adults in a variety of educational settings. This enriches not only the learners' journey but also our colleagues as we can learn so much from each other in our teaching practices.



Questions and Answers

1. Is China anti-foreigner?

People in China are generally more curious than xenophobic. But it's a little more complex depending on where you are, where you're from, and how you act. In Shanghai people won't bat an eyelid if a foreigner walks past, while in the countryside people will generally be far more interested and friendly. In terms of nationality, some countries, will stir more interest than others. Ultimately though, it comes down to how you act. Most Chinese are patriotic (and occasionally nationalistic) and proud of their country and its development over the past thirty years. Show an interest, act respectfully, be polite, and tell them you're a teacher, and you'll find that China is an extremely safe, welcoming and open place to live.

2. Can I practice my religion in China?

Religious practices are permitted in China, and you will find mosques, churches and temples across the country. Although religion does not have a marked presence in cities, and the communities are relatively small and quiet.

3. Do I need to speak Chinese?

Although the answer is "no, you don't need it" your life will certainly be a lot easier if you can count, ask for milk in your team and tell a taxi to slow down. That said, if you ask most teachers who've been here a long time a common regret is that their Chinese is better. Since Mandarin doesn't have an alphabet it can seem impenetrable at first, and certainly requires patience.

As such it's best to be methodical in your learning, do a crash course and find yourself some Chinese friends to practice with!

4. Will I have a good quality of life?

Most teacher salaries are well above the average salary in a lot of teachers' home countries. That means that you don't have to worry about eating out regularly or taking trips to Thailand during the holidays. More importantly, China is arguably the most convenience-driven country on earth. Getting food or groceries delivered, getting something repaired at home, or finding someone to drive you to the mountains are all extremely easy. So yes, you will have a quality of life that will take some beating elsewhere.

5. How does politics affect life in China?

In China, the influence of the Party is tangible, be that on roads, or in schools. Political posters are the norm, middle school children study politics, and some of your colleagues will be Party members. What this means to your everyday life is very little. But during times like zero-covid, or important political meetings, it will become a lot clearer how much all these things matter.

6. How easy it is to find communities?

There are a lot of sports groups, choirs, drama groups and other activities in most cities. And something incredible in China is just how open people are to try



and learn new things. Do you practice circus skills? Propose an after-work activity and you'll have no trouble finding people to get involved.

7. Is it difficult to be vegan in China?

China can be amazing for vegetarians because they love cooking and vegetables and have a long history of Buddhism. You'll need to double check though and specifically ask for absolutely zero meat because often approaches to vegetarianism/veganism can be quite flexible. Like, "this doesn't have much meat in it so don't worry."

8. Is the air-quality really that bad?

Had you asked six months ago, we would've confidently said that the air-quality is great. Recently though, there have been some serious sandstorms in the north coming from the Gobi desert. In general, things in China get better every year and pollution is one of them. And once you download the apps that show you pollution levels in different cities around the world you'll quickly realise, "What? Paris is more polluted than Shenyang today?!"

9. Does the government track everything I do?

I guess we'll find out the answer to this after we release this guide! But honestly, unless you are planning on launching a rival Party, or robbing a bank, the answer is probably no. Or at the very least, no more than most

social media platforms and governments elsewhere. Do be careful though, because you are an ambassador for your country and foreigners in general. So don't get drunk and pee on a temple because millions of angry netizens are generally way scarier than the government.

10. If you were me, would you go and teach in China?

It is possible that you get unlucky and have a terrible time. But it is much more than likely you will have the experience of a lifetime. It's fast, fun, interesting and a genuine adventure almost every day. And in the words of the youth: YOLO.

Thank you!

If you are considering teaching in China but aren't sure which school is right for you, please reach out to us.

We would like to say a big thank you to the community of teachers in China who helped us put this guide together, as well as the following schools and universities who contributed to this guide: Ningbo Xiaoshi High School, Sedbergh School Fuzhou, Wellington College International Shanghai, JPED Academy and the University of Sunderland.

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