



THE OXFORD UNDERGRADUATE HANDBOOK
FOR STUDYING ABROAD IN

BEIJING





Hi guys,

This booklet has been produced by undergraduates in the year above to tell you about what will happen when you go to Beijing to study. This period is, for most people, their only opportunity (during the degree) to spend a long time in China and to gain some fluency in Chinese. From third year onwards, the Oxford course places more focus on history and Classical Chinese, so take advantage of the opportunity to get your modern Chinese up to scratch and gain a decent speaking ability in Chinese to take away with you when you finish your degree. Obviously, you'll also want to have a good time when you're out there and make the most of the experience, as it is also a change of scene from the rigours of Oxford. This booklet should tell you most of what you need to know before you leave and what to do when you arrive, and it will hopefully help you make the most of living in Beijing. It may be fairly long, but we highly recommend that you use it as a reference guide when you are in Beijing—especially the "Step-By-Step Guide to Setting Up Your Life" section.

Some things can't be covered by the booklet, so if you find yourself in a really bizarre situation in China, or if you just want a little clarification, the editors who worked on this edition of the guide are:

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We have various little specialisms in dealing with things Chinese—contact Peter for any information about technology, and if you just want a healthy dose of caustic sarcasm then Cameron's your man. But in general you can get in touch with any of us, and if we need to pass you on to someone else, we will. A few of our year didn't work on the guide, but they're still perfectly nice people, so by all means seek them out. And now there's only one thing left to say:

Good luck, guys! We hope you have a ball!

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Before You Go

Before launching into the specifics of the preparation process, here is an idea of what the structure of your year will look like. This is the programme for the current second years—while it of course will not be absolutely identical for you, it should hopefully serve as a rough guide.

2 Sept	Registration at Beida	You will be welcomed by the International Students Coordinator, Wáng Fāng (王芳). Afterwards, you will meet your new language partners, have a group photo taken and be given a welcoming lunch.
3 Sept	First day of classes/ collections	We had collections on the third, then a sort of weird break before classes started on the ninth
Sept-Oct	Beijing tours/activities arranged by Beida	Staff from the university will organise (free!) tours around some of the touristic sites of the city. Among these might be the Forbidden City, an acrobatics show at Chaoyang Theatre, Peking Opera, a Hutong tour, the Temple of Heaven and the Great Wall.
28 Sept-6 Oct	National Week	You will have a week off class. These dates are approximate.
20 Dec (approx!)	Classes for the first term end	You <i>may</i> have one or two Beida exams just before the end of term, but we didn't. This date is approximate—more will be discussed in the “Flights” section about how to account for your flights, should you wish to return to the UK for the Christmas break.
16 Feb	Classes for the second term begin	Again, just an estimated date. You will also have collections set by Oxford around this date.
Apr-May	Possible day/week off	There may be a possibility of a mid-term break here, still unsure!
before 27 Jun	The week of final Beida exams	

The prospect of spending an entire year abroad is incredibly exciting, and your time in China will likely be more fantastic than you can imagine. Having said that, relocating to China is something of a mammoth task, and there are certainly things that you need to account for well in advance. A variety of considerations (such as flights, visa procedures, health checks, insurance, documentation, money, housing arrangements, etc.) need to be dealt with, or at least should have some thought, before leaving the UK. Chinese visa bureaucracy is definitely better to be anticipated than not!

From our experience, it is highly recommended that you head to China about two weeks before you are needed at Beida, so we would recommend arriving around the 18th August. We would advise this so strongly because it will be much easier to sort out living arrangements (which requires lots of *cash* as deposit payments) without the commitment of having to be in class every day. The “Documentation/Temporary Residence Permit” section has more information on what you'll be obliged to do in Beijing so early on.

You might be booked to stay in Beida's on-campus Sháoyuán (勺园) accommodation for either one week or two. You may alternatively decide to find accommodation nearer Wudaokou (which is a popular district for university students), where many students decide to live. This will be discussed in more detail in the "Arriving" section.

Flights

When you have decided when you want to fly to China, try to book your flights as soon as you can—the sooner you start to enquire about fares, the more likely you are to find a good deal. If you travel in groups, Beida have sent out a minibus to collect people from the airport in recent years (for groups of five or more). Alternative transport from the airport is not too difficult. You can use the Airport Express train which connects to the Beijing Subway for just 27RMB (25 for the Airport Express line, two for the onward journey on the main subway) or you can go with taxis from the well-organised taxi rank at the airport. If you've never been to Beijing, get the yellow ones—the men who specifically ask you for a taxi are black cabs (黑车 hēichē) drivers and will rip you off. Taxis will inevitably be pricier (still only about 100RMB), but a lot more convenient if you have a lot of luggage or are unfamiliar with the city. There is more about getting to the city in the "Arriving" section.

If you want to come home for the Christmas break, you will have four individual flights to book. You could book this:

- in two segments (a **return ticket** for the beginning and end of the first term, then a **return ticket** for the beginning and end of the second term) or;
- in three segments (any arrangement of **two singles** and **one return**).

If you book it in two segments, you can be limited by Beida's somewhat unpredictable change of term dates/exam arrangements and thus have to change flight dates, but if you book it in three segments, it could be easier to overcome these problems by only booking the segments whose dates you are sure of. Some students have also felt the need to pop home for a while in April or May as well, in which case just three return flights is best. The problem is that people often decide quite late that they need that break, so keep that in mind.

Consider what you want to do at the end of the year—do you want to come home straight after term time ends or will you want to travel around China? It is a really good opportunity to travel around and the Beida course doesn't really allow much time for any long excursions. The Oxford Careers Service also advertises great opportunities for internships and teaching work in China over the summer. This summer two students at least will be interning through programs provided by the careers service based in Beijing and Shanghai, and many students have done the Qinghua University summer schools both before and after their year at Beida. These might create issues with visa extensions, but at that the time of writing we haven't figured out how to solve that... Ask in a few months time once we've done our placements.

Student Finance England may offer you reimbursement for a few flights. It seems that since tuition fees went up this has only been for students who are entitled to finance based on parental

income (i.e. those who get more than the minimum maintenance loan of about £3,500 per annum). It's best to have a look and see if you're entitled to help with travel.

Booking flights

As far as booking flights is concerned, there are a number of options.

- **Use a flight comparison website.** There are a good number of these websites out there. The ones we would recommend are <http://www.fly.com/>, <http://www.skyscanner.net/>, <http://www.travelocity.co.uk/>, <http://www.kayak.co.uk/> and <http://www.travelsupermarket.com/>. These sites work by searching independent booking agents to find the cheapest deal, which may well be cheaper than booking directly through the airline's own website. It is definitely a good idea to use these websites to make sure you're getting the cheapest possible price, although be aware that some comparison sites are better than others, and they do not always guarantee that you get the absolute cheapest price. Often many prices shown are predictions and might be subject to change—Skyscanner seems to show some 'live' prices which suggests that they're the guaranteed price.
- **Book directly through the airline's own website.** Once you have decided which airline to book with (if you have a certain preference: see the "Airlines" section below), use their website to book the flight. It is a good idea to compare the prices shown on the airline's own website with those shown on flight comparison websites. Some people say that it's easier to manage meals, seating, or changing flights if you book directly through the airline, but students haven't had too many problems doing all these things if they booked through another website. You get a reference number for the airline regardless.
- **Travel agents.** STA is always a popular choice if you choose to go through an agent. They often have discounted fares for students, and apparently they have a branch in Shanghai, which some find handy. Another option is to use a Chinese travel agent—there is one in Oxford on Park End Street and several in London—which could save you money on your flights.

Airlines

China Southern/KLM/Air France all seem to be in a partnership. You can easily get a quick flight from Manchester or London to Paris or Amsterdam, then a direct flight to Beijing. Sometimes people haven't had personal screens or anything for entertainment, but the leg space is surprisingly good and most flights for us were around £550 return, so a pretty damn good price for quite a short travel time. If you are on a China Southern flight from your European airport the staff might have poor English, but it's a good chance to warm up on your language before the grind. Note that some of us have found changing flight dates at short notice particularly tough on China Southern.

Emirates has received great reviews from those of us who have travelled with them. They have good food and service, comfortable planes and, importantly, a generous baggage allowance (30kg); however, you might be paying upwards of £700 for a return flight. The other disadvantage is that reaching Beijing takes longer as you have to transfer in Dubai (around 20 hours to Beijing is

the standard). However, if you don't mind the longer journey time, the baggage allowance definitely makes Emirates a good option to consider.

Aeroflot, the Russian flag carrier, is usually returned as the outright winner on low prices. The quality of service is adequate, but not as good as Emirates, and Moscow is not as nice an airport to transfer at as Dubai, though it is quite a direct route from Western Europe. Their baggage allowance is standard, at 23kg.

British Airways is often the most convenient option, although not always the cheapest. You can (obviously) fly directly from London, which is a big plus. Its luggage allowance is 23kg, as well as a laptop bag to supplement your cabin baggage. Additional baggage is fairly cheap (£30~ if flying direct), which could be useful at the end of the year. Its flight change policy is a £100 flat fee.

Finnair is an excellent option too. You transfer at Helsinki Vantaa, their hub, but this is pretty painless. The service is excellent, and baggage allowance is standard.

n.b. If any of you want to earn airmiles (and you'll accrue a ton of them, so do), you may want to consider looking at airlines that work together in one of the major global alliances. These are OneWorld (BA, Finnair, but also a bunch of other carriers like American Airlines), the Star Alliance (Air China, Lufthansa, United Airlines, etc.) and the heroically named Sky Team (Aeroflot, China Airlines, China Southern, KLM, Air France and others). This is obviously a secondary consideration, but given that miles can be used on any airline within one of these alliances it could be worth considering if the prices are all very similar.

Insurance

Get travel insurance for the time you are in China, over and above the coverage that Oxford will provide you with (this doesn't cover you for any trips you may take, or for time in China after the end of the year). Make sure you have adequate medical coverage, as if you need to see a doctor in China you will have to pay for it. There is a clinic in Beida, but as the doctors there do not speak English and seem to practice a mixture of Chinese and Western medicine they may not be able to help you. There are private medical facilities in Beijing with English speaking doctors who will charge around \$70 for a consultation (see the "Health" section). This is claimable under travel insurance.

If you are taking a laptop or other pieces of expensive equipment, this can be covered too, although there may be an add-on charge to your basic insurance. Consider a separate laptop policy: these will generally cover your laptop worldwide for anything, including accidental damage, for one year for about £50.

You can either get a whole year policy or can book your year's cover in segments. It may be more convenient and cheaper to consider doing it in segments, as you will obviously not need insurance for the Christmas period, should you wish to come home. Also, it may be more convenient to book it in certain segments as your travel dates and plans may change for the end of the year. Many insurance companies indicate that they do not allow you to take out cover whilst you are abroad, so all the organisation for insurance policies must be done in the UK.

When finding a policy, the main things you'll want included are medical, baggage cover, personal money (cash), cancellations of flights etc., and you may want to check if cameras, laptops and phones are included. Internet insurers are often cheaper, though some companies such as **Endsleigh** offer discounts to students. <http://www.moneysupermarket.com/insurance/> is a decent comparison site. <http://www.yearabroadinsurance.com/> is also a possibility: at least one of us uses them (though, not having had to make a claim, we can't really speak to how good they'll be come crunch time), and they seem to offer well-tailored coverage. Their limits are good, and you can also get an eighteen month policy, which may be useful if you're arriving in China early/staying on for the whole summer. Moreover, as you'll be going for their "Worldwide" policy, they'll cover any trips you take during the year, even if you go out of China. The main message on insurance is: don't skimp on this. You should expect to pay *at minimum* £250, and possibly £350 or more, for the total of the year's insurance. Again, Student Finance England might reimburse up to 40% of the insurance cost for you if you are entitled to it. See the "Student Finance Reimbursement" section for more details.

Having said this, the insurance that the university offers is absolutely brilliant. Several students have had to go to hospital with quite bad experiences, and if a friend rings up the insurance company at the time, or a while before if you're seeing a GP, then everything should be covered and you merely have to send back a scan of a claim form to Oxford. The best hospital in town is the United Family Hospital, 和睦家医院 Hémùjiā yīyuàn (see the "Health" section). All of the staff have brilliant English and it's well kitted-out. The Oxford programme may only cover you if you are in Beijing, but it will cover you for almost any health issue in the city, so why not go to the best place? The only issue is that you need to create an account to make any payment, for which you need your passport and maybe your insurance reference. Not having to sort this while dying of some disease means taking a friend along can be a great idea.

A Step-By-Step Guide to Setting Up Your Life

This section is a brief run-through of what to expect in your first few weeks in China. It is not overly detailed; for further information you should refer to the specific sections later on in the guide. Like death and taxes, all these tasks are unavoidable, and best dealt with swiftly and under anaesthetic. Airline gin will do.

- Initial visa
- Arriving at Beida
- Getting a Mobile Phone
- Residence Permits
- Getting Somewhere to Live

Initial visa

This is all mentioned in the “Documentation” section below. Just to give you a sneak preview:

- You apply for your initial visa in the UK, having stated your intent to study in China for up to one year.
- For this, you will have to pay about £70.
- You will have to submit whatever the website states that they require, usually application form, passport photos, admission letter and form from Beida, passport. Of course, this means that you should pick a time to organise this when you don’t need your passport for anything else.
- You will pre-book an appointment online, if you plan to go in person, and diligently bring along everything.
- The centre administrators will tell you when your visa will be processed and ready for collection (perhaps after a sporting attempt to scare you by pointing out all the mistakes you’ve made filling the form in). Go back to the centre to pick up your passport, together with visa, and pay the fee. Your visa will be labelled [Validity: 000], meaning your permitted length of stay is yet to be determined. You are going to determine it later by applying for a Temporary Residence Permit—more on this to follow. For now, you have a visa which permits you to be in China for up to 30 days from your day of entry. It will be valid for entry for **3 months** after you applied for it.

Arriving at Beida

Of course, for more details on this, the “Arriving” section below is a lot more thorough. You should have made arrangements for the lodging for the first days/weeks, either at Beida’s Shaoyuan accommodation or somewhere else arranged independently.

When you come out of the airport, you have pretty much two options wherever you are going:

1. Get into a registered taxi. These are recognisable by their broad yellow stripe on a red/blue/green base. Look out for the yellow stripe, plenty of official-looking certificates and driver IDs inside the cab, a registration plate bearing “B 京” and a “TAXI” Toblerone-thing on top. They’re really cheap compared to British ones, so it should only cost you just under 100RMB (£10) to get to Beida. Don’t get into an unregistered people carrier. Be careful at this point—make sure that the taxi has a meter when you get in (and that the driver uses it), even if their livery looks legit.
2. Take the Airport Express line, and then the subway (地铁). It’s very well signposted, and you’ll be able to get to Beida and Wudaokou both with just two transfers.

It’s probably not a great idea to plan exciting travel before term. Uses up days of your initial visa, and unless you’re a seasoned gappie you’ll probably find it totally knackered, especially as if you leave Beijing immediately you’ll be lugging all of your bags about. Take it from us, yurts and camels start looking more grim than great when you haven’t slept in 48 hours and are dragging everything you own behind you.

Getting a Mobile Phone

It might look odd to list this so early on, but being contactable will be necessary for some forms from Beida, the health check people and your estate agent and landlord, not to mention your poor long-suffering language partner. Here’s the procedure:

- You wander into a phone shop and ask for the cheapest handset they have that can text (发短信 fā duǎnxìn) in Chinese, and ask for a pay-as-you-go SIM card (智能卡 zhìnéngkǎ). Get them to set it up. China Mobile is the least expensive. You can also just get a SIM to go in your smartphone brought from the UK, as long as its unlocked.
- You can buy more credit from newspaper stands on the street, but your first wodge should last a few weeks.

Residence Permits

This is all in the “Documentation” section, but in short, it will involve:

- your passport and Chinese visa, the university’s initial letter of invitation and the JW202 form;
- the health check;
- a trip to the local police station with your landlord to obtain a Housing Registration Certificate;
- a fair lump of money;
- all of the above getting handed over to the university’s visa office.

Getting somewhere to live

This should of course be done in conjunction with the previous step, and involves:

- Considering what kind of accommodation you’d like to pursue. If you’re brave enough for a homestay, you should have it organised either to be there when you arrive (and then carry

out the residence permit rigmarole when you're with the family), or organise it while you're in China to start after you've already arrived.

- Many of you will still be looking for a flat. Do this by calling into an estate agent (for example 我爱我家 or HomeLink, and then proceed according to the above section).

The "Accommodation" section will have a lot more useful information.

Documentation

Application form for Beida

This should be given to you by the department. You fill it in and give it to Rosanna, and the department sends it out to Beida for you. You will then receive an **admission letter and JW202 form**, which you will need in order to get your visa and residency permit.

Visa

To enter China you will need a **visa**. The details regarding visa applications seem to change fairly regularly, so for the most up-to-date information check the website:

www.visaforchina.org/

As of **March 2013**, you will need a type **X** visa. (Tick the box "Multiple entries, staying up to 12 months" on the application form.) This allows you to **enter China once and then apply for your Temporary Residence Permit**. There is more on this joyous process under the heading *Temporary Residence Permit* below.

You can either apply by post or you can apply in person at the centre. The website explains the procedures for both, but both start by filling in an online application form and printing the result. Then gather up your passport, admission letter, application form and anything else the website asks for, saddle up your most noble steed and submit it all. You will have to make photocopies of most of the aforementioned documents, including pages of your passport etc.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

- **BEWARE: you can no longer get same day or next day service.**
- Book your appointment well in advance; don't wait for the end of Prelims to go online/ phone them (though this doesn't apply—and see below—if you will have plenty of time in the UK in the summer)
- Make sure you have enough time to allow for a **failed application**. If your application is rejected you will need to reapply, so the Centre recommends you apply 1 month before departure. However, the Centre asks that you do not apply more than 3 months before entry into China.
- Do not be late for your submission appointment! Otherwise, you may not be able to submit your application.

- Generally, the Visa Centre wants you to submit applications yourself. Contact them to check if it is okay for one person to deliver several applications. Tel: **0207 842 0960**.
- If anything happens to your passport, this can make your visa invalid. Make sure you tell Mr Kan and contact the visa office as soon as possible.
- The location of the London centre changed in 2012 to: 12 Old Jewry, London, EC2R 8DU, in the City; leave a bit of time to find the right street/bring a map. It's a one-stop tube ride from Waterloo. Tel: **0207 710 6000**. You can get someone else to pick up your visa, but they will need the collection receipt.

Bear in mind that if you aren't doing anything over the summer or will have a few weeks in which you are in the UK and don't need your passport in July, **it might be worth submitting your application in July** rather than June because this will give you three months **from then** to enter the country and begin the residency permit application process. This editor submitted his application at the centre in London on the 4th of June, meaning he only had until the 4th of September to get into China and submit all the stuff for the residency application, because you have three months from when the visa is processed. This may have meant that strictly speaking he was living illegally for a few weeks, because even though he was organised and managed to give all the forms to the Beida Visa Office/Exit and Entry Administration Bureau in early September, he only got his passport with the residency permit back at the end of September (having been told it wouldn't be ready until the 8th of October). This all means that there will often be a small period when you have stayed past the three month deadline from when your visa was issued but before you get your passport back with the residency permit in it. No-one is likely to ask you for your passport in this period unless you try to buy train tickets, but it may give you a bit of extra peace of mind if you know that, despite being passport-less, you are still within the time you have been given to convert the visa.

Also don't forget that you will need your passport to go travelling (if you plan to) in the summer, to China or elsewhere, so factor visa processing times into your travel plans—the fact that I was abroad from the end of 9th week of Trinity until mid-August almost continuously was the reason I had to apply so early, as I wouldn't have been able to do the application/go to London in my summer holiday.

Temporary Residence Permit (居留许可)

This is effectively the visa that you will live on for the year. It is obtained by first applying for an 'X' visa in your own country, then entering China on this, and then converting the 'X' visa to a Temporary Residence Permit. Your 'X' visa will allow you to enter once within the three months after it was given to you. It will probably say that it is valid (i.e. allows you to be in China after that one entry) for "000" days. Please note, this actually means "28 days after entry"! Within this time, you must get your application for a Temporary Residence Permit in to the visa office in Beida (reached via your course coordinator). It is ambiguous whether you "*submit* your application" or "*receive* your Permit" within this time; it is likelier the latter. It would be a good idea to be prompt, just to be safe, especially as the office only works four days a week and takes public holidays off, of which there are a few in September. Our coordinator took breaks from 11am-1pm, and the corridor necessary to access the visa office was usually locked during these times.

The procedure for receiving your Temporary Residence Permit is, alas, tortuous, intricate, and pretty rigid. However, we hope that this order of events will remove some of the confusion we experienced and help everything run smoothly.

FOR THE TEMPORARY RESIDENCE PERMIT, YOU WILL REQUIRE THE FOLLOWING:

- passport;
- initial ('X') visa;
- letter of admission to Beida (fancy red letterhead, collected from Rosanna in Trinity Term);
- JW202 form (arrived with your letter of admission, official slip saying you're a student);
- Health Check Certificate (more on that later);
- Housing Registration Certificate (more on that too);
- 400-500RMB for Temporary Residence Permit (ours was 460; they might have gone up by now), plus 300-500RMB for Health Check Certificate, plus Housing Registration Certificate processing fee (maybe 100RMB)—i.e. in total about £100/1000RMB if you have a one year rental contract.

The **first four** are straightforward, and Li Ke/Wang Fang at the Beida office might look after your admission letter and JW202 for you until you submit them.

Health check certificate

This can be a bit of a pain depending on the time you have to wait. To reach the centre, take a taxi: it's easier than the bus/metro and not much more expensive if you share. **DON'T FORGET YOUR PASSPORT FOR THIS!**

The Chinese name of the centre is 北京国际旅行卫生保健中心海淀分中心 but this is unlikely to be helpful: the only people who ever need to go there are foreigners, so taxi drivers are unlikely to know where this obscure place is (it's outside the fifth ring road). It is at 海淀区, 德政路, 10 号。Don't be fooled into thinking it's close by the fact it's in Haidian District—Haidian is huge and has several million inhabitants. Both times I had to use a Chinese map app on a smartphone to direct them (which requires having mobile data working on your phone).

What you first tell the driver when you get into the taxi may affect whether he decides to take you or not, and this may be difficult. Tell them you want to go to the health check centre **AND** that it's outside the **五环** **AND** that it's on **德政路** in Haidian district, and as a last resort to head to **圆明园西路** (and then to just keep heading out/north).

A tried-and-tested route is to go westwards along the southern edge of the **圆明园** (Old Summer Palace, North of Beida campus), past the **圆明园** and **西苑** stations of subway line 4, then get on to **圆明园西路**. Then instruct them to head to the **肖家河桥** of the **五环** (Fifth Ring Road), bearing in mind that you want to continue over this bridge (that goes over the **五环**) further on out of Beijing, rather than actually be on the Fifth Ring Road. You will continue north/northwest

along 圆明园西路 for a while, and then turn east/right along 后厂村路, then take a left soon after onto 西北旺三街, then a right onto 德政路. If your taxi has followed these directions to the letter the centre should be on your right at that point. There will be a guard sitting in a box and folding fence across the drive (like everywhere in China) but you just walk through and round to the entrance.

You could also try marking the centre's location on a map of Beijing (there are big ones on sale in the roadside newsstands) and trying to find it on 百度/Soso 地图 before marking it on so you can show it to the taxi drivers, but they may be useless with maps/unwilling to take their eyes off the road. It might also be an idea to find it before arriving in China, in case you have no internet when you first move in. You will know you have come to the right place when you see Westerners and Koreans being deposited outside (depending of course on how busy it is at the time you go—when we went it was pretty quiet).

You then fill in an arrival form, queue up to pay your money—the amount that you will have to pay depends on the health tests you might have taken in your home country before arriving (when you apply for your visa), but take several hundred RMB—and then go between little offices for blood tests, x-rays, etc. It matters not what order you do it in, as long as you do it all. If you are lucky enough, it should only take 30min. Get there at nine (leave 40 minutes for finding a taxi driver who is willing to go and then getting there)—it is only open for checks in the morning and only for collections in the afternoon (from one till four). Your results are then handed in, processed, and will be ready for collection in 3-4 working days, meaning another trip to the same place.

You can opt to have them sent to Beida for collection, but this adds two days odd to the waiting time (and another little fee), so keep your permit application deadline in mind. Another thing to keep in mind is that it can be significantly cheaper to as well as quicker to avoid going privately in Europe and to have the blood tests, x-rays etc done **at the centre on the day**—and you won't have to worry about whether your tests will be accepted by a Chinese official.

Previous years told of two hour waits to even get into the centre but in our experience this was not the case if you arrived early, and the six tests were all very efficient, if dubious in their necessity.

Finding a taxi to get back could be a problem because the weird location of the health check centre out in the sticks obviously doesn't attract as many taxis as Wudaokou. We got the metro back on at least one of the times we went there—it'll save 40RMB or so, even if you do flag a taxi to the nearest station on line 13 (Xierqi), from where it's an easy journey back south to Wudaokou with no changes. (There is also a bus line that goes right past the centre and runs to the vicinity, though not the door, of the subway stop. If you want to do this the cheap way and avoid any taxis at all, which at least one of us did, you can do a Google maps directions search for public transport from Wudaokou to 德政路, which should just about do the trick.

Good news for Sinologists in the future is that Line 16, when it is constructed, will run right along the road running out to Dezheng lu where the centre is, with the nearest station to the centre probably at Xibeiwang on this new line.

Housing registration certificate

This is another delight. It is a form stamped by your local police station to say that you live somewhere. Strictly speaking you must be taken to the relevant police station by the owner of the address, although it's obviously not that strict because our landlord just took our passports for a few days and returned them with the slip of paper. Even if they are aware of this requirement you may have to push them a bit to do it in time for getting your residency permit application sent off as soon as possible. So, if you're renting, it's your landlord. If you're staying with a family, ask them—it might be *their* landlord.

We don't know who would go with you if you started off the year livings in halls in Beida (Shaoyuan), as none of us chose to. You'd have to ask the course coordinator.

Don't panic, we didn't know the word for "housing registration certificate" either—just tell him/her you need to be taken to the police station (派出所 pàichūsuǒ) to say you live here. You then pay more money in processing fees. Please do note that you need this form to apply for your Temporary Residence Permit, so you will need to have chosen and signed the contract for a flat. Landlords are busy, sometimes absent, people, so it is best to **get a flat as soon as possible**—we recommend within the first week in China—and then pester your landlord.

Make sure you have all got **Chinese phones** when you first meet them and exchange numbers; top-up cards can be found at the roadside newsstands (Just make sure you get the right network, 中国联通 China Unicom vs 中国移动 China Mobile—your network should appear on your homescreen. New phones should come prepared with money prepaid and calling/texting is cheap.)

Warning : some of us have been asked to pay a so-called "foreigners' tax" to get our housing registration certificate (5.5%, or more, of one's monthly rent, multiplied by the number of months of the tenancy—all upfront). This tax doesn't exist, or at least not for you. When they rent a flat, landlords have to pay a small tax on the rent they are receiving. Many are trying to avoid paying, and find it easier to make foreigners (who probably have no idea that they are being tricked) pay the tax for them. Fortunately, some landlords are more honest than others, and some of us were not even asked to pay anything. Ask your prospective landlord the amount of money that they will require you to give **before signing the contract**. This way, you should avoid any unpleasant surprise. Note that this is not the same as the agent's fee that almost everyone in our year who was renting had to pay (about as much as one person's three month rent instalment), even when we seemed to be renting directly from the landlord...

You will notice that there is a fair amount of money involved in processing your Temporary Residence Permit application—as mentioned in the required items list, you will need up to £100/1000RMB just to obtain all the paperwork. Please also be warned that to get a flat (to get an address to get a permit) you will need to pay yet more money upfront in estate agents' fees, deposits and advance rent. Since landlords can often ask for quite a few months' rent upfront, this can amount to a couple of thousand pounds (see the "Accommodation" section). Please be prepared for this eventuality! As Student Finance will insist on releasing loans in chunks over the year, if you are not in a position to borrow money from family then speak to colleges/department/Student Finance and find a way around this.

To be absolutely clear, it is advisable to **lay your hands on all of the above documents, give them all in** to the Beida visa office and **get back a** Temporary Residence Permit **within 28 days** after landing in China. This will mean 1) doing your health check, 2) deciding upon a flat and 3) getting your landlord to register you as resident there within possibly the first week of arriving. Do not panic: this is achievable. Once you have all of your documents, proceed, processing fee in hand, to the course coordinator, who will point you in the direction of the Beida visa office (we're not sure quite where this is, as the building it was in for us was demolished during our time in China). You will hand over everything, including your passport, for about two weeks of processing, although they may tell you it is going to take much longer than this, and who knows, it might do so. Then you'll get back your passport with what looks like another visa glued in. Check all stipulations printed thereon are as expected. Celebrate.

Sadly, all this means that even if you have arrived early, you will not really be able to travel before the start of the course. You need to make use of your 28 days for all your documentation until you have submitted; thereafter, you are passport-less for a while. It is probably not advisable to turn up too early to get round the travel limits, either: you need Beida to be up and running to process your application and you need time to gather all your documents together. Check with your coordinator when her office and the visa office start running, but arriving 1-2 weeks before class seems best. Then you'll be all settled in for term, not dashing about like headless chickens wondering vaguely about being deported. Sigh. Plenty of time for Yunnan next summer...

The end date of your residency permit will be printed on it (it's a sticker on a page of your passport) when you get it back. In our experience, asking them to set the exit date as late as possible elicited the response that the latest they could make it was two weeks after the end of Beida term, i.e. the middle of July. It's therefore worth remembering that if you want travel or do an internship throughout July and August and perhaps beyond, you will have to get an extension/change your visa when the time comes. (n.b. The section below tells you the ways we've been told it's possible to do this. At the time of writing the actual process, which like all things bureaucratic seems to be invented out of thin air for each new batch of applicants, is still unclear. Ask us later on in 2014 when we've sorted it and we may be able to give clearer advice.)

Visa Extensions

To get a new visa during the course at Beida you can do one of two things. The first option is to go to the course coordinator at Beida. The other option is to go out, come back in on an 'L' tourist visa (obtained in whichever country you go to) and then, if applicable, arrange a new student visa once you are back. Note that your 'L' visa only lasts 30 days from the day of entry.

To arrange a new **student visa** in either case, you need to see the coordinator. They will give you a form saying that you are a student at Beida. Be warned, however, that the coordinator has control over the date until which your new visa will run, and will sometimes only put a date on the form for when the Beida course ends rather than when you are leaving Beijing. If you are planning to stay in China for a while, this is rather inconvenient. If this happens, get Mr Kan to email them explaining the situation.

You must take this form to the Public Security Bureau Visa section (Exit/Entry Administration), near 雍和宫 Yōnghégōng metro station in Beijing. You also need your housing registration certificate from the Public Security Bureau—see **Temporary Residence Permit** section—and a colour passport photograph. When you get there, fill in the form and join the queue for visa extensions. There is a fee for processing your new visa. Like the London visa section, it takes a week to turn around. There is no express option, which is why, if you want an extension quickly, you may have to get a tourist visa obtained in another country and organize the student visa once you get back.

If the coordinator will only give you a visa until the end of the course, or if for any other reason the visa you are on runs out, you can apply for an 'L' tourist visa extension in Beijing. This visa only lasts 30 days from the day it is granted but you don't need a letter from Beida to get it (you still need the housing registration certificate). You can specify how many entries you want. This means that you can stay as a tourist for 30 days in China after your student visa runs out. Obviously, if you go out of China when the course has finished you can come back in on a tourist visa obtained in the country you go to. This visa can be extended twice.

In short, the go-abroad-and-get-new-visa-there option is for, "Oh no, my visa runs out tomorrow. Quick, leg it to Hong Kong!" but the in-Beijing 'L' visa is for, "Oh, I have a month left on my visa but I would like two months. Better get this processed soon, and allow time on my old visa for processing."

Visa Overstay

If you overstay your visa, it's not the end of the world. Worst case scenario, you will end up spending a very frustrating two weeks being sent between the Exit/Entry Administration Bureau at Yonghegong, the Beida visa office/Wang Fang (course coordinator in our year), and some other police station. You may have to wait for hours queuing at Yonghegong with loads of other foreigners in the same situation, but they are basically unlikely to deport you or charge you the exorbitant fines that they say they can. Obviously it's best not to get into this situation, but if you do:

- wear a suit to deal with the officials (no jokes—it's a godsend);
- **contact Iain Buchanan at Univ, who will be in third year by the time you have to deal with this rhubarb, over Facebook or Nexus (iain.buchanan@univ.ox.ac.uk). He will be able to give you a detailed explanation of all the ins and outs from his considerable personal experience of them.**

Money

1 元 (yuán) also called 块 (kuài).
= 10 角 (jiǎo) also called 毛 (máo).
= 100 分 (fèn).

The biggest denomination for Chinese money is the 100 元 note, followed by 50 元, 20 元, 10 元, 5 元, 1 元, 5 角 (0.5 元), 1 角 (0.1 元) notes. There is apparently a 2 元 note, but this has the

mystical quality of the real, but never-seen, American \$2 bill. The most common coins are of 1 元, 5 角 and 1 角, but there are also 10 分 to a 角, meaning you get strangely fake-feeling coins worth 5 分 (0.05 元), 2 分 (0.02 元) and 1 分 (0.01 元). Collect change, as most vendors would rather you didn't pay for your baozi with huge notes.

Get some RMB before you leave for China (you can visit the Post Office): getting set up is quite expensive as you're likely to have to pay your rent in one lump sum (see "Accommodation"). Your student loans might not come through until you've been in China for about a month, which can really make the first few weeks difficult if you don't think ahead.

ATMs are everywhere, and you shouldn't have a problem finding one that will take your card. There are some that will only accept Chinese bankcards though, so don't panic if your card isn't accepted. Most of the cash points in Beida accept foreign cards (there are several outside Wumei, see the "Arriving" section) and there are several cash points around Wudaokou. The big Western-style shopping malls are also a good bet.

Beware! Money comes out of the ATMs before your card, so **DON'T FORGET THE CARD**. The banks are unhelpful, and you won't be getting it back.

Withdrawing cash from a foreign account in China can cost a lot, so if you don't have free withdrawals get out the maximum amount you can in one go and keep it in a safe place rather than withdrawing 100 元 when you need it.

If you need money from your parents fast, the best way is to give them your bank account details (account number and sort code) and get them to pay it into your account in cash. That way it is available for you to withdraw instantly, whereas bank-to-bank transfers can take days in some cases.

The Western Union (西联 Xīlián) is another practical way of sending/receiving money, especially when you need a large quantity for a multi-month rent payment. The easiest way to do a Western Union transfer is to pay your parents the amount of money you want sent to you (via online banking from your British account). They then go to any Western Union outpost in the UK—many Post Offices have them, and the <http://www.westernunion.co.uk> website will list those nearest you—and fill in a form with your name, passport details, etc. The person in the shop should be able to walk them through it. Once they've paid, you then go to a Western Union outpost in China—there's one in the large Post Office on the main street of shops in Beida—taking your passport with you. You fill in another form, being careful to write in the name of the person who sent the money exactly as they gave it. Some Chinese bureaucracy later and you'll myriad massive stacks of 100RMB notes and leave feeling like a bank robber and potential mugging victim at the same time. Western Union is quick, reliable and allows you to transfer huge amounts in one go, possibly up to £4,000. The main thing to note is the necessity of getting all the details (sender's name, recipient's name as shown in their passport, etc., exactly right). Otherwise, who knows, your money might get lost in the international banking ether.

It is perfectly possible for you to travel to China with your normal student debit card without going through the rigmarole of searching for the best deal. However, it might be a good idea to drop by your local branch and inform them that you will be going to China for X months

and that you'd appreciate it if they didn't block your card. Whilst your card may still end up being blocked, you will be more entitled to your indignant fury. Check out your bank's policies on blocked cards and make sure you have their emergency number in case something goes wrong.

For those people who want the best deal (or whose parents insist on it), the following rates and charges were accurate for March 2013:

BARCLAYS = Withdrawals - 2.99% + £1.50 - £4
= MAX £300 withdrawal in a day

LLOYDS TSB = Withdrawals - 2.99% + £2-£4.50
= purchases with debit card - 2.99% +£1 per transaction

CO-OP BANK = Withdrawals - 2.75% + £3 or 3% (whichever is lower)
= purchases with debit card - 2.75%
= MAX £250 withdrawal in a day

NATWEST = charges 2.75% of value (min £1)

HSBC = 2.75% +£1.75-£5
= purchases with debit card - 2.75%

NATIONWIDE = charges 2% + £1 on withdrawals

n.b. Nationwide have **cancelled** the Cashcard free-withdrawals-abroad system: they now require you to open a Current Account with them and probably want you to make it your main account. Whilst it is still a better deal than the other banks offer, switching accounts is a bit of a hassle.

An alternative and a good back up in case of a lost debit card, is a **currency card**. These cards offer great exchange rates; you transfer money onto them online then use them to withdraw money. They can't be used for transactions but as they only contain a finite sum of money, if they are stolen, the thief won't have access to all your cash.

You can apply online:

Caxton FX: <http://www.caxtonfx.com/>

Fair FX: <http://www.fairfx.com/>

Traveller's cheques are becoming less popular and, according to one Post Office employee, more and more of them are coming back unused. They are potentially a good failsafe method of getting cash, but be warned that you will be charged if you return them to the Post Office and want them exchanged back into money. They're basically the old-fashioned equivalent of Western Union, but at least one of us has used them and they're a perfectly serviceable method.

It is unlikely that in most towns or cities you will fail to find places to withdraw money, but in some rural areas you may have problems. However, good planning is probably the best way

around this. You may want to have some cheques as a backup but make sure you keep your back-up options in various safe and separate places.

Packing: What to Bring and What to Buy

Hand Luggage

- Laptop and charger (and adapter!). If you want to travel around in China I would especially recommend a netbook or tablet PC, as full-sized laptops can be really heavy after a few hours standing on a train...
- (Note on laptops. Many people found having laptops invaluable but ***make sure your laptop is insured*** if you bring it. Consider that you might want to go travelling after the course ends and will either need to courier it back home (which will probably cost you about £100), leave it with a friend while you travel, or carry it with you and risk it being stolen or damaged. Consider this carefully as the type of accommodation you choose might limit your choices. If you are staying in a Chinese dorm with five others in your room, for example, there may not be room for one and it's probably not a safe idea either.)
- Travel documents (passport, ticket/boarding pass, visa, address of hotel/Shao Yuan and hotel booking confirmation)
- Entertainment, such as a book, kindle, iPod or magazine
- Wallet with pounds and RMB for use in both airports and the taxi when you arrive in Beijing (this will be about RMB 100, but bring more than that. How much exactly would depend on your plans. Of course bring your bank cards too, but don't bring all your various cards from home like your drivers licence and your Tesco clubcard, because if you lose them, they're a hassle to replace.

Hold Luggage

Clothes

Clothes are going to make up the bulk of your luggage. Consider where you're likely to go and if it will be hot / cold / wet. The weather in Beijing when you arrive in August will be swelteringly hot, so some of your clothes should be for hot weather, however from October to March, Beijing can be freezing. Make sure that at least for the first half of your year here, you focus on warm clothes – you definitely won't regret it when November and December come around. After March or April, Beijing heats up again, before returning to the high summer temperatures in May.

Since you'll experience both the sweltering heat of Beijing summertime as well as the bitter cold of winter, you will need a good range of clothes for different seasons. If you are intending to go home at Christmas, this is a little simpler. For the first term pack a few summer items (a pair of shorts and a few T-shirts) and a good stock of layer-able items for winter. Bring home most of your winter clothes at Christmas, and bring a higher ratio of summer to winter clothing the next time round. Bring one going out outfit, girls, as you will struggle to find anything suitable in Beijing.

Bear in mind that you might find yourself climbing mountains and visiting cold areas on your travels so take a decent pair of walking shoes, waterproofs and fleece. Similarly, you may want a bikini and sun cream for China's lovely beaches. Sun cream is available from Watsons in *Wudaokou* in the summer but won't be appearing in the shops until late May/June so take some if you burn easily.

Clothes in Beijing are not especially cheap. They are about the same price as clothes in the UK, if a few pounds cheaper, so if you're hoping to buy most of your wardrobe when you arrive (which is definitely an option) bear the cost in mind.

(n.b. strap tops may be considered "too friendly"; try cover up a bit more if you're spending time with older/more conservative Chinese people).

Household

You can bring sheets and pillow cases, but this isn't crucial. The rooms in Shaoyuan (or wherever you'll end up staying when you first arrive) will have clean sheets, and you will most likely have the chance to go to IKEA to get your own bedding before you move into your flat. Another option is to buy bedding at Wumei on the Beida campus, or Lotus in Wudaokou.

If space in your case is limited, consider bringing a small towel. You can pick up a bigger one in China.

Hairdryers cost about £5 in Lotus, so again, think about how much you need your one from home. Straighteners might be harder to find, however.

If you're bringing any electronics from home, like a laptop, you will need an adapter. Electronics in China tend to have three pins (not the same as in the UK) but sockets have both three pin and two pin slots.

Definitely bring something to make your flat more homely. Think posters, your teddy, photos of friends and family and whatever else you'll miss!

Toiletries

You can buy excellent toiletries in China so bringing travel sized bottles is enough, unless you have specific needs. A good brand for facial cleansers is Limi, available in Watsons. You cannot get easily tampons in China, so stock up.

Other

- Have several spare **passport photos** for various forms in China. You can get these done in the *Wumei* mini-mart on campus near *Sháoyuán* 勺园. It's a good idea to carry a **photocopy of your passport** in case it goes missing -this will facilitate your getting a replacement. It may also be a good idea to take down your credit/debit card numbers,



passport numbers and insurance policy numbers and leave them with a trusted person back home (i.e. mum) so that if you lose any of these or have them stolen you can more easily get your cards stopped and get replacement documents. Alternatively, think about setting up a Card Protection Policy (CPP) before you go so you can cancel all yours cards and order replacements with one phone call, rather than 5.

- If you're on prescribed **medicines** make sure you get a prescription to last you the time you're in China. Also bring paracetamol/ibuprofen as these are hard to get hold of. Things like **plasters** can be purchased very easily in Watsons, so you don't need to take loads and loads, but you might want to carry a few just in case. See the *Health* section for information on medicines, mosquito repellents and sanitary products.
- *A Lonely Planet, Rough Guide* or similar **guidebook** is definitely worth investing in, especially if you are intending to travel in China. These are hard to get hold of in China and can be confiscated at the airport. Most people manage to bring copies in from England but if you're desperate, try the Bookworm in *Sanlitun* (三里屯). Both guides massively underestimate the price of stuff and sometimes the information in them is a bit outdated (particularly for more unusual destinations) but they're rarely completely wrong.
- Whilst in Beijing get a copy of *The Insider's Guide to Beijing* (available in The Bridge, the Ó Sun bookstore and most places in Sanlitun) – everything you need to know about expat life in Beijing. Copies of *Time Out*, *That's Beijing* and *City Weekend* come out on Thursdays, are in most western coffee shops and are a really good way to find out about stuff going on in the week.
- Bring your **books from Oxford** for the year abroad (as of 2013-14 these were the red literature and classical book, the orange newspaper reading book and T'ung and Pollard). You can buy stationary really easily and cheaply here, so for the very beginning bring a couple of pens and a notebook.
- Most modern mobile phones from the UK will work fine in China if unlocked. You can buy a GSM SIM Card suitable for UK phones from China Unicom once arriving in China, and most phones (especially smartphones) will have Chinese character input available. However, if you are using an older phone, bear in mind that you may wish to buy a mobile phone in China to enable you to text in Chinese, and if you do not have an unlocked phone, then you will certainly need a Chinese handset. It is a good idea to bring your UK phone and also buy a cheap Chinese handset in order to make sure you have access to communication should there be any issues related to using your UK phone with a Chinese SIM.
- Another helpful item is a **phrase book**, or a dictionary with phrases in. Gǔbō and Pàlánkǎ don't teach you the word for "towel" or "cockroach" and other useful vocab that you'll need to get around. Phrasebooks also often have useful vocab for visits to the doctor, which can save you from launching into bizarre medical charades. There's a good one that goes with the *Insider's Guide*, and can be bought in the same places.
- Think about other things that will make your time there more fun. Cameras, digital or otherwise are fun to have to document your time out in China. MP3 players can make an 8 hour bus journey more fun. English books are available in Beijing but will cost a few pounds. Bear in mind that while travelling there is the chance that things will get stolen, or more likely, broken so either don't take anything you're too fond of, or make sure it's covered by insurance.
- Completely indispensable in China is the smartphone app Pleco, available on iOS and Android smartphones and tablets. Pleco offers character recognition, has a highly

comprehensive and expandable dictionary, and is affordably priced (free, if you don't get the useful ad-ons). Plus, if it's already on your phone, there's no need to carry around another device to decipher what those 汉字 on subway ads are!

- There's a full selection of technological devices on offer in China, with the latest phones, tablets and cameras all readily available from a range of stores. Some brands (especially Chinese brands of electronics, such as Lenovo and Huawei) are cheaper to buy in China, whilst others such as Apple and Samsung are much the same price as elsewhere. It's completely possible to buy devices for your year whilst you're in Beijing, or buy beforehand and bring them over. Do bear a few things in mind if you're planning to make a big purchase in China though. Consider where you are buying from: there are phone shops aplenty in Wudaokou, but prices can often vary wildly between stores next door to one another. Some features may also be disabled on Chinese versions of Android smartphones (Google Play store, Facebook apps etc), so be wary that the Android smartphones popular in China are rather different from those bought at home, and you may find it difficult to get the apps you want. iPhones, iPads and iPods purchased in China bear no differences to their UK versions, so there are few reasons to avoid buying those in China. Buy in China if need be, but there are certainly pros and cons to be aware of if you do so.
- If you're a **contact lens wearer**, don't bother packing lots of bottles of solution as it's available everywhere. There's an eyecare store beside the *Chaoshi* Supermarket and an optician on the ground floor of the U-Centre (next to the Metro).

REMEMBER:

- Repeat the mantra: 'The less I take with me, the more I can bring back.'
- Go through your wallet and leave unnecessary cards at home. (If it gets stolen at least you won't have to replace your Tesco Clubcard.)
- You may want to bring the charger for your UK phone so you can call your parents at the airport when you get back.
- If you're bringing large amounts of medication into the country, ask your doctor to print a copy of your prescription, keep this with your medicine in its original packaging.
- Don't forget to tell the bank you're going away.
- And sorry if this is patronising, but do check your passport hasn't expired...

Here's a more concise checklist of things you might want to bring:

- ☐ Passport; plane ticket
- ☐ Chinese RMB; Bank cards; Travellers Cheques
- ☐ Photocopy of passport/bank cards/travellers cheques
- ☐ Copy of insurance information/certificate; Beida admission letter
- ☐ Hotel/Hostel/Beida address in Chinese
- ☐ Guidebook, phrasebook
- ☐ Money belt
- ☐ Padlock (for lockers, bags, etc.)
- ☐ Camera; MP3 Player; CHARGERS/CABLES
- ☐ Laptop, charger, ethernet cable, microphone (for Skype, if you don't have an inbuilt one)
- ☐ Adaptor plug
- ☐ Clothing

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- ☐ Accessories- sun glasses, hat
- ☐ Toiletries
- ☐ Medicines- plasters; paracetamol/ibuprofen; Imodium; hand sanitiser, Pill
- ☐ Books, notepad and pen

Health

Vaccinations

You should have been registered with a doctor when you started university. Each college is affiliated with a particular surgery; these may be able to help with vaccinations.

Which vaccinations you need for China will depend on your travel plans. If you don't know where you're planning to travel, it may be best to be prepared rather than end up vomiting blood. In particular, malaria remains a problem in Yunnan, so if you are planning on travelling there, make sure you have obtained tablets or some other form of medication.

The following vaccines are free on the NHS: Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Diphtheria, Tetanus and polio. Most of these one will have received at secondary school.

For other vaccines: the website for the 19 Beaumont Street surgery says, "there is a charge for other vaccines and a price list is available at reception." As a rough guide, here are the prices current for 2013:

- Rabies course: **requires 28 days**, costs £100 for three jabs. (Most of us don't have this, having opted for a strategy of avoiding foaming-mouthed dogs. Nonetheless, this is a nasty disease, and if you think you might travel to remoter areas you should definitely consider the course, since it allows you several more hours to get to a medical centre before the likelihood sets in that you get full-blown rabies and die.)
- Hepatitis B: **requires 21 days**, costs £60-ish for three jabs. If you only need a booster, it'll be £20.
- Japanese Encephalitis: **requires 14 days**, costs £150 for three jabs. This is very dependent on where you're headed.
- Malaria: three different types, one of which requires a trial. Varying costs. Need to discuss with a travel nurse.
- Yellow Fever: **requires 10 days**, location-dependent, costs £50.

If you don't know what you need it doesn't matter. Just ask the receptionist about vaccinations and you should get an appointment with a Travel Nurse who can check out your records and advise you as to what you may or may not need. Make sure you leave enough time to complete your courses of vaccines: many of the vaccines come in courses over a 3-4 week period so it is advisable to allow at least 6 weeks prior to departure to ensure that you are covered. This is especially the case as the clinic may have to order in certain vaccines. If you're pressed for time or can't get an appointment with your clinic quickly, some SuperDrug stores have travel clinics. You won't be able to get any vaccines done free on the NHS here (though most of the vaccines you might be getting probably wouldn't be NHS-able anyway), but it will solve the problem of peripatetic travel nurses who are only in surgeries once every Friday when the moon is full. If you're worried that you don't have enough time to get your vaccines done (say you're only four or so weeks from your flight date), this is a great back-up option.

19 Beaumont Street recommends the following website to travellers:

<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home.aspx>

Medicines

Paracetamol (醋氨酚 cùānfēn) and ibuprofen (布洛芬 bùluòfēn) are both available in China, but make sure you check the strength of the tablets. If you require any vitally important medicines then make sure you are prescribed enough for the full amount of time. Generally speaking, medicines can be a difficult thing to get across to shop assistants, so save yourself some embarrassing mimes and bring some with you. One other point is that a lot of people develop a cough in the first couple of weeks in Beijing due to the adjustment to air laden with carbon particulates, so it is a good idea to bring a bottle of cough medicine with you in particular. There is a pharmacy in Beida: go to the Wumei (物美 wùměi) underground supermarket south of Shaoyuan 7 (the Beida guesthouse). Walk through the corridor of Beida souvenirs and at the end turn right, and then left.

Mosquitoes

- For some people, mosquitoes can be the bane of existence. Beijing may not be a hotspot for these munching miseries but if you are usually popular with them, they will find you. The local alternative to Deet is 蛇胆花露水 shédǎn huālùshuǐ), a green liquid that evaporates almost immediately, leaving you cool and tingly as well as pungent enough to ward off mosquitoes (but pleasantly scented to the human nose). The stuff is cheap and available in supermarkets, and even better, **it works**. It is also soothing post-bite.

Repellent extraordinaire



Tiger balm or an equivalent is also good for easing the itching. Just show the assistant the bite and talk about itching (痒 yǎng) and mosquitoes (蚊子 wénzi). They will hopefully give you a little pot of stuff that looks like Vaseline and smells like Vicks (i.e. burns your sinuses).

If you head south, you'll encounter many more mosquitoes. The best advice is really just to cover up in the evenings: once you get bitten, it gets a whole lot worse if you later have fabric rubbing the bite. Otherwise, try to hang out with someone who you know gets bitten a lot. Hopefully the mosquitoes will go for them instead.

Sanitary Products

Ladies: you can find sanitary products in any supermarket in Beijing, although most of them only sell pads. You can usually find tampons in more western-style supermarkets (the one

under the U-center in Wudaokou for instance), so don't bother bringing over boxes and boxes of them.

Sanitary products are available in big cities, but, when you're travelling, finding them can be another hassle to think about (tampons are especially problematic). "Femmecups" or "Mooncups" may be a good alternative. Not only are these silicone cups healthy and convenient, they're better for the environment and they'll also save you a lot of cash over your lifetime. It may be worth asking your College Welfare Officer/Women's Officer whether they have any money available to provide them. Otherwise, they're available online, as is plenty of information: <http://www.femmecup.co.uk/>

n.b. In terms of sterilising, it turns out the denture baths you can buy in chemists are the perfect fit. Add cold water and one of those sterilisation tablets used for baby equipment, and leave the cup to soak overnight. (Saves you from having to explain what exactly you were boiling in your housemate's saucepan...)

Drinking water

Drinking tap water is a bad idea (and we're not just saying that: you **will** spend time getting friendly with the toilet). Keep a supply of bottled water at home (some flats will have water dispensers with big barrel things, ask your landlord). Boiling tap water in your kettle is also perfectly safe, so that's an option as well. Also, either carry bottles with you or remember to buy them when you're out and about, though be wary of pedlars selling re-sealed bottles on the street. Dehydration isn't fun either. One other possibility is to buy/bring a thermos or tea flask to keep your boiled water in. n.b. rinsing your mouth out with tap water is very unlikely to result in any ill effects (pardon the pun).

Sunburn and heat stroke

The Beijing sun has a habit of hiding behind clouds, composed either of H2O or PM10. Whilst it may seem impossible to burn in such weather, UV thinks otherwise. You may want to wear sunscreen of a high enough factor to avoid a peeling nose and wincingly painful shoulder blades.

Most of us aren't used to consistently hot weather so the summer months can come as a shock. Take all the usual precautions (sunglasses, hat, etc.) and keep an eye on others in your group who may be flagging. Frequent breaks are wise, and take advantage of the watermelon vendors at the roadside—a messy but tasty way to keep up your water levels.

Toilets

These are legendary. In general, Chinese public loos are pretty unpleasant. They almost never have loo roll, so get used to taking **packs of tissue** with you. They also may not have soap, so it's a good idea to carry **hand sanitizer** (available from the Lotus Centre, look for the Dettol bottles).

The crouching toilet is allegedly more hygienic than our sit-down loos, which is a thought to comfort you as you try and maintain balance whilst avoiding all surrounding surfaces (enjoy the smell of the corridors in Beida's library...). Whether at home or out and about, try to remember not to flush toilet paper down the loo: plumbing here generally can't take it. That said, some of the newer flats, for example in Huaqing jiayuan, are up to the task. Experience suggests that the same is not true of Dongshengyuan (another potential housing complex) or Beida. If you are desperate for the sit down toilet experience, seek the toilets in Shaoyuan 7. You might even find toilet paper if you are lucky...

Food hygiene

The university will advise you not to eat food purchased from street vendors, but it can be difficult to resist when faced with the mouth-watering reality – not to mention the bargain prices. That said, there are fears that eating freshly fried jiānbǐng (煎饼) out of the plastic bag it is served in can melt the bag, thus transferring certain toxins into your body. A lot of the local Chinese restaurants look sketchy from a hygiene point of view. But again, prices and food quality are hard to resist, so don't worry too much—none of us have contracted particularly bad cases of the runs at this sort of establishment. We did once have complimentary maggots in our order of hóngshāo niúròu, but we'll let you discover this restaurant for yourselves. You will hear stories about bad restaurants recycling oil, which concentrates the toxins in it. The basic rule of thumb in China is to eat where other people eat—if a restaurant is empty, this can be a sign not only of bad food but also of poor hygiene.

Considering that Chinese flats sometimes lack sinks with hot water, be careful when preparing food and clearing up afterwards. One could boil the kettle every time, but from experience, use washing up liquid and scrub well every time, and you should be fine. Avoid leaving food out in summer, lest your flat become infested with cockroaches.

What to do if you are ill

- Use common sense to determine whether you can look after yourself or if you need to seek medical attention.
 - If you need to contact a hospital, contact AON Insurance (the university's provider of travel insurance) and they will take care of things for you. For more information, see the "Insurance" section.
- Let a friend know and consider informing the **course coordinator** at Beida, i.e. Li Ke or Wang Fang.
- If you're going to miss class time, inform your class representative who can make sure you are marked ill, not just AWOL.
- Remember that you can still access the NHS Direct Website, which can provide helpful advice (see below). From experience, phoning them for advice outside of the UK really does not work.

If you get a stomach upset, drink lots of (clean) water, as you'll be losing a lot of liquid...

Pre-existing Conditions

If you have a pre-existing condition, such as an allergy, make sure you:

- **carry your insurance details and any relevant medication with you at all times;**
- **inform the International Office;**
- **tell your friends what to do if there is a problem;**
- **ensure you always have credit on your mobile phone;**
- **keep a spare 100 yuan note tucked away in your wallet or purse just in case;**
- **carry a note that briefly explains your condition in Chinese (Mr Kan or one of the other teachers can help you with any complex explanations).**

For example:

§

我对花生和果仁有严重的过敏反应。
万一引起过敏反应，本人携带肾上腺素注射药，和抗过敏的（抗组胺）药片。
请立即将我送往就近医院。非常感谢。

I have a serious peanut and nut allergy.

If I have an allergic reaction, I carry epinephrine injection drugs and anti-allergy (antihistamine) tablets.

Please take me to a hospital immediately. Many thanks.

Where to find more useful information:

- <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/>
- <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/china/health>
- <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>
- travel guides such as *The Lonely Planet*, *The Rough Guide to China* etc.
- Beida International Student Office can offer good, reliable advice and help you explain what you need.

Medical Emergencies—急诊 (jí zhěn)

Cross your fingers that it won't happen, but on the off-chance that it might, **pay attention to this section.**

Ambulances in Beijing are, according to most sources, slow and inefficient (one study in 2005 showed the median response time to be 16 minutes). The emergency number is **120**, but be aware that you will have to speak in Chinese, and know your location and that you will be expected to pay for the service afterwards.

A better option may be dialling the **Beijing United Family Hospital's** emergency line. This hospital provides English translation and has a hotline to ambulance services so you can be picked up more quickly (see below for more information on this hospital).

Dial: **+86 (10) 5927-7120**

(Add this to your phone)

You can also ring the emergency room at Beijing United Family Hospital for emergency medical advice.

In cases where the individual can be moved and needs to get to a hospital quickly (as in the case of an allergic reaction), the best bet is to **hail a taxi and ask to be taken to the nearest hospital.** (There is a Chinese hospital in 中关村 Zhōngguāncūn)

Chinese hospitals will demand that you pay as soon as you enter; staff may also seem frustratingly unbothered. Try to clearly and concisely inform them what has occurred. Shouting at them won't help (we tried that).

In cases of emergencies and medical treatment, you should be able to claim back the money under insurance but treatment will be costly and you may have to pay by card, depending on the amount.

HOWEVER, one way to make this aspect of the hospital experience infinitely more convenient is to prepare in advance, where possible. Insurance companies—especially the one that Oxford has a policy with, AON—are used to dealing with these international hospitals. As mentioned above, a lot of the time they will demand payment prior to any treatment. But one way to get

around this is to contact the insurance company in advance and ask them to send the hospital a “guarantee of payment” in the form of an email, for example. This will let the hospital know that they can send the bill directly to the insurer, and you, the patient, will not have to foot any bill.

We have done this several times at Beijing United Family Hospital (和睦家医院 Hémùjiā yīyuàn) and found it to be by far the most convenient way of dealing with them. Having done this once, you will also have an account opened for you at the hospital, and will be able to make future visits with no inconvenience whatsoever.

The phone number for AON while you’re abroad, good as of 2014 is:

+44 (0) 207 173 7797

(Add this to your phone; check the documents you’ll get by email from the Chinst to see if this number has changed)

As they say, “in the event of any medically related emergency, the patient should call this number any time of the day or night, 365 days a year.”

Hospital Contact Details & Locations

Beijing United Family Hospital

2 Jiangtai Lu, Chaoyang District

Telephone: (0)10 6433 3960

Emergency telephone (24/7): (0)10 64332345

<http://www.unitedfamilyhospitals.com/en/bj/>

北京和睦家医院,
朝阳区将台路 2 号

The hospital is clean and modern with English speaking staff. They are available to contact by telephone (very useful in an emergency) and very familiar with foreign health and travel insurance policies. The service and care received is of a very high standard and the staff members are very friendly (even allowing some of us to order McDonalds whilst we waited for a friend). However, this hospital is very expensive. Ensure that you have your insurance details with you (if you phone the university's insurance before making an appointment—or as soon as possible—you shouldn't have any problem).



Beijing International SOS Clinic

Suite 105, Wing 1, Kunsha Building

No 16 Xinyuanli, Chaoyang District

Telephone: (0)10 6462 9112

http://www.internationalsos.com/en/about-our-clinics_china_38.htm

国际 SOS 北京办公室,
朝阳区新源里 16 号琨莎中心 1 座 105



Bayley and Jackson Medical Center

7 Ritan Dong Lu, Chaoyang District

Telephone: (0)10 8562 9998

Emergency telephone (24/7): (0)10 8562 9990

<http://www.bjhealthcare.com/>

庇利积臣医疗中心,
朝阳区日坛东路7号



Student Finance Reimbursement

Although you won't be going to China until the summer, you can get your hands on this form and 准备好! However, the following information only applies to English students¹.

According to Student Finance England, you are eligible for a travel grant if you receive student finance that depends on your household income (i.e. more than the minimum available maintenance loan), and state in your student finance application that you are attending an overseas institution for the next academic year. In that case, they will probably send you two forms:

- the SFE Course Abroad Form which should be completed by the university (e.g. by Rosanna Gosi) or college to confirm the period abroad;
- the SFE Travel Expenses Form which you should complete.

You can claim for:

- Up to three return flights within the academic year period, minus the first £303;
- Visa-related fees, incurred in the UK or China;
- The medical portion of any travel insurance plan (typically 40%);
- The foreigner health check (which is, of course, necessary to attain a residence permit).

Make sure you have scanned/electronic copies of any UK receipts of any such payments made and have your parents send the originals of those off to SFE, but **do not** trust the Chinese postal system with the originals of any Chinese evidence receipts: scan these in, hold on to the originals, and email them to your parents to send SFE printed copies (SFE understands that you don't want to risk sending off the originals—plus, the post will take time). In fact, it may be best just to hold on to all receipts and then send the whole thing off when you get home next summer.

As for “evidence” of the obligatory year abroad, apart from the form Student Finance provided, past students had tutors write me a letter of confirmation that, yes, students definitely **do** have to go to Beida in their second year. You should want to get the department to sort out the paperwork for you in Trinity Term (it is much easier when you are still in Oxford). The

¹ For any Scottish students, the information about travel grants can be found here: http://www.saas.gov.uk/student_support/special_circumstances/going_abroad.htm . Apologies, this Sassenach is unfamiliar with the student finance north of the border; Northern Irish students, you might well have your Beida tuition fees paid for (see here: http://www.studentfinancenir.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=54,1266656&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL), though the Oxford Li/Feng scholarship covers this anyway; Welsh students, good luck, because your student finance website refuses to load.

claims form lists everything you can claim for, but keep receipts for **anything** you reckon you can claim some eligibility for—it is worth trying.

As we say, you leave the form at home for your parents to sort out as you accumulate Chinese receipts and send scans of these for them to collate alongside British receipts, so bear in mind that, given the form itself requires the physical signature of the student/claimant, you might wish to sign the blank form before you leave in the summer! You can start claiming at any time, but consider that **for each separate list of claims you send off, that £303 excess applies**, so, if you can, wait until you've collated **all** of the things you want to claim and submit just one big claim and pay that excess once. Past students have submitted this in early Spring after we had booked our final flights home. It is complicated and SFE will likely let you down at several points, so keep on your toes: if you do not automatically receive the forms in good time for Trinity term, badger Student Finance until you receive them. Remember, sort out as much of this as you can **before** you go to China and be diligent in collecting receipts, etc.

Sources:

<http://www.sfengland.slc.co.uk/frequently-asked-questions/extra-funding.aspx>

http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_195933.pdf

Arriving

Your dates of arrival in Beijing will be communicated via Mr Kan to Beida. Although the turnaround from finishing your Prelims to arriving in Beijing is very short and you might feel like you want some time to relax in between, many find that it's good to get to Beijing as soon as possible to sort out your accommodation and settle into your new life! In fact, we **strongly** recommend that you arrive here at least a fortnight before your lessons start (1st of September). Otherwise, you're likely to struggle with getting over the shock of being in China, lots of bureaucracy and health care checks, sorting out all you need at Beida, dealing with estate agents and fángdōngs (房东—landlords) and moving into your flat all at the same time! Your flat will almost definitely be in need of a clean, so get a number for a cleaner off your landlord/college parents. There's a lot to get done, but it will be much less stressful if you don't have to do it all at the same time.

If you don't already have some Chinese currency, get some before you leave the airport to pay for cabs and hostels, etc. There are ATMs at the airport. Check the exchange rates, but at the moment it's about 10RMB to a pound.

(Also, don't bother taking food off the plane. The sniffer dogs get suspicious and your first conversation in China will be, "It's just bread! You know, *mianbao*! Honest!")

Methods of transport

To get from the airport to wherever you're spending your first few days, you may take the Airport Express and then the metro, and overall it will take you at most 45 min to get there. It's very well signposted, and you'll be able to get to Beida and Wudaokou both with just two transfers. Beware though: in the heat of summer and with all your worldly possessions on your back, it may not be the comfortable option to battle through the crowds. There is a Beijing subway map at the end of this guide to help you plan your route. This is not to be recommended during rush hour.

Alternatively, you may want to take a cab. **Only use the official taxis outside the airport and not the drivers who hang around inside.** These hēichē (illegal taxi) drivers are uninsured, illegal and will charge you phenomenal prices. We did in our jet-lagged confusion and were charged 600RMB for a short trip. They may try to pull you in by claiming you have too much luggage to fit in a regular taxi, before ushering you to a larger people carrier. When exiting the airport, follow the signs for the taxi rank. Legitimate taxis are recognisable by their broad yellow stripe on a red/blue/green base. Look out for the yellow stripe, plenty of official-looking certificates and driver IDs inside the cab, a registration plate bearing "B 京" and a "TAXI" Toblerone-thing on top. The taxis are really cheap compared to British ones, so it should only cost you 100RMB (£10) to get to Beida or Wudaokou. You can usually spot it because you'll see a congregation of half-yellow-half-green/purple cabs with a queue of people being directed into them by a warden. Be prepared to queue for quite a while and ignore the random people who will be coming up to you and offering you a ride.

Where to stay

Beida

If you are planning to arrive before Beida's official arrival date—and we've already advised that you really should do so—then you will obviously need to sort out your accommodation. Beida offered us the option of accommodation when we arrived, which turned out to be for the first two weeks of September and therefore entirely useless. This may have changed but don't rely on it. Hostels or hotels are a better option if you want to be certain of a roof over your head when you arrive. Alternatively if one of your friends is moving into a previous second year's flat then making use of their floor or sofa is the easiest option. If you do need a hostel, The PekingUni International Hostel is a fifteen minute walk east from the East Gate, between Beida and Wudaokou.

If you are headed for Beida, tell your driver to go to 北大西门 Běidà xīmén(r) (in taxi-speak) on Yiheyuan Lu, and then tell him you want Sháoyuán bīn'guǎn 勺园宾馆 in the Beida campus—he can drive you right to the hotel, and you just make yourself known at the desk. If you are forced to get out and enter on foot, when you get to the gate the security guards will want to see your letter of admission to prove you should be let in, otherwise they might do a Gandalf the Grey on you. Hereafter, your Beida student card will serve as your security guard patronus. If you choose to take the subway, the nearest station is East Gate of Peking University on line 4. Note that this is on the other side of campus to Shaoyuan (where you'll be put up), so be prepared to approach someone knowledgeable-looking and ask for directions across campus. If you are going to 五道口 the time and price is very similar.

If you don't happen to have RMB on you at the time (and why don't you, you silly individual?), note that the ATM in the lobby of Shaoyuan does not accept Visa. To use a Visa card, go out of Shaoyuan, turn right and keep walking until you reach the 物美 Wùměi minimart. To the right of the minimart is a bank with ATMs, all accepting Visa and other international debit cards.

Alternatives

Even if it is available, you may want to reconsider staying in Shaoyuan. All the estate agencies are in Wudaokou—a good 30-35 min away on foot from the Shaoyuan buildings—and your flat will most likely also be in Wudaokou. Therefore, even though Shaoyuan bedrooms are reasonably comfortable, staying in a hostel in Wudaokou may turn out to be a better option, since it will make contacting estate agents and moving into your flat a lot easier. Bear in mind that renting a flat involves a lot of comings and goings with money, passports and so on (see "Accommodation") and the same applies to moving in. Moreover, your flat will probably be in the need of a two-day cleaning session, so being in Wudaokou can be a considerable advantage (unless you want to get toned legs!).

On the 1st September, or whatever date you're told by Beida, you will have a welcome session. You should thereupon be given a welcome pack including a Beijing tourist map, a Beida map (all in Chinese and fairly unhelpful, but you'll find your way around just fine) and a Beida handbook. Beida International Office and your course coordinator, Wang Fang, will process your Residence Permit (外国人居留许可), but in order to do so they'll need you to do a couple of things (which is another reason to get to Beijing earlier). They will request the following:

- **A health check.** (See the “Documentation” section.) Probably your first experience with Chinese bureaucracy. The sooner you do this the better, as by the end of August you'll find yourself queuing behind every other foreign student in Beijing waiting for a slightly puzzling set of tests. You'll spend the morning doing blood tests, heart test, X-ray, sight test, hearing test, and any single kind of stupid, health-related test you can imagine except an AIDS test and a pregnancy test. Get up sufficiently early in the morning to be at the healthcare check centre (which is 30-40 min away by taxi from Beida) at their opening time. You need to be done before 1pm, when they stop doing tests. They'll ask you for money, and ask you to come back a few days after to pick up results—or alternatively you can pay a little extra (less than the cab fare to the centre) to have them mailed to you.
- **Passport pictures.** Get A LOT of passport pictures before leaving the UK and make sure they are simply the best quality passport pictures you can possibly get. They can be really picky about the background not being bright white and so on, and you don't want to have to queue a second time after you manage to get new passport pictures. There are also plenty of places in Beijing that will do this; just be careful of their attempts to airbrush your face once they're done...

Note: previous editions of this distinguished volume mentioned being able to decide the date that your residence permit ends. This is a satisfying little sticker in your passport that lets you leave and re-enter China for the duration of your study. In our year these expired mid- to late July (a few weeks after the second semester ended), and we were told that there was no way of extending them. However, the rules are constantly changing so do ask about extending your permit for as long as possible. Also, check back with us later in the year to see if we have any new advice to offer, as at the time of writing those of us trying to stay in China past July still hadn't finished the process of sorting this out.

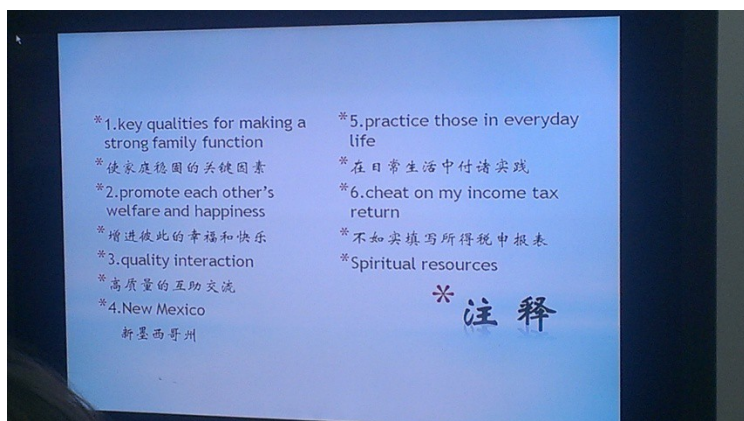
As stated previously, during the first few weeks the International Office and Wang Fang will do their best to help you. Don't miss out the chance to ask whatever questions you may have; as the term goes by they may lose interest in helping you.

The Beida Course

Shortly after you arrive, there will be an introductory meeting with the Beida International School programme organisers. There will be around 14 hours of class time a week, divided into five kinds of class: three according to Beida material and two based on the famous “big red book” (a collection of classical and literature passages set by Oxford tutors). These are oral (口语 kǒuyǔ, one class per week), newspaper reading (报刊 bàokān, two classes per week) and translation (翻译 fānyì, two classes per week). Classes are made up of two 50-minute halves with a ten-minute break in the middle. They are scheduled at 8.00am-09.50am, 10.10am-11.50am, 13.00-14.50, or 15.10-17.00 Monday–Thursday. Classes for us were all held in the Russian building (俄文楼 éwénlóu), though you may have some in the Sháoyuán 勺园 buildings.

The classes are conducted purely in Chinese. The language can be a bit daunting at first, but your listening ability will improve rapidly and by the second semester you won't have any problems. The Chinese teaching style is less interactive than in Oxford but you may be pleasantly surprised by how open to discussion some of the teachers are. How much vocab you learn will be pretty independent and open-ended. Rather than receive a list of 50 characters and be expected

to know them by the following lesson, you will see the same characters cropping up again and again in different texts and different classes, before you know it, you'll have mastered the most common (and the most bizarre). If nothing else the classes are two hours of Chinese listening practice, so please show up more than we did (a literature class late in the first term had an attendance of one, which was particularly impressive).



Both Classical and literature lessons are based on material set by Oxford. Strangely our literature teacher started us off with the most difficult text, but we raised this with Mr Kan and you might not have the same problem. In general the literature class was very good and the teacher puts a lot of effort into giving good feedback if you put the effort into doing the homework. Our Classical teacher began the year a bit confused over how much material he was supposed to cover and raced through a lot of material without explaining the texts in much detail, but in the second semester the pace relaxed a bit and he spent much more time explaining detail and background to the texts.

Translation class is based on a textbook which is both infuriating and puzzling, both in terms of its content and the strange English sentences you will be faced with. Topics start promisingly, with the first lesson talking about air pollution in cities, but quickly move onto such gems as the life of the Bronte sisters and what makes a happy family. The texts are English language magazine-style articles (often with an odd small-town-America twist) to translate into Chinese. Translating the texts is often a more useful exercise than the classes themselves, which tend to be a whistle-stop tour of an uninformative, sometimes even incorrect standard answer. (At least this was the

case for us: we raised the standard of this class with Mr Kan, and who knows, he may have made Beida actually raise the standard of the class.)

Newspaper lessons are not approached in an Oxford-style analytical way, and in all honesty, have been much more current affairs or sociology-like than newspaper reading. This has probably been the most enjoyable class, with the teacher often going off on tangents about issues in China. Many of us will never be able to hear the recurrent phrase “因为那个毛泽东时代” (“because, in the time of Mao Zedong...”) without smiling at the fond memories. The content is split between a newspaper-reading textbook, an orange book from Oxford and recent news articles.

Warning: the first few weeks will feel like a barrage of new vocabulary (which you should not attempt to learn all of—instead, pick the useful items), and you may feel like the articles are above your level. Stick with it and you will quickly become more comfortable with the course as a whole.

The oral classes are also vital to extend your vocabulary and bring your spoken Chinese to a higher level. You will be required to do oral presentations every few weeks based on topics from the textbook (which is the best of all the textbooks we have encountered: it has a weekly vocabulary list and features some idiomatic and common phrases like 萝卜青菜各有所爱 lit. “carrots and cabbage have their own loves”, hence “each to their own”). This class often has the feel of a very well taught A-level language lesson and is by far the most applicable to your everyday life in Beijing.

In everyday conversation with Beijingers you often only get as in-depth as the, “I’m from England, I study at Beida, I live in Wudaokou”, conversation, and generally speaking you won’t have much of a chance to discuss your views on smoking or the political situation in China. Language partners are a good way to have more complex conversations, but be aware that they are not become your BFF (unless you are REALLY lucky). Beida does pair you with a language partner, but if you don’t click with them (or are a shameless language partner whore) it’s easy to find Chinese students who are eager to trade languages with you. Post ads in cafes (especially Paradiso), ask your teachers or Chinese friends or even approach students in the street if you’re feeling bold. Just watch out for potential stalkers (both male and female).

Fluency (well, relative fluency) is best achieved by the above and having plenty of mundane, everyday conversations, so get out and speak as much as you can. Also flashcards, endless, endless flashcards. Don’t worry about sounding stupid – the Beijing people are generally very friendly and kind to foreigners. And remember, they will have heard much worse speakers than you.

If you find it awkward to randomly initiate conversations with strangers, try chatting to taxi drivers, go to a hair salon/barber and chat to a hairdresser, or, girls, go and get your nails done and chat to the nail technician (there’s a salon in the basement of the Wumei supermarket, between the photo store and the bookshop.) After nine months, you may end up bald and with three-inch blood-red talons, but you’ll also be a whole lot better at Chinese. These are all situations where silence can be more awkward than talking, so you’ll hopefully find it more natural to chat.

Beida has a rule that you must attend 75% of all classes in order to pass and **not only do teachers take attendance every lesson, they’ll be telling Mr Kan whether or not you’re going.**

Whilst they may not tell you off or even appear particularly critical, you may get a nasty awakening in the future... The same applies to homework.

Technically the course has exams halfway through the semester and at the end, although we were not graded with these. Note that, unlike Oxford exams, your participation in class, your homework and your attendance record may all count towards your final exam mark. Oxford collections will take place at the start of each semester, but we didn't get our September exams back until Mr Kan came out to visit us in March.

Holidays

You'll get a few days off for National Day, *qingmingjie* and May Day. These are great opportunities for travelling. Shànghǎi, Shānxī and Shǎ(a)nǐ are all readily accessible by train, and internal flights allow travel to just about anywhere. Bear in mind that China is huge and it often takes a day just to get to a place, so try not to be over-ambitious with your plans to avoid disappointment. **Also, book early: train tickets are often available from up to 10 days in advance!** The holidays are nightmare times to travel, so booking tickets as early as possible is a must. It is not inconceivable to be lumped with a wǔzuòpiào standing ticket for long train journeys during these periods (for 12 hours or more depending on your destination).

International Language Competitions

Although this is billed as a competition, it's really more of an "everybody wins" occasion. The first one of the year occurs before Christmas, around November time, and consists of one member of the class having to make a speech (this lucky individual will be selected during oral class). The premise is that each international class does a three or four minute slot in Chinese, on pretty much any topic pertaining to China (for which read an interminable slew of "how China is different from my country of origin" speeches).



However, the BETTER competition takes place at the end of April and is an opportunity to warm up the old creative cogs. Most people do mildly entertaining and generally incomprehensible plays, and a very few do something funny *and* good (this is recommended).

The audience and judges have to watch group after group give rather grave and rather lengthy 'sketches', so it might be an idea to organise something that will give them a break. If the whole class is involved, it takes the pressure off individuals and helps avert the dreaded desperately-shuffle-notes-and-try-and-find-your-place moments that occur when one person alone is facing an avid audience. Whatever you do, aim for fun rather than fear—it's nothing to worry about.

Class Representative (班长)

Just a quick note for those of you who get honoured with (roped into) doing this job. This isn't a particularly weighty responsibility. You aren't expected to do much, but rather the job is as much as you wish to make of it. The main task is to give a speech at the welcome dinner. A few of the university bigwigs may be there, along with your future teachers, fellow Oxford students and students from the Cambridge cohort (third years who will be spending their time in China concurrently with you). The speech has to be in Chinese; if you're nervous about it, email it to Mr Kan beforehand so he can check it over (note: he may not reply, but no news is good news, n'est pas?). Go for things like "building bridges between our countries", "heartfelt thanks" and "enduring memories"—it'll go down a storm and really is nothing to worry about.

Once you've done the speech, your job basically consists of liaising between the International Office and the Oxford students. If there is any communication that needs to take place between the central International Students Office and the class, you will be the messenger. For which read: you will spend a lot of time telling your compadres to come to class, and even more time wondering why they still don't. It's a chance to speak some more Chinese and an opportunity to improve the reputation of Brits abroad (yeah, right). You will also be asked to coordinate the updating of this lovely guide which you are reading now. Have fun.

Probably the most exciting aspect of assuming the coveted title of 班长 is the opportunity to take part in the **Beijing Forum**. This should take place in November, with materials having to be submitted throughout August and September (or, for the 2012-2013 representative, two weeks before the forum). This series of discussion panels (with topics related to any contemporary issues) is attended by professors, academics and generally important people from all over the world, and the 班长 may be invited to represent and uphold the intellectual reputation of Oxford University. You'll just be participating in the Student Panel, which is almost entirely separate from the rest of the business. You will be required to prepare a brief summary of your arguments pertaining to certain topic and then a speech on the subject. At first it seems like there's a lot of work involved, but once you've written the speech, all you have to do is deliver it and then have a relaxed, impromptu discussion. Above all, it is a nice opportunity to see other students from all over the world (in 2012 this included Australia, South Africa, US, Israel, Mexico, Turkey, Japan, North Korea...), and you all will relate to each other about the slightly dubious Chinese concept of "academic discussion". Wait for information to be emailed from your course coordinator before worrying about it. (Note: the events described foregoing paragraph didn't happen in our year, and our esteemed 班长 therefore spent all of his time after the welcome speech chasing fellow students for non-attendance. He leaves the prospect of the Beijing Forum as a dangling carrot of potentiality for all future candidates for the job.)

At the time of writing we don't think there will be a closing ceremony, but it may be best to check that you don't have to do another speech at the end of the course. Be prepared to do some running back and forth to Beida and the International Office, as you may be called on to deal with certificates, student cards, etc.

Enjoy...

Extracurricular Beida

Although you will be going to Beida Monday to (probably) Thursday, it's a really good idea to involve yourself in other activities when you're out there, not only to have fun but also to enrich your experience of Chinese culture and hopefully improve your language skills.

It can be difficult to get involved in Beida's extra-curricular activities—the website is in Chinese and poorly organised (ask your language partners! They will know how to use it). Beida may seem relatively keen to keep you separate from Beida students. The best way to get involved in Beida activities is to ask the students what's going on around campus. Alternatively look for things outside of Beida by checking magazines such as *Timeout* and *That's Beijing*, although these are likely to be classes run for ex-pats and are often in English. Early in both terms there's a kind of activities fair on the main shopping street in Beida (the one with the big post office and the Subway); one of our number spent the whole year shuffling to and from orchestra rehearsals in an underground car park beneath the chemistry faculty after signing up for an audition here, so it's definitely worthwhile.

Since you are out here for a year it is to be recommended, once you've settled in, that you get involved in something in Beijing. Some people choose to teach English to children (the money is pretty good), volunteering opportunities are quite common and internships are also out there (if you have one free day a week). The first term in Beijing is spent acclimatising to Beijing life and trying to get your Chinese to a level where simple conversations now flow easily—the second term is the one to go wild with extracurricular things.

The sports facilities at Beida include a gym and a pool, but are not really open to foreign students, no matter what they tell you. The tennis courts, etc. are free but you have to sign up for them. There are several gyms in Wudaokou, including in the Huaqing jiayuan compound. It is generally worth seeing if you can bargain with gyms as they may be willing to cut you a deal, especially if several people want to join together.

Unfortunately, there are no venues at or around Beida to practice musical instruments. If you sign up for music lessons, though, your music teacher might be able to provide or direct you to a place where you can practice. However, an easier alternative would be to go to 新街口 where you can find both instruments and teachers!

You can join the Beida library (see "Communications") and borrow books, although most people don't bother apart from for the four Oxford essays, as it's a confusing place. The library is rated as the best in Asia and has a surprisingly well-stocked English language section with some material in controversial areas, although don't expect to find anything unusual on Taiwan, Tibet or Tiananmen. Because China has very lax intellectual property laws you can take borrowed books and have them photocopied whole. This can easily be done on campus and costs about 15RMB, so you can build up a good library of material to bring back with you.

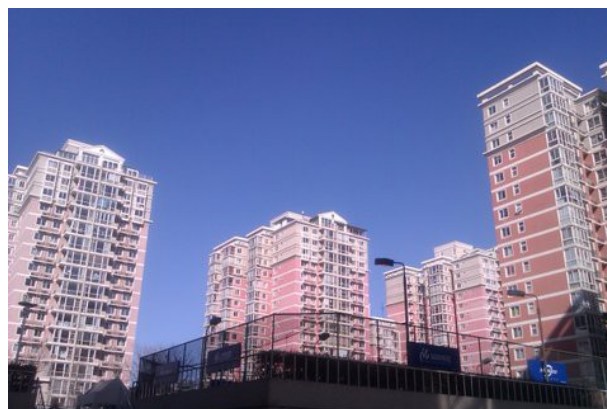
Accommodation

Finding accommodation is probably the most daunting part of moving to Beijing, but if you keep your wits, patience and sense of humour about you, it's actually not that difficult.

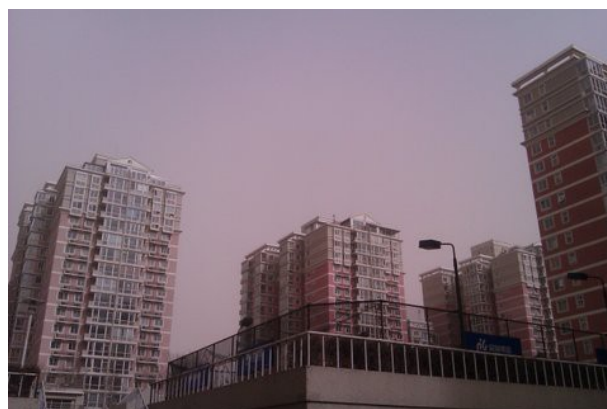
Location

Undoubtedly the most obvious choice of location for Beijing students is Wudaokou, which lies at the heart of the university district and is famous for its restaurants, amenities, clubs, bars and transport connections. Its ideal location and large foreign student population has seen house prices soar in recent years, but there is still plenty of reasonably priced and very pleasant accommodation to be found.

The most popular place to live in Wudaokou is a large apartment complex called Huáqīng jiāyuán, 华清嘉园, which is about 25 minutes' walk from the East Gate of Beida and is situated very close to the Wudaokou metro station. To get there from Beida go out of the East Gate and walk straight up Chengfu lu 成府路 (as in Cheng Fu Road) until you reach the set of pink buildings just before the metro station. Huáqīng is very convenient—with access to shops and a gym—but can be a little pricier than elsewhere, although prices vary greatly from building to building. The two three-person groups who rented flats here in our year paid an average of about 10,000RMB pcm.



Huáqīng jiāyuán 华清嘉园 on clear and smoggy polluted “cloudy” days....



Directly south of this complex is another one called Dōngshēngyuán 东升园, which tends to be a little cheaper but is still nice. There are also apartments further down Chengfu lu, near the former Geography University, and there are often flats available in Beijing Language University (语言大学). If you don't like Wudaokou you can try near the southwest gate of Beida; this is closer to campus but not as convenient for public transport.

Apartments are generally 2- or 3-beds (there are a few 1-bed and 4-beds but these are rare and expensive).

Rental Agencies

There are a number of rental agencies who can show you around apartments, but be

prepared for stress and frustration—it's a competitive business. Some of the all-male agencies find it difficult to take all girl groups seriously, so if you're getting nowhere you can try and take a guy along with you. You may also find that the agencies try to play you off one another, as it's likely you'll be the only groups moving in at this time and the agencies are desperate to get the commission. Keep a good sense of the ridiculous and be prepared to store up some grin-worthy anecdotes and affectionate pet names for flats.

The area around 华清嘉园 is covered in rental agencies; you can just walk in, tell them what you want and they'll immediately start taking you around flats. Century 21 is highly recommended, Homelink is pretty good, and 我爱我家 (WoAiWoJia) are quite professional. Also recommended by Beida is Beijing Buddy (at the time of writing the number for our contact at this agency, Allen, was +86 150-1027-5766). Commission tends to be somewhere around one month's rent, although in some cases in the past this seems to have been the landlord's responsibility rather than the lessee's.

If you want to deal directly with the owner, there are lots of adverts in windows and on notice boards in cafés. Like the smaller no-brand rental agencies, be aware that this may give you very little security if things go pear-shaped. Also, if you know anyone in Beijing, it's worth asking around to see if they know any private agents—these guys appear out of nowhere and seem to have access to a huge range of flats. Alternatively, check www.thebeijinger.com to find people looking for housemates; you can then contact people by email or telephone.

Choosing an apartment

When viewing apartments, have a good look around and make sure it has all the necessities such as a working shower and toilet, secure locks, air-con, working electric sockets, a TV (you can get DVD players for £10-£15) and a fridge. It's also good to ask your landlord about internet access—our landlord was willing to sort out wireless for us (for about 1,500 RMB for 12 months). If there's anything that needs fixing or installing (e.g. air con: YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT IT) bring this up when viewing the flat, before you sign anything. It's also an idea to think about what furniture you'll need when viewing each property, as you can often negotiate this with the landlord when you are discussing rent. It's not unheard of to manage to knock 1-2000RMB off the rent, but the real prize for one group was getting entirely new bed and sofa suites, desks and tables included for free. Be aware that the flat is not likely to have been cleaned when you get it, but your landlord might be able to arrange a cleaner for you. The Lotus Centre provides lots of chemical goodies for your cleaning pleasure, and some of us have hired cleaners very cheaply, so feel free to ask for contact information.

Look around a few places and be prepared to **bargain** to get the rent lower, but don't go OTT and try to keep it friendly. You'll probably be shown the same apartment by several agencies and this can give you bargaining leverage. It is often easier to bargain face to face with the landlord, as agents are taking a cut. Be sure to take your time in viewing flats and considering different agencies. Agents will try to make you seal the deal within a day and will be very pushy about it, so just keep your cool and say you will come back tomorrow. There are plenty of flats for rent in September, so even if the agents tell you the flat will be rented out immediately, there is no need to worry.

No matter what happens, also discuss the fees you will be paying up front and before you commit to ANYTHING. If the agent makes noises about paying a commission, they may be trying to rip you off (they might also be receiving their cut from the landlord—the situation on this is a little murky). It's been known for an agent to insist on commission right up until some of our number threatened to walk out, whereupon the need for it mysteriously abated. Do not get pressured into paying obscene amounts—there will be other flats available. If you aren't comfortable being blunt, find someone who is—it'll save you money.

You will be asked to pay all your rent up-front (often three months' rent plus a deposit of one month's rent) so you should **take money out from ATMs over a several of days** to ensure you have enough, as the daily withdrawal limit is about 2000RMB. Do think about drawing cash out as soon as you get to Beijing, or come with a lot of money (see also the "Money" section on the usefulness of Western Union for large transfers; this may well be the best option, assuming you have pliant family back home willing to 办 the 手续 for you). The agencies and landlords sometimes do not understand when foreign students cannot pay everything upfront within three days. Be sure to explain the withdrawal situation to them clearly if it's a problem. Obviously, be careful about carrying large sums of money around and leaving lots of money in an insecure place. A money belt that you can wear under your clothes and padlocks and lockable bike-chains for your baggage are a good idea, especially when travelling around.

Living in an apartment

Once you have your apartment, you will get bills through your door for water and gas. You can either take these to the bank and pay them or else collect them to pay to your landlord at the end of the tenancy. If you have paid them throughout, choose a draw/shelf and use it to **KEEP THE RECEIPTS** so you can prove you've paid.

Electricity (and gas if you live in 华清嘉园) often runs off a top-up-able card, and if you have a nice landlord, you can text him when your lights and laptop go dark and he'll go and top up the card for you. Otherwise, you can take the card to a local bank (Bank of Beijing opposite the East Gate of Beida for gas, and for electricity the yellow, three-storey State Grid building opposite Zhongguancun Number Two Primary School, just across the road from the Huaqing jia yuan compound in the Beida direction) and put more money on it. Air-conditioning eats money (and the environment), so it's a good idea to remember to switch it off when you go out, for all that you want a cool house to come back to.

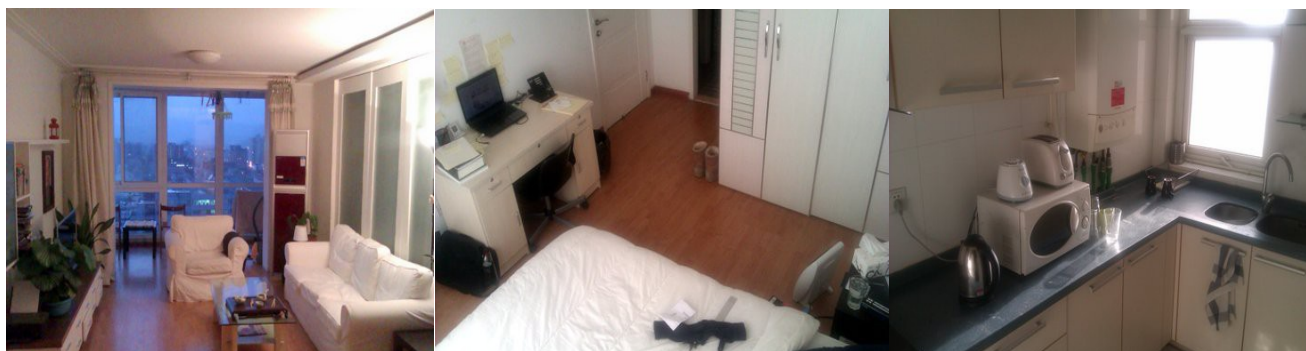
Cockroaches (蟑螂 zhāngláng) and mosquitoes are potential visitors. If you don't have mosquito screens on your windows, make sure to shut them well before sunset to keep the mozzies out. You can also buy cheap anti-mosquito, plug-in scent devices from the Lotus Centre. Cockroaches like damp places (bathrooms) and will be attracted to any food that gets left out or any unclean surfaces. This is a true incentive for cleanliness. In general they don't do much harm, but they do have an annoying habit of exponentially increasing in number. If you get cockroaches, tell your landlord; if you don't receive help, you'll find a well-stocked arsenal of cockroach poison and traps in Lotus, which when used en masse in a 'shock and awe' counter-offensive can be devastatingly effective. If you have cockroaches, turn on the lights before entering rooms at night in order to avoid crunchily unpleasant consequences. In killing cockroaches, do not squash them: they let off odours which will attract other creepy crawlies; cockroaches are into necrophilia... So

you should preferably poison or drown the beasts.

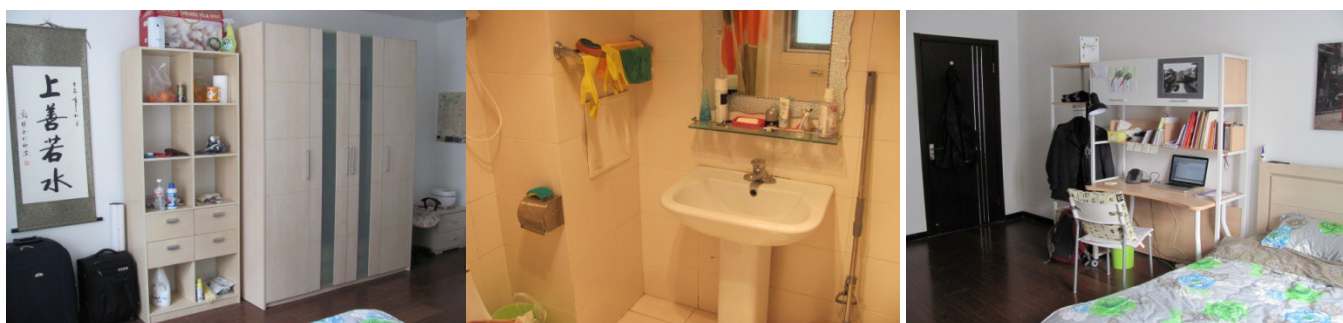
Approximate Accommodation Prices

To give you some idea of what to expect, here are some details for 2013-2014. Sadly, given the rising trend of Wudaokou's prices, this section may be out of date before too long.

华清嘉园(五道口) — 3 bedrooms (2 bathrooms, inc. 1 master bedroom + ensuite) 11,500 元 per month (4500 and 3500 元 per person):



South of Beida (六道口) — 3000 元 per month (for bedroom + ensuite):



西王庄 (五道口) — 2 bedrooms (1 bathroom), 5000元 per month (2500元 per person):



Alternative Accommodation

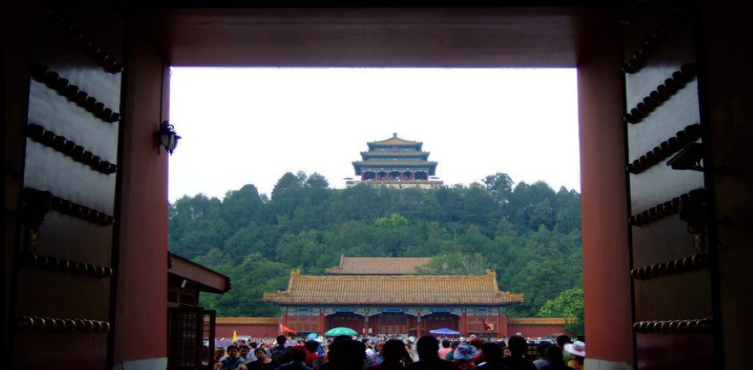
Some students lived in a Chinese **student dorm** with Chinese students. The university prohibits international students from living in the Chinese dormitories. However, other options are

available such as living in dormitory-style accommodation with students and other people from outside the university. Chinese people from outside the university generally have more time and tend to be more interested in learning English—and helping you with your Chinese. The main disadvantages are SERIOUSLY inferior living conditions (some dormitories do not include air-con, mosquito nets or internet, have communal shower and toilet facilities, tend to be very small and come with house cockroaches), security issues (especially with respect to valuables) and the reduced privacy that stems from having several room-mates. With regards to privacy, however, roommates do tend to be respectful of personal space, and many people hang curtains around their bunks to help.

In the words of someone who actually did it: “As it gets towards July/August the heat when sharing a room is absolutely unbearable, and landlords are usually stingy with the air-con. I had to move out after about four-and-a-half months as I nearly went mad... Oh, and the worst thing is that people will smoke in the room and genuinely not realise that it’s inconsiderate, even while you’re asleep. Apart from that it was good fun.” The money saved (rent can be as little as 300RMB a month) and more importantly the opportunities for language-learning and cultural exchange can make this option worthwhile. You have to be brave to opt for this, and self-evidently the more Chinese you know the less difficult things are initially. The best person to help you out if you’re looking for a dorm is your language partner at Beida.

The Global Village (Zhongguan xinyuan 中观新园) is a convenient but pricy alternative, situated directly opposite the East Gate of Beida. This complex is mainly occupied by foreign students and is the official international student accommodation of Peking University. Because of this, it is highly sought-after by foreign students and quite expensive. If you are interested in meeting other internationals and like being able to roll out of bed and into class, this would be a good option to consider. Some rooms are shared between two people; the price for a suite consisting of two bedrooms and a shared bathroom is approximately 3500RMB per person per month. If you get a considerate roommate, chances are you will barely notice their presence. The Global Village also contains private rooms, but be prepared to spend a little extra.

Homestays are possible but fairly difficult to find. You’ll have to organise it yourself, so if you have your heart set on living with a family, try to set it up before you go. “Connections” (关系 guānxi) are important to the Chinese—mention to your Chinese friends in Oxford that you’re looking for a homestay near Beida and you might just end up with a friend of a friend of a friend of theirs! There are plenty of benefits—a true immersion in Chinese culture, greater opportunity for language development and the potential for lifelong friendship. There are, however, also some potential problems to think about: if you don’t get along with the family it can be hard to extract yourself from the arrangement; Chinese families may be strict about curfews and rules; and you may find yourself a long way from your classmates and therefore slightly isolated. You could potentially opt for staying in a family for half the year and live on the Beida campus for the other. Talking to some of the Cambridge students who have been living with Chinese families, it seems as though it is very tough in that there is no place for escape or a break from the constant Chineseness. Moreover, you might end up being the unpaid English teacher of your host’s children, neighbours, and other relatives.



Really alternative living arrangements...

Registration at the police station

Once you have found a place, you need to **register with the police station** to gain a temporary residence permits within 24 hours of moving in. This is not only a legal necessity but also required if you need to claim anything on insurance or change your visa. Your landlord should

take you through this process and foot the bill, but if they do not then the police station for 华清嘉园 and 东升园 is in 东升园. If you are living near the south gate of Beida, you'll probably go to the police station down the street from Carrefour (Jiālèfú 家乐福). Take your passport. Don't panic if you've left it over a day before registering; they have no idea when you've moved in.

Don't be persuaded into not registering with the police in order to save on rent. Although it's highly unlikely you will be discovered, if there are difficulties such as theft of belongings, which requires insurance documentation from the police, you will run into problems and could be heavily fined.

Do not be surprised if your landlords asks for your passport—(s)he generally wants to make sure you are under the correct visa permits. Make sure to have photocopies of your passport to give to your landlord and to keep for yourself when you hand your passport over to your university coordinator to change your visa to a temporary residency permit.

Communications

Internet (& VPN)

If you cannot get internet in your apartment (unlikely) then there are several alternatives:

- There are quite a few internet cafes in the area surrounding Beida. There are several in *Wudaokou* (largely in mini-Korea on the other side of the railway tracks near the cinema). Internet cafes generally charge 2RMB per hour and require you to leave a deposit from which the amount you spend is deducted. Foreigners are often asked to produce passport identification. There are also quite a few cafes in *Wudaokou* that have free wireless access, including Helen's, Lush, La Bamba, Bean Tree and The Bridge Café.
- The other way to access the internet is in the Beida library. You can join the library once you have been given your student card by Beida (you should be given it when you register). Go to the library and go to the card desk to register (it's 10RMB, though if you want to borrow books you also pay a 500RMB deposit). You will also need a passport photo (yes, again). Once you have a library card you can use the internet in the library. Simply hand your card over to the internet desk, write your name in the logbook, and the librarian will give you a number for a computer you can use. The library also costs 2RMB per hour but doesn't require a deposit, although it seems to get blocked faster than most other places. Also, finding a free computer may be a little bit of a challenge.
- Also on the Beida campus, Shaoyuan 7 has a computer room next to the post office, opposite the shop. You can pay to access the internet, but be aware that if you want to print it can be quite expensive.

Note that if your bank accounts are online it is best not to check them in internet cafes, as security is questionable. The computers in the Beida Library are the best bet for any financial transactions if you don't have internet in your apartment. Alternatively, get somebody at home (i.e. mum) to do it while you're in China. You might even consider setting up an enduring power of attorney that allows somebody else to give signatures on your behalf. This does not give them control over your life, but it means that they can sign your loan application form and sort out bank issues and insurance claims, etc., on your behalf.

If you want access to Facebook, Youtube or anything the Chinese government doesn't want its pesky citizens seeing, you *must* set up the **Oxford VPN** before leaving for China. Go to <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/network/vpn/> for more information on sorting it out.

You may need the following information to set up VPN on iPods/Linux:

IPSec gateway: vpn.ox.ac.uk

IPSec ID: oxford

IPSec secret: osiris

Username: (your Oxford username)

Password: (your remote access password)

n.b. Kaspersky Internet Security software can cause problems with Cisco VPN.
The solution to this problem and others can be found at:

<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/network/vpn/faq/anyconnectfaq.xml>.

In terms of internet, the best option still remains to get it in your apartment. This will involve more dealing with Chinese bureaucracy (another reason for coming earlier), but once you're done you can connect at home and it is reasonably cheap. And at least when the eternally variable connection speed slows to a crawl you'll be in your own home, able to curse as loudly as you like without getting funny looks.

Phoning

To phone abroad, **Skype** is your best option—in addition to the free Skype-to-Skype calls, you can buy credit on it to call real phones, which is reasonably cheap.

For in-country calls, get a Chinese phone. Speaking over the phone can be challenging at first (so many homophones...), so get your landlords/estate agents/language partners to text you instead until you're confident in phone calls. Your mobile from home will work with a Chinese SIM if it's unlocked, but you may need to buy a phone in China if you want to text in 汉字. Wudaokou is full of phone shops, but your best bet is to go into the Lotus supermarket and ask for the cheapest deal. Cheaper SIM cards have lots of fours in the phone number. You can also get SIM cards and top up vouchers (chōngzhí kǎ 充值卡) here—but make sure you know which network you're on (usually it's 中国移动 aka China Mobile, generally the cheapest option). Top-up cards can also be bought from newsstands on the street. The Lotus Centre may not be especially cheap (the cheapest phones in 2013 were around 200RMB), but you can return the phones if you have problems, so it remains a good bet.

Post

The post in China is secure and generally, though not universally, reliable. Packages from home will get to you if your address in pinyin is on it, but you can always type up your address in Chinese so that your family can print it out and stick it on. There is a post office on the Beida campus, on the main shopping street between the Subway and the bank.

Letters will generally end up in the mailboxes on the ground floors of apartment blocks. If you miss a delivery of a parcel, the deliveryman will sometimes leave it outside your door, give you a call or leave it with the porter—in which case you'll get an angry porter at some time in the future...

The Chinese can be very particular about what can be posted and how. For example, they often require only paper to be posted in envelopes; if anything besides paper gets put in and they find out, the post office staff will have to often give you a box or jiffy bag to repackage it with. There is also a size requirement for letters—an envelope which would pass regulations in Britain may be “too small” for posting in China. You'll find out through trial and error what's allowed and what isn't. Much better to “ask for forgiveness, not permission”—in other words, if there is something you'd like to send home and which you can fit in a normal envelope, go ahead and package it up and don't ask them whether you're complying with their rules. They'll let you know if you're not!

As regards posting parcels, the pricing system is near unintelligible. It is probably easiest to take things along to the post office and see what they charge.

In 2010, a 13kg(ish) box sent SAL (Surface Air Lifted) cost £70 and took 1 month to arrive. SAL is generally the compromise option (airmail being much more expensive and surface mail being much slower).

If you are sending parcels they usually need to see the contents so they can give it the official okay, so to avoid all this kerfuffle, just take whatever you want to send down to the post office unpacked and buy a box there. Or you can let them put it in a jiffy-bag for you, which is cheaper than sending things in a box.

On a side note, anyone interested in stamps should go along to the **Beijing National Post and Postage Stamp Museum** to check out its 'abundant and fine postal antiquities':
<http://www.czyypm.com/>

Transport

Bike

Although Beijing traffic looks like the stuff of nightmares, it is really fun to cycle—though it starts to get boring by the hundredth time a bus is hurtling headlong towards you, its speakers blaring out the phrase “Be careful of your safety” in grimly amusing irony. You can usually get a bike for about £20, making them a cost-efficient and time-efficient way of shuttling between Beida and home. A good bike shop can be found behind the Lotus Centre, past the train ticket shop. From here, a bike, with a lock and basket included costs about 200RMB (after some hefty bargaining). Although the quality can be slightly dubious, this bike shop will often pump up tires for free and give you low cost repairs. You might want to get a bicycle in the first week, so that you can run your errands whilst settling in. There are some particularly funky specimens sold at 北大 for your perusal, and repairmen there are able to do practically anything to a bike quickly and often, strangely, for free. Bicycle thieves are rife so do treat yourself to a good lock. If you really have a crush on Korean style, you might one day invest in a scooter (around 2000RMB).

Travelcard

You can buy these at any metro station, or at any of the designated kiosks. The system is called 一卡通, and works just like an Oyster card. You pay a 20RMB deposit on it, which you can get back when you leave, and top it up whenever you like. It’s valid for buses and the metro.

Subway

(地铁): The metro/subway/underground in Beijing is very cheap – you can get anywhere in the city for 2RMB. There is a metro stop in Wudaokou, which makes it easy to avoid the traffic when going across town. But be warned, though it is sometimes quicker than a taxi over long distances, in rush hours you often won’t find a seat. Actually, if you manage to find a seat at *any* time, open the bottle of champagne you’ll have brought with you for this rare occasion. It takes around 40 minutes to an hour to get from Wudaokou to Wángfǔjǐng and Tiananmen on the metro. There’s a map at the back of this guide—it’s slightly out of date, but the changes are very minor.

Bus

The buses are extremely cheap and go everywhere, though they can take a long time if you’re making a long trip across town. Have a look at the bus timetables on Chéngfúlù and around Beida to see where they can take you. There are buses that go to the Summer Palace, Xiang Shan (the hills outside Beijing), Qiánmén (bottom of Tiananmen Square, not far from the Forbidden City), BLCU and many more. They usually cost 1 or 2RMB—just swipe your travelcard once you get on the bus and it will display how much has been deducted, or ask the conductor how much cash to give for the ticket. The buses can be a fun way to take a trip around the city to see what it’s like if you’re not in a hurry. From Wudaokou to Beida, you should take route 731 or 307.

Taxi

Taxis in China are pretty cheap. Beijing's and Shanghai's taxis are a bit more expensive than those in other cities, but you can generally get across the city for about £6-£8 depending on traffic. If there are a few of you it works out really cheap, and if you just can't be bothered to get the metro or the bus it's a nice option, as they all have air-con and you're guaranteed a seat and a nice chat regarding the four standard questions: Where are you from? Where are you studying? Who pays your tuition fees? How much is a car in the UK? When getting a taxi at night-time don't wave your hand; instead keep your arm straight and look as sober as you can, as that is exactly the kind of clients taxi drivers are looking for. You'll be surprised at how many taxi drivers don't take you just because you're foreigner and they think you'll probably be drunk.

A general note on taxis: on the dash board in front of the passenger seat there should be a laminated card with a photo of the driver, his driver number, and the taxi company on it. This is the taxi license. If you take a taxi without this, it is probably an illegal one, and even if it has a meter you are likely to get ripped off, either by being driven round in circles for hours or because their meter has been tampered with and runs at twice the normal rate. Make sure the drivers use their meters (ask them to 打表)—this isn't usually a problem. Taxis in Beijing are fairly cheap, though during rush hour it's quicker to take the subway if you're going on a long trip across town.

Long Distance Buses

Long distance buses between cities are sometimes quicker and easier to get tickets for than the trains. The sleeper buses are no joke when the road looks more like a sandpit than a road and you may end up sleeping rather too close to comfort with total strangers. But for daytime journeys, or if the route takes you on a nice bit of sealed highway, they can be great. You can also see a bit more of the countryside than from the train. A couple of long distance bus stations to note are at Xizhimen (a subway stop at one end of line 13), and at Liuliqiao (on subway line 9). In buying long distance bus tickets, it's a wise idea to go to the bus station a few days in advance so that they don't sell out.

Train

Though a great long distance option, train tickets are not always easy to get, especially if you want a sleeper ticket. In order of ease of purchase from easiest to hardest: **standing ticket** (the hardcore option, you basically stand wherever you can), **hard seat** (the best value option, you sit on a chair for the duration of your journey), **soft sleeper** (costs a lot more than a hard sleeper, 4 beds to a compartment and a door between the compartment and the corridor), **hard sleeper** (best value for money, you get a comfy, clean bed for the night but a fairly cheap fare, six beds to a compartment, no door). You can sometimes upgrade your ticket once you are on the train but not always, so don't count on it. The hard sleepers have three bunks: top, middle and bottom. The top gives you more privacy and is the cheapest but you can't sit up—it's too close to the ceiling and pretty claustrophobic. The bottom one is big enough for you (and your friends) to sit on during the day but is less private and is the most expensive. The middle one doesn't give you privacy or room to sit up. If you're travelling in twos getting one upper and one lower can be a nice compromise. Earplugs come in quite useful. To some destinations there's the additional option of the high-speed 高铁.

A good place to buy train tickets is at Beida, in the Shaoyuan ticket office, or at the office down the main road from the Lotus Centre. Tickets can also be bought online. Look out for 火车票 signs. You will need your passport to purchase tickets, and you may also be asked to show your passport on train journeys. Tickets go on sale from between 2-10 days ahead of the travel date. If you want to get the international train to Hong Kong, you have to go to Beijing West station to buy tickets.

Sleepers are certainly recommended for overnight travel, and hard sleepers are pretty decent. If you want to save money, choose a seat section, but be aware that the lights stay on all night, people are generally crammed into every gap (including the aisles) and that you'll be surrounded by smokers. This gets less and less fun with every hour.

If you're doing a round trip hoping to take in lots of places in a limited space of time, try not to cut it too fine with the timing. You might not be able to travel on the days you want, so leave a few days spare to cope with delays. If you are travelling during busy periods like national holidays, it is vital that you go and buy tickets as soon as they go on sale. This can mean travelling to the ticket office several days in a row, but otherwise you may end up stuck in Beijing, or even better, travelling overnight for 12 hours with a standing ticket (don't ask).

Plane

Though still more expensive than the train, internal flights are getting cheaper in China and can save you a day or two in travel time. For example, Beijing to Chengdu is 27 hours on the train, but the flight is only a few hours. Also, bear in mind that you may not be able to go directly between two places on the train.

E-long: <http://www.elong.net/flights/> is highly recommended. They sell internal flights in China as well as flights to Hong Kong and some over-seas destinations, often at discounted rates. If you book in advance, you can often get tickets as much as 70% off, which can make it cheaper than the soft-sleeper and potentially save you days of messing around with trains. When you book tickets with E-long, arrange to pay the courier in cash when they are delivered. That way you don't have to give out credit card details, and you will have the tickets in your hand and can check them before you hand over the cash.

Ctrip: <http://www.ctrip.com/> is also highly recommended. Similar to E-long, if you book in advance you can often get savings of more than 60%. Also have a look at their lowest fares section, where you can find discounts of up to 80% on normal prices, though beware that this often doesn't include the mandatory fuel surcharge and usually only applies one way from Beijing. If you're looking for hotels, Ctrip is pretty good for these too.

China Highlights: <http://www.chinahighlights.com/china-flights/> is also tried and tested. They will email you with confirmation details and you'll end up with a sheet to print off. Though it doesn't look much like a ticket, don't panic: the airport will wave you through. If you run into trouble, the customer service is really good.

If you don't have too much luggage, the **Airport Express** is a great way to get to the airport. It runs to both terminals and costs 25RMB on top of the 2RMB subway fare. See the Metro Map at the back of this guide.

Around Beijing

The easiest way to navigate Beijing is to picture it as a series of concentric rings. Beijing has five ring roads (with a sixth huge one on the way), the innermost of which is the second ring road 二环路, which encircles an area roughly equivalent to central Beijing—the old city—with the outermost ring road at present the sixth ring road 六环路. There is no first ring road; instead the boundary of Tiananmen 天安门 square and the Forbidden City 故宫 forms the innermost of these rings. Within this system of rings, Beijing is laid out like a grid. Almost all roads and streets in Beijing go north-south or east-west, so if you're keen on exploring the city, a compass can be pretty useful. No joke!



The 北大 campus and 五道口 areas lie between the fifth and fourth ring roads, in the 海淀 district to the north-west of Tiananmen. 五道口 has a huge student and international population, a large number of bars, clubs, and boutiques, and cafes and restaurants offering all manner of cuisine (see relevant sections of this guide).

To the south of the 北大 campus, just across the fourth ring road is the 中关村 area, which offers bigger buildings with more shops and restaurants in a shinier setting: skyscrapers, shopping malls, a few cinemas and one humongous, cheap-as-chips electronics market.

Within the 二环路, to the north of 天安门 and the 故宫 are the hutongs 胡同: the home of grassroots Beijingers and grassroots Beijing culture. Most of the hutongs in this area remain residential and are therefore a perfect place to get away from the crowds, go for a stroll or get a meal. Some hutong areas like Nanluoguxiang 南锣鼓巷 and 后海 have been renovated with trendy bars and boutiques. On the south side of 天安门 are the 前门 and 王府井 areas: big pedestrianised shopping streets where you'll find department stores, more restaurants (!), a reconstruction of an old Chinese town and some flea markets.

The Chaoyang 朝阳 district in East Beijing is perhaps the most glitzy cosmopolitan part of the city, with the CBD (Central Business District) and Sanlitun 三里屯. The CBD has the biggest, shiniest and most interesting buildings (if you're into that), whilst Sanlitun has the biggest, shiniest and most expensive bars and clubs.

On top of all this, there are all manner of—for want of a better word or phrase—"specialist streets" for book stores, for music stores, for calligraphy supply stores, for minority communities, for gay bars, for cooking utensils, and for pretty much anything you can imagine a special street for.

Some recommendations:

The **Forbidden City** and **Tiananmen Square** are the obvious places to visit. If it takes your fancy, you can go and see dead Mao...

If you want Western-style malls and shops, try 西单 (where you'll also find frozen yoghurt).

- Go down to Jiùgǔlóu (旧鼓楼) area for interesting bars and restaurants, namely BED, Dali and anything on Nanluoguxiang (南锣鼓巷).
- Sānlǐtún has lots of lively ex-pat bars and clubs with dangerously cheap drinks and large screens for watching sport.
- Beijing has many lovely parks including the old and new **Summer Palaces** and the **Fragrant Hills** (Xiāng Shān), which have an awesome cable car to get you up the mountains. All of these are near Beida. Jǐngshān Park has beautiful views of the Forbidden City, and Běihǎi Park is full of attractions. Rítán Park is much smaller and quieter (and cheaper). More locals go here; if you're interested in martial arts, some pretty eminent teachers work here, and you can see people doing *taiji*. Chaoyang Park is a great place to hangout in the summer—with a fake beach, monkey-zip wires, an amusement park and pedalo boats to keep you occupied! Zizhuyuan (Purple Bamboo Park) is another great place to go and is a bit of a quieter destination compared to Chaoyang, plus it's free entry!
- There are lots of interesting temples. Favourites include the **White Cloud Temple**, Bāiyúnguǎn, and the **Lama Temple**, Yōnghégōng, which has its own subway stop.
- The **798 艺术区** (yìshùqū) is a fascinating **art district** in Chaoyang. It can be a little hard to find, so look it up on the net before venturing forth. It's made up of a complex of old warehouses (some of which still bear communist slogans on the walls) now made into a variety of galleries and workshops.
- **Beijing Natural History Museum** is worth a visit if only to see the very dilapidated dinosaurs (when we visited there was a small child hanging off a diplodocus tail). In 2010 there were also some amusing stuffed animals (and also halves of stuffed animals), a follow-the-sperm trip around the reproductive system, an exhibition on dinosaur eggs, and a pot noodle-stocked café. Who knows what the future may have in store...
- If you're a really busy bee, Beijing's a good place to pick up some work experience—don't expect to be paid though! In the past people have worked at the China Britain Business Council, Time Out and Beijing Kids magazine. Teaching English is a definite possibility, providing some welcome pocket money—don't settle for anything less than 150RMB/hour, preferably aiming for closer to 200+RMB.



Food

Be prepared to throw away any stereotypes you might have about Chinese food—each region in China has its own specialities and styles of cooking, and Beijing not only brings together regional cuisines, but is a melting pot for international styles too. Selecting dishes is generally as much about luck as anything else—sometimes it pays off, sometimes it doesn't. Below you'll find a few tips about places we discovered and liked but really, this is an opportunity for intrepid exploration. Firstly, a few hints regarding food problems:

- As mentioned in the “Health” section, **DO NOT drink the tap water** unless you've boiled it first. Water coolers usually dispense hot water as well as cold, so you can make tea. In the Beida accommodation they will give you flasks of hot water.
- We have found that **vegetarianism** is not too much of a problem. There may however still be times when however good your Chinese, the idea that you do not eat meat does not compute in the minds of Beijing's restaurant owners. It is likely more of a challenge as you travel further away from main cities. 吃素 is “to be a vegetarian”, and 我不吃肉 seems to work equally as well. Look out for Indian restaurants and the occasional Chinese Buddhist restaurants for top quality food. There are also plenty of vegetable variants of baozi available for snacking. Worst comes to worst, the Lotus Centre will provide you with all the ingredients necessary to cook your own meals.
- It's very possible to get **food poisoning** if you're not careful. The vast majority of places are fine but be aware that some small places selling Western-style fast food (i.e. fried chicken) may not cook things properly—avoid bloody, poorly reheated chicken drumsticks. A lot of restaurants will give you a doggy bag for leftovers; DON'T EAT THESE! The boxes they use are often not clean, and a couple of us got hospitalised this way. No, really. The best advice is to eat where you see Chinese people eating.

Beida campus

北京大学 campus has a variety of good places to eat, a mixture of cheap canteens and restaurants, with various foods on offer. The restaurant-style places with table service generally accept cash as payment, and the canteens use money on your Beida card, which you top up at an office just off the main street with the post office. Ask your language partner if you have trouble finding it! 100RMB credit can last several weeks, and the food, especially in the canteens, is remarkably cheap (and delicious).

To buy food in the canteens, take your tray and ask for whatever dishes you want (you can usually just point and smile). After giving you a dish, the dining hall staff will key the amount into a box and then you'll swipe your card, which will take off the right amount.

There are also loads of nice restaurants just outside the gates on the west side of 北大, and depending on the weather/season vendors selling fried snack food at the east gates.

BLCU Campus

BLCU, or 语言大学, is also another really good location to explore for nice foods. Walk down 成府路 past the metro station until you come to the gates on the left hand side.

BLCU Muslim is an amazing 新疆 (Xinjiang) restaurant. THIS is the place for roasted bread, 烤馕, and lamb 串. They also do a pretty yummy 红烧茄子 and special noodles called 丁丁削面. Really do make the effort to find this place and eat here: it's 新疆 food at its best!

BLCU also has a pretty nice Japanese restaurant that does good value sushi.

Another reliable place for comfort eating is **Hope café**; pasta & pesto, garlic bread and hot chocolate are among the highlights on the menu, and the place also has free Wifi if you can work out how to use it.

五道口

Asian Style Food

Many, many places to eat here—again impossible to list them all and it can be really fun to explore and find your own favourites. Also, almost everywhere will do 'take-away' for you if you ask them to 打包. Some firm favourites are listed.

A reliably good value restaurant with a delicious menu is found on 成府路, on your left-hand side if you are walking from 五道口 to 北大, just a bit beyond the unmistakably glaring hairdressers on the crossroads with 中关村东路 (you'll understand when you see them). The sign on the shop says 拉面/拉洲, and it is actually on the corner of a side street food of nice little places to eat. This restaurant is a great place to ask for 串 (don't forget the Beijing 儿!), and they also do very nice grilled bread, 烤馕 kao nang. In the summer they have tables outside, and if you're well-protected against mosquitoes, this is a great place to eat.

Down this road there are a few restaurants you must visit, in particular a restaurant called 成都小吃. Here you get big portions for very cheap prices. The 茄子, 地三鲜 and sweet chilli prawn dish are especially good.

A great vegetarian restaurant is located in a very unsuspecting place round the back of the TusPark commercial development. It's called Tianchu miaoxiang restaurant, 1F, Chuangye Building, Tsinghua Science Park. Approaching from Chengfulu, you have to walk past the Google headquarters, and then it is on the left-hand of the lawn. It's not too much pricier than regular restaurants, and the quality of the food is excellent for meat-eaters and vegetarians alike.

Somewhere nice for something a bit different is a small Korean restaurant found next to the Green Tree shop; despite being in both Korean and Chinese, the menu is practically incomprehensible, but they do good soupy noodles with plenty in the bowl and a nice tonkatsu-style curry. It's not too obvious from the street because it's underground, but the doorway is signed and then you go downstairs.

For more Korean, head towards the cinema opposite the U-centre. Just on the left hand side of the cinema (as you face it) there are a number of Korean restaurants. A Korean BBQ on your right hand side (you can go upstairs or downstairs to eat). And on the left hand side there is a place that does particularly tasty bibimbap (lots of vegetables, rice and often some meat in a bowl—yum).

A good place for sushi is Isshin (一心). This is tucked away round the back of the Tous Les Jours building. Alternatively, the sushi place on the ground floor of the Lotus centre does good stuff with a bit less atmosphere.

Also on the Japanese menu is a place called Tonkatsu Curry (mentioned under places that deliver). Across the road from Lush there is a group of shops—it's the one with the yellow sign. The only place in China you will find a piece of chicken, as a fillet, not chopped up AND no bones. Tastes just like Wagamama's but a quarter of the price.

Another really good pair of Chinese restaurants is along the same road as Helen's, a little further down. The first is 独一味, slightly the pricier of the two, and the other is 合众观. For those living in Huaqing jiayuan, these are two absolute mainstays.

On the top floor of the U-centre there are a number of good restaurants (though some tend to be a bit pricier). There is a really good Japanese restaurant where they cook the food on a hot plate in front of you! Go for the noodles. Only 25RMB and so tasty.

Western style food

Beijing, like any other city, has the usual McDonalds, KFC and Pizza Hut for those fast-food fixes, all of which can be found in 五道口. Other slightly less greasy places to go when you've had enough of noodles include...

Bridge café: open 24 hours a day, with free Wifi and good breakfast deals (pancakes are excellent), also does salads, sandwiches, pasta, etc., but definitely one of the pricier places to get your western food fix.

Lush: also open 24/7, they do lunch deals and serve burgers and cocktails in the evening. The banana yoghurt here is amazing.

La Bamba: dark and smoky but cheap. This café is found above Propaganda and offers a different deal every day of the week—Wednesday 10RMB sandwiches, Friday 10RMB burgers, etc.

Helen's Café: Definitely worth a visit- good value pizza, pasta, and sandwiches (plus fresh-baked apple pie!). Also a nice place for drinks in the evening, especially if you get a table outside. Much cheaper than the above two places, with friendly staff and daily meal deals.

These four places are found in the centre of Wudaokou along the Huaqing jiayuan block. Helen's is a little further down than the others (past the side entrance for Dongshengyuan).

Another good place for pizza is Red House, just on the corner of 王庄路 and visible from 成府路, which also does cheap drinks in the evening. Also worth a mention is the Tous Les Jours bakery, which offers some slightly odd pastries; their baguettes are nom.

The supermarket in the Lotus Centre has a fairly average supply of Western foods, cereal and chocolate, but you can go a little further afield to Carrefour supermarket in Zhongguancun, which sells bread, cheese, pasta etc. In the bottom of the U-centre there is also a more western style supermarket where you can find most of the western food you want.

For a Western-Chinese “fusion”, try Element Fresh in The Village, Sanlitun. The lamb here is unbelievably good. And the smoothies are also amazing.

Beijing Roast Duck

北京烤鸭 has to be done. A great place to experience this is the 大董烤鸭店—there are three branches in Beijing, but the one we tried was in the Chaoyang district. (Find it in the Lonely Planet). Not cheap at roughly 200RMB per person (including a couple of other dishes), but totally worth it. The vegetables here are AMAZING, and they usually give free ice cream and lychees for dessert too. It gets extremely busy so unless you want to queue for hours/not get in, reserve in advance. They'll probably only have slots left for earlier in the evening, up to 6pm-ish. Duck du chine, right next to Dadong, is also very tasty.

Korean BBQ

Again, another must-try in Beijing.

- Most local/convenient is a restaurant on one of the floors within the Lion King building. A little expensive, but very nice, order combo platters and they cook the meat right in front of you.
- Another great place is found down 王庄路- walk down the road (it's at least a ten minute walk) until you come to a Korean BBQ restaurant on the right side of the road, next to a bar called Peppers. Order meats and vegetables off the menu and then cook it yourself on the grills in front of you.

Street Food

Beijing street food is delicious, varied, and cheap; aim to try out as much of it as possible, although with half an eye on the elevated risk of food poisoning...

MUST TRY: 包子. Please do not leave Beijing without having eaten baozi! They are 2.5RMB maximum, come in loads of different flavours and are super-filling. There are loads of stalls about—we found a great baozi place on 成府路, about a quarter-way between 五道口 and 北大, within a little row of shops and next to a stall selling nuts and spices (just before you get to Chaoshifa). They sell really good 小龙包—one 笼 basket) is 6RMB. This stall also sells 烧麦 (shāomài), little addictive bundles of sticky rice. Also, 7/11 do a surprisingly tasty chicken curry 包子.

Another handy snack/breakfast to grab on the way to class is 油条, long chewy dough sticks, best enjoyed with soymilk 豆浆. Yum! Also found along 成府路. You'll probably see some stalls

selling a 1.5RMB wrap with egg, salad, meat and chilli in it. Tastes better than it sounds... 煎饼 is another must try—there are always about eight mini temporary stalls selling them in the morning on the way to 北大. (Note: they pack up about 11am as they are a breakfast food, but they are also enjoyed by westerners for lunch if you can find one at that time.) It's a savoury pancake with salad, chilli and a crackerbread type thing. Usually about 4RMB.

As the weather gets warmer more and more stalls will appear selling sticks of grilled meat, 串. You can ask for spicy, 辣 (là) or not spicy, 不辣. Lots of the little stalls selling drinks will also sell little clay pots of yogurt and honey. Tasty, but watch out: the proprietors might expect you to hang about to finish your drink so you can return the clay pots. If you can, try to get hold of some 奶茶. There are various forms available, but its best manifestation is when served in a plastic sealed cup with a straw and with 珍珠 in the bottom. In the winter you can get it hot and in the summer with ice in it. After having drunk this elsewhere in China we were a little disappointed not to see it more readily available in Beijing, BUT in the summer places around the city start to crop up. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

It's Time To (鲜果时间): Despite the silly name, this chain offers really good cooling drinks and milkshakes which are well worth checking out in the summer months. There is one on the southern side of Chengfulu just by Huaqing Jiayuan, one by the south exit of the Wudaokou subway and another on the basement floor of the U-Center.

臭豆腐: you'll smell it before you can see it... Give it a taste if you dare... (Do dare: it's actually really good.)

Places that Deliver (Lazy Food)

All the fast-food places deliver 24/7 (a guilty McDonalds breakfast arrives in less than 20 minutes...), and their numbers are available online. They are all pay on delivery.

Some of the other popular places that deliver include:

Pyro's Pizza: good pizza; try the mozza sticks and the cheese bread sticks. The chicken wings are mediocre. Menu on website:

<http://www.lushbeijing.com/pyro/index.htm>

010-8286-6240

Pie House: With a near irresistible website, the Pie House offers American-style pies with amazing flavours and great ingredients. They're pretty expensive but definitely worth it; two favourites are key lime and pumpkin. You need to order at least five hours in advance; an adorable granny will then deliver to your building and screech “我有你的 PIE” through the intercom.

<http://www.piehouse.com.cn/>

010-5166-4464

Tonkatsu & Curry Rice 双马餐厅: cheap and somewhat addictive curry. One sauce fits all. Try the banana yoghurt. It's situated just past KFC, and you should be able to retrieve a delivery service number from a menu or a flyer.

Must-try foods

- 北京烤鸭 běijīng kǎoyā Beijing Roast Duck. Essential
- 宫保鸡丁 gōngbǎo jīdīng Hot and spicy chicken with peanuts
- 干煸豆角 gānbīāndòujiǎo Twice fried string beans with chilli
- 红烧茄子 hóngshāo qiézi Stir-fried aubergine
- 大白菜 dà báicài Stir-fried cabbage, with vinegar (醋 cù) or garlic 蒜 (suàn)
- 鸡蛋炒米饭 jīdàn chǎo mǐfàn egg-fried rice
- 羊肉串儿 yáng ròu chuàn lamb kebabs

Special Dining Outside of Wudaokou

Fine Dining: Chinese

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1/F, Grand Hyatt Hotel, 1 Dongchang'an Jie, Dongcheng District

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东城区金宝街金宝大厦5层 Dengshikou L5 8522 1234

2. 1-2/F, Nanxincang International Plaza, 22A Dongsishitiao, Dongcheng District

东城区东四十条甲22号南新仓国际大厦1~2楼(立交桥西南角)

Dongsi Shitiao L2 5169 0329

3. 3 Tuanjiehu Beikou, Dongsanhuan Lu (southeast corner of Changhong Qiao)

朝阳区团结湖北口3号楼东三环路(长虹桥东南角) Tuanjiehu L10

6582 2892/4003

Winner of Beijinger's Best Chinese; **reservation required 120-200pp**

Duck de Chine 全鸭季

1949 – The Hidden City, Courtyard 4, Gongti Beilu (opposite the south gate of Pacific Century Place Mall), Sanlitun, **Chaoyang** District 朝阳区工体北路4号院(太平洋百货南门对面)

Tuanjiehu L10 C

6501 8881

Peking Duck, **reservation required 200+ pp**

Fine Dining: International

Capital M

3/F, 2 Qianmen Pedestrian Street, www.capital-m-beijing.com

前门步行街 2 号 3 层

Reservations can be made online 6702 2727

Overlooks Tiananmen, contemporary world fusion, **reservation required 400+pp**

Temple

23 Shatan Beijie (off Wusi Dajie), **Dongcheng**

东城区 沙滩北街 23 号 (五四大街向北)

<http://www.temple-restaurant.com/> 8400 2232

High-end fine dining, Winner of The Beijinger's Best Newcomer for 2012, **reservation required**

Vegetarian: Chinese

Pure Lotus 净心莲

Tongguang Bldg, 12 Nongzhanguan Nanlu, **Chaoyang** District

朝阳区农展馆南路 12 号(通广大厦内)

Tuanjiehu **L10 B**

6592 3627, 8703 6669

Famous mock meats and nice setting, **120-200 pp**

Lily/Baihe Courtyard 百合素食

23A Caoyuan Hutong, **Dongzhimennei** Beixiaojie, Dongcheng

Beixinqiao or Dongzhimen **L2/13**

6405 2082

Chilled out hutong setting, **50-80 pp**

The Veggie Table 吃素的

19 Wudaoying Hutong, **Yonghegong**

6446 2073

First ever vegan in Beijing, **50-100pp**

Chinese regional and speciality

Yunnan

Haney Restaurant 哈尼个旧云南餐吧

107 Baochao Hutong, **Gulou** Dongdajie

东城区鼓楼东大街宝钞胡同 107 号

6401 3318

50-100pp

Middle 8th 中八楼

R17, Zhongguancun Pedestrian Mall, 15 Zhongguancun Dajie, Haidian District

海淀区中关村大街 15 号中关村广场步行街 R17

Walkable from the **S or E gate of PKU**

Affordable Yunnan, **50-80pp**

Dali Courtyard 大里院子

67 Xiaojingchang Hutong, **Gulou Dongdajie**

东城区鼓楼东大街小经厂胡同 67 号

8404 1430

Renowned décor, particularly stunning outdoor terrace, **reservation required**, **120-200pp**

Beijing

Fangshan Restaurant 仿膳餐厅

1 Wenjin jie, on **Beihai Park's** Qionghua Island (It's the only big island)

Dishes created for Dowager Cixi and the Qing court (very interesting), no idea of price

<http://www.kinabaloo.com/bh9.html>, can't find phone number; a long walk from public transport

Beijing Palace 北京宫正味大酒楼

130 **Chaoyangmen** Neidajie, Dongcheng District

东城区朝阳门内大街 130 号

Chaoyangmen **L2**

6523 6320

True 'old Beijing' cuisine, **80-120 pp**

Duck de Chine 全鸭季

1949 – The Hidden City, Courtyard 4, Gongti Beilu (opposite the south gate of Pacific Century Place Mall), Sanlitun, **Chaoyang** District 朝阳区工体北路 4 号院 (太平洋百货南门对面)

Tuanjiehu **L10 C**

6501 8881

Famous Peking Duck, **200+ pp**

Huajia Yiyuan 花甲怡园

Dongzhimennei and Gui Jie 东直门内簋街

235 Dongzhimennei Dajie, **Dongcheng** District

东城区东直门内大街 235

Beixinqiao **L5 B**

6405 1908

Beijing/Homestyle contemporary Chinese, lovely décor and hutong garden, consistently a Best Restaurant contender on The Beijinger, **100-200pp**

Najia Xiaoguan 那家小馆

Shijingshan 石景山

1 Yikesong (south of **Botanical Gardens** crossroad), Fragrant Hills, Haidian District

海淀区香山一棵松 29 号(植物园十字路口南)

8259 8588

Manchurian Beijing cuisine, one of The Beijinger's favourites.

80-150pp

or

Yonganli / Silk Market 永安里秀水街

10 Yonganli (south of the LG Twin Towers, west of 119 Middle School), Jianguomenwai Dajie, Chaoyang District

朝阳区建国门外大街永安里 10 号(双子座大厦南侧, 119 中学西侧)

6567 3663, 6568 6553

Southern

No Name Restaurant 无名云南餐吧

Houhai Yandai Xiejie Di'anmen 后海烟袋斜街地安门

1 Dajinsi Hutong, Xicheng District

西城区大金丝胡同 1 号

Contemporary southern Chinese, hip, rooftop/outdoor dining, **80-120pp**

Speciality Northern

Made in China 长安

Wangfujing/Dongdan 王府井/东单

1/F, Grand Hyatt Hotel, 1 Dongchang'an Jie, Dongcheng District

东城区东长安街 1 号东方广场北京东方君悦大酒店 1 层

Dongdan **L1 A**

8518 1234 ext 6024

Contemporary, offers a great 烤鸭, Perennial Reader's Favourite Chinese restaurant for The Beijinger (**reservation recommended!**), **200+pp**

Xinjiang Islam Restaurant (Provincial Government Restaurant) 新疆伊斯兰饭庄

Xizhimen 西直门

Xinjiang Provincial Government Office, 7 Sanlihe Lu, Xicheng District

西城区三里河路 7 号

Beijing Zoo L4 D, though I reckon you could get there on the 319

The Local BLCU Muslim Canteen is, however, an excellent alternative that is walkable from home.

50-80pp per person

Non-Chinese Asian

Purple Haze 紫苏

Dongsi and Dengshikou 东四灯饰口

1, Dongsi Liutiao (east exit), **Dongcheng** District

东城区东四六条 1

Dongsi Shitiao **L2 D**

6501 9345

Acclaimed Thai, Live Jazz on Wednesdays, **80-120pp**

or

Sanlitun 三里屯

Opposite the north gate of the **Workers' Stadium** (in the small alley behind the ICBC Bank), Chaoyang District

朝阳区工体北门对面胡同工商银行后

Dongsi Shitiao **L2 B**

6413 0899, 8774 6387

50-80pp

Susu 苏苏会

Dongsi and Dengshikou 东四灯饰口

10 Qianliang Hutong Xixiang, **Dongcheng** District

东城区钱粮胡同西巷 10

Year Abroad Handbook, 2014-15

Dongsi **L5 A**

8400 2699

Vietnamese, Gorgeous and famed courtyard hutong setting, **80-120pp**

Le Little Saigon 西贡在巴黎

Gulou / Beiluoguxiang / Jiugulou Dajie 鼓楼北锣鼓巷旧鼓楼大街

141 Jiugulou Dajie, Dongcheng District

东城区旧鼓楼大街 141 号

Gulou

6401 8465

Whimsical French-Vietnamese in the hutongs, **50-80pp**

Beijing Nightlife

Clubbing

Clubbing in Beijing can be quite a surreal experience. It is rather different from clubbing in Oxford, and there is lots of fun to be had. The clubbing scene is fairly fast-evolving, so keep your ear to the ground for new places to go—guides such as *Time Out* and *The Beijinger* can be helpful for this and are available free in many of the cafes around Wudaokou such as The Bridge, Lush and La Bamba. In general, you will find a range of places very different in style—some are much more expensive than others, but things can be done cheaply. Many clubs have special offers on drinks or entry on various nights, such as the infamous “ladies’ night” where girls can get free drinks and/or free entry. These are good fun, but watch out as ladies’ night can also attract some fairly creepy men...

五道口: Keeping it Local

STEPS: few would argue in awarding it the title of Class Favourite. Hugs can be expected at the door (by the waiters). £1.50 mojitos for “beautiful ladies” too. Also available are thrilling dice battles or feisty table football matches.

PROPAGANDA: known to some as the Clems of Beijing, has to be tried at least once. Ladies’ night is Thursday: free entry for all and five free drinks for ladies. Good music and sweaty dancing.

La Bamba: bar just above Propaganda, does drink deals—the earlier you go the cheaper (50p tequila shots anyone?). A good place to start off a night out. (Also does food: sandwiches, burgers, fries, etc.)

Sensation: club just next to Propaganda, and is to all intents and purposes an exact replica of it. It remains to be seen whether this will sink or swim in the face of the original’s formidable reputation... The night to go however is Thursday, when entry includes a voucher for five free drinks (for girls).

Wu: another new Propaganda. Located under the U-center, just past Wudaokou station. Cheap drinks and good music. Definitely a must try!

Helen’s: located a short distance past Propaganda and La Bamba, this place is another great student hangout. It has some great drinks deals such as various different “drink buckets” and just general good value for money. Helen’s also does food such as burgers, pizzas, pasta etc, but beware that the service can be pretty slow—a good place to go if you’re not in a rush. You’re guaranteed to bump into some other Beida students here.

后海 Hòuhǎi, 鼓楼 Gǔlǒu and 南锣鼓巷 Nánluógǔxiàng, what we refer to as ‘the hutongs’, are all fantastic to wander around to find bars with character.

Houhai district has multiple bars lined up along its two lakes, and it gets especially buzzing with Chinese tourists and Chinese looking for some fun on Saturday evenings. Prices listed on the

menus can be rather expensive, but promoters outside will often offer some sort of deal, and they can also often be bartered down—the lowest we saw was 10RMB for a beer and 15RMB for a cocktail, but settle for whatever you're happy to pay. Try the small and grimy **Huxley's** for 12 shots for 100RMB.

On **Nanluoguxiang**, **Salud's** jazz band, friendly manager, and quality drinks (i.e. delicious mulled wine) make it a great setting for a cosy night out in a smoky Cuban vibe. Go for the tucked-away **69** if you're looking for some live music in a tiny grunge café (9 p.m. Friday to Sunday) and events such as a "Beatles Revival". For a low-key, edgy dance floor to let yourself loose, hit **Dada**.

Near Gulou and around the Drum Tower the cosy bars abound, making it perfect for a bar-crawl. **Four Corners** is a nice one with an upstairs Vietnamese restaurant and, downstairs, great drinks with a warm feel.

Our main advice remains to go and discover; our words can't do justice to these wonderful hideouts!

三里屯: Sānlǐtún

This district is full of bars and clubs. Some tried and tested include:

Kokomo bar with roof terrace—this gets seriously popular in the warmer months and for good reason. It's a great place to enjoy a relaxed drink on a warm evening, and there's even occasional live music. Located in TongLi Studios.

Blu bar: just a few floors below Kokomo, this is a popular choice for moving on, as things tend to really get going a little later on at around 12 or 1. Drum and bass, house and minimal tech music provide what could be a welcome break from the cheese that can otherwise seem overly prevalent...

Smugglers: located just off the main bar street, next to the fish & chip shop. A small, pub-type venue that does amazingly cheap drinks. A great place to start the night off!

Q bar: located on the top floor of the Eastern Inn Hotel towards the south end of Sanlitun Nanlu, this is another bar with a good rooftop terrace and 2-for-1 martinis on a Wednesday.

Mix and Vics: these two clubs are located opposite each other and are rumoured to maintain a fierce rivalry. Vics is the more Western of the two, generally reckoned to be a good place for a dance; Mix is frequented by more local Chinese, and also has more authentically ineffective air conditioning. They are situated near the Worker's Stadium and get a mention in the Lonely Planet, so have a look for them.

Migas: located in Nali patios, Migas is a more sophisticated destination compared to a lot of the other bars in Sanlitun, this place is complete with its own roof terrace (with pods—but you do have to pay for these), which is great in the summer. But beware that drinks don't come cheap, so if it's somewhere to chill out with a cocktail, then this is the place to come.

Other

秀吧 Xiu bar: beautifully decorated, with soft lights and an outdoor roof terrace with water features (less tacky than it sounds), this stylish spot is located on the sixth floor of the Park Hyatt hotel. Drinks aren't cheap, but Thursday is ladies' night with vodka mixers free at the bar from 10pm to 1am. Live music adds to the atmosphere, though it can be of variable quality, and there is also a small dance floor. The queue can be nightmarish, so arriving pre-11pm is advisable.

Don't forget the cute little road off Āndìngmén 安定门, with its rows of cool cafés owned by young Chinese entrepreneurs (offering cupcakes and the likes), as well as a fantastic variety of restaurants (from Greek to Vietnamese), as well as vintage shops, as well as **School**, renowned live music bar (a bit more on the hard-rock side)! Connecting to the Lama temple, the interesting combination of modernity, authentic Beijing architecture, and Tibetan-inspired cafés should not fail to charm you.

KTV

Another absolute must-try in Beijing is 卡拉 OK!

- **Lion King** KTV bar is inside the same building as the Tous les Jours bakery in 五道口 (both have massive signs that are pretty unmissable). One of the cheapest, with a good song selection, and is conveniently situated.
- **Melody** is further into the centre of town, rather expensive but very swish inside. (Again, check your Lonely Planet guide.)
- If you're feeling up for a challenge, some shoddy Chinese and claims of being a poor student (and possibly some batting of eyelashes) can sometimes get you discounts.

Cinema

There is a cinema on 成府路 just opposite the U-Centre, but it is expensive with a rather small selection. A better option is Megabox in the 中关村 mall. Check the website for times and for special offers (with your 北大 student card you can get super cheap tickets (18RMB before 4pm, Tuesday—Thursday). Foreign films will usually be shown in their original language with Chinese subtitles. <http://www.imegabox.com/index.html> Beida also often shows films in the large central hall on campus—check out the hoardings in front to see what's on.

Music Festivals

Keep an eye out for these around April and May in Beijing—here are a few from 2011:

- MIDI festival—this ran over a long weekend in Haidian, so pretty convenient for Wudaokou. Tickets could be bought at the gate on a daily basis. A real mix of music from all over.
- INTRO festival—a one-day electro festival, located in the super-cool 798 Art District, great dancing.
- Strawberry Fields Festival

Beijing and Beyond

Once you've finished the Beida Course, the rest of the summer is a perfect opportunity for travel. The possibilities are virtually endless and you'll probably be best served by flicking through your travel guides, by searching on Wiki or by chatting to people. One thing you'll realise is that your opinion of a place probably won't match other people's, so take all the information you read with a pinch of salt (including the stuff in here!). Stay safe and enjoy your travels.



Incidentally...

A map of the area around Beida can be found at the back. Places seem to come and go in a flash in Beijing, but it should give you a rough idea of where things are. Hopefully this guide was in some way useful to you (if only as reading material on the plane) but if you've discovered that anything is inaccurate then please delete, add and edit away. Have an amazing time in China!

