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beijingkids

HOME & RELOCATION GUIDE 2016/17

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- Helping your kids settle
- Moving and relocation companies





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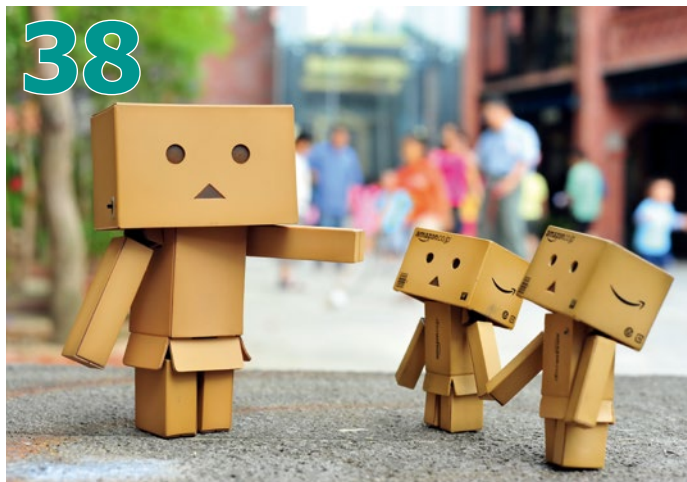
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On the Cover:

Taking to the skies this month is Luke Wang, who has just turned three. He lives with mom Wang Yu, a native Beijinger, and they love cooking, gardening, and of course traveling together (though not usually by hot air balloon!) During the shoot Luke fell in love with the photographer's cat Nikkon. Nikkon loved Luke too, and we had a hard time stopping them flying away together!

Photography by Dave PIXSTUDIO

WOMEN OF CHINA



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Eyee Hsu

When CCTV talk show host and mom-preneur Eyee Hsu is not chasing after her two kids or the family dog, you might catch her at a Pilates studio, one of the Counting Sheep boutiques, or on TV. Find out more about the baby and maternity retailer she co-founded at www.countingsheepboutique.com.



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Caroline Nath moved to Beijing as a teenager after having grown up in the US, Canada, France, and India. She is a filmmaker, radio host, Parent Effectiveness Training teacher, founder of Bonne Nani Jams, and an organic food promoter. She has two multi-ethnic and multi-lingual children. Contact her at kulfidoll@gmail.com.



Celine Suiter

Celine Suiter has been an expat for the past 17 years; from South America to Asia via Europe. This is her second posting in Beijing where she lives with her husband and two children. She likes making new friends, trying new restaurants, and visiting new countries. She documents her crazy life in Beijing and beyond with a picture a day at aTotalTaiTaiTale.tumblr.com

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SCHOOL A-Z CHECKLIST

A quick guide to education in Beijing

Updated by Jessica Suotmaa

A

AIR QUALITY

Smog is a fact of life in Beijing, and the best we can do is clean the air indoors. Several schools – such as the British School of Beijing (BSB) Shunyi, Western Academy of Beijing (WAB), and Dulwich College Beijing (DCB) – have sports domes with air filtration systems. But it's not all about air-locked, purpose-built facilities. Look into each school's air purification systems, testing and monitoring processes, and Air Quality Index (AQI) cut-off point for outdoor activities.

B

BOARDING SCHOOLS

For many families – especially those with frequently changing postings – boarding schools can be a viable option. For some children, they can provide a stable environment, foster independence and maturity, and strengthen social and academic skills. Schools with residential accommodation include Keystone Academy, St. Paul American School, Wellington College International Tianjin, and Harrow International School Beijing.

C

CURRICULUM

Beijing's schools offer a wide selection of curricula and educational philosophies, including American school systems (with SAT/PSAT testing), the Chinese National Curriculum, International Baccalaureate (IB), Montessori, Multiple Intelligences, Reggio Emilio, UK National Curriculum, bilingual programs, and more. For more detailed information, pick up a copy of the 2016-2017 *beijingkids* School Choice Guide (contact distribution@truerun.com for more info).

D

DEMOGRAPHICS

Smaller schools have their advantages, but the likelihood of uneven gender ratios is higher. This can be a concern for some parents, as it is normal for kids to pass through stages in their maturation when same-sex friendships are dominant. Similarly, a lack of diversity may be a concern in some schools. For example, some kids may not enjoy being the pioneering *waiguoren* at a local Chinese school, while some parents may feel being immersed in a completely familiar western culture is not a productive use of their child's time in China.

E MPLOYEE TURNOVER

The quality of the teaching staff is of paramount importance. If possible, meet the teachers who will be educating your children. International schools can face greater levels of staff attrition; think twice about schools with high staff turnover. It takes time for teachers to settle in, develop rapport with their students, and build quality learning programs.

F ACILITIES

Facilities and equipment at top-of-the-range international schools are second to none (see **Air Quality** and **Sports**). Modern learning spaces, science and robot labs, vast libraries, black box theaters, organic vegetable gardens, koi ponds, meteorological stations, dark rooms, TV and radio stations – if you can dream it, chances are one of Beijing's international schools has it. By contrast, the amenities and hygiene conditions at smaller local schools may not always be up to standard; we suggest carefully inspecting each school before making a decision.

G UT FEELING

Of successful child-school pairings, parents often tell us: "It just felt right." When you've narrowed down your options, and weighed all the pros and cons, you may still be left with a coin toss between schools. Trust your intuition and the impressions garnered from school tours (see **Visit**).

H OMESCHOOLING

It's not compulsory for foreign children to attend school in China, so there are no legal obstacles to homeschooling. Many families will opt for homeschooling to save on costs, spend more time with family, and get the best out of their China experience by exploring the hutongs, museums, and other cultural heritage sites. Homeschooling can be tailored to any curriculum, belief system, or language. Homeschooling parents can collaborate to address socialization and sports needs through Beijing's active homeschooling community, Beijing Homeschoolers (Yahoo group), which provides support, information, and opportunities to meet other families.

I NTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Beijing's international schools are truly international. Most of them can legally only accept foreign passport holders and many of the student bodies are incredibly diverse – it's not unusual to have 40 different nationalities together on one campus. The international school alumni network is also one of the largest in the world, and can be a wonderful way to initiate your child into global citizenship. The city's best educational institutions are on par with top schools all over the world. However, their academic excellence, manicured campuses, and state-of-the-art facilities don't come cheap (see **Tuition**).

J OIN IN

For new families, the school provides a vital link to the community. Many schools act as a social hub; some have parent-run cafes (such as DCB, MSB and BSB Shunyi) and others offer all-day drop-in services for parents (such as at HoK). Many schools also have teacher-parent coffees, parent education workshops, and other ways to involve parents in their children's education.

K NOW-HOW

Checking up on accreditations is a vital part of the school selection process. Any school can call itself "international" or "Montessori," but talk is cheap unless there is a stamp of approval from an established governing body. Accreditation naturally increases the price of tuition because the process of obtaining and maintaining certifications entails substantial costs for the schools. If the school you're looking at isn't properly accredited, ask comprehensive questions about its curriculum and methodologies.

L OCAL SCHOOLS

Since 2006, foreign students are allowed to attend any local school, even those without an international campus, as long as the school has the right permits. However, interacting with local schools can be especially challenging for expat families. Differing expectations, larger class sizes (commonly up to 40 students), mismatched holidays (local schools follow the Chinese national holiday schedule), and communication difficulties are some common complaints. It's crucial that you speak Chinese and/or interview a parent whose child attends the school to get an idea of what lies ahead.

M

ANDARIN

Beijing-based families can offer their children a major advantage: exposure to Mandarin. There is a wide range of options available ranging from Mandarin as a subject all the way to unilingual Chinese programs. Bilingual programs have become increasingly popular as families realize how much of a leg up Mandarin proficiency can give their children—just look at how Mandarin has seeped into the curricula of K-12 schools in the US!

N

UMBER OF STUDENTS

Is bigger always better? Smaller schools may lack the resources of their larger counterparts (see **Facilities**), and it is likely your child will have to change school locations (and perhaps curriculum) as they progress from primary to secondary school. On the other hand, smaller schools are less constrained by bureaucracy, and educators are free to make flexible day-to-day decisions based on independent situations. Young children may also be less intimidated by cozier settings.

O

BEDIENCE AND DISCIPLINE

You might have raised model citizens, but be sure to research the school's disciplinary and bullying guidelines to ascertain if their policies seem workable and effective when children do step out of line. Overall, disciplinary policies at international schools are more forgiving, whereas the rote learning system at local schools requires a level of focus that often entails stricter regulations for students.

P

ARENT ORGANIZATIONS

An active Parents' Association (PA) can provide networking and socializing opportunities as well as offering a platform to contribute to the school and community at large. Many Beijing PAs hold annual fundraising balls and other events to benefit local charities (see **Join In**).

Q

UALIFICATIONS

Accredited schools should have properly qualified faculty. Check that teachers have the right qualifications to teach the curriculum offered by the school, whether a teaching certificate from your home country, a Montessori certification, or just relevant degrees. There is a broad range of daycare, playgroup and kindergarten options in Beijing, with significant differences in educational quality and approaches.

R

ECOMMENDATIONS

Ask your existing network, such as your company or new acquaintances for school testimonials to have a better understanding of the school's reputation in the community. Talk to parents whose children attend your preferred school, but also use community resources to get other perspectives on your shortlist by contacting other parents online through Beijing Mamas or Beijing Café (Yahoo Groups). Once you arrive in Beijing, draw on newcomers' groups, such as INN, or simply turn up to the school gate and mingle with other parents. (For more information see page 42.)

S

PORTS

Alongside more traditional facilities such as running tracks, football fields and gymnasiums, Beijing's international schools feature everything from Olympic-sized pools to rooftop putting courses and air-purified equestrian arenas. If your child's chosen sport isn't available at their school, check out the many after-school sports programs available from organizations, such as Imagine, Flips and Kicks, and Sports Beijing.

TUITION

Beijing has joined the ranks as one of the world's most expensive metropolitan cities to live, so don't expect education to be cheap. Inflation hasn't just affected the housing market, but the cost of education has been rising as well. Budget ought to be your number one consideration; after all, there's no point wasting time on schools you can't afford. That being said, tuition costs vary widely. Grade 12 in the international section of a local high school can range from RMB 50,000-100,000 per year while international school fees range from RMB 150,000-300,000 per year, though sibling and other discounts may be available.

UNIFORMS AND DRESS CODES

Many schools opt for uniforms as a way of reinforcing their ethos, increasing identification and school spirit, and reducing the differences between students. Schools without uniforms, albeit not without dress codes, generally emphasize personal choice, freedom of expression, and individual responsibility.

VISIT

After you've read the School Choice Guide and various school websites, it's time to draw up a shortlist and pound the pavement. If you're unable to attend the school's open house or take a tour, contact their admissions departments. Most will be happy to arrange a private visit. Observe the students as you go around. Are they orderly or rowdy, excited or exhausted? Can you see your child fitting in?

WORKLOAD

Some expat families have difficulty adjusting to the Chinese school system due to the long school hours and the excessive amount of homework (and subsequent performance pressure) from school, even for younger students. Despite a focus on academics, the school workload is generally much lighter at international schools, and can be adjusted via a more challenging program, for example.

EXTRACURRICULAR

After-school activities (ASA) may not be the most important factor in choosing a school, but they can tip the balance when it comes to deciding between two otherwise evenly-matched schools. These days, extracurricular pursuits are weighed more heavily – particularly for students preparing for university. Music, arts, sports, and honor societies – ask your children for their input, and think about what's important to your child and their life stage.

YEARS

Is this a short-term posting, or are you here for the long haul? Families committed to expat life tend to prefer education systems, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), which is both available and accepted worldwide. If you're not planning to be away from your home country for long, you may not want to change curriculum in Beijing. Some schools – like the German Embassy School and French International School of Beijing – are backed by foreign education ministries.

ZZZ

Distances in Beijing are often exacerbated by traffic conditions. Cross-city commutes can mean getting up brutally early in the morning, so the school's close proximity to home is a key consideration. Before making your final choice, try to run through the commute to each of the schools you are interested in at peak rush hour. Long transits can wear kids out, especially if they have a lot of homework to complete after they get home. Be sure to ask the schools about their school bus schedule and pick up/drop off locations as well.

On the Street Where You Live

Popular residential neighborhoods for families

by Jessica Suotmaa

The size of Beijing makes it less like a city, and more like a county or province, which means selecting the right neighborhood is as important as choosing your place of employment or school, because where you live will shape what is convenient for you to do, purchase, and value. So whether you're looking for an authentic Beijing experience in the hutong courtyards, a fancy high-rise apartment in the heart of the city, or a mansion-like villa with your own yard and picket fence, you will find it somewhere! We have included the more popular expat neighborhoods in Beijing, using the proximity of schools, and the convenience of dining, shopping, and children's play areas as our yardstick.

CBD (Central Business District) 北京商务中心

The CBD is the financial and media center of the city. Occupying an area of around 4sqkm, the area is sandwiched between the Third and Fourth Ring Roads. The CBD encompasses the famous CCTV Tower (or "Pants Building"), one of Beijing's most recognizable landmarks.

Pros: Affluent, easy access to shopping and financial services, convenient access to the subway (Lines 1, 2, 10, and 6), decent number of kindergartens and preschools.

Cons: Heavy traffic (quieter after office hours), lack of historical buildings and culture, few schooling options for older kids.

Schools: There are several schools for younger children, including Ivy Academy (Central Park), AnRic Little Montessori Room, Beanstalk International Bilingual School (Wanda Campus), The Family Learning House (Guomao), Huijia Kindergarten (Chaoyangmen), and Etonkids' various campuses. School-age kids have fewer options; one is Fangcaodi International School, a local school with an international department.

Shopping and dining: The CBD has a number of fancy shopping malls, such as Shin Kong Place, China World Shopping Mall, Kerry Center, and the LEED-certified Parkview Green. The Place, which has a huge LED screen, hosts mid-range stores including Zara Home, H&M, Uniqlo, and Marks and Spencer. Restaurants tend to be concentrated in malls or compounds. For example, Central Park has Obentos (Japanese),

Thai Lime Cafe (Thai), and Pekotan (bakery and deli), while The Place has Ganges (Indian) and Herbal Cafe (Hong Kong).

Just for kids: Central Park has a large green space ringed with cafes and restaurants that draws families on weekends. Ritan Park, Tuanjiehu Park, and Chaoyang Park are close by. Most major shopping centers have play areas for children. Play centers include the Adventure Zone (Kerry Centre) and Yu Kids Island (The Place), as well as the family center little oasis (Parkview Green, and no, that's not a mistake - "little oasis" is all lower case!).

Popular residential compounds:

- Central Park: Central location in a large compound filled with restaurants, shops, cafes (and bakery), and beauty services. It has its own indoor swimming pool, sauna, squash court, and gym.
- Gemdale International Garden: Gemdale has a supermarket, restaurants, cafes, a post office, a gym, a swimming pool, and a children's playground. A shopping center called Gemdale Plaza is located across the street.
- Blue Castle International Apartment: Close to the post office, banks, Shin Kong Place, and hospitals. Limited choice of western restaurants in the area, though there's an Annie's just around the corner. Blue Castle allows pets, has a clubhouse, gym, and children's playground.

Shuangjing 双井

Located just south of the CBD, Shuangjing was once a no man's land of factories and farmland. With one of the highest concentrations of residential compounds in Chaoyang District, Shuangjing now has a diverse population of white-collar locals and expat families who have settled in the area due to its proximity to schools and the CBD.

Pros: Easy access to the CBD, decent number of schools, burgeoning bar and restaurant scene, relatively safe residential neighborhood, close to shopping and entertainment facilities (BHG, CapitaMall, Viva Plaza), and an active expat community with frequent events such as the Shuangjing Block Party.

Cons: Heavy traffic (especially around Shuangjing Qiao), not great for public transport unless you live near Shuangjing or Jinsong subway stations, not much culture or history

Schools: There are several schools in the area, the largest of which is Beijing City International School (K-12). Kindergartens include The Family Learning House, Etonkids, American International Academy of Beijing, Little Village Montessori School, and New Garden International School.

Shopping and dining: Carrefour, Landgent International Center Mall, and Viva Mall are within walking distance of the area's many residential compounds. There's a large Decathlon further south along Fourth Ring Road. Shuangjing has a growing bar and restaurant scene, which includes Lily's American Diner, Gung-Ho Pizza, Plan B, The Brick, and more. There are also plenty of Chinese restaurants nearby.

Just for kids: There are a few parks in the area in addition to Qingfeng Park along the Tonghui River. The closest major parks are Ritan Park and Chaoyang Park, which are about 15-20 minutes away (by



Qingfeng Park in Shuangjing

car). The top floor of Viva Mall has a selection of play centers. Though pricey, the Adventure Zone at the Kerry Centre in the CBD guarantees a good time.

Popular residential compounds:

- Pingod: Large compound with a good selection of convenience stores and shops in the compound; right next to BCIS.
- Fulicheng: Gym and health club, children's play areas, and clubhouse; adjacent to Viva Mall.
- Landgent International: Relatively new apartments (built in 2007) with a man-made lake and central garden. Near Carrefour, cafes, florists, laundry services, post office, and banks.



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Chaoyang Park has fairground rides for all ages

Chaoyang Park and Liangmaqiao 朝阳公园和亮马桥

Called “the lungs of Beijing,” Chaoyang Park is the largest park in the city. Lined with shops, restaurants, and residential compounds, this area is especially attractive to families. Solana and Lucky Street are on the northwest end, connecting Chaoyang Park to Liangmaqiao, an area with a significant expat community and several embassies.

Pros: Proximity to Chaoyang Park (which hosts free yoga sessions, Heyrobics, HeyRunning, pick-up soccer games, and more), many western supermarkets and restaurants as well as embassies and schools.

Cons: Some of the compounds near the South Gate are relatively far from the subway, though that will change when Chaoyang Park station on Line 14 opens. Stations near the west of Chaoyang Park include Liangmaqiao (Line 10) and Zaoying (Line 14).

Schools: House of Knowledge International Kindergarten and School is located near the West Gate. In Liangmaqiao, there’s the Canadian International School, Germany Embassy School, and The Children’s House International Montessori Kindergarten.

Shopping and dining: Solana Lifestyle and Shopping Park is an open-air mall next to Chaoyang Park. It’s one of the most popular shopping centers, including Zara, Uniqlo, Muji, H&M, American Eagle, Gap, and more. There are many restaurants lining the west side of Chaoyang Park, including Muse (Vietnamese), Annie’s, and Alio Olio (Italian).

Across from Solana, a strip called Lucky Street has several Japanese restaurants and the South German Bakery, a popular brunch spot.

Just for kids: Chaoyang Park is a must-do for families in Beijing. There’s plenty of space to run around, ponds for paddle boating, and a children’s area with amusement rides and fairground games. Kite flying at Chaoyang Park is a great spring tradition and can easily be combined with picnicking. Solana has an indoor skating rink, a cinema, and an entire wing dedicated to maternity and kids’ shops along with play groups and activity classes (e.g. kung fu).

Popular residential compounds:

- **Palm Springs:** With its north-facing units overlooking Chaoyang Park, its Roman-style garden, and large clubhouse with an indoor swimming pool, children’s playground, sauna, and gym—it’s no wonder it’s popular with families.
- **Park Avenue:** Park Avenue has a shopping complex with imported groceries, cafes, and sporting goods stores in addition to its children’s playground, swimming pool, and gym.
- **Greenlake Place:** Located east of Chaoyang Park, Greenlake’s apartments overlook the man-made lake in Chaoyang Park and its compound has many stores, restaurants, and even a Jenny Lou’s.

Sanlitun, Xingfucun, and Dongzhimen 三里屯、幸福村和东直门

The area around Sanlitun is a major expat hub. With so many bars, clubs, and restaurants concentrated in one place, it's a fast-changing – and some would say noisy – area. Just west of Sanlitun lies the quieter Xingfucun with its own developing bar and restaurant scene, while to the north is Dongzhimen, which contains one of the city's embassy districts. Inner Dongzhimen is a gateway to historical neighborhoods, such as Gulou, Andingmen, and Yonghegong.

Pros: A high concentration of international restaurants and bars, access to schools, close to western-style amenities, and many other expat families

Cons: Living inside the expat bubble, inconvenient subway access (nearest Lines are 2, 10, and 13), frequent traffic, seedier areas such as Sanlitun Bar Street

Schools: The area includes the British School of Beijing, Ivy Academy, the French International School of Beijing, Beijing No. 55 Middle School (a local school with an international section), MOMA Kids International Kindergarten, and La Petite Creche de Beijing (Season's Park).

Shopping and dining: The main shopping and dining hub is Tai Koo Li, a sprawling village-style mall with popular brand stores such as H&M, Hollister, and Sunning. Most of the western restaurants are concentrated in Tai Koo Li and the adjacent Nali Patio, including Element Fresh, Moka Bros, Blue Frog, Union Bar and Grille, Wagas, and Crêpanini. Xingfucun is home to a growing number of bars and restaurants, including Great Leap Brewery, O'Steak, and Big Smoke. The Dongzhimen area is not only a gateway to the historic hutong neighborhoods (e.g. Gulou, Andingmen), but also has its own fair share of malls, such as Raffles and Ginza with a variety of restaurants and shops.

Just for kids: Tuanjiehu Park has a water park, a roller skating rink (where Beijing's only roller derby team practices on Saturdays), and boat rides. Though a bit rough around the edges, Fundazzle is a reliable and long-standing play center located near Worker's Stadium. At the south gate, there's Blue Zoo Beijing, an aquarium with rays, sharks, dolphins, and even mermaids. The Cervantes Institute and French Cultural Center are also near the south gate; both have libraries with children's books and film screenings with English and Chinese subtitles.

Popular residential compounds:

- Seasons Park: Popular with expat families, Seasons Park is close to banks, restaurants, and western supermarkets. The compound has a kids' playground.
- Lianbao Garden: Located just behind the April Gourmet in Xingfucun, this compound's convenient location, spacious apartments, and children's playground and gym facilities make it popular with expat families.
- Tayuan DRC: Tayuan is one of the five "diplomatic residence compounds" (DRC) originally built to serve Beijing's diplomatic and foreign community. Located just north of the Canadian Embassy, the compound contains relatively spacious western-style apartments, a big stretch of grass within the gated community, and even has its own import market.



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Lido has long been a popular area for expats

Wangjing and Lido 望京和丽都

Wangjing and Lido lie halfway between Shunyi and downtown Beijing. These areas are popular with families due to their relatively cheaper rent, access to international hospitals and schools, and proximity to foreign companies such as Samsung, Ericsson, Nokia, and Microsoft. Both have significant Korean communities, with Wangjing being known as the Koreatown of Beijing.

Pros: Short commute to international schools in Shunyi, proximity to the headquarters of foreign companies, close to family-friendly destinations such as Si'de Park, 798 Art District, and Indigo Mall.

Cons: Connected to satellite subway lines (13, 14, and 15), limited foreign shopping and entertainment options, lacking history or culture.

Schools: In Lido, there's 3e International School, Young Starters Academy, Beijing International Bilingual Academy, Etonkids, and Beijing Collegiate Academy. Schools in Wangjing include Beijing World Youth Academy (K-12), Korean International School of Beijing, and Muffy's International Kindergarten.

Shopping and dining: The world's second largest Ikea is located in Wangjing, right by the new Carrefour shopping mall with built-in air purification and water recycling systems. Indigo Mall near 798 Art District offers good shopping and dining, with a cinema, restaurants, BHG Marketplace, frequent children's events, and a large outdoor playground. Next to Si'de Park, the Korean-owned CJ Foodworld houses a Tous les Jours bakery, Bibigo, and Twosome Coffee. There's also Ele-

ment Fresh, Gung-Ho Pizza, Annie's, Taj Pavilion, and more. Wangjing has some great Korean restaurants and markets, and Wangjing Soho has a selection of hard-to-find restaurants and cafes straight from Korea.

Just for kids: Si'de Park has a children's amusement park, tennis courts, ponds with resident black swans, well-landscaped lawns and gardens, and running paths. Lido Place has a bowling alley called SMJ Bowling. In nearby The New City Center in Wangjing is an expat-owned cafe, community center, and events venue with an indoor playground as well as after school and enrichment classes. Wangjing play areas include Miffy Jump and Family Box. Both areas are not far from 798, which is a great place to take children as new exhibits are always popping up, there's a lot of space to roam, and the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art has children's art classes.

Popular residential compounds:

- Wangjing Huayuan: Close to local kindergartens, Wal-Mart, Jingkelong, banks, hospitals, post office, beauty salons, and more.
- Upper East Side: Has its own gym, sauna, and swimming pool, as well as a coffee shop within the compound, with proximity to supermarkets, banks, cafes, restaurants, bakeries, and more.
- Chateau Regency: Clubhouse with a swimming pool, a fitness center, a convenience store, and a playground. Mookey Swim, a parent-owned center offering baby swimming classes, is located on the ground floor.

Shunyi 顺义

Shunyi is the expat neighborhood par excellence. There are villa compounds resembling American suburbs, complete with quaint street names and two-car garages. Beijing's oldest international schools are here, including the International School of Beijing (ISB), the British School of Beijing (BSB), Dulwich College Beijing (DCB), Harrow Beijing, and the Western Academy of Beijing (WAB).

Pros: Lots of schools and villa compounds, safe, very close to the airport, many expat families, good base for day trips

Cons: Expat bubble, inconvenient for public transit and taxis, not much to do in terms of shopping and entertainment, larger distances, isolated from the city

Schools: Shunyi has the largest number of international schools. Apart from the ones mentioned above, there are also newcomers like Keystone Academy, an American-style boarding school with a bilingual and bi-cultural focus. The International Montessori School of Beijing, Daystar Academy, Etonkids, House of Knowledge International School and Kindergarten (HoK), Beijing International Bilingual Academy, and Eduwings Kindergarten are also in Shunyi.

Shopping and dining: There isn't as much shopping and dining in Shunyi, but families will be able to find what they need. Malls include Europlaza, Cathay View, the recently-opened Shine Hills, Sci-Tech Outlet, and Pinnacle Plaza. Beidong Flower Market has household decorations, some furniture, plants, and gardening supplies. Western restaurants tend to be scattered through different malls. Hegezhuang Village has The Orchard and Green T. House Living. Mrs. Shanen's sells homemade bagels and dishes made with organic produce from the restaurant's farm, Green Cow.



Shunyi is greener than central districts, but can feel remote

Just for kids: Atelier, an expat-founded art school, just opened a branch in Shunyi. Schools like DCB offer sports and recreation programs for the wider community. Quanfa Garden has a new indoor ice rink with hockey programs for kids. Nearby Miyun County is ideal for weekend excursions and is home to Nanshan Ski Resort.

Popular residential compounds:

- Capital Paradise: Outdoor and indoor swimming pools, gym, squash, bowling, mini-golf, tennis courts, sauna, outdoor and indoor children's playgrounds, bars, cafes, and restaurants.
- Yosemite: Clubhouse, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, hot springs, sauna, gym, restaurant, cafe, children's activity center.
- Beijing Riviera: Bicycle track, large green spaces, artificial lake, clubhouse, cafe, swimming pool, gym, tennis and squash courts, massage room, bar, and supermarket. On-site kindergarten.



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Rental Health

The crucial questions to ask before renting your home, and a checklist of what to look for



LOCATION

Where's the nearest _____?

最近的_____在哪儿? Zuìjìn dì _____ zài nǎr?

- subway station 地铁站 dìtiě zhàn
- bus stop 公车站 gōngchē zhàn
- ATM 提款机 tíkuǎnjī
- convenience store 便利店 biànlì diàn
- hospital 医院 yīyuàn

INFRASTRUCTURE

What year was this building constructed?

这个房子是哪一年建的? Zhège fángzi shì nǎ yī niánjiàn de jiàn de?

How many square meters? 有多少平米?

Yǒu duōshǎo píngmǐ?

Which direction is it facing? 这个房子的朝向是 _____? Zhège fángzi de cháoxiàng shì _____?

Is the elevator 24-hours? 这儿的电梯是24小时吗? Zhèr de diàntī shì èrshísì xiǎoshí de ma?

How many entry points does this residential compound have? 这个小区有几个入口? Zhège xiǎoqū yǒu jǐ gè rùkǒu?

Have there been problems with insects or vermin? 这个房子又没有过虫蛀问题?

Zhège fángzi yǒu méiyǒuguò chóng zhù wèntí?

Does this residential compound have round-the-clock security? 这个小区有24小时的保安吗? Zhège xiǎoqū yǒu èrshísì xiǎoshí de bǎo'ān ma?

Does this apartment use community heating or independent heating? 这里是区域供暖还是按用量计算? Zhèlǐ shì qūyù gōngnuǎn háishì àn yòngliàng jìsuàn?

Is there hot water in both the kitchen and bathroom? If not, can you have a plumber redo it? 厨房和卫生间有热水吗? 如果没有, 你可以请人安装吗? Chúfáng hé wèishēngjiān yǒu rèshuǐ ma? Rúguǒ méiyǒu, nǐ kěyǐ qǐng rén ānzhuāng ma?

Is the hot water available 24 hours? 热水是24小时的吗? Rèshuǐ shì èrshísì xiǎoshí de ma?

Is the hot water heater gas or electric?

热水器是使用煤气还是电?

Rèshuǐqì shì shǐyòng méiqì háishì diàn?

THE BASICS

How long ago was the apartment renovated?

上次装修是什么时候? Shàngcì zhuāngxiū shì shénme shíhou?

Will you clean it before I move in?

我搬进来之前你能清理一下吗? Wǒ bānjìnlái zhīqián nǐ néng qīnglǐ yíxià ma?

Can this room be repainted? 能粉刷一下这个房间吗? Néng fěnsuā yíxià zhège fángjiān ma?

Can I hang things on the walls? 墙上可以挂装饰品吗? Qiángshàng kěyǐ guà zhuāngshìpǐn ma?

Can you remove this? 你能把这个拿走吗?

Nǐ néng bǎ zhège ná zǒu ma?

Can you buy a _____? 你能买一个_____吗?

Nǐ néng mǎi yíge _____ ma?

How old is this item? Can it be replaced before I move in? 这个用了多久了? 我搬进来之前你能换新的吗? Zhège yòngle duōjiǔle? Wǒ bān jìnlái zhīqián nǐ néng huàn xīn de ma?

Can you provide more furniture? 能提供更多家具? Néng tígōng gèng duō jiājù?

Write it down. Put it in the contract. 写下来吧。在合同上标出。Xiěxiàlái ba. Zài hétóng shàng biāochū.

MONEY

How much is the rent? 房租多少钱?

Fángzū duōshǎo qián?

Who pays the agency fee? 谁交中介费?

Shéijiāo zhōngjiè fèi?

Who pays the property management fee?

谁交物业费? Shéijiāo wùyè fèi?

How to pay the gas bill? 在哪儿能交煤气费?

Zài nǎr néng jiāo méiqì fèi?

How to pay the electricity bill? 在哪儿能交电费?

Zài nǎr néng jiāo diàn fèi?

How to pay the water bill? 在哪儿能交水费?

Zài nǎr néng jiāo shuǐ fèi?

Whose name is on the phone account?

在电话账户上是谁的名字? Zài diànhuà zhànghù shàng shì shéide míngzi?

Who pays the heating fee? 谁交暖气费?

Shéijiāo nuǎnqì fèi?

TV - how many channels? Is the fee included?

电视有几个频道? 是含在房租以内吗? Diànshì yǒu jǐ gè píndào? Shì hán zài fángzū yǐnèi ma?

Listen for:

The payment method is ... 交款方式是...

jiāo kuǎn fāngshì shì...

(1) monthly 月付 yuè fù

(2) quarterly 季付 jì fù

one month's deposit, three months rent

押一付三 yā yī fù sān

(3) half-yearly 半年付 bànnián fù

• deposit 押金 yājīn

• normal wear and tear

正常磨损 zhèngcháng mósuǎn

• rechargeable card IC卡 IC kǎ

• pay at the bank 银行 yínháng

• meter reader 抄表 chāo biǎo

BUILDING MAINTENANCE

If this breaks, who is responsible for fixing it?

如果这个坏了, 谁负责修理?

Rúguǒ zhège huàile, shuí fùzé xiūlǐ?

Where is the property management office? What's their

phone number? 物业办公室在哪? 电话号码是多少?

Wùyè bàngōngshì zài nǎ? Diànhuà hàomǎ shì duōshǎo?

Can you recommend a _____?

能推荐一个_____? Néng tuījiàn yíge _____?

• handyman 修理工 xiūlǐgōng

• plumber 下水道修理 xiàshuǐdào xiūlǐ

• locksmith 锁匠 suǒjiāng

• electrician 电工 diàngōng

CHECKLISTS

The Shell

- ☐ Ceiling for signs of leakage
- ☐ Walls for stains or cracks
- ☐ Flooring for unevenness or holes
- ☐ Size of the windows and whether there is cross-ventilation
- ☐ Screens and locks on all windows (look for rips in the screens)

Security

- ☐ Whether the windows have bars (on a lower-level apartment)
- ☐ Whether the front door has a solid lock

Furnishings

- ☐ Amount of storage space
- ☐ Whether your current furniture will fit in the apartment (and through the door)
- ☐ Mattress for firmness

Electrics

- ☐ Functionality of all appliances (stove, fridge, hot water heater, air conditioner, washing machine, cable TV, microwave)
- ☐ Number of electrical outlets in every room
- ☐ Phone/broadband jacks
- ☐ Cellphone reception inside the apartment
- ☐ Lighting fixtures for brightness (and whether light bulbs can be easily replaced)
- ☐ Speed and power of all fans
- ☐ Location of fuse box and the electricity meter
- ☐ Location of the radiators

Bathroom and Kitchen

- ☐ Amount of cabinet space
- ☐ Location of the main gas valve and water valve

- ☐ Location of gas meter? Electricity meter? Water meter?
- ☐ Water pressure and functionality of the showerhead
- ☐ Sturdiness of the faucets (do they leak? do they need to be replaced?)
- ☐ Amount of counter space
- ☐ Drainage speed in all sinks and tubs
- ☐ How well does the toilet flush?
- ☐ Does the toilet seat need to be replaced?)

Outside

- ☐ How much natural light does the apartment get?
- ☐ Is the neighborhood noisy? How close is the nearest street? How soundproof is the apartment?
- ☐ Location of garbage cans and recycling bins
- ☐ Location of bike racks



Keeping It Covered

Understanding the necessities of medical insurance

Updated by Nimo Wanjau

A trip to the doctor isn't cheap, especially to an international hospital. Healthcare costs can be a nightmare to settle if you're uninsured. In most expat remuneration packages, medical insurance is an attractive benefit. Students are usually covered through their institutions of higher learning, while younger students are included in their parents' insurance.

However, a significant number of expats aren't covered at all. In a 2014 online survey conducted by insurer NOW Health International, a quarter of the 209 respondents living in United Arab Emirates, China (including Hong Kong), Singapore, and Thailand reported having no medical insurance.

"[They] believed that such cover was unnecessary because they were currently healthy and would not fall ill. However, as costs for medical care in popular expat locations have undergone double-digit inflation in recent years, they risk facing large bills if they are proved over-optimistic," says the report.

Understanding Medical Insurance

Tony Motola is the president and co-founder of Waterstreet Asia Consultants, a Shanghai-based insurance broker founded in 1999 with a focus on serving clients. Motola has over 20 years of experience helping expats find medical insurance, and is a regular speaker at International Newcomers Network (INN) meetings.

There are essentially two types of medical insurance, he explains. "There are government or social programs subsidized through the tax pool, and private medical insurance delivered either through commercial insurance or charitable organizations," says Motola.

"The process for buying insurance is twofold. Clients get insurance through a group – typically a company or a union – or buy individually. There are also combinations of government insurance such as Medicare in the US and private insurance. You often see this with expats in China."

Groups that are more likely to look at individual plans include entrepreneurs and their families; individuals traveling, studying, or engaging in short-term consulting projects in China; family members who are visiting, studying, or interning in China for several months; and small and medium-sized enterprises employing foreign nationals with medical needs not covered by the state-provided *shebao* (social insurance) or *yibao* (medical insurance) system.

There are three essential questions to consider:

1. What do I need? This includes an assessment of your current health status and family health history. "For example, someone who has three generations of breast cancer would want a plan that covers mammograms, screenings, and surgery," says Motola.
2. What do I want? "This means vision, dental care, maternity – the riders, the frills."
3. What can I afford? "Usually what people would like to have is not what they can afford. If they see that a plan will come to USD 4,000;

5,000; 6,000; or 7,000 per year, people suddenly say 'How can I change that?'"

Evaluating Brokers and Insurance Companies

The simplest way to compare medical insurance plans is through a broker like Waterstreet Asia, Pacific Prime, or Abacare (see Resources). In a nutshell, a broker acts on behalf of the client to find the best insurance plan for their needs. Brokers are usually compensated through commissions taken from the premiums charged to policyholders (i.e. you) by the insurance company, so their services are free for clients. Be sure to seek out an advisor who specializes in medical insurance for expats living in China.

"Be wary of brokers who offer deals that sound too good to be true – they usually are," says Michael Ray, a senior consultant at insurance broker Pacific Prime. "Don't end up on another company's corporate policy. These might sound like a great deal and cover you for outpatient visits, but in the case of a large claim such as a medical emergency, the insurer could ask you to prove you work for the company to which the policy belongs. You then find you are not really covered and have a huge hospital bill to pay. I have spoken to a few clients on this type of policy who were not even aware that they were."

Hospitals require a Guarantee of Payment (GOP) from incoming patients and sometimes the insurance company needs to be notified to ensure that the insured gets the medical coverage they require, and the hospital knows that the bill will be settled. Brokers can act as an intermediary between the insurance company and insured.

Though both brokers and agents act as a bridge between the client and the insurer, an agent usually represents an insurance company like Cigna, Aon, Allianz, Bupa, IMS, or Aetna. Both agents and brokers must be legally licensed to work in China.

If you currently have medical insurance but are looking to change plans, your current insurer would be the most logical place to start. However, the insurance company may not extend coverage to China, or may limit the list of hospitals you can go to. If you're set on going to a particular facility, check the hospital's or clinic's website for a list of insurers they currently have direct billing relationships with.

Tony Motola urges readers to examine an insurance company's history and industry rating from US-based rating company A. M. Best before making any decisions. "You want an A. M. Best rating of at least an 'A.' That means an operating history of 25 years or more, very good financials, and management meeting certain standards of professional criteria," he says.

Conversely, what are the characteristics of an insurance company you'd want to stay away from? "They often have a short operating history of less than 10 years, sign up lots of sales agents with high commissions, and make their financials look good so they can get publicly traded to a bigger company," says Motola. In other words, these companies are more interested in making a profit than helping clients.

Factors to consider

Annual Limit

An annual limit is the cap on benefits that your insurer will pay in a year. If the dollar amount of covered hospitalizations, treatments, and prescriptions exceeds the annual limit, you'll need to pay all health-care costs for the rest of the year. Annual limits range from USD 100,000 to several million per year depending on the plan. The higher the limit, the more expensive the premium.

Annual Rate Increases

Smaller and mid-range insurers with less financial stability usually have more erratic rate increases. Some even increase the premium in response to claims. Larger, more reputable insurers have more gradual increases, both annually and with age. "Watch out for age brackets," says Ray. "You may find a large increase when you turn 50 if the insurer's age brackets are 45-49, 50-54, etc."

Child Coverage

Medical care for children (including check-ups and immunizations) is often included, but confirm this with your insurer. Families with older children who may or may not live at home as dependents may be included, but check if there are any age caps and details of the "global" part of "global insurance coverage" if your kids don't live in China.

Discounts

Some insurers offer a family discount, which can be especially cost-effective for large families. No-claims discounts or first-

year discounts are sometimes also offered, but keep in mind that a 10 percent first-year discount carries a 10 percent plus age plus annual increase at renewal.

Maternity Coverage

Couples planning to conceive should note that most insurers require a waiting period of 10-12 months of paid maternity insurance before pregnancy, birth, and/or newborn coverage kick in.

Medical Evacuation

Evacuation is an essential consideration. Take a moment to think about the cost of out-of-pocket repatriation in case of an emergency. Evacuation would cover transport for essential surgery, medical treatments unavailable here, or a health epidemic. Check whether the plan covers return transportation to Beijing. Insurance for evacuation can be overkill if your primary policy covers most or all possibilities, so make sure it complements rather than overlaps existing coverage. Note that medical evacuation doesn't necessarily cover treatment in your home country or a third location like Hong Kong.

Outpatient Treatment

Consider how often you or your dependents are likely to visit the doctor in a given year. Policies with high deductibles to minimize the cost of monthly premiums may not be the most cost-effective if you're only planning to see doctor twice a year.

Pre-Existing Conditions

Some insurers will cover certain pre-

existing medical conditions, but the trade-off is a higher premium. Coverage for high blood pressure or cholesterol may seem expensive, but keep in mind you'd also be covered for heart attacks.

Travel Insurance

International travel goes hand-in-hand with living in Beijing; getting travel insurance is important as a backup on your rider. This is often available as a small package when you have visitors, either through your current insurance plan or through an international hospital or clinic membership. US citizens should note that many global policies don't cover treatment in the US or only cover it for a limited number of days (usually 30-45).

OTHER

Additional considerations include coverage for children with special needs, deductible and copayment options, dental and visual insurance, coverage for second opinions on major treatments, and emergency protocols (e.g. whether pre-authorization is required).

In addition to health insurance, international hospitals such as Beijing United Family Hospital or primary care clinics such as Raffles Medical have memberships that offer patients additional discounts and extra services for an annual fee. These memberships can supplement company-sponsored insurance packages; they can also be appealing for expats who select packages based on low upfront fees, or those who must pay for treatment out-of-pocket.

Resources

Abacare

Founded in Hong Kong, Abacare is a broker specializing in finding health insurance plans for individual expats and international companies. Beijing contact: Ann Lee, 135 5281 6708, beijing@abacare.com, www.abacare.com

Pacific Prime

UK-owned Pacific Price is a leading broker for expat individuals and families worldwide. The company has six offices worldwide, with over 120 staff in mainland China. Pacific Prime works with over 40 leading international insurers, including Bupa, Allianz, Cigna, AXA, and more. Contact: Senior Consultant Michael Ray, 21 2426 6503 (direct line in Shanghai), 181 2129 8641 (mobile), mray@pacificprime.com, WeChat and Skype: [mray_pacificprime](https://www.pacificprime.cn/en), www.pacificprime.cn/en

“Be wary of brokers who offer deals that sound too good to be true – they usually are”



Waterstreet Asia Consultants

Founded in 1999, Waterstreet Asia specializes in employee benefits, risk management, and healthcare. Contact: President and Co-Founder Tony Motola, 8751 1820 (Beijing), 186 1198 2854 (mobile), www.navigatortravelinsurance.com

"We're Not In Kansas Anymore..."

Ten things to expect when you move to China

by Sally Wilson

Whether this is your first or tenth overseas posting, it's only natural that you and your family will experience some culture shock when you arrive in Beijing. Even if you've already experienced expat life in other parts of China, Beijing has some rather unique traits. As soon as you stop expecting things to be "like home," you can embrace the adventure.

1. The Toilet Situation

There's good news and bad news about public toilets in Beijing. The good news is that Beijing has more public toilets than any city in the world; the bad news is that few of them meet international standards. In older hutong areas, the city's public bathrooms serve as communal facilities. The squat toilet is still prevalent thanks to its enduring popularity with the locals and the general perception that it's more hygienic. Increasingly, public facilities include at least one western-style toilet, usually in the disabled stall. Toilet paper, soap, hand towels, and working dryers are rarely provided, so get used to carrying tissues and hand sanitizer. Public toilets in Beijing are also infamous for their rather pungent aroma. Modern shopping malls tend to have good, clean facilities, but restaurants, bars, and cafes aren't required to provide restrooms for their customers. Even in higher-end dining establishments, you'll sometimes need to put on your coat halfway through the meal and stroll to the nearest restroom in the mall or building.

2. Got a Baby? Good Luck

One of the frustrating things is the lack of baby changing tables, even in the newest shopping malls and family restaurants. The cleanliness of the floors is such that you wouldn't want to lay down a changing mat, so be prepared to change baby in their stroller, on a plot of grass, or on your lap. The locals won't be offended by you changing baby in public, but they may stop and

have a good look. Similarly, breastfeeding rights have a long way to go here and few malls have dedicated nursing rooms; pack a cloth cover when you're planning to be out and about.

3. Your Children Will Get Photographed (A Lot)

Your children will attract a lot of attention from locals, especially in touristy areas. Like paparazzi, a few will start taking photos and you'll be surrounded before you know it. Some will ask permission; others will hoist your child into their arms before you can protest. It's important to understand why you're attracting this attention. Some locals have never seen a blond-haired, African-American, or mixed-race child before. To them, you're just as foreign as the Surma people of Ethiopia are to you. If you or your children feel genuinely uncomfortable, quickly learn the Mandarin for "Please do not take photos of my children" (qing bu yao pai wo de haizi). Otherwise, while this can be annoying at times, remember that they have good intentions and there's no real harm done.

4. Ayi Coddling

Your transition will be made easier with the help of an ayi (Chinese term for a domestic helper or nanny). Perhaps you'll be experiencing affordable help for the first time – a blessing that will give you some much-needed free time. Your ayi will want to make your children happy; she may buy

them gifts, let them eat sweets, insist on putting on coats and shoes (even if they're capable of doing it themselves), and hover nearby as they play, terrified that they may scrape a knee. Young Chinese kids are used to being carried everywhere; before you know it, your 3-year-old will expect you to carry them too. Explain your expectations to your ayi and demonstrate how you want her to care for your kids; be patient, as this relationship will take time to develop.

5. No Such Thing as "Right-of-Way"

One interpretation of right-of-way in Chinese is 先行权 (*xian xing quan*), which translates literally to "first go rights." This pretty much sums up how road etiquette is understood and applied on the streets of Beijing. Drivers tend to adopt a "winner-takes-all" attitude. If you get your Chinese driver's license, it won't be long before you find yourself doing the same; it's the only way you'll ever get from point A to B. Teach your kids that a green pedestrian light does not mean it's safe to cross. You'll often find yourself dashing across eight-lane roads, weaving through the onslaught of rickshaws, taxis, bicycles, and scooters. Some locals have their own unique strategy for crossing the road: they look at their phones, stride confidently to the other side, and 90 percent of the time cars will stop for them. Drivers will opt to swerve around you and honk their horns rather than use their brakes. That being said, it's rare that they will go so far as to yell insults at you.

PHOTO: JORGE LASCAR (FLICKR)

6. Taxi Woes

If you have a stroller and are trying to hail a cab, be prepared for most taxis to just drive right on by. Taxi drivers don't like picking up foreign families – especially those with young kids – because they're worried they might dirty the car. If they do pick you up, you'll find most cabs have removed the rear seat belts or the latter simply don't work. If you don't have a personal driver, it's worth looking into car-sharing services like Uber (see p62 for more information).

7. Yes Means No (Sometimes)

The Chinese are generally much more indirect than Westerners. To start with, there are no words for "yes" or "no" in Mandarin. Locals rarely refuse a request outright or admit that they don't know how to do something. This can be frustrating if you're lost and in need of directions. Fear of "losing face" means a tendency to rush into saying "OK." It's up to you to read between the lines and decide whether that actually means "no." It's the same with food; Chinese often refuse food or drinks several times in a row even if they are hungry or thirsty. Never take the first "No, thank you" literally. Even if they say it once or twice, offer it again. A good guest is supposed to

refuse at least once, but a good host is also supposed to offer at least twice.

8. Shopping Ain't Easy

Beijing has a range of supermarkets, including local chains, Carrefour hypermarkets, and international grocery stores stocking imported goods. What they don't do is provide everything you need for the weekly shop. Some won't have a meat counter, others limited dairy, and others still only a tiny selection of baby items. Expect to spend a lot of time getting everything you need from half a dozen different stores. Pricing can vary widely; expect to see one price for locals and sometimes double for foreigners. Meat cuts are different and the Chinese like to use every part of the animal. Local supermarkets will also sell more unusual foods, like live bullfrogs and turtles.

9. Old Habits Die Hard

Young, old, male, or female – one of the first things you'll notice is how many locals spit. Though you may find it repulsive, remember that it's not a universally rude gesture. Once you stop seeing spitting as a personal offence, it largely fades into the background. You may or may not eventually feel the same about the clearing of nasal passages or

public nose picking. Blowing your nose in a handkerchief and putting it into your pocket is considered to be disgusting by the Chinese – better to get it all out onto the street. The levels of dust and pollution here do call for the constant clearing of airways; you just have to accept that some of the locals have a very different way of dealing with theirs. Chinese babies often wear split pants, and you will see them pee and poop on the ground. To Westerners, potty training means going on a toilet; in China, it means going on command. It is not unusual for the poop to remain on the ground. If you are in the process of potty training your own child, you may need to remind them that that's not how things are done back home.

10. Service, Please

Service standards in restaurants are slowly but steadily improving. In high-end restaurants, most of the staff will understand and speak English. Most restaurant menus will be in English or have pictures so you can point to what you'd like. Your food probably won't be served all at once, so you'll need to adjust your eating habits unless you want the first few dishes to be enjoyed cold. If you have young kids, most places will be pretty good about bringing out their food first.



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Appy Ever After

Essential apps for surviving Beijing

by Andrew Killeen

The smartphone has transformed expat life, giving us access to information and services wherever we go. Here are a few of the most useful apps to help you survive and thrive in Beijing.

Social media WeChat

Forget Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp – in China, WeChat is king. Beijingers use it for networking, sharing and gossip, and even pay their bills on it. Get used to the idea of scanning QR codes instead of exchanging phone numbers, and start building up your *guanxi*. But there's much more to WeChat than just chat. WeChat Wallet is your easy, portable payment system in a country that's still getting used to card payments. You can top up your phone, pay utility bills, order a taxi, or book a table for dinner. If there is one app which symbolizes contemporary China's love affair with the smartphone, it's WeChat. The main functions are available in English, but most of the "official accounts" (mini-apps which you access through WeChat) are Chinese only.

Available for: iOS, Windows Phone, Android, Symbian, Blackberry OS

Language Pleco

Whether you're serious about learning Mandarin or just want to get by, Pleco is the outstanding language app for Chinese. The basic package is free, but you can buy and download up to date and specialist dictionaries, flashcards, and other added functionality. Particularly useful is the ability to read characters with your phone's camera. Although most of the signs in Beijing are in both Chinese and English, you'll find this invaluable for deciphering menus and identifying those mysterious bottles of sauce in the supermarket. The flashcards are a great way of making use of the time spent on the subway or stuck in traffic. Adding new words and characters and testing yourself every day builds your vocabulary and your confidence, and there is help with pronunciation and writing too. Pleco even indicates the tones for characters, with a crafty color coding system.

Available for: iOS, Android



Payments Alipay

WeChat may dominate the social media, but when it comes to payments it's competing with a well-established market leader, Alipay. Alipay has been running for ten years now, and has 300 million users and 80 percent of the market. It's more than just a Paypal equivalent – you'll see more locals paying for their shopping and dining with their smartphones than with cards. The good news is that the app is now available in English. The even better news is that once you have an Alipay account, you can go wild on Taobao, China's online marketplace (think Amazon or eBay, but cheaper and with more fake designer goods.) Taobao itself is all in Chinese, unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately, if you're a shopaholic!). You're likely to need help from a Chinese friend to set up your account.

Available for: iOS, Android



Getting around:

For car-hailing apps, see our feature on page 62.

ILLUSTRATION: LOUISE OVARZABAL PHOTO: ESTHER VARGAS

Three apps we wish were in English

Baidu Maps

Even if you can bypass the Great Firewall, Google Maps just aren't accurate in Beijing. Global Positioning System (GPS) location is "offset", meaning that it's out often by hundreds of yards, and the maps themselves are outdated. Apple Maps are better, but lack features. Baidu Maps on the other hand are up-to-date, and offer 3D searching, traffic information, street view, and more – as long as you can read Chinese.

Available for: iOS, Windows Phone, Android, Symbian



Dianping

This popular app provides you not only with user-reviews of nearby restaurants, bars, and other services (all in Chinese), but also group discounts.

Available for: iOS, Windows Phone, Android, Symbian



Taobao

Taobao, its upmarket sister site Tmall and wholesaler Alibaba are at the heart of the Chinese obsession with e-commerce (though newcomer JD.com is taking them on in the cities at least.) But while the Taobao app is less intimidatingly busy and complex than the website, it's still for the fluent and/or determined only.

Available for: iOS, Android, Windows



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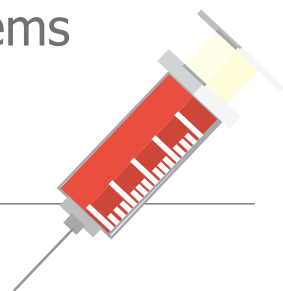


HARROW
BEIJING

Doctor Who?

Navigating Beijing's healthcare systems

Updated by Nimo Wanjuan



One of the top priorities for families arriving in Beijing is figuring out where to get medical treatment, as our children's health is of paramount importance. Over recent years, the number of international standard hospitals and clinics has been on the increase, but the options are still rather slim compared to other major capitals around the world.

Going to an international-grade facility is costly, as registration and consultation fees alone can amount to over RMB 2,000 depending on the doctor you wish to see. Having healthcare insurance will ease the burden paying out of pocket (see our article on health insurance, p30).

Most uninsured expats use local public hospitals, many of which have excellent reputations in their fields. They are much cheaper compared to private hospitals and see a higher number of patients, but the language barrier can be an issue. In addition, they can be a rude awakening for expats who go in expecting a western-style bedside manner and privacy standards.

Clinics

Clinics provide routine services such as checkups, pediatric medicine, and outpatient care. They may also offer dentistry, mental health services, physical rehabilitation, official physical examinations (for visas or other purposes), and vaccinations. In most cases, anything relating to obstetrics and pre-natal care require a visit to a hospital with more specialized medical staff and facilities. Although some clinics offer emergency care, patients may need to be transferred to a hospital depending on the seriousness of the case.

Medical practitioners here are usually tied to a hospital or clinic and don't have standalone private practices like their western counterparts. Part-time specialists who keep regular office hours at a private clinic often also work at a public hospital.

Hospitals

International hospitals are either wholly foreign-owned enterprises (WFOE) or a joint venture between an international medical operator and a Chinese hospital. Foreign patients will find the process and surroundings familiar and therefore comforting, but bear in mind that the attending doctor will likely still be Chinese – although English-speaking – and that not every international-standard hospital is equipped to handle all scenarios. For example, patients requiring major surgery – particularly emergency surgery – may need to be transferred to a Chinese hospital, both for the operations themselves and for continuing post-surgery treatment.

These cautions aside, international hospitals offer extras such as reminders for checkups and some have more than one location, making them convenient for your home, office, or school. There will also be a greater emphasis on preventative care.

If language isn't an issue and/or you don't have medical insurance, you might try visiting a local hospital. Expats often recommend Peking Union Medical College Hospital (founded in 1921) and the China-Japan Friendship Hospital, which served as the primary hospital for athletes, coaches, and officials of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. Both have "VIP" sections with fewer patients and some English-speaking doctors.

Emergencies

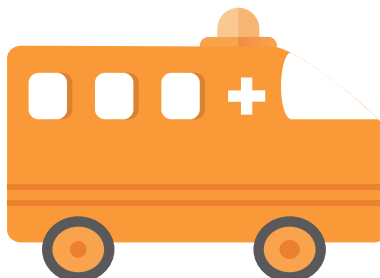
The emergency phone number in Beijing is 120 (999 for English speakers). Keep in mind that ambulances in Beijing have a mixed record for two reasons: (a) getting lost and (b) being perfunctory in their treatment of non-emergency patients. Also, Beijing's traffic situation isn't exactly conducive to the quick transfer of patients to medical facilities, and drivers here aren't yet in the habit of yielding immediately to ambulances.

There's no simple solution for this. Many taxis will simply refuse to take injured or sick passengers for fear of being held liable for any negative outcomes. Some international hospitals have their own 24-hour emergency call centers with English- and Chinese-speaking operators. However, ambulances are still subject to traffic constraints.

To make matters even more complicated, there's no Good Samaritan law in China. This may explain why many Chinese are unwilling to get involved in emergency situations. Bystanders who offer help may be held liable even if their actions help resuscitate the injured party. A patient who is given cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) may survive, but non-qualified rescuers have been sued for the broken ribs that can occur in the process.

When in doubt, call 120 and report the emergency. However, consider carefully whether there's a good reason to become directly involved in a situation.

That said, for the sake of one's own family, friends, and colleagues, most international hospitals and clinics in Beijing offer internationally-recognized CPR and first aid training in English. It's a good idea to take a course, especially for people who live farther away from a major medical center.



Pollution Solutions

Living with the Beijing haze



PHOTO: BERNHARD WINTERSPERGER (FLICKR)

However much we love our adopted home, there's one aspect of Beijing that it's hard to feel good about: air pollution. Around the world smog has become associated with Beijing, as synonymous with the city as the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong or the CCTV Building. For many people moving here, it's the first thing their friends and family will ask about.

Yet some twenty million people live here, their day to day lives largely unaffected. While we can hope for clearer skies in the future,

for now air pollution is just something to work around, like the traffic and the crowds, part of the price of living in one of the world's great cities.

To separate fact from fiction, we talked to Dr. Richard Saint Cyr. Dr. Saint Cyr, who practices medicine at Beijing United Family Hospital (BJU), was a health columnist for beijingkids for many years and continues to write about health and wellness in China on his blog, My Health Beijing.



How much of a problem is air pollution in Beijing? Who should be concerned?

Air pollution in Beijing is quite high, even when the air seems to be clear. It is most concerning for people who stay here for many years, but it's also a potential issue for those who are already sick or vulnerable, such as small children or the elderly, or people with chronic heart and lung disease.

Are kids more affected by air pollution than adults?

There is concern that air pollution can cause permanent damage to a child's lungs, which continue to develop until around age 18. The best studies so far are from California and show that higher air pollution causes a decrease in lung function, which can last into adulthood. The good news is that studies also show that moving to a cleaner area can improve lung function. Air pollution is also considered harmful to pregnant women and their unborn babies.

What is PM2.5? What is PM10?

PM2.5 simply means "particulate matter" of 2.5 microns, and PM10 is larger at 10 microns. We worry more about the PM2.5, as these particles are so small that we can breathe them in deeply and they get absorbed into our bodies via the lungs. These particles can come

from many sources, especially from coal burning, emissions, construction sites, and factories.

What is China doing to address air pollution?

China is taking enormous steps to control air pollution, but the problem itself is enormous. It's estimated to take at least 15 years before Beijing's air approaches any meaningfully-improved levels that would be considered healthy. The goal is to get PM2.5 under 10 ug/m3, and Beijing's air currently is around 86 ug/m3. We have a long way to go!

To keep track of daily pollution levels, get into the habit of checking the US Embassy Twitter feed (@BeijingAir), which provides hourly readings of PM 2.5 levels from the roof of the US Embassy in Liangmaqiao. Keep in mind that these readings may not be accurate for other parts of the city, but they do provide a reliable snapshot of the air quality in central Beijing. The Beijing Municipal Environmental Monitoring Center also publishes its own air quality readings (zx.bjmemc.com.cn) from 27 different monitoring stations across the city.

The most convenient way to stay up-to-date on daily AQI readings is through apps. iPhone users can download the free app China Air Quality Index by Fresh Ideas, which provides data not only for Beijing but a number of other cities in China. Android users can download the Beijing Air Quality widget.

PHOTO: STEVENZHANG1221 (FLICKR)

FACE MASKS

Dr. Saint Cyr says:

Masks are reasonable any time you're outside for more than a few minutes and the air is bad, especially an AQI over 200. Many do work but many do not, so it's important to stick to masks that have government certifications like N95, N99, KN95, and FFP2 or 3. The fit is also crucial, especially for kids' smaller faces. If you can feel air leaking around the edges, then it's not fitting well enough. If it does fit well, then indeed it can decrease your exposure to PM2.5 by 95 percent or more. When in doubt as to brands, just stick with 3M; they've been proven effective for decades with government certifications across the world, they're cheap, and are available in many places, including 7-Eleven.

Masks are divided into disposable and reusable types varying widely by material, cost, and style. Recurring brands include 3M, Respro, Vogmask, and Totobobo. The US-based company 3M makes disposable N95 masks that have proven popular despite their rather "surgical" appearance; they can be a bit awkward for those who wear glasses, but conform to a number of

international standards. Each mask costs RMB 10-30 depending on the model. They can be found at select supermarkets and convenience stores like April Gourmet and 7-Eleven, as well as websites like Amazon China (z.cn) and Taobao (www.taobao.com). Respro masks are easily recognizable by their "Darth Vader" aesthetic, with replaceable charcoal filters and two external valves. They're popular with cyclists, though the close-fitting design tends to be uncomfortable for longer rides and hot days. The Techno (RMB 399) and Sportsta Tech (RMB 429) models are available at any of the websites listed above and Natooke, a fixed-gear bike shop in Wudaoying Hutong. The friendly staff can advise you on the best model for your needs. Two-packs of filters are also available RMB 259.

Vogmask produces comfortable microfiber and organic cotton masks containing HEPA filters in four sizes: XS (ages 1-2), S (ages 3-7), M (ages 8-12), and L (adult). However, the child sizes are often out of stock due to high demand. There are numerous styles with patterns inspired by animals, flowers, classic arcade games, contemporary art

movements, and even particle physics. Vogmasks cost RMB 225 at the time of print and can be bought at Torana Clean Air Center. The store also carries RZ Masks (RMB 198), which are similar in appearance to Respro masks.

Totobobo masks are made in Singapore and consist of a lightweight, transparent material called SoftTech. They also feature replaceable filters (RMB 126-236 per pack) and can be trimmed to fit kids 5 and over. Both the Classic, which covers the nose and mouth, and SuperCool, which covers the mouth only, are available on TMall (totobobo.tmall.com) for RMB 208. Cyclists may find the SuperCool model comfortable in hot weather, as condensation tends to form within the full mask during times of physical exertion.

When you come home at the end of the day and shut the door to the outside world, you still can't be certain that the air you're breathing is safe. Even the most modern buildings will only keep out half of PM2.5, and there are numerous other pollutants which might be lurking unseen.



INDOOR POLLUTION

Dr. Saint Cyr says:

Families should focus on making their indoor air as clean as possible, and this inevitably means air purification. Everyone's goal should be getting their indoor air PM2.5 under 10 micrograms per cubic meter of air (ug/m3), which is equivalent to an AQI under 50 – the 'green zone' of healthy air, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

When should families use air purifiers?

I personally think that, in Beijing, every family should use air purifiers always, every day, all year round. It's so rare that Beijing's air is under AQI 50 for even a few hours, you simply need to get air purifiers, keep the windows closed, and keep the machines on 24 hours a day. They work extremely well, but only if you've correctly assessed how many machines you need and what speed you need to keep them on. At the very least, every child should have an air purifier in their bedroom.

What factors should you consider before buying a purifier?

Before buying, you really need to assess your needs, which means measuring the room area and volume and figuring out what's the total flow rate you need; every room needs five circulations per hour for effective cleaning.

With this information, it's much easier to see which machines or

combination of machines can cover your needs. Don't forget that advertised flow rates, often [expressed] as Clean Air Delivery Rate or CADR, only apply to the machine's fastest speed, which is almost never what you'd actually use in everyday use, [most likely] due to loud noise at this setting. The quieter settings will have a lower flow rate, but you won't see that in most ads; a simple rule of thumb is to cut the CADR in half as a more reasonable expectation of what that machine can do for you.

As you can see, buying a purifier can be very confusing, especially if you have a big house, so you may be better off hiring an environmental assessment team and getting their input.

If you're worried about brands, don't fall into the trap of only buying expensive imported air purifiers. Plenty of HEPA-certified local brands work just as well and cost far less than many famous models. All you need is a strong fan with a good HEPA filter. If you want to test your investment, just buy a PM2.5 particle monitor and see how well they are working.

Are green plants useful for addressing air pollution at home?

Green plants look nice and do absorb a bit of air pollution as well as provide oxygen. But the amounts are so tiny that it's not a proper solution to tackling air pollution anywhere in China – at least not by itself. All HEPA-rated air purifiers perform much better than any plant.

If you're concerned about indoor pollution, companies such as PureLiving will come to your home and test the air. After the test, a full report is produced with the most pressing issues to be tackled and a list of recommendations.

Factors that might affect the health and safety conditions of your home include the location, housing type, and age of the building. When you move in, ask your agent, landlord, or management office for a history of the home, including the year it was built, the date it was last renovated, and materials used to build the house; this will make the testing process much easier.

Air Purifiers for the Home

There's a dizzying array of indoor filtration options, with a similarly broad range of price tags to match. Many families are willing to spare no expense to invest in imported air purifiers such as **Health-Pro**, **Blueair** (distributed by Torana Clean Air Center), **Alen Air** (distributed by Renaud Air), and **Oransi**. Expect to pay between RMB 3,000 to 25,000 per unit depending on the size, model, and surface area you'd like to filter. When deciding on an air purifier model, factors include brand, surface area of your home, and extra features such as UV-C lights to kill mold and yeast.

There are much cheaper air purifier models, mostly made by domestic manufacturers like Yadu that can be found at supermarkets and electronics chains like Gome, Dazhong, and Suning. However, keep in mind that foreign brands are more likely to have undergone rigorous testing for their purifiers and passed product safety standards. And then, there are upstarts like **Smart Air**, a social enterprise that champions low-cost DIY air filters and puts on regular workshops to help Beijing residents build their own air purifiers. Kits – which

are consist of a fan, a HEPA filter, and a strap – are available on Smart Air's website for RMB 200 or RMB 468 depending on the fan strength. The enterprise's experiments with DIY filters are backed up with hard data on their website (see Resources).



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF VOGMASK AND HEALTHPRO, SUI

Common Indoor Pollutants

Lead

Lead is a naturally occurring element that can be toxic to humans and animals when ingested or inhaled. It's particularly harmful to children, who are vulnerable to impairments in their neurological development. Common sources of lead include paint, ceramics, pipes and plumbing materials, toys, solders, gasoline, batteries, ammunition, and cosmetics. Lead exposure is one of the foremost causes of child mortality in China. Kids are at a higher risk of absorbing lead, as they may touch objects containing lead; ingest foods or drinks containing lead; use plates or glasses containing lead; inhale dust from lead-based paint or lead-contaminated soil; or play with toys containing lead.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)

VOCs are a group of odorless, carbon-based chemicals that evaporate quickly at room temperature. Indoor environments usually count up to ten times higher levels of VOCs than outdoors. VOCs are given off by thousands of products, including paints and lacquers, paint strippers, cleaning products, pesticides, building materials, furnishings, printers, corrector fluid, glues and adhesives, and permanent markers. This can cause long-term damage to the liver, kidneys, and central nervous system. Some VOCs are known carcinogens.

Formaldehyde

Formaldehyde is a type of VOC considered by the US National Toxicology Program to be a "known human carcinogen." It can be found in building materials such as plywood, paneling, pressed-wood products, and urea formaldehyde foam insulation (UFFI), a type of resin used in adhesives, finishes, and medium-density fiberboard. UFFI was banned in the US and Canada in the mid 1980s due to concerns over formaldehyde vapor. In Beijing, however, some homes still contain UFFI and pose a serious health concern for families.

Carbon Dioxide (CO₂)

Carbon dioxide is a colorless, odorless gas occurring both naturally and as a result of human activities such as burning gasoline, coal, oil, and wood. Indoors, CO₂ levels are dependent on the number of people in the house, how long an area has been occupied, the amount of fresh air circulating in the area from outdoors, the size of the room or area, and whether combustion by-products are contaminating indoor air (e.g. idling vehicles near air intakes, leaky furnaces, tobacco smoke). When there is too much CO₂, the lack of oxygen can cause reduced organ function and permanent damage to the brain and heart.

Particulate and Allergens

Air pollution is made up of various components; among them is particulate matter, which is commonly referred to as PM. Particles that are 10 micrometers in diameter or smaller can pass through the throat and nose then enter the lungs. PM can still be found indoors, as leaving windows and doors open over a prolonged period of time can lead to buildup. Dust mites, animal dander, and even cockroaches can trigger allergic reactions for sufferers of asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases. If possible, use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter; a regular vacuum cleaner is likely to spit particulate matter and allergens back out.

Mold

Outdoors, molds play an important part in the natural cycle by breaking down dead organic matter such as fallen leaves and dead trees. Indoors, however, mold growth is to be avoided. Molds reproduce by means of tiny spores; the spores are invisible to the naked eye and float through the air. Mold may begin growing indoors when spores land on moist surfaces, increasing the likelihood of respiratory diseases for both adults and children.

Radon

Radon is a colorless, odorless gas found in nearly all soil types and that seeps in from underground. When inhaled, it gives off radioactive particles that can damage the cells lining the lung; in fact, radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. It can be found in both old and new houses, well-insulated or drafty, with or without a basement. Radon can enter homes via pathways such as openings in floor caulking and sealants around pipes. Built-up air pressure between the foundation of the building and the soil can also cause radon to be drawn into the house. There is also some concern over marble and granite, which are mined from the soil and contain trace amounts of radioactive elements called Naturally Occurring Radioactive Mineral (NORMs). The latter can emit measurable amounts of radiation and radon gas, but this depends on where the granite or marble was mined.

Resources

- **Vogmask:** 400 650 1253, info@vogmask.cn, vogmask.cn
- **HealthPro:** 400 650 1266, www.iqair-china.com/en
- **Torana Clean Air Center:** 8459 0785, 8590 0511, 6597 9986, toranabeijing@163.com, www.toranacleanair.com
- **Renaud Air:** 400 820 2791, www.renaudair.cn
- **Oransi:** 400 665 9677, www.oransi.cn
- **Smart Air:** info@smartairfilters.com, smartairfilters.com
- **Pure Living:** 6500 8058, www.purelivingchina.com



Dr. Richard Saint Cyr

Originally from the US, Dr. Richard (as we know him) graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English from Columbia University before turning to the field of medicine. He has lived in Beijing since 2007 and wrote for *beijingkids* for many years. He and his wife have a son, Alex, who is almost 2. Find more of Dr. Richard's writing at www.myhealthbeijing.com.

Any Drop To Drink

What you should know about drinking water and shower filters

Updated by Jessica Suotmaa



Everyone knows about Beijing's notorious air pollution, but many newcomers forget that clean water is not a given in China.

The tap water in Beijing is not fit for drinking (or cooking, or showering) as China treats water with high amounts of chloramines, a combination of chlorine and ammonia, to disinfect the water. Chlorine alone is known to cause cancer, asthma, and skin irritations (allergies), but chloramines is even more difficult to remove, and, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is about "about 2,000 and 100,000 times less effective than free chlorine for the inactivation of E. Coli and rotaviruses, respectively", which may negatively affect those of us with weak stomachs and poor immune systems.

Drinking water solutions

- Boil it! Boiling tap water is a cheap method that removes bacteria but has no effect on neurotoxins, heavy metals, mercury or minerals like calcium.
- Purchase carbon filters, such as those in Brita pitchers. You can find larger carbon filters for water coolers if the little pitchers are not enough for your family, but remember that while carbon filters

can remove volatile organic compounds (VOCs), chlorine, taste, and odor, it cannot handle the minerals, salt and dissolved inorganic compounds found in Beijing's tap water.

- Order water delivered to your door — a popular option as it's convenient to call up a company to deliver 19l jugs of water while you're out. However, there are three points to consider: (1) bisphenol A (BPA) is commonly found in plastic bottles, especially if the jug has been filled for more than a week (which is likely); (2) water jugs usually get placed in a dispenser, which ought to be cleaned/disinfected regularly or there could be bacterial growth; (3) the authenticity of the water delivered, as even bottled water could just be tap water. Brands such as C'estbon have bar codes that supposedly "track" your water, but their reliability is questionable due to their many branch stores. The most reliable water delivery service is Watsons, which has just one warehouse they deliver from and a very user-friendly English website to order from.
- Purchase bottled water in 4-5L bottles. Not the most eco-friendly option, but if you stick to the well-known brands such as Watsons, Nestle, and Ganten, at least you won't worry about the quality of the water.
- Install counter-top or under-counter water filtration (for an indi-

PHOTO: MAURICIO ALVES (FLICKR)

“The tap water in Beijing is not fit for drinking (or cooking, or showering)”

vidual faucet), such as the systems from Aquasana or Xiaomi. These are more affordable as filters only need to be changed every six months or so. The Aquasana table top model has been tested to remove 97 percent of chlorine, herbicides, pesticides, etc. while keeping beneficial minerals. The Xiaomi model is newer and has four levels of reverse osmosis filtration, filtering 99.9 percent of most pollutants, including antibiotics.

- Install a whole house water filtration system, the most cost-effective way to ensure the safety of your water for not only drinking and cooking, but also brushing your teeth, showering, and laundering purposes. Whole house water filtration systems can be upgraded to include water softening features, and Aquasana offers free installation and delivery.

Shower Filters

Many expats complain of skin disorders like eczema, psoriasis, and dandruff as well as chronic skin and hair dryness while living in Beijing. According to Aquasana's website, showering and bathing in chlorinated tap water even at very low levels can cause damage to skin and hair. Chlorine is known to strip hair and skin of its natural protective oils, resulting in scaly skin, itching, and bacterial imbalances. In addition, the contaminants in shower water are at least 20 times more concentrated in steam, which can be inhaled in a shower and will even linger as indoor air pollution. To address these health concerns, filters can be directly installed onto shower heads, with or without a wand, which according to Aquasana can remove 97 percent of chlorine while balancing PH levels.

Resources

Aquasana China 美国阿夸莎娜公司

Rm 1271, Jinchao Building, Beijing Bureau of Environmental Protection, 5 Nongzhanguan Nanlu, Chaoyang District (400 000 8320, EN: 136 5128 5157, shop@aquasana-china.com) www.aquasana-china.com 朝阳区农展南路5号北京市环境保护局京朝大厦1271

World Health Store 世界健康品店

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TAKE CHARGE

How to pay for electricity, gas, water, and Internet

by Sijia Chen

Paying for utilities is a pain at the best of times, but language barriers can turn what should be a simple task into a Sisyphean undertaking. Those lucky enough to live in villas and serviced apartments will likely have their utilities taken care of by the management office or a rental agency, but the majority of expats will need to learn how to recharge an electricity card or pay a water bill at some point. Here is a crash course on setting up and paying for electricity, natural gas, water, and Internet.

Central Heating 暖气

Central heating is included in the price of rent in Beijing. Typically, the heat is turned on on November 15 and turned off on March 15 unless temperatures are unseasonably low. Most apartments have air conditioning units with heat settings that can be used to fill the gap between the onset of cold and the arrival of central heating. The latter compounds Beijing's dryness by stripping moisture from the air, so be sure to invest in a couple of humidifiers.



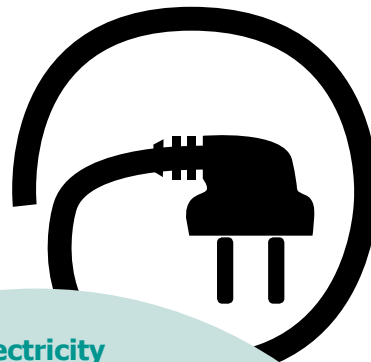
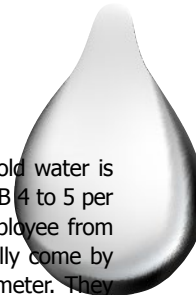
Natural Gas 燃气

In most compounds, natural gas for cooking and heating water is piped directly into homes, included in the rent, and overseen by the management office (物业 wùyè). Sometimes, an employee from the gas company will knock on your door and ask to check the meter. They will then give you an invoice on the spot or tape it to your front door a few days later. The bill can be paid online, or in person at the bank or post office.

Many Beijing residents resort to top-up cards that can be recharged online or at select banks. After it has been recharged, the card must be inserted into the gas meter and held for a few seconds. When you hear

Water 水

In water-starved Beijing, household water is relatively expensive at around RMB 4 to 5 per cubic meter. As with gas, an employee from the water company will periodically come by your house to check the water meter. They may ask for payment on the spot – in which case you should always ask for a receipt – or give you an invoice, which can be paid online or at the bank.



Electricity 电

Unlike in the West, most utilities are prepaid here. Electricity use is administered by State Grid (国家电网 guó jiā diàn wǎng) and tracked through meters tied to apartments, villas, and *siheyuan* (traditional courtyard homes). Typically, newer buildings have a single meter per household while *siheyuan* and older buildings might have more than one.

The newest generation of electricity cards – known as “smart cards” (智能电表购电卡 zhì néng diàn biǎo gòu diàn kǎ) in Chinese – can be topped up online on platforms like Alipay and WeChat Wallet. Electricity can also be purchased in person at the bank or using specialized machines located in State Grid offices, select banks (Bank of Beijing, ICBC, China Merchants Bank, Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of China, China Everbright Bank), and convenience stores. Though these machines have Chinese-only interfaces, the procedure for buying electricity is quite simple; just ask an employee to demonstrate.

Some *siheyuan* use a clunkier system where residents must write down the serial number of the electricity meter(s), go to China Postal Savings Bank, and tell the clerk how much money to recharge to each meter, but this is relatively rare. Note that only cash is accepted for these transactions.

Electricity costs just under RMB 0.50 per kilowatt hour (kWh) for residential use. The bill can vary significantly from month to month depending on the season and housing type. For example, old and poorly-insulated hutong homes with electric radiators tend to eat up a lot of power in the winter.

a “beep,” that means the balance has been updated.

Gas costs RMB 2.28 or RMB 3.23 per cubic meter depending on the compound. This is because high-end residential complexes tend to use more expensive “commercial” gas (工商业 gōng shāng yè), the same type found in restaurants and commercial establishments.

Older homes and hutong houses sometimes have propane tanks for cooking that require periodic changing. This involves calling Beijing Gas and arranging for a new tank to be delivered; this should cost around RMB 120 for a 50 jin tank (around 21L). Beware of black market propane vendors; tanks can cost as low as RMB 70-90, but there is no guarantee on the quality or safety of the contents.

PHOTO: KEN, MODEL: TOM ARNSTEIN

Internet 宽带

There are three state-owned network providers: China Mobile, China Unicom, and China Telecom. China Mobile is considered to have better coverage nationwide, while China Unicom has the most comprehensive Internet and mobile data packages. China Telecom is less popular with users largely because fewer unlocked iPhone models are compatible with its 4G LTE network. See the Resources box for more on network compatibility.

China Unicom has several high-speed Internet packages: Internet only, Internet plus landline, and Internet plus 4G. For reference, urban residents can expect to pay RMB 1,480 per year for 4MB/20MB speeds; RMB 1,780 for 50MB; or RMB 1,980 for 100MB. Internet can also be paid in monthly installments, but prices will be a bit higher (e.g. RMB 140 instead of RMB 123 per month for 4MB). Pay online or upfront at any branch of China Unicom.

However, not all residential compounds are compatible with every provider; for example, China Unicom coverage does not extend to some hutong communities. Before signing any contracts, make an appointment for an in-home inspection to make sure your compound supports the Internet package you are interested in. Do not bother forking out money for the fastest packages; unless you install fiber optic cables, you will be lucky to reach speeds of 20MB/s in Beijing.

Online Payments

The simplest way to pay for utilities is online. Both WeChat and Alipay have English interfaces and allow users to top up their water, gas, electricity, and mobile phones. The first step is to open a domestic bank account (see p46 for more info) and enable online banking in person.

To pay electricity, link your utilities account to the payment platform, then specify the amount of money you want to recharge. To complete the transaction, enter your six-digit Alipay or WeChat Wallet payment PIN.

For water or gas, input the invoice number (nine digits for water and 10-11 digits for gas) into the relevant field in Alipay or WeChat Wallet. The system will automatically pull up your account balance, then you can pay as normal.

Resources

State Grid 国家电网

Hotline: 95598 (press 4 for service in English). Website: www.sgcc.com.cn

Beijing Gas 北京燃气

Hotline: 96777 (Chinese only).

China Unicom 中国联通

Hotline: 10010 (press 9 for service in English). Website: www.10010.com

China Mobile 中国移动

Hotline: 10086 (press # for service in English). Website: www.10086.cn

China Telecom 中国电信

Hotline: 10000 (press 2 for service in English). Website: 189.cn

Is Your iPhone Compatible with Chinese 4G LTE Networks?

China Mobile: support.apple.com/en-us/HT202909

China Unicom: support.apple.com/en-us/HT204430

China Telecom: support.apple.com/en-us/HT204442



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The Bottom Line

The basics of banking, mobile payments, and money transfers

by Sijia Chen



Just a few years ago, conventional wisdom held that China was a cash society. However, that is rapidly changing with the growth of mobile payment platforms like Alipay, Baidu Wallet, and WeChat Wallet. These cashless payment methods are now accepted not only on e-commerce sites, but also an increasing number of brick-and-mortar stores, supermarkets, and restaurants. That said, using them still requires setting up a good old-fashioned domestic bank account.

Setting Up a Bank Account

Opening a bank account requires only a passport, a proof of address, and a minimal deposit, though you will need to bring a Chinese-speaking friend or colleague since most banks still do not have customer service in English.

Unless your employer issues salary payments through a specific bank, it is best to base your choice on convenience. Be sure to open your account at a branch near your home or office since you will need to return to this location to replace lost or stolen cards. If your work involves a lot of domestic travel, consider a bank with Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) nationwide such as Bank of China or Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC). Domestic accounts carry a single withdrawal limit of RMB 2,500 (RMB 10,000 for the

Bank of China) and a daily withdrawal limit of RMB 20,000.

Take necessary precautions to avoid losing or damaging your card, as it is a hassle to get a new one. The replacement process can take up to a week – or longer if it is a national holiday. It is impossible to withdraw money during the waiting period, even if you present your passport in person to a bank clerk. Many people maintain a second bank account or open another one rather than wait for the replacement card, then wire money from the old account to the new one.

ICBC and Bank of China have basic English interfaces for desktop online banking services, but they are extremely clunky and only compatible with Internet Explorer (seriously). By contrast, banking apps make it very easy to make transfer money between domestic accounts, wire funds to other people, and pay utilities for those who can read basic Chinese.

Making Mobile Payments

Once your bank account is set up, it can be linked to a mobile payment platform. WeChat Wallet and Baidu Wallet require only your bank account number and name, which is case-sensitive and must be written exactly as it is given on the account.

Alipay is a bit more complicated; it involves a two-step verification system where you must first upload the pages of your passport

containing your photo ID and dates of entry. Then, as with Paypal, Alipay will wire a tiny amount of money to your bank account, which you must then input into a box for confirmation. The good news is, Alipay offers a beta English version of its website and app as of October 2015. For full setup instructions, search "How to Set Up Alipay as a Foreigner" on the beijingkids website.

These payment platforms can be used to make online transactions, find deals, buy movie tickets, pay utilities, and more.

Transferring Money Overseas

The State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) severely restricts the outward flow of renminbi, so it can be difficult for expats to get money out of the country. The limit for overseas transfers is a paltry USD 500 per day for foreigners. Though both foreign and Chinese nationals are limited to USD 50,000 per year for accounts held in RMB, Chinese nationals can wire that amount in one transaction.

If you are an expat working for a foreign company and paying all your taxes, your company should be able to apply on your behalf for a wire transfer of over USD 50,000 without issue. If you do not work for a foreign company, the simplest way to transfer a considerable sum of money overseas is to go through a trusted Chinese friend or colleague. You will need your passport, domestic bank card, the details and address of your foreign bank account, its SWIFT code, and the permanent address tied to that account.

The bank will require you to convert the renminbi to the foreign currency in-house before making the transfer. Charges vary and include a basic commission fee, plus a small percentage of the amount being transferred (typically 0.01 percent). For reference, Bank of China has a basic commission fee of RMB 80 while China Merchants Bank charges RMB 100.

Alternatively, Alipay and the Bank of Shanghai offer an international transfer service that allows Chinese nationals to wire up to

RMB 350,000 per transaction or month for a reasonable commission fee. The transfer must be done from a Chinese national's Alipay account, so again, choose someone you trust.

Another option is Western Union, which has higher transfer limits but only allows transfers in USD or EUR. In addition, someone has to receive the money transfer, which means you have to provide their name, address, city, state, country, phone number, and gender. Commission fees vary from USD 15-30 depending on the amount being wired. Western Union counters can be found in selected branches of Agricultural Bank of China, China Construction Bank, China Post, and more. For a list of locations, visit www.westernunion.cn/en or call 800 820 8668 (press 2 for service in English).

A Word of Caution

It can be tempting to use illegal methods to move money out of the country, but do not do it – it is simply not worth the risk. When in doubt, retain the services of a tax lawyer who is well-versed in Chinese capital control regulations. Keep in mind that you can carry the equivalent of up to USD 5,000 in cash when flying out of the country; anything between USD 5,000 and 10,000 must be declared and amounts of over USD 10,000 are prohibited.

On a lesser note, beware of fake bills. There is little incentive to turn them in, as banks will usually not replace money lost. As a result, people often try to shift fake bills onto others. For example, some taxi drivers have been known to surreptitiously replace a real RMB 100 bill with a fake one and make a big show of examining the money, only to claim the customer gave them a fake bill. Carry smaller denominations whenever possible and always be aware of your surroundings. Even ATM machines have been known to dispense fake bills, so count your money on the spot and go straight to the bank counter if you spot a fake.



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Helping Hands

How to hire an ayi (and other help)

by Sijia Chen



Affordable domestic help is one of the luxuries of expat life in China. Not only do ayis (as nannies and cleaners are known in Beijing) provide invaluable help for any family, their services can be downright liberating for new parents and those with limited mobility. Many families develop a bond with their ayi beyond that of employer and employee; time and time again, long-term expats have told us that the hardest part of leaving Beijing was separating from their ayi.

Beyond domestic chores, ayis can also soften the effects of culture shock by helping families navigate some of the more challenging aspects of living in Beijing: dealing with repairmen, tracking down missing parcels, sourcing hard-to-find ingredients, etc.

While personal drivers are often assigned to executives by their company, ayis will almost always be hired by the family, either directly or through an agency. The interview is a crucial part of the process, so it is a good idea to ask someone to act as a translator so that both you and the prospective ayi are clear about expectations and benefits.

In general, June and December are the best times to look for domestic help because many employment contracts are up around then. The best way to start your search is through word-of-mouth. Finding an ayi with the kinds of qualifications needed to serve an expat family – the ability to work full-time, cook, clean, take care of children and pets, and perhaps speak basic English – can be difficult, so getting in touch with other parents can save considerable time.

Start by asking around school or parenting-focused WeChat groups, expat forums, and Yahoo groups (e.g. *the Beijinger*, *beijing-kids*, Beijing Mamas, Beijing Exchange, etc.). Families leaving Beijing often post advertisements vouching for their ayi while others post on behalf of ayis looking for additional work.

These forums are also a valuable source of information on the benchmark for typical working hours, average pay, overtime rates (if any), and the range of duties ayis can be expected to perform.

Online classifieds are also a research avenue, but ads are often posted by ayi recruitment agencies and will require more sifting through. The building and compound management office can sometimes provide leads or recommendations for ayis that residents have employed in the past. Ayis themselves often leave advertisements on billboards at businesses often frequented by expats, such as April Gourmet or Jenny Lou's.

Once you have a list of applicants, start by checking their references. Do not hesitate to contact previous employers and ask as many questions as necessary; the ayi will have a significant place in your family's life, so find out exactly what you want to know. Determine the qualifications that are most important to you and ask about the ayi's experience and performance in these areas. If you need help with childcare, a history looking after expat kids is a must. If you need someone to do the groceries and cook, a repertoire that goes beyond simple Chinese dishes might be beneficial.

Once it is time to interview prospective ayis, be candid, clear, and thorough (see below for questions to ask). The interview also provides a good opportunity to see how much English the applicant speaks, if any. It is perfectly reasonable to ask the prospective ayi to go through a trial, such as preparing a meal or cleaning. It is customary to pay the applicant a day rate for any trial; determine the amount with them ahead of time.

What About Ayi Agencies?

If you are short on time, an ayi agency can significantly simplify the process of finding domestic help but this requires a careful evaluation of the agency first. Your company may be able to recommend a vetted agency.

However, keep in mind that using an agency will likely be more expensive and possibly carry higher ayi wages, though it is much simpler to change ayis if you are not satisfied with the first one. Agencies usually require a membership or management fee, but the monthly wage should go directly to the ayi. Make sure to clarify how the fees are split between the agency and the ayi. Agency websites are a great resource for pay ranges, which are clearly outlined according to qualifications, language ability, hours and other criteria.

Going through an agency can take some of the guesswork out of the process, with background checks, health checks, and training sometimes included. During the interview stage, use your own translator rather than one provided by the agency. Monthly wages for a full-time, English-speaking ayi range from RMB 3,800-7,000.

Establishing Expectations

Besides setting expectations for everyday tasks, it is crucial to discuss holiday policies during the interview stage. If you go through an agency, it is possible they have their own policies concerning holiday leave and pay.

PHOTO: KEN

Questions to consider include:

- How much time will the ayi have off for Spring Festival and other national holidays?
- Will they receive a guaranteed bonus (often referred to as a “13th-month bonus”)? Many ayis will expect this.
- Will the ayi receive full salary while you are away on vacation?
- Will you need the ayi to travel with you, including out of the country?

Different ayis have different strengths and experiences. Expect to spend some time showing them what “clean” means to you. At the beginning, demonstrate down to the cleaning product how you would like cleaning tasks to be done, including laundry, ironing, and tidying.

If you are interested in a particular posting or referral, contact the candidate immediately; good ayis are always in demand. Remember, if you’re happy and your ayi is happy, that’s all that really matters. It may take several tries to get it right, but putting in the effort to find and train your ayi will benefit all those concerned.

Ayi and Driver Checklist

Questions to consider when hiring an ayi:

- Does she speak English? If so, how well?
- Do you want her to speak English with your children or help them improve their Mandarin?
- Has she worked for expat families before? If so, were their customs and background similar to yours?
- Has she undergone a recent health check? If not, you may want to insist she does so, although you would have to cover the cost.
- Is she certified in CPR and first aid?
- How old were the children she has cared for in the past?
- Does she have any experience caring for babies?
- Is she available for babysitting and/or on weekends?
- Does she have any experience looking after pets? Does she have any allergies?
- Do you need her to cook? Do you want her to cook western food?
- Do you want a live-in ayi? If so, what are her needs and can you accommodate them?
- Does she live close by? This can affect her availability, should you need her for emergencies or occasional babysitting duties.
- Do you want a trial period? This can range from three weeks and to three months.
- Is she trustworthy? Was she referred to you by a friend?
- If the ayi is to have keys to your house, is she willing to give you a photocopy of her Chinese ID card?
- What do you want your ayi to do? Be specific about her daily tasks, as well as a list of additional tasks such looking after the children at birthday parties.
- Discuss all aspects of money and leave, including pay, overtime, raises, bonuses, holiday leave, and sick leave.

Questions to consider when hiring a driver:

- How many years of experience does the applicant have as a personal driver?
- Do you need them to speak English?
- Do they have previous experience with expat families?
- Have they ever been involved in an accident?
- What kind of car do they drive?
- How much will their salary be? Will there be overtime pay?
- How much will their annual bonus be?
- What will be their standard working hours?
- What holidays will they be entitled to? With full or reduced pay?
- How well do they know the city and suburbs?

Glossary

Ayi 阿姨

This is how an older, unfamiliar woman is addressed in Chinese society – especially by children – but in this case refers to female domestic helpers (both live-in and part-time) who help with cleaning, housework, and childcare.

Sījī 司机

Typically addressed as *shīfu* (师傅, “master”), *sījī* is the generic term for a driver. A personal driver is a *sīrén sījī* (私人司机).

Wùyè 物业

The building management office is responsible for managing your residential compound or apartment block, including general upkeep of the buildings, grounds, and facilities.

Xiūlǐ Gōng 修理工

Also addressed as *shīfu*, *xiūlǐ gōng* are general handymen. There are more specific terms for plumbers (管子工 *guǎnzi gōng*), electricians (电工 *diàn gōng*), and heating repairmen (水暖工 *shuǐ nuǎn gōng*).

Xiǎoshí Gōng 小时工

Xiǎoshí gōng are cleaners paid by the hour who typically work freelance. Hourly wages usually range from RMB 25-35 and go up for labor-intensive tasks like floor waxing.

Yuèsǎo 月嫂

Yuèsǎo specialize in caring for mothers and newborns: cooking, cleaning, feeding and even breastfeeding support. Most are contracted through agencies and demand premium prices due to the specialized nature of their work.

Resources

Ayi Agencies

Beijing Ayi Housekeeping Service Company

Contact: 6434 5647/8, 139 1136 3252, service@bjayi.com, bjayi.com

Beijing EX-PATS Service

Contact: 6438 1634, expatslife.com

Beijing Sunnyhome Housekeeping Service

Contact: 5288 4727, 133 6636 9720, bjayiservice.com

Beijing Huijia Ayi Housekeeping Service Company

Contact: 6040 9096, beijingayiservice.com

Nanny Beijing

Contact: 5642 9208, 159 1050 7956, nannybeijing@hotmail.com, nannybeijing.com

Car and Driver Agencies

Beijing Top Rated Car Rental Service

Contact: 6504 7266, car-rentl@live.com, sxsdcars.com

First Choice Car Rental Service

Contact: 6434 0778, 6433 7408, fccars.cn

Crowd Control

How to practice situational awareness and stay safe in Beijing

by Sijia Chen

By all accounts, Beijing is a safe city. According to the 2015 Crime and Safety Report published by the US Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), the most common incidents are petty crimes such as pickpocketing, credit card fraud, and other scams. Violent crime involving the expat community tends to happen after-hours in bars and clubs, where factors like cultural misunderstanding, xenophobia, alcohol use, a rarely-enforced legal drinking age, and overcrowding can cause fights.

However, a couple of high-profile cases in the past year have highlighted the need to remain vigilant about safety in broad daylight. In August 2015, a sword-wielding man attacked a French-Chinese couple outside the Uniqlo store in Taikoo Li Sanlitun, leaving one person dead and the other seriously injured. In December, several embassies warned of potential threats to foreigners around Christmas Day in Sanlitun following a yellow-level alert – the highest possible – from the Public Security Bureau.

Situational awareness – the ability to observe one's surroundings and assess potential threats – is a crucial part of staying safe, but it takes time and training to develop. Some Beijing residents have resorted to self-defense courses such as those offered by Krav Maga Global (KMG), which teaches a self-defense system based on that used by the Israeli military.

Krav Maga has a reputation in some circles as a brutal combat sport, but KMG China Director Von Ng is quick to debunk this perception. "Krav Maga is first and foremost about defensive action and strategy," he says. "For civilian use, it is about preventing, avoiding, and getting out of a bad situation, and not picking a fight or provoking other people."

He recommends adopting a cautious attitude when it comes to stepping into potentially volatile situations. "In China, it is a cultural and societal issue as much as a legal one. For example, although there are now laws against domestic violence, as a culture the practice is to not intervene in conflicts between family or friends," he says.

"It is important to understand that getting involved will always have consequences. As such, it is always important to gauge a situation properly before going into it. There is a difference between apathy and caution."

To complicate matters, the lack of Good Samaritan laws in China means there have been cases where people were penalized for trying to help a stranger. In November 2006, 26-year-old Peng Yu escorted an elderly woman to the hospital after she broke her hip trying to board a bus in Nanjing. She claimed that he caused her fall and sued him; the court eventually ordered Peng to pay RMB 45,000 in damages. Though the facts of the case were later disputed, the news drew widespread condemnation and undoubtedly had a chilling effect on would-be Good Samaritans.

With that in mind, newcomers should familiarize themselves with the local language, customs, and environment in order to make better deci-

sions about their safety. Those who are interested in taking self-defense courses can rest assured that no previous martial arts or combat experience is needed. "The more open-minded and willing a student is to learn, the better they learn," says Yonina Chan, KMG China's general manager and a recently-certified instructor.

"Sometimes we have people who come in with a lot of previous experience but who have trouble learning simply because they insist on their way and doing what they already know. On the other hand, we have others who have never done any martial arts before but end up progressing much faster because they actually listen, take in the corrections, and try to be open to what is being taught."

Classes take place at KMG China's Sanyuanqiao location and attract a wide variety of students: expats, locals, men, women, high schoolers, parents, young professionals, etc. The second branch in Shuangjing is slated to open this month and KMG China is introducing classes geared towards children and teenagers, partly as a response to safety issues highlighted in the past year.

"We believe that kids and teens have to learn about safety and self-defense at an early age. They have to develop danger recognition, correct decision-making, problem avoidance, calling for help, reporting incidents, and, if needed, fighting and defending themselves," says Ng.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF KMG CHINA

“It’s about preventing, avoiding, and getting out of a bad situation, and not picking a fight or provoking other people.”

Instructors will tailor the KMG curriculum and testing process to each age group as well as address special topics such as bullying and staying safe when moving to a new city for university.

“With kids and teens, it is also important that we focus on motor skills, coordination, self-confidence, discipline, social skills, and character development. These are built into the classes in a way that is very different from adult classes,” explains Ng.

One final thing to keep in mind is that self-defense training is not a silver bullet. “From dealing with prevention and awareness, all the way to fighting to survive, we assume that you are at a disadvantage and need to use all the tools you have and the presence of mind to survive and get away,” says Ng.

“Developing your reaction to many possible real-world problems is a long process and not something done in a simple one-hour groin-kicking seminar.”

Resources

- **Beijing Municipal Public Security:** Visit www.bjgaj.gov.cn to read about public security in Beijing, including police news and articles.
- **Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC):** Visit www.osac.gov and search “crime and safety reports Beijing” to find the latest reports on public safety.
- **KMG China:** Visit www.kravmagaglobal.com.cn to learn more about Krav Maga and see class schedules. Trial classes are free.

Important Numbers

Save the following numbers in your phone as well as your embassy’s contact information:

- Police: 110
- Fire: 119
- Traffic accidents: 122
- Ambulance (English hotline): 999
- Ambulance (Chinese hotline): 120
- Beijing Chaoyang District Center for Disease Control and Prevention: 6777 3512
- Foreign Emergency Services: 6525 5486
- Beijing United Family Hospital Emergency Services: 5927 7120
- International SOS Clinic and Emergency Services: 6462 9112



Safety Tips from KMG China

The following tips are condensed from an email sent out to KMG China members in the wake of the sword attack in Sanlitun.

- **Think of awareness as a choice.** This means putting away your mobile device, taking off your headphones, and consciously observing everything around you. Watch how people move and interact, what and where things are around you, what the traffic is like, etc. When you are first practicing this, it will seem awkward and obvious to others. But as with anything, it takes conscious practice over time to become smoother and better at picking up details and subtle changes without looking like a nervous and paranoid person. The act of being aware will then become natural to you, like an app running in the background.
- **Determine the baseline.** A baseline is the “normal state” of things. In a coffee shop, most people will move in a relaxed manner, talk in a certain volume and tone, gesture in a certain way. A disturbance in the baseline means something out of the ordinary has occurred. This can be as obvious as someone suddenly yelling, running, or moving aggressively, or something subtler, like someone looking shifty or uneasy, or someone constantly staring at you. A disturbance at times means nothing, but other times it could signal something bad about to happen.
- **Do not dismiss anomalies.** A lot of times, people notice disturbances in the baseline but choose to ignore or discard these signs, even if they indicate possible danger. This is in part because we tend to hope or believe that there is no danger, and also in part because we fear being mistaken or we don’t want the trouble of getting involved. It is always wiser to act defensively than to just hope things will be OK. It does not mean you have to immediately go to extremes (i.e. resort to violence). The point is to act as early as possible to avoid an extreme situation.
- **Avoid “focus locks.”** Focus locks are distractions that prevent us from practicing situational awareness. While mobile phones are the most obvious focus locks, they also include blasting music loudly into your headphones, being deep in conversation with someone, staring at something that catches your attention, or even eating while walking on the street. If you need to engage in a focus lock, do it in a controlled environment like at work or at home.
- **Look up before you look down.** If you must engage in a focus lock in public (e.g. taking an important phone call), make it a habit to check your surroundings before looking down. If you frequently take phone calls while outside, consider using hands-free headsets that don’t block out ambient noise (like those made for runners or cyclists). When you are walking and talking with a friend, make it a point to scan your environment; they will understand.
- **Know when to seek help.** If you see someone with a deadly weapon, alert security and do not engage with the potential threat yourself. Be familiar with the local emergency hotlines or know where your local police station is. In these cases, it is important to get the right people to help and not try to be a hero yourself, which might simply cause a panic or end up with people getting hurt.

Putting Down Roots

What worked: one family's experience over nine years in Beijing

by Anjana Kainikkara



Tebby, Sean and their daughters at home

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TEBBY HINTON

“ Learning the language gave me the confidence to go out and explore, to get a better feel for my surroundings and the culture ”



Finding your feet in a foreign country can be exciting and daunting all at once, and in China there's an adventure around every corner. One of the most important factors is a solid support network, which helps newcomers make the transition into what can be a challenging new environment.

Different people will find their support networks in different ways: some through a faith-based community, some through work or volunteering, others through hobbies or interests. However, two very distinct approaches can be observed in the international communities here in Beijing.

Perhaps the majority like to live in the 'expat bubble', settling into expat friendly neighborhoods, getting involved in the community there and developing a social circle of fellow westerners with shared experiences. Other families choose to go down the less trodden path of immersing themselves into the culture of their exotic host country. Both can be equally successful and enriching experiences, but whichever you choose to do, you're likely to find we all need a support network to rely on. This doesn't come easily, and it takes a lot of initiative and effort to establish one that works for your family and your needs.

Tebby Hinton, her husband Sean and their three daughters have lived in Beijing for the last nine years, and the family is relocating to the UK this summer. They chose to immerse themselves in the Chinese culture while they were here, and managed to strike a balance between learning aspects of a new culture while maintaining their existing cultural values. We talked to Tebby about the thinking behind her decisions, and how she sees those decisions having worked out nine years later.

While her husband stayed busy at work, Tebby, a stay-at-home mom, set the tone for this shared family adventure by joining an intensive language course, five days a week at a local university, almost immediately after landing. "Learning the language was essential," she says, "and the biggest contributing factor in finding my feet. To be honest, 'a sense of belonging' is asking too much of China. I don't think China offers a sense of belonging, it's not like USA, UK, Canada or Australia that's a multicultural society and embraces people from other places, offering them opportunities to become one of them. China doesn't offer that up. However, it's achievable if you make a conscious effort to understand your surroundings better."

They chose to live in a beautiful house in the middle of a little village in the Shunyi area, and to experience everyday Chinese life unfold around them. Things that seemed strange at first are what they find most interesting now! The man who passes their window at 7am selling sticky rice, children running around playing in the street or the fact that since their neighborhood has no plumbing it's common for locals to brush their teeth outside by the street, are all pieces of a puzzle representing their lives and experiences in China. Their family has had the opportunity to observe and establish similarities between their African culture and Chinese culture. Certain aspects resonate more than others: for instance how the Chinese are extremely respectful towards and take care of their elders.

Tebby relied mostly on the Chinese community, school community and Baha'i community for support. Taking Chinese lessons helped her forge friendships within the Chinese community at the university. Volunteering in her kids' school helped build a support group within the school. Getting involved in the Baha'i community got her connected with others of the same faith. Establishing this support network enabled them to be more adventurous.

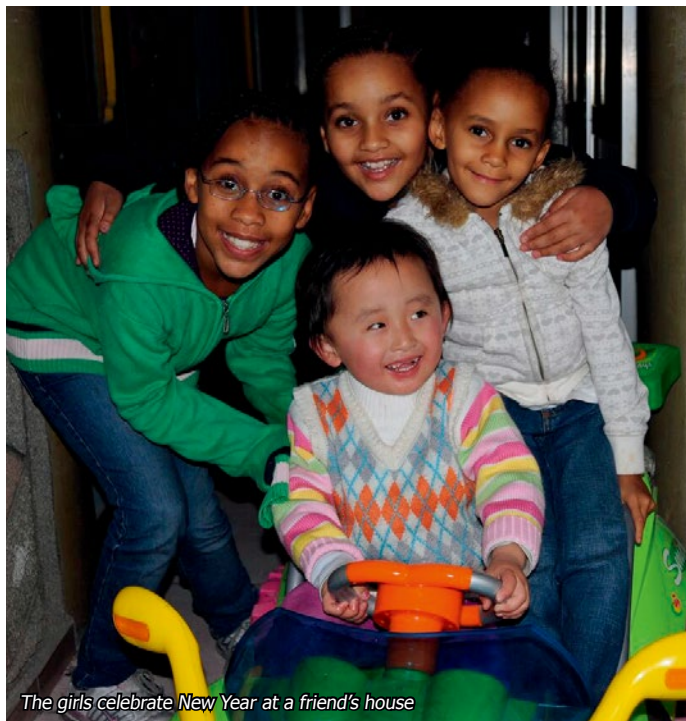
"Staying busy was a priority, and learning the language from day one gave me something to do. So I made friends along the way and didn't have time to look for more. Beijing warrants a different way of living. This is what I would advise all new families coming in. Learning the language gave me the confidence to go out and explore, to get a better feel for my surroundings and the culture. It helped me understand Beijing better, as well as bridging the gap between my Western way of life and the Chinese way of life. We made a conscious effort to have different groups to socialize with, to have a balanced perspective on life in Beijing, and we've thoroughly enjoyed it."

Living in a transient society as expats it's natural that in the end we all tend to gravitate towards people who understand our experiences. For people on the move, shared experiences help forge a strong basis for making friendships, while building a reliable support network. You'll find that you do not have the luxury of time to put a safety net in place, especially when you're new to a foreign country with no friends or family. Some people feel comfortable staying in the expat bubble and that works really well for them. But everyone copes differently, and if you want to navigate outside the expat bubble, you'll need knowledge of the Chinese language.

Tebby further stresses the importance of finding a balance. "The expat community has played a huge part in my social life, especially in school. I have however made a conscious effort to make my experience more than just expat. I wanted to include people from our host country! It is easy to have a complex and rich life without making that effort, but we tried hard and without realizing it have managed to set an example for our kids to be inclusive. Our kids now effortlessly bond with Chinese and expat kids alike. All three kids have learnt the language, and that's why their experience has been different."

Tebby and Sean have three daughters aged 18, 16 and 13 years old. With two in Dulwich College Beijing (DCB) and one at Western Academy of Beijing (WAB), she has had her hands full juggling their school and extracurricular activities, along with everything else. By and large, she feels children are resilient and handle moves much better than adults, but she points out that they are not infinitely flexible. Adapting successfully takes a lot of work. Children have to be listened to, and given what they need to make this transition easier on them. Tebby agrees that social media helped maintain the friendships her children left behind, but they also solidified their local friendships through WeChat and Skype!

She herself relied on social media to maintain connections back home, with frequent updates on their lives in Beijing. She also



encouraged her parents to move to Beijing for five years. Her parents worked in the teaching faculty of a local school. They had space in their lives for a big adventure at an early retirement stage, and it was a unique experience for all of them. Tebby highly recommends reinforcing language learning by hiring tutors at home, no matter how well your children are faring with Chinese at school. It will manifest in positive ways to give them a sense of confidence, and help them comprehend the changes in their lives.

Two things that helped her adapt faster and settle in:

Learn the language, and get a driver's license! This helped Tebby find normalcy in an unfamiliar place, which can be extremely hard for your brain to process when you don't understand what's going on around you. It was also positive having Chinese-speaking help at home, which in turn forced them all to learn faster.

What they're going to miss the most and what they are taking back with them:

"One thing we're leaving behind is the house, and that's really special, with the courtyard and life outside in the village that we immersed ourselves into. We are all taking our Chinese language that we didn't have when we came here. When the kids first moved, there was excitement, but also a fear of the unknown. Now they're definitely happy to go back into an English speaking environment; however they really appreciate what they've learnt here, and that is a very big part of who they are or will be."

Support Groups and Networks:

Beijing's most visible newcomers' group is the **International Newcomers' Network (INN)**. Founded in 1996, it is the largest and oldest volunteer newcomer association in mainland China. INN's mandate is simple: to welcome newcomers – any newcomers – and help them to integrate into life in Beijing. "INN is where new and seasoned expats come to make new friends and reacquaint with old," explains INN President Theresa Ahdieh. With over 2,000 members from more than 200 countries, INN is a completely volunteer-run organization that doesn't rely on sponsors. Regular INN events

include INN Nights Out, INN Trekkie day trips, INN Coffee Mornings, and Arrival Survival in August, the most popular annual meeting of the year, which is timed to coincide with the arrival of many families in late summer.

School Communities and Getting Involved: For most families, school communities are the most natural way to meet people. Most international schools have an active parent group, committee, or body where you can get involved in organizing, fundraising for, or volunteering at school activities and events. Other avenues to explore for establishing a support network include hobby and interest groups, religious organizations, country- or language-specific resources, parenting support groups and online groups such as Beijing Mamas, Beijing Café, Beijing Mommy Group on WeChat and Beijing Exchange. These are great sources of information about living in Beijing and these sites are also a handy place to buy and sell items. (For more on this, see page 63.)

Resources

Newcomers' Networks

- **Beijing International Newcomers' Network (INN):** www.innbeijing.org
- **InterNations:** www.internations.org

Religious Organizations

- **Bet Yaakov Chabad House and Community Center:** www.chabadbeijing.cn
- **Beijing International Christian Fellowship (BICF):** www.bicf.org

Cultural Organizations

- **French Institute:** www.institutfrancais-pek.in.com
- **Instituto Cervantes:** www.pekin.cervantes.es
- **Italian Cultural Institute:** www.iicpechino.esteri.it

Interest Groups

- **Beijing Guild:** www.beijingguild.com
- **Beijing Stitch n Bitch:** stitchnbitch_beijing-owner@yahoo.com
- **Beijing Photo Walks:** www.beijingphotowalks.com, www.facebook.com/groups/BJPhotowalks

Online Groups

- **Beijing Mamas Yahoo Group:** groups.yahoo.com/group/Beijing_Mamas
- **Beijing Exchange:** groups.yahoo.com/group/beijingexchange
- **Beijing Cafe:** groups.yahoo.com/group/Beijingcafe

Parenting Support Groups

- **Bumps 2 Babes:** beijingbumps2babes@gmail.com
- **La Leche League:** lelechebeijing@gmail.com, www.llli.org/beijing

Volunteer Organizations

- **Roundabout:** www.roundaboutchina.com
- **Migrant Children's Foundation:** www.mcfchina.org
- **Sew GORGEOUS:** sewgorgeous@yahoo.com

Other

- **Signature Wine:** www.sigwine.com

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Where The Heart Is?

Easing the transition to a new country for your family

by Andrew Killeen



Whether it's the first time moving to a new country, or you're an experienced international family, change is still a challenge. We look at some of the ways you can help your children cope with the transition.

Get the Kids Involved

For many children, by the time they learn about the proposed move, it's already a *fait accompli*. Of course you can't put important decisions about careers and finances in the hands of young children, but the more your kids feel in control of the process, the happier they will be about it.

If you're planning an exploratory trip, go as a family, so that the kids feel like they have a say in the next chapter of their lives. As

much as possible involve them in discussions about which neighborhood you're going to live in, and your new house or apartment.

They'll want to choose which of their clothes, books, toys and games they take with them. Allow them to decorate and personalize their room – they may need to surround themselves with reminders of home at first.

Keep them informed

Children's anxiety can stem from the fact that they don't know much about their new home, and can't imagine living there. (My own six-year-old was greatly reassured when we watched Youtube videos of Beijing, and he saw that there were roads, shops and parks just like home.) Be clear with them what's going to change and what's going to stay the same.

Encourage your children to start a scrapbook or decorate a wall with information about their new home. They can study maps, collect interesting facts, or maybe make some food from the local cuisine. The internet is an amazing resource – you may be able to take a virtual tour of their new school, or to walk around the neighborhood with Street View.

Most important of course is tackling the language barrier. Children generally learn new languages much more easily than adults, but any head start you can get will ease the shock of arriving. You don't need to take a course: learning some simple phrases, making character flashcards or even just mastering the tones can be a big help.

Listen to their concerns

Children are all unique, and will respond to change differently. Some will embrace it enthusiastically, others will be frightened, unhappy or even angry. It's important that you listen to them, and acknowledge that their feelings are valid and natural.

The age of your children will also affect their response. Broadly, the younger the child, the easier transition will be for them. Moving can be hardest for teenagers, whose friendships and relationships are of paramount importance to them. "You'll make new friends" is true and helpful, but not if your teens think that you're dismissing the significance of the friends they're leaving behind.

Most important for children is reassurance that the family will still be together. Invest time in sharing and discussing your experiences, and in doing fun things together. Try to develop family rituals, like a pizza night or going out for ice cream. These can help children to form positive associations with their new home.

Be realistic

It's good to talk about the positives, but it doesn't help to ignore real issues. Moving countries can be stressful for adults too! Don't burden your kids with your problems, but if you try to hide your feel-

PHOTO: WOOLLYWONDERWORKS (FLOCKR)

“It's good to talk about the positives, but it doesn't help to ignore real issues. Moving countries can be stressful for adults too!”

ings, children will pick up on them anyway, and wonder what else you're hiding from them. It's better to say, "Mom's having a bad day too. Let's get some popcorn and watch a movie to cheer ourselves up."

Some children will need lots of reassurance, from the moment you tell them that you're moving until you've settled in your new home. Expect to have ups and downs, and expect to explain all sorts of issues again and again.

Make sure you keep up the communication. Even if they're settling well, children can still run into problems. Be particularly mindful of bullying, which can be difficult for children to talk about, but which needs to be tackled quickly, before it escalates.

If your children aren't adjusting, or if they are particularly distressed, don't hesitate to seek professional help. Your health provider or school counselor will be able to steer you in the right direction.

Keep in touch...

Children don't need to lose all contact with their friends from back home. Email and video calling (Skype, Facetime etc.) make it easy for them to stay in touch. But don't underestimate the value of an old-fashioned handwritten letter. This gives them the chance to put other things in the envelope: pictures they've drawn, photos, information about their school or interesting places they've been. This will mean a lot more to their friends than a quick "Hi" on social media.

If you do use video calling for them to speak to their friends, don't be surprised if young kids, instead of talking about their new home and asking what their friends have been up to, just goof around. This is probably what they did when they played together!

... but make new friends!

Your kids should be clear that they're not expected to forget about their friends. But it's important that they make new ones.

This can be particularly challenging for children at international schools, where small class sizes and language barriers can drastically reduce their peer group. Out-of-school clubs (sports, drama, music etc) can broaden their social circles, keep them busy and reduce the scope for moping. Help their friendships develop by organizing play dates and inviting their new friends along on trips. You'll probably find that the other parents are grateful and happy to return the favor!

In time you'll find that, while important friendships will endure, long-distance communication will become less frequent, and your kids will be increasingly focus on their new lives. The first time they say "my friends", and you realize they're talking about their Beijing friends, will be a major step towards them feeling happy and at home.

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At Your Leisure

Fun places to explore with your kids
on weekends and holidays

Updated by Anjana Kainikkara

Finding exciting and adventurous places to explore is essential to feeling at home in Beijing, especially if you have children. While there are plenty of different activities available, pollution can be a factor in dictating what you might choose to do on any given day. With the city's unpredictable air quality, it's always good to have a few different options in your back pocket that you can pull out when needed. Here are some indoor and outdoor suggestions to get you started. For complete addresses, contact information and more fun ideas visit our website at www.beijing-kids.com.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF TRAVELOURPLANET.COM

Play Centers and Family Fun

Latitude

All Ages. Latitude, the operator of two successful trampoline parks in Australia, recently opened a Shunyi branch that promises tons of bouncy fun. The pulse pounding activities are sure to appeal to children and it is perfect for smoggy days and muggy summers. Located on Anping Street, the Shunyi activity center boasts an array of trampolines, climbing walls, obstacle courses, a dodgeball court and more. A great option for birthday parties, especially once their café has opened.

Fundazzle

Ages 1-8. Play centers have come and gone over the years, but this Gongti fixture has catered to local and expat families alike for over 17 years. Even though it lacks the novelty factor, Fundazzle has managed to stay a birthday party favorite. Its huge jungle gym, ball pit, arcade games, inflatable climbing wall, sandbox, and fishing pool are a real draw for little kids. Drawbacks include the Chinese-style bathrooms and non-English speaking staff. However, it is economical, consistent, and predictable, which makes it a safe choice.

StarTrooper Laser Tag

Ages 10+. Located near Caochangdi, StarTrooper Laser Tag appeals to older kids and adults alike, as it offers them a chance to live out their Star Wars fantasies by arming them with laser guns to annihilate the 'Dark Forces'. StarTrooper also has a pool table, arcade games, and a concession stand for some post-game entertainment. The entire venue can be rented out for birthday parties.

EE City

Ages 5-12. This 18,600sqm center at Joy City Chaoyang allows kids to role-play 84 different jobs by dressing up in uniforms and trying their hand at various tasks. Careers include firefighter, cashier, police officer, travel agent, TV anchor, submarine operator, and more. There are two 4.5-hour sessions daily, with each career 'session' lasting 30 minutes and led by adult facilitators. We recommend planning which careers your child would like to try out in advance, as they're likely to only do three or four per visit.

Also check out: Adventure Zone, New City Center, SMJ Bowling, U-Speed Go-Karting, Red1 Karting, Family Box, Mitty Jump, Le Kids!

Shopping Malls

Indigo Mall

All ages. Located just south of 798 Art District, Indigo Mall opened in 2012 and is a popular place for families to hangout. The mall hosts regular kids' events in its airy atrium space. In the warmer months, families can access the free Indigo Playground out back, which features a fountain and two play areas connected by a garden. It's always busy and lively

Solana Lifestyle Shopping Park

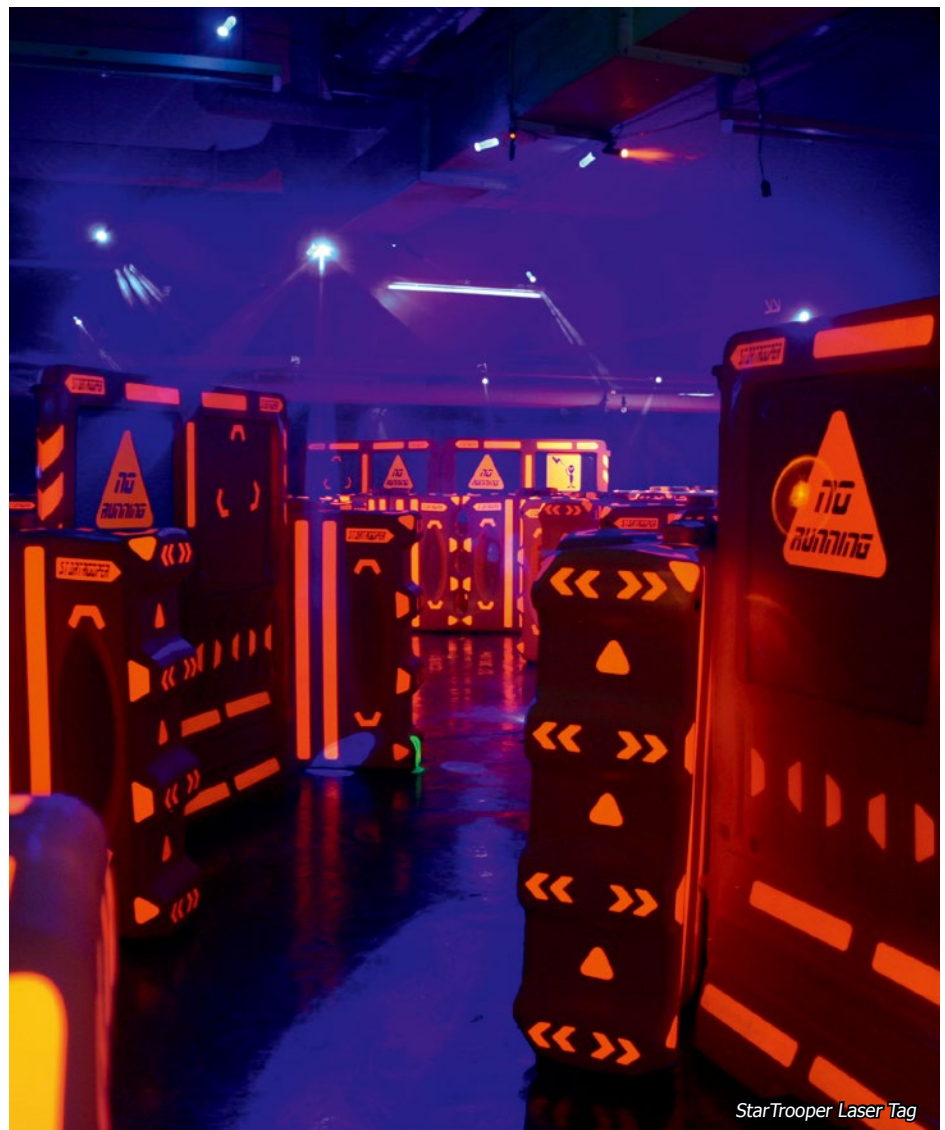
All ages. Located a stone's throw away from Chaoyang Park, this family favorite has been open since 2008 and carries brand names like Zara Home, H&M, Mothercare, and more. The village-style layout offers plenty of space for kids to run around in and offers indoor, as well as, outdoor options. The central plaza, with its fountains and whimsical

decorations, is particularly popular. Indoors, there's an entire children's wing with play facilities and family-oriented shops. Solana also has a cinema, western restaurants, and an indoor ice rink.

Tai Koo Li Sanlitun

All ages. The area in and around Tai Koo Li Sanlitun is an expat hub, with a myriad of international shops, restaurants, bars, beauty services, and more. In the summer, the fountain in front of the Apple Store attracts lots of kids, who play and run through the water jets as their parents look on. Tai Koo Li also has a Megabox Cinema that shows Hollywood films and the Coldstone Creamery is a perfect heat-buster on hot days!

Also check out: Kerry Center



StarTrooper Laser Tag



PHOTO: KEN

Generations of families have played and learned together in Beijing's parks



Art in 798 District

Beijing Attractions

798 Art District

All ages. Suitable for art lovers, 798 Art District is a complex of decommissioned munitions factories that have been turned into shops, galleries, cafes, and artists' studios. UCCA Creative Studio runs weekly bilingual art classes and workshops, inspired by the seasons and the gallery's current exhibitions, for kids under 12. Even if your kids aren't really into art, they'll have fun touching, exploring, and playing around the many sculptures and graffiti murals displayed and scattered around the compound.

The Great Wall

When it comes to Beijing's most famous attraction, not all sections are created equal. Avoid at all costs the crowded and reconstructed Badaling in favor of quieter and more authentic segments. A good choice for families is Mutianyu, which is broad and smooth enough for even young children to walk on. The nearby Schoolhouse and Brickyard Inn and Retreat offer a great place to recharge and eat lunch. A visit to the Bohai Township can also be combined with the Great Wall for a relaxed day trip. Active families with older kids can hike wilder, unrestored sections of the Wall (see below). Note that some sections involve steep climbs and crumbling ramparts, so you're hiking at your own risk.

Also check out: Forbidden City, Panjiayuan Antiques Market, Beihai Park and various other sections of the Great Wall (such as Jinshanling, Gubeikou, or Huanghuacheng)

Parks

Chaoyang Park

As the largest park in Beijing, Chaoyang Park is a no-brainer for families; entrance fees are cheap and a myriad of activities to explore. Young visitors can fly kites, rent a pedal boat for the lake, go on fairground rides (including a merry-go-round and bumper cars), or play on the bouncy castle. There's also a treetop obstacle course called Happy Gorilla with a network of bridges, swings, and zip lines.

Si'de Park

Located in Lido, this modest but well-maintained park is a popular destination for local families. Si'de Park features a running track that winds around the park, a roller skating rink, a fishing pond, soccer pitches, a playground, an indoor funhouse, a bouncy castle, and fairground rides.

Ritan Park

This free park has stunning foliage in the fall, with the ginkgo trees turning bright gold. Located in the Ritan embassy district, it has a supervised outdoor rock climbing wall, an extensive 'people's gym' and a central pavilion that offers decent views of the surrounding area. Some great local restaurants and quaint shopping avenues make it well worth a visit.

Also check out: Tuanjiehu Park, Ditan Park, Olympic Forest Park, and Fragrant Hills

Animal Attractions

Beijing Wildlife Park

All ages. This conservation park covers over 14,000sqm and is home to more than 10,000 animals. The park is split into two sections, with one half containing large animals such as deer, lions, tigers, and bears and the other half housing smaller animals, as well as, birds. Ideal for a family day out, they also have restaurants, cafes, and suitable spots for a picnic if you're in the mood.

Blue Zoo Beijing

All ages. Located at the south gate of Worker's Stadium, Blue Zoo Beijing is worth a visit. Visitors can spot parrot fish, nurse sharks, leopard sharks, stingrays, moray eels, daily mermaid shows, and the occasional underwater marriage ceremony. This is also where SinoScuba holds confined water sessions for the PADI Open Water certification.

Beijing Aquarium

Not to be confused with Blue Zoo Beijing, Beijing Aquarium is adjacent to Beijing Zoo in Haidian District. The aquarium features a rainforest zone where families can feed fish for an extra fee, a Whale and Dolphin Discovery zone, and a Marine Mammal Pavilion. There are also daily dolphin and sea lion shows.

Also check out: Beijing Zoo, Milu Deer Park, Hanshiqiao Nature Reserve

Shifu! Shifu!

Your Beijing Taxi Guide

Updated by Jessica Suotmaa

Transportation in Beijing via taxis is convenient and relatively cheap if you can get around the traffic. However, newcomers might shy from hailing taxis on their own due to the language barrier (the prospect of having to speak Mandarin), or a fear of being rejected by a cabbie (due to his fear of having to speak English). Fortunately, taxi and car hailing mobile apps have become more commonplace. In this guide, we outline the basics of taxis and the most foreigner-friendly private car hailing apps in Beijing.

Taxis

If your phone is out of battery, not set up for payment, or you just don't want to try to speak Mandarin over the phone, a normal taxi will do just fine. Beijing taxi rates start at RMB 13 (RMB 14 between 11pm-5am), then RMB 2.30 per km (RMB 2.80 per km at night, RMB 3.5 after 15km). Most drivers do not speak English — you're lucky if they speak standard Mandarin — and many are illiterate, in case you're wondering why they get angry when you stick an address in their face. So sometimes it helps to prepare your own GPS using Baidu Maps, or at least a map with your intended location. It might be worth investing in a "taxi book", which has lists of destinations with their addresses in Chinese characters and Pinyin. The newer versions have maps too, and there's even an app for i-Phone, called Beijing Taxi-Book. Drivers tend to know major street names and landmarks such as tourist sites, but if you do encounter a clueless driver, try suggesting a nearby subway station to keep him on track. Be warned that taxis might smell of third hand smoke! They usually only take passengers from the right side (for safety reasons), and most do not have seat belts (so don't bother with the child car seat). If you travel far, or use an expressway, the incurred toll fee will be added to your total cost (usually RMB 5-10) and you will receive the receipt for it. If you prefer ordering a taxi the traditional way (for a RMB 5 tip), then call 96103 and press 8 for English service.



Uber 优步

Since its 2009 launch in San Francisco, Uber has been connecting riders to drivers in hundreds of cities across the globe. You can easily create an account online or download the Uber app on iOS, Android, or Windows phones. Uber is especially popular among foreigners in Beijing thanks to its English interface, the fact that you can use the same Uber account in all your travels (I use mine from the US), and its ability to link foreign credit cards for payment. Much like Didi, different service levels are available: People's Uber is the carpool option offering seating up to four people; UberX is the mid-level option with slightly better cars; UberBlack is the premium option with luxury cars such as Audi and BMW; and UberXL consists of SUVs and mini-vans for large parties (or if you just have a lot of stuff).

How to use:

1. Once you've got your account set up (with payment methods and phone numbers), all you have to do is connect your GPS and drop the pin on your requested pick up location.
2. A rate will pop up if surge pricing is in effect (rates rise during peak hours or holidays as an incentive for drivers), shown in 1.25x format, which you will have to acknowledge and accept before proceeding.
3. On the map, you'll be able to see the number of Uber cars in the area and how long it will take for the nearest one to arrive. Unlike with other car hailing apps where the drivers fight for your "order", Uber assigns drivers orders, so sometimes you will be assigned a driver who's farther away than the closest driver and wait times are inconsistent.
4. Tap the arrow next to "Set Pickup Location" to order a car. Specifying a destination is optional, though often useful since many Uber drivers aren't native to Beijing; a suggested route will pop up on the GPS screen.
5. The driver will call to confirm your exact location. You will see the

PHOTOS: BFI SHADOW AND POLELOQ (FLICKR)

driver's photo, color and make of the car, and car license number on your screen once your ride is confirmed.

Payment methods: Uber accepts Alipay, Visa, and Mastercard. The fee is automatically deducted after each ride.

Verdict: Uber is a favorite with many families as taxis have a reputation for avoiding parties with strollers. In our experience, Uber drivers are friendly and their cars are clean, due in part to Uber's usage rating system. Some cars even offer free bottled water, Wi-Fi, or phone charging stations. Since Uber and Didi are in direct competition, Uber also gives out special discounts and vouchers regularly, reducing the cost of your ride. But...

Warning: Uber has a history of being targeted by the Chinese government over legality issues. As a result, Uber cars are subject to police scrutiny, and drivers avoid certain pick up and drop off locations, such as airports, train stations, and tourist spots (e.g. Jingbao Jie in downtown Dongcheng is often hit). If you're traveling with children it can be distressing to be stopped by the police.



Dididache (Didi) 滴滴打车

Dididache, previously a taxi ordering service, merged with Kuaidi Dache (private driver service) in 2015 and has been providing us with everything we could possibly ask for in a car hailing service in one app. The app is not only available on iOS, Android, and Windows interfaces, but has also been added into the WeChat platform, allowing users to order a car even without downloading their app. The only caveat to the app is that it's in Chinese, but it's easy to figure out, and this is scheduled to change at the end of the year now that Dididache (Didi) has merged with Lyft, an American cab-hailing company.

How to use Didi on WeChat:

(note, you'll need an active WeChat Wallet – for more information see p24)

1. Click on the "Me" tab
2. Click on "Wallet" and you'll see the option to "Order a Taxi" once you scroll down
3. Allow the app to find your location (click "OK")
3. Fill in your locations (to and from)
4. Enter tip amount (optional)
5. The driver will call you to discuss the pick up

If you don't want to pay via WeChat wallet, you can always pay cash and still get a receipt (*fapiao*), making it easy to order taxis for other people.

How to use the Didi app:

1. When you open the interface, select the type of service you want: *Chūzūchē* 出租车 (normal taxi), *Kuàichē* 快车 (private drivers), *Zhuānchē* 专车 (VIP version), *Pīnchē* 拼车 (carpool), or *Dàijìà* 代驾 (driver drives your car for you)
2. Input pick up location by tapping into your GPS.
3. Input drop off location.
4. Wait for driver to call you.
5. Pay via app (unless it's a legit taxi, in which case you could pay cash).

Payment method: Cash for licensed taxis, WeChat Wallet, and Alipay. Normally you have to go in and manually "pay" for the ride (and you won't be able to request another ride until you've cleared your debts), but you can also set up "automatic payment" which will deduct as soon as the driver taps the arrive button. For company reimbursement purposes, if you do not pay cash or you use Didi private car services, you can request receipts to be sent to you for free if the fare is above RMB 200.

Verdict: Didi is the most convenient way to order a licensed taxi without having to add a tip. Since you've already inputted GPS locations and addresses, it also does not require much communication with the driver. The *Kuàichē* function is significantly cheaper, especially since Didi regularly gives users vouchers and coupons. While *Kuàichē* cars can be domestic, or even electric, *Zhuānchē* has higher standards where drivers are often professional chauffeurs working on the side. *Pīnchē* is the cheapest option of all as it is a legitimate carpool, but can be a slower alternative due to pitstops.

Taxi Vocabulary

Prefer to just hail a cab? If possible, have the Chinese address handy. At first, it's helpful to have a contact number for someone who can guide the driver if necessary. Here are some useful phrases:

- I'm going _____. *Wǒ qù* _____. 我去 _____。
- How much? *Duō shao qián?* 多少钱?
- We've arrived. *Dào le*. 到了。
- Turn right. *Zuǒ zhuǎn/guǎi*. 左转 / 拐。
- Turn left. *Yòu zhuǎn/guǎi*. 右转 / 拐。
- Please give me the receipt. *Qǐng gěi wǒ fāpiào*. 请给我发票。
- Where are you going? *Nǐ qù nǎr?* 你去哪儿?

Food at Your Fingertips

Ordering food the easy way

Updated by Nimo Wanjau



If your shipping hasn't arrived yet, or you're at your wits' end over what to cook, then don't fret, as getting hot, delicious food delivered to your doorstep is very simple. Beijing has several English- and Chinese-based delivery services, which simplify your life by giving you one less thing to think about. Here's the list of English-only delivery services and stand-alone restaurants that deliver.

Sherpa's

This company's familiar orange scooters can be seen across the Chaoyang and Dongcheng districts. It was founded in 1999 and has a large selection of restaurants which have partnered with them, such as Home Plate BBQ, Wagas, and Tandoori Kitchen. There's a minimum delivery amount of RMB 100 at dinner hours from 6pm.

Delivery zones: Chaoyang and Dongcheng District

Delivery fee: Starts at RMB 15 and increases according to distance. Sherpa's has a happy hour promotion from 1-6pm on weekdays where the delivery fee is waived if the total is RMB 20 or less.

Average delivery time: 45- 50 minutes

English service? Yes, English-speaking operators and English website

How to order: website interface

Contact and delivery hours: Daily 10.30am-10.30pm, closed during major holidays. 400 600 6209, www.sherpa.com.cn



KK Rabbit

Though more limited than Sherpa's or Jinshisong, KK Rabbit offers a range of international and Chinese cuisine. Operators can also take orders through MSN and Skype.

Delivery zones: Guomao, Sanlitun, Chaoyang Park and Shunyi

Delivery fee: RMB 15 for addresses within 3km of the restaurant. There's an extra RMB 7 for every kilometer after that. When you place an order through the website, KK Rabbit will call you within ten minutes to tell you the correct delivery fee; the website tends to over-estimate the fee as a conservative measure.

Average delivery time: 40 minutes

English service? Yes, English-speaking operators and English website

How to order: website interface easier than calling as the orders can be easily mistaken.

Contact and delivery hours: Daily 10.30am-10.30pm (hotline), delivery hours vary from restaurant to restaurant. 400 720 1717, www.kkrabbit.com.cn

Jinshisong 锦食送

Along with Sherpa's, Jinshisong is one of the larger delivery services for western restaurants. It has international and Chinese selections and covers a wider delivery area than Sherpa's.

Delivery zones: Chaoyang, Dongcheng, Xicheng, and Haidian

Delivery fee: Starts at RMB 15, though many restaurants offer free delivery within 3km. There is a minimum order of RMB 68.

Average delivery time: 45 minutes

English service? Yes, English-speaking operators and English website.

How to order: website interface

Contact and delivery hours: Daily 10.30am-10.30pm (hotline). 400 030 0517, www.jinshisong.com

Delivery Services

Youcansong 优餐送

Youcansong delivers from Chinese and international restaurants. In its own words, Youcansong delivers "the best food with superior service."

Delivery zones: Chaoyang and Dongcheng District

Delivery fee: Delivery fee is calculated by the distance from the restaurant to your home. Youcansong charges RMB 15 for the first 3km and RMB 5 for each additional kilometer.

Average delivery time: 45-60 minutes

English service? Yes, English-speaking operators and English website

How to order: online via website or app, calling

Contact and delivery hours: Daily 10.30am to 10.30pm, delivery hours vary from restaurant to restaurant. 4000 700 250, www.youcansong.com

Standalone Restaurants

Annie's 安妮

This award-winning Italian chain is a godsend to parents with hungry children who need food now. Founded in 1999, Annie's offers pasta, pizza, salads, and antipasti at low prices. Their delivery service is quick, friendly, and geared towards families. There's a kids' menu with choices like chicken strips and cheesy penne pasta.

Delivery zones: Sanlitun, Ritan Park, Chaoyang Park, CBD, Shunyi, Wangjing, and Lido

Delivery fee: None

Average delivery time: 30-40 minutes

English service? Yes, English-speaking operators and website.

How to order: Browse the menu on Annie's website and call the branch closest to you for delivery.

Contact and delivery hours: Daily 10.30am-10.30pm. www.annies.com.cn



Gung Ho! Gourmet Pizza Factory 叫板比萨

Gung Ho! are now synonymous with the color pink. The delivery guys pair pink t-shirts with black helmets and can be seen zooming their way across traffic. Their unique pizza boxes feature artwork by local artists. Delivery tends to be fast and there are many meal combos (including a kids' combo) with pizza, pasta, or salad plus a side dish and drinks.

Delivery zones: Sanlitun, Shuangjing, and Lido

Delivery fee: None

Average delivery time: The website says 45-60 minutes, but the Gung-Ho! dudes are often much faster than that.

English service? Yes, English-speaking operators and website

How to order: Call or order online. Customers have the option of paying with a Chinese bankcard; ask for the deliveryman to bring the POS system.

Contact and delivery hours: Daily 11am-11pm. 5135 8557 (Lido), 5876 5262 (Shuangjing), 5738 9040 (Lido), www.gung-hopizza.com

Element Fresh 新元素

Element Fresh has been popular among families since it opened in 2002. The Shanghai-based chain is known for its healthy fare, including tasty salads, sandwiches, and smoothies. Note that delivery can be slow during lunch hour, as this is the restaurant's peak period; call well ahead of time to one of the seven locations in Beijing.

Delivery zones: Lido, Indigo, Solana, Sanlitun, Dongdaqiao, and CBD

Delivery fee: Free with a minimum order of RMB 40 or more

How to order: Call the hotline or order online. On the website, you'll need to register an account with a phone number and address. You can then browse the menu and add to your shopping cart before proceeding to check out.

English service? Yes, English-speaking operators and English website

Average delivery time: 40-60 minutes

Contact and delivery hours: Daily 10am-10 pm. 6430 2170,

order.elementfresh.com

Obentos 本之味

This Japanese-style nutritious eatery opened a second location at Liangmaqiao and now delivers food to a wider area. Their famed seasonal dishes and the introduction of a kids' menu has made this a popular delivery option for many expats wanting something healthy and affordable.

Delivery Zone: CBD, Liangmaqiao

Delivery fee: Free

How to order: website interface

English service: Yes, English speaking operators and English website. Optional POS card payment is offered but you'll need to explicitly tell them when you call that you're paying by card.

Average delivery time: 40- 50 minutes

Contact and delivery hours: Mon – Fri 8am–10.30pm; Sat-Sun 9am – 11:30pm.

65970085 / 65970223 (Central Park); 8531 5098(Grand Summit) www.obentos.com

These are just a few of the family-friendly restaurants that offer delivery. Be sure to also check out Lily's American Diner, Ganges, and Green Bites for English delivery and Eleme and Waimai Baidu for Chinese delivery services. For full listings, visit our website at www.beijing-kids.com.



PHOTO: JOEY GUO

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Shipping Out

You don't have to go it alone, when it's time to move on

by Sijia Chen



Few events inspire as much dread as moving. Packing up one's belongings and relocating within the same city is difficult enough, let alone overseas. Consider language barriers, slow Internet, and ever-changing import and export regulations, and you can start to see why China poses a special challenge for expats relocating to or from here.

Though employee benefits have decreased in recent years, some international companies still offer relocation packages and may pre-select a mover for the process. However, many families must do their own research and make the move without the help of a relocation consultant.

Terms of Service

To begin with, many people are unclear about the differences between the terms "moving," "shipping," and "relocation." Chad Forrest, the general manager of Asian Express (AE) International Movers, says to think about moving as one part of the relocation process.

"The traditional components of relocation are moving, the home search, visa, immigration, and cross-cultural training. A moving company focuses on the moving aspects. A relocation company will engage in all separate components in one way or another," he explains.

Many moving companies have logistics divisions, which typically move products rather than household goods. Some have a general cargo division that focuses on large projects and moving machinery.

Then, there are "relocation management companies" (RMCs) which outsource different stages of the relocation process. They might contract with one company to oversee global relocation, another for immigration, and yet another for cross-cultural training; all the while, the RMC remains the single point of contact for the client.

Finally, "shipping" refers to the part of the international moving process where personal belongings and household goods are transported by sea or air freight to the destination country. Generally, air freight is quicker but more expensive while sea freight is slower but

cheaper. More commonly, a moving company would be your point of contact for shipping services.

There is no best option; it all depends on your family's needs and budget. In any case, be sure to obtain quotes from at least three companies, arrange a visual survey of the belongings to be shipped, and plan ahead as much as possible. Very little is negotiable when it comes to relocation fees, so getting an accurate estimate upfront will significantly simplify the process.

Preparing for the Visual Survey

If you are engaging the services of a relocation or moving company, one of the most important parts of the process is the visual survey. This is when an employee comes over and inventories everything your family is planning to ship; some surveyors log the belongings into a tablet while others use good old pen and paper.

Before the survey, cull as much as possible by donating or selling anything you do not need. "If you have a copy of Tom Clancy's *Hunt for Red October* that you've been carrying around since 1980, you can probably donate that," says Chad Forrest from Asian Express.

Having a tidy house and setting out everything you are planning to take can save you considerable time and money. "Often when we go to a villa and there's a garage, [the client] might open it up and say 'About half of that will go.' But the move date comes up so quickly that people don't have time to remove half of that and end up packing everything," explains Forrest.

An experienced surveyor would take note of such situations and be able to accurately how much space different items will take up in a shipment container. Expect the surveyor to open cabinets, drawers, and wardrobes. Keep in mind that the survey is by definition an estimate; this is why it is important to get several quotes. "If two moving companies have estimated a similar volume and the third is way out, then you pretty much have the answer to your question," says Forrest.

Moving on a Budget

Where in the relocation process can families save money? The best thing they can do is get the process started as early as possible, says Forrest. For starters, there is a wealth of information online about how to organize and estimate the value of possessions before a move. During off-peak times, contacting the moving company one month in advance is fine; however, Forrest recommends getting in touch in early April if you are planning to move, say, during the last week of June.

It bears repeating that paring down your belongings ahead of time can go a long way, both financially and logistically. "This goes for anyone who is moving, not just those paying for [the relocation] themselves," says Forrest. "There are even people who can come in and help you do this."

Air or sea freight may not be worth the price for expats with smaller-volume shipments. "[For a moving company], it's the same amount of work for 4 cubic meters and 20 cubic meters – the only

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ASIAN EXPRESS

difference is packing. The office work and everything else that goes into helping you is the same," says Forrest. If you have soft items, he recommends packing them into check-in luggage; some people simply mail their extra belongings back home through China Post.

If you have the flexibility to choose when to move, you are more likely to get a good deal if you relocate during off-peak months such as fall or early spring and winter rather than June or July.

Watch out for hidden fees, especially if you are planning the move yourself. There are many parts to the relocation process and each stage carries its own costs, so be sure to clarify exactly which services and conditions are included in a quote: door to door, door to port, port to port, air versus sea freight, etc.

Consider making a moving budget several months before the intended relocation date to prepare for unforeseen costs. Nomadic Matt, a blogger who has traveled to over 80 countries and author of *How to Travel the World on \$50 a Day*, recommends cutting down on unnecessary daily expenses such as Starbucks coffee. Assuming you spend USD 5 on coffee every day, that amounts to USD 150 a month or USD 1,800 per year – enough to last a single traveler around two months in southeast Asia.

Quality Control

When comparing moving companies, be sure to check accreditations and certifications. "The primary one is called FIDI [Federation of International Furniture Removers]. Member companies must go through a quality audit and continue to be re-certified," says Forrest. FIDI's certification process is known as FIDI Accredited International Movers (FAIM).

Another certification body is the International Organization for Standardization (ISO); the main difference with FAIM that ISO companies set their own procedures and are audited by ISO based on these procedures, while FAIM sets their own standards and companies either pass them or do not.

"This includes everything from financials, to what the warehouse roof is made of, to calling the receptionist and seeing how long it takes for the office to direct you to someone who can answer your question," says Forrest. FAIM also examines the company's claims loss ratio and how quickly insurance claims are processed.

Changes in Regulation

There are two recent changes in regulation that may affect expats. One is an increase on import duties on household goods. To take the guesswork out of the process, AE Movers has an online calculator for estimating the import duty for various belongings, including electronics, household appliances, furniture, kitchenware, and musical instruments.

The second change in procedures concerns the inspection process for "relics," which are defined as items made before 1949 and some Communist artifacts dating from before 1979. In the past, the client or their representative (such as a moving company) could bring items needing inspection to the Friendship Store in Jianguomen on Monday and Friday afternoons without an appointment.

Now, a request for an appointment must be made five business days in advance and the client's name, photos of the items, item listings, and descriptions of materials (e.g. bronze, wood, stone, etc.) must be submitted before the inspection. In-home inspections can also be arranged if there are many items to be inspected and an application is submitted online with the same time delay.

Because the relics inspection stage generates so many questions, Asian Express usually goes through a Powerpoint presentation with the client after the visual survey on this topic. Fossils cannot leave the country, nor can certain pieces of Tibetan furniture and decorations – even if they are new. Some buddha statues and certain types of wood also cannot be taken out of the country. There is no such issue with

Chinese art or books, unless they are deemed politically sensitive.

The final piece of advice that Chad Forrest has for expats leaving the country? "Get everything packed up two weeks before you're going to leave. Get that part of your relocation done, check into a hotel, then spend your last two weeks in Beijing having fun," he says. "I've been here for 21 years and I've had many friends leave. People who have taken that advice have really enjoyed it."

Resources

Asian Express International Movers

Asian Express is a FIDI/FAIM-accredited moving company founded in 1979 with four locations in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. The website includes customs tips for various destinations, an import duty calculator, insurance forms, and more. Contact: 8580 1471, www.aemovers.com.hk

Crown Relocations Beijing

Crown Relocations' services include domestic and international transportation of household goods, home and school search, storage, expense management, policy consulting and program administration, online tracking tools, transit protection and intercultural services. Provides services for corporations, diplomats and private customers. Contact: 5801 8088, beijing@crowrelo.com, www.crownrelo.com

Links Moving Beijing

Established in Hong Kong in 1997, Links has a full range of moving services and storage options. Handles over 3,000 international moves worldwide each year. Website offers info like freight container sizes and details; online quotes available for smaller shipments. Keep an eye out for specials, such as free air freight with certain container sizes or percentage discounts for early booking during peak seasons. Contact: 8447 7496, www.linksmoving.asia

Santa Fe Relocation Services Beijing

Santa Fe offers moving, relocation, real estate and visa and immigration services for individuals and companies moving to China and around the world. First established in Hong Kong in 1980, it has since then expanded to become a leading global mobility services company with operations in all six continents. Contact: 6947 0688, beijing@santaferelo.com, www.santaferelo.com

Allied Pickfords

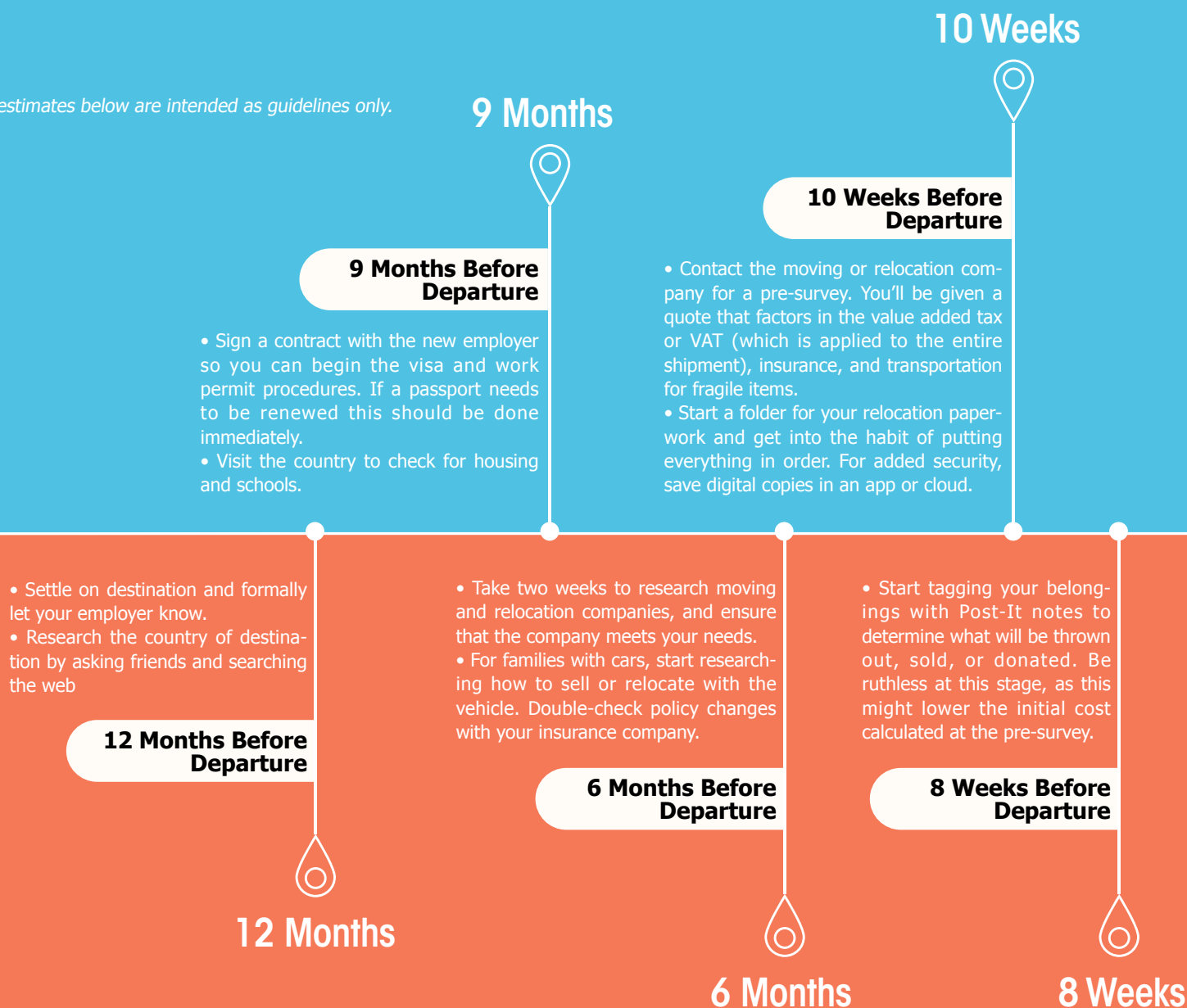
With more than 800 locations worldwide in over 40 countries, Allied Pickfords has eight China offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dalian, Chengdu, Suzhou and Shenyang. Offers international, domestic, local and office moving services, with a Move Coordinator to assist throughout the process from door-to-door. Contact: 5870 1133, www.alliedpickfords.com.cn

Asian Tigers

FIDI/FAIM members with 1,500 full-time dedicated staff members. Offers the largest fleet of trucks and the most warehouse space of any mover in East Asia. Provides post move follow-up. With every shipment, Asian Tigers makes a donation to a support program. Contact: 6415 4155, china@asiantigers-mobility.com, www.asiantigers-china.com

On Your Mark, Get Set, Go!

The estimates below are intended as guidelines only.



Antiques: Handle With Care

• If you wish to take Chinese antiques out of the country, you'll need a certificate from the Beijing Committee of Cultural Relics Administration to pass through customs. The relocation company will take photos of the antiques, then send them to the Cultural

Relics Administration for inspection. If the authorities say they want to see the antique(s), you can either take them there in person or request someone from the office to perform a site visit, which requires at least one month's notice.

• Do not take any chances. If you don't obtain an export certificate for your antiques, your entire shipment will be halted at customs, after

Timeline for a successful move

by Nimo Wanjau

7 Weeks

7 Weeks Before Departure

- Start getting rid of your belongings. For more info on where to sell or donate, see p63.
- Make the final decision on your moving or relocation company. Book an appointment to further discuss your moving date, time, and details.


- Six weeks out is the latest you want to inform your landlord of your intention to leave – the earlier, the better. Share your moving date and time with them, and discuss issues like getting your deposit back.
- Start getting your hospital and school records in order, in case you need them for an application or intend to continue treatment for an ongoing medical condition in your destination country.

6 Weeks Before Departure

6 Weeks


which the authorities and the anti-smuggling police will be called in to inspect the items.

- If you have fragile items (eg a glass-top table), they must be transported in specially-crafted crates. Depending on the country you're moving to, unpacking a crate may carry an additional cost. In the US, for example, the moving company must hire a specialized third party to unscrew the crate.



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2 Weeks

2 Weeks Before Departure

- Work out your budget for the two weeks leading up to the departure date, then go to your local bank and start transferring funds to your home bank account. For any transfers equivalent to USD 10,000 or more, you'll need to prove that you're leaving to take up a new post in another country; this regulation is designed to prevent fraud and money laundering. International bank transfers take around seven working days to finalize.
- Before going to the bank, arrange with your landlord to have your deposit refunded to your Chinese bank account. That way, you can get all your transfers done in one go.
- Provide your current company with the details of the bank account that you want your last paycheck transferred to.

5 Weeks

5 Weeks Before Departure

- Get packing materials from your moving or relocation company. Start putting away non-essential items and clearly label the moving boxes.
- Start making sure utilities and other bills are paid for or will be paid for by the time you leave.

Moving Day

- Even if everything is labeled, work with movers to identify which things are going and which aren't.
- Perform a sweep of each room and box before it's closed. After verifying the contents, sign the bill to make sure that everything's accounted for.
- When all the boxes have been moved out, perform one final sweep with the landlord or agent to make sure everything is in order. Hand over the keys.
- Breathe a sigh of relief and bid goodbye to Beijing. Good luck and safe travels!

- If you have pets, start planning for their relocation if you don't intend to take them into the plane cabin as carry-on. Research policies and conditions for different airlines, as some will refuse to take animals as cargo in the summer to prevent them from overheating.
- Make a weekly food plan to minimize waste and make sure you have nothing left in your fridge or pantry by moving day.
- If you have a car, make sure that the proper documentation for selling or moving the vehicle has been finalized.

4 Weeks Before Departure

4 Weeks

- Create a checklist of important documents you'll need during the move, such as passports and export certificates for antiques and other valuables.
- Come up with a plan for the order in which the movers should clear out the house. Even if you trust in the professionalism of your relocation company, this will save time and make the whole process smoother.
- Defrost and clear out the fridge, and scour the cupboards for any leftover food.
- Call or text your landlord or agent to remind them of your moving date and time; they'll need to come over to take the keys and inspect the house or apartment.

1 Day Before Departure

1 Day

Waste Not, Want Not

Where to recycle, donate, or sell your stuff
when you leave Beijing!

Updated by Anjana Kainikkara

Donate

Founded in 2008, **Roundabout China** is well-known among expats for its various charity projects.

Roundabout sends collected funds and donations to those in need, including sick children and under-resourced orphanages.

The social enterprise accepts a range of items for its store and projects, including gently-used clothing, toys, blankets, storage containers, and baby equipment. Roundabout keeps an updated list of currently-needed items on its website. They offer pick up services as well for bulky items you might want to donate. Apart from their warehouse and store in Shunyi, they also have bright and eye-catching drop boxes located at multiple places in the city for your convenience, should you not want to drive all the way to Shunyi. These wonderful new donation boxes are now out and about in Beijing, and you can drop off small donations in them. Here is an updated list of some locations along with their phone numbers.

Roundabout Store: 1371805 3814, **Riviera Club House:** 8450 6888, **Tuan Jie Hu community recycle station:** 139 1075 9629, **CCAFC office:** 5166 0112, **OASIS Hospital :** 59850405, **Shine Hills:** 6144 5671, **BoYa School:** 158 1128 6996, **SCOUT Real Estate:** 8596 8873, **BIBA:** Staff only , **Zarah Cafe:** 8403 9807, **Hua Jia Di Compuond:** 136 8131 4094, **DCB:** 6454 9000/9068

Visit www.roundaboutchina.com to find out more.



Sell

Expat publications like *the Beijinger* (*beijingkids'* sister magazine) and *City Weekend* have classified sections on their websites with categories like bikes, clothing, electronics, furniture, and more. Though a login is needed, the service is completely free.

Many people advertize on Yahoo groups like Beijing Mamas or Beijing Café. You're more likely to find baby and child gear like strollers, car seats, nursery furniture, toys, etc. on Beijing Mamas, though many users post ads to both groups.

Craigslist Beijing has never been very active, but a quick check showed a number of fairly recent "for sale" ads, many of them reposts from the Yahoo groups or expat publications. Though it probably won't be necessary, it never hurts to post ads in more than one place. <http://beijing.craigslist.com.cn/>

Recycle

Founded in 2005, Freecycle Beijing is a Yahoo group that is open to all who want to 'recycle' that special something rather than throw it away. This group is part of The Freecycle Network, a nonprofit organization and a movement of people interested in promoting community involvement, reducing consumerism, and keeping viable items out of landfills. By following a few simple rules, members can post ads for things they no longer need and others will claim them for free. It currently has over 1300 members. Membership is free. To join, follow the prompts at groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/FreecycleBeijing/info.

Founded in July 2009 by Nathan Zhang, Brandnu is a social enterprise that works with migrant women, using second-hand clothes to create upcycled fashion. It is essentially a charity store which employs disadvantaged women.

The shop accepts donations of clean, gently-used clothes. Call the donation hotline at 153 1300 8571 (Chinese only) to find out more.

Favorite Family Restaurant

We love **Great Leap Brewing**. Amazing burgers, delicious salads, yummy fries and onion rings and REALLY kid-friendly. Our kids love the food and the ambiance, and they have a great weekend brunch, too.

New Discoveries

We recently tried **ACW** (Ambassador Chicken Wings), rave reviews from all of us, even the 4 year-old. We also like **SoLounge!** at Solana.

Parents' Date Night

So many places to choose from, but some of our favorites are **O'Steak** and **Golden Time Spa & Massage** for delicious steak and really relaxing, well, relaxation.

Kids Beg to Go

Xiang Man Lou, they just can't get enough duck! Or **Baoyuan**. It's walking distance from our house and it's the first restaurant we ate at after arriving in Beijing.

Favorite Place to Shop for Yourself

I love to shop at **Hongqiao** for pearls from **Nancy**, and fun, unique pieces from **Lisa**. My jewelry collection has grown exponentially since we moved here.

Best Place to Shop for Your Child

I used to shop for them almost exclusively from **Yashow**, but then it closed and I was heart-broken. Since then, I haven't found a place that I like as well for children's clothes, but **H&M** is pretty good for basics.

Family Rituals

Monday night is family night. We try really hard to make sure all our commitments happen other nights so we are able to spend at least one evening a week home together. It doesn't always happen, but when it does, it's a great opportunity to just be together and enjoy each other.

Best Place to Celebrate a Special Occasion

Casalingo at the JW Marriott Hotel Beijing Central. The food is superb and the chef is spectacular.

Favorite Place

Our neighborhood, west of Chaoyang Park. We like that now when we walk down the alleys people recognize us and smile. And, we love being across the street from the park.

When It Rains in Beijing

When does it rain in Beijing?

The Jackman Family

Kenny Jackman and Linsey Crisler have lived in Beijing for three years, with their children Caleb (10), Isaac (8) and Claire (4). Kenny is a second secretary at the US Embassy, and Linsey works there too, as well as being a part-time stay-at-home mom. At weekends they love to spend time with their friends, seeing the sights, playing wiffle ball, or enjoying the city's culinary delights. They're leaving Beijing in the summer, and shared with us a few of the things they'll miss. *Anjana Kainikkara*



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