THE CHINA HELPER

FREE STUDENT RESOURCE

YOUR ROUTE THROUGH THIS GUIDE

01 · Before you fly
Documents, visa paperwork, copies and backups
PART 1

02 · Digital setup
Apps, translation, maps and mobile payment
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SIM card, registration, reaching your room
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04 · First month
Routines, city knowledge, banking
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China Arrival Checklist

A complete guide for international students moving to China — documents, apps, payments, transportation and first month essentials.

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START HERE

Welcome to your China journey

Moving to a new country can feel exciting, but also overwhelming. China has a unique digital ecosystem, transportation system and daily lifestyle. This checklist will help you prepare step by step — before departure and during your first month.

This guide covers

- [ ] Essential documents
- [ ] Important apps
- [ ] Payment preparation
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Campus registration
- [ ] Daily life essentials

FOUR WINDOWS

Your preparation timeline

1–3 months before arrival

- [ ] Confirm admission documents
- [ ] Apply for visa
- [ ] Research university information
- [ ] Prepare financial arrangements

2–4 weeks before departure

- [ ] Install important apps
- [ ] Prepare document copies
- [ ] Pack essentials
- [ ] Inform family

First week in China

- [ ] Register at university
- [ ] Buy SIM card
- [ ] Set up payments
- [ ] Complete accommodation registration

First month

- [ ] Understand local transportation
- [ ] Build daily routines
- [ ] Explore your city
- [ ] Open a local bank account

VISA AND REGISTRATION

What happens on each side

Before arrival

- [ ] Prepare a valid Chinese visa
- [ ] Prepare your university documents

After arrival

- [ ] Register at your university
- [ ] Complete accommodation registration
- [ ] Follow local residence requirements

Always check the latest requirements with your university and the local authorities — rules change, and they are applied differently by city.

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PART 1 · BEFORE LEAVING YOUR COUNTRY

Prepare your documents

Travel documents

- [ ] Passport
- [ ] Chinese visa
- [ ] Flight ticket
- [ ] Travel insurance

University documents

- [ ] Admission letter
- [ ] JW201 / JW202 form (if applicable)
- [ ] Registration documents
- [ ] Scholarship documents

Personal documents

- [ ] Passport photos
- [ ] Academic certificates
- [ ] Medical records

Digital backup

- [ ] Scan important documents
- [ ] Keep digital copies
- [ ] Share emergency copies with family

PART 2 · DIGITAL PREPARATION

Install these apps before you fly

CATEGORY	APP	MAIN USE
Translation	Pleco / Google Translate	Chinese translation and dictionary
Maps	Amap / Baidu Maps	Navigation, metro and bus routes
Payment	Alipay / WeChat Pay	Mobile payment for most daily needs
Social	WeChat	Messaging, services and mini-programs
Food	Meituan / Eleme	Food delivery from local restaurants
Transport	Didi	Ride-hailing and taxi service

Download and register before departure wherever possible. Several of these ask for phone verification — much easier while your home number still works reliably.

BEFORE YOU BOARD

Your digital setup checklist

- [ ] Create a WeChat account
- [ ] Download translation tools
- [ ] Save university contacts
- [ ] Back up important files
- [ ] Learn basic Chinese input

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PART 3 · MONEY AND PAYMENTS

Money in China

Daily spending in China is highly digital. The two most widely used payment methods are Alipay and WeChat Pay, and together they cover most offline and online situations. Most students arrive with a combination of an international bank card, some RMB cash and the payment apps.

Before-arrival checklist

- [ ] Bring an international bank card
- [ ] Check your bank's overseas service
- [ ] Prepare some RMB cash

WHERE YOU WILL USE IT

Digital payments, in practice

- [ ] Restaurants
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Shopping
- [ ] Online services

Keep a backup payment method for the first weeks. Whether an overseas card can be bound, and whether a shop accepts it, varies by card type and currency — some merchants also set a minimum amount for foreign cards.

PART 4 · PACKING AND TRAVEL

What should you bring?

Electronics

- [ ] Phone
- [ ] Laptop
- [ ] Chargers
- [ ] Adapters
- [ ] Power bank

Study items

- [ ] Notebook
- [ ] Documents
- [ ] Learning materials

Personal items

- [ ] Medicine
- [ ] Glasses
- [ ] Personal necessities
- [ ] Copies of any prescriptions

Do not overpack. Most daily supplies, clothes and electronic accessories are easy to buy in Chinese cities — often more cheaply than at home.

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PART 5 · FIRST ARRIVAL

Your first day in China

- [ ] Arrive safely
- [ ] Connect to the internet
- [ ] Contact your university
- [ ] Reach your accommodation
- [ ] Keep important documents safe

Do not try to finish every procedure on day one. Prioritise safety, confirming your arrival and getting to your room — everything else can wait until you have slept.

THE WEEK AFTER

Your first week in China

University

- [ ] Complete registration
- [ ] Get your student ID

Finance

- [ ] Set up payment methods
- [ ] Understand local banking options

Living

- [ ] Buy a SIM card
- [ ] Learn the nearby stores
- [ ] Understand transportation

The SIM card is step zero. Almost everything else — payments, delivery, ride-hailing, a bank account — asks for a Chinese phone number.

PART 6 · FIRST MONTH

Your first month goals

Learn your city

Get to know the campus surroundings, nearby supermarkets, hospitals and metro stations, so that daily life has stable boundaries. Walk the routes once in daylight before you need them at night.

Improve communication

Learn basic daily phrases, how to ask for directions, and enough simple conversation to handle everyday situations on your own.

Connect with people

Reach out to other international students, to Chinese students on your programme, and to university communities — this is what turns a campus into somewhere you belong.

Routine beats motivation. A fixed canteen, a fixed route, a fixed shop: the first month is far easier when the small decisions are already made.

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WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Common problems, practical fixes

PROBLEM	PRACTICAL SOLUTION
Limited Chinese proficiency	Use translation apps and learn key daily phrases
Getting used to digital payments	Bind your international card in Alipay or WeChat Pay
Finding familiar food	Explore campus canteens and nearby supermarkets
Transportation confusion	Use Amap or Baidu Maps for metro and bus routes
Internet access	Buy a local SIM card on arrival
Language barrier at the hospital	Save your international office contact in advance

DO NOT MISS THESE

The deadlines that matter most

STEP	WHY IT CATCHES PEOPLE OUT
Accommodation registration	Deadlines are short and differ by city and by housing type — ask your university on day one
University registration	Often the same week as arrival, and it unlocks your student ID and campus systems
Residence permit	A fixed window after entry; your university usually drives the paperwork, not you
Health check	Only the certificate issued by a designated hospital in China counts

> **Put these four dates on paper the week you land.** They are the only items in this guide where missing a date has real consequences.

SAVE BEFORE YOU NEED THEM

Numbers to keep in your phone

- [ ] University international office
- [ ] Dormitory or landlord reception
- [ ] Your embassy or consulate
- [ ] Insurance emergency line

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ONE PAGE, THREE MOMENTS

Final checklist before your China life

Before the flight

- [ ] Documents ready
- [ ] Apps installed
- [ ] Accommodation confirmed

After arrival

- [ ] University registration completed
- [ ] Payment set up
- [ ] Transportation understood

First month

- [ ] Build a daily routine
- [ ] Explore China
- [ ] Enjoy the experience

Print this page and keep it with your passport.
The first week is mostly logistics — paper survives a flat battery.

NOTES — FLIGHT, ADDRESS IN CHINA, CONTACTS AND THE FOUR DATES

Free China downloads

Scan for the full library of printable checklists and guides.

Essential Apps in China — *the setup, step by step*

First Month in China Checklist — *your first 30 days, week by week*

Getting a Chinese SIM Card — *the step everything else depends on*

Police Registration in China — *the deadline you cannot miss*

Disclaimer: this checklist is general guidance for international students, not legal or financial advice. Visa rules, registration procedures, app availability and payment limits change, and they are applied differently by city and by office. Always confirm current requirements with your university's international office, the Chinese embassy or consulate covering your country, or the local authorities.
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