THE CHINA HELPER

FREE STUDENT RESOURCE



First Month in China Checklist

Your first 30 days, week by week: registration, address paperwork, payments, transport and the admin nobody warns you about.

WEEK 1

University registration, address registration, SIM card

WEEK 2

Mobile payments, bank account, cash backup

WEEK 3

Transport, daily routes, survival phrases

WEEK 4

Routine, community, budget, paperwork review

BEFORE YOU LAND

Get these ready at home

Documents — carry digital and paper copies

- [ ] Passport and Chinese visa
- [ ] Admission letter
- [ ] University registration papers
- [ ] Accommodation details and address
- [ ] Medical examination records, if required
- [ ] Emergency contacts, printed and on paper

Apps — install and verify before you fly

- [ ] WeChat — messaging, university groups, payments
- [ ] Alipay — payments, transport codes, delivery
- [ ] Amap or Baidu Maps — navigation and transit
- [ ] DiDi — ride-hailing for late arrivals
- [ ] Your university portal or campus app
- [ ] A cloud folder with scanned documents

Why before you fly: app verification sends an SMS. Doing it on roaming with a foreign number often fails, and you will want payments working on day one, not day four.

WEEK 1

Arrive and register

- [ ] **Complete university registration** — passport, visa, admission letter, forms and photos
- [ ] **Register your address** — a legal requirement, keep the slip
- [ ] **Get a Chinese SIM card** — passport and visa; China Mobile, Unicom or Telecom
- [ ] Save emergency contacts in your phone
- [ ] Photograph your visa page and registration slip
- [ ] Ask the international office for its arrival checklist

Address registration: in a university dormitory the university usually files it for you. In a private rental you normally register at the local police station, often with your landlord. Keep the document — later visa and residence permit steps can ask for it.

WEEK 2

Set up money

- [ ] **Set up Alipay and WeChat Pay** — passport, Chinese number, card
- [ ] Test a small payment in a shop before you rely on it
- [ ] **Open a Chinese bank account** — passport, Chinese phone number, student documents
- [ ] Keep some cash as a backup for the first days

Expect this: many small shops, markets and campus canteens do not accept foreign cards. Mobile payment is not a convenience in China, it is the default.

WEEK 3

Learn the city

- [ ] Enable a transit code in Alipay or get a transport card
- [ ] Map your daily routes: campus, supermarket, clinic, metro
- [ ] Practise a handful of survival phrases every day
- [ ] Try shared bikes for short campus trips

SAY IT LIKE THIS	IT MEANS	SAY IT LIKE THIS	IT MEANS
Nǐ hǎo	Hello	**Wǒ tīng bù dǒng**	I don't understand
Xièxie	Thank you	**Kěyǐ yòng yīngwén ma?**	Can we use English?
Duōshao qián?	How much is it?	**Zài nǎr?**	Where is it?

WEEK 4

Settle in and review the paperwork

- [ ] Explore your neighbourhood — food, clinics, shopping
- [ ] Join a club, language exchange or international office event
- [ ] Set a monthly budget using your first-month spending
- [ ] Diarise housing, registration and visa deadlines

Cost bands, before you set that budget

BAND	WHAT IT CHANGES FOR YOU
Lower cost — Xi'an, Chengdu, Wuhan	Rent and eating out take a smaller share, so a modest stipend stretches further
Higher cost — Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen	Rent dominates the budget, so settle housing first and plan the rest around it

IF IT GOES WRONG

Common snags and quick fixes

SNAG	QUICK FIX
Language barrier	Ten survival phrases, a translation app, and your university's international office
Card or payment rejected	Fall back to cash, then re-verify Alipay or WeChat Pay with your Chinese number
Address registration lapse	Register again promptly and keep the new slip with your passport
Verification SMS never arrives	Turn off roaming, use the Chinese SIM, retry on campus Wi-Fi

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MASTER CHECKLIST

Tick these off before day 30

- [ ] University registration complete
- [ ] Address registered, slip filed
- [ ] Chinese SIM card active
- [ ] Alipay and WeChat Pay working
- [ ] Bank account opened, if needed
- [ ] Transport card or transit code set up
- [ ] Daily routes mapped
- [ ] Ten survival phrases in use
- [ ] One community or club joined
- [ ] Budget set and deadlines diarised

Continue your China journey

Scan for the full library of free China downloads — arrival checklists, app setup sheets, budget templates and study planners.

Your First Month in China: Complete Checklist

Police Registration in China — *the 24-hour rule behind week one*

Finding Accommodation in China — *the address you will register*

Getting a Chinese SIM Card — *what to bring to the counter*

Notes — deadlines, contacts and questions for your international office

Official sources: confirm current rules with your university's international student office, the National Immigration Administration (12367 hotline), or your local exit-entry administration before you rely on any step above.

Disclaimer: rules, fees and platform features in China change frequently and vary by city, institution and individual circumstances. This checklist is general guidance, not legal advice.

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