



## **NEW STAFF**

# **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

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# Pre-Departure

## Q: What will I need to do in order to obtain a visa?

**A:** *You will be in touch with our office staff who will collect any and all information to process your visa.*

- Please make sure to read and follow directions *precisely* to avoid any visa delays
- At the time of this publication, the processing time for a work visa is 100 days. This includes:
  - Sending original documents to and from your home country and China
  - Successfully completing and submitting a background check
  - Performing required health checks

*Remember to be punctual with tasks you must complete on your end as there are several steps to the process.*

## Q: Which injections do I need before arriving in China?

**A:** *It is recommended that you are up to date on your Hepatitis A and B, tetanus and typhoid shots. Consult your personal physician, however, if you have other concerns.*

## Q: How much money should I bring to get settled?

**A:** *There will be several things you will need to consider before you receive your initial paycheck.*

- Rent
  - Typically, landlords will ask for a deposit **plus** the first 3 months' rent upon signing the contract
  - Keep in mind, there is an agency fee as well (**see Housing**)
    - Monthly rent varies upon area – doing some research ahead of time is recommended
- Basic necessities (bedroom and bathroom items)
  - There are a large verity of basic western necessities available in China at a low cost
    - If you're planning on bringing some essentials, please note that there are **airline restrictions** on many items for either *checked or carry-on bags*
    - This usually includes weight restrictions, liquids, some electronics – refer to your airline
- Cell phone
  - Obtaining a new SIM card and/or phone is a relatively simple process after arriving
    - If you bring your existing phone, be sure it is "unlocked" or free from contract restrictions.
- Internet
  - Be prepared to pay for a full year upfront – price varies on speed
- Food expenses
  - Groceries and food is generally very cheap
    - Most super markets will stock mostly Chinese-style groceries

*A comfortable amount of money would be around RMB25-26K or USD\$4000*

## Q: What kind of things should I pack?

**A:** *Packing efficiently will save you a lot of time, money and frustration when you arrive in China. For the most part, you will be able to find most toiletries, OTC medicines, and common household items, such as dishes, towels, etc., here in China. If you have specific medical needs, make sure to inform your doctor of your intent to move abroad.*

**WOMEN:** Feminine hygiene products, such as tampons, are not readily available in most shops. You can, however, purchase them online or seek out one of the many shops around Beijing that specialize in foreign goods.

When packing clothes, think essentials. There are hundreds of shopping malls in Beijing with popular brands like the Gap, Zara, H&M and many more! One thing to keep in mind, however, is Chinese sizes and Western sizing are very different. Clothes purchased in China tend to run on the smaller side, and many shops don't often carry sizes suitable for larger body types (either tall or heavy set). Exercise due diligence when packing to make sure to bring an assortment of clothes that will cover all seasons, particularly a heavy jacket for the winter months if you believe you won't find one in your size. For example, an XL in the U.S. is a 3XL (sometimes a 4XL) in China. It is possible to buy larger clothes online, but the quality of the product is not guaranteed to meet your standards.

**Q: What's the internet like in China?**

**A:** *Most basic websites are available in China, but for full-access to the internet you will need a VPN.*

A VPN is a Virtual Private Network that which will allow you to access websites that would otherwise be blocked or inaccessible inside China. Blocked websites include Gmail, Google, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Netflix and many others. Having a VPN before your arrival will make your transition a lot easier. We can't recommend any particular VPN, but we can say to research thoroughly which VPN service is working in China as it may change. Connectivity and reliability will vary among providers, therefore reviews and up-to-date specs should be a part of your research. VPNs typically cost around \$80-\$100 per year.

**Q: Is it helpful to know Chinese before arrival?**

**A:** *Yes. While China is frequented by international tourism, Chinese is an essential part of getting around and for everyday needs.*

Many cab drivers, waiters and other persons you may come in to contact with do not speak English. Within major cities, mass transit (the MRT and rail stations), markets, banks and other public buildings should typically have English translations and signs. Outside of these cities, however, English will be found less frequently. It is helpful to have a few basics, such as common phrases, memorized before you arrive. Chinese is used in daily life on one scale to another. Most assuredly, knowing the basics of the language will make your time and transition easier. Learning the basics for these interactions is a great start:

- Taxis
- Restaurants
- Directions
- Shopping
- Greetings/Goodbyes

**Q: Can I bring my pet to Beijing?**

**A:** *It is recommended you do not bring your pet with you. Along with lengthy processes for importing and exporting your pet, it must be considered that many landlords will not allow animals in their apartments.*

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# International Flights

**Q: Any tips for the long flight?**

**A:** *Yes! Before booking a ticket, do your research on airlines by reading reviews about seats, movies, and airline staff service. **Check your airline ahead of time for any and all restrictions.***

Ticket price is directly linked to comfort for many airlines. Also, Invest in a neck-pillow for the long flight from your hometown to Beijing. Not only will this keep you comfortable, but also save you neck from unnecessary strain. During the flight, try to stand up several times in the aisle to stretch your legs and back. This will make your flight as pleasant as possible.

Try to wear comfortable, durable clothing. Plan for security checkpoints and for long-periods of sitting and waiting. Belts, loose change, hats and portable electronics can be a hassle at security checkpoints. Store nearly everything you will need for the flight in your carry-on bag and have your laptop, if you have one, easily accessible to remove for security checks. The more prepared you are for the on-boarding process in the airport, the smoother the transition will be. Plan for function, not fashion.

## Arriving

**Q: It's my first time traveling internationally. What can I expect?**

**A:** *With your visa and passport, the process of entering into China will be easy though sometimes does involve long queues. On the plane, you will be given an arrival card by the airline staff. Fill this out ahead of time and don't lose it. After exiting the plane, you will walk through a health check post, immigration, baggage claim and then finally customs. Once clearing customs, you are free to leave the airport.*

**Q: How will I get from the airport to the school when I arrive?**

**A:** *Please send us your itinerary and we will happily meet you at the airport when you exit customs.*

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# Housing

**Q: Does SPAS offer housing to teachers?**

**A:** *Saint Paul American School does have housing on campus, but these opportunities are limited and currently have a waiting list. Your name can be added to the waiting list, but it is strongly recommended that you seek housing off-campus once arriving.*

**Q: Do teachers receive housing stipends?**

**A:** *Yes, each teacher will receive a housing stipend.*

**Q: What is the monthly price range for housing in Beijing?**

**A:** *Apartment costs in Beijing vary greatly, even within the same complex. In Beijing, apartments are owned by individual landlords who set their own prices. For this reason, we must use housing agents who service a particular area, and not necessarily a particular building. Housing near the campus can range from 4,000RMB to 6,000RMB or the equivalent of USD \$600-\$900 per month. In many housing contracts, heat fall to the responsibility of the landlord. Electricity, gas, water and internet are the tenant's responsibility, which on average, add up to another \$15-\$50 per month depending on individual usage.*

**Q: How do housing contracts work?**

**A:** *As mentioned, apartment leases are contracted on an annual basis. The initial payment is set up like this:*

- *A one-month deposit*
- *Three month's rent*
- *Agency fee (the equivalent of a month's rent)*

*After your initial payment, you will be required to make a payment every three months for the next year*

**Q: How do I pay my utilities?**

**A:** *Utilities can be paid in a few ways and are billed to you in different ways as well. Electricity must be paid ahead of time, pooled as an account, by using the internet or an APP on your phone which you may use until your account reaches zero. Your electricity usage is tied directly to a usage card that you will be given by your landlord. Water and gas are bills that will be distributed in-person by utility officials who will visit your home once every two to six months. They will inspect your water or gas meter and print a bill that can be paid electronically. This system requires some adaptation, but can be easily mastered.*

**Q: What types of amenities should I expect to find in my apartment?**

**A:** *Chinese apartments typically are fully furnished and include a bed, a couch, a television, a refrigerator, a table and chairs, and a wardrobe. Some may also have microwaves, DVD players, and other small appliances. Apartment sizes vary by price and location. Kitchens may either be equipped with two gas burners or a hotplate, but no oven. You can purchase toaster ovens in almost any supermarket. Bathtubs are a rarity, and some bathrooms are standard water closets where the shower is not sectioned off from the rest of the bathroom. However, western toilets are very common throughout apartments in Beijing.*

**Q: Is it possible to find a roommate?**

**A:** Yes. You can find apartments for single occupants and multiple occupants, whichever suits your needs best. Please let us know if you're looking to share an apartment.

**Q: What are the apartments like in Beijing?**

**A:** Beijing has a number of different style apartments, depending on location and price. The most common type of apartment will be studio-style, but multi-bedroom apartments can also be found in many buildings.

**Q: What is residence registration?**

**A:** This is a short and simple process that is compulsory. Once you arrive and find residence, you will be required to find the local police station and register with your initial visa and passport. You will be required to do this again once you have your working visa as well. You will also be required to register again each time you leave the country on vacation. Yes, each time.

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## Finances

**Q: How will I be paid?**

**A:** Your salary and housing stipend will all be paid in USD. You will be given the choice of which bank account (worldwide) you would like that money to be paid in to. We will provide assistance in setting up a Chinese bank account. SPAS also offers the choice of placing your entire monthly salary into one account or splitting it between a Chinese account and your home account at a ratio of 65/35.

**Q: Do I pay taxes?**

**A:** No. Your salary is tax free. Check your local laws in your home country for any taxes that may apply to you there.

**Q: Will I need a bank account in China?**

**A:** Having a bank account in China will allow you to shop online, have local access to funds (without paying international transaction fees), and use debit purchases wherever cards are accepted. It is advised you check with your local bank to see if they cooperate with any banks or ATMS in China.

**Q: How do you exchange dollars for RMB?**

**A:** It is not recommended to exchange money at airports as you will pay high commission fees and/or be given a poor rate on the exchange. You can choose to exchange money in the U.S. by ordering RMB through your local bank. Many larger banks offer this service in America and the process is fast. This is best done ahead of time, before boarding the plane to Beijing.

**Q: How do I send money home?**

**A:** *Sending money to the U.S. from China can be an arduous task. There are several methods in doing so, but are time intensive. Policies and fees vary by bank, and your own bank in the US may also charge a fee. Alternatively, you could send money by withdrawing your earnings and find a Western Union. It is important that you are knowledgeable of your bank information if you do intend to use a bank wire transfer.*

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## Health

**Q: Does SPAS offer insurance?**

**A:** *Yes – You will have the Chinese National Medical insurance plan; however, it only covers emergency situations. Full worldwide insurance may be purchased by staff individually. Our school nurse stocks & provides OTC medications.*

**Q: Where do I go if I need to go to the hospital?**

**A:** *In your welcome packet that you'll receive upon arrival, you will receive a list of nearby hospitals you may use for your convenience.*

**Q: Do teachers get medical leave, including maternity/paternity leave.**

**A:** *Teachers have five PTO days per contractual year.*

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## Saint Paul American School

**Q: Who are the principals?**

**A:** *Mr. Patrick Carey is the Superintendent and School Principal. Mr. Chase Vaughn and Mr. Stephen Dignin are Assistant Principals. A full staff directory can be found on the Saint Paul American School website.*

**Q: How will my department be structured?**

**A:** *Every department has a department head and will hold weekly meetings. There will be about 3-4 people in each department.*

**Q: Where can I get help or ask questions?**

**A:** *Saint Paul American School has a friendly and open staff. If someone in your department is not available, other teachers will be more than happy to aid you with any questions or concerns. Other questions or concerns can also be directed toward the administrative staff.*

**Q: What are the students like?**

**A:** *Students at SPAS are from a variety of different places around the world. Most of the campus population is made up of students from Korea or China. There are also students from Thailand, the Ukraine, Russia, America, Brazil, Slovakia, Spain, Yemen, Mongolia and others still. Students are polite and friendly and generally active on campus. You will often see students on campus and in the cafeteria greeting you or asking questions.*

**Q: Are there any rules at SPAS that I will always need to enforce?**

**A:** *Yes. In the classrooms and in the hallways during school hours, you will be tasked to enforce the policies of the Student Handbook that can be found on our website that help Saint Paul American School stay unified and cohesive.*

**Q: Is there a staff dress code?**

**A:** *Yes, be prepared to dress professionally.*

**Q: What do I do if I need materials for my classroom?**

**A:** *Saint Paul American School's main office has several supplies for paper, markers, erasers, pens, pencils and other stationary. You may go there during your office hours or between classes to sign out materials.*

**Q: Will I share my classroom?**

**A:** *You will have your own classroom during class time throughout the entire day, and in the afternoon a Chinese teacher will use your classroom for the final periods of the day for their class in almost every case.*

**Q: What am I expected to do during office hours?**

**A:** *During office hours, which occur daily, you can plan, organize or grade work, but it is a timeslot primarily used for you to meet with students and address their needs or concerns.*

**Q: Alright, I'm excited. How can I be more involved at SPAS?**

**A:** *There are a number of ways to be more involved in Saint Paul American School other than teaching. There are monthly events for student for you to participate in, clubs, sports and other organizations that are all part of being a member of the SPAS community.*

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# Beijing City Life

## **Q: I'm in Beijing. How do I get around?**

**A:** *Beijing has an extensive and developing subway, the MRT. Nearly everything you might need is nearby one of the stations of the MRT. You can find maps online and there are several apps that make navigating the MRT easier.*

Additionally, Beijing has a number of taxis and buses available throughout the city. Bus timetables are available at the bus stops and there are popular taxi apps that can be downloaded for free. Be aware that a very small number of the taxi and bus drivers will be able to communicate in English. It's best to plan your trip through the city ahead of time.

Keep in mind, Beijing is a large city. Transit can consume much of your time, even without traffic.

## **Q: Do I need to carry around my passport everywhere I go?**

**A:** *No. Taking a photo of the first page of your passport, the visa page and your residence registration page on your phone is enough to have with you.*

## **Q: What are the people in Beijing like?**

**A:** *The size of Beijing and its population is the leading cause of the expressions and attitudes of Beijing Residents that you will encounter. In large numbers of people, pushing, shouting, spitting and queue-cutting are very common. Beijing is a very large city, local Beijing residents may not be the most reliable with directions. Be patient with Beijing residents and plan for these situations when you are transiting the city. However, you may find that many of the local population are friendly and helpful on an individual basis.*

## **Q: Are there a lot of other foreigners, like me, in Beijing?**

**A:** *Yes! Beijing has a large expatriate (foreigner) community full of friendly and inviting people from all over the world.*

## **Q: Is it easy to get out of the city?**

**A:** *During public holidays in China, times where the entire country is on vacation all at once, traveling from Beijing can be extremely difficult. On normal occasions, however, the wisest course of action will be to purchase tickets ahead of time via train or bus out of the city. It may take up to an hour to arrive at the bus or train station of your choice from normal traffic or transit time. Following this, travel time is relative to your final destination.*

## **Q: Is it easy to travel to other nearby countries?**

**A:** *There is a generous amount of time for vacation during the school year at Saint Paul American. Traveling can be easy if you're on your way to a neighboring country, but all preparations and research will be your own responsibility.*

**Q: Can I find western-style food?**

**A:** *Yes. There are a number of restaurants throughout Beijing that serve or specialize in western food. In general, the cost is much higher than local food. McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks, Pizza Hut, TGIFridays are all examples of American chain restaurants that can be found in Beijing.*

**Q: Is Chinese food in China the same as Chinese food in America?**

**A:** *No. Westernized Chinese food is quite different.*

*Dumplings, noodles, rice and soups make up the core of most Chinese food, but a number of what could be considered 'unusual' dishes are the main source of Chinese cuisine; chicken feet, steamed or boiled chicken necks, whole-dried fish, hot-pot, donkey sandwiches, as well as Asian vegetables may be of the most peculiar new foods. Foods are seldom baked, and more frequently fried, boiled or steamed. Chinese food is often either spicy, salty or simply bland. If you have food allergies or special dietary needs, it is your responsibility to research online about what you can or cannot eat. Most restaurants will not have the time, patience or knowledge to outline all of their ingredients.*

**Q: I want to drive/ride a motorcycle. Is it an easy process to transition into being a motorist in Beijing?**

**A:** *No. Beijing has a good amount of restrictions on licenses, fuel and even days when motorists are allowed to use their vehicles. This can lead to a lot of hassle. Beijing also does not recognize International Driving Licenses. Planning to get a license in Beijing requires a practical and academic course and test. After completion, your name is entered into a lottery for approval to own a vehicle and operate it on the road on predesignated days. Many newcomers to Beijing purchase bicycles or electric scooters. Electric scooters do not require a license, but do require daily recharging. Laws about electric scooters should be researched ahead of time before you plan to purchase.*

**Q: Is there an emergency contact I absolutely must have saved in my phone?**

**A:** *Yes. You will want to have the emergency contact number of your home country's embassy saved in your phone. It would be a wise choice to register with the embassy to receive text message notifications.*

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## A Short History of Beijing

Beijing is an ancient city in the world, and the city's origins can be traced to more than 3,000 years ago. Its true significance came in the early years of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC – 771 BC), during which the emperor gave his feudal lords plots of land. One of these plots of land was the Yan Kingdom, with the "City of Ji" as its capital. The "City of Ji" marked the beginning of Beijing's long history as a city.

During the tumultuous Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and much of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), the conflicts resulted in Yan expanding its empire and swallowing up much of the surrounding land. Historical records show that the City of Ji was a famous and wealthy city.

After Emperor Qin Shihuang conquered his rivals and unified China in 221 BC, the City of Ji was chosen as the administrative center of Guangyang Prefecture, one of the key prefectures in China's first feudal empire. Beijing became a commercial center connecting the North and the South during peacetime and a military center during wars. In the ensuing centuries, there were numerous conflicts and changes. The city emerged as a frontier garrison, serving as a staging base for campaigns against the empire's nomadic enemies to the north.

During the Liao Dynasty (AD 916-1125), the city became the alternate capital of the Liao Kingdom, which was founded by the Khitan people who lived in today's northeastern China. Because Beijing was located south of the Liao homeland, it was renamed Nanjing (in Chinese "nan" means "south").

The People's Republic of China was established in 1949, and Beijing became the capital of new China. With a history of over 3,000 years and a capital history of more than 860 years, Beijing is one of the Four Great Ancient Capitals in China. After more than half a century's construction and development, Beijing, with its rich historical resources and extraordinary vibrancy, has become an international metropolis connecting the past with the modern.

*\*<http://www.chinatravelpage.com/a-brief-history-of-beijing>*

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