



Australian  
National  
University

# Your First Steps in China

A PRACTICAL GUIDE/CHECKLIST  
FOR ANU COMERS



Beijing & Shanghai offices

## About CLO

ANU China Liaison Office, known as CLO or China Centre, is one of two satellite offices of ANU across the world. The first office in Beijing was established in 2017, followed by the launch of its Shanghai Desk in early 2023.

The office plays a crucial role in facilitating the university's collaborations with local high schools, universities institutions and educational organizations across Mainland China, promoting the ANU brand, fostering university-enterprise partnerships, activities for current students and alumni, supporting Chinese and Australian higher education policy initiatives. CLO also actively operates five official social media platforms in China. These platforms provide the latest news from the university and comprehensive information resources. CLO reports to Pro Vice-Chancellor (International and Future Students).

## Mainland China A to Z

### Culture

China is the country with the second largest population in the world, after India, with a total population of 1.40489 billion by the end of 2025. One of the world's oldest continuous civilizations, with over 5,000 years of history. It's deeply influenced by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Traditional arts include calligraphy, painting, porcelain, silk, and martial arts like Kung Fu.

### Economy

**China is the world's largest trading nation.**

- **Major exports:**
  - Electronics and Electrical
  - Machinery: Integrated circuits, mobile phones, computers, and home appliances
  - Machinery and Equipment: Industrial machinery, generators, and specialized equipment.
  - Consumer Goods: Furniture, toys, textiles, apparel, and footwear.

- Technology-Intensive Products: EVs, lithium batteries, and solar panels (known as the “New Three” of exports).
- **Major imports:**
  - Raw Materials & Commodities: Crude oil, iron ore, copper, and soybeans (to fuel its industry and feed its population).
  - High-Tech Components & Semiconductors: Integrated circuits and microchips (the largest import by value, crucial for its electronics manufacturing).
  - Luxury Goods & Specialty Products: High-end automobiles, pharmaceuticals, and luxury brands.

## Main Pillar Industries

- **Manufacturing:**
  - Electronics and Telecommunications: Smartphones, computers, and communication equipment (e.g., Huawei, Xiaomi).
  - Machinery and Industrial: from construction machinery to factory automation systems.
  - The world’s largest vehicle market and producer, rapidly leading in Electric Vehicles (EVs).
- **Real estate and construction**
- **Financial services**
- **Technology and innovation:**
  - Digital Economy: Dominated by tech giants like Alibaba (e-commerce, cloud) and Tencent (social media, fintech).
  - New Infrastructure: 5G networks, data centers, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT).

## Education

China’s higher education system is a massive engine for human capital development, central to its economic and technological ambitions. With over **47.6 million students currently in the system** and over **11.7 million new graduates entering the job market** annually, it is a defining feature of the country’s social and economic landscape.

## Language

The official language is Standard Mandarin (Putonghua). The writing system uses Chinese characters (Hanzi). There are also many major regional languages and dialects, such as Cantonese (Guangdong), Shanghainese, Sichuanese, Hokkien, etc. In major cities and business environments, bilingual signs are often found.

## Regions

China is administratively divided into **23 Provinces, 5 Autonomous Regions, 4 Directly-Administered Municipalities** and **2 Special Administrative Regions** (SARs)-Hong Kong and Macau, which have their own legal and economic systems.

- **Beijing:** The capital, political and cultural center.
- **Shanghai:** The global financial hub and port.
- **Guangzhou & Shenzhen:** Key southern cities driving trade, technology, and manufacturing.
- **Chongqing:** A massive inland megacity in the southwest.

## Weather

China has a highly diverse climate due to its vast size and complex terrain. It spans almost all climate zones found in the Northern Hemisphere, from tropical in the far south to subarctic in the far north. China’s climate is complex, but a simple rule is: **hot, rainy summers and cold, dry winters in the populous east, with increasing aridity and temperature extremes as you move west and north.** The best times to visit for mild weather are generally **spring (April-May) and autumn (September-October).**

# Practical Tips

## 1. Book Your Flights

### Major destination cities

- Beijing: Two airports. Closer airport to the city center is Beijing Capital International Airport (PEK).
- Shanghai: Two airports. Closer airport to the city center is Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport (SHA).
- Shenzhen: Shenzhen Bao'An International Airport (SZX).
- Guangzhou: Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport (CAN).
- Chengdu: Two airports. Closer airport to the city center is Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport (CTU).

## 2. Accommodation

Please choose any international brand hotel chains or consider the below recommended hotels with corporate pricing.

### CLO corporate pricing hotels

#### Grand Hyatt Beijing

Corporate rate: 1100 CNY per night, incl 1 breakfast

Email: [Nancy.an@hyatt.com](mailto:Nancy.an@hyatt.com)

Booking code: ANU

#### Swissotel Grand Shanghai

Corporate rate: 900 CNY per night, incl 1 breakfast

Email: [Reservations.Shanghai@swissotel.com](mailto:Reservations.Shanghai@swissotel.com)

Booking code: ANU

Please email the hotel directly and include the booking code as your booking source in your email.

## 3. Visa entry requirements for China

- Australian Passport Holder traveling to China for business, tourism, family visit, exchange and transit purposes and with the duration of each single stay not exceeding 30 days, are eligible for visa free entry policy as of the last updated date of this document.
- Non-Australian Passport Holder needs to check visa policy. CLO can assist in issuing the invitation letter if needed.

## 4. Travel Insurance

Just so you know, medical care here works differently. Instead of seeing a GP first, you go straight to a hospital and see a specialist for your specific issue. If you need to go to hospital, go directly to the International Department/VIP Ward of a major hospital. They have English speaking staff. Call them before you go. In a life threatening emergency, call 120 for an ambulance.

## 5. Packing Your Bag “Dos and Dont’s”

- ✓ Climate-appropriate clothing—Australia’s seasons are the reverse of China’s.
- ✓ Travel documents (passport, visa, itinerary, hotel booking, local contacts).
- ✓ Power adapters / converters (China uses Type A, C, and I plugs, 220V).
- ✗ Do not bring animals, plants, or related products.
- ✗ Carrying substantial cash is unnecessary due to prevalent digital payment methods.
- ✗ All illegal items are prohibited.



## 6. Your Digital Life Set Up!



- 1. **WeChat**, like WhatsApp. Messaging, voice/video calls, social networking (Moments), mobile payments (WeChat Pay).
- 2. **Gaode/Baidu maps**, like Google Maps.
- 3. Not everyone in China speaks English. Prepare **Youdao Translate**, like Google Translate.
- 4. **Didi**, like Uber.
- 5. **Alipay (Zhifubao)**, like PayPal. Mobile payments, money transfers, QR code payments, utilities & small services.
- 6. Most update-to-date info on **Rednote**, like Reddit.
- 7. Food or delivery food can check **Dianping** (Google Maps) and **Meituan Food Delivery** (Uber Eats or Doordash).
- 8. For booking high-speed train tickets, use 12306 or Ctrip.com.

Do use your phone for almost everything in China: payments, transport, ordering food, booking taxis and paying bills, if your phone battery is low, panic is allowed.

## 7. Phone & Internet

- Wi-Fi: All hotels and most airports/shopping malls offer free but may be time limited Wi-Fi (requires SMS verification).
- VPN highly recommended if you need to log in your Instagram/Facebook/Google accounts.

## 8. Money & Payments

- Local currency: RMB / CNY, 1 AUD ≈ 4.7 RMB (as of the last updated date of this document).
- Cash & Card & Mobile Payment: Strongly recommend using WeChat Pay or Alipay. They are widely used in shops, restaurants, and transport. Sometimes stores finding change for cash can be difficult. International credit cards may not be accepted.
- ATMs & Banks: Most ATMs accept international cards; note daily withdrawal limits.

## 9. China's cost of living

China's price level varies significantly between regions and city tiers. Overall, it is moderate by developed world standards but has risen noticeably in recent years, especially in major cities. Prices are generally lower than in North America, Western Europe, Japan, or Singapore, but often higher than in most Southeast Asian countries (except Singapore) and other developing economies.

- Tier 1 Cities: High, approaching international levels.
- Tier 2 & 3 Cities: Moderate and noticeably lower than Tier 1.
- Smaller Cities & Rural Areas: Low.

### Food & Drink

- Local restaurant meal: 25–60 RMB
- Coffee: 10-25 RMB
- Bottle of water (0.5L): 2–4 RMB
- Big Mac Meal: ≈ 35 RMB (China is famously low on the Big Mac Index)\*
- Transport:
  - Metro/bus ticket (city): 2–7 RMB
  - Taxi starting fare: 10–14 RMB
  - High-speed rail (Beijing-Shanghai 2nd class): ≈ 550 RMB

## Price Comparison: Common Items in China vs. Australia – Feb 2026

Item	Price in China	Price in China	Price in Australia
Bottled Water (500ml)	2–4 CNY	0.4–0.8 AUD	2.5–4 AUD
A Bottle of Local Beer (500ml)	4–8 CNY	0.8–1.6 AUD	6–10 AUD (bar/restaurant)
McDonald's Big Mac Meal (Medium)	35 CNY	7.3 AUD	12–14 AUD
McDonald's Medium Fries	12 CNY	2.5 AUD	4.0–4.5 AUD

China offers a wide spectrum of living costs. An expatriate or tourist in Shanghai will experience prices similar to a major European city, while a local resident in a smaller city enjoys a very affordable lifestyle. The overall national average is pulled down by the vast interior, making it seem moderate, but life in the coastal megacities is now unequivocally expensive.

## 10. Cultural Tips

### Greetings

- Handshake common
- Do accept things with both hands when receiving business cards, gifts, important documents, it shows respect and professionalism.

### Dining & Social Norms

- Avoid discussing sensitive topics (politics, income, age)
- Tipping not customary in most restaurants

### Transportation & Safety

- Public transport is very safe; have local map apps ready for navigation
- Right-hand traffic system

### Language

- Mandarin is the official language; Cantonese is more commonly used in the Greater Bay Area. English is limited outside major business areas.
- Recommended to learn basic phrases or use translation apps
  - Hello = Ni Hao
  - Thank You = Xie Xie
  - Could I have a receipt, please?  
= Wo Yao Xiao Piao, Xie Xie.

## 11. Shopping in China

China offers convenient and diverse shopping options, both online and offline.

Online popular platforms (normally 2–3 days shipping time):

- Taobao – daily goods, clothing, souvenirs (Highly recommended)
- JD.com – electronics, appliances, fast delivery

Payment can be made online by Alipay or WeChat pay. Physical retail shopping malls: SKP, IAPM, Hang Lung Plaza, Taikoo Li, etc.

## 12. Food

Chinese cuisine varies by region, and each major city has its own local food style. In local restaurants in China, dishes rarely list their ingredients. If you have any food allergies, be sure to ask the staff in advance.

- Northern cities (such as Beijing): Northern-style cuisine, including Peking duck and noodle dishes.
- East China (Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang): Jiangnan-style cuisine, lighter flavours with a slight sweetness.
- Greater Bay Area (Guangzhou and Shenzhen): Jiang Nan-style cuisine, known for fresh ingredients and dim sum.
- Southwest cities (Chengdu and Chongqing): Sichuan cuisine, famous for bold and spicy flavours (with non-spicy options widely available).

If you miss western food, taste of home or fast food like McDonald's, don't worry—almost all major cities offer plenty of options to choose from.

## 13. Emergency Contacts

Local emergency numbers:

- Police: 110; Fire: 119; Ambulance: 120
- Hotel / accommodation front desk
- Travel insurance provider contact
- ANU China Centre staff: +86 186 0027 7245; Email: china.liaison@anu.edu.au

# Australian Diplomatic and Consular Missions in China

### **Australian Embassy, Beijing**

21 Dongzhimenwai Dajie, Sanlitun, Beijing 100600  
+86 10 5140 4111

### **Australian Consulate-General, Shanghai**

22F, CITIC Square, 1168 Nanjing West Road, Shanghai 200041  
+86 21 2215 5200

### **Australian Consulate-General, Guangzhou**

14th Floor, Development Centre, No. 3 Linjiang Road, Zhujiang New Town, Guangzhou 510623  
+86 20 3814 0111

### **Australian Consulate-General, Chengdu**

27F, Tower 1, Yintai Centre, No. 1 Section 3, Hongxing Road, Chengdu 610021  
+86 28 6268 2000

### **Australian Consulate-General, Hong Kong**

23/F, Harbour Centre, 25 Harbour Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong  
+852 2827 8881

# Contact us

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### ANU Shanghai Desk

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