

## Interning in Shanghai

Although the thought of living and working abroad in a country as different as China may be daunting, Shanghai is an incredibly safe, diverse, and westernized city, and is quite easy to navigate.

**Before you get to Shanghai**, there are a few things you will want to do in preparation:

**Find out where you'll be living:** By any standards, Shanghai is a very large city. Figuring out which area your dorm or apartment will be in before you arrive will give you some time to find out how long your commute will be, plan out the best subway routes, and discover if you're near any shopping or restaurant hubs.

**Setup a VPN:** This is crucial! The Chinese government has blocked access to all western social media, as well as services such as Gmail, Google, and YouTube. Despite the central government's recent crackdown on VPNs (virtual private networks), setting one up is still simple, cheap, and there are plenty of options. Due to the constantly shifting restrictions on VPNs, the easiest way to find a current list of the fastest services is to just google "best VPN to use in China". [Startuplivingchina.com](http://Startuplivingchina.com) is a reputable site that has a few different options that are around \$10 a month. If you want uninterrupted access to all the sites you would have in the states, set up your VPN before you depart, but you won't have any trouble setting one up when you're in China either.

**Set up an International Plan or opt for a local SIM card:** Currently, Sprint and T-Mobile both offer free unlimited international texting and data that is limited to 2G speeds. While incredibly helpful in a pinch, it may not be fast enough for your needs. If you want faster data, local SIM cards are the way to go. Chinese data plans are cheap compared to US prices, and you can get a few gigabytes of data for \$5-10 dollars.

**Check if your credit/debit card has foreign transaction fees!** If your card does not, then you're set, but if it does, consider opening an account that does not charge for cash withdrawals out of network, because the fees add up quickly! Most Chinese ATMs will accept Visa or MasterCard debit cards, but you may run in to issues every now and then, so you may want to consider asking a friend to help you open up an account with a Chinese bank. The most common banks used by foreigners include the Agricultural Bank of China (ABC), the China Construction Bank (CCB), and the Industrial & Commercial Bank of China (ICBC).

**Download WeChat.** WeChat, or 微信 (*weixin*), is undoubtedly the single most ubiquitous app in China. It is a messaging service, social media, way to pay back your friends (a la Venmo), hail a taxi (Uber), a debit card, a marketing platform, and so much more all rolled into one absurdly convenient app. Almost every Chinese national that you'll meet will have WeChat and chances are your employer will too! You'll need a Chinese debit card to access the payment services, but once you do it's almost universally accepted, even most street vendors will accept WeChat Pay!

**Upon arrival at the airport**, the first thing you'll want to do is withdraw any RMB that you'll need for the first couple of days. You shouldn't need more than a thousand rmb (currently \$145) to get you started, as day-to-day life in China is relatively inexpensive. If the program you're interning with has set up transportation for you, you're in luck, otherwise just take the subway or hail a taxi.

**Taxis**, while quicker, are more challenging to use if you do not have some previous experience learning Chinese. If you don't speak Mandarin, the best way to try and get somewhere in a taxi is to pull up the address in simplified Chinese characters (most people on mainland China don't read traditional characters) and show it to the driver. Taxi fares should generally not be more than around 80 rmb to the city center from Hongqiao International (SHA), and 150 rmb from Pudong International (PVG), but if you at a particularly busy time or late at night, expect to pay an additional 30-50 rmb. For the most part, taxi drivers are semi trustworthy, but occasionally you might come across one or two who may try and rip you off. If you're worried about the integrity of a cab driver, take a picture of the driver's ID that is located in front of the front passenger seat, and has a picture of the driver as well as a number and 0-5 stars. The lower the number, the longer the taxi driver has been registered, and drivers with numbers below 100,000 have been around for quite some time. The stars are awarded only after a driver has sat for an exam and is evaluated based off the driver's English fluency, service level, knowledge of the roads, and how nice their taxi is.

**For the first few days in Shanghai**, even though you might be experiencing some major jetlag, push yourself to go out and explore the area around where you'll be living. Make note of any restaurants you may want to try in the future, any big shopping centers (of which there will be many) you may want to check out, or any attractions you think might be worth going to. One of the things to be careful of is getting swept up in the swing of things and focusing too much on one small part of the city, and ignoring all the other things Shanghai has to offer.

**Housing:** Depending on your program, you may be living in a typical 2 person dorm room, or you may be sharing an apartment with individual rooms and a full kitchen. In either case, one of the first things you'll want to do is head down to your local Walmart 沃尔玛 (*wo er ma*), and stock up on any necessities. You may have access to a washing machine, but you will almost definitely need to hang dry any laundry that you have. Consider calling a laundry service to do your laundry for you. They generally have pickup and delivery services and usually charge by the kilogram.

**Classes:** Registering for classes should be relatively simple, and most programs will provide you with an orientation that may cover some of the things listed above. If you have any trouble, the faculty and staff are almost always happy to help out.

**Internship:** It's difficult to give advice on internships in Shanghai, as, with an internship in any country, your role can vary greatly depending on your skills and major, and even more so depending on your fluency in Mandarin. Some internships may have fairly limited responsibilities, and some may have too many. In either situation, if you are interning through a placement agency or program, it is best to talk to your coordinator, and ask for advice on how to deal with the situation. If you are interning independently, it is important to politely express your concerns with the arrangement, but depending on the company you may see fewer results. Personally, my internship was the highlight of my time in Shanghai; it was interesting work within my major, it was challenging, and my coworkers were incredibly helpful and supportive.

**Traveling:** Take every opportunity you get to travel outside of Shanghai! China has some of the most amazing national parks in the world, like Zhangjiajie, the park that inspired the floating mountains in Avatar. Jiuzhaigou in the Sichuan province was another incredibly beautiful national park, and it offered a unique look into Tibetan culture. If you have a bit more free time, popular and incredibly accessible destinations included the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Japan.

**Finally,** Things may be chaotic as life in Shanghai does not move slowly, and it may take a while to adjust, but it's undoubtedly worth it. You'll find that for whatever its faults, Shanghai can be an amazing place with so much to offer.