

STUDYING ABROAD | **China**



One Guide to Study Abroad That Will Tell You to
GET LOST!

(and why you should listen) | **BY LIZ LYON**

Introduction (Why You Should Get Lost Already)

The paradox of a guide to study abroad is that the sole purpose of a responsible guide to study abroad is to convince the reader to stop reading it and to go outside and figure things out for him or herself. Study abroad is an opportunity to immerse yourself in a new culture, to learn by experiencing instead of by reading and taking notes, to discover new things about yourself in a new context, and to get out there and actually use a language you've ceaselessly pounded into your brain for what must seem like ages.

This is an opportunity for continued study of the Chinese language while at the same time having the opportunity, every minute, to put down your textbook, put down your dictionary, and go outside and speak authentic Chinese with ordinary Chinese people. China is, effectively, a limitless hands-on language laboratory, which, as soon as you put this book down, you can explore on your own terms and your own time.

The goal of this guide is not to tell you what to do, that is the goal of a lab manual for high school science. The goal of this guide is to make the small details of studying abroad at the Middlebury/CET School in Hangzhou slightly easier, and to convince you to go and figure the big things out yourself.

Ultimately, the more you do by yourself, the better your Chinese will get, the better your ultimate experience in China will be, and the more truthfully you can say, "I did that all by myself." That said, this guide will answer a lot of questions you can (and probably should) answer yourself. So don't read this book. It's long-winded and you can figure all this stuff out on your own. Be uncomfortable, be confused, be embarrassed, get lost, and struggle your way out the other side. You'll be all the better off for it. In the words of Robert Frost, "The best way out is always through."

— *Liz Lyon*

Chapter One: Before You Get Here

I. Things to Expect (Or Why You Shouldn't Have Expectations)

The poet Carl Sandburg once wrote, “I’m an idealist: I don’t know where I’m going, but I’m on my way.” You’ve got a little advantage over him—you know that you’re going to be spending a semester (or two) at a technology university in the southeastern part of China in a big city called Hangzhou. You know that you’re going to be studying Chinese. You know that you’re going to be using Chinese on a daily basis, in all of your interactions, from those as simple as buying a newspaper to those as complex as answering sensitive political questions posed to you (with a thick accent) from a drunken, ornery man in a loud, smoky bar.

Maybe that hadn’t occurred to you. The point is this: you know that you’re about to embark on a crazy, wonderful, challenging, difficult adventure. That’s all you need to know. You can try to get a bigger picture by talking to other students who have studied in China, by reading contemporary Chinese fiction, by seeing as many Chinese movies as you can, by studying Chinese history, all of which you should do, but know that, until you get off the plane, (and maybe not even then) you won’t be able to conceptualize China in any real way.

That’s just how it should be. You can’t really prepare for something you’ve never done, so don’t worry about it. If you have no expectations, you can’t be disappointed. If you have no expectations, you’re also more able to see things as they are, instead of how you assumed they would be. That’s the thing about expectations. If you’re not careful, they’ll become outcomes.

In short, get on the plane already! China’s waiting for you.

II. Boring (But Extremely Necessary) Preparations

Money...the big and most important boring necessity. How do you get money in the first place? How do your parents send you more money once you’ve blown all your renminbi on teahouses, pirated DVDs, and tchotchkes handmade by any one of China’s fifty-five recognized minority peoples? Bring both an ATM card and traveler’s checks. ATM cards are convenient and re-fillable. Traveler’s checks are a hassle to change, once you make it to a bank that recognizes what they are, but they are invaluable because, if they are stolen, they become ‘non-money’ and you don’t actually lose any money. Every Chinese city (and almost all tourist locations) has lots and lots of ATM machines, which, depending on your own personal luck, may give you money, may be empty or not working, may eat your card without explanation, or may give your private information to a scam artist. That’s assuming, of course, your ATM card hasn’t been stolen yet. ATM cards are perfect for normal, predictable, convenient existence, but that’s not always an option. Bring both an ATM card and traveler’s checks. You can bring a credit card to beef up your wallet, but you’ll probably only have the opportunity to use it once or twice. It’s also not a bad idea to have a couple of crisp U.S. twenties, just in case. But, in general, money gets honey; everything else gets confused looks.

And, once you get here, you don't want to find yourself broke in the middle of Inner Mongolia, so always have enough money for a cab, a hotel, and some food. The more off the beaten path you are, the more you need to always be thinking in terms of escape plans. You can get away with a couple kuai and an ATM card in a big city, but it's not the best decision. A safety one hundred kuai note in a secret wallet pocket is fine, until your wallet gets stolen. Consider investing in a tourist dork money pack, which, in addition to being the least stylish thing on the planet, will keep your money both cozy and relatively safe.

III. Packing List (The Things You Actually Have to Prepare)

In general, you can buy almost anything you need to buy (and certainly everything you don't need to buy) once you get to China. However, the less you resemble an average Chinese person (the big-footed, the tall, and anyone who developed significantly after puberty), the harder buying appropriate clothing will be. Adjust the following packing list according to your body type and willingness to go shopping when you find your supplies lacking.

Also, when it comes time to take a cold, hard look at the growing mountain of clothing falling off of your bed, remember that Chinese kids don't bring as much clothing to college as the average American kid does. This isn't some hip fashion university in New York City; you can get away with repeating outfits and even wearing basically the same clothes for a pretty long time. But, if you are a fashionista, China has more than enough playful and perky clothing waiting for you. When in doubt, leave it out, and, just for good measure, take out three other articles of clothing.

- Sensible walking shoes (anything Vibram-soled and ankle-supporting)
- Sneakers, especially for the athletic, unless you like blisters and shin splints
- Warm coat (No one likes shopping cold and jet-lagged the day after arrival)
- Wool socks (2 pairs of good hiking socks are worth your while)
- A couple of bras (non-padded bras with good support are hard to find)
- 1-2 pairs of jeans (You won't wear more, but you can always buy more)
- Hooded sweatshirt, down vest, fleece, anything that layers and is easy to wash
- Any specialty sweat-proof North Face hiking gear-head clothing is expensive and hard to find, so if you're into that sort of thing, bring it along
- Same goes for vitamins, over the counter medicine, and any specialty skin product
- Ask your doctor if you should take any emergency use only medicine (But, when you get diarrhea (and you will), don't pop Cipro like candy—it's a heavy-duty antibiotic, not Pez)
- Bring working deodorant, or come to terms with your own body odor
- Bring any chocolate or snack item you can't live without. A box of energy bars isn't a bad idea; you don't know your class schedule or breakfast scene
- Bring LOTS of presents: postcards, key chains, t-shirts, cheesy tourist stuff from your hometown or college, mint U.S. coins, stamps, chocolate, whiskey, cigarettes, books on tape, bath and body stuff, etc. Chinese like to give (and of course receive) presents, and the more "authentic U.S.A." items you have on hand, the better.

- A good Chinese-English dictionary (Surprise! They're hard to buy here!)
- Same goes for in-depth guide books, which can be helpful, but they can also be a hindrance because they tell you what's worthwhile and don't let you figure it out. All the same, you can't get them in China, so think about lugging one over
- Computers are cool, but there are Internet bars all over, and if you have Internet access in your room, that's just another reason not to go outside. Think about it.
- Cables, cords, adapters, and all other electrical whatchamacallits are buyable
- A smallish traveling bag with good zippers is worth its weight in platinum
- T-shirts, sweaters, skirts, underwear, and other general clothing items are easy to buy, so bring staple items, but don't go crazy.

In general, you want to have enough clothing to get by on doing laundry once a week. A smallish suitcase or hiking backpack is more than ample, whether or not you believe it.

IV. Mental Packing List (Or How Not to Be a Nutcase On Arrival)

Basically, just don't freak-out. That's the most important thing. Besides that, make to sure to have tender goodbye conversations with loved ones and friends, get a good mass email list going if that's your thing, prep a few pen pals and package-senders, and, in general, make sure your relationships are fairly stable when you leave. You want postcards from overseas, not unnecessary stress.

Academically, how can you prepare?

First and foremost, you're not going to cram for China. You've been learning the language for a while now, and you can't magically go back in time and make sure that you have been studious ever since you first said ni hao. Be reasonable. Look over all your final tests, breeze through some note cards, listen to a few tapes, have a heart-to-heart with your favorite teacher, practice taking a monkey holding a red hat out of a bag, do what you need to do, but don't try to manically study everything you've ever learned the night before your flight. It will just stress you out and make you question your language skills. When you get to China, you want to be calm, and you want to be at peace with the state that your Mandarin is in. There's nothing else you can really do.

The best academic preparation you can do is to try to deal with the small language issues you have now. Once you get thrown into a screaming confusing pile of dialects, where to place le in a sentence gets put on the backburner. In China, survival Chinese is a lot more pressing than grammatically perfect Chinese. Get rid of as many bad habits as you have, but know that they'll all come back as soon as you're nervous. If you like making helpful grammar sheets, do that. Organize your notes so that you only take what will be useful to you in China. Basically, fix what you can, and come to terms with the fact that you are in the process of learning an extremely difficult language, and that it's about to get a lot more difficult in some ways, and a lot more easy (or at least logical) in other ways.

In short, get stoked! And get on the plane already. Stop preparing, and just get going!

Chapter Two: Now That You're Here

“Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better. What if they are a little course, and you may get your coat soiled or torn? What if you do fail, and get fairly rolled in the dirt once or twice. Up again, you shall never be so afraid of a tumble.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

I. On Not Being a Native Chinese Speaker (or How to Deal With Things You Can't Change)

Generally speaking, the less you look like a Chinese person (related to your size, the color of your hair, skin, and eyes, and your mannerisms), the more attention you will get. You can't help it. You may feel like a walking museum. It may seem that in every interaction, you are forced to be a sole representative of your ethnicity. Every person you see stares at you. If you're with an Asian friend, no one talks directly to you. If you start to speak in Mandarin, you get confused stares; no one believes that the words coming out of your mouth could possibly be Chinese. And they're still staring at you!!

Get over it. You can't change the fact that you, a non-Chinese person, have decided to study Mandarin in a country made up basically of entirely Chinese people. You're weird and neat, and there's no escaping that.

For students of Asian background (especially of Han Chinese ethnicity, but in general, of all Asian students), you won't get stared at. You can blend into crowds. People won't practice their English on you. But they will tell you how bad your Chinese is (which might actually be a compliment), often in the same breath that they're telling your non-Asian friend how wonderful his or her Chinese is. You're an anomaly, a Chinese person who can't speak the Chinese language. People are confused by you, but you don't have the exotic 'other' mystique of your classmates. You may fit in easier, but you still don't feel like you 'fit in,' even if this is the land of your ancestors.

Get over it. You can't change the fact that you, a Chinese or sort of Chinese-looking person, has decided to study the language of 1.3 billion people who look a little bit like you, and will be boggled as to why you can't speak “your own mother tongue.” You're an irregularity, and there's no way around that.

Regardless of what you look like, and what the state of your Mandarin, you can find reasons to be frustrated everywhere you look. You're studying a difficult, difficult language, and there is no way to convince the entire People's Republic of China to be particularly considerate to you because you're a little bit nervous.

So, don't take it personally, and don't take it negatively. The more positive (perkiness is not required) you are, the easier (and more enjoyable) everything will be. No matter what 'it' is, just get over it, get used to, and love it. Have a sense of humor, have a sense of humility, and, trust me, it will be a lot easier to have a good time.

II. Cultural Sensitivity, Political Correctness, and other Myths of Study Abroad

Everyone you ask will say that, “After the economic reforms of the 1980s, Chinese people are also becoming more and more liberal,” but this statement needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Homosexuality was only recently declared not to be a mental illness, some people have such strong anti-Japanese sentiment you may wonder if the war actually ended, and there is often a general vacuum of ‘political correctness’ and/or ‘cultural sensitivity.’ That statement, of course, also needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Every country, regardless of how developed its economy and how post avant-garde its art scene, is going to have a lot of people who judge people they haven’t met by people who look sort of like them who they have seen on television.

Just keep in mind, the less you resemble the average Chinese person, in looks or beliefs, the more potential there is for you to be offended by a curious statement. (And for you to accidentally offend Chinese people!) Don’t take it personally; don’t take it negatively. You may find that the person who accidentally insulted you the first time you met may end up being a close friend. Despite a general lack of the notion of ‘political correctness,’ Chinese people are usually very willing to accept and befriend people they see as ‘the other.’

All the same, you may even find the opportunity to exist in a not-politically correct environment freeing. People don’t hesitate to say what’s on their mind. Without a ‘p.c. censor,’ you may find more freedom to say what you actually want to say, and ask the questions you want to ask. Or you may hate it and completely freak out if, after you tell someone that you’re Jewish, they are surprised to find that there are still Jews left after the Holocaust, or if someone asks you if the English word ‘Negro’ means the same thing as ‘slave,’ or when a little girl who just called you big sister smiles sweetly and then says, “Just like the one on television!”

Regardless, no matter what you do, you can’t change what people you haven’t met will say to you or think about you. The best thing you can do is to not let it get to you. If you look for opportunities to be angry, you will find them. A good sense of humor is your best defense mechanism. Don’t take things too seriously, and they won’t seem so serious. The Indigo Girls said it best when they sang, “The best thing you’ve ever done for me, was to help me take my life less seriously, it’s only life, after all.”

And let’s not forget, cultural sensitivity goes both ways. Though you are learning Mandarin and have an amazing and wonderful opportunity to come to China to study the language and the culture in a ‘hands-on laboratory,’ this isn’t Discovery World or Chuk E Cheeze. Most of the people you encounter are going about their every day lives, speaking some version of Chinese, and being average, normal, boring Chinese people. That may well be new and surprising and weird and crazy and novel to you, but not to them. What is a mind-blowing experience for you is just another day at the office for somebody else. Use the opportunity for cross-culture exploration and friendship making, not to make someone feel awkward or embarrassed about being his or herself.

Keep in mind, no matter how completely wonky something seems, people aren’t going about doing things just to surprise or appall you. People do things because that’s what they do. The wonderful and glorious Chinese culture that has evolved from thousands of years, piles of revolutions, and assimilation of however many other cultures did not do so just so it could piss you off for five minutes when that guy ran over you with his bike and didn’t look back to see

if you were okay. Cultures evolve in specific and different, but generally logical and rational, ways. Differences should not be looked at with a value scale. All cultures have both similarities and differences, and, in general, are more similar than different. Instead of taking excuses to criticize the weird, foreign, crazy Chinese culture in all of its weirdness and insanity and whackiness, take a deep breath, and take the opportunity to marvel at the diverse and varied aspects of general human existence. Or whatever. Just remember, whenever you have an opportunity to call a somebody else a ‘them,’ they have the same opportunity. Labeling others as ‘the other’ or ‘them’ in an attempt to simplify understanding inhibits understanding and fosters bad thinking habits. If it’s weird, go with the flow, you’ll be surprised at how fast weird becomes normal and normal becomes weird.

Basically, there’s crazy, and then there’s crazy that you’re used to. Just remember, it’s you, not them, and it’s not personal. Don’t blame China for being new to you.

III. Homesickness, Disconnectedness, Frustratedness, and Other Things That Will Make You Grumpy, But You Should Just Get Over Already, Dude

So now you’re here, on the other side of the globe from most of your loved ones, learning one of the hardest languages out there, adjusting to a new culture, and often feeling as helpless as after the doctor cut the umbilical cord. You want to ask questions, but you don’t know what they are, or how to say them. You feel frustrated at an inability to express complex thoughts and emotions that are hard enough to express in your mother tongue, and near impossible to express in, of all things, a tonal language written in morphophonemograms, which is just another word you can’t pronounce! Every time you open your mouth, you get confused or disdainful looks. You can’t do anything right, you can’t say anything you want to say, no one cares, and all you want to do is cry to Mr. Fluff, but he didn’t fit in your suitcase! Waaahh!

It’s just like being thirteen again, with fewer zits, and no end of the year dance.

Hey, guy, did you ever think at any point that learning Chinese was going to be easy? No. You’re a world-class trooper to have hauled yourself this far, so just keep on keeping on. Embrace confusion, give up on controlling outcomes, and go with the flow. The more flexible you are and the more willing you are to say “I don’t know, can you help me out?”, the less being in China will seem like a grueling test you have to overcome, and the more it will resemble the opportunity of a lifetime and fun adventure that it really is.

And if you’re feeling down, homesick, disconnected, frustrated, grumpy, whatever, don’t go out to Pizza Hut with a friend and use big English words to explain what your grumpiness has to do with, like, the Cultural Revolution, or something. Resist the urge to blame the man. Cope rationally, and in Chinese. Get a hold of yourself, man! Buy some street food, ride your bike to West Lake, get your hair washed, get a massage, blast some Zhou Jie Lun and get your roommate to dance around the room with you, go to a teahouse, go see a movie, shoot some hoops, go for a run, do whatever will get you out of your funk without disconnecting yourself from China. When you feel disconnected, the best solution is to connect yourself to something, not to put yourself into some weird, disconnected vacuum of not-being-here-ness.

When a sense of being an incoherent and spastic outsider gets overwhelming, take a deep

breath. One of the paradoxes of learning a language is that, no matter how good you get, you're always going to be frustrated and confused and lost, only about different things. It's not like, you study really intensely, everything is extraordinarily difficult, and then you're magically a native speaker. No matter how good your language skills get, you'll always bump into the occasional inability to communicate. As your language skills get better, it will come from increasingly abstract and increasingly difficult concepts, but there's always going to be a wall. Don't get bogged down thinking that you haven't made any progress. Instead of focusing on what you can't say, appreciate what you can say.

In general, don't be a grump, it makes you grumpy, and, except for Grumpy the Dwarf, who got fame and glory and probably a lot of royalties, it doesn't do much.

IV. Dealing With Stress

An old family friend once told me, "What are you complaining about stress? Youth is stressful. When every day is comfortable and you don't have any stress, you're dead. Don't complain about the stress of youth to an old man."

So don't be afraid of stress. It's a lot like cholesterol—there is good stress and bad stress, and bad stress will eventually give you a heart attack, so you should try not to have it. You have to figure out for yourself what is good stress, what is freaky, unnecessary stress, and how to both recover from and avoid freaky, unnecessary stress. Generally speaking, good stress comes from living adventurously and bad stress comes from freaking out about living.

So take your experience and push it to the limit of bearable. To learn by experience, you have to remain on the edge of your comfort zone. If you wanted to be comfortable, you would be sitting on a sofa somewhere, eating Cheez Its and watching Family Guy. Comfort is boring, and it's a poor teacher. You've come to China to learn a foreign language, study a new culture, and to learn about yourself, not to buy cheap DVDs. The more you feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, confused, and generally weird, the more you will learn. A student who studied at Harbin noted, "The ways we choose to stress ourselves out determine how we learn."

Your health and safety are certainly very important, but have a little faith in yourself, guy. The human body is a time-tested machine. It not only has a great death-aversion system, but also is quite good at self-maintenance. Stay hydrated, eat well, get some rest, exercise both your body and a little common sense, and you'll be fine. So get lost, order off the menu, figure out the bus schedule, turn off the English subtitles, take a train to a town whose name you can't pronounce, try to figure out how to pour tea, get lost, get lost, get lost, get lost again, and find your way home.

In general, don't blow things out of proportion and don't get annoyed with things that are beyond your control. If you can't put things in context, ask a rational friend. If it helps, keep a journal. You can't get a sense of anything immediately, especially if every day is a flood of new experiences, but looking back on a journal filled with emotional snapshots will help you sort through things later. You're a big kid now, you already know how to cope with a lot of stress, and you know the difference between good coping skills and bad ones. Go easy on the unhealthy

coping skills, and search for positive outlets in a new environment. Don't take out your frustration, try to understand and mediate the root of the problem. Look in the mirror, and say to yourself, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and, goshdarnit, people like me!" And so on.

Someone, somewhere, probably once said something about how a great wind was able to topple a big, tall, strong tree, but unable to uproot a small blade of grass. Why? Because the big, tall, strong tree had unhealthy, rigid coping mechanisms and the small blade of grass was extremely flexible. Don't be that tree.

Ultimately, it's your job to figure out how to do a lot of new and challenging things without making yourself going berserko, which, let's face it, is really, really easy. Just don't go berserko. What's so hard about that?

V. Compromise (Or How I Learning to Stop Worrying and Love the Mystery Meat)

Do you know how international business trades go down? Two companies get together, prepared to eventually sign a deal. Each company has a lawyer whose job is to write the contract that each company will agree with. From the start, the lawyers on both sides know basically how the deal is going to go down, but their job is still, ostensibly, to fight to the death for the terms of the company who hired them. The first meeting, when the companies explain to the lawyer they've hired exactly what terms they want to see in the contract, the lawyer, after nodding and listening attentively, will reply, perhaps with undertones of sadness, with a little something like this, "Frankly, I'm surprised and, maybe even a little bit disappointed and embarrassed to hear this from you. I can't imagine the other side will agree to such irrational and unreasonable terms; in any way, I don't even know how to start fixing something so intrinsically flawed."

The company immediately starts to rewrite their side of the contract, instead of figuring out how to force the other company to rewrite their side of the contract. Why? Because it's a lot easier to convince your side to compromise than the other guy.

What does this have to do with you, personally, studying abroad in China?

Frankly, I'm surprised and maybe even a little bit embarrassed to have to explain this to you, but, come on now, existence is itself a compromise. And, right now, the 'other guy' is an ancient culture flourishing on a lot of land filled with more than a billion people, and you're still a young, spry college kid whose joints don't creak when it rains.

The things you will have to compromise depend entirely on the things you have decided, prior to discussing them with your now-embarrassed lawyer, are completely and totally not open to compromise. What habits do you have? What ironclad belief systems are you working with? What parts of your environment do you like to control? This may not be instantly apparent, so just wait until you are horrified, shocked, and appalled.

On a personal note, I have been a vegetarian for almost ten years for a variety of spiritual, environmental, and health reasons, which is cool and all, but, as I discovered fairly soon after I got to Hangzhou, is a big pain in the butt. So, after a rough adjusting period, I'm on hiatus. Will it have far-reaching effects and ultimately soil my inner being? Not likely. Vegetarianism, like any other 'ism' with strict guidelines, is just a way to add order to the chaos of existence in order

to remain sane. It's a natural human response to an incomprehensibly large universe, and that's fine. But, in a new culture, any attempt to control outcomes the way you "always have" tends to result in a lot of stress. As a dumpling-eating vegetarian, I would strongly advise reconsidering previous constraints in the context of a new culture.

Basically, don't do things that will stress you out in bad ways, don't let things you can't change make you go berserko, try to put things in context, and calm down, take a deep breath. Make some compromises yourself instead of adding more stress trying to alter a fixed environment.

Chapter Three: Academics (You are here to learn, aren't you?)

“学如不及,犹恐失之。” (*xue2ru1bu4ji1,you2kong3shi1zhi1. –Kong3Zi3*)

“Study as if you'll never know enough and you're afraid of losing it all.” – Confucius

I. The Language Pledge (This means YOU)

After orientation, everyone promises, as a student of the Middlebury/CET School in Hangzhou, not to use any language except Mandarin Chinese. Some people will cross their fingers and some people will sign with blood. Each person gets to define what “I won't speak anything except Mandarin Chinese for the duration of this program” means to them, but no one has the right to define what the language pledge means to anyone else. The freedom of self-definition does not give you the ability to stand in the way of other people's goals. In short, have respect for your fellow classmates. Don't speak English with people who don't want to speak English. Don't ruin it for other people.

But, much more importantly, have respect for your own decision to study Chinese. Full immersion is the best way to learn a language. Signing away your mother tongue isn't an easy thing to do. But you don't learn to swim by dipping your toe in the shallow end and talking about how pretty the water looks. You learn to swim when you fall in the pool and the lifeguard is off duty.

So, buck up, and don't be lazy about it. Keep in touch with your loved ones at home, read a little poetry, keep a diary, do whatever keeps you sane, but don't think that watching *Ace Ventura* with Chinese subtitles is fooling anyone. Again, it's all about your comfort zone. You learn by being a little uncomfortable and a little embarrassed. If you're speaking fluently and easily, what are you trying to improve? You are in a country where most people speak a language that you have dedicated a lot of time, energy, money, blood, sweat, and tears to learn—why stay indoors to chat with a friend from your home school in your home language? Go outside, alone, and start stumbling around, in Chinese. There's no way to do anything, but to start, and then to keep going.

II. In the Classroom

Some of your biggest shocks about cultural differences may come to you in the classroom. Like everything else, the classroom is just another place to discover that you're not in Kansas anymore. A teacher may ask you a horrifyingly inappropriate question, you may think a teaching style is so completely useless that you are unable to believe it could evolve in a country advanced enough to have nuclear power, you might say something offhand and shock and appall your teacher, anything can and will happen.

Like everything else, these things are okay, are normal, and are to be expected. Use moments of awkwardness to learn, to move forward, and to get a bigger picture of the world. Try not to go berserko. Be open. Have a sense of humor.

Less vaguely, what can you do? Be a good student. Be on time to class (or even early), do your homework carefully and well, listen attentively to your teacher, ask questions if you don't understand, don't take difficult lessons personally, prepare well for class, be super respectful to your teacher, take good notes, and so on.

Get to know your teacher, get to know his or her teaching style, and figure out how you can get the most out of being his or her student. Don't just sit in class, highlighting random words, seeing whether or not you remember how to write certain characters and twiddling your thumbs. Be an active student. Don't waste class time or else you'll think that being in class is a waste of time. It's not, assuming that you know how to use it.

If you have a problem, ask your teacher. If you're getting frustrated by something, don't brood about it—go and have a chat with your teacher. Get the class together to take him or her out for lunch, whatever. All problems are resolvable, if you address them, and the sooner, the better. Your teachers are all normal people, just like you. They don't want to make your life miserable. They don't want to make you feel bad about yourself. They want you to learn Chinese, and they want to help you make progress. Let them.

III. Experiential Learning

Mark Twain warned, “Don't let schooling get in the way of your education.” Don't be so obsessed with learning vocabulary words that you don't have time to actually use what you've studied. Learning Chinese is not abstract memorization without an end goal. The purpose of learning a language is to use it to communicate, not to do well on all of your quizzes. Many study habits that work just fine for getting A's have little practical use. That said, you must study, and you must study hard, but perhaps not the way you always used to. Every minute is an experiential learning opportunity; don't study yourself into a coma. Find your balance between traditional learning and hands-on learning.

Now that you're in China, there are a lot more ways to learn Chinese available to you than ever before. Take advantage of every learning opportunity. Use your time well.

Read newspapers or magazines or kid's storybooks. See what you can learn by context, and by guessing. Talk to your cab driver, talk to the bored saleslady, talk to the guy sitting next to you on the train, talk to the guy who sells DVDs, talk to the kids tabling outside of the cafeteria....see a pattern? Open your mouth! It doesn't matter what you say or with whom you talk. If you can't say what you want to say, who cares? Say something else, and say it with good tones. Some conversations, focus on your tones, make sure that you are speaking correctly. Some conversations, focus on your content, try to say exactly what you mean. Don't be in perpetual sputter mode. You can get into heated political conversations all you want, but know that if you're speaking without correct tones, you're babbling incoherently and hoping that someone will know what you want to say. Every minute doesn't have to be pronunciation class, but you must be

aware that you are speaking a tonal language, because, otherwise, you're not.

Listen, too. Eavesdrop in crowds, ask your cab driver to turn on the radio if he's not a talker, rent a Chinese audio guide when you go to a museum, watch movies without Chinese subtitles, etc. Don't give up if you hear a word you don't recognize, add gas, but don't get frustrated if you get confused. Keep listening.

When dialects and heavy accents start to get you down, go to West Lake, and chat up some of the Beijing tourists. Talk to school kids. Talk to your teachers. But don't block out dialects because they're too hard to understand. Listen harder. You'll find even the most difficult dialect out there is at least partially understandable, eventually.

Make remembering Chinese names easier. You have to do it, sooner or later, so start now. Every time you chat with someone, get his or her name. Repeat it and make sure your tones are right. Find out what each character means and how to write it. Afterwards, remember his or her name long enough to scribble it down. Lose the piece of paper, but train your brain to remember names made up of characters.

Go out, alone, as much as possible. Take weekend trips to nearby cities and try to find friends once you get there. Go to small restaurants with one or two customers; it's very likely someone will want to talk to you. Get lost and ask for directions. Go shopping, whether or not you need to. Ask the salesperson what's popular, what's a good present, what will make your thighs look smaller, what will make you look more muscular, whatever. Chitchat and small talk are just how normal people speak. When you go out to eat, ask the waitress to describe the different flavors of dishes to you. When you get your hair washed, talk to your stylist, and don't give up when the blow dryer gets turned on. If you have a high alcohol tolerance, go to a bar alone. You may have to drink a lot, but you'll make friends. In an environment where everyone is speaking Mandarin Chinese and a lot of people are extremely interested in foreigners (especially those who care about the NBA or soccer), there is never a shortage of people to talk with.

Watch movies. Get addicted to Chinese soap operas. Watch your favorite movies dubbed into Mandarin. And turn off the English subtitles! Don't read English signs in museums and don't pick up any English leaflets. Whatever it is, you'll forget it in five minutes, but if you forsake knowing unnecessary details now, your language skills will improve that much faster. It's better to be perpetually mildly confused about irrelevant little things in order to eventually be less confused in general.

Don't translate. When learning language and observing culture, there's always the urge to put things in your own words, or place things in a familiar context. But there won't always be a direct translation. Don't translate. Understand things in their own context, not within a warped mental paradigm you already have.

Get down with your Chinese pop music. There are stands of dirt-cheap pirated CDs everywhere you look, and almost every CD includes the lyrics. Buy lots of CDs. Don't just listen to the music in the background, actively listen; follow along with the lyrics, sing along loudly, dance along crazily, let the spirit move you.

Sing karaoke, and not just songs you already know. Go out with good friends, don't be self-conscious, and start singing. Who cares if you're singing terribly in a small room? There is a reason karaoke is so popular—it's a blast! Make a fool of yourself, sing at the top of your lungs, and surprise your friends with how well (or how horribly) you can sing. When worst comes to

worst, make up the melody and read off the screen. Eventually, you too can be a karaoke master, if you choose to be.

Basically, to get the most out of your time in China, be at all times an active learner. Talk, listen, read, write, absorb, absorb, absorb, and don't be afraid to mess up, all the time. Challenge yourself to learn this language, and be proud of yourself when you've stepped up to the challenge. Never stop studying, but don't ignore your own progress. When you can order food for a party of people, when you know how to work the karaoke machine, when you can read a bus schedule, when you know exactly what the guy on the radio is saying even though you're tired and not really paying attention, when you understand a newspaper article, when a pop song makes you roll your eyes because it's corny, when a joke in Chinese is actually funny to you, when you dream in Chinese, when someone tells you that your Chinese is not bad, understand what that means. Push yourself, but don't be so hard on yourself that you can't see your own progress. Just because you're always trying to do better doesn't mean you can't feel really, really proud of how far you've come, and how well you're doing.

IV. Interactions With Staff

You're not polite enough. The sooner you come to terms with this, the easier it is to get over yourself and be polite enough. Don't grunt or wave at people as a greeting—this is a polite country, not a locker room. When you see a teacher or a staff member, call him or her out by name and greet him or her. Teacher So-and-So, *nin hao*, have you eaten yet? When you walk into a classroom, greet your teacher and ask how they're doing. It's not brown-nosing, it's politeness, and it is expected of you. Don't ignore the ladies who work downstairs. Find out their names. Chat with them when you enter and leave the dorms.

Don't put up walls between yourself and people in authority. Be friendly with them. If you have the urge to make grumpy comments behind their back, think it through, and then go to them with rational complaints or suggestions. The staff does not represent 'the man.' They want to help you, not make your life confusing and awkward. Make friends with them, be polite to them, and not only will your interactions be more pleasant, but everyone will benefit from clear and respectful lines of communication.

Chapter Four: On Being a ZUT Student

I. Information You'll Be Embarrassed Not to Know Later On

ZUT (浙工大,Zhe4Gong1Da4 or 工大,Gong1Da4 for short) is a public university with fifteen thousand Chinese students and a few foreign exchange students. The main entrance (正门 zheng4men2,前门 qian2men2) is on 潮王路 (Chao2wang2Lu4),but you'll probably find yourself using the back entrance (后门 hou4men2,北门 bei3men2) on 德胜路(De2Sheng4Lu4) because it's closer to the dorm and has more to offer in the way of cheap restaurants, hair salons, Internet bars, fruit stands, mediocre bubble tea, etc. You can catch buses near both gates, but not the same lines. The K12 (catch it opposite the ATM) and the 6 (outside the back gate) both go to the general West Lake zone.

The library is located next to the building where you attend class. You can make copies there for a fee. There's no heating, so wear enough clothing and bring your hot water bottle, which you can fill near the bathroom. Kids come early and leave books to stake out turf, but no one lives at the library, so sit at an empty seat until the book-owner comes back. You can, in theory, use the computers here, but you have to pay money and come at a time when there isn't a class in session and you can find an empty computer. If you only want to quickly check email, there is a computer with free Internet access right by the door, but, if you want to get online comfortably, just go to an Internet bar in the alleyway outside of the back gate. In general, you need to show ID and pay ten kuai up front, but, with a two kuai per hour cost, you'll get most of that back. If they don't want to take your ID, for whatever reason, don't give up—you can usually bully, lie, and confuse your way in. Late night email checkers beware, due to trying to pretend they're not open all night, many Internet bars lock the doors from midnight until dawn. Surprise! Be aware of your situation.

For kids who have personal computers, Internet access shuts down on weeknights after twelve as an attempt to control general addiction to computer games. If you walk past other student dorms at night, you won't see any lights by after 11:00 because they also get shut off. Living in the special dorm for international students, you are not having the normal ZUT student experience. Ask your roommate for a more detailed comparison.

There's a pay-per-use gym and swimming pool near the track. You can buy a monthly pass if you think you'll be working out a lot. If you're a dancer or yoga person, hang out near the mirrored rooms long enough and you'll probably run into a class or team to join. If you like basketball, running, or tennis, the courts and track are free. There are more tennis courts near the dorm and on the “new” part of campus over the bridge.

You can buy DVDs and CDs right by the dorm, between the newspaper stand and the eyeglass shop. You can also buy them at the shopping strip near the bridge across from the sports area. That shopping area has a fruit store (don't waste your time, buy fruit outside of campus), a general supplies store, and a variety of other stores that sell things you may or may not need. There's another smaller shopping strip on the “new” side of campus, near the cafeteria. If you drink tea (which you should start doing), don't rely on the water heater in the dorm. Do what

the other students do, buy a hot water bottle and fill it up with boiling water. You can fill up at the library or at a place behind the bigger shopping strip, but, when it's that time of day, just follow the kids with empty thermoses.

There are three bridges on campus, all of which are good places to find information about activities, clubs, and events open to students. There are usually posters by the cafeterias as well, and sometimes even people trying to get people to sign up for things. Don't walk by. Read the posters, talk to the people. If you don't understand something, stop a random student and ask what it means. They'll probably be glad to help you, and may even be interested in whatever activity is being advertised.

There are three cafeterias on campus. The one right by your dorm has three floors. The first floor has the best food with best selection, the second floor is the cheapest food, and the third floor has a teahouse/café. The cafeteria near the back gate has two floors, the first is a cafeteria, the second is an okay restaurant. The cafeteria on the other side of the river has a normal cafeteria as well as a pretty good restaurant. All the cafeterias sell beer, which is funny, but it's expensive, and, at a school where you can buy bai jiu for four kuai at the school store, who cares? As far as cafeteria etiquette, forget everything you've ever been told about waiting in line, elbow your way in, and slap down your card.

The campus is littered with ATMs, all of which should be useless to you. The ATM you want to go to is before the post office, outside of the main gate. Walk through the gate, turn right, go through the light, and cross the street. Your home bank will probably hit you with big fees, so take out money in bigger parcels to minimize the damage. To go to the post office, keep walking, turn left at the first light, the post office is on your left. If you want to send big packages, you have to go to another post office, which is nearby. Ask the people at the first post office how to get there.

There is a medical clinic on campus. Before you cross the bridge going to class, turn right, the clinic is on your right. If they can't help you, you can walk to the People's Hospital outside of the main gate. If it's anything more serious, you'll be taking a cab, you'll be taking a friend, and you'll probably want to go to Hangzhou's only hospital that advertises having English-speaking doctors, Shao Yifu Yiyuan. (www.srrsh.com)

If you want to get a cell phone, ask your roommate to help you find a cheap one. Once you have the phone, buy your necessary cards from the bored person sitting outside of Man & Angle, the karaoke bar by the back gate. If you want to use the dorm phone, you have to buy two cards—one to put into the phone, and one to put money on that phone. Turn right before the bridge to class, pass the medical clinic, turn right again, and hopefully find the sneakily small store that sells the cards you want.

Realistically speaking, any information that you will be embarrassed not to know later on, you'll find out pretty easily. If you don't know, ask your roommate, or go wander around outside. A good way to familiarize yourself with the campus (or any place in general) is to bike or stroll around at random.

II. Rules, General Conduct, and Why You Can't Go Streaking Like Back at Home

ZUT is not a liberal arts school in the States. It wouldn't dream of funding a skinny-dipping club, it doesn't provide free condoms in convenient locations, it does not throw parties with cross-dressing themes, it would not condone herds of naked students running across campus during finals or at any other time, it does not have a three strike system for possession of narcotics, and it hires people to make sure there are not boys in the girls' dorms (or girls in the boys' dorms) after a specific time.

Surprise! It's a whole new college experience! As they say in Rome, when in Rome, do as the Romans. (As they say in China, 入乡随俗 ru2 xiang4 sui2 su2。)Don't go streaking, don't do drugs, and don't do things that could be classified as a public nuisance or disturbance. You should find it pretty easy to adjust to living at ZUT, so don't worry too much. Going from a liberal school to a conservative school is a whole lot easier than the other way around.

Another thing. The notion of 'free love' or a 'hookup scene' is still a ways in the future. So, for a semester, when John Lennon tells you that all you need is love, what he means is 100% platonic love. Everyone involved with this program thinks you shouldn't have relations with another college student, and they have a lot of good, rational reasons. Think about it. If you're from the States, you've come from a culture where playing Spin the Bottle is a rite of passage, 'grinding' is the way people dance, and Sex in the City is seen as a somewhat reasonable depiction of reality. In China, relationships are forbidden during high school, boyfriend often means 'guy you'll probably get married to,' and the idea of a girlfriend-less boy and boyfriend-less girl "just being friends" is just plain weird-o. When it comes to relationship experience and emotional maturity, you're not on a level playing field. The official stance of this program is that you should not date anyone.

Basically, when it comes to general conduct, don't do things that will leave a bad impression of the school or of your home country. Chinese society looks at groups, not individuals. Don't make everyone else look bad. But, don't freak out either, it's not hard to know how to act appropriately. When in doubt, ask your roommate, and trust his or her decision. In general, he or she is the best person to assess how weird you are being.

III. Your Roommate

You two lucky guys or gals are the sole inhabitants of one of the plushiest rooms on campus. You have your own bathroom with a hot-water shower, heating, washing machines nearby, and you can turn your lights on whenever you want. More importantly, you two are particularly lucky because you have a unique opportunity to learn, through a peer, about a culture that maybe you only saw on television or read about in books.

As always, living with a person who you've just met is challenging. You may have different living habits and styles, different taste in music, different coping skills, different definitions of personal space and privacy, and completely different ideas about what to do with a shopping bag filled with dried shrimp. That's totally normal—do you remember what it was like freshman year living with a complete stranger? Being a good roommate means knowing when to compromise, and being a good friend. Set aside time to eat together in the cafeteria, go sightseeing at

West Lake, shopping on 延安路(Yan2an1Lu4), studying together in the library, going out to the local Internet bar, and having a good time together. For the two of you to make the most of your experience, be friends, be fair and reasonable living partners for each other, and have fun together.

So be fair and reasonable. Don't expect your roommate to be your personal dictionary and teacher. Don't expect him or her to explain everything about China to you. And don't assume your roommate knows everything anyway. You don't have to make your relationship an in-depth two-way sociology experiment. You are two college kids living in a particularly sweet room and enjoying a fortunate and rare opportunity. So have a good time with each other, be friends, be fair living partners, and, when you leave the program, don't say goodbye forever. Exchange addresses. The Internet and webcams allow people on opposite sides of the globe to remain friends. When you make friends, don't think in terms of temporary companions; think in terms of letting people into your life, in terms of making bonds that may last a lifetime. That's what a friend is, right?

IV. Making Friends (In Addition to Your Roommate)

Chinese students are totally different from American students, the college scene is sooo different from back home, finding friends is way harder, yadda yadda yadda. Despite everything else you can complain about, don't forget, all people are pretty similar—they like some alone time, but if they're alone for too long, they want friends. Just like back in the States, Chinese students make friends with their classmates and the people they see most often. As an exchange student taking classes with other exchange students, finding friends is not going to be easy, but so what? Join a sports team, go out to the basketball courts and shoot hoops, brush up on your ping-pong or badminton skills, join a club, ask your roommate if you can meet some of his or her friends (but don't be a leech), go to a school dance, joke with the people standing next to you on line, etc. Get into some sort of routine, even if it's just looking at DVDs at the same time of day a couple of times a week. Get out, and stay there. No one's going to show up at your room and ask if you want to hang out.

If you're having trouble finding friends, which you may, don't get stuck on the idea of finding friends your age with the same hobbies, political or religious philosophies, and thoughts on whether or not The Backstreet Boys make good music. What's wrong with kids who wish they had older siblings, bored restaurant-owners who tell you to come back if you have time, sweater-knitting grandmothers, the person who washes your hair, or sunflower seed-spitting old men who play a mean mahjong? A friend is someone who thinks spending time with you is a good way to spend time. If you find it hard to make friends with people like you, branch out. In a city as big as Hangzhou, you're not the only person who's a little homesick, a little lonely, and just wants someone to talk to.

As always, exercise common sense, and keep personal safety in mind. Just because China may seem a lot safer than where you come from doesn't mean that it is. Listen to your gut, don't trust strangers, and don't do things that will put you in danger. Make friends; don't accidentally

sell your organs (or yourself!) on the black market.

Chapter Five: Living in Hangzhou

I. Things You'll Be Embarrassed Not to Know Later On

Back in the thirteenth century, Marco Polo described Hangzhou as “the finest, most splendid city in the world...where so many pleasures may be found that one fancies oneself to be in Paradise.” Several centuries later, wave upon wave of Chinese tourists still agree. Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang province and is home to more than six million people. West Lake is its claim to fame, and if you're looking for temples, pagodas, Kodak moments, teahouses, and tourists, you should head there, and head there often. West Lake is nine miles around, and surrounded by interesting spots on all sides. There's a lot to see, and, unless you've seen it in every season, during all kinds of weather, and at every time of day, it's still a new place to you. Some people say the best time to be at West Lake is five in the morning, some say the best time to see it is during a rainstorm. Find your favorite time, and don't be afraid of getting up early or getting wet.

Hangzhou's history goes back to the beginning of the Qin Dynasty, its economic prosperity has a lot to do with the Grand Canal which goes all the way to Beijing, it was the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty, it was the center of China when China was being invaded in the thirteenth century, and, to oversimplify, Hangzhou is a beautiful city with a rich, varied, and violent history that resulted in many of its famous sites having been rebuilt after you were born. To learn as much about Hangzhou as possible, get out your map, go to all the places that look interesting, wander around West Lake, hop on a tour boat or tour bus, pick up a book about Hangzhou's history, and get out there already.

II. Getting Around, Getting Lost

When you want to get out, you can take a bus, a taxi, a bicycle, or your own feet, depending on how much money you want to spend, how fast you want to get there, and how much you want to immerse yourself in the commuter experience.

Buses go everywhere and can cost anywhere from free to four kuai, depending on a whole host of factors. If you've got a free couple of hours, ride a bus line from start to finish; it's a good, cheap way to get a sense of the city's layout. To get a good feel for the West Lake zone, ride one of the Y buses around. If you're lucky (or unlucky), you'll get picked up by a kindly old woman who is in actuality a smooth tea seller.

Taxis are the fastest and easiest form of transportation, so don't take them unless you need to. They're comparatively expensive, they're comfortable, and they disconnect you from the general sense of being a commuter in Hangzhou. It's usually easy to get a cab, except from around five to six in the evening when taxis are switching shifts in the middle of rush hour when all the business people just want to get home, and, at that point, traffic will be so congested and empty taxis will be so scarce that you're better off running. If you ever have an important place

to get to on time, add fifteen minutes of desperately searching for a taxi. Being early is never a problem.

If you can't ride a bike, learn. There's nothing that gives you greater freedom, greater flexibility, and a general ability to go wherever you want, whenever you want, than a bike. What better place to learn how to ride a bike than the bicycle kingdom? When you buy a bike, buy at least two locks, but don't assume they will stop anyone from stealing your bike. When you leave it parked, lock it to a non-movable item or a friend's bike. Consider hauling it up to your room at night. Bikes (including two of mine, both locked) have been stolen from downstairs. You can buy old or new bikes, but there are bike repair guys sitting on the side of the road practically everywhere, so don't worry as much about breakdowns as having a bike that someone will want to steal. A new bike starts at around one hundred twenty kuai, a used bike should be around fifty kuai. Exit the back gate, turn left, turn left at the corner, and there's a bike store on the left. If you want to buy a used bike, ask around. There may even be flyers around the school. The waitress at the restaurant you go to often might know of someone selling a bike. Bike repair shops often sell used bikes. If you want to make sure you're not getting ripped off, take your roommate. Buy registration if it makes you feel better about yourself, but if your bike gets stolen, your best bet is to be glad to have had the opportunity to donate to the international "Random People Who Want Free Bikes" charity, and buy a new bike.

The last form of transportation, your feet, don't need much explanation. There's nothing like a good stroll around a place you're not familiar with, so go for a city hike. After a day of walking, treat yourself to a foot massage. Beware of massage parlors near bars, and, in general, don't get your feet rubbed alone, after dark, or in a place with pink lights. A lot of restaurants, teahouses, massage parlors, hair salons, and other seemingly innocent venues turn into brothels at night. Exercise common sense at all times.

As far as where you "should go," Hangzhou is a big, bustling city filled with a variety of places so different it's hard to believe they're in the same world, let alone the same city. Go find them. Go near construction sites, look around in the sections of the city that are going to be torn down. Go to all the "must see" sights near West Lake, sure, but don't only go to West Lake. Go north, go east, go south past the lake, go wherever, but go someplace new, see what it's like. In general, when it comes to exploring, be less afraid of getting lost or getting diarrhea, and more open to having new experiences.

III. Safety (请注意安全)[qing3zhu3yi1an1quan2, please pay attention to safety]

Homer Simpson will tell you that, "Stupid risks make life worth living," and he's right, but only to a point. Living on the edge is exciting, but there is always the risk of falling off. In a new culture, you may feel extremely safe when you're not, and extremely unsafe when you are. The things that make you worried might be nothing, and the things you ignore might be warning signs. Don't do things you wouldn't do at home. Exercise the normal precautions without driving yourself crazy, and you'll probably be fine. It's nice to stroll around West Lake at night, but stick to well-lit places with other people. Especially in tourist locations, always keep an eye out

for pickpockets; keep your bag in front of you, and know that carrying a wallet is often akin to carrying a sign that says, “Hey, anyone want some free money?”

Don’t get into fights. Whatever it is, it’s not important. If you get angry when you get drunk, don’t get drunk. If you think you’ve been ripped off or scammed, take a deep breath, and walk away, it doesn’t matter anyway.

Ladies, exercise as much caution as you would in the States. You may feel that Chinese men are trustworthier because they’re not vilified in the media or something, but that makes no sense. Don’t let your guard down.

Whenever you’re out and about, always keep an eye out for cars that don’t care whether or not they run you down. Look both ways, even if you’re just standing on the sidewalk. When it comes to crossing the street, cross one lane at a time and/or stay in a crowd. In general, if you’re in a mass of Chinese people, you’re probably not going to get run over. The same goes for bike riding—don’t pull anything crazy, just wait for the light. If you hear a horn from behind, it doesn’t mean that there is an angry driver behind you, it means that there is a car that is about to be driving where you are, so you better move, and quickly. On campus, bike slowly, especially during “rush hour,” when the entire student body is out. Use your bell, but don’t expect anyone to pay attention. In general, whenever there’s the possibility of being run over or of running someone over, drive cautiously and with a sense of humor.

And don’t just think that safety means don’t do things that will result in you dead, robbed, or bleeding. Stay healthy. Mental exhaustion may make your body feel tired, but it doesn’t count as exercise. The better in shape your body is, the better your brain works, and the less likely you’ll get sick. Drink enough water, eat (washed and/or peeled) fruit, eat vitamins if that’s your thing, and try to exercise, if not violently for one hour a day, at least fairly regularly.

Basically, you’ve remained alive up until this point with a combination of good luck, street smarts, and not having fallen off cliffs. Just keep doing that. Always have an escape plan, expect the worst so you know how to plan, and keep safe. If you work out regularly, it makes running from danger and disaster that much easier. You can’t guard against everything, so keep a good defense system up at all times, but do get out there, do scare yourself, do make yourself uncomfortable, but don’t lose sight of personal safety. It’s always better to be safe, even if it’s a little boring, than a victim.

IV. Food, Drink, and Things You Want (Or May Not Want) To Put in Your Face

One of the best things about living in a new country is the opportunity to eat lots of tasty food you may have never dreamed about. Peppers that turn your mouth numb, noodles pulled from a ball of dough in front of your eyes, fruit that looks like hairy eyeballs, rock-hard bricks made out of dried fruit, bottles of wine with dead lizards inside, rats on a stick, tofu that smells like poop but tastes like, well, poop, and the list goes on. If you have the time and curiosity, you can eat something new every day.

Hangzhou is a big city filled with a lot of people who need to eat, and a lot of people whose job it is to sell those people food. Whatever you want to eat or drink—Sichuan spiciness of death, authentic northern dumplings, Beijing roast duck, Tibetan butter tea, Indian curries,

greasy fast food from the States, sushi, pizza, ice cream sundaes, pad thai, “family style” food from all over China, fancy schmancy Chinese food, cheap Chinese food, or restaurants catering to tourists offering solely Hangzhou specialty food—whatever it is, you can find it here.

High ticket, famous, and any other type of restaurant that would appeal to tourists are near West Lake and everything else, from hot pot to Sichuan to fast food to noodle shops to pizzerias are liberally sprinkled all over Hangzhou. You can rely on addresses (from friends, guides, magazines, or the like) but you don’t have to, and it’s good for you to not rely on definite information all of the time. Taxi drivers can be great resources, and so can your eyes. Unless you’re looking for something very specific, walking or taking a bus at random will eventually take you to a good restaurant. The city is filled with restaurants, most of them very cheap and very good. Don’t wait until you’re starving to eat—take your bike out and ride until something calls to you. Go in search of the perfect noodle shop. Once you find it, go back again. Develop a relationship with the proprietor—you may find yourself with the unique opportunity of learning how to make Chinese food in a Chinese restaurant.

You don’t want to spend every meal at the restaurants outside the campus, but they’re still great. When it comes to good and cheap food, they’ve got it all—noodles, mala soup, stuff fried on a stick, bread-y snacks, and a whole host of stir-fried dishes that you can slap down on a bowl of rice.

As far as ordering, don’t be squeamish about it and just do it. If you go with a lot of friends, you’ll all order a lot of dishes and individual rice bowls. If you’re eating alone, as soon as you sit down, you’ll be asked, “What are you going to eat?” Your options are 菜 *cai4* (something stir fried with a bowl of rice) or 面 *mian4*, any sort of noodle item. If looking at the menu gets your head spinning, ask the server for suggestions, or see what other people are eating. Point. Or just ask the server about the 特色, *te4se4*. Every place has food that makes it famous, and you should at least think about eating it.

Speaking of at least thinking about eating it, let’s talk about meat. Despite an age-old tie with Buddhism, China, in general, still looks at vegetarianism with a confused gaze. Pork is used as casually as parsley and “don’t eat meat” is often interpreted as “I don’t want a lot of meat.” Bigger cities have a greater number of restaurants catering to foreigners and often will have vegetarian restaurants, but they charge foreigner prices. For day-to-day vegetarian living in Hangzhou, realistic options are to get really friendly with white rice or to loosen up your definition of vegetarianism. You don’t have to go to a dog restaurant, but don’t ask what kind of stock your soup is made with, eat around the pork in your family-style tofu, and don’t be too upset if the vegetarian dumplings you ordered that the waitress promised you are meatless have pork. You didn’t come to China solely to study Mandarin, but also to be immersed in Chinese culture. Food is an important aspect of any culture, especially Chinese culture. Though you can remain a fairly strict vegetarian while in China, you will be giving yourself a lot of hassle at the expense of missing out of a pretty big chunk of Chinese culture.

In general, you will encounter a lot of food that, at least, is novel, and, at worst, is not something you think is food. Get over food prejudices and try things that you wouldn’t normally eat. Who knows, you may even like them.

As far as food etiquette, as long as you pour beverages for others before pouring yourself and don’t stick your chopsticks straight up in your rice (it looks like an offering to the dead and

will horrify traditional Chinese), you really can't go wrong. As far as spitting out bones on the table, as long as there isn't a tablecloth, you're fine. If it can be wiped down or thrown out, you can spit out whatever you don't like on it. When in doubt, look at what Chinese people nearby are doing.

1. Hangzhou Specialty Foods

This list is, at best, extremely abbreviated and, at worst, criminally so. If you are truly interested in trying as many Hangzhou (and Zhejiang and southern) specialty foods as possible, you need to personally step up, always be on the lookout for regional specialties and eat as many new things as possible.

西湖醋鱼

Xi1hu2cu4yu2

West Lake fish in vinegar sauce

龙井虾仁

Long2jing3xia4ren2

Dragon Well tea shrimp

叫化童子鸡

Jiao4hua4tong2zi3ji1

“Beggar's Chicken” (chicken slowly baked with herbs in lotus leaves and mud)

东坡肉

Dong1po1rou4

Fatty braised and roasted pork

宋嫂鱼羹

Song4sao3yu2geng1

“Aunt Song's Fish Broth”

蟹汁桂鱼

Xie4zhi3gui4yu2

Fish with crab sauce

清汤鱼圆

Qing1tang1yu2yuan2

Clear soup with fish balls

番茄虾仁锅巴

Fan1qie2xia4ren2guo1ba

Rice cake and shrimp in tomato broth

为踵神仙鸭

Wei4zhong3shen2xian1ya1

“Duck for the arrival of the immortals” (duck prepared with ham-based sauce)

干炸响铃

Gan1zha2xiang3ling3

Fried tofu skin rolls (filled with tomato, potato, or pork)

虎跑素火腿

Hu3pao3su4huo3tui3

Tiger Well Vegetable Ham (Tofu skin prepared in such a way that it's similar to ham)

油焖春笋

You2men4chun1sun3

Dried bamboo shoots braised in oil

西湖莼菜汤

Xi1hu2chun2cai4tang1

West Lake vegetable soup

蟹酿橙

Xie4niang4cheng2

Crab prepared with orange juice

2. Restaurant List

The same warning for the list of Hangzhou foods also applies here. It's not possible to list every restaurant you're going to want to go to, nor is it in your best interest. Also, when it comes to searching for restaurants, whether or not you have an address, you need patience and dedication when searching. If you know where you want to go in theory, that doesn't mean anything in practice. And if you don't know where you're going, at least you know that. Look up restaurants in guides or magazines, ask friends, or just hop a bus and get off when you see a restaurant that calls to you. If you find a place that's great, write down the address and tell your friends.

- There's an Indian restaurant on 南山路(Nan2shan1Lu4), on the lakeside, before the road meanders off into the hills. On the opposite side of the road, before the Indian restaurant, is at least one Italian restaurant and a Thai restaurant.
- There are several Japanese restaurants near West Lake as well as an "all you can eat" sushi place that may or may not be worth your while.
- Pizzerias aren't too rare. West Lake has several Pizza Huts, but if you don't want to eat Pizza Hut pizza, you don't have to. You can go to the shopping zone on 延安路(Yan2an1Lu4), across the street from the foreign bookstore, to the one near the school (ask your roommate), or many more.
- Western food, in general, is available at hotels and near West Lake. There's an ice cream place on 南山路(Nan2shan1Lu4) right before the turn off towards 吴山广场(Wu2shan1guang3chang3) as well as several Haagen Daaz near more up-scale West Lake shopping zones.
- There are two Korean restaurants right near ZUT (turn right twice after walking out of the back gate) as well as near West Lake and sprinkled throughout the city

- For Beijing Roast Duck, you can go to 烤鸭店(Kao3y1aDian4) at 49 邮电路(You2dian4Lu4)
- Grab some noodles at 奎元关(Kui2yuan2guan3), the “Noodle King of East China,” located at 154 解放路 (Jie3fang4Lu4) [7028628]
- Hot Pot (火锅huo3guo1) may be the most entertaining way to eat with friends. Don’t burn yourself and, if it’s too spicy, drink beer. The rest is easy. A popular chain, 小肥羊(Xiao3Fei2Yang2), has restaurants on 莫干山路 (Mo4gan1shan1Lu4) and 体育场路(Ti3yu4chang3Lu4). There’s also a good hot pot restaurant right near 乐够 (Le4Gou4) on 德胜路 (De2sheng4Lu4) but, really, hot pot restaurants are everywhere.
- Many of the small alleys have little restaurants with cheap, tasty food and talkative owners. After eating, don’t forget to explore the neighborhood nearby.
- Hangzhou has several fancy schmancy, famous, and/or expensive restaurants, but the most famous is 楼外楼(Lou2wai4lou2) [8796 9023 30] on 孤山路(Gu3shan1Lu4). 山外山餐馆 (Shan1wai4shan1Cai4guan3) [8799 6621] at 8 玉泉路Yu4quan2Lu4) is probably the next famous. If you’re into the fancy schmancy scene, you can probably pick up a list of all the expensive restaurants at any of the hotels near West Lake.
- The whole West Lake zone is flooded with coffee bars, many of which also serve food. If you walk for five minutes on 南山路(Nan2shan1Lu4), you should find one to your liking. And, yes, 星巴克来了 (xing1bake4 lai2le, Starbucks is here), there’s one near the malls on 延安路 (Yan2an1Lu4), as well as one on the banks of West Lake, near the Haagen Dazs.
- Hangzhou is fairly liberally sprinkled with bars. The expensive ex-pat and/or tourist style are clustered on 南山路(Nan2shan1Lu4) and other tourist zones.
- Hangzhou’s claim to fame is 龙井茶(long2jing3cha2); accordingly, teahouses are everywhere—especially near West Lake. 湖畔居(Hu2pan4ju2), right on the lake in the northeastern corner, may be the most famous, but that doesn’t mean it’s the best. When it comes to teahouses, you either want a quiet place to study or a completely over-the-top tea and snack experience. If you just want to study, there are adequate teahouses all over. If you want to drink tea like you mean it, go to West Lake, and don’t settle for anyplace whose waitresses aren’t equipped with walkie-talkies.

III. Drinking Tea

If you have the time, tea drinking is a wonderful habit to pick up. For the price of one cup of tea, you can spend an entire day at a teahouse, eating all sorts of food, playing cards, study-

ing, chatting with friends, or whatever you feel is most appropriate to accompany cup after cup of tea and plate after plate of snacks. And don't forget—the price of one cup of tea includes at least one switch of tealeaves. If you really enjoy tea, you'll want to get past the teahouse experience and try to become a tea connoisseur, or at least make an effort to taste all ten of China's ten famous teas. Buying tea is a great way to learn about teas. Any store with a table covered with tea paraphernalia in the back is fine. The tea salesman will be more than happy to explain in depth whatever teas you are drinking. People don't often buy tea without drinking, so don't feel awkward asking to taste a tea before you buy it. If you plan on buying a lot of tea, try to master pouring tea, or at least be able to stumble through the moves. To get a good demonstration, order oolong (or any tea that needs the tea ceremony business) at a high-class teahouse. Of course, if you only bring back Xihu Longjin, you have nothing to worry about—the most discerning tea drinker drinks Longjin out of an ordinary glass cup.

IV. Shopping

While in China, the things you need to buy will be loosely separated into two categories—general survival items and neat “I was in China and so I bought this!” items. You can get general survival items anywhere—the store on campus, outside of the back gate (cross the street, walk through the restaurant alley, turn right), any host of department stores, or at a big market. For knick knacks, presents, souvenirs, and anything with Chairman Mao's face on it, you'll want to go to a night market or an outdoor shopping zone. If you're buying clothes, you can go to a mall, a market, or go window-shopping on 延安路(Yan2an1Lu4). Pirated DVDs are everywhere, just open your eyes.

Except at very mainstream stores, there is no such thing as a fixed price. At tourist markets, the price will drop so far you'll wonder if anyone pays the opening price. The end price depends on what you look like, how well you speak Chinese, your ability to gauge real prices, and whether or not you're willing to fight for the death over two dollars. Everyone has their own theories and suggestions about successful haggling, but, as long as you're happy with the end price, that's all that matters. The nice thing about the current exchange rate is that, in most transactions, you feel like you're getting something dirt-cheap and the proprietor is making a nice profit. So, get out there already, and go support the new communism!

IV. One Last “I NEED that Address” Address, just for you.

中国银行(zhong1guo2yin2hang2)Bank of China branches that deign to change traveler's checks320延安路(Yan2an1Lu4)321 风起路(Feng1qi3Lu4)

96 Things that you MUST do Before You Leave China – Or Else Your Experience Will Not Be Complete and You Will Be Sad for the Rest of Your Entire Life Forever

(aka a list of things that would be great to do but who cares because there's a lot of things to do anyway?)

1. Go to 雷锋塔(Lei2Feng1Ta2) in the early morning and look out over a misty West Lake
2. Take a bus during rush hour and pass out in a sardine can of Chinese business men (Bonus points if you wipe out when someone moves)
3. Spend a full day (and/or night) with friends at a teahouse
4. Rent a paddleboat at West Lake
5. Watch old people do their early morning exercises at a nearby park
6. Get into a screaming fight with a taxi driver because he doesn't know where you want to go, or, more precisely, because you are giving him the address of a restaurant in Suzhou (Beware information from the back of magazines)
7. Sing solo karaoke (对面的女孩and 甜蜜蜜are copouts)
8. Successfully bargain for anything (and then go back to ZUT and get ripped off buying fruit)
9. Get invited to drink 白酒bai2jiu3 (Drinking from rice bowls, chain smoking, and drinking with someone who can't speak Mandarin add style points)
10. Go to the Longjin Tea Village and buy authentic, genuine Longjin tea from an authentic, genuine tea peasant who, coincidentally, happens to be backed by an authentic, genuine businessman in a snazzy business suit.
11. Learn enough of the Hangzhou dialect to impress, astound, and confuse street vendors
12. Figure out how to eat shrimp as stylishly as Chinese people do
13. Get on a random bus, ride it to the end, and see what's out there
14. Get your hair washed, get a massage, get your feet rubbed. If it's late at night, boys, remember: “我不需要服务。” (Wo3 bu2xu1yao4 fu4wu2, I don't need service)
15. Learn how to play the dice game, and beat the bar-ladies at least once
16. Have heart-to-heart talks with your roommate until too late/early in the morning
17. Get the class together to invite your teacher out to lunch (This goes for staff members, the ladies who work downstairs, and anyone else you come into contact with pretty regularly but don't have enough camaraderie with)
18. See a movie, see an IMAX, see a play, go to a music concert, any sort of entertainment you have to buy a ticket for
19. Get your bike stolen. (Can you beat two bikes in two weeks?)
20. Learn how to eat sunflower seeds very quickly
21. Endure public embarrassment after a Chinese person says, preferably using a microphone, “我刚刚发现我们有一个外国朋友,请让他给我们表演一下” [“I just discovered we have a foreign friend! Let's invite him/her to give us a performance!”] (Bonus points if you make the newspaper)
22. Buy at least two pounds of pirated DVDS
23. Spend a minimum of fifteen consecutive hours on a hard-seat train

24. Get a tailor-made 旗袍 (qi2pao2)
25. Send presents to your friends and family at home. Write letters to them in Chinese, tell them you'll translate when you get home
26. Learn how to play mahjong and then go to a nearby park and find cigarette-smoking old men to lose your money to
27. Eat 臭豆腐 (chou4dou4fu), on at least two separate occasions
28. Keep a diary, English or Chinese, with or without photos, anything to jar your memory bank when you're old and forgetful
29. Outfit yourself with a full 小树民族(xiao3shu4 min2zu2) getup, including shoes and hat
30. Eat dog meat (Or make pretend vomit noises while your friends do)
31. Go to a ZUT sporting event (Bonus points if you participate)
32. See the pinprick light in the cave at 飞来峰Fei1lai1 Feng1 (outside of 灵隐寺Ling2yin3 Si4)
33. Read up on your Hangzhou folk stories and go to the places where they took place
34. Try to make grilled cheese in a wok over a jet engine (you have to make friends with a chef or a small restaurant owner first)
35. Master riding a bike without hands (Or learn how to ride a bike)
36. Go to at least one of the activities advertised on signs posted around campus
37. Eat hot pot (if you don't cry, it's not spicy enough)
38. Check out the mosque near West Lake, find the Catholic churches, look for the long-winded rabbi in Shanghai, go to the Daoist temple near Baoshu Ta by West Lake, etc. Don't just go to the biggest Buddhist temples you can find.
39. Commission a calligrapher to write you a scroll with one of the poems you studied in pronunciation class or a favorite 成语(cheng2yu3)
40. Hang out at the east train station and talk to local farmers
41. Read the stories you read as a child, again, translated into Chinese
42. Get in a heated debate about any aspect of the NBA (it'll be more productive and rewarding than arguing about whether or not Taiwan should be independent)
43. Use public toilets, and get used to squatters without doors (Ladies, this is the closest you'll get to the bathroom camaraderie associated with the urinal)
44. Spend a night playing arcade games, and win as much weird junk as possible
45. Learn how to make at least one dish of Chinese food
46. Sit in on a class (taught in Chinese, of course) with your roommate
47. Ride around town on the back of a friend's bike, or take a friend around on the back of your bike. (Don't forget to hop off when you see a cop)
48. Go on a tour, anywhere, with Chinese tourists (Try to get a hat!)
49. Work out at a brightly-colored outdoor exercise playground (usually located near residential areas)
50. Become a regular at a restaurant, hair parlor, bar, clothing shop, teahouse, etc.
51. Take one of the tourist go-carts around West Lake with a pile of camera-toting Chinese tourists (Bonus points for each shot of yourself standing or sitting in front of a scenic West Lake location)
52. Go to a Chinese doctor to see whether or not your yin and yang are aligned. If you're

- feeling brave, get acupuncture.
53. Buy at least one over-the-top Chairman Mao memorabilia item
 54. Eat lots and lots of street food (Laugh in the face of 拉肚子!)
 55. Be able to name all four men on the one hundred kuai note
 56. Send postcards to family, friends, and loose acquaintances back home
 57. Get pictures taken wearing whatever crazy costumes they have on the rack
 58. Go to a public shower (ask your roommate how normal ZUT students bathe)
 59. Go to a local food market (Vegetarians, animal rights activists, and the squeamish in general should mentally prepare first)
 60. Go into Shanghai and see the Chinese circus
 61. Get your face painted on a tee-shirt (bonus points if you get a monkey's body)
 62. Go skiing at Shanghai's indoor ski mountain (or go up north and go skiing on a real outdoor mountain)
 63. Stroll around an industrial factory zone
 64. Find a bar with a guitarist and request John Denver's Country Road
 65. Give food to beggars. Whether or not they are actually backed by gangsters who use them as a front to get money from kind-hearted strangers, they'll enjoy getting some noodles
 66. Check your email in an Internet bar
 67. Buy at least one pair of scissors at the scissor factory on 27 大关路(Da4guan1Lu4)
 68. Walk or bike around the whole of West Lake
 69. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, take unconventional public transportation (rickshaw, pony-cart, the back of some guy's motorcycle, etc.)
 70. Get lost on a mountain covered with monkeys. Don't let the monkeys take advantage of you.
 71. Find a drunk Daoist monk to talk about airplanes with. (Go to the Daoist temple in the middle of the shopping zone in Xi'An, the guy will probably still be drunk)
 72. Try to go to as many of the tourist sites Bill Clinton has gone to as you can (There will be pictures and maybe even books)
 73. Get your hair cut, and tell the stylist to give you the most stylish cut (Don't forget, hair grows back, embarrassment fades)
 74. Master making a phone call, using the dorm phones
 75. Eat scorpions on a stick
 76. Take a picture of yourself and a water buffalo
 77. Go to KFC, at least once, to make a comparison check
 78. Dedicate an unreasonable amount of time to finding a perfectly prepared version of some specific food item (bubble tea, basi apple or banana, a randomly selected Sichuan dish, family-style tofu, anything!)
 79. 不到长城,非好汉。(到长城后,更遗憾。)
Bu2dao4 Chang2Cheng2, fei4 Hao3Han4. (Dao4 Chang2Cheng2 hou4, geng4 yi3han4) If you don't make it to the Great Wall, you can't possibly be a good [Chinese] person. (After you get to the Great Wall, you'll be even more regretful and disappointed)
 80. Go dancing at a Chinese club (Bonus points if your dancing skills produce a clapping, awestruck circle of Chinese clubbers)

81. Frolic around on tea plant-covered hills (Points off for singing Sound of Music)
82. Spend at least one night in a place without heating or heavy blankets
83. If you have the opportunity to be walking on a frozen lake or river, slide!
84. When you see a squadron of uniform-clad hairdressers out on their annual “look! we’re not a brothel!” march about town, see if you can join in
85. Get into a minor bicycle crash. It’s better to get run into by another bike than to run someone else down, but anything goes, really
86. Ride the elevator with at least fifteen Chinese students
87. Try to explain naked parties, streaking, Middlebury students’ reaction to “Like a Prayer,” or any other quirky U.S. college student behavior to your roommate
88. Take a nighttime stroll around campus (or West Lake on the weekend) and count how many benches are filled with hugging couples
89. On a sunny day, go to the artificial pond beneath the flaming-hair lady statue outside of the gym, near the bridge, and see how many frogs are out
90. See at least one spraying water show with rainbow colored lights set to “The William Tell Overture” (parks at night, West Lake, and any place with water and a sizeable crowd of people are all good bets)
91. Kick around the feather toy with some kids (or limber grannies)
92. Get someone (preferably an older person with an unintelligible dialect) to read out loud sections from your textbook
93. If you see anything that’s shiny because it’s been rubbed by a lot of people, rub it for good luck
94. Take at least one afternoon stroll in the countryside to chat with peasants
95. Bike through any of the other college campuses in town
96. See the sun rise over West Lake from the 保叔(Bao3shu1) hills

Chapter Six: Traveling, Touring, and Leaving Hangzhou in General

*“One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree.
‘Which road do I take?’ she asked.
‘Where do you want to go?’ was his response.
‘I don’t know,’ Alice answered.
‘Then,’ said the cat, ‘it doesn’t matter.’”*

—Lewis Carroll

I. Where to Go

Paul Theroux, the travel writer, once said, “The difference between a tourist and a traveler is that a tourist doesn’t know where he’s been and a traveler doesn’t know where he’s going.” Go to all the tourist spots because you’ll hate yourself for not seeing them when you go home, but don’t limit yourself to only going places The Lonely Planet says you should go to. Look at a map and buy a ticket to a place you haven’t heard about—if it’s on the map, it has at least one hotel and one restaurant. Sometimes you want to plan ahead and reserve your hotel room beforehand, but sometimes it’s good to arrive at a new place, tired, dirty, and armed only with a map you just got ripped off buying at the train or bus station. If you’ve never traveled alone before, nothing will boost your self-confidence like figuring it out by yourself. Start small, but don’t be afraid of starting.

As far as places you should go to, Hangzhou is close to a lot of really interesting places. You can check out any tour book (or the Internet, which is less likely to be out of date) for more detailed information, but a few basic “don’t miss” towns, and why you should go are right here. Shaoxing is famous for being the birthplace of Lu Xun, Shaoxing wine, chou doufu, and riverboat hats. Mogan Shan, the site of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and a lot of political meetings in beautiful villas, is a great place to stroll around. Yandang Shan, located near Wenzhou, a moderately interesting coastal trade town, offers beautiful mountains and scenery, but would probably be a rough weekend trip. The south of Zhejiang province can also provide a respite from living in a bustling city. Speaking of which, Shanghai is worth a weekend trip for its museums, architecture, and general Shanghai-ness. Wuzhen is a picturesque canal town. Go to Suzhou to buy silk and look at gardens. If time permits, go to one of the nearby river towns. Yixing is the place to buy tea pots. Nanjing has got enough history for anyone. Ningbo is a nice-looking trading city. Huangshan (eleven hours by bus from Shanghai) and Putoushan (twelve hours by boat from Shanghai) are just two places that are worth seeing but probably not doable in a weekend.

Again, get a map, figure it out yourself. China is a big country filled with a lot of cool places you will not in a lifetime have the time to go to. So, get out there, go to some of those cool

places, talk to locals, eat the local snacks, buy whatever their specialty handicraft is, take pictures if that's your thing, send postcards to your friends at home, and have a blast. Don't be afraid of leaving Hangzhou. The more places you see, the more dialects you are exposed to, and the more people you encounter, the better your sense of China will be. As always, think in terms of taking advantage of this wonderful opportunity, not in terms of catching up on sleep.

II. How to Get There

When going anywhere outside of Hangzhou, your options are bus, train, plane, or boat. If your destination is close, take a bus. They're cheap, reasonably fast, painless, and give you a good opportunity to practice your karaoke, provided you enjoy the cheesiest pop music in existence and your bus mates want to hear you sing. Hangzhou has three long-distance bus stations (north, east, and west), all of which are connected by the "Oops! I went to the wrong station!" bus line. If you don't know where you want to go, it doesn't matter which bus station you go to. If you have a destination, you need to figure out which bus station you should go to.

Hangzhou has two train stations, but since you'll have bought your ticket before you go the station, you'll know which station to go to. You can buy tickets within ten days at 58 德胜路 (De2sheng4Lu4), on the way to 乐够 (Le2Gou2). You can also buy tickets at a lot of big hotels. Your ticket options are hard seat, soft seat, hard sleeper, and soft sleeper. If you don't buy your ticket early enough (three or four days should be okay), you will be buying a hard seat ticket, which will save you a lot of money, which you'll need for a back massage when you get in to wherever you're going. For long trips, unless you want to eat some bitter, which you should do at least once, you want a sleeper. Hard sleepers are fine, but soft sleepers are worth the price differential. Some trains have dining cars, but you probably won't know whether or not yours does until you board, so unless you like instant noodles, bring your own food. You can buy all the bai jiu you need on board. If drinking hard alcohol isn't your favorite way to pass the time, talk to the people around you. These activities, of course, are not mutually exclusive.

Planes are the most expensive transportation option, but if you want to maximize a week's worth of break and get far away quickly, there's no better option. You can buy tickets yourself at 390 体育场路 (Ti3yu2chang3 Lu4) (or any of the many other ticket offices in town), or you can just ask the Hangzhou staff to help you.

Boats are a non-conventional transportation option that, regardless of where you're going, you should probably try at least once. If you don't want to go anywhere, but you want to ride a boat, go to Wulingmen at 8:00 AM for the 1/2 day tour, 9:00 for the full day tour, or 7:30 for the night tour. You can also go there if you want to go to Suzhou or Wuxi. Call 85153185 for more information. If you're feeling crazy, you can hire a boat for a night of karaoke and general river-top insanity. In general, if you don't get seasick and you have a lot of time to get from Hangzhou to another port city, see if you can take a boat. Make sure to bring warm clothing—there probably won't be heating.

III. What to Bring

When traveling, you don't need as much as you think. Don't take more than you're willing to haul, while running up and down stairs in a mob of peasants who are all carrying bales of hay and pitchforks. You only need basic hygiene products, warm clothing, and toilet paper. The more stuff you lug around, the more you'll inconvenience yourself and the more you'll draw attention to yourself. You only need a daypack.

IV. Once You Get There

When you get to someplace you don't know anything about, what do you do? Buy a map, figure out exactly where you need to go, and what bus line to take? Get on a tour (which can save you money or totally rip you off) and struggle through the Chinese? Wander around at random, trying to get a sense of the living culture, missing or plain bypassing historical sites and cultural relics? Whatever you want to do, you can do. But, whatever you do, keep in mind that you aren't in China to bum around, you're here to learn the language and to learn as much about the culture as you can.

And, in your quest to see as many sites of cultural and historical relevance as possible, don't ignore living culture. You can read as many history books as you like, but nothing will teach you more than an afternoon spent with someone who was actually there. Chairman Mao died less than thirty years ago. You may have been born after the economic liberalization, but it wasn't that long ago. Learn by listening, by observing, and by seeing what's out there, not just by reading the little signs outside of tourist locations.

In general, when you go to a new place, get to know as much of it as you can, and from as many viewpoints as possible. Try to get a sense of its historical relevance as well as its place in modern China. See what aspects of its culture the locals are selling to make a profit. Most locations have some sort of specialty handicraft and all locations have special food, and, despite the fact that they're readily available only because they pull a handy profit, it's still a very good and accessible window into local cultures. You'll probably find a lot of artisans (or even the average salesman) very willing to chat with you. The paradox about towns that receive heavy tourist traffic is that many of the tourists can't speak Mandarin, so even though locals see busloads upon busloads of people from other countries, they often can't communicate with them and, as a result, may be delighted to have the opportunity to chat with you.

So, what should you do when you go to a new place? Walk slower, look closer, listen harder, and talk longer. Don't be in a rush. See what's in front of you, and don't worry about seeing every single heritage or cultural site. Culture is a living, breathing thing that often isn't found in museums. If you're quiet, you can hear things.

Conclusion (Get LOST Already!)

“Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” –T.S. Eliot

In a perfect world, you wouldn't have read this guide to the end. It would be in the trash-can, maybe even on fire, and you would be outside, smiling, laughing, grimacing, jumping up and down to stay warm, or drawing Chinese characters on your palm in a last ditch attempt to communicate. But, whether or not this guide is in the trash yet, and whether or not you're outside yet, doesn't really matter—you're a paragraph away from walking out the door.

What are the important things to remember? Get lost, pay attention to everything, and don't be afraid to be confused. Don't be comfortable, don't hang out with your friends from home, don't do things in groups, and don't get caught in the dorm bubble. Make friends without speaking English. Try new things, especially if they're weird or horrible or terrifying—they're probably not. Be open-minded, be delighted, and don't be so serious. You're a lucky kid, you're a smart kid, and you're about to have the time of your life—so get out there already!!

Appendix: Inspirational Quotes That Didn't Fit Anywhere

“There is one purpose to life and one only: to bear witness to and understand as much as possible of the complexity of the world—its beauty, its mysteries, its riddles. The more you understand, the more you look, the greater is your enjoyment of life and your sense of peace. That’s all there is to it.” —Anne Rice

“Everything has beauty, but not everyone can see it.” —Confucius

“There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. —William Shakespeare

“Don’t look at your feet to see if you’re doing it right. Just dance.” —Anne Lamott

“Physical discomfort is important only when the mood is wrong. Then you fasten on to whatever thing is uncomfortable and call that the cause. But if the mood is right, then physical discomfort doesn’t mean much.” —Robert M. Pirsig

“Do one thing every day that scares you.” —Eleanor Roosevelt

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.” —Socrates

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” —Helen Keller

“Love truth, but pardon error.” —Voltaire

“Sometimes you get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right.” —The Grateful Dead

“Let him who would move the world first move himself.” —Socrates

“Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.” —Epicurus

“Life is ten percent what you make it and ninety percent how you take it.” —Ben Franklin

“We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.” —Anais Nin

“The highest reward for a person’s toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.”

–John Ruskin

“The quality of life is in proportion, always, to the capacity for delight. The capacity for delight is the gift of paying attention.” –Julia Cameron

“The moon and sun are travelers. Even the years wander on. Whether drifting through life on a boat or climbing toward old age leading a horse, each day is a journey, and the journey itself is home.” –Basho

“Life constricts or expands in relation to one’s courage.” –Anais Nin

“知之为知之,不知为不知,是知也。”

“Shall I explain understanding to you? When you understand something, know that you understand it. When you don’t understand something, know that you don’t understand it. That’s understanding.” –Confucius

“When we are no longer able to change the situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” –Viktor Frankl

“You must understand the whole of life, not just one little part of it. That is why you must read, that is why you must look at the skies, that is why you must sing and dance, and write poems and suffer and understand, for all that is life.” –Jiddu Krishnamurti

“Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I’ll try again tomorrow.” –Mary Radmacher-Hershey

“A sense of humor is the ability to understand a joke—and that the joke is oneself.” –Clifton Fadiman

“i imagine that yes is the only living thing.” –e. e. cummings

“Live to the point of tears.” –Albert Camus

“If you’re going through hell, keep going.” –Winston Churchill

“Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities have crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.” –Ralph Waldo Emerson

“For a long time it seemed to me that life was about to begin—real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life. This perspective has helped me to see there is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way. So treasure every moment you have and remember that time waits for no one. Happiness is a journey, not a destination.” – Souza

“Fear less, hope more; Eat less, chew more; Whine less, breathe more; Talk less, say more; Love more, and all good things will be yours!” –Swedish Proverb

“All know the way. Few actually follow it.” –Bodhidharma

“Just because something doesn’t do what you planned it to do doesn’t mean it’s useless.”
–Thomas A. Edison

“The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one.” –E. Hubbard

“Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” –Chinese Proverb

“Worrying about something is like paying interest on a debt you don’t even know if you owe.”
–Mark Twain

“I always think the chances of finding out what really is going on are so absurdly remote that the only thing to do is say hang the sense of it and just keep yourself occupied.” –Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy

“Be happy. It’s one way of being wise.” –Colette, *Les Misérables*

“Be not afraid of going slowly, only of standing still.” –Chinese proverb

“Fail. Fail again. Fail better.” –Samuel Beckett

“Often we can help each other most by leaving each other alone; at other times we need the hand grasp and the word of cheer.” –Elbert Hubbard

“Well, you can’t ride the sled if you don’t climb the hills.” –Hobbes

“The world only exists in your eyes. You can make it as big or as small as you want.” –F. Scott Fitzgerald

“The trick is in what you emphasize. You can make yourself miserable or you can make yourself strong. The amount of work is the same.” –Carlos Casteneda

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” –William Butler Yeats

“Do or do not. There is no try.” –Yoda

