

China Onboarding Fact Sheet

Mainland China

Before Departure and Upon Arrival

Q: Where do I apply for a visa?

A: Visas can be applied for in Bern or Zurich. Please be sure to apply for the correct visa and submit all required documents as approvals are very strict. Please apply in advance to make sure you get the visa before departure.

Q: How long does the visa process usually take?

A: With all the documents provided and meeting the requirements, the visa application process takes usually one week. Please refer to the official website.

Q: After getting a visa, are there any restrictions on the date of entry and the duration of stay?

A: The permitted duration of stay depends on the duration of the exchange programme. In general, you must enter China by a certain date, and then from that date onwards you can stay in China for the number of days stated on the visa. The duration of stay can be discussed at the service office when applying for a visa, e.g., when you wish to stay in China for longer than the duration of your studies for travelling purposes.

Q: How to obtain a residence permit?

A: Depends on where you live. Several scenarios:

- Renting your own place: you must go to the police station to get a residence permit;
- Staying in a hotel: no need;
- Staying in student residency provided by the university: the university can be responsible for declaring your accommodation to the authorities (please check with the university).

Living in China

- **Housing & Transport**

Q: What are the housing options? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

A: Two main options:

- **University residency.** Not all the universities have that for the foreigners and in general the residency for the foreigners is not the same than the one for the local students. It is not easy to get a room. Make sure you know where you will have classes. Some universities have several campuses that are very far away from the center of the city. Please check the options and application process with the university.

Pros: opportunities to meet more people and make friends, close to the campus and good price.

- Cons:** less privacy - usually have to share the room or the apartment, sometimes less favourable living conditions.
- **Renting an apartment.** Finding a good apartment close to campus can be challenging due to factors such as language barriers. Make sure to always visit the appartements on site and try to negotiate before renting. You can also rent an apartment with a friend.
- Pros:** more privacy.
- Cons:** more expensive and registration at the police station would be mandatory.

Q: Is it expensive to rent an apartment? Are there any good apps for finding an apartment?

A: Rents can vary greatly depending on where you stay in the city. It is possible to find a decent place (e.g., studio) for around 500 Swiss francs. Zillow and Wellcee could be helpful apps. You can reach out to the landlords before you arrive to plan visits once you arrive in China.

Q: Is it easy to access local public transport? Are there any apps that could be helpful?

A: Taking public transports is easy and convenient. In Beijing and Shanghai all the metro stations and signs are in Chinese and English. Google map doesn't work well but Plan on iPhone works. The most convenient way is to use Alipay. Enter by scanning the QR code at the gate and the app will directly debit your authorised bank account. Tickets can also be purchased using cash at vending machines. You can use Alipay to take public bikes almost everywhere. "Amaps" is a useful app for seeing public transport routes. It gives a travel itinerary with different modes of transport (walking, cycling, bus, metro, taxi) as well as combined variations. You can use it to order taxis. It offers an option to carpool. Taxis could be ordered through Alipay too (DIDI is the taxi company listed on Alipay), which is very easy and convenient to use.

- **Money / Bank**

Q: What are the payment options for foreigners in China?

A: Alipay and WeChat are very convenient to use on mobile phones in China. By link your credit card to your app account and you can pay from almost anywhere. Cash is still in circulation but no longer common. International credit cards don't work everywhere, so don't count on them too much. "Revolut" (international online bank, which works worldwide) can be another option.

Q: Do I need to open up a Chinese bank account?

A: Opening a bank account in China is quick and easy. However, everything has to be in Chinese. Most bank will not let you open a bank account unless you have a residence permit. A certain amount of fee is charged for transferring money from a Swiss bank account to a Chinese bank account. Taking RMB from your Swiss bank account and depositing it into your account at a Chinese bank is also an option. In short term it is also possible not to open a local bank account, just link your Swiss credit card to Alipay or WeChat Pay, but sometimes there are issues linking foreign bank cards to these apps. Also, please note that transactions over 200 RMB (25 CHF) are subject to a 3% fee.

If you are here on scholarship for a year you are required to open a Chinese bank account. Certain functions require a local bank card, like certain online shops need a Chinese bank account to use Alipay.

Q: What is the approximate monthly budget for a student living in Shanghai?

A: 1'000-1'200 CHF. The most significant expense is the accommodation. Meals on campus are very cheap (around 3-4 CHF). Just for reference: accommodation 400-500 CHF, meals 400-500 CHF, activities 100-200 CHF.

- **App / Communication**

Q: Where do I get a local SIM-card?

A: It is suggested to get a local SIM card in order to register on many apps. Do not buy the SIM card at the airport as they can be very expensive. Shops/spots on or near campus sometimes have special offer for students.

Q: Can I use foreign apps in China?

A: Yes. But the apps need to be downloaded before you leave for China and many require a VPN to work (e.g., Google, Instagram, etc.).

Q: Are VPNs allowed?

A: Officially, VPNs are not allowed. But foreigners and even Chinese are using them. Some VPNs have been blocked and do not work anymore.

Q: Are there any IT security concerns?

A: There are controls on social media. Avoid discussing any sensitive topics in general.

- **Daily life**

Q: Is it required to carry my passport with me at all times?

A: No. Though, it is suggested to keep a photo of your passport on your mobile phone. You will need your passport when you take the train. In Beijing, you will need to carry your passport to enter a few places such as Tiananmen Square.

Q: What are the requirements and options for medical insurance?

A: Check with your health insurance company in Switzerland regarding their coverage policy. Sometimes universities require an additional insurance before departure.

Q: What are some things to keep in mind when travelling in China?

A: There are many interesting places to visit in China. Take the opportunity to travel in China during your stay. It is suggested to travel with a friend who speaks Chinese as it would be much easier. Be aware that Chinese people often travel within the country during holidays, so buying train tickets is not always easy and many places are crowded.

Studying in China

Q: When do I receive confirmation of my admission to the university?

A: Depends on the university.

Q: What is the workload like in Chinese universities?

A: Generally, the workload in Chinese universities is not heavy and it is not difficult to pass the course. The difficulty may vary depending on the discipline and the programme (international/Chinese).

Q: What is the credit multiplier for our bachelor's degree?

A: Depends on the university.

Q: Are there any language barriers to communicating with Chinese people? Do I need to learn Mandarin? If so, what's the minimum level for daily conversations?

A: It is not compulsory to learn Mandarin, but most Chinese people don't speak English. Communication is not easy. Local people sometimes try to communicate with foreigners in Chinese. Most of the time, if they find you can't understand them, they use translation apps. Learning Chinese requires a lot of effort, even to reach a basic level.

Q: What opportunities are there to improve my Chinese? Do universities offer Chinese language courses?

A: Depends on the university. Some universities offer courses and some of the official language courses can even be converted into credits, if your home university allows it. There are also many options for courses outside the campus. Though it may be difficult to choose a good one.

Q: Are there any student communities/groups in different locations to facilitate exchanges among students stay in the same region?

A: Sometimes the Chinese universities create the groups before the beginning of the semester. You can join the group on Wechat of the international students. You can also ask the university if they can create the group.

Q: How are the work opportunities in Beijing in terms of work permit/ job vacancies?

A: It is difficult to get a work permit as a foreigner. Officially foreigners are not permitted to work as long as they are studying at university.

Hong Kong

Q: What are the requirements and options for medical insurance in Hong Kong?

A: Check with your Swiss insurance company if your insurance covers medical treatment overseas. If not, a travel insurance for covering medical treatments is suggested.

Q: Is it necessary to open a bank account in Hong Kong? What kind of payment method is recommended in Hong Kong?

A: You can use cash credit cards or Alipay. Utility bills can be paid at convenient stores. A bank account is useful if you do not want to take money from your bank in Switzerland because of the transaction fees. With a "Revolut" card, no fees are applied. Once you arrive in Hong Kong, you can also get an "Octopus Card" from any MTR station for public transportation and payments at some shops and restaurants.

Q: How is the public transport organised in Hong Kong?

A: Public transportation in Hong Kong is very convenient. It brings you to almost everywhere. There are subways, buses, trains, trams, ferries, taxis, Uber, etc. You can use “Octopus Card” and charge it with apple pay or cash.

Q: Where do I get a local SIM card in Hong Kong?

A: You can buy a SIM card at the convenient stores, like 7-11. It is with a number and data usage. 3HK is one option for SIM card which can be ordered on “Deliveroo” or you can buy in “Welcome”. It is a prepaid card. Note that as soon as you change your SIM card you will lose access to Tiktok.

Q: Are student residences recommended?

A: Student residences provided by universities are good. Some recommended places are Weave Prince Edward, Weave Olympic, Weave Central West. Please consult the university you are enrolled for information.

Q: Do we need a visa to go to Hong Kong for 1 semester?

A: For stays over 90 days, a visa is needed. For exchange students, the university will help with the visa application. Please check with the university for the required forms and other details.

Q: What do we have to consider about the political issue between Hong Kong and Mainland China?

A: Please refer to the [travel advice](#).

Q: Is there any language barriers?

A: Most of the people understand English.

Q: Is the subject macroeconomics available?

A: In HKU yes.

Q: Are there any recommended places to visit in Hong Kong?

A: There are many interesting places to visit in Hong Kong. For example, for hikes (suicide cliff), beaches (big wave bay - surf), viewpoints (Victoria Peak), camping, restaurants, markets (ladies market), rugby sevens, etc.

Useful links:

Embassy of Switzerland in China:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/china/en/home/representations/embassy-in-beijing.html>

Consulate General of Switzerland in Hong Kong:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/china/en/home/representations/embassy-in-beijing/consulate-general-hong-kong.html>

Info on requirements for entry/visas for China:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/representations-and-travel-advice/china/china-representation-in-ch.html#par>

Travel advice for China:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/china/en/home/travel-advice/current-situation.html>

Swissnex in China:

<https://swissnex.org/china/>