

# VISIT TO SISTER SCHOOL IN CHINA

## *FAQ - Prior to the Trip*

Q: How do I sign up for the trip?

A: You will need to complete an online registration form to sign up for the trip. The link will be provided at the initial interest meeting.

Q: What kind of government-issued ID do I need for the trip?

A: A valid passport is required. The passport should be valid at least six months beyond your entry date into China. For example, if the group arrives in China on April 13th, 2019, the expiration date of the passport should be no earlier than October 13th, 2019.

Q: Do I need a visa to go?

A: Yes, a valid visa is required for all non-Chinese citizens. Laurel will assist with the visa application in January 2019.

Q: What documents do I need to submit for China visa application?

A: A valid passport, one passport photo, and the completed visa application form. Some cases require additional supporting documents. Applicants will be informed by Laurel staff then.

Q: How do I apply for a passport?

A: You can apply for a U.S. passport at the Department of State or any U.S. Postal Office. The instructions can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/passports.html>.

Q: How long does it take to process a passport application?

A: The standard processing time is 4-6 weeks.

Q: Where can I take a passport photo?

A: You can take a passport photo at CVS, Rite Aid, Walgreens, Walmart and Costco. A detailed photo requirements will be given at the initial interest meeting.

Q: Can I scan an existing photo or take a photo of myself?

A: Yes, and you need to make sure the photo strictly follows the requirements of a passport photo.

Q: Where can I find the visa application form?

A: Laurel will distribute the form to applicants and give instructions on how to fill it out at a later time.

Q: What do I need to pack?

A: Laurel will hand out a checklist for your convenience at the Pre-Departure Meeting about 2 to 3 weeks prior to the trip.

Q: How much spending money should I take with me?

A: It depends entirely on personal spending preferences. Some of the factors to take into consideration are how many souvenirs you want to buy, if you want to get a coffee at Starbucks, etc. Former students take around \$150-\$200.

Q: Do I need any vaccinations?

A: There are no vaccinations required to enter China, but you may also want to consult your physician to ensure your shots are up-to-date and appropriate for travel in China.

Q: What if I have underlying health problems?

A: Those who have underlying health problems such as heart or lung disease, anaemia and diabetes, who are on any form of regular medication or treatment, who have recently had surgery or been in hospital, or who are concerned about their fitness to travel for any other reason should consult their doctor before deciding to travel by air. Also, we ask that you provide us with relevant information so we can take precautionary measures as necessary.

Q: Do I need insurance?

A: Laurel will purchase travel insurance for all participants. The insurance covers medical emergency and lost travel documents. Lost and damaged checked luggage will be covered by airline companies.

Q: Can my parents join the trip?

A: Laurel leaves the decision to individual schools, whose policies may vary.

# VISIT TO SISTER SCHOOL IN CHINA

## *FAQ - Transportation*

Q: How does the group transfer to/from the airport?

A: On the day of departure, parents drop off their child(ren) at the airport. When students return, parents pick them up from the airport.

Q: Which airline do I fly with?

A: Laurel uses major airlines such as United Airlines, American Airlines and Air China for international flights.

Q: Is it a direct flight to China?

A: Laurel always does the best to provide the most direct route for everyone's convenience. However, due to seat availability for group travelers, direct flight is not guaranteed.

Q: How long does a direct flight to China take?

A: About 13-14 hours.

Q: Which travel class do I fly?

A: You will fly economy class.

Q: May I upgrade to economy plus or business class?

A: Yes. You will need to pay for the upgrade fee. If needed, please do so at the airport during check-in or contact us in advance.

Q: Do I have an assigned seat?

A: Seat arrangement can be made at the airport during check-in, but it is not guaranteed depending on the availability.

Q: As a frequent flyer, can I add the travel mileage to my account?

A: Yes. Please let the airline company know during check-in.

Q: What baggages can I bring on the airplane?

A: Generally speaking, you may bring one carry-on bag, one personal item, and one checked baggage that is no heavier than 50 pounds for free. The airlines will charge extra fees for additional checked baggages and overweight baggages.

Q: Which airline do I fly with while in China?

A: Laurel always uses major Chinese airlines including Air China, China Eastern Airlines and China Southern Airlines.

Q: What should I do if my flight is delayed?

A: Laurel is not responsible for airline schedule changes, or mechanical, weather, or capacity-related flight delays, but we will try to make the best arrangements available.

Q: What if my checked bag is delayed or missing?

A: Airlines are responsible for delayed or missing baggage. Laurel will contact the airline and have your baggage delivered to your host family or hotel.

Q: How do I go to school while in China?

A: If students stay with host families, they may walk to school, be driven by host parents or ride public transportation with his/her buddy. Considering the high volume of traffic during rush hours, biking to school is prohibited. If not staying with host families, daily transportation will be provided by Laurel.

Q: How do I go sightseeing in China?

A: A private coach for the whole group will be used for inner-city transportation.

Q: How many adult chaperones will go on sightseeing tours with me?

A: About 2 to 3 depending on the size of the group. There will be teacher(s) from your school, parents (if any) and a local tour guide.

# VISIT TO SISTER SCHOOL IN CHINA

## *FAQ - Lodging and Meals*

Q: Where do I stay while in China?

A: While visiting the sister school, some schools stay with host families while other schools require the students to stay with chaperons in a hotel. While traveling to other cities, both students and chaperons stay in a hotel.

Q: How are host families chosen?

A: 1) Host students must be enrolled students of the sister school. 2) Host families are required to pass a criminal background check by the local police department. 3) Living conditions are evaluated for necessary amenities and cleanliness. 4) Host students must be able to speak English and are willing to take the responsibility. 5) Some schools conduct a home interview to all host families selected.

Q: What is the living condition like in host families?

A: Most host families live in condos in downtown Beijing or Hohhot. They all have air conditioning, shower, toilet and internet access. A visiting student either has his/her own bedroom or shares a room (not a bed) with the host student.

Q: What if I cannot get along with my host family?

A: In the rare case that you don't get along with your host family, we will investigate into it and arrange for another host family for you if necessary.

Q: While staying in host family, where do I have dinner?

A: As a family member, you will have dinner at home or eat out at restaurants.

Q: If my host student visits our school, can I host him or her in my home?

A: Yes, this is usually the case. However, if you graduate, transfer to another school or aren't able to host, your host student will stay with another host family.

Q: When I go to school, where do I have lunch?

A: Schools will provide free lunch. You will have lunch at school with your host student.

Q: What kind of food is offered at school?

A: In addition to Chinese food, most schools will provide some American food such as fried chicken and French fries so students who are not used to Chinese food can have an easier transition.

Q: How do I drink water at school?

A: Chinese schools don't usually have tap water. You can either bring a mug to get hot water or bring bottled water from your host family.

Q: While not with host families or at school, do I need to buy meals myself?

A: No. While you are in China, all meals will be provided. When not with host families or at school, you will eat breakfast at hotel, and lunch and dinner in restaurants. However, you will need to buy drinks and snacks yourself if needed.

Q: What kind of hotel do I stay in?

A: You will stay in a 3-star hotel (equivalent to Holiday Inn or Hampton Inn) when traveling in China. Two students of the same gender share a non-smoking, double-bed room.

Q: Is tap water in hotel drinkable?

A: No. You can drink complimentary bottled water provided by the hotel.

Q: Is bottled water provided during sightseeing tours?

A: Yes. If you want to buy snacks or drinks, you need to pay out of your own pocket.

# VISIT TO SISTER SCHOOL IN CHINA

## *FAQ - Cultural Adaption*

- Q: What if I am not quite used to Chinese food?  
A: Authentic Chinese food may taste a little different from what you eat here. Be prepared to try different things, but don't force yourself if you are not ready. Let your host family or local tour guide know your food preference and eating habits. Laurel will collect food preference information during registration as well. We will try our best to accommodate your needs.
- Q: What are important table manners I need to know?  
A: 1) Do not stick your chopsticks straight up in the bowl of rice. 2) Do not use your chopsticks or forks to stir in the sharing plates since most of the meals are family style. 3) Help with setting up the table, such as plates, bowls and chopsticks. 4) Hold your cup or bowl while someone is getting water/food for you.
- Q: Do Chinese people prefer to drink hot/warm water and milk?  
A: Mostly yes. If you would like some ice water or cold milk, let your host family know in advance.
- Q: What is personal space like in China?  
A: Personal space in China is different from here, so is the level of discomfort. Please don't be offended if someone stands just a little too close when speaking to you, or people are calmly pressed against you in crowded public transportation. The population density in China has a great effect on what personal space means to people there.
- Q: What are some sensitive topics to avoid discussing with my host family?  
A: It is not recommended that you discuss politics or religion with your host family. Some families might be sensitive to boy/girlfriend relationship as well.
- Q: What should I wear to school?  
A: You may wear jeans/shorts and long sleeves to school. The school is not air-conditioned in March and April and people tend to open up windows to let in fresh air. So be sure to keep yourself warm.
- Q: What do I do at school?  
A: You will shadow your host student's schedule at school. Classes include regular classes and specially designed classes such as calligraphy, paper cutting, Taiji, etc. for you to experience the Chinese culture.
- Q: What is the bell schedule in Chinese schools?  
A: In china, most schools start at 7:30 AM and finish at 4:00 PM or even later. Each class is 45 minutes long and the break is 10 minutes. There is a one-hour lunch break at noon time.
- Q: What kinds of gifts should I bring for my host family?  
A: It's a great idea to bring a small gift with you for your host family. You don't have to know your host family to start thinking about what to bring. Think of things that represent your community or state: a significant landmark, a famous local sports team, or a well-known company. Small gifts such as English books, music CDs, pictures, mugs, t-shirts, or caps are popular. Be careful not to overindulge! A small token of appreciation for your host family is plenty.
- Q: When is a good time to give gifts to my host family?  
A: When you first sit down to have a conversation with your host family in their home.
- Q: Do I need to tip in China?  
A: No. Tipping is not an established practice in China. Hotel porters may expect a tip; taxi drivers, waiters/waitresses and housekeepers do not.
- Q: How to cross the street safely in big cities?  
A: Crossing the street in big cities can be a daunting affair for foreigners. You are better off crossing the street with a large group of people when the green light is on.
- Q: What should I do when I receive attention in public?  
A: Sometimes foreign visitors to China receive plenty of attention in public. People will openly stare at you and sometimes even point you to friends and family by jabbing a finger in your direction. Please don't be offended. People are generally just curious. When you are invited to take a picture with tourists, just relax and smile.
- Q: What is the hardest adaption I have to make?  
A: The squat toilets at school and public places. In your host families and hotels, toilets like what you have at home are guaranteed.

# VISIT TO SISTER SCHOOL IN CHINA

## FAQ - Others

Q: How do I contact my family while in China?

A: If you bring a cell phone with you, you can contact your family by FaceTime, Skype, text and email. To do so, you need to contact your cell phone carrier to add an international roaming service.

Q: How can I keep data usage to the limit of my plan?

A: All host families and hotels have Wi-Fi. You can turn off cellular data to restrict all data to Wi-Fi. Turn it on only when you think necessary.

Q: What is the weather like while I am in China?

A: The months of March and April see a big rise in temperature, with average daily temperatures rising from a cool 50 °F to a mild 63 °F. Night temperatures can be lower than 37 °F at the start of April. Rain and thunderstorms are possible.

Q: What clothing should I bring?

A: It is still long sleeves weather most of the time. Taking comfortable shoes and a coat for the evenings is recommended.

Q: Do I need a converter and a plug adapter for my appliances?

A: No for cell phones, cameras and computers, and yes for other electronics. Most North American countries use 110V electricity, while China uses 220V electricity. A voltage converter "steps down" electricity to 110V. You'll need to use an adapter because the American plugs will be too large for the sockets in China.

Q: What if I am sick?

A: In case of sickness, you will be taken to a local hospital authorized to receive foreign patients. Expenses will be covered by yourself. Laurel will help with payment if needed, but you need to pay Laurel back upon returning to the U.S. It will be your responsibility to make any claim from the insurance company upon return to the U.S.

Q: What about pharmaceutical matters?

A: If you are on medication, be sure to bring along your prescriptions to last through the duration of your stay in China. All medication must be kept in their original packaging to avoid confusion.

Q: What is the time difference between China and the U.S.?

A: In springtime, China is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. For example, when it is 9:00 pm Sunday in D.C, it is 9:00 am Monday in Beijing. China has a single standard time, though it geographically crosses five time zones.

Q: How to exchange Chinese currency?

A: While in China, you can find a currency exchange at the airport or hotels. Exchanging in the U.S. is not recommended due to high foreign exchange fees.

Q: What is the exchange rate between U.S. dollar and Chinese Yuan?

A: As of May 23, 2018, 1 U.S. dollar converts to 6.39 yuan. The rate is subject to change.

Q: Can I bring cash to exchange?

A: Yes. In general, Chinese banks are more likely to accept crisp new bills in small denominations of \$5, \$10 and \$20 than larger and worn-out ones.

Q: Can I use credit card while in China?

A: Yes. Visa and Master Card are easily accessible in big cities. It is important to check with your bank to make sure you can use the card while at overseas. Using credit card for purchases will possibly be charged transaction fees depending on the bank policy.

Q: What if I lose some of my personal belongings, for example, credit card or passport?

A: Do NOT lose your passport or your return to the U.S. will be heavily delayed. You are strongly recommended to take good care of your belongings. Laurel will help you to apply for a new passport and visa. The processing usually takes 1 to 2 weeks.

Q: Can I hang out without the company of my host family?

A: No. Sometimes you may feel like exploring the city by yourself. It is understandable, but please always do things in the company of your host family, teacher chaperone or local tour guide, just in case.