

Mandarin Excellence Programme Intensive Study in China

Frequently Asked Questions

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Section 1: The overall objectives and the programme for the visit

Who is organising the 2020 MEP Intensive Language Study Courses in China?

The Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) is being delivered on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) by UCL IOE Confucius Institute in partnership with the British Council.

As part of the MEP, the 2020 Intensive Study in China is organised and managed in China by the British Council in partnership with Hanban Headquarters who generously funds and co-coordinates the host institutions in China to deliver the courses across various locations in China.

When and where are the Intensive Language Study Courses taking place?

The Courses will take place from 2nd to 18th July, 2020.

The hosting schools are:

Beijing - Beijing Foreign Studies University ([BFSU link](#)); University of International Business and Economics ([UIBE link](#)); Beijing Language and Culture University ([BLCU link](#))

Shanghai - Shanghai Foreign Language School affiliated to Shanghai International Studies University in Shanghai ([SHISU link](#)), East China Normal University ([ECNU link](#)) and Shanghai University of Finance & Economics ([SUFE link](#)).

Chengdu - Xihua University ([XHU link](#))

Jinan - Shandong University ([SDU link](#))

Kunming - Yunnan University ([YNU link](#)) & Yunnan Normal University ([YNNU link](#))

Shenyang - Shenyang Normal University ([SYNU link](#))

Xi'an - Xi'an International Studies University ([XISU link](#)) & Shaanxi Normal University ([SNNU link](#))

Hangzhou - Zhejiang International Studies University ([ZISU link](#))

Dalian - Liaoning Normal University ([LNU link](#)) & Dalian University of Foreign Languages ([DUFL link](#))

Guangzhou - South China Normal University ([SCNU link](#)) & Jinan University ([JNU link](#))

Zhengzhou – Host venue TBC

What is the purpose of the visit?

All participating students will have 40 hours of language lessons during the visit, as well as Chinese culture and art & crafts workshops, and time to engage with Chinese students. Students will learn and practise their Chinese language skills through classes, cultural visits, shopping in the Chinese supermarkets, visiting local tourist attractions and sites of interest, and working on projects with their counterparts in their host schools.

On return to schools in England, students and teachers can share their experiences with their colleagues and beyond by making presentations at the school assembly, writing articles in school newsletters and through other media. Please send the MEP Project team any articles / newsletters related to the visit, and

we will present them to the Department for Education and Hanban to demonstrate the impact of the study visit.

We hope that a high proportion of participating students will continue to study Chinese at a higher level and engage with China authentically in their future study and careers.

Are we expected to bring gifts/presents for the host families/students?

During the 2 weeks' stay in China, you will meet the British Council and Hanban representatives, host schools co-ordinators, Chinese classroom teachers, and Chinese students. It is likely that you and your students may form a special bond or friendship with some particular people and in previous years some hosts in China have shown great personal generosity to camp participants. It would be a good idea to prepare a few small presents to express your gratitude when appropriate. **Bookmarks or postcards of any local UK tourist attractions, fridge magnets, and souvenirs of icons such as red phone boxes, London buses or Big Ben** are usually well recognised and well received by Chinese hosts.

What is the pre-departure teachers' briefing day for? Who should attend?

The teachers' briefing day takes place a few weeks before the schools depart for their international educational visit. This is a key date for all teachers who will accompany this year's visit to China. **We expect that each school should send at least one of the teachers who will accompany the trip to attend this briefing event – we recommend that if a teacher has not been on this kind of trip before they should attend.** Due to venue constraints a school cannot send more than two teachers. This year's briefing day will be held at in London on 12th May 2020.

Teachers will be well informed in order to set realistic expectations for the China visit, have an opportunity to network with other teachers going on the trip and prepare for any common problems that may arise before or during the trip.

What will we do while we are there?

Broadly participants can expect the following:

During the first five days, participants take part in lessons of in-class study and practical sessions designed to facilitate language learning, as well as activities in the local area to facilitate their language learning, such as trips to a local market, cultural lessons, art & crafts workshops, dancing and singing sessions, sports activities, visit to cultural performances, and time to engage with Chinese students. At the mid-way point, there will be a programme of cultural visits to featured landmarks (depending on the city). The final five days will once again involve lessons of in-class study as well as activities in the local area to facilitate their language learning.

The programme of events will vary from province to province depending on local attractions, facilities and customs. However, common to each of the provinces will be 40 hours of Mandarin language learning along with experience of Chinese cultural activities and contact with Chinese students.

Will we have any spare time?

The programme is likely to be extensive and lots will be arranged for you so free time may be limited. However when you have free time, it will mostly be in the evening. Accompanying teachers are expected to make their own arrangements with their pupils during any free time and they are responsible for their students' welfare during this time. All participants are asked to respect the advice/requests of the local hosts during their stay.

None of the accompanying teachers speak any Mandarin, does this matter?

No. Ideally one of the teachers will speak Mandarin but we understand that this may not be possible. Whilst in China there will be plenty of bilingual English/Chinese-speaking staff/volunteers on hand to help you if you need it.

You might find it useful to have a copy of the **BBC Active Mandarin Chinese Phrase Book** with you. It has useful phrases for a wide variety of situations and is very clearly laid out and helpful (ISBN 978-1-4066-1210-3, RRP £4.99).

How much pocket money do students need?

All essential costs in China are covered by Hanban. This includes accommodation, food, drinks and transport. Students will only need a small amount of money for souvenirs and snacks, and are discouraged from bringing a lot of money with them.

A shopping mall visit in each city will be arranged. Though prices will be non-negotiable in modern malls, they may be negotiated substantially downward from their asking prices in more traditional markets. Hosting institution staff are often a reliable source of advice on bargaining strategy. In our experience, students from other Camps visits have been known to spend their pocket money in the excitement of the shopping experience and quickly regretted doing so. Teachers and students are warned to plan their budget carefully to avoid unnecessary spending.

It is recommended that the UK students and teachers exchange cash before the trip. Though a visit to a bank is possible, banks may not have enough capacity to process cash exchange requests from 50-100 students in one day, and there will be fees to withdraw money from a cash machine (please check with your bank before you travel).

Section 2: Accommodation

Where are we going to stay?

Camps participants will be accommodated in host schools/universities. Students are likely to share dormitory style student accommodation with other students from their school. Each room can typically sleep two students, has a TV set, desk, chairs, and has its own showering and toilet facility.

Accompanying teachers are going to be housed in the same building but typically on a separate but nearby floor designated as a teachers' floor. The teachers' floor is for both male and female teachers. Each room will also have its own bathing and toilet facility. Usually your Chinese hosts will be more than happy to support you within their means. It is also likely that the teachers' rooms may have better facilities, such as en suite and TV. This varies from one host school to another and depends on availability.

Schools staying in Beijing may stay in a local hotel – further details will follow once confirmed.

What are the toilets & showers like?

Each room will have its own showering and toilet facilities.

Public toilets in the teaching building, or outside campus in China may be in a traditional squat style but in accommodation seated toilets are normally standard.

Alcohol

Accompanying teachers should be aware that alcohol is **strictly forbidden** in student accommodation, even for staff. In previous years, accompanying teachers have been able to enjoy a drink at local restaurants or bars when off duty.

How do students contact home while they are in China?

Mobile phones with global roaming enabled do normally work in all provinces in China and phone owners will be able to call and text at will. It is the phone owner's responsibility to ensure that they are aware of the charges that they will incur for using their phone while in China. We recommend that students and teachers all turn off their internet roaming while in China as phone bills can be very costly.

We recommend that schools instigate a 'phone tree' system to let parents and guardians know that the Camps participants have arrived safely and to advise them of possible delays on the return journey.

Landline phones may be provided in the rooms, but may be restricted to domestic calls only. However, there will be free Wi-Fi in the accommodation, and email should be readily available in the host schools in which case students can send emails themselves in their free time. **Please note that certain internet services popular in the UK may be blocked in China, including Facebook, Twitter, Gmail, Instagram, and Whatsapp.**

What should I do if one of my students falls ill on the campus?

All host schools have medical clinics on the campus. First aid boxes will be prepared in the accommodation. If you or your student falls ill, the first point of contact will be your allocated school co-ordinator, who is usually fluent in both Chinese and English. She/he can take you to visit the school nurse or the best local hospital and help you translate the symptoms of the illness and any background information such as pre-existing conditions and regular medication.

A list of local hospitals qualified to treat international patients for physiological and/or mental condition(s) is available in each hosting school.

Section 3: Risk assessments

What sort of risk assessments are carried out for the visit? When will we receive the completed forms?

The British Council and Hanban team conduct the risk assessments in all host institutions and carry out an extensive risk assessment. The risk assessment covers emergency contingency plans, campus facilities and activities, accommodation and out-of-campus activities, such as a cultural visits.

The assessments themselves are being carried out in late 2019 to ensure that the assessment and measures are as up to date as possible.

My Local Education Authority has additional questions for the visit which are not covered by your risk assessments, what should I do?

The British Council and Hanban in China conduct an extensively detailed risk assessment for each host school. If your LEA has additional requirements that we need to answer on a case by case basis, please ensure that you send in your requests for our attention as early as possible as and no later than the end of May.

Section 4: Medical insurance and inoculations

Do we need to have medical insurance?

Schools are responsible for ensuring that all participating students and teachers have valid travel/medical insurance for the visit before departure, as set out in the Terms and Conditions. **A valid medical insurance number will be required for each participant at the visa application stage.**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) offers detailed advice about travelling to China, including useful sections on medical insurance.

FCO Travel advice for China:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/china>

FCO Health advice for travel in China:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/health>

Schools are responsible for arranging travel and health insurance for their group.

Do we need to have inoculations?

General information on [travel vaccinations](#) and a [travel health checklist](#) is available on the NHS website.

Participants are responsible for arranging all appropriate inoculations, as set out in the Terms and Conditions. **We strongly urge all participants to consult their doctor or travel clinic for immunisation advice no later than six weeks before the departure date (i.e. mid May 2019).**

Most NHS General Practice (GP) surgeries will offer appointments for travel advice. A doctor or other qualified medical professional will be best placed to advise on the course of inoculations required, and check that any necessary vaccinations and other preventative measures are up to date in the case of each participant. The NHS website has a search facility to locate health services in your area.

Your GP or travel clinic may ask which areas of China you plan to visit in order to determine the most appropriate course of inoculation. For confirmation of which provinces your group will visit, please consult the trip co-ordinator at your school.

The NHS offers further information about travel vaccines online:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Planners/vaccinations/Pages/travelwhereandwhen.aspx>

You may also wish to refer to the health advice for China on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/health>.

What if one of the participants falls ill during the trip?

During the visit to China, the accompanying teachers are expected to take the lead with their own school group, including their students' safety and well-being, as set out in the Terms and Conditions.

Teachers are expected to prepare in advance and carry with them a (confidential) list of all known medical conditions for participants in his/her group, including any known allergy information and a clear schedule of any current medication with dosages and times.

It is the responsibility of the teacher to log any illnesses or accidents and report them to the host school's co-ordinators regularly (the co-ordinators speak good English). Host institutions all have trained medical staff on site for small injuries. If a hospital visit is necessary, a Mandarin/English staff member will be available to accompany the participants to the hospital. The co-ordinators will be able to advise the teacher on the best options to treat the illness, either on site at the school's clinic or at a local hospital.

What if one of the participants has a pre-existing medical condition?

If any of the participants has a pre-existing medical condition which requires special arrangements, the school must inform the IOE CI before the trip.

Depending on the condition, the school may be asked to liaise directly with airlines/travel agents for special requirements. If any of the participants take medication, they may need to obtain a doctor's note. Please check with the travel agent and/or the IOE CI if this is applicable to your group.

The IOE CI will share the information of the medical condition with the British Council. The British Council will share this information with Hanban and the hosting institution, ONLY when their collaboration is needed in helping handle the condition.

One of my participants has a food allergy/other allergies, will this cause a problem in China?

Nuts and shellfish are often used in Chinese cooking and food is sometimes cooked in peanut oil. Please bear this in mind if a participant suffers from allergies. If in doubt the participants should seek advice from a native Chinese speaker who can ask the chef/waiting staff what is contained in the food. It is expected that teachers know of student allergies and should be wary of this when food is being served.

Depending on the severity of the allergy, this fact may or may not affect your student. Food allergies are not understood in China in the same way as they are here in the UK because they are not as widespread.

Allergies to other things may be more or less well understood in China depending on the case.

To reduce the risk for participants with allergies, the IOE CI and the British Council:

- Includes details of the possibility of food or other allergies in the general risk assessment;
- Outlines any special requirements to our Chinese partners, Hanban;
- Sends the participating schools a list of useful phrases in Chinese which we recommend they make into cards for all the students to carry with them at all times. These phrases include; 'I am allergic to nuts. I must not eat any nuts', 'I cannot eat shellfish', 'I am allergic to penicillin' etc.;
- Strongly advises that participants with food allergies do not eat from street stalls whose owners may have cooked with peanut oil or other allergens;
- Asks schools to ensure that parents/guardians have made the accompanying teachers fully aware of the details of the allergy and any special requirements that may arise from it (failure to do so will shift responsibility to them if there is a problem);
- Requires accompanying teachers to be trained to use an EpiPen if the student carries one with them.

Ultimately, accompanying teachers are responsible for their students' welfare whilst in China, and in agreeing to take part in the trip, teachers accept this responsibility.

We may need a signed letter, on your school headed paper, detailing whether the student will need to carry an EpiPen with them, the likely symptoms if they do come into contact with nuts, and confirming that the teacher accompanying can take care of them and use the EpiPen if necessary. If a letter is required it should also include details of step by step actions should an emergency occur.

The same applies for any condition that may require treatment with an injection.

My student has a dietary requirement; is this going to cause a problem in China?

Dietary requirements such as vegetarianism/veganism or religious observances such as halal meat/kosher food are NOT generally understood in China in the same way as they are here in the UK because they are not as widespread.

Vegetarian/vegan participants may find themselves limited to a small number of dishes and are unlikely to be given a separate meal. The IOE CI will provide cards with Chinese explanations of these requirements

but participants are asked to be flexible in their approach and be prepared to explain carefully and many times that they do not eat meat.

It is extremely unlikely that it will be possible to determine how food has been prepared – particularly to find out if food is halal or kosher. Where this is the case participants may need to seek out a vegetarian option.

Please note: If anyone in your group has an allergy/special requirement you must let us know as soon as possible. We will also inform the airlines in advance of your flights. Special requirements normally catered for by airlines are as follows: vegetarian, vegetarian non-dairy, vegan, kosher, halal, diabetic gluten free, non-lactose. Some airlines require a medical form to be completed in the case of a severe nut allergy.

My student has a physical special need; can he/she take part?

Students with restricted mobility may find accessibility to buildings, public areas and tourist sites difficult, especially outside Beijing and Shanghai, and may not therefore be able to be as independent as they can be here in the UK.

If you have a student with a physical disability and are concerned about any element of the trip in regards to your student, please contact mandarinexcellence@ucl.ac.uk to discuss.

Section 5: International flights and domestic China flights

Does it matter if the passenger names in the e-tickets are inaccurate or spelt incorrectly?

Yes! At check-in, the airlines will insist that each passenger's passport matches the flight booking information and tickets to the letter. If the e-ticket details do *not* match participants' passports exactly at check-in, it is likely the participant concerned will *not* be allowed to board the plane and exceptions will not be made on the day.

Please remember that the information that you send to us when we request passenger information will be used to book flight tickets. If names are spelt incorrectly at this stage, the tickets will need to be corrected after issue and the airlines charge a fee to do this. Schools are responsible for payment of any penalty fees incurred in such circumstances. **Please thoroughly check all the passenger information before you send us your spreadsheet.**

Any inaccuracies in the e-tickets must be corrected well in advance and may incur an additional fee from the airlines.

Please double-check all e-tickets very carefully well in advance. If there are any discrepancies, please get in touch with the CI team as soon as possible at mandarinexcellence@ucl.ac.uk.

What are the travel arrangements within China?

There will be only in-city transportation in each hosting city, which will be usually in the form of coach. Teachers and students are advised not to take the public transportation, because it is usually very complex and may not always have English instructions.

What is the luggage allowance for flights?

We recommend that check in luggage does not exceed 20kg in weight. Although the international luggage allowance may exceed 20kg, internal travel in China will not.

How much time should we allow for check-in at the departure airport in the UK?

We recommend that the groups arrive at the airport **check-in** in good time, and preferably more than 3 hours before departure. School groups are advised to allow as much time as possible.

Can you request vegetarian meals for us on the international and domestic flights?

Provided that schools have passed the dietary requirements to the IOE CI team well in advance, CI team will share this information with our travel agent in the UK and Hanban in China.

Section 6: Visas

How can I arrange the visas?

Schools are asked to arrange the visa application themselves.

Diversity Travel can arrange visa's for a fee. Diversity Travel visa service details are available here:

Diversity Travel,
9/10 Staple Inn,
London,
WC1V 7QH
Tel: 020 3544 3550
Email: visas@diversitytravel.co.uk

Most participants should apply for an F visa.

What kind of visa - group or individual?

We recommend schools apply for individual visas instead of group visas. Should one student have to return home unexpectedly but the remainder of the group wish to stay on, having a group visa can be problematic.

What category of visa should I apply for, tourist visa or business visa?

Participants are recommended to apply for F visas.

What is a visa invitation letter?

Our Chinese partner, Hanban, provide letters of invitation which support the visa application, copies of which will be sent to the school to enable applications in early 2020.

One of my students holds non-UK passport, what should I do?

If your school group has students whose passports are non-UK passports, it is recommended that you seek advice about the visa application procedure as soon as possible because the applicable visa rules might be more complex to some countries' passport holders and it could take a lot longer to obtain a visa.

See the contact details for Diversity Travel above.

How long should my passport be valid for?

At the time of travel, all students and teachers must hold passports which are **valid for 6 months from the return date**. For example, **if you return to the UK on 18th July 2020 then your passport must be valid until 18th January 2021 the following year.**

Section 7: Emergency procedures

What happens if there is an emergency such as flooding, landslide, medical quarantine or social unrest?

The CI team and the British Council in collaboration with Hanban, identifies the safest areas of China to become Intensive Study destinations. The CI team and the British Council also work with Hanban and the selected host schools in China to conduct rigorous risk assessments, taking into account reasonably known risks and putting in place appropriate preventative measures and emergency procedures.

In the unlikely event of a major public emergency in China, British Embassies and High Commissions abroad have their own websites and may have individual social media feeds or consular networks. Contact details for all British diplomatic posts overseas are available via the FCO website.

Should an emergency situation arise, the emergency procedures will come into effect. The procedures specify an effective system of communication and staff support at IOE CI and in China, which we ask all schools to be aware of and adhere to if necessary. Accompanying members of staff will be instructed on the full procedures at the teachers' briefing event prior to departure.

IOE CI will request contact details for teachers in China and an emergency contact for the school in advance of the visit.

Section 8: Trip Funding

How much does the trip cost?

All essential costs while in China including accommodation, tuition fees, food, drink and transport are paid by Hanban. Students will only need money (cash) for souvenirs and snacks, and are discouraged from bringing a lot of money with them.

All schools participating in the programme will be charged an identical, heavily subsidised amount per pupil by UCL. Schools will then recoup this cost from parents/carers. Whilst all schools are charged the same amount by UCL for each participant, they may use different charging models to pay the overall cost of the trip depending on their school's circumstances. For instance, schools may include the cost of visas and teacher cover in the total cost paid by parents meaning the final cost of the Intensive Study experience to parents or carers may vary between schools.