



Pre-Departure Packet

Study Abroad in Guilin

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese Language Institute (CLI)'s Study Abroad in China program, in partnership with Guangxi Normal University, immerses students in Chinese language and culture. Students take a combination of one-on-one and small group Mandarin classes, and small group content courses focused on China and taught in English. CLI's language and culture environment provides students countless opportunities to practice their Chinese language skills. These include, but are not limited to, weekly organized activities and weekend excursions.

As adequate preparation is the first step toward making the most of your experience, we've developed the following packet to jumpstart the process. As always, please feel free to contact us anytime.

UTILIZING CLI'S LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT

- 1. Make sure you know all 58 pinyin sounds:** Concentrate on hearing and saying the slight variations between sounds. Clear pronunciation of the pinyin sounds is an essential building block of spoken Mandarin. Utilize this [audio pinyin chart](#) to start practicing daily.
- 2. Speak (and think in) Chinese, regardless of your Chinese level:** Whether you are an absolute beginner or the world's greatest Mandarin speaker, you can always advance your skills by practicing the language at every turn. Take the initiative to speak with those around you every day. When it comes to spoken Chinese, there is no better way to improve than to simply speak.
- 3. Keep CLI informed:** All of CLI's team members are here because we love the Chinese language, love sharing it, and love that you're interested. Let us know if you don't understand something or have a specific question.
- 4. Attitude is everything:** Maintain a relentless attitude in your approach to mastering the Chinese language. A student's dedication and persistence is the ultimate factor that leads to success when learning a foreign language. Many non-native speakers have reached a high level of proficiency in the Chinese language, and with the right combination of language environment, determination and attitude, you can too.

WHAT YOU'LL WANT/NEED

Fall

The months from September to December are Guilin's most mild. Expect a lot of sunshine, moderate temperatures, and limited rain.

- ❖ **Autumn clothing:** Even though Guilin's latitude (25°N) is just north of the Tropic of Cancer, it can still get quite chilly during autumn. You should pack a light jacket and additional layers. Most days will be warm, but temperatures steadily decrease as November and December approach.



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Winter

Guilin winters can often be quite cold. Because the city is in a mountainous region, its southern latitude does not guard it from chilly temperatures. Be prepared to have the following items:

- ❖ **Winter clothing:** Thick winter coat, long underwear tops and bottoms, winter hat, scarf, gloves, and winter socks. Many locations in Guilin still do not have centralized indoor heating.

Spring

Spring brings Guilin's rainiest weather, in particular from early March to late April. The following items can all be purchased in Guilin:

- ❖ **Umbrella:** This is a must. Nearly every corner store in town sells umbrellas for 2-6 USD depending on quality, but you may want to bring your own from home.
- ❖ **Rain boots:** Rain boots are a great way to go. They will keep your feet, socks, and the bottom of your pants dry all spring.
- ❖ **Raincoat:** A variety can be bought in Guilin.

Summer

During the Guilin summer, temperatures usually stay in the 80s (low-mid 30s Celsius) and peak in the high 90's (high 30's Celsius). Be sure to have the following items:

- ❖ **Sunscreen lotion:** Sunscreen is very difficult to find in Guilin.
- ❖ **Sunglasses:** Being even in latitude with the furthest point south in the USA, the sun is very powerful in Guilin.
- ❖ **Bathing suit:** There's a pool near Guangxi Normal University (GXNU) where you can swim for 2 USD per day. Guilin's Li River and Yangshuo's Yu Long River are also popular swimming destinations during the summer.
- ❖ **Breathable summer clothes:** Guilin gets hot in the summer, so be sure to plan accordingly!

Visit the following site for Guilin climate information: www.travelchinaguide.com/climate/guilin.htm

Money

The most common payment method is using Alipay or WeChat to purchase goods and services. Please download WeChat and Alipay ahead of your arrival. You can upload a credit card from Visa or Mastercard to either of these apps — check out these guides for setting up [WeChat](#) and [Alipay](#). In China, you will scan QR codes at restaurants, malls, etc, or have your personal QR code scanned to pay. If you run into any issues with WeChat or Alipay, you are welcome to contact us for assistance, or speak to us after arriving at CLI — we're happy to help.



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The simplest and safest method to obtain Chinese currency (RMB) in cash while in China is by using a debit card from a major international bank. The best ATMs to use are those of Bank of China, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), and China Construction Bank. Such ATMs are conveniently located throughout all major Chinese cities, including Guilin.

If you haven't already, please notify your bank that you will use an ATM card during your CLI program dates. For security purposes, bank and credit card companies may freeze the credit card and/or ATM card if used in China without first receiving notification.

General

Electronics

- ❖ **Laptop computer:** All CLI housing options have WiFi Internet access, and many cafés have wireless as well.
- ❖ **Converter:** Electricity in China is 220V while in the US it is only 110V. Most computers, iPods, and chargers have built-in converters on their power adapters. Yet electric shavers and hair dryers often do not. Check the voltage range before coming – some electronics range from 110-240V. A converter can also be bought in Guilin.

Miscellaneous (**starred items are difficult to find in Guilin*)

- ❖ **Gifts for newfound friends*:** You are sure to make many new friends while in China, and in keeping with Chinese custom, you may want to offer a very simple gift upon departure, such as a t-shirt, baseball cap, or other small token of appreciation.
- ❖ **Note cards (flash cards)*:** Surprisingly, this is one of the few things that you cannot find in Guilin. Bring your own or use one of the many great online services for compiling note cards, such as Quizlet.
- ❖ **Dental floss*:** It can be difficult to find dental floss in China, but it is available in select supermarkets.
- ❖ **Prescription medicine*:** If you take prescription drugs, be sure to bring enough to last the duration of your stay.
- ❖ **Feminine products*:** Pads are available, but tampons are near impossible to find.
- ❖ **Books*:** There are countless books in Chinese in Guilin, but few in English. If you would like to enjoy recreational reading, you may want to bring your own books. CLI also has a quickly growing library from which you can borrow books.
- ❖ **Organic or natural products:** Unfortunately there are few all-natural products in Guilin, and surprisingly enough, the one shopping market in Guilin that does have an organic section is Walmart.



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- ❖ **All-terrain shoes:** These are easy to find in Guilin (as long as your shoe size is under 44 on the international scale).
- ❖ **Hand soap and toilet paper:** Chinese toilets usually have neither soap nor toilet paper, so always carry your own with you when you go out. Little tissue packets are for sale everywhere and you can buy hand-sanitizers at all grocery stores.
- ❖ **VPN to access the entire Internet:** See “The Great Firewall” section below in “What to Expect.”
- ❖ **Contact solution:** You can buy this all over China, but make sure to bring enough for at least the first week.
- ❖ **Leave empty space in your bag:** You will likely return to your native country with more than you brought to China. Anticipate this and pack light. While in Guilin, you can also buy another suitcase or have things shipped home.

SKILLS TO WORK ON BEFORE ARRIVAL

- ❖ **Chopstick skills:** Very, very few restaurants in China have forks. Only Western-style restaurants will. All other restaurants use chopsticks. You can also always ask for a spoon (sháozi 勺子).
- ❖ **Squatting skills:** All CLI apartments have Western toilets, but most of China has squat toilets. Don't forget to bring toilet paper with you whenever you go out (see “Chinese bathrooms” in the “What to Expect” section below).
- ❖ **Open-mindedness:** You will encounter minor and major differences in culture, food, social-interaction, and surroundings. Depending on the observer, these differences can be exciting, shocking, eye-opening, delightful, and even frustrating. In order to enjoy your time in China and gain as much as possible from the experience, always keep an open mind and be accepting of the many, many differences.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- ❖ **Friendly, excited people:** Guilin truly has a southern hospitality that you don't always find in the rest of China. Strangers are often enthusiastic to help you with your Chinese and it is common for CLI students to sit in a restaurant or store for hours learning with locals.
- ❖ **Curiosity towards foreigners:** Foreigners are a somewhat common site in major cities, but for many people in smaller cities, and especially in the countryside, you may be the first foreigner they have ever interacted with. Expect occasional staring and calls of “Hello!” The stares and greetings from strangers are innocent and not done in malice; people are truly curious, and once they discover you speak Chinese, you will have a new best friend.



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- ❖ **Big city and small town wrapped into one:** CLI lies on the eastern edge of Guilin. You can walk downtown in about 45 minutes, ride a bike there in 15, or take a cab there in 8. Likewise, you are about the same distance to pure countryside.
- ❖ **Surreal scenery:** There is a famous expression known across China – 桂林山水甲天下 (Guilín shānshuǐ jiǎ tiān xià), which means “Guilin’s scenery is the best under heaven.” Guilin’s beauty is so renowned that it is even on the back of the 20 RMB bill. You will immediately realize why Guilin is one of the premier destinations in China. You’ll fully experience the natural beauty of Guilin in its countryside, especially near Yangshuo and the Longsheng rice terraces.
- ❖ **Awesome biking:** Major roads in Guilin have separate driving lanes, bus lanes, and bike lanes, and also have sidewalks. Almost everywhere in the city is accessible in under a 30 minute bike ride. The ride from GXNU to downtown is only 15 minutes by bike.
- ❖ **Qigong, kungfu, and yoga:** Some of the most entertaining 'performances' in Guilin are locals doing Taichi (tàijǐ) by the river with the sunrise each day and old ladies with boom boxes dancing the solo waltz, electric slide style, each night by the high arched bridge over Banyan Lake (róng hú). In addition, there are endless kungfu and yoga classes to attend.
- ❖ **Daily rest time:** There is a daily rest time from noon to 2:30pm that many Chinese people observe. Universities and most government offices close within this window, and it is therefore sometimes difficult to accomplish tasks requiring cooperation with locals during this time.
- ❖ **Low cost of living:** One of the luxuries of Guilin is that you can live very comfortably on 500-1,000 USD a month (depending on your lifestyle). Many services that are very expensive in America are quite inexpensive in China; for example, massages (8 USD/hour) and taxi rides (2-4 USD almost anywhere in town). In addition, clothes, food, and traveling are much less expensive.
- ❖ **Upbeat nightlife:** Bars in Guilin range from quiet cafés to all-night dance clubs. Two bars frequented by younger Chinese patrons and foreigners alike are Muse and Cats & Rabbits (māotù). Muse mostly spins international pop, electronic, and hip-hop music, while Cats & Rabbits offers a more laid-back atmosphere and regularly plays lounge and punk music.
- ❖ **Karaoke:** Known as KTV, this is the preferred choice of entertainment for many locals. At some point during your stay in Guilin, you will most likely end up in a KTV and have a mic handed to you. If you do not know how to sing the Carpenters’ “Yesterday Once More” or Celine Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On,” you will soon.
- ❖ **Delicious food:** Though it’s likely not the Chinese food you are used to from Chinese restaurants in your home country, most will agree that Guilin cuisine is truly excellent. And if you’re ever craving some food from back home, Guilin has several good Western-style restaurants.



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- ❖ **Traditional Tea Houses:** Tea is an important part of Chinese culture and there is ceremony and ritual associated with the process of drinking it. Tea houses are a great place to go to study Chinese and meet friendly locals.
- ❖ **Wonderful parks:** Being a tourist town, Guilin has numerous parks scattered throughout the city. All parks feature pagodas resting atop karst mountains, great for midday studying or relaxing.
- ❖ **People from all over the world:** There is an excellent international community in Guilin, which includes people from the United States, England, Ireland, France, Germany, Spain, Holland, Poland, Switzerland, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Estonia, Nigeria, Algeria, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, and more. That being said, Guilin is a great place to avoid all foreign contact if so desired.
- ❖ **Haggling/special foreigner prices:** Since parts of China heavily cater to tourism and have countless visitors each year, vendors and cab drivers sometimes try to take advantage of foreigners by overcharging them for items and services. However, once they hear that you speak even the most basic Chinese, they will be much more willing to negotiate with you and will accordingly lower their prices. Almost all goods and services can be bargained for.
- ❖ **The Great Firewall:** In an effort to prevent anti-government activity, China's government blocks access to almost all non-Chinese websites. Instagram, YouTube, X, and other social media sites/apps are among those that you cannot access without a VPN. Many foreigners and locals use a VPN to get around the firewall. LetsVPN offers an excellent VPN for 6.69 USD per month, or 15.49 USD for 3 months, securing your privacy and providing you with Internet access. Please note that, even when using a VPN, almost all foreign websites run slower in China than they do in the West.
- ❖ **A lack of violence:** Your biggest threat in China is someone coyly trying to steal your bike or your wallet, and thieves quickly submit when caught. Even so, make sure to lock up your bicycle and keep your bag zipped. Fighting almost never happens in China, especially Guilin. Many people speak loudly, and it may appear as if someone is angry when they are merely trying to express a point.
- ❖ **Firecrackers and fireworks:** Major events such as holidays, weddings, and business openings are almost always marked by the ritual of lighting firecrackers. The loud sound is used to ward off evil spirits and thus bless important events with a fresh start.
- ❖ **Incredible language environment:** Wherever you go in Guilin, you will find yourself in an amazing language environment. Unlike Beijing and Shanghai, English is seldom heard in Guilin. Chinese is even used as the medium of communication between many foreigners. Guilin is a fantastic place to call home and offers the best of both the countryside and a small city to create an amazing language-learning environment.



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SUGGESTED BOOKS AND MOVIES

Suggested Reading List

- ❖ **River Town** (c. 2006) by Peter Hessler: In 1996, 26-year-old Peter Hessler arrived in Fuling, a town on China's Yangtze River, to begin a two-year Peace Corps stint as a teacher at the local college. Along with fellow teacher Adam Meier, the two are the first foreigners to be in this part of the Sichuan province for 50 years. Expecting a calm couple of years, Hessler at first does not realize the social, cultural, and personal implications of being thrust into such a radically different society. In *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*, Hessler tells of his experience with “the citizens of Fuling, the political and historical climate, and the feel of the city itself.”
- ❖ **Iron and Silk** (c. 1987) by Mark Salzman: Salzman captures post-cultural revolution China through his adventures as a young American English teacher in China and his shifu-tudi (master-student) relationship with China's foremost martial arts teacher.
- ❖ **China Shakes the World** (c. 2007) by James Kynge: A former bureau chief of the *Financial Times* in Beijing, Kynge demonstrates how China's thirst for jobs, raw materials, energy, and new markets—and its export of goods, workers, and investments—will dramatically reshape world trade and politics. China's appetite, though unpremeditated and inarticulate, has become a source of major change in the world. Not all is rosy, however, because China has serious problems with its environmental resources, severe pollution, and institutionalized corruption within the government, the legal system, the police force, and the media. Kynge sheds light on each of these topics and answers many questions critical to understanding 21st century China.
- ❖ **China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power** (c. 1995) by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn: Published in 1995, the husband-and-wife team of Kristof and WuDunn, whose reporting of the Tiananmen Square massacre for the New York Times earned them a Pulitzer prize, range from Beijing to the Tibetan highlands in their illuminating look at the changes and contradictions unfolding within Chinese society.

Suggested Movie List

- ❖ **China: A Century of Revolution:** *China: A Century of Revolution* is a six-hour journey through the country's most tumultuous period. *China in Revolution* charts the pivotal years from the birth of the new republic to the establishment of the PRC, through foreign invasions, civil war and a bloody battle for power between Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek.
- ❖ **The Passion of Mao:** An excellent documentary. The director brings a tremendous amount of rich primary source material to the screen with an original and entertaining perspective, uncovering the relationship between Mao's political and policy achievements with Mao's colorful life story, marked by some of his comically bizarre traits.



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- ❖ **Young & Restless in China:** A riveting and poignant documentary, *Young & Restless in China* tracks the lives of nine ambitious young Chinese professionals who are struggling to make it in this very tumultuous and rapidly changing society, as it prepares to host the 2008 Beijing Olympics.
- ❖ Any and all films by director **Zhang Yimou**, especially **To Live, Hero, House of Flying Daggers, The Story of QiuJu, The Curse of the Golden Flower** and **Raise the Red Lantern**. Zhang Yimou is well-known as the director of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony.

For more information, please visit our [FAQs page](#) or contact CLI anytime (info@studycli.org). We are all very excited to welcome you to Guilin and are looking forward to an excellent educational experience together!

一路平安 (yī lù píng ān, *bon voyage*)!
The CLI Team

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