

IDENTITIES ABROAD: CHINA*



IDENTITIES ABROAD

As you prepare for your education abroad program, you may be considering how your own identities may or may not interact with the host culture in similar or different ways than they do at home. Below you will find country-specific information on potential challenges for students who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in education abroad programs. This information, adapted from the Diversity Network's Country Diversity Notes (via [Diversity Abroad](#)), is intended to assist you in exploring how you might be received abroad based on your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, or ability.

The information below features a country overview for China as well as information pertinent to the socio-cultural climate that U.S. students of diverse backgrounds can reasonably expect while living in the country. It also offers bulleted information noting facts that may directly relate to student experiences in the country. Links with additional information resources on the various topics are also offered.

The below information provides a bird's-eye view of diversity matters in the country as they pertain to U.S. students. IEIGI understands the below information is not exhaustive or inclusive of all possible student identities and experiences. We encourage you to conduct further research and chat with relevant points of contact including your program advisor, faculty leader, or peers who have traveled to China, to gain a greater understanding of your host country and/or city.

If you would like to speak with us about any questions pertaining to diversity and inclusivity abroad, please contact us at study.abroad@purchase.edu and we will answer your inquiry to the best of our ability and/or refer you to others with the expertise that you need. Additionally, if you are interested in discussing other geographical locations, please don't hesitate to contact us.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FAST FACTS:

Capital: Beijing

Population: 1,394,015,977 (July 2020 est.)

Language(s): Standard Chinese or Mandarin (official; Putonghua, based on the Beijing dialect), Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghainese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Hokkien-Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan, Hakka dialects, minority languages (see Ethnic groups entry)

Religions: Buddhist 18.2%, Christian 5.1%, Muslim 1.8%, folk religion 21.9%, Hindu < 0.1%, Jewish < 0.1%, other 0.7% (includes Daoist (Taoist)), unaffiliated 52.2% (2010 est.)

Ethnic groups: Han Chinese 91.6%, Zhuang 1.3%, other (includes Hui, Manchu, Uighur, Miao, Yi, Tujia, Tibetan,

Mongol, Dong, Buyei, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazakh, Dai, and other nationalities) 7.1% (2010 est.)



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With a wide range of education

The country's rich history, diverse geography, and rising commercial and geopolitical prominence attract students from a wide range of academic disciplines, from art history to ethnic studies to international business and beyond. The sheer immensity of the country's population and policies that rapidly expanded the Chinese higher education system has meant that the number of partnerships between Chinese universities and U.S. institutions has multiplied several-fold over since the 1980s. A panoply of study and teach abroad opportunities exist for U.S. students.

Most U.S. students in China study in urban areas, generally along the northeast in Beijing and Shanghai or along the south coast, in Canton Province and Hong Kong. Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong are considered more cosmopolitan than most other large cities in China. In these metropolitan areas there has been a much longer and steadier exposure to Westerners than in other parts of the country, particularly its interior.

Outside of China's capital and its former British colony (Hong Kong), residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What is advertised as "typical" cultural behavior or norms may also be a narrow and selective interpretation, such as the perception in some countries that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of China are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners. Members of the community in which students however, will live may display a range of reactions to differences that students present.

Travelers can explore some of the [Best Places to Visit in China](#). Recognized as a [World Bank Upper-Middle Income Country](#), the average [Numbeo Cost of Living in China](#) is 43.4% lower than in the United States (aggregate data for all cities, rent is not taken into account). If you plan on renting, expect monthly costs for a single person to be around 61.39% lower than in the U.S. On the micro level, the average cost for a three-course meal for 2 at a mid-range restaurant is between \$15-52 USD (about 100-350¥ Chinese Yuan) while a meal at an inexpensive one might cost about \$3 USD.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Review current travel risks for China:

- [U.S Department of State Travel Risks](#)
- [Safe Travel to China](#)

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors Report 2019, 11,613 students from the United States studied abroad in China, a roughly 2.5% decrease from the previous year recorded.

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN CHINA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR:

Although China is somewhat ethnically diverse, it is highly racially homogenous. Additionally, some contend that China has no problem with racism, and that's the problem. Outside China's global cities, most Chinese are unaccustomed to Westerners of any race. Almost universally, the only students of color on Chinese campuses are other study abroad students. A student of color may be the only non-white "minority" in his or her group or may be working and living with individuals with limited experience or understanding of their background.

It is difficult to generalize how Chinese may perceive students of color. Americans of Asian descent will have a very different experience than those of African descent, who will have a very different experience than those of Hispanic descent. However, students on online discussion boards about being black in China do mention experiences of overt and covert racial discrimination, from staring and hair-touching to harboring prejudicial beliefs and derogatory comments. Despite these, most students report that they feel the statements are made without menace and are the product of myth and ignorance. Students of color report having a positive experience of being black in China and look at most interactions as a chance to make a good impression and/or dispel stereotypes.

NOTES:

- Students of color should carry a copy of identification (or information confirming the traveler's purpose in the country) to show authorities in the event of being racially profiled.
- Students of color report generally feeling welcomed in the country and incidents of discrimination on tourists are rare.
- Students of color [may experience stares, people wanting to take pictures, overly curious](#) or what may be perceived as inappropriate questions, or even blatantly racist statements. Disturbing as they are, such experiences should be considered in relation to the considerable probability that any offense was unintended.
- Some students of color may be evaluated as less professionally competent than white students.
- Some students may not be perceived as being North American. For example, African American students may be perceived as being from Africa.
- Asian Americans may be identified more by their cultural heritage than by their American citizenship. Current or historical Chinese relations with other Asian countries, such as Korea or Japan, may have an impact on how Asian American students are perceived.
- Asian Americans may have to deal with people's higher expectations of their language-learning ability or cross-cultural adaptability.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [IES Abroad China Diversity resources](#) (see "Race, Ethnicity & National Identity")
- The China in Africa Podcast presents: [Race, Culture, and the Politics of being Black in China, HuffPost](#)
- [Minority Rights Group International](#), World Directory of Indigenous People
- [Speaking Mandarin in Melanin: Being Black in China](#), One She Goes Blog
- [Being Black in China](#), World Away From Home blog
- [What It's Like Studying Abroad in Shanghai as An American Raised Chinese](#), CAPA World Blog
- [Black & Abroad: My Experience in Chengdu, China](#), USAC Blog
- [Studying Abroad in China as a Second Generation Chinese American](#), IFSA-Butler

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN CHINA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER OR QUEER STUDENTS:

Although homosexuality is not illegal in China (same-sex marriage is illegal) the state does find ways to restrict the accessibility and the [visibility of the LGBT population and culture](#), particularly, with state run media, propaganda, and censorship. This aggressive and conservative culture has led to more than half the population report not being supportive of LGBT rights. Generally speaking, the Chinese culture does not accept or understand homosexuality or bisexuality and can be extremely prejudicial. [Being gay in Hong Kong can mean straddling two worlds](#). According to [this article](#) from 2017, China is one of the worst places to be gay. Gay students grapple with the question of whether they can confide in host country friends, but usually do not. There may or may not be sufficient support for a homosexual or bisexual lifestyle in many study abroad locations outside of more liberal enclaves like Hong Kong or Beijing, or other coastal cities.

Despite the challenges faced by the LGBT community in conservative China, the younger Chinese generations are more liberal, supportive of LGBT rights and a majority report favoring same-sex marriage. Students traveling abroad should be mindful of this context when considering outward expressions of their sexuality.

NOTES:

- Official homophobia in China has never reached the level of countries such as Russia or Uganda, where gay men are demonized as an alien or incur predatory threat. However, with LGBT rights being shaped by Western media and Japanese manga, [LGBT people have become increasingly visible over the last decade and a half](#).
- Gay students might spend a year abroad without meeting another gay student. Lesbians will have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex (as do most women).

- Relationships with homosexual host country nationals can happen, but as with many cross-cultural relationships, they may be more challenging to navigate.
- While China does have a small [LGBT nightlife](#) with places where LGBT are more welcomed, few people come out as many people continue to hide and struggle to be accepted by families and the state.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Global Gayz](#), A gay-owned charitable travel and culture website focused on LGBT life in countries around the world.
- [Being Gay in Conservative China: Foreign Correspondent](#)v, YouTube Video sponsored by Australian Broadcaster
- [A Brief Perspective on the LGBT Movement in China](#), Outright Action International
- [LGBT Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel (see Local Laws & Special Circumstances).
- [Equaldex](#) - China, A collaborative LGBT knowledge base
- [LGBTQIA rights and resources](#) gathered on an (incomplete) map of the world, many popular study abroad destinations are featured.
- [Lonely Planet LGBTQ Traveler guide](#) for China
- [IES Abroad China Diversity resources](#) (see “Gender & Sexuality”)

PHYSICAL DISABILITY IN CHINA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES:

As a disabled student in China, students may face a special set of challenges. In China, as in other parts of the world, some people hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. Very little support exists within Chinese culture for anyone with disabilities, and students with non-visible disabilities may encounter a lack of understanding, and therefore support, concerning their disability.

However, new and specially-designed and equipped facilities in public transport, hotels, and airport travel are [now more accessible than in the past](#). The law protects the rights of persons with disabilities and prohibits discrimination, but in many instances the government does not allocate sufficient resources to adequately and effectively enforce these provisions or support people with disabilities.

The government not only provides programmatic services and increased access to information for those with disabilities but also effectively enforces applicable laws.

NOTES:

- China does not quarantine cats and dogs that meet the certain requirements from approved countries ([Pet Travel](#)). All requirements also apply to [service and emotional support animals](#) when traveling abroad.
- Medical facilities in China, including emergency response services, frequently do not meet international standards and may lack medicine and supplies: Although you can purchase many prescription and non-prescription medications at pharmacies, some common U.S. medications may not be available and thus it is recommended by the [U.S. Dept. of State Bureau of Consular Affairs](#) that travelers carry prescription medication in original packaging, along with a doctor’s prescription. As a precaution, travelers should check with the [U.S. Embassy website](#) to find a list of medical facilities.
- Travelers should check with their health insurance policy to see if they are covered abroad. If not, it is advised that travelers acquire supplemental insurance or travel insurance because they could be responsible for all medical costs. U.S. Medicare does not cover travelers overseas. Local healthcare facilities might demand on-the-spot cash payment if your insurance doesn’t cover the cost of treatment.
- If students are hearing impaired, or traveling with someone who has a hearing impairment, they should check with potential hosts to determine whether they have: visual adaptation aids for telephone ringers, smoke alarms, fire alarms, doorbell, audio loop systems, amplification on telephone handsets and televisions with teletext.
- For travelers with visual impairment, it is important to check whether accommodations welcome their guide dog, as well as: having markings denoting changes in floor space and height, braille instructions for appliances and controls and use of large print.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- The Lonely Planet, [Traveling with a disability in China](#)
- [Information for Students with Disabilities Traveling Abroad](#), U.S. Department of State (see section under Local Laws & Special Circumstances)
- [Mobility International USA, Resources for Americans Traveling Abroad with Disabilities](#)
- Food Allergies- [Selectwisely](#)
- [Frommer's Tips for Travelers with Disabilities](#) - China
- [Touring China with a Wheelchair](#), Wheelchair Traveling
- [Disability Accessibility](#), Country Reports Travel Edition
- [Traveling with Disabilities and Medications](#), Transportation Security Administration
- [Wheelchair Accessibility in China](#), Wheelchair Travel Organization

RELIGION IN CHINA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDENTS:

Although all religions suffered enormous setbacks during the Cultural Revolution, the majority of religious Chinese are Buddhists. There is a [Muslim minority](#), mostly in northwest China, and Sichuan does have a number of Islamic mosques. There are also practicing Christians and churches in China, although most services are in Chinese. The government does not recognize Judaism as an ethnicity or religion. Media reports stated that authorities forced the only Jewish learning center in the community to shut down, blocked the community's ritual bath, and barred foreign tour groups from visiting.

NOTES:

- Students in China are free to practice their religion but not to proselytize to the Chinese, as it is against Chinese law. Previous students have advised active believers to bring their own holy books and religious readings and to be prepared to worship alone.
- China's government has [increasingly expanded restrictions on Muslims within its borders](#), for instance, the burqa is banned and any garments that "promote religious extremist ideology,"
- Most members of the Chinese younger generation (under 50) are non-believers, and students should not be surprised if their Chinese classmates tell them that all religions are superstition and they want no part of it.
- Do not be surprised if students are assumed to be Christian, are asked curious questions by students regarding the religious significance of major holidays or questions about the Bible.
- Religious travelers should feel encouraged to celebrate their personal religious beliefs.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Countries and Their Cultures: China](#) (see section on Religion and Expressive Culture), Every Culture
- [Faith-Based Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [Is China imposing Islam with a Chinese twist in the Hui Muslim Heartland](#), The South China Morning Post
- [Travel China the Jewish Way](#), Yeah That's Kosher, Kosher things While Abroad
- [Catholics and Cultures: China](#)
- [Synagogues in the China](#), Kosher Delight
- [China Virtual Jewish History Tour](#), The Jewish Virtual Library (JVL) is your source for information about Jewish history, Israel, U.S.-Israel relations, the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and Judaism.
- [Prayer Times](#), Islamic Finder
- [Religious Beliefs in China](#), World Atlas
- [IES Abroad China Diversity resources](#) (see "Religion & Spirituality")

WOMEN IN CHINA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS:

Rape is illegal with penalties of up to three years in prison to death. Domestic violence remains a significant problem, but the government took a significant step to protect women from domestic abuse through the passage of the Family Violence Law.

Some female students in China have experienced “body image” issues relative to the Chinese cultural definition of ideal feminine beauty. Few Western women are small or thin enough to achieve that narrow ideal, which may be frustrating for some students, as is the possibility that their attractiveness may also be defined by this standard.

NOTES:

- China ranked 106th (out of 153 countries) in the 2020 [Global Gender Gap Index](#) conducted by the World Economic Forum.
- China is usually safe to travel around alone, including for women travelers. However, since women travelers have been more likely to be targets of high risk crimes, it is recommended that travelers are vigilant of their surroundings and make a conscious effort to travel in groups as often as possible.
- Despite the outward appearance that women are equal to men in China, women still struggle to be considered and treated as true equals in the workplace. This bias sometimes extends to some classrooms or campuses too.
- The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape and prohibits sexual harassment and provides civil penalties.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Will China Have its #Me Too Moment?](#), Amnesty International
- [Pink Pangea: China](#), The Community for Women Who Love to Travel
- [Go World Travel](#): For Those Who Love to Travel
- [Information for Women Travelers](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel

REFERENCES

Maps, flag and country facts are from the [CIA World Factbook 2019](#) Online
[CIA World Factbook](#) | [IIE Open Doors Report](#) | [Lonely Planet China](#)

Please note: The content within the resources provided were last reviewed in October 2020 and as such could have changed. Views expressed in links provided or in sub-links within the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Purchase Office for Global Education.