

Working in China: Pros and Cons



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Living and Working in China: Advantages

In this document I will list the main advantages and disadvantages of living and working in China.

Let's start off right away with the advantages!

1. Finding a job is “easy” (in some industries)

Up until a few years ago, it was possible to land in China and find a job just because you were a foreigner.

You speak English? You're hired as a manager for client services in Europe and North America.

Do you have white skin and blue eyes? You're hired: model or poster girl.

Are you forty years old with graying hair? Fantastic: you're our company's fictional partner to impress clients and local politicians.

And so on.

Today it's no longer like that. China has undergone a gradual process of “normalization”.

That said, **there are many industries where finding a job in China is still relatively simple** (or at least easier than in the West).

Here are a few examples, in random order:

- Teacher (especially language teachers, though not exclusively, since the private school sector in China is constantly growing, and such schools give priority to foreign teachers);

- University researcher (especially in fields such as physics, mathematics, biology, engineering, and the like);
- Experts in marketing and sales (especially for firms that are looking to expand in your country, though not exclusively);
- Experts in the chain of distribution (quality controllers, purchasing agents, intermediaries, etcetera);
- Doctors (for private clinics or hospitals. In public hospitals the doctors are mainly Chinese);
- Football (soccer) coaches and trainers (this is a relatively new opportunity since an impressive number of football schools are opening in China);
- Journalists, writers, translators, editors and copywriters (especially in English);
- Lawyers (just in Beijing alone there are 200 law firm, and the market is expanding).

2. Salaries and benefits (if hired abroad)

If you're hired by a company from a country where the cost of living is higher than that of China, and you work for the Chinese branch of the same company, then you'll have a so-called "expat" contract, and **your salary will likely be higher than the industry average.**

Besides the salary, "expat" contracts often include various benefits such as round-trip tickets from China to your country, health insurance, rent, etcetera.

3. The language and opportunities that you may encounter

If you've never been to China you might think that Mandarin would be a problem. All those complicated sounds and esoteric characters to memorize.

Yes, learning Chinese involves a greater initial effort than learning Spanish. But, like all languages, Mandarin is just another means of communication, and [as such it can be learned](#).

These days, those who speak Chinese have a leg up in the battlefield that they call the “world of work”.

Knowing China, its culture and its language makes you appealing to all those companies that are thinking of exporting to what is becoming the most extensive market in the world, delocalize their production in Asia or bypass their suppliers to directly import from China.

Imagine being able to communicate effectively with the Chinese, Americans or Europeans, and know the customs and culture of each world.

Wouldn't you also agree that it would become easier to work as a consultant, commercial intermediary or direct importer (even if you go back to the West)?

4. Top notch infrastructure

If you've been to Vietnam, or Laos, you will have noticed that the infrastructure has a long way to go. The airports are antediluvian, the trains come and go when they want, high speed roads are a pipe dream, and the traffic... let's not even talk about it!

In China on the other hand, the government has invested an enormous amount of resources to create top notch infrastructure: fast trains (for example, the Beijing-Shanghai route can be covered in five hours, while it would take you two by air), highways, cutting edge metro systems (the Shanghai metro is the most extensive in the world) and super-modern airports.

Among other things, this infrastructure is still subsidized by the State, so getting around China is rather inexpensive.

To give you an idea, a metro ticket in Beijing costs only a few dozen cents.

5. The cost of living is relatively low

Even though in recent years China has undergone high levels of inflation, **prices are still less than what we are used to in Europe or North America.**

For example, in Shanghai you can still eat for a few dollars (a dish of dumplings in a cantina can be had for less than two dollars), a twenty minute ride in a taxi costs about five dollars and, on Smartshanghai, you can still find a room for rent in a three bedroom apartment with bathroom, kitchen and living room in the middle of the city for about 400 dollars a month.

If you were to move to a “smaller” city – I’m still speaking of metropolises that are larger than Chicago – such as Kunming, Chengdu or Changsha, the cost of living goes down another 30-40%.

[Click here](#) for more information on the cost of living in China.

6. Cities are safe

I don’t know if it’s just the nature of the Chinese or the unforgiving justice system, but in China you (almost) always feel safe, even at night.

Living and Working in China: Disadvantages

If the first part of this document has convinced you that China is your ideal destination, hold off on buying a one-way ticket from Los Angeles to Beijing.

In the Middle Kingdom we also have a few problems...

1. Difficulty accessing the internet

As you perhaps already know, to preserve harmony (a word often used in these longitudes), the government has enforced a restrictive policy for accessing the Internet.

While some websites are completely blocked (Google.com, Facebook, Youtube or Twitter, just to cite the most famous), others are accessible but extremely slow.

To access blocked sites, you need to install and use on your pc or smartphone, a so-called VPN (Virtual Private Network), which is a software that masks your IP address, and in practice will allow you to access such websites even from China.

Keep in mind that such services require payment (nothing excessive, about 7-10 dollars a month).

[Here you'll find](#) more information on VPNs.

2. Getting a work visa

Let's be clear: the government's priority is the country's stability. **This translates into periodic tightening when it comes to visas**, which can often be predicted. For example I remember before the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, there was a

tremendous curtailing of tourist and business visas and many were forced to leave the country.

A new 'crackdown' has been registered on visas during the convention for electing a new president and Party executive committee that took place in Autumn of 2012.

It went exactly the same in the months preceding the convention in 2017, when a points system was introduced for obtaining work visas.

In practical terms, this means that to get a work visa, and be able to legally work in China, you need to respect certain requirements (both on the level of qualifications and work experience).

[Click here](#) to read our complete guide on visas for China.

3. Pollution

China is an extremely polluted country. This goes from air pollution due to the production of electricity mainly from coal, to city traffic, to the polluting of groundwater caused by industrial runoff.

To conclude, you need to keep in mind the contamination of foodstuffs, due to the massive use of pesticides and practices that are not always transparent (such as for example the scandal involving silicone injected in chicken legs to increase their weight).

4. You'll almost certainly be forced to live in a metropolis

Living in a metropolis is not obligatory, but let's just say that a Chinese city with less than a million inhabitants is normally considered the equivalent of a dormitory town where it's hard to even find a bar (let alone a job).

The few exceptions are the towns that live on tourism such as Yangshuo, Dali or Lijiang.