

# Tips to feeling more like a local when studying abroad <http://tinyurl.com/y9b9lf3>

As a student studying abroad in a foreign city, you obviously would like to see all the tourist hot spots. You definitely want to learn and see all the things that attracted you to pick that city. But where there are tourist attractions, there are lots of tourists. Often doing things and activities that the locals do gives you the student more insight into the people and culture of the city in which you are temporarily a member. The following are easy (and cheap!) ways to immerse yourself into the city you are learning in.

**1. Get a newspaper.** Just like papers that circulate here, there are sections dedicated to telling the reader what entertainment is happening for the week i.e. shows, local bands playing in parks, flea markets, etc. Many of these things are free or relatively cheap.

English Newspapers in China:

The China Daily: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>

People's Daily Online: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/>

Chengdoo Magazine: <http://www.chengdoo-magazine.com/>

SINA English: <http://english.sina.com/index.html>

Xinhua News: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english2010/>

CRI English: <http://english.cri.cn/>

Or, grab a Chinese newspaper and use it to help with your learning of the language. The newspaper is an excellent source to help improve your language skills.

**2. Ride public transit.** Taxis are not only expensive, but they offer little interaction. Hop on a bus and just ride its route. You can not only people watch and observe, but you also can see a lot of the city that you might not have seen otherwise.

## **BUSES**

Bus riding is a very cheap and reliable means of transportation, but buses are often crowded, and they are one of the few places where thefts occur. Great places to observe Chinese life though!

## **TRAINS**

Touring by train is one of the best ways to see the country. There are four ways to travel by train: hard seat, soft seat, hard sleeper and soft sleeper (listed in order of increasing price). The soft sleeper cars have four beds per compartment with a door to separate each compartment from the rest of the car. The hard sleeper cars contain open sections of six beds (two

stacks of three) facing a shared window and table. Trains that go overnight all have dining cars. However it is good to bring some of your own food (fruit, water, and some crackers). If you want to get out for a stretch when the train stops, be sure to pay attention to how long the stop is to avoid being left behind.

**3. Shop at flea markets.** In flea markets, many handmade and home grown products can be found. You can get many unique pieces at these markets and for very cheap.

### **Markets in Chengdu:**

#### **Song Xian Qiao Art City**

Address: At corner of Qingyang Shangjie and Huanhua Beilu

Just outside the west 1st ring road is Chengdu's largest art market, Songxianqiao Art City. Local foreigners and travelers alike will be able to find whatever it is they are looking for here. However, the market is not cheap.

#### **Tailor & Costume Street**

Address: Shanxi Jie

Tailor & Costume Street in Chengdu is a great spot for tailor-made clothing and fun costume shopping. The rumor of the ability to buy cheap, but good quality suits, formal wear, etc in China is in fact true. Even travelers who don't speak a word of Chinese should not be worried about the language barrier.

#### **Women's Market**

Address: Central Business District, intersection of DaYeLu & ShangDongDaJie

Literally translated as 'Women's Street', a women's market is a more suitable description. Located in the heart of the central business district, across the street from Ran Fang Jie and close to ChunXi Lu, the winding halls of the market are perfect for the ravenous female shopper. Any kind of clothing accessory, jewelry, or style of young women's fashion can be found here.

#### **Tibetan Quarter**

Address: Wuhouci Heng jie

Traditional Tibetan restaurants, traditional Tibetan shops

**4. Eat food from a street vendor.** Food from street vendors may sound questionable, but it is often quite delicious. Do be cautious though, and wait until you have fully adjusted to local cuisine before trying street vendor food. Use your best judgment!

**Street Food in Chengdu:** spicy wontons, pork dumplings in soup, chicken skewers in mala sauce, sour and spicy noodles, etc.

**Special Sichuan Cuisine:** Sichuan Cuisine is one of the Eight Great Cuisines in China and is famous all over the world for its richness and variety. Characterized by spicy and pungent flavors, Sichuan Cuisine, with a myriad of tastes, emphasizes the use of chili, red hot peppers and garlic. Sichuan food is known for being 'spicy' hot! It's said that one who doesn't experience Sichuan food has never reached Sichuan.

#### **Stir-Fried Spicy Diced Chicken**

Spicy Diced Chicken is cooked by stir-frying a mixture of diced chicken together with dried, crushed chili pepper and golden peanuts. Spicy Diced Chicken, and the dish below, Mapo Bean Curd, are as popular among Westerners as among the Chinese in general, and among the residents of Chengdu and Chongqing in particular.

#### **Mapo Bean Curd (Mapo Tofu)**

Mapo Bean Curd is bean curd, or tofu, set in a tasty bean-and-chili based sauce, which serves as a thin, somewhat oily, bright red suspension. The dish is often topped with minced meat – usually pork or beef. Seasonings include water chestnuts, onions, mushrooms – such as the Judas ear (*Auricularia auricula-judae*) – and other vegetables. Mapo Bean Curd is often described with some or all of the following adjectives: numbing, spicy-hot, fresh and flaky, soft and tender, and aromatic. Mapo Bean Curd is as popular in London, Paris and New York – and, of course, in Amsterdam – as it is inside China.

#### **Sichuan Hot Pot**

Sichuan Hot Pot, like most of the cuisine consumed in the humid province of Sichuan, is very spicy (note that, as implied here, spicy food is considered an antidote to humidity and resulting sweatiness, in keeping with the precepts of Chinese Traditional Medicine – elsewhere referred to as Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM, which acronym Westerners generally associate with Turner Classic Movies, which should never be ingested). The broth is flavored with dried, crushed chili peppers and with other pungent herbs and spices. The main ingredients of the cooking broth include chili pepper, Chinese crystal sugar and wine. Diced or sliced pieces of pork – including the kidney – chicken breast, beef tripe, goose intestines, spring onions, soy bean sprouts, mushrooms, duck and sea cucumber are the usual meats used in the dish.

### **Fuqi Fei Pian**

Fuqi Fei Pian is made of thinly sliced beef, cow's lung or beef tongue seasoned with frying oil that is spiked with chili. There is a homely story about the origin of this famous Sichuan dish that goes as follows. Guo Zhaohua, the inventor of this dish, and his wife sold their marinated (in Baoning vinegar) meat slices from a small vending cart that they would push from street to street. The couple's marinated meat slices were so delicious – and the aroma of them so enticing – that no one could resist them. The marinated meat slices of Guo Zhaohua and his wife became so popular that people gave the dish a fitting name meant to represent all of the marinated meats served by the couple, irrespective of whether it was beef tongue, beef slices or cow's lung: Husband and Wife Lung Slices.

LEARN MORE ON SICHUAN CUISINE:

<http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-food/chuan-cuisine.htm>

**5. Walk and wander.** Though riding public transit is part of the experience, walking is an adventure all in itself. You will come across a variety of shops, eateries, clubs, etc. You will find things you did not know existed. As well as discovering hidden treasures, exploration will help you better acquaint yourself to the city. In no time, you will be able to easily find your way around town and may even be comfortable enough to give directions to others. Then you will really feel like a local and less like a tourist or visitor.

**Parks and good areas to wander:** Tianfu Square, WangJiangLou Park(Bamboo Park), People's Park, HuanHuaXi Park, Sichuan Museum, Jinli Street, Qingyang Gong the Taoist Temple, WenshuFang, QinTai Ancient Road, ChunXi Road, etc.

These are just five simple actions you as a student can do to “fit-in” and learn about everyday life for locals in the city you are studying abroad in. These are cheap and easily accommodating ways to feel like a local on a student budget. When not popping around the city with a camera, take a break and do as the locals do.