2020 Harbin Program Guide

We’re delighted that you’ve decided to join us in Harbin! Whether you’ve never been to China before, or have visited many times, you are in for a fantastic adventure in China’s northeastern metropolis. And you are going to be amazed at how much your Chinese will improve, in only a month—expect to come back to Canada changed for the better!

Almost everyone who spends a significant amount of time in China loves it, and wishes to go back. This is not because China is perfect, of course—there are many serious problems in Chinese society, caused by authoritarian governance, corruption, pollution, wealth disparities, inadequate infrastructure, etc. And many of China’s faults are completely visible to the foreign visitor—at times aggravating, and on rare occasions, potential sources of danger. But these are greatly outweighed by the general friendliness of most individual Chinese citizens, the cultural riches of the nation, and the intoxicating speed at which daily life happens in China.

The purpose of this short guide is to give you a rough introduction to the good, the bad, and the ugly of living in China, so that you can get the most out of your summer in Harbin. It will outline the procedures necessary for you to do well in your language study, and get transfer credit. And it will give you some pointers about how to get out and enjoy yourself while there.

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Application and Registration Process

Our application procedures, documents, and deadlines should be posted on our department website. Please read them carefully, and get your application in on time!

Once you have been accepted, we will send you lots and lots of paperwork to fill out: a registration form, a liability waiver, and a media permissions form. In addition, you will need to register online through HIT’s system. It is your responsibility to fill these forms out by our registration deadline. Along with the registration forms, you are required to pay our $300 administration fee by the due date, March 1.

The registration form which H.I.T. ordinarily uses requires you to list your passport number. It is obviously best if you have this already, and can list it on the form. However, if you require additional time to get your passport, just leave that sections blank, and let us know the correct information when you have it. Once H.I.T. has received your registration, it will issue you the correct forms needed for you to apply for a student visa.

During the last week of winter semester, we will have a mandatory orientation session for all participants—this are required by university policy, as well as by the terms of the scholarship funding awards which we receive. The orientation session will consist of two parts: the first will be led by University of Alberta International’s Go Abroad office, and will explain how to minimize risk during travel abroad; the second will be offered by the Department of East Asian Studies and will focus more specifically on Harbin. We will try to schedule the orientation session for the early evening of a weeknight, so that there are less potential conflicts with classes; if you do have an unavoidable conflict, we will require you to schedule a make-up orientation with the Go Abroad office.

Travel to Harbin will largely be the responsibility of individual participants. We will plan on making a group booking, but if our group is large, we will not be able to book spaces for all members of the group. Hence, ultimately all participants are responsible for purchasing their own airfare, and making their way to Harbin. Once your tickets are bought, let us know your flight schedules: if possible, either Ms. Li Yang or H.I.T. faculty will meet you at the Harbin airport. Before departing Edmonton, everyone will also be given the printed address of the correct destination on the H.I.T. campus, so that if it comes to it, you will be able to find your way by giving this to a taxi driver at the airport.

After the Harbin program is over and you return to Edmonton, there are two important tasks you must remember to do. First, you must bring your H.I.T. transcript to the student services office of your home faculty in order to get your credits transferred. (Some faculties will want a sealed copy; we will make sure that H.I.T. provides these to everyone or the program coordinator Ms Li Yang submits sealed copies to each faculty.) Please see the following chart for credit transfer equivalency. Second, those who have been awarded $500 China Institute scholarships through East Asian Studies should bring their H.I.T. transcript to the department’s financial administrators in 2-40 Assiniboia Hall for reimbursement.
Credit Transfer Equivalency Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIT Chinese course</th>
<th>U of A course equivalent</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level A CHINA 1XX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level B CHINA 2XX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level C CHINA 3XX</td>
<td>You are NOT allowed to take China 101, 102 at the U of A if you have completed Level B courses at the HIT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level D CHINA 4XX</td>
<td>You are NOT allowed to take China 101, 102, 201, 202 at the U of A if you have completed Level C courses at the HIT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level E CHINA 4XX</td>
<td>You are NOT allowed to take China 101, 102, 201, 202, 301, 302 at the U of A if you have completed Level D courses at the HIT</td>
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Responsibilities

Foreigners cannot be pure individuals in China; we are always taken as representatives of our home country. Obviously, nothing that you can do in a month as a language student is going to change the course of Sino-Canadian relations. But you could affect the H.I.T.-U of A bilateral relationship, either reducing opportunities for students in future years with bad behavior, or increasing opportunities for them by being a model student. This relationship is more than just a summer language program; the Provost’s office has been working on a bilateral agreement covering general educational mobility, advanced research collaboration, etc. And to you, this should be more than just a summer vacation—it is a rare opportunity to acquire language skills and cultural understanding. Because of these responsibilities you have to yourself and to others, we ask participants to commit to the following:

• Obey all Chinese laws, and all regulations of the host institution. Scrupulously.
• Attend class every day. Be on time every day, despite the fact that class starts at 8:30 a.m. and there is no early-morning coffee available.
• Work hard to meet your instructor’s expectations in class and out, participating actively in class and completing all assignments. If you are struggling, make sure that your instructor knows you are struggling rather than lazy or disinterested.
• Show friendly respect to your instructor, your classmates, and all H.I.T. faculty and staff.
• When you encounter problems, talk to someone as soon as possible to get the problem resolved. A month goes by incredibly quickly, and you don’t have time to waste hoping things will get better. For academic problems, talk to your instructor first, then to the H.I.T. program coordinator; if these don’t solve the problem, talk to Ms. Li Yang.
• When looking for a resolution to problems, do not adopt an attitude of complaint or protest, but present yourself as trying to look for a constructive solution that will benefit all parties. Do not stereotype your hosts as authoritarian party members and under no circumstances attempt to bribe them to resolve difficulties. Language classrooms are just language classrooms, not microcosms of Chinese society.

• Whenever you are not in class or doing homework, you should be out experiencing Harbin and interacting with ordinary Chinese citizens. Do not travel in large packs of foreign students which would insulate you from having real conversations with locals. Definitely do not stay in your dorm room. Exposure to the actual language environment is just as important for your progress as your classwork.

• Study characters wherever you go. If you have a smartphone, install a Chinese dictionary and look up new characters you see whenever you have a chance. If not, buy a pocket dictionary and learn how to look them up the old-fashioned way.

• When out at night, have fun and enjoy yourself. But do not get into drunken brawls, do not use illegal drugs, and do not gamble or solicit prostitutes.

• Do not under any circumstances antagonize police or military personnel; show complete respect and friendliness when it is necessary to interact. Never, ever take photos of military convoys or military bases, as this could result in espionage charges. (It is OK to take friendly group photos with police or soldiers, if they first give their permission.)

• If you travel in China by yourself after the end of the program, please prepare thoroughly, keep family members informed of your whereabouts and your progress, and use caution and common sense. Do not expect that the U of A will be able to provide any assistance after the end of the H.I.T. program. In addition, your Chinese medical insurance will not cover you after the end of the program—and Chinese emergency rooms might not admit you, even if you are dying, without local medical insurance.

Preparing to Go

1. **Passport.** In order to get into the People’s Republic of China, you will need a valid passport. If you are a Canadian citizen and do not currently hold a Canadian passport, please apply for one as soon as possible. If you already have a passport (Canadian or otherwise), please check now to make sure that it is due to expire after you plan to return from China—and if not, renew it as soon as possible. You will need to have extra valid time on your passport before the Chinese consulate grants you your visa. Either getting a new passport, or renewing an old one, will take time—possibly several months. Please plan ahead.

2. **Visa.** In addition to your passport, you of course also need a valid visa. In theory, you need a short-term student visa—for Harbin, this will mean an “X2 visa.” (If you do get an X2, be sure to demand a 60-day one, rather than 30-days; the latter will result in a massive fine if you leave the country late due to a cancelled flight.) However, many past participants have
found the student visas to be a hassle. There are 10-year tourist visas available from the Chinese government, and those who have used them in the past have not had any problems. However, these are not what you are supposed to use, and it is not guaranteed that you will be able to use these without problems. Whatever visa you decide to apply for, you should apply through the Chinese consulate in Calgary, and if you are in Calgary regularly, you can take care of this yourself—see www.visaforchina.org/YYC_EN/ for details. Since 2019 every foreigner is required to go to the Chinese consulate in person to get fingerprinted for their visa application, which means that you need to go all the way to Calgary (or other cities) to submit your visa application. If you are in Calgary regularly, you can take care of this yourself, you can also offer a ride to other participants. During orientation in April, we will invite a staff from the Maple Bridge Travel Agency in the HUB mall to give us a brief introduction to Chinese visa application as well as their visa services. They will help you with your visa application at a discounted price and can provide us a carpool service to Calgary for $700+ tax in total if we have 14 people available (around $50 per person). After you submit your application in Calgary, the Maple Bridge Travel Agency can also provide us a pick-up service with $40 per person so that you don’t need to go again in person to pick up your passport.

**NOTE:** By the terms of your visa, you will be expected to arrive at the H.I.T. campus within 24 hours of your entrance into China. Hence, it is recommended that you not do any travelling in China prior to the beginning of the Harbin program. If you must do so, be sure to get copies of your local residence registration permits from your hotel or local police office, and bring them with you to H.I.T. If you do not do so, you may be required to make one or more trips to the police station in Harbin for additional paperwork. This will not be a major problem (you will not be arrested) but it could be a very annoying hassle.

3. **Immunizations.** We do not require any immunizations for our program, and we will not be checking your medical record. However, we do strongly recommend that you get appropriate immunizations before leaving: these shots are perfectly safe, and necessary to protect you from diseases common in China. You should talk to your doctor about what immunizations are appropriate for you. However, travel to Harbin in summer should generally require three immunizations beyond the regular schedule of vaccines administered to children in Canada: Japanese encephalitis, Hepatitis A, and Hepatitis B. The latter two are of special concern, since Hepatitis is far more common in China than in Canada. Moreover, Hepatitis B requires a three-shot sequence over a six-month period, so it is best if you schedule the first shot ASAP.

4. **Register with the Canadian Embassy.** Canada runs a program called “Registration of Canadians Abroad” which allows you to file your itinerary and contact information with the Canadian government. In case of emergency, the Canadian embassy in China may be able to get you assistance more easily if they have this contact info on file. The Department of East Asian Studies will do a group registration for all participants in the Harbin program; however, if you plan on doing additional travel in China before or after the program, consider registering your personal travel and contact info here: travel.gc.ca/travelling/registration.
5. **Check your insurance.** Medical insurance is important—you need to understand your coverage before leaving, as well as reimbursement procedures. Because of China’s unusual medical system, we are requiring all participants to carry local medical insurance in China; this will be paid for by H.I.T. However, while that local insurance will cover emergencies, it may not cover other expenses. **Hence, everyone is also required to have some form of Canadian medical insurance coverage before going to China.** All U of A students with the normal university health plan should have some basic services covered, but know your coverage limits. If you are not satisfied with your available coverage, consider purchasing additional medical travel insurance.

6. **Bring medicine.** Chinese pharmacies are not going to be able to refill your prescriptions—bring at least a month’s supply. Most over-the-counter medicines have equivalents available in China. If you do bring prescription medicine, also bring a doctor’s note on the plane explaining why you are required to use it—border police may ask to see this documentation.

7. **Order RMB from your bank.** If you like, you could take a wad of Canadian bills to China, and change them at the airport, but you won’t get a very good rate. You could get a better rate at a Chinese bank, but not all banks can do exchanges for foreign currency. It is better to order some RMB from your local Canadian bank: usually they require a couple of weeks, but can get you as much as you need, at a rate close to the current official exchange rate.

8. **Buy adapters.** Chinese electricity supply is 220V, rather than the 120V of Canada. Adapters should be available at Walmart, Canadian Tire, etc. For recharging-syncing portable devices via USB cables, it is fine to plug these directly into computers or plugs designed for Chinese outlets.

9. **Pack wisely.** Since airline baggage fees are now outrageous, give some thought as to how and what you pack. If you are planning on doing lots of shopping, you might want to take only one bag with you to China—cheap single-use suitcases can be bought for the return trip without much trouble. (Any trip outside the country of 7+ days gives you an $800 limit of personal exemption from tariffs.) If this is your first trip across the Pacific, be aware that the jetlag is fierce, and you won’t have much time to adjust—consider buying some melatonin at your local drug store.

### Arriving on Campus

H.I.T. can send people to meet us at the airport, even if we are all coming on different flights. However, in order to do so, they need to have advance notice. **If you wish to get a free ride to campus from the airport, you must send your complete flight info, including airline, flight number and arrival time, to your program coordinator, no later than June 1.** If you have sent
this info, then there should be someone waiting for you at the airport who will be holding up a sign for “Harbin Institute of Technology”.

If you do not get us your flight info by June 1, or if something strange should happen and H.I.T. does not meet you at the airport, you will have to take a taxi. Do not take a ride from anyone who walks up to you in the terminal—bandit cabs can be dangerous. Instead, go to the normal taxi stand outside the airport. Make sure the driver turns on the meter; if he does so, your fare should at most be about 150 RMB (and probably more like 120-130 RMB). Cut out the following card, and give it to the driver, and he should be able to get you to the H.I.T. international students’ dorm:

Also, at the time you arrive at the dorm, you will be asked to turn in 2 passport-style photos for dorm check-in, and to pay a 15RMB deposit for a food card and a 10RMB deposit for a room key. The rechargeable card used for buying food at the campus cafeterias—you can deposit money on the card in the cafeteria just across the street, to the right, from the international center where you will be taking classes. Please do not lose this card, and do not forget to return it before leaving campus in July!

On the Monday before classes start, you will also have to turn in 2 passport-style photos for school registration. (You do not have to bring these from Canada; they can be done more cheaply on campus, a short walk from where the registration is done.) On the same day, they will also administer placement tests. These can be chaotic, since their classrooms are small, and if too many people who show up want to take the placement test for a given level, they will then try to arrange a new room to accommodate everyone. Try to be patient. Remember, these tests will go better for you if you have first reviewed how to read and write the characters you should have learned in the past year’s Chinese class. (Last year, H.I.T. had a hard time placing our students in appropriate classes, because everyone understood and could speak Mandarin very well for their level, but could read and write many fewer words than they could speak and understand.) After taking the test and receiving your assignment, if you are certain that you have been placed in the wrong level, talk to your program coordinator.

Classes

The H.I.T. program structure is very similar to other reputable programs in China, and very different from our own. Part of this difference is due to the fact that classroom pedagogy in
China will be conservative by Western standards, and you should expect more classroom grammar drills and rote memorization, and less of an emphasis on contextual usage than we use in our own Chinese classes in Edmonton. However, part of these differences are due not to Chinese conservatism, but to the very different context. Learning a language for 4+ hours every day in an immersive native environment is simply a completely different thing from learning it for 3-5 hours per week in a foreign country, and teaching it requires different methods. For students studying language at Chinese universities, it can be assumed that you will get plenty of real-language practice just by living your life; hence, in-class time is better spent giving you as many grammatical and vocabulary tools as possible.

Please remember that methods and curricula may seem conservative but in fact have been honed over the past 30 years by applied linguistics researchers working directly with classroom instructors, and they now get very good results. You would not be getting six U of A credits if we did not believe that H.I.T.’s one-month program provided the equivalent of a year at the U of A; those who spend a full year in Chinese language programs there can often go from zero ability to basic fluency.

However, in order to achieve these results, diligence and discipline are required on the part of the student. It is a labor-intensive method of learning, and East Asian Studies will expect all participants to work hard. In particular, you should expect much more character memorization than in our classes in Edmonton, and more high-stakes testing on those characters. Students in beginning classes may be asked to learn 5-10 characters per day; those in higher-level classes may be asked to learn up to 40 characters per day. Moreover, most classes will start each day with a dictation quiz, in which students are expected to correctly transcribe (in Chinese characters, not pinyin) the phrases or sentences spoken by the teacher.

Because there is more emphasis on character reading and writing in H.I.T.’s program, compared with our own, we strongly encourage everyone to review the characters they were supposed to have learned at their current level, before arriving in Harbin. This will help you place into the correct level class, rather than being moved down to a more basic class; it will also help ensure that you can keep up as you learn new material.

This will sound daunting, but it is possible to do well—last year everyone had to work hard, but also everyone passed the course and received six credits. And we expect that the same thing will happen this year. **Note: getting six credits does not mean that you can necessarily skip a year of our own Chinese program at the U of A, which runs on a different curriculum. Returning students who wish to take more Chinese language classes will be evaluated by Chinese program coordinator, and only those who have actually made significant progress over the summer will be able to skip to a higher level language class.**
Life in Harbin

How to Keep in Contact
There will be many problems which you encounter in China. You are encouraged to try to solve as many of these as you can by yourself—it is good for your Chinese learning if you actually have to use the language to get important things done! When you can't solve something by yourself, see if you can get help from someone else in the dorms whose Chinese is better than yours.

However, there will be some occasions in which you will need official help. In this case, you can speak to either our own group leaders, or to our main contact at H.I.T.’s international office, Ms. Li Dongmei (room 302 of the international office building, cell 18246017369). You can knock on our doors in the dorm, call us, or send us a message on WeChat.

Everyone should plan on installing WeChat. This is a messaging app which is used by pretty much everyone in China, and it is the primary means of contacting people. Before the beginning of the trip, we will set up a WeChat group chat involving all participants—and any important announcements will be posted there. You can also use the group chat yourselves to ask advice from each other, round up friends for a trip downtown, etc.

Scholarships, Money, and Banking
Your CLIC Chinese government scholarships will cover the cost of your tuition, instructional fees, and dorm fees, so that you will not have to pay anything to H.I.T. except for a 10RMB dorm room key deposit. In addition, the scholarships provide you with a 3000RMB living stipend for the month, and HIT will give this amount to you in cash. However, it will take at least a few days for them to process the paperwork necessary to get you your payments. Therefore, you should definitely bring cash with you to China. You may wish to order RMB in advance for your Canadian bank (this can take up to 2 weeks, so talk to them early). You could also bring Canadian dollars to China to exchange there, but be aware that not all banks will exchange foreign currency. If you do try to exchange currency in China, you will need to bring along your passport to the bank with you.

When you do get to campus, it may be worthwhile to open a Chinese bank account. Both of the two banks near the dorm (Bank of China, and ICBC) are major Chinese banks with thousands of branches, and which should be able to deal with international transactions. Putting your living stipend in a bank account may be a safer option than keeping it in your dorm room, but be 100% certain to keep your ATM card safe and PIN secret—we have had one incident of money being stolen from a student’s bank account using an unguarded card. If you do open a bank account, you will need to bring along your passport—and show them your passport ID page and passport expiry date.

It is also a very good idea to develop multiple plans for obtaining emergency cash from Canada, since any individual method can fail, and you do not ever want to be without access to cash in
China. (Very few places in Harbin accept international credit or debit cards). Here are the three most important options which you should prepare for in advance:

1) **Withdrawals from your Canadian accounts.** It is possible, sometimes, for you to withdraw cash from Chinese ATMs using your Canadian cards. But these cards will frequently not be accepted, so you should take steps in advance to maximize the likelihood that your cards will be accepted. First, all Chinese ATMs require 6-digit PINs, so **go into your bank branch to change your all your PINs to 6-digit ones before leaving Canada.** Second, many Canadian banks have anti-fraud policies in place to prevent unauthorized withdrawals, and will freeze your account if they see someone trying to withdraw money from China—so talk to them in advance, and make sure that their systems will expect you to be using your ATM while abroad. Finally, bring multiple debit and credit cards with you—some may work while others do not. If you do get to an ATM and it is refusing to recognize your PIN, **do not try your PIN three times in a row!** If you do this, your bank will freeze your card until you get back to Canada and go into a branch to unlock it. If you try your PIN twice and it does not work, wait a day and go to a different bank to try again. Generally Bank of China and ICBC ATMs are among the most likely to be recognize your cards.

2) **International bank transfers.** If you do open a Chinese bank account, ask them to give you the information for international transfers—this will include your exact name on the account, the account number, the address of the branch where you opened your account, and something called a SWIFT code. If you have all of these, you should be able to go online to your Canadian bank accounts and send yourself an international transfer. The transfer will take 5-7 business days, and will not automatically show up in your account for you to withdraw from an ATM—you will have to go into a branch and let them know that you are expecting a transfer.

3) **Western Union.** You can use a credit card to wire yourself money, and pick it up the same day, from the Western Union website. There are fees, and the exchange rate isn’t great, but it is an important emergency option. There are many Chinese bank branches, including a couple near the HIT campus, that can pay out Western Union transfers—see the Western Union website for a complete list. After your transfer goes through, take your passport, confirmation number and any other info from the transaction to the local Western Union agent and tell them that you are expecting a transfer (the Chinese name for WU is 西联汇款 xi1 lian2 hui4 kuan3). The big problem with Western Union is that they will usually freeze transfers to China until you call them and go through a lengthy confirmation process to establish your true identity. In this process, they will use your credit report to ask you questions about yourself, so if there is incorrect information on your credit report (frequently the case) they will refuse your transfer. In order to guarantee that WU is a usable emergency resource for you, it is strongly recommended that you check your credit report for errors long before leaving for China. It is easiest if you have a friend or family member who can go to a Canadian WU branch for you and
send you cash from their own accounts—these should go through easily as long as they are sent by someone who appears in person at a branch.

**Dorms**

The physical condition of the dorms is quite nice by Chinese university standards, and quite poor by Western university standards. Most of the dorm rooms have two bedrooms, each with two beds, plus a small common area, plus a bathroom. When you arrive, if you discover that the room is not clean, you do not have to live with this; instead, ask the front desk staff to get someone to clean the room. If that does not work, talk to your program coordinator, or to Ms. Li Dongmei in the H.I.T. international office. Living in dirty spaces is not a “Chinese thing”: most average people keep their own apartments spotless. But the international students’ dorm has people moving in and out all the time, and there isn’t a dedicated housekeeping service like in a hotel, so the dorm staff may just ignore problems unless you make your complaints known.

Apart from the cleanliness, there are other problems that can’t be solved. The beds will be rock-hard by Canadian standards; this is because only rock-hard mattresses are sold in China. (If you really need a soft bed, consider bringing or buying lots of pillows.) Also, there is no air-conditioning, and the weather does get hotter than Canada. However, the situation is livable if you do the following: (1) don’t plan on staying in your dorm room during the heat of the day; if you need to study, try the library. (2) Buy an electric fan (100RMB) from the campus supermarket. (3) Keep the windows open at night, when temps usually come down significantly.

Also, do bring a new shower curtain, and all the towels you need. These won’t be in the dorm, and while you can buy them in the supermarket, the ones on offer aren’t great.

Electricity in the dorms is metered. You will have to come to an agreement with your roommates about how to pay; generally each individual could expect to pay about 100-150RMB for a month’s worth of electricity. And then paying is kind of a hassle: you need to pay a deposit and get an electricity card from the main desk downstairs. Then you take this card and go to the electricity office (ask for directions to dorm 10). Give them the card and the money you want to charge to the card. (You might want to bring along a Chinese speaker if your own Chinese is poor). Then you bring the card back and put it in the meter on your floor next to the elevators, and then finally go back to the front desk to return the card and get your deposit back.

Internet is also a hassle. You need to pay 30RMB to open an internet account with the university. (The internet office is in a building on the far side of the basketball courts in front of the dorm, diagonally to your right side). Bring your passport, and probably also a Chinese speaker, since you will have to fill out forms. Once that is done, your dorm room Ethernet connection should work—but there is no wifi in the dorm. If you want wifi, you should either bring your own router, or you can buy a new one at the campus supermarket (100RMB).
Medical Care and Insurance

All participants are absolutely required to have (1) Canadian health insurance coverage, either through their student plan, parents’ plan, or medical travel insurance for all regular medical fees; and (2) local Chinese medical insurance, for use in emergencies. The latter will be supplied by H.I.T. at no cost to us, but it will not be easy to use. In case of medical emergency, you will need to call Ms. Li Dongmei, tell her your Chinese and English name, your passport number, and which hospital the ambulance is taking you to. After you call her, she will call the insurance company, and they will arrange for an emergency deposit payment to be made to the hospital. It is strongly recommended that you write your passport number and Ms. Li Dongmei’s cell number on a card and keep this card on you at all times in your wallet or purse; it is potentially a matter of life and death!!!

Chinese hospitals differ from hospitals elsewhere in the world in one critically important way: their emergency rooms do not automatically provide treatment for someone who is dying. Instead, they will demand either that someone produce either Chinese medical insurance (foreign medical insurance is not accepted for pre-cleared coverage) or a huge deposit (far more than ATMs would let you withdraw in a single day). If you are in an accident and are badly injured, and don’t have any local insurance to pay for you, the hospital may let you die rather than treat you.

Anyone who does have a chronic condition which may require emergency care should develop a plan for treatment in consultation with Ms. Li Yang, H.I.T. administrators, and your insurance carrier before you leave Edmonton.

For all non-emergency claims, just keep your receipts from treatment. You could try to submit them for reimbursement through the Chinese insurance, but it probably isn’t worth the hassle. Instead, bring them home and submit them for reimbursement through your Canadian provider.

If you do need to see a doctor, you will probably need to go to a hospital—there aren’t many independent clinics with walk-in service, so most Chinese regularly go to outpatient clinics in the hospitals themselves. There is an H.I.T. hospital, which should be good enough for minor injuries, aches and pains, digestion problems, etc., but it is not a place to get top-flight professional medical care. Hence, for anything serious, you should make a trip to the Harbin Medical University Hospital #1, which is much, much better. In Chinese, this is called “Yidayiyuan”（医大一院）, and you can get there easily on the subway, or take a cab. (There is also a Medical University Hospital #2, but it is further from H.I.T.)

Getting medical care in a Chinese clinic is a confusing and frustrating experience, and you might want to bring along a fluent Chinese speaker if you have time. First you have to register and get a personal hospital card—you need to pay a small fee and show them your passport. Then you have to use this card to register for a spot in the clinic waiting list, which carries another fee. The registration window will usually not have a nice lineup; instead you have to push your way to the window. When that is done, you take your card over to the clinic and give it to the nurse, and then wait to be seen by the doctor. There is no lineup there either; everyone waiting just crowds into the one exam room. This means that, unless your problem requires actually taking
off your underwear, you are not going to get any privacy—strangers will be sitting next to you when you explain your problem to the doctor. Once you are diagnosed and get a prescription, you will need to take the prescription back to where you registered, and pay the fee for whatever medicine you will be getting. Finally, when that is done, you take your receipt and prescription to the hospital pharmacy to pick up your medicine.

**Phone**

If you want, you can sign up with your Canadian carrier for a roaming plan that will work in China. That is easiest, and you don’t have to worry about phone compatibility or getting new SIM cards etc. It might be slightly inconvenient, as average Chinese people don’t know how to dial a foreign number, so you might not be able to keep in touch easily. In addition, sometimes registering for local services (such as logging into wifi at a local café) will require a local cell number, and your Canadian number won’t be accepted. Also, more importantly, you will need a local cell number for opening a bank account.

If your phone is unlocked, or you are willing to buy a new phone, you can get a Chinese phone number without too much difficulty. You can get a SIM card at several places on campus, with one of China’s main cell providers; and you should be able to have a choice of data plans (ask specifically about 4G if you need it). The person at the kiosk can fill out most of the paperwork for you, but you will need to bring your passport along. However, be aware that not all Canadian phones will work on all Chinese networks; for example, only China Unicom (中国联通) can give 4G data service to Canadian iPhones. Do some Googling in advance to figure out which providers will work best for your particular phone.

**Campus Life**

As is the case on most university campuses, things are relatively dead during the summer. However, H.I.T. is a very large institution, and even if 90% of undergraduates have gone home for the season, there will still be some on campus working or taking classes, as well as lots of graduate students, various hangers-on, etc. So, for example, the tennis and basketball courts in front of the dorm will still be full most of the day. The student union building is very near the international dorm as well, so you can feel free to stop by there and see if anything is happening. Also, H.I.T. will introduce all participants to students of their own who have relatively good English—they can be good guides to campus, as well as Chinese tutors, perhaps. However, for most of your fun, you should plan on spending your time off campus, out in Harbin.
Sightseeing and Nightlife

Far and away the top tourist attractions in Harbin are the yearly ice and snow festivals. You can actually visit the fairgrounds in July if you really want to; but you’ll find it’s rather lacking in something.

However, there are lots of fun things to do in the summer! H.I.T. will probably organize field trips to major tourist sites such as Central Street and St. Sophia Church, the Siberian Tiger Park, Unit 731, etc. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of these group trips—it is much more convenient to get to these places when you have a bus provided for you! If you do go on these trips, however, please pay close attention to what time you are supposed to meet back at the bus—if you are late, they will leave without you. Beyond this, there are many smaller things to see and do in Harbin—historical sites of importance in the old city, museums, art galleries, music venues, etc. Depending on schedules and student interest, we may organize one or more group trips of only Alberta students; you should definitely also take the opportunity to see as much as you can on your own.

In addition to local tourist sightseeing spots, there is a lot to do that may be completely unremarkable for locals, but which will be weird and wonderful for you. One such activity is shopping: there are Western-style malls in the city, and luxury boutiques on Central Street, but it will be much more interesting for you to visit Chinese-style malls, which are set up as maze-like multilevel structures with row after row of tiny stalls run by individuals selling clothing, jewelry, pots and pans, toys, books, knickknacks, etc. There are several such large markets at the Heilongjiang University subway stop, on the west side of Xuefu Road. In addition, there are frighteningly large underground malls of this style around St. Sophia Church in which it is very possible to get lost. Also, you should definitely go at least once to the very large night market which stretches out for a couple of kilometers near Heilongjiang University. If you need to go to a Western-style mall to “take a break from China”, there is a good one right at the Xuefu Road subway stop.

Nightlife in Harbin can be a lot of fun, mostly because people aren’t exactly shy about drinking. The famous Harbin beer festival happens right around the time that we will arrive there, and if the dates line up, we can arrange a group trip—imagine a large fairground dedicated to pavilion after pavilion of loud music and raucous drinking. On average nights in July, the immediate neighborhood just outside the gates at the international dorm will be filled with outdoor BBQ stands, with lots of people sitting at sidewalk tables eating shish kabobs and drinking. There is at least one Western-style bar just out the same side gate, and more bars near Heilongjiang University. Naturally, karaoke parlors are pretty much everywhere—but you need to bring a large group of your friends along. Among dance clubs, Myst has been the most popular (address: 道里区爱建商圈爱湖路 111 号), and at least last year, they seemed to have a standing offer of free drinks for foreigners. Please remember: any drinking you do is entirely at your own risk, so try not to drink so much that you will get in trouble.
Some of last year’s students took excursions far outside of Harbin on the weekends. Some people went to Mt. Changbai, on the border with North Korea; others went to Beijing! This is a long way to go in a weekend, but it is much more doable now that the high speed rail lines are built. Other travel options that might be better saved for after the program include other spots around Heilongjiang. It has large and beautiful national parks for the naturally-inclined; or those who are planning a career in the energy sector might wish to make a personal study tour of Daqing (China’s Ft. McMurray). If you’d love to see Russia, Khabarovsk and Vladivostok are also reachable by overnight train. (Remember to get a Russian tourist visa in advance!) One of the best travel options might be Dalian, which is only 4 hours away by high-speed rail, and which has a reputation as one of China’s most pleasant and livable cities. (Imagine Victoria, but with the population of Toronto.)

Transportation

Strangely for a large Chinese city, Harbin has a small subway system: as of now, just two lines, though more are being built. These two lines connect several of the city’s universities, which is very helpful for the city’s nightlife. Oddly, though, it doesn’t go into the heart of downtown, sort of skimming alongside downtown instead. If you do want to go downtown, one of the buses leaving from the campus main gate (such as the 64/94, for Central Street) would be a better bet. Like public transportation in other Chinese cities, ticket prices depend on the route and distance, but are all dirt cheap, with the cheapest bus routes costing under 20 cents Canadian. There are several websites that make checking bus routes easy; one site that works smoothly is haerbin.gongjiao.com.

Taxis can be more expensive, of course, but are still reasonable by Canadian standards—most trips around central Harbin would cost $5-$10. And the fact that any taxi should be easily able to get you back to H.I.T. should make you bolder in exploring the city. Occasionally, it will be hard to call a cab—they can all fill up during rush hour. And sometimes they will refuse to stop for foreigners, on the assumption that the foreigners don’t speak Chinese. To solve this problem, send the most Chinese-looking member of your group out into the road to flag one down, or ask a friendly bystander for assistance. Please note: in Harbin, it is very common for taxis to take multiple separate fares at the same time—so you might be in the middle of a ride, and the driver will stop to pick up someone else as well! That can be annoying—but the flip side is that if you can’t find an empty cab, you may be able to get a ride yourself from a taxi who is already carrying someone else. In any case, do not ever get in a bandit cab (a car not marked as a taxi)—you will be guaranteed to be charged way too much, and you may even be abducted. These are most common around tourist sites, such as St. Sophia—they are looking to prey on foreigners.
Eating and Drinking

The northern climate and proximity to Russia had its effect on Harbin cuisine. On the bright side, this means a lot of interesting things are done with preserved meats and vegetables: lots of pickled vegetables used in innovative ways, lots of soups, and lots of dumplings, famous Russian-style red sausages. In addition, the pleasant summer nights means that outdoor BBQ is very popular. On the negative side, there are noticeably less fresh vegetable dishes than elsewhere in China, so it is somewhat harder to eat a balanced diet—especially for vegetarians. There certainly are some healthier options available in the university cafeterias, and we will show you where to look for certain kinds of foods. However, in addition, you should supplement your cafeteria or off-campus meals with fresh fruit—there is a small fruit market next to the “black stores” (a row of fairly unhealthy snack food shops next to the international student offices).

When eating off campus, there will be many options, good and bad. You can get super-cheap snack food on almost every corner. But if you have even a little bit of room in your budget, you should also try finding nicer places to eat—for 100RMB per person; you could have an extravagant meal at an amazing restaurant. To find good places, search on dianping.com (the Chinese equivalent of Yelp).

In general, food hygiene is an important concern when eating out in China, but it is not necessary to be paranoid. (Despite real and serious problems with contaminants in the food supply, Chinese people do eat every day without keeling over.) Do get your Hepatitis A shot before you arrive in China; other than that, just judge for yourself whether a restaurant looks clean. In this regard, street food (despite its bad reputation) is easier to judge, because you can directly look at how it is being prepared.

Health

For daily health needs, most basic personal care products are available in local mom-and-pop groceries; for more unusual items or cosmetics, look for a Watson’s. However, please note: although Watson’s looks like any other Western drug store chain, it does not have a pharmacy. H.I.T. does have its own pool and gyms, but the pool will not be available to you, and the gyms are poorly equipped. However, there are basketball and tennis courts right in front of the dorms, and soccer fields a short walk away; balls and exercise equipment can be purchased from the campus supermarket. And exercise is an excellent way to quickly overcome jetlag, and reduce the stress of culture shock. However, consider incorporating social engagement into your exercise routine: a long hike around the city might be better than jogging alone on a track, a pick-up game of basketball with H.I.T. students better than a solitary swim, etc. In any case, please use caution while exercising—in 2016 one student had to receive emergency surgery following a bad injury on the soccer field.
**Interacting with Locals**

Because of Harbin’s proximity to Russia, it is the only major city in China where obvious foreigners will not be assumed to be English-speaking. This probably won’t stop random jokers from shouting “Hello” at you and laughing, but you probably won’t have to deal with every average person you meet wanting to practice English. Fortunately, everyone in Harbin speaks standard Mandarin as their native language, so you will never have to wonder if you are having a hard time understanding because someone is using a dialect, or heavily-accented Mandarin. Assume anything you hear on the street is correct, completely standard, and hence something you can learn from.

Apart from the language barrier, the hardest part of interacting with locals will probably be getting used to the fact that China is not in any way a multicultural society, and has very different norms for what is considered acceptable. Non-ethnically-Asian students should expect questions or comments which would be stupid, rude, or outright racist in Canada, but which proceed from simple and total lack of knowledge rather than any ill-will.

Those who look Asian will face a different set of challenges. Twenty years ago, Asian Canadians who travelled to China without speaking fluent Mandarin were often looked on as mentally handicapped Chinese, and treated with open contempt. Now, because there is a huge Korean expat community in China (especially in Beijing and the northeast), Asian Canadians will most likely be assumed to be from South Korea. Insistence that one is, in fact, Canadian will sometimes be met with disbelief, and statements along the lines of, “But you don’t look Canadian!”

Fortunately, a month is probably not long enough for this kind of thing to become truly enraged—so try to remain amused by it. If you return to China, you will have to make your peace with it eventually: usually people do so after about a year—after that it remains tiresome but is hardly worth getting upset over anymore.

**Climate**

Despite being in China’s far north, Harbin is hotter than Edmonton, and you should prepare yourself. Average daily highs will usually be about 30 degrees, but there can be stretches of a week or more with temperatures at 35 or higher. The unfortunate fact is, China in summer is just a very hot place—at cities farther south, and summer highs will reach 40 or even 45. Harbin’s hottest temperatures will be uncomfortable, but they aren’t dangerous; and at least the climate is not overly humid. Few buildings will have central A/C (one notable exception will be Western-style malls), but there are room-based A/C units in your classrooms, as well as at most restaurants, cafes, etc.
Pollution

No Chinese city has air or water that is as clean as you will find in Alberta. This is an unavoidable fact of China’s rapid modernization combined with its incredible population density. That said, Harbin in summer should be relatively bearable. There are some industrial sources of coal-based air pollution operating in the city, but these are much fewer than in winter, when the frigid air requires much more energy output. Also, unlike many of China’s older cities, Harbin is not located in a geographical basin which traps smog behind mountain ranges. One student with severe asthma was on our trip last year and had very few problems with the air quality until the last week of July, when there was a temporary rise in pollution levels. For students without respiratory problems, it is very unlikely you will notice much difference from Edmonton’s air quality.

In 2005, there was a major pollution incident in Jilin, which travelled down the Songhua River to Harbin and rendered water supplies undrinkable. However, in the decade since there have been no similar incidents, and pollutant concentrations in the river have returned to low levels. However, in general it is not a good idea to drink a lot of tap water. Certainly, never drink unboiled tap water; the country’s water control systems do not remove bacteria from the water supply. Boiled tap water is safe, but may contain higher pollutant levels than would be acceptable in Canada. To be on the safe side, drink bottled water: Nongfu Spring is usually considered the most trustworthy brand.

Communications

Wifi is common in China, and you will find plenty of hotspots on campus at H.I.T. (Though not in the dorm, unless you set it up yourself—see above.) However, what are you going to do with your internet access? Many of the most common sites which you use in Canada will be blocked—Facebook, YouTube, major news sites, Google, etc. Google is a particular problem for us, of course, because all of our U of A email is run by Google, and hence this will be blocked as well. At a minimum, you should turn on vacation forwarding for your university account and use an alternate address (Yahoo and Hotmail accounts still work fine, as of course do any accounts on Chinese sites such as QQ, 126, etc.). If you want greater functionality, you should install a good VPN program on your computer or mobile device. Unfortunately, in recent years China has begun cracking down on VPNs, so they are now not guaranteed to work. The U of A has its own VPN software which you can install on your own devices—just go here to install: https://uofaprod.service-now.com/kb_view.do?sysparm_article=KB0012158. However, the U of A VPN only works sometimes in China now. Other providers that some people had success with last year are Express VPN, Nord VPN, and Hexatech.

Assume that no electronic communication in China is private, because it isn’t. In general, the Public Security Bureau has better things to do than dig through the personal messages of foreign exchange students. But everything you send will probably be logged in your own personal folder, with your name and passport number, somewhere in a PSB server. Make sure
that the Chinese government doesn’t have anything to hold over you 15 years from now when you are working in a sensitive government or business post.

**Finances**

The common forms of payment in China nowadays are WeChat Pay, Ali Pay, and cash. If you would like to try WeChat Pay and Ali Pay (just like Apple Pay in Canada), you need to open a Chinese bank account to use them; otherwise you should always have a couple hundred RMB in your wallet for emergencies. There are now many stores which take credit cards, but they will often only accept cards issued by Chinese banks. Debit cards won’t work. Travellers’ cheques aren’t any better than Canadian dollars—they need to be exchanged first. So keep renminbi on hand. When you run low, go to a bank. Some ATMs will let you withdraw RMB directly from your Canadian bank account or credit card, and some won’t—it’s hit or miss. Your best luck with any kind of financial transaction will usually be with Bank of China branches—they almost always can accept your cards. Thankfully, there is a Bank of China branch on campus, half a block from the dorms. It will probably be easiest if you can just keep enough money in your Canadian account for your use during the summer; however, if you need some way to receive a wire transfer, you could also go to the Bank of China to set up a local savings account which can receive foreign transfers.

**Staying Safe**

In general, life in China is very safe, with very low rates of violent crime. It is very rare for foreign visitors to be victims of assault, and rape and murder are essentially unheard of. Walking alone late at night is probably not the best idea, but it would be much safer to try this in Harbin than in Edmonton. There is some petty theft, for which foreigners are obvious targets, and students should guard their belongings carefully, especially on public transit or other crowded areas where pickpockets might operate.

You may have read news reports of isolated incidents of small-scale domestic terrorism which have been committed in response to China’s repression of its Uighur minority. These are real. However, these attacks have only ever happened in the nation’s west (where most Uighurs live) or in Beijing; Harbin is one of the last major cities anyone would think to attack.

Perhaps the most common crime that foreigners might be targets for is fraud of various kinds. At its most common, and least crime-like, this can be something as innocuous as being overcharged by 1000% for clothes or knick-knacks; this is almost impossible to avoid, and might as well be viewed as an entertaining annoyance. However, there are darker versions: a request for help might turn into a financial scam (imagine an in-person version of a spam email from a Nigerian banker). Or an unmarked taxi (or even a pedicab!) might quasi-kidnap you, overcharging you and not letting you leave until you have paid. The easiest and best way to
avoid these traps is to never engage in a transaction with anyone who eagerly approaches you. Your first opportunity to practice this skill will be at the airport: if you aren’t being met at the airport by H.I.T. staff, walk past the several balding men who yell “taxi” at you, and go straight to the airport’s regular taxi stand.

The only real danger of physical injury will be from vehicle traffic. Not only do cars and trucks not yield to pedestrians, they often seem positively eager to attack anyone on foot. Moreover, since vehicles commonly flout all rules of the road, they may come at one from any and all directions simultaneously, including from cross-streets that have red lights. When crossing a road, you must constantly look out for oncoming traffic in all directions, and assume that no vehicle will ever yield for you. Do not play “chicken” with Chinese drivers—they will NOT stop for you. Whenever possible, avoid crossing roads altogether, or cross together with a large crowd that might be able to slightly deter the average insane driver.

When enjoying the nightlife of Harbin, please take special care to behave responsibly and avoid conflict. Like all Chinese cities, Harbin offers many opportunities to get drunk; please be aware that, unlike most Chinese cities, Harbin also has a reputation for drunken brawling. This is not as bad as it sounds; even the rowdiest bars in Harbin are probably not as pugilistic as the average Whyte Ave. scene on a Saturday night, and we have never had any real problems with this. However, remember that any non-Asian male would be an obvious opponent for a drunken local looking for a fight, and it is worth being careful.

In addition, non-Asian males in nightclubs will be likely targets for sex-related crimes. These range from outright prostitution solicitation, to prostitutes hiding the fact that they are working until after a job is over, to women being used as bait for a group of muggers hiding in an alley or in a hotel room. Just as with more mundane scams, the best way to avoid these traps is to never engage in a transaction with anyone who eagerly approaches you.

LGBT participants should exercise more caution than in Canada. Unlike some countries, there is no official anti-gay propaganda emanating from the Chinese government, and among some segments of the population, homosexuality is now broadly accepted as a normal phenomenon. However, acceptance of homosexuality is very unevenly distributed, since there is no public discussion of the issue, and hence no consciousness of LGBT rights. Although there are no available statistics, anecdotal evidence suggests that anti-gay violence is a real problem in China. No one will get attacked in the street for “looking queer,” as might happen in Russia; but be very careful about approaching the wrong person in a nightclub. One safe venue is Lanyu Bar (“Blue Rain”) at 200 Maduan Jie, in Nangang.

Under no circumstances should any participants ever even consider bringing illegal drugs to China, or to purchasing or using them there. Drug laws in the People’s Republic of China are incredibly draconian by Canadian standards, and police will regularly target foreign students in drug sweeps. Possession of a tiny amount of marijuana is often punished by multi-year prison sentences, and there will be little that the Canadian consulate can do in such cases.
**Contact Info**

*Remember: when calling Canada from China, first dial 011, then 1+area code*

Emergencies:
- Police  110
- Fire  119
- Ambulance  120

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