

# HUZHOU



Last summer, I was lucky enough to spend a few weeks teaching English at Zhejiang Hongda School (浙江宏达南浔学校) in Huzhou. The school specialises in teaching English to students aged 8-14, and through employing English teachers like yourself, hopes to improve in particular the students' oral/conversational and listening skills.



I hope this guide will give a clear idea as to what it's like to teach at the summer school, in the case that you're interested in working here, or at the very least, will give you an insight into what it's like to work in a Chinese school.

## Teaching

First up, let me tell you about the job of teaching Chinese students. Below, I have listed what in my experience are the essential points about teaching at a summer school. I have also tried to anticipate any questions you may have.

- There will be roughly ten other foreign teachers at the school, mostly current UK university students or recent graduates, but also may be some people from western schools.
- Don't worry! The majority of teachers will not have had prior teaching experience and it is not expected of you. In fact, as Chinese schools and classes are so different from western schools, approaching teaching with few expectations and a completely blank sheet can actually be useful!
- You will be teaching Oral English, also referred to as Speaking English. While the Chinese education is very effective in developing the students' reading and writing skills, you will be expected to help develop their conversational skills, where they may lack experience and confidence.
- You will have a teaching assistant, most likely a university student from Zhejiang Normal University. My teaching assistant, called Min, was fantastic, helping with class planning and dealing with any communication issues in the class. They will be your main liaison with the school- giving you your timetable and helping communicate any questions you may have for the school.



- You will be teaching students aged roughly between 8-14. The youngest classes will know little English and you may find the main challenge to be communicating with them at all. In contrast, the oldest years should have a good grasp of simple English already, so your task will be to find creative and interesting ways to improve and develop their speaking and to keep them engaged.
- You will be provided with a timetable at the beginning of the placement, probably a day before classes start. Class size is around 30-40. You will have 3 classes every day to teach during the placement.



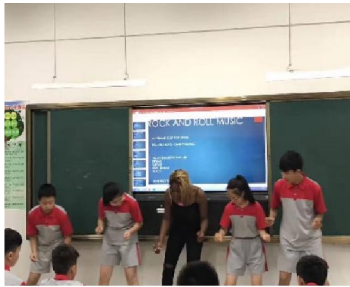
- You will be provided with a syllabus detailing what the school wants you to cover. While this can be helpful as a rough guide, you need not stick to the syllabus too closely, as different classes may be confident in one particular area but not another. Therefore, feel free to branch out and develop your own plan for the two weeks, as long as it roughly sticks to the content the school requires the students to cover.
- As it is a summer school, your students will not be tested on any content you have taught them.
- It is most likely that there will be an observation of your class at some point by a Chinese teacher. This is nothing to worry about, indeed a big part of the summer school is learning about each other's culture and ways of doing things. The Chinese teachers will be interested to see what they can learn from your class. Equally, you will be invited to observe a couple of their classes to see how they teach and pick up a few ideas.
- Almost all classes have PPT facilities and a chalk board. While the PPT was certainly a life saver, the chalk board was a surprisingly fun way to teach, great for games and getting the students involved in the learning, with drawing pictures, noughts and crosses, hangman etc.



### Hours

You will teach a maximum of 4 ½ hours a day. This includes 3 "big" lessons (2x40 minute blocks with a 10-minute break in the middle). If there are more foreign teachers hired that summer you will have less hours.

I had two "big" morning classes 8-9.30, 9.40-11.10, followed by a long lunch break with one "big" class in the afternoon at 15:00. The times of the classes varies for different teachers.



### **Accommodation/transport:**

You will be well looked after in Huzhou, staying in a luxury hotel with comfortable beds, huge bathrooms, and crucially, air conditioning!

You will also be provided with breakfast at the hotel, whilst lunch and dinner will be provided by the school. If you are eager to try authentic Chinese food, this will be a great opportunity to try the huge meals the school kindly provides every day. However, for the more sensitive stomachs, the school also prepares some western foods such as chicken strips or pizza and soft drinks are provided with every meal!

Hotel location may differ from year to year. In 2017, the hotel was approximately a 15 minutes' drive from the school, with cars provided every morning and evening to take us to and from the school. The benefit of this location was that we within close walking distance of the beautiful old town, where we frequently went in the evenings to unwind at the karaoke bars. As Huzhou is not a very big or established city, there isn't much in the way of public transport. However, this was not a problem as whenever we wished to go somewhere beyond the local bars, the school would provide cars and drivers. They also organised tours of the famous sites in Huzhou such as Xiaolianzhuang and the Huzhou Tai lake on our days off.

If we wanted to travel somewhere on our own, we would use the app Didi, which is the Chinese equivalent Uber. Alternatively, riding the local tuk-tuks was a blast and certainly very cheap. A 10-minute ride could be as little as 10 yuan, equal to £1.



Transport between Huzhou and Shanghai Pudong Airport is organised by Teach English In China.

## Travel after teaching

Huzhou is conveniently only a 2-hour drive from Shanghai. From Shanghai, you can easily reach any part of China with flights to most domestic destinations, as well as cheap flights to other countries in Asia such as Seoul, Tokyo or Singapore. Aside from the obvious destinations such as Beijing or Shanghai, I would recommend visiting Zhangjiajie, only a couple hours flight from Shanghai and yet, home to the most stunning mountain range. James Cameron and the design team behind the film Avatar were inspired by the mountains in Zhangjiajie when creating the world of Pandora. Furthermore, the nearby 'Pheonix City', is a fantastic old city, built on the banks of a river where anyone can jump in from the bridges and cool down to avoid the Chinese summer heat. This is just one example of the multitude of places you could visit following your teaching placement. Other ideas could be the nearby 'Huangshan', Yellow Mountain, or perhaps the overnight train to Xian to see the Terracotta Army.



## Packing Tips

Huzhou gets extremely hot during the summer, well over 30 degrees and humid as well. Be sure to bring all your summer clothes. There is no dress code for the teachers but neat casual is assumed. Be sure to bring mosquito spray and cream for bites as you will most likely be bitten! As Huzhou is a small city and not very internationalised, if there is a particular product you love from home then bring it with you because it would be hard to find here.

## Facilities

Washing is typically done by hand in China. However, there is a washing machine on the school campus which your TA can help you use.

There is a gym and sports hall at the school including basketball and badminton courts, plus indoor and outdoor running track and ping pong tables, all of which you will be able to use freely. There is also a pool which you can arrange to use at specific times. Also, expect to be pushed in by the kids as I was on more than a couple occasions!

The canteen where you will eat lunch and dinner most days is also on campus.

You will be provided with office space during the day where you can plan your lessons.



## Talent Show

There will be a talent show towards the end of the placement! This year the school went all out with the show, putting up a huge outdoor stage complete with light and sounds system, as well as their very own Olympic torch to start the event. All your students will be performing, and of course, the foreign teachers are expected to put on a performance as well. Our group performed to a mash up, opening with the Harlem Shake followed by songs like Watch me, Macarena, YMCA and ending with Gangnam Style. Safe to say, we smashed it with our mash up, Gangnam style at the end was definitely a hit with the school! And if we could manage it all with two 10-minute rehearsals, I'm sure you won't have any problems either. You're their teachers so the kids will love whatever you do.



## Other Activities

At the school, extracurricular activities for the students are constant, and as teachers you are encouraged to take part in as many as you like. Water fights and the dumpling making are must dos, as were the pool activities. The whole school dancing in the basketball courts was also amazing to take part in.



To finish, I had an amazing time teaching and travelling in China. I am missing the school, my kids and all the other teachers – I have so many unforgettable memories this summer! It was a fantastic experience and I fully recommend it, but if you're just looking for more information about teaching in China, then I hope this has helped you too.

*By Nick Daniels, Summer Teacher in Huzhou (2017)*