

The Ultimate China Survival Guide





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Chapter One: Getting Some Grub in the Middle Kingdom

1. What's Your Dish? Try the 10 Most Popular in China

What does “Chinese food” look like in your hometown? Chinese food in foreign countries such as the UK and USA is popular, but the dishes are often different from what is actually served in China! Do you know what these “authentic” dishes are?



A list of the 10 most popular Chinese dishes was put out by the China Hotel Association. The survey was based on 2016 information collected by China’s major online ordering platforms and public surveys.

We should take a flavor journey! Let’s give these popular dishes a try, shall we?

酸菜鱼 (Suāncàiyú) Fish with Sichuan pickles

Do you notice the blend of spicy and sour? This dish’s personality comes from the pickled mustard greens that make it unique from other Sichuan fish dishes. The fish is often carp. Eyes burning from the heat? Cool down with some veggies...



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炒青菜 (Chǎo qīngcài) Stir-fried vegetables

You may be surprised at the amount of vegetables that are eaten in China! Stir-fried pea shoots, morning glory and bok choy are among countless others. These healthy and colorful vegetables are often stir-fried with garlic and oyster sauce. Now back to the powerful sauce...

宫保鸡丁 (Gōngbǎo jīdīng) Kung Pao chicken

You have seen this on menus outside of China, right? In Sichuan Province, this dish will numb your face with its peppers and seared chilis. Peanuts and Shaoxing wine are often added to give this dish its famous kick!

鱼香肉丝 (Yúxiāng ròusī) Shredded pork with garlic sauce

This “fish-flavored” pork dish from Sichuan Province is as colorful as it is tasty! Ironically, there is no “鱼 (yú) fish” in this dish, although it uses seasonings traditionally used for fish. The ingredients of the dish are: 胡萝卜 (húluóbo) carrot, 肉 (ròu) meat, and 木耳 (mù'ěr) edible tree fungus.

Yes, the name of this dish is confusing. It’s so confusing that recently a woman in China refused to pay for the dish in a restaurant when she was shocked and disappointed to find no fish in it! Don’t be surprised, you’ve been warned!

水煮鱼 (Shuǐzhǔyú) Fish fillets in hot chili oil

The only swimming these fish do is in fiery chili oil. The whitefish in “水煮鱼 (Shuǐzhǔ yú) Fish filets in hot chili oil” is cooked soft and tender and will melt in your mouth as you sweat your way through this numbing Sichuan specialty. Need to give your tongue a break from spiciness? Let’s try...



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红烧肉 (Hóngshāoròu) Braised pork with brown sauce

Let's take a trip over to Shanghai and sample “红烧肉 (Hóngshāo ròu) Red cooked pork”. It's pork belly cooked with wine, sugar and soy sauce. The color and flavor are deep and rich. Don't go falling in love with its beauty, we've got to eat it and move onto something a bit odd...

剁椒鱼头 (Duòjiāo yútóu) Steamed fish head with diced hot red peppers

The sight of a fish head would scare many foreign eaters. What you may not know is that the neck and head contain the best meat in the fish. Just try not to make eye contact!

烤鸭 (Kǎoyā) Roast duck

Another dish that is popular outside of China, “烤鸭 (Kǎoyā) Roast duck” is a famous succulent delicacy from Beijing. The ducks are raised specially for this dish, then roasted and served with scallions, cucumber and sweet bean sauce, all wrapped in a pancake. The duck is famous for its crispy skin and moist meat. Mouth watering yet? Let's cool it down...

番茄蛋花汤 (Fānqié dàn huā tāng) Tomato and egg soup

This light and easy soup tastes better than it looks! Chinese mustard is the key ingredient here to give the soup its kick. It is often served as a side dish and you can especially enjoy it in the summer. Full yet? There's just one more to try...



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回锅肉 (Huíguōròu) **Twice-cooked pork slices in hot sauce**

Yet another Sichuan specialty (have you had enough of this style yet?), this pork is sliced, simmered and stir-fried along with vegetables. You can enjoy this dish on the 1st and 15th of each lunar month, as many Sichuanese do!

I hope you've enjoyed our trip around China to sample some of the most popular and famous dishes we have to offer. Next time, if you want the real thing, you will know what to order!



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2. The Eight Major Cuisines of China

Chinese food includes many different styles: the major ones are Lu (Shandong) cuisine, Chuan (Sichuan) cuisine, Yue (Guangdong) cuisine, Min (Fujian) cuisine, Su (Suzhou) cuisine, Zhe (Zhejiang) cuisine, Xiang (Hunan) cuisine, and Hui (Anhui) cuisine. These are often referred to as the “Eight Major Cuisines” of China.



Lu cuisine is represented by Hongshao Hailuo (Conch braised in soy sauce), and Tangcu Liyu (Crispy sweet carp); Chuan cuisine is best known for Shuizhuyu (boiled fish with bean sprouts in hot chili oil) and Mapo Doufu (Stir-fried bean curd in hot sauce); for Yue cuisine, there are Kaoruzhu (Roast suckling pig), and Qingzhengyu (steamed fish); for Min cuisine, we have Fotiaoqiang (Steamed abalone with shark’s fin and fish maw in broth), and Qingtang Yuwan (Fish balls in soup).



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Songshu Guiyu (Deep-fried mandarin fish in sweet and sour sauce) and Yanshuiya (Poached chilled duck with pepper corn) are the leading dishes of Su cuisine; Dongporou (Braised Dongpo pork) and Jiaohuaji (Baked chicken vagabond style) represent Zhe cuisine; the major dishes of Xiang cuisine include Dong'an Ziji (Dong'an style spring chicken) and Huadiao Fengchi (Braised chicken wings with yellow wine); Hui cuisine is famous for its Huotui Dun Jiayu (Ham stewed with turtle) and Fuli ji Shao ji (Fuli ji roast chicken).

The Features of the Eight Major Cuisines of China

The eight major cuisines of China differ in ingredients and taste. Lu cuisine, with a lot of spring onion and garlic, has a strong and thick taste, especially in seafood, soup and animal organs. Chuan cuisine is famous for being spicy, numbing, fresh, delicious and hot. Yue cuisine, in general, is fresh, tender, smooth, hot and salty. Min cuisine is sweet, sour, salty, and delicious with freshness and the temperature of the cooking. It is summarized as light in color and elegant in style, processed and cooked with great care, looking fresh. It is mainly stir-fried and stewed. Xiang cuisine has a thick taste. It is colorful, tender and delicious. Hui cuisine focuses on color and the cooking temperature. Also, it is famous for keeping the original juices and taste of the food.

Food Types

凉菜 (Liángcài): Cold dish.

热菜 (Rècài): Cooked dish.

海鲜 (Hǎixiān): Seafood.

汤 (Tāng): Soup.



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3. How to Order Food in Chinese?

If you come to China, you will have lots of opportunities to taste Chinese cuisine. There are many different types of food available, so, to get just what you want, it is essential for you to know how to order in Chinese restaurants.



Usually, the waiter will give you a menu and ask: “请问您要什么? (Qǐngwèn nín yào shénme?) What would you like?”

The following sentence structures will help you order:

Structure 1: Subject + 要 (yào) + Number + Measure Words + Food.

Structure 2: 来 (lái) + Number + Measure Words + Food.

Dialogue 1

Fúwùyuán: Qǐngwèn nǐmen yào shénme?

服务员: 请问 你们 要 什么?

Waiter: What would you like?

Linda: Wǒ yào yí fèn xī hóng shì chǎo jī dàn. Zài lái liǎng jīn jiǎo zi.

Linda: 我 要 一 份 西 红 柿 炒 鸡 蛋。再 来 两 斤 饺 子!

Linda: I want the scrambled eggs with tomato and two jin of dumplings.



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Dialogue 2

Nǐmen zhè'r yǒu shénme tèsècài?

A: 你们 这儿 有 什么 特色菜?

What are your specialties?

Wǒmen de tèsècài shì shuǐzhǔyú.

B: 我们 的 特色菜 是 水煮鱼。

The specialty is called Boiled Fish.

Tīng qǐlái búcuò. Lái yí fèn'r.

A: 听 起来 不错。来 一 份儿。

It sounds great. I'd like one dish, please.

Nín chī dé guàn yòu má yòu là de cài ma?

B: 您 吃得 惯 又 麻 又 辣 的 菜 吗?

Can you eat spicy hot food?

Wǒ méi chī guò, Xiǎng cháng yí cháng.

A: 我 没 吃 过, 想 尝 一 尝。

I've never had it, but I'd like to give it a try.

Verb repetition: 尝一尝 (cháng yì cháng)

Verb denoting action can be repeated. This device is usually employed when one wishes to indicate that the action is of a very short duration, to soften the tone or to make it sound relaxed or informal.



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4. How to Order “外卖 (Wàimài) Takeout in China!

Mealtime is an essential part of daily life in China. The importance of eating even influences the daily language of the Chinese. For example, New Yorkers may greet friends with “How ya doin?” While traditionally friends in China may ask “你吃了吗？ (Nǐ chī le ma?)” or “Have you eaten yet?” Although this expression is losing popularity in Chinese cities, other food-related expressions and words are becoming increasingly common in busy, modern life. One example is “外卖 (wàimài) takeout.” As smart-phones and apps change daily life in China, “外卖 (wàimài) takeout” is becoming more and more important each year.



Example:

Jīntiān wǒmen jiào wàimài ba!

今天 我们 叫 外卖 吧!

Let's order takeout today!



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When and How to Order “外卖 (Wàimài)?”

With internet and smart-phone usage playing a large role in daily life, convenient takeout meals, or “delivery,” is becoming the norm for busy workers in the cities. Late night at the office? 外卖 (wàimài) takeout! Heavy traffic? 外卖 (wàimài) takeout! Romantic movie with your honey? 外卖 (wàimài) takeout!

You can order “外卖 (wàimài) takeout” on a website, an app, your telephone or by simply walking up to the restaurant and ordering face-to-face.

However, before you grab your food to go, you should do your homework and learn how to order in Chinese. So, how do we order “外卖 (wàimài) takeout?” Five useful Chinese sentences you need to know:

Nínhǎo, wǒ yào jiào wàimài.

您好，我要叫外卖。

Hello, I want to order takeout for delivery.

Wǒ yào diǎn yí fèn pīsa.

我要点一份披萨。

I want to order a pizza.

Qǐng sòng dào Wǔyī lù 185 hào.

请送到五一路185号。

My address is No. 185 Wuyi Road.



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Yào duōjiǔ cái néng dào?

要多久才能到?

How long will that take?

Wǒ de wàimài sòng le ma?

我的外卖送了吗?

Is my takeout on the way?



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Chapter Two: A Roof Over Your Head

1. Four Things You Must Ask When Renting an Apartment in China



If you are soon moving to China or already living there, it is possible that you will need to rent an apartment. For some people, such as English teachers, an apartment might be included in their contract. Students may live in dorms, which is prepared through the school. So, this may not seem relevant to you at first, but knowing how to rent an apartment can come handy and it can't hurt to be independent. Here is a guide to some of the things you should consider, as well as relevant vocabulary you will need when renting an apartment in China.

Factors you need to consider:

a. 户型 (Hùxíng) Type or size of apartment

You can find apartments to rent online or through real estate agents, which speckle every corner in China.



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These intermediaries will put you in contact with the apartment owners. When you go to rent an apartment, the first question that the “房东 (fángdōng) house-owner” or agent will ask is:

Nín xiǎng zū shénme hùxíng de fángzi?

您 想 租 什么 户型 的 房子?

What kind of apartment do you want to rent?

Types of apartments are put in a kind of shortened form:

一室一厅 (Yí shì yì tīng): One bedroom, one living room

两室一厅 (Liǎng shì yì tīng): Two bedrooms, one living room

三室两厅 (Sān shì liǎng tīng): Three bedrooms, two living rooms

All you have to do is reply with this sentence structure:

“我要 + 户型 (Wǒ yào + hùxíng)” I want + type or size of apartment.

For example:

Wǒ yào liǎng shì yì tīng de.

我 要 两 室 一 厅 的。

I want an apartment with two bedrooms and one living room.

b. 家电 (Jiādiàn) Household appliances

Next, you need to consider what kind of appliances you want in your apartment. It is very common in China that the apartment won't have a dishwasher or dryer. Most newer apartment complexes will have everything else you need, but you still better make sure to ask.



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