

THE EXPAT'S GUIDE TO EDUCATION & SCHOOLS IN

GUANGZHOU

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INTRODUCTION

China has one of the world's fastest-growing and dynamic economies. Expats moving to the East – most likely to one of China's coastal hubs like Shanghai, Beijing or Guangzhou – can expect an often surprising mix of cultures, old and new.

Guangzhou is the capital and business centre of Guangdong province, and though it has received less attention in the West than the likes of Hong Kong, Beijing or Shanghai, it is nevertheless one of the most economically important cities in China, with the largest seaport in South China and one of the first economic free zones in the country. The city has a large expat community, many of whom are involved in the growing commercial and manufacturing industries.

Expats moving to Guangzhou with families in tow might understandably be nervous of their family's adjustment to a new life in China.

Chinese schools offer a brand of education which is considered good by global standards, and which is free for international students. Students in this system regularly out-perform American or British students in international benchmark tests, particularly for mathematics and science. However, the Chinese system has come under fire for its authoritarian teaching methods and heavy focus on exams and rote learning.

By contrast, international schools with strong ties to British and American educational bodies are more likely to place an emphasis on well-rounded development which includes some participation in sport and the arts. However, be prepared to pay for the privilege of attending these schools, with the fees at some international schools exceeding 200,000 RMB a year.

The Expat Arrivals Schools Guide for Guangzhou is intended to shed some light on the mystery of the school systems and to give parents the all-important insight you need to make the transition abroad as smooth and seamless as possible.

No matter where you're moving, few tasks can feel more daunting than choosing the right school for your children to continue their education, and the questions can feel endless: What curriculum is best? Will my child get the attention he needs? Will she be able to integrate back into our home system? Will he be best prepared for college entrance exams? Will she be safe? Can I afford it? Will he make friends easily? Will she overcome the language barrier?

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Chinese children are required by law to attend school for nine years between the ages of six and 15. Public school is free for Chinese students, and is also free and open to international students as long as they are legal residents of China. Parents of both Chinese and international students are expected to pay for Chinese public high schools. The fees are modest, and subject to government regulation.

In cities, most students go on to attend public academic or vocational high schools. Academic high school students graduate with a Chinese high school diploma. In turn, most high school graduates go on to study at tertiary institutions. To do so, they must first compete for top marks in the *gaokao*, or national college entrance examination, which takes place in June each year. This test is widely considered to be the most important test in a student's life and the pressure to do well is immense. Preparation is generally long and arduous, featuring round-the-clock cramming and culminating in a nail-biting wait for results. A single score determines which universities graduates may attend, and consequently is seen to determine one's entire professional career. In turn, parents judge high schools almost solely by how well their students typically perform in the *gaokao*.

In recent years more schools have been built, but seat scarcity is still a common complaint of most new arrivals, especially for those trying to find a place for a student between the ages of three and six. We advise that parents make any and all attempts to settle the school situation as soon as possible, preferably well before the move.

Although public schooling in China is criticised for its emphasis on rote learning, students do generally perform well in testing and the quality of education is considered good by global standards. Some public schools in China have international streams that run alongside the Chinese curriculum.

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

There are thousands of private schools throughout China – some are fly-by-night, profit-driven schools which close as suddenly as they appear, while others have built up deservedly good reputations. With an eye on China's international expansion, many middle-class and wealthy Chinese choose to forgo nearby free public schools in the interests of ensuring their children are well prepared for the *gaokao*.

Some private schools offer bilingual education, which can be a good middle-ground for expat parents looking to integrate their children into local life without the culture shock that comes with Chinese public schooling. These schools aren't free but fees are modest.

On the other hand, those who can afford to will usually send their children to international schools – these are private schools that are authorised by the Ministry of Education to teach a curriculum other than the Chinese curriculum. In Guangzhou, there are more than a dozen international schools following a range of curricula, including that of the UK, the US, Canada, and France. There are also schools offering the International Baccalaureate, a globally respected certification.

Technically, Chinese children are not allowed to attend foreign-owned international schools unless they hold a foreign passport – in practice, however, some high-ranking government officials and businessmen manage to send their children to private international schools by having the right

connections and acquiring special permission to do so. So, for the most part, students at international schools are children of expats.

For those who settling into China for the long-term, the lack of interaction with locals in international schools can be a downside. However, international schools with partial Chinese ownership are excluded from the law that bans locals from attending – these schools are recommended for expats who prioritise cultural integration.

ADMISSIONS AND ENROLMENT

Generally, schools make it straightforward for parents to find out when and how they need to apply. It is usually a matter of consulting the school's website or, when in need of more information, contacting the school via telephone.

When it comes to enrolment, some schools are more selective than others. This is particularly true of private and international schools, which may require children to take an entrance exam or attend an interview.

Though admissions policies vary from school to school, in general, expats will want to make sure that they have the following documents in order to apply for admission to the school of their choice:

- Completed school application form
- Proof of vaccinations
- Proof of medical examination
- Birth certificate of child
- Parent's passport/s
- Recent reports from previous school
- References from previous school
- Proof of address

Some schools only grant admission during the designated period, while others have rolling admissions policies granting entrance whenever space becomes available throughout the year. So, even if a place can't initially be found, it's important to stay positive. After all, Guangzhou can be a transient place, and spots can open up just as quickly as they can close. That said, it's crucial that expats apply to more than one school so that their child has a seat somewhere at the start of the school year.

Expats moving to the city without having secured a slot for their children should keep in constant contact with school administrators, put the word out on expat forums and networks, and utilise any company contacts that can facilitate the process – one never knows when another family has to repatriate.

TUITION AND FEES

School fees at international schools vary from institution to institution. Annual fees peak at over 150,000 RMB in Grade 1 and over 200,000 RMB in Grade 12, or more for boarding school.

Most schools will also charge an additional non-refundable fee of at least 1,000 RMB for making an application, anything up to 50,000 RMB for accepting an offer (sometimes deductible from the year's tuition, sometimes not), as well as additional placeholder fees every year. Students who are deemed to have insufficient fluency in English may be enrolled in language support programs, for which an additional fee is charged.

Most schools have their own private bus transport system and cafeteria lunches, both of which are optional and billed separately. Parents should also make allowances for additional fees for school uniforms, extra-curricular activities and school outings.

SCHOOL TERMS AND SCHOOL DAY

Schools in China typically start at 7am or 8am, and though technically classes may end in the early or mid-afternoon, in practice many students will either stay after hours for supervised study time and extra lessons, or attend separate cram schools (*buxiban*) to improve their performance in certain subjects. A typical school day for a Chinese student ends at 9 or 10pm. In international schools, children are more likely to spend their afternoons taking part in extra-curricular activities.

The school year is divided into two semesters, with the academic year beginning in September and concluding in June or July of the following year. There are usually a few weeks of holiday in January.

HOMESCHOOLING

By law, all children in China have to attend nine years of school, regardless of nationality. Under this law, homeschooling isn't recognised and is therefore illegal. In practical terms, though, authorities are less likely to bother themselves with foreigners breaking this law than with locals – but it remains a risk. For this reason, the decision to homeschool a child should only be taken after careful consideration of the alternatives and thorough research.

NURSERY SCHOOLS

Kindergartens in Guangzhou typically provide three to four years of pre-school education for children aged 2 to 6. Pre-schools are generally private, although some government-run kindergartens are available. The quality and cost of nursery schools will vary depending on whether the facility employs Western-educated teachers and is aimed at expat children or local Chinese.

Many large international schools have feeder kindergartens, and parents planning to stay in Guangzhou for some time should note that these are a worthwhile way to get one's child into a top school early on. However, as younger grades tend to have longer waiting lists, it may be necessary to enrol in an independent kindergarten at first.

There are many pre-schools, nurseries and kindergartens in Guangzhou which purport to be Western owned and run, and which offer an international or Western-style early learning experience, such as Montessori or the Early Years Programme associated with the National Curriculum for England. It is

essential to visit the school personally and get a feel for the teachers and school environment before committing to a kindergarten.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

China's tertiary education system is one of the world's largest and remains one of the most popular destinations for international students. There are more than 6 million students – approximately 400,000 of which are foreigners – enrolled in over 2,000 higher education institutions throughout the country.

In June each year, Chinese students compete in the *gaokao*, or national college entrance exam, for scores that will determine the university they get into the following year. The *gaokao* score is the sole measure by which universities will select Chinese students, in an attempt to level the playing field for both wealthy and poorer students. The most sought-after courses at the best universities demand formidable minimum *gaokao* scores.

The *gaokao* is considered one of the world's toughest exams – foreign students are exempt from writing it, but may be requested to complete a different entrance exam, depending on the institution.

To study at a Chinese university, expats will first need to apply for admission at a Chinese institution, following which an application for a study visa (known as an X Visa) must be made.

TIPS FOR CHOOSING A SCHOOL

Whether a seasoned expat who has had to sift through countless school choices or a first-time assignee who's never had to do much more than pack lunches, it's always a good idea to consider a few key principles when making choices about a child's education.

THE EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENT

This is not typically the first thing on an expat parent's mind, but it is an important aspect that's worth serious consideration. Relocation can be challenging for young students and it isn't unusual for parents to ask how moving might affect their children's lives. This is a normal anxiety that many expats deal with, and the best way for parents to address it is to think carefully about their child's preparedness for a new school context and their ability to enjoy, succeed and grow throughout the experience.

Anything radically different from a child's previous experience must be considered with great care. It is important for parents who plan on moving overseas to evaluate their children's needs and abilities and try to find a school that best aligns with their priorities. If a child has special needs, parents need to be certain that a prospective school can cater for them. Similarly, it is important for a school to offer courses or activities that develop and foster a child's interests and talents.

CURRICULUM

Most expats tend to choose a curriculum that aligns with that of their home country, but it is also important to make sure that the curriculum is challenging enough for their children. This point is central to the decision-making process, especially for parents with kids in high school approaching the time when college applications begin.

Those with older kids should find out about the standardised test the curriculum is geared toward, as well as which diploma is granted upon graduation. It is worth noting, for instance, that the International Baccalaureate curriculum is accepted in many countries.

Besides these fundamentals, it is also important to have a close look at the extra-curricular options a school offers. The best institutions will have a balanced blend of sports programmes, will encourage their students to take part in community activities, and will offer a range of cultural activities such as art, debating and music.

TEACHERS AND CLASS SIZES

A school is only as good as its teachers, who are arguably the determining factor that influences a child's education and development. Though it can be difficult to find out how "good" a teacher is, there are some basic questions that parents can ask to draw some general conclusions.

Find out about the qualifications the school requires its teachers to have and whether it encourages them to take part in professional development courses. Find out about the average teacher turnover and, above all else, find out about the average class size. Even the best teachers can become swallowed by a giant sea of eager students.

Lastly, visit the school and meet the teacher to find out how friendly, enthusiastic and knowledgeable they are about the school and its curriculum.

PROXIMITY

When choosing a school, it's important to consider practical aspects such as the proximity of the school to the home. Most expats find the best thing to do is to find a decent school close to their place of work, and then find a home that is a reasonable distance from both of them.

International schools in Guangzhou are mostly clustered in Tianhe, a popular expat area near the city centre, or other prestigious expat suburbs and residential complexes. In some cases, it will be possible to live within walking distance of one's chosen international school.

The public transport system in Guangzhou is constantly expanding and being improved, and many, if not all, schools are accessible via the metro system or buses. Almost all international schools have their own school transport options available for an additional yearly fee.

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Guangzhou has plenty of international schools to choose from. Parents should contact schools directly to get the most up-to-date information, and to enquire about admission policies. In primary schools especially, space can be limited; so it's important to start the enrolment process as soon as possible.

Canton Global Academy

Physical address: No. 4 Chuangjia Road, Jinshazhou, Baiyun District

Website: www.cgagz.com

Email: admissions@cgagz.com

Telephone: +8620 6660 6886/5

Gender: Co-educational

Curriculum: English National Curriculum

Ages: 2 to 14



Background

Founded in September 2017, Canton Global Academy (CGA) is a newly-established, non-profit, co-educational international school in Guangzhou, China which offers the English National Curriculum. Currently it has an Early Years section for children aged 3 to 5 years old and a Primary section catering for Years 1 to 6.

From September 2018 it will also take registrations for Middle School students (i.e. from age 11 upwards) and it will eventually offer the Cambridge International Board General Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations (IGCSEs) to Year 11 students (i.e. 16-year-olds). It is anticipated in future years to be offering Cambridge University Board Advanced Level Examinations.

CGA is located on Jinshazhou Island in the Baiyun District. The school campus is extensive with ample, fitted-out classroom space which currently includes a music and dance facility, and at the time of writing there is work in progress on a library and information centre, a football pitch, basketball court and playing area, laboratory facilities and art room. These are currently being completed in good time for the new academic year.

All the teaching staff are native English speakers and are fully qualified and experienced, the majority having worked in schools offering the English National Curriculum either in the UK or in international schools throughout the world.

Canton Global Academy is a member of the Canadian International Educational Organisation (CIEO).

Curriculum

Our school curriculum is based on the English National Curriculum. Currently we are offering education for the students in Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and 2, and Secondary Education.

Fees

For the 2018/2019 academic year, annual fees range from 60,000 RMB for pre-nursery (half day) to 100,000 RMB for Year 9. There is an initial application fee of 2000 RMB.

What the parents say

“The most sufficient key for students and school's success is to involve positively the dedicated teachers and enthusiastic parents as one family and this is what I found at CGA.”

– Parent

Utahloy International School

Address: 800 Sha Tai Bei Road, Bai Yun District, 510515

Website: www.utahloy.com/gz

Email: info@uisgz.org

Telephone: +86 20 8720 2019, +86 20 8720 0517

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English

Curriculum: IB

Ages: 3 to 18



Background

Built in 1998, UISG is an established international school in the greater Guangzhou area. The school's campus is modern, spacious and well equipped, with most classrooms and facilities overlooking a tranquil lakeside environment. UISG is one of only a few international schools worldwide to offer mother-tongue instruction, with six mother-tongue classes in operation within the mainstream curriculum; students are encouraged to remain bilingual through classes in Chinese, German, French, Korean and Japanese among others. Extra-curricular sports include rugby, badminton, basketball, volleyball, table tennis and soccer, and a host of private music lessons are available at all levels. The visual and dramatic arts are available as school subjects up to IB Diploma level.

What the school says

“High academic standards, a diverse curriculum and a clear focus on the moral, intellectual, physical and emotional development of students are central to the UISG experience. UISG is accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). It is also authorised by the International Baccalaureate to provide the IB Primary Years, Middle Years and Diploma programmes. Academic rigour is assured, due to the IB frameworks and high calibre of international teachers employed. The teaching staff comprises well-qualified teachers, recruited from Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, the UK, and the USA.”

Curriculum

The school is a fully authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) school and offers the PYP, MYP and DP programmes. Mother tongue lessons are available in six languages for students aged 5 to 18.

Fees

Fees for the 2017/2018 year range from 111,600 RMB a year for kindergarten to 210,600 RMB a year in Year 12. Additional fees for school lunches and bus transport are applicable.

Location

Utahloy is situated in Baiyun, about 20 minutes from the city centre.

From the head teacher

“UISG has been providing an exceptional academic programme for the international community since 1998. The school commenced with 50 children in kindergarten and primary classes. It now offers an international education from K – 12 for more than 900 expatriate students who represent over 50 nationalities. We are proud of UISG’s commitment to the development of internationally minded students, who will benefit personally from their global connections and help create a better world. Please come and visit to see for yourself.”

– Neil McBurney, Head of School

Alcanta International College

Address: 1130 Baiyun Dadao Nan, Baiyun District

Website: www.aicib.org

Email: admissions@aicib.org

Telephone: +86 20 8618 3999

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English

Curriculum: IB

Age: 14 to 18

Background

Alcanta International College (AIC), part of the well-established Alcanta Education Organization, is an IB World School in Guangzhou. AIC offers a two-year Pre-Diploma Programme and a two-year IB Diploma programme for Chinese and international students. It is the first IB World School in Guangzhou to recruit Chinese students without foreign passports as Chinese children were not allowed to attend international schools in the past. AIC also recruits international students from all over the world regardless of race, religion and background.

American International School Guangzhou

Address: Science Park Campus: 19 Kexiang Road, Luogang District, Science Park

Ersha Island Campus: 3 Yan Yu Street South, Ersha Island, Yuexiu District

Website: www.aisgz.org

Email: admissions@aisgz.org

Telephone: +86 20 8735 3339 or +86 20 321 35555

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English

Curriculum: American and IB

Ages: 3 to 18

The American International School Guangzhou (AISG) is an independent, not-for-profit day school from pre-kindergarten up to Grade 12. It is both the oldest and largest international school in the city as well as the only non-profit international school. AISG has a good reputation among expat parents for its strong academic programme – it follows a combined IB/American curriculum – and its good facilities, staff and extra-curricular programme. Both the elementary and middle/high school campuses have excellent purpose-built facilities with sport-specific facilities, libraries, music rooms and art rooms, and the Science Park campus is fully wireless-enabled. Extra-curricular activities include rugby, badminton, volleyball, drama and numerous outreach programmes, among many others.

British School of Guangzhou

Address: Tonghe Middle Road, Baiyun

Website: www.nordangliaeducation.com/our-schools/guangzhou

Email: info@bsg.org.cn

Telephone: +86 20 8709 4788

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English

Curriculum: English National Curriculum

Ages: 1 to 18

Background

Founded in 2005, the British School of Guangzhou is a top-class international school with an excellent reputation. The school is part of Nord Anglia Education, a premium group of 43 schools around the world. The school is divided into two campuses a short walk from one another, located on the outskirts of Baiyun district on the beautiful shores of Nanhu Lake. Students from age 1 to 18 are accepted on a selective basis and are interviewed to test English ability. The school has world-class facilities including purpose-built buildings for each phase, well-equipped sports facilities, libraries, art and music rooms, a golf range, a theatre and a swimming pool complex.

Clifford International School

Address: Clifford Estates, Panyu

Website: www.cliffordschool.org

Email: adm@clifford-school.org.cn

Telephone: +86 20 8471 8273

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English

Curriculum: Canadian

Ages: 6 to 17

Background

The Clifford International School is regularly singled out as a top international school in Guangzhou. Situated in the popular Clifford Estates residential complex in Panyu, the school has attracted both local and international students since 1996. Currently the school has 3000 students of over 40 nationalities, over 60 percent of which use the boarding facilities. With the support of Princeton

University and Brigham Young University in the USA, has recently launched a fully bilingual Chinese/English system in addition to its international (fully English) stream.

French International School of Guangzhou

Address: Favor View, Wushan, Tianhe District

Website: www.efcanton.com

Email: direction@efcanton.com

Telephone: +86 20 3879 7324

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: French

Curriculum: French

Ages: 2 to 18

The French School, established in 1997, is the only school to offer French-language and French-curriculum education in Guangzhou. The school is a non-profit institution run by a governing body of parents and teachers in partnership with the Association for French Teaching Abroad. All students from kindergarten onwards study English and Chinese in addition to their normal classes, and may opt for additional languages at senior level. The school relocated to a new campus in Tianhe, an accessible area in central Guangzhou popular with expats.

Guangzhou Grace Academy

Address: Xinpu Nan Lu, JuShu Cun, Nanpu, Panyu 511431

Website: www.gzgrace.net

Email: info@gzgrace.net

Telephone: +86 20 8450 0180

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English

Curriculum: Christian

Ages: 4 to 18

Background

The Guangzhou Grace Academy (GGA) was founded in 1994 as an alternative Christian-curriculum school, and was awarded Model School status by the ACE School of Tomorrow. Although students with non-Christian backgrounds are permitted, the school makes it clear that the curriculum followed is imbued with strong Christian values, and both students and their families are encouraged to embrace these. New students are admitted between the ages of 4 and 11. After this age, new students must be transferring from a Christian school or demonstrate strong Christian principles and proficiency in English.

ISA International School

Address: Block C2-2 Redtory, Siheng Road No.128, Yuan Village, Tianhe District

Website: www.isaschool.com

Email: info@isaschool.com

Telephone: +86 20 8890 0909

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English and Chinese

Age: 2 to 12 years

Background

ISA International School blends the best of Chinese and international educational practices and traditions, creating a new model of high quality, bilingual education in China. ISA International School's mission is to provide holistic education with academic and personal challenges, preparing students for life-long learning while building strength of character. The school aims to support each student's intellectual, physical, social and emotional development in a safe, stimulating learning environment.

Nanfang International School

Address: 1 South Industrial Park, Yinglong Road, Longdong Tianhe District, Guangzhou

Website: www.gnischina.com

Email: admissions@gnischina.com

Telephone: +86 20 3886 5920

Gender: Co-educational

Teaching language: English

Curriculum: British and IB

Ages: 2 to 18

Background

Nanfang International School is situated at the heart of Guangzhou's city centre, it is easily accessible from nearby expat areas and therefore a popular choice with expat parents, among whom it enjoys a good reputation. Facilities at the school are good and include dedicated art, music, science and technology rooms, classrooms with interactive whiteboards, various sport-specific courts and a senior study area with laptops. There is a variety of extra-curricular activities on offer, including school newspaper, school band, drama, yoga, taekwondo, soccer and basketball, among others. Students are also encouraged to participate in community service projects and numerous field trips throughout their school career.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on moving to New York City, including accommodation, healthcare and transport, have a look at our Expat Guide to Guangzhou:

<http://www.expattarrivals.com/china/guangzhou/moving-to-guangzhou>