

# WHY BEIJING IS GREAT FOR TEACHING FAMILIES



北京顺义国际学校  
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF BEIJING

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# WELCOME MESSAGE

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On behalf of the community of the International School of Beijing (ISB), we are delighted to welcome you to the city of Beijing. We understand moving to a new country or city comes with challenges and emotions.

This guide has been designed with insights and support from the ISB community for accurate and realistic insights. It is packed with the essential know-how of Beijing, like the climate, community support, transportation, housing, and such, to help you prepare and embrace your new start in this magnificent city.







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## OVERVIEW OF BEIJING

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Beijing is the quintessential combination of ancient culture and modern global power, new-age construction, and the influence of international and western cultures. With its striking temples and high-tech infrastructure, this land of opportunity can be your home away from home, a place to explore with the comfort of modern conveniences.





## Climate and Seasons

Beijing lies at about the same latitude as Madrid and New York. It is situated 1,500 kilometers (about 1,000 miles) north of China's largest city, Shanghai. Beijing's climate is temperate, with humid summers and dry winters.

The strong Siberian winds and occasional snow can result in frigid winters; the months spanning from December to March are the winter months. Spring and fall are among Beijing's most pleasant seasons, spanning from April to May and September to October, with beautiful foliage and clear

blue skies defining characteristics. Summers are hot and rainy, lasting from May to August.

In the winter months, the average temperature is below 7°C with a low of -8°C to a high of 2°C, with the coldest days seen in January.

In the summer months, the average temperature is above 25°C with a high of 40°C and the hottest month being July. Fall and spring see similar transitional temperatures.





## Improvements to Air Quality

In the past, China's rapid urbanization and growing population influenced a high fine particulate matter (PM2.5) reading in the city's air quality. During low-quality air days, more frequent in the winters, residents remained indoors and utilized air purifiers to prevent exposure.

However, over recent years great strides have been made to improve the air quality. These include Government-approved strategies to fight air pollution, measures to control air pollution emitted by industrial enterprises, control

over bulk coal, and reduction and replacement of coal consumption.

These measures have drastically reduced the low local air quality days in the winter, leading to a reduced number of bad air days.

Visit [www.iqair.com/china/beijing](http://www.iqair.com/china/beijing) daily to review air quality levels.







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## SETTLING IN

The city's transformation has influenced its people to adapt by working together. You will find opportunities to build connections, an abundance of delicious food, chances for adventurous excursions, culture and history tours, and access to a range of conveniences that function within these guidelines. Beijing is a city of the future, just waiting to be explored.



## Housing

Most of the accommodation found in downtown Beijing is in the form of apartments. It is common for international schools like ISB to provide faculty and staff with an allowance in addition to your salary and assistance from the school in locating housing.

You can find houses with yards, larger kitchens, and even community swimming pools further away from downtown. Many of ISB's faculty have found

homes in the suburban serenity of Shunyi, a family-friendly district with plenty of places to eat, shop and unwind.







## Community Support

Domestic helpers in China are known as an *ayi*, or “aunty” in Chinese. You can hire an *ayi* for part-time or full-time work to help with housework, childcare, looking after pets, shopping, etc. *Ayis* can be found through personal recommendations or referral companies.

When negotiating, consider hiring a translator to ensure you agree on work conditions, responsibilities, salary, etc. Employers typically give *ayis* and drivers public holidays and pay them in full even if they are traveling during a holiday. All employers pay double their salary on Chinese New Year.

## Utilities and Telephones

Utilities and telephone often function on pre-paid payments made using designated cards and meters. Remember to check your meters regularly to stay up to date on payments. You can talk with your concierge, management office, or relocation organization to learn about recharge cards and meters.

You can choose from various cell phone service providers, the main ones being China Telecom, China Unicom, and China Mobile; you can find payment plans in English online. You can top up your phone credit through WeChat or Alipay ([see page 13](#)) and save on long-distance calls by using video calling platforms like Skype or FaceTime.



## Banking and Credit Cards

The official currency is the *renminbi* (RMB) (which translates to “the people’s money”), also known as *yuan* or *kuai*. The most common payment methods across the city include cash, UnionPay, Alipay and WeChat; remember to check available payment methods before making your purchase as some merchants may not accept credit cards.

Familiarizing yourself with local banks’ rules, regulations, account limit fees, withdrawal limits, and sources of funds is recommended. Using an overseas card will incur a foreign exchange fee depending on your bank or ATM; consider opening a local bank account instead. The daily withdrawal limit is most often 20,000 RMB (approx. \$3,000 USD). It is best to inquire about this with your sponsoring organization.

## ATMs near ISB

**ISB:** Lower Gallery; China Construction Bank.

**Outside of River Garden:** On the street-facing side of the clubhouse; China Construction Bank.

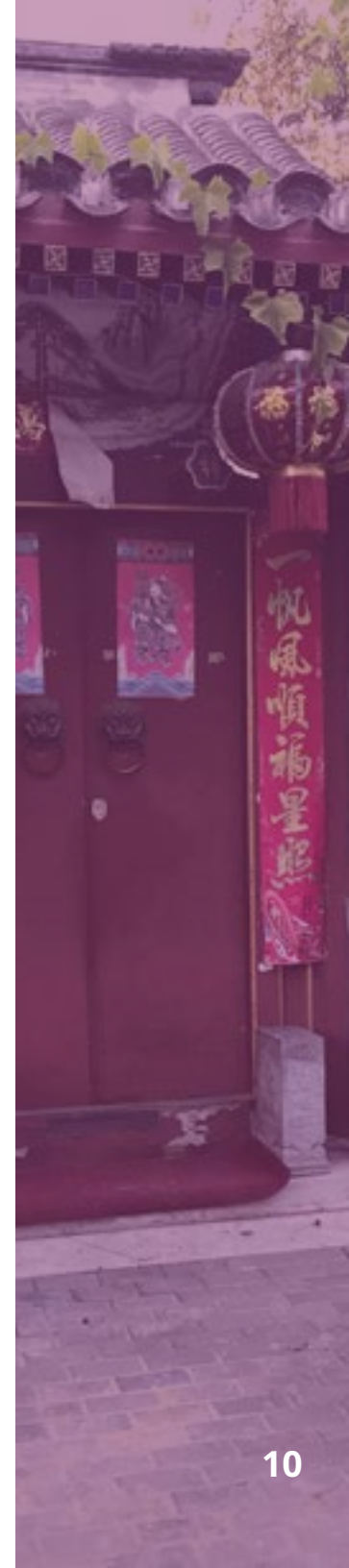
**Yosemite C Gate:** Bank of China.

**Crowne Plaza Hotel lobby:** Bank of China

**Tian Zhu Plaza:** On Tianbei Road east of Jingshun Lu, in the shopping center with Jing Ke Long Supermarket; Bank of China.

**Shine City:** China Construction Bank.

Please note overseas and local bank cards are accepted at all ATMs. Fees may apply.

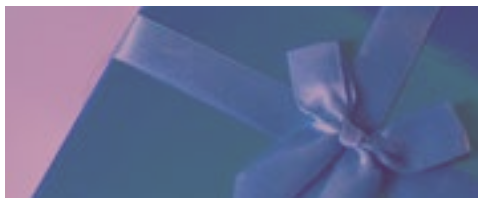




## Chinese Cultural Tips

### DO

- Have a name card printed up, even if you are not working outside of the home, to have one to exchange on official occasions.
- Use both hands to present and receive name cards to show respect.
- Mention the family name first, then the given name, when using Chinese names. Remember, most women keep their maiden surname rather than taking their husband's surname. Children generally are given their father's surname.
- Shake hands with people when you first meet them. The Chinese are generally reserved; courtesy rather than familiarity is preferred. Stick to handshakes and only give hugs if you know the person well.
- Giving and receiving toasts at a meal is a common way to show courtesy and gratitude. Offer a host/hostess a gift when visiting someone's home or company. An item from your home country will be especially appreciated.
- Use the number eight (8) at weddings and birth celebrations as it is considered a lucky number (it sounds like the Chinese word for "prosperity").
- Use the full title of our host country: "The People's Republic of China," in all formal communications. "China" can be used informally.
- Dress conservatively. Revealing clothes should be avoided since they may offend. Adhering to the ISB dress code should prevent any awkwardness.
- Ask your helpers how they would like you to refer to them. Some are happy with *ayi*, which means "aunty." Others might prefer you to use their name.
- You can call your driver *shifu*, which means "master." This respectful, versatile title can also be used to address workmen. Children should refer to your domestic helper as *ayi* and your male driver as *shushu* (literally "uncle").





## Chinese Cultural Tips

### DON'T

- Don't show anger in public. If you encounter a conflict/offense, it is best not to confront it directly but work through a third party to allow the original party to save "face."
- Don't be offended if people stare; they merely do so to express open interest in seeing a "foreigner." You may encounter this frank interest, especially when visiting remote provinces.
- Don't use number four (4) at weddings and birth celebrations. Four is considered an unlucky number and is avoided because it sounds like the Chinese word for "death."
- Avoid talking about politics or religion with new acquaintances.
- Don't give clocks, knives, or pears as gifts to Chinese friends. When giving gifts, avoid watches (meaning your time's up, i.e., wishing someone were dead) or knives and pears (which in Chinese sounds like the word for "separate," or ending a relationship).





## WeChat

This “super app” is the most widely used app in the country. It allows users to network, chat, share photos and videos, pay bills via WeChat wallet, use other banking services, buy groceries, shop, download music, and so much more. WeChat is the one-stop solution for all your needs and problems. It has recently grown in popularity overseas so that you can add your family and friends outside of China.

## Alipay

Alipay is one of China’s most popular third-party online payment platforms. It provides an easy, secure way for millions of individuals and businesses to make and receive payments.





## Transportation and Your Commute

The most common way to get around the city of Beijing is through public transportation and Didi ([see page 15](#)). While downtown is better connected and can be explored on foot or by bike, the suburban part or Shunyi district may require a car or a bike for your daily commute.

### DRIVER'S LICENSE

Check with your company's human resources department to see if it allows expatriate employees and their family members to drive. China does not recognize overseas driver's licenses. Getting acquainted with Beijing traffic before you drive into the city is also a good idea.





## BICYCLES

China is the “Kingdom of Shared Bikes.” Brightly colored shared bikes are abundant in Beijing and are an inexpensive way to get from point A to B. Download one of the mobile apps like Mobike or Didi, electronically transfer a deposit, and then pay per ride by scanning the QR code on the bike.

## DIDI

Didi Chuxing is a popular ride-sharing mobile app akin to Uber. Passengers send ride requests using the app to be connected with drivers. This app is available in English and Chinese.

## TAXI

Though most riders favor Didi, Beijing taxis are a reliable form of public transportation. Taxis can be booked using the Didi app but are paid for based on the meter. It is recommended to decline the cab politely if the driver states their meter is “broken.” Make sure to get an official receipt (known as a *fapiao*) after you pay the fare. This receipt also has the number to trace the taxi if you leave something in the vehicle.

## SUBWAY

Beijing has the oldest subway network in mainland China. Fares are distance-based, and you will not find monthly or multi-day passes. If you plan on using public transportation often, consider buying a rechargeable IC card, the so-called Yikatong, which works on buses and the subway.

Subway Line 15 connects Shunyi to downtown Beijing, with China International Exhibition Center (opposite Europlaza) being the closest station to ISB. The subway operates between 6:00 am and 10:30 pm every day. However, depending on the day and line, times may vary.





## FOOD

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The city's transformation has influenced its people to adapt by working together. You will find opportunities to build connections, an abundance of delicious food, chances for adventurous excursions, culture and history tours, and access to a range of conveniences that function within these guidelines. Outside of challenging pandemic regulations, Beijing is a city where the past meets future, just waiting to be explored.



## Dining Out

In authentic Beijing cuisine, generally influenced by the Shandong Province, common dishes are more snacks than full dishes. Street food vendors offer the best local experience for cheap with staples like *jiān bing* — a savory pancake cooked with egg that is a breakfast staple — or *chuàn'r*— Beijing-style barbecue that's popular during summer.

Are you looking for greater cuisine options? The central area of Sanlitun plays host to a multitude of international restaurants, from steak houses to sandwich shops, from Italian to Persian, Indian, and Arabic cuisine.

***Pro-tip on local food culture etiquette: Tipping is not encouraged or required in mainland China but is accepted in the travel industry. Avoid sticking chopsticks straight up in your food (it may be seen as offering incense to the dead) and tapping your bowl with your chopsticks.***





## Food Delivery

Food delivery is widespread in Beijing. It is generally inexpensive and easy to arrange online or by phone. Depending on your preference and the area, eating out or ordering in can be cheaper than buying groceries to cook. Here are some food delivery apps, and keep in mind some require proficiency in Chinese to use:

- » Ele.me
- » JSS
- » KouBei
- » Meituan Waimai
- » Sherpa's







## Food Shopping

You will find a vast number of supermarket chains throughout the city specializing in local and imported western goods.

**Carrefour:** supermarket chain with various locations, with online delivery service.

**Fudi:** with locations in both Shunyi and Chaoyang District, Fudi is another membership-based warehouse store specializing in fresh produce and offering a limited range of imported goods.

**Ikea:** East 4th Ring Road; second location in Daxing South Beijing.

**Jenny Wang's, Jenny Lou's:** chain with various locations (There are two "Jenny's" businesses, each with several locations).

**Jing Ke Long:** local supermarket chain.

**BHG Marketplace:** various locations in Beijing.



**Metro (麦德龙):** a German-run discount supermarket.

**Vanguard:** local supermarket chain.

**Wal-Mart:** various locations in Beijing.

**Wu-Mei:** various locations in Beijing.

**April Gourmet:** various locations in downtown Beijing.

**San Yuan Li Market:** produce market near San Yuan Qiao. A remarkable and colorful selection of fruits, vegetables, meat, seafood, spices, etc. Near the embassy District.

**Sam's Club:** membership-based warehouse store offering a range of imported goods and produce to buy in bulk.

Organic meats and vegetables are also available from Carrefour, Ito Yokado supermarket, and the supermarket in the basement of Shin Kong Plaza.





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## SHOPPING

Beijing's expansive shopping options, ranging from opulent malls with luxury brand stores to local markets with bargain prices and opportunities for haggling, cater to all budgets.





## Places to Shop

**Bicycles:** Check out the Trek store in Shine Hills or the Giant Store on Tianbei Road (on the way to the airport). Decathlon also stocks a reasonably-priced variety of bikes.

**Electronics:** Gome and Da Zhong are two of the biggest Chinese electronics stores. Carrefour and Auchan also carry electronics and appliances.

### Home Furnishings:

- » Aika
- » B&Q
- » Easy Home
- » Hola
- » Ikea

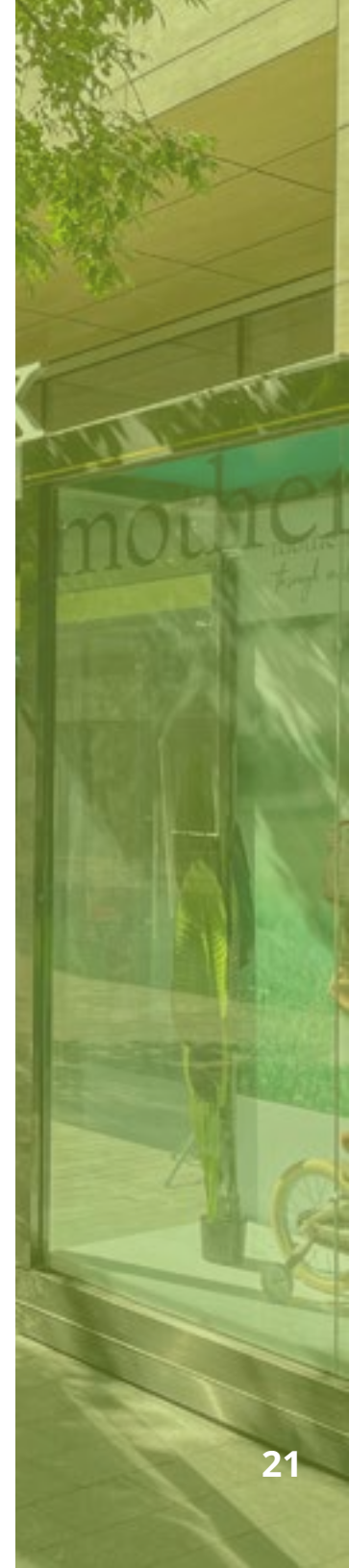
### Malls:

- » Europlaza
- » Shine Hills (9 An Xiang Street, 5 minutes drive from ISB)
- » Indigo Mall (20 Jiu Xian Qiao Road, near Lido Hotel)
- » Jia Mao Mall (Wang Jing)
- » Oriental Plaza (by Wang Fu Jing)
- » Park View Green (Fang Cao Di)
- » The Place
- » Shin Kong Place
- » Solana (Chaoyang Park West Gate)
- » Tai Koo Li (The Village at Sanlitun)

**Sports:** Decathlon (a French sports superstore). Stocks a wide variety of sports equipment.

**Watsons:** is a Hong Kong chain that mostly carries cosmetics and toiletries with many imported brands available.

Some stores even have a small pharmacy. Most products include English labeling.



## Markets

**Hong Qiao Pearl Market 红桥珍珠市场:** Souvenirs, electronics, shoes, bags, clothing, and pearls on upper floors. The back building houses toys, costumes and stationery. Many tour groups go here, so be sure to bargain hard. 46 TianTan Dong Lu.

**Bai Rong World Trade Mall 百荣世贸商城:** Enormous fabric market with low prices. Best to go with someone who knows where it is the first time. Located near the 3rd Ring Road north of the Mu Xi Yuan Bridge, Fengtai District.

**Pan Jia Yuan Market 潘家园旧货市场:** (also known as the “Dirt Market”) Great for “antiques” and everything from pottery to Chinese boxes. It’s busiest on the weekends – go early for the best buys! It is also open on weekdays but has a lot fewer vendors.

**Silk Street Market 秀水街市场:** A 5-story mall with stalls of clothing, souvenirs, pearls, etc. It’s popular with tourists, so expect higher prices.





## eShopping

While WeChat is the go-to app for all solutions, here are some of the other popular online marketplaces in Beijing.

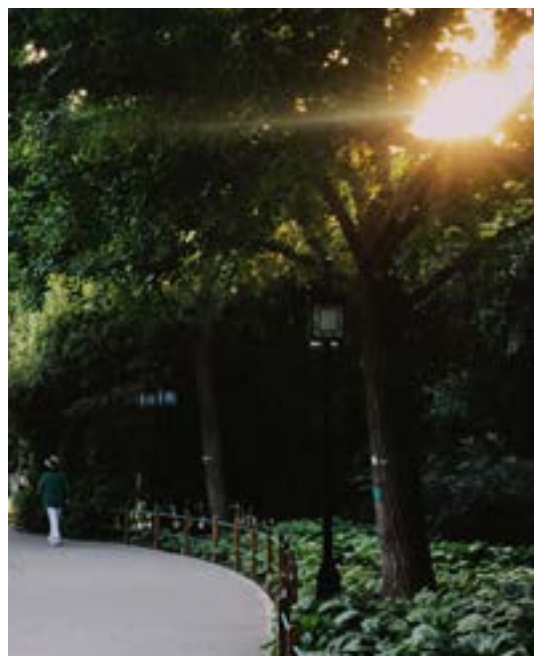
**Jingdong:** a great platform to browse and buy quality electronic products and household appliances.

**Taobao:** the Chinese version of eBay; you can purchase a range of items at great prices, such as clothing, accessories, and electronic and household appliances.

**Pinduoduo:** this is a social e-commerce app that uses group shopping. Promotions and limited-time offers can be used by meeting its requirements (two people, following the app's account, and such). The more you shop, the cheaper products and better offers you get.

**XiaoHongShu:** another social e-commerce app where people share shopping tips, product reviews, and lifestyle recommendations. This app lets you purchase products from renowned beauty brands like Lancome or Innisfree.

**Baopals:** considered the “English version of Taobao,” but expect items to be a bit pricier.







## FUN AND RELAXATION

The great city of Beijing is adorned with culture, picturesque outdoors, world-renowned attractions, fascinating history, and innovation. The city is abundant with fun activities for every family member and families to enjoy together.

If you've decided to live in the calm suburban Shunyi district, welcome to the neighborhood! Not only is it located close to ISB, but the district is also known to be family-friendly, with many restaurants, coffee shops, and more.



## Fun Activities for Kids

**Club Football:** community based football/soccer league for kids.  
[www.clubfootball.com.cn](http://www.clubfootball.com.cn)

**Universal Studios:** theme park featuring the best Universal rides, shows, and attractions.  
[www.universalbeijingresort.com](http://www.universalbeijingresort.com)

**Happy Valley Amusement Park:** Roller coasters! East 4th Ring Road, Xiao Wu Ji Lu Bei.

**Beijing World Park:** this theme park holds miniature versions of global landmarks and hosts cultural performances.

**Beijing Ocean Park:** visit this massive indoor aquarium and learn about thousands of aquatic creatures.

**Le Cool ice skating rink:** famous ice skating rink that is usually open throughout the year.

**Beihai Park:** one of the most popular historical parks located in the heart of the city.

**Nan Shan Ski Resort:** Mi Yun county, Sheng Shui Tou Village.  
[www.nanshanski.com](http://www.nanshanski.com)

**Movie Theaters:** Stellar Int'l Cineplex in Wang Jing, Star City at Oriental Plaza, Megabox at the Village at Sanlitun, Wanda International Cineplex at Wanda Plaza, Shine Hills.

**Latitude:** Trampoline park in Shunyi. <https://latitudeair.com/info/locations/china/>

**Escape Room:** 2/F, Shimao Department Store, No.13 Gongti North Road, Chaoyang District. Call their hotline at 4008-598-298 and press 1 followed by 3 to speak to an English speaking staff.



## Fun Activities for You

### **Visit cultural or historical sights:**

The Great Wall of China, The Palace Museum and the Forbidden City, The Summer Palace, The Temple of Heaven, The Lama Temple, Tiananmen Square, and much more.

### **Get acquainted with traditional Beijing:**

visit The Beijing Hutongs and explore the mazes of alleyways that exhibit traditional courtyard houses of a time that once was.

**Beijing Food Tours:** going on a food hunt is another fun and delicious way of getting to know a city. Find popular local snacks at Nanluoguxiang, Ghost Street, Wangfujing Snack Street, and even Hutongs.

### **Visit the Beijing Olympic**

**Park:** this stadium is the world's largest steel structure that boasts complex engineering and wonders.

**Karaoke:** many call this the national sport as it is an excellent method to make local friends.

**Watch a Kung Fu Show:** the most popular local martial arts form, also known as the earliest surviving sport in the country. Watch a show to observe the coming together of body, mind, and classical Chinese philosophy.

**Acrobatic Shows:** Chinese acrobatics are world-renowned for their history. Watching a performance of traditional acrobatics is a must in Beijing.

**Socialize with community members:** ISB's foreign talent are known to get together over the weekend for drinks, food, and popular board games like Mahjong.





## Create Your Own Fun!

### TEAM SPORTS

Beijing has a long-standing history of intramural sports clubs. All levels are welcome to join friendly competitions in a variety of sports ranging from soccer, touch and contact rugby, basketball, ice and field hockey, volleyball and more.

### YOGA IN THE PARK

Though more yoga studios have been popping up all over the city in recent years, Yoga in the Park is a great chance to get outside and practice outdoors during the fall, spring, and summer months.

Class is normally held on Sunday mornings in Chaoyang Park in east Beijing.

### BYO BIKE TOUR

Why don't you pick up one of the thousands of shared bikes available around the city and create your own tour? Most roads have bike lanes and this allows you to create your own bespoke tour of Beijing's historical and cultural spots and also gives you access to the amazing variety of restaurants that you could sample on the way!





## SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The pandemic years between 2020 and 2023 brought challenges and changed many things globally. With the reopening of China in early 2023, the country is returning to pre-Covid times. Beijing has a low crime rate and is a safe city to live in, whether you are single or choosing to raise a family in China's exciting capital. There is good access to healthcare and many different options for clinics and hospitals to suit all budgets.