

## School Profile of Ruiquan Middle School

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### The School



Ruiquan Middle School is a large school, with about 6000 students, and 500 teachers – 60 of which are English teachers. There are three grades, (1, 2, and 3) and the age range of the students is from 15-18. In other words, this is like a secondary school and college combined (UK). The school is located a mile or so to the east of town, but we live just off campus, so it's just a 5 minute walk to class. It's also really easy to get to town in the day – just a quick 1 元 bus ride away (the #1 bus) which stops at around 9pm. At night you'll have to call in a taxi (in Chinese) to come and pick you up. It's a 30 minute walk to town, or a 10 minute bike ride. The school is surrounded by fast food and stationary shops (many of which are closed when the students are on holiday).



(inner courtyard of the grade 2 building)

#### **The Classes**

Currently they have 2 foreign teachers, both from Buckland (though WeiNan itself hosts numerous foreigners both teachers, at the university and a private language school, and engineers). One teacher teaches grade 2, the other grade 1, leaving the oldest grade without a foreign teacher. The school has a large 4/5 story building for each grade, splitting the students up among the 30 classrooms. So each class has about 75 students. Since I teach just grade 2, I have 30 different classes, with about 75 students in each one (except class 1 which has just 30). I see each class once every 2 weeks. I

usually teach about 3 classes a day (15 per week) though the schedule changes after the summer break. The classrooms are nice and modern, equipped with an over-head projector, blackboards on 2 of 4 walls, and plenty of chalk. The rooms have no air conditioning or heat - so on hot days they have ceiling fans and windows in each room, and in winter they have pure old fashioned body heat. That and thermal clothing.



### **Other Buildings**

There are large dormitories for the students on campus, with students having typically 4 students per room. Luckily, there is also another building on just off campus for the teachers and former teachers. There are several other buildings on campus, like the science lab building, the art department, the food canteen and the administrative building, but you rarely will venture into those.



(The best noodles, just opposite the school entrance, not only in WeiNan, but so far, in China! P.S. The owner is standing in the doorway)

### **Cafeteria**

The school also has a large cafeteria, some students say it's great, some say it's terrible, all I know is that the cakes are good! As there is an abundance of little food shops and restaurants around the school you are not short on choice for tasty and cheap food. At the school canteen you buy food with either cash or a food card that you can charge up at the cafeteria's cashier.

## The Apartment

Left: Lounge, right: bedroom



ft: Bedroom. Right: kitchen

The apartment is nice and spacious. It's a two bedroom apartment – with one large lounge, a separate office room, two good sized double bedrooms, a separate bathroom and a separate small kitchen, there is also a pantry for hanging up clothes to dry. The apartment is fully furnished with old fashioned though perfectly good cupboards, wardrobes and cabinets. Most appliances such as the washing machine, fridge, freezer etc. were brand new when we moved in. The computer is perfectly adequate, and the Internet connection is good (not as fast as typical UK standards but still good), but is still subject to the 'Great Chinese Firewall'. So say goodbye to YouTube (unless you have a proxy).

Left: Bathroom, top right: office and bottom right: view from the kitchen (school building in the distance).

### **Kitchen & Bathroom**

The kitchen has all the pots, pans and whatever that you'll need. There is a rice cooker, fridge/freezer, water cooler, and a camping style hob for cooking. There is some counter space for cooking, but not much. There is plenty of storage space for food and such just outside the kitchen. As for the bathroom, you have a western toilet, bath tub, electric shower, sink and an electrical outlet. As the shower is electric it is nice and hot though that is the only hot water in the apartment (both sinks, bathroom and kitchen have only cold water).

### **The Apartment Building and nearby**

The teachers apartment complex is generally quiet, occasionally you hear fireworks going off and the school band playing and there are the daily shouts of “niú nǎi!” as the milk man comes by (usually around 9pm).

## The City of WeiNan



### **Shopping & Night Life**

WeiNan is located in the east of Shaanxi province, just an hour and a half to the east of Xi'an by bus (20 RMB). It's a small town, with 2 main supermarkets, a couple of big department stores, and no bars. There are a bunch of KTV places if that is your thing, but other than that the people of WeiNan tend to drink at the restaurants or at outdoor beer courts of which there are 2 or 3. There are plenty of parks, restaurants, and clothing stores. In the center of town and nearby you'll find the other supermarkets, the department store, Adidas stores, Nike stores, outdoor clothing markets, fruit markets, and flea markets. They have a couple of KFC's and a McDonalds here, but other than that it is all Chinese food. At night there are often little night markets that pop up all over the place, offering clothes to BBQ meat, and even small carnival rides. At night at one of the larger parks there is a ballroom dancing night. There is a cinema, but it is all in Chinese. So the night life here is pretty tame. Welcome to the *real* China.

### The People

The people of WeiNan are generally friendly and extremely curious. Although WeiNan has several foreigners not many come to the eastern part where the school is located and as such you often get stared at, and called out to, or if you are in a restaurant, you may get beer bought for you :)

### **The Students**



The students of Ruiquan #1 Middle School are all very friendly and all 5000 of them will say "Hello!" to you as often as they can. The students are in school from 7 in the morning until 10 at night, though they are not studying for this length of time, first class is at 8:15 and last class is at 5:15, passing the classrooms after this time and you will find the students sleeping, playing on QQ or reading comic books. The skill level is fairly good on average, with a few students per class having excellent English, and then of course the ones who don't understand anything you say. Behavior is good generally though if you want to teach the

whole class and not just the first few rows of students then you have your work cut out, often the more you try to get everyone to participate the worse the behavior becomes. Around 30% of the class will not

participate and instead attempt to read comics, play on the mobile phones, sleep or do homework. I find taking these things away from them and handing it to Mrs Yin soon rectifies this happening again, though they may no longer attend your class!

There are about 6 'rocket' classes (all on the top floor for grade 2) that are in theory exceptionally good, though after grading each lesson over the academic year I find that some non rocket classes are in the top 6 1 lesson plan fits all, except class 1 that has only 30 students are an extremely high level of spoken English therefore require a more advanced lesson. So planning for the 30 classes is pretty easy though your lesson must be adaptable to varying skill levels, not so much in the lesson plan itself but in the way it is implemented. Getting them to write or prepare material for dialogues is difficult – they respond well to impromptu dialogues and conversations. They have large vocabularies, but placing them in sentences with the correct grammar is another matter. You will end up teaching the same lesson 30 times, so make sure that you plan a lesson that you will enjoy as well.

### **Teachers & the FAO**

The other teachers are generally friendly, but most don't go out of their way to meet you or to try and do something with you. They have their own lives and generally stick to them. A few of the English teachers are rather good at English and are brave enough to talk to me. For the English teachers that are Chinese it is a matter of 'face' to talk to a foreigner – they fear their English is poor and do not wish to embarrass themselves, and so will limit their contact with you.

As far as the Foreign Affairs Officer (FAO) goes, she is very nice and will try to help you in any aspect that you need. Her name is Mrs. Zhang (pronounced 'Jung'). She is a very high ranking member of the administration of Grade 2. Her English is generally good but make sure you can tell that she *really* understands. The vast majority of the English teachers and the FAO of course are female so there are no drinking sessions and no baijiu!

Aside from the FAO there are 2 assistants designated to help, one for grade 1 (Mandy) and one for grade 2 (Mary aka Mrs Yin), both have excellent English and are very keen to speak with you and learn from your experiences and will help you with any issues you have in regards to your classrooms/teaching/students etc.

### Transportation & Cost of Living



The best way to get around is by bus, they cost 1 元 or you could call a proper taxi, on rare occasions they attempt to not use the meter, so check on the meter it is usually around 5 元 or even less. The school will provide a bike for you if you push for it (we didn't), and it is not a bad idea to just ride your bike to town if you want to go during the day. It's free and it provides exercise.

The cost of living here is fairly cheap – you will probably eat most of the time in local restaurants where a large

meal costs something in the neighborhood of 30 元 for 2 people.

For the two of us per month our spending with includes transport, food, household products and bi-

monthly weekend trips to Xi'an for our coffee fix at Starbucks we spend around 1300 元. In WeiNan it is almost impossible to spend your salary, you will end up saving a lot.

## Frequently Asked Questions & Quick Facts

City Size:	Small city; rural farmland's center of commerce
Regional Climate:	Average northerly inland climate – cold winters, hot summers
School Size:	6000 students, 500 teachers, 60 English teachers, 2 foreigner teachers
Class Size:	75 students average
Students' ages:	15-18
Students Skill level:	Grade 1: Beginners - lower intermediate; mostly beginners Grade 2: Beginners - upper intermediate; mostly lower intermediate
Classrooms:	Modern – digital ceiling mounted projector, wall clock, 2 walls of blackboards, 3 doubled rows of desks, podium
Teacher's workload:	30 different classes, each with 40 students. You see each class once every two weeks, and teach an average of 3 classes per day, each lasting 45 minutes. A schedule is given by the FAO. Weekends are free. One lesson plan will last you two weeks.
Nearby places:	Xi'an, has everything you need/want plus a rich history with plenty to see and do. Lintong, smaller than WeiNan but has high standard facilities like aqua springs, hot baths and swimming pools.
Things to do for fun:	Bike rides, the school's “playground” (basketball, football, ping pong, monkey bars, and other various brightly colored outdoor workout equipment), shopping in town, flea & fruit markets, parks, relaxing farmland, many restaurants, KTV, computer games, or the Internet. The town does not have any bars, nightclubs, movie theaters that you can understand but Xi'an does.
Things to bring: (or things I found it hard to find)	Bras for the larger lady, tampons, lime, Havana Club rum and bread that isn't sweet. Good chocolate.
Cost of Living:	650 元 a month (per person)