

Sanlitun International Volunteer Service Report

Challenges Faced by Foreign Residents in Beijing

Student	Jiabei He
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Project Context	International volunteer service and urban community support
Focus Areas	Hospital visits Volunteer communication Dining in Beijing

A student-led service insight report for international community support in Beijing.

Background

In recent years, Beijing has welcomed more international visitors because of China's expanded visa-free policies and increasing international exchanges. According to the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, Beijing received about 5.48 million inbound visitors in 2025, a 39% increase compared with the previous year. More people are coming to Beijing for tourism, study, business, and cultural exchange. As the number of international visitors continues to grow, providing practical language support has become increasingly important to help them adapt to daily life in the city.

Problem 1: Hospital Visits

Problem

Many foreign visitors are unfamiliar with the Chinese medical system. They often do not know how to register, choose the correct department, pay medical fees, or collect medicine after seeing a doctor. During emergencies, these unfamiliar procedures can cause unnecessary stress and delays.

Research

We interviewed local volunteers, international students, and several foreign visitors living in or travelling around Beijing. Many interviewees said that hospital procedures in China are very different from those in their home countries. Some visitors said they did not know which department they should visit, while others found the registration and payment process confusing. Although translation apps were helpful, they were not always convenient during urgent situations.

Solution

To solve this problem, we designed a bilingual Hospital Visit Guide Card. The card explains the hospital process step by step, including registration, choosing the correct department, payment, consultation, and collecting medicine. It also provides useful medical vocabulary, emergency expressions, recommended translation tools, and official hospital websites. All information is presented in both Chinese and English with simple icons and a clear layout, allowing users to find information quickly.

Expected Impact

The card can reduce confusion and waiting time for foreign patients. It helps visitors understand the hospital process before asking for help and improves communication with doctors, nurses, and hospital staff. Volunteers can also use the card when assisting international visitors, making the whole medical experience smoother and more efficient.

Problem 2: Volunteer Communication

Problem

Foreign visitors often ask volunteers for directions, transportation information, or other assistance. However, some volunteers are not confident using English in real-life situations. As a result, communication may become slow or unclear, even when volunteers are willing to help.

Research

During our interviews, many volunteers shared that they sometimes knew the answer but were unsure how to express it in English. Foreign visitors also mentioned that simple and clear

communication was more helpful than complicated explanations. Both groups believed that a practical language guide would make communication easier.

Solution

We created a bilingual Volunteer Communication Card. The card contains common greetings, polite expressions, useful directions, and helpful sentences that volunteers can use when assisting visitors. It also includes common questions asked by international visitors and suggested responses. In addition, the card reminds volunteers to speak slowly, use simple words, remain patient, smile, and always communicate politely.

Expected Impact

The card helps volunteers communicate more confidently and reduces misunderstandings. It allows foreign visitors to receive information more quickly and clearly, improving the quality of volunteer services. Better communication also creates a friendlier atmosphere and leaves international visitors with a more positive impression of Beijing.

Problem 3: Dining in Beijing

Problem

Ordering food is another common challenge for foreign visitors. Many restaurant menus contain unfamiliar dish names, ingredients, and cooking methods. Visitors with dietary restrictions or food allergies may also find it difficult to explain their needs. These language barriers sometimes lead to incorrect orders or an unsatisfactory dining experience.

Research

Many interviewees said they often relied on pictures or translation apps when ordering food. Some visitors said they wanted to learn basic Chinese food vocabulary but did not know where to start. Restaurant staff also found it difficult to communicate with customers who spoke little or no Chinese.

Solution

To address this problem, we designed a bilingual Dining Guide Card. The card introduces common restaurant vocabulary, popular Chinese dishes, ingredients, cooking methods, and useful ordering expressions. It also includes phrases for food allergies, dietary preferences, payment methods, and simple dining etiquette in China. The information is organised into clear sections so visitors can quickly find what they need while ordering.

Expected Impact

The dining card helps visitors order meals with greater confidence and reduces communication difficulties between customers and restaurant staff. It also encourages visitors to try more local food because they can better understand menus and ingredients. By making the dining experience easier and more enjoyable, the card helps international visitors feel more comfortable during their stay in Beijing.

Conclusion

Through interviews and research, we identified three common challenges faced by international visitors in Beijing: visiting hospitals, communicating with volunteers, and ordering food. To address these problems, we designed three bilingual information cards that provide practical guidance, useful vocabulary, and clear communication tips.