

Sinan Middle School #1 & High School #6



Sinan Middle School #1: Approximately 1,500 students attend Sinan Middle School. Emily taught 15 classes per week on a biweekly schedule for a total of 30 classes. She taught Junior 1 and 2 (ages 11-14). There are approximately 50 students in each class. There is one building for classes and teachers' lounges, one for teachers' offices and a small auditorium, and one with a canteen and gymnasium. There is also a large courtyard and outdoor sports area.

All the classrooms are equipped with chalkboards and smartboards. The school gave Emily Grade 7's textbook (not Grade 8's) to familiarize herself with the students' knowledge, but lesson plans were completely up to her discretion.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are provided by the school. Lunch and dinner typically include rice, soup, and a variety of spicy dishes including chicken, pork, tofu, and/or vegetables.

Emily shared an office with three recently graduated teachers who acted essentially as TAs in the English department, observing lessons and assisting teachers as necessary. In the office there was one computer and three desks. There are many Chinese English teachers who can be found in the teachers' lounge if needed. All the English teachers were very friendly, but most had a very low level of English which often made it hard to communicate. This low English level included Emily's FAO, making it was incredibly slow and difficult trying to solve any problem or have any question answered. Thankfully, two of the TAs had much better English, and Emily frequently directed questions to them when queries to her FAO failed.

Sinan High School #6:

Thomas was the 3rd foreign English teacher to teach at Sinan #6. You will be teaching Senior 1 ages 15-16 who have moderate to low English levels. There are approximately 19 classes a week with about 50 students per class. The school's FAO (Nicole) has the best English in Sinan and is very helpful with any questions you or another foreign teacher might have. This school offers 3 meals a day which options rotate daily. Otherwise, the school has a very friendly atmosphere and many of the Chinese English teachers are very friendly and have moderate English skills. If you teach here, make sure to be firm with classes but keep a friendly attitude and you'll be just fine.



Apartment:

The teacher's apartment is a 10 minute electric moped drive away from the school (or 45 minute walk). The moped was provided by the school, and was shared with another teacher who lived in the same building and worked at a school nearby. The path to the school requires driving through the busiest street in town and up several steep hills, so it is not for the faint of heart but is manageable after some practice. An apartment closer to the school was offered, but was older and had a much smaller kitchen and bathroom so the farther apartment was chosen.

The apartment is on the third floor of the building. It is a one-bedroom apartment with living room and bathroom. The kitchen is separate and is shared with two other apartments (5 foreign teachers total). The apartment has a Chinese-style queen sized bed, one dresser, double closet, couch, armchair, coffee table, computer desk with desktop computer, water jug dispenser, and mini-fridge. The bathroom has a Western toilet; unfortunately, the shower head is located in the exact position so that full pressure will only hit the toilet, and you must instead use low pressure

to actually stand under the water. The kitchen is large and has two hot plates, a microwave, toaster oven, plenty of dishes, and limited cooking ware. A small laundry room is also located in the kitchen, containing only a washer and no dryer.

The apartment building shuts the water off regularly during the night and afternoon. It also frequently turns off when it rains. It is located on an elementary school campus, so throughout the day every day Chinese children's music is blasted over the loudspeakers. Expect its opening strains at 6:30 am, and the closing bugle 8:30 pm. The same 7-9 songs (including "Jingle Bells") and various short command phrases will quickly become the soundtrack of your life. On weekdays, the students perform exercises and dances to the music in the courtyard, which is pretty entertaining to watch. The city is split by a river, with most stores and entertainment on one side. The apartment is on the side with few businesses, a 15-20 minute walk across the bridge to the supermarket. We frequently used our moped for trips into town.

Students

The students are incredibly enthusiastic in the hallways and when you enter or exit a classroom, and are very friendly. However, at the middle school they have a very low level of English which makes it difficult to explain directions. At the beginning, it was difficult to keep them engaged yet under control, as they swung quickly from quietly confused to raucously participatory. Chinese teachers sometimes sit in and assist in directions, but this can also lead to the students being too afraid to speak or relying too much on the Chinese instructions rather than listening and watching the English teacher. The high school has a higher level of English with much less difficulty explaining directions, and teachers never sit in on classes.



Sinan Area

Sinan is a relatively small town of 70-90,000 citizens. It is surrounded by beautiful mountains and divided in half by a river. At this time, only 10 foreigners have ever lived in the city. Therefore, although it is a fairly modern town it is very authentically Chinese. The closest to Western restaurants are two fast food fried chicken places (Wallace and Dicos), two attempts at pizza (Castle in the Sky and Haucks), and a rather sad fast food burger place. It is also next to impossible to find cheese or butter. The bright side of this is that you can try many authentic Chinese dishes from street vendors or local restaurants. We are particular fans of their leaf-wrapped sweet bread, street barbeque, hot pot, and some naan-like dish that is cut into squares and sold by small bagfuls. Every five days there is a street market that goes up and down two main streets with tons of vendors (mostly vegetables, but also some spices, live animals, and street food). It is a lot of fun to walk up and down, people-watching and trying new foods!



There is a half-completed shopping mall and lots of boutique clothing stores and discount stores on the main street. There are two bars, a cinema, a computer gaming center, and several KTVs. The river has a nice running path along it. You can visit the small Huayan Temple or try to find the elusive Thousand Buddha Cave. Once a month, the five foreign teachers were treated to weekend trips by the local school administration based in Tongren which made exploring the

culture much more manageable than it would have been on our own. One member of the administration did tend to “invite” teachers to school events that were essentially mandatory, often shortly after the monthly outing, but this was not much of an issue.

Final Thoughts

This position is best suited for someone who knows basic Chinese or is very eager to immerse themselves in the language. They should also be comfortable spending time relaxing at home, as there is not a great number of things to do in the city. With that said, the people are friendly and generous, and always try their best to understand you through your limited Chinese, translator apps, and gestures. We also made great friendships with the other foreign teachers who lived in our building, and it was really pleasant swapping stories whenever we crossed paths in the kitchen. The scenery is gorgeous, and the bridge near the apartment is beautiful. Seeing the students’ unending excitement at something as simple as you walking in the door is incredibly heartwarming, and made teaching enjoyable. Sinan is certainly a challenge, but it is not without its rewards.