

# Taking a bus in China - Fuzhou, Fujian province

Many people visit China as a tourist and never experience the delights and tribulations (though the latter are slight and rare...) of going by bus. It is definitely not as scary as one might think. While the Chinese don't believe in orderly queuing, and the buses are always VERY crowded, they never jostle you, and they give up their seat for elderly people (especially foreign ones..!!) and parents with children. Children ("Little Emperors") are always given a seat to themselves! In addition, at the front of each bus are 6 seats reserved for those two categories. Add to this that the drivers are usually extremely helpful and that the Chinese are very honest. But more of that later...



The main advantage of bus travel is that the service is excellent. There are many many buses (which are very modern) and they run every ten to twenty minutes. Second advantage, a ticket is very cheap - only 1 yuan (kuai in common parlance), about 20 NZ cents, for one ride, no matter how far. The longest trip we took was about 20km, from Hwa Nan College to the main Fuzhou, Fujian province, railway station, all for 20 cents!, [*not to be confused with Fuzhou in Jianxi province which would have been a real bargain!*).

Another advantage of going by bus is the number of interesting people one speaks to, and believe me, they ALWAYS want to talk to you. Practise their English, tell you about the time they spent in England, help you find the restaurant you wanted to go to (and often get off the bus to show you) - the Chinese people love to talk. This is in contrast to the total indifference that Chinese people often get in the West.



Again, note the number of buses! The slot-thing for fares (with red slot) is bottom right

The first hurdle, when you travel on a Chinese town bus, is paying for your ride. All passengers are supposed to enter the door next to the driver and you pay by 'posting' your 1 kuai note into a box next to the driver, or by swiping your electronic ticket past a device. Paying by swipecard is extremely practical. The only problem is that, the 20 yuan card soon runs out, and you need to put money on it, of course..... We only knew of one kiosk in town which did this and it never seemed to be open!!! (there are more, of course. but where?)

Things got more complicated when the bus was very full, passengers often getting on by the exit doors located half-way down the bus. How to pay? Absolutely no problem!! The one kuai note, or their swipe card is passed to the nearest passenger, who then passes it down the bus for the note to be posted, or swipe-card swiped. Then, the card goes back up the bus to its owner!! Similarly, if the anarchist has only a 20 kuai note, same manoeuvre, but this time the change gets passed back up the bus!!! Conclusion? The Chinese are VERY honest or very well trained!!

OK, one has paid, but how do you get off at the required stop?!

Well, all bus stops have a display board with the name of the stop. Admittedly, this is in Chinese characters and in pinyin. Inside the bus, the stops are also displayed but only in Chinese characters.



So the foreigner must be able to recognise the characters of the required stop and be ready to spring out when they get there! Not an easy job in a crowded bus!! Failing that, you must be taken by a guide or simply try to recognise some landmark or other or ask and hope someone speaks English. No wonder some of us got terribly lost. But that is another story.....

It was mentioned above how helpful the drivers can be. One day, our bus broke down between stops. No problem! The driver directed his passengers to the nearest stop so we could catch the next bus and waited with us until it came along. Then the first driver told the second we had already paid...!!! Beat that!!! Imagine that at home?? One day, the driver of 'our' 89 bus warned me that my wallet in my pocket was a target for pickpockets. Unfortunately, he was one day late.....!

All in all, we found using the buses in Fuzhou a real pleasure and even did business on it one day. Seeing a lady with a musical instrument case, we politely asked what it was. Nothing daunted, she opened it and



produced a beautiful hulusi, a kind of musical flute/gourd. When asked if she would play it, she obliged, to the pleasure of the entire busload and the driver. We asked where we could buy one. Without hesitation she said, "You can buy it from me!", and at this point the whole busload leaned in close. The Chinese love a good haggle. It seemed to us a paltry sum and we willingly handed it over and received our prize and the whole bus resounded with clapping!

That's riding by bus in China for you!

*Thoughts from Abroad, Feb 2010*  
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