The Yangguanzhai Archaeological Field School

Xi'an, China

Program Information

PROGRAM SPECIFIC FIELD CONDITIONS

What are the average weather conditions during the time of the field school? (average temperature, humidity levels, amount of rain, wind, variation between day and night, etc.)

During the project period, it coincides with the summer high-temperature weather, with the average temperature generally ranging from 25°C (77°F) to 35°C (95°F). There is a significant temperature difference between day and night. The specific temperature range may vary due to weather changes. Rainfall is relatively frequent, with the expected precipitation between 10-40 millimeters. The humidity is high, with relative humidity reaching 60-70%.

Please describe the site(s) where the students will work, for example, outside and/or inside; in a city, town or rural area; shady or sunny, etc.

The excavation site is located in Xuwu Village, Gaoling District, Xi'an City, approximately 25 km north of the city center. Our excavation is primarily conducted outdoors, beneath a shelter that provides shade and protection from rain. This facility ensures that excavations can continue in all weather conditions throughout the season.

Are there special features of the program site, for example, nearby important cultural areas, ambiance or scenery, interaction with staff, access to unique infrastructure, techniques or objects?

The Yangguanzhai site is located on the north bank of the Jing River, a major tributary of the Wei River, which flows east into the Yellow River. Inundated by seasonal floods, the valley's rich soil deposits and mild climate provided an ideal environment for early farmers to settle.

Dating back more than 5,000 years, Yangguanzhai is the largest known settlement so far of the Yangshao Culture's Miaodigou Phase in the valley. Over the past decade, archaeologists have uncovered numerous features, including large ditches, a pond likely used as a reservoir, several ceramic kilns, house remains, pits, child burials, and a nearby cemetery containing several hundred tombs. Excavations have also yielded various tools made of stone, as well as pottery sherds and ceramic vessels—including bowls, jars, urns, and other types of containers—some of which are beautifully painted. Animal bones will be analyzed under the guidance of a zoologist at the nearby Shaanxi Academy facility.

Students will have full access to all the artifacts they excavate. Under the guidance of instructors, they will catalog, measure, and restore artifacts when possible. Additional skills learned at the site include excavation techniques, measuring, drawing, photographing, and flotation. For detailed coursework, please refer to the syllabus.

Known as the cradle of Chinese civilization, the Jing-Wei River valley has witnessed a long and continuous history. Southwest of the site, the ancestors of China's first emperor built their capital in present-day Xianyang on the valley's north bank. To the south, across the valley, lies the World Heritage Site of the First Emperor's Mausoleum. The short-lived Qin Dynasty was succeeded by the Han Dynasty, China's second imperial dynasty. Unlike the harsh policies of the Qin, the early Han emperors implemented lighter taxation and more lenient laws, leading to widespread prosperity. The Han Emperor Jing's Yangling mausoleum, located near the site, features an underground museum displaying a smaller-scale army of armed soldiers and horses compared to the First Emperor's terracotta army.

Students will visit both historical sites, along with other museums, and will have the opportunity to try on ancient-style clothing at the Yangling Museum as part of an immersive learning experience in ancient costume and etiquette.

In this historically rich valley, there is no shortage of beautiful scenery attached to fascinating stories. Our instructors will share compelling narratives about the surrounding areas near the site.

In addition to its historical significance, this area is also commercially vibrant, with cinemas, shopping malls, restaurants, farmers market (open daily), and various other facilities to meet daily needs. Students will have plenty of opportunities to taste the delicious local cuisine.

Will there be other people onsite with the field school or working in the same area? For example, other researchers, staff, or community volunteers?

Several professional archaeological technicians and laborers, primarily local villagers, assist with the excavation work and actively participate in the fieldwork. Additionally, two graduate students from Northwest University, both with extensive fieldwork experience and strong language skills, will be involved throughout the process.

What does an average week look like (working times, lecture/discussion times, free time, weekends)?

The field school lasts for five weeks. The first week is dedicated to classroom learning at Northwest University, visiting museums, sightseeing in the ancient city of Xi'an, and adjusting to the time difference. The following four weeks consist of fieldwork, following a six-day-per-week schedule.

Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology will provide each student with a digging bag containing all necessary tools and a field recording notebook; however, students must bring their own water bottles. In addition to excavation, students will gain hands-on experience in various archaeological fieldwork skills, including measuring, drawing profiles and plan views of excavation squares, sifting, bagging and labelling artifacts, daily field recording, and photography. Scheduled water (or watermelon) breaks will be provided in both the morning and afternoon, along with water and snacks.

On Wednesdays, organized trips will take students to nearby archaeological sites, museums, and scenic natural locations.

Two PowerPoint presentations by students are scheduled at the end of the second and fourth weeks in the field. This means that during these weeks, students will work in the field for five days. The presentations will take place in the afternoon, allowing students time in the morning to prepare.

What are the options for students to access money? Are there ATMs nearby? Should students plan to bring a certain amount of cash?

In China, electronic payment is the primary method of transaction. Therefore, it is highly recommended to download the Alipay (支付宝 Zhifubao) app on your phone before departing, as it links directly to your bank account. Alipay functions similarly to Apple Pay in the U.S.

Before traveling, notify your credit card company and bank to prevent them from flagging your transactions as fraudulent and blocking your access. Many places in China may not accept American credit cards. However, you can use your debit card to withdraw cash at major banks, including the Bank of China (中国银行 Zhongguo Yinhang) and the Construction Bank of China (中国建设银行 Zhongguo Jianshe Yinhang). You may need to set up a pin for your credit card before departing for China.

Both banks are located near the site, so there is no need to carry large amounts of cash.

ACTIVITY LEVEL & ACCESSIBILITY

Please provide information about the physical requirements of the program.

The excavation activities for this project typically involve physical tasks, such as bending, kneeling, squatting, and lifting, all of which require a certain level of physical stamina. The distance between the hotel and the site is about 2 km.

Please comment how accessible your site is for people with mobility challenges.

This project is primarily conducted at outdoor archaeological excavation sites, where the terrain can be uneven. It involves long hours of outdoor work and requires good physical stamina. As such, it is not suitable for individuals who use wheelchairs, crutches, or other mobility aids.

PROGRAM COUNTRY & CULTURAL INFORMATION

What do you love about the country and area you work in? What do you think students will be most excited to discover?

This project is the first and longest-running international field school in China. This year marks its 12th season since its launch in 2010. In the past, three students completed their master's degrees based on their research at Yangguanzhai, and many others have continued their graduate studies in prestigious programs worldwide.

With the unwavering support of the IFR and collaborations with the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology and Northwest University, the program has provided international students with the opportunity to work at the Yangguanzhai site—a national treasure protected by China's State Department.

Over the past decade, archaeologists have excavated nearly 20,000 square meters of the site, gaining significant insights into the region's ancient environment, the daily lives of its inhabitants, ceramic technology, subsistence practices, and burial customs. At the same time, our team has gained valuable experience in training international students, passing on not only knowledge of the past but also teaching our students how to navigate interactions in a completely different environment. This has helped foster an inclusive and cohesive group, which is vital to the success of the fieldwork.

The wealth of artifacts and features found each season by our students, dating back thousands of years, continues to captivate participants, making this program a truly exciting and unique experience.

How large is the community where students will be staying? Will students have opportunities to interact casually with local residents? Please describe.

The township where the site is located lies within an economic development zone of Xi'an. It is one of many rapidly growing satellite cities near major regional centers in China. The Yangguanzhai site was discovered during the construction of the Shaanxi Heavy Truck Company as part of the *Belt and Road Initiative*.

The township is home to a mix of young, educated workers from other regions, as well as local residents and their families. Due to language barriers, our students may find it challenging to engage with local residents; however, they do interact closely with local archaeological technicians of the Yangguanzhai archaeological team throughout the four weeks of fieldwork.

Primary languages spoken by people in the area:

Mandarin and local dialogue.

What are some things students may find surprising about the local culture?

Students are often surprised by the crowds of people wherever they go in China. The beauty of Xi'an, the Terracotta Army Museum, and other sites they visit frequently become topics of conversation.

On the other hand, some aspects of daily life may take time to adjust to. Indoor cigarette smoking and the cultural norms around drinking can be unexpected for some students. Additionally, heavy traffic and the lack of designated pedestrian crossings in certain areas of the township may require extra caution.

Are there cultural aspects that students should be aware of before they come, particularly behaviors that could be offensive or misinterpreted (for example, eye contact, dress, gestures)?

The township where we stay is a recently developed area with a relatively conservative local culture. Students are advised to dress comfortably but avoid overly revealing clothing.

As the local community is not accustomed to foreigners, especially individuals of different racial backgrounds, some residents may occasionally comment on students' appearance out of curiosity. While these remarks are often intended as compliments, the best approach is to

simply ignore them. However, if any interaction feels offensive or problematic, students should immediately contact the program directors for support.

What cultural enrichment opportunities are students likely to have outside of the program?

Our program takes full advantage of the region's rich history, with museum visits as a key component. Students will have the opportunity to explore the Terracotta Army Museum and the mausoleum of the First Emperor of Qin, as well as the Yangling Mausoleum of Han Emperor Jing. They will also visit the Banpo Museum, which preserves the earliest known Neolithic settlement in China.

Other museums on the itinerary include the Shaanxi Archaeological Museum, the Qin and Han Galleries of the Shaanxi History Museum, and the Baoji Bronze Ware Museum.

These visits will provide students with a deeper, firsthand understanding of Shaanxi's local customs and culture, along with a broader perspective on Chinese history and heritage.

Will students have opportunities to explore other areas of the country?

On weekends, group outings will typically be organized for students to visit and explore various sites. Transportation will be arranged using rental cars, taxis, ride-hailing services, or the subway, depending on the destination and group size.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS

Please describe student accommodations.

During the first week of the field school, students will stay at Zhechen Hotel (喆辰酒店), located on West Chang'an Street (西长安街), near Shaanxi Normal University. The address is: No. 989, West Chang'an Road, Chang'an District, Xi'an (西安市长安区西长安街989号).

While in the field, students will reside at Sanne International Hotel (桑宁国际酒店), located near the excavation site. The address is: No. 2335, Jinghuan Nan Road, Gaoling District, Xi'an (西安市高陵区泾环南路2335号).

Please describe how/how often students can do laundry.

Both hotels where the students will be staying are equipped with washing machines, which are available for daily use. No dryer is available.

How are room assignments made? If rooms are assigned according to gender, how will you assign rooms for non-binary, trans and queer students?

Students will be assigned to double-occupancy rooms in both hotels. For students who are non-binary, trans, or queer, we will have a discussion with them prior to room assignments to ensure their comfort and needs are met.

Are there options for single rooms? Would there be an additional charge (and approximate cost)?

Yes, students may request a single room for an additional daily cost. The actual amount will depend on the hotel room rates and the exchange rate at the time of the program.

Will the program provide meals? If not all meals, please specify which meals students will be responsible for, and what facilities are available for them to get groceries and prepare meals.

Food is provided Monday to Saturday, including breakfast and lunch. Students may also use their daily allowance to obtain their own meals if they prefer.

The daily diet in northern China typically includes noodles, rice, meat, and vegetables. Specialized diets (e.g., gluten free, kosher) can be difficult to maintain in this location. Vegetarians may find their options somewhat limited and should be prepared to be flexible with local food offerings or bring supplemental food (such as protein bars) if they feel it will be necessary.

As the village students will live in is vibrant, there are plenty of local restaurants offering regional cuisine, as well as familiar options like McDonald's. You can enjoy Chinese cuisine, especially Xi'an local delicacies during this period; these won't let you down.

Please describe typical meals that are offered by the program.

The daily diet includes noodles, rice, meats (such as pork, beef, lamb, and chicken), and a variety of vegetables (most commonly available). Tofu is regularly served as part of the meals.

The program can accommodate vegan, vegetarian-friendly (dairy products allowed) and halal food.

VISA AND PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Indicate the visa requirements, if any, for US citizens. If there is a visa requirement, what type of visa should students apply for?
It is advisable to apply for an F visa, and we can provide an invitation letter for the visit. Additionally, please ensure that the visa duration is longer than the program duration to avoid it expiring. If you need to extend your visa, please inform the director or TA at least ten working days in advance.

TRAVEL (TO AND DURING THE PROGRAM)

If students will fly, what airport should they fly into?

Xi'an Xianyang International Airport (西安咸阳国际机场)

If there are other ways students can get to the program, please describe.

Take the high-speed train to Xi'an North Railway Station (Xi'an Beizhan, 西安北站).

Where will you meet students?

Students should travel directly to Zhechen Hotel

Travel by air:

• From Xi’an Xianyang International Airport (西安咸阳国际机场), take the airport shuttle bus to Jiyuan Hotel, Chang’an District (长安区吉源酒店), then take a taxi to Zhechen Hotel. Alternatively, you may take a taxi at the airport directly to Zhechen Hotel, near the Chang’an Campus of Shaanxi Normal University (陕西师范大学长安校区).

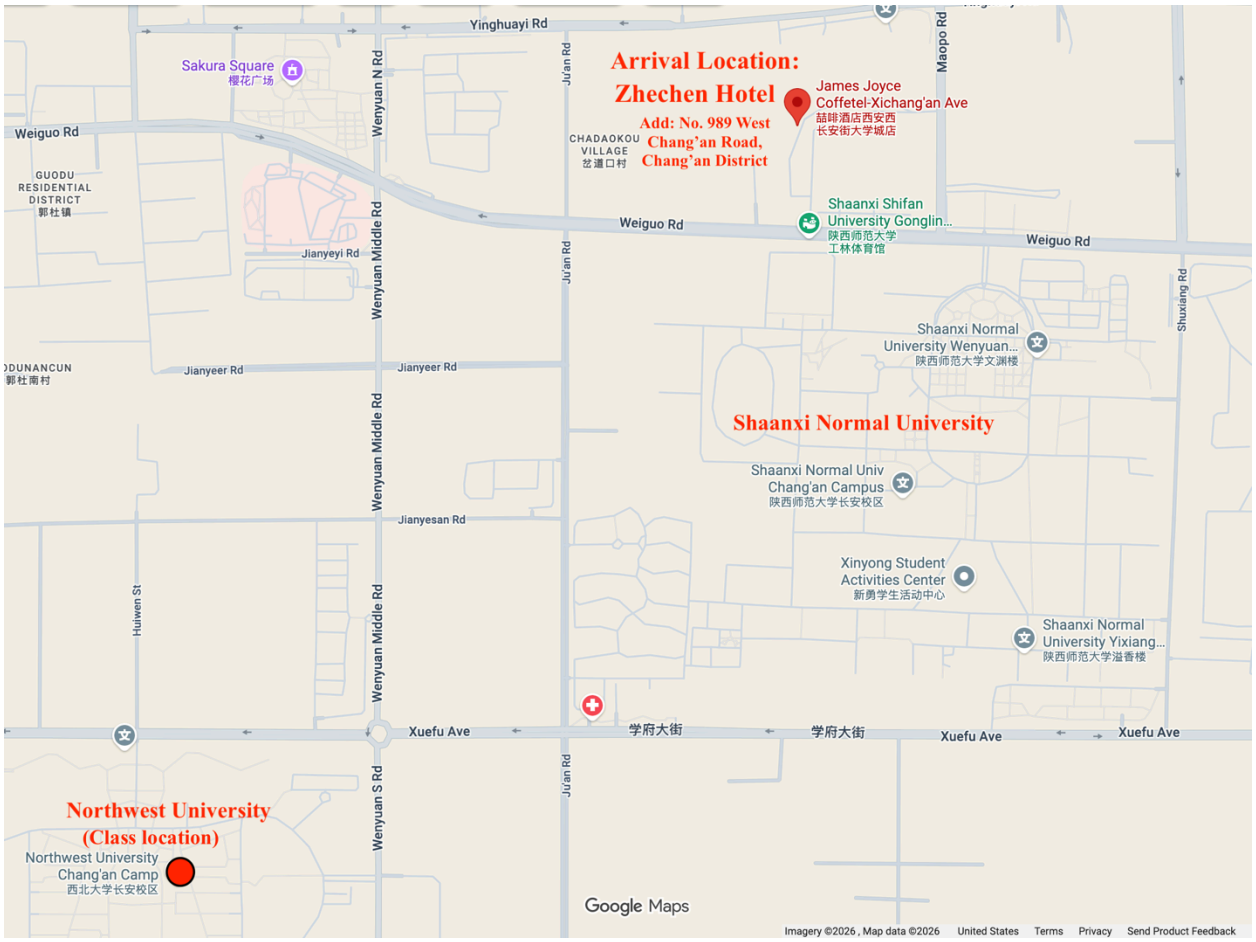
And for subway, you may take Line 14 from the airport and transfer to Line 2 at Xi’an Beizhan (西安北站). Take Line 2 to Hangtiancheng Station (航天城), exit at Exit F, and then take a taxi to Zhechen Hotel.

Travel by train:

• From Xi’an North Railway Station (Xi’an Beizhan 西安北站): take Subway Line 2 to Hangtiancheng Station (航天城). Exit at Exit F and take a taxi to Zhechen Hotel. Or you may take a taxi directly from the railway station to the hotel.



The surrounding of Zhechen Hotel



Map showing the arrival location (Zhechen Hotel) near the Chang'an Campus of Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an. Northwest University, where the first-week classes will be held, is also shown for reference.

If the field site is not close to student accommodations, how will students get there? How long does it take?

The site is approximately 2 kilometers away from the hotel. We provide bicycles and helmets, and students can use them to cycle to the site. The one-way cycling time is about 10 to 15 minutes.

EQUIPMENT LIST AND PACKING LIST

- Passport
- Entry visa to China
- Close-toed shoes
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent
- Wide brim hat
- Sunglasses
- Rehydration powder
- Imodium or Pepto Bismol
- Medications or prescriptions that you need to cover the duration of the program
- Preferred feminine hygiene products
- A few pairs of work pants and shirts
- Electrical adapters

If you want to use your phone, check the roaming options of your carrier or consider getting a temporary eSIM card, e.g. through Holafly. We encourage students to download the WeChat app on their phones. The field school may handle a lot of communication via WeChat. Electrical adapters to the Chinese electrical system – have a look here to see what you need for China as compared to what you may already own. By the way, the hotel provides free Wi-Fi.

Recommended

- **Will students need formal or nicer clothes?**
  There are no strict dress code requirements. The project team has organized a welcome ceremony and a closing ceremony. Students can decide based on their preferences and needs whether they need to bring formal attire.

- **Are there items that are hard to get locally, such as tampons or sunscreen?**
  No. You can purchase items from supermarkets or through online platforms, with delivery typically completed within 2-3 days.

- **Shower shoes or indoor shoes?**
  No need. The hotel will offer them.

- **Hiking boots/socks?**
  As mentioned before, any close-toed shoes will meet the needs.

- **Swimwear?**
  No need.

- **How often can students do laundry?**
  The hotel offers self-service laundry, and clothes can be washed daily.

- **Items they should not bring?**

  Do not bring drugs (including marijuana), firearms, or any other items prohibited by Chinese law.

MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

You are welcome to learn more about us on the official website of the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology (https://www.shxkgy.cn/nav).