

Squiz the World goes to... China

Each week, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Amanda Bower, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting China. We're hearing a lot about it at the moment - because the Australian Government is navigating some tricky diplomatic waters with China, meaning that although there are things that both countries agree on, in some areas we have to agree to disagree. So let's find out a bit more about our Asian neighbour. Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and fly northwest for a squiz at China ...

Just the Facts

Australia is a big country with a small population - our 26.5 million people live on about 7 million square kilometres. China is a slightly bigger country at 9 million square Ks, but with a LOT more people... 1.4 billion and counting. That's fifty three times as many people as Australia in a country that's only a tiny bit bigger!

China is also the world's biggest country to be ruled by a Communist government.

What's that, you ask? Basically, the idea of Communism is that the government owns all the land and businesses in a country, and people get paid what the government thinks they need. China made some changes about 30 years ago and allowed individual people to own businesses, but the government still has much more influence on people's lives than they do in Australia. In fact, many democratic countries, including Australia, are worried that the Chinese government treats its people badly when they disagree with their leaders.

Lately, the Chinese government has also made decisions that affect Australia - for example, they've made it easier for Aussies who sell beef, cereal and coal to China, and while it's not all smooth sailing there are lots of reasons to be optimistic. Stay tuned...

Enough politics. Let's get to travelling! Every year, when there's no global pandemic, 10 million tourists visit just one tourist attraction in China... the Great Wall, which is actually a series of walls that go over 20,000 km. Some bits are over 2000 years old, and apparently it took MILLIONS of soldiers, peasants, prisoners and animals to build it. Fun fact - at the beginning of construction, they used rice flour to stick the bricks together!

A common myth is that the Great Wall is easily visible from space, but my friends at NASA say you'd have to fly very low, and know what you're looking for. I've popped their video in your episode notes to learn more.

Whenever you travel, it's important to learn a few words in that country's language. It's a great way to show respect. On top of that, there are more than one million people with Chinese heritage living in Australia. So, let's....

Learn the Lingo

In China the official language is Mandarin Chinese, which is spoken by 70% of the population. There are other Chinese dialects, like Cantonese and Hunanese.

We've asked Squiz Kid, Louis, who was born in China but now lives in Sydney, to teach us how to say hello in Mandarin:
Ni Hao.

Go on, you give it a try! Ni hao.

People are always really grateful when you just try to speak their language. They may even thank you for it. Hey, Louis, how do we say thank you?
Xie Xie.

And a huge Xie Xie to you, too, Louis!"
Now that we can communicate a little bit, it's....

Time for School

Depending on where kids live in China, it's often dark when they go to school, or dark when they get out, because even though China is big enough to have five time zones, it has only ONE. That's because the communist party wanted the country to be unified.

School usually starts at 7:30 in the morning with the raising of the Chinese flag. The kids all line up outside, and do about 20 minutes of exercise together. They also get two whole hours for lunch, and head home at 4pm! But if you think that sounds easier than your school day, listen to this.

Only one in three Chinese kids passes the exam that lets you go to high school - so starting when they're really young, kids are doing tons of homework and getting tutoring. In your episode notes, I've put a link to a video made by a young girl about her daily life. She studies every night until 8:30pm, and even more on the weekends! (She also has a huge crush on her art teacher...)

Another thing that's different about school in China - Monday is usually 'cleaning day', and students spend their whole recess cleaning walls, wiping desks, mopping the floors, and yes, dealing with the toilets. (FX: Toilet flush) Makes you even more grateful for the people cleaning your school, doesn't it?

Chinese school kids are active in sport, just like we are. Let's find out what they play in...

Sport Time

Which sport do you think China has won more Olympic medals in than any other country? Yep, it's table tennis! Kids start playing REALLY young. There's a link in your episode notes to a three year old kid, nicknamed "little rice cake", who has been training since he was one and a half. You won't believe his moves - and his head barely comes above the table!

China also has many traditional sports. My favourite is Beikou Tarkbei, which has been played for over 1,000 years. It's a bit like hockey, but they use a knob of apricot root for the ball, which they hit with long wooden branches. And if they play at night, they set a felt-covered ball on fire, so they can see it! I've popped a link in your episode notes to a guide on how to play.

Phew! After all that athletic activity, I'm starving! I think it might be...

Dinner Time

Most people in Australia have probably eaten Chinese food—there are Chinese restaurants in almost every town!

"One very old and special dish is Peking duck. There's a recipe in a book that's almost 700 years old! 'Peking' is the old name for the capital, Beijing. The duck is roasted in a wood fire oven, and the chef presents it to you whole before slicing it into about 120 thin segments of meat and skin. The slices are eaten with thin pancakes, green onion or shallot, plum sauce and fresh cucumber. Mmmmm... now, not everyone has a wood fire oven at home, but there's a link in your episode notes to a shortcut version.

The S'Quiz

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1 What was once used to stick blocks of stone on the Great Wall of China together?

Question 2 What happens in many Chinese schools on Monday?

Question 3 What happens to the Beikou ball if the game is played at night?