Living/Working in Shanghai

1. It is really, really hot. I never wore a cardigan or jacket and think I wore pants maybe once.
2. Comfortable walking shoes are essential.
3. Buying a pocket-sized map of Shanghai in English before arriving is really helpful. Having a map of the Shanghai Metro, (in English), is great too.
4. The metro signs are all in English as well as Chinese while the street signs are in Pinyin and Chinese. The subway stations can often be hidden inside buildings with the entrances indicated with a red circumscribed “M”.
5. Taxis are relatively cheap and you can hand them a business card of where you want to go (such as your hotel) or point on your map.
6. Don’t hesitate to ask your coworkers for advice on getting around, places to eat, weekend trips etc. I found everyone at work incredibly helpful and friendly and the majority of the younger workers speak English.
7. Having business cards with your email address is nice to give new friends and coworkers.
8. Giving gifts is a common practice and bringing a few small things to give away would be considered very thoughtful. Appropriate gifts might be something family made like honey, jam, or wine (if your family does that), a nice book of regional photography, chocolate (not very common in China), or postcards from your hometown, pre-addressed to keep in touch.
9. Many of my Chinese coworkers used an online instant message program called QQ. Anyone can make an account and it can be fun to chat with friends outside of work or if you are on different floors while at work.
10. There are many restaurants in Shanghai with picture menus and English menus. The more a restaurant caters to English speaking patrons, the more expensive it is likely to be. I found dinner prices could range from less than $1 up to the $30-50 range, (US dollars). There are definitely much more expensive options as well. If you eat out with coworkers, it is typical for one person to order for the whole table.
11. There is a huge variety of Chinese food and you will often not be able to tell what exactly you are eating. If you have any allergies or dietary restrictions, it would help to have someone write a short note in Chinese to take with you out to eat, such as “no pork”. Just a caution, vegetarian, vegan and kosher are very difficult diets to maintain. On the other hand, there are hardly any dairy products.
12. No one drinks the tap water in Shanghai, but water jugs will be common at work. You can buy liters of bottled water at a local grocery for your hotel.
13. Be wary of overly friendly strangers in tourist hotspots asking you to join them for a meal or tea, after which you will be stuck with a huge bill. This is a scam I read about but also happened to a friend of mine, twice. Be attentive and cautious and you won’t have any problems.
Like Beijing, Shanghai is a very international city. If you travel outside of the city, do not expect anything to be in English.

Most importantly be polite and try to be flexible. Because of the communication barrier, you may not feel very informed about expectations or your schedule at work. If you are confused or concerned, ask questions!