

Guess who's moving to China? It's me.

[intro music]

Hello, my Lovely Learners and welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from okay to good and from good to great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show, and today's episode is a conversation about my upcoming move to China. As always, you can find the transcript and the PDF on [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com), and you can find the link to that in the description.

So it's true. Not now, not tomorrow, not in a week's time and not in a month's time, but in the month of August I will be moving halfway across the world from London to Ningbo, China. That's right. It's happening.

Now, I know you might be thinking: why? Let's talk about it. So a few episodes ago I talked about the fact that I'm doing a Japanese exam, I'm preparing for a Japanese exam, and I also hinted that there was some big life decisions connected to this.

Well, originally the plan was to apply for the JET Program. The JET program is a government-sponsored program in Japan where you can go and work for a local government either teaching English or working for their tourism board doing like translation, interpreting, presentations about culture and so on.

And I was planning on applying for that second role. And if I got the role, I would be moving to Japan next year, 2026, in August. But I changed my mind! So, annoyingly, I still have the exam booked and I'm still planning on doing the exam, but in August this year, 2025, I will not be moving to Japan. I will be moving to China, which is a different country with a different language. So I'm still doing the Japanese exam, which isn't so useful now, but it may be useful in future.

So what am I doing in China? Well, I've been thinking a lot about my career: teaching English. And I've also been thinking a lot about my dreams, things I've always wanted to do, and one thing that I always really wanted and never had the opportunity to do before is teaching abroad.

Now, I looked into it because one of my students said, well, you could go and teach English in China, maybe for a year before you go to Japan. So I started looking into jobs in China and I forgot how good the working conditions are for teaching English in China.

Um, the last time I looked at moving to China kind of seriously was before Covid and during Covid or like just after Covid, and I don't know, the conditions are just really favorable. Maybe living in London for a year and a half has made me depressed about my finances, but genuinely the salaries they offer, the fact that they give free accommodation, they pay for your flights. It really just made China a very attractive place to work for me. Plus, thinking of my long-term career, working there for a year or two, saving up money, will give me the opportunity to do a master's, to travel a lot and to expand the kind of areas I work in.

It would also just be really good for building my network. I'm gonna meet lots of people. I'm gonna get different experiences and I feel like if I stay in London teaching English, there's not gonna be much progression. And in fact, right now is a really bad time to be teaching English as a foreign language in London because a lot of the schools including the school I was working at, uh, are having financial problems because of visa restrictions. The British government is being much stricter with visas this year, and everything going on in the world politically, so it's a good time for me to get out and try something new.

Now I applied for mostly language school jobs, although in China they call them training centers. So the idea is you are teaching kids after school and on the weekends, um, so they're doing that in addition to their regular school. But these jobs, they weren't as

attractive. They're quite similar to what I do now. The hours are kind of unsociable. You're working at these weird times.

So I was also applying for international schools and I knew I was less likely to get these because I don't have a postgraduate teaching qualification. I don't have a master's. And a lot of the roles were kind of teaching something more specific than just English as a second language.

But I did get one of these jobs. Now, technically it's not an international school, technically it's a bilingual school, as in the students do most of their subjects in Chinese or maybe half of their subjects in Chinese and then half in English. So they're doing things like studying history and literature in English.

And that's where I come in, 'cause I managed to get a job teaching English literature to middle school students in China in a bilingual school. So I'm feeling very happy.

Now I'm kind of going out of order. So let me rewind a bit. So the job interview process, the job hunting process. Looking for a job in China is so different from the UK. In the UK you find the position online, you make your CV, you write your cover letter, you send it off. And usually you hear nothing. If you do hear something, it's usually directly from a company and they'll invite you to an interview and there'll be a very formal interview process.

In China, everything is different from the word go. First of all, they ask for a lot more documentation when you first apply. You have to give a photo. It's actually illegal to ask for a photo on a job application in the UK. And usually what happens after you apply is you get in touch with a recruiter, so a person whose job it is to go between the company and the people they're hiring. And then this recruiter often puts you onto other jobs and other recruiters.

So I applied for a few positions at first, and then I was talking to like 10 different recruiters and they're messaging you and being like, Ooh, what do you think of this job? Do you like this job? Why don't you interview here? These people want to talk to you.

And keep in mind there is an eight hour time difference between the UK and China, or there was, and then we had daylight savings, so now it's a seven hour difference. So I did get quite a few interviews. I had to do all of them, most of them, at about seven o'clock in the morning. So before going to work, I was doing job interviews online for these Chinese jobs. One of them I even did at 6:00 AM. That was the last one where I got offered the job. So, um, it was worth it.

But yeah, it's kind of weird waking up at half five in the morning, putting on a suit and doing a job interview. It feels, it kind of puts you in a very awake mood for the rest of the day, let's put it that way.

Um, so for about a week and a half I was doing these job interviews. I think I had like four in one week, possibly five. But the bright side of that is, I got the process over with fairly quickly actually. And like I said, I had two interviews for this job in Ningbo and I got it and it seems like a fantastic school. They seem really keen to have me.

It sounds like exactly the kind of thing I want to teach because it's not only teaching English, but also teaching literature. So I'll be teaching things like Charles Dickens. I don't know, uh, Treasure Island, Virginia Woolf. Maybe not Virginia Woolf. But I'll be teaching literature and I'm very excited.

Uh, so it's middle school students, so ages like 11 to 14. It's a very big school, 2,500 students. They have like an elementary school, a secondary school and a high school.

So, that's, that's the news I guess. Um, obviously it's still early days. I'm still doing Visa applications, or rather I'm preparing my documents for my Visa application. So, um, there's quite a lot to prepare for a Chinese visa actually. I have to have like my passport, well, I've

sent my passport over, but I have to do like a background check and then have the background check apostille'd.

So an apostille is like a seal, like a stamp saying this is an official document and I have to do that for my background check. So my, to check, I, I haven't committed any crimes. Yeah? My criminal record check. And I have to do that for my university degree, so I have to take them to a lawyer. The lawyer has to sign them, then they go away to the government and. They get an apostille. So it's, it's very complicated.

So what about Ningbo? Now, you may not have heard of Ningbo before. In fact, you've probably not heard of Ningbo before, or as they say in Mandarin, Ningbo. Um, Ningbo is a 'small' city of just 9 million people, uh, near Shanghai. It's a few hours from Shanghai, so it's on the east coast of China. It's well known for seafood and fresh kind of food, I guess. And it's fairly historic. I mean, most cities in China have some kind of ancient history to them, and it seems like a good place because it's cheaper than somewhere like Shanghai. So I can save up my money, but it's also gonna be really convenient for traveling.

And to be honest, travel is one of the things I am most excited about. Because this is a normal school, I'll get nice long school holidays, so I'll be able to travel around China, within Asia, like to Thailand and Japan, and, I don't know, I'm, I'm keen, I've already planned a lot of places in my head I want to visit.

Originally, I was looking for work in Kunming and Chengdu, which are much more inland, much more West China, um, for various reasons: because they have a relaxed pace of life, because they have good food, because they have good climates. Also, Chengdu is supposed to be the gay capital of China, and I also, I know someone who lived in Yunnan, which is the province where Kunming is, and she told me all about it and it sounds amazing.

Um, but I didn't get a job there. Ningbo is all the way on the other side of the country in Zhejiang province, but that's okay. You know? Um, the job itself seemed really worth it, and I was always kind of flexible with location from the beginning.

So it's a two year contract, which is quite a long time. I'm definitely sad to be leaving London. I feel like I'm leaving two really big communities behind, which is my yoga studio, the gay yoga studio I go to, and also, um, my church. I go to a church in Waterloo in South London, which is really queer affirming, really inclusive, and I'm really gonna miss my church community.

I'm also gonna miss, you know, my work colleagues, my friends, my family, um, but I can come visit. I'll get a bit of time off around Christmas, and I just feel ready for this step in my life.

You know, in the past I was held back by a lot of fears. Because working abroad, like I said, is something I've wanted for a long time. And actually working in China specifically has something, has been something I've thought about a lot. When I first did my English teaching qualification in 2018, I was looking at jobs in China and various places, but to be honest, I was not ready to live abroad then. I think that would've been quite bad for my mental health, or at least I was too scared to take that step. And I considered it again in like 2020, 2021, but it just never felt like the right time. I was very scared of the social aspect, like, will I struggle to make friends? What if I hate the job?

Whereas now I am not worried about that. You know, London has given me like a, an iron. Maybe not iron. A, a rock hard confidence. I feel so confident in myself now after living in London that I can do pretty much anything. Um, but it certainly, I'm confident that I can do really well in this job and that if there are issues, I can deal with them. And I'm also confident that I will find friends and I will find community because I've found community in so many different places in London and I've realized, you know, now that I'm in a really healthy place

in my life, I'm very confident in who I am as a person, I get on really well with people. I make friends easily, and that's not something that was always the case for me in the past, but now I genuinely feel like I can make it anywhere.

And at the very worst, it's gonna be a few maybe slightly difficult years, which will give me a lot of life experience and a lot of money. And honestly, right now I'm in this place in my life where I need money.

You know, I was looking at like. The, the reason I chose to apply for these jobs was largely because I was making a list of priorities. I made this decision matrix, which is this fancy way of making decisions. Basically, you list all of your values, like what's important, like time, money, social life. And then you list your choices as columns and you kind of add points.

It's really hard to describe in a podcast format, but basically I was looking at things like, how important is my time? How important is money? How important is having new experiences and all that stuff. And I realized right now making more money is an important thing for me, not because, whoa, I love money. Ha, I'm an evil capitalist. Whoa. No. Because making money will give me a lot of opportunities.

It will allow me to travel, and I have not been able to travel very much at all the last few years. I certainly haven't been able to travel to the places I wanted to. It will give me the possibility of doing a master's. It will give me the possibility of going to India and studying yoga in an in an Ashram if I want to, you know, taking a really long holiday to Thailand or Japan. It will give me the opportunity to, yeah, kind of just lay out my future. Maybe even enough money to put down a deposit to buy a flat or a house in the UK.

So I see myself coming back to London in the long term. I really see myself settling in London in the future. So this is goodbye, but not farewell. You know, I'm leaving London for a while, but I'm definitely going to be coming back. Or at least right now that's how I feel. I can see myself doing two year, well, at least two years in China because that's my contract. Maybe longer, maybe three, maybe four. And I can also see myself working in Japan for a bit afterwards. Um, I can see myself doing a master's in education or linguistics, and then coming back to the UK, working in an international school here, maybe working in an international school in Japan.

Honestly, right now, I'm just leaving my options open. I'm really confident that this is a good job and I feel like it's the next step for me. It's the next step in my career and also my personal development. You know, after they offered me the job I was mostly certain, but I still wasn't completely sure, so I made sure to ask some questions. I talked to a British person who works there, and all of the answers they gave were just like, it sounded perfect. I was like, oh, this sounds like exactly where I want to work. You know, like a really welcoming workplace and somewhere I'd fit, fit in really nicely.

Sorry, I'm being careful to not give too many personal details away because I feel a bit strange about talking about a workplace that I haven't started at yet. Obviously there's a lot of like visa and stuff still to happen. Um, and I wanna maintain, you know some of my private life. But yeah, without going too much into detail, I think this is going to be a really great fit for me.

And on the day I signed the contract, I went into work and a bird pooped on me. I arrived at work and I realized a bird had pooped on my back. Um, poop is when you know, you let something out of your behind and birds like to poop on people. And I arrived at work and saw a bird had pooped on me, and I was very happy because in many cultures, being pooped on by a bird is a sign of good luck. Right? It's auspicious. It's a positive sign, and that

was just before I signed the contract, so it felt like a slightly funny sign, but a sign from God nonetheless, that this was the right decision.

Also, funnily enough, right? There's a university in the UK in Nottingham. Nottingham is a city, Nottingham University, and Nottingham has a campus in Ningbo, and how do I know this? Because about four different people, when I told them I'm moving to Ningbo, they're like, oh, I have a friend at the campus there. You know, there's a Nottingham University campus there? My mum was invited to a conference. Recently in Ningbo, my previous employer said, oh my God, I know a couple who work at Nottingham Ningbo. I'll put you in touch with them. My other friend somehow knew about it. Anyway, it sounds like I'm gonna have to visit the Nottingham University campus in Ningbo, weirdly enough.

So again, there's just like lots of little signs I've been seeing that have really like confirmed to me like, okay. This is the right path to go down.

Speaking of auspicious signs, good omens, you know, messages from God, I've been getting very spiritual lately. Now, as I record this, it's a week before Easter, or it is Holy Week. actually. Holy Week starts today, which is the week leading up to Easter Sunday. And Easter is really important for me, and generally it's very important for Christians. So yesterday on Sunday we read the passion play in Church.

So the passion play is the story of Easter, how um, Jesus was crucified, killed on the cross. And I was reading the narration, I was the narrator for the story. So, um, I had a lot of lines. And then over the week we kind of perform different parts of the story in different ways. And I remember Easter being really emotional last year because the services in my church are very moving and I, I will cry. I will absolutely cry. Multiple times, I'm sure. Um, so I'm looking forward to that very much.

Sugar, sugar update! Yes, because, you know, I quit sugar for Lent. I'm still holding strong. I did slip a tiny bit. I had a bubble tea. Um, I actually got an Earl Grey latte where I got it with low sugar or no sugar, and I got it with some of the, uh, pearls, the tapioca pearls and the tapioca pearls are quite sweet. So I found after that I was craving sugar a bit. Um, but then after like half a day or a day I was back to normal. So, um, that was a bit of a naughty slip, a bit of a mistake, but I'm back to no sugar and I think I'm gonna keep going until after Easter. So we'll see.

Also in spiritual news, I recently went to a full moon drumming circle. So the full moon is when the moon is round, not a crescent moon, but a full moon. And every month when there is the full moon, there is a drumming circle that is run by the Radical Faeries in London.

The Radical Faeries is a group of basically gay pagans. Um, it's gay people, queer people who, um, are very in touch with nature. They're often into kind of traditional shamanistic religious practices like paganism and Wicca. If you're not sure what that is, it's kind of very old, uh, British religious practices or it's like a reconstruction of them, so it's like magic and crystals and druids, that kind of stuff. A lot of worshipping nature, Tarot reading, quite a lot of overlap with like yoga practices as well.

And I've kind of known about the Radical Faeries for a while. I went to a festival a few years ago called Queer Spirit, which has a lot of Radical Faeries. So Radical Faeries are, um, a very particular group. They tend to, they kind of have their own subculture, so they do these gatherings in various places around the world. It's mostly gay men, but it's kind of queer in a broad sense as well. And they do various rituals and specific practices at these gatherings.

So the this, um, drum circle is like a Radical Faerie thing. So the idea is the full moon is a big time of change in like energy and it's an opportunity to meet and kind of, I don't know if worship is the word, but basically you're all sitting in a big circle in the dark drumming.

Drumming like. That's gonna sound horrible on the recording probably 'cause I was drumming on the table. But you get the idea. Wait, let me, let me drum on my chest.

That kind of thing. Um. And there is a very interesting thing about drumming, which is, so you have brainwaves, right? You have like alpha, beta, gamma, theta. These are the waves which your brain kind of moves at, I don't know. And drumming, like a steady drum beat, does actually change your brainwaves. So when you're drumming in a circle with people, you enter a different state.

This is why many traditional indigenous cultures have drumming rituals as a big part of their celebrations. It's often tied to like magic and shamanism. So we had a big circle with drums. There were candles on a table in the middle, and there were other instruments, and many people were also dancing.

I broke a tambourine. A tambourine is like a little drum with, um, metal bits around it. So when you shake a tambourine it goes. You probably know what a tambourine is. It's probably called a tambourine in many different languages, but. I'll play a recording here just in case.

So anyway, I was drumming on this tambourine and then it broke. So, um, I don't think it was a very well made tambourine, personally. Um, but yeah, the drumming circle was fun. I'm not going to lie, I spent about 30 minutes drumming and then most of the night socializing. I made out with someone on the balcony. We climbed up to the balcony that overlooks the drumming circle and kissed a lot. So, you know, I had a great time.

But it was really lovely. It was really nice to be surrounded by alternative people. I really need to go to more Radical Faerie gatherings before I move to China. Um, it's funny, you know, I, I am a Christian and I think traditionally people think that Christianity and like Pagan celebrations.

So pagan, pagan is a really hard word to describe. Traditionally, it really just means any religious practice that's not Christian. But usually it refers to these kind of traditional magic practices, right?

So, um, many Christians are against paganism or traditionally Christians have been against Paganism because it's seen as like unholy and wrong. But I am very happy practicing many different types of spirituality together, and I really appreciate being in a space where there is such freedom of expression. People can just dress and act however they want. There's a very relaxed culture. Um, and there's a lot of time and importance given to, to emotions and things like, you know, drumming and chanting and storytelling.

An example of Radical Faerie culture is each fairy has, um, their own name, like a faerie name, and they're often very playful, like Nuisance or Ramble or Cherish or Sexual. Sexual was one of the fairy names I came across on Saturday. So, you know, very interesting stuff.

One of my friends who I was at the drum circle with, who is one of my yoga teachers. A very interesting guy. He is studying to be a psychedelic practitioner. So psychedelics, P-S-Y-C-H-E-D-E-L-I-C. Oh, that's a difficult word to spell. Psychedelic. Psychedelics are a type of drug that give you visions, basically hallucinations. That's the really simple way of putting it. So magic mushrooms, LSD, acid, that kind of stuff.

And uh, I actually know two people from my yoga studio who are training to be psychedelic practitioners. So essentially that means you are, they are qualifying to be doctors of psychedelics, basically using psychedelics with people to help them deal with trauma, to, um, help cure health problems and just kind of help people along a path of self-discovery in a safe way.

Now, obviously, psychedelics are not legal in the uk, so a lot of these practitioners, you know, they're practicing in different countries or they're giving advice, but the actual rituals are held in different countries. And actually it does seem to be the case that, um, many of

these psychedelics, if you're using them for personal development, they work best in a group, like a ritual context. And again, kind of going back to the paganism and the drum rituals, it seems to be the case that, um, many cultures around the world that you know, have these traditional ceremonies and rituals involving psychedelics, it's always done in community. Right? There's always like a ritual and a community surrounding it, which makes it safe and also probably more effective for the purposes it's being used for. Right?

So the reason I bring up this friend and his training is because, why did I bring it up? Oh. Because he's also, uh, doing a lot of, um, shamanism. He's getting really into shamanism. So shamanism, I'm having to explain a lot of really specific concepts. If you're like really confused, don't worry. A lot of British people don't know the precise meanings of these things as well. Like I would have to explain this to anyone, but shamanism is basically, it's kind of a, a term that's used to describe, um, rituals and practices which are present in all ancient and indigenous cultures around the world.

So basically shamans are people, kind of people who do magic kind of witches in a way. But shamans were usually respected members of communities who communicate with spirits. And that could be like spirits of the dead, or it could be like the spirit of a place or an idea or a person. So shamanistic journeying is kind of a modern practice that's built on all of these ancient practices, if that makes sense. So, uh, it's really interesting, and actually the other day I tried it myself.

Um, so again, this goes back to drumming and how drumming changes your brainwaves and puts you into an altered state of consciousness. So the idea with shamanistic journeying is you listen to a drumbeat with headphones, maybe you cover your eyes with a blindfold, you deliberately enter an altered state of consciousness, and then you go on a journey, and you can kind of see it.

So, um, I've only just started looking into this, so I'm not an expert in any way, but the idea I think is that you, you decide if you're going into the upper world or the lower world. So the upper world is like up a mountain into the sky, whereas the lower world is like into a cave under the sea.

So you think of a place in nature that you know well, and it could be the upper world or the lower world. So in my case, I was walking up a hill, which is the upper world. And you imagine yourself crossing a threshold, so like a, a gate or a barrier, and then entering into this world. And then while you listen to this drumbeat, you just kind of explore and see what happens. And then eventually you go back and return to the beginning. And then you either talk about it, journal, you know, reflect on your experiences.

So I did a shamanistic journey. I gave it a go, and it was really, really interesting because I have never been someone with a particularly strong mind's eye. Like I find it very hard to picture visual images in my head. So I've always been very jealous of people who dream a lot and have very vivid kind of pictorial imaginations and people who hallucinate. Um, but when I did the shamanistic journeying, I really just kind of saw these things. I did have to focus myself and I had to force myself to focus more, but it was a lot easier than I expected.

So I went on this very strange journey. Um, I won't go through into all the details because it got quite sexual and also quite disgusting, although I'll, I'll give you the brief version. Basically, I, I did this, I, I lay in bed with a blindfold and these headphones I put on this shamanistic drumbeat, and I went on a journey.

So I went up this big, big hill near where my parents live, where there are amazing views. And then I imagined that the hill was turning into this like pillar of earth and all these spirits, all these ghosts were escaping around the outside. And then some of them were kind of touching me, and then one of them, I ended up going into his belly button. Uh, his belly

button, his navel, and that like opened up and turned into a tunnel. And then I was crawling through the tunnel and then I broke out of the tunnel and it was a snake, a giant snake. And then the snake ate me, and then I was under the sea, and then I like swam to the surface and I pulled these like big stone pillars out of the sea and made like a staircase. And I went to the top of the staircase.

You get the idea. Right. I won't tell you the whole thing because it has a lot of different difficult vocabulary in it. Unless you want me to tell you the whole thing. I could do a whole episode just about shamanistic journeys. I could do whatever I want. Maybe another time.

I'm in a funny mood. I've been talking really, really fast. Hopefully you'll actually be able to understand this episode. But as you can tell, I'm just very excited. It's a fun, exciting time in my life. Big change, big changes. But it's good. It's great. It's fantastic.

So, um, that's, that's, uh, my shamanistic journeying. Um, I think I kind of analyzed it this morning as I was on the Tube going to work. I think there was a lot of getting swallowed and like constrained by people and creatures in this, um, journey, this vision. And I, I, I interpreted that to be about, um, kind of some of my romantic and sexual relationships recently, how I can allow myself to kind of be devoured by men. Right? There are men who really want to just like, take me and take my energy and like, actually I need to make a really conscious choice how much of my energy I give away, right? And doing it. Not just being interested in someone because they're interested in me, but like having the interest of my own will and volition probably something like that. Who the hell knows?

So anyway, I'm gonna stop here while I'm still on a high, and also I've run out of things to talk about. So there we go. Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Easy Stories in English. If you would like to book a private class with me, just go to EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes.

My availability has changed recently, so do go there, have a look. You can book a free 15 minute consultation with me and get an idea of when you might be able to do a lesson with me. Thanks again for listening and see you soon.