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Your Hotel: Breakfast Buffet

A free buffet-style breakfast will be provided at your hotel each morning. At the White Swan, you will be given a set of coupons at check-in that you'll need to present each day; at other hotels, just walk in, take your seats, pick up a plate and dig in.

Most hotels' breakfast selection is quite reasonable, offering many items you'll immediately recognize: pastries and breads, fruits, cereal, some cheese and some meat (always ham, sometimes also bacon or sausages.) The "ham" is probably more like Spam® than a cut right off the pig.

To drink, you'll have approximations of Western beverages. The "orange juice" is diluted and probably mixed from a powder. The milk is whole milk, not the 2% or skim we are used to. There will be something that looks like coffee; avoid it and find a Starbucks instead, it was awful in every hotel we stayed at.

There will often be a chef at a small table cooking eggs. Our experience was that the only way these cooks were instructed to make eggs was fried, sunny side up, and picture-perfect. In Beijing, we once saw a senior chef humiliate a trainee by throwing out three pans' worth of eggs, one try after another, because they didn't look artistic enough...not that any of us who were waiting for eggs cared, as ten minutes went by.

There will also be some Chinese foods at the buffet. You may recognize some noodle dishes, stuffed buns, and spring rolls. Be aware that some of the fillings may not be what you expect – sweet bean paste instead of meat, for instance. You may also encounter a tureen of soup-like congee, glutinous rice balls, fried sesame balls (very tasty), and more. Especially in the south, you'll also have local fruits to sample.

Yes, you could load up on nothing but Western food each morning for two weeks, and some days that's all you'll want. But that ham gets boring after the first week. Try something local every so often; you're in a no-risk situation...

Contact us with your ideas, questions, and feedback! weninchinainfo@mac.com

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A good idea we came across was to grab some extra sandwich buns and – yes – the “ham” to make into small sandwiches to take with you during day trips. It’s OK to do this, and you won’t know when you’ll get a chance to pick up food later in the morning.

The buffets for the first part of your trip will pale in comparison to what you’ll encounter at the White Swan in Guangzhou. The first morning we walked in, it was as if we were being given food sent directly from home. Almost anything you can imagine is on the Swan’s buffet – buffalo wings, hash browns, ice cream, pizza, pie, several kinds of sausage, scalloped potatoes, American-style bacon, skim milk, real orange juice, scrambled eggs, name-brand cereals, hearty oatmeal, and French toast with real maple syrup. We ate far too much that first morning. We ate far too much the second morning. Maybe by the third day, we throttled back to the portion sizes we’d eat back home. Don’t blame us – experience it for yourself. You may not want to leave the dining room until they close it at 10:00 am – except for the coffee... Starbucks is three blocks northeast of the hotel, in the middle of the island.

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