

Following local customs and rules will help us get through lockdown



Spaniard Alberto Fernandez (right) and his wife Summer Yan in protective outfits are ready to do volunteer work in their residential compound in Shanghai's Xuhui District. — Ti Gong

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Alberto Fernandez

A Barcelona native who has lived in Shanghai for 22 years

Yao Minji

The latest lockdown and the accompanying uncertainty, disruption of daily life and panic over resources have been a challenging for many people in Shanghai.

Among them is Alberto Fernandez, a Barcelona native who has lived in the city for 22 years.

Fernandez and his wife, Summer Yan, have been volunteering in their neighborhood, which has around 1,300 residents.

That means, among other things, getting up at 6am to distribute and explain anti-gen tests, picking up meals for the hardworking security guards, and translating and explaining community rules and testing arrangements to other expatriate neighbors.

So when some of them, upset over the early morning testing, started complaining and making fun of people and local rules, Fernandez could not hold back.

In a post on the residential community's WeChat group, Fernandez urged them to “show some respect toward the community and the efforts they make in arranging everything in these difficult times” and to “follow local norms and values.”

“It's a difficult time for everyone, especially since we have never had this kind of experience in Shanghai before. But many people are trying to help,” he told Shanghai Daily. “At least, we can have some understanding of the challenges involved instead of saying things like ‘I'm free to do whatever I want.’”

Such unpleasant remarks, according to Fernandez, are unnecessary and impolite. The

Spaniard arrived in Shanghai 22 years ago and has seen the city transform itself as one of the most established cities in the world in terms of business and attractiveness. He had a cultural shock when he first came to the country, but now he enjoys living among the local community.

“Shanghai is so urban, with so much comfort for expatriates, that it might give the impression that you're not actually in China. As a result, some expatriates may talk and act in ways they would not elsewhere in the world,” he argued.

“To me, it is very simple. Whether you are European in China, in the Middle East, in Europe, or anywhere else, or the other way around, respect the locals, their customs, their rules.”

The unprecedented staggered lockdown and the “grid screening” had residents living through what had only been in the news - both the good and the bad. Media and social media platforms are filled with heroic and caring volunteers or innovative ways the local administration tried to cope and help, as well as individual cases of the elderly and sick, and people needing help and attention.

The Shanghai government has acknowledged these efforts and challenges in a recent official letter to its residents in the city.

“People have sacrificed a lot, including the medics on the front line, grassroots officials, community volunteers, police officers, and all the people who work in the pivotal sectors that keep the city functioning,” it said.

Fernandez especially appreciates the hard work put in by the security guards in his



Fernandez's younger daughter Gemma shows one of her sketches about medical worker, or *dabai*.

community.

“Their efforts are often overlooked,” he said. “But they really work very hard and are very nice.”

Fernandez and his wife volunteered to secure food for them for the lockdown. They live in Xuhui District but have an office and warehouse in Pudong.

“We have about 60 employees in Shanghai. I told them to work from home and go grab some groceries before the lockdown,” he said.

He said the wine industry in Shanghai was 90 percent outdoors, which means that if there is a lockdown or restrictions, it is among the hardest hit. He hopes that the city will brave the challenge and return to normalcy soon, in the same way that the city government ended its letter:

“We can only protect our house and city if everyone works together ... We will defeat COVID-19, and the spring in Shanghai will be as beautiful as it has always been.”