Study abroad at Shanghai University, China

- Experience report -

0. Introduction

Going abroad is something everyone should do. Be it study abroad or just backpacking. The reason for that is the unforgettable experiences and skills someone get during such a trip. Imagine you travel to an unknown place, the people and culture are completely different and almost no one speaks your language. It sounds scaring but ones you did that step you have to fight in order to survive. You will find out abilities about yourself which you have never faced before. For example, flexibility in facing new things, managing yourself and the trips, getting a sense of people you can trust or not as well as facing a different kind of lifestyle. After returning back you will consider yourself and your home country different.

Anyway, lots of people miss the chance to go abroad during studying because of their partners, to scared or just too lazy to give up their comfortable life for a while. I took the challenge twice. During bachelor I used to life and study in London. I have been living there for 1.5 years. It was an amazing time. During masters I decided to go abroad again but outside Europe. I took USA, South Africa or China into consideration. Well, I was having a tight budget. Following I skipped USA also because I saw some culture similarities with Europe and would not experience something completely different. South Africa was great as well, but there are lots of German companies already in China and this country is becoming a super power in the world. Furthermore, it is much safer to travel in Asia compared to Africa. Shanghai is a quite international city and except the polution spread over China it was an awesome time.
1. Preparation

Well, the partnership between the University of Bremen and the Shanghai University has been established recently. Following, me and three other students were the pioneers. In the beginning, no information about courses and the application process were available. It was quite exhausting to get all things together. Due to the fact that the most information about Shanghai University is available in Chinese language only we must rely on the exchange office in Bremen as well as the exchange coordinator from the Shanghai University.

The first thing to do was to handle in the application to the international office of department 7. Once I received the acceptance the following main points needed to be resolved:

- Course choice / Learning agreement

  The university in Shanghai has a 4 Semester system. Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. In each term different courses will be offered. Unfortunately, the available courses will be published quite late. So, there is a standard list of possible offered courses in each term available at the international office. Due to the fact, that some courses might not been offered changes in the learning agreement can occur later which can be fixed by email exchange.

- Visa

  You can apply for your Visa in Hamburg. The first step to do is to visit www.visaforchina.org. Select Germany and Hamburg and click on arrange a date. After you got an appointment click on application form and fill it out. What you need to bring is a passport, Application for Study in China und Admission Notice documents from the Shanghai University (Original and a copy of each document), passport picture, Visa application form. The visa fee was 30€ + a service fee of 35,70€ in July 2014. In case you are planning to stay in China for more than 3 month you have to go to a medical check and
apply for a permanent residents Visa in Shanghai.

- Bafög

Just apply as early as possible. The Bafögamt in Tübingen is responsible for China.

- Accomodation

I used to stay on campus due to the fact that you meet lots of international students easily. You can apply for a single or shared room. The single room costs almost 350€ and the second option around 150€. I switched from a single to a shared room in order to save some money for traveling. Both options are fine. Another option would be to rent an apartment somewhere downtown. I would recommend to stay on Hengshan Campus because it is located between Baoshan Campus, there will be your courses taking place, and downtown.

- Flight

The cheapest and most convenient option was to fly with Emirates. There are flights available with a one day stop over in Dubai. So, we did one day sightseeing over there. A return flight costs around 600€.

- Bank account

I was using a bank account by Comdirect. This bank offers a Visa credit card and free money withdraw worldwide. The Account is completely free of charge.

- Insurance

I paid 260€ for a 6 month protection at Hanse Merkur

- Vaccination

Ask your doctor for advice
The internet is censored in China and for example Facebook is blocked. But you can avoid the blocking using a VPN.

3. Shanghai and Shanghai University

Ones you arrive at the airport you need to get a metro card in order to travel to your choosen campus. Unfortunately, the staff was not able to speak English so it was quite a challenge. Fortunately, 2 Chinese girls from the Shanghai University picked us up. Strange and sometimes annoying was the security check at each metro station.

The Shanghai University consists of 3 locations. The courses will take place on Baoshan campus which is quite far in the north and it takes around 45 minutes to downtown by metro. It is a huge campus but if you consider to go out or shopping more often I would recommend to live on Hengshan campus or find a room downtown. There is a shuttle and public bus 767 between these campuses.

In order to use the canteen or library you will get a debit card after registration. Your coordinator will guide you to the process. The internet is not really reliable, so I suggest to buy a mobile card with internet access. I used to have a sim card by China Mobile and paid around 8€ for 2 GB 3G. The rooms are a bit expensive for what you get offered but you meet lots of international people and won't get ripped off by landlords. Shanghai is famous for its nightlife. Plenty of clubs are around and if you know a promoter you will get all kind of drinks and entrance for free as a foreigner. It is not a joke. Getting a promoter is quite easy. Just get WeChat on your mobile, ask around and get connected. I can recommend the bar Perry's or Window sports bar as a pre drink location. Other exciting sightseeing activities are temples, parks, the Bund and the finance district of Shanghai as well as traveling around Shanghai or even China.
4. Academic life

Actually, I missed some activities for international students organized by Shanghai University. But maybe the international student exchange has just been established and will develop in the future. Nevermind, instead of 1.5h lectures we used to have 4h lectures. No one can listen and be focused 4h in a row. Ok, that is the Chinese system. The final grade consists usually of participation, presentation, essay and exam. We were having a lot to work in order to pass the courses but it was not extremely painfull. So, enough time to explore Shanghai and the rest of China.

5. Public transport

Usually, the metro is the main transport to get almost everywhere in Shanghai. One way cost between 3-5 RMB = 0.20-0.50 €. Alternatives are taxis or trains to get out of Shanghai. A taxi ride from Hengshan to downtown cost around 35 RMB = 4-5€ for 20 minutes.

6. Back home

Just handle in your transcript and learning agreement at Pabo and upload your experience report.

7. Conclusion

So far, it was the best time of my life also because I was travelling in South East Asia after finishing studying in Shanghai. I experienced a completely different culture. Actually a mixed culture of modern, traditional, lost or something inbetween Chinese people. Lots of people are very ignorant others friendly and helpful. But I liked the impule people have to work hard in order to survive and help the country to become a better place. I continue to take Chinese language courses and I am pretty sure to deal with China in the near future again.