

Exchange Report - China the Land of Controversies

Huānyíng dào zhōngguó – Welcome to China

After leaving the airport in Beijing my Chinese journey began, no more English, no more familiar signs and surrounded by people who struggled to speak and even to read anything else than Chinese Characters. For a second, I was really nervous and asked myself, if it is going to be like that for the rest of the exchange Semester?

Well, it turned out to be the complete opposite, once I arrived at the graduate campus at Haidian district, where the Chinese University of Political Science (CUPL) is located, problems seemed to fade away.

Especially, other international students were very supportive due to the fact that they were sharing the same concerns at the beginning of their Chinese experience. They were more than welcome to share useful tips or to help me with organizing things, such as the registration at the police station. Also the International office, with April in charge, does everything to make your stay as pleasant as possible, although, it may not be as organized as you may be used to from the RUG, you still feel that they care about you.

Location

The campus is rather small in comparison to other Universities, but it has a very unique location. You have a variety of Restaurants within the neighborhood and with the subway (5min walk) you can go wherever you like for approximately 25 cents. Very popular is Wudakou, which is a close by Student area, with Bars, Clubs and Restaurants. Especially, international people seem to enjoy this part of the city. The great advantage is, that it is only 2 stations by subway. If you feel more like partying, Salitun would be the right address. I mean, I have been in several clubs around the world, but this place beats it all. The clubs are so modern and fancy that it is no surprise when out of the sudden Daft Punk or Fritz Kalkbrenner enters the stage. We as foreigners have a great advantage due to the fact that Chinese people are very interested in the Western culture, so that the club owner lets you in for free in order to attract the wealthy Chinese people. The location is about 35 minutes by subway, so it is easier to take a Taxi (costs about 2,70 Euro/per person)

If you want to shop, that is also no problem, Beijing as the capital looks like a typical Western metropole. There is nothing that you could not find in Beijing that you would find in Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris or Barcelona. The closest shops are in walking distance. However, the primary spot for shopping is also at Salitun- area, about 40 minutes by subway or 20 minutes by Taxi (costs about 3 Euro/ per person).

Accommodation

The campus itself has a lot to offer, it has several shops located on the campus where you can buy snacks or beverages, it has its own café, 'chillout' areas and the Sport offer is not bad either. It has its own gym, badminton field and basketball court. Very popular is also the pool tables and table – tennis area.

The rooms have a decent size, with two loft beds and a table and closet beneath it. You have to furnish the room yourself, which is not such a big deal. Everything you

need is easily and affordable at a Market close by (walking distance). Besides, you pay only around 8-9 Euro for the room a month! The rooms are shared with one more person.

Food

Well for starters it may not be the worst idea to have somebody with you, who has some experience with Chinese food – otherwise you may experience some surprises. Although they have often pictures of the dish in the restaurant, it remains a secret what it actually is. No worries, dog, cat or snack is not as common in the Beijing area as one may think. The campus has two canteens, one of them is Muslim. Both canteens have a variety of different dishes. But most of them are typical Chinese. A dish is around 80 cents up to 1 Euro. They serve food 3 times a day, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Although having a warm meal, such as soup, for breakfast is hard to get used to (at least for me). A disadvantage is that there is no kitchen where you could cook your own dish. So you are more or less forced to eat out. If you get tired of the things in the canteen and places around the campus, there are a lot of places that serve Western food or Japanese (Pizza, fries, Burgers, Sushi etc.).

Study Programme

CUPL provides you with a great variety of courses you can choose from. They have several trade and investment courses, Human Rights Law, Constitutional and Administrative Law. But also more unusual courses, such as Air and Space Law or Chinese Law and Society. I visited all courses, except from Research & Writing and Procedural Law. It is similar to the Netherlands that not all courses start at the beginning of the semester, but that they rather take place in block form. Nevertheless, attendance is required and a lecture is mostly about 3 – 4 hours long. In most of the courses you are required to hand in the paper in the End. After what I have experienced, the grades are the least you need to worry about.

In addition, you can participate in extra curricular activities. I taught Chinese postgraduate students about the German culture and language, for which I received a certificate in the end. There are several workshops such as, how to make proper Chinese tea or learn how to write Chinese characters in the Calligraphy course. For more active people they offered a Tai Ji course which was very interesting but also very hard to learn.

Language

In a country like China, it is definitely helpful when you can speak/ remember a little bit Chinese. It is not that you need full sentence, but at least key words that the person knows what you want. So for example you should know the name of the campus by heart, which is an absolute life saver when you sit in a cab (most Cab drivers do not have a Navigation system or are just too stubborn to use it) But also on the market, when you have to negotiate about whatever you would like to purchase (it seems like nothing has a fixed price in China)

The free Chinese course offered by CUPL may be a great way to learn the basics.

Personal experience

China is really a fun place and I can only recommend to check it out. I guarantee it is not as bad as people often think. Especially Beijing is a very modern city and can easily compete with every modern city in the West. You can go to concerts, the cinema or clubbing. You can visit art galleries or modern architecture at several places in the city. At the same time, Beijing has still its old traditional charm – it is not surprising that you see elder people doing Tai Ji in the parks or drinking tea at the corner on small stools. Also the buildings give you a great impression, how it must have been like in China centuries ago. So Beijing combines the best of a modern city and applies it to a traditional context.

The Chinese people are very interesting. Although they are rather reserved at the beginning, once they get to know you or you only say one word in Chinese, they open up immediately and talk to you in a ‘waterfall kind of style’.

What is more, How about skiing in the city, on a hill covered with fake snow? Yes as crazy as it sounds, it is possible. The complete package, Bus ticket, equipment and ski-pass costs around 60 Euros. If you think that is too expensive, how about staying overnight at the Great Wall, for free? Yes, it is possible and probably one of the craziest experiences I had in China. With a group of approximately 20 international students we hiked over the Great wall, before we set camp and enjoyed the sunset. On top we had a great party and fell asleep under the starry sky.

I can only encourage students to go to China for their exchange. It is really an interesting place to visit and to spend some time. It will not be as challenging as you may think it could be. Nevertheless, it can sometimes be frustrating (mostly due to a communication barrier), but from my personal experience you are never alone and have always the support of other exchange students or the International office. Go for it!

Zàijiàn – Good Bye