



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Dalian University of Foreign Language
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 2024
Otago degree(s)	Languages and Linguistics
Major(s)	Spanish, Chinese

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Oral Chinese (Primary B)	Chinese	CHIN300
Listening	Chinese	CHIN300
Foundation	Chinese	CHIN300
Chinese Dialogue	Chinese	Cultural course
Chinese Papercutting	Chinese	Cultural course

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

The Foundation course takes up the majority of the lesson time. This is the essential vocabulary and grammar structures in a very traditional 'textbook' method of instruction. We had 9 hours a week with this class.

The oral and listening courses were marked significantly easier and much of the content crossed over from the foundation paper.

The cultural courses are optional. There was around 10 different choices.

All courses are in mandarin. At the beginning the teachers are very slow and use simple compressible language with a lot of gestures and it speeds up gradually.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

The main difference is the whole thing is in Chinese. There is absolutely no English.

Attendance is mandatory.

There is a greater focus on rote memorisation and all courses are 100% externally assessed.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I lived off campus in a family friend's second apartment. This was 1200RMB per month. I lived alone, really enjoyed having a kitchen and my own space but I was a little far from campus. (40min walk, 20 min bike)

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Rent was 12000RMB

Food per day was around 25RMB, obviously more if you eat at nicer restaurants. I'm pretty stingy.

Visa was I think 40NZ

Insurance was around 200NZ

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

WeChat was an absolute must in China. You can link your bank card to the app and you pay for EVERYTHING with that. Very convenient.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

Yes, just a student visa through the Chch consulate. Very straightforward. They had my passport for around a week before it was returned by post with the visa.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

The cultural courses were very good. Highly recommend trying them all and then you can just choose to stay in the ones you like. There were all sorts of sport's teams and clubs to join as well but honestly we would have a pretty great time just going out to eat all the different types of food and the different restaurants around the university. This was probably a highlight for me.

What was the university/ city like?

The university was very much self-contained in a sense. You could buy anything, any food you wanted on campus... there was even a mall. There was 400 running track, gym and gymnasium. There was a wee lake which was pretty to walk around. The library was comfortable enough and the international classrooms were really nice and warm. There was a massive canteen with so many options for food.

The city was very far away from campus. (1.5-2 hours on the subway) It did not feel at all like the cosmopolitan life that is portrayed of Beijing or Shanghai. I liked that it was far out though because there were such an overwhelming amount of people in Dalian city. However, the area where the university is located (LvShun) really doesn't have much at all. The area wasn't super active socially or culturally or in a sporting sense so it depends on what you're into - you can find everything in the city though if you're okay with the return journey.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

Honestly you just have to go and explore it all. Look on 小红书. I have a friend who runs a ceramic workshop nearby so let me know if you want contact with her! There is a big farmer's market every Monday morning on 海鲜街 which was epic.

Any tips for future students?

Brace yourself for a totally new experience. China is a completely different world. I would be lying to say it was all sunshine and rainbows but overall an incredible semester. I am so so thankful for the opportunity to have gone.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!
So I flew in to China with the expectation that I would be able to 'easily' handle the infamous culture shock. I consider myself pretty adaptable and independent but boy was I wrong.

China, especially outside of Beijing and Shanghai, is very separated (and still virtually blocked with the firewall) from the West. Being at a Foreign Language university, there was a pretty nice international vibe that was honestly pretty comfortable but as soon as you leave the campus, you are constantly aware of this immense contrast in culture. China is so amazingly unique. It is completely a world of its own. It's a wonderful adventure but really challenging and can feel quite isolating.

I didn't take the study overly seriously - I still learnt all the content and got good grades but I didn't let myself stress about the workload too much because I wanted to put my time and energy toward a broader array of things while on exchange - especially using the language outside of the classroom.

At the beginning, there is an entrance examination and you are placed at a level to start at, then you can move up or down if you think its too easy/hard. I ended up with a great teacher in my foundation class, I recommend factoring this in when selecting your level because the course content jump isn't too steep and I had some friends with 'less motivating' foundation teachers who did not enjoy the classes at all.

Dalian as a city is very strange. It was once under Russian AND Japanese occupation and at present serves as China's northern hub of tech and trade. It is considered a relatively beautiful and wealthy city. There are very limited natural spaces. But Dalian is a great place for a language exchange because there are fewer foreigners, fewer English speakers and more opportunity to encounter an authentic North Eastern Chinese society. Feel free to message if you are considering 大外