



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Tsinghua University
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 2018
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Geography and Chinese

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Pre-Intermediate Reading	Chinese	CHIN200	Combined value of my courses were 54 Otago credits
Pre-Intermediate Listening	Chinese	CHIN200	
Pre-Intermediate Speaking	Chinese	CHIN200	
Pre-Intermediate General Chinese	Chinese	CHIN200	

Any comments about these papers?

These papers all came under the International Chinese Language and Culture Center Program Course, which has many different levels. I was in the pre-intermediate level and this worked perfectly for me having learnt Chinese for a number of years. I would recommend starting at a lower level if you have only been learning Chinese for a short time. Be aware that when signing up for courses make sure you register for the International Chinese Language and Culture Center Program, which is a specialised program just for Chinese language learners. I was first put into the general Chinese language program, which wasn't intensive enough as it was also for people doing other courses and not just focusing on the Chinese language. This course added up to 17.5 hours a week and in addition to that, I also sat in on a Chinese reading class twice a week. More information on the ICLCC Program is here: <http://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/iclccen/3417/index.html>

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

My classes at Tsinghua were a lot smaller- almost like a tutorial. This was because I was in the ICLCC Program, which aimed to have as much contact time as possible- about 3.5 hours a day. If, however, you were taking another more general course I imagine it would be much bigger. Some of the lecture theatres at Tsinghua were absolutely huge and always full of people- more than the biggest lecture theatres at Otago. I loved the class I had and we all got along very well. As well as this, the teachers were top quality and very engaging. Getting a teaching job at Tsinghua, one of China's top university, is almost as hard as getting to be a student there so all of the teachers are of a very high standard. In general, the workload wasn't too much, however, I did have to write a lot of characters and sometimes the persistence of the teachers to always go by the book was a bit tiresome. But I discovered some interesting cultural differences from this- for example that rote learning is very prevalent in the culture of studying in China. Although there wasn't a lot of use of multimedia platforms in the classroom like at Otago, there was always lots of time for discussion and using our conversation skills, which I loved. Also, because of the small classroom dynamic, our classes were hard when they needed to be but also quite relaxed and fun as well.

Accommodation

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

I stayed at the Zijing Student Apartments at Tsinghua University, in a single room with a bathroom. These student apartments were only for international students, which was very cool as there were people from all over the world living there. I know other people who lived off campus because they couldn't get into the student apartments so I recommend booking a room as soon as they are available. The pros of the apartments were that they were so close to my classes and are on campus so very convenient. My classes were only a 10-15 min bike ride away and the supermarket and main building, the C building, was only a 5 min bike ride. The apartments are also well provided for with a bathroom and shower, as well as cleaners coming to clean the rooms 3 times a week. A con of the accommodation is that you don't live in a 'local' area as it is mostly international students so you miss out on some aspects of daily life. Practicing speaking Chinese is also not as easy because of this reason but I had a lot of interaction with local Beijingers anyway. There is also very strict times for visitors and the lobby calls your bedroom up if someone has stayed past the curfew. Strict times are also put in place for hot water, which is available from 7:30pm- 12am and 7:30am- 12pm.

Money matters

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

The accommodation cost 80 RMB a day and was cheaper if you shared a room, however, I don't recommend that. This is much cheaper than what people pay for apartments in Beijing so is a very good deal. I got flights for about \$600 NZD to Beijing via Auckland and booked them a few months before. I recommend preparing everything for the visa well in advance as it does take quite a while and you have to go to the visa office in person. I went to the embassy in Wellington and it was a smooth process providing you have all the documents. The visa cost about \$250. Food at Tsinghua University is the cheapest I have ever known. There are about 15 canteens all over Tsinghua campus serving subsidised meals for all students. For purchasing the meals you use a meal card that can be purchased and topped up on campus. For lunch, I would get a dish that cost \$3.50 RMB, which is the equivalent of about 70 cents and it was huge. Meat dishes cost a little bit extra but are still cheap and some weeks I would spend less than \$100 RMB on food. I purchased Southern Cross Travel Insurance and when registering at Tsinghua you are made to buy Ping An Health Insurance, which wasn't expensive.

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

I used my ANZ eftpos card for accessing my finances although this had a fee attached to it. I also set up a Bank of China Account, which enabled me to set up a Wechat Pay account. WeChat Pay is a cashless payment system using the WeChat app, which is a must to have in China as everyone uses it. WeChat Pay is very easy itself but the setup of it can be a bit complicated as you need a Chinese phone number and Chinese bank account. I ended up having two WeChats, one for my friends and one for WeChat Pay. Next time I would definitely ask a Chinese friend to help me.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, when studying in China you have to apply for a visa. I applied for the X2 visa, which is for people studying for less than 6 months in China. I don't remember the process exactly but what makes everything easier is being prepared in advance and making sure you fill out all the required documents. It is a streamlined process once you have completed these. I organized my visa in the Wellington consulate and the waiting time was only a week. There is more information for all of the required documents here: <http://www.chinaconsulate.org.nz/eng/lqz/gg/t1196820.htm>

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes, the host university has mandatory insurance that you buy when registering at Tsinghua.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

At the start of the semester, there was a group and club day that had a whole lot available. I signed up for these groups but unfortunately, a lot of them became inactive. In saying that clubs like the Snow Sports Club continued with events throughout the semester. I was part of the Yoga Association that had very cheap yoga classes and I signed up for a crossfit gym called BA. There are many gyms on campus, however I found this one was the cleanest and had the best facilities. I also joined a group called the language corner in Wudaokou where I practiced speaking Chinese with a whole range of people, and they spoke English to me as well. I found this through a Wechat group and in fact, a lot of the activities I discovered were through various Wechat groups so I recommend joining as many as possible!

What was the university/ city like?

The university campus is very beautiful, especially in autumn. There are lots of trees, old buildings and not a lot of traffic because of restrictions, which is a very nice contrast to the rest of Beijing! Much of the traffic is actually made up of bicycles and having a bicycle is another must as it makes traveling around campus a lot easier because it is so big. There are multiple bike shops on campus that sell cheap bikes but they will try to sell you the most expensive one. Go with a Chinese student and they will help with that. Beijing city itself is massive and is more akin to a lot of sprawling suburbs than having one main city centre. Tsinghua is quite far out, between the 4th and 5th ring road, so getting to the 'centre' of Beijing, Tiananmen Square takes about 40 minutes on the train. Other popular spots such as Sanlitun also take the same amount of time or longer. This means that generally I stayed near Tsinghua campus for the week and explored different parts of Beijing during the weekend. My course was quite convenient, as it would finish at noon every day so sometimes my friends and I would take a trip to various Beijing sites such as the Workers' Cultural Palace, Fayuan Temple, and the old Hutong areas.

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

Any tips for future students?

My tips are to get out as much as possible around Beijing and even further afield. I went on trips to Zhangjiajie, Xian, Datong, Pingyao, Harbin, and Hong Kong, which added even more to my exchange experience. Traveling in China is also much cheaper than most countries so it was all very doable, especially by using the Ctrip booking app, which has lots of deals. Going on an overnight slow train is also a cool experience as you get to know other people traveling in your cabin, and practice speaking Chinese. This is another important point, particularly if you are at Tsinghua for learning the language, is to speak to as many people as possible in Chinese. I have come back from China not completely fluent but can have many conversations, mainly because I talked to anyone I could, or who would let me! Apart from that, just enjoy your exchange in such an exciting and ever-changing country.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

My overall experience was very positive and I am glad that I went to Tsinghua University and I highly recommend it. I think that going to a country such as China for an exchange made my experience very rewarding, as it is such a different country to New Zealand. This was because the language, culture, and environment were completely different. This means that there were more challenges throughout my experience but I always felt very proud and happy when I did something well, like had a full conversation in Chinese or worked out how to get somewhere in the most efficient way. I travelled a lot around China and Beijing, which added to my experience. Sometimes people in rural areas are more welcome to interacting and helping people from other parts of the world, so I got to understand Chinese “re qing” or hospitality. The most valuable parts of my experience were the friends I made from all over the world, as there are so many international students, and the language skills I developed. I feel confident that in the future I can use Chinese not just for traveling and communicating, but also in a future career. Thanks Otago Exchange for the great experience!

