

Dalian University of Foreign Languages

Dalian, Liaoning, China

Semester 1 2016



大連外國語大學



[1 http://school.cucas.edu.cn/Dalian-University-of-Foreign-Languages-43/](http://school.cucas.edu.cn/Dalian-University-of-Foreign-Languages-43/)

Dalian

Dalian University of Foreign Languages, known informally as DaWai (presumably due to the abbreviated name in the school's logo) is a language school in Liaoning Province's town Lushun (Lvshun, Lvshunkou – however you want to Latinise “旅顺口”) The school was previously located in Dalian City proper, however was relocated to it's current location about an hour or so out of the city.

Lushun, or at least, the area where the university is located, is essentially a semi-rural fishing village, with a line of cafés, a gym, supermarket, fruit stalls and some restaurants catering to the university crowd. One thing of note – while China is doable with no Chinese skills, Lushun is very small and every shopkeeper and 80% of university staff cannot speak any English, so if your Chinese is not on point it will be a bit of a rough first week or two. However, the university finds you in the airport with a sign with the Dalian University logo on it, takes you on a bus to the campus, you get your accommodation sorted and then you're set, all your needs can be met by pointing to things, and you really do get to a day-to-day useable level within 3 weeks if you put the effort in, so it's not a big issue. I had done 1 semester of Chinese (scored low 50s, a year and a half before exchange) so was effectively at a level 0 of Chinese, and was there with a friend who had never looked at Chinese before, and we did pretty ok.

The campus itself has a multi storied food court, and a mini shopping centre with a food court upstairs, both buildings have meals averaging around 7-15 RMB. You can easily eat out every meal and still spend much less than you would in Dunedin cooking at home. There's not much of a choice in this actually - the 'kitchen facilities' are effectively just rooms with a couple of microwaves and portable stovetops – you can't really cook.

The dormitory area also has a bit of a restaurant right next to where you stay, mainly frequented for breakfast everyday by students. On top of this, all food outlets on campus, and almost all off campus, will have a business card with a phone number on that you can call and order food, they'll deliver to the dormitory door so if your Chinese is good enough there's no need to leave the dorm other than for class. Hence almost all members of our class looked substantially plumper towards the tail end of the semester. Beers are around 5 RMB in most restaurants, cheaper at supermarkets, so you'll never really spend more than \$1.50-\$2.00 for a beer here. The wine is awful, it's almost impossible to get imported wine and the Chinese brands are really not at a good level yet. The taste is bad and the headaches are awful. Same with spirits generally however if you don't overdo it the Soju available everywhere is alright.

Nightlife was alright amongst international students, there were lots of students from Russia, Korea, Japan and some from Europe. The more long term international students tend to stay in the apartments in the residential areas, which are groups of 4-6, and they usually have house parties on Friday nights. When it's warm there's a sweet area where people sit and eat or study or hang out, drink after dark, but for the first 60% of my semester it was way too icy and cold for that. The temperature is pretty bipolar, absolutely freezing when I first arrived, pretty painfully hot when I left. Not a huge issue though.

The area around the campus has everything you need, but kinda gets a bit claustrophobic. Dalian proper is accessible by campus bus for about 10 yuan, return usually 20 yuan for some reason.

Class

I did an intensive language course, I'm fairly certain that's the only option for this exchange. You are put in to do an exam in the first week to see which class you should be in, and they'll provide a recommended class based on those results. You can move around and try other classes in the first week of classes, and see which you like best. This is a pretty good system and I felt I was placed in a good class for my level. Alternatively, if you don't have language training or it was long enough ago for you to feel like beginner class, you can just not sit the exam and go straight to the beginner class.

Classes are intense, there is very few English words spoken, and from about the 3rd week on there is almost nothing spoken except for Chinese. This really helps out your listening, and though my teacher could understand me reasonably well if I asked a question in English, it was much easier and faster after a couple of weeks to try the question in Chinese. They text books all have English translation in each chapter's vocab list, and the Korean, Japanese and Russian translations in the back of the book.



2 Teaching block garden on DaWai campus

I felt the quality of teaching was amazing. I improved more in one semester than I feel I would have in a couple of years studying in NZ. The teachers are incredibly skilled and know exactly what vocab the class knows, and we could understand the teacher perfectly fluently when she spoke as she used only vocab we had already learned. There is massive opportunity to advance at breakneck speed here, but the workload is intense, people generally had class 8:30am-1:30pm with an hour for lunch, and then spent the rest of the day in the library until 5 or 6pm, Monday to Friday. Some students who missed a few weeks of homework and after class studying seemed to fall off and never really recovered. It seemed pretty important to stay on top of study.

Travel

We left travelling until late in the semester, as we didn't feel like our Chinese level was high enough to keep us out of trouble. This was probably a mistake, as once we did leave we found all trains and hotels could be booked online, and once you make it to the bigger cities the English level of operators and shopkeepers etc improves substantially and it wasn't really as scary as it seemed. There are infinite places to visit in China. DaWai has a school trip in the mid semester break, which is a little pricey, but gives a pretty good tour of some of China's most famous attractions. When we went the trip was to Shanghai, though after one night there we left and visited Hangzhou and Nanjing over the course of 3 or so more days. This provided a basis for further travel, as it gave us an overview of both China's modern and historic sides.

We visited Beijing and Tianjin independently using the bullet trains. These were much cheaper than flying and quite comfortable, a pretty good experience in and of itself.



3 水长城 - Shui Chang Cheng, Great Wall near Beijing, photo we took on a long weekend away from school



4 Fishing boats at Lushun, 10 minute walk from campus

Overall, I highly recommend this exchange for all those looking to improve their Chinese level!