



What to Bring

If you are going in the first semester, warm clothes are a must! Three sets should do the trick and make sure to pack thermals, a woollen scarf, beanie and gloves. Your puffer will be your friend.

Dalian is known for being extremely windy (it's even in the school's nickname – 大风奴性大学) and in winter it is biting cold. The temperature will rise steadily though, so the worst of it will be over in the first three weeks and soon be all too hot.

Cold and flu medicine, band aids, and paracetamol typically come in handy, whether for yourself or for people around you. If you grew up in NZ or another country where hygiene standards are comparatively high, you will probably also appreciate Imodium or some other anti-diarrhoea medication just in case you eat something not quite right while you're on the move.

If you're looking for souvenirs to give to people you meet, Whittaker's chocolate is a hit with pretty much anyone so if you have some spare weight allowance, bring a couple king size blocks and fill up on mini slabs. They are perfect for sharing with friends and flatmates as well as for yourself! Chocolate in China leaves much to be desired unless you spend big money on imported brands. Good coffee and hot chocolate are also near impossible to come by, so bring your own if that's your thing.

Also, make sure to get a VPN **before** you set off. Facebook and Google (which means Gmail!) and many other sites are censored in China. International sites that aren't blocked are monitored and load painfully slow so you will be glad you arrived prepared.

Do try to keep your things to a minimum – you can accumulate a surprising amount of stuff over four months so you will appreciate it when you are packing to return. I left with one suitcase and came back with two. Old students also generally leave a lot of their belongings behind so I found myself fully kitted out with a hairdryer, utensils (not that you will need to cook though I did choose to towards the end), stationery, shelving and a local phone charger without having to spend a cent.

Money Matters

On arrival, you'll want some cash for transport to the university, accommodation and other small expenses (food, toiletries you forgot, insurance that the school makes you pay for etc). Thereafter, the best way to get funds is just to use a VISA debit card to withdraw from an ATM in Lüshun or in

the city centre as the exchange rate is good and there is only a small \$5 fee per transaction. I took about 9000RMB in cash with me so I didn't have to stress about finding an international ATM in the first week.

That being said, cash is no longer commonplace in China – most opt to use the smartphone apps WeChat (微信) and Alipay (支付宝). There were even some stalls in the mall food court which wouldn't accept cash! It's actually pretty straightforward to set up after opening a bank account in China which also isn't as hard as you might think. Just grab your passport and head over to any bank which isn't the Bank of China (they require you to have a residence visa). I went with ICBC across the road which, if you take the bus to Lüshun, is right in front of the bus stop. Your PIN number has to be 6 digits so it's a good idea to have one in mind before you go. Also make sure to pick a day where you aren't in a rush - the paperwork takes a *long* time, it took about an hour or so for me. If you choose ICBC as well, there's a room with ATMs to the left if you're facing the bank from the street. You can use your VISA to withdraw cash from NZ (max 3000RMB per transaction) using the ATM on the right-hand side, and deposit the cash into your Chinese bank account using any of the machines to the left. Then you just need to set up the apps using your bank card details and ID (which is your passport).



Transport

When I arrived in Dalian Airport, there were people selling bus tickets for 50RMB which was well worth it as they take you right to the gate. You just have to say that you're going to 大连外国语大学 and the person selling the ticket will tell you where to go to board. If it's obvious that your Chinese isn't very good (as it was for me!) the person will also contact the bus driver to make sure they wait for you. Taking a taxi will cost you more than double the price, and more if you're not careful since they know you are a foreigner. There are also school buses from the airport but I arrived before the service started running.

The campus itself is in the middle of nowhere. The bus to Lüshun only costs 1 块 or if you don't want to wait, go with some friends and take a taxi. They will generally agree to take you for 5 块 each if you're in a group of three or four. You can also ask other people at the bus stop to carpool with you

(拼车走) as almost everyone waiting at 大外东门站 will be heading to the same place (新玛特 aka Walmart in Lüshun for shopping or nearby).

There are also school buses which can take you for an hour-long journey to the city center for 8 块 each way. You now have to pay using Wechat (it really is a good idea to have your bank account set up!) though I am sure there will be other students there willing to help you out if you only have cash. The two main stops for returning are in 中山广场 (just by 天安国际大厦) and 万达广场 though it's best to get a friend to show you where they are the first time.

If you have your WeChat Wallet set up, you can also opt to use the app to order a taxi (滴滴出行).



The service is integrated with WeChat so you don't need to download anything. 滴滴车 is basically a Chinese Uber. It works out to be cheaper, and the drivers are also more friendly and polite as at the end you can rate their service. If you use it, it's worth choosing a place to wait which is easy to describe as, even though you select where you are and where you're going on the app when ordering, the driver will generally give you a call to confirm exactly where you're waiting. When you arrive at your destination, you don't have to pay straightaway (note that you *cannot* pay with cash). It's normal to just hop out and pay

later on WeChat whenever you have Wi-Fi.

Accommodation

I stayed in one of the 6 person apartments (3 double bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, kitchen, lounge and dining). It was about 6000RMB for the semester, plus or minus depending on whether you choose a north or south facing room. I ended up in a north facing room which didn't get as much sun (this is a blessing in summer) and was significantly smaller, but I'm quite a small person myself and didn't have a lot of stuff so I was able to make do. I also did my study in the dining area so the lack of sun wasn't an issue either. The kitchen in the apartment was just a bench, sink and cupboards below, plus two bathroom sinks to the side complete with mirrors (strange, I know). Chances are the other students will have kettles, portable stovetops and perhaps even rice cookers. They will most likely be more than happy to let you use them, but otherwise check the storage room for equipment left behind by previous students.

Do make sure to check your room for any damages before settling in and report anything you notice. Though it wasn't much, we were charged for a tear in the sofa upholstery which was already there before moving in.



Academics

You will be doing an intensive full-time language course which can be credited back for two of your Chinese language papers. There will be a placement test but you can try out other classes in the first week if you think the level you're assigned to isn't suitable. Personally, I think the class I was put into was pretty bang on, but a lot of other students wanted to challenge themselves and moved up. Unfortunately, this resulted in a lot of blank faces when there could have been more engagement and discussion. I would encourage you only to move up if you are already familiar with more than half of the new grammar points (just flick through your 基础 textbook). Only move down if after learning the new vocab and reading through the grammar notes, you still have to use a dictionary and struggle to make sense of the lesson dialogue/text. All your classes will be taught in Chinese so there will be a lot of adapting to do in the first couple weeks but it will come! So don't be discouraged if you don't always know what you're supposed to be doing or what page you're supposed to be on at the start.

I think the most important habit to get into for your study is 预习 – memorize your vocabulary and do your best to read through the dialogues *before* class so that you can focus your attention on what the teacher is saying rather than just struggling to understand. Work through exercises in advance as best you can to make sure you're not just copying down answers and are ready to ask specific questions in areas you're not sure about. We were moving through the material about four times faster than when I was studying in Otago so it is imperative to keep on top of your study.

You will also be able to choose electives which are either one or two hours per week. The max you can choose is two papers if you read the rules, but pretend you don't understand the small Chinese print at the bottom and sign up for more if you're keen. I took three papers (erhu, Chinese calligraphy and tai chi) and credited them back as 100 level general arts points. All papers are taught

in Chinese and are in my opinion a very worthwhile way to get more exposure to the language and culture.

Other tips

Check when the graduation ceremony is before booking your return flights. I just missed out and was gutted about not being able to attend with my classmates. There are also some decent prizes you can get for attendance, being a good class rep, passing a certain HSK test etc. that you can only receive if you attend.

Bring some extra passport/visa photos with you in case they lose the ones you sent with your application (I needed an extra four). Bring them along on registration day to save you a trip back to your dormitory. Even if you don't need them then, it will come in handy when they ask for a photo for your graduation certificate.

Handy apps to have

Pleco , Baidu Maps 百度地图 , Alipay 支付宝 , WeChat 微信 , Taobao 手机淘宝

Contacts to add in WeChat

weliveindalian – add for news about organised trips for foreigners to various spots around and even outside of Dalian for a reasonable price. Good way to meet people and see more of the places you'd normally think are too troublesome to go to.

wxid_sabgvbtmey522 – this is the WeChat ID for a guy who delivers big tanks of water (about 20 or 30L, I think). Your first order will cost 50 块 for the pump as well, then 10 for each tank thereafter. Cheapest and most convenient way to get clean water unless you don't mind drinking boiled water.

If you are looking to improve your Chinese, I have no qualms about recommending DUFL. Language teaching is their expertise and you can tell from the attitude teachers take towards their profession and their students. The school won't go out of their way to show you the ropes though, so don't be afraid to approach teachers and other students with questions. I found the people of Dalian to be surprisingly honest and friendly so there's really nothing to worry about! Be proactive about making friends (especially Chinese ones) and finding things to do to get the most out of your exchange. Your Chinese ability will improve the more you put yourself out there and challenge yourself!