
Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.

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ABOUT:

Guangzhou is by far the least known First Tier City in China (the others being Beijing & Shanghai). With a population of just over 14 million you will never be able to fully explore all the little nooks and crannies that dot the city. It is not as 'touristy' or 'westernised' as its other large city counterparts and as such you will have an experience that is more immersed in local culture. There are plenty of fantastic places to eat, both local and fancy. The smaller population of expats means that 'all-thing-western' are concentrated in the CBD area, great for cramming in all aspects of 'home' (yes there is even a new NZ/Aussie founded bar/lounge).

Due to its position on the Pearl River delta the 'China Smog' in Guangzhou is much less worse than other cities, which you will be very thankful for when you travel to the other areas and experience the haze for yourself.

For a dose of internationalism/westerners, Hong Kong and Macao are only a short three(ish) hour train ride away, very easily done for a fun (but expensive) weekend away.

The Chinese language can be initially intimidating and complex. But with a few good apps and a couple of weeks mumbling and fumbling your way around, you will have mastered the keywords for everyday life. Typically most Chinese are friendly and helpful, especially the students, they find foreigners interesting. But be warned, to save 'face' ("mianzi") some locals will give you false advice or direction in the event they have no idea what you are asking about.

UNIVERSITY LIFE:

Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) has one of China's most beautiful campuses, filled with trees and old brick buildings. It is in stark contrast to the mega buildings and urban sprawl of Guangzhou. There are 4 campuses, but the business school (SYSBS) only operates out of the South (main business campus) and East campus.

The best place to rent (the international dormitory is reserved for full-year exchange students) are the apartments right outside the North Gate of the South campus. You will no doubt find some flatmates soon after arriving. Typically a Facebook page is setup before you get here.

SYSU has a buddy program that can either be hit-or-miss. My buddy was excellent, helped setup my apartment, phone plan and showed me around campus. Additionally they will introduce you to their friends, which lets you have a insight into the thoughts and opinions of Chinese students. If your unlucky your buddy will not have much or anything to do with you, but fortunately the international students are all in the same boat and will help out.

Courses here are run a little differently to Otago. I don't want to give away all the surprises but be prepared to be flexible. I can guarantee that whatever you preselected back in Otago will not fit once you get here. I can recommend that you go for classes that are part of the MBA program. These are open to all foreign students at any level. Are they harder, yes, but much more interesting and often run by very competent professors.

WHAT IS CHEAP AND WHAT IS NOT:

Cheap:

- Eating. Local food is seriously cheap, even restaurants will be cheap compared to New Zealand prices. If you pay more than NZD\$20 that is considered expensive.
- Beer. QingDao, is the 'best' Chinese beer. Only costs NZD\$1.25 at the store or NZD\$2.25 at a bar. Keep in mind that is a 600ml bottle.
- Public transport and Taxi's. You can get across the whole city for less than NZD\$3. Taxi's start at NZD\$2.25 for the first 8-10mins of the journey, then go up very slowly.
- Anything not western. You will still find all the official clothes shops around. Keep in mind all the knock-off stuff as well as the Chinese branded stores, often selling the exact same stuff, just with a different brands, which will also often have hilariously similar logos and names.

Not:

- Renting, prices here are comparable to Dunedin. For a good apartment you will be paying around NZD\$140 a week. Saying that I did have a room with a view of the river and ensuite... Utilities are around the same as New Zealand, so don't hope to save loads in this area.
- Travelling: China is huge. Like seriously huge. As such it can cost a fair bit to travel from one place to another. But if you avoid the public holidays, travel periods and book in advanced you should be able to move about cheaply.

HINTS & TRICKS:

Setting yourself up takes a bit of time. Bureaucratic red tape is everywhere here. By the time you have done all the registration necessary (university, police, phones, permits etc..) you will have doubled your patience levels and explored a good part of the city. The earlier you get onto this stuff, the much more fun and flexibility you have later on.

You will also have to buy your own linen and other necessities for your apartment. All this can be done at the local IKEA, super cheap and a amusing shopping experience. The Chinese sleeping on the beds makes for some great photos.

Upgraded your student visa to a Residents Permit ASAP. You will get the forms from the University upon registration. The whole process takes one month. As soon as you have this you can enter and exit the country as much as you want. Absolute necessity for trips to Hong Kong and abroad.

Everyone in China is on their smartphones. If you haven't realised by now, Google doesn't work. That means if you have an Android you will have a miserable time (not able to use any of the apps or access the app store to download more). Easiest thing to do is actually buy a iPhone. Seriously. Everything works perfectly on it. Otherwise make sure you have all the following apps downloaded before you go. "Air Quality" app, Interesting to track the smog levels. Get "WeChat", this is how you will communicate to everyone in China about everything. "Ctrip", the

english version. Use this to make all your travel bookings in China, especially the trains. Even flights can be cheaper if done through the mobile app. A Chinese map ("Baidu Maps" works fine), this is very useful for showing Taxi drivers where to go. "Memrise" is great for learning Chinese characters and some basic Mandarin. "Waygo" can auto-translate Chinese characters and is very useful reading menu's without any images.

But most importantly is having a good VPN service. Basically this lets you use internet connected devices trick the network into thinking you are in another country. Aka the access of all the blocked websites and services. "Express VPN" is currently the best service in China. It does cost some money so get the six month subscription just before you leave.

OVERALL:

One of the absolutely best things about this exchange is you will have a truly unique experience. China is still a developing beast. There are so many things they do here that will leave anyone stretching their head wondering why? And how do they make it work? The answers are much harder to find, but all the more interesting.

Almost every exchange student ever, says the best thing about an exchange is the people you meet. This is true. Now that I have said it there really is not much else to add. It really is true.

China is still one of the most exiting and diverse counties to live in. Guangzhou is hot and humid in summer, cool and humid in the winter. The locals will take photos of you, stare unashamedly and buy your drinks at bars and clubs. Be prepared to eat weird food, have all personal space invaded on public transport and really enjoy yourself.