I’m writing to introduce the greatness of Dalian University of Foreign Languages, with the hope that you will go and experience it for yourself.

Dalian University of Foreign Languages, or Dawai (大外) for short, is located in the beautiful beach city of Dalian. Dalian despite its youth, only established as a city in 1899, is a fast growing city and is regarded favourably, with its alternative name being the ‘Capital of Romance,’ named as such due to its beautiful scenery. Dalian’s beach scenery does help towards holding this status, however, for me what truly stole my heart was the traces of Dalian’s multi-cultured history and the friendly nature of Dalian.

In the past Dalian had been occupied at times by Japan and Russia, but it was Russia’s influence that was to leave the biggest traces in Dalian. Perhaps it is due to this multi-cultured history, that Dalian holds a good understanding towards foreigners and I never felt anything but welcomed.

I’m going to further introduce the many facets of Dawai and Dalian city that made me feel so welcomed, the immersive language experience, friendly atmosphere, delicious food and the amazing travel opportunities.

Dalian University of Foreign Languages (Dawai)’s academic opportunities-

I was recommended Dawai by Paola, my past Chinese lecturer and current Head of Languages and Culture Department, she said that Dawai offered the best facilities to improve my Chinese language ability, and she was undoubtedly correct. Dawai offers an amazing Chinese language course, with
classes tailored to your level, and split into the respective skill areas – reading, listening, speaking, and newspaper reading.

**Starter Exam** –
Classes are tailored to your level, as prior to starting classes, an exam is completed to ascertain your level. There are two parts to this exam, a written exam attached with a listening comprehension, and a reading aloud exam.

I was quite concerned about this exam, as I knew my poor listening ability ran the risk of lowering my overall level, but I needn’t have worried. The markers know that people have strengths and weaknesses, and they will take this into consideration when totalling up the scores.

Also, while the exam is done to figure out the class level best suited, you are not locked into the results. In the first week (or possibly two) you have the chance to try other levels, higher or lower, and can change from your recommended level if you want to. Once those trial week(s) are over though, you will be locked into your chosen class level so make sure it is a choice you feel good about.

That being said, don’t be afraid to push yourself and try a higher level, as Dawai’s teachers and other related staff are more than happy to support you in this endeavour.

**Dalian University of Foreign Languages teaching staff**
I was placed in a level higher than what I was initially comfortable with, but as I wanted to really challenge myself to improve my Chinese, I stayed with the recommended class. My classmates, despite most having studied for fewer years than me were amazing, speaking rapid-fire Chinese, it would have been an easy atmosphere to feel insecure in, if it wasn’t for the always helpful teachers and the open friendly learning environment they created.

- Questions were always welcomed - with one memorable moment being when a girl unknowingly asked for what a certain dirty word meant. Even in this scenario, the teacher was to only chuckle and provide a very PC answer. Students were encouraged to ask questions, be they hard or easy questions, the teachers saw it as proof of our willingness to learn.

- Classes were kept interesting - with grammar terms and new words being learnt through new methods. I remember during one listening class, the teacher showed us a PowerPoint on China’s ugliest male celebrities, to get us to try a new grammar structure to comment on their looks. Huang Bo was one of the unfortunate celebrities to be chosen by her.

- Humour and teaching was closely related - my Advanced Reading teacher was prone to use funny stories when teaching new terms and/or grammar patterns. He was to even have running jokes, very nearly every class he was to bring up Korean romance drama clichés, for instance a guy dragging the girl forcefully out of the airport. These amusing stories were very memorable and great at keeping the key terms and/or grammar in our heads.

- A feeling of community – groupwork was a big thing in classes, and helped forge a close connection with classmates, as class conversation topics like ‘Are you addicted to the internet’ generating some friendly debates. Helping forge this close connection, was the fact
that all language based classes had the same classmates, so had plenty of time to socialise and get to know each other.

**Dalian University of Foreign Languages administration staff –**

Just like Dawai’s teachers, the administration staff were always eager to help students. Dawai is a popular destination for exchange students, so the staff are well acquainted with exchange students’ common difficulties and most likely have experience dealing with it.

Quite a few of the administration staff are also very skilled language-wise, with several knowing English fluently, and even Korean, so if it is a pressing issue and you are concerned about language barriers, speaking English is a possibility.

**Dalian University of Foreign Languages Counselling**

Dawai offers counselling services, if you are feeling overwhelmed or simply want to talk to someone, there are services available (I’m not sure of the language(s) this is offered in though).

Also near exam time, there will be a mental health questionnaire to fill out, that attempts to gauge how you are feeling and recommends that if you are feeling particularly stressed due to exams, or other reasons, to attend a counselling service. This questionnaire is prepared in each students’ language, which really shows the care and regard that Dawai has for their students.

**Class Attendance –**

Think of studying at Dawai as like being back in high school, one cannot ‘wag’ class. Attendance makes up a sizeable portion of your grade, and if you miss enough days you run the risk of not being eligible to attend the final exam.

Of course, you are allowed to be sick, and in such cases as long as I informed the teacher (you will receive all your classmate and teachers’ wechat contacts) my attendance score did not suffer. Although, I did hear from another student that her teacher was demanding a doctor’s note as proof for the missed class, so I guess it depends on which teacher you end up with.

**General Language Class Information –**

As explained previously, your Chinese language learning will be split into separate classes - listening, speaking, reading and newspaper reading (some levels though don’t offer the newspaper reading class). These classes will be taught in Chinese, and chances are that your teacher can’t speak English. While this sounds scary, it does mean it is an ideal learning environment as you are fully immersed in the language.

Although, chances are that at least one of your classmates can speak English, or even be from a fellow English speaking country, so you can ask them for further explanation if needed.

In my class, there was a wide range of nationalities, Russian, Estonia, Egypt, France, Japan, Korean, Thailand, England and I the one New Zealander. There were only two of us with the mother tongue of English, which was great as we had to use Chinese to converse with others, but also meant if we were struggling with something English could be used to explain it.

Although, I must admit my English took a beating in Dawai, our reading teacher liked to have all the different nationalities say the equivalent of some Chinese terms in our own languages, which would have been fine if I could English. He asked what was the onomatopoeia of tear drops in the English language, and the English student and I panicked and said something like ‘pomple-pomple.’ We must have sounded convincing enough as he brought it, I’m sorry teacher.

**Class Timetable and Extra Class Options**

Classes generally start early morning (8:30) and finish at lunchtime (12:00), with a 30 minute break starting at 10:00. Different levels may have different class timetable structure, but for me, for every day except one, I’d have two classes (both one hour and a half long). This doesn’t count the two extra classes you can choose though.
Dawai offers a wide range of extra courses that you can choose two of, these courses include Tai Chi, calligraphy, Chinese decorate knot making, Chinese decorative paper cutting, Chinese painting, Chinese grammar and I’m sure there is others I’ve forgotten to name. These courses only become available in your second week at Dawai, and just like the Language classes, for one week you can trial a few before settling on your chosen two. Popular classes fill up fast though, so I’d recommended that you put your name down on classes before you try them, as you can choose to not take them later, but can’t enter an already full class.

I choose Chinese painting and Chinese grammar, both were also taught in Chinese. My Chinese painting teacher was very enthusiastic of his profession, so spoke quite fast, thankfully as a painting class, watching him paint and learning visually was most important to master the skill as I had no hope of understanding his high spirited discussion on the best method to flick one’s brush. It was an enjoyable class though, we learnt to paint pandas, shrimps and what not, and he was my most lenient teacher in terms of keeping attendance (extra classes are also bound to the same attendance rules, so make sure to turn up to them).

I choose the Chinese grammar class, as I wanted to improve my hopeless grammar skills, and the almost four hour class certainly achieved that. Attendance is heavily monitored in this class, and you must be there for the full four hours, to be marked as there. This class requires a textbook, which was reasonable priced. To be honest this isn’t the easiest nor the most riveting class, but if you want to improve your Chinese grammar than it is the right class to take.

Both my extra classes had one exam near the end of semester, and generally all extra classes end sooner than the language classes, to provide more time to study for the language classes final exams.

Mid-term Exams –
Not all your classes will have a mid-term exam, for instance my listening class only ever had the end of semester exam. The classes that do have mid-term exams will provide the necessary details to you in plenty of time for you to prepare. If not, you can ask your class rep (classes at start of semester choose a class rep) to ask the teacher, or ask them yourself. Just like in Otago, the materials covered in the mid-term exam will already be known to you, and you will be given hints of what will appear in the exam so listen closely.

Final Exams –
Just like the mid-term exams, the information for final exams will be given earlier to allow time to prepare. Exam layouts at Dawai are more flexible than Otago, in that a different class may have their speaking exam spread out over two days, whereabouts your class has only one day. Due to this flexibility make sure you are keep checking the location and time of the exam, as they can occasionally change. That being said, you will be informed of any changes, but doesn’t hurt to double-check.

Dalian University of Foreign Languages (Dawai) Campus Life -

Location of Dalian University of Foreign Languages, and their transport options –
Dawai is quite isolated from the main city area, it’s at least an hour and 10 minutes bus ride away. This is a little irritating as it means that heading into Dalian city and then back to Dawai has to be planned a little. The university offers a very comfy bus option (under 10 yuan, and guaranteed seating), but it only runs to 8:30pm (can be picked up after, but 8:30pm is meant to be the latest), which means that you can’t stay out for too long. There is another bus option (I’ve forgotten the number, 2002 possibly) that has a stop by Dalian’s Medical University (short ten minute walk from Dawai) and this bus runs to 9pm, I believe, so can catch this one if want to stay out longer. However, buses that aren’t connected with the university work on the policy of early bird gets the worm, and you might have to stand the whole bus ride back if no seats are available.
The university bus back can be caught at multiple places in Dalian city, but I only ever used one, the bus stop at Wanda Plaza. This pick-up point can be found at the end of the seafood looking street located by the Wanda Plaza mall. On the bus ride back, you will stop briefly at Dalian’s Medical University, and that is where you will pay for the ride.

Speaking of payment, Dawai changed their payment procedure to only accepting wechat payment (you can no longer use cash), this means you will have to get a Chinese bank account, or set up a deal with fellow bus goers, they pay by wechat and you give them the cash.

Dalian’s main city area may be a good hour away, but the little town Lvshun is only a 10-15 minute bus ride away. Lvshun is a tiny area, but boasts a movie theatre and several malls so is a good idea for a relaxing afternoon if pressed for time and can’t afford to take the longer bus ride to Dalian city. Lvshun is also where you can find Port Arthur which is worth a look, and was being retouched when I went so should look great now.

**Dalian University of Foreign Languages Food Options**

Dawai may be isolated from the main city area, but you will not be lacking food-wise. With Haixian street (seafood street), just across the road from Dawai, offering a wide range of restaurants, cafes and general shops. Dawai’s campus also contains three canteen areas, each providing different food and drink options. My favourite canteen was the Zonghe one (综合), and I will recommend a few places worth checking out there –

- **Drinking Express (地铁)** located on the ground floor. The staff that work there are lovely and always happy to chat. Their brown rice milk cap tea is delicious, any of their milk cap (奶盖) teas are fantastic.

- Located next door to the Drinking Express is a little stall that sells frozen yogurt, absolutely delicious and if you are there for the summer semester like I was, absolutely necessary. They also sell a delicious warm mung bean milk that’s worth getting.

- **Gomax** – located by an entranceway on the ground floor, they offer delicious drinks. My two favourites were the caramel latte, and salted green tea latte.

- On the second floor located to your right as you climb the stairs is a food stall that sells egg wrapped rice rolls (with a range of different flavours, fried pork, mushroom, spicy, and so on), and fried savoury pancakes with three fillings of your choice and meat. Both are absolutely delicious and very filling.

- On the third floor, there is a stall on the right as you go up the stairs, that is choose your own stir-fry. Wide range of ingredients to choose from, and you can choose how spicy you want the dish, really yummy.

**Socialisation**

In most Chinese universities exchange students mostly mingle with fellow exchange students, as there isn’t much chance for interaction with local students. At Dawai I had no classes with local students, but I still had a great deal of interaction with the local students, and this was due to our shared interest.

Dawai is the university for those wanting to study a foreign language, for both international and local students. I wanted to study Chinese, and a good portion of Chinese students wanted to study English, this meant the start of a fantastic mutually benefiting friendship. I became good friends with several Chinese students studying English, and we were always eager and happy to help each other. I
still regularly keep contact with them, and have them to thank for helping advance my Chinese skills and my English, their English questions are intense, so keeps me on my toes. These friendships with the local students develop very easily, in fact you are likely to approached by students wanting to improve their English as you walk around campus, involving yourself in events such as English Corner will also put you out there. Also, it is worth asking Dawai’s administration staff to give your contacts to Chinese students, or you may find they have Chinese students’ contacts already available for you to contact. Apart from the many chances to forge friendships with local students, there is also of course fellow exchange students, who come from all over the world. They just like you, want to forge connections and take in different cultures, and no one understands your situation better and can provide more support than the student who is also going through the same thing.

Living Accommodation-
Dawai offers student dormitories, and while you can live outside campus, due to Dawai’s isolation from the main city area, it is recommended you live in the offered dorms. There are several student dormitories, and all seem to be quite nice. There are two room options:

- A shared bedroom with another person, that connects to a shared bathroom and living room, kitchen area with another two people located in the other bedroom (four people overall).
- Single room – much more expensive, but if you enjoy your own space than the cost is worth it. The room comes with a single bed, desk, chair, drawers, cupboards, television and your own private bathroom.

I choose the single room option, and while pricey I believe it was worth the peace of mind, as I’m a particularly messy person and I didn’t want to trouble another person with that. On that note though, Dawai’s dorm staff do perform checks on the state of your room (often with no warning beforehand) and your room number will be placed up on the whiteboard of shame if it isn’t in a satisfactory state. After my room’s second time on the whiteboard, it become a medal of sorts, and there are no consequences to having a messy room, apart from the ‘shame.’

To help with maintaining a clean environment, the dorm staff provide fresh sheets every week, but you have to go collect them from the dorm staff’s office to get them.

Internet –
I’m the worst person to be explaining the internet situation at Dawai, as I spent a whole semester there, yet I still don’t understand it, but here I go anyway. When you first arrive at Dawai, you aren’t immediately given a student ID card, and this means to log on to Dawai’s internet you need to get a password and username from the dorm office, which is located on the ground floor (known as first floor in China) of student dormitory building three. This password and username will last you a month (if I remember correctly) and contains 7G for only 20 yuan, if you are like me however, and uses it up before the end of the month, you can easily get another load of internet from the internet man. The internet speed isn’t bad, you can watch shows on it without buffering.

When you finally receive a student ID, is when the internet situation became too complicated for me. With the student ID your internet username and password is now locked in, and to top up your internet account you have to give money to machines located on the other side of campus (they will provide details as to where when you receive the ID card, and classmates will know). It doesn’t matter how much money you put in to top up your internet, your internet account can only hold 20 yuan’s worth of internet (7G) at a time, and only when your 7G runs out can you add 7G more. This process is confusing as if you use up the 7G before the month it’s expected to last runs out, then topping up your internet involves more steps, than if you lasted the whole month.
I never seemed to grasp the how-to-steps and would often turn to the internet man for help, who while most likely judging me for my inability to use technology, did always help me. So if you are in doubt turn to him, but given I seemed to be the only one not understanding how to internet, you should be fine and understand everything perfectly.

Dalian City-

Recommended sights -
Just like its multi-history background, Dalian offers a wide range of diverse sights, from beaches, old Russian buildings, modern high rises and a fake Venice street, and a dumpling museum there is plenty to see and so.

A few of the beaches to see –
- If you enter into Dalian’s Medical University (10 minute walk from Dawai) and walk through it, you will find a small private beach area with a nice view (first photo).
- Xinghai beach, is a man-made one, but is very beautiful. The area around it is also worth a look, and has a small amusement park located near it (second photo).

Russian influence –
- Dalian’s Zhongshan Square is definitely worth a look, like Dunedin’s Octagon, it’s surrounded by beautiful old buildings. The gorgeous Russian buildings now mostly house banks, so if you want to feel fancy while withdrawing money that is the place to be (first photo).
- Russian street – located a short walk away from Zhongshan square, this street also contains old Russian architecture. Also on this street are vendors, all basically selling the same things – cigarettes and stereotypical Russian things, so expect to be hollered at a little. The buildings on this street are mostly empty and sadly crumbling away a little, I think there are plans to demolish some of them soon, so try and see them while you still can (second photo).
Modern buildings, malls and such-
Dalian, like any Chinese city contains more malls than it needs, each fancier than the last, but I’ll only recommend one.

- Wanda Plaza, located between Dawai and the main city area, so it is only a 30-40 minute bus ride away. Contains a fancy movie theatre, lots of restaurants, cafes and cute stores. The street next to it, is also worth a look, containing black sesame waffle selling stores, options spicy chicken fillets, lots of seafood and adorable themed cafes.

The second photo shows one of these cute cafés, called Time Library Café, and not only has cute looks, but also delicious food.

Fake Venice street –
Supposedly Dalian pumped a lot of money into making this street, with its beautiful canal and buildings, which is surprising considering how empty it is. It’s a gorgeous area, yet most of the buildings are empty and seems like a waste of money. Really fun to go around in though, and great photo taking to be had, be wary of accidentally appearing in wedding photos though as it is a popular place to have them taken. Second photo is taken of a cute café Momi Café close to Venice street, with delicious drinks and food, and super cute stationary.
**Dalian's dumpling museum** - located near Dalian’s fake Venice street and offers a really informative and yummy tour of dumplings in Chinese history. Costing only 58 yuan, with the chance to make dumplings at the end, this tour is a great way to spend 1 to 2 hours. Chinese address is 辽宁省大连市中山区东港商务区东方威尼斯水城 B31 栋港东二街与港浦路交叉口. At the end of the museum tour you will be lead to a cute souvenir store, where you could choose to buy a giant broccoli soft toy, or even a potato.

**Dalian Weather** –
Dalian in the winter is freezing, and its location close to the sea means that a windbreaker is needed to combat the harsh wind. I arrived in Dalian for the summer semester, and I still needed to wear a puffer jacket for several weeks till the heat kicked in. Even when the heat arrived though, there would still be the odd damp mist day that required more than one layer.

**Dalian People** –
I didn’t meet anyone who didn’t make me feel welcomed, and wasn’t happy to offer help to the lost foreigner. Also, due to Dalian’s past history and its popular destination for tourists, being a foreigner there doesn’t attract stares and requests for photos, so quite the relaxing environment to study and travel around in.

**Travel Outside of Dalian** –

**Harbin** –
Another Chinese city that has deep connections with Russia, Harbin is a gorgeous small city, filled to the brim with Russian flavoured history. I arrived in China earlier enough that Harbin’s International Ice and Snow Festival was still on, and from Dalian I travelled to Harbin, only a four hour train ride (I recommended that you download Ctrip on your phone as allows you to book train, plane, and hotels very easily). I loved my 6 days in Harbin, taking in the festival and the beautiful city’s scenery, and would definitely recommend it to others.
Jinan –
I was only in Jinan for a three day trip, but it proved to be a lovely city. Jinan, the city of hot springs, contained many beautiful sights, and I would have loved to spend longer there.

Tianjin –
Located 30 minutes from Beijing, Tianjin seems to be neglected by tourists due to its famous neighbour, in my opinion though Tianjin is more enjoyable and beautiful than Beijing. My hotel was located close to Tianjin’s Hai river, and walking along the river and taking in the sights was lovely. Located over this same river is Tianjin Eye, a 120 meter Ferris wheel, and near to it is Dabei Buddhist Monastery (originally built in the Ming Dynasty). Tianjin also contains homages to Western history, my personal favourite being the Italian Style Street, that in its beautiful buildings offers a wide range of Chinese and European food and cute stores. Although Tianjin’s Wudadao Historical Culture Tourism Area is also beautiful.

Yangshuo-
Is a beautiful little city, that offers amazing scenery, with very uniquely shaped mountains. With a wide range of things to experience there, from haggling over pretty scarves to experiencing cormorant fishing, definitely worth a trip.
Guilin –
Located close to Yangshuo, Guilin’s pretty scenery is more well-known than Yangshuo’s but both offer equally amazing views. If you have to choose one though, I’d recommend Yangshuo as seemed to show more culture.

Pingan -
A small rural village, this gorgeous area is unlikely to remain small for long, as tourist interest has perked up and already multi-storey hotels are being built there to both draw more in and keep up with demand. Pingan is growing in popularity due to its beautiful scenery of the rice terraces, and the look of the village, houses nestled on hills.
Guangzhou –
China’s third largest city, Guangzhou first appears to be very modern looking city, but scattered throughout the city are beautiful spots of history. Cantonese is spoken in Guangzhou, but most people can speak Mandarin as well so can still practise your Chinese there.

I hope that somewhere in this exchange report there is something helpful, that makes you think Dalian University of Foreign Languages is the right choice for you, as it certainly was for me.

All the best for your future exchange!