

## My Experience in China.

When I first revealed to friends and family that I was planning on studying in China for a year, I was met with shocked faces and many questions. It's not everyday you hear of someone moving to China, however for me it made it more enticing. An adventure untravelled by most, it excited me. It reminded me of a poem I had studied in secondary school written by Robert Frost "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-, I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference." Nevertheless it also terrified me, how was I going to manage? I had never lived away from home before, and my first taste of independence was going to take place on the other side of the world.

I managed, but not without challenges. Arriving in Beijing airport, sluggish and jet lagged but my tummy full of butterflies. I clutched to my passport like my life depended on it. Scanning my bag and belongings making sure I had everything especially all my important documents. At the airport we were greeted by two "buddies" arranged by the University. Our buddies helped us gather our things and got us to our hotel safe and sound. I cannot thank the buddies enough for all the help they gave from the early hours of the morning to the late hours of night for the first five months of moving to China. We could not have done it without them. Their kindnesses and patience did not go unrecognised.



Living in Beijing was completely and utterly different to the life I was use to, in a small suburban town. Skyscrapers galore! Lots of cars, all shapes and sizes, and lots and lots of people! I quickly ditched my purse and adapted to paying for everything by phone using Chinese Apps such as We Chat (similar to WhatsApp but better, think Revolut and WhatsApp combined). I swapped out my knife and fork for chopsticks and opted for a glass of hot water instead of cold. It was definitely all a learning curve but it all soon became very natural. Studying Chinese in China really did push me to speak more and have more confidence. I struggled with it at the beginning, the learning doesn't end in the classroom, simple day to day tasks required that bit more focus. One thing I preferred in China to Ireland was the public transport, it was very cheap, easy to use and very frequent. We were able to visit a majority of the historic sites in Beijing via the metro. One of my favorite places to visit in Beijing was Summer Palace. On a sunny day, this place was paradise. You could take a scenic walk, small hike, you could even take a boat out onto the lake which brought you to the temple.



The University organized many trips for all of its International students. This was great experience as we could make friends with people from all over the world. My favourite trip was when we embarked on climbing The Great Wall of China. This was an incredible experience, one I will never forget. It was an extremely hot day, so a 2l bottle of water was essential, it was the most challenging and rewarding thing I have ever done, and probably will over do. Fun fact, I had full bars on the Great Wall, even had 4g data!!.



Initially I found it difficult to engage with the Chinese students as the University kept the International students separated. When the weather changed, and Beijing became much colder it was difficult to socialise. Luckily my friend came across dance classes, this is where I got to meet the most friendliest girls. The classes were in Chinese, which was tough in beginning as that was not the

vocab being covered in class. It was a great break from my studies, I was able to get my exercise in, make new friends, improve my Chinese and have so much fun while doing it. The group was so welcoming and kind my confidence grew threefold. I was invited to join the University's Dance crew, Aero Dance Crew. Our Dance Crew performed as special guests at the University's talent competition. This was so much fun, the friendships I made that night I will cherish forever.



After a tough few weeks of studying for our end of Semester exams, my friends and I started to plan our trips around China. Our first trip was to Harbin, we went with a tour group and this was the best decision we ever made. Our tour guide made our trip so much fun, she made the trip stress free, we knew we were in good hands with her. We took a sleeper train from Beijing to Harbin, where there were bunk bed style cabins. This was a new experience for me, it's a much cheaper travel option, however I wouldn't do it again. The first day in Harbin we visited a white tiger sanctuary, this was equally terrifying as it was fun. That night we went to Harbin's Ice and Snow festival, the highlight of the entire trip. It was an Ice wonderland, it felt like I had stepped into Disney's movie Frozen. There were so many amazing ice sculptures as well as fun slides. Despite the cold (it was -40 degrees) we had an amazing time here. It was truly breathtaking. I also took a trip to Shanghai and I got to meet up with classmates who were studying in Shanghai. We went up the Pearl Tower and walked along the glass floor which was 259 meters high and gave a 360 degree view of the Huangpu River. Although my trip to China was cut short, it was jam packed with trips and new experiences that I didn't even mention. There were lows as well as many highs, but I believe I have come out a better person from this experience. I feel very fortunate and grateful for my time in China. "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-, I took the one less travelled by, And that has made all the difference." Robert Frost.

