

My Experience in China

A huge advantage of learning a second language is that it will open you up with many new opportunities, whether it is meeting new friends, or just simply being able to see the world from a different perspective. My year abroad to China has surely opened my mind and ways of thinking. It was a once during a lifetime opportunity that I do not wish to possess it done else wise.

It almost seems as if it had been just yesterday I just landed in Beijing, China. Beijing Normal University, my host university that I have chosen myself warmly greeted us at the airport and kindly brought us back to the university campus. Followed by was a week full of events and procedures to help us settle in with life on campus.

Like any other student would be, I was terrified on my first day of the class commencing, especially being an exchange student so far away from home. I did not know anyone around me but it sure did not take too long till we all blend in as a whole. Our class was a well-mixed group of students from all around the world. We spend most days together, from the moment the class started till late at night, from recalling little things that have happened during the day to sharing stories from our hometown. Looking back now, little did I know I were to meet the foremost amazing and loving group of friends that I bound to cherish for the rest of my life.



The Chinese Department of Beijing Normal University organizes a cultural exchange event every year, bringing the international students and first-year master students together to another city to conduct a cultural inspection. This year the chosen city happens to be Anhui.

Anhui is known for its making of Xuan paper and Hui ink, and throughout our stay in Anhui, we had the opportunity to visit the factory and watch the process of them in the making. We also went for a hike up Huangshan, there's a famous Chinese saying, 'the landscape of the Five Great Mountains tops those elsewhere, and the landscape of Huangshan tops that of the Five Great Mountains.' The Five Great Mountains being Mount Tai, Mount Heng, Mount Hua, Mount Heng, and Mount Song, but nevertheless, Huangshan has a combination of all its beauty.



We also paid a visit to a local secondary school to experience what it would be like to be a student there. While being there we also took time to answer any questions they may have, whether it's about our culture, academic choices etc, as well as sharing our journey of learning Chinese as a second language.



For the duration of my stay in China, I was lucky enough to be able to travel around, exploring different parts of China, getting to experience its diverse culture and magnificent landscape. I visited Xian, Anhui, Tianjin, Nanjing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Changsha, Hangzhou, Chengde, Luoyang and of course Beijing, where I was based.

One of the most memorable experiences of mine would be traveling across cities by high-speed trains with a friend of mine. Like myself, she's also a student from Maynooth University, and having her to share this experience with was more than anything I could have ever asked for.

Of being the most breath-taking view, I would sure give it to the night view of Hongyadong, located in the downtown of Chongqing by the riverside of Jialing River.



Having visited many cities but my favourite city has still got to be Beijing. As the capital of China, Beijing has a combination of ancient and modern architecture all in one, without any sense of violation. Every step you take you can almost feel the richness of its culture as if it is calling for you. The Forbidden City is located in the centre of the central axis of Beijing. It is the imperial palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It is also the world's largest and most well-preserved palace-shaped wooden structure with nearly over 600 years of history.

A place I would recommend going to in Beijing would be Guixiaoshi. It is a place that very few people would have known of, it locates just on top of Beijing Xishan National Forest Park. Visitors can oversee the whole of Beijing city, as well as the Beijing TV Tower, Summer Palace, Xiangshan Botanical Garden, and so on from the top of Guixiaoshi.

My friends and I decided to climb up to the top of Guixiaoshi late at night once. The journey up was sure an experience to have to tell others later on in years down the road.

With a clear sky, we got to stargaze while admiring Beijing city as a whole.



Being away from friends and family for half a year and living alone in a completely different country has taught me a lot of things. While abroad, there were times where I have missed home and wished that time would pass quickly. As in now, being back home, I turned out to be missing the life that I once had in China more and more each day. This is something I would never have imagined, but it also gives me a lesson on the importance to 'focus on the present moment and stay in the moment'.

We thought we were just having fun, but we did not realize we were making memories also. Here now, to mark the end of this chapter, I can say for sure that the duration of my time abroad was the best time of my life and will always be a part of me.

~ Megan Phuong Kieu Luu