Exchange report-Tsinghua University

INTRODUCTION

I am a fourth year business student majoring in Finance and Human Resource Management. This past spring, I had the opportunity to study abroad for one semester at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. It was an amazing experience; not only that I enhanced my knowledge about the Chinese culture, I was also able to work along with students from across the globe and view the field of business from an international perspective. Beijing has always been a city that I wanted to explore because of its fascinating history and this was the main reason why I chose Tsinghua University. Its well-known academic reputation also attracted me as it is the top ranked university in China. This exchange semester was an eye-opening adventure and I highly recommend you to apply and go study abroad as there’s no better opportunity than this to enhance yourself academically and experience the essence of a different culture.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE YOU GO

I have also experienced the frustrating period when you are waiting anxiously on your official letter admission from your host university so you can start applying for your study visa. However, there should be no reason for you to overstress yourself. The official letter of admission will be sent about a month before the start of the academic semester (at your host university), and that will give you enough time to finishing up your visa applications. The admission package from Tsinghua University includes all information you’ll need about dorm application and campus directory explaining what you should do upon your arrival at the school. It does not matter whether you are going in the fall or the spring semester, warm
jackets and winter gear should be prepared to pack. It is also a good idea to pack your own medications, as drugs and medications in China can be substantially different and sometimes it is actually difficult to get what you really need from a local drugstore. If you are going in the spring semester, you would also need to pack some spring and summer clothes. However, I wouldn’t recommend you to pack your entire room with you, because all the things you’d need to settle down can be purchased cheaply from this student shopping mall inside Tsinghua campus. When you have arrived at Beijing International Airport, the best way to get to Tsinghua would be by Taxi. It is a 30-45mins ride costing around 150 RMB (less than $30 dollars). If you do not speak any of the language, it is a good idea to prepare a paper with Tsinghua’s address in Mandarin so you can just show it to the cab driver. I would also recommend you to have some Chinese currency with you because most transactions done in China are still with cash.

After you have settled down, you can open up an account at Bank of China or ICBC, and deposit the cash you brought with you or receiving wireless transfers from home.

ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION

Just before the start of our classes, you’ll have an International Student Orientation. Important regulations and helpful advice are given by the school’s administration. It is also the perfect opportunity to mingle and meet your fellow exchange student. You’ll also meet your buddies from Tsinghua SEM, they are there to help you adapt and answer any questions you have about life in Beijing. Before your classes start, I highly recommend you to purchase a bike; it will be a necessity for you to get around in the campus. The student shopping center in Tsinghua is
located in the C Building, in the center of all student dorms. There you can find food and pretty much everything you need to settle down.

ACADEMIC INFORMATION

The teaching environment at SEM is pretty similar to SFU. All the courses I took are in lecture styles, but there are no tutorials. So if you want to meet some local students, you’ll only have the chance in class or during the breaks. The gradings of the classes are mainly assignment, midterm and final exam based. As long as you study the materials and participate during lectures, you should be as competitive as the Tsinghua students!
FOOD AND ACCOMMODATION

I highly recommend you to live on campus, as you will have a greater chance to meet and socialize with all the other students that are there. There are cons about living in dorms such as no visitors during the night and limited hours of hot water during day and night; but overall, I think the benefits outweigh the costs. A single dorm costs 80 RMB/day so around 2400RMB a month. This is actually cheaper than sharing an apartment outside of the campus because normally renting a one bedroom flat will cost you around 3500RMB. Normally during the day, I would have lunch and breakfast at varies canteens located near the student dorms. They serve different Chinese cuisines that orient from different regions of China. A full meal usually cost 20 RMB or less. There are also “Western” foods that are prepared at some canteen, but I don’t think it’s the best choice to go with at Tsinghua’s canteens. To shop for food and everything you need you can either go to Lotus Mall or BHG, both are located in the famous student district Wudaokou. It is a 5mins bus ride from Tsinghua University. You can also find countless Chinese and fast food restaurants in this area, KFC and McDonald’s are both open 24/7. They are also places for students to hang out at night; some recommendations would be La Bamba, Helens, The Bridge Café, Lush and Pyro Pizza.
TRAVEL

Beijing is a perfect starting point to travel around China. Famous destinations in Beijing include the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, Beihai Park, the Summer Palace, Wangfujing, the Hutong areas, the Fragrant Hills, the Lama Temple, the Olympic Stadium, the Temple of Heaven, the Great Wall, the Longqing Ice City (only open in winter), the Ming tombs and the Sacred Way. Once you are done with all the sights, you can travel to many major cities cheaply by speedtrain: You can go to Xi’an and visit the Terracotta Warriors. You can have a week-long trip to Shanghai, Nanjing and Hangzhou. You’ll experience the prosperity of China in Shanghai, understand the formation of China in Nanjing, and spend a relaxing day at Hangzhou’s West Lake, known in China as the “Heaven on Earth”. Another city you can go is Qingdao, you can lay on the beach and enjoy the famous Chinese beer Tsingtao with a blend of German taste.
MY REFLECTION AND WORDS OF WISDOM

This exchange term is one of my most memorable experiences so far in my life. I got an in-depth view of myself from how I dealt with issues in a different environment. I see my strengths and weaknesses and most importantly this experience improved my problem solving skills in regards to every aspect. I experienced cultural shocks but was able to overcome those with other students who were facing similar struggles. So I highly advice you to get out from your comfort zone, interact with the people around you and look positive to the environment which can be completely different from what you were in before. Also, you should definitely practice the skill of bargaining when you are shopping in Beijing. Normally you just need to pay half of the original price of the stuff that you want to buy. I want to remind you that safety abroad is always a top priority. You should not take the risk at things that you don’t feel confident or comfortable in doing. Of course you should step out and embrace the different culture, but I find being risk averse while abroad very beneficial. Stay open minded and maintain positive attitude, you will for sure have an amazing experience abroad!