Exchange Experiences

I am a fourth year business student concentrating on Finance and Marketing. I went to Tsinghua University in Beijing China last fall semester. Tsinghua University is considered to be the best university in China where I was born and raised. This university has been established for 97 years and the Economics and Management (SEM) department is consistently ranked first among business schools in China. I am very interested in its professional and academic programs which are considered the premier training ground for China's business leaders. I’ve heard a lot about this school since I was young. It was once my dream to study there someday. As a SFU business student, I feel extremely exciting and lucky to have this great opportunity to accomplish my childhood dream. Below are some personal experiences and useful information for future exchange students.

The recommended airline to China is Air Canada in my opinion, 10.5 flight hours is not easy. Luckily Air Canada has its own screen in front of each seat, so you won’t get bored and tired when there’re a huge selection of movies and games. After your arrival, take an hour taxi to your host university that only costs $20. During your stay, there’re various options of ground transportation such as subway (30 cents/time), bus (15 cents), and taxi. If you would like to travel around, which I believe most exchange students do, I suggest you join a local tour group which will be cheaper, safer, and easier.

Upon your arrival, there will be soon an orientation. Although during the time I went there, there was swine flu outbreak, so Tsinghua decided to cancel the orientation. However, from what I’ve heard from the previous students, it’s a great opportunity to meet the local students and get familiar with the campus, so I suggest everyone attend it. You will be issued a student card by the university in the beginning of the semester. There’re so many advantages of using a student card. For example, you can get discount in some restaurants, some famous place of interest, bus tickets, and the movie tickets will be half price.
There’re several options of international student dorm in Tsinghua. I chose the single room which costs around $12 per day. It’s a small room with basic furniture and its own bathroom. There are phone and internet access each room. If you want to make international calls, you can buy a $10 phone card and the internet is $15 per month. Be aware of the hot water supply. There’re three times (morning, afternoon, and evening) per day that Tsinghua supplies hot water for shower. Room service is available, every morning there’re housekeepers come to clean your room, change your sheets etc. If you feel lazy to go out to eat, you can call delivery. There is variety of choices including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or Western food. The student supermarket also does free delivery of groceries and other stuffs.

The courses in Tsinghua are instructed in both Chinese and English. I’ve chosen four courses all taught in English. The professors I had are either famous in business field in China, or had overseas teaching experiences. Overall, they’re knowledgeable, friendly, and responsible. The registration procedure is easy, just like what we did in SFU, or even easier. The manner and quality of instruction are also similar from SFU. Since the campus is quite big and we cannot drive there, I suggest each student buy a bicycle. It’s not only a convenient way to class, but also a way of exercise.

The weather in Beijing is worse comparing with Vancouver. Although it doesn’t have lots of rain, it’s very cold in winter with lots of snow and sand. Luckily, each student dorm has heater, so staying inside is very warm. I recommend each student to take warm clothes if it’s winter and some body lotion and hand cream. I felt very dry when I was in Beijing. More importantly, please remember that you cannot drink the tap water in China, it’s not clean.

When you study at Tsinghua University, you will find that it’s hard to understand at first, especially when you encounter a math problem. Most Chinese students have very strong math background even their major is not science. The average exam score is often above 85 which is hard to believe. It’s not because the exam was easy, but because the local students really study hard for the exam, and I must say they are really smart. So if you are below the average, it is normal. I found no exchange student beat the local students in
exams. But there’s no need to worry, you will be fine soon. I found that most exchange students start to feel better after 3 or 4 classes. When you have problems about the courses, don’t hesitate to ask professors and local students, they speak fluent English. And they are very friendly to help you. As long as you study all of the notes and attend class all the time, you will pass the course easily.

Tsinghua University provides many interesting activities for exchange students. I would recommend you to attend them as many as possible. It is really fun, and you will have the chance to meet other foreign students from different countries and learn other languages and cultures. Furthermore, Tsinghua also has many clubs such as taekwondo, yoga, dance, speech and so on. If you have spare time, you can join one; you will learn many things and make more local friends. Overall, you will never get bored in Tsinghua, many students decided to extend their stay to experience more.

Finally, I believe being an exchange student enriched my life. Personally, since I was born in China, I would love to go back to experience the campus life in my motherland. I felt like home and learnt more about my own culture. Academically, Tsinghua University offers many business courses that are best qualified in Asia. I believe I will be energized by its exciting learning environment. For my career pursuits, the experience inspires me to adopt a new attitude towards the world, and opens my eyes to the possibilities out there. This life-long experience taught me how to survive and succeed without depending on others. I become more independent and confident which is a valuable experience that benefits my whole life.
This photo was taken in Yangzhou Shouxihu (Slender West Lake).

This photo was taken inside of Beijing National Stadium (Bird's Nest/Olympic Stadium).
This photo was taken in a famous Beijing restaurant called Fangshan (Imperial) where used to be Dowager Cixi’s kitchen during Qing Dynasty.

This photo was taken at Beijing Tiananmen Square during the 60th National Holiday.