

Studying at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics

As a third year Economics and Business Economics Student at the ESE I did an exchange in Shanghai, China at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (SUFU) in the fall semester (block 1 & 2) of 2015. I left on September 1st and came back in the Netherlands on January 8th.

Preparation

After getting accepted by ESE for the exchange, it took quite a while before receiving an email from SUFE. In this email it said I had to fill in an online form with personal information. Together with some other documents, like a copy of my passport, this had to be sent to SUFE. Then, after some more weeks, I received the documents needed for the visa application. The visa application is pretty straightforward. All the necessary information is given in the documents and on the website. One week after application at the visa centre in The Hague, I received my visa.

Make sure you get the necessary vaccines before leaving for China. You can make an appointment at the GGD or other providers, and they will tell you which vaccines you need. Make sure you do this some months before departure.

I did not apply for the accommodation at the campus provided by SUFE. It is pretty basic, and I wanted to live in the centre during my exchange in Shanghai. If you do want to live on campus, make sure you register immediately, as they are quickly rented.

I did not speak a single word of Chinese upon arrival. This sometimes gave some difficulties, but with some effort it is always possible to get around, and this won't be a big problem.

A lot of websites in China are blocked. To still be able to use sites as Facebook and Google, a VPN is necessary. I recommend ExpressVPN, which is paid, but offers fast and easy connections.

In choosing courses, try to keep your Friday free. This enables you to travel during the weekends. The first week in Shanghai, you can still change the courses if you are not satisfied.

Also make sure you have the right insurance before going to China.

Upon Arrival

When arriving at the airport, you can take a taxi to your hotel. Make sure you take an official taxi that uses the meter, and bring the Chinese address of your hotel, as the driver won't speak English. Taking the metro or maglev train is also easy.

I booked a hotel for the first week. In this week, I looked for an apartment in the centre. I used the website www.smartshanghai.com. There are a lot of rooms on here. It may be a bit stressful the first days, but make sure you find a nice room, so that you can have a great time during your exchange. Room prices are a bit expensive in Shanghai, and are still rising, but living close to the centre was definitely worth it for me.

To get around in such a big city may be a bit hard the first few days. Make sure you download some good apps, such as the metro app and a map of the city. I used Ulmon Shanghai for this, which can also be used offline, and is really helpful.

The University provides a buddy program, so you are coupled with a student from SUFE. The buddy can help you with a lot of practical stuff in the first days after arriving, and was really helpful to me.

After a week, the exchange program started with an introduction day. The next day, lessons started.

Courses

I took three economic courses.

Organizational behaviour accounted for 2 credits, which is 3 ECTS. The course was pretty interesting, but the professor was difficult to understand and it was not that hard. Management accounted for 3 credits, 4.5 ECTS. It was taught by a European professor, but gave some nice insights in the Chinese way of managing.

Intermediate Macroeconomics also accounted for 3 credits, 4.5 ECTS. In the course, a Chinese view was given on macroeconomic topics, so I found it pretty interesting.

All economic courses were not that hard. After doing some effort, it won't be a problem to pass the exams. I found it interesting to get education from a Chinese perspective, and to see how the Chinese educational system is different from our European system.

I also took 3 Chinese courses: Foundational Chinese listening and speaking (6 credits, 9 ECTS), Foundational Chinese Reading and Writing (3 credits 4.5 ECTS), and Foundational Chinese Character and Culture (3 credits, 4.5 ECTS).

I had Chinese class every Monday till Thursday in the evening from 6 till 8:30. They were a lot of fun and also gave great insight in the Chinese culture. To learn the language is quite hard, so don't expect to be able to speak fluently after the semester.

Finances

To book a room on campus is not that expensive. However, room prices in the centre can be really expensive. The food in China is very cheap. In restaurants and in the campus canteen you can have a meal for 1.50 euro. Also, public transport is pretty cheap. A 15 minutes metro ride from centre to university costs around 50 eurocents.

- Rent: 450 euro a month
- Food and drinks: 200 euro a month
- Metro: 35 euro a month
- Phone costs: 10 euro a month
- Gym: 25 euro a month
- Plane ticket both ways: 550 euro
- Visa: 90 euro
- Bicycle: 30 euro

Daily life

Life in Shanghai is simply amazing. It is a huge, wonderful city, in which they really have everything you could ever want. There is so much to do, that even after four months, there are still places to explore. I found the food amazing, and everywhere you look they sell food. If you eat just outside the city centre, it is really cheap. Inside the centre, it is not much more expensive. There are also a lot of fancy places too, however. If you like shopping, Shanghai is also the place to be. Imported products sell at a premium price, and are therefore often more expensive than in Europe. At the famous 'fake market' and 'tailor market' you can get all the products you want.

Infrastructure is in most places in China pretty good. In Shanghai, there is a huge metro connection, which is also really cheap. From city centre to university takes you around 40 minutes. I also bought a bicycle to get around, which is the best way to see the city in my opinion. There are broad scooter and bicycles paths next to most roads, and it is pretty exiting to ride through Shanghai. Taking a taxi is also a really good option. 15 minutes costs you around 4 euros, and there are taxis everywhere.

The nightlife in Shanghai is really amazing. The clubs are really nice, and there are a lot of them. For foreigners, in most places entry and drinks are free.

The people in China are really nice. At first, they may seem a bit shy, but once you start talking with them, they almost all smile, take pictures with you and are really friendly.

The Asian culture is really different from what we are used to. Sometimes this can be hard, but my exchange offered me great insights in their way of living.

During my stay, I travelled as much as possible inside China, as I only had a single-entry visa. There is enough to see inside China, and although it can be really crowded, most places are really special and beautiful. The trains are really good in China, and help you to get fast to your destination. My trips included Guilin & Yangshou, Xi'an, Zhangjiajie, Beijing, Suzhou & Hangzhou, and the yellow mountain.

Concluding, I can say I had a wonderful time during my exchange. I had amazing experiences, met new friends, saw amazing places, and learned a lot about cultures and the foundation of a new language. I can really recommend applying for SUFE for an exchange.