

Young Australian Ambassador's Delegation: Life Hacks for Future Participants.

Written by Joshua O'Shannassy in November of 2013. Please feel free to update as needed over time.

The information below was accurate at the time of writing and is only a guide based on my personal experiences.

- Visa:
 - It is actually a fairly painless process (particularly compared to the old system.)
 - This website is your friend:
 - http://www.visaforchina.org/MEL_EN/
 - You will need to go to the office in St Kilda Rd once to hand in your forms and once to pick them up.
 - You do not need to get the medical examination unless you plan on extending your visa or paying for it to become a multi-entry visa. Visa changes can only be made once in China.
 - We required the 'F' visa which is also for business travellers. Unfortunately at the time it was only a single entry visa and for 150 days. It is possible to change the visa once you have arrived in China if you plan on travelling internationally, however, it will require the medical checklist.
 - You DO NOT require proof of transport out of the China in order to get a visa.
- Flights:
 - Following on from the last point, in my opinion it is best to leave booking a returning flight until arriving to China.
 - Given the Visa restrictions, it is best to visit surrounding areas, such as Hong Kong, Korea, Japan or Mongolia, either before or after you leave China.
 - Use a combination of websites such as skyscanner (fantastic as you can search from country to country, rather than airport to airport), Hipmunk and Kayak.
 - You will also be able to find cheaper flights by using a hub airport (Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong etc.) as a 'middle-man' to find and book your flights. Note that this can get messy if flights get delayed or cancelled so it is a good idea to spend a couple of days in the city. An example is, find a cheap ticket (often less than \$200 one-way) to Kuala Lumpur, then fly from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on another cheap ticket (usually under \$200).
 - If you haven't booked by yourself before or are happy to pay extra (often double, but with more reliable airlines) a travel agent may save you some stress.
- Length of stay:
 - There is always the possibility to extend your stay in either Tianjin or China in general (another reason to only book one-way).

- It is best to decide once you have been here for a while and got a taste of the day-to-day life. Personally, I wish I could stay longer to continue improving my Chinese (I have a training program in Vietnam I must go to.).
- YAAD:
 - In addition to the activities available to all international students at the university we have had the opportunity to help Chinese students at the English corner and give a presentation about Australia. Photography students have also had opportunities to enter contests and show their work to local students.
 - This year there were also two paid positions available to teach English at the university. Any student taking the opportunity will need to stay in China until the start of January. It is a great chance for experience, to help the local students and to gain a greater insight into what life as a Chinese student is like. Between the class hours, class planning and the occasional assessment (making and marking), it is quite time consuming and will affect the amount of study and/or free time you will have.
 - Each student in the Delegation will have an official position. Once you arrive in China, honestly, these positions will not be very important (although they will spruce up your resume). The President of the group will, however, be the point of contact between students and both RMIT and TNU so this position should be selected more carefully. It is best to select the best candidate after getting to know each other in Australia. Organisation skills and good communication skills are the most important attributes in the president.
- Chinese Language:
 - Ok. Chinese is not an easy language to learn, particularly at first. If you are a beginner at the language, 3 months is not enough time to be speaking with anything resembling fluency. If you have an aim to speak Chinese, be aware it is a long-term goal that must be continued in the future if you are only staying here for three months. If learning Chinese is your main motivation for this Scholarship, you should consider lengthening the time you are here studying.
 - You will not learn Chinese unless you work hard. This cannot be stressed enough. It is not a language you can pick up by simply being in the Country. Study hard! You will reap the rewards.
 - Now for the nice stuff, Chinese is not a frustrating language to learn. It has very simple grammar compared to most languages. Chinese characters and words also get exponentially easier to learn once you have a base. The more you know the easier it is to know more. Longer words are often composed of shorter words, which you may already know.
 - Consider doing a HSK test. These are standardised tests that are conducted and recognised around the world. There are 6 levels based on different quantities of (very practical) vocabulary.

Completing a HSK test expanded my vocabulary and gave me more incentive to study hard.

- Smart phone apps for China:
 - Skritter: Expensive but very good. You can test it for a week before paying a subscription (~\$17AUD a month).
 - Pleco: The best Chinese-English dictionary, all available offline. I also recommend paying for the add-on that allows you to draw a character and the definition will come up. This is handy for menus, signs and learning characters that you see when around out and about.
 - Chinese writer: A game that will help with your stroke order for characters.
 - Chinese: The icon is a red book with a star on it. Contains basic and useful phrases in Chinese. Have a good look before arriving in China.
- Travel in China:
 - Beijing:
 - You must stay at 365 inn!
 - The Great Wall:
 - I went to the Great Wall twice (one day visit and one camping trip), with Jinshanling the better of the two places. Highly recommended. Both places I went didn't have many tourists, which I have been told is a good thing. Avoid the very touristy spots if you want a relaxing day.
 - Shanghai:
 - Rock 'n' Wood Hostel is great.
 - Xi'an:
 - Ancient city hostel is great.
 - Other:
 - Pingyao and Qingdao (Go while it's warm, it has a beach) are two other recommended spots. If you are staying for winter the Harbin Ice festival is supposed to be good.
- Tianjin:
 - Unless the accommodation has changed, you will be staying in a hotel that is not particularly close to the centre of the city. Currently (November, 2013), it is mainly surrounded by empty buildings and constructions sites, which will be changing quite quickly. There is construction underway for a subway station nearby.
 - The staff at the hotel do not speak English. You will be living with other international students and your classes take place in the hotel. The rooms in the hotel are nice.
 - There are two basketball courts next to the hotel, which are a great opportunity for exercise and practising Chinese. There is also a Gym on the 4th floor of a building around 100m away.
 - We all got bikes. Mine was stolen in the first week (get a decent lock and lock it to a structure. Mine was stolen when I was eating approximately 3 meters away ☹). Some students use their bikes

every day. Second hand is better (less likely to be stolen, cheaper and apparently often more reliable.)

- There is a large complex with restaurants, shopping and supermarkets around 1.5km away. Emart is the largest supermarket. Dmart sells only imported goods (Cheese!!) and 'marketplace BHG' is a great supermarket stocking a mix of both Chinese and foreign products.
- Food:
 - I will not go into the local restaurants in the area, as they are in the process of relocating due to construction. There should be a lot of street food (didn't make any of us sick, however, after finding out about 'gutter oil' I was personally turned off.) and low cost restaurants within a couple of hundred metres. Find out what the people who have been there for longer are eating!
 - There is a large fruit market within a couple of hundred metres of the hotel. The entrance is not particularly noteworthy so ask staff or students for directions.
 - My favourites for home food cravings:
 - Dublin Irish Pub: Expensive treat. Burger is amazing (~\$11AUD). Pool and Foosball tables.
 - Alibaba's: Dingy little bar/restaurant with cheap western options and cheap beer. Ok food but a fun atmosphere. Foosball tables.
 - Japanese: Opposite the McDonald's at the Emart complex. Very good.
 - Chinese BBQs: You will see little portable coal barbeques pop up at night. The meat is decent quality and they are quite cheap. Chicken skewers are a winner.
- Weather:
 - It is hot for around the first month and a half. Shorts and t-shirt weather every day.
 - One day, that will change. And it will not change back. Towards the end of the 3 months it is cold. Puffy jacket cold. You can buy these in China.
 - It is unlikely to snow if you only stay the 3 months. Rain is quite rare here too.
 - Pollution can be quite heavy in Tianjin. Some days are blue skies and others you can only see a few hundred metres ahead. It won't have a big impact on the time you have in China.
- Almost anything you need you can get in Tianjin. Have a big shop at the Emart once you arrive and set yourself up. Don't bother packing for every possible scenario; there are pharmacies and clothes shops nearby.
- Tianjin Normal University:
 - The new campus is really nice. Our 'campus' is, as mentioned earlier, a fair bit more humble.

- The quality of Chinese teaching is very good, if you want to learn; you will learn. You will be put into a class based on your level before the first class.
- You will not find out about things until they are about to happen, which is an interesting cultural difference. It is not uncommon to find out about exams, meetings, additional classes or ceremonies until within hours of their commencement. Go with the flow.
- You will have one or two points of contact at TNU. We had Sarah Ding as ours, who has been very helpful and has made a huge effort to ensure our stay has flowed smoothly.

