

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

A: Student Information

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| VUW degree(s) | BA |
| Major(s) | Spanish and Chinese |
| Exchange Institution | Peking University, China |
| VUW Tri & Year of Exchange | Trimester 1, 2015 |

B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

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| Books | \$60.00 |
| Accommodation | \$3,500 |
| Return Airfare | \$1,300 |
| Local Transportation | \$20 per month |
| Meals | \$50 per week |
| Visa | \$140.00 |
| Health & Insurance | \$400 |
| Personal Spending | \$3000 |
| Communications (phone, etc.) | \$50 |
| Other fees (specify) | |
| What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected? | Accommodation was more expensive than anticipated. The options aren't huge and should you stay in university accommodation then you will have to stay in foreign students' accommodation which is more expensive. Food is incredibly, especially if you eat most of your meals at the university canteens. |

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

I ended up spending more than I thought but this is largely because I travelled around China more than I had anticipated.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

Because I was only there for one semester I just used a visa card with my NZ account. Many of my friends who were staying for longer opened Chinese bank accounts.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

China is cheap in general but do plan to not pay China prices when it comes to accommodation.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

Coffee was actually the same price as in New Zealand, if not more expensive. A can of coke would be maybe 50 cents.

C: Visas & Insurance **Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

Applying for a visa was not difficult at all and it only took 5 days for it to be processed. You need to wait until you have your acceptance letter from your exchange university and then you can apply at the Chinese embassy. It cost \$140 for a one semester visa.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

If you are applying for a one semester visa you will only have a single entry visa however if you wish to leave China during your time there it is easy to add entries to your visa through the Peking University visa office.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

You needed to have insurance but did not require you to have a certain type.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

I used Allianz and they were fine. I didn't have to use their services at all so cannot comment on how they are in an emergency etc.

D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

| Course Title | Language of Instruction | VUW course equivalent or elective | VUW points/credits value | Rating (1-5) | Comments |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|----------|
| VUW Trimester 1/YEAR | | | | | |
| Chinese Language | Chinese | Chinese Language | 60 | 4 | |
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| VUW Trimester 2/YEAR | | | | | |
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Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

There is a two day period where you must register. It is fairly easy so long as you have the right documents with you. There are a lot of different offices for international students so should you need help it can be difficult to determine where to find it.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

Enrollment in classes was easy because I was doing a set programme of solely Chinese language study so there were no electives within that.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

No as there is no choosing to be done.

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

I really enjoyed studying Chinese at Peking University. The learning experience was a lot more intensive and therefore a lot more rewarding. I found it a lot easier to engage with Chinese in that environment.

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

The teaching style is quite different to that of VUW. Teachers in China can have a very close relationship with their students and be friends to their students as well as teachers. Our teachers were all very invested in their jobs and therefore they expected a lot from you in return. I think I worked harder than I do at VUW but you could get away with doing as much or as little as you wanted to, depending on the results you want to get from your time there.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

As stated before there any options when it comes to this.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Do a little each day. I think regular study was way more effective for me than cramming when it came to tests.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

I actually never went into the library or used university computers. As for internet it can be a little tricky to come by and there is a bit of a process to setting up WiFi but once you've got it it's fine.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

I had already studied Chinese for two years prior to going and when I was there all I studied was Chinese and therefore I had survival Chinese to get by.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed in International Student Accommodation on campus.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

The accommodation was fairly new and very convenient in terms of getting to class but expensive.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I think initially going into the International Student accommodation is good because it allows you to meet other exchange students and settle in and it is so convenient. If I was staying for a year though I would definitely try to find a flat with Chinese students for my second semester.

How early can you move into accommodation?

As early as you wish to.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

There was one hot plate and one microwave for an entire floor of students to cook with so I didn't bother with cooking at all. There are heaps of canteens on campus that serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day. The food is pretty good and incredibly cheap. Otherwise there are lots of restaurants surrounding the campus as well.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

If you want to stay in the Global Village which is where most international students stay be sure to apply early.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

Because I lived in international student accommodation and took only Chinese language courses I found it really hard to meet Chinese students. All of my closest friends and the people who I spent the most time with were not Chinese. I would definitely recommend joining some clubs if you can in order to meet local students.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

It was fine. The adjustment wasn't huge because I was always surrounded by other international students.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

I think some cultural customs were a bit hard to adjust to. Coming from New Zealand Chinese people do a

lot of things that we would consider rude such as pushing in in a queue or spitting on the street. We in turn tend to do things that they would consider rude such as sitting at the wrong place at a dinner table. I think getting to know how to be polite within Chinese culture and learning to ignore things that we would normally find rude was definitely a challenge. I think you just have to remember that it's all an experience and that there isn't one right way for things to be done.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I loved the food. Chinese food is insanely good and eating is a huge part of the culture which I really loved. Because of its long history Chinese culture is rich and varied which is wonderful to see for someone coming from a young country like New Zealand.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

I mostly found Chinese people to be very kind and generous, especially when they discovered that you were there to learn the language and enjoy their culture. The university staff aren't the most helpful to be honest. It's not really the Chinese way to go out of your way to help someone as part of your job. If you need help within the university the chances are you are really going to have to fight for it. Other students are great because they are all in the same boat as you.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

I think generally it should be fine. I don't think people would go out of their way to make anyone's life difficult and I think mostly you can expect to be accepted and treated like anyone else.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

There will always be the people who try to play you because you are foreign and obviously not fluent in the language. Do keep an eye out when it comes to being scammed and be savvy.

G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

Peking has so many student clubs that you can join. They have a club weekend at the beginning of the semester where each club has a stall and you can go around and join whichever club you wish to. I would highly recommend joining clubs as it is one of the few ways to meet Chinese students as it is highly likely that you will be living with and have classes with only other international students.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Definitely take the time to explore Beijing as it is a city with so many different aspects to discover. Pick a district and head there to explore for the day. Alternatively plan ahead a little and jump on a fast train to explore other cities in China.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

Many students had under the table English teaching/tutoring jobs and/or internships. Both of which are relatively easy to come across once you are there. Just ask through the international students networks.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There are plenty of internship opportunities. If you take the initiative of approaching businesses, organizations, or embassies you will be sure to land something, especially as a native English speaker.

5 things to take to your host country or region

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| 1 | Any personal products that you like to use such as deodorant and facial cleanser. |
| 2 | If you happen to be arriving in winter take your warmest clothes as it gets pretty freezing in Beijing. |
| 3 | Whittakers! |
| 4 | Face masks for the pollution. |
| 5 | Any medication that you may need. The Chinese health system is not the easiest or most pleasant to navigate. |

5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

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| 1 | Definitely make sure that you download Wechat as it is the most popular way to communicate in China. |
| 2 | Go with an open mind as it is almost guaranteed that things will not work out as you had anticipated. Just go with the flow, that's all part of living in China. |
| 3 | Try to interact with locals as much as you can. It will enrich your experience. |
| 4 | Join clubs to meet local students. |
| 5 | Do try to see other parts of China. It is such a fascinating and diverse country. |

Top 5 Things to do

What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

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| 1 | Explore the hutongs in Andingmen and Guloudajie, my favourite area of Beijing. |
| 2 | Eat many jianbings for breakfast. |
| 3 | Have a cocktail on the rooftop of Migas in Sanlitun, without a doubt the best view of Beijing. |
| 4 | Go for a walk around the Weiming Lake, Peking University is famous for it. |
| 5 | I spent my last 10 days in China in Yunnan. If you have the chance to get to this region go for it. It was incredible and offered a completely different insight into to China compared to Beijing. |

H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

I wouldn't hesitate to recommend an exchange to Peking University. The university is incredibly prestigious which in itself makes your exchange an unforgettable experience. Beijing is an amazing city despite its bad rap for pollution (to be fair the pollution can feel overwhelming at times). China is a fascinating country that is obviously playing a huge role in the world today. Nothing can compare to living there in terms of trying to understand the language, culture, politics etc. Going to China on an exchange will no doubt be more challenging than going to a Western country but I don't think that the rewards that come from overcoming these challenges make it more than worthwhile.