

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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A: Student Information

Name	Matilda Gaby
Student ID	300304171
VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Science
Major(s)	Development Studies
Exchange Institution	Peking University
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1, 2016

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.)

Books	\$5
Accommodation	\$1050/ month
Return Airfare	\$1705
Local Transportation	\$0.25 (bus), \$1 (subway)
Meals	On-campus: \$2.50, off-campus Chinese food: \$3-\$5, off-campus Western food: \$5-\$10
Visa	\$160
Health & Insurance	\$300
Personal Spending	\$25/week
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$5/month
Other fees (specify)	Personal travel costs (to other parts of China), gifts
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	No unexpected costs. Generally items were less than I expected (e.g. books, communications), but accommodation was a lot more than I expected!

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

Ended up being around the same as I expected (more due to personal travel that I did not plan to do initially)

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

I opened a bank account in China, but hardly ever used my credit card. I always used cash. Internet payment is very popular and widely used in China now.

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

Set up internet payments on your phone e.g. Alipay, WeChat wallet

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

Coke \$0.30 and coffee \$2-\$7

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?

Yes I applied for a visa. It was not a difficult process: just went to the Chinese embassy with the required documents and received the visa soon after. It only took one week. One issue was that I applied for a double-entry visa, as I hoped to travel to other countries, but this was denied due to an interesting restriction...

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

Apply for it early. It didn't take long for me, but better be safe than sorry!

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?

Yes, cost \$75.00. Unichina International Insurance by Ping An Insurance Company: Comprehensive Insurance and Protection Scheme for Foreigners staying in China

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

Southern Cross travel insurance. Yes I would recommend them

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					
Our Changing Planet	English	Environmental Science 300-level	20	4.5	It was difficult as I only gained admission because English is my native language. The course content was completely different from my major at VUW and I was essentially skipping all introductory papers and going straight to 300-level.

China's Environmental and Energy Challenges	English	Environmental Science 300-level	20	3.5	The content was again, very different from anything I have learned at VUW, but it was manageable.
Educational Psychology	English	Psychology 200-level	15	2.5	Much easier because I have taken VUW 100-level psychology papers and the workload was reasonable.
Aerobics	Chinese	N/A	N/A	4	I audited this class. All PKU students are required to take P.E. classes and this is one of the hardest P.E. classes due to the assessment... But it was my favorite!
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Very simple, went to the International Students Division and the dean in charge of exchange students enrolled me in my classes. However, I later found out that I should have chosen Chinese classes before, and then picked up my English-taught courses so I could improve my Chinese!

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?

Successful for my English-taught classes, however I was disappointed that I could not take Chinese classes too

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

Make sure that you understand the course selection process well. Also, enroll in lots of courses in the first

week and then just drop classes that you dislike before the deadline.

Academic Experience

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

There was a lot more presentations and group assignments. The academic experience did meet my expectations, in fact, exceeded them.

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?

For 'Our Changing Planet' course and 'China's Energy and Environmental Challenges' course, the style of teaching was similar to VUW. However, for educational psychology, the style of teaching in lectures was more focused on student-led discussion and students presenting the course content. The workload was about the same as VUW, depends on personal choice

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?

I would say that my course load was good. I would definitely recommend Educational Psychology and auditing a P.E class! These were my favourite classes as they were enjoyable, interesting and I could offer lots of insight into New Zealand and cultural similarities and differences.

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

Ask for help if you need it, make friends with your classmates

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

I didn't use computer facilities, as I bought my laptop and used that all the time. Internet access was mostly fine, apart from VPN's did not work too well. Library is a worth checking out- but I didn't study there.

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 learned basic Chinese before I left and have been to many Asian countries before. I am very fortunate that most students at Peking University can speak good English and I quickly made contacts and friends with people who could speak both Chinese and English fluently. There are intensive language courses, but I was not able to take these.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Shaoyuan Guest House, Peking University

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

Pros: on campus, clean facilities, private bedroom

Cons: expensive, a handful of awful staff...

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Do NOT live in Shaoyuan, try Zhongguanxinyuan or flat with native Chinese

How early can you move into accommodation?

As soon as you get there.

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

No cooking facilities, ate out for every meal.

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

I did not live off-campus. If you are planning on doing this, make sure you are near a subway station and register at the local police station

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

I would not recommend Shaoyuan... I found out that hotels are cheaper than what I paid at Shaoyuan!

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

Very easy, most of my friends are local students- got connected by joining clubs, talking in classes, just making the most of every opportunity to meet new friends!

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

Quite easy for me, since I am a Chinese New Zealander...

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

Seeking justice is difficult and corruption, I hope you won't have to deal with this though!

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The friendships I formed with many local Chinese students and professors, the delicious food, the incredible historical sites, temples, KungFu

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

Overall treated well, especially by local students (who were keen to practice English and get to know someone from New Zealand) and the university staff and faculty (who warmly welcomed me). However, I would rate the service and a lot of the staff at Shaoyuan low

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 cannot really speak to these questions. However, I do know that LGBT attitudes are similar to those in NZ among Chinese youth, at least those students at PKU- but not adults...

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

No

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?

A lot: from cooking clubs, to hiking, skiing, book clubs, volunteering groups, groups for internationals. I

would recommend joining the SUN buddy program, it is THE best.

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

Honestly, the Great Wall was a huge highlight for me. Exceeded my expectations by a mile, chose a beautiful day to visit and amazing scenery. Also, Kung Fu performance, Beijing opera, temples, hutongs, KTV and travel, travel, travel! I found freshman that wanted to travel too and it was amazing to explore China with locals.

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

Teaching English, a lot of jobs available!

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Internship with New Zealand embassy, I'm sure there are plenty of others too.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Download 'Pleco' on your phone
2	Photos or something from home to decorate your room
3	Cash
4	Light-weight clothes for when the temperature reaches 40 degrees!
5	Whittaker's chocolate

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

1	The International Students Division is your first port of call for any questions or issues
2	Take the first week to just explore Peking University campus and navigate your way around- it is much bigger than VUW!
3	Travel with local students and travel as much as you can- you may as well now that you are in China
4	Eat street food, relish the opportunities, do things that you would never do in New Zealand and would make crazy, interesting memories to share when you get back
5	Use ofo bicycles! Very cheap and convenient to get around campus

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Beijing: Great Wall, Forbidden City, Summer Palace, Tiananmen, Hutong, Kung Fu performance, Beijing opera
2	Eat Peking duck in Beijing!
3	Take a high-speed train to Tianjin (can even visit for one day, and it'll be worth it)

4 Inner Mongolia (especially in summer)

5 Travel to anywhere in the South of China

H: Personal Experience

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

My exchange experience was incredible and is invaluable. I cannot recommend going on exchange enough! Going to a country so different from New Zealand sure made for lots of adventure and new experiences. I have so many highlights, from the friends I made, to the traveling opportunities and just living in an exciting, rapidly developing country. Although I ended up facing a significant cultural conflict with the staff at Shaoyuan dormitory, it all came down to cultural differences and I learnt a lot from this. Overall, I had the most fantastic exchange experience and will definitely return to China in the future 😊



