

Experience report - Fudan University 2017 – Shanghai

Felix Nosthoff-Horstmann; Email: felix_nosthoff@web.de; Tel.: 00491726658128



Before departure:

I applied for this exchange semester in January 2017 and fortunately was selected in early March 2017. Following this, I started to prepare for my exchange semester. There are several topics one has to/ should deal with before departing to Shanghai, China. The most important topics basically regard the Chinese Visa, the flight as well internet connectivity. The Chinese Visa requires an application form and several copies of passport etc. In my own experience, it does only take about two weeks for the Visa to be issued. All in all, the process is not very demanding and quite easy. For my flight to China I chose to take a direct flight from Frankfurt to Shanghai. There are several other options with indirect flights, which however were only slightly cheaper and featured more than 3 hours of extra traveling time. Furthermore, I also booked my return flight as I already knew the return date. This substantially lowers the cost for the flight as single flight tickets are generally way more expensive. Regarding connectivity one should be aware that

China blocks various internet services like for example Google, Facebook, Instagram and so on. As I possess an android mobile phone that uses the Google Play Store, I therefore had to download a VPN App to access the aforementioned services and respectively my app store. My recommendation would be the slightly expensive ExpressVPN, which worked for me without major problems in China. However, there are also other free VPN apps.

Arrival:

I arrived in Shanghai one and a half weeks before the semester start at the Fudan University in late August. The arrival in Shanghai was quite easy. Even though, the Pudong airport is relatively far out of the city, the metro is very convenient to travel to the city center. It takes about one hour. Even though, most Chinese people don't really speak English or are hesitant to do so, the way is well signposted. One can reduce this travel time by taking the Maglev train for some part of the way. This reduces the travel time to about 30 minutes.

Accommodation:

As I did not get a place in the Fudan dormitory, I had to find an accommodation off-campus. In the end, I have to say that I am very happy about this as the university campus is quite far from the city center. In my personal opinion, one misses a lot of the actual Shanghai life when living on campus. As I arrived in Shanghai early, I chose to look for accommodation after arriving in Shanghai. Therefore, I booked a hostel room for the first week. Regarding the housing market in Shanghai, one has to understand that it is very unique and different to the German one. It is actually very easy and does not take a lot of time to find a flat in Shanghai. However, one should be aware and cautious of scams! You should not pay anything before you are certain that the person you are talking to is allowed to rent out the flat and is going to register you at the right police station! Otherwise you could get into serious trouble with the police, which obviously is not smart in such a different country. The advantage of looking for a flat after arriving in Shanghai is that you can actually visit the flats and also see if the agent/ landlord is legit. After a couple of days I found a nice room in a shared flat in the city center. In the course of this, I would recommend to look out for a flat close to line 10 as this metro directly services the Fudan University area.

University/ Courses:

The Fudan University has more than one campus. The campus for business/ economics studies is the Handan Campus in the north of Shanghai close to metro station Jiangwan Stadium. As the campus is very huge, the Chinese bike apps come in very handy (See mobility section). Depending on where you need to go on the campus, it may make also sense to get off the metro one or two stations earlier.

In my own experience, the level regarding workload and difficulty varies largely across courses. In the first two weeks one has to choose the courses. In my case, the introduction of courses conveyed a good overview of what was going to be required for the courses. In comparison with my home university, I have to state that the grades at the Fudan University are generally based on more and different parts, while Frankfurt often only requires one exam. For example, courses at the Fudan University more often feature term paper, assignments as well as presentations. I have to say that I very much liked the aforementioned way of studying. My course selection included "Doing Business in China", "China's Taxation and Fiscal System", "Asset Pricing" und "Corporate Finance". I would recommend all of the courses, but I have to say that for instance „Doing Business in China“ is way more comprehensive and demanding than the others.

Food:

Shanghai offers all kinds of food. Literally every cuisine can be found. In general, food is really cheap in Shanghai. Especially, if you buy street food or in smaller restaurants. European-style food is regularly more expensive than Chinese food and comparable to prices in Europe. However, I would recommend to try the different taste of the Chinese kitchen. There is plenty to experience from for example various types of dumplings, spicy Sichuan food, Shanghainese crabs or a hot pot.

Mobility in Shanghai:

The metro system in Shanghai is very well-developed. Moreover, it is not very expensive as one regular ride costs around 50cents. In addition, it is possible to get a prepaid metro card which gives you a further discount on each ride. Another opportunity is to download one of the bike apps for shorter distances. They are called Mobike and Ofo. One has to make a deposit, which is refundable. Riding a bike is very cheap in Shanghai. I bought a smart pass for mobike, which cost me about 50cents and allowed me to ride bikes for free for 2 hours. Another opportunity is the DIDI app. DIDI is the Chinese "UBER" and basically is an app where you can call taxi or private drivers. It is really cheap compared to Germany and tells you approximately how much you are going to spend before each ride. Especially, when the metro closes at around 10 – 11pm Didi comes in very handy. Furthermore, it helps you to ride a taxi as most taxi drivers do not speak English. In the app you are able to set your departure location and arrival location in English. For train rides in China I would recommend to use Ctrip. Therewith you can easily book trains, planes as well as hotels in China. Money/

Payments:

It is useful to apply for a credit card that allows you to withdraw money without paying fees before your departure to China. In addition, it was very easy and cheap for me to open up a Chinese bank account at ICBC. I only had to pay about 60 cents for opening the bank account. With this bank account, you are able to use mobile payment apps like WeChat and AliPay. These apps are very popular and you can pay with them almost everywhere. Very often even at small shops without a real cash register. It is also very useful when transferring your monthly rent. Therefore, I would recommend to open up an account at a nearby bank in China after you arrive.

Trips/ Leisure:

In addition to studying, I also spend some time to explore Shanghai as well as some other sights in China. Regarding Shanghai itself, I can recommend a variety of places including inter alia the Bund, Shanghai Tower, Xitiandi, Tianzifang, Zhujiajiao, Fake Market (Metro station Science and Technology Museum) and Taylor Market (South Bund Soft Spinning Market). Furthermore, Shanghai offers a lot of nice places to go out at night. There are for example manifold rooftop bars like Bar Rouge, the Kartel, Hyatt on the Bund, Flair and so on. Additionally, a lot of clubs offer promotions for western people including free drinks etc. In order to get these promotions you only have to contact one of manifold promoters and say their name at the club entrance. Outside of Shanghai, I visited the Yellow Mountains, Hangzhou as well as Beijing. The Yellow Mountains are simply beautiful and the ways are not too crowded. Only the platforms near the cableway were very crowded with Chinese tourists. Further, I would definitely recommend everyone to visit Beijing and see the Forbidden City as well as the Great Wall. For the Great Wall, I visited the Mutianyu part which is harder to reach, but definitely less crowded and more beautiful in my own experience. However, I spend most of the time in Shanghai, as I did a trip throughout China before this exchange.

Weather/Smog:

The weather in Shanghai is quite comparable to Germany, but a little bit more extreme. In my own experience, the seasons lag the ones in Germany and the transition from summer to winter weather was very short. For instance it was quite warm until late October, but gets quickly cold in November. One big topic when talking about weather in China of course is the smog. That basically means that the air quality is not very good in many cities in China, including Shanghai. However, it must say that I did not experience the smog as a major problem. In sum, it were maybe about 10 really bad days in Shanghai with an air quality index of 200. On days like this you should probably stay inside and otherwise wear a face mask.

Additionally, I was told by friends that lived in Shanghai for some time that the smog got better over the years. Therefore, smog might be even less a problem for future exchange students.

End:

Shanghai is one of the largest cities in the world and features a unique combination of Chinese culture, which was greatly influenced by western countries over the years. My aforementioned own experiences should help to have a good start in Shanghai. However, I would recommend that one should just be open for the Chinese culture and eager to make his/her own new experiences.

Furthermore, I am always happy to answer any questions regarding my exchange semester or the life in Shanghai! All the best wishes to my exchange successors with the Fudan University! It's going to be an experience of a lifetime! In the end of this experience report, I would like to say thanks to the Faculty's International Office for making this exchange possible as well as the Banco Santander and Bank of Shanghai that supported my exchange with the FIMP program!



1. Shanghai – The Bund



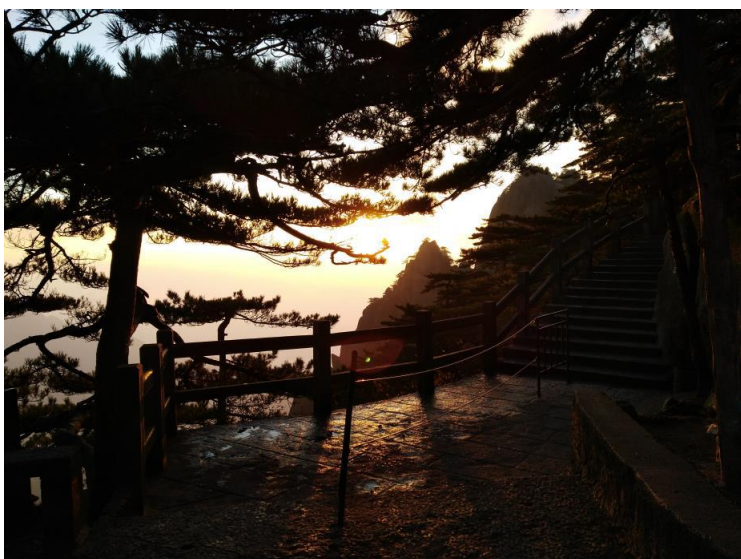
2. Hangzhou – West Lake



3. Beijing - Mutianyu Great Wall



4. Yellow Mountains



5. Yellow Mountains.