

Field Report on Exchange Semester at Nankai University in Tianjin, China

Fall Term 2017/2018

1. Application & Preparation

Registration

After you have been nominated for an exchange semester at Nankai University in Tianjin, you need to pass through the registration procedure. The university might provide you with a document describing the registration steps. You may encounter some problems as a master student, since the registration for classes in English are only provided for bachelor degree students. However, I was told to complete the application system as possible and they will be able to change the information after the submission.

Finished the online registration you need to send hard copies of the required documents (nomination letter, transcript, medical insurance document, etc.) via mail. As soon as Nankai University receives the documents, they will prepare the invitation letter that is needed for the visa application and send it to you. This might take some time, so make sure to be on time to finish the registration within the deadline.

Visa

Getting a visa is quite simple and takes only one to two weeks. You can decide between X1 and X2 visa. X1 visa is usually issued for multiple entry with validity up to 5 years, whereas X2 visa is issued for one entry only and with validity up to 6 months. Please keep in mind that you need to take a medical insurance check as soon as you arrived in China, when applying for a multiple entry X1 visa. I have heard that you might be able to change your X2 to a X1 visa – but unfortunately that was not possible in Tianjin.

Credit Card

Despite statements that some credit cards don't work in china, you should not have any problems when withdrawing money from Bank of China (ICBC). However, I recommend to take some cash (just in case) that can be easily exchanged to RMB at the airport to avoid any problems and to insure a smooth travel from Beijing to Tianjin – 50€ should be enough considering the worse exchange rate at the airport.

VPN

Due to censorship by the government, the use of the internet is heavily restricted. Thousands of websites and apps including Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp are blocked. If you are not willing to forgo the apps during your exchange time, you can avoid the censorship by using a VPN.

2. Arrival

Before buying flight tickets, make sure to be clear on your preferences. Flights from Frankfurt to Beijing are relatively cheap, especially outward and return flights. However, many things can change during the exchange semester – you might want to go home earlier or later, so consider buying flexible or one-way tickets instead.

Arrived at the airport you can either take the fast train or the bus to Tianjin. The high-speed train takes only about 30 minutes and departures almost every 15minutes. Nevertheless, you need to go to Beijing South Railway Station first, what might be exhausting if this is your first time in china without any Chinese language skills. Taking the long-distance Bus from the airport is therefore more pleasant, costs around the same and takes in total about the same time to get to Tianjin. You can find the fast distance train outside of Terminal 1 or Terminal 3. Please keep in mind that this information could change. From the Bus station in Tianjin you can then take a taxi to Nankai University. The taxi drivers won't speak English so the first words you should learn is: 南开大学东门 "Nánkāi dàxué dōng

mén” (Nankai University, East Gate). Watch out for overpriced taxi drivers that are waiting for you at the bus station. Do not accept any fixed price but persist on the taximeter instead.



3. First Week

For your registration you were asked to open a bank account at the “Bank of Communications” right next to the campus. It was quite useful during the semester, since you can link it to your WeChat and AliPay account. In China it is very common to pay via WeChat or AliPay rather than using cash. Furthermore, it allows the access to other useful apps like “Ofo” or “Mobike”, with which you can borrow bikes almost for free. This is very important since the campus is huge and you can use them to explore not only Tianjin but all other bigger cities in China.

Next step is to get a new sim-card. If you use a lot of data, I would recommend getting a sim-card with unlimited data for 200RNB (~25€) a month. The wifi in the dorm is terrible and sometimes not even fast enough to load a normal homepage.

Finally, attend all the introduction events and you will not have any problems with finding a lot of new friends that will make your experience in china perfect.

4. Courses

You were allowed to participate in classes on the first week to see which ones you wanted to take, before handing in your course registration. The final course registration was due two weeks after the start of the semester.

During the fall semester I was the only exchange student at master degree level and was first sent to the business department like all the other bachelor students where we were allowed to choose our classes from. Unfortunately, there are no master degree courses but only bachelor or MBA courses, from those only a part was taught in English. It seemed like the university was not prepared for master degree exchange students yet. After several discussions, Nankai University allowed me to sign in for the economics department and to attend courses from the “Master of International Economics

and Business” program. Despite all the confusion, I want to point out that both my supervisor and other people in power were very helpful and courteous during the process. All the courses required participation in class, which was monitored. Depending on the length of the course and the afore participation a few absences may be tolerated and could quite easily be cleared up with the professors.

I completed the following courses:

- Transnational Investment and Management
- International Marketing
- Intermediate Macroeconomics
- International Business
- Chinese

What I liked most about the courses at Nankai was the low number of students in the classes. Since only 12 students attended the courses, we were able to have a lot of discussions and the personal mentoring was great. The work-load during the semester is way higher than in German universities. We were asked to do presentations and prepare case studies every week. Furthermore, we had two mid-terms and for the final exam we either needed to write a paper or had a written exam. The level of the classes was quite high, depending on your fellow students.

5. Living in Tianjin

Accommodation

There are certain pros and cons for campus versus private options. I decided to live on campus in the dorms that were provided for exchange students. The rooms are very basic and small, but in good condition, functional and overall clean. There is no kitchen or place to cook in the building, however enjoying the delicious food that is offered in every street around the campus for a very cheap price, is the better option anyway. One downside of living on campus is, that you will share your yet small room with another person. I was lucky with my roommate and since we got along with each other quite well, I was able to get used to it very soon. Great advantage is the close distance to the university facilities what brings me to my next point:

Living on Campus

Nankai University has a huge sports center including a fitness center, swimming pool, a football field, basketball fields and more. Joining a sports team might be a perfect opportunity to get in touch with Chinese students. Furthermore, there is an activities center where you can play ping pong or games.

Sightseeing

Tianjin is a very diverse city. From traditional Chinese streets to Italian and other European streets and buildings left from its colonial era up to giant modern skyscrapers – you will find it all.

Furthermore, there are a lot of museums, the Tianjin Eye and the Porcelain house. In case you get bored, it only takes 30 minutes to get to Beijing by train.



Nightlife

There are a lot of bars and clubs around Nankai. The nightlife is different to ours but very funny in its own way and you will get a lot of free drinks in the clubs – if you are into partying, you should definitely give it a try.

6. Final Comment

All in all, my time in China was an outstanding experience. The culture is very different, thus makes it harder to settle but you will get forced to get out of your comfort zone and therefore end up learning a lot not only about china but yourself. If you are not open minded, China might not be your best choice. Else you will definitely have a lot of fun and find friends for life. I hope this exchange report was helpful and makes you more comfortable that Nankai University is the right choice for you, as it certainly was for me.

