



Peking University HSBC Business School

北京大学
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TUM Somex Exchange Program Report

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Picture: View from the dormitories over the university campus

General Motivation

For me personally, I already knew that I would do a study abroad. I wanted to take the opportunity students have in order to see as much as possible before the working life starts. I chose China because it is one of the most contradictory places and for the European perception a crazy choice.

Studying and living in China is something completely different than visiting that enormous country for a short period. This country has so many things to offer. The difference between provinces is as big as it is for all the countries of the European Union. You can experience different people and mentalities, food and culture depending on where you go within China. But one thing is for certain: you will realize that some clichés will certainly not meet your expectations!

Before I left for my study abroad to China, I was not sure what to think about that country. Many people who already visited told me that it is a terrible place, where people don't know any manners, show bad behavior and the food is just not what you are used to in terms of quality and taste. Not to mention all the pollution that you could have already seen on the news or at least in pictures. But at the same time you find these amazingly beautiful countryside pictures of the yellow mountains or the great wall. Those contradictions and the fact for being one of the most powerful nations at the same time made me wonder how that place actually looks like. I wanted to see and especially experience it for myself. The TUM Somex Exchange Program was the best opportunity to bring all of that together and I can certainly recommend it! It's the best and easiest way to get the chance to experience a different country, culture, language and mentality.

About Peking University HSBC Business School

As the name already tells you the Peking University has its main campus in Peking, the capital of China. It is one of the two most famous and best universities in China along with the Tsinghua University! The more recent established Business School was opened in the very South of China and is an international graduate campus which offers classes only in English.

About Shenzhen

Shenzhen is a rather new city with a short history of about 30 years but already inhabits 15 million people and is referred to as the fastest growing city on earth. In 2008 Shenzhen received the UNESCO City of Design award and is part of the Creative Cities Network. It is located in the very South of China within the Pearl-River-Area at the coast right next to the boarder to Hongkong. This makes it one of the most important cities of China next to Shanghai and Beijing because of the business opportunities that this city can offer. It is

considered to be the 'gate' to China since foreign companies located in Hongkong enter the Chinese market through Shenzhen. The city rose to the reputation of being *the* place for start-ups and innovative companies within China. There are several innovation centers located around the city and these are always welcoming to foreign students.

Shenzhen is one of the richest cities of China with the highest average income per person. The main business fields are the electronics and telecommunication industry. All of these facts make Shenzhen very attractive for foreign workers, called 'Expats'.



Picture: View over Shenzhen towards Hongkong from the Nanshan Mountain

Application and Preparation

The TUM Somex makes an application for the program really easy. As long as you follow all of the instructions in the guideline carefully you don't need to worry about anything. Sometimes the time between deadline days can make you feel uneasy because you don't get new information and you feel like you should prepare something and that's what happened to me as well but whenever I contacted the international office they told me I would receive an email with new instructions if there are any. And I can ensure you that is totally correct. At every time of the process I received the latest information on time and had no reason to not think that way. So don't freak out and just check your mails regularly.

After you get the confirmation by TUM Somex you can apply at the Peking University website for a study abroad. Instructions, deadlines and general information will you receive by the exchange coordinator either by the TU or by PHBS. The registration will contain personal information as well as a housing application. You can choose between a single room and a double room while the second is half the price of the first one. But it's worth getting a single room just to have a little privacy. The double rooms are the same size with one bathroom and a balcony but you don't have the chance to be on your own. It is two single beds in one room. If you think that is weird than you should know that almost no

Chinese has the comfort you do. Most of them stay in a room of the same size with up to 4 students. The alternative is to look for accommodation yourself outside of campus.

At this point I want to highly recommend living on campus, not only because you will have daily contact with students and living on campus gives you lots of opportunities but also because of costs. Apartments in Shenzhen are relatively expensive compared to the prices the university offers you within their dormitory.

If you get the confirmation of the Chinese University the application phase is done and you are ready to go for the preparation.

Language course

Some exchange students that stayed with me in Shenzhen prepared with a language course in advance, I personally didn't. This is a decision that everyone needs to do on his own.

Chinese is a very hard language that you need to use a lot in order to learn it properly. If you want to work in China in the future or want to get an internship while you are abroad then I certainly recommend doing one. It can prepare you for your study abroad and help you a lot if you want to travel and visit China. As long as you stay on campus you don't really need it because everyone speaks English in the first place. But as soon as you leave for the city nobody can really understand you. So if you want to avoid any difficulties, do a language course!

If you don't find the time or motivation beforehand, don't worry. PHBS offers you several courses for exchange students to learn Chinese. And basically everyone attends it to get a basic level of Chinese to get you around.

Before departure

Rather shortly before you leave for your adventure you need to apply for a Visa. The application in Munich is very straight forward and easy. All the material you need for it will be sent to you by your exchange coordinator. You only need to consider that it will take about 1 to 2 weeks to get ready and cost you about 130€. You will find the Chinese Visa Application Center in Laim. The Visa you will be applying for is the X2 Visa for studying abroad. It will be valid 180 days starting the day you enter China, not the day you receive it. But it will still tell you a latest date until which you need to enter China so don't apply too early for it and watch out for your flights. Also the X2 Visa will only grant you a single entry and a single exit!

If you want to visit e.g. Hongkong then you need to apply for a residence permit when you arrive at your partnering university. PHBS will ask you in the first 1 or 2 weeks if you want to apply for it and I certainly recommend it! You will get a lot of assistance during the process which includes a health check and a visit to the main police station in Shenzhen. In total the process will take about 6 weeks and 150 euros but it is totally worth it! I have been to a lot

of places outside China including Hongkong and Macao (which right next to Shenzhen) and I couldn't have done it without the permit. And you don't want to be the person staying behind when all your exchange students are travelling.

You also want to check out the courses offered abroad. Not all of the courses will be accepted at your home university and you don't want to do a course which does not get accepted. So check your learning agreement before departure.

Before you leave your comfort zone you should definitely get a VPN (e.g. ExpressVPN). As everyone knows certain websites or apps like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google, Gmail, WhatsApp, etc. are blocked by the Chinese Government Firewall. In order to get access to those you will need a VPN. Even then it is not guaranteed since certain VPNs are under attack by the government. Even if you forget getting one beforehand (like it happened to me) you don't need to worry, there are still ways to get a VPN while being in China. I just recommend to even pay for one otherwise it can be really frustrating if you want to talk to your family or friends with a whatsapp call and the free-to-use VPN just got shut down.

Arrival and Check-in

As soon as you get to the university campus your arrival and check-in is easy. You will most likely meet some of the permanent international students who live on campus for the whole year to guide you through all the procedures.

Depending on how you plan your arrival there are multiple options you have to get to campus. If you choose to go to Hongkong first to stay there a week (which some people did) and then go to campus you will enter Shenzhen by metro at Luohu and continue by metro afterwards to the station Xili Lake or University Town. Both stations are right next to the campus from where you can enter easily. Alternatively you can go from Hongkong by ferry or Bus. The ferry arrives at the Shekou port where you can get a shuttle bus to the metro station while the bus from Hongkong arrives at the Futian district. From all locations you have the opportunity to take a taxi. But remember that you can't pay by credit card or visa so prepare to get cash in advance. If you arrive at the Shenzhen airport directly the easiest way is to get a taxi since you are not familiar with your surroundings and probably have a big luggage. The taxi ride takes you about 40 minutes to campus and will cost you about 15 euros. The metro ride takes at least 1 hour but is very cheap with 1 euro maximum fare.

Your exchange coordinator and permanent students will guide you through the whole process from here on. One of the first steps will be to get a Chinese SIM card which is mandatory if you want to get a Chinese bank account for easy access to cash and WeChat pay. It will take you quite some time so you can use the opportunity to get to know your future classmates since you are going through the process together. The Union Pay card of your Chinese bank account will be your room key at the same time as well as your student ID

and campus card. It may be confusing at the beginning but you will accept it quickly whether you actually understand it or not. You don't even get a choice at that one. But when you are done with Chinese bureaucracy you will get access to WeChat pay and a lot of other features which will make your life in China easy.

But your first day is still not done. Usually in the evening a trip to IKEA is planned so that you can buy important things for your room (e.g. towels, bed sheets, drying wreck, etc.). Me and my classmates got the chance to buy second hand stuff from the exchange students before, but from here on onward this will not be possible anymore. There was a change of the international student coordinator who apparently didn't know about this process and canceled it straight afterwards since the university was the storage for all of the sold things. If you are lucky then this opportunity will be re-arranged and if I could I would tell them to do it because it makes it easy for future students and saves you a lot of money.

For the rest of the days until the courses start there are some activities planned to show you around campus and the city. All of these activities are not mandatory but I still recommend to participate at least partly. You get the chance to meet the coordinators, exchange students and maybe some chinese students. They will explain the metro system to you and will arrange a small rally through the enormous city of Shenzhen.

Studying abroad and campus life

Studying abroad is an experience simply because its different and everything feels new even though it's not. The difference to the TUM is that you live on campus, you walk to university within 10 minutes, you will meet friends on the way or have breakfast before (if you can call it breakfast) and also walk back for lunch with them. With some of them you will attend the same courses and even work in projects together.

About courses

The courses at PHBS are completely different from the ones you know by TUM. The system, size and the way of working equals more the TUM seminars. There are a maximum of 30 people for one class sometimes even less than 20 including Chinese and international students. Each course will be held in English and are much more interactive. But that also depends on the professors origin you will have. American, Taiwanese or Korean professors will be more open to discussions than Chinese professors will.

Generally the semester is split into two halves each lasting for about 6 to 8 weeks. In between you will get a couple of days off which you can use for travelling. For each part of the semester you are only allowed to attend a maximum of three courses excluding the language course. Since the language course will not be accepted by your home university for

credit transfer. So if you choose to take the language course you have a maximum of 4 courses. Each course has two classes per week with a duration of two hours. It may not seem a lot in the beginning but like I said the system is different and you will soon notice that you will have a lot to do.

Not for every course the system is the same since every professor has its own way of doing things but generally the following things will be part of your overall grade:

- Attendance
- In-class participation
- Homework
- Group Project and presentations
- Writing Papers
- Exams

Since the attendance is part of your grading it is basically mandatory to attend to classes as well as actively take part in classes by e.g. answering questions from the professor. You can still choose not to participate but then you cannot expect good grades in the end. It may sound like a school system from Germany but from my own personal experience I can guarantee that you will learn a lot from your classes!

Usually after each class you will get homework that you have to finish for the next class either within the same week or over the weekend and you will have to hand it in at the teaching assistant that every professor has. On top of that at the beginning of each semester term you will be put into separate groups for each class. Within those groups you will either have to do one big project over the whole term including a presentation in front of class in the end or do several small projects including a written report for the professor. For some classes (depends on the professor) you will have to write papers about business cases or about a theory to hand in. Finally you will have several exams over each semester term. Usually one mid-term exam and one final exam.

The good thing about this system is that you actually work with the content covered in class a lot and put it into practical use. First of all you will learn about it in class, secondly you need to do homework about exactly that content and afterwards put the things learned into practical use within real-life business cases or papers in either a group project or a written report. Since the exams will be about those things you learned and actually used it yourself already you don't need to study a lot for it. Most of it you already know by heart. I personally prefer this system over the one in TUM because you learn a lot more within a short period of time. During the semester it can be constant work you have to do but since the exams are scheduled for the final class you are done instantly.

About campus life

On campus you have almost everything you need. Right next to the dorms are restaurants (including a subway), a café, two convenience stores as well as a hair dresser and a copy shop. Within the university building you will find another restaurant and a starbucks for your daily coffee. There are also other possibilities to get your coffee and I would recommend the library café for example simply because it is cheaper in the long run. If you want to try street food or local restaurant/cafes you can explore the area around campus, called University Town or Xili. Those two areas offer you a lot of possibilities to try local food as well as simple stores for shopping. I personally can recommend the street food from University Town or the sushi in Xili.

On campus you have amazing opportunities to do all kind of sports. Right next to the dorm buildings you will find a soccer field, tennis courts, basketball courts, badminton fields and ping pong plates. Across the whole campus which includes four different universities you will find a lot more of those possibilities as well as a volleyball court. All these activities are very popular and due to the hot weather will be played rather late often even at night. For almost all of them exist Sports Clubs or WeChat groups you can join and participate. Even a golf club which goes for the driving range once a week on average can be joined.

Life in Shenzhen and surroundings

About Shenzhen

There are a lot of different areas to explore in Shenzhen and the surroundings. Multiple shopping centers around the city with restaurants, bars and even clubs are the center of the life in Shenzhen. The most popular one which is also the place where you want to go party is Cocopark or the more fancier option Sea World. Cocopark offers you a huge shopping center with a western supermarket inside as well as international food. Right next to it is the popular night life area. If you want to have the chinese way of shopping with all the fake things you can imagine then Luohu is the place you want to go. Right next to the metro station and the boarder to Hongkong is the Fake Market on 7 or 8 different levels. Here you will get all sort of things including electronics on a bargaining basis.

For the real electronics market which Shenzhen is known for you need to go to Huaqiangbay. Statistics show that almost 2/3 of the worlds mobile phones have been to that place! Here you can watch people rebuilding iPhones from scratch in small stores or buy the newest hardware for your own computer.

If you don't like shopping and want to go for more cultural or outdoor things I can recommend going for China Splendid Park, Artist Village, Window of the World, OCT Loft, Shenzhen Bay Park or one of the hikes in Nanshan District or Luohu.

Just remember that the campus is a little outside the city so you always need to calculate a lot of time in order to get there and to get back. During the day you certainly want to take the metro. It is the fastest and cheapest way to travel within Shenzhen. In the late evenings or at night you have to take a DiDi (Chinese Uber). The metro stops working at around 11pm and the distances are usually not recommendable by bike. But if you still want to do that you can download the Ofo (yellow) or Mobike (orange) app in order to unlock one of the hundreds of thousands bikes you see around the city.

About travelling and surrounding areas

Before you receive your residence permit you can travel only around China. But it is a country you should definitely get a look at since you are spending at least 5 months there. On top of that there are several places that are a must-see including Beijing, Shanghai, Hongkong, Taiwan, Zhangjiajie (Avatar Mountains and Glass Bridge), Guilin/Yangshuo (popular Chinese place) and Macao.

One of my favorite features about China and especially Shenzhen is that there are a lot of interesting countries reachable within just a few hours. Take that opportunity and visit as many places as possible! You may not get the chance to see that much again and especially the big distance to Europe usually makes it hard to travel a lot in that area if you don't have the time. I personally visited all the places mentioned above plus a handful more in China as well as Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. So if you need any travel advise let me know and feel free to contact me any time!