

Alex Westin-Hardy – Learn, Live and Intern in China, Summer 2016

This summer I spent 10 weeks participating in the Learn, Live and Intern in China (LLIC) programme run by the University of Hong Kong. Bringing together undergraduate students from top universities worldwide, the programme consisted of a one week seminar series at the University of Hong Kong and an 8 week internship at the Shanghai offices of Boehringer Ingelheim, a global top 20 pharmaceutical company.

The first week of the programme was spent at the University of Hong Kong receiving lectures on economics, business and Chinese society, through which we were able to gain an overview of the corporate world and personnel systems in Hong Kong and China. The fundamental importance of understanding culture and society in order to be successful in business was emphasised, and the impacts of different management strategies were discussed. Learning about Hong Kong's development from a manufacturing economy based on cheap labour to a service industry and financial hub was particularly insightful. From Hong Kong we flew to Hangzhou, not only to sightsee but also to visit the headquarters of Alibaba Group, a Chinese e-commerce company. As a city, Hangzhou was beautiful, with highlights being the smoky temples of Feilai Peak and the willow-lined banks and boat-filled panoramas of the dreamy West Lake. Our time in Hangzhou was rounded off by a trip to the charming water town of Wuzhen.

My 8 weeks in Shanghai were an unforgettable experience. We were given time to explore before our internship started, so I planned a packed schedule to keep me busy. Top of the list was the bund, a gorgeous curve of larger-than-life, concession-era heritage and a sharp contrast with the seemingly infinite sprawl of Pudong skyscrapers across the Huangpu River. Sightseeing continued with Shanghai's most iconic attraction – the Yuyuan gardens. With its shaded corridors, zig-zag bridges and glittering pools churning with carp, the labyrinthine gardens represented a delightful escape from Shanghai's hard-edged, glass-and-steel modernity. However, clearly never designed to accommodate the number of visitors they receive each day, many of Shanghai's main attractions and museums were as crowded as the malls and sardine-packed metro system, and the frantic nature of the city left little time for reflection or contemplation. Alongside the excellent China Art Palace and Shanghai Museum, the Site of the 1st National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and the Propaganda Poster Art Centre were particularly absorbing. The dizzying Marxist spin of the museums' commentaries was a salutary reminder that Shanghai remains part of the world's largest communist state, something easy to forget when you consider the maelstrom of shoppers, department stores and neon lights of Nanjing Road.

Our internship at Boehringer Ingelheim went incredibly quickly. The Biostatistics & Data Sciences Summer Programme began with an introduction to the history of drug testing and the modern clinical trial process, before a week of lectures on data collection, data management, statistics and programming. We learnt how to assess drug efficacy using objective tumour response and how to assess drug safety using records of on-treatment adverse events. We were then given data from an oncology clinical trial, performing data cleaning, producing a trial statistical analysis plan and generating analysis datasets, before implementing our statistical analysis to make useful predictions on the efficacy of the drug. Most importantly, during the internship we were able to learn to program using the SAS statistical analysis system, which allowed us to create reports detailing demographic data and best overall response to treatment, produce waterfall plots showing decrease in tumour diameters, and generate Kaplan-Meier curves for progression-free survival. These skills were invaluable in communicating our results in interpretable visualisations and summaries. As a day-trip, we were also able to visit Boehringer Ingelheim's Zhangjiang plant and observe their automatic packaging line in action – an impressive sight.

Weekends provided an excellent opportunity to escape Shanghai, taking advantage of China's impressive high-speed rail network for trips to Suzhou, Nanjing, Huangshan and Beijing. Our time in Nanjing was largely spent in the Zhongshan Park scenic area, visiting Dr Sun Yat Sen's Mausoleum before climbing Purple Mountain for views of the city. We also spent time at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial and scaled the historic city walls. Hiking up the 1840m Huangshan Mountain was an unforgettable experience, with the highlight of my three days exploring the dreamily-named peaks being a breathtaking sunrise over the sea of clouds from the 'monkey watching the sea'. Four days in Beijing towards the end of summer allowed me to see a side of the country's history absent in Shanghai, with visits to the sprawling Forbidden City, beautiful Temple of Heaven and enchanting Summer Palace, alongside an expedition to the wild Jiankou and restored Mutianyu sections of the Great Wall. I was also able to visit the imposing Soviet-inspired Chairman Mao Memorial Hall, Tiananmen Square and the Olympic Park, as well as scouting Beijing's captivating warren of hutong alleyways. We ended with a final week in Hong Kong, where we presented our programme reflections and internship findings at the Closing Ceremony. As well as exploring the metropolis of Central and the night markets of Kowloon, we rode the Star Ferry, climbed Victoria Peak and even took a day-trip to Macau to see the ruins of the Church of St Paul, Monte Fort and the uniquely Portuguese-influenced architecture.

This summer has been an extraordinary experience on so many levels, and it was fascinating to spend time in Shanghai and wider China. The LLIC programme provided an excellent opportunity to expand my cultural horizons, make new friends, gain practical working experience and learn new skills to prepare me for today's global workplace. I am extremely grateful for the support received from Pembroke College and the Victor and William Fung Foundation.