

Keiler Totz - Learn, Live, and Intern in China, Summer 2014

China's five thousand year old history and explosive economic growth creates an exciting environment for educational and cultural learning. Ever since I was first introduced to Mandarin Chinese while living in Singapore, I have wanted to enrich my knowledge of Asia by travelling to China to experience its diverse culture first-hand.

The Learn, Live, and Intern in China Program (LLIC), run by the University of Hong Kong (HKU), provided me with the perfect opportunity to immerse myself in the Chinese language and gain valuable insight into the Chinese business culture. LLIC is a nine week program consisting of a two week Global Business in Asia Course, taught at HKU, followed by a seven week work internship in Shanghai. Close to 30 students from top universities in the UK, US, and Asia participated in the program which created a unique group dynamic that lead to a very enriching and multicultural experience.

We all met in Hong Kong where we were housed in the Lee Hysan Hall located on the HKU Medical campus. After exploring the surrounding area, we realized that the hall was isolated from the main portion of the university and city, so we spent the first week entirely dependent upon the local HKU students who kindly showed us which mini buses to catch to lectures and introduced us to local restaurants and an assortment of tourist attractions.

Our group became very close over the course of the two weeks as we learnt to ride Hong Kong public transport, shared meals, and sat through lectures together. We spent the majority of our free time in the evenings and on weekends exploring the high energy city and its culture: we took the tram up to the Peak; traveled to Lantau Island to see the Big Buddha; sampled the local cuisine in the fishing villages; explored the night markets; and took the iconic Star Ferry over to Kowloon. My favourite memories from Hong Kong include admiring the city's incredible nighttime skyline from the highest bar in the world, Ozone, located on the 118 floor of the International Commerce Centre, and spending a day swimming and banana boating on a junk trip in the New Territories.

At the end of our business course, we packed up and flew to Shanghai for the next leg of the program. Our new 'home' was the Yuhang Hotel in the Puxing district of Shanghai, which was conveniently located by a metro station, offering easy access to many of the city's attractions. I was among a group of seven interns that was assigned to work at the Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation (SAIC) in Anting, which is an hour and a half commute to the outskirts of Shanghai.

At SAIC, I was placed in the Engineering Department where I worked in the Powertrain Systems Integration Unit on an Emission Control project. My supervisor was very approachable and he enriched my work experience by allowing me to sit in on department meetings conducted in Mandarin, taking me to visit suppliers for business deals, and even treating me to a traditional Shanghainese lunch and showing me around the beautiful Yuyuan Gardens! In the office, I spent time talking with other employees who were eager to practice their English, and from them, I gained an understanding of what it is like to work and develop your career at a Chinese, state-owned company.

Our intern group was split up during the work week due to our different work schedules, but on the weekends we planned activities and explored Shanghai, as well as surrounding cities including Hangzhou and Suzhou. Within Shanghai we walked the Bund waterfront area at night, shopped at the fabric and 'fake' markets, wandered the French Concession, and experimented with local cuisine from street vendors and restaurants alike. Part way through our time on the mainland, a group of us took some time

off to travel to Beijing by high speed train and see the capital for ourselves. We lucked out with perfect summer weather and made the most of our time by cramming as many tourist destinations into our short stay as possible. Amongst our many excursions, the trips to Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, and the Badaling section of the Great Wall stood out as incredible experiences.

My summer working and living in China has helped prepare me for today's global workplace by providing invaluable insight into the growing Asian economy and the important cross-cultural business relationship between the east and west. In the process, I formed lasting friendships with other interns from across the world, as we lived and travelled side-by-side, tackling language barriers, culture shock and logistical challenges on a daily basis. By taking every opportunity to explore ancient landmarks and immerse ourselves in the language and local culture, we improved our spoken Mandarin and became more confident as world travellers. I thoroughly enjoyed my time on the LLIC program, and am eager to see how my summer experiences will impact my future career and travels.