



光华管理学院

Guanghua School of Management

EXCHANGE REPORT

DOING BUSINESS IN CHINA

GUANGHUA SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
PEKING UNIVERSITY

Shamiet Chadha
schadha17@schulich.yorku.ca

Preparation

With my prior Indian education and work experience and now an MBA from Canada/ North America, I wanted to challenge myself by going outside my comfort zone to a non-English speaking country. Considering the global economic factors and developments, China became an obvious choice. It is a global business center with access to a huge market and high projected GDP growth rate due to manufacturing, increased exports and increased spending of the rising Chinese middle class. I think it is safe to assume that no matter the region where a business is located, there is bound to be Chinese influence that affects how businesses manage their operations. Also, the Chinese immigrant community is huge, and we are bound to interact with them at our workplaces, schools among other places, so understanding the Chinese culture was an added advantage.

Considering the above factors, the short-term exchange at Peking University in China was my first choice. A well-structured and intensive 2-week program that allowed us to visit 3 Chinese cities – Beijing, Xi'an, Shanghai – was a perfect fit for me.

Visa

The Visa process was fairly easy and straight forward. I applied for the visa from New Delhi, India and got it stamped within 5 days of submitting the application (without any help from any agent or consultant). I had all the documents in place from Schulich as well as the host school (Peking University) including the details about the accommodation in the 3 cities that I was visiting.

The only issue with the Chinese visa was that there was no online option for the application and it had to be physically submitted at the visa application center.

Finances

As our stay at all the 3 cities was arranged by Peking University, we did not have to bear any living expenses. Apart from the housing, 100 RMB per day should more than suffice one's needs and one can calculate his/her financials based on the duration of stay. I took some part of the currency in cash and the rest in forex card. Forex is accepted in all the major malls/ shopping centres and can also be used to withdraw cash from any of the ATMs at a service fee of \$2. Since China is known for its street food and local/street shopping, keeping cash is recommended.

Arrival

I flew Cathay Pacific from New Delhi to Beijing and the flight experience was second to none. My arrival and immigration at the Beijing airport was quick and hassle free.

Since all the required documents (confirmation letter for exchange, details about the program, accommodation letters for all three cities) were given to us well in advance by Peking University, there were no questions asked at the immigration. The only major problem in China is the language barrier as very few people speak English. We were well prepared on this front as all the information regarding our stay and the taxi route to our hotel were given to us by Peking University in Chinese translation to avoid any issues.

The same evening, we had a grand welcome dinner organized by Peking University and it gave us an opportunity to know all the incoming students from across the world. Peking Duck, a Chinese delicacy was relished by all.

Accommodation

Our stay was arranged by Peking University in all the three cities. All hotels were of 4-star category and were strategically located near the campus. The staff at all the hotels was friendly, check-in & check-out was smooth. To explore the city, take a local map from the hotel and understand the road & metro (subway) routes. Metro is very convenient in Beijing and Shanghai and is the cheapest way to travel within the cities. Breakfast was included, and the spread was huge at all three hotels, it provided for a great start to the day.

Academics

The DBIC (Doing Business in China) program organized by Guanghai School of Management (Peking University) was a short exchange of 14 days and it was very well structured, consisting of the following sessions:

- China's Reforms and Waves of Starting Businesses (2 sessions).
- Capital Markets in China
- Cross-Cultural Management case study.
- China: Institutional Reforms and Growth models.
- China: Social structure, Cultural Norms and Business practices.
- Marketing in China (2 sessions).

The exchange began on a fun note with a welcome dinner on the day of arrival, followed by a visit to the Great Wall of China the next day. On the third day we kick started our academics and were given a roadmap for the entire 2 weeks. There were pre-readings assigned for each of the lectures along with a case study on Cross-cultural management, which I feel was a key take-away from the program. We've heard stories of how American giants such as Amazon, Google & Uber had a hard time operating in China, and after this exchange program we could figure out various possible scenarios that could have led to such giants closing their China operations. This includes the technical aspect such as the government rules & regulations as well as the Cultural aspect, since the Chinese culture and the way business is done in the country is very different.

We had 6 continents represented in our cohort adding to the diversity and offering us a chance to know fellow students from top business schools such as Kellogg, Duke Fuqua, NUS, Arizona State, Texas A&M. The mix was about 90% MBA students and 10% undergraduate students. The Cross-cultural case study really showed us that there is no right or wrong answers to a problem, and how the same problem is dealt in different ways in different parts of the world. It really showed the importance of why understanding the local people and local culture is critical for any business to be successful.

The striking feature of the DBIC exchange program is that it is a tailor-made course focussing on the Chinese market, the Chinese consumer and the Chinese way of doing business all within a short span

of 2 weeks. So, it is different than most courses at Schulich which stretch for about a term and provides for a different learning experience. The teaching style was a mix of lectures, case studies and a group project. All the professors had a good command over their respective subjects and proactively entertained questions from the students. The class environment was engaging and discussions on how similar business situations are handled or dealt with in different parts of the world were interesting to be a part of.

Our program culminated with a group project in which we had to present a strategic recommendation for a Company based out of Europe/ North America to enter into the Chinese market. The company we chose was a London based fintech start-up 'Cuvva' which offers a pay-as-you-go car insurance services. I was able to apply the learnings and frameworks learnt in the first two terms at Schulich along with the knowledge gained through the modules at DBIC exchange. The diversity in the group contributed to meaningful and thoughtful discussions and resulted in valuable exchange of thoughts while working on the project.

To complement the class room lectures on Chinese economy and reforms, we had 4 company visits which helped in understanding the business models and operations of MNCs and local companies in China:

- Beijing Hyundai
- China National Offshore Oil Corp.
- Cisco Systems, Shanghai
- Airport New City of Xixian New Area





Travel, Recreation and Culture

The program is designed to include fun activities to go with the academics. Throughout the 14-day program, we were taken to almost all tourist attractions of Beijing, Xi'an and Shanghai. The following attractions were part of the itinerary and included in the fees:

- Day 2, Beijing: The Great Wall of China (Mutianyu Section)
- Day 6, Beijing: Forbidden City and Tian'anmen Square
- Day 7, Xi'an: Bullet Train ride from Beijing to Xi'an followed by downtown tour and visit to Muslim food street
- Day 8, Xi'an: Long Sorrow Opera
- Day 9, Xi'an: Terra-Cotta Warriors Museum
- Day 10, Shanghai: Air travel to Shanghai followed by visit to The Bund (Waterfront)
- Day 11, Shanghai: Huangpu River Cruise
- Day 13, Shanghai: Farewell

We had several evenings free to explore the three cities. Both Beijing and Shanghai have popular shopping malls and shopping streets along with a very vibrant night life. There are lots of cool spots to soak in the vibe of the city and have a drink or dance the night away. China is also extremely safe with strict enforcement of laws.

Some of the must visit places in Beijing are: The Summer Palace, Beijing Central Business District, Olympic Stadium (Birds Nest), Sanlitun Street (For bars and clubbing).

In Shanghai, the Financial District leaves one in complete awe. Oriental pearl tower, Shanghai Tower and Shanghai Aquarium, Nanjing Street are worth a visit.





International Services

We were well supported by the International Relations team at Schulich led by Cheryl Stickley. An orientation program was organized, and we were informed about various Do's and Don'ts. The session was helpful and provided us with details on what to expect and pre-requisites to do before departure.

At the Peking University, we always had a point of contact to reach out to in case of any queries or concerns. Shadow & Jenny from Guanghai School of Management went above and beyond to extend all possible help before the start and during the course of the program. There was a group created on 'WeChat' (used in China instead of WhatsApp), all the information, tips & day by day schedule was communicated to us over WeChat and email. A campus tour at the main campus of Peking University in Beijing was organized to make us familiar with important landmarks.

Languages Outside the Classroom

Communication outside of the campus was a major challenge in China since very few people speak English. Mandarin is the language spoken and understood everywhere. Thus, communication with locals was difficult. However, this was an experience and presented an exciting challenge to communicate or figure out things that I was stuck with knowing people would not understand the language. In some cases, the local people went out of the way to help, using translator apps on the mobile to help answer our questions.

Food

The Chinese food I'd say is part of the culture shock that one would experience once in China. The authentic Chinese food you get in China is quite different from the Chinese cuisine that we are used to having in our home countries. Foodies, especially non-vegetarians would relish the kind of delicacies one gets to gorge on while in China. Most of our meals were included as part of the itinerary and we were taken to the very best of Chinese restaurants and the spread was lavish at all the places (lavish is still an understatement!). For vegetarians, the food at times can be a struggle with very limited options available. I'd recommend packing some ready-to-eat stuff as backup.

One of our dinners in Beijing was at a Mongolian restaurant and that was the best meal I had in China. Mongolian food was more to my liking which had more spices and sauces, much like the Indian food.

In China, you would get to try different preparations of pork, chicken, beef and fish and this adds its own flavour to the amazing exchange experience. The Peking Duck is a must try.



Recommendation/ Conclusion

Having faced the questions “Why you chose China for exchange” and “Do you want to later work in China” multiple times in the last months, I can only answer that I could not think of a country more important to understand in today's business world, than China. I warmly recommend everyone to go on a student exchange and consider China as one of your top choices, it is totally worth it and adds an entirely new dimension to the MBA!

My exchange to Peking University, China was a phenomenal experience and China especially is such a culture that once you experience it, it breaks you out of prejudices and stereotypes we're fed about through media and other news sources. There are some decisions you take in life which turn out to be among the great choices that you've made, this DBIC exchange is going to be a life-long memory and a highlight of my MBA program.

I'd like to sum up my views on China by quoting 'Aldous Huxley'-

“To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries”

