

Internship in Changzhou, China

An internship in China sounded very nice, even though everybody warned me about doing it in summer. My expectations were high as was the temperature at the beginning of my internship.



Arrival

I took a flight from Frankfurt to Shanghai. I was greeted by a member of IAESTE China and we waited together for a second intern to arrive a little later. The intern had a relative who already visited China, so he took me to see old friends of his relative. The first evening went by, with seeing many amazing things. On the first weekend we took part in a LePA -program organized by IAESTE China, its aim was to provide us interns with a better start, so we learned a little Chinese and then there was the fun part: two actors from the traditional Chinese opera gave us a private show, teaching us how to sing and how to dance.

Apartment

During my time in Changzhou, I stayed in an apartment together with two other interns from my company. The apartment was quite big. Everybody had his own room, we had a kitchen, two balconies and a big living room. There was one well working washing machine, but we had to figure out, what's written on it, by ourselves. All necessary supplies could be bought in small supermarkets around the corner or in a Tesco, 10 Minutes away from the apartment. There was a direct bus line from the front of our district to the company.

Work

I was one of five international interns in Xingyu Automotive Lighting Systems. We all worked in different departments. I worked in two departments, first I was part of the thermal analysis team, learning how to use CATIA and Autodesk CFD simulation. After half of the internship was over, I was asked whether I could help another department. So, I was transferred to the project management department, where I met an external project manager, he was a German, who stayed in China for the time of the project. He entrusted me with managing the time schedule and taking part in the improvement of the quality of a certain lighting system. Even though some rules of the company might seem awkward to a westerner, I did enjoy (especially the second half of) the work, because I was taken seriously, I had a lot of freedom, concerning how I get my tasks done, and I was a real member of the team.

Changzhou

The city of Changzhou is quite big, compared to German cities it's almost equal to the size of Berlin. In Changzhou you can find the biggest Pagoda of Jiangsu province, several real nice public gardens, one of the 10 best looking book shops in China and much more. In Changzhou you could taste a variety of Chinese and international dishes, such as Beijing style roasted duck, Japanese Sushi, Indian Curry or the Changzhou specialty: "Sugar Pie".

Changzhou – Traffic and transportation system

The public transportation system is quite good, so you can reach almost everything by bus and if you want to go faster, you can take a taxi. Taking a taxi is very cheap, compared to German standards. But let's just say, Chinese have their own style of driving, so be prepared for some "unique" traffic experience. Funnily Changzhou's traffic was louder and more chaotic than the one in Shanghai.

Free time

IAESTE organized some trips. We went to Shanghai for the LePA-program, then for a pool party and later to Huangshan for a weekend on the mountains and a close by city.

On the other weekends I was exploring China. So, I went out of Changzhou every second weekend. Together with my roommates we went to Nanjing, together with the international interns from my company and one of the Chinese employees we went to Suzhou, together with my language tandem partner we explored Beijing and once I went to Wuxi by myself. These tours are an example of what cities you can visit and I can recommend every one of them.

The evenings in Changzhou were filled with inexpensive restaurants and for some of my colleagues with hours in the gym. The Cinemas have some English movies with Chinese subtitles, so you can enjoy that, too. If you want to watch Youtube or use Google, you have to have a VPN, but many other websites can be entered. You can use Bing.cn as a substitute for Google, even though it's not as good as Google.

Language

I had a Chinese speaking tandem partner, I taught her English and she taught me Chinese. After 6 weeks, I noticed that I didn't use much Chinese at all, I was able to buy my daily supplies without the use of the Chinese language and the level of my Chinese was far too low for being helpful during work. Considering how hard it is to learn a new language and how few I would use it after my internship, I gave up on learning Chinese but I still kept on practicing English with my tandem partner, she invited me to dinner in return.

Conclusion

I would recommend an internship in China to everybody who has the ability to adapt to his environment. The summer is quite hot (almost 40°C) during July and August and not every department uses its air conditioner. I heard rumours that Xingyu doesn't use heating devices during winter while it's around 10°C. If you'll be talking English most of the time, most of the people in the company will understand you. That does not apply for all the people, especially the older restaurant waitresses. The lifestyle is different, you are(!) considerate of everyone and you are being reminded of it everywhere. In all of China there are videos (in comic style) of accidents or correct behaviour on every bus, metro or train. The time in China was full of paraoxons, while being very relaxing at one hand, there was a lot of underline pressure at some points. You'll most likely see life differently, when you come back.