

Participant A (2008)

My time on this programme has greatly influence my future career direction. The skills and knowledge accrued through this exchange will be integral to my future and set me apart from my peers. I am certain that having proficiency in Mandarin will be an asset to me as China continues it rapid development and as globalisation makes the world appear ever smaller. Especially as economically it has become advantageous to now collaborate with China. I recognise that the root of effective communication and active cooperation comes through having a degree of cultural understanding. This understanding allows you to gain the most out of interactions with those from other countries. Due to the vast size of China I understand that each region has its own diverse perspective and individual traits. However, from my limited knowledge I believe that much of it stems from China's unrivalled truly rich ancient history. Hence, my brief exposure to China's history through Beijing has been of enormous benefit. I was so captivated that I arranged tours in order to gain an insight into China's chemical industry. Upon my return to the UK the positive impact of these visits has stayed with me and has now led me to even consider employment opportunities in China in order to further my career.

Participant B (2009)

Our accommodation was very good. The rooms had televisions, fridges, kettles, bathrooms and washing machines. The daily tasks of shopping and eating out were fantastic opportunities to talk to people. This year, I tried to go out with other students (non-English speaking) to improve my Chinese. A trip to Xian with students from the Ukraine and Canada was a particularly exciting event. As a child I remember seeing the opening of the museum (1979!) in pictures and it has been a life ambition to see the site. Unfortunately, due to flooding, the train ride took 36 hours, rather than the planned 12. The additional day was not wasted. We spoke to almost everyone in the carriage, providing much entertainment and stretching our Chinese to the limit! The bingmayong were fantastic and, even though our time was much shorter than planned, the visit was unforgettable. All that, and we were back in time for class on Monday!

The organised trips were very useful in introducing a range of Chinese culture but we also went to a much wider range of places using public transport (Beijing shows just what can be done with public transport and sill people have cars!) and this was one of the best opportunities to practice Chinese. I tried a whole range of ordinary experiences and because I had been before, spent more time talking to people and less time drawn to tourist attractions.

In conclusion, my experience of the BeiShi Da-Warwick summer school was brilliant. The programme was really well organised and it was great to see a Warwick teacher when she came to visit. The lessons were useful and productive and the daily living was exciting and linguistically profitable. I feel very fortunate to have had this opportunity and I hope I have made the very most of it.

Participant C (2009)

Lessons were interesting in a way that you walk to class knowing that the all-smiley and friendly teachers will speak Chinese all the way through and that you probably will not understand half of it for the first week. However the daily repetitions of useful sentences gave us courage as with time we were able to understand mostly everything. The teachers were especially helpful in making us feel at

ease in a foreign country and the pretty teacher Tingting was my favourite. She always had a smile for everyone and a word to cheer us up when tiredness started to gain on us.

This trip was simply excellent, I loved the food and tea, the different cultures and traditions of the Chinese (they have their own special way of doing things) and their welcoming smiles. The one-day visit in a nearby village proved that even the smallest area in China could be warm and home to wonderful features. The view was indescribable, the water pure and fresh, the waterfalls breathless. A few days later, at a pottery-making factory, I could not choose between the vase I made myself and the plate-drawing, so I took both. This was once in a lifetime chance! For lunch we had rabbit, what an interesting dish, we were all both shocked and curious.

It is those little things which make China a great country. We had the opportunity to witness the preparations for the 2008 Olympics and their extreme stadiums. Little souvenirs were a must. We went home sad to leave but promising ourselves to come back again. If the opportunity shows itself in the near future, there will be no hesitation from my part, I will pack my bag straight to China.

Participant D (2010)

This year I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to attend the summer Chinese language programme in Beijing along with many other students from both the University of Warwick and from all over the world. In retrospect I highly value the time I spent at Beijing Normal University (Beijing Shifan Daxue), not solely for the progress I have made in Mandarin as a result, but also for its exposing me to another culture quite apart from my own. Furthermore, as a result of the time I have spent at Beijing Normal University I have had the opportunity to meet many new faces from all over the world, which has been a learning experience in itself. I have found that studying with those who speak English as a second, or sometimes third, language can inspire progress through co-operation and shed new light on a seemingly complex mode of communication – i.e. Mandarin.

Participant E (2013)

Furthermore, I feel that I now have a better cultural understanding of many different societies now both in China and other countries. The people I met whilst on the course were truly amazing and I can honestly say that I have made many new friends from around the world and talk to them on a regular basis. I can safely say that I now have a place to stay in 6 continents through meeting some wonderful people on the Beijing course.

Participant F (2009)

In retrospect, I cannot consider myself anything other than very lucky. The course was so well organised and planned, I imagine it must have been quite comforting for those concerned about

their first time in China. Beijing Normal University is a well renowned centre of education, and it showed, because I felt the teaching was excellent. The books covered appropriate material, and the level was challenging but didn't want to make you give up. But what was most important was that studying in BNU really opened up the culture of China to us. It was great to hear about the different ways of life, see the different attitudes and really feel submerged in the country itself. It was great to feel part of it, rather than just a tourist.

Although the mornings were early and the classes were very concentrated, we made good progress and I feel like my vocabulary has doubled in only 4 weeks. The teaching method is very different from in England, but for someone going to China specifically (this time, at least!) to learn Chinese, I think the intensity is great, and still left you with time in the afternoons to explore the fantastic sights of China's capital. But most importantly, it meant that that work/play balance of the course was ideal, as you could study hard, but also make some very strong friendships in that time. In fact, another two weeks would have been brilliant!

Participant G (2009) (Lots of tips)

- Beijing is absolutely huge. I would guess that it covers twice as much area as London. But despite its size, it has less tube stations than London, which implies a lower density. My advice is to realise that just because a certain tube station is the nearest, it does not mean that it is near! In particular, BNU is more than 15 mins walk from any tube station making buses necessary – even if only then to pick up the tube.
- The tube network is very modern and clean. It is being expanded all the time as well.
- The tube costs 2 Yuan per ticket, irrespective of where you will go.
- Buses cost 1 Yuan per ticket, irrespective of where you will go (actually this might not be true for all journeys, but for me I always paid 1 Yuan)
- The tube *requires* and the bus *allows* the use of electronic passes a bit like Oyster in London. Should you want one you can only buy them from tube stations – a very easy process – top it up with however much you want.
- The airport express tube line takes 20 minutes to and from Dongzhimen and costs 25 Yuan.
- Throw away your preconceptions about China being poor (and the associated expectations about asset ownership). There are more cars on the roads in Beijing than in London, and the average quality of car is much higher (i.e. VW Passat, Ford Mondeo are the most common type – not at all rare). Also Beijingers have all of the other assets that rich people have. Everybody has a mobile phone (again of better quality than the average British phone) and an mp3 player. Laptop PCs are also just as common as in England. In other words, any thoughts that Beijing people can't afford to own assets, based on the assumption that they are too poor, is simply wrong.
- Mobile phones are expensive in Beijing. A phone that you would expect to pay 300 pounds for in England is 3500 Yuan. Nevertheless, many Chinese own them!
- Chinese plugs are not the same as any other country that you are likely to have visited. Bring an adaptor with you as they are not available in most shops. That said, the market does sell them – expect to pay 25 Yuan.
- Visit Summer Palace – and stay for 5 hours. It is amazing!
- Food is cheap. There is a noodle bar 5 minutes away around the corner (out of the apartment turning left, at the first junction turn left and then walk for 1 minute) which sell noodles for 8 –

12 Yuan. That is a typical price for most local restaurants. Also over the road, about 5 minutes walk past Mcdonalds, is a decent Japanese restaurant (expect 35 Yuan total cost) and next door is a dumpling restaurant (expect 25 Yuan). Basically I would recommend going to places like this every day for lunch and then also for dinner. Cheap and tasty with fast service.

- Street food is even cheaper – expect to pay 2 – 4 Yuan for an item. Two items should feed you for lunch.
- Beer is cheap. You can pay 2.5 Yuan for a 660 ml bottle of Yanjing beer. More usually though it is about 3.5 Yuan in shops and 4 or 5 Yuan in restaurants.
- Bring 5000 Yuan for four weeks.
- Lessons are tough and you need to work hard to keep up. Expect your day to be as follows 7.30 am Wake up. 7.55 am Walk to lesson. 11.45 am Finish lesson and go to lunch. 1.15 pm Finish lunch and walk back to accommodation for a nap. 2.30 pm Wake up and work. 8 pm Dinner. 9.15 pm Chill out with friends. 11.30 pm Go to bed. As you can see, that represents over five hours of work in your room before dinner.
- Don't go away for the weekends. You will not have enough time to visit Shanghai, Tianjin or Inner Mongolia properly. You will need to do work at the weekends. Also Beijing has so much to see that you really don't need to explore other places.
- Hire a bike and ride around – it is great fun. Olympic park is riding distance.