

# EXPERIENCE REPORT FOR IAESTE SWITZERLAND

3 MONTHS IN YANTAI, CHINA

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by Vera Zeugin

## ORGANIZATION AND ARRIVAL



When I received note that I was accepted to the internship in China it didn't realize what journey I would soon start. While I traveled to a few countries before, I've never been to Asia. The reality started sinking in after I looked at my Chinese Visa in my passport: I'd soon live in a country where I wouldn't understand the language and that was vastly different from the Western countries I've visited before. I was excited but also a little intimidated.

IAESTE China helped me with my preparation: they provided me with all necessary papers for the visa, they answered all questions I had immediately via email and they prepared everything for my arrival in Yantai.

I had to change flights in Beijing, which included picking up and dropping off my baggage. Upon landing my worries vanished immediately. The whole airport was labeled in Chinese and English. The staff there also spoke (sometimes broken) English and could give me directions. After I landed in Yantai, two colleagues, one of them my roommate, picked me up and drove me to the apartment where I would live.

It was a two-bedroom apartment with a small kitchen, a bathroom with a shower, washing machine/dryer and a small living room.

## WORK IN YANTAI

The first day at work included my only bad experience with the whole internship. The ad was described as consulting and business management, the actual work however turned out to be teaching English. While it didn't meet my initial expectations, the whole experience turned out just as great and I still learned a lot during my stay.

The classes I was assigned were for adults and only for few people. Usually I had 1-3 students. I was given a topic list but had the freedom to structure the lesson to my liking and even changing the topic when I found them unfitting. Focusing mostly on oral practice gave way to fun and entertaining lessons.

Besides the regular lessons I had to arrange Demo Classes where interested people could have a free lesson in a casual environment. Some of those classes were at the bureau, while others were at college campuses.



My company had, besides the English school, also collaborative businesses. In this context I also had to create an interview with the vice president of international affairs from the Missouri State University.

While the work in Yantai was not what I expected, I learned a different set of skills, including public speaking and efficient organization. My colleagues and boss also always made sure to include me into everything and made me feel welcome in general.

## LIVING IN YANTAI

While I shared my apartment with one other colleague, we didn't spend much time together. This was also true for any other colleagues I had. I was welcome, included at work and cared for very well, but besides



having lunch and sometimes dinner together, most of the Chinese I've met (and what my foreign friends told me) liked to spend their free time withdrawn to relax from everyday stress.

Unfortunately I was alone in Yantai with no other IAESTE students. So even though there was an IAESTE WeChat group, there wasn't much for me to gain from it. And since I was in China outside IAESTE's main season, there weren't many events I could participate in.

So, jumpstarting any social activities may not have been as easy as I thought but I was never truly alone. IAESTE China soon gave me a contact from foreigners working at a local company and thus the door to meeting new people was opened. Because the average foreigner in China likes to participate in more activities than the

average local, foreigners stick together strongly and quickly introduce you to many new people to meet – some also locals that have a similar mentality.

The best opportunity to meet new people was at the Chao Yang street (the Bar street) where there were many pubs. I found myself learning darts, playing pool with other Westerners and exchanging stories over Tsingtao beer.

For entertainment there were also many malls with different Chinese, Korean and Western brands. A nearby cinema also had foreign movies in English with Chinese subtitles.

I mentioned that, from my experience and what other foreigners told me, the average foreigner participates in many more social activities in their free time. This means in no way that the Chinese are not social. Proof for this is their eating culture that has a strong connection to social activities and emotions. This becomes clearer upon realizing that the Chinese phrase for "How are you?", "吃了没 (Chī le ma)?", literally means "Have you eaten?".

I always ate together with my colleagues in the neighboring food street where I enjoyed many different meals and snacks. The Chinese way is to share your food (unless it comes in a small bowl for yourself) either eating it directly from a plate in the middle (this is most often the case) or simply giving the others some of the street snacks you bought, like small sausages on skewers. Not only did I eat with my colleagues but also with my students from time to time. Sometimes they brought me food just because. We also went to their home to cook some local food.



## EXPLORING CHINA



Because my students were working adults, most classes were in the evening or at the weekend. So weekend trips were usually not possible for me. However I did travel to two other places: Beijing and Shanghai.

In Shanghai I met two IAESTE students for a short time. We went to a fake market where I honed my negotiation skills. And while the skyline of Shanghai was incredible to see and the parks beautiful to walk in, it was A-Okay compared to the city of Beijing.

Beijing has an incredible amount of historical sightseeing. Getting around was easy because, like Shanghai, the whole city is labeled in English. Even the metro announcements were in Chinese and English. A good website in particular for travel preparations is [travelchinaguide.com](http://travelchinaguide.com) which also explains things that are not translated, such as train tickets and how traveling by train works.



Besides all the temples and museums, the true highlight of my China journey was the visit of the Great Wall. We went to the Mutianyu section outside of the tourist time and thus were almost alone. The sight on the wall is definitely something one has to experience when visiting China.

## THANKS AND CONTACT

My time in China has definitely been one of my best experiences so far. There was so much to learn and see and while every journey has its pro and contra, the good has definitely outweighed anything negative by far. I would recommend anyone considering such a program to take the step and go explore the world.

I want to thank the IAESTE Switzerland team, in particular Victor Varga, who helped me immensely until everything was settled. I also want to thank the IAESTE China team, especially Min Xiaoke, who helped me with everything during my stay. My thanks also go to E&C International and Hippo who welcomed me to their company and made this whole experience so great.

Last but not least, for anyone considering going to China or who's trip is already in planning, I want to offer my help. If you have any question about my experience or in general feel free to contact me at [vera.zeugin@outlook.com](mailto:vera.zeugin@outlook.com). I'd love to help you out.

