



October 2019 – January 2020



Shanghai, China

Experience of being abroad

What situation brought me to limits?

When I landed in China, I was not aware of the fact that the Chinese people don't speak English nor understand it. Therefore, when I arrived at the hotel and asked for the room which IAESTE organized for me, the receptionist didn't understand me and pulled over a phone where I could talk in English and the phone translated automatically into Chinese. It took me a while to get to use to this kind of communication via a device. During these 3 months the situation didn't change at all and it was always challenging to order food of your preferences or ask for something else on the street or in public places. So, you were on your own and you had to eat what you've been served and there were literally no chance that you get to know what exactly were eating. So, this language barrier brought me to the limit but with the time I got used to it and I learned the most important Chinese words and was able communicate a little which helped me a lot. It need to be mentioned that in China you don't have Google, WhatsApp or any other kind of Internet.



How did my traineeship influence my personal development?

During these 3 months, I lived together with 5 other IAESTE Students in the same apartment since we had the Practical Training in the same company. So being together 24/7 we shared all the experiences we made and learned to adjust according to each of our wishes which was sometimes even challenging but at the end we got to know each other very well became very close friends who share an unique experience for lifetime. So certainly each of us learned tolerance and acceptance which is highly beneficial for our personal development.



What am I happy about?

To have taken this step and went to a country which felt like another planet. One of the most important things to mention is, that in China you don't have Google, WhatsApp or Wikipedia. So, you are totally lost anyway and have to rely on VPN which doesn't work always and if yes really slowly. So, you couldn't talk to your friends and Family back home as you used to, and this was challenging. I can proudly say that I managed 3 months without proper social media, and it was definitely worth it.

The most interest encounter I had.

I was shocked and overwhelmed by the politeness and hospitality of Chinese people. I didn't know that they'll treat you so nicely and gentle. They would help you without hesitating and take all of their time and would drop everything to come and help you. And this help and gesture came from their heart. They were happy when you were happy and there was no way they gave up on your issue or problems until they found a solution. This was my most impressive, meaningful and touching experience.



Experience at work:

What was the most valuable thing I've learned from my colleagues at work?

As I already mentioned, I learned about their culture, which also was present in work environment where they always were helpful and cared about you 24 hours. As soon as they feel that you don't feel comfortable in the lab, they would do anything to change it. From ordering warm clothes, blankets, Train tickets to the great wall, etc. And almost every day, one of the Chinese girls, with whom I became very close friend now, brought me Chinese sweets and snacks from home and we had lot of coffee breaks and good talk during our work.

What could your colleagues learn from me?

I think the only thing they could benefit from me was to use their English while talking to me. And I could see their improvements in the 3 months where they had no other choice. And I could tell that they were really proud about their development and I am grateful I could contribute to this experience.

Cultural Differences: There were many cultural differences between Chinese Culture and Swiss culture, I will mention a few:

The Food: They eat different kinds of meat which we are not used to eat. Once they served us frogs in the canteen. Since they don't speak English at the Canteen, we were not aware of it but one of the Chinese colleagues gave us the hint right on time, since she knew that some of us exchange students don't eat frogs. The most special food I had was Chinese Hot Pot. It is typical Chinese Food and I loved it; it was a nice experience.

Once over the weekend we went to Xian which was famous for Chinese Burger, but I didn't know that the meat was almost uncooked. But the long waiting queue for that burger showed me that it was a delicacy for the locals.

Traffic: In China traffic lights exist, but nobody cares. If its green or red, it's all the same. You need to have a good amount of intuition and awareness to cross the road safely. Coming from Switzerland this traffic chaos was something I needed to get used to it.

Social Media Ban: As already mentioned, in China Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp or Google or even Youtube is all banned. You need to find alternatives to spend your time while staying at home in the apartment or want to talk to your friends back home.

Payment: In China they don't accept Cash, nor any Foreign Credit card. So, it was impossible to buy anything, and it was devastating since the products were so cheap. Instead, you need to use WeChat or Alipay to use as payment method, whereas to open an account you need a Chinese Bankcard which nobody of us had. I was lucky since my Mentor connected his bankcard to my account and I could use WeChat as payment method. And this was one of his simple gesture I was so overwhelmed about and appreciate a lot.

What was the advantage doing an Internship through IAESTE?

It is not easy to travel to China Mainland as a and nearly impossible to get a visa to live there in a longer period. Through IAESTE I luckily had this opportunity, and everything was well organized, and you had always someone to get back to if you had any questions or troubles. You were guided very well during the application procedure and had a very good back up.



What do I take from this experience?

During this Internship I met people from all over the world and made some good friends. Especially the 5 people who I lived and worked together with were amazing and we are still in touch. As our apartment was near Disneyland, we used to go there almost every day after

work and enjoy the castle and the Disney Music and environment. We came as stranger and became very close friends in such a small period, we celebrated Christmas and New Year together, had amazing time during Shanghai nightlife, visited the great wall of China and have gone through all the struggles I've mentioned before together. Later on, three of us travelled to Seoul in South Korea and one of them visited me later in Switzerland. I am really grateful about this experience and want to thank IAESTE for this opportunity and one of the best Experience in my Life.



With Love,
Sahana S.