

The Forbidden City



CHINA

4 Weeks in The PRC

If you were to ask me what some of my favorite moments were from the INTO China Summer Program, I'd have to sound cliché, but honest and tell you: "all of them". A full month in a foreign land may seem like an eternity, with plenty of time for things to turn sour, but in my experience, those 4 weeks flew by in a flash, jam packed with laughter, color, taste, photos, crowds, smells, cab rides, culture, and skewers.

First Weekend in Beijing



Week One: Expect the Unexpected

Our first taste of the People's Republic of China was in Beijing. Our group of just over a dozen students, from all over the world, spent the next Friday, Saturday and Sunday exploring all of the sights you would expect to see, such as The Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, and The Temple of Heaven, but we also took some time to see, taste and hear some things that you might not have found on a Lonely Planet blog or an episode of Globe Trekker. For example, the local representatives from INTO China recommended we have dinner at a restaurant called "A Thousand and One Nights" an Arabian restaurant we would never have thought to seek out, much less be able to find in downtown Beijing on our own.

A Lesser
Known Part of
the

Great WALL



CHINESE+

Living and studying on campus, comfortably

We lived in the heart of campus at the international student dorm. Before long we had made friends with other students from Russia, Vietnam, Brazil and Italy.



Week Two:

New City, New Adventure

From Beijing, our group set off to Dalian, a “small city” of just under 7 million in the Northeast, where we would embark on our cultural immersion program at Dongbei University of Finance and Economics. Unlike Beijing, which has a great number of bicycles due to its relatively flat cityscape, Dalian required a taxi or bus to get around, because of its hilly and sprawling layout. This was perhaps the best feature of daily life in Dalian, an abundance of taxicabs at a very affordable rate. A ride from campus to the main city square, about a half hour ride, cost less than \$10 USD. Such cheap and reliable transportation enabled us to explore virtually every aspect of the city, from the beach to the nightlife to the Old Russian District.



Weeks Three and Four:

Being Able to Speak Mandarin... a Little

After two weeks of living and learning in China, we had all adjusted to the culture and language enough to comfortably take on tasks by ourselves like directing a cab driver or shopping for everyday items. I remember one of the first phrases I mastered was “Duo shao qian?” or “how much does it cost?” This phrase soon evolved with several follow up phrases such as “that’s too expensive” and “can you make it cheaper?” It did not take long to learn that virtually every item for sale, other than food and goods sold in chain stores, had to be haggled for. This dance of numbers and cheesy smiles is one that all people in China conduct every day, for many purchases, but as a foreigner, you had your work cut out for you as most merchants viewed tourist as easy prey. For example, a bottle of water at a tourist attraction may cost a foreigner about \$1 USD, but for the average Chinese tourist, the same bottle of water could be had for less than 20 cents, with some friendly encouragement. By the end of the fourth week, we all felt like we had found our place in Dalian. Unfortunately, just as we had begun to feel as though we belonged, it was time to go home.