

Luz Figueredo

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Luz Figueredo is an IAF student who took part in a Faculty-Led Program Abroad to the Beijing Language and Culture University in Summer 2018. Below she details her experience in Beijing, China.

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Have you ever thought about going to China someday? In my case, the answer was 'no'.

But one morning, I got an email from Seneca offering a chance to be part of a mobility program in Beijing. I was curious, but skeptical about whether it would be a good idea at first. Eventually, I decided to go ahead with my application. I said to myself that opportunities like this don't come every day.

But the result was that on April 27, 2018, I ended up with a wonderful group of people. Once I arrived, I saw a completely different world. Beijing, the capital of China, is also the best representative of Chinese tradition and history.

That's not to say there weren't some jarring surprises. What was surprising about Beijing was the shortage of people who can speak English. This language barrier caused a lot of difficulties when we wanted to explore around the city. But after our first week of Chinese lectures with the best Laoshi (teacher in Chinese), we had the basic words to start socializing with locals.

As a way to adapt to this and other differences you'll find in China, there are also other things you should know before you go.

1. It's very rare to find an establishment where they take credit card, everyone uses Wechat Pay, Alipay, and cash.
2. Download Didi. It's the taxi application of China and you will need it. They charge the fair price of a ride and you will be safe from scamming from black taxis.
3. China is an extremely safe place, but when crossing the street, you should be extremely careful. In China, a red light doesn't mean stop at all.
4. People will take pictures. They do ask nicely. For some Chinese people, it is rare to see foreigners and they might want to keep a memory of them.

5. When shopping in China, ALWAYS negotiate, and NEVER take the first price. Sellers will offer you an extremely high price, which you can get lowered by more than a 50 per cent if you bargain effectively.

But in spite of any issues, this was a great trip. Apart from the city, the Beijing Language and Culture University also surpassed my expectations. The residence was very clean and organized, and we had a lot of amenities as well as kind staff. Inside, they had were two restaurants with great meals at a fair price.

But the one moment that I consider as unbelievable, which I'll never forget, and which in many ways encapsulates the trip, was when we all went to the Great Wall of China as part of a BLCU tour. It turns out that this giant structure has a lot of loops around the city, and our Laoshi took us to the less crowded loop with the most unbelievable view.

The Great Wall took many years of construction, but it wasn't sufficient to protect the city. And yet, it's considered a masterpiece of world architecture. If there was something I learned on this trip, it's that despite any imperfections, the most beautiful things are the sometimes the most imperfect.

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