

# My Journey to China: The Best Semester Ever!

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*This chapter per the authors focuses on a study - abroad experience in China and everything that came with it, offering an honest look at the ups, downs and unexpected moments that shaped the semester. The purpose of this chapter is to give readers a clear understanding of what the experience involved and how it unfolded over time. Instead of presenting an idealized story, this chapter shares the more realistic side of studying abroad - days filled with excitement, stress, and long periods of uncertainty that still moved the journey forward. Through all of these moments, the experience continued, slowly creating change that was not always noticeable at first but became meaningful over time. The authors present this chapter as a way of showing how a new environment can push someone to grow in ways that are not planned or intended. living in a different country often bring a mix of emotions, and this chapter explains how those emotions influenced the overall experience. There were days when everything felt manageable or overwhelming.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

China has been nothing short of an amazing experience. I'm incredibly grateful to have been offered this opportunity and to have seen all the things I've seen on this trip. As an exchange student studying abroad, I've witnessed parts of China I never thought I'd experience, especially at my age. I've also never been this far from

home for so long, and in this time, I've learned a lot about myself, about others, about my own culture, and about Chinese culture too.

One of the best parts about China I would have to say is probably the people. I've met so many—not just locals, but people from all over the world. While China is predominantly Chinese, there are also many foreigners here who come to work and study. I've met people from Korea, Syria, Turkey, Russia, Belize, Morocco, and even Belarus. It's been incredible hearing their stories and learning about their cultures as well. The attractions, deep history, stunning architecture, culture, and fun nightlife have all given me memories and stories I'll be telling for years to come. Looking back, I can't believe I almost chickened out and didn't come...

The Chinese people have been incredibly welcoming and kind, helping me adjust to this new environment. I've met strangers on the street who showed genuine kindness without expecting anything in return—just naturally good people. Of course, there's no place like home, but this place has started to feel like one. Life here is very different from the U.S.—a new economy, a new market, a new diet, a new pace. Adjusting hasn't always been easy. You have to change so much of your routine that it can feel overwhelming at first. But once you find your footing, everything starts to come together.

Honestly, the support I had made all the difference. From my mentor, Bae, to Jessie (the CIS coordinator here in China), to my Chinese friends and fellow classmates—everyone helped make this place feel less foreign. I've learned so much about the culture, the people, the city, and even the government. China isn't as hard to navigate as I thought either. This might sound surprising, but the language barrier has actually been the least of my worries. Maybe that's because I had some practice beforehand, but honestly, people here are so patient and understanding I feel like it's really not that bad. Plus, with ChatGPT as my translation tool, I've been pretty unstoppable as it makes communicating really easy since it accounts for dialect, idioms, and translation disparities.

## **BEFORE CHINA**

Before studying abroad, I attended Kean USA as a transfer student from NJCU in Jersey City, New Jersey. I grew up in New Jersey and consider myself a suburban girl, though I've spent plenty of time in urban settings as well. I'm Latin—Puerto Rican and Dominican, to be exact—but ultimately, I identify as American. In fact, my time in China helped me embrace that identity even more. Over there, no one asks for specifics; if you're from America, you're simply American. I didn't mind that at all. I was born and raised in the U.S. and, if anything, feel more American than anything else. Back home, when people find out I'm Puerto Rican and Do-

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