Studying in China has always captivated me due to the country's rapid economic and technological growth so as its rich cultural history. I intended to do there an exchange in 2020, but the health crisis postponed it, so the summer program was a great opportunity to do it before starting my master.
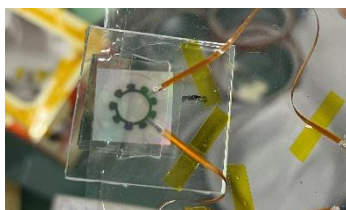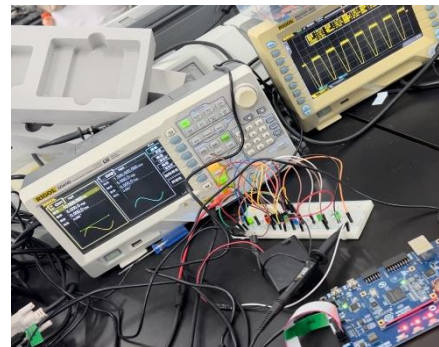
My short time in China was a life-changing experience. It expanded my worldview so much and it made me get out of my comfort zone. I made so many valuable friendships during this time and dove into the rich culinary taste from the country.

The application process mainly involved submitting my university's enrollment, a motivation letter, a nomination letter from the international office, an ID photo, my passport and proof of my language skills. After getting the submission of the university you can go directly to the embassy without an appointment to apply for your Chinese visa. I paid around 100€ for it and got it like 4 days after. When you get your first visa, normally you only get one entry visa, so you got to be careful not to plan any trips during your stay there because you won't be able to come back to the country. Preferably travel before or after your program to other countries (use the opportunity if you are already in Asia).

I won't lie, at the beginning it was difficult since everything I knew was different. No western apps were used there (that's also means no google maps, unless you have internet and a vpn app), most of the people couldn't speak English, got blocked of WeChat for sending a friend request twice to the same person, my normal bank cards were not working (only Alipay but I had some problems with it at the beginning) and most of the toilets were squad toilets. But after some days I started understanding how everything works there, I got a Chinese SIM card, and the volunteers were really helpful. They helped us registered and with all apps, guided us through the campus and took us to touristic places. We also got the opportunity to visit two of the most important companies in China, Alibaba and Baidu. Both companies shared with us their history, main achievements and gave us a plant tour.

The program I enrolled into gave us practical experience into the immersing technologies. We immersed into coding, microcontrollers, AI, FPGA board, telecommunications, data analysis and sensors. Beside we got the chance to have some Chinese language and cultural classes. Through the program we were informed about an international Chinese competition and the chance to apply there during our stay in China. The university provided support material for the development of the idea and mentoring. I was lucky enough to find a great team to develop our idea in our time there. We worked on it after classes and made it to submission. At the moment, no results have been published but either way I was lucky enough to find in these project friends and teammates with the motivation on continuing regarding our country location and time difference.

China is developing fast and its technology it is amazing. The university showed us some projects, like the smart contact lenses. Also, you saw some autonomous autos from Baidu on the streets or you got options to pay with your face or hand.

During the summer program I mostly spoke English and Spanish, there were no German classmates in my course, but this helped me made many friends of other parts of the world. My Chinese skills mostly developed in some useful sentences or words, but I would love to continue learning the language. I used an app called Nomad, which included mobile data and at the same time vpn. This app helped me communicate using the translator (images and conversation) when communicating with natives. Being able to break this language barrier gave me great opportunities to meet so many Chinese people and to travel to places on the weekends where normally tourists don't go.

I was able to pay this trip because I still received my salary and only took vacation days to be able to participate in the program. However, the university covered the program expenses and the dorms. China is a cheap country so even if you eat three times a day out you might not even spend 10€ and if you eat inside the campus one meal per day, you need around 12€ for the whole week.

Normally you get credits points for the program and a certificate. In my case I only got a certificate because I had to come back a week before the program finished to write my first exam of the semester.

The main things I can recommend are:

- Don't be afraid to experience something new and to make mistakes (or to approach people). Chinese people are super friendly, they love foreigners. Make new friends! Also most of the time they are going to ask you to take photos with them.

- Bring a VPN (before entering the country) and mobile data with you. I recommend Nomad (for mobile data and vpn combined), Astrill or LetsVPN as only VPNs and to get a SIM card after arriving. Having a Chinese mobile phone is super useful as verification and communication method.

- Download WeChat and Alipay. Everybody communicates through WeChat (you can also pay with it). Alipay was for me the most useful app for payment, ordering in restaurants, for using the public transport (you get your QR code through the app), for sending money to my friends, for using Didi or Hellobike. Alipay accepted only MasterCard or visa, but I think no IBAN card so take that into consideration. For Alipay and the train app you need to verify yourself with your passport.

- Being vegetarian can be hard in China. They eat a lot of meat. Make sure you learn how to explain in Chinese that you don't want meat. All kinds of food in the cafeteria were written in Chinese so If you are not proficient make sure to use the image translating app. At least for iPhone you find it as "Translator" and inside the app under camara.

- Always take paper or soap with you, many toilets don't have toilet paper nor soap. Also, street food restaurants or hawk centers don't have toilet paper sometimes.

- China is super cheap, make sure to always bargain, you definitely can get some good prices! Taobao is like an amazon app there, you can find so many stuff there to buy.

- China has amazing mountains, make sure to visit them. Get out of the typical touristic places. There is more of China than those typical places, besides they are mostly overcrowded.

- On Summer China can be super warm, having a fan or ventilator with you might be helpful and using an umbrella to cover from the sun as well! When it rains it rains really hard, bring good shoes for it, some classmates got their shoes destroyed because of the rain.

- If you are in Beijing some places I can recommend (not very known) for traveling are: Gubei water town, Datong (Yungang Grotto, hanging temple Heng Shan and city wall), Shidu (Beijing Sidu Juma Paradise), Yun Ju Temple, Tan Zhe Si, Gushan Stockaded Village, Cuandixia Village and the eight temples great park. There is also a hotpot chain called "haidilao" you eat hotpot and get your nails done for free. The restaurant Peking Chamber is also worth it to try the Peking duck.

Navigating daily life in China required some adaptation, but it is worth it to experience it at least once in your life, it's another world! I normally travel a lot, and before China I was in Singapore but after China I felt that after being there I could be anywhere in the world and survive, it's a nice feeling of independence and achievement.