

In this report, I will describe my experience during my study abroad semester in China, at Nanjing University. During my stay, I got the opportunity to experience a new educational system, learn the Chinese language in an authentic environment, and gain a deeper understanding of the local culture. Throughout this report, I will discuss organisational aspects, including the application process, obtaining a visa, and finding accommodation, as well as the challenges and achievements in the academic field. In the end, I will highlight both the positive aspects and the difficulties encountered to provide a balanced perspective on this experience.

The first step of going abroad was completing the forms for the future host university, which was extremely easy. The form that we had to complete was quite straightforward and had a good English translation, so as a non-native German or Chinese speaker, I found it easy to understand and complete the task. After the form and all of the documents were sent, the next step was obtaining a visa. Personally, for me, this was not a stressful process, as this wasn't my first time doing this, so it was quite fast. I had the chance to apply for a visa in Frankfurt, rather than my home country, a thing that made my preparation for going abroad more convenient. Because I was able to do this, I could just simply stay in Germany and solve all of the next steps for the semester abroad, rather than wasting time on going back to my country, the overall process being extremely easy and accessible to complete.

The next step was finding accommodation. I opted for the dorms that were provided by the host university, and I would sincerely recommend this to other students who want to study in Nanjing in the future. We just had to submit a form, and the accommodation was guaranteed. The only problem with the process was that we couldn't select the people we wanted to room with, and also they gave us a single-room option or a double-room, but in the end, when we arrived at the university, they were only allowing students to stay in a shared room. For me, this was not a huge problem, but a lot of international students ended up complaining about this fact.

After all of the steps we completed in Europe, the next thing was the going abroad part. A short time before arriving in China, the university provided an information guide with everything that we had to know before and most importantly after arriving in China. I found this guide quite helpful, with pictures and pieces of information that helped us settle in a bit faster.

Until now, everything was fine. I arrived in China, and the route to the university was easy to find, we found the dorms, the check-in process was again extremely easy, the rooms were fine, and we had to clean, but that was to be expected. Everything was smooth sailing until the class registration period. Here is where I had the most problems, as I still think that the information from the host university was not clear enough. Before arriving in China, besides the information guide, we got an Excel document with all of the classes offered in English for international/exchange students and a guide on how to register for the said classes. The people in charge of us mentioned that the class

registration would be held on the orientation day to make sure that the students don't make any mistakes in selecting the class. What was not made clear to us was that the already limited spaces were for all students, including those who already knew how the whole registration process worked. This meant that on the day we had to register, we didn't have classes left to register for. As a student who had to complete 30 ECTS to pass my semester, this was a big problem, as it was extremely hard to secure a spot in a class. It was a very stressful process because we had to "fight" for our places. In the end, the university was somehow able to solve this problem because they provided more spots for exchange students, but still, it wasn't enough. However, I don't know if this issue will be addressed in the future, as adding a few extra spots was the only solution they found at the time.

Despite this, the registration process itself was simple. The university provided buses to take us downtown to the registration building, where everything was extremely structured. Volunteers were assigned to each section and department, making the process even smoother. This was also the moment when we obtained health insurance, which was incredibly easy to get. A dedicated section in the hall handled everything for us; we paid the required fee, handed over our passports, and it was done. Later, if we needed to access our insurance, we could easily find it through a mini-program on WeChat. The entire registration process was well-organized—we received our student cards, and everything was clearly explained. We even got a small welcome pack, which I found very thoughtful and useful.

The next problem was attending courses taught in Chinese, and here I am excluding the intensive language program, which was very enjoyable and I feel helped me integrate a bit better into Chinese society. Because the English classes had a limited number of spots, I was forced to take a class in Chinese. I was aware of the difficulty factor, but at that time, it was my only option. The problem was that the teacher, after the first class, told us never to attend the class and to find other courses to try. After some stressful weeks, I managed to find enough classes to complete my ECTS request, and the classes I ended up taking were one of the reasons I really enjoyed my stay in China. The classes were really interactive, with different teachers who shared their experiences with us and who tried to help us better integrate into society. We had different activities, we visited temples, discovered Chinese food and local life—it was a really nice experience.

The next big problem was the location of the dorm and the classes. Half of my classes were on the campus affiliated with my dorm, but the morning classes were held downtown, which meant we had to commute every single day for class for 1 hour in the morning and 1 hour back. This was extremely tiring as my classmates and I had to wake up at 5:30–6:00 a.m. to make it on time for the 8 a.m. class. This commute was necessary because advanced-level Chinese classes were not available on the campus I was living in. Another issue was that, despite multiple requests, the university did not allow exchange students to live in the dorms closer to the classrooms downtown.

As far as the academic part goes, this is where I encountered most of my problems. Besides that, everything else was quite easy to decipher and understand. The food was easy to procure, the daily necessities were available everywhere, and everything was just one click away due to China's technological developments.

After I finished my academic requirements, like any other international student, I went travelling. In my opinion, this was the most entertaining part of my exchange. Traveling around China really helped me integrate a bit better into the social structure, interact with local people, learn more about the culture, and of course, experience things that are not available in Europe. I visited ancient towns, ultra-high-tech cities, villages—everything that was available to us and that I had time for. The local people, even though at times they were a bit sceptical about interactions with foreigners, were extremely welcoming. They showed us around, took pictures with us, and introduced us to local food and places—it was an amazing experience.

Overall, I truly enjoyed this experience. Studying and living in China, even with the small challenges I encountered, exceeded my expectations in every way. Not only did I gain valuable academic knowledge, but I also developed personally, learning how to adapt to new environments and navigate unfamiliar situations. If someone offered me the opportunity to go to China again, I would go tomorrow without hesitation.

Picture time: (I will send a separate document with pictures)

Since day one, the wonders of China made it really impossible not to take any pictures or videos, so I made sure that even during stressful times I took a brief moment to capture what was around me at that time. Here are some pictures from my stay abroad in China. The first picture shows the flag that was raised every morning in front of the library on my campus. Next in the PDF, you'll find some pictures from different museums and temples I visited during my stay, some friends we made along the way, cities and skylines, and the last picture, which shows how I and my friends celebrated the beginning of 2025 in Chongqing surrounded by locals and local traditions.

