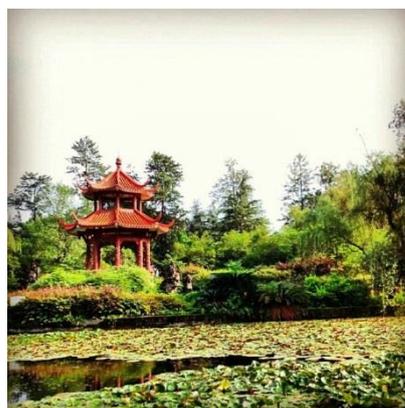


## Queen Mary University Expedition Fund - China Immersion Programme 2014

### Nǐ Hǎo! - “你好”

My trip was to China, in the city of Chengdu, which is the Sichuan province capital. Here I participated in Sichuan University's international immersion program with students from universities from around the globe. The opportunity to participate in the immersion programme was a result of Queen Mary's partnership with Sichuan University in China. I found out about this opportunity from the study abroad department. Immediately after seeing such a great opportunity and gaining details about it I simply felt it would be a shame not to participate! It was such a well organised programme and to be among the students to represent Queen Mary was an overwhelming experience. Whilst on the program I selected a module called Cooperative Games, this led me to having a lot of fun and interaction with the students, the module was taught by an international professor from Barcelona. I was also given basic lessons in Chinese culture and Mandarin. We spent lots of time with the local students which allowed us to really appreciate the differences between Chinese students' lifestyle and our own. Many of the students were eager to practise their English with us, with quite a few heading to Europe and USA on a year abroad in the coming months.



### A Vegetarian's Introduction to China - “没有”

I can only imagine the sense of nervous apprehension felt by many international students as they wave goodbye to their families and board a seemingly endless flight to begin their course in an unknown country. As for me, I was only taking a 11 hour journey for a 2 week adventure, although hearing rumours such as “if it moves, the Chinese eat it” certainly got me worried and at that point nerves definitely dominated my emotions. How would I cope being a pure Vegetarian? Would my basic of basic knowledge of Mandarin get me by? Would the people be helpful? Would I meet a good group of people? It turns out I needn't have worried as long as you know the name of the place you're going (preferably written in Chinese too) and a smart phone with a translation app you're sorted. People in China are very helpful that you'd be overwhelmed and find that language isn't a problem at all, so if you're lost or unsure where you're going, they'd happily help you out. As for being a Vegetarian, China can be a very frustrating place for a lao wai, but if you try to skip the food and stay with the Western establishments then you are missing out, so I'd advise to download an app called 'happycow' prior to going to China and it gave me headstart of the Chinese-Vegetarian restaurants near me and there were quite a few. One that I would recommend is Sunflower Daddy – pure vegetarian and delicious!

### First Impressions

Upon arrival at Chengdu airport, we were greeted by two lovely and very helpful Chinese students that could speak English quite well, they took us to our hotel that was based on university campus, they sorted out our rooms, showed us around the university which is much bigger than Queen Mary I must say! And even got us sim-cards soon as we requested them! Maintaining great communication with these students is important, at least in the first few days whilst you're getting acquainted with everything around you, also they are there to ensure you have the best experience and face as little of a difficulty as possible. So do make use of your resources!

Adventure is key to having a great time in China! Food and transport in Chengdu is very cheap – and extremely convenient! You could probably get a taxi for less than £2! And their metro is the equivalent to the Metropolitan line with an equivalent Oyster card! The transport system is great in Chengdu.

Make sure you have written down in Chinese where you plan to go, so in case you get lost, you can get a local to help you out - although there's a strong possibility that the person you ask will not understand a word of English so be prepared - but also don't worry, these locals will be more than happy to help out a foreigner!



## Life at Sichuan University

Studying a module at Sichuan University with Chinese Students was probably among the most memorable experience. If you're lucky you're the only one who has selected the module among your peers and therefore you're on your own. Classes are usually taught every day and therefore you have to make your own way, this probably is the most exciting part, as you'll find yourself in the limelight (the only foreigner in the class!), you'll find students whom are extremely excited to show you around and take you out to explore at their own initiative and you'll find yourself really feeling the experience. The classes are pretty chilled out too and extremely interesting and I'm not just talking for myself but from my peers who went to different classes and absolutely loved the experience. My Monday to Saturday was pretty full on and filled with cultural activities and classes and therefore you'll find yourself having a great time and without a doubt having the time of your life with no time to spare. You will also find that a lot of people use cycles in Chengdu, that they're even used as taxis. Sichuan University also planned a big bang theory competition and a debate competition, and it was compulsory for everyone to participate in either one. I participated in the big bang theory competition where I had to present my research, I decided to present my research on the Human Genome – this was an absolutely nerve wrecking experience, nonetheless there were prizes and I won the prize for 'outstanding scientific research'. Sichuan University also planned a trip to the famous 'Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding' – admittedly once you visit this place you'd find Panda's cute! Even though their life only consists of eating bamboo and sleeping, they're still cute. Also, Pandas are the national animal of China so you'd naturally grow to love 'em.



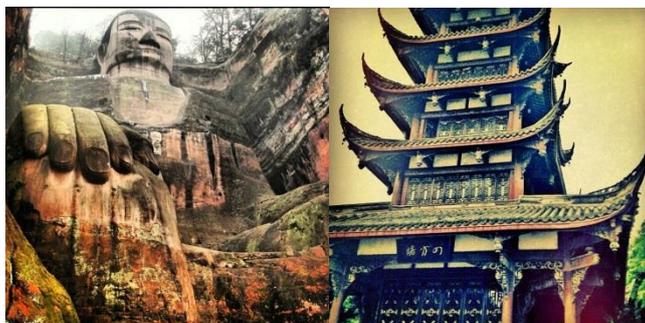
## Life outside of Sichuan University

When I said no time to spare, I did have the evening off and Sunday's so we made the most of it especially when you're with international students - this involved going a lot of shopping, a lot of walking, adventures and KTV (karaoke).

One Sunday we travelled to Leshan to see the Giant Buddha, the tallest Buddha statue in the world carved out of a cliff. The experience was great and involved a wonderful adventure and a lot of walking. Another amazing experience was going to monasteries – it's where you will fall in love with Chinese architecture.

Shopping was probably among the best experiences, I can guarantee that by the end of the trip you'd have learnt the art of haggling of almost bringing the price down to 50% of its original price, if not.. lower!

And lastly KTV, we didn't just go once, but twice! An absolute wonderful experience with international and Chinese students, you all share a room with almost a life stock of food and drinks and you sing the night away singing almost all the English songs you know, and you'll learn some Chinese songs too, at least a rough idea of the tune anyway.



## Goodbye China – “再见”

Having gained such a wonderful experience and memory it felt as if my trip came to a premature end, there's always so much to see and such little time. Knowing that the people you met, you probably won't ever meet them again got everyone a bit emotional, nonetheless a wonderful atmosphere and definitely a recommended adventure of a lifetime! Thanks to this programme and the expedition fund, I gained a lot of interpersonal skills, grew in confidence and independence. To be able to write about a great experience will certainly be an advantage to my CV. I hope more people take up such opportunities to gain valuable experiences and to make most of the available opportunities at university.

