Brenton Olsen – Exchange to Yunnan University of Finance and Economics in 2009

**Studying:** business-international business

Specific to Kunming and the Yunnan University of Finance and Economics (feb-july 09’)

**Pre-departure**

I was attending the Yunnan University of Economics and Finance. I would attend for a half session, 5 months, so needed to obtain a single entry 180 day Chinese visa. To complete this I needed a J202 form which Charles Sturt helped me obtain from my host university in China. The single entry visa cost around AUD$50.00. I also needed to get a current passport, a visa debit/credit card and a laptop. I felt as though there was a very large unknown about what I was to actually do at my host university, in terms of class arrangements. I did not meet to discuss fine details until very close to leaving, the month of my departure.

**Travel**

My flights were organised by voyager, along with the university and paid for by the travel grant I received. My flights cost was around AUD$1500.00. I had a choice of three alternative flights to arrive at my destination. I left Melbourne at 11:59pm on the 25th of February and landed in Hong Kong at 6:00am on the 26th of February. Leaving Melbourne at night allowed me sleep on the plane so was not tired upon arrival; I think this is a good idea. However the connecting flight to Kunming from Hong Kong had a six hour wait which was a long time to fill in, without really being able to leave the airport and explore.

I was picked up right on time from Kunming airport by Miss Zhang Ling and taken back to the university where she organised us with accommodation and answered any questions we might have had. I was then introduced to some local students and other teachers by Miss Zhang to be shown around the campus and taken out to dinner for our first night. (Miss Zhang Ling is extremely helpful with everything). I had no problems with any part of my travel to China.

**Insurance** - Travel insurance was taken care of by the Charles Sturt, they organised basic travel/medical insurance, if you plan to go rock climbing or something very adventurous you may want to take out additional insurance. You would be you responsible in organising this. There are no physical medical tests that you must complete in order to go. Simple forms to fill out alerting medical history etc is all that is needed.

**Campus**

Yunnan University of Economics and Finance is a very large campus. It has countless classrooms and lecture halls, four Chinese dining halls and one western restaurant, two libraries, many sporting facilities which consist of around 30 basketball courts, tennis courts, an indoor gymnasium and a small workout gym. There are also many other facilities I never used.

The accommodation consisted of two different rooms, a one bedroom unit with a bathroom or a two bedroom with bathroom (toilet shower and basin). Both located in the IBS buildings. I originally started in the one bedroom unit and after two weeks was moved to the larger room. Be aware that you will have to pay for the accommodation it is not free as we (Cobie and I) thought. It will cost you around AUD$1300 for the duration of your stay.

You have access to a washing machine to wash clothes, it is on the bottom floor and it is free, security will let you in. If you are staying in the single rooms to begin with you may want to shower in the afternoon as the water is heated by solar panels, and this is when the water is at its hottest. Otherwise you will be having a cold shower, as I did. The double room units have a small hot water service in the room, so you can enjoy hot water when it pleases you.

The rooms have plenty of power points and there is no need to buy power adaptors because they suit the Australia adaptors. There is also a television, however I found useless because I could not
understand the Chinese stations and I did not have the international channel CTV9. The staff will be constantly asking if there your room is ok and that everything is fine with your accommodation.

Food

The local food is very cheap, it is spicy and may take some time getting use to. It is hard to order meals on the street to begin with need to go to places with pictures so you can point to something you may like. You will have to do this until you can get your university canteen card. The canteen is the best way to eat you can walk along and see what you want and point and pay. It is very cheap costs around $2.50AUD for lunch or dinner. However, you eat at around 11:30 – 12:30 and 5:30 – 6:00 at the canteen (you pay via a swipe card which the university organises within the first week of your stay; you place money onto the card and use it like credit).

To get away from the local food there are western style foods. Many foreigner type restaurants and cafes are opening in Kunming. Lazy bones pizza is a nice place to eat; it is just down the street. There is also a place called Daddy’s diner located very close, it takes a little to find (it’s inside the orange and white apartment complex right next to the university).

Salvador’s coffee house in the city is also a nice place to go for a bite to eat, grab a drink or some homemade ice-cream. There is also Pizza Hut, KFC and McDonalds in the city centre (5 -10mins on bus). However I think that the local Chinese food is far more enjoyable (my mother would not believe I turn down fast food for healthy Chinese food). Remember you must buy all your drinking water.

Course information currently (up until April 17th) this was my classes for the week:

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<th>8:00pm-9:50pm</th>
<th>10:00pm-11:50pm</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday:</td>
<td>writing</td>
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<td>Tuesday:</td>
<td>chinese listening</td>
<td>comprehensive chinese</td>
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<td>Wednesday:</td>
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<td>Thursday:</td>
<td>chinese speaking</td>
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<td>Friday:</td>
<td>chinese listening</td>
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*Comprehensive Chinese: a combination of all the other classes, reading and writing pinyin and Chinese characters, speaking and listening.

Transport

As far as transport goes there is a very good bus system in Kunming. Its costs AUD$0.25 for the bus, regardless of how many stops you pass on its rout. The buses run regularly. You can catch the bus many places you wish to go around Kunming. The 84 will take you into the city centre in about five or ten minutes depending on traffic. There are taxis however you will need to be able to speak Chinese to use this style of transport.

You may catch taxis when you are more familiar with the roads or catch them with your Chinese friends. Getting around the university is as simple as walking, it is a large university but everything is within walking distance. Your classes will be held right across from the IBS dormitory.

Expenses

Initial expenses will vary from person to person depending on what they already have or do not have. For me they included; obtaining a passport, visa, laptop and purchases of toiletries etc. University associated fees are around AUD$125 and then there is accommodation which will cost around AUD$1300. The exchange rate at the time of my travel was around 4:1. For everyAUD$1.00 you get CRMB$4. I brought a lot of toiletries so i would not have to buy them over here, but remember not to put them in your carryon bag, or they will be taken at customs. I would say personal expensive will vary greatly from person to person, I found that I spent around AUD$45 per week on food and then maybe another A Ud$45 per week on DVDs or clothing and other items of choice.

You must buy all your drinking water it is around AUD$0.25 per 600ml bottle. You will also need to purchase a Chinese sim card upon your arrival students from the university will take you to get this. It
costs around AUD$15.00, phone credit will last you a long time. A text message within China costs around AUD$0.02. You will not be able to call Australian mobile numbers from this sim however you can message home from this sim card (sorry but I am not sure of the cost to do so).

**Holiday travel**

I had decided that I would explore the Yunnan province as much as I could but as far as going around china I had chosen to leave this until the end of my stay. I have so far travelled to Dali with some of the local Chinese students. Dali is about four or five hours by bus from Kunming. This old area of Dali I visited is full of mountains, waterfalls, lakes and old town charm (old buildings, coffee houses, food stalls, street shops etc). This trip was made on a weekend leaving Friday and returning Monday costing around AUD$350 in total. I plan to make some other small trips close by to Anning and possibly Lijiang. For the larger travels I will have 16 days at the end of the university timetable. There I have organised to travel to Xi’an, Beijing, Shanghai, Guilin, Yangshuo, Macau, Kowloon and finally Hong Kong before my departure.

**Social activities**

The Chinese students attend an English corner where they meet to practise their English by playing games and telling stories. There is very little contact with other internationals that speak English as their first language.

Sometimes it is hard to communicate with the local Chinese students as many have been taught English by American teachers. So if communicating in English they can find it hard to understand an Australian accent. Basketball in china is a very popular sport and in Kunming almost every male plays basketball and some females too. Both of these are good ways to meet new people. There are many things to do in the city centre of Kunming during the day or night. Often you may go there to grab something to eat or drink.

There are many restaurants, food stalls, coffee houses, bars, and clubs. As well as KTV (a private room to watch movies or sing with your friends, they seem to like this very much), video arcades and countless shops.

**Cultural information**

I did not really experience to much culture shock, however the language barriers can cause many problems and awkward situations. However, afterwards (or sometimes during) you will laugh at it. I would advise that future students are recommended to do some Chinese lessons before they come, to learn basic conversations. The Chinese are extraordinarily nice people so it is always best to be as polite as possible, no matter what the situation and if worse comes to worse just smile, smile, smile. They will do their best to find some way in communicating with you.

You will be very popular in China. Foreigners are a large attraction and you will be asked to do many things. Often it will become too much and you will have to say no to some things and some people. I think though it is best to keep as busy as possible.

**Weather**

The weather in Kunming is among the best in china and is around the 20 degree mark for most of the year. It is called the city of the eternal spring and I think the name speaks for itself. However it will get cold on some days so do bring long pants and jumpers.

**What to bring from / what not to bring and shopping**

**What to bring:**
The shopping in Kunming is not the best. It is nothing like I had expected (my expectations were of cheap clothing everywhere similar to that on the silk market, I was a tad uninformed and had to greater expectations. Although there are countless shops for girls clothing, shoes and handbags etc) so I found I did not bring enough clothing. I only brought three t shirts one pair of pants and a jumper! However, I did bring lots of underwear; I recommend this as you will find it hard to buy some that will
fit. Also remember if you are going to purchase things in markets to bargain very hard. Start at a very low price and work your way up to a price you want to pay (the shopkeeper will try and get you to pay up to ten times what he or she would normally sell it for). And it is ok to walk away you may find they will chase you down the street and settle at your price. Often souvenirs are quite worthless and they will ask a lot of money for something that you think looks nice but really have no value!

I also recommend to bring lots of toiletries e.g., deodorants. They may take up lots of room but you won’t bring them back and sometimes it hard to find what you want there. And being a male I find it is just a pain in the bum to go buy.

*What not to bring:*

Bedding, this is supplied in the rooms. Don’t overfill your bag you will find you will buy things hear that you want to take home.

*What you may need to buy*

Upon arrival I purchased cleaning products so clean my room and toilet paper. You will need to purchase an iron also, however I never did!

*Relationships*

You will obviously miss friends and family very much. But the experience will be far worth it. The six months you are gone not much will change at home but the experiences you will have will be so great. Any time I missed home I thought about all the things I would be able to do whilst friends and family were still at home. I stayed in touch with friends and family very well using Skype which is a free call/webcam utility. Also programs like Face book are useful to keep up with things going on at home.

You will meet many new people in your first week away. You will be introduced to English speaking students (Most likely first year students studying International Business-English). They will be very helpful and most likely become your best friends during your stay. These students will take you out for dinner etc a couple of times in the first week to get you settled in a get a feel for the culture and the university. You will exchange phone numbers with them so it gives you someone to contact if you have any problems. I think to get the most of the trip and to beat any homesickness you may experience is to keep as busy as possible, even if this means saying yes to some things you generally would never do.

*The teachers are very nice and very accommodating. They will often call you to make sure everything is going ok or to make sure you or not getting bored. Any troubles you have with anything they will sort out as soon as they can. They will work hard to make sure you enjoy your stay at Yunnan University as much as possible.*