

Report of the Exchange Semester at PHBS through TUM SOMex in WS 2018/19

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APPLICATION PHASE

In order to participate in the TUM SOMex program, it is necessary to apply following the times and indications of the management department of TUM. Usually only the curriculum vitae, the transcript of the grades and a motivational letter are required; however, in order to successfully pass the application, one should have medium-high grades, participate in the Buddy program for freshmen or exchange students and/or give the availability to rent his room to future exchanges. You can select up to three partner universities according to your preference in your application.

Once the TUM acceptance email has been received, you must apply directly to the foreign university. The partner university coordinator will send you an email with all the information and the link to register for the university. In the following months the PHBS coordinator will send you other emails with various information, such as the form to fill out to request a room in the dormitory (single or double).

PHBS is one of the best business schools in China and belongs to Peking University, which is often named the best university in all of China. In fact, many of the popular university rankings even rank Peking University higher than TUM (as of 2019). Despite it probably being one of the highest ranked universities in the whole TUM SOMex program, the demand for the spots is relatively low, which probably can be contributed to the fact that many people still prefer a country with a lower cultural barrier. However, if you think you're open-minded enough for China, you will have the opportunity to study at one of the most highly renowned universities in Asia and the world.

PREPARATION

Before leaving for China it is necessary to get a visa, in fact the Chinese university will send all the necessary documents directly to the management department of TUM. Therefore, each student will have to collect these documents and apply for a student visa for 6\12 months depending on whether they will stay for one or two semesters. It is advised to apply for this visa at the Chinese embassy in your own

country, although in many cases it is possible to do it directly in Munich. While there isn't a Chinese embassy in Munich (only a consulate), you can apply via the Chinese Visa Application Service Center. The duration of the procedure is usually around 5 working days and the price around 125 Euros (which includes the visa fee and the service fee of the service center). The student visa you get is single-entry only – meaning that you cannot re-enter China with it once you left the country. But don't worry: If you want to travel to nearby Hong Kong (which you certainly want given its proximity to Shenzhen and the fact that there is a lot more to do in HK than in Shenzhen) or to other countries in Asia, you can apply for a Residence Permit once you are in China, which allows you to freely leave and enter China whenever you want. PHBS will guide you through the application process (which takes around 3 weeks and is unfortunately extremely bureaucratic).

To arrive in Shenzhen, you can take many routes. There are direct flights to Shenzhen from some European cities, however it's usually cheaper to fly to other cities close to Shenzhen. The most common ones depart from Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Paris, Zurich and they arrive to the layout airports of Beijing and Hong Kong. The stay in Hong Kong requires no previous visa, and from there Shenzhen can be reached in just 20 minutes via the high-speed train (or 2 hours by subway). From Beijing the flight is a little less than 4 hours. When booking the trip, special care must be taken not to arrive in Mainland China (China excluding Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) before the validity date written in the visa. And similarly, for the return journey – you should make sure that you leave Mainland China before the expiration date of your visa. If you want to travel around Asia after (or before) your semester in Shenzhen, it is advisable to book your flights to and from Hong Kong, as you can always enter Hong Kong without a visa. If you really need to go to Shenzhen during a time your student visa is not valid, it is possible to get a short-time visa just for the Shenzhen area when entering Mainland China from Hong Kong.

As PHBS is a graduate school, you can transfer (as of 2019) any of the courses offered at the school via the 30 ECTS window which allows you to transfer credits of any management or technology related master-level course taken abroad. If you want to replace a course at TUM with one taken at PHBS, you need to check the course specifically.

Every course at PHBS is taught in English, it is therefore not necessary to do a Chinese course before you arrive in China. Generally, at the school most people have a good level of English, as even the local students must take English courses. However, people in Shenzhen generally don't speak English. So, knowing some basic Chinese to communicate with taxi drivers etc. is very beneficial (but not needed).

BTW, while the province Guangdong speaks predominantly Cantonese Chinese, in Shenzhen Mandarin Chinese is more common as Shenzhen is a city which is mostly made up by immigrants from other parts of China.

As previously mentioned, PHBS will guide you through the application process for the dormitories. You can stay outside the campus; however, we wouldn't recommend that as a) the accommodation at the campus is extremely cheap compared to off the campus and b) staying at the campus enables you to participate in the very vibrant campus life in Shenzhen. If you want to have a single room, make sure to fill out the application as fast as possible after it opens (PHBS will provide you with the exact time). One of us finished the application just 15 minutes after it opened and ended up with a double room for the whole semester.

ARRIVAL

If you arrive at Shenzhen airport you need to calculate that it will take about an hour to get to the university campus. If you have stayed in Hong Kong before you go to Shenzhen, you can reach the campus from East Kowloon via the high-speed train in around 1.5 to 2 hours. The university will provide you with instructions on how to get to the campus.

The day of arrival is very hectic. In fact, there was an enormous amount of people and booths. First you register for the dormitory and receive your student card (which is your ID, your campus card and your bank account debit card). After that, you are assisted in buying a SIM card from China Mobile (you definitely need internet and a working smart phone all the time in China) and then you go to Ping An Bank to activate the bank account connected to the student card and payment services via WeChat pay (WeChat pay is absolutely essential for life in Shenzhen, as some places don't even accept cash nor credit card). In all these procedures there are university assistants available to help you, even if sometimes with little success.

STUDIES

The university semester is divided into 2 mini-semesters called "modules". In each module it is possible to attend a maximum of three subjects, and up to four in case the home university requests it. In addition, a beginner's Chinese course is offered (which however naturally can't be transferred to TUM) which you can take regardless.

Before registering for the courses, a meeting is held to explain the procedure. During this procedure the servers of the university go haywire, so it is difficult to select all the desired courses given the limit of places per subject of about 50 students. If the desired subject is full, you will go to the waiting list. In this selection, exchange students and second- and third-year students will have the opportunity to register a few days in advance. In the following days it will be possible to attend the classes and decide to leave some courses and to enroll in new ones.

The lectures are usually held twice a week. Considering you have fewer courses per week than at TUM, you generally spend less time in lectures than at TUM. However, in Chinese university education it is typical that courses require a high amount of self-study and usually require multiple assignments and projects to be completed (so in total the workload per course is more or less the same as at TUM). Not every course requires an exam to be taken at the end of the module (some just have projects or mid-term exams). However, for those that do the exams will be held all in the same week, with some courses even scheduling their exams for the same day.

Generally, the organization at PHBS unfortunately is a bit lackluster and often there will be last minute announcements regarding course schedules or deadlines, which definitely was a bit of a problem during our stay.

LIFE AT THE UNIVERSITY AND IN THE CITY

PHBS is located in the Shenzhen University Town in Xili district which houses multiple schools from highly renowned universities in China. The dormitory is also located there, around a ten minutes' walk from the school. As the whole town is populated by students, there's an abundance of canteens, cafes and restaurants on the campus. As nearly all the student's stay next to each other on the campus, there's a real campus life with many activities every day and it's hard to get bored. There are also many possibilities to get active at the campus with gyms, swimming pools, football and tennis fields, etc. located only a few minutes from the dormitories. Furthermore, there's many different clubs and associations at the campus which you can join and connect with others with similar interests.

PHBS itself is a very modern business school with highly advanced class rooms and equipment. There's a large amount of study rooms and places, so you will probably never have trouble finding a quiet place to study in the afternoon like you have at TUM. The university is open 24 hours, so if you really want you can spend your whole day there, it's possible. In addition, there's a large library next to the school which is used by all the students of the university town.

Shenzhen is probably one of the most modern cities you can find anywhere in the world right now (which shouldn't be a surprise, considering it didn't exist 40 years ago and now surpassed neighboring Hong Kong in GDP). While it is certainly still less known than the other Chinese first-tier cities Beijing and Shanghai, it is a city which grows at an enormous speed set to surpass the former two. If you want to see the new China, if you're interested in the newest technologies and the booming Chinese start-up scene, Shenzhen is the place to go. The city is incredibly safe, with crimes basically not occurring. Unfortunately, the campus is a bit outside the city center of Shenzhen and requires around an hour by subway to reach from there.

The costs of living at the campus is very low, with meals averaging around 1 – 3 euros. The rent of the dormitory is extremely cheap, with around 800 euros for the double room and 400 euros for the single room for the whole semester (as of 2019). However, downtown Shenzhen can get quite pricy and a meal at a good restaurant easily equals European prices. In theory, you can survive with very little money at the campus. Nonetheless, the average exchange student in Shenzhen likes to spend evenings in one of Shenzhen's nightlife districts, visit Hong Kong once in a while or even travel to further places and therefore spends much more money than living at the campus actually requires. So, while it's possible to actually save money by going to China compared with just staying in Munich, that very much depends on what you like to do during your exchange.

The food at the campus is primarily Chinese, which is probably entirely different from the food you might be used to from that neighborhood Chinese restaurant in your street. Most international students perceived the food as tasty, however it can get boring after a while. You can find many more food options near the campus in the surrounding villages. Shenzhen downtown offers international cuisine so you can pretty much find everything there (however for a higher price). Vegetarian options at the campus (and in most of the local restaurants) are very limited.

Considering Shenzhen is still Mainland China, the culture is very different from what you might be used to, and even quite different to the very Western Hong Kong. Especially interacting with the older generation which have lived through the cultural revolution in China, can be sometimes very irritating and hard to get used to. However, the local students at the campus and in general the younger generation is getting much closer culturally to the average Westerner and therefore it is usually easy to find common interests or things to talk about. Nevertheless, most Chinese are very kind-hearted and especially the ones that rarely speak to foreigners are often very interested in some cultural exchange, even when they only know little English.

Despite the occasional culture shock, we both had an amazing time at PHBS and in Shenzhen. China, with its insanely long history and rich culture, has so much to offer as long as you stay open-minded and interested in cultural exchange. By spending your exchange in Shenzhen at PHBS, you not only have the opportunity to study at one of the best universities in the world, but you can see the maybe most innovative city on the planet and use it as a base to explore the fascinating country of China.

PICTURES (CREDIT NICOLAS)



Picture 1: International Students visiting Huawei's headquarters in Shenzhen



Picture 2: International students visiting the Shenzhen Stock Exchange



Picture 3: Shenzhen's skyline at night



Picture 4: Mirror lake in the middle of the campus



Picture 5: The Great Wall of China - one of the things you can see when studying abroad in China



Picture 6: Typical Shenzhen street food



Picture 7: The campus as seen from the top of the dormitories



Picture 8: Dongmen - Famous shopping district in Shenzhen