

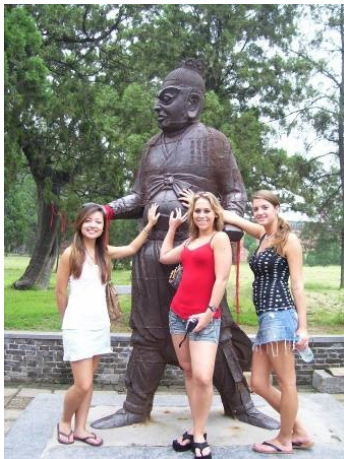
# SMEAL International Programs Newsletter

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## Shanghai 上海

With no previous Chinese, courageous Rebecca Entenman set off for Shanghai, China for the summer 2007 program.



Hang, Alicia & Rebecca visiting an early Daoist Temple.

“Experience: The most brutal of teachers. But you learn, my God do you learn.”- C.S. Lewis. I had that extraordinary learning experience this past summer when I embarked on a journey of self discovery in Shanghai, China. My name is Rebecca Entenman and I am a junior majoring in Finance and with minors in International Business, International Studies, Economics and Chinese. My philosophy has always been to reach for the stars; this summer not only did I reach for the stars, but I reached inside of *myself* and found the deeper meaning of *study abroad*.

Shanghai 上海 is eight times the size of New York City and has a population of more than 18 million. Being a girl from the suburbs, city life is a culture shock by itself, let alone a city with an entirely different language. You would think it was pouring outside, when walking down the street of Shanghai, because most people are using umbrellas. It's not for fear of evil UV rays, but against the tan that could cause them to look like low class citizens. Some hot commodities for sale on the streets are illegal DVDs, and Jiaozi (delicious Chinese dumplings). Everything is available for a price equivalent to less than 10 cents and any price is up for haggling.

I went to China with no previous Chinese experience. I found it miraculous how easy it was to pick up on the language, when constantly surrounded by it. Every interaction requires you to exploit any Chinese that you have retained. Mandarin Chinese has four different tones. One sound depending on how it is pronounced can have four wholly different meanings. Coming from a non-tonal language picking up on the difference can be quite a challenge. Reading Chinese is another hurdle to surpass. Not only do you need to learn pinyin, the written pronunciation but you then learn the character. For example; Hello,

pinyin: Nǐhǎo, Character: 你好. Therefore, Chinese is more like two languages within one.

The promising Chinese economy was one of the main reasons I chose China. After recently becoming part of the World Trade Organization, China's gross domestic product has been rapidly increasing. To actually witness the construction of the tallest building in the world (Shanghai's World Financial Center) and see thriving Shanghai was extraordinary.

My initial housing concerns were banished when I walked into the apartment CIEE had arranged for me, located in the Pudong district of Shanghai. Resembling a swanky New York penthouse, I was blown away by my luxurious living space. Greeting me at the door was a small Vietnamese girl. She was from Penn State too and we had a great deal in common. Our other roommate was a Shanghainese girl, Yang Fan, and her English was more than fluent. I learned the most about the Chinese culture just by observing Yang Fan's day-to-day activities and getting to know her. Her personality puzzled me at times because she was modest, guarded, hard-working, seemingly cold, yet she had good intentions. Even though she had no classes, she studied Korean every single night. Due to the one child law, Yang Fan referred to her cousins as her sisters and brothers.

The schedule in China was grueling, but I adapted to waking up at 8 am and catching the bus to school. East China Normal University was not far away, but it took about an hour to get there, due to overpopulation and the extreme amount of traffic. Our first class of the day, “China's Rising Economy”, was taught by an eccentric American who had been living in Asia for about 20 years. He is fluent in both Chinese and Japanese. We had one hour for lunch followed by our intensive Chinese class for three hours. I only had three classmates. Our youthful teacher was a 22 year old graduate student and she was, hands down, my favorite teacher of all time. By the end of the program we had truly grown into a family.

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### Chinese language class.





Rebecca's fabulous window view of Shanghai.

**"We share memories that will bond us for a lifetime....struggling to use our limited vocabularies after a friend broke her nose competing in a break dance off, to tasting Sichuan Tai (extremely spicy food) and losing all taste sensation.**

#### Attending the Peking Opera.



**"The experiences I have taken away from this trip are far more profound than I could ever express in this article."**

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Getting around in China is similar to any major city. There is the metro, the bus or a cab. Traffic in China is tremendously chaotic because you are legally permitted to execute a right or left hand turn at a red light. My favorite means of transportation was rickshaw. A rickshaw is a wagon transported by man power, which literally means a man carrying you on his back. It might sound demeaning, but, trust me, it's so exciting.

Nightlife in Shanghai is exotic to say the least. One night we went to the "Ice Bar" where the floor, walls, even the cups were made of ice. Another night I saw the Chinese rapper Jin perform. And if you ever wondered what happened to Coolio after his one hit wonder "Gangsta's Paradise" here's the answer. At 45 years old he's performing at Bon-Bon in China.

In Shanghai you can converse with people from all over in the world. Everyone who's anyone is flocking to China. While in China I met Aussies, American entrepreneurs, a particularly handsome German, South Americans, Africans, Swiss and a famous French clothing designer.

During our week off, friends and I booked a tour beginning in Xian and ending in Beijing. On our trip we visited some of the first Daoist and Buddhist temples. One of my favorite exhibitions was the Terra Cotta Soldiers. As I saw the magnificent detail I appreciated the delicate handling skills required for the excavation. In Beijing we went to Tiananmen Square, a stark example of the differences between a democracy and a communist country. I found this experience quite moving, because most Chinese aren't even informed about the murders that went on here in 1989, when a group of college students rebelled against the communist government. One of the most gorgeous landmarks I've ever seen was the Summer Palace. We also did some cultural activities like seeing the unique Peking Opera and eating Peking duck.

Traveling in China gave me a closer view of the issues facing the country. The poverty truly touched me the most. I will never forget one night in Beijing when a toddler about two years old, reached out his hand and miserably asked "Money?" The image of this baby is burnt in my mind. This child's first word in English was "money". It was then that I realized how cruel the world can be and how lucky I am to be so privileged.

My trip to China has given me memories that I will never forget and a greater perspective on the world. China has so deeply touched

me that I plan to work to help those less fortunate. I made friends for a lifetime and my roommate in China is now my best friend at Penn State. We share memories that will bond us for a lifetime, from spending a day and a night in a Chinese hospital struggling to use our limited vocabularies after a friend broke her nose competing in a unique break dance off, to tasting Sichuan Tai (extremely spicy food) and losing all taste sensation, to going to the Science and Technology Center and buying knockoff Louis Vuitton's, Seven jeans, and even Puma sneakers.

A lasting effect of China is my new ability to speak Chinese. After being in China for two months I went from zero Chinese experience to an almost fluent speaking ability.

My advice about studying abroad is to keep this in mind. Choose not where you want to travel abroad, but where you want to study abroad. Choosing an eccentric location like China has done more for me than I dreamed it could. I have memories of an amazing cultural experience, and a remarkable resume booster. Employers' mouths drop when they learn that I can speak Chinese. I am no longer scared of the unknown. While some choose their abroad locations with the priority of having a "fun time", they often take away little more than a dreadful hangover. The experiences I have taken away from this trip are far more profound than I could ever express in this article.

#### Great Wall of China.

