

A Day in the Life of an International Intern In Shanghai, China

As an intern working in the charity sector, and in a small office at that, a typical working day for me is much more relaxed in comparison to my corporate counterparts. The following is a rough schedule based on a recount of my day as I'm nearing the end of my time in Shanghai - just two weeks left, eek! I've included prices as well as a sum of the costs at the bottom of the page for those looking for an insight into a day-to-day budget.

9am My phone alarm rings and alerts me to start getting ready for the day. Some days I'm already awake and can dismiss the dismal beeping beforehand. Those are the best mornings: I potter about tidying the flat, stick my laundry on, and make a nice cup of tea to go with my morning read - pu'er is my loose leaf of choice here. On other, less serene mornings, I might hit snooze two or three times before frantically chucking things about - on my body, my face and in my bag - and rushing out the door.



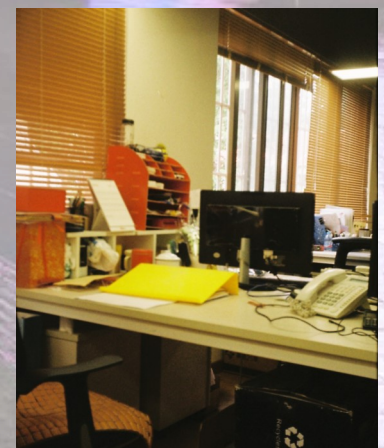
My morning view



Waiting for the Metro

9:50am The latest I need to be out the flat and begin my journey to work. Two minutes' walk later, I'm at the metro station - Jiangning Road - and hop onto Line 13. If I'm lucky, I'll grab a seat; if not, I stand and read for 30 minutes before transferring lines and travelling one stop further (4元). Once out the metro, it's another 5-7 minute walk to the office. If I'm hungry, I'll grab a couple of *baozi* on the way for a cheap, tasty breakfast - usually, I'll get two mixed mushroom and vegetable buns (香菇菜包) (4元). Total commute time: ~40 minutes.

10:30am The office grind begins. Habitat for Humanity is an international charity with a mission to alleviate housing poverty and ensure that everyone has a decent place to live. The Shanghai branch has 3 employees... plus me! It's nice to be a part of a smaller team. Also, office perks: free tea and coffee and snacks. My main task is writing. I write articles, family profiles to send to sponsors, proofread and edit texts, draft social media posts, and



In the office

1pm There's no set period for lunch, so I get free reign of when to take an afternoon break. My colleagues tend to eat at their desk sometime between 1 and 2pm - one orders takeaway to be delivered every day and the other two bring their own. I like to do the latter too (0元), but on days like today - left my lunchbox in the fridge, it evidently was a snooze-three-times kinda day - I'll wander about and find a place for lunch. The office is very close to the Tianzifang area and so there are a lot of options nearby. Although China does not have the greatest reputation for being vegetarian- or vegan-friendly, I've had zero issues during my culinary explorations. Today, I went to a local vegan joint and had hot and spicy veggie noodle soup (27元) and a portion of dumplings (24元). It was somewhat of a splurge as the meals I have alone, I like to keep to under 30元. However, I do like to support local, all-vegan businesses and am a bit of a dumpling fiend. Money doesn't buy happiness, but it does buy dumplings...



Local Supermarket

5:30pm I am now officially out of office. Working at a charity has exposed me to many of the social issues prevalent in this country (urban migration, the family registration system, access to education for marginalised communities, effects of the ageing population, etc.) and has been truly educational.

I head home via metro (4元), stop by the supermarket if I need fresh vegetables, - I typically buy enough for 3-4 meals for around 20元 - and get cooking. Most days the girls and I eat dinner together in the flat. We buy communal rice and soy sauce and will also take turns getting fresh produce too. It's a nice cosy environment to come home to. Maybe once or twice during the week-day they'll be some kind of social dinner going on. Tonight was one of those nights: we dined with our flatmate's granddad who has recently flown over for a visit! We hit up a favourite restaurant of ours and ordered so many dishes that they were practically overflowing from our table (13元). A standard evening meal outing can range from 10元 - 60元 depending on the restaurant.

7:30pm Although my programme's Mandarin classes are now over - they were twice a week over the course of one month vs. once a week over the two months - I'd still like to include it here as a part of a typical life in the day as it was such a fun part of the experience. I'd rush home from work, wolf down some food then head to class and practise my Chinese!



9pm—home time!

On the days without class, evenings are spent reading, working on personal projects (research and writing) and chatting with flat-mates or friends and family back home in the UK. I've found the best times to call are usually very early in the morning or late at night which can be quite inconvenient, but it is also quite nice to have your loved ones be the first/last people you speak to that

A note on budgeting

Today I spent: 76元.

Just under 90% of that was optional and could easily have been saved. Although I personally am aiming to live on a minimal budget (in preparation for post-grad student life), I'm most lax when it comes to food and social spending. Group dinners and drinks I keep to around 2-3 nights a week and I love scouring the city for vegan restaurants and local homemade food (dumplings). Besides these extra expenses, I buy only what is necessary, cook a fair amount and skip out on any weekend trips. I've had such a brilliant time in China so far that I'm already planning on coming back next year - hopefully with enough time to fully explore the country.