

My eight months in China.

After three years working in audit in Luxembourg, I was missing China, the country that I discovered when I was studying abroad when I was 21 years old. At that time, I was living in Shanghai and had opportunities to travel in Yunnan, Hong-Kong and other cities near Shanghai. Discovering China changed my life, I kind of fell in love with that country, with the culture, people, travels, villages and cities.

I start learning Chinese on my own and I knew that if I wanted to do a big step in my writing and speaking skills, I would have to move back to China.

But I wanted to experience China in another way, from the inside, by living with Chinese people and in the same time get some serious Chinese class to improve my writing skills.

By checking on the internet, I found STAR EXCHANGE, which was proposing a really attractive program; being part of a family while attending intensive Chinese courses at the University. Getting in contact was easy and they rapidly proposed me cities where I could go. I chose Chengdu, to discover a new city and another way of living rather than Shanghai. I had one Skype with a charming mother and her two kids and within 2 months, here I am in Chengdu, in October 2014.



I was welcome with Carrie and Zel, the Chinese organisation working in a partnership with Star Exchange. They would be my main contact during all my stay.

I spend my first night in a great hotel, in order to get time for myself, and get ready for the day after, meeting my new family.

The day after my arrival, I was welcomed by my Chinese mother and children. Back home, the experience was starting. To be honest, the first week is the most difficult one, everything is new and it is sometimes scary to imagine that this is going your environment and people you're going to live with for the next eight month.

First best memory, the first night that I spend in the same bed with the mum and the little girl of 5 years old...plus the fact that she didn't like me at all at the beginning, the Ayi who was speaking a dialect that I could not understand. To be honest, I almost gave up. But thanks to Nicole, Carrie and Doris and a really comprehensive Chinese mum, we finally put things together and found solutions. For example, I won't have to share the same bed and same bedroom with the little 5 years old girl

(which is usual in China, children don't sleep alone until 8 or 9 years old), I would start talking in Chinese with her in order to make friend with her and finally I got my weekly planning:

- Intensive Chinese class at university from Monday to Friday, 4 hours in the morning (I was asking to take an exam to know my level and which class I will attend),
- Apart Tuesday and Friday off, take the girl at the end of school at 6pm and looking after her/play/teach her English until 9pm,
- Saturday and Sunday with the family, from 9am to 21pm.

This planning was fair enough and based on the initial contract (not more than 6 hours a day with children, two day off a week etc...)

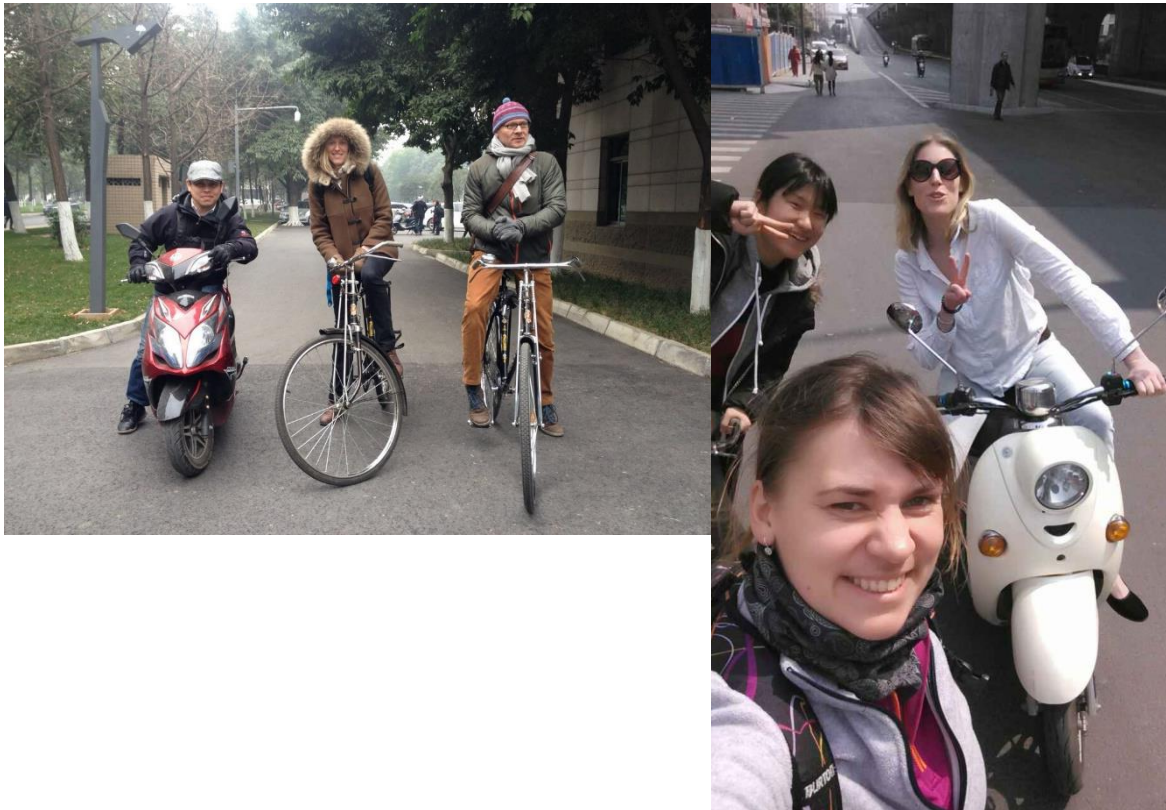
And after 2-3 weeks, we all got our routine. I had time to discover my new classmate, teachers, books, discover the city by myself, buy a bike and later a scooter to get more autonomy during my free time, get along with Miaomiao, my new little sister, get some amazing cooking class with Ayi, discovering new taste, new traditional food having lunch and dinner with the family..



My time spent with Miaomiao got better and better. The mum trusted me and gave me completely freedom for choosing the activities. Best time, was weekend where I and Miaomiao could improvise totally, take buses, underground, go to the park, have an ice cream, make some drawings, watch some Disney (in English!), teach her English, make her discovering classic music, instruments, singing nursery songs etc...together, we were the attraction of people around us, they were always surprised to see

this little girl talking in Chinese to a tall blond girl, which one was answering to her in English. I tried as much as possible to bring her my European education, taught her as much as possible how to be different, how to do things by herself, how to explain things instead of crying, how to don't be a spoiled child and how to appreciate value of things and gifts, how to be polite, how to act spontaneously etc...

Regarding Chinese class, it was exactly what I was expecting, intense, serious with interesting teachers. All students were coming from everywhere, all were motivated to speak Chinese. I met lot of people and some became really close friends.



During holidays, I had chance to travel with the family and other opportunities to go exploring by myself surroundings. (So many touristic see sight near Chengdu!).



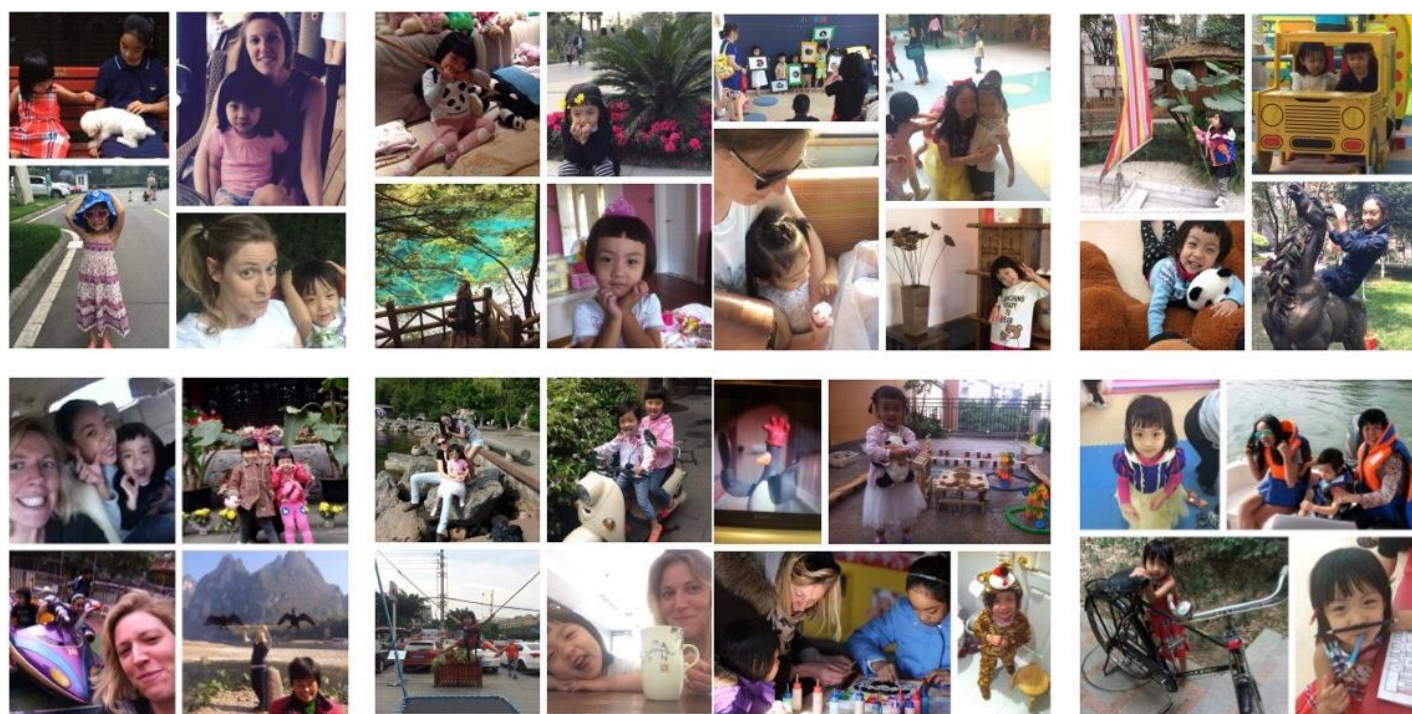
Finally, after two semesters at the university in Chengdu and a lot personal work, I succeed to pass my HSK level 5, (six level in total)!! It was quiet challenging but if you work hard and talk as much as possible with your family and willing to make Chinese friends, you can easily get a good Chinese. And

if you want to pass any exams, the university is taking care of everything and provides also classes to help you to get ready for the test.

After eight month, it was time for me to go back home. My little girl was at that time understanding everything I was saying in English, to my biggest surprise.

Saying good bye to everyone was really hard, even if sometimes things were difficult. You will encounter lot of communication problems, you will feel alone sometimes and face some issues every day with members of the family, (families in China are made of the parents, uncles, grandparents, Ayi, drivers...and you have to get along with each one of them! But you will also learn so much from each one of them. To be honest, Ayi became my best friend and my confident). Anyway, to succeed in this experience, you much be open minded, flexible, never judge what is different from your country and habits, you have to talk and ask help to people around you like Carrie, Doris, Zel, Nicole, they were so much helpful and I thank them for everything that have done for me.

I am proud to have done this experience, I would like to thank Star Exchange and their partner in Chengdu for giving me this opportunity, find the family and take care of every administrative tasks and every problem I was facing while in China. If you are looking for a challenging and rewarding experience, have a look on Star Exchange program. See by yourself some of my memories from this year.



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