

junior lawyers northants & bucks

A Chinese Internship

Prior to going to university I had hoped to embark upon a business management graduate scheme on completion of my degree, however I really enjoyed studying for my law degree and thus on graduation I was left in a quandary as to which career path to follow. To assist me to make my decision I decided to seek some more legal work experience. I found a number of companies offering the opportunity to combine work experience with travel; this was greatly appealing to me. With the help of one such work experience co-ordinator I was able to secure an internship in Shanghai, China.

Upon arriving in China I was met by a representative of my work experience co-ordinator and taken to my accommodation. I was to live with three others on the 8th floor of an apartment block. My flat mates were doing internships in medicine, business and teaching. It was really nice to live with people doing such a variety of different internships as we were each able to find out more about working in Shanghai. The work experience co-ordinator also arranged plenty of social events allowing us to meet other interns staying in different flats.

My internship was with the law firm LongAn Law. LongAn Law was located in a gold coloured office block which had a giant television screen built into the glass covering the area of about 20 floors, the television screen was used to show television commercials to the outside world by night. At LongAn Law I worked for the international partner on a range of research and drafting assignments based on US and English law. My supervising partner would check my work and if necessary offer constructive feedback; thus this was a genuine learning experience. In addition to my legal work I was fortunate to also partake in various client entertainment. I found all my colleagues to be extremely welcoming and as is normal amongst professionals in Shanghai, all my colleagues spoke English, so there was no requirement for me to speak Chinese.

As most of my colleagues were originally from Shanghai they were able to recommend places I should visit and take me to restaurants off the beaten tourist track. At such restaurants I lost count of the number of times I was told "Try this first and then we'll tell you what it is"! I was delighted to try, among other things: chicks feet, pigs intestines and snails, all of which were surprisingly tasty! During my time at LongAn Law I was pleased to participate in various social events including a karaoke night, which is of course hugely popular in China. However, rather than the karaoke taking place in a bar the venue was instead divided into numerous small rooms each equip with a television screen and several microphones allowing you to have your own private karaoke party. I was delighted to witness some highly amusing scenes

as people air guitared, swung their t-shirts in the air and screamed into microphones! This was a superb way to get to know my colleagues!

I spent the weekends travelling with my flat mates, visiting most of the major Shanghai tourist attractions, a number of nearby cities and a Buddhist island located about 8 hours by boat off the Chinese mainland. Travel was fairly cheap in China and for the most part not terribly challenging as most signs have an English translation below the Chinese. Shanghai has a huge amount to offer a tourist including the 468 meter tall Oriental Pearl TV tower with its rotating restaurant/viewing platform, river boat cruises, a wide variety of museums, a fantastic circus and Cloud 9 which at the time I visited was the world's highest bar, located on the 88th floor of the Jinmao tower. I also sought to spend time on foot observing the frantic markets sellers, the street food sellers and the innovative street sellers who could switch from sunglasses to umbrellas at a moment's notice as the weather conditions changed. By walking through Shanghai I also witnessed the curious sprawl of the city. One moment you would be walking through a buzzing cosmopolitan city of steel and glass, the next you would find yourself in a city slum witnessing absolute poverty as people washed their clothes in the filthy water collecting in puddles in the street and just a block further on and you would find yourself back in the heart of a major global city. This staggering and ever increasing wealth divide amongst Shanghai's population is illustrative of both the relentless pace of economic progress and of the ensuing tensions and divides. This vast economic progress is also causing social conflict between the increasing openness of Shanghai society and the alleged existence of persistent and rife corruption as well as intensifying the battle between the conflicting ideologies of the Communist regime and that of an increasingly capitalist city. Shanghai is a city in transition and I would advise anyone to visit it now before it changes beyond recognition.

With the current economic downturn affecting the employment opportunities for many lawyers and lawyers in training it is probably a better time than ever to seek some work experience abroad, particularly in those Asian nations which are still experiencing some economic growth.

If you would like further details of how I arranged my internship in China feel free to email me at: gordon.ackers@dfalaw.co.uk.