

Experience report

Internship abroad

in

Beijing, People's Republic of China

Company: Orientas Limited

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by Tobias Houben

As a mandatory part of my CEMS master in Cologne, I did an internship abroad for 3 months in Beijing. It was an extraordinarily valuable experience. Especially the organization is not easy, I hope this report will help future students in finding an internship position, especially in mainland China.

Application

This is probably the most difficult part, and I spent the most time of my preparation on it. That's why I want to emphasize here on it, I hope it will help others. There are several options to find internship opportunities, but I experienced that the easier it is to find an open position, the harder it is to get it or even only to get some feedback of your application. Here are the channels I used to find an internship, ranked in my opinion from the best to the lowest chances:

- Ask around your friends who already did an internship at a certain company, or even friends of friends, to recommend you or at least to get the email address of an HR person in charge of interns. This would normally already set you in front of 95% of other applicants. Networking is important all around the globe.
- Ask Chinese students if they can have a look at their university's BBS. Usually companies post there, it is kind of a forum just for the universities students, so you can only see the ads if you are logged in as a student. Thus it can only be seen by local students, not by all the other applicants from abroad. You can also post an ad yourself about your profile and what you are looking for, other students can be very helpful.
- Apply at large multinational companies, maybe with headquarters in Germany (Volkswagen, Siemens, ...). They often have a large amount of positions available. However, you cannot be picky about the city, sometimes not even about the country.
- Look for companies that interest you, google their (HR) contact, and write an application, no matter if they haven't posted a position for an intern.
- Use platforms for internships you can find in google or, for a start at the bottom of this report. But be aware that in these you will always only be one in thousands, no matter how fancy your CV is.

By the way, pure mainland Chinese companies often require you to be fluent in Mandarin, so if you are not you should focus on international companies. Interviews will be conducted through Skype or some bigger companies might invite you to their headquarters in Europe (travel expenses paid).

I found my internship over the first option, and conducted two Skype interviews to get the offer. On the company's homepage I posted below you can find current internship offers, but you can also write an application for one of the other areas I mentioned on your own initiative.

Visa

Once you have successfully got an offer, you can apply for a Visa at the nearest Chinese embassy. All you need is an invitation letter by the company, fill some documents and have a passport picture. I took the X1/X2 visa, which is relatively easy to get. However, it is important that the invitation letter meets some standards, as a company stamp, field of work, and most importantly that the internship is unpaid. There are some exceptions with possible expenses and grey areas and I have heard it is much more difficult to obtain a working visa, so I would recommend this X visa.

Insurances

As China is outside of Europe, you will need an extra health insurance. For me I chose AOK which was around 40€ per month. I would also recommend you to be at least covered by a private insurance. Check with your policy if you are covered worldwide, sometimes they only cover holidays but not longer periods.

How to get there

The main hub is Frankfurt, at this time you can get quite cheap flights, I paid 520€ return for Frankfurt-Beijing with AirChina. Pages like swoodo.de let you easily compare (almost) all airlines.

Accommodation

There are 2 options to recommend. The ads section of beijinger.com, which is also the biggest network of expats in Beijing. The advantage is that everything is in English, the disadvantage that the offered rooms are more pricy. The second option is the local one, 58.com. Prices are cheaper but you will need the help of a Chinese friend or be fluent in Mandarin yourself. I used the latter and found a room with

20sqm and shared bathroom with 3 people for 300€/month in Wangjing, Chaoyang district (Northeast of BJ). Generally I found that it is not very hard to find accommodation in Beijing compared to other big cities.

The company

Orientas Limited is a quite young (2,5years) and very small consultancy, that has offices in 4 countries. Especially the Beijing office is growing quickly, the CEO is constantly looking for new staff/ interns. Due to its early time, the focus is not really clear yet and comprises of a few areas. These are market entry, which I was working in, M&A, which is apparently not really big in China yet, food, green technology/ buildings, horses, and private investments. Some tasks are quite interesting, as they are really international. For example private investment brings together Chinese investors and European companies, real estate holders and other parties. Thus you are involved in the marketing of these assets (sell side) for Europeans, but also in organizing outbound trips from China for interested buyers. If you have further questions on one of the areas you're welcome to contact me via mail. The office is a little bit outside of the center of Beijing, which brings the advantage that you don't have to fight through crowds of people to get on/ off the subway. Also, the office rooms/ desks are much bigger than the ones in the business district, which is also the reason why the CEO picked this location. Lastly, the office rooms are in the same building as an art gallery, founded by the famous Ai Weiwei, and also next to the famous 798 art district in Beijing. However, if you're looking for an internship at a huge office tower in the center of Beijing, this is the wrong address.

The tasks

I was working on a project for a Chinese company in the building industry, that considered entering into the European market. My task was thus to write a market research report about the specific market in Europe. I conducted primary and secondary market research including databases, phone interviews, writing enquiries, writing research reports and assembling powerpoint presentations. You always have to try to find information that is not easy to obtain and this is basically what consultancies do. Understand the problem, get information, wrap and package the information (ppt) and sell it. I furthermore represented the company and conducted further research at trade fairs and networking events which was quite nice as I had the chance to travel a bit through China. Of course I also did general

administrative tasks, e.g. translation German/English, office and IT administration, but this was only a minor part of my time. The work climate is very well, we went skiing together at weekends or went to KTV with the interns. Work hours are also fair, but the compensation is low. I had enough time to work on my Chinese language as well. In general I can recommend you this internship if you are interested in the business areas I mentioned and still want to have enough time to get to know China/ learn the language.

Beijing

I think Beijing is a great city to get to know Chinese culture, history and art. There are plenty of museums, famous art exhibitions and sights to visit. Compared to Shanghai, it is also much more “Chinese”, people generally don’t understand you when you talk in English and the western influence is comparably low. Apparently the most important topic for all foreign people is the pollution. The air is bad after all, but maybe it is not as bad as I expected it from western media. However, I would not want to live in Beijing for longer than a few months due to the air. Living and working in Beijing, the capital of this crazy fast growing country is an enormously valuable experience – for yourself and for your CV. So everybody has to decide for himself if it’s worth for him/ her to accept the pollution. For me, I loved living there, even though it took me longer to adapt than in any other country I have lived in before.

Contacts

<http://orientas.com/> - company

58.com, <http://www.thebeijinger.com/classifieds/> - housing

www.europeanchamber.com.cn/en/job-vacancies, <http://jobmarket.china.ahk.de>, - internship positions

tobias.houben@hotmail.de – my email address in case of further questions