

Here's my Study Abroad Story

Priscilla Hsu SIT—Chinese Culture and Ethnic Minorities Kunming, China

Major: International Relations; Asian American Studies Sequence

Program Overview: The SIT program is great. They have a very structured timeline that helps ease you into the country and ease into confidently conducting independent research while living in such a foreign country. The staff is incredibly well-qualified and extremely in-tune with American culture (and the problems we may have trying to adjust to China) and are super friendly in general. Chinese language classes with SIT are tailored to fit your needs and teachers are always willing to listen to feedback.

Typical Day: Because the SIT program has several sections to the semester, your typical day varies depending on the date.

Kunming Nationalities University Dorms (4 weeks): For the first month, you will be based at the university (living in the foreign student dorm), with Chinese classes from 8-12 and a Taichi break in between. You can choose to get lunch at the student cafeteria or any of the restaurants sprinkling the college area but you have to be back at 2:30PM for the English lecture.

Kunming Urban Homestay (2 weeks): Schedule stays the same in terms of classes, though students will have to adjust their time to include the commute to and from school.

Group Trip and Independent Study Period (6 weeks): Because the group trip will have you changing locations every couple of days (sometimes every day), there



is no real typical schedule. Lu Yuan (the program director) will always have an itinerary for you though. In addition, the independent study period typical day will really depend on you.

Highlights: The scenery in Yunnan is absolutely breathtaking, especially when you get further out from the city. I had a great time with both my homestays, urban and rural, and learned a lot from my families. For National Week in the fall, my roommate and I went to Xishuangbanna, where together we learned to navigate local transportation (and learned that it runs on whatever time it wants to), had our first introduction to Burmese food (Yunnan Province is very close to Burma), and sampled a hodgepodge of tropical fruits (dragon fruit, mangostein, passion fruit, you name it).

Challenges: One of my biggest challenges was getting used to local hygiene. Chinese people have no qualms about spitting on the street and its common to see babies wearing bottomless pants in lieu of diapers. Toilets are not held at the same standard as Western bathrooms and usually are not the same style either (you will need some quad strength for the amount of squatting you are about to do). You should learn (and will learn very quickly) to carry your own tissue with you at all times. In addition, while Chinese people are incredibly friendly to people they meet (its not uncommon to be invited to eat with strangers) and extremely family-oriented, the streets themselves can be a bit of a power struggle.

Advice: Travel outside of Kunming. Talk to locals, even if your Chinese is awful because they will love you anyway. Invest time in reading Yunnan Province guide books (I would recommend visiting all the minority areas: Xishuangbanna, Dali, Shangrila, Deqin County, etc.). Be patient with local transportation. Be patient with local culture. Have a great sense of humor.