

Letter from Roslyn Stephens  
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Hello everyone over there in Aus!

I want to give you an update on the first 5 weeks of my Beijing experience. I'm on the university program to learn Mandarin so I have classes from 8am-12pm Monday to Friday. I have so much fun with my classmates because we are all such like-minded people. Everyone here respects and cares for each other because I think we all know how it feels to step out of our comfort zone. My best friends here are from Russia, Japan, Thai, Chad... actually, pretty much every corner of the globe is represented!

A week after I arrived I celebrated my 22nd birthday. I thought it would be a lonely affair with a bit of homesickness, but it turned out to be the best birthday ever!! I went to class and my classmates spoilt me rotten, then when class was over I came out from the building only to find my lovely AFS contact person Yiran waiting for me with a pressie! She had trekked all the way from her uni to give me well wishes, it was such a nice surprise. Later that day we had a class excursion to the Forbidden City. It felt so good to take a leisurely stroll in a place where most people never manage to get to in their whole life. After that, I didn't think it could get any better but to cap it all off, one of my favourite teachers, Yang Xiao Ming, plus some of my friends- one American, two Russians, one Chinese and my Japanese friend had all organised to take me out to a Korean restaurant. We had a great night drinking Chinese beer and they bought me a mouse birthday cake because I never shut up about how much I miss my two pet ratties :) A Korean tradition is to finish the meal with the birthday girl/ guy eating a bowl of seaweed soup. Seaweed is considered the longest plant in the world so it's supposed to bring good luck for longevity. And hey, it didn't taste as bad as it looked!





There is always something to see or do here in Beijing. A few weekends ago my Russian friend Alexei and I travelled to the outskirts of Beijing to Xiang Shan (the Fragrant Hills). I'm still not sure of its exact height but the main mountain is pretty big, but yes, I made it all the way to the top! It got colder as we climbed until finally it began to snow. There's nothing more beautiful than the crystal crusting of snow across a landscape. Partly because of my laziness and partly because of my curiosity I convinced Alexei that we should take the chairlift back down the mountain. I think my heart beat a little faster on the way down because my eyes didn't know what to look at first- there were too many spectacular things to see. And also because the chairlift was about 40 years old and was groaning like an old man.

Well, I hope my little window into Beijing life has entertained you, I'll keep you updated!

With warm wishes to everyone,

Roslyn