

# Studying Abroad

## World class traveler adapts to life in China

SAMMIE HATCH

Not many of us would be able to hold our own in Beijing, China; some might even say it's a different world. But for Nik Arcot, freshman, stepping onto the streets of China is stepping into a very familiar world.

Arcot, in addition to having taken Chinese for four years, is fluent in two other languages, Japanese, which he has studied for eight years, and English. Arcot also began taking Arabic, but soon quit because the teacher stopped teaching the class.

He is very interested in

Asian traditions and customs and says that his favorite part of the culture is the food. Arcot aspires to go to European countries as well, such as traveling to France to see the Eiffel Tower but he doesn't wish to learn the language. Another country he's interested in is Morocco.

Although Arcot loves seeing the interesting cultures and differences of the places he travels to, he dislikes the journey to the destination. He doesn't particularly like plane rides or car rides and would prefer to stay at home during

vacation time to hang out with his friends.

When Arcot is at home with his younger sister, Anisha, 10, and his parents, Prem and Binny, he likes to play basketball, golf and go sailing in the Willamette River. Arcot has been sailing for over a year and a half and finds it extremely fun. If Arcot is not sailing, he is spending time with his friends.

This semester, Arcot is in China for a fourth time studying abroad.



Photo courtesy of Nik Arcot  
Nik Arcot, freshman, shops at a food stand in Beijing, China. Arcot said he loves different types of food and that he was excited to sample Chinese cuisine.

## Student sends best wishes from Beijing in his year abroad

NIK ARCOT

It's February 6th. Our plane lands in Beijing, China (北京, 中国). I love this place. As we step into the airport at Beijing, I am instantly Chinese. I do not feel any different from all the people around me. I hear Chinese everywhere and my heart races excitedly. As usual, I can understand everything and feel quite at home.

On the plane from Portland to Seattle, I met a Chinese elder who was going home for the Chinese New Year. She did not know any English and was somewhat lost and confused. She tried to communicate with the air hostess in Chinese and they both appeared frustrated by the lack of success. I walked up to her and helped translate for her. She was shocked but grateful.

Here I was, this very "non Chinese" looking young boy, who was able to speak fluently. She stuck to me all the way to Beijing. When we

landed, I helped her with her luggage and made sure that she was comfortable. People around me were staring at us. I am not sure if they were surprised by my language skills, by the way I looked or by her apparent trust in me.

It feels strange, but powerful to be in charge. My mom accompanied me on this trip and cannot speak Chinese, so she has to depend on me to navigate everything. I feel very protective towards her. I wonder if this is how parents feel?

I have been to China a few times in the past, but never during Chinese New Year. It is a different feeling. There are fireworks everywhere. It is like 4th of July, on every street corner for two weeks. The smell of fireworks is mixed in with the wonderful aroma of spicy and flavorful Chinese food being cooked on street side carts. All my senses are alert and I cannot wait to taste some food. We find a restaurant and settle down to a simple meal of steamed buns (包子) and porridge (粥).

Everywhere around us is the sound of laughter. Families are out in big groups enjoying dinner as a part of the Spring Festival celebrations (also known as Chinese New Year).

The next week consists of trying all the foods I like and visiting bookstores for school supplies. On Friday, I move in with my host family. My room is bright and clean. I call my host father Uncle (叔叔) and my host mother Aunty (阿姨). They are wonderful people. Uncle thinks that I don't eat enough. Ha! Mom is amused, she thinks I eat too much and need to cut back. The meals here are even better than at home.

Uncle arranges for us to visit my school on Saturday to meet with a teacher, Chen Laoshi (老师), and finish my paperwork. It is a huge, state-of-the-art school. I see swimming pools, basketball courts, soccer fields, art rooms, music rooms and science labs. Outside at many places on campus are ping-pong tables. I am looking

forward to becoming a good ping-pong player.

Uncle and Mom sign the paperwork to make Uncle my official guardian. My heart races and I feel strange. I try to smile, but it comes off as a grimace instead. Mom tells me to stop making faces.

School will start on the 21st for the local Chinese students, but Mom wants me to start as soon as possible so we don't waste any time. Laoshi (老师) does not know English, so as usual, I translate and work with him to find a solution. I will spend the next week studying with some Korean and Japanese students in the International Department and begin regular school on the 21st with the native Chinese students.

My first day of school is here and I am quite excited. I take public transportation bus #473 to school. The Chinese is not too difficult, but the other kids are all seniors, so I struggle with the calculus that is being taught in math class. It is a strange

feeling to struggle at math, because in the past it has always been so easy for me.

It is Tuesday morning and Mom is flying home today. I am now alone in this great big country with my host family and a few new friends from Japan and Korea. This is quite surreal. I cannot wait to be back home, and yet, this is fun too.

It turns out to be a busy week with lots of learning. I spend the lunch break and after school hours playing basketball. Uncle tells me to enjoy the time, because once school starts on the 21st there will be no time to play. Most Chinese students study until 11 p.m. every day!

"One day at a time" I remind myself. This is my new motto—"One day at a time."

Happy Chinese New Year! (新年快乐)

Best wishes for a prosperous new year (恭喜发财)



Photo courtesy of Nik Arcot  
Nik Arcot, freshman, chooses his books for the school term in Beijing. For the first time Arcot had difficulty with math, in his Calculus class.



Photo courtesy of Nik Arcot  
Nik Arcot, freshman, stands in the atrium on the international campus of the Beijing school he is attending. "It is a huge, state-of-the-art school," Arcot said. "I see swimming pools, basketball courts, soccer fields, art rooms, music rooms, and science labs."



Photo courtesy of Nik Arcot  
Nik Arcot, freshman, meets his host family in Beijing Capital International Airport in February. He will be staying with them for the rest of the school term.