WUSTL/HKPU International Service Trip FAQ

The WUSTL/HKPU trip is a fantastic experience that will surely impact you as much as you impact others through the trip. Each year, the details (such as location in China, project type, etc.) may change, so please realize that the answers given may not 100% pertain to your trip. Still, this should give you a better idea of what the trip is like.

Questions Before Applying:

What work will I be doing?
Washington University students will partner with students in the Prosthetics and Orthotics (P&O) program from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Specifically you will be a part of the P&O service learning trip that HKPU organizes during the summer. Typically Wash U students spend one to two days learning how to make orthotics at the university Hong Kong, then apply their newfound skills at a clinic in mainland China while aiding the HKPU students with fitting patients. In 2014, students travelled to Guangzhou, China to fit children with cerebral palsy during the first week, then travelled to Shaoguan, China to observe prosthesis creation for amputees.

The amount of hands-on work varies from project to project and within steps of a project. There are definitely a lot of opportunities to help with fitting, casting, and shaping orthotics for patients, but certain steps require technical experience so be prepared to take more of an observational role at those points.

Will I visit any tourist sites?
There is plenty of time to experience the culture and to visit some of the tourist sites. Usually there are a few arranged excursions, for example in 2014 these included mountain hiking, touring a medical center to learn about traditional medicine, souvenir shopping, and a visit to a historical pagoda. You will also have free time to do some exploring on your own and to engage with the nightlife (visiting a karaoke club is a must).

How much of my own money will I spend?
The BME department will cover airfare up to around $2000, you will be responsible for all food and lodging expenses once in China. Hotel and meal prices are inexpensive compared to what you would find in America, so you will probably end up spending about $500 to $900 in total, depending on how many souvenirs you buy :)

How flexible are the dates?
If you have other summer commitments that cause you to cut a day or two at the beginning or end of the trip, talk to the BME department-- there is some room for flexibility.

Is Dr. Yin as scary as he was in BME140?
No! Getting to spend time with Dr. Yin is one of the biggest highlights and privileges of the trip. He makes the culture accessible with detours through bustling markets, walks around old neighborhoods, trips to authentic restaurants, and lessons on Mah Jong.

If you have any other questions, feel free to contact the members of past trips. They are happy to tell you about their experience and give advice!
Questions once accepted:

How do I apply for a Visa?
For American citizens, a Visa is required to visit China. Although you will most likely be flying into Hong Kong (which doesn’t require a Visa for Americans), you will be traveling into China and will need one at the border. During some trips it was necessary to travel back and forth between China and Hong Kong, so a multi-entry visa is recommended. Metropolitan Express (http://metropolitan-express.com/chinesevisa.html) has been a trustworthy site for ordering visas, you will get more information about this when meeting before the trip.

Do I need to obtain a vaccine?
Vaccines for Hepatitis A and Typhoid fever are recommended. CDC recommends the Hep A vaccine because you can get this disease through contaminated food or water in China, regardless of where you are eating or staying. CDC recommends the typhoid vaccine for most travelers visiting smaller cities or rural areas, or if you are an adventurous eater.

Where will I be staying?
Typically students stay in hotels near the clinics that they will be working in. The hotel rooms accommodate two students (if you need to triple up, a cot can usually be provided by the front desk at an extra cost).

In Hong Kong, the hotel of choice is the BP International hotel (http://www.bpih.com.hk) and rooms can be booked directly through its own website, or through third party websites such as booking.com. There are a few ways to get to the hotel from the airport: (1) you may purchase tickets beforehand online or in the airport at the transportation kiosk to take the direct airport-hotel shuttle (link), (2) you may take a taxi, (3) you can take the Airport express train and transfer into the metro system and find your way to the Jordan MTR station. The trip from the airport to the hotel will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour, so the most painless and economic method given your jetlag and luggage is probably the airport-hotel shuttle.

All the hotels in China provided breakfast, air conditioning, and most of the basic amenities that you would expect a hotel to provide (soap, towels, etc.) Internet is not guaranteed, however on the 2014 trip a hotel actually bought extra internet routers to provide wifi to the floor.

How much Mandarin/Cantonese should I learn?
In Hong Kong, you can easily get around with English alone since it is a very global city. In mainland China, very little English is spoken so it might be nice to learn a few basic phrases. However, since much of the logistics are set up through the HKPU program as far as lodging, transportation, and meals are concerned, it is not necessary to pick up the language.

What if I’m vegetarian/have other dietary restrictions?
If you have dietary restrictions or allergies, don’t worry you won’t starve! In the past, students with allergies showed restaurants a translated note that specified their restriction. Although some restaurants may not have many alternative meal choices, they usually try to be as accommodating as possible.