

Publication: Study International Online

Date: 12 April 2021

Headline: 'The most wonderful time': A Mumbai-born Schwarzman Scholar's time in China

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For Schwarzman Scholar Toshin Sequeira, the chance to understand the world from a more global perspective drove him to compete for the prestigious scholarship programme. In addition to gaining insight on China from a first-hand point of view, he was drawn to the leadership development skills he stood to acquire.

Sequeira was born in Mumbai but grew up in Singapore. As an undergraduate at Singapore Management University, his most memorable experiences were outside the classroom and student leadership was a big part of his uni experience. Keen to further his studies, he wanted more practical exposure over a purely academic experience.

It was at a conference at the US Military Academy at West Point that Sequeira heard about the Schwarzman Scholars programme. Here, he would have the opportunity to live and learn with some of the brightest young leaders around the world. It seemed like the right next step.

Below we speak to this Schwarzman Scholar on what life in China was like:

Why did you apply to become a Schwarzman Scholar?

The opportunity to understand China's development from their perspective and the experiential aspects of the academic curriculum, like the deep dive (a week-long cultural and intellectual immersion programme) also appealed to me.

The Schwarzman football team. Source: Toshin Sequeira

What do you like most about China?

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Definitely the warmth and hospitality of the people. Despite not being completely well-versed with the language, I always felt fairly at ease there. People are always patient and made an effort to communicate with me.

Give us three fun facts about yourself.

I've acted in a number of plays and musicals and almost always play the villain. While living in China, I wanted to buy insurance: "Bǎoxiǎn" but asked for "Xiǎobiàn" which means urine. Within a month of moving to Singapore, I stood for student government elections.

What are your top three favourite things about Beijing?

The people, Tsinghua University as it has one of the most beautiful campuses I've seen in my life, and the food!

What was your most memorable non-academic experience in China?

I did an overland trip from Beijing to Bangkok with seven of my classmates. Over the course of two weeks, we travelled through Southern China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. While the trip gave us the chance to explore the region, understand its history and try many local delicacies, the highlight for me was the quality time that we spent with each other in the evenings.

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Tell me about your hometown. Where would you take me and show me?

My hometown is Mumbai — the financial capital of India. If you were to visit, I'd first take you to see the historic Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. Located just opposite of the Gateway of India, this hotel is a symbol of resilience and an embodiment of the spirit of entrepreneurship.

There are a lot of things to do in Mumbai. This includes appreciating the religious and cultural diversity of the city by visiting many iconic temples, churches and mosques, trying street food, going to the beach or enjoying the nightlife in the city that never sleeps.

Did you explore the region? Which location really stood out to you?

Not as much as I would have liked to! My favourite place was Guilin, an oasis of tranquility and one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen. From rowing in the lakes to exploring the night markets and tea houses with friends, I had the most wonderful time.



What's the local food like? Tell us your most and least favourite.

Delicious! My personal favourite is the "Peking Duck" (thin crispy duck served in Chinese pancakes), but I didn't really have a least favourite.

What's one thing you missed from home and how did you substitute it?

My family and friends. But having a wonderful and supportive community at Tsinghua University while I was a Schwarzman Scholar certainly helped. In addition, the occasional catch-up calls were also something I did to substitute missing them.