

WINTER CAMP SUMMARY

By Andrew Goh

Even after a month, the memories of the trip still remain pretty fresh, the sights n sounds, the smells, the tastes ...the laughs, brendan Lee's laugh and always the friendships (hand on chest, tear of joy) formed along the way. Thanks to several reunions we've also had time to reminisce and share photos too, which makes writing this a little easier. For me every place we visited in China was special in that it provided some piece of unique history and cultural identity, from the small, quiet and serene villages, the semi-developed urban sprawl clogged with traffic, to the modern metropolis of Shanghai and Beijing.

Admittley the state of some of the cities were a little shocking as some buildings were pretty ugly and looked like they needed some serious water blasting, even so I enjoyed learning about their unique history, and witnessing the way of life. I found the basic living conditions in the villages quite fascinating too, each had a distinct character and easy going nature about them that seperates rural life from the phlem soaked pavements of urban desperation, the people here are more laid back, locals playing mahjong outdoors, a villager tending to a buffalo, the chickens scattered around, dogs doing what dogs do etc. As grotesque as it maybe, even the rich pungent smell of sewage and ever present sound of hoicking and spitting formed the basic foundation of what it meant to live in china, it's just the way things are.

I also enjoyed learning about the arts, not just the painting and calligraphy class but the intricate process involved in crafting jade and silk and how it has stamped itself into Chinese tradition. Even the art of tea making was really interesting. Of the arts, Kungfu was perhaps the biggest highlight of the trip because it really tested our abilities, tested mine for sure, and gave us an opportunity to work as a team and perform in front of the locals. We did really well I thought.

For me Haungzhou was the most attractive city, I enjoyed the beautiful scenery, the fresh breeze, and other sights on that day, I could only imagine what it would've been like in spring time. The Yu Fei memorial was a highlight, the story of Yu Fei moved me, his talent and ambition to unify china was inspiring, the betrayal leading to his execution tragic. The water town in xi tang was also impressive, imagine it in sunshine! But even in rain and fog, it created a unique backdrop plus we had the luxery of getting ourselves lost in the labyrinth of alley ways which was quite exciting for a while. Beijing and Shanghai were large and impressive cities with a unique fusion of modern and historical architecture, I enjoyed visiting the Hutong Vilages in Beijing, but it was unfortunate they were reduced to such a small number because of vertical development.

The visit to everyone's ancestral village was a remarkable authentic experience. It was unfortunate my village was too far away, but it was really rewarding to see my fellow china trippers find their roots and even their distant relatives whom stll live in the villages.

I have to admit there was a lot I didn't know about china before the trip, and perhaps one of the biggest regrets was not doing the background reading, having said that it made the journey more interesting in a way; you just didn't know what was coming next until it captured you. The great wall experience was priceless; I really enjoyed walking up those steps to the highest fortress, I vaguely remember shrugging off the freezing cold, standing on a rock pedestal topless staring into the horizon as millions of photos were taken.

Finally, meeting every soul on the trip was amazing. I've joined tour groups with various companions over month long holidays and know that it's always a lottery what chemistry you can develop with these people, everyone on this trip bonded from the word go and supported each other right through. The China experience wouldn't have been the same without them.

So that's about it, I was really impressed by china, but being brought up in New Zealand, I've also come to appreciate my unique position of being part of both cultures.

For me, the trip helped define who I am and has inspired me to learn more about my roots. Perhaps another trip could be on the cards, the Silk Road or western china as well as a visit to my fishing village. Thanks Kai and Janet for organising this trip, it's been amazing, extroadinary, sensational, thrilling, splendid, magnificent, marvelous, exciting, remarkable, awesome, tremendous, incredible, over whelming, unbelievable, breath taking and out of this world.

Yay! 800 words lucky number!

